



In the Future They Ate From the Finest Porcelain

a film by Larissa Sansour & Søren Lind



In the Future they Ate From the Finest Porcelain

في المستقبل، أكلوا من أفخر أنواع البورسلين

Short Content

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Long Content

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On the brink of the apocalypse, a narrative resistance group makes underground deposits of elaborate porcelain – suggested to belong to an entirely fictional civilisation. Their aim is to influence history and support future claims to their vanishing lands. Once unearthed, this tableware will prove the existence of this counterfeit people. By implementing a myth of its own, their work becomes a historical intervention – de facto creating a nation.

The film takes the form of a fictional video essay. A voice-over based on an interview between a psychiatrist and the female leader of the narrative resistance group reveals the philosophy and ideas behind the group's actions. The leader's thoughts on myth and fiction as constitutive for fact, history and documentary translate into poetic and science fiction-based visuals.

As the film progresses, the narrative and visuals alternate between the theoretical and the personal. The resistance leader's deceased twin sister makes a crucial appearance as the story takes the viewer deeper and deeper into the resistance leader's subconscious.



Credits

Palestine/UK/Denmark/Qatar 2015, 29 min, digital, color, Arabic with English or French subtitles

Directors	Larissa Sansour & Søren Lind
Writer	Søren Lind
Producer	Ali Roche, Spike Film and Video
Executive Producer	Film London
Director of Photography	Thomas Fryd
Production Designer	Simon Godfrey
Editors	Daniel Martinez, William Dybeck Sørensen
Visual Effects Supervisor	Henrik Bach Christensen
Post Producer	William Dybeck Sørensen
Costume Designer	Line Frank
Composer	Aida Nadeem
Supervising Sound Editor	Tom Sedgwick

Cast

Resistance Leader	Pooneh Hajimohammadi
Girl 1	Anna Aldridge
Girl 2	Leyla Ertosun
Voice actors	
Resistance Leader (voice)	Larissa Sansour
Psychiatrist (voice)	Carol Sansour

Larissa Sansour – Sci-fi Trilogy

A Space Exodus (2008) is the first part of Larissa Sansour's science fiction trilogy along with Nation Estate (2012) and In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain (2016). Under the common themes of loss, belonging, heritage and national identity, the three films each explore different aspects of the political turmoil the Middle East. While A Space Exodus envisions the final uprootedness of the Palestinian experience and takes the current political predicament to its extra-terrestrial extreme by landing the first Palestinian on the moon, Nation Estate reveals a sinister account of an entire population restricted to a single skyscraper, with each Palestinian city confined to a single floor. In the trilogy's final instalment, In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain, a narrative resistance leader engages in archaeological warfare in a desperate attempt to secure the future of her people. Using the language of sci-fi and glossy production, Sansour's trilogy presents a dystopian vision of a Middle East on the brink of the apocalypse.

All three films are distributed by mec film, you can book them individually or as package. For educational purposes the trilogy is available at kanopy.



Film-makers

Larissa Sansour

Larissa Sansour was born in 1973 in East Jerusalem, Palestine, and studied fine arts in London, New York and Copenhagen. Her work is interdisciplinary, immersed in the current political dialogue and utilises video, photography, installation, the book form and the internet. Central to her work is the tug and pull between fiction and reality.

Recent solo exhibitions include Turku Art Museum in Finland, Photographic Center in Copenhagen, Galerie Anne de Villepoix in Paris, Kulturhuset in Stockholm, Lawrie Shabibi in Dubai, Sabrina Amrani in Madrid and DEPO in Istanbul.

Sansour's work has featured in the biennials of Istanbul, Busan and Liverpool. She has exhibited at venues such as Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; LOOP, Seoul; Al Hoash, Jerusalem; Queen Sofia Museum, Madrid; Centre for Photography, Sydney; Cornerhouse, Manchester; Townhouse, Cairo; Maraya Arts Centre, Sharjah, UAE; Empty Quarter, Dubai; Galerie Nationale de Jeu de Paume, Paris; Iniva, London; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; Third Guangzhou Triennial, Guangzhou, China; Louisiana Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark; House of World Cultures, Berlin, and MOCA, Hiroshima.

Sansour currently lives and works in London, UK.

Filmography

- 2015 In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain, 29', sci-fi, with Soren Lind
- 2012 Nation Estate, 9' 04", sci-fi
- 2012 Feast of the Inhabitants, 15'
- 2011 Trespass the Salt, 10', 3-channel experimental documentary, with Youmna Chlala
- 2011 Falafel Road, 60', experimental documentary, with Oreet Ashery
- 2009 A Space Exodus, 5' 24", sci-fi
- 2008 SBARA, 8'30"
- 2008 Run Lara Run, 2'
- 2007 Soup Over Bethlehem, 9'30", experimental documentary
- 2006 Happy Days, 2'30"
- 2005 Bethlehem Bandolero, 5'12"

Soren Lind

Soren Lind (b. 1970) is a Danish author. He writes children's books and literary fiction. With a background in philosophy, Lind wrote books on mind, language and understanding before turning to fiction. He has published a novel and two collections of short stories as well as four children's books. In addition to his literary production, Lind is also a visual artist and writes short film scripts.

Lind lives and works in London.



Sansour/Lind

Larissa Sansour and Soren Lind have worked together on numerous occasions. Lind usually provides the scripts for Sansour's films, just as he contributed a sci-fi story for Sansour's 2009 graphic novel *The Novel of Nonel and Vovel*, a collaboration with artist Oreet Ashery.

Artist's Statement

Central to my practice is the tug and pull between fiction and reality in a Middle Eastern context. In several pieces over the past years, I have been exploring not only the sci-fi genre, but also the comic book superhero. Both forms have an inherent ability to communicate the most fundamental ambitions of a people or a civilization in a way that is naturally inspired by, but never hampered or restricted by a non-fictional reality.

Also, despite its high production value and glossy imagery, sci-fi tends to allow for a specific kind of almost nostalgia framing of the topic at hand. Even the slickest sci-fi almost invariably carries within it a sense of retro, ideas of the future tend to appear standard and cliché at the same time as they come across as visionary.

In the case of Palestine, there is an eternal sense of forecasting statehood, independence and the end of occupation. The ambitious ideas that we hope to achieve have long since become so repetitive that the odd mix of nostalgia and accomplishment that the sci-fi genre often embodies lends it itself well to the topic. (Larissa Sansour)

Interview with Larissa Sansour

Unbreakable - by *Abdellatif R. Abdeljawad for Reorient, February 16, 2016*

Palestinian artist Larissa Sansour dishes out the final installment of her sci-fi trilogy

Born in Jerusalem, Larissa Sansour is an acclaimed Palestinian artist whose works have been exhibited throughout the world. Her interdisciplinary work, ranging from video and photography to installations and sculpture, is immersed in current political discourses surrounding the Palestinian question. Her most recent exhibition, *In the Future, They Ate from the Finest Porcelain*, currently on display at Dubai's Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, presents a commentary on Israeli claims to Palestine through archaeological findings and excavations. Sansour's film (made in collaboration with Søren Lind) blurs the lines between fiction and documentary, and myth and reality, championing Palestinian identity in the depths of time and space. By burying porcelain bowls decorated with kufiya patterns deep underground, Sansour's protagonist puts forth the political legitimacy of Palestinians and their claims to Palestine, as well as provides future archaeologists with 'evidence' of past Palestinian existence.



Do you eat yourself from the finest porcelain?

Well, I guess the whole premise of the film is that this rebel leader narrator is setting up an elaborate operation in order for the future generations of Palestinians to obtain the basic privileges that history has so far denied them; so, it is basically a revisionist historical comment. Am I eating from the finest porcelain? Right now, maybe in my mind ... but not according to the rest of the world. I want the rest of the world to see me as a person who is doing so.

This work is very much about who tells history, and how much myth and fiction are really a part of writing history. If the world does not realise that we exist, we might as well just bury some porcelain DNA for future archaeologists to find, as a stick in the wheel on currently accepted versions of history. Maybe the revisions that this porcelain will cause will tilt the balance in favour of the Palestinians at some point in the future. The film is also a commentary on how Israel uses archaeology as headline news, and how it has been instrumentalised, rather than been seen as a scientific method ... Israelis want to prove something, and therefore they dig to find evidence supporting a fiction already having taken the form of fact; they use archaeology towards their own political ends, and it is becoming a means by which to prove a continued historical presence entitling them to territories currently belonging to others.

On a personal note, my own family holds papers showing that we own this particular piece of land; but an Israeli capable of 'proving' by way of religion or archaeology that they have been there for thousands of years needs no further justification than that to confiscate the land that I own by law.

Yes – as a Palestinian, I am very aware of the core issue of this conflict, and of how Israel has been using archaeology as a means to fabricate reality. The question, however, is, if I put myself in the position of the average spectator – who may not have been exposed to what's been happening in Palestine – will it be difficult to grasp the messages you're trying to convey? I think the film needs to be seen over and over again.

I agree with you. This is why the film benefits from being shown in an art space and in a loop, where people can watch it over and over again. It is kind of a strange balance to have, because you don't want to spoon-feed people – otherwise a lot of what is being said will be lost. There is something inherent in art: things you can express visually go beyond a narrative-based way of describing things.

I think there are certain things that were really important for me to include in the film; only much later did I realise why I included them. There is something that precedes verbalisation in art, so it is very hard to make things clear when you're talking about something so complicated; but I assure you that every detail has been completely revised multiple times. I have been working on this for two years with a screenwriter, with a total of 17 revised scripts.



The imagery of the film is spectacular, as is the narrative, especially as it's told in vernacular Palestinian Arabic. Some of the sentences (which I even wrote down) have the quality of quotations that can be framed and hung on a wall. What inspired the choice of narrative and the way in which it's told?

I worked with two other people, and they wanted the narrative to be in fus'ha (Classical Arabic) because they thought it would make it very 'Shakespearian'. That is also another comment on the state we are in as an Arab community; I mean, everything has to be pan-Arab. You lose things that every particular region prides itself on. I wanted to write and speak the way I write and speak on a daily basis. Using the Palestinian dialect was also difficult because I felt I was inventing terminology in Arabic to suit a sci-fi film; it was difficult to deal with these linguistic problems. It was hard to come up with a language and terminology suited for Arabic sci-fi.

Speaking of sci-fi, one notices that most of your recent works – in particular, A Space Exodus (2009), Nation Estate (2012), and now, this one – contain elements of science fiction. Do you like it when people refer to your work as 'sci-fi'? Do you think it suggests you're detached from the reality of what is happening in Palestine?

Well, it's fine with me; it's the approach I've been using in my last three works, of which In the Future ... completes the trilogy. I don't necessarily like sci-fi myself. I haven't seen Star Wars, for example, which is a 'no-no' for someone working with sci-fi. My entire team is raving about Star Wars. You know, spaceships and bombs are not things that are important to my film, obviously; but they elevate a Palestinian narrative to one on par with those of the rest of the world. Glossy sci-fi is preferable to us always being the subjects of documentaries, which is something I think is hurting us, more than anything.

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I wanted to engage with sci-fi because, first and foremost, it's unexpected. It bends the rules for dealing with Middle Eastern politics, and it also has this fascinating way of offering you the space to deal with present problems; it's by no means an 'escape' from what's happening in Palestine right now. It actually offers a completely different approach to the problem, going head to head with the Apocalypse and the consequences of continuing to behave the way we do. Sci-fi has a cyclical nature that works very well with the Palestinian condition, because we always project a state; but at the same time, we always talk about the Nakba (lit. 'Catastrophe'), so there is always this dialogue between nostalgia and ambitions for the future. The present is kind of lost in documentaries; it lives in this state of limbo, it isn't real. That's why I think sci-fi works really well.

Let me ask you something else: it was mentioned in the film that Israelis use archaeology to create reality on the ground and use myths to form their identity; do you think we Palestinians also need to adopt the same approach? Given the fact that



Palestinians actually have concrete evidence of their existence, do you think it is relevant for us to use the same method in the case of the porcelain plates?

Well, obviously this is a commentary on Israelis more than anything else, but it is true; it does pose a problem when you look at it this way. That is why at one point in the film, the psychiatrist says to the rebel, 'wouldn't claims made by the flesh-and-blood descendants of the existing population ... be more legitimate?', to which the rebel answers, 'it was never a question of legitimacy. Our rulers have long since removed us from the equation. I am adding new numbers, messing with their maths'. The psychiatrist responds by saying, 'but by giving rise to this counterfeit people, aren't you accepting the erasure of your own?', and the rebel says, 'quite the opposite. They are us, and we are them. They will claim the land on our behalf'.

So, yes; the film posits a philosophical equation rather than really creating a nation. The rebel has been going through a traumatic experience and has been trying to find a solution. She has gotten into this mad frame of mind, and she is willing to go that far, just in case people aren't convinced that Palestinians exist. It's like saying that our enemy is ruthless, and if they exterminate us, we need to make a plan (e.g. burying DNA) so that no matter what happens, we will always exist.

What first caught my attention was the title of the film, which uses both the future and past tenses at once. As you mentioned, Palestinians aspire for a future state, yet simultaneously continue to point out the Nakba. How did you tackle the issue of identity in your film? In other words, how do you explain the relationship between these contradictions (past vs. future, archaeology vs. sci-fi, etc.)? Are there even contradictions to begin with?

Yes, exactly. The title brings us back to our identity as Palestinians, and that is what I talk about in Nation Estate as well. It's kind of overloaded with symbols you find amongst Palestinians like the key, the kufiya, the folk dresses, and all these [others] that are becoming more like artefacts for a museum than real things. The idea in Nation Estate was to make the building seem artificial and like a museum that housed all these symbols and artefacts we've gathered as Palestinians; but, do they really mean anything anymore? Other than that, we are resisting. The topic of identity also fascinates me, what we are. For example, if we do have a state, what are we going to look like? If you take away the resistance of Palestinians ... I don't know!

The resistance aside, if the conflict somehow ends, where does it leave Palestinian art? Because almost all Palestinian artists – including you – are immersed in the current political situation when producing art. The subject matter of Palestinian artists is almost always related to the occupation, conflict, etc.

I think art, no matter where it comes from, has always been political. Even though the Constructivism of 1930s Russia looked purely abstract to the naked eye, it was entirely political. Artists wouldn't have been imprisoned, blacklisted, and killed if they weren't considered dangerous, because what is inherent in art is revisionism; artists are always



querying what others may prefer to leave alone. But with the Palestinian question, the political dimension is obviously much more in your face. Most Palestinian artists work with politics, because art is informed by what surrounds us; art does not live in a vacuum. We experienced a period of autonomy of art in the Modernist period, and that had a faulty logic to it, because it was not really autonomous.

We always react to the contexts we're in, and unfortunately, the context of Palestinians is conflict; and that conflict becomes part of your identity. So, the question of what we would be without the occupation applies just as much to the artist as to any other Palestinian. Once the apocalypse that has loomed over our heads for so many decades disappears, who will we be, and what will we do? We will all need years of therapy. It would be naïve to think that the end of the occupation would ring in an immediate era of bliss and harmony; look at Lebanon. Decades after the end of the Civil War, everyone – including Lebanese artists – is still trying to come to terms with this dark part of their collective history. I wouldn't imagine this to be any different in the case of Palestine.

source: www.reorientmag.com/2016/02/larissa-sansour/

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