

**|RE|THINKING THE HERITAGE OF  
MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN THE  
MENA REGION AND BEYOND**

**Exhibition title//**  
**MODERNITIES OUT OF PLACE**  
*15 sept - 20 oct\_2023*



# BACKGROUND

Countries in the MENA region, particularly in North Africa, possess a rich collection of modern architectural heritage dating back to the twentieth century. However, a significant portion of this collection is currently in a critical state. Many historical buildings have been replaced by new infrastructure for three primary reasons: the need for more space in urban centers, a lack of awareness regarding the significance of heritage, and, in some instances, a rejection of the colonial past. The project focuses on revisiting and re-evaluating the modern heritage in Morocco and Libya, emphasizing the urgent attention these sites require. This is achieved through a critical and meticulous lens, fostering a constructive dialogue and comparison with Vienna, Austria.

The Placeless Academy is a digital platform that seeks to provide an international forum for the analysis and critique of the architectural legacy in the MENA region. It aims to generate alternative critical knowledge that goes beyond the Western colonial conception of modernity. The project is committed to providing support to emerging architects in Libya, Morocco, and Austria, equipping them with essential tools, mentorship, and global outreach. By establishing a connection between the south (Morocco and Libya) and the north (Austria), The Placeless Academy creates an alternative educational and critical environment that facilitates the exchange of knowledge and shared learning, thereby overcoming didactic and rigid traditional academic systems.

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project selected 12 participants and organized a three-month digital workshop that featured several talks by local and international experts in the field, including Professor Caroline Jäger-Klein, Associate Professor Cruz Garcia and Nathalie Frankowski, Architect Hakim Benchekroun, Architect Imad Dahmani, Architect Amalie

## // Tactics of Reconstruction in Omar Al Mukhtar Street - Downtown Benghazi

- The street holds significant urban importance within the city due to its vital location, along with its historical and symbolic value. Initially established by the Italian Colonial Movement, it was later reclaimed by the Libyans, who dedicated it to the renowned leader of the resistance movement, "Omar Al Mukhtar." This street is an integral part of a broader historical area that, as of 2023, has been subjected to haphazard destruction and reconstruction practices, posing a threat to the area's significance as a repository of critical knowledge and memory. This erasure also overlooks the problematic historical context upon which the area was built, including the legacies of the Imperialist Ottoman and the Italian

colonial heritage, thereby exacerbating gaps in our research and archives. Enduring the impact of colonization, World War II bombing, and the recent civil war, this cultural space bears deep scars and significant destruction. How can we reconceptualize this street as a generative and critical archive? How can we decolonize the theoretical and built production of the Italian colonial legacy and redefine the concept of Modernism in Libya? The group aimed to foster a "counter" process of heritage creation by documenting and analyzing Omar Al Mukhtar Street, producing alternative critical knowledge, and designing strategies for the reconstruction of post-war Benghazi.

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Libya -



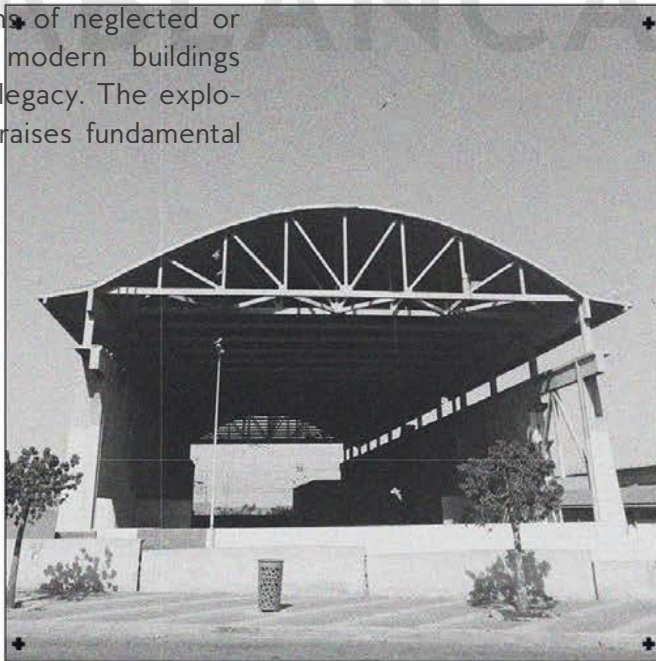
## // Inhabiting the Void - The Old Poultry Market Structure

The building's transformation from a cement station for LAFARAGE Cimenterie to a poultry market in the late 90s has left its current activity at a standstill. It gained prominence through its portrayal in one of the most iconic Moroccan films, "Ali Zaoua," depicting it as a decrepit shelter for homeless children. The August Perret's constructed structure now stands abandoned in Hay Mohammadi, an industrial area on the outskirts of Casablanca, Morocco. It has been described as an emaciated body, devoid of adornment, and seemingly unremarkable.

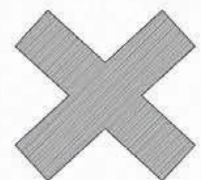
Through this site, the group aims to reshape perceptions of neglected or underrepresented modern buildings and redefine their legacy. The exploration of this site raises fundamental

questions: What hidden features lie beneath the seemingly ordinary facade of this building? What undiscovered realms are waiting to be unveiled within this vacant shell? How can we analyze the architectural features of the structure, its (dis)connection to the Hay Mohammadi urban area, and the metaphorical and unwritten narratives it holds to create new visual representations of the building?

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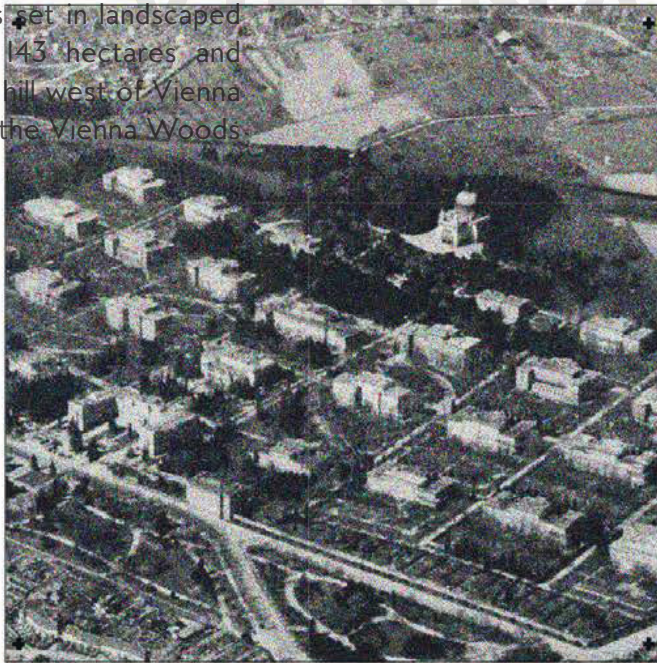
Morocco -



## // Reconnecting with the City - Steinhof Site

The group analyzed the modern social ideas in the design of this structure that was considered for curing the mentally ill patients, and provided creative solutions to re-conceptualize and re-use the site's potential as a healing cultural landscape in contemporary life. When the 'Lower Austrian Provincial Institution for the Care and Cure of the Mentally Ill and for Nervous Disorders at Steinhof' first opened its doors to psychiatric patients in 1907, the site was unanimously celebrated as the world's largest and most aesthetically pleasing asylum to date. Erwin Pendl's beautiful panoramic view of Steinhof shows that the asylum was conceived as a series of villas set in landscaped parkland covering 143 hectares and sloping up a gentle hill west of Vienna and at the edge of the Vienna Woods

. The Psychiatric Hospital at Steinhof was intended to evoke comparisons with a self-contained rural colony and directly responded to fervent anti-psychiatric campaigns waging around 1900 that accused asylums of warehousing patients like prisoners. So, did the Steinhof's design really fostered a utopian idea of an asylum that brought together psychiatry and modern architecture?



Austria -

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Elfalah, and Dr. Oliver Sukrow. During the workshop, the participants conducted critical research and developed speculative designs for selected sites in Casablanca, Benghazi, and Vienna. These works were subsequently physically showcased in the exhibition.

“MODERNITIES OUT OF PLACE” at philomena+ art and architecture platform.

The Placeless Academy is an important initiative, mechanism and project that will continue beyond its set deadline. It is expected to develop further into various forms in the future.

# PROJECT FUTURE

*This project is curated and overseen by:  
Fatimzahra Benhamza (MAMMA), Sarri Elfaitouri  
(Tajarrod), Negar Hakim (philomena+)*

Fatima Zahra is a Moroccan architect and visual artist based in Casablanca. Interested in revealing the contemporary urban issues, she observes, questions and reimagines the existing city through architectural drawing, illustration and collage. She has published several essays around these topics. Since 2019, she has been part of different artistic residencies in Morocco and abroad; In 2021, she exhibited her work *Positive Pandemics* at LAAF Liverpool Arab Arts Festival. In 2022, she exhibited her works *Where is the Sun* and *What Do You Choose to See* respectively in 32bis (Tunis) and Alte Munze (Berlin).

**Fatima Zahra Benhamza**



**Sarri El Faitouri**



Sarri is a conceptual architect, artist, art curator, and cultural producer based in Benghazi, Libya, and the founder and director of TAJARROD Architecture and Art Foundation. Sarri's work investigates contemporary socio-cultural issues, identities, and their impact on architecture and cities, and searches for alternative possibilities of creative socio-spatial transformation. His works manifest as: research, theoretical architectural projects, art curation, and collage art. He has published theoretical projects and essays online, and curated/participated in several exhibitions locally and abroad. Sarri has a bachelor degree in architecture, and has 4 years of experience as an early career architect, and he is currently a Fulbright scholar studying Masters of Urban Design at the University of Virginia, USA.

Born in Isfahan, Iran, Negar studied art history at the University of Vienna. She is on the editorial board of "Memar Magazine" and "Kunst und Kirche" and has acted as a co-editor of several other art and architecture magazines in the Middle East. Negar does intercultural consulting in art and architecture between Europe and the WANA region. Together with Christine Bruckbauer she founded philomena+ in 2016, a platform for artistic collaboration between artists from West Asia, North Africa and Austria. She is a curator, and organizes transregional workshops, seminars and study trips, and has been a jury member for various architectural competitions. Currently she is also a Univ. Ass. (PostDoc) at the TU Wien, with a focus on non-European architecture.

**Negar Hakim**



Arch.Elfalah is an interdisciplinary architecture/ urban designer and independent early-career researcher examining socio-spatial constructions, actualities, and imaginations of Italian colonial Libya (1911-1943). Her research questions 'modernist' discourse and environments rooted in 'difficult heritage' concurrently tracing how colonization is concealed/ embodied, forgotten/ remembered, and erased/ concretized in contemporary [post] colonial Italy and Libya.

**Arch.Amali Elfalah**



**Arch.Imad Dahmani**



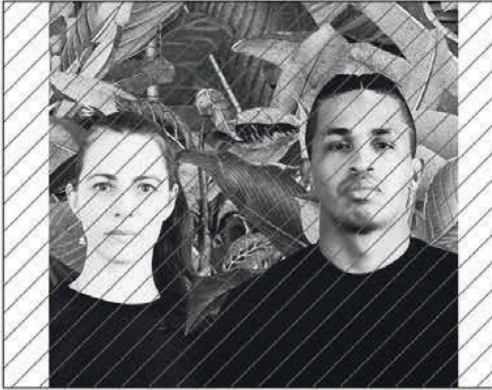
Imad Dahmani lives and works in Casablanca. He obtained his degree from the Casablanca School of Architecture in 2015, focusing his thesis on brutalist architecture in Morocco from 1950 to 1970. Following this, he relocated to Paris to work with "Architecture Studio." In 2017, he became a part of "MAG Architecture" in Casablanca. Currently serving as a professor at the Casablanca School of Architecture, Imad is also the co-founder and president of the MAMMA Association. He has delivered numerous lectures both in Morocco and internationally, primarily focusing on modern architecture in Morocco. In 2020, he established his own architecture studio, "Atelier Dahmani," and is currently pursuing a specialized Master's Degree at ENA Rabat in collaboration with Chaillot city in Paris.

Dr. Sukrow currently is a project assistant (post-doctoral) in the FWF third-party funded project "Transnational School Building: Austria, Slovenia, GDR" within the research department of art history at the Vienna University of Technology. Additionally, he is a fellow of the Wüstenrot Foundation. From 2012 to 2016, he pursued his doctoral studies at the Institute for European Art History at the University of Heidelberg. Following this, from 2016 to 2020, he worked as a university assistant in the research department of art history at the Vienna University of Technology. In 2018, his doctoral thesis, titled "Work. Reside. Computer: On the Utopia in the Fine Arts and Architecture of the GDR in the 1960s," was published by Heidelberg University Press.

**Dr.Oliver Sukrow**



**Prof. Cruz Garcia and  
Nathalie Frankowski**



Prof. Cruz Garcia and Nathalie Frankowski are Associate Professors at Iowa State University, where they are Design for Critical Futures in Activism and Emancipatory Practice fellows respectively, and faculty at Columbia University. They are authors of Narrative Architecture: A Kynical Manifesto, Pure Hardcore Icons: A Manifesto on Pure Form in Architecture, A Manual of Anti-Racist Architecture Education, and the upcoming book Universal Principles of Architecture.

Prof. Jäger-Klein became a member of ICOMOS Austria in 2003 at the suggestion of Professor Eduard Sekler, Harvard and a long-standing UNESCO advisor. In 2013 she chaired the ICOMOS Southeast Europe Regional Conference in Vienna, in 2014 she founded the ICOMOS Group of Kosovo, and in 2019 initiated and chaired the ICOMOS Southeast Europe Regional Conference in Kotor, Montenegro. The ICOMOS Heritage Alert triggered in 2015 for today's Otto Wagner Hospital Am Steinhof in Vienna is based on her (together with Plakolm-Forsthuber) scientific research and documentation of the building history of the area, which was published by Birkhäuser in 2014. studied architecture at the Vienna University of Technology and the University of Michigan.

**Prof. Caroline Jäger-Klein**



Hakim Benchekroun lives and works in Rabat. While his formal training lies in architecture, it is through his engagement with photography and visual arts that his artistic expression finds its fullest manifestation. His photographic endeavors lead him to delve into territories marked by obsolescence, revealing an intimate understanding of a forgotten Morocco, as exemplified in his notable project "Lost in Morocco." His work has been widely exhibited and published both within Morocco and internationally, including noteworthy displays at the "Le Maroc contemporain" exhibition at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris in 2015, and at the Biennale of Photography of Bamako in 2022. Notably, he was awarded the first prize at the "Photographic Nights of Essaouira" in 2017.

**Arch. Hakim Benchekroun**

