

WHERE NO WALL REMAINS

AN INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL ABOUT BORDERS

CURATOR'S NOTE

"They say there is a window from one heart to another.
How can there be a window where no wall remains?"

—Rumi, from *Thief of Sleep*

Where No Wall Remains is the third edition of the Live Arts Bard Biennial, a festival of commissioned works that temporarily reconfigures the Fisher Center as a site for innovative and interactive performances and installations. The first edition, *The House Is Open* (2014), explored the relationship between visual and performing arts; the second, *We're Watching* (2017), examined contemporary states of surveillance. We started planning the third edition in January 2017, in the week that the Trump administration's "Muslim ban" came into effect, accompanied by increasingly xenophobic rhetoric and the specter of a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. It was inevitable that the current edition would focus on the subject of borders.

November 2019, the month of the festival, marks the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. One of the most significant and celebrated events of the 20th century, at the time it seemed to promise a future of open borders and unification. Three decades later, the heady dreams of 1989 are very far from us; walls are being built, not torn down. The recent near-elimination of America's immigration program, together with an increase of human rights violations on the Mexican border, have made the festival's subject even more grimly present than we could have imagined in 2017. Current U.S. immigration policy has particularly affected people from the Middle East and Central America, and we therefore invited artists from those regions to join us in creating the festival.

The title *Where No Wall Remains*, taken from a love poem by Rumi, invites us to imagine a utopian state of being—a fully unbordered world. The festival comprises nine new artistic works that engage with the notion of borders—political, physical, historical, and contemporary, borders seen and unseen, the borders of the body, borders between art forms, performers, and spectators, borders that divide or define us, borders to be crossed, tested, resisted, destroyed, rebuilt, or transcended.

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Festival venues include the Fisher Center, Bard College Farm, and the nearby village of Tivoli, New York. The political potential of each work evokes many ideas and representations of borders: *letter to a friend*, *FITO*, and *Cultural Exchange Rate* recenter the political debate around the personal, presenting autobiographical, familial, and neighborhood accounts of border crossing and navigating broader systems of oppression; *Night* brings the audience to the most intimate site of alienation, the human body, reminding us that love stories are also about borders and how we transcend them. The entire program reflects the urgency of our political climate, not by merely advancing critique, but by also producing knowledge. Works such as *Hostile Terrain 94 (HT94)*; *Menu of Dis/appearance*; *m(Other)s: Hudson Valley*; and *At those terrifying frontiers where the existence and disappearance of people fade into each other (part 2)* engage dispossessed bodies, erased cultures, and forgotten artifacts. *Naturalized Borders (to Gloria)* redraws the U.S.-Mexico border as an imagined line by communities who have historically asserted the intersection between labor rights, land sovereignty, and migration. We are reminded of the everyday price many people pay for borders: the marginalization of indigenous communities, the uncounted and unrecorded deaths at border zones, and the erasure of entire lifeworlds. The festival's cover image, Samar Hazboun's photograph of the wall in her town of Bethlehem, represents a global community of artists who refuse to be imprisoned by racism or cement.

The festival is the culmination of a two-year partnership with many Bard programs (including Middle Eastern Studies, Latin American and Iberian Studies, Experimental Humanities, and the Human Rights Project) and has included undergraduate courses, public programs, and artist residencies. We are talking with colleagues across the Bard network about future iterations of *Where No Wall Remains* at Bard College Berlin, Al Quds Bard, and in other cities dominated by the past, present, or future political reality of border walls.

We acknowledge the vast body of work that came before this program by artists and activists who are most affected by discriminatory border politics. We pay homage to them and hope to build on the ongoing discussion and mobilization on borders with this timely and inspiring body of work.

–Tania El Khoury and Gideon Lester