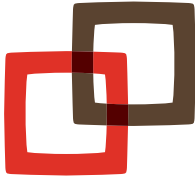


Fall 2011 / Spring 2012



CECartslink

NEWSLETTER

A black-bordered poster on a white background. The text 'I AM' is on the top line, 'MANY' is on the bottom line, and a horizontal line is drawn under the 'AM' portion of the top line.

I AM
MANY

Teaching Filmmaking and Video in Kabul

By Mariam Ghani, Filmmaker and ArtsLink Award recipient

When you fly into Kabul, whether from Dubai, Delhi, Frankfurt or Istanbul, you always witness a curious ritual. In the last minutes of the flight, as the plane circles over the mountains that surround Kabul's valley, a series of small movements ripples through the seats. Elegant Afghan women in slim-cut pants produce *manteaux*, light belted raincoats, from their monogrammed carry-ons, while NGO workers in jeans and tank tops pull *kurtas* out of their backpacks. Scarves that have been stuffed into purses or pressed into service as pillows and blankets are shaken out, folded, and swept over sleep-rumpled hair. The smartphones that have been amusing certain passengers through the long film-less flight are tucked into pockets and cheap Afghan "burner phones" are extracted from briefcases. Blackberry owners are busily swapping their SIM cards. By the time the plane touches down, many of its passengers will be subtly transformed. The expats, exiles and old Afghan hands will have assumed their Afghan identities, which they keep here in Kabul, like a spare set of clothes.



Mariam Ghani with Afghan crew in preparation for the video shoot at Dar ul-Aman Palace.

Like these temporary inhabitants, Kabul is a city that is always performing its identity, for different audiences and on different stages. Each audience sees a different Kabul: a home, a threat, a maze, an abyss, a playground, a posting, a practice range. Perhaps they all exist, in layers or concentric rings; perhaps none of them exist, except in the fictions we construct around the city itself.

My Kabul is a city of walled gardens, not far removed from the Kabul of the Persian emperor Babur: villas surrounded by roses and fruit trees, enclosed within high walls with metal gates that are often guarded, these days, by men with guns. In one such villa, a dusty-pink house on a side street in Kartechar, you can find the Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan. The CCAA is a small non-profit, which offers classes for women students in cooperation with the Fine Arts Faculty of Kabul University. CCAA students spend their mornings at the university and their afternoons at the center. This allows them to supplement traditional or design-oriented instruction with courses in experimental forms, new genres or technologies not covered at the university, and short-term workshops with visiting international artists. Film and video classes are among the more important “extensions,” because of the growing network of Afghan satellite TV stations, which play an increasingly important role in constructing arenas for political debate. This makes technical skills and media literacy into prized commodities on the otherwise brutal job market.

Established Afghan and Afghan diasporic filmmakers like Siddiq Barmak and Atiq Rahimi have responded by founding production companies and bringing foreign co-productions to film in Afghanistan,

which provide on-the-job training for young filmmakers. While these informal projects tend to reproduce the unspoken hierarchies of the Afghan film world, such as the predominance of men in production roles, Barmak and Rahimi are also exploring more formal arrangements, such as a proposed Afghan Film Foundation. Ateliers Varan provides another model. Originally founded by Jean Rouch in the 1980s, Varan sets up documentary filmmaking workshops along “direct cinema” principles in countries across the world, produces projects for a year while training teachers, and then leaves equipment in place to allow a new autonomous branch to continue operation (as in Afghanistan since 2006).

Thanks to a grant from CEC ArtsLink, which just added Afghanistan to the list of countries eligible for ArtsLink Awards, my trip to Kabul this summer began a project that, while more modest in its aims, borrows from the Varan model. Using the grant money and my contacts in film and video departments around New York, I collected enough new and donated equipment to set up a video program within the structure of the CCAA. The workshop I taught in June 2011 was the first in a series of three that will serve to establish this program and, we hope, make it self-sustaining. A lot of time was spent ironing out technical and organizational kinks, most having to do with translation of one kind or another. My Dari still has a long way to go before I can use it to teach technical classes, so I depended on my students Arzu and Faiqa to act as translators for their peers. And the Canon HD SLRs, which are the basis of the new program, work like a dream with the Mac and FCP system I set up at CCAA, but produced one headache after another with the many different versions of Win-

dows and Premiere on students' home systems. After six years of teaching in the highly regulated US university system, I also had to adapt to the extreme fluidity of education in Kabul, where the chaos of war and reconstruction has seeped into every aspect of life. Still, if my fifteen—or sometimes ten, or ten plus a new five—students didn't learn quite as much about post-production as I had hoped, in our twenty three-hour sessions of screenings, discussions and demos we did cover quite a lot of theory and practice. Some students took to the medium and some decidedly did not. Those who did will return for the follow-up workshop in October, which will begin with a week of intensive technical "training the trainers" for two or three potential teachers, who will then assist at a three-week workshop where each student will develop a single project from inception through delivery. I have even more practical knowledge to offer my students now that I've survived my own tricky production in Kabul. Since all my previous videos about Afghanistan were drawn from documentary footage that I shot on the fly, this project was my initiation into the Afghan production environment, and was made particularly complicated by the nature of the Dar ul-Aman Palace, the site and subject of the video. Dar ul-Aman is a ruin, a national monument, a strategic location, and a site of past battles over history, politics and territory. It is covered in multiple layers of graffiti, full of rubble and bomb holes and strange bits of trash, surrounded by barbed wire, guarded by the National Army, and subject to the jurisdiction of multiple ministries and generals. Visually, it is an extraordinarily rich, dense, textured space. Physically, it is extremely difficult, if not dangerous, to negotiate; to set up my long sequence of tracking

shots through the building, we had to hire four day laborers to clear a path through the rubble with pickaxes and shovels. Politically, it involves a nightmarish labyrinth of permissions, which took our "fixer" several full days to navigate, crisscrossing the city multiple times each day. Luckily, I had an extensive support network behind my project, which included project commissioners of DOCUMENTA (13), their Afghanistan-based partners at the Goethe Institute Kabul, the nonprofit TV station Saba (which loaned production equipment), and my family, whose house in the Dar ul-Aman district was pressed into service as production base camp.

Our best asset, however, proved to be the quiet, professional competence of the crew hired (unofficially, as moonlighters) from Afghan Films, the national film production support system. My longtime collaborator Erin Ellen Kelly flew in to serve as choreographer and AD, and we had originally hoped that students from the workshop could assist us on the shoot. That proved impractical because of the early-morning shooting schedule necessary to avoid the *khakbatt*, the dust storms that sweep through Kabul every afternoon between two and four. Aman Mojadidi from d13 helped me find and hire Hayatullah Alamyar and Ikramuddin Saddozaias production manager and production assistant. Hayat offered to help us find an Afghan actress, which led to a memorable afternoon in the Afghan Films building—a time capsule of peeling aquamarine paint, formica and linoleum. Erin and I sat on a flower-patterned couch in Hayat's office, drank endless cups of green tea, and watched as a succession of Afghan Film staffers came into the office, withdrew small black notebooks from their vest pockets, flipped through



Afghan crew helps clear the debris at the palace.

the pages, found and dialed numbers, conversed with actresses, relayed conditions, and exchanged increasingly incomprehensible banter. Many stories were told, including one about a pre-war shoot where an actress failed to turn up and Hayat had to assume a *burqa* to get a shot before they lost the light, which led to him being propositioned by a very persistent man on the street, because, of course, before the war only streetwalkers wore *burqas*. For some reason no one ever explained why there was a large fake palm tree hanging over Hayat's desk...

Ultimately three women came in to meet with us—one suspiciously haggard, one terrifically polished and snappy, and one quiet and composed—and we hired the quiet one, Parwana Riazi, because she fit into the costume. Later we discovered that she was not an actress but an editor at Afghan Films who wanted the acting job because she needed some extra cash—her television aerial had been struck by lightning and had burned out all the wiring in her house. Initially we had to

agree that neither her face nor her name would be used in the final video. But over the course of the shoot everyone built up an unexpected rapport, trust and investment in the outcome, and by the last day she decided that we could show her face and feature her name in the credits. Dar ul-Aman has played a part in some of the best and worst episodes of 20th-century Afghan history; to be trusted with its representation is no small thing.

After a long, strange, and sometimes arduous ten-day shoot, we ended with a tradition on Afghan sets. For good luck, on either the first or last shot of the production, something sweet is thrown at the camera, filling the frame—usually wrapped hard candies or flowers. We used rose petals, gathered from a walled garden.

An abbreviated version of this article appears in the Fall 2011 issue of Filmmaker magazine.

AT A GLANCE

Fall 2011 / Spring 2012

In the US

September 30 – October 31, 2011

ArtsLink Awards | **BRANKO FRANCESCHI** (Croatia) opens the Overseas Headquarters of the Virtual Museum of Avant-Garde Art with Residency Unlimited in New York, NY.

October – November 2011

ArtsLink Awards | **OTO HUDEC** and **MAGDALENA STANOVÁ** (Slovak Rep.) install site-specific works for the exhibition *Voices from the Center* at threewalls gallery in Chicago, IL.

October 10 – November 19, 2011

ArtsLink Awards | Fifteen ArtsLink Fellows from abroad are in residencies at the US arts organizations.

October 12 – 21, 2011

ArtsLink Awards | **BORUT SEPAROVIĆ** (Croatia) researches and casts his stage adaptation of Paul Auster's *Timbuktu* with HERE Arts Center in New York, NY.

Ongoing – February 2012

ArtsLink Awards | **SANDRO DUKIĆ** (Croatia) performs a piece by Nan Hoover as part of The Getty Research Institute's performance series *Kaleidoscope of Pacific Standard Time*.



January 12 – February 23, 2012

ArtsLink Awards | **DENIS KOLOKOL** (Ukraine/Poland) collaborates with The Herb Alpert School of Music at CalArts in Valencia, CA, on an electronic composition and performance.

March 2012

inPublic NYC | A collaboration between US and international artists at **THE POINT** in the Bronx launches the **ONE BIG CITY** initiative.

April 1 – 15, 2012

ArtsLink Awards | **SVETLANA SPAJIĆ-LATINOVIĆ** (Serbia) performs and teaches master classes on ancient Serbian folk music in collaboration with Kitka Women's Vocal Ensemble in Oakland, CA.

Abroad

Ongoing through April 2012

ArtsLink Awards | **MARIAM GHANI** (NY) conducts second workshop in a series of three on video and filmmaking in collaboration with the Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan in Kabul.

Through November 13, 2011

ArtsLink Awards | **HANK WILLIS THOMAS** (NY) exhibits work and participates in lectures and workshops at the Istanbul Biennial.

October 2011

ArtsLink Awards | **LOS ANGELES CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS (CA)** Associate Director Robert Crouch explores exhibition possibilities at the Unsound Festival and with the Tone Foundation in Krakow, Poland.

Through October 16, 2011

Global Art Lab | US artists **KENDAL HENRY** and **MARK JENKINS** conduct public art workshops at Ilkhom Theater in Tashkent, Uzbekistan; J.D. Beltran, Scott Minneman, and Andrea Steudel conduct workshops and work with local artists in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

January 7 – 21, 2012

ArtsLink Awards | **CHRIS FITZPATRICK (CA)** curates an exhibition at the 2012 ART IST KUKU NU UT in Estonia and researches the Baltic Notebooks of Anthony Blunt in Vilnius, Lithuania.



April 5 – 20, 2012

ArtsLink Awards | **TRIPLE CANOPY (NY)** conducts workshops and public conversations in collaboration with Duplex Gallery in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Spring 2012

Global Art Lab | Five traditional American music groups perform and conduct workshops across Russia as part of the US Embassy's "American Seasons" Festival.

OUR PROGRAMS

ArtsLink Awards facilitates the exchange of arts professionals through three programs:

- ArtsLink Projects support US artists, curators, presenters, and arts organizations undertaking projects in eligible countries
- ArtsLink Residencies support US organizations to host artists and arts managers from eligible countries for five-week residencies
- Independent Projects support artists and arts managers from eligible countries to pursue collaborative projects in the US

Global Art Lab responds to current artistic and cultural issues in Russia and Central Asia through collaborations, exchanges, performances, professional development workshops and short-term residencies.

inPublic NYC presents workshops, readings, exhibitions, and performances with US and international artists in New York through the ONE BIG CITY project and other initiatives.

Application Deadlines

For artists and arts managers from 32 eligible countries:

October 15, 2011

ArtsLink Residencies in visual & media arts (residency will take place in fall 2012)

December 1, 2011

ArtsLink Independent Projects grants in all disciplines


For US arts professionals and arts organizations:

January 13, 2012

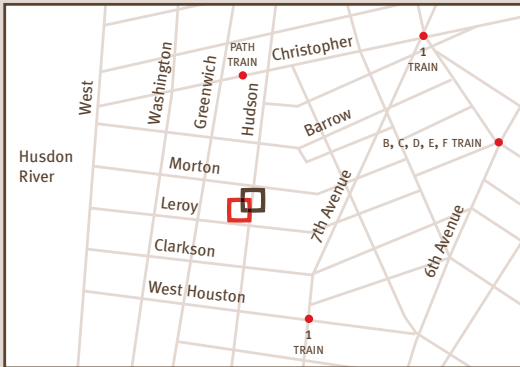
ArtsLink Projects grants in performing arts & literature

For more information visit www.cecartslink.org.

Major funding is provided by generous individuals, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; the Kettering Family Foundation; the Kettering Fund; the National Endowment for the Arts; Ohio Arts Council; Open Society Institute; Mikhail Prokhorov Foundation for Cultural Initiatives; The Robert Sterling Clark Foundation; the Rockefeller Foundation; Trust for Mutual Understanding; US Embassy Moscow.

 **CECartsLink** promotes international communication and understanding through collaborative, innovative arts projects for mutual benefit. We support and produce programs that encourage the exchange of visual and performing artists and cultural managers in the United States and 32 countries abroad. We believe that the arts are a society's most deliberate and complex means of communication and that the work of artists and arts administrators can help nations overcome long histories of reciprocal distrust, insularity and conflict.

435 Hudson Street, 8th floor • New York, NY 10014 • 212.643.1985 • www.cecartslink.org



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CEC ArtsLink is wheelchair accessible.

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All art is by CEC ArtsLink's participants.

Cover

Hank Willis Thomas, *I Am Many*, 2009, Liquitex on canvas, 25 1/4 X 19 1/4 X 2 1/4 inches, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.

At a Glance, clockwise from bottom left: Processional Arts Workshop (Red Hook, NY) conducts a workshop with local artists in Kiev, Ukraine in preparation for the night procession inspired by Mikhail Bulgakov's masterpiece *The Master and Margarita*, September 2011.

Artists from Central Asia complete a mural in New York in a Global Art Lab workshop with the artist Gabriel Reese (Brooklyn, NY), March 2011

Jason Ditzian of Charming Hostess (San Francisco, CA) performs in Uzbekistan, April 2011.