

Akram Assam

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Location: Netherlands, Amsterdam



Education, Training, and Awards:

Diploma of the Institute of Fine Arts, Baghdad.

Bachelor of Fine Arts Academy of Baghdad - University of Baghdad

Berlin Academy of Arts (artistic residency for development)

Master of Arts Amsterdam University

Best young Iraqi director

Nomination for DNA's next Amsterdam Prize

Teaching in modern theater in various places in Europe and Iraq, in addition to working as a theater maker and performer.

In the past years, Akram Assam's main theme has been the impact of war and violence on humans. Coming from a war zone, he knows the effect this has on the body and mind of the people, who have had to put up with it and its effects on society. Through his work, he wants Western audiences to learn about the diverse and multi-layered effects of war and violence. For him theater is not “fun” or just a “story”, theater conveys knowledge and experiences to the audience so that they can understand the world around them more profoundly and holistically.



THE TURTLE - Berlin, Germa

To achieve this, Akram devised a new method: collecting memories about himself and others. They are the foundation of the work but transformed into a fantasy setting, amplified through the meticulously constructed use of performance, motion, video, photography, and lighting design. His use of real memories of war/violence enhances our awareness as spectators but places them in a fictional stylized form, enabling it to guide spectators in the path of their imagination and empathy.

This combination creates a new, different, and effective way of telling stories, establishing a connection with the audience by addressing them during the performance and leaving room for interpretation due to the countless images it produces.

Akram uses this methodology in both his recent works *Here I Am There* (2019) and *cassettes* (2020). He collected the memories and stories of the Iraqi people about how the war affected their lives. Turn them into one long text. The audience heard a male voice speaking in Arabic. The English translation is shown as a background projection. During the performance, the red and green squares were projected onto the floor, disappeared, and back. In the background, images of modern buildings appeared - up close - and left the audience wondering how they relate to the sadness and pain that the texts reveal.

Akram is on stage. Sometimes he is actively one of the red squares, lying on the floor or standing still, and sometimes he addresses the audience directly and talks about the performance of that performance, its darkness, and tries to make it less hideous by offering a little wine to the spectators.

The countless images and impressions it creates, in a rather dark and slow series of events, give the audience time to be there, and get used to the irregularities of the story and the disturbing aspects of the war. That's not all. Suddenly the "green squares" "green zoon" are placed in the audience area, while Akram remains in the red zone on the stage. Akram wants us to actively confront our safety, but not only that, security combined with danger and violence elsewhere. You feel uncomfortable about your little wine! you knew, of course, but being put in the "safety" spotlight like this has another effect: annoying and embarrassing. Just like the end of the show when you watch a recurring video of a devastated city with military vehicles in motion, you know that the shiny modern buildings you saw earlier are your safe reality. Very different from what a lot of people in the world have to deal with *Five Nights*.

Five Nights is a special project that takes place five nights in a row. A different story every night, referring to 1001 Nights, the Arabic heritage that I grew up with. In addition, *Five Night* witnesses a family tradition. During the warm summer nights in Baghdad, I lay on the top of the roof of our house listening to my grandmother's stories. She also based her stories on those of 1001 Night, but also featured me, my family, friends, and just happened events. I adopt this method in *Five Nights*. I base the stories on those of Scheherazade but interweave Amsterdam in it and how migrants experience their new home and its residents.

Akram is in a lab continuously working with memory.

Entering a lab that explores physical movement and its relationship to memory by motivating to explore his body from different perspectives and find its movement vocabulary...

Series of translations of memory and stories that relate to the city and them in their daily lives or that they have experienced in the past, among words, images, sounds, and movements ...

as we write, draw, dance, think, watch,
imitate, write again, close our eyes,
dance our words, paint our feelings, sing
our drawings, make stories, design our
movement...

Researching the essential elements of
choreography - form, rhythm, and
gesture. Translate the stories we will
write into videos related to movement
and dance and designing lines and lights
related to the borders inside us and
placing them on the stage to navigate
within our stories, our memories, and the
memories of the city



HERE I'm THERE - Amsterdam, Netherlands 2019



Researching the relationship of man to the city through generations, how the city has changed now, and how we preserve our traditions within the modern city.

How do we tell history to the next and present generation?

How do we spread our stories and legends in the sea and desert and bring them into the city in a modern way?



CASSETTES - Rotterdam, Netherlands 2020



FIVE NIGHTS - Amsterdam, Netherlands 2021

Aim Akram work:

It is to present Akram and his works to a wide audience.

Akram's work is likely to be of interest to different target groups from people who love to tell stories to those who have a greater affinity with performance art and other abstract forms of theater and even the visual arts. In addition, participating visitors from the country are identified as well as other non-original residents of the country

As a relative newcomer to any new city to present his project, he feels the need to meet the audience thereafter the performance. He is curious about their reaction, their experience, and how they feel, so he knows best what he can focus on to communicate his "message" in the research he's been working on for years. He wants his story and works to touch the heart of the beholder. To truly understand the privileged position they have by not having been brought up with war and violence.

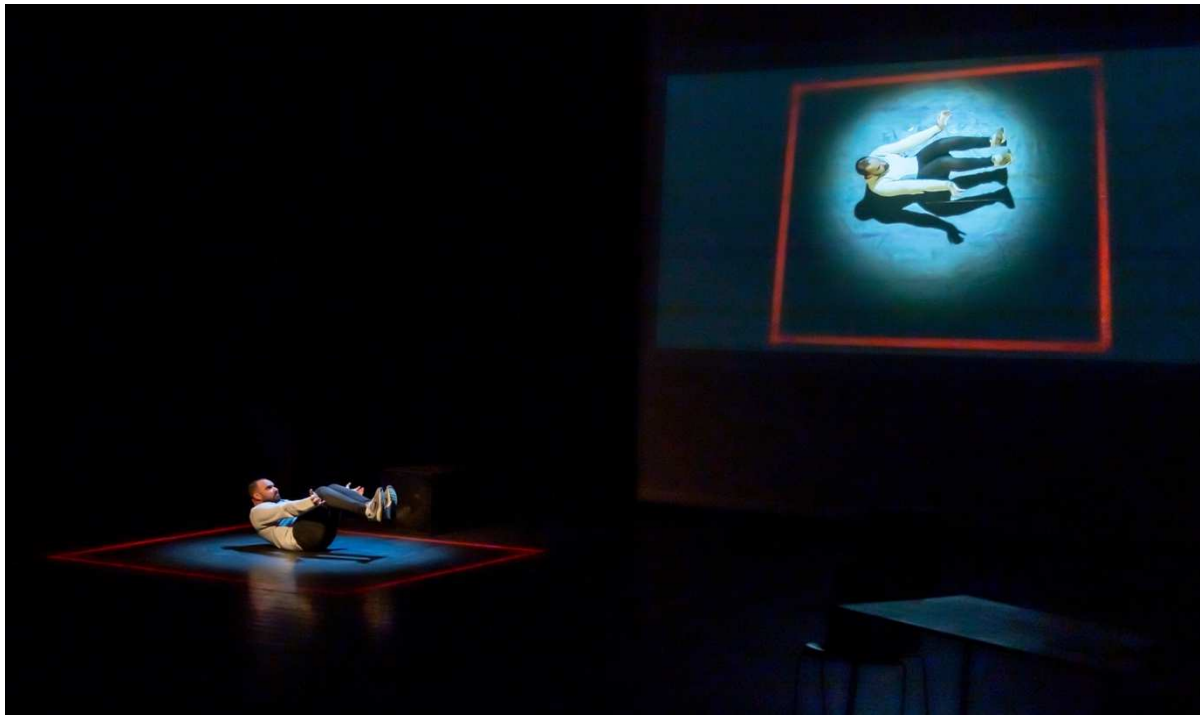
He is willing to reconsider his choices as an independent artist if they do not all come together (the result of rehearsals) and to choose new solutions and options that increase the impact on the audience. Akram believes that art is often placed above the audience's experience. Now he certainly doesn't make choices against art but artistic necessities have judgments. He too has anticipation and artistic vision, but he likes to let that be informed by the audience.



The language :

Akram speaks Arabic as his mother tongue and the language of performance and the workshop will be between English and Arabic if we have someone who speaks Arabic

FIVE NIGHTS - Amsterdam, Netherlands 2021 .



Artistic signature

I tell stories, stories from and about the Red Zone, the dangerous place in the world, where there is war and conflict. And I tell them to those who don't know this danger: to those who live in the Green Zone and have no idea how lucky they are to live there.

FIVE NIGHTS - Amsterdam, Netherlands 2021

First of all, I collect personal stories. I weave these into a whole and thus form a text that I write together with Chris Keulemans (A writer from Holland I've been working with for years). This text does not form the supporting narrative line of the performance but is one of the building blocks with which I create the performance. I also use video, lighting design, and the performativity of the players. Each of these components has its own distinct added value and meaning in the communication to the public. They are not supportive, like lighting design or decor that can be in (some) performances but are essential in conveying the storyline and theme.

My themes are war, violence, and migration: themes that may be big and difficult for those who were born and raised in the safe Netherlands. But for me as an experienced expert, it is very different. They were part of my daily life. I want to start a conversation about this in the Netherlands and let them experience what this means for people who experience this day in and day out. I have been living in Amsterdam for two years now and I am located between the red and green zones. The war is still in me, but I now also know what security feels like. This strange combination is my inspiration.

You may see some similarities in the image above because Akram works with lighting in this way, but it is different in performance and project.

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Here I Am There 52 min: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5gcQ5JCdGU>

Cassettes 40 min <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CECmOu2Ebg>

Five Nights 55 min <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcE52OOZOE>