

Parastoo Anoushahpour,
Faraz Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko
Sep 14 — Nov 23, 2024

 Western Front
303 E 8th Ave
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Canada

Lovers' Wind

Western Front is pleased to present *Lovers' Wind*, a multi-channel video installation by the Toronto-based artists Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, and Ryan Ferko whose collaborative filmmaking practice engages speculation, historical fiction, and documentation to excavate existing narratives and uncover the power relations and subjectivities shaped by them.

Developed over three years of archival and community research, the exhibition circles around the story of the French filmmaker Albert Lamorisse and his last film, *Bād-e Sabā* (The Lovers' Wind) (1978). Commissioned by the Imperial State of Iran to document the country's history and modernization, Lamorisse's film was largely shot from a helicopter to produce sweeping views of Iran's natural and built environments, and narrated by a voiceover personifying its winds. Unhappy with the original edit, the monarch Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi requested Lamorisse return to film additional sequences emphasizing the industrialization of Iran, which ultimately led to the filmmaker's death in 1970 when his helicopter crashed at Karaj Dam near Tehran during production.

Created a half-century later, Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, and Ryan Ferko's exhibition

both continues and deconstructs Lamorisse's project. In the central work, *Lovers' Wind* (2024), material drawn from *Bād-e Sabā* and autobiographical details from Lamorisse's life are directly sampled and restaged alongside new footage showing both candid and scripted encounters in Iran, Tunisia, and Canada. Unfolding across a large vertical projection and multiple TV screens of varying scales, *Lovers' Wind* mediates imagination, memory, and legacy, challenging the authorial voice of documentary filmmaking.

In the accompanying single channel video work *Postscript* (2024), a phone call with an archivist at the National Film Archive of Iran scores a slowed-down version of a short film made by the Iranian Ministry of Art and Culture from Lamorisse's final images of Karaj Dam. Recovered from the site of the crash, this footage was released as a companion piece alongside the final version of *Bād-e Sabā* posthumously completed a year before the Iranian Revolution. Across the conversation, the archivist speculates about the circumstances surrounding Lamorisse's film, revealing the always incomplete and fraught nature of the historical record and the stories they tell.

Lovers' Wind and *Postscript* each run for 37 minutes and play simultaneously.

A JANUS-FACED STORY

by Minh Nguyen

Sometimes premonitions tell you that you are in the throes of something more than a mere ‘accidental obsession.’

— John Akomfrah¹

In the early eighties in post-war Britain, a group of young African, African-Caribbean, and Asian artists who dubbed themselves The Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC) emerged to respond to a society unable to reconcile with its internal changes and the “states of emergency in which the diasporic communities existed.”² Through inventive combinations of an array of media—from 16mm to analogue video tapes to moving image archives of industrial workers and urban riots, to literary, ethnographic, and historical fragments on British nationalism and Black radical thought from Du Bois to Fanon—BAFC’s films sought to “invent a poetics of affect, beyond the scope of documentary media, that could penetrate beneath surface symptoms to the deeply buried psychic economy of race and belonging.”³

To put another way, by artist and BAFC member John Akomfrah, these works were characterized by an obsession with ghosts: haunting absence, disappearance, nonexistence. BAFC films were less about the information presented in the archival materials but a reflection of the artists’ relationship—or lack thereof—to it. There’s a moment when a marginalized group comes to realize that its self-concept was formed through strategies of exclusion masked as standard norms, Akomfrah explains in his essay “Memory and the Morphology of Difference”; “these regulatory mechanisms that it sensed were ‘framing’ and giving shape to that life, were in fact that same mechanisms conferring an identity upon it; that its identity was emerging out of something far too generalized to be ‘personal’—out of something far too amorphous and yet so regular in its appearance and outline that it could only be understood as a ‘morphology of difference.’”⁴ As expressions of this realization, or what Akomfrah also calls “the moment

of the hyphen,” BAFC films were “always Janus-faced [...] always located somewhere between history and a series of counter-myths. It was work that wore its hybrid motivations very proudly on its sleeve.”

In *Lovers’ Wind*, the exhibition and multi-channel installation by Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, and Ryan Ferko first presented at Mercer Union, Toronto from January 20 to March 23, 2024, and subsequently at Western Front, Vancouver from September 14 to November 23, 2024, Akomfrah’s questions and “Janus-faced” approach are enlivened and refreshed. It is a work likewise obsessed with the ghosts that haunt Iranian cultural memory, starting with one man in particular: the French filmmaker Albert Lamorisse. In 1968, the monarch of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, with support from the Iranian Ministry of Art and Culture, commissioned Lamorisse to make a film about a nation as beautiful as it is modern. When he submitted *Bād-e Sabā* (or *The Lovers’ Wind* in English) the Shah was dissatisfied, deeming the shots too sentimentally bucolic and contrived (Lamorisse had created a helicopter-mounted camera to emulate the winds from an aerial vantage, but ultimately recorded people scurrying from the dust the helicopter blades billowed.) Consequently, the director was sent back to capture scenes of laboratories, factories, and other feats of civil infrastructure—the grandest of which would take his life. In 1970, Lamorisse crashed his helicopter into the reservoir of the Karaj Dam, a newly completed project regarded as the greatest achievement of the Pahlavi regime. Lamorisse’s water-damaged footage was retrieved from the helicopter and stored in the Iranian Ministry of Art and Culture. The regime fell soon after, with the director’s death deemed as foreshadow in retrospect.

1. John Akomfrah, “Memory and the Morphologies of Difference.” *Politics of Memory: Documentary and Archive*, ed. Marco Scotini and Elisabetta Galasso (Berlin: Archive Books, 2016).
2. The Black Audio Film Collective were John Akomfrah, Lina Gopaul, Reece Auguste, Avril Johnson, Edward George, Trevor Mathison, and David Lawson.
3. *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective, 1982 – 1998*, ed. Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007).
4. *Politics of Memory*, 26.

In the 2024 *Lovers' Wind*, this story is told straightforwardly and not. Through sampled footage that is remixed, manipulated, and collaged with new material filmed between Iran, Tunisia, and Canada, the artists seek to both continue and deconstruct Lamorisse's original project. Created a half-century later during a present moment of popular unrest against the authoritative state in Iran, art historian Leila Pourtavaf writes that *Lovers' Wind* "mimics the original film's intention to document the Iranian condition, but offers a different approach: a deconstruction of national identity in the face of state repression, migration, and exile."⁵ Documents, such as the haunting footage Lamorisse recorded of the dam before his crash, are projected and played on multiple surfaces in the exhibition space. Throughout the film, scenes elucidate details of the director's life, some too strange to believe. In addition to directing films, such as the beloved 1956 children's classic *The Red Balloon*, Lamorisse invented the board game of colonial strategy and military conquest Risk. A character who inhabits Lamorisse tells us these facts, which are followed by dream-like sequences: a red balloon bobs against the ceiling. Two characters scuttle game pieces across a Risk board on a suburban hill in Toronto, a scene that brings to mind Akomfrah's notion of "memory as counter-cartography: memory as a map by which one re-navigates the present."

While details and documents flash like clues that may unlock a broader conspiracy (the reason, say, for the fall of the regime), *Lovers' Wind* does not attempt to solve any mystery. A layer of mediation—of time, of distance, of the artists themselves—separates us and the story, disclosing the impenetrability of the original referents. In *Postscript*, the water-damaged footage retrieved from the helicopter crash is slowed down and paired with a recorded phone conversation with an employee of the National Film Archive of Iran. What initially takes the tone of interrogation dissolves into speculation, when after thirty minutes of analyzing the circumstances of the original film, the archivist concludes that "maybe all the narratives that we are repeating for fifty years are fundamentally wrong." These irresolute moments are when the exhibition feels most intimate and mournful, as insights into the diasporic psyche, into the quest to piece together a historical identity from documents that are themselves fraught and incomplete.

In his essay, Akomfrah makes a clarifying point about the nature of BAFC's existential questions that to me also seems essential to *Lovers' Wind*. The point may seem paradoxical: though this

work has always been infused with a politics of identity, it is anti-identity politics. That is, while it attempts to foreground the theoretical, cultural, and psychoanalytic implications that the term "identity" implies, it does not seek to find comfort in belonging or a cohesive national narrative. *Lovers' Wind* is not solely about the story of Lamorisse, or the Iran that once was, but a meditation of what Akomfrah describes as "the cognitive dissonance, an unusual perceptual positioning that allows one to be both foreigner and citizen at the same time."⁶ "It is a story about a love affair that collapses and fails," Parastoo tells me, and I can't help but hear it as a description of the artists' own relationship to their subjects—of their own accidental obsession with a story that taunts with clues but can never be solved.

5. Leila Pourtavaf, "Lovers' Wind," exhibition essay, Mercer Union, Toronto (2024).
6. *Politics of Memory*, 27.

Biographies

Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, and Ryan Ferko have worked in collaboration since 2013. Their shared practice explores the tension of multiple subjectivities as a strategy to address the power inherent in narrative structures. Foregrounding the idea of place, their work seeks to both decode their surroundings and trouble the production of images through speculative narration and dialectical imagery, with the presentation of their work shifting between gallery and cinema contexts.

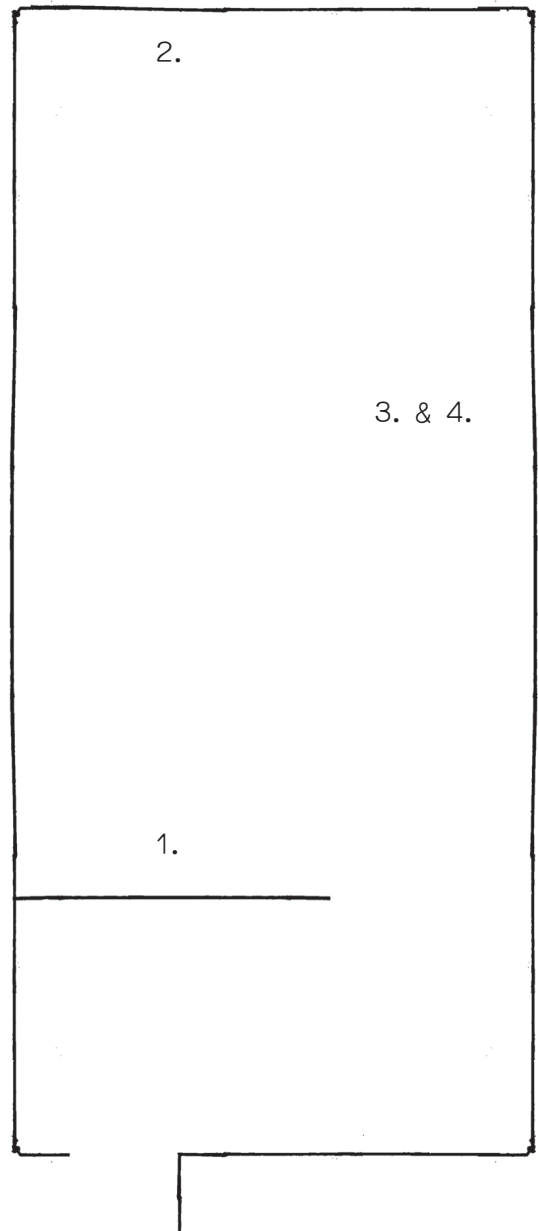
Minh Nguyen is a writer, editor, and organizer of exhibitions and programs currently based in New York, by way of Ho Chi Minh City. Her writing appears in publications such as *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *Momus*, *MOUSSE*, *frieze*, and *ArtAsiaPacific*, among others. She has curated exhibitions and screenings at Wing Luke Museum, Northwest Film Forum, King Street Station, Gene Siskel Film Center, and Chicago Cultural Center. Nguyen received a 2022 Andy Warhol Arts Writers award, and was a 2022–24 visiting scholar at New York University via the Asia/Pacific/America Institute. Currently the managing editor of *e-flux Journal*, she is working on a book of essays, forthcoming with Art Metropole.

List of Works

Floorplan

1. Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko
Lovers' Wind (2024)
16mm to HD
37 min.
2. Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko
Postscript (2024)
35mm to telecine video to HD
37 min.
3. *Dams of Iran (From Ancient Times to Now)*, by Ahmad Azadfar
Digital scan of original typewritten dissertation, Department of History and Geography, University of Tehran, 1961-62. Courtesy Tavakoli Archives, Toronto.
video
25 min.

Documentation of live performance on ney, by Kahveh, Spadina Subway Station, Toronto (2024)
video
3 min.
4. Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko
Helicopter fuselage suspended over Karaj Dam (2024)
SD video
5 min.



Project Team

Curator: Susan Gibb
Assistant Curator: Kiel Torres
Design: Line-Gry Hørup
Technicians: Ben Wilson

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