

## FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

**Mon Dec 10 | 8:30 pm |**

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$12 [members \$9]

### **JUMANA MANNA: *Wild Relatives***

A “wild relative” is the natural counterpart of a domesticated plant—its pre-agribusiness archive, its memory. Going back and forth between Lebanon and Norway after the closure of a seed bank in Aleppo, Jumana Manna’s latest film powerfully ties two burning contemporary issues: the war in Syria and the need to protect biodiversity. She weaves an intimate texture, combining small acts of resistance against the oppression of farmers, the well-meaning policy of international organizations, and the intensive labor of young female refugees gathering the seeds. Manna is a US-born Palestinian filmmaker and sculptor whose films have been shown in such major festivals as the Berlinale, The Viennale, Rotterdam, Dokfest Kosovo, Sheffield, Cinéma du Réel, Haifa, and Göteborg. She lives and works in Berlin.

#### **In Person: Filmmaker Jumana Manna; Curators Shoghig Halajian and Suzy Halajian**

“The subtle, slow-burning intelligence of Manna’s film lies in the way she gently holds up the best of these intentions against quiet but forceful evidence that suggests baser motives and more troubling consequences.” – *Artforum*

“Close-ups of hands as they artificially pollinate plants, dissect, handle, wash, package, prune and run through soil to assess its quality feature at many stages of the film and it is this labor and dedication that the film respectfully acknowledges and gives space to.”

– Humbolt-Universität zu Berlin

“Jumana Manna’s ability to reveal a story’s multiple facets, and surprising political undertones, remains just as striking. Like Emily Dickinson, she catches the truth aslant, and her talent earned her the Best Art Film prize at this year’s CPH:Dox Film Festival.”

– Museum of the Moving Image Art *Reverse Shot*

## **Program**

### ***Wild Relatives***

(2018, 66 min)

I began *Wild Relatives* by way of broader questions around how taxonomic approaches to nature have accelerated material and social changes to the life cycles of plants and their allies, small farmers. I have been thinking about the complicated experience of encountering something so beautiful that carries with it histories of colonial violence; be it a herbarium sheet, a botanical garden, or a seed sprouting in a biotechnology lab.

While in Lebanon, I came across ICARDA (the International Center of Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas). It had recently moved from Aleppo, Syria to the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon, due to the Syrian civil war. The center was unable to move its genebank, leaving behind a fully intact collection of over 140,000 seed samples collected from small farmers and the wild. To continue their work, ICARDA created a duplicate bank in Lebanon from back-up copies withdrawn from the Global Seed Vault, a storage facility for many of the world's crop genebanks. The vault is in Svalbard, an island in the Arctic Ocean under Norwegian custody. ICARDA was the first center to ever take out their seeds and this garnered a lot of media attention.

This geographic connection and the symbolic resonances of the story inspired me to build a narrative, which takes these two tiny spots on the earth, connected by a transaction of seeds, as a starting point. The more I learned, the more I realized that in order to address this event, many other stories had to be told. (JM)

### **Preceded by:**

#### ***A Sketch of Manners (Alfred Roch's Last Masquerade)***

(2013, 12 min., co-scripted with Norman M. Klein)

Based on an archival photograph, the film recreates a masquerade thrown in 1942 in Jerusalem by Palestinian National League member Alfred Roch. It invokes a forgotten history, in which unmasked and melancholic pierrots point toward the post WWII events that will irrevocably change the future of Palestine and its people.

**Jumana Manna** is an American born Palestinian artist and filmmaker. After studying at the National Academy of Arts in Oslo, she earned a master's degree in Aesthetics and Politics from the California Institute of the Arts. Her artwork has been shown in solo exhibitions including Henie Onstad Museum, Oslo and Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin,

Chisenhale Gallery, London, Malmö Kunsthall, Sculpture Centre New York, and CAPC, Bordeaux. In 2017 she was nominated for the Preis der Nationalgalerie, Berlin. Her films have been shown at the Rotterdam International Film Festival, the Göteborg Film Festival, the Guggenheim Museum, BAFICI (Buenos Aires), Lincoln Center Art of the Real Festival, the Berlinale, the Viennale, CPH:DOX (Copenhagen), Cinéma du Réel (Paris), Sheffield Doc/Fest (UK), DokFest Kosovo, and Tate Modern (London), among others.

Filmography:

2010: *Blessed Oblivion*, 21 min; *The Umpire Whispers*; 15 min.

2013: *A Sketch of Manners (Alfred Roch's Last Masquerade)*, 12 min; *The Goodness Regime*, 21 min., co-directed by Silje Storihle.

2016: *A Magical Substance Flows Into Me*, 68 min.

2018: *Wild Relatives*, 66 min.

This screening is part of the exhibition "**A grammar built with rocks**", curated by Shoghig Halajian and Suzy Halajian." Beginning with research into the 1950s history of the Chavez Ravine evictions, the project appropriates its title from Édouard Glissant's writings, as it looks to the ways in which the landscape contains, unfolds, and narrates its own history. It attempts to present artistic practices that trace the racialized and gendered relationship between bodies and land, and question narratives of socioecological crisis that contribute to the displacement and erasure of people and collective formations.

**Shoghig Halajian** is a curator and writer whose work employs a feminist and queer reading of historical narratives, and explores visuality's implications on the material conditions of bodies and on legislation. She currently serves on the Board of Directors at Human Resources and was Assistant Director at LACE from 2013-2016. In addition, she has presented projects at the Hammer Museum; ONE Archives at the USC Libraries; UKS, Oslo; Magasin-Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Grenoble, among others. She is currently a PhD student in History of Art, Theory & Criticism at the University of California, San Diego.

**Suzy Halajian** is an independent curator, researcher, and writer. Her work deals with the intersection of art and politics – especially the legacies of trauma and conflict in experimental documentary and performance practices from the Middle East and North Africa and their diaspora. Halajian has curated exhibitions and programs at Human Resources, LACE, Hammer Museum, ONE Archives at the USC Libraries, Los Angeles Contemporary Archive (all Los Angeles);

Sursock Museum, Beirut; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; UKS, Oslo; Disjecta, Portland among others. Her writing has been published by *ArtEast*, *BOMB*, *X-TRA*, *Ibraaz*, among others.

*Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud as part of the Jack H. Skirball Series. Funded in part by the Ostrovsky Family Fund. Presented as part of "A grammar built with rocks," a two-part exhibition by curators Shoghig Halajian and Suzy Halajian at Human Resources LA (September 29–November 4, 2018) and ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Galleries (October 12–December 22, 2018). "A grammar built with rocks" is supported by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, Goethe-Institut, Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant, ONE Archives at the USC Libraries, and Pasadena Art Alliance.*