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100 years then and hereafter

An exhibition by Hiba Abdallah
Curated by Sandy Saad-Smith

March 15 - May 15, 2021

DEAR CITIZEN OF 2121,

I AM SURE THIS MESSAGE IS THE LAST TRACE OF ME THAT REMAINS. FROM THIS FINAL TRANSMISSION, I WANT TO KNOW IF WE MADE IT. AGAINST ALL ODDS, AGAINST THE RISING TIDE AND THE SUFFOCATING BLANKET OF CARBON DIOXIDE, AGAINST HABITAT DESTRUCTION AND RESOURCE DEPREDATION, AGAINST IGNORANCE AND DENIAL... AGAINST IT ALL, ARE WE STILL HERE?

I AM SURE THIS IS THE LAST TRACE OF ME THAT REMAINS

Reflecting on their mortality and the state of the world, the author of this note expresses a genuine sense of uncertainty and concern. They list several odds stacked against the stability of life, wondering if there will be anything left to support the future reader to whom the note is addressed. The message is intended for a citizen of 2121 and is one of many prompted by an invitation from the artist, Hiba Abdallah, for the exhibition *100 years then and hereafter* at the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington.

Looking back 100 years into the Municipality of Clarington's documented history, Abdallah used her findings as the grounds for the exhibition. Situated in the middle of a 200-year timeline, the project operated between past, present, and future. *100 years then and hereafter* examined a century's worth of archival material and communicated to the citizens who will inhabit the world 100 years from now. Through the exhibition, Abdallah prompted us to think about how history is recorded, repeated, and remembered. Abdallah proposed a counter archive, inviting whoever wished to participate in the project's *Messages to the Future*. Messages were collected online and in person during the show allowing for constellations of meaning and intensity to shift and evolve over time.

The exhibition combined futuristic design, history, and fantasy to explore ways to interpret the future. *Don't Worry About Hard Times* was one of the first text works hung in a row of bold reflective-chrome phrases appearing against shiny, poster-sized black-boards. The words are extracted from various documents found in Clarington's archives — diary entries, political documents, and newspaper headlines.

These texts take on new meaning in a contemporary context, sharing uncanny similarities to the present moment. The works were positioned adjacent to a series of pristine reflective time-capsules, each paired with objects inspired by present-day events and Abdallah's findings in the Clarington Museum's collection. They included a flashlight, a face mask, and a piano tuner. The tuner references pianos crafted by the Dominion Organ and Piano Company, a once prominent Bowmanville business. Abdallah used the notion of piano

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practices. Records in our society are determined by the distribution of wealth. The most powerful and richest communities have the greatest capacity to find documents, preserve them, and decide what is, or is not, available to the public.¹

In her play with time and narrative, Abdallah recreates, reckons with, and reveals systems of archival strategies. She forges a co-authoring for a future we can only imagine today.² Abdallah engages the community to view the archive through a different lens, while creating new ways of engaging with historical material. Various conversations emerge from the project: the relationship between the past, present, and future; the relationship between building a record of an experienced present and for an imagined future; the relationship between the institutional record and the community record.

100 years then and hereafter invites us to think about how we create, store, and circulate information. Abdallah's archival research investigates this form as both an artistic medium and a working method that generates new kinds of relationships to information. As both an artistic vehicle and a methodology of artmaking, Abdallah's counter-archive functions as a force of active translation and an alternative mechanism for recording historical events.³ The exhibition is an intervention that ruptures the hegemonic record, making space for side-lined stories and perspectives. It enriches our perception of the past and unlocks a spectrum of divergent futures.

At the end of the exhibition, the collected messages were read during a performance by Abdallah. She placed them in the pristine time-capsules included in the installation, and then buried them underground. The capsules holding the new record are to be opened in 100 years — to be discovered, reckoned with, and assessed by the citizens of 2121. They will take on a new life in a different time, viewed through a different lens. Also, they will offer a narrative that was created by a community, serving as evidence of our existence and collective efforts.



tuning, the act of adjusting the tension of the strings to harmonize musical intervals, to ask participants to tune in through opportunities for meditation and reflection. Recontextualizing the objects to take on new imagined functions, she demonstrated their alternative potentials in a film that accompanies the installation. The video features the artist and her collaborator, Alyssa Bistonath, suited in futuristic silver jumpsuits. The artists store, contain, and preserve various objects found in the exhibition. This act was echoed at the end of the project when the messages collected from the community were placed in the time capsules and buried to be resurfaced in 100 years.

Looking at the archive as a conceptual and physical space in which memories are preserved and history decided, Abdallah created a restorative communal and collective space for personal reflection. Messages were submitted online and in person throughout the exhibition from March 15 to May 15, 2021, adding to a growing collection of historical testimonies. Created during the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism in Canada, the exhibition was shut down and reopened in accordance with provincial health regulations. It continued to live virtually as messages to the future poured in during the unprecedented times. Abdallah's invitation to create a new archive became a constructive gesture of social impact, opening the possibility for a nuanced and diverse historical narrative. The exhibition offered a conversation between the artist, the record, and the community that prompted critical reflections on archival practices and encouraged a more complex chronicle of our times. The messages to the future serve as evidence of their authors' existence, giving insight into their thoughts and experiences, while creating space for the community to set the record. The notes include expressions of advice, concern, pain, and guilt. By creating a space for members of the public to generate an archive, Abdallah becomes the composer of alternative outcomes, giving room for new possibilities and historical vistas.



¹ Lae1 Hughes-Watkins "Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices," Kent State University, 2018.
² Claire Bishop, "Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?" *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*.
³ Okwui Enwezor, "Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art" <https://www.wicp.org/sites/default/files/exhibition/credits/sites/default/files/exhibition_pdf/Archive_PRESS.PDF>

**DANGER
LURKS
IN EVERY
ONE OF US**

I AM SURE THIS IS THE LAST TRACE OF ME THAT REMAINS

Biographies

Hiba Abdallah is an artist and cultural organizer who frequently works with others. Her practice explores the structural legacies and futures of cities by researching the intersections of collaboration, communication, and disagreement as productive frameworks for re-imagining public agency. She lives and works in Toronto.

Sandy Saad-Smith is a curator and writer. Much of her work considers the ways in which artists disrupt and subvert hierarchical systems and narratives. Her curatorial practice aims to create more accessible and meaningful ways of engaging with art and asking questions. Sandy has over a decade of experience working in museums and galleries and is a former Curator of Exhibitions and Education at the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington. Sandy holds a Master of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto and is currently the Curator at the Doris McCarthy Gallery at the University of Toronto, Scarborough.

Essay by Sandy Saad-Smith

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