

# **Same Old Story: a Topography of Anti-Colonialism**

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## Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that I have written this paper as a guest on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish people, including the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh, and I am grateful because of that. As a tribute, I try to reflect on the methods of decolonization in my life, research and practice. My current project with the working title of *Same Old Story* is one result of my reflections.

## Vocabulary

At the beginning, I propose two definitional clarifications of the terms decolonization and narrative in order to provide readers with an understanding of the context in which I use these terms.

### Decolonization

This paper does not suggest any clear definition of the term decolonization but rather frames it as a question; as it is one of the primary aims of this work to contemplate how we can use the term. To set the tone of this paper, I borrow Frantz Fanon's definition of the term that Steven Salaita suggests in his book *Inter/Nationalism*.

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder. But it cannot be accomplished by the wave of a magic wand, a natural cataclysm, or a gentleman's agreement. Decolonization, we know, is a historical process: In other words, it can only be understood, it can only find its significance and become self coherent insofar as we can discern the history-making movement which gives it form and substance. Decolonization is the encounter between two congenitally antagonistic forces that in fact owe their singularity to the kind of reification secreted and nurtured by the colonial situation. (Fanon atd in Salaita xii)

Salaita continues this argument by writing that for Fanon, decolonization is less about physical resistance to foreign occupation and more about the psychological expulsion of the colonizer (a process that nevertheless can only occur through physical resistance) (Salaita xiii). This definition reminds us that decolonization requires action. In an environment such as university where the prevalent discussions around decolonization has barely changed the existing colonial structures, this work aims to open an opportunity to contemplate this term.

## **Narrative**

In a definition of narrative in Miriam Webster, it is considered as a way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values. I found this definition close to how this paper uses the term. During my research, I benefited a lot from resources that incorporated narrative history. Narrative history is the practice of writing history in a story-based form. It tends to entail history-writing based on reconstructing series of short-term events (Payne, Barbera 90). Partly in response to the COVID conditions the world has lived under for the past year, the resources that I have used during my research are all from the internet, and thus circulate digitally. I have not done any field research or interviews as a method of data collection, though this work has benefited immensely from conversations with several scholars and peers.

## Introduction

In order to discuss my current research project that engages historical colonial narratives, I need to take a step back and provide a brief account of my practice as an artist. After some years of working as a practicing artist, I know that the material of my work comes from my immediate environment. I constantly reflect on my interactions with my surroundings. When this environment changes, naturally the content and form of my work follow through. This pattern was most prominent around the time of my relocations from Tehran to Zurich, and from Zurich to Vancouver respectively. In an overview, I can see that I tend to shift my attention to places that constantly challenge me, places that make me feel uncomfortable. This is how I learn, it seems.

I have come to realize that different places demand different methods of interaction, and I cannot use the same model or mechanism as a default. Moving to Vancouver, I have been eagerly trying to know more about this city and generally about Canada. Since arriving in Canada, in addition to experimentation with understanding my environment, I was constantly exposed to discussions about colonialism. As a form of interaction with my environment, I gradually decided to further research the complex subject of colonialism, its mechanisms, its history and its power relations. The discourse of colonialism in Canada inspired me to reflect on terms like land ownership, decolonization, cognitive colonialism, settler-indigenous relations, neocolonialism, orientalism, etc. I was able to learn about the work of authors like Edward Said and Frantz Fanon in relation to history and decolonization, and whose ideas have been taken up by contemporary scholars such as Joseph Massad and Hamid Dabashi. Additionally, I familiarized myself with different methods of historical representation, as well as methods of archival research in the works of artists such as Mathew Buckingham and Julie Mehretu.

Here, I wish to discuss a personal motivation other than those mentioned above that has directed me toward this project. When I lived in Iran, coming from a middle-class family, the social inequality and injustice that I experienced mostly originated from class differences. Although I was aware of this inequality, I never reacted to it in my work. There was a thought at the back of my mind and a hope that I can

always surpass my social class. But, since I left Iran, the inequality and discrimination that I experienced has mainly been race-related. Based on the common global understanding of race, I do not belong to the privileged race, and this is not a hurdle I can surpass. I gradually gained this understanding by living in countries that are home to a privileged race. By gaining this understanding through lived experience, the idea of reacting to this reality of my life seeped into my practice. As I reflect on my current practice by looking back to my process, I can see one of the sources of inspiration that has led me to criticize colonialism is a struggle that I have in my day-to-day life in relation to racial discrimination. Here, I am mostly referring to a kind of racism that is silently embedded in the structures of western society and is rooted in the colonial mindset.

After a few months of living in Canada, I finally found a project that tethered me to the place, providing a new way to interact with my surroundings. In my current project, I am attempting to develop a global topology of anti-colonial movements and forces in order to better understand and contribute to Canada's contemporary discourse on colonialism. I have an interdisciplinary approach to this project and my main enquiry here is: what are the possibilities for creating a model that puts diverse narratives of colonialism in conversation with each other? Can such juxtapositions or contours produce an expanded understanding of decolonization? While these may be broad concepts to research and I am still at the early stages of this journey, I am excited by where it is leading me.



## Background

My mother is a journalist who has been active in several newspapers, and my father, a History graduate, is a documentary film producer and a former editor of a political monthly magazine in Iran. To seek distance from the sociopolitical discussions that surrounded me as I grew up, I ventured into the realm of fine arts. I wanted to carve my own path towards the future. After several years of art-making that mostly incorporated decorative elements, looking at my current practice catches me by surprise as I see how much it is inspired by journalism and is informed by history. I enjoy merging the role of the artist with that of a historian in my current work.

Although I was familiar with the history of colonialism in Iran, I was never particularly focused on the concept of colonialism and never felt inclined to incorporate it into my research and practice. As a result of living in a post-anti-colonial revolution era, the public opinion in Iran, living under a totalitarian regime, is not interested in the discourse of Western colonialism at the moment. After moving to Canada and gaining a new understanding of colonialism, I started to reflect on it in relation to Iran, and its history of colonization by British and Russian, and eventually American imperialism. The American coup of 1953 still has a strong negative presence in the Iranian collective memory, a coup that replaced a popular and democratic government with a dictatorship. I continue to face the legacies of colonialism that have had a deep impact on my life.

Through the discourse of colonialism in Canada, I came to realize besides its historical narrative, the discussion is about how colonialism has perpetuated its existence through the structures of society based on a colonial mindset, and also how colonialism is not a historical entity but an ongoing process. I began to reflect on what the possibilities are for decolonizing existing structures, i.e., our community and our mindset. What does decolonizing mean exactly? What are the best practices of decolonization? These personal preoccupations led me toward developing an artistic research process to further investigate these concepts.

Building a narrative has always worked for me as a way of connecting to a subject. In order to gain a deeper understanding of colonialism, I started an online search for events from around the globe that were connected to narratives of colonial interactions. I also started reflecting on the methods of reproducing these narratives, putting them into an artwork. Since my previous work, *Haikus* (2020) (figure 1) incorporated the institutional space of a university campus, I continue to remain sensitive to institutional buildings. *Haikus* speaks to the possibility of intimacy within an institutional culture. I used my writing as a tool to study the possibilities of bringing the private into the public. These haiku-like compositions were shaped through my everyday lived experience within the corridors of Emily Carr University as the institution, wherein I spent most of my days at the time. This led my research toward areas where the architecture reflects the historical experience of colonialism. In my research, I realized one of the strategies that colonial forces adopt in their quest for domination is to use monuments and buildings to impose their presence on the land both literally and metaphorically. I became interested in analyzing how the qualities of a building or a neighbourhood perpetuate colonial power relations.



Figure 1, from *Haiku* series (four of the twelve Graffitis), installation view, 2020

## Same Old Story

In my current project, *Same Old Story* (2020-present), I am reflecting on the possibilities and limits of image (moving and still), text (in any format) and sound, combined or separate, in order to find the best possible process of building narratives. In one iteration of *Same Old Story*, I have included four historical events in a single piece. The image component of this work consists of four different superimposed renderings based on online archival photos of the sites of these events that are laser engraved together on one canvas (figure 2,3). The four different narratives that I have chosen to include in this work are:

- The anti-colonial speech of Patrice Lumumba (the first prime minister of The Democratic Republic of Congo) at the ceremony of the proclamation of the Congo's independence (1961) in the Palais de la Nation in Kinshasa.
- The urban war that occurred during the Battle of Algiers (1956-1957) as a part of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) between France and the Algerian National Liberation Front. I am particularly interested in the role of the Casbah neighbourhood in these conflicts.
- Secret negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization happening in Norway that resulted in Oslo Accords.
- The British Embassy in Tehran as the symbol of colonial interventions in Iran , generally, but also specifically the negotiation of an oil concession between Britain and Iran that granted exclusive rights to oil prospects for Britain for 60 years (figure 4).

I specifically include different narratives in one piece in order to put these diverse events in conversation with each other. A source of inspiration in taking this approach is Eve Tuck and C. Ree's essay, "A Glossary of Haunting," where they advocate for violating the terms of settler-colonial knowledge which "requires the

separation of the particular from the general, the hosted from the host, personal from the public, the foot(note) from the head(line), the place from the larger narrative of a nation, and the people from specific places” (Tuck, Ree 640). In my work, I aim to emphasize the similarities of the selected events in terms of power relations. Another source of inspiration that encouraged me toward this approach was a traditional form of dramatic storytelling in Iran called *Pardehkhani*. *Pardehkhani* is a performance in which the performer stands in front of and narrates a large painted backdrop that depicts several interrelated stories (Figure 5). The painting component of this performance is a particular source of inspiration in creating my drawing.

To add to the livelihood of the stories and to encourage an intimate connection to the work, I decided to add sound to the project. The audio component, which is based on online archival sounds, following a similar logic, consists of four channels, with each sound related to a single event coming from a separate speaker. With *Same Old Story*, the aim is to combine drawings and sound to encourage a simultaneity among different narratives. The presence of diverse narratives in one work stimulates a fictional situation as if all the events are happening at the same time (link to the video of the work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JMKdFrJjA>). Finally, In order to provide some information about the events and also to bridge between drawing and sound, I include captions of each drawing in a supplementary booklet in the installation for visitors’ reference (see the appendix).

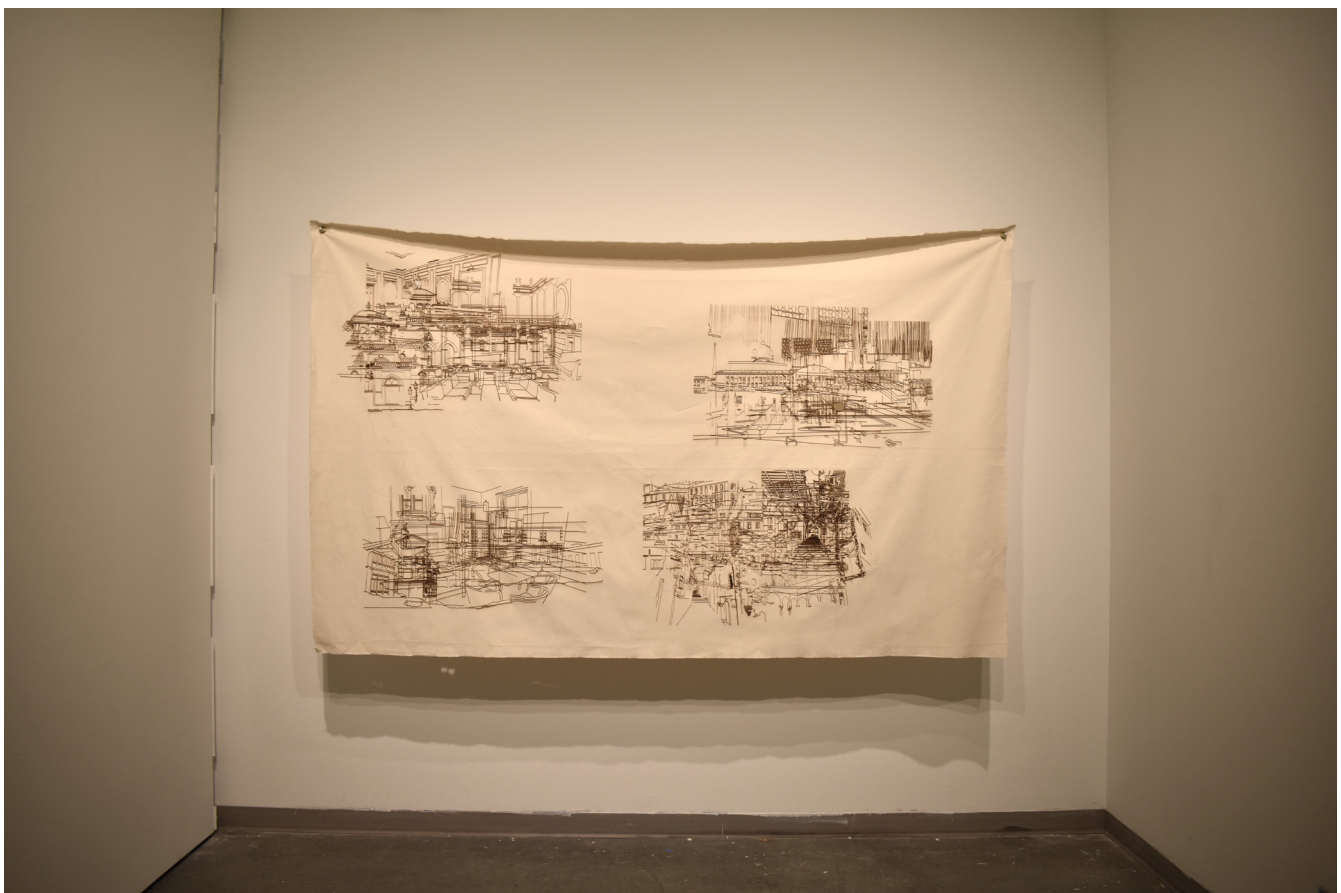


Figure 2, *Same Old Story* , The drawing component, laser engraving on raw canvas, 94\*63-inch



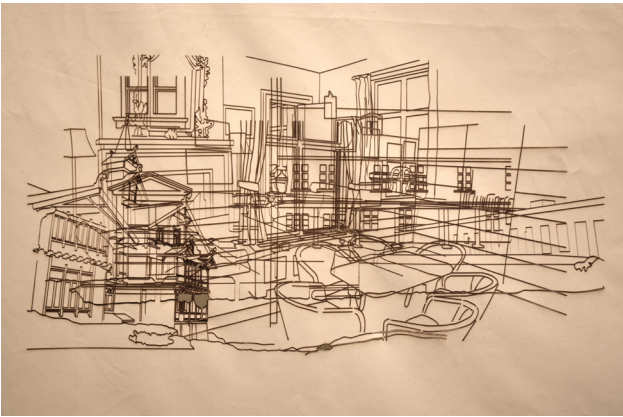
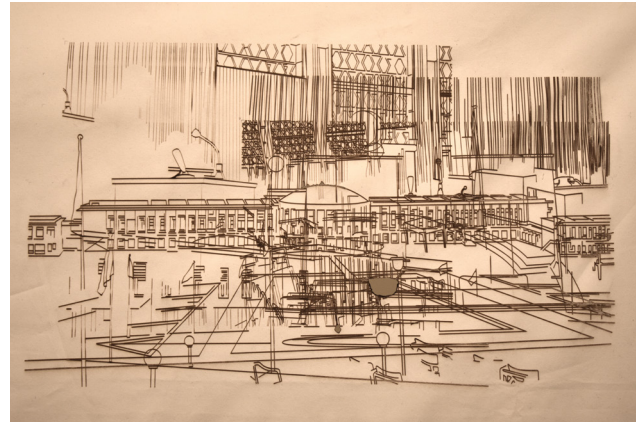
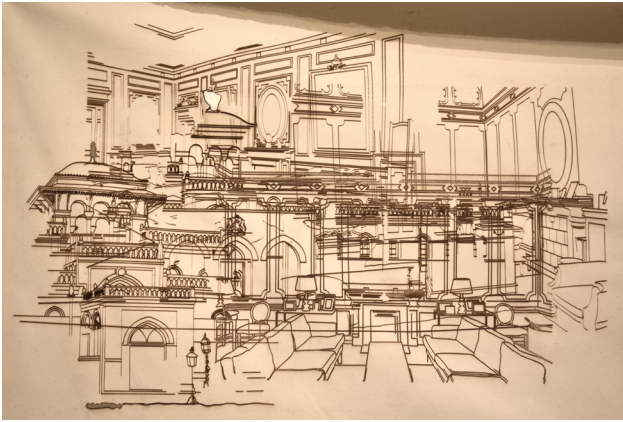


Figure 3, *Same Old Story*, details of the drawing

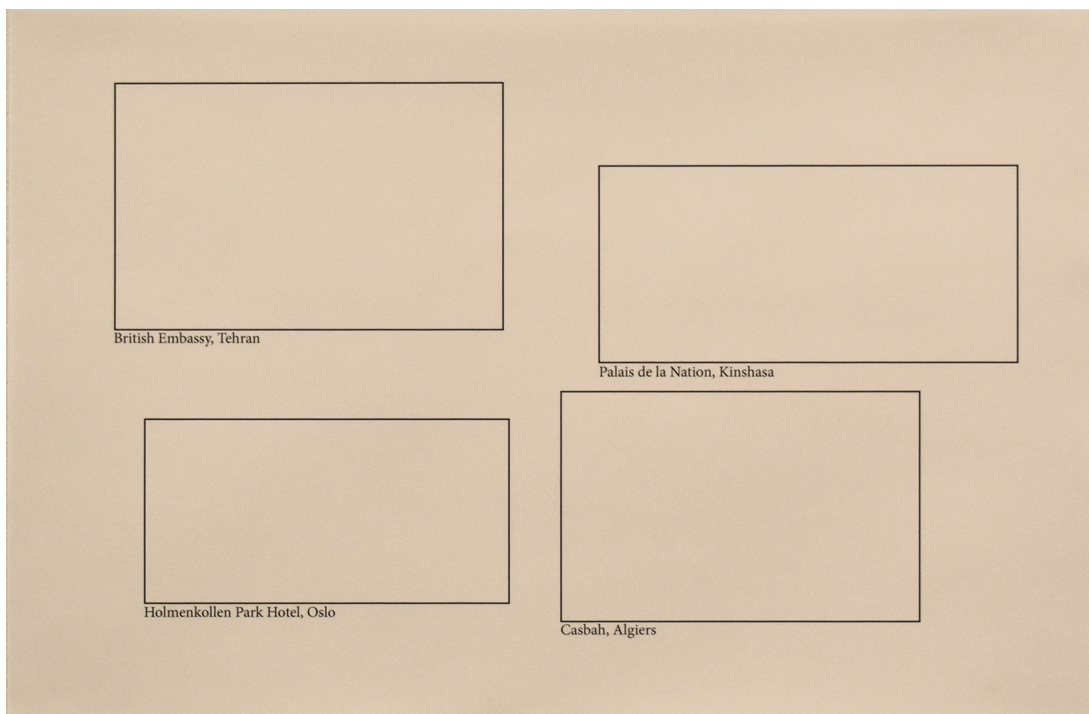


Figure 4, *Same Old Story*, a map of drawings

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24737138.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A9623fcf9b66ce259c-32312362da875b0>

(Figure 1)

Figure 5, *Pardehkhani* (a traditional form of dramatic storytelling in Iran)

## Cacophony

I am drawn to the idea of cacophony. I do not intend to prioritize my personal narrative over others as I relay the story associated with me (in this case, the story related to the history of colonialism in Iran) as part of a collection of different voices. By including several voices in my work, I am inspired by the work of Canadian artist Ken Lum, specifically his portrait-text<sup>1</sup> works. He adopts image and text to create a fictional situation in each of these works. Here, I discuss one of Lum's prominent artworks, *There is No Place Like Home* (2001) that exhibited for the first time as a 10mx54 m billboard on the side of the Kunsthalle Vienna. This work presents multiple voices within one space, giving rise to an aesthetic of pluralism. *There is No Place Like Home* was an enormous public installation that consisted of twelve visual blocks, six photographs, and six text cells on the subject of "home" (figure 6).

In "Ken Lum, Paul Wong, and the Aesthetics of Pluralism", Ming Tiampo suggests Lum actively refuses to focus solely on Chinese-Canadian issues but does not entirely ignore them either. Instead, he considers what his critical perspective brings to the larger context of his imagined community. His works shed light on a diverse and fractured community while articulating a model of pluralism that is relevant beyond the borders of Canada. Figuring multiple, overlapping, and conflicting narratives in his work, Lum employs an aesthetics of heterogeneity (Tiampo 181). Informed by this, in my work, I reflect on the possibilities of forming an aesthetic of heterogeneity. The format that I reached in *Same Old Story* to include several stories in one work is a result of this reflection. *There is No Place Like Home* had a major influence on me in creating this format.

In her article, Tiampo argues that, operating on multiple levels, Lum's work represents a diverse world without creating a discourse of otherness, by weaving together self and other into a fractured, heterogeneous, yet common fabric of experience. These pieces are banal, yet despite their banality, they are deeply political. Their strength comes from the multiplicity of stories that are told, and only

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1 "The Portrait Text works can be divided into three groups, the Portrait Logos, Portrait Attributes, and Portrait Repeated Texts, each of which considers a different kind of relationship between text and image." (Tiampo 184)

when the pieces are viewed together, that heterogeneous vision begins to emerge (Tiampo 184). My work also engages with the concept of banality in its own way. In my drawings, I am curious about the conditions of the buildings as the site of the stories: empty and banal spaces devoid of people that carry the weight of political events that perpetuated colonialism in one way or another. I believe the banality of the rooms is better exposed when nothing is happening inside them and they are empty of people.

The combination of the twelve panels in *There is No Place Like Home* pluralizes a myriad of reflections on the question of home. The simultaneity of the narratives, complicated by the purposeful ambiguity of text-image relations, creates an impression of chaos. Image and text are juxtaposed in such a way that the viewer is not sure which text belongs to which image. What emerges is a collage of multiple voices and narratives and a visual space in which no single narrative takes precedence over the others. The work does not provide a clear message that can be consumed. In *Same Old Story*, I aim to create a similar situation with the inclusion of drawings of different events and their related sounds in one work. Although Lum's work follows neat and legible aesthetics, the multilayered image and sound of my work make it difficult for the viewer to ground themselves and to fully understand the collapse of multiple narratives. I aim to suspend the viewer in the space between connecting to and disconnecting from the content of my work to illustrate how connecting to historical narratives necessarily involves fluctuations.

<http://kenlumart.com/there-is-no-place-like-home-2010/>



## Studio

As I previously discussed, my work includes a drawing and an audio installation, while the written texts, act to complement it. The drawings are made by digital line tracing a selection of photos. I collect the photos through an online search for places that are related to the selected events (i.e., Palais de la Nation in Kinshasa, Holmenkollen Park Hotel near Oslo, the Casbah neighbourhood in Algiers and the British Embassy in Tehran). By spending time with the photographs, I made a selection of five of them for each place to incorporate in my project. The selected photos were related to spaces within and around the building from various angles (figure 7). I traced the outlines of each photo, using a Wacom tablet and an optic pen and created a digital drawing of each. I used CorelDraw as my software for drawing.

Next, I imported the completed drawings as separate PDF files in separate layers to Adobe Illustrator and started experimenting with their sizes and their positions on a 94x63-inch background. I divided the background into four areas dedicated to the four events and included the drawings related to each event in these areas. In each area, I adjusted the positioning of the drawings in order to create a desired superimposed drawing. I meant to highlight the multiplicity of the narratives and the illegibility of history through these superimposed drawings and their messy appearance. (figure 8,9)

In order to create a physical version of my digital drawing, I experimented with a few techniques such as screen printing, digital printing on different kinds of photo papers, and digital embroidery on canvas and on muslin. In this process, I came across laser-engraving that was suggested to me by a colleague. After running some tests with a laser machine on different kinds of papers, fabrics and canvases, I found laser engraving on raw canvas a befitting choice for the work both formally and conceptually. I could explore different variants of the laser machine to learn about the possibilities of the technique. As a result, I could learn how to enhance the depth of drawing. Additionally, I learned how to set the machine to increase the possibility of burning the canvas and to create holes, as well as how to control and shape these burns. I particularly like this specific treatment process, as I found burning, destruction, and elimination in harmony with the history and trajectory of colonialism (figure 10).

In addition, I decided to give the work more liveliness by adding sound. I used a similar approach of multilayering in creating a sound installation. During the process of sound editing, after making some samples, I came to realize if I want to include both drawing and sound in one work, the type of connection to them needs to be the same. By that I mean if the connection to drawing happens instantly, the connection to sound needs to be instant as well and not delayed. This led me to select rather abstract sounds related to each story instead of the sound of a conversation, for instance.

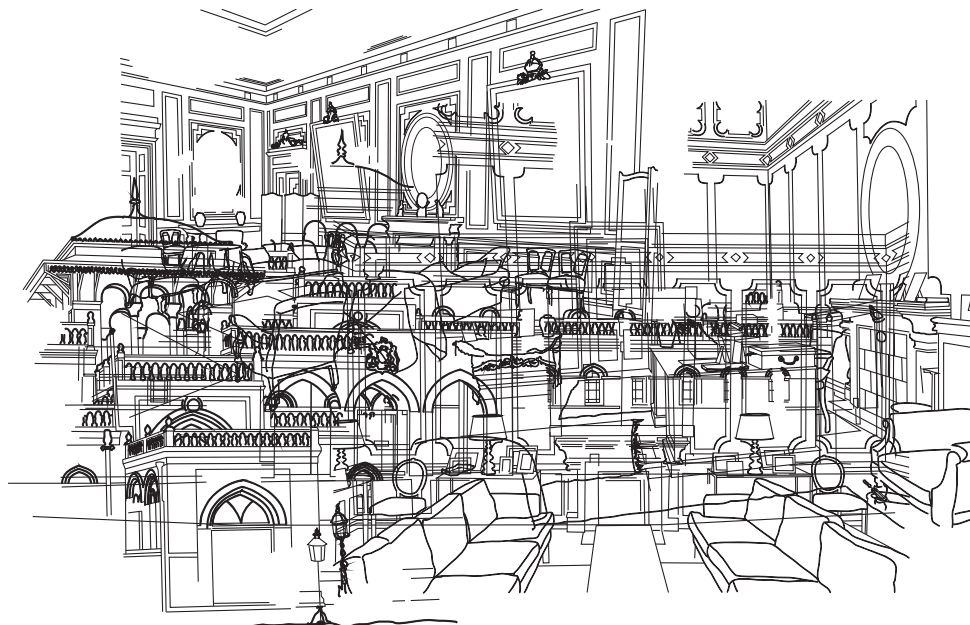
The sounds that I selected for the work are:

- An old oil jack pump drilling the ground.
- The sound of urban conflicts including gunshots, explosions, footsteps, sirens, etc.
- The sound of applauding of world's leaders in the ceremony of Oslo Accord One.
- The sound of Patrice Lumumba's anti-colonial speech.

Although the last one is time-based, it is in French which is not the language of the work, so it does not need to be followed or understood. In this selection process, I tried to find the actual sounds by searching the online archives related to each event. As a complementary element to the work, to provide some background information in relation to the stories, the buildings, and the sound, I included some supplementary text (see the appendix).



Figure 7, The British Embassy, a photo sample, Sevruguin, Antoin. Tehran (Iran): Interior of British Embassy [graphic]. [1943-44] The Myron Bement Smith Collection. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. <https://sova.si.edu/details/FSA.A.04#ref10376>

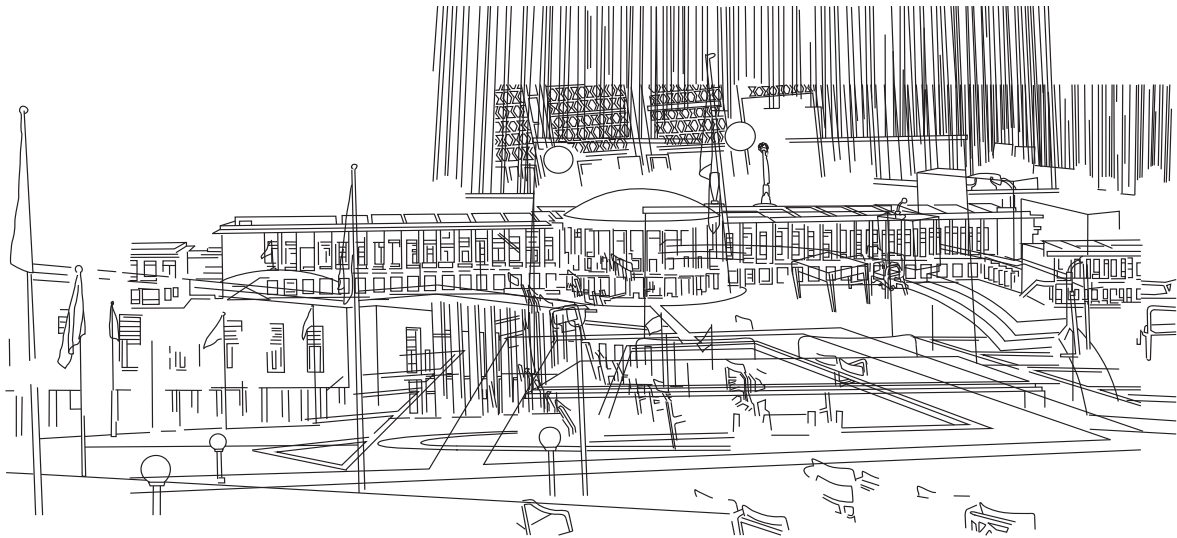


The British Embassy, Tehran

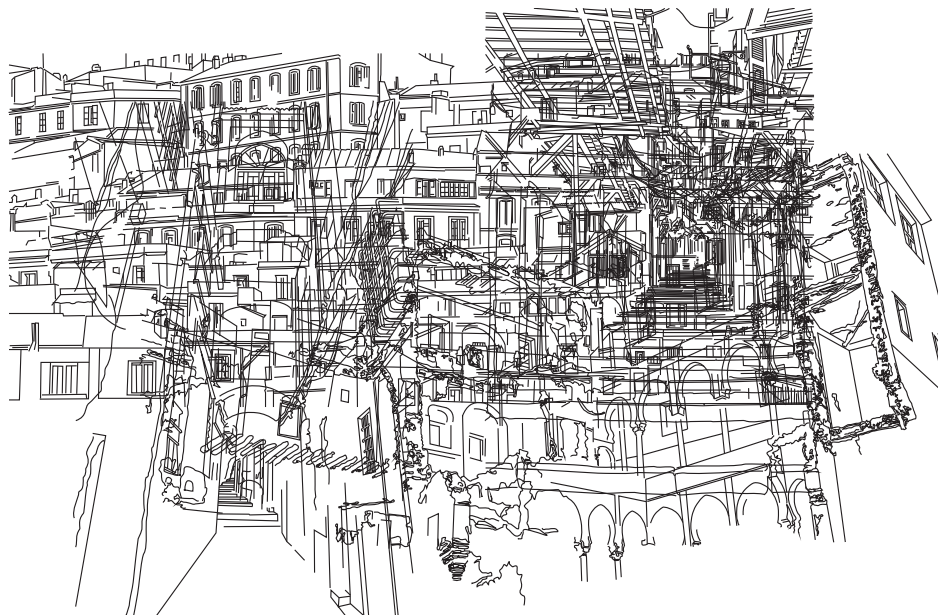


Holmenkollen Park Hotel, Oslo

Figure 8, *Same Old Story*, digital drawings



Palais de la Nation, Kinshasa



The Casbah, Algiers

Figure 9, *Same Old Story*, digital drawings



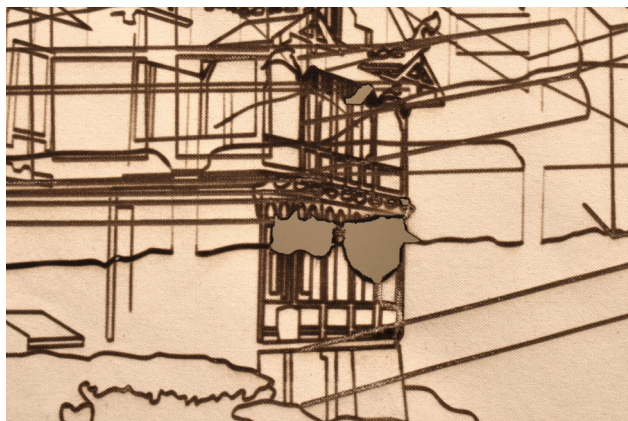
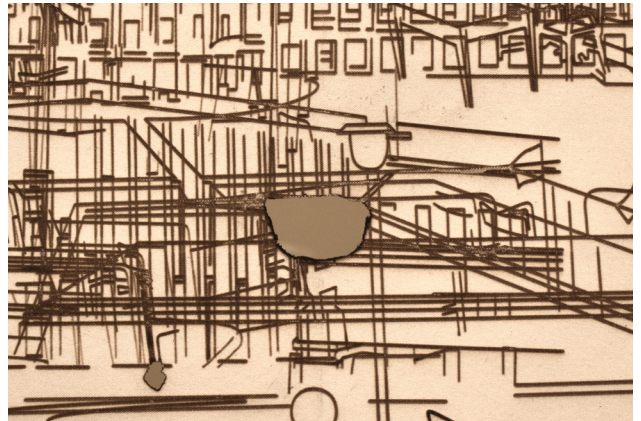
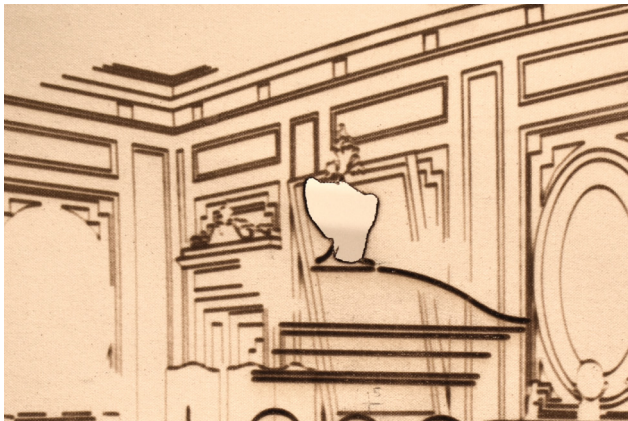


Figure 10, *Same Old Story*, burning examples

## History

In the process of drawing, I had to decide what to keep from each photo by tracing it and what to remove. I decided to keep all the major architectural elements of the interior and exterior of the buildings that characterize the building, including some ornaments and furniture, and to eliminate certain details together with ephemeral elements in the photo such as trees, flowers, people, etc. In this decision making, I was reflecting on ideas such as how colonial architecture characterizes itself. My aim was to depict empty and banal spaces devoid of people. I emphasized certain elements in the drawing that I believe contribute to perpetuating colonial power relations. For example, the presence of numerous tabletop and wall photo frames together with paintings installed on the walls of the meeting rooms grabbed my attention. I could see this as a strategy of the interior design to demonstrate a sense of identity. This curated identity is in concert with what Edward Said refers to as the way rulers set about creating such supposedly age-old rituals and objects as a way of imposing a new sense of identity for the ruler and ruled (Said, 178). Therefore, I decided to emphasize these frames and to trace them all.

In his essay, “Invention, Memory, and Place”, Edward Said contemplates history, maintaining that invented history has a significant role in constructing collective memory. He asserts that collective memory is a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning, and sometimes even for urgent purposes in the present. Said proposes that memory is not necessarily authentic, but rather useful (Said 179-185). His ideas about the formation of historical narratives and the construction of canonized official memories inform my research on colonialism. Said asserts, “far from being a neutral exercise in facts and basic truths, the study of history, which of course is the underpinning of memory, both in school and university, is to some considerable extent a nationalist effort premised on the need to construct a desirable loyalty to and insider’s understanding of one’s country, tradition, and faith” (Said 176). These ideas are followed by the scholars who continued this discourse such as Hamid Dabashi who argues we are constantly in the battle of narratives (Dabashi). I specifically utilize the theory that Said provides to study the dynamism of the relations between the colonizer and the colonized. In addition, the idea of “history as construction” has influenced the manner

in which I have built my project as a set of narratives. These ideas directed my process toward exploring a fictional space by using multiple voices and putting them in conversation with each other.

Besides Said's scholarly approach to history, Mathew Buckingham's approach to history as an artist who explores pressing issues of the present time informs my process. Buckingham combines the role of the artist with that of a historian. Like Said, in his works, namely in *The Six Grandfathers, Paha Sapa, in the Year 502,002 C.E.* (figure 11), Buckingham initiates his research because of the urgency of a particular idea in the contemporary moment. Similarly, the process of my research and the curiosity for investigating colonialism globally stems from the urgency of the settler-indigenous disputes in Canada.

In his article "The Artist as Historian", Mark Godfrey gives a clear description of *The Six Grandfathers, Paha Sapa, in the Year 502,002 C.E.*:

Buckingham uncovers a repressed history of a monument, projecting the future of the mountain known to the Sioux as Paha Sapa and to most other Americans as Mount Rushmore. Here, similar to Lum's practice, Buckingham uses image and text. The work consists of two parts: a digitally produced C-print photograph and a text arranged as a timeline printed directly on the wall next to it. The image shows how geologists believe the Six Grandfathers will appear in 500,000 years, while the timeline charts the geological history of the mountain, the eviction of the area's Sioux during the European colonization of North America, and the employment of the Ku Klux Klan affiliated sculptor Gutzon Borglum, who carved the presidential portraits. The timeline continues with sections on the late twentieth-century tourism boom around Mount Rushmore, the campaigns of the Sioux to retrieve their land, and in a turn to geological history, the projected fate of the mountain and the erosion of the sculptures. The accompanying image, however, has a different tone and adds a less didactic, more imaginative register to the work (Godfrey 155).

As I found this description crucial in understanding Buckingham's work, I decided to include the entire passage here.

While Buckingham's historical research continues to the present time and passes through time to speculate an imaginary future, my work concentrates on past and present processes that have influenced the present moment of our lives. In *The Six Grandfathers, Paha Sapa, in the Year 502,002 C.E.*, Buckingham conducts archival research that informs his timeline, as he presents his text in chronological order. Sim-

ilarly, but in a different format, my work with both image and sound is informed by archival research, while also utilizing archival material. I am specifically inspired by the way Buckingham manipulates an archival image to create his own images. I see it as one of his methods of interaction with history. As I have already explained at the beginning of this chapter, I also attempt a form of manipulation by digitally drawing the images and choosing what elements to trace and what to remove from them.

My process is also informed by Buckingham's fluidity in medium specificity and his capacity for the reinvention of form with each project. His decisions about forms and media are based on the conditions and the demands of the project, a method that I continue to employ in my own work. He does not use the same format over and over again, but a recurrent device in his practice is the combined use of image and text. The image can be presented as a film, video, photograph, or slide, while the text can appear near a photograph as a long caption, in Letraset on an adjacent wall, as a voice-over to a film or slide projection, or as subtitles. Being familiarized with Buckingham's work, I started to reflect more consciously on different interpretations of image and text and the possibilities of combining them in a project. My attention is drawn to the potential embedded in these combinations in transforming knowledge while creating an intimate connection to the audience.

[https://www.mumok.at/sites/default/files/cms/05\\_matthewbuckingham\\_thesixgrandfathers\\_2002.jpg](https://www.mumok.at/sites/default/files/cms/05_matthewbuckingham_thesixgrandfathers_2002.jpg)



## Geography

In the process of creating *Same Old Story* and exploring topography, I was drawn toward mapping and cartography. Although the idea of mapping in this project has more to do with mind maps or maps of concepts, it led me to research map art and the practice of mapping. Among the artworks that inspired me in this regard were Julie Mehretu's superimposed paintings and drawings.

In "Cartographies of the Future: Julie Mehretu's Dynamic Charting of Fluid Spaces," Christina Ljungberg asserts in contemporary cartography, maps are defined as graphic representations that facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes or events in the human world. Maps are spatial embodiments of knowledge that conceptualize and record the world again. They generate new 'realities' as they continuously create new narrative spaces. They are 'protocols of cognition' and processes of creating meaning (Ljungberg 308-309). Ljungberg goes on to state that conventional map symbols demarcate objects and "facts" that are socially and politically constructed and are the results of human conceptions. There is an immense power held by those who draw the maps (310). Based on these ideas it is possible to speculate the same mechanisms of power that construct history, as elaborated in Said's article, "Invention, Memory, and Place", as well, shape the maps to serve that power.

Colonizers not only romanticize their role in history, but they design maps based on their cartographic gaze. The representations of spatial relationships in dominant maps are when understood critically, more or less accurate representations of the political relationship in a particular place at a given time. I reflect on this idea while trying to create a topography of decolonization and drawing contour lines between different decolonial forces using the internet and conditions of globalized media.

*Cairo* (figure 12) by Mehretu includes much of the qualities of her practice that informs my process. The work portrays Cairo as the contemporary, revolutionary city in the political spotlight as the seat of the Arab Spring, raising the world's consciousness about government suppression and citizen-led change. In the middle of the work is a rendering of Tahrir Square, the site of several historical protests, that came to symbolize democracy during the 2011 uprisings.

The opacity in *Cairo* that is the result of superimposition creates a radical potential for interpretation and suggests new grammars of orientation. Her marks create a sense of interconnectedness. They suggest what happens in one part of the world will affect the rest of the world. *Cairo* depicts a complex situation that is not to be easily deciphered. In *Same Old Story*, I seek the possibilities of depicting the interconnectivity among diverse narratives of colonial interactions that have happened or are still happening in different locations in the world. The addition of a sound installation, where a fictional situation is created in which distant events converge, is an effort to echo this interconnectivity.

Mehretu incorporates architecture into this work, as well. As a distanced observant, she has depicted historical and empty spaces, a revolutionary square, and devastated and haunting buildings. The superimposed drawings of *Same Old Story* of empty spaces that are politically charged, share similar visual qualities with the buildings of Mehretu's painting. Here, I have tried to create the opacity through multiple perspectives of a place depicted in the work, while Mehretu creates illegibility by incorporating layers that follow diverse visual languages.

Mehretu's painting amplifies sonic qualities. The noise is embedded within the clash of the spaces. Her work incorporates motion, too. The painting is alive and a speed element is implicit within lines, shapes and the way the colors interact. Adding the actual sound to my work was also an attempt in seeking the methods of generating motion. I gathered a collection of noises associated with narratives and experimented with creating situations where diverse noises overlap. So in my work, the noise exists literally outside of the canvas while in Mehretu's paintings and drawings the noise exists within the visual elements inside the canvas.

<https://www.thebroad.org/art/julie-mehretu/cairo>

Figure 12, Julie Mehretu, *Cairo*. Ink and acrylic on canvas, 120 x 288 in., 2013

## Conclusion

At its current stage, my project has gained a certain physical shape and is partially formed. The work has a structure and there are elements that have found their place in it. However, the process is still ongoing both in its conceptual and formal aspects. In the next stages of this process, I look forward to adding more stories to this work. My research is still ongoing and although West Asia and North Africa were my starting point, I am looking for other instances of anti-colonial struggles in history. The model that has emerged by including diverse narratives in one work that share similar patterns can be expanded in order to contribute to the revealing of larger patterns in relation to the history of colonialism.

From the beginning, a question in front of my process was whether to include a Canadian Indigenous narrative in my work or not. I was not sure if I am allowed to incorporate a distant read of the history of a specific community in my work and to narrate them to those people as an outsider to that community. However, after consulting with some local Indigenous scholars and based on their advice, I realized my project is rather about criticizing historical constructions than getting engaged with specific narrative. Moreover, I received a suggestion that removing a Canadian Indigenous narrative from a project that is engaged with a global topography of colonial interactions would be more provocative than including one. As a result, currently, I am researching the Chilcotin War and the resulting execution of Tsilhqot'in chiefs in BC (1864), the Oka Crisis that took place on Mohawk territory (1990), and the current construction of the Coastal GasLink Pipeline through of Wet'suwet'en First Nation territory in BC (ongoing) as exemplary moments of colonial resistance.

Although I had not predicted that my work would move toward socio-political concepts and discussions of history, I can see how this research has helped me expand my knowledge into socio-historical concerns. I enjoy the multidisciplinary approach to my practice and being able to engage with different fields of knowledge. I do acknowledge that I continue to experience a complicated relationship with the Western academic system that, while it educates me to become sensitive toward colonialism and encourages me to reflect on decolonization, upholds a colonial narrative embedded in its structures. However, I am grateful to all the individuals who supported me in the process of my work.

Here, I end this paper with a quote from the book *Inter/Nationalism* by Steven Salaita about solidarity:

Solidarity requires certain ethical commitments to function. A functional solidarity does not involve appropriation. It does not come with the expectation of reciprocity. It is not quid pro quo. It is not recorded on ledgers. Solidarity is performed in the interest of better human relationships and for a world that allows societies to be organized around justice rather than profit. It happens across the communities with whom we are in contact—on behalf of the many we never met. (Salaita, xix)



Figure 13, *Same Old Story* (installation view), MFA thesis exhibition, Emily Carr University's Michael O'brian Exhibition Common, March 2021

## After defence

In the continuation of my process, I included two additional narratives in the work: the destruction of the Old Summer Palace in Beijing by Anglo-French forces during the Opium Wars, and the construction of the Tiny Houses in the path of the Coastal GasLink Pipeline in northern BC as a form of the Wet'swet'en people's resistance. In the process of determining how to present the six narratives on one canvas, I created two different compositions. The first included overlaps between the drawings, and was informed by both the Indigenous map of North America and Julie Mehretu's body of practice (figure 14). In the second composition, the borders between the drawings of different narratives are distinct and there are empty spaces between each drawing (figure 15).

Following several discussions about the two compositions with my supervisor and peers, I decided to use the second composition as the representation of my work at its current stage. Among the reasons I chose the second design are: firstly, the second design is depicting several narratives involved in my work more clearly; secondly, in terms of depicting the relations between the narratives and their connection to one another, which is one of the main incentives of the work, although there are areas that separate each drawing from others, all of them are etched into the same canvas that connects them to each other; and thirdly, although the chaos that is depicted in the first design might be more in concert with the histories of colonial interactions, I believe I need to make my audience familiar with the visual language that I am developing to depict this chaos. I see this development happening in a timeline and through different artworks that use similar visual language.

The generative discussions that happened during the defence made me reflect on several aspects of my work. While I will continue to refer back to the questions and try to develop answers for them in my future practice, here I summarize my reflections on some of the ideas discussed during the defence. Among these were the role of the burned portions in the work, how this work functions as a map, the relevance of using banality in describing the colonial architecture, who is the intended audience of this work, etc.

I believe the burning holes play a pivotal role in my work both formally and conceptually. Besides the fact that burning and elimination have been part of the history of colonialism and there are always exclusions and holes in official histories, I found burning as a form of expressiveness that this work needs to demonstrate besides its conceptual elements.

I refer to my work as a map as it creates contour lines between different histories of colonialism. It relates different histories with each other and draws connections between them. This map encourages dialogue between different historical events rather than offering a holistic representation of these local narratives.

As a result of my defence, I could further reflect on the adoption of the term banal in regard to the empty spaces that I have selected in my drawings. A decision that I made in the process of drawing was to eliminate people and any happenings from the place to further focus on the place itself. Although there is banality involved in those places, in many instances, the design choices and architectural elements charge the place with political meanings (ie. using greek designs in colonial buildings in order to connect the colonizers to the ancient civilizations and construct a sense of identity for them). As the result, these spaces, although banal, are charged with the residue of the power relations involved in constructing them. This perception made me more cautious in using the term banal while referring to these places.

Lastly, in terms of the audience and to answer who is the audience of this work, I refer back to the Introduction section, where I have discussed the place-specific qualities of my practice. As I have already discussed in that section, I see my practice as interaction with my immediate environment. As a result, I expect my audience to be from that specific environment. The work might function differently in different places and new interpretations of the work might emerge. But I see my primary audience as the community where the work has been shaped within it.



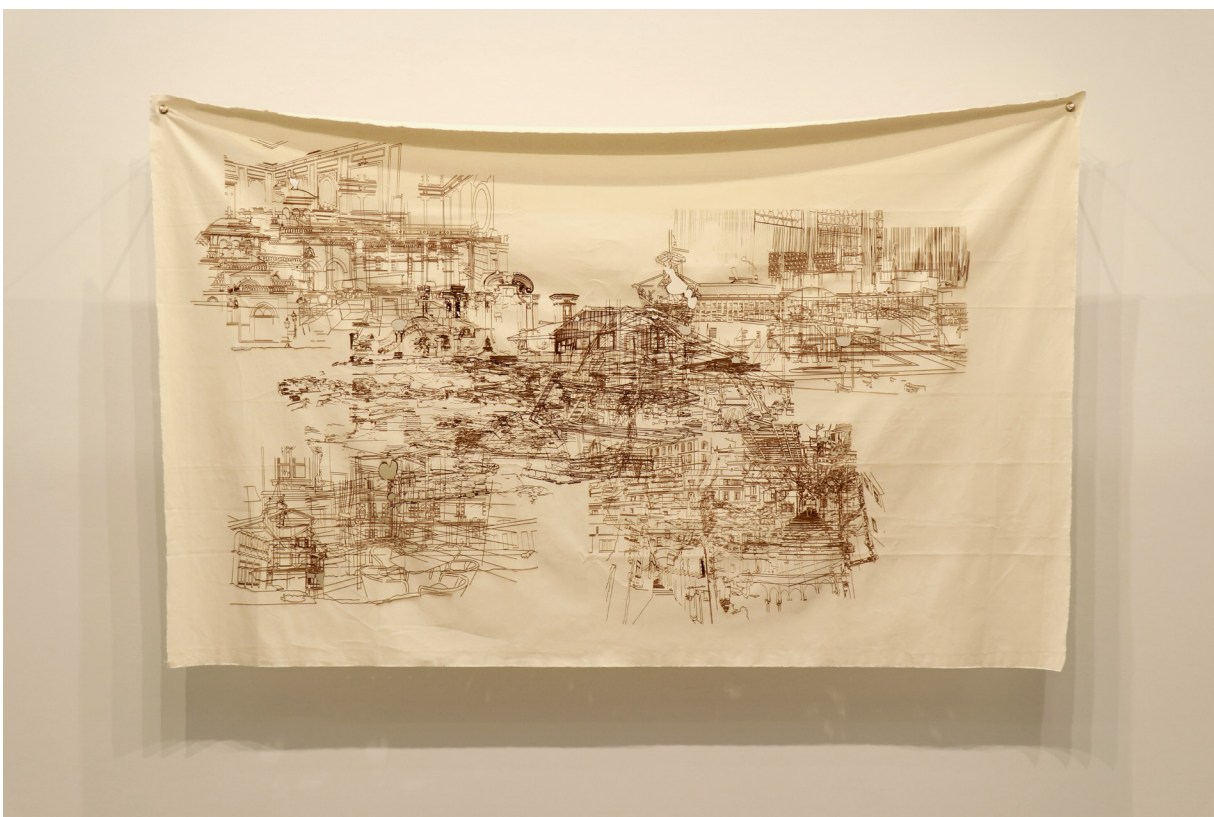


Figure 14, *Same Old Story*, first composition



Figure 15, *Same Old Story*, second composition

## **Appendix**

### **Supplementary text:**

#### **Palais de la Nation, Kinshasa**

The Palais de la Nation is a state building in Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After Congo's independence from Belgium in 1960, the Palais became a symbol of the new state. The official ceremonies surrounding the independence, including Patrice Lumumba's speech denouncing colonialism, took place there. The speech at the ceremony of the proclamation of the Congo's independence was a short political speech given by Patrice Lumumba, the first Congolese Prime Minister, on 30 June 1960. Lumumba's speech, broadcast live on the radio across the world, has been praised for its use of political rhetoric and is best known for its outspoken criticism of colonialism. It begins with Lumumba addressing the Congolese people and praising independence as the culmination of the struggle of the nationalist movement, rather than the result of Belgian concessions. It has also been cited as a contributory factor to Lumumba's murder in 1961. While the speech was filmed during its delivery, the recorded speech has only survived as fragments and in some sections, only the original audio survives.

#### **The Casbah , Algiers**

The Casbah of Algiers is an old neighbourhood, the citadel of Algiers that initially was founded on the ruins of old Icosium (an important Roman colony) in the 10th century. The Casbah played a central role during the Algerian War of Independence that was fought between France and the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) from 1954 to 1962, and led to Algeria winning its independence from France. This was an important decolonial war, within which the Battle of Algiers was a campaign of urban guerrilla warfare carried out by the FLN against the French Algerian authorities from late 1956 to late 1957. Casbah, a dense neighborhood with narrow and maze-like alleys, was the center of planning for FLN and it was the site of a series of violent urban conflicts. During the conflicts, surrounded by several French military checkpoints, the Casbah became a ghetto for its inhabitants who were native Algerians. The sound of gunshots, explosions, and sirens was the background noise of the neighbourhood during this violent anti-colonial battle.

## **Holmenkollen Park Hotel, Oslo**

A house 100 kilometers from Oslo, near the Swedish border, was the place of a series of secret negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993. These meetings aimed to peacefully resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The two parties met for another time at the Holmenkollen Park hotel near Oslo, and the meetings continued at the resort of Halvorsbol. The Oslo I Accord was signed in Washington, D.C., in 1993 and the Oslo II Accord in Taba, Egypt, in 1995. Both were named after Norway's capital city, where the secret negotiations took place. Many at that time believed this was a step in the right direction. World leaders applauded the proclamation of the first accord at a White House garden, ignoring one party's assertion of dominance over the other. The process failed to deliver on its promise and the transfer of control to the PA never happened.

## **British Embassy, Tehran**

Since its establishment in the 1860s, the British Embassy in Tehran was a center for Britain's colonial activities in Iran. It was constructed by British Architect James Wild, who had a strong reputation as a specialist in Middle Eastern architectural design. Wild's first proposal for the State Rooms was rejected, apparently because he had selected a "Persian" style. This was not considered workable for Britain's official profile in Iran. His second (more conservative) scheme offered a British rendition of a "foreign" style, echoing the eighteenth-century British assimilation of Greek and Roman architecture. In 1901, William Knox D'Arcy, a British millionaire, negotiated an oil concession with Iran. D'Arcy assumed exclusive rights to prospect for oil for 60 years in a vast tract of territory covering most of the Iranian soil. Subsequently, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) was founded in 1908 following the discovery of a large oil field in Iran. Although D'Arcy never visited Iran, the noise and bustle of newborn enterprise shattered the silence of Iran's hills. The drills were working in shifts without pause, changing the landscape of Iran's plains.

## **Tiny Houses, Wet'suwet'en Terriroties**

The construction of oil and gas pipelines that pass through Indigenous territories is a major struggle for Indigenous peoples in Canada. Coastal GasLink Pipeline, one of these projects, is a multi-billion dollar natural gas project currently under construction in northern British Columbia. The project is opposed by the hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en, other First Nations peoples, and environmental activists. As part of this opposition, activists and land stewards have constructed blockades on the Wet'suwet'en peoples' traditional lands. In British Columbia, most of the land has never been ceded or surrendered through treaties with settler governments. Nevertheless, in 2018 and 2019 the BC Supreme Court issued injunctions against protestors blocking the project. In enforcing the injunction, the RCMP used violence against peaceful protestors and criminalized Indigenous protectors. As one form of resistance, protestors have built Tiny Houses in the path of the proposed pipeline to impede construction and draw attention to their struggle. These Tiny Houses are built to support Indigenous sovereignty and resurgence. They serve as both a mobile trapping unit for Wet'suwet'en people and meeting spaces for protestors. The Wet'suwet'en's struggle is ongoing and they continue to face harassment. Recently, a cabin belonging to a Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chief was burned down in a suspected arson attack.

## **The Old Summer Palace, Beijing**

The Old Summer Palace was a complex of palaces and gardens in Beijing, China. It was known for its extensive collection of gardens, its architecture and numerous art and historical treasures. Constructed throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries, the Old Summer Palace was destroyed by Anglo-French forces in a day and a half in 1860 during the second Opium War leaving a scar on the land and in the Chinese psyche. The Opium Wars were two wars waged between Western powers and the Qing dynasty in the mid-19th century. When their cotton was no longer in demand in China anymore, the British who were not satisfied with paying silver for Chinese products such as tea, porcelain, and silk that were in increasing demand in Europe, decided to export opium from India to China. The Chinese government facing the disaster of massive opium consumption in the country after failing to resolve the problem peacefully, forcefully seized British merchant ships on a variety of occasions, actions that resulted in wars in 1839 and 1856, and in a variety of treaties. As a result of these treaties, the Chinese agreed to pay the cost of war, ceded Hong Kong to the British indefinitely, and opened five coastal zones to foreign trade. The opium trade became legalized throughout China and the Chinese customs office was put under British and French control.

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