

Youssef Fahdeh, a story from Baalbeck Studios - Exhibition



UMAM D&R invites you to two separate but intertwined events exploring the life and legacy of Youssef Fahdeh, Baalbeck Studios, and filmmaking in Lebanon. Filmmaker Youssef Fahdeh was the inventor of the “LebanoScope” lens and a person whose life and works allow for in-depth tracing of the film industry as well as political and social dynamics in Lebanon and the wider Middle East region.

These two events explore preserved remnants from film archives, approaching them not as materials to be fully restored or reconstructed, but as traces to be excavated. The works adopt an archaeological method, uncovering gestures, fragments, and names erased by time, circumstance, or power. What emerges from this process is not only the shadow of lost films but the presence of practices and individuals who played a crucial role in shaping cinema in Lebanon and the wider Middle East, yet remain largely absent from official histories.

Curated by Ayman Nahle

This archival installation explores the fragility and depth of meaning embedded in preserved remnants from film archives, with particular attention to pioneering works and lost films that were never completed. Rather than attempting to fully reconstruct these films, the work engages in an archaeological process of excavation, uncovering traces, gestures, and names that have been erased or buried, whether by chance or by design, within the folds of history.

Through close examination of these fragments, a tension emerges between the traces and their makers. What emerges is not only lost works, but individuals and practices that played a pivotal role in the development of cinema in the Middle East that have often been excluded from dominant historical narratives.

In this context, the archive becomes not merely a site of preservation but a space for reactivation and rearticulation. The work approaches archival materials as a means of restoring a fragmented biography, bringing together the life, practices, and imagination of a filmmaker whose existence now survives only through incomplete images, damaged reels, marginal notes, or scattered references.

This archival installation is currently in development under the auspices of UMAM Documentation & Research, curated and researched by Ayman Nahle; the poster is by Alfred Tarazi. This project was funded by the U.S. Department of State's Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP).