



**EMPAC**

FILM / VIDEO

MARIAM GHANI

MONDAY / APRIL 24 / 7:00 PM



## WHAT WE LEFT UNFINISHED MARIAM GHANI

Mariam Ghani will present and discuss a selection of rare films from the Afghan Film Archive. *What we left unfinished* is Ghani's long-term research, film, and dialogue project.

Working in the dual role of artist and historian, Ghani describes the project as “centered around five unfinished Afghan feature films shot, but never edited, between 1978 and 1992: years that encompass the Afghan Communist coup d’état, attempted reforms that met bitter rural resistance, a series of internal purges and assassinations, the Soviet invasion and withdrawal, a five-year attempt at national reconciliation, the handover of power to a mujahidin coalition, and finally dissolution into civil war. From the unfinished films commissioned, produced, and canceled by various iterations of the Afghan state in various moments of the Afghan Communist project, we can reconstruct not the truths, precisely, of how the state existed and acted in those moments, but rather its most important fictions: its desires and fears, ambitions and ghosts. In the imagery presented by most finished films of the period, we see the ideal People’s Democratic Republic that could have been, but wasn’t; in the unfinished films, the reality—a utopian project secured by violent force—lingers like a shadow, just barely concealed behind allegories and codes. The world around the films, where filmmaking itself was a dangerous enterprise, seeps into the world onscreen.”

For this event at EMPAC, Ghani will provide commentary during the screening of the mostly silent films—which range from a re-enactment of the 1978 Communist coup-d’état in which the party leaders and Afghan army play themselves, to fictions centering around infiltration into criminal organizations, and the portrayal of a gang of diamond smugglers and a rebellious teenage daughter—to draw out the complex histories of conflict, politics, and war inscribed into the images themselves.

The audience is invited with EMPAC curator Victoria Brooks to act as interlocutors, with questions and discussion encouraged throughout.

## FILMS\*

### **INQILABI SAWR / THE APRIL REVOLUTION (1978-9)**

COLOR, EXCERPTS RT 10:40

Featuring the PDPA leaders and the Afghan army, playing themselves.

A re-enactment of the 1978 Communist coup-d'état, commissioned by the party leaders, which begins with scenes laying out the decadence of the rich and misery of the poor before the revolution, and then (with loaned tanks, soldiers and ammunition) replays the day of the coup itself. Sadly, 40 minutes of footage went missing, which supposedly showed Hafizullah Amin and his family reenacting the famous scene of his house arrest and the sending of his young son with a message to the army, which triggered the coup.

### **ALMASE SIAH / THE BLACK DIAMOND (ABDUL KHALEK HALIL, 1984)**

B/W, EXCERPTS RT C. 20:00

Starring Nuroshan Abir, Nassima Jalal, Abdullah Samadi, Asadullah Aram, Zarghuna Aram, Esturay Mangal, Qader Faroukh, Mari Omeid, and Farida.

A man's involvement with a gang of diamond smugglers leads to unfortunate consequences for his family, especially his rebellious teenage daughter. *Almase Siah* not only takes as its subject the trafficking that provided income for the mujahidin, but also replicates in some scenes specific stories that circulated during this period.

### **SOQOOT / FALLING (FAQIR NABI, 1986)**

B/W, EXCERPTS RT 24:34

Starring Farid Fayz, Adela Adeem, Qader Faroukh, Esturay Mangal, Zarghuna Aram, Juwansher Haidary, Saboor Khinji, Said Mira, and Farida

A police officer goes undercover to infiltrate a criminal organization, but finds his new life dangerously seductive, and begins to have trouble balancing between truth and lies. *Soqoot* reflects the paranoia of the mid-1980s, when Afghanistan's secret service (KhAD, mentored by the Stasi) was believed to have placed informants in every profession and neighborhood, through a story that turns on signifiers of surveillance: infiltration, eavesdropping, bugs and wiretaps, stake-outs with telephoto lenses, and always people watching each other, both openly and furtively.

### **KAJ RAH / WRONG WAY (JUWANSHER HAIDARY, 1991)**

B/W, EXCERPTS RT 29:27

Starring Farid Fayz, Estoray Mangal, Faqir Nabi, Habib Zorghai, Faif Azouly, Fay Ebadi, Mari Omeid, Asadullah Aram, Saboor Khinji, Faqir Kawider, Sharif Kheir Khwo, Tsang Chikan, and Homeira.

The conflicts within and around a border village represent in miniature the conflicts of the war between regime and mujahidin, the personal ties between fighters on both sides, and the ways in which each has diverted from the right way or straight path. *Kah Rah* (which also translates as "crooked path") was shot just before Najib's "reconciliation Jirga" of 1991, and is part of the same mood swing towards reconciliation; its director originally planned to incorporate that historic meeting of Communists and mujahidin into the film itself.

### **GOMASHTA / AGENT (ENG. LATIF AHMADI, 1992)**

COLOR, EXCERPTS RT 15:56

Starring Farid Fayz, Habib Zorghai, Saboor Khinji, Asadullah Aram, and Salaam Tsangi.

A look at the many players and facets involved in or trying to thwart drug trafficking during the Communist period, set primarily at and around a dangerous mountain pass.

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\* **CAVEAT:** Assemble cuts of inexpertly re-filmed/transferred, partial, silent, 16mm rush prints (except *Gomashta*, which is excerpts ripped from a DVD rough cut provided by the director). 10-30 minutes of excerpts from each film will be presented.



**Mariam Ghani's** work spans video, installation, performance, photography, and writing, and frequently turns on memory, history, language, loss and reconstruction. Ghani's projects often engage with places, ideas, or institutions over long periods of time, and she maintains several long-standing collaborations: the experimental archive *Index of the Disappeared* (with Chitra Ganesh, since 2004), the video series *Performed Places* (with choreographer Erin Kelly and composer Qasim Naqvi, since 2006), and the Afghan Films online archive (with Pad.ma, since 2012).

ALL IMAGES: MARIAM GHANI.  
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND RYAN LEE GALLERY.

**EMPAC**  
DANCE, PERFORMANCE

TUE / APRIL 25 / 5:00 PM

*The*  
**RETURN**  
*of*  
**LA ARGENTINA**  
*Trajal Harrell*

*Dancer Trajal Harrell mixes postmodern and vogue styles with the Japanese dance/theater form "butoh" in this hybrid dance performance on the EMPAC Mezzanine.*



# STAFF

**Geoff Abbas** / Director for Stage Technologies  
**Aimeé R. Albright** / Artist Services Specialist  
**Eric Ameres** / Senior Research Engineer  
**Argeo Ascani** / Curator, Music  
**Eileen Baumgartner** / Graphic Designer  
**David Bebb** / Senior Network Administrator  
**Peter Bellamy** / Senior Systems Administrator  
**Michael Bello** / Video Engineer  
**Victoria Brooks** / Curator, Time-Based Visual Arts  
**Eric Brucker** / Lead Video Engineer  
**Michele Cassaro** / Guest Services Coordinator  
**John Cook** / Box Office Manager  
**David DeLaRosa** / Desktop Support Analyst  
**Zhenelle Falk** / Artist Services Administrator  
**Ashley Ferro-Murray** / Associate Curator, Theater & Dance  
**Kimberly Gardner** / Manager, Administrative Operations  
**Johannes Goebel** / Director  
**Ian Hamelin** / Project Manager  
**Ryan Jenkins** / Senior Event Technician  
**Shannon Johnson** / Design Director  
**Carl Lewandowski** / Production Technician  
**Robin Massey** / Business Coordinator  
**Stephen McLaughlin** / Senior Event Technician  
**Josh Potter** / Marketing and Communications Manager  
**Alena Samoray** / Interim Master Electrician  
**Candice Sherman** / Senior Business Administrator  
**Avery Stempel** / Front of House Manager  
**Kim Strosahl** / Production Coordinator  
**Jeffrey Svatek** / Audio Engineer  
**Todd Vos** / Lead Audio Engineer  
**Michael Wells** / Production Technician