

# Spike Island

PRESS RELEASE

LAWRENCE ABU HAMDAN

*45<sup>TH</sup> PARALLEL*

8 October 2022 to 15 January 2023



Spike Island presents *45th Parallel*, a new film commission by artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan and his first major solo exhibition in the UK since winning the 2019 Turner Prize. Focusing on the Haskell Free Library and Opera House – a unique municipal site that straddles the jurisdictions of Canada and the United States – the work continually recasts the border as at once powerful yet facile, absurd yet lethal.

Originally built in 1904, the Haskell building was designed as a symbol of unity between Canada and the US and is one of the only cross-border theatres in the world. Anyone can enter unchecked and, though a thick black line runs through the entire building, once inside the border all but disappears.

Filmed on location to activate the legal and symbolic potential of the site, *45<sup>th</sup> Parallel* unfolds as a monologue in five acts, performed by acclaimed filmmaker Mahdi Fleifel. The story centres on Hernández vs. Mesa, a judicial case covering the fatal shooting in 2010 of an unarmed fifteen-year-old Mexican national by a US Border Patrol agent. At the US Supreme Court, Mesa's bullet, which crossed the US/Mexico border, began to implicate missiles fired in Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia and Libya. If this murder could be tried in the US, so too could 91,340 drone strikes.

Each act of the monologue is demarcated by a scenographic change in the hand-painted backdrop on the Opera House stage. Starting with the original backdrop of a picturesque Venice canal, two newly commissioned scenes also form part of the installation at Spike Island. One references a 1920 painting by Richard Carline of an aerial view of Damascus and its surrounding landscape, and the other the concrete culvert of the 2010 El Paso-Juárez cross-border shooting.



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Highlighting how borders are not just lines but, rather, richly layered spaces, the changing backdrops draw attention to the film's underlying questions about shifting perspectives and vantage points.

Together the film and installation render the Haskell Free Library and Opera House as a political and geographical grey zone, reminding us how free movement, free knowledge and free space are constantly under threat.

– Ends –

Image: Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *45<sup>th</sup> Parallel* (2022), film still.  
Courtesy the artist

For further information and high-resolution images please contact Sam Talbot on [sam@sam-talbot.com](mailto:sam@sam-talbot.com) / +44 (0)7725 184 630 or Jon McCall, Interim Communications Manager at Spike Island on [jon.mccall@spikeisland.org.uk](mailto:jon.mccall@spikeisland.org.uk) or +44 (0)117 929 2266.

#### NOTES FOR EDITORS

- **LAWRENCE ABU HAMDAN**  
Lawrence Abu Hamdan (b. 1985, Amman, Jordan). His audio investigations have been used as evidence at the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal in the UK and as advocacy for organisations such as Amnesty International. He has exhibited at the 58<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2019); the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Sharjah Biennial (2017 and 2019); the 11<sup>th</sup> Gwangju Biennale (2016) and Tate Modern. As part of a temporary collective with nominated artists Helen Cammock, Oscar Murillo and Tai Shani, he was awarded the 2019 Turner Prize.
- **PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS**  
*45<sup>th</sup> Parallel* is commissioned by Spike Island, Bristol; Mercer Union, Toronto; the Toronto Biennial of Art; and the Western Front, Vancouver. Produced by LONO Studio and supported by Arts Council England and Just Films | Ford Foundation. The exhibition is part of the West of England Visual Arts Alliance programme, supported by Arts Council England.
- **ABOUT SPIKE ISLAND**  
Spike Island supports, produces and presents contemporary art and culture across an 80,000 square foot former industrial building in Bristol. Its diverse artistic programme includes free major exhibitions, events and engagement activities taking place on-site and online. Championing outstanding work by emerging and underrepresented local, national and international artists, the programme enhances access to contemporary art for audiences from all backgrounds.

Alongside its public offer, Spike Island directly supports artists through new commissions, over 70 subsidised studios, and sector-leading artist development opportunities that



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widen access to its programme and facilities. Its Exhibition Services business supports the bespoke production and installation of artists' film and video throughout the UK and internationally. Spike Island is home to a dynamic community of hundreds of artists and creative businesses, working in flexible, affordable workspaces, alongside UWE Bristol's Fine Art department, Spike Print Studio, and café bar Emmeline.  
[www.spikeisland.org.uk](http://www.spikeisland.org.uk)

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