

MONUMENTING

a documentary film by **Anahi ALVISO-MARINO**,
53', 2024

With

Deema ALGHUNAIM
Lolwa ALKANDARI
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Laure ASSAF
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Asunción MOLINOS GORDO
Lucas MORIN
Marine POIRIER
Sahar AURORE SAEIDNIA
Roman STADNICKI
Nadia VON MALTZAHN
Participants to Monument Exchanges
at Alserkal Arts Foundation in Dubai

With research participants :

Sami MOHAMMAD
Nabil BASBOUS
Lidia QATTAN
Ibrahim SALEM
Viken MAHSEREJIAN

Production :

Bad Manner's
Neïl BELOUFA
Léa LONGIS

Editing : **Ermanno CORRADO**

Sound Editing : **Arno LEDOUX**

Music : **Nathan NOTKIN**

Photography : **Anahi ALVISO-MARINO** and
Raymond RAMOS in Dubai

Genre : **Documentary**

Language : **English, French, Arabic,**
with English subtitles

Country of production : **France**

Locations : **United Arab Emirates, Kuwait,**
worldwide video-conference
locations

Research : **Anahi ALVISO-MARINO**

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Synopsis

What makes a monument become a monument? Participants in a game-like protocol engage with this and other questions by guessing rather than asserting what they know. They take us to Dubai, Kuwait City, Abu Dhabi, and Sana'a - places where they live, have lived, or perhaps never have - as their kaleidoscopic exchanges produce a different kind of knowledge about the future of the past, about what monuments are, and what they could become.



Statement

As monuments continue to be toppled, relocated and reassessed all over the world, this documentary takes an experimental approach to explore what monuments are and what they could become in cities across the Arabian Peninsula. A series of participants are invited to engage in a research process through a game-type protocol, building a kaleidoscopic collection of monument stories. Architects, sociologists, artists, geographers, engineers, lawyers, curators, historians, graphic designers, political scientists, anthropologists, photographers, filmmakers, and even a middle school student offer their perspectives, guessing rather than asserting what monuments need in order to become monuments. Convened remotely or on-site and residing in the region, having resided there or maybe neither of them, these diverse voices exchange ideas around maps, archives, fieldwork materials and images of monuments. Through their exchanges, they engage in a game-type approach that weaves together fieldwork materials and archives offering new insights into cities such as Dubai, Kuwait City, Abu Dhabi, and Sanaa among others.

This non-linear documentary proposes a unique lens for understanding the politics of memory in cities rarely studied through their monuments, whether they are state-sanctioned or private interventions in public space. By associating a variety of multimedia materials collected and produced through fieldwork research, this documentary makes virtually understudied monument stories accessible to a larger audience who is also invited into a research journey.





Context

In recent years, monuments worldwide have gained increasing attention, sparking debates and actions ranging from dismantling and toppling them to extravagant constructions, relocations, and socio-political reassessments of their historical significance. From Kuwait City to Abu Dhabi, Sana'a or Dubai and mostly since the 1970s until present-day, cities across the Arabian Peninsula have been both transformative and transformed settings for monument stories, where myriad gestures and actions by a constellation of actors contribute to reimagining the symbolic work monuments do. Among these are stories of bifurcations, omissions, transformations, and decisions that make these monumental objects somewhat inaccessible or invisible.

There are the stories that have particularly captured my imagination. What started as a research puzzle reconstructing one of these stories through drawings and miscellaneous documents from an artist's personal archive, unearthed complex and multilayered narratives that over time connected with other similar monument stories across varied sites of research. These monument stories exposed the dynamic interplay among a rich variety of actors involved in the life of monuments, from private and public commissioners, artists, engineers, and government officials, to every-day passersby, city inhabitants and observers of public space. Exploring objects meant to commemorate sites, events and figures of the past, also opened up new imaginaries of futurity. The idea of sharing a variety of multimedia materials and archives gathered through fieldwork also became central and so did the possibility of showing an alternative fieldwork methodology within a research-creation process that intertwines social sciences research with creative audiovisual writing.



About the director

I am a researcher and a scholar trained in Political Science and Middle Eastern Studies, with an extrovert social sciences practice, and working on research-creation methodologies for over a decade. I started to experiment with film during my PhD dedicated to proposing a political sociology of visual art in Yemen, creating my first desktop short film in 2011 for an exhibition at Bétonsalon centre d'art et de recherche in Paris (O.P.N.Is, Objets Politiques Non-identifiés au Yémen), and I worked in 2023 on a film that activated archives produced during online encounters that dealt with archival practices. *Monumenting* (2024) is my first documentary film and it starts in 2020 as a multi-sited and transregional research process that still continues.

I am currently a research associate at the French Research Centre of the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA, Kuwait) and at the French Institute for the Near East (IFPO, Jordan). I hold a PhD in Political Science from the Sorbonne University-Paris 1 and the University of Lausanne, and an MA in Middle Eastern and Asian Languages and Cultures from Columbia University in New York City. As a political scientist practicing research-creation, my methodology explores game-type protocols to produce and activate research materials and archives. My work focuses on cultural production across cities of the Arabian Peninsula, with a particular recent interest in the biographical trajectories of monuments in Kuwait, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia and previously, in art worlds in Yemen. I am also part of a collaborative research project based in France on urban and social transformations in al-'Ula, Saudi Arabia (2024-2025) and a member of the Global (De)Centre (2022-). Previously, I was a lecturer at the Urban School at Sciences Po Paris (2024-2023) and at the Collège d'études Politiques (NCEP) (2017-2020), and I held postdoctoral fellowships at the Ecole des Ponts ParisTech/ University Gustave Eiffel (2020-2023), the EUR ArTeC/ University Paris 8 (2019) and the MSH/CEFREPA (2017). My research and archival materials have been exhibited in France at Palais de Tokyo, Villa Vassilieff and Bétonsalon, and in Spain at Casa Arabe. As part of my work on monument stories, I was a researcher in residency at Alserkal Arts Foundation (2022) and at the Henry Moore Foundation (2023), and I directed the documentary film *Monumenting* (2024), produced by Bad Manner's and supported by Neïl Beloufa Atelier, the EUR ArTeC, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts and CEFREPA.



