ATLAS UNLIMITED: ACTS VII–X
Karthik Pandian & Andros Zins-Browne
with Zakaria Almoutlak

October 10 – November 3, 2019
Thursday to Saturday: 4–8pm
Sunday: 2–6pm

Conversation between
Aruna D’Souza & Matthew Jesse Jackson
Thursday, October 17, 7pm

Atlas Unlimited: Acts VII–X is made possible by the generous support of the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts and the Cheswatyr Foundation. Previous iterations of Atlas Unlimited have been hosted by Logan Center Exhibitions (Chicago), Precarious Pavilions (Belgium), and Netwerk Aalst (Belgium). Acts VII–X were supported by residencies at Certain Bird (Vermont) and the ArtLab at Harvard University. Atlas Unlimited: Acts VII–X is curated by Nicola Lees.

Special thanks to designer Casey Lurie and conservator Daniela Murphy Corella.

ZAKARIA ALMOUTLAK is a Syrian sculptor and refugee living in Belgium. Atlas Unlimited: Acts VII–X renders the banalities and atrocities of his life through sculpture and vocal performance. Artist Karthik Pandian and choreographer Andros Zins-Browne have been working with Almoutlak since 2017, incorporating fragments of his story into the previous acts of Atlas Unlimited.

In Belgium, 2018, Almoutlak carved a sculpture from a block of limestone before destroying it in the climactic finale of Acts I–III. In Acts V–VI, a conservator pieced the shattered body of the sculpture back together in Chicago. Over the four weeks of the exhibition at 80 Washington Square East, the sculpture will be disintegrated and reanimated, yet again. Refused entry to the U.S. due to the 2017 travel ban, Almoutlak’s presence will be conjured by the voices of Ganavya Doraiswamy and Aliana de la Guardia, who will be singing for the duration of the show. Drawing on karnatik, operatic, and pop vocal traditions, the singers evoke the convulsions of Almoutlak’s life through sculpture as “a bear’s head”, a more likely possibility is that it represents a dromedary. Ancient Palmyra’s identity as a “caravan city” made camels a frequent occurrence in Palmyrene art, but mostly in low relief accompanying a more fully modeled human figure.

The screen is a composite of two types of boundary architectures: (a) a traditional Cairene balcony front – often placed in the street-facing side of a home – that forms a permeable boundary between public and private space; and (b) a border wall – a geographic boundary of steel bollards that allows for visibility but limits the movement of bodies.


Syria: Palmyra, adjacent to Roman Theatre. Limestone. Period unknown.

After breaking ground on the Experience Palmyra museum, a team of Russian archeologists uncovered this fragment of an animal head. While the style and material recall funerary sculpture of the Severan Period (193–235 AD) or Ingibolt’s Type III, the scale is highly unusual. Animal statuary from Palmyra ranges from the miniature (see the Oriental Institute’s collection of tesserae or banquet tokens, A6744-A6765, A6767-A6770) to the monumental (see Lion of Al-Latta, slated to be returned to Palmyra under the glass dome of the EP museum in 2045) but has rarely, if ever, been found as a free-standing statue. Even rarer is the slope of the neck, which suggests a rearing pose not attempted in three-dimensional sculpture of this scale until the 17th century. While excavation notes translated from Russian identify the sculpture as “a bear’s head”, a more likely possibility is that it represents a dromedary. Ancient Palmyra’s identity as a “caravan city” made camels a frequent occurrence in Palmyrene art, but mostly in low relief accompanying a more fully modeled human figure.

VISA w/ Daniela Murphy Corella, Shao Lei, Jane Foley, Zakaria Almoutlak, and Nerses Vardanyan. Limestone, plaster, foam, slaked lime, fresco on panel. 2018–19.

Pieced back together in Chicago, the body that was once a part of the sculpture now lays prone on the floor. In time, it will be pulverized, slaked, and transformed into a fresco, inset in the wall of the gallery.

ATLAS UNLIMITED w/ Zakaria Almoutlak, Aliana de la Guardia, and Ganavya Doraiswamy. Ongoing performance based on a libretto of 18 songs by Pandian, Zins-Browne, and Almoutlak. 2019

The libretto of Acts VII–X is based on interviews with Almoutlak covering periods of his life from his childhood to the civil war in Syria, his relocation to Europe, and a speculative future, envisioned in collaboration with the artists. The singers move through this material in a non-linear fashion, vocalizing his stories through disparate musical traditions.

All works by Karthik Pandian and Andros Zins-Browne.