

Joe Namy

Studies for a Library

September 16 - October 28, 2023



Studies for a Library, 2023. Single channel video installation. Color, sound, 5'00"

Brief Histories presents *Studies for a Library*, an exhibition by Joe Namy, opening on Saturday, September 16, and on view through October 28, 2023. In *Studies for a Library*, Namy explores the transformation of grief and the coping methods of survivors through a body of work that includes a video installation, photographs, selection of books, and a sound sculpture. Together, these elements map the library as a space where memorial, healing, and regeneration intersect.

Central to the exhibition, the video installation, *Studies for a Library* (2023) tells the story of how The Khalid Jabara 'Tikkun Olam' Memorial Library at a preschool in Tulsa, Oklahoma came together, highlighting its collection of children's books focused on early childhood development. Teaching ideas of empathy, compassion, fairness, justice, and peace, the library is dedicated to Khalid Jabara, the artist's cousin, who, in a tragic hate crime, was killed by a racist neighbor at the front steps of his family's porch in south Tulsa in 2016. Namy's video, made between the children's library and a studio in Tulsa – and which comes from a larger documentary project about the aftermath – presents a meditative loop, reflecting on the moments after the tragedy occurred, in the acts of mourning and acceptance, and the need to teach love. Flowers, books, and colors fade into the screen, and the image cuts between assemblages the artist created and scenes filmed in the library. Narrated by Khalid's sister, Victoria, and the preschool's director, Shelli Wright, and accompanied by

a composition played by Detroit-based harpist Ahya Simone, Namy renders an intimate portrait of the memorial library, dealing with endemic tragedy and becoming a catalyst for the transformation of grief to essential elements of learning and growing.

Alongside the video footage, Namy arranges a series of photographs that punctuate the space between looking and listening, framing a child-like perspective. They depict flowers that echo the bouquets of sympathy that once blanketed the front lawn of Khalid's family home, and the children's books from the library collection – their titles made legible are like markers of our society's place in time. While the bookcase in the exhibition presents a selection of the hundreds of books that make up the Khalid Jabara Memorial Library, which was originally assembled by librarians, children's advocates, and abolitionists.

Collaboration and the auditory experience are critical to Namy's practice, and in the sound sculpture, *A Siren Sung Six Different Ways* (2023), a clay megaphone amplifies six compositions by the artist, sounding on the hour with a series of vocalizations by Alya Al-Sultani, a British-Iraqi dramatic soprano and composer known for her contributions to new opera. In each rendition, Al-Sultani's interpretation of a siren's call oscillates between a warning, a lullaby, and a demarcation tone. Side by side, sound sculpture, photographs, and video installation form an aural and visual narrative of the environment of the library, the permanence of the written word and the transience of life in an atmosphere saturated with colors, plants, and sound.

Joe Namy is an artist, composer, and educator often working collaboratively through sound, video, performance, and sculpture. Their projects often focus on the politics of music and organized sound, such as the pageantry and power of opera, the noise laws and gender dynamics of bass, the colors and tones of militarization, the migration patterns of instruments and songs, and the complexities of translation in all this - from language to language, from score to sound, from drum to dance. Namy holds a monthly DJ residency Rhythm x Rhythm on Radio Alhara. They are a Sundance/Time Studios/Kendeda Fund fellow, and artist in residence for the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham. Namy is a PHD researcher at the Ruskin School of Art at the University of Oxford. Their work has been exhibited, screened, and amplified at Ashkal Alwan Beirut, Art Night London, the Asia Culture Center in Gwangju, Darat Al Fanun in Amman, the Berlinale, Boras Biennial, Detroit Science Center, La Biennale de Montréal, Nottingham Contemporary, Sharjah Biennial 13.

Studies for a Library opens on Saturday, September 16th, 2023. Doors open at 4pm and the talk and listening session with Joe Namy and writer Brian Kuan Wood begins at 5pm, followed by the opening reception 6-8pm.

The exhibition is on view at Brief Histories from September 16, 2023 to October 28, 2023.

Brief Histories hours: Thursday-Saturday 12pm–6pm.

For more information visit www.briefhistories.art

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