



Press Release
January 2017

Ruya Foundation announces free educational publishing initiative Ruya Notebooks

The Ruya Foundation is pleased to announce the launch of Ruya Notebooks, a new educational publishing initiative that will release two titles a year. For each Notebook a well known artist, curator or critic will select five short texts that they have identified as fundamental to their creative development. These texts will then be translated into Arabic, in most cases for the first time, and the resultant Notebook distributed for free to artistic communities in Iraq and the wider Middle East. The aim of the project is to provide resources to schools, communities and individuals who have previously had little or no access to educational art texts. The series will launch on 19 January 2017 in Erbil, to coincide with the first re-staging inside Iraq of Ruya's 2015 Venice Biennale exhibition 'Invisible Beauty'.

The first title in the series will be *Art and Its Objects: 5 essays on contemporary art selected by Jonathan Watkins*. 2,000 copies will be printed initially, with the eventual aim of making the resource accessible to as many Arabic speakers as possible. Jonathan Watkins is Director of Ikon Gallery in Birmingham and a collaborator of the Ruya Foundation. His Ruya Notebook will include a new introductory essay by Watkins entitled 'Art and its Objects' and the following five texts:

- I. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 'Chapter 1' (1972)
- II. Alfred Gell, 'Vogel's Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps', first published in *Journal of Material Culture* (1996)
- III. Michel Houellebecq, *The Map and the Territory*, 'Preface' (2010)
- IV. Will Self, 'Are the hyper-rich ruining the new Tate Modern?', first published in *The Guardian* (2014)
- V. Gavin Brown and Daniel Baumann, 'The Demise of the Future', first published in *Spike* (2014)

The impetus for the launch of Ruya Notebooks was twofold. Firstly, it is the Ruya Foundation's mission to bridge the gap between the conflict-ridden regions of the Middle East, particularly Iraq, and the rest of the world. Despite greater access to information brought about by the Internet and other technological advancements, access to good educational art texts in the Middle East is still restricted by socio-economic factors, one of the most limiting being the ability to speak a Western European language. Secondly, access to scholarship is generally constricted in the region, inhibiting the ability of creative communities to think freely and without censorship. Combating these issues requires a host of developments, including access to good schools and teachers, and well researched and updated curriculums and methodologies. Ruya Notebooks aims to contribute in some way to this effort.

In the foreword to the first Ruya Notebook, the Foundation states:

“It has come to our attention that most texts on art, however diverse, do not exist in Arabic. This is the bridge we are constructing, notebook-by-notebook, as we seek leading international art professionals, artists and writers to share their knowledge and expertise with Arabic speakers. It is an experiment. We think it is an important one.”

A number of publishers and writers generously waived reproduction fees to enable Ruya Notebooks to launch. Initially Ruya will publish two titles in the Notebooks series each year. Future participants will include the artists Hiwa K and Kader Atia, curators Marie Muracciole, Venetia Porter and Aneta Szylak, and the artistic director of S.M.A.K. (Museum for Contemporary Art) Philippe Van Cauteren. Selected texts will include pieces by Irit Rogoff, Hito Steyerl, Gayatri Spivak and Mikhail Bakhtin, amongst others. Details of the second title for 2017 will be announced in the Spring.

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Notes to Editors:

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About the Ruya Foundation

The Ruya Foundation is an Iraqi registered non-profit, non-governmental organisation founded in 2012 with the aim of aiding and enriching culture in Iraq, and building cultural bridges with the world. Ruya's initial goal is to promote culture in Iraq at a time when priorities are focused elsewhere, and to build a platform that will enable Iraqis in the arts, the young in particular, to benefit from and participate in international events. In addition to supporting local projects, its aim is to create a network of intercultural events that can contribute to the development of civil society in Iraq.

Ruya initiates and commissions creative projects in the visual, audiovisual and performing arts. Ruya was the commissioner of the National Pavilion of Iraq for the 56th and 55th Venice Biennales in May 2013 and May 2015. It will once again commission the Pavilion for the 57th edition, in which Paolo Colombo and Tamara Chalabi will co-curate an exhibition entitled 'Archaic'. Ruya collaborated with international artist Ai Weiwei on a major publication *Traces of Survival: Drawings by refugees in Iraq selected by Ai Weiwei* (2015). In March 2015 Ruya staged the first drama therapy project in Baghdad, supported by the Prince Claus Fund. In April 2016 Ruya launched the first publically accessible online database of contemporary Iraqi artists, which can be found at www.ruyafoundation.org/en/artists. In addition, the Ruya website is a live platform for Iraqi art. Interviews with emerging and established artists both in Iraq and the diaspora are published regularly to encourage dialogue, the exchange of ideas and promote the possibility of collaboration.

www.ruyafoundation.org

About 'Invisible Beauty' at the Erbil Citadel

In January 2017 the Ruya Foundation will present the first re-staging in Iraq of 'Invisible Beauty', the exhibition originally shown as the National Pavilion of Iraq at the 56th Venice Biennale (2015). After having transferred to S.M.A.K. (Museum for Contemporary Art) in Ghent in May 2016, the exhibition will be re-staged in the Erbil Citadel in an 18th-century merchant's dwelling, the Salih Chalabi House. The Erbil Citadel was placed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014; the historic landmark is a walled fortified settlement that dominates the Erbil cityscape. 'Invisible Beauty' will be the first time that an

international exhibition has been held in the space and the show has been reformulated to suit its new environment, with all the works displayed on locally crafted furniture. 'Invisible Beauty' is curated by Philippe Van Cauteren, Artistic Director of S.M.A.K. (Museum for Contemporary Art), and will feature the work of five contemporary artists from across Iraq and the diaspora, accompanied by a display of over 500 drawings made by refugees in northern Iraq. The exhibition will run 19 January - 16 February 2017.