

Jala Wahid

Rock Fortress

Born out of Elam, bathe me in Mithra,

Turn Akkadia into Assyria,

Now you're in Kurdtopia.

Rock Fortress is an exhibition that derives its title from Heskîf, Northern Kurdistan. An ancient town comprising layers upon layers of civilizations for millennia, Heskîf is now fully submerged under water having been subject to Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project. Masquerading as sustainable development and economic growth, this project drives multi-sector regional development, encompassing 22 dams, 19 power plants, and irrigation schemes over a land mass of 17,000 km². For decades, it has led to forced displacement and the erasure of Kurdish culture through construction and flooding.

Through an installation of sculpture, song and light, Rock Fortress explores an ongoing silent warfare performed underwater, while silence is physical, as well as, political. A provocation towards feelings of being unanchored, it is an assertion of the future in spite of erased histories. Set after a flood has occurred, iconographic lions spanning civilizations across millennia sing, invoking the Kurmanji melodies of Beytocan amongst other singers, calling on their collective voice which desperately embodies Kurdishness through a sense of place. In this process, questions are raised regarding the ethics in claiming histories and the voices of others to assert a future politics, of redrawing borders, and of reimagining Kurdistan beyond geopolitical terms.

The sound piece Rock Fortress is performed by Julia Katarina and produced by Owen Pratt.