

Peer Dala Nasser: Cemetery of Martyrs

19 September – 12 December 2026

Cemetery of Martyrs is a major new co-commission by Beirut and London-based artist Dala Nasser, produced in collaboration with Nottingham Contemporary and KM21 The Hague, Netherlands. Nasser's new body of work comprises a canopy of dyed and marked fabrics, layered and draped over a site-specific wooden structure and an accompanying text work.

Nasser's work explores history, displacement and community through a relationship with abstraction and alternative forms of image-making. She integrates sound, performance and film in her work, but remains quintessentially a painter, working with the medium's most elementary materials: fabric, pigments, stretcher bars and mark making.

Cemetery of Martyrs departs from Nasser's past works that explore the cultural and political histories of Southern Lebanon and wider West Asia; a region imprinted with the remnants of ancient societies, landscapes and geology. Whereas Nasser's previous work has drawn on historic subjects and sites, ranging from the tragic love story of mortal Adonis and goddess Aphrodite, the 600–400 BCE tomb of King Hiram, or most recently, three tombs of Noah in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, her new commission transforms Peer's exhibition space into a symbolic graveyard.

This new body of work is the outcome of many years of research and field trips, guided by conversations with historians, her communities and collaborators. Using the process of frottage (the technique of taking a rubbing from an uneven surface), Nasser worked in many geographic contexts to collect charcoal grave rubbings from the gravestones and sites of seminal artists and intellectuals from Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, the United Kingdom and the United States, who all, at some stage of their lives, spent time in Beirut, Lebanon. Included in the work are Etel Adnan, Inji Aflatoun (also Efflatoun), Mahdi Amel, Ghassan Kanafani, Khalil Sakakini, Raif Khoury, Laila Shawa and Anbara Salam Khalidi, amongst many others.

The resulting collection of graves represents the lives of cultural figures from the mid-

nineteenth century (specifically The Nahda, a cultural and intellectual Arab Renaissance movement) to the present day, who all used their art as a tool to fight for independence and freedom in times of political dominance and occupation. Each life represented in the installation has, through their own artistic and intellectual work, shaped the notion of true sovereignty in Western Asia.

Within the installation, Nasser layers cyan blue and charcoal-marked sheets of cloth amongst black and green mourning fabrics that she has dyed and marked with shells, seeds, ash and crushed malachite. The charcoal rubbings transcribe the surfaces of known graves, while the cyanotype treated fabrics act as a visual representation of those whose graves are unreachable or unknown by featuring the person's name transcribed in Arabic using various scales and legibility. A booklet accompanies the exhibition, offering an individual obituary for each of the artists, writers, poets, filmmakers, historians, journalists, and others included in the cemetery. Written by Nasser in collaboration with translator and researcher Rayyan Abdelkhalek, the booklet acts as a way of commemorating each life and legacy beyond the physical cemetery.

Cemetery of Martyrs initiates a reflection on the challenge of interpreting the extreme and unceasing violence of the present moment, and invites audiences to reckon with their own role in forging new pathways of thought and action. Nasser's cemetery creates a collective space to gather and reflect on the legacies of people who were steadfast in their commitment to freedom and cultural sovereignty; a graveyard to mourn, learn, and reaffirm the power of culture, art and humanity to connect us to histories of resistance and renewal.

The exhibition is accompanied by a series of events as part of Peer's Talks, Events and Workshops programme. Cemetery of Martyrs is part of Peer's 2026 Programme, which examines themes including the construction of place, sovereignty and community and includes solo exhibitions by artists Leah Clements, Okiki Akinfe, and a forthcoming 2027 commission by Ceidra Moon Murphy.

BIOGRAPHY

Dala Nasser (b. 1990, Tyre) lives and works in London and Beirut. Selected exhibitions include: Cemetery of Martyrs, KM21 The Hague, Netherlands and Nottingham Contemporary; Xiloma.MCCCLXXXVI, Kunsthalle Basel; Aichi Triennale 2025: A Time Between Ashes and Roses, Nagoya, Japan; Flesh Flowers, Aishti Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon (all 2025); Adonis River, Renaissance Society, Chicago, USA; Red in Tooth, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, Germany; Whitney Biennial 2024: Even Better Than the Real Thing, Whitney Museum of Art, New York; Diriyah Biennale 2024: After Rain, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (all 2024); Time spent without its flow, V.O Curations, London and 58th Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (all 2022). She is the recipient of the forthcoming inaugural Frieze Abu Dhabi Artist Award 2026, curated by Nabila Abdel Nabi.

LIST OF WORKS

GALLERY 1 & 2

Cemetery of Martyrs (2026)

Cotton bedsheets, charcoal, soil, shells, seeds, ash, malachite, cyanotype, reclaimed timber, obituaries document.

Dimensions vary.

TALKS, EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS

EAST END DAY:

CURATOR'S TOUR

SUNDAY 11 OCTOBER, 3PM

Coinciding with Frieze London and Frieze Masters 2026 East End Day, join us for a curator's tour of Dala Nasser's exhibition with Beulah Ezeugo, Curator at Peer.

ARTIST TALK:

DALA NASSER AND SOHRAB MOHEBBI

FRIDAY 16 OCTOBER, 11.30AM

Dala Nasser is joined by Sohrab Mohebbi, Director of SculptureCenter, New York, to discuss Nasser's new commission and her wider painting practice.

LISTENING EVENT:

AHMAD KAABOUR

SATURDAY 17 OCTOBER, 5PM

Join us for an intimate listening event and celebration of iconic singer-songwriter, Ahmad Kaabour (1955 - 2026) with his son, writer and visual artist, Marwan Kaabour.

EXHIBITION RESPONSE:

WASSILA ABBOUD – MAHDI AMEL ON FRANZ FANON

WEDNESDAY 4 NOVEMBER, 7PM

In collaboration with Basecamp for Tactical Imaginaries in the Netherlands, cultural worker and writer, Wassila Abboud hosts a discussion with historian, Ziad Kiblawi. The conversation centres on the anti-colonial origins of Lebanese Marxist philosopher Mahdi Amel's work, focusing on the period between 1960 and 1967, when Amel lived and taught in Algeria by invitation from the National Liberation Front (FLN).

Tickets are £5, please book via the QR code.

BOOK LAUNCH: IARLAITH NÍ FHEORAIS – THERE'S A TUNNEL UNDER BALLYBRIT BUSINESS PARK

THURSDAY 18 NOVEMBER, 7PM

Author and curator Iarlaith Ní Fheorais is joined by the writer Daisy LaFarge to discuss Ní Fheorais' new book There's a Tunnel Under Ballybrit Business Park, which critiques the continuing rise of Ireland as a key location for the global medical technology industry.

OFFSITE FILM SCREENING:

ONE HUNDRED FACES FOR A SINGLE DAY, 1972, DIRECTED BY CHRISTIAN GHAZI. INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS, LONDON SW1Y 5AH

THURSDAY 26 NOVEMBER, 8:30PM

In collaboration with the ICA, Peer presents a public screening of Lebanese director and activist, Christian Ghazi's (1934- 2013) experimental 16mm film One Hundred Faces for a Single Day / Mi'at Wajeh Li Yawm Wahed (1972). Considered to be his 'personal manifesto', the film offers a critique of Beirut's political, cultural, and intellectual elites during Lebanon's pre-civil war era, contrasting their apathy and comfort with the struggles of the working class.

COMMUNITY COFFEE MORNING WITH CURATOR'S TOUR

THURSDAY 10 DECEMBER, 9.30AM

Join us for a community coffee morning at Peer where you can tour the exhibition and meet others living and working in the local area, with Ellen Greig, Director at Peer.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S STUDY GROUP: CEMETERY OF MARTYRS

Writer and researcher Nihal El Aasar leads two study sessions for young people exploring the political lives and legacies present within the exhibition. This is a closed event for Peer Ambassadors and for young people aged 17-25. To learn more, please email max@peeruk.org.

Booking is required for all events with a suggested donation of £3, unless otherwise stated. To reserve your place please visit Peer's website. If ticket prices are a barrier to attend an event, please speak to a member of staff or email info@peeruk.org.



FOUR QUESTIONS

ELLEN GREIG, DIRECTOR, PEER:

This new body of work is the result of many years of research and field trips, guided by conversations with historians, your communities and collaborators, to literally map people's graves through the process of frottage. The work is also a scholarly document, of sorts, that points the viewer to the lives behind each grave rubbing through a booklet of obituaries that accompany the installation. Why did you choose to represent these 46 lives here in this work? What drew you to them specifically?

DALA NASSER, ARTIST: This body of work has been in the making for 5 years now. I have long felt the isolation of living in the diaspora since I was 18, and I found that during my time in academia that I was unable to form the connections and conversations that have always been part and parcel of my work. And as the situation back home (in Lebanon) continued to collapse, with the crash of the banking sector, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the port explosion, and the 2021 bombardment of Gaza post-Sheikh Jarrah, I decided to do something pretty simple in an attempt to foster wider connections around me. I created a Linktree page on my Instagram to which I uploaded PDF files, videos, interviews, and podcasts that addressed the history of occupation and colonialism in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. I wanted to help provide a material history to what was so saliently unacknowledged and historically misunderstood by many of those in my vicinity and to whom I showed my work.

Once I started building that, many of my friends sent in links and the page actually blew up to include more than 500 links. In that process of collectivising and publicising knowledge, I first learned about the 1919 King-Crane Commission, which was an official inquiry sent by the then U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to the post-Ottoman Middle East to assess local political desires and guide post-WWI mandate. It was the first time that I learnt of a historic moment that had an alternate reality to the one we know, in the sense that it was drawn up, there was a constitution for it, research about it, and a popular demand from the Arab population of the Ottoman Empire for their freedom, sovereignty, and independence. And this was verbalised and put forward so passionately in The Nahda – a history I hadn't yet learned of. I knew I wanted to somehow make a work around this, but rather than looking at history through monuments and sites like in my previous works, this one would look at history through a timeline of figures.

This idea wasn't actualised until October 2024, after a year of the genocide in Gaza and of contending with the feeling that cultural production was not only being suppressed but also

rightfully scrutinised and contested in the face of such violence. At that moment, the only thing that crossed my mind was that I never made rubbings of my grandparents' graves in Souwaneh, my village in the South of Lebanon.

At this point, it was a month into the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon, and I was living in London while all my family lived in Beirut. In the moments when I wasn't watching the news anxiously, the only thoughts I had were how the loss of my grandparents' home (my former studio) would feel like losing them all over again. And because I have the tools, and in all of my works I have done frottage, I just wished I had thought of doing rubbings of their graves so that my mother wouldn't feel their loss another time over. It was a simple and powerful act of recording.

The embodied witnessing that urged me to do this work, and the moving force of this commission was that there was no space to mourn, no space to remember. I then sat down with the legacy of all these figures, in that each person lived by these resounding hopes and ideals that we were all building upon. I not only wanted to learn more, but also to look at them together in the same light, because so much of life throughout Lebanon and Palestine is fractured because of Israel. Much of what concerned these figures and is reflected in their body of work has genuinely shaped our experience in exile, especially the fact that many of them are born in one place and buried in another.

The conversation started with many wonderful individuals to whom I am very grateful to have included in building this work: Rayyan Abdel Khalek, a wonderful researcher and artist; my uncle Chabib Al Amine, a poet who knew many of these individuals personally; and Nadi Abousaada, an art historian who provided a wealth of knowledge on a long history of artists and thinkers. I suppose what drew me to them fundamentally is that each individual, no matter how varied the spheres of influence listed – from poets to theatre-makers, historians, art critics, journalists, translators, musicians, archivists, activists, filmmakers, novelists, painters, sculptors, and cartoon satirists – all of these figures have embodied in all their labour and continued to live by, no matter what the cost, the principle of political self-determination in its fullest sense.

In this accumulation of lives I found the most devastating part to reckon with: the overlaps in history – how similar the struggles they endured are to those we are facing today. The Lebanese poet and writer, Khalil Hawi, for example, took his life on the eve of the Israeli invasion in 1982 in protest of the government's inability to protect innocents from such violent deaths. 44 years on, what can we say has changed other than the advancement in the field of military death machines? From the deaths of Mohamed Bouazizi to Aaron Bushnell, the echoes are clear.

The work came together through shared anecdotes from what has been left behind after life, but also these deeply personal moments that separate the personal or private life of each person. The push to do this could only have come from me trying to evade a deep feeling of personal loss. I needed to understand not only the moment we were living through, but also my own labour and the labour of all those upon which we can build. This work looks at the extensive and varied collective efforts towards sovereignty.

EG: Can you tell me more about the significance of The Nahda, a cultural and intellectual Arab Renaissance movement born in the mid-nineteenth century, as a starting point for this work? And the importance of Beirut in how you approached arranging the list of figures you have included in this work?

DN: My works deal with ruptures, erasures (historical, colonial, psychological), and fast and slow violence, all of which can only be read through material. In previous works, the spaces themselves existed as either rivers, caves, or archaeological and historical ruins. In this work the lives we are mourning and holding, and all the graves themselves, exist (or existed at some point, and some have recently been destroyed), but a space for gathering does not.

The title of the exhibition is taken from an existing graveyard in Beirut; however, rather than looking at history and the passage of time through site and geography, as I have done in previous works, this work looks at history and geography through a timeline of figures. And this timeline starts at the end of the Ottoman Empire.

The Arab Renaissance, The Nahda, fueled a burst in writing, publishing, art, and political organising, which all came together to support the Arab population of the Ottoman Empire (Syria to Egypt) who wanted self-determination. This was outlined in the King-Crane Commission (my initial starting point for this body of work), and was additionally outlined and supported by Woodrow Wilson in his proposal to divide the region. But as Wilson's health deteriorated and he stepped out of the Versailles negotiations, the UK and France drew up Sykes-Picot, and then came the Balfour Declaration and so on. This timeline shows you where the arbitrarily drawn borders imposed on Western Asia have brought on the current moment of genocide, militarised border frontiers, and continuous cycles of mass exodus, and how these incredible collective aspirations for sovereignty and political self-determination never came into being.

I was drawn to how a century of political thought and organising against the systems in place have never been isolated, and that we continue through a shared struggle not through "resilience" but through collectivity. This list could be infinite as the struggles and geographies

overlap, so I used a relationship to Beirut as a marker to edit the list down. I did this because of the city's history as the site for 'Cosmopolitan Radicalism' (term coined by historian Zeina Maasri) from the 50s onwards, and the fact that despite my life in London now, I maintain that Beirut too is a base for my practice in all my works, as I am a byproduct of both cities. I have lived in London as long as I have lived in Beirut in my life thus far.

EG: Can you tell me about the material process of making this work – from the use of cyanotype, indigo blue and charcoal-marked cloth to the method you used to make charcoal rubbings of known graves? I am also interested in your use of wooden structures throughout your installation work – including this commission, and what these holding structures and use of scale represent for you?

DN: I developed my approach to image in a way that is antithetical to image-making. I treat each component as a separate material; the wooden stretcher bars create the line and the fabrics create the grid that holds the material. They are treated with handmade dyes. I also use frottage as the means for shadow and mark making. All together, these components create an expanded painting, which is the work that you experience in the end.

My work is process-driven, and the process itself is linked to the material at hand. My view has been that material is the 'witness' in my work, one often without testimony, as it embodies what it has survived. So at the core of my work is how base it is, how all the material is often too base to be sacralised as one does in art. In this work, I used a fixed-size fabric for all works, cotton sheets the size of a single bedsheet, and on them I used a combination process. Frottage rubbings were made from all the known graves I could access, and the cyanotype fabrics show the names I illustrated in Arabic using sand, and I exposed them to sunlight.

The dyed fabrics in indigo and green are meant to bring in the colour of paradise. Some of the bedsheets were my own, from the different cities I've lived in, and some belonged to dear friends. The sheets are meant to show the level of intimacy one feels towards these figures, from experiencing their writings/music/art/film/poetry and such. Also, the process of making a frottage of a grave is incredibly different from that of an archaeological site or a cave. It is a deeply intimate act, one almost uncomfortably so, as it feels as if you are hugging the person, being so close to the only surface that separates us. Rayyan, who wrote the obituaries with me, also made many of the rubbings too, and we both felt how heavy the process is. It is the act of mourning through and through that made this work.

EG: The work is a site of mourning, and is laced with loss and grief, but also with generosity, love and defiance. As an artist, you have created a body of work that refuses erasure of life. You have used this refusal as a tool to produce new ways of honouring death, intellectual and cultural work and shared political struggles and commitments. Do you feel a sense of responsibility in honouring the people included in this work?

DN: Thank you for your words; refusal and generosity are two words that hold a lot of weight to me, and of course, love. It feels impossible sometimes to be able to translate love into art, even though it is at the core of creative thought. So I deeply appreciate that this is translated to those who engage with it, as it is what I would hope for.

Of course, I feel a huge sense of responsibility compounded in this work. The post-7/7 world alone has added a weight to what one would hope is all on our shoulders collectively — for me as an Arab and also for those of us in cultural production — to not only engage with difficult truths around our labour, and how it moves within the world, but to hold alongside it the very real and impossible reality of never-ending, and incomplete mourning.

We are all witnesses to loss of life on a mass scale, to the reshaping of the earth and land as we know it, from genocide to ecocide. It feels impossible to be able to hold room for all of what we are experiencing, something I felt could only be done collectively, and only through the celebration of all of our elders. Many of whom's close ones I would hear say, "It's good they aren't with us today to see this," and in the same breath "I wish they were still with us to guide us." I hope that through this act of gathering and sharing, and by learning of their lives and honouring their labour, the way they have been by both those who knew them personally, and those of us who only knew their work, we can look into the legacies that we have all inherited and are all responsible for; these are aspirations for life that we all hold dear and strive for.

I don't think that anything can be lost. It can be destroyed. But it is never lost. This is the essence of resistance, I suppose, within cultural production. A life can be extinguished; so much has been destroyed, taken, reframed, and absorbed. I say this in the context of my work because it is tightly linked to the geography from which it emanates. We are looking at this current moment through these histories and landscapes so that something is actualised. I said earlier that I repurposed my bedsheets and my best friend's sheets - these, to me, are acts of love and care. In the face of such violent erasures of communal histories (personal and collective), acts of gathering and holding and making space become instinctual as much as they become revolutionary. Mourning remains an impossible act. It is always

incomplete and yet it is constant. There is nothing worse than forgetting. I hope this commission posits something antithetical to forgetting. To wrap this up, my entire body of work as an artist deals with the traces of time, and nothing is more crushing than time; we can never have enough of it, and in time much is forgotten. So in my choice to make art, something that, ultimately, you would hope, outlives its maker, is to hold what cannot be forgotten or erased and to carry it onwards beyond my life and beyond myself.

SUPPORTERS

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Cemetery of Martyrs is produced and commissioned by Nottingham Contemporary in collaboration with KM21, The Hague, Netherlands and Peer, London.

ACCESS

ENTERING THE SPACE

The gallery is on the ground floor and has step free access. The gallery door opening is 86cm wide.

The gallery consists of two rooms with a doorway of 100cm separating the two spaces.

Access to the rear entrance of the gallery is 8cm off the ground with the door opening measuring 77cm wide. We offer ramp access for the rear entrance.

Assistance dogs are welcome throughout the space.

EXHIBITION

INTERPRETATION

Printed exhibition materials are available, also in plain text. A member of staff is always available to talk you through the exhibition too.

SEATING

Individual stools and chairs (40cm wide) are available if required. Please ask a member of the team at the front desk.

LIGHTING

The exhibition space is lit by both large windows and overhead gallery lights. Audiences can make a flexible lighting request before attending or ask a member of staff.

FRONT OF HOUSE

When visiting the gallery, you will be welcomed by a member of the team or a young person who is participating in Peer's youth programme, Peer Ambassadors. For many of these participants, this is their first paid work experience. To find out more about the programme, please visit our website or ask a member of staff.

TOILETS

Peer has a public universal toilet, however it is not currently accessible for wheelchair users or for baby changing facilities. The nearest wheelchair accessible toilet is located at Shoreditch Library which is 243ft away from Peer. Their opening hours are Monday to Thursday 10am to 8pm, Fridays 10am to 6pm, Saturdays 10am to 5pm.

QUIET SPACES

Peer's office is a flexible space that has been used in the past as a quiet space, prayer space, and baby changing area. Please ask gallery staff if you would like access to this space and we would be happy to accommodate.

FORTHCOMING

Ceidra Moon Murphy
30 January–24 April 2027

97–99 Hoxton St
London N1 6QL

www.peeruk.org
info@peeruk.org
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Free and open to all,
Wednesday–Saturday
12–6pm

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