

*tarab: recordings of
classical arab music
selected by tarek
atoui*

new york:

june 25 — july 31

mexico city:

june 25 – august 15

opening

june 25, 6 — 8 pm

kurimanzutto
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For the first time, kurimanzutto presents a project simultaneously across its galleries in Mexico City and New York. Artist and composer Tarek Atoui shares a selection of classical Arab music drawn from an archive shaped by more than two decades of listening, travel, and collecting. Atoui's selection unfolds as the gesture of one music lover sharing records with others, guided by curiosity, fascination, and the belief that others will find something in them worth hearing. Amid the current global climate and the many forms of noise that surround us, the gallery offers a place where the act of listening can become a form of dialogue—with ourselves and with the history embedded in these recordings. A way of finding, in sound, the connections between us that may have become harder to hear.

In Arabic, *tarab* refers to a heightened emotional state that music can produce in the listener, an engagement bordering on a trance. The term is also associated with the musical tradition that flourished across Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine during the Nahda, the Arab cultural renaissance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The development of this repertoire coincided with the emergence of sound recording technologies, the establishment of record labels and later radio, which transformed how this music was heard and transmitted.

Long played in salons, theaters, and courtyards, with little regard for authorship or a single, fixed version, this tradition began, at the turn of the century, to circulate on recordings in different formats. As the Ottoman Empire dissolved and waves of people from the Eastern Mediterranean settled across the Americas, they brought this music with them. The diaspora took root in the United States, Mexico, and across Latin America. In cities like New York, Arab music record labels were established, extending the influence of these sounds into local musical genres. Alongside the recordings traveled a culture of listening in which music was a place of gathering, of collective memory held in sound.

Drawn largely from the first half of the twentieth century, the recordings heard here offer a glimpse into a much broader musical tradition. At its core, *tarab* is an oral heritage: a repertoire transformed through improvisation around shared melodies and modal structures, nourished by exchange between musicians who constantly adapt the music to new contexts. Its power lies precisely in its resistance to

fixity, which reflects something deeper about the culture from which this music emerged.

Classical Arab music speaks of connections and bridges often forgotten, a space of dialogue that exceeded religious and linguistic boundaries. It is a testament to a larger history of migration across the Middle East and beyond. In its versatility, resilience, and capacity to hold many voices at once, this music remains an enduring witness to these complexities. Spanning various geographies and generations, Atoui's selection of recordings recalls the Arab diaspora and the culture of listening that has long sustained this music. It reminds us of the possibility of returning to those bridges, and the ongoing, necessary work of listening to each other despite the distance.

about the artist

Tarek Atoui is an artist and composer working within the realm of sound performance and composition. His work challenges traditional ways of perceiving sound and focuses on the medium's ability to act as a catalyst for human interaction, while exploring its relation to current social, historical and political realities. Atoui's work often revolves around large-scale, collaborative performances that stem from extensive research into music history and anthropology. He engineers complex and inventive instruments, arranges and curates concerts, performances, listening rooms and workshops. Atoui is also represented by Chantal Crousel in France and Vitamin Creative Space in China.

Tarek Atoui has become known through individual exhibitions such as: *Souffle Continu and Sunflowers*, Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin, Ireland (2026); *The Whispering House (Bayt Al Hams)*, commissioned by the Royal Commission for AlUla, Bayt Al Hams, AlUla, Saudi Arabia (2025); *Tarek Atoui. Al Tāriq. Un viaje a las tradiciones musicales rurales del norte de África y del mundo árabe*, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain (2025); *Tarek Atoui*, Kunsthau Bregenz, Austria (2024); *the Shore / a place I'd like to be*, Municipal Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.), Ghent, Belgium (2024); *The Rain*, Mirrored Garden, Guangzhou, China (2024); *Standing Waves*, Cukrarna Gallery, Ljubljana, Slovenia (2024); *The Drift*, Institut

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d'art contemporain (IAC), Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes, France (2023); *Tarek Atoui: The Whisperers*, The Jones Center, The Contemporary Austin, Texas; traveled to The FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2022); *Waters' Witness*, Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany; traveled to Serralves Foundation – Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, Portugal; and Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean (2022); *Cycles in II*, Sharjah Art Foundation, United Arab Emirates (2020); *Organ Within*, kurimanzutto, New York (2019); *Resonance: Sound Art*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota (2019); among others.

Tarek Atoui currently lives and works in Paris.

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