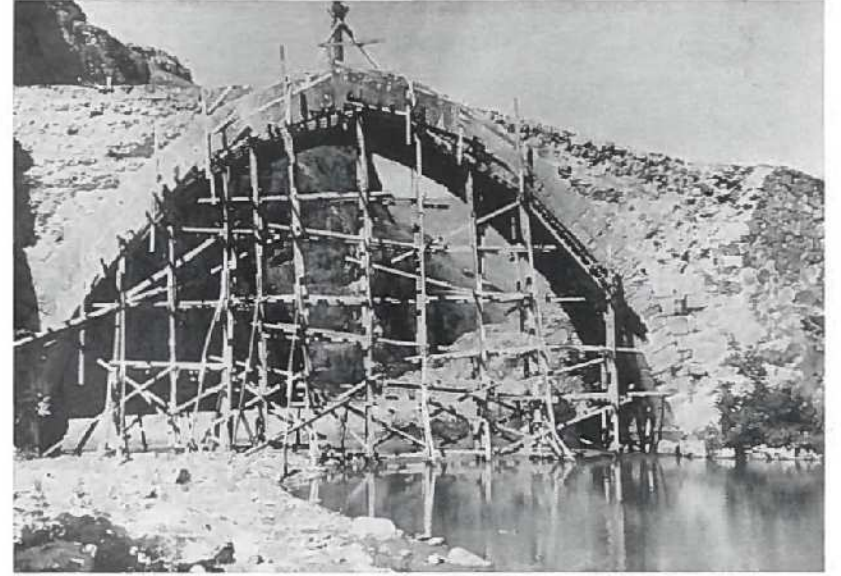


36° 15' 43" N 29° 59' 14" E



1 Söküm iskelesi kurulmuş, kemer sırtı temizlenmiş, taşların sökümüne geçilmek üzere
The scaffolding is erected, the arch of the bridge cleared, and work is about to begin on the dismantling of the stones



2 Köprünün mansap tarafı görünüşü
View of the upstream side of the bridge

SaraNoa Mark's exhibition "36° 15' 43" N 29° 59' 14" E" is bounded on both sides by colored clay-cone mosaics. Similar cone mosaics were some of the first objects ever made with express purpose of transforming a building from a container for activities to a place whose spiritual force becomes the focus of those activities. When these cones were first made in the fourth millennium BCE, some temples had existed in Mesopotamia for as many as two thousand years. It was the marvelous communal feasts that had taken place in these buildings that fixed them in the experience and memory of the participants, causing them to be rebuilt again and again, ever larger each time, at the same location. They eventually became the homes of the gods that guided the Mesopotamian cosmos in the earliest written accounts of the lives of these gods. The clay cones added to this tradition, but they transformed it. They made a place sacralized by stories and experiences into a place whose visual power was unavoidably experienced, even by a stranger.



Clay Cones of Uruk.

Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago

The clay cone tradition lasted only for a few centuries. By the third millennium, however, very similarly shaped “pegs” were being used to attach the growing power of these temples, by this point stretching back to time immemorial, to the identities of particular kings who sponsored their various episodes of rebuilding. Each time a temple was rebuilt, the construction team looked for the original foundations of the temple and unearthed a deposit that contained a collection of pegs inscribed by every king whose labor teams had engaged in the same activity of renovation since the practice began. A new peg naming the current king was added, and the collection of objects was reburied. It was based on these deposits that the king Nabonidus (r. 559-539 BCE) wrote some of the earliest known histories based on archaeological data, and assembled his archaeological museum, the earliest known building for this purpose. These histories were histories of those temples, those places, that had, through millennia of experience, oral and written history, and objects of beautification, become the cornerstone of the “cuneiform culture” that reached its greatest geographical extent under Nabonidus.



Foundation Peg of Gudea, King of Lagash.
Courtesy Musée des beaux-arts de Lyon

But Nabonidus was also the final king who lived completely within this cultural world. Following his reign, these temples, some of which had been continuously rebuilt for five thousand years, began to fall into disrepair and sink beneath the silt dunes. The baked bricks that had once formed some of the most spiritually powerful places on earth, were treated as scrap, mined to build newer buildings.

When Percy Shelley wrote the famous poem “Ozymandius” about a sculpture of Ramses II in 1818, he observed that “Nothing beside remains. Round the decay/of that colossal/wreck, boundless and bare/the lone and level sands stretch far away.” This observation was certainly not true in his own time, as Egypt was at that time an urbanized and agriculturally productive place with numerous greatly respected historical monuments. However, it is true that the monumental works of Ramses II were little known in 1818, and even less of his life and reign. This is quite the opposite of the case today, only two centuries later, when innumerable sculptures of the king are visited every year, not only within the monuments he created them to populate, but also in museums across the globe, and his reign, the second longest among Egyptian kings, is known in more detail than almost any other king who ruled anywhere before the Roman Empire.

The passage of time and the events of history have a way of transforming places and buildings from monuments with unavoidable power to refuse or raw material and back. Last year, SaraNoa traveled through Turkey as a part of a Fulbright-sponsored project to physically interact with ancient and medieval rock monuments in the country. During these travels, they were touched by the mysterious ways the rock monuments were transformed through this never-ending process. How is it that one cliff face, carved into elaborate tombs by the ancient inhabitants of the city of Myra, has become a Turkish national park and an internationally recognized tourist destination, while the opposite face, carved into similarly stunning tombs, remains the backdrop of privately-owned orange groves? How is it that an equally elaborately carved Phrygian tomb near the village of Ayazini has become a stone quarry? And how did it happen that a stone quarry outside the ancient city of Ephesus made the opposite journey, first as a Roman burial site and then as a Byzantine site of pilgrimage? And finally, as they watched the waters of the newly created Ilisu Dam reservoir rise, how was it that a collection of medieval religious buildings was removed from the ancient town of Hasankeyf, and reconstructed on the cliffs above, while the similarly aged houses and market were left to be submerged?



Myra tombs in an orange grove.



Hasankeyf in February 2020.

In this exhibition SaraNoa ties together all of these processes and attitudes with a collection of work formed from materials that take millions of years to decompose. Here, replicas of the clay cones that once marked buildings as having an eternal meaning beyond their material existence mingle with work made from industrial stone scraps that were discarded as worthless as soon as they were created. Here, monuments that were forgotten, discarded, buried, and submerged gain new life in the human consciousness.

Akiva Sanders
February 2021