A Brief History of Collapses in some ways could be thought of as looking at history from the perspective of two buildings. The two buildings are the Darul Aman Palace in Kabul, which was built in the 1920s by the German architect Walter Harten, who was commissioned by King Amanullah. And the second building is the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, which was built by Simon Louis du Ry in the 1770s. He was commissioned by Friedrich, who was the Landgraf of Hessia at the time. What’s interesting about the two buildings is that even though they were built almost two hundred years apart, they both represent a similar moment in the two societies that they are a part of, which is this kind of impulse on the part of these rulers to open the societies.

For Documenta 13, there was a real emphasis on process and research. So I made a story map, which is how I’m looking at history from the perspective of these two buildings. So it’s actual uses of the buildings, intended uses of the buildings, people who are connected with them in different ways, different sort of thematic motifs that I wanted to explore through the stories of these buildings, myths, and legends. Also, the Museum Fridericianum was a library where the Brothers Grimm worked, so the Brothers Grimm are very associated with that building. There’s a strand in the narration that is stories about storytelling. There’s also a strand in the research that’s about different kinds of literary collections, and different kinds of stories.

The process of writing the narration for this particular film was really peculiar. It wasn’t a linear process at all, because it’s not a linear kind of narration. So actually making the story map was very helpful, because in the story map, all of the connections between these different ideas and people, and uses, and stories, are drawn out. It enabled me to basically start structuring a narration where I could make these sort of spiraling connections between all of these different things. So what I wanted to do basically was write a narration where I went back and forth between the two buildings, but also backwards and forwards in time.

In both channels, the passage of the camera through the spaces, and the way that that coincides with both this kind of choreography of objects and small incidents that the camera encounters, and the way that it is pursuing this sometimes very elusive, sometimes very present figure that is constantly escaping either the frame of the screen or the frame of the architecture, you know, that’s all very, very, very carefully planned out. So, there are extensive storyboards, done with photographs, where I basically shot test footage in both spaces before we shot the actual film. There’s also architectural plans where everything is plotted out, to the point where we were actually counting the number of steps that it would take to go through each room, and so on and so forth. But because we couldn’t find architectural schematics for the Darul Aman Palace, I had to draw them myself. And those are the plans that we ended up using to make the kind of plotting of the various choreographies. So I worked with Erin Ellen Kelly, who’s a choreographer I’ve worked with for nine years now and she came to Kabul with me, and came to Kassel, and she’s also the performer that you see in the Kassel channel of the footage.
So, *A Brief History of Collapses* has always been installed more or less the same way—that is, with two screens that are arranged in a sort of V-shape, usually at a 120-degree angle. It’s probably the smallest screens its ever had—you know, I always try to get it as close to floor-to-ceiling as possible, but because of the size of the room that really isn’t possible at the Guggenheim. But we’re raising them a bit off the floor to compensate. It’s always interesting to show a work about architecture in a museum that’s so known for its architecture. I think it’s great for the New York premiere of *A Brief History of Collapses* to be in the Guggenheim for that reason, and I think it’s really fantastic for Sara to have made architecture and modernism a theme of the show.