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Ali Cherri

Press Package

Ben Luke, « Ali Cherri: If you prick us, do we not bleed? at the National Gallery review - vandalism made good », *Evening Standard*, March 17, 2022

Evening Standard

CULTURE > EXHIBITIONS

Ali Cherri: If you prick us, do we not bleed? at the National Gallery review - vandalism made good

The Beirut-born artist has explored the histories of vandalised art and in doing so reveals them afresh



Self Portrait at the Age of 63, after Rembrandt, 2022 by Ali Cherri / Ali Cherri

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Diego Velázquez's painting The Toilet of Venus – or the Rokeby Venus, as everyone calls it – was slashed with a knife in the National Gallery by the suffragette Mary Richardson almost exactly 108 years ago. The response to it in the press and among staff at the National Gallery used terms more akin to descriptions of a murder than an attack on a work of art: the Venus suffered a "cruel wound in the neck", "a ragged bruise"; she was a "victim".

When the Beirut-born artist Ali Cherri took on the role of artist-in-residence at the National Gallery and began his research into its collection, this clearly leapt out at him. In the end, he chose to focus his attention on this and four more victims in the gallery's collection – a Rembrandt self-portrait, Barocci's The Madonna of the Cat, Poussin's The Adoration of the Golden Calf, and the Leonardo cartoon – paintings that have all been attacked by members of the public over the years.

It opens up fascinating territory: the violence itself, the nature of our attachment to the paintings, and the way these histories become hidden, through restoration and security concerns about copycat violence, among other things. And, of course, it conjures metaphors aplenty. Everywhere in the National Gallery are images of trauma – wounds on the body of Christ, beheadings in biblical and mythological scenes – and renewal in Resurrections. In past works, Cherri has also pondered the long history of museums as places where works have often been violently removed from their original locations, victims of colonial trauma, spoils of the violence meted out on communities. The National is less of a culprit – but still there are works dismembered from their settings here, shorn of their context and purpose.

Ben Luke, « Ali Cherri: If you prick us, do we not bleed? at the National Gallery review - vandalism made good », *Evening Standard*, March 17, 2022



Diego Velázquez's The Toilet of Venus, known as the Rokeby Venus / The National Gallery, London

All of this feeds into a hugely engaging project in the National titled Ali Cherri: If you prick us, do we not bleed? – a series of historic-looking display cases with abstracted references to the five damaged paintings, in the form of found objects and sculptural creations. There are clear evocations of scientific and anthropological museums here, and Cherri nods to the history of cabinets of curiosities, the *wunderkammern* of European rulers and aristocrats of the past, filled with precious and strange objects, often gathered from distant colonial realms. Often, they'd include religious relics, and there's also something of the reliquary about Cherri's vitrines.

Cherri and the curator Priyesh Mistry are wise to have avoided too obvious a connection with the damaged works they respond to, displaying the cabinets instead in a line through two spaces in the Sainsbury Wing. This in itself is hugely novel in the National, because it only collects paintings – though sculpture richly informed so many of the pictures around Cherri's installation, the pictures normally exist separate from any three-dimensional art. And there are lovely correspondences between Cherri's works and those around them: where he riffs on the Poussin, he converts the French Baroque artist's biblical dancers into a plinth with a sculptural frieze, like the antique friezes that originally inspired them. Nearby, Lorenzo Costa's Virgin and Child with Saints is teeming with similar reliefs described in paint.

Above Cherri's revellers on the plinth is a gilded lid topped not with a calf but a taxidermied lamb, another religious symbol, of course. But this one has birth defects, with two heads and many legs, a 1920s specimen Cherri found in Italy – like a mythological beast made eerily real. Cherri regards the lamb as representing the Poussin painting after it was vandalised with spray paint in 2011, and calls on an Arabic idiom describing yearning which, literally translated, describes how, in loss, one becomes more "beastly".



All Cherri (b.1976) *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and the Infant Saint John the Baptist ('The Burlington House Cartoon')*, after Leonardo, 2022 / All Cherri

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This visual and thematic rupture and intrigue pervades the display. Responding to the Velázquez, Cherri includes in the vitrine a figure from non-Western culture, which are often called “Venus”, with ceremonial carved markings, and pairs it with a 19th-century European sculptural bust, apparently severed from a body. But he fits the bust with a glass eye, which is reflected, like Venus’s face in Velázquez’s painting, in a mirror. All that remains of the Rembrandt in Cherri’s response is the head, dismembered and realised in a grimly coloured wax, almost mid-melt, and hanging on a brilliantly talon-like hook. In the Leonardo piece, a blown-up facsimile of the gunshot damage sustained by the painting looks like cracked skin around a sore.

The response to the saccharine beauty of Barocci is the simplest and perhaps the best: in the painting, St John the Baptist plays with a goldfinch, a symbol of Christ’s fate, touching it as it flies through the air. Cherri has a plaster hand from a classical sculpture clutching at the same bird, another example of taxidermy, but the bird is against the wooden base of the display case. The hand could be caressing the goldfinch, I suppose, but it looks more like it’s on the brink of crushing it.

Throughout, there are points of tension like this, moments that reveal the opportunity for close reading afforded to artists-in-residence. Cherri has grasped this to produce a deeply thoughtful project, perceptive and quietly irreverent, even subversive. It’s a fresh perspective on a collection I know well, yet one that enriches it – not just the works he chose to respond to, but a wealth of others beyond them.

National Gallery, to June 12, nationalgallery.org.uk

Kevin Rawlison, « National Gallery exhibition explores trauma through vandalised paintings », *The Guardian*, March 16, 2022



National Gallery exhibition explores trauma through vandalised paintings

Ali Cherri's If you prick us, do we not bleed? looks at people's emotional responses to art



Ali Cherri's After the Rokeby Venus. Photograph: The National Gallery Photographic Department/The National Gallery

An exhibition inspired by the vandalism of five paintings while they were being displayed has opened at the [National Gallery](#), in an attempt to explore how trauma can manifest itself in people's response to museum and gallery collections.

If you prick us, do we not bleed? has been put together by the gallery's artist in residence, Ali Cherri, appointed in 2021, who uncovered accounts of National Gallery paintings being vandalised while on display as he researched its archives.

He said he had been struck by the public's emotional response to the attacks, noting that the damage was referred to in newspaper articles in similar terms to wounds, while some of the reports compared the gallery's conservators with surgeons. Overall, he sensed an urge to heal and felt that people tended to personify artworks by suggesting that they can experience trauma and distress.

The research prompted him to take the title of the exhibition from Shakespeare's *The Merchant Of Venice*, the gallery said.

It described the exhibition as including mixed media, sculptural installations that "recall aspects of each painting and that imagine its life following the vandalism". It added: "By translating each damaged work into a series of objects, Cherri reminds us that we are never truly the same after experiencing violence."



Ali Cherri is the National Gallery's second artist in residence. Photograph: The National Gallery Photographic Department/The National Gallery, London.

Kevin Rawlison, « National Gallery exhibition explores trauma through vandalised paintings », *The Guardian*, March 16, 2022

Cherri, who was born in Lebanon and is based in Beirut and Paris, uses sculpture, film and installation to pursue the meaning of the built environment and its histories. He often uses archaeological relics and sites as a starting point to explore the processes of excavation, relocation and the museum classification of objects, animal artefacts, images and their narratives.

He said: “Giving a contemporary artist access to one of the world’s richest collections of paintings is a way of keeping the dialogue going and open for new kinds of engagement.”

The exhibition has been assembled in the National Gallery’s Sainsbury Wing in the form of five vitrines reminiscent of early museum displays and cabinets of curiosity, surrounded by Renaissance paintings, many of which show wounds and suffering.

Cherri is the National Gallery’s second artist in residence since the launch of its modern and contemporary programme, after the appointment of Rosalind Nashashibi in 2019.

If you prick us, do we not bleed? will run from 16 March to 22 June in the Sainsbury Wing at the National Gallery.

Ben Luke, « Six of the best experimental works by emerging artists at Frieze London », *The Art Newspaper*, October 15, 2021



THE ART NEWSPAPER

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Six of the best experimental works by emerging artists at Frieze London

We take a tour around the Focus section of the art fair

Focus is the section of Frieze London dedicated to younger, more fringey galleries. With a more open structure than the main fair, it tends to privilege media that are less common in the more blue-chip presentations, such as film and video. There is much experimental work among the 35 exhibitors, but the abundance of painting elsewhere in the fair carries through here too. Frieze London's artistic director Eva Langret's commitment to bringing new voices to the fair has borne fruit in this section: 13 of the galleries are new to Frieze, including three in this selection of highlights: Addis Fine Art, Copperfield and Edel Assanti.



Photo: David Owens

Sammy Baloji, Ali Cherri, Imane Farès

This stand brings together two artists investigating histories of colonialism and museum collections who are about to show their work in august European institutions: Baloji at the Uffizi in Florence and Cherri as artist-in-residence at the National Gallery in London. Baloji's works in bronze and acrylic paint on paper investigate the global trade in textiles in the historic Kongo region, now part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola and Gabon. They inevitably refer to another historic trade: slavery. Cherri's vast totems and small figures bring together found and made objects to explore the distinctions in the classification between nature and culture, and the underlying social, historical and museological implications.

Kaylie Felsberg, «12 Artists to Discover at London's October Fairs», Artsy.net, October 12, 2021



Art Market

12 Artists to Discover at London's October Fairs

After last year's edition largely played out virtually due to COVID-19, London's marquee week of fairs is back in full swing, with in-person editions of Frieze London, Frieze Masters, and the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair opening in the coming days. We connected with participating galleries to get a sense of what they'll be showing. Below, we highlight 12 artists whose work will be presented at Frieze London and 1-54, as well as on Artsy.

Ali Cherri

Follow

Frieze London, Imane Farès, Booth H14



Ali Cherri
Grafting (F), 2018
Imane Farès
€18,000



Ali Cherri
The Avian Spirit, 2021
Imane Farès
€12,000

Ali Cherri's eye-catching works on paper, prints, and installations highlight the process of excavation and the relocation of artifacts from his native Lebanon to museums. Made primarily from archaeological relics and sites, the artist's works invite the viewer to rethink the classification and collection of those objects from historical ruins—especially during times of geopolitical disasters. This past April, Cherri became an artist in residence at the National Gallery in London, in collaboration with the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum. Later this year, works by the artist completed during the residency will be exhibited at the gallery in a solo presentation.

[Browse Ali Cherri's work at Frieze London.](#)

Barbier Colette, «Paris
Gallery Weekend : la
directrice de la Fondation
Pernod Ricard dévoile
son parcours artistique»,
Numéro, n°2023, juin 2021

Numéro

Paris Gallery Weekend : la directrice de la Fondation Pernod Ricard dévoile son parcours artistique dans la capitale

ART 03 JUIN 2021



En 2014, la galeriste Marion Papillon initie le Paris Gallery Weekend, un parcours sur plusieurs jours guidant les visiteurs au sein des galeries d'art parisiennes. Le projet se renouvelle plusieurs fois par an et propose désormais 7 parcours originaux par quartiers et animés par des rencontres, vernissages, goûters et autres événements conviviaux. Pour sa nouvelle édition du 3 au 6 juin prochains, le Paris Gallery Weekend invite des acteurs du monde de l'art à raconter au fil d'un texte leur parcours personnel au sein de cette nouvelle programmation, publié chaque jour par *Numéro* jusqu'à l'événement. Aujourd'hui, jour du lancement du parcours, découvrez la dernière visite de Colette Barbier, directrice de la Fondation d'entreprise Pernod Ricard.

Par [Colette Barbier](#).



Imane Farès. Ali Cherri, "Return Of the Beast" (2021) © Tadzio.
Courtesy de l'artiste et Imane Farès

Quel bonheur de flâner dans le quartier Saint-Germain sous une première journée radieuse de mai avec des terrasses bondées, des boutiques ouvertes, des vitrines accueillantes ...Mais vous allez devoir accélérer le pas si vous espérez voir les nombreuses très belles propositions de ce Paris Gallery Weekend. Comme je suis très sympathiquement invitée à vous faire quelques recommandations, les voici.

Visite incontournable chez **Imane Farès**, une galeriste engagée qui nous invite à partager sa passion pour les artistes de la scène du continent africain et des mondes arabes. Elle présente, à l'occasion de leurs dix ans de collaboration, l'artiste libanais **Ali Cherri** qui vit entre Paris et Beyrouth. L'exposition "Return of the beast" réunit une série d'aquarelles et de graphite sur papier, d'oiseaux naturalisés, motif récurrent dans ses installations - nous avions pu les découvrir, entre deux confinements, dans la très belle exposition du CREDAC "La vie des tables" - et toute une série d'objets-sculptures anthropomorphiques, tout à la fois inquiétants et désirables. C'est aussi l'occasion de découvrir sa nouvelle monographie éditée chez Dilecta avec un texte de Roxana Azimi, excellente dans cet exercice, comme toujours.

« Les animaux fragiles d'Ali Cherri », Connaissances des Arts, mai 2021

{ galeries }

MARCHÉ DE L'ART



Ci-dessus Moïse Kisling, Fleurs, 1939, huile sur toile, 73 x 54 cm, détail
 © GALERIE TAMÉNAGA, PARIS.

À droite, de haut en bas : Julien Beneyton, Chuck D. Hip-Hop Tributes, série 2, 2006, acrylique sur papier, 65 x 50 cm
 © GALERIE ALAIN LE GAILLARD, PARIS.

Alain Jacquet, Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe, 1964, sérigraphie sur toile, 176 x 200 cm
 COURTESY GALERIE PERROTIN, PARIS. © C. DORN.

Ali Cherri, La Mort dans l'âme, 2020-2021, aquarelle, mine graphite sur papier, 50 x 42 cm (avec cadre)
 COURTESY A. CHERRI/GALERIE IMANE FARÈS, PARIS.

www.tamenaga.com du 27 mai au 17 juin.

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TAMÉNAGA FÊTE SES 50 ANS

Le 50^e anniversaire de la galerie Taménaga est l'occasion de rappeler le parcours mythique de son fondateur, Kiyoshi Taménaga, qui décide en 1971

d'établir une galerie de six cents mètres carrés en plein Paris, sur la prestigieuse avenue Matignon. La galerie Taménaga s'impose avec pérennité et discrétion selon les valeurs repères de cette grande maison japonaise, et la relève est ensuite prise par le fils du fondateur, Tsugu Taménaga, aujourd'hui rejoint par Kiyomaru Taménaga, 28 ans, prêt à s'inscrire dans cette dynastie artistique. Pour célébrer l'événement de ce cinquantenaire, une grande exposition rétrospective présente les principaux artistes défendus par la maison depuis sa création, avec des œuvres modernes et contemporaines, dont la fourchette de prix va d'une dizaine de milliers d'euros à plusieurs millions. Seront ainsi réunis Bonnard, Chagall, Dufy, Kisling, Utrillo, Soutine, Van Dongen mais aussi Alzpiri, Bardone, Carzou, Christopher, Chen Jiang-Hong, Cottavoz, Fernandez, Fusaro, Hailima, Gorriti, Guiramand, Rikizo, Sugawara, Weisbuch... V. DE M.

www.tamenaga.com du 27 mai au 17 juin.

BAS LES MASQUES !

Captivante et variée, cette exposition décide de « tomber le masque » et de tordre le cou aux idées reçues sur la représentation de soi et de l'autre chez les artistes modernes et contemporains. Revisitant le portrait de fond en comble, elle en dévoile les ambiguïtés, à travers le questionnement de l'identité, de la limite acceptable du « montrable » et l'expression du tourment intérieur, avec un riche corpus d'œuvres (de 2000 € à 4 M€) de Pascin, Man Ray, Molinier, Marina Abramovic... V. DE M.



www.galerieleminotaure.net
 et galerie Alain Le Gaillard, 19, rue Mazarine, 75006 Paris, 01 43 26 25 35, du 13 mars au 15 mai.

ALAIN JACQUET DANS L'AIR DU TEMPS

Intemporel et pourtant au goût du jour, Alain Jacquet (1939-2008) s'impose avec ses œuvres sobres et efficaces. Emmanuel Perrotin, qui représente désormais l'estate de l'artiste français qui a fait carrière aux États-Unis, lui rend hommage avec cette exposition où l'on retrouve toutes les facettes de son travail, avec des œuvres allant de 5500 € à plus de 200 000 €, dont des pièces emblématiques comme *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, citation de Manet dans l'esprit Pop, une mise en scène décalée devenue à son tour une icône. V. DE M.



LES ANIMAUX FRAGILES D'ALI CHERRI

L'actualité est dense pour Ali Cherri avec la finalisation du tournage de son premier long-métrage *The Dam*, et la parution de sa première monographie, *Ali Cherri. Earth, Fire, Water* (éd. Dilecta), à l'occasion de cette quatrième exposition à la galerie Imane Farès. On y découvrira des sculptures et dessins récents (de 3000 € à 45 000 €) dans la lignée de ses séries précédentes : artefacts hybrides (objets, ossements ou oiseaux naturalisés), aquarelles troublantes et sensibles d'animaux blessés. V. DE M.



www.alicherri.com du 22 avril au 24 juillet.

Tamraz Nayla,
“Mapping the City”,
Saradar collection, 2020



As a fragment of the “country”, a landscape is the place where territory, in its geographical and political meaning, is represented. It presents a certain relation to space: a relation of identification, domination, control and political or economic agency. It is a socially, politically and symbolically constructed space. For many artists, landscape is today the place where the notion of territory is activated. This essay engages with the representations of territories that occur in certain artists’ works in the Saradar Collection. We will begin by situating the emergence of landscape and related issues amongst the so-called “modern” generation of artists. Subsequently, we will focus on the use of those topics and the issues related to their formulation in the work of contemporary artists: Ghassan Salhab (b. 1958), Marwan Rechmaoui (b. 1964), Lamia Joreige (b. 1972) and Ali Cherri (b. 1976). This will lead us to draw a poetics/politics of place in the works of the above-mentioned artists in the practice of mapping.

From Landscape to Territory

Landscape painting was prominent in Lebanon during the first half of the 20th century, in the works of painters such as Khalil Saliby (1870-1928), Cesar Gemayel (1898-1958), Mustapha Farroukh (1901-1957), Omar Onsi (1901-1969), amongst others, who found in landscape painting a way to represent the country and a means to give shape to a certain ideal of the Nation. Landscape is therefore the site of a discourse in which subjects are defined as individuals who belong to a national entity. This comes as no surprise: having been educated in Western schools, these painters brought back the European tradition of landscape painting with them. The development of landscape painting in Europe is related to the promotion of a certain ideal of the nation derived from the Enlightenment, and serves as a direct model for landscape painters in Lebanon. Omar Onsi, for instance, dedicates himself to landscape painting and produces multiple views of Sannine, Kesserwan, Mayrouba, Ain Zahalta, Bekaa and the Tallet el-Khayat hill where he was born and where he returned to live. Tallet el-Khayat overlooks Beirut and the sea, from which he also paints views of Ramlet el-Bayda and

Tamraz Nayla,
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its shore. Undoubtedly, his views, just like those of his contemporaries, allow for the construction of a certain representation of a place which is, of course, geographically located, and yet no less idealized and timeless.

The turn of the 20th and 21st century also marks an epistemological and aesthetic turn in which, under conditions of globalization, reflection on the landscape entered the field of the human sciences.

It was first an epistemological turn. Since the beginning of the ‘80s, spatiality is reintroduced in discourse in the form of a paradigm, that of the territory. The issue of territory takes place within the economic and ideological context of globalization. Territory is both the real and the conceptual place where links between the massive deterritorialization of trade and the desire for anchoring identity are negotiated. Considered at the time best suited to reflect on contemporary issues, the concept of territory is articulated within a postmodernity theorizing an end to the utopias of the previous era. Approaching landscape through the prism of this notion becomes necessarily dysphoric.

It became an aesthetical turn then. In contemporary art practice, in addition to the shift in medium from painting to video, photography or installation, this shift from the representation of space in a genre (landscape) to the representation of space as a territory—that is, as a place where issues related to contemporaneity are negotiated—is an answer to what I call ‘the shift of knowledges’. It marks the transition from modernity to postmodernity, from ideologies towards their apparent collapse and, regarding the paradigms of contemporary art in Lebanon, from the idea of a nation to its failure (and to the disintegration of the fundamental ideas that shape it). It is the transition from myth to history.

A place of composition, decomposition, transformation, fragmentation, scarification and negotiation, the very idea of territory is, in light of the history of Lebanon, problematic. It becomes the place of reflection, a field where elements of cultural sociology and the geopolitics of territory can be observed and studied. This reflection on territory will materialize in an object that is both aesthetic and epistemological: the map. As a representation of a territory, a map is also a discourse on territory, that is, a discourse on the issues that pass through it.

The Map in the Contemporary Artistic Practices

There is a long-held proximity between artists and cartographers. Both the fields of art history and mapping, which are *a priori* distinct, were seen by Alberti as parts of a single continuum. Both of them were intended to represent the world. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the artists of the Land Art movement made abundant use of the map.¹ The 1990s and 2000s witnessed the emergence of a generation of artists who initiated a practice that diverts from its initial framework, seizing mapping as a tool for representation.² There are also different reasons for the increasing use of the map in art.

¹ It allowed those artists who were interested in the landscape to apprehend vast areas of territory and to locate works that were often monumental and built in desert regions.

² For example: *Mapping*, an exhibition organized by Robert Storr in 1994 at the Museum of Modern Art of New York, and *GNS*, organized by Nicolas Bourriaud in 2003 at the Palais de Tokyo. They both reflect the important place of mapping within art practices at the turn of the century.

Tamraz Nayla,
“Mapping the City”,
Saradar collection, 2020

Aesthetically first: as an abstract mode for representing the world, the map shares, ever since its origins, many of the same objectives and tools as two-dimensional art. Artists were involved in the development of the first maps.³ Many contemporary artists also use mapping to create works that combine landscape and graphic outlines, in which cartography becomes a transposition of pictorial technique, and a way to talk about it.

Resorting to this method was part of contemporary artists' tendency to take possession of other disciplinary fields and their tools. If artists borrowed the map as a representational mode, it's because they are attracted to issues related to the relationship between man and territory. Geography as a discipline is a field of possibilities. Its tools are a means to apprehend space, in particular to map it. These artists' work converges on revealing the status of the map as a privileged tool for knowledge and work, because it questions man's place in the/an environment.

Like any discipline assumed to be “neutral”,⁴ mapping makes available a methodology as well as a certain *scientificity* to artists. In fact, mapping has never been a neutral or an objective process. Reality transposed by a cartographical image is nothing but a possible view of the territory. It depends on what its author chooses to highlight and show. This “subjective objectivity” goes almost in the direction of an artwork. This way, artists appropriate the general approach of the map. They project their discourse and issues onto it. This displacement of objective data towards a specific and sometimes symbolic exploitation of this same data is, however, organized into a system of knowledge that refers to the basis itself of the map—in its first function, that of producing knowledge.

When Deleuze and Guattari introduce their concept of mapping (Deleuze & Guattari, 1976 & 1980), they do not directly designate the practice of geography usually referred to by this concept. By this act of re-presenting space through the map, in a “geographical” mode, Deleuze tells us that communities and peoples map their way of occupying their territories with their practices, but also with their myths and their dreams (Deleuze, 1993, p. 83). The geographical activity is coupled with a symbolic dimension. The map is the site of a discourse.

It is on this mode of representation that Marwan Rechmaoui, Lamia Joreige and Ali Cherri work quite explicitly.

³ Leonardo da Vinci used to carry out topographical surveys and draw maps. In his work, the art of the painter meets that of the cartographer, like for example in the background landscape of the *Mona Lisa*. Until the nineteenth century, the map was approached like an analogous process to painting. In both cases, it is a process of transposition of the world to a flat surface.

⁴ “First theorist of the *perspectiva artificialis*, Alberti shows that pictorial representation is subject to vision. Any spatial representation is reduced to man and his point of view. This imposition of a single point of view is applicable to both the record of space and its artistic restitution. But unlike perspective, mapping negates the point of view, at least potentially: what is notated and has coordinates that escape the dictatorship of a single point of view. The map becomes a geometric plane that allows an infinity of points of view. This view (called “ichnographic”) of the marks made on the ground is theoretically the result of an infinity of zenithal points of view. Therefore, two nearby yet strictly opposite processes take place at the same moment. With the *perspectiva artificialis*, the horizontal gaze of the vertical support (of the painting) becomes linked to a hypothetically single point of view, hence a one-eyed one. With the geometric plane, a hypothetically vertical gaze falls down towards the horizontal plan of the territory that is recorded before being deferred on a horizontal surface (the map); the gaze is released from the single point of view. The first process will allow the artist to support his single point of view, the second one will allow the engineer to claim his neutrality. Of course, the artist who masters perspective will be in his own way a scientist, and the engineer-cartographer will be able to express sensitivity or artistic talent. However, the first states the singular, the other reaches for the universal, the first chooses a point of view (and a moment), the second seeks to neutralize the point(s) of view from which he has produced data.” (Cf. Monsaingeon, 2013, p. 34. Translated from French by the author).

Tamraz Nayla,
“Mapping the City”,
Saradar collection, 2020

An Unquiet Cartography: *Trembling Landscapes* by Ali Cherri

The work of Ali Cherri falls within clear topographical dimensions: the desert (*The Digger*, 2015), the forest (*The Disquiet*, 2013), or cities (A *Circle around the Sun*, 2005). His work has always had a clear relationship to space, to an anxious geography with highly existential content.

Trembling Landscapes (2014) is part of a wider project in which Cherri works on the idea of catastrophe and chooses the map as a discursive modality. Relying on satellite images (Google Maps) that he then transcribes with lithography, a technique he chooses for its precision (it is about maps after all), but also for its aesthetics (the contrast between an older technique and the images produced with contemporary instruments of knowledge that it is meant to reproduce), this project engages in studying the history of earthquakes in cities like Beirut, Damascus, Tehran, Algiers and Erbil, acting as an investigation into the geological cracks in the region. The seismic faults revealed through aerial views and transcribed on the lithographed map are topographical objects where the potential threat of imminent catastrophe is embodied. Therefore, they are like the signs of the presence of ‘disquiet’, to borrow the title from one of Ali Cherri’s videos produced a year earlier.

As a corollary to the map, Ali Cherri’s video develops through the modality of the walk.⁵ *The Disquiet* is a video that shows sequences of long walks in nature alternating with archive images and shots on a seismograph registering what we could understand either as already ongoing disasters or ones yet to come, as well as apocalyptic images.⁶

Through a narrative described as the history of earthquakes in Lebanon, the video places us immediately in the regime of unavoidable disaster, which is documented by the voice-over. Tools of knowledge try to measure it in order to make it scientifically valid, but we are to understand that those tools are insufficient, because the catastrophe discussed here is not only a natural phenomenon. The catastrophe takes on an existential dimension, with Cherri developing the idea of a ‘seismographic body’.⁷

Cherri transposes this relationship of the body to the territory into a cartographic model where earthquakes and natural cataclysms are clearly detours to talk about political upheavals in the region. They show that below the ground we walk on, beneath

⁵ The long walk developed by Ali Cherri in *The Disquiet* is to be understood also in the frame of artistic and scientific creative mechanisms developed by certain artists: “Today the walk combines the artistic creative mechanisms as well as the scientific ones. Today the walk has become a fully-fledged artistic medium. In his artwork *A Line Made by Walking*, the land artist Richard Long had already in the ‘60s made a walk for days through the large American fields. In this work, the artist draws on the ground the visible and invisible sunlight at a time (Tibergien, 1995). His works have initiated, as early as the ‘70s-‘80s, a long movement of artists affiliated to the medium of walking and thereby linked to a whole range of properly geographical concepts such as landscape, place, course, path, border and, amongst them, the map (Volvey, 2012). Often identified as ‘landscape-scale’ art, the work of walking artists is measured indeed to the place... Also, using the walk as a medium or as a tool for experience in a scientific process is not unusual. The walk is used as an observational device in the social and human sciences, and in geography, as a field practice. (Olmedo, 2018, pp. 229-232. Translated from French by the author).

⁶ Like the views on the Beirut River. An allusion to a news item dated February 15, 2012 according to which the reason behind Beirut River turning red was an industrial chemical dumped in the water.

⁷ It is the body that registers trauma and scars, which also refers to another dimension of his work. Therefore, the reflection on space that he suggests in his work is inseparable from a reflection on the body. (*My Pain is Real*, 2010. *Tryptich - Studies from a Human Body*, 2012). In a seminar from 1927 on the work of Burckhardt and Nietzsche, Warburg described them as ‘receivers of mnemonic waves and very sensitive seismographs’. What this implies is that the historian cannot be reduced to the status of a chronicler of the times. For Warburg, the historian is driven by the phenomenon of empathy by which, faced with the threatening aspects of the historical life, they might lose their way. Warburg used to present himself as a Burckhardtian seismograph, a time pathology sensor. For Georges Didi-Huberman, Warburg was affected by history, consumed by it (Didi-Huberman, 1999, pp. 5-20). In *The Surviving Image*, he describes Warburg as gifted with a too sensitive a seismic knowledge of the world events (Didi-Huberman, 2002, p. 123).

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surface level events, important shifts are taking place. Lebanon does indeed stand on several major fault lines. This investigation into the geological situation in Lebanon, trying to look for the traces of an imminent disaster is, in essence, the work developed in *Trembling Landscapes*. Broadly speaking, the precariousness of Middle Eastern cities’ landscapes is compared to the social and political anxiety that characterizes the location of these cities and the broader region.

Map and Territory: Artistic Practices in Marwan Rechmaoui’s Work

Divided and organized by the social, political and economic practices of a group of people, the territory describes a way of appropriating, by different groups, the spaces in which those practices take place. Through the power relations they establish with their territory, the groups of people give a representation of themselves and their history. By this act, the territory is associated with a sense of identity and belonging. This is the idea of the project developed by Rechmaoui in many of his works, *Blazon* (2015) in particular, and *Beirut Caoutchouc* (2004-2008).

Marwan Rechmaoui’s work is the result of extensive research and archival work on Beirut. It is presented as the desire to understand (and to make understandable) the structures that allow us to think the city. Often monumental, his artworks have an important spatial dimension. Formally, but also thematically, they always negotiate with space, in its geographical, sociological and political dimensions.

To make *Beirut Caoutchouc*, Rechmaoui built on the maps of an urban topography office in Beirut and translated the digital data into electrical then mechanical data. *Beirut Caoutchouc* is a large black rubber floor sculpture – a map of Beirut – embossed with an accurate record of roads and highways, as well as the sixty segments that divide the city’s neighborhoods, the new and old demarcation lines.⁸

Through what is presented as a research into the history of the city and its impact on its inhabitants, Rechmaoui’s work is critical, raising questions on urban planning, issues of borders and limits, as well as the ghettoization process behind them, and beyond that, the process of territorialization. Rechmaoui’s reflection results in an observation: the city today appears to be as fractured as it was during the civil war, suggesting that the war never really ended.

The result is a model halfway between a paper map (the object of the gaze) and real life (the space of an immersive experience), an object that is suited to the viewer’s gaze and with which they can interact. Hence, by placing us and the geographical dimension on the same level—almost literally, because on this rubber map of Beirut we are invited to walk—*Beirut Caoutchouc* introduces us to a symbolic territoriality and into a meeting space both with the artistic work and the city that it represents.

⁸ “At the time I was working with the piece in 2002-2003 a lot of the highways in Beirut were already in place. Earlier discussions about urban development were coming true, but those highways would disconnect regions, and create more enclosed neighbourhoods. One would have to cross above or below the city, not noticing anymore the city and people who live on both sides of the highway. These new borderlines between areas started to cause political problems. All the attention shifted from the infamous Green Line [an imaginary line that divided Beirut during the civil war, and was dangerous to cross], into smaller lines that are inside neighbourhoods now, so the city is really being divided into smaller and smaller quarters.” (Rechmaoui/2010, 2017, p. 152).

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Ten years after *Beirut Caoutchouc*,⁹ with *Blazon* Marwan Rechmaoui continued his research, inspired again by the history and geography of Beirut, and by different written and oral narratives, in order to put in place a cartography (a 3 dimensional map) designed according to socio-cultural criteria, and making use of etymologies relating to each community and its history.

Based on the idea that the city of Beirut has been in a perpetual state of alert since the so-called ‘end’ of the civil war, the idea came to Rechmaoui to design an army. Each neighborhood is thus seemingly controlled by an armorial symbol. The idea was to create a state of mind where the viewer would have the impression of crossing a military camp or a battlefield on the eve of a conflict.

Hence, *Blazon* should also be understood as a map of the wars to come.¹⁰ In this installation, Rechmaoui imagines Beirut as divided into six legions. Each legion corresponds to a territoriality which was built according to political, economic and demographic criteria. Each legion is assigned a color, an insignia, a shield, coats of arms and a flag. To that end, he develops a military semiology (which intersects at several points with cartographic practices as the implementation of a system of signs) serving a codified representation of Beirut.¹¹ This grammar, or language, that Rechmaoui establishes is based on the signification of the blazons as well as the shape and color of the flags. Quite a few combinations are made possible by the activation of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes, and by the implementation of a syntax that could evolve into a discourse. This game of combinations reveals, by extension, the games of power and religious, economic, political and social obedience.

This “semiotized marking” is what delimits the territory, a usage that is seen in animal behavior. The concept of territory has indeed been studied through animals and more specifically birds. It is particularly active in ethology, the “scientific study of animal behavior”, whose denomination dates back to the mid-19th century (Saint-Hilaire, 1854, vol. 1, p. XXII) and that aims to observe plants and animals in order to find elements that contribute to understanding human behavior. It is in ethologists’ studies that the study of the ritornello (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 397) by Deleuze and Guattari finds its roots. In their work, they theorize the concept of “territory” based on the ritornello, that is, the whistle emitted by birds marking out, while fluttering, their nesting territory. They say that children sing a ritornello in the dark because they are scared. What surrounds and envelops them is unknown. Faced with this formlessness, they sing and regain confidence, because they are at the center of their song, of their territory, conquered from darkness. Hence, the territory is, for the living, an extension of the self, an environment secreted around oneself to protect from a threatening exteriority.

The interest in urban planning in the work of this artist, who has a background in engineering, finally found form in his interest in building. *Spectre* (2006-2008) is probably

⁹ “The process started from *Beirut Caoutchouc* (2004-2006), originally. The fifty-nine neighborhoods are in that work. But *Beirut Caoutchouc* is one layer which maps the roads and real estate divisions. With *Blazon*, I research more deeply the city. I used the previous information from *Beirut Caoutchouc*, and I developed it in *Blazon*. I did a thorough historical research for this project, focusing on the history of Beirut since the 1830s, when it started to become modern. Before that, Beirut was a small town on the Mediterranean coast that had not much importance. But in 1831, historical events happened in a way that it drew the picture of Beirut today” (Rechmaoui/2016, 2017, p. 224).

¹⁰ Landscape painting and the historical genre have often taken a cartographic form. In the classical paintings of battles that showed armies in action across battlefields, the question as to whether it was a landscape or a map was indeed relevant.

¹¹ Claude Raffestin develops the idea that processes of territorialization are also analyzed on the level of a representational system: “semiotized” spaces translated and transformed into territory. (Raffestin, 2019).

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the installation that best reflects this. It also allows us to think about territory in its relationship to the body (through the intermediary of the intimate sphere). The corporeality present in *Beirut Caoutchouc* and *Blazon* through the physical presence of the viewer who, by their interaction, participates in the creation of territory is here conceptually present in the work itself. It's in this context that *Spectre* allows us to follow this reflection where a building or architecture (as a variant of the map), suggests what we could approach as a territory within the territory (in which the body itself would be a territory within the territory of the building). Therefore, *Spectre* acts as a link between the individual and the geography of the city in a similar way to how it is presented in other works by Marwan Rechmaoui.

Spectre is a replica of a modernist building in the style of Le Corbusier, the “Yacoubian building” (owned by a Lebanese Armenian called Yacoub Yacoubian, not to be confused with the Cairo's Yacoubian building) in Ras Beirut, that was built at a time of political and economic transformations, which are reflected in the urban landscape of the '60s. The great double-block structure with 10 floors and 140 apartments was a commercial and residential building before being gradually transformed during the 1975-1990 civil war.¹²

A metaphor for the modern architectural heritage of Beirut, *Spectre* simultaneously questions the relationship of modernity to its communal utopias. Today, the Yacoubian building is inhabited by a very diverse population of residents, very different from the building's original intentions. They offer an example of cohabitation that is, on a larger scale, obviously problematic. But by altering the original model, which is probably the proof, according to Rechmaoui, that this modernist utopia imported from the West, has put forward a certain model of civic organization that is not all that well adapted to the local culture. *Spectre* becomes a space of questioning.

Mapping as autopsy: the anatomy of places

In a work that dates back to 2010,¹³ Lamia Joreige attempts to approach the representations related to the city of Beirut the way we approach a body in order to study its different layers. Or, in other words, to perform an autopsy of it. She invites us to consider the city in its organic dimensions, which means the city that is subject to

¹² “Yes, there are probably fifteen or twenty buildings in Beirut from the late 50s to early 60s. In 1955, laws and regulations started changing in Lebanon. The region was living in turmoil, between social changes and the new oil economy. Real estate investors came to Lebanon and skyscrapers changed the cityscape with commercial and residential construction. The project *Spectre* is a replica of the Yacoubian building, one of these buildings built in 1961. It was designed according to modernist ideas and aesthetics, to accommodate upper middle class or Arab bourgeoisie who spent some time in Beirut either for vacation or business. It was located in Ras Beirut and in its basement was the most important nightclub in Beirut in the 60s, Venus. The building began deteriorating from the mid 70s onward, when the civil war started. Many of the tenants took refuge in different areas of Beirut or left the country so it stayed empty for a couple of years until 1978. This was when the Israeli invasion of the south happened, causing the biggest migration of people of all different sects from the south to Beirut, creating many squats. Of course with time, the façade of the building and the interior changed. It was supposed to have a consistent model of windows and unifying colour for the outside. The ACs were not supposed to be hung on the exterior and all these interventions really transformed this ideal modernist concept into something else. I don't know what to call it. I am not saying its negative or positive, but it was transformed into something else. Again, this work [Spectre] had a lot to do with questioning the ideas of modernism and what happens when something goes wrong. This ideal collapses very quickly, but it also raises the question, if this happens, what is the alternative? Is it really chaotic or is it something different, something parallel to what was there before? Because from a modernist point of view, this is chaos. All the people here are from various groups – income, gender, ages – and they manage to live in one structure and use one entrance for the building, which accommodates probably 750 people.” (Rechmaoui/2010, 2017, p. 153).

¹³ *Beirut Autopsy of a City* (2010).

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transformations inherent in the idea itself of a body, in its biological sense. Performing an autopsy on a living body (rather than a dead one) is then an action that is defined, from the outset, by its openness to the future and its uncertainties.

In medicine, the autopsy is a method that could be compared to archeology. In both cases, the work consists in making cuts into a surface with a thickness in order to extract knowledge from it. Transposed to the body of the city, this metaphor, together with a methodology, allows her to show the *palimpsestic* character of the *autopsied* urban space, that is, the multiple spatial and temporal layers.

Born from what could be called an “anxiety” related to the city and its possible disappearance,¹⁴ the project, in its three chapters, consists of photographs and videos that narrate catastrophic episodes from Beirut’s history up until a post-apocalyptic vision at some point in 2058. This anxiety or this anguish is then mixed with a constant fascination for the transformation of the city. Performing an autopsy on the body obeys this double dynamic: understanding the body and thus trying to appropriate it; and, at the same time, witnessing its metamorphosis, until the departure, the exhaustion, of its materiality itself.

Adopted as a methodology that consists in collecting narratives that give corporeality to the city and its history, Joreige will apply this approach to her whole work dedicated to the representation of the city. This second phase in the artist’s work, following a first body of work focused on the memories of the civil war (or wars),¹⁵ shifts towards work on territory, a process that she continues in *Under-Writing Beirut* (2013-ongoing).

In this project, divided into several chapters,¹⁶ Joreige explores places that interest her and attempts, in the same way, to rebuild their history, by simultaneously questioning the representations that are related to them, the movements of their populations, and the political choices that led to their transformation and that of the communities that inhabit them. Lamia Joreige then adopts a socio-political and a socio-economic approach, as well as a methodology that is part archeology, part documentary practice and part field study, trying to understand why those places are sedimented, and the extent to which they contribute to the shape of a certain idea of the city, and also the extent to which they are representative of its contemporary identity.

After the first chapter, *Mathaf* (2013), dedicated to the National Museum, the two following chapters deal more specifically with issues related to territory, its representations, and issues related to its history.

Nahr, or *The River* (2013-2016) explores the notion of landscape through the space adjacent to the river, today dried up, and that separates Beirut from the Southern suburbs, the target today of a large real estate project. Joreige offers a portrait of a territory taken in such problematic situations as waste management, the impoverishment of riparian citizens, the settlement of migrant populations (Armenian, Palestin-

¹⁴ “I woke up one day, thinking that the city I’ve been living in could disappear: that disappearance is not exclusively a historical process, nor an extinct one. This anxiety led me to investigate the specific moments that endangered the life of Beirut from 1200 BCE until 2058 AD.” (*Lamia Joreige, Works 1994-2017*, Kaph, 2018, p. 157).

¹⁵ *Objets de guerre* (1999-ongoing), *Replay* (2000) and *Replay (bis)* (2002)... Even if the artist’s interest for cartography is already visible in projects such as *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere* (2003).

¹⁶ “*Mathaf*” (2013) was the first chapter. “*Nahr*”, the second chapter (2013-2016), and “*Ouzai*”, the third chapter (2017- ongoing).

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ian, and Syrian, established by successive waves from 1915 until today) and the urban development that drives the river region towards accelerating gentrification. *The Nahr* project unveils a rapidly changing territory, as well as the precariousness of the urban structures and the uncertain future of the populations inhabiting them.

In the framework of this project, Joreige imagines a series of drawings in wax, pencil, pastel and crayon,¹⁷ inspired by different maps of the river. They show the evolution of the territory and its neighborhoods over the years through sinuous lines that develop in some places into colored stains. Simultaneously floral representation and an anatomic map, the resulting image is part of a gesture that, while making way for the accidental development of the figure, always regains control of it. It is perhaps also, for Joreige, a way to think the organic character of a stain in expansion, miming territory on paper, and thus the development of the spaces described. These poetic autopsies become a space where the physicality of the territory and the materiality of color reflect one another and dialogue with each other. Those organic patterns are the same ones that she reuses in her project *Ouzai* (2017-ongoing), which constitutes the third chapter of the project *Under-Writing Beirut*.¹⁸ Like the *Nahr* series, the series of drawings *Coastline* is based as well on the different maps of Beirut.¹⁹ The topography of the Ouzai coastline and its surrounding region is developed organically, taking abstract floral and organic shapes indicating *localities* all along the seafront, places where sociological changes are imposed by the experience of war, the phenomenon of immigration and the exacerbation of religious affiliations.

In a conversation with Kader Attia,²⁰ Lamia Joreige refers to this more specifically plastic dimension in her art practice. For the artist, painting or drawing are more difficult to anchor in a real context and, consequently, less obvious media for conveying political gestures. This more formal aspect of her work therefore becomes inseparable from the fieldwork and its ability to display different media.

Because “Ouzai” is a project with a definite political foothold. In her presentation of the project, the artist recounts the birth of this neighborhood in South Beirut known for its complex socio-political history in the ‘50s, when this strip of land made of sand dunes attracted its first inhabitants, rural Lebanese citizens driven to Beirut by a changing economic system, until the settlement of Shiites who came from South Lebanon following constant bombardment then invasions of their southern villages by the Israeli army, until the establishment of the political power base of Hezbollah in the region.

Lamia Joreige carries out fieldwork research by interviewing local residents. The stories

17 “The River”, 2015, Wax, watercolor and graphite crayon on Arches Velin paper, 42 x 31 in, 106.7 x 78.7 cm.

18 In a sequence of the film *And the Living is Easy* (2014) filmed in 2011 at a time when Lebanon strangely didn’t seem to be affected by the disruptions of the Arab world, Joreige imagines characters talking about their mixed feelings about their city. Among them is Firas (Firas Beydoun), who is filmed with a friend in a coffee shop in Ouzai. He complains about the decline of the region and contemplates the airplanes landing at the nearby Beirut International Airport. The story of Firas is the starting point for a research that becomes the subject of the third chapter of *Under-Writing Beirut*. What’s the problem here?

19 *Coastline*, 2018, Wax, pigments, pastels & crayons on Velin d’Arche paper, 75 x 106 cm.

20 “My painting, which was initially somewhere between figuration and abstraction, moved toward abstraction. It dealt with the body and the city, which are subjects pretty close to those I was dealing with in my multimedia installations and videos. But I couldn’t anchor my painting in reality, in other words, I couldn’t anchor it politically. I missed being on the ground, meeting reality head-on, even if I was going to turn it into something fictional. I’m still drawing, but today my drawings get included in projects like *Under-Writing Beirut – Nahr*” (Joreige, 2018, p. 138).

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gathered, as well as the information collected from legal and historical documents, are put on display in a series of 15 pencil drawings along with typed blocks of text, entitled *A Brief History of Ouzai*.²¹ It is accompanied by a metal sculpture that reproduces the topographical coastline in a series of works entitled *Ouzai, Cartography of a Transformation* based on aerial photographs from the Directorate of Geographical Affairs in the Lebanese Military from 1956 to 1995, and from Zoom Earth in 2017.²² Joreige juxtaposes and superimposes those aerial views, enabling us to understand, in a poetic way, the gradual transformation of Ouzai along the years.

Digging into this region's history, in the end the artist asks the following question: to what extent is a territory such as Ouzai representative of contemporary Lebanon? In other words, to what extent are the issues that Lebanon faces today related to sectarian divisions and community affiliations, to the displacement of populations, to outrageous urbanization, to sociological inequalities, to the relationship between the private and the public sectors, to the reconstruction and the reconciliation? *Ouzai* is therefore an eminently political and critical work that calls for a reflection on the links between politics and poetics: how can art think and suggest outside prevailing rhetorics?

Territoriality in Crisis: The Course throughout the City in Ghassan Salhab's Work

The word territory comes up frequently in interviews with Ghassan Salhab. When he talks about himself, he often returns to his experience of the "geographical, territorial and identity displacement" caused by his departure from Senegal, his country of birth, and his return to Lebanon with his family, and to that of having found in cinema "another country". Also it is cinema that reintroduces him to the city: "The movie theatre, it is a relationship to the city, with a territory, with darkness, with others in that shared darkness, even if there were only four or five of them." (Salhab, 2011. Translated from French by the author)

Salhab apprehends the city, in other words, territory-wise.²³ This is why he films his movies in Lebanon, in Beirut more particularly. Also for him, "the central question is not 'what is the topic?', the question, if there is one, is rather 'where?'. The question is that of place not topic, the place as a living entity, unknown and familiar. A place that is equally inner, 'invisible' and exterior".²⁴ (Salhab, 2011. Translated from French by the author.)

And to the question "what's the issue in Lebanese cinema?", Ghassan Salhab answers: "I believe that the more or less recurring problem or issue...is...that of identity...Because Lebanon is a nation-state that fails to be a nation or a state...This necessari-

²¹ *A Brief History of Ouzai*, 2017, Graphite pencil and inkjet print on paper, 40 x 30 cm each.

²² *Ouzai*, 2017, metal alloy, 90 x 240 cm, Edition of 3+1AP.

²³ "I had the need to apprehend the city territory wise. It is hence during the Lebanese wars, from 75 to 90, that I started to find my marks like an animal. This is by the way the reason why I have never really filmed in Paris. I know Paris very well, but I return to this animal relationship, I am not in my territory." (Salhab, 2014- translated from French by the author)

²⁴ "My movies speak Arabic, they are inscribed in a territory, they are in a place, and a place is not a simple decor; a place carries a lot of stories and histories, in their plural or singular form, especially in Lebanon [...]"(Salhab, G., 2011- translated from French by the author).

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ly creates a sort of a moving territory, then sometimes this moving territory can be emotionally moving...To get back to cinema...the question is: what is my place in the world, what is my place here, in this territory?” (Salhab, 2014). And to film the territory, “there is not only the visual or the physical [territory]. The inner territory is very important but the inner territory is also affected by the exterior territory and vice versa”. (Salhab, 2014)

In an experimental video, *La Rose de personne* (2000),²⁵ Salhab shows a car crossing the legendary Hamra Street in Beirut. The trajectory is shown at different times in different places but at a same time, by superimposing six image layers and sound footages. Space-time is multiplied, creating gaps that work like voids preventing the image from uniting, and forcing the idea of a whole to fail. This whole disaggregate suggests instead a multiple and necessarily fragmentary experience that the video tries to contain. It's an attempt to tell a certain relationship to the city, and specifically to this street. However, the thickened image seems to express its struggle to represent a fleeing object. The singular editing of *La Rose de personne* shows in some way the filmmaker's helplessness in the face of a space that reconfigures itself constantly. The effect is dizzying: does the city really exist?

The same technique of superimposition, and also the same helplessness, are present in *Posthume* (2007). In the aftermath of the Israeli attack on the southern suburbs of Beirut in 2006, Ghassan Salhab also filmed a trajectory in the city. The video doesn't develop a specific storyline beyond the one developed through the discontinuous trajectory along the urban streets of the ghostly suburb, leading to restricted areas where the camera and viewers are prevented from going further, and hence from seeing the destruction. Here the superimposition of images has the effect of dilating and disconnecting space-time with reality, although this space-time is omnipresent. The narrative is taken in charge by the activity of diggers, the display of conflict traces, which are many details that reveal a whole, or a view of a whole, considered impossible. At the interface of spaces and times, characters contemplate, witness, or are they simply faces?²⁶ Other voiceovers make the link between different faces that are there only as contact points gathering around them the city's different planes, as well as the diverse disembodied voices that we hear. They make the link between the city and the body.

In Ghassan Salhab's work, the map's ability to draw contours is questioned. It is replaced by a diluted and diluting thickness. The technique of superimposition, as practiced by Salhab, has indeed the effect of diluting limits. It's a symptom, that of the crisis of narrative, the crisis of the image in its very territoriality, the crisis of space lived as a comprehensible whole, as well as an aesthetic tool to tell a problematic topography.

²⁵ As a tribute to a poem by Paul Celan from his poetry collection *Die Niemandsrose* (*La Rose de personne* in French). More precisely, *La Rose de personne* gets its name from the poem “Psalm”: “A nothing/ we were, are, shall/ remain, flowering:/ the nothing- the no one's rose.” This poetry collection would be a tribute to the murdered voices in Auschwitz. Paul Celan's work is largely inspired from the Shoah, and has often been considered as a possible answer to Theodor W. Adorno who said that “writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage”. Salhab's video could be understood as an ode to what is still possible to be said after the crisis. More broadly, it clarifies his poetic relationship to the city.

²⁶ “My characters fail to inscribe themselves in a territory, a history and a filiation (...). Most of my characters are trapped in monologues, as if the words were circulating between them without managing to cross the border of bodies.” (Salhab, 2003 - translated from French by the author).

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Conclusion

Contemporary art is perhaps the best place for a reflection on territory, and for an investigation of the aesthetic tools of its representation. It allows for the establishment of a reflection on power, and politics as the place it is exercised. Michel Foucault's (2004) writing on this matter allow territory to be apprehended as the place where power is practiced, but also as the place that allows us to think power. The map as an aesthetic practice and its corollary, the trajectory, become the places where aesthetic reflection on the landscape can be renewed. Ideologically loaded, the landscape as utopia sees in the emergence of reflections on territory an extension and a re-actualization of its principles through the prism of a world that is consequently seen as a globality, of course, but a disturbing globality in crisis. This leads us to rethink the practices around the territory in Lebanon, in light of more global issues. The discourse on territory, a place where the postures and the politics related to a constantly negotiated space are performed, since the divisions resulting from the Lebanese civil war to their re-activation in a political and economic form in the post-war Beirut, moves towards a more general discourse that is involved in a problematic post-modernity.

Nayla Tamraz is a Lebanese writer, curator, researcher and professor of Literature and Art History at Saint Joseph University of Beirut where she has also been, from 2008 to 2017, the Chair of the French Literature Department and where she created, in 2010, the MA program in Art Criticism and Curatorial Studies that she currently heads. She also organized several events including the symposium *Littérature, Art et Monde Contemporain: Récits, Histoire, Mémoire* (2014, USJ, Beirut). In parallel, she leads a career as an art critic and a curator. In this context, she co-curated the exhibition *Le Secret* (Espace Ygreg, Les bons voisins, 2017) in Paris and curated the exhibition *Poetics, Politics, Places* that took place in the Museum of Fine Arts of Tucuman in Argentina, in the frame of the International Biennale of Contemporary Art of South America (BienalSur, 2017). Her research is about the issues related to the comparative theory and aesthetics of literature and art in their historical context, which brings her to the topics of history, memory and narratives in literature and art in post-war Lebanon. Her current research explores the relationship between poetics and politics as well as the representations associated to the notion of territory.

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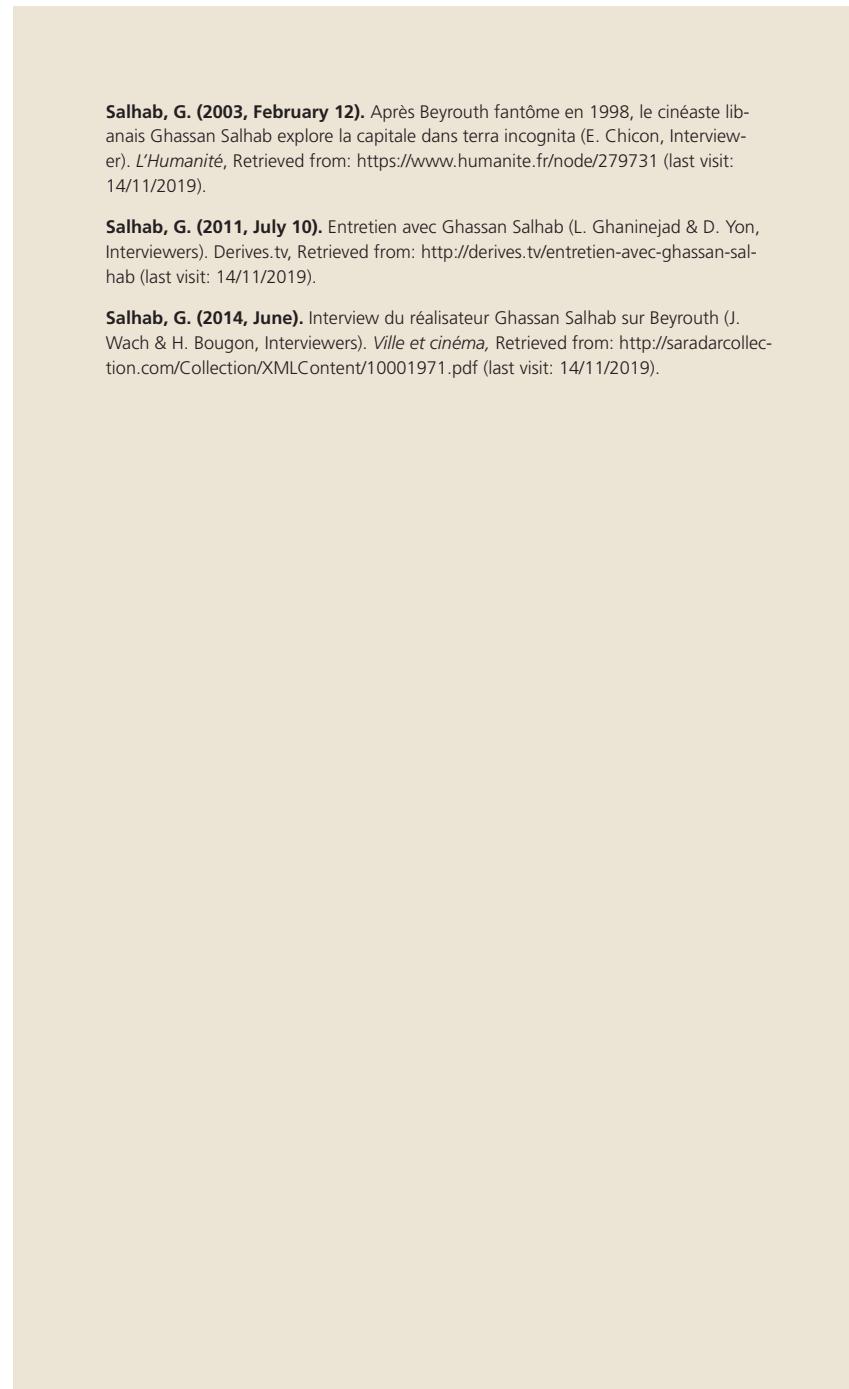
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Tamraz Nayla,
“Mapping the City”,
Saradar collection, 2020



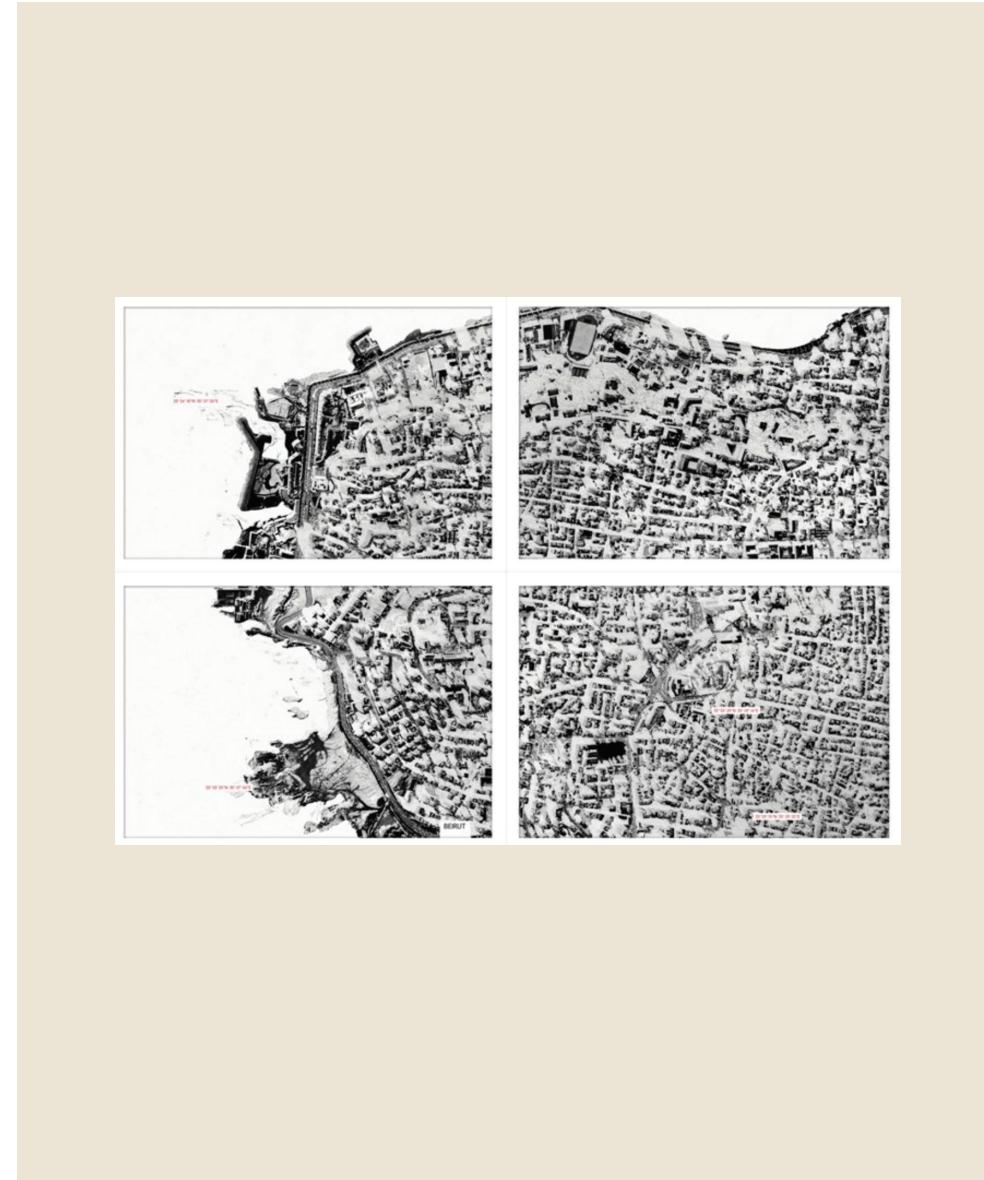
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Tamraz Nayla,
“Mapping the City”,
Saradar collection, 2020

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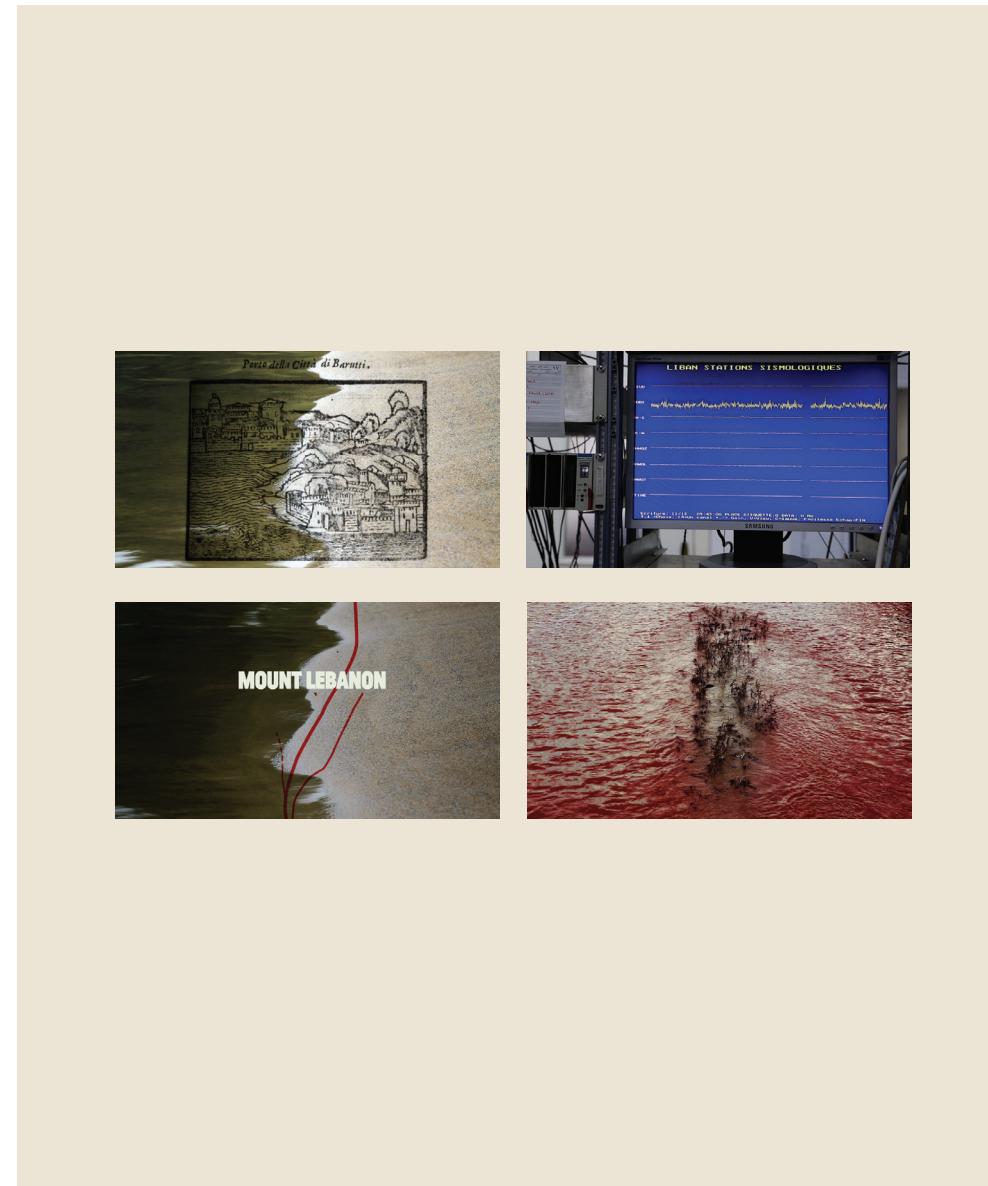


Ali Cherri
Trembling Landscapes (Beirut), 2014
Lithographic print and archival ink stamp. 4 x 72 x 102 cm. Ed. 3/7 (+ 2AP)
courtesy of the artist and Iman Farès Gallery

Imane Farès

Tamraz Nayla,
“Mapping the City”,
Saradar collection, 2020

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Ali Cherri
The Disquiet, 2013
Film HD, Color, 20min, Stereo, Arabic
courtesy of the artist and Iman Fares Gallery

Gouge Francis,
“Le Palais du facteur
Cheval en fête”,
Le Monde, November 22,
2019

CULTURE • ARCHITECTURE

Le Palais du facteur Cheval en fête

Deux expositions marquent le 50e anniversaire du classement aux Monuments historiques de ce chef-d'œuvre d'architecture naïve.

Par Francis Gouge · Publié le 22 novembre 2019 à 07h00

Article réservé aux abonnés



Le Palais idéal du facteur Cheval à Hauterives (Drôme). FRÉDÉRIC JOUHANIN

Le 23 septembre 1969, le Palais idéal du facteur Cheval (1879-1912), à Hauterives (Drôme), était classé monument historique, à l'initiative d'André Malraux, appuyé par de nombreux artistes – Pablo Picasso, Bernard Buffet, Jean Tingueli, André Breton, Niki de Saint Phalle, Robert Doisneau, Agnès Varda – qui le tiennent pour une œuvre majeure malgré l'hostilité d'experts du ministère de la culture pour lesquels « *le tout est absolument hideux* ». Ce classement a permis de sauver ce que Malraux considérait comme « *seul exemple d'architecture naïve du monde* ». Un demi-siècle après, il s'est imposé dans le paysage patrimonial avec une moyenne de 180 000 visiteurs par an, chiffre largement dépassé cette année (255 000 début novembre) grâce au film de Nils Tavernier *L'Incroyable Histoire du facteur Cheval* (2018).

Deux expositions, qui se tiennent jusqu'au 5 janvier 2020, commémorent cette inscription.

La première, dans une partie de l'espace muséal aménagé dans l'ancien abattoir restauré sis dans le jardin attenant, est consacrée à Picasso et au plasticien Fabrice Hyber. Du peintre catalan est présenté un fac-similé du carnet de quatorze feuillets dessiné en 1937, lors de sa visite avec Dora Maar et Paul Eluard, où figure le facteur sous forme d'une chimère à tête de colombe et corps d'étaillon, avec « PTT » tatoué sur la croupe ; de Fabrice Hyber, on peut voir, entre autres, cinquante dessins réalisés pour l'occasion.

Symbol de fraternité

Gouge Francis,
“Le Palais du facteur
Cheval en fête”,
Le Monde, November 22,
2019

La seconde exposition se déploie à la villa Alcius, qu'il a construite en 1896 dans l'enceinte du Palais. Elle ouvre pour la première fois au public avec l'exposition « Le vent et les oiseaux m'encouragent », qui unit dans une vision poétique le rêve et la nature avec des œuvres (photos, lithos, tableau de plumes de colverts...) de Rebecca Horn, Kate McCwire, Ali Cherri et Jean-Luc Mylayne. Cette exposition devrait être la seule présentée en ce lieu, le directeur, Frédéric Legros, envisageant d'en faire un espace d'accueil pour des résidences d'artistes et d'écrivains.

Deux expositions permanentes sont également visibles : la première, à l'espace muséal, consacrée à l'histoire du Palais avec un fac-similé du seul dessin du projet dû à Ferdinand Cheval, aujourd'hui propriété du Musée de la poste ; la seconde à l'Atelier, à proximité, qui rend hommage au facteur avec des portraits que lui ont consacrés différents artistes.

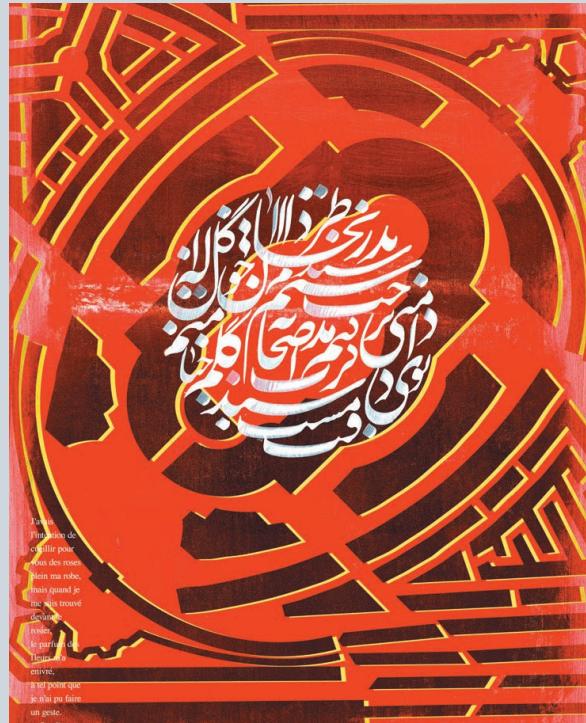
Parallèlement à ces présentations, la communauté d'agglomération annoncera, le 14 décembre, la demande d'inscription du Palais idéal à l'Inventaire mondial de l'Unesco, en tant que symbole de fraternité entre les cultures et en raison de son importance dans l'histoire de l'art. Ainsi que de son influence, saluée par nombre de créateurs dont Fabrice Hyber, pour qui les artistes d'aujourd'hui « *descendent tous du facteur Cheval* ».

Lire la critique (2015) : [Excentricités en hommage au Facteur Cheval](#)

¶ Palais idéal du facteur Cheval, 8 rue du Palais, Hauterives (26).

¶ www.facteurcheval.com/expositions/exposition-2019.html

Francis Gouge (Hauterives (Drôme))



L'Empire des roses

Ali Cherri (2019)

Le jardin est un élément fondamental de la culture persane, présent dans toutes les formes artistiques. Il est fréquemment structuré en quatre parties -représentation de l'une des traditions les plus anciennes de l'Asie, selon laquelle le monde est divisé en quatre zones-, avec, en son centre, un espace sacré accueillant la vasque et le jet d'eau.

Cette conception du jardin persan a inspiré l'artiste Ali Cherri sollicité, par le Conseil départemental, pour réaliser une estampe marquant l'ouverture de la Roseraie du Val-de-Marne. L'œuvre part du plan et de l'agencement d'origine du jardin des roses. L'artiste a travaillé avec le calligraphe iranien Bahman Panahi qui a retracé, au centre de l'œuvre, des vers de Saadi, poète et conteur persan du XIII^e siècle. Ce texte, extrait du célèbre ouvrage *Le Golistan* (*Le Jardin des roses*), est traduit en français au bas de la composition.

La forme de la calligraphie rappelle celle de la rose. « Pour les couleurs, je voulais rester sur des teintes vives et chaudes, surtout le rouge, précise Ali Cherri. Le jardin, entre labyrinthe et plan de ville, devient une sorte de microcosme, une parcelle du monde qui contient la totalité du monde. Le poème de Saadi est une allégorie destinée à dévoiler la nature profonde des êtres et des choses et ainsi amener à un éveil et une perception de la réalité de l'existence. »

Une affiche, reproduisant l'estampe originale, est offerte aux visiteurs du MAC VAL.

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UNE ŒUVRE SE DÉVOILE

MAC VAL



Ali Cherri

Né en 1976, à Beyrouth, Ali Cherri vit et travaille entre la France et le Liban. Il appartient à la génération d'artistes libanais nés pendant la guerre civile et dont la pratique a été marquée par ce contexte d'instabilité. Il réalise aussi bien des œuvres vidéo et des films que des installations ou des lithographies. Il puise ses sources dans l'histoire de son pays d'origine, dans celles du Moyen-Orient et de l'Afrique du Nord. En 2017, il a participé à l'exposition collective *Tous, des sang-mêlés*, au MAC VAL.

Zalzal Zéna,
"Quand Ali Cherri (re)
met la nature en vitrine",
L'Orient le Jour, June 4,
2019

L'Orient LE JOUR

Mardi 04 juin 2019 | Le Commerce du Levant | In English

CULTURE

Quand Ali Cherri (re)met la nature en vitrine



INSTALLATION

Avec « The Breathless Forest », l'artiste plasticien rappelle aux Beyrouthins le déclin environnemental dont ils sont les témoins... impavides.

Zéna ZALZAL / O LJ

03/06/2019

C'est une œuvre qui s'adresse d'abord aux piétons. À ceux qui aiment silloner la ville à pied pour en (re)découvrir les coins et recoins les plus secrets. Mais aussi, et surtout, à ceux qui privilégient la marche pour réduire leur empreinte carbone. Même si vous n'appartenez à aucune de ces deux catégories et que vous passez par la rue Pasteur (à Beyrouth, secteur Gemmayzé), prenez la peine de garer votre voiture au niveau de la station d'essence et de traverser la rue en direction de l'immeuble d'en face. Vous y verrez, nichée dans un coin, en renfoncement du rez-de-chaussée, la Vitrine. Conçue par la Beirut Art Residency (BAR) comme une sorte de fenêtre sur rue dédiée aux pratiques contemporaines, elle est mise à la disposition d'artistes locaux afin qu'ils y présentent sans contraintes thématiques ou financières leurs œuvres aux quidams. Cette fois, contrairement aux expositions précédentes, la Vitrine est fermée par une porte opaque à double battant fendue de deux étroites vitres hautes. Il faut donc prendre la peine de s'en approcher pour y découvrir, comme un trésor volontairement dissimulé et qui ne se révélerait qu'aux méritants, un diorama captivant.

Une installation signée Ali Cherri et intitulée *The Breathless Forest* (La forêt à bout de souffle) exhibant, en trois dimensions et grandeur nature, des antilopes empaillées évoluant dans un paysage aride, aux rares arbres desséchés.

Une atmosphère de dépouillement, de décomposition et de désertification imprègne ce tableau. De ces animaux au regard de verre, qui semblent eux-mêmes observer les passants de cette rue animée, se dégage quelque chose d'insoudable et d'envoûtant. Mais aussi de cette mise en scène, soutenue par un jeu de miroirs réfléchissants et d'images de nature montagneuse tapissées en toile de fond, l'impression de se confronter aux profondeurs d'un passé lointain et d'un avenir irrévocable. Les deux invisibles sous le jour de notre présent. Et qui, de manière aussi subtile qu'impromptue, renvoie le spectateur à son inerte responsabilité dans la mort de la nature. Une œuvre qui, derrière son apparence ludique, aiguise la conscience d'un imminent désastre écologique.

Carte de visite

Né en pleine guerre libanaise, Ali Cherri appartient à cette génération d'artistes libanais dont la pratique a été fortement marquée par ce contexte instable. Diplômé en graphic design de l'Université américaine de Beyrouth (AUB), il a poursuivi avec une maîtrise en arts du spectacle de DasArts, à Amsterdam, en 2005. De quoi apporter à son travail ce côté polymorphe nourri de performances, de cinéma et d'histoire de l'art. Ces multiples références apparaissent dans ses premières vidéos, où son propre corps joue le rôle de pivot dans une composition esthétique raffinée. Entre 2005 et 2014, il s'attache à disséquer les situations géopolitiques du Moyen-Orient, avec un langage visuel très poétique. Plus récemment, ses projets se sont concentrés sur la place de l'objet archéologique dans la construction de récits historiques. Un changement thématique, signe d'un changement philosophique pour l'auteur de *The Breathless Forest*. Un artiste qui explore aussi la nature en tant que construction enchaînée dans les ordres culturel, symbolique et politique de l'histoire humaine.

Azimi Roxana,
 "Épreuves d'artistes",
 Historia Hors série
*Beyrouth, histoire d'une
 renaissance*, June/July
 2019, p. 96-97

HEURS ET MALHEURS D'UNE CAPITALE

ÉPREUVES D'ARTISTES

L'histoire de Beyrouth hante l'imaginaire de nombreux créateurs contemporains.

Certains plasticiens utilisent le passé de la ville comme matière première de leurs œuvres. Trois cas d'école.

Par Roxana Azimi

A charming residential building - Beirutopia (série), 2010
 Randa Mirza

Courtesy de l'artiste and Galerie Tanit

Randa Mirza est née à Beyrouth en 1978, de parents eux-mêmes originaires de la capitale. « Enfant, quand les autres familles passaient leurs vacances et les week-ends dans leurs villages nataux, nous restions en ville », se souvient-elle. Elle a vécu les plaisirs de l'adolescence au bord de la mer, mais y a aussi subi les bombardements et la guerre, sans solution de repli. « Beyrouth, c'est mon village », ajoute la jeune femme qui, après deux années d'études supérieures à Paris, vit aujourd'hui entre Beyrouth et Marseille. Observant les mutations de sa ville natale, elle hésite entre affection et affliction. « On détruit de vieilles bâties pour construire des tours vides », résume-t-elle, en phase avec une grande partie de la société civile. Cherchant à rendre compte de ce mirage immobilier, elle tombe un jour en arrêt, près d'un chantier, devant une affiche vantant un futur projet. Sur cette palissade publicitaire, l'image idéalisée d'un gratte-ciel contraste avec le pauvre bitume tristement familier. Pour l'enfant de Beyrouth, l'effacement de l'Histoire est source d'inquiétude et la réalité



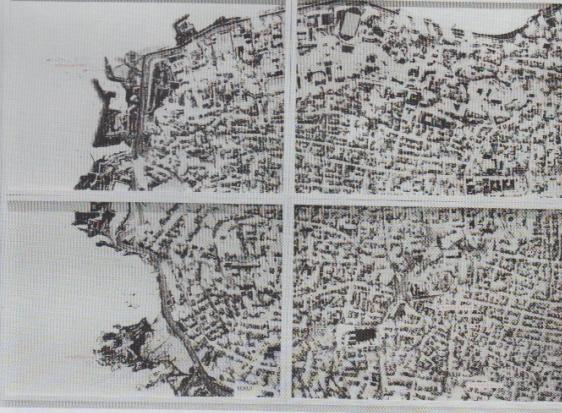
artificielle créée par les promoteurs ne rassure guère : « Que cachent ces visions fantasmées ? Qu'annoncent-elles ? Comment évoquer le passé de cette ville,

son présent et son avenir alors que tout se transforme à grande vitesse ? » Et l'artiste beyrouthine de conclure : « Comment vivre sans repère ? ».

Azimi Roxana,
 "Épreuves d'artistes",
 Historia Hors série
*Beyrouth, histoire d'une
 renaissance*, June/July
 2019, p. 96-97

Paysages tremblants (Beyrouth), 2014
Ali Cherri
Courtesy de l'artiste et Galerie Imane Farès

Ali Cherri connaît son Beyrouth comme personne. Il y a grandi pendant la guerre civile, fouillant tous les recoins en archéologue, transformant chaque enclave en champ d'investigation. Dans ce *Paysage tremblant* décomposé de quatre panneaux, le prodige libanais a pris de la hauteur. Cette carte met en exergue les failles tectoniques responsables des nombreux tremblements de terre, du séisme de 551, qui a anéanti la ville romaine, au choc de 1956, dont les vieux habitants de Beyrouth gardent la mémoire. Une autre lecture évoque les photographies de villes détruites durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale ou les images captées, plus récemment, par les drones sur des champs de bataille. Ainsi, aux chamboulements telluriques se superposent d'autres fractures non moins



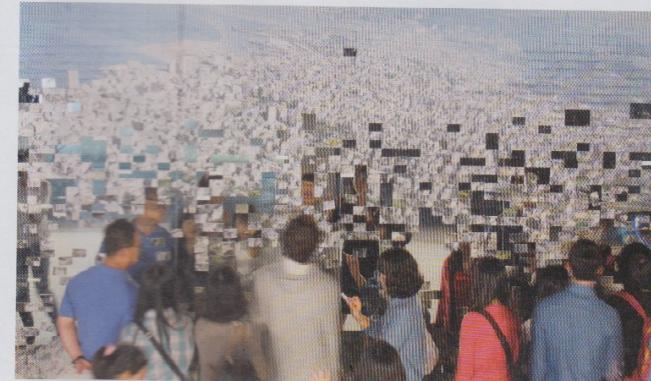
profondes, politiques celles-là. Les césures, sur la carte, évoquent aussi la ligne de démarcation qui a divisé la capitale pendant la guerre civile. Le cloisonnement traduit les crispations confessionnelles et le sectarisme qui obèrent encore et menacent la société libanaise. « J'ai voulu montrer les signes d'un présent inquiet, angoissé par les désastres passés et à venir », confie le sismographe Ali Cherri.

« cercle de la confusion » la limite de perception entre le flou et le net, c'est que chaque fragment est numéroté et annoté par ces mots : « Beyrouth n'existe pas. » Le spectateur est invité à détacher celui qu'il souhaite emporter – bout de tours, portion d'autoroute, ruine ancienne ou débris de la guerre. Au fur et à mesure de l'effeuillage ne subsiste plus que le miroir, renvoyant l'observateur à sa propre image.

Les post-it de Hadjithomas et Joreige traduisent l'impossibilité de saisir le mille-feuille de communautés ethniques et confessionnelles de Beyrouth. Ils figurent aussi l'hétérogénéité de ses architectures. « Le fragment relativise les définitions toutes faites que l'on peut avoir d'une ville et nous renvoie à nous-mêmes », explique Joana Hadjithomas, qui ajoute : « Beyrouth n'existe pas, mais elle n'en finit pas d'exister. Ainsi, Beyrouth nous fait exister. »

Le Cercle de confusion, 1997
Joana Hadjithomas et Khalil Joreige
Courtesy de l'artiste et In Situ Fabienne Leclerc

Cinéastes et plasticiens, Joana Hadjithomas et Khalil Joreige aiment forer dans l'histoire libanaise comme on carotte un sol, pour exhumer des épisodes enfouis



et tracer des cartographies oubliées. Cette œuvre représente un point de vue aérien de Beyrouth datant de 1997, sept ans après la fin de la guerre civile, alors que la reconstruction bat son plein. L'image est faussement banale ; il s'agit d'un puzzle composé de 3000 petits morceaux collés sur un miroir. Et si le titre renvoie au jargon photographique, qui désigne

Drake Cathryn,
 "Questioning Museology as
 a Medium for Conveying
 Culture",
Frieze, January 11, 2019

Frieze

EDITORIAL ON VIEW FAIRS VIDEO ACADEMY

Reviews /



BY CATHRYN DRAKE
 11 JAN 2019

Questioning Museology as a Medium for Conveying Culture

Beirut Art Museum and StudioCur/art organized an exhibition with works placed in architectural landmarks that represent bookends for European colonization

'Cycles of Collapsing Progress', curated by Karina El Helou with Anissa Touati, engaged the works of artists from Lebanon and Mexico in architectural landmarks that represent both contrasting notions of history and bookends for European colonization: the Citadel of Raymond de Saint-Gilles, fortified after the 1099 Crusader conquest of Jerusalem, and the modernist Rashid Karami International Fair, designed by Oscar Niemeyer in 1963. Organized by the Beirut Museum of Art and StudioCur/art as a prelude to the construction of a dedicated building, the exhibition questions museology as a medium for conveying culture and history within the framework of a dynamic perpetual present characterized by migrating conceptions of reality.

Arrayed on a fortress terrace as if an excavation site, the sculptures of Haig Aivazian's *Rome Is Not in Rome* (2016) – including Stadion, a leather-upholstered wrought-iron version of the Coliseum, and Aqueduct, a clay water pipe fused with a decorative column – distort Western cultural icons. The idiosyncratic ensemble evinced Rome as a state of mind through disembodied archaeological fragments displayed in museums. Employed in turn by the political and consumer cultures of Western societies, these icons are all the more effective isolated from their origins.

Rayyane Tabet's battalions of castrated column stubs taken from modern buildings, *Colosse Aux Pieds D'Argile* (Colossus with Feet of Clay, 2015), presented history as an unfinished construction, as destroying itself, its remnants merely stumbling blocks to comprehending its totality. Equally severed from the ceaseless narrative of history, like the beheaded Roman statue displayed in the citadel's museum, they are unable to tell the truth.

Edgardo Aragón employed Niemeyer's Lebanese Pavilion – an M.C. Escher-esque maze of suspended staircases and arched apertures reflecting the deceptive porosity of Lebanese territory – for the audio-visual installation *Mute* (2018). A performance of rappers Straight outta Tripoli, transmitted aurally by speakers and viewed in separate videos of each singer, some isolated in underground chambers, compelled visitors to make a disorienting circuit to integrate sound and image. The band members are only a few of the large number of legally invisible people in Lebanon – including orphans and registered refugees – unable to obtain enfranchisement under the 1925 French law restricting nationality to patrilineage. The empty pool surrounding the pavilion presents a perilously imperceptible barrier for visitors, who can neither perceive its depth nor see their own reflections.

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's *A Space Museum* (2018) was staged in a subterranean building, designed but never used for that very purpose, topped by a retro-futuristic mushroom-shaped helipad. Videos from *The Lebanese Rocket Society* (2011–13) document the short-lived space programme's unmanned launches of the 1960s. Displayed alongside the suspended model of a sleek rocket ship, they expressed the national optimism castrated by civil war – exemplified in the fate of the Niemeyer complex, an architectural folly symbolizing a failed utopian project and finally a living museum in crumbling concrete.

Museums are key to cultural legitimization and self-determination, illustrating a progressive, linear development of civilization that necessarily excludes certain voices in the process. Lebanese history since the French Mandate has been so tumultuous that neither self-determination nor official historical accounts have emerged, even as foreign-funded skyscrapers in Beirut represent one recent form of insidious invasion. Overwhelmed with refugees since the Palestinian exodus of 1948, with the highest concentration per capita in the world, the country encapsulates our fractured present.

Ali Cherri's breath-taking *The Disquiet* (2013) recalls past catastrophic destructions of Tripoli and Beirut among a dizzying enumeration of natural disasters to conjure the precedence of geological time over the relatively transient chronology of human events. The film concludes with a prolonged walk through a primeval forest accompanied by the sound of lone footfalls – the very earth under our feet echoing cycles of eternal return. As Ibn Khaldoun wrote in the fourteenth century: 'From its inception, the living organism contains the germs of death.'

'Cycles of Collapsing Progress' was on view from 22 September until 22 October 2018.



Robert Colescott,
Diana's Secret
(The Orchid Corsage),
 1976, acrylique sur toile et bois
 découpé, 203x319x4 cm.
 Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

Succès pour Colescott

Pour la Parisienne Imane Farès, la présence du Libanais Ali Cherri, qu'elle présentait en solo show, a été déterminante. « *Le public a apprécié les échanges et discussions avec l'artiste autour des œuvres* ». Résultat : les collages et dessins à 6 000 euros sont partis tout de suite, tandis que les sculptures hybrides réservées le premier jour ont vu leur achat confirmés les jours suivants par des Français, Libanais, Américains et Asiatiques. La foire présentait un nombre exceptionnel de solo shows (une bonne vingtaine), dont le travail très remarqué de Katharina Grosse chez Gagosian ou les lumineuses sculptures de Ann Veronica Janssens chez la Berlinoise Esther Schipper. Une prise de risque très souvent payante, y compris chez Blum & Poe (Los Angeles) qui montrait, pour la première fois à Paris, des œuvres des années 1970 de l'artiste noir américain Robert Colescott (1925-2009), présent dans de grands musées américains à l'instar du MoMA. Tous les tableaux ont trouvé preneurs (entre 200 000 et 375 000 dollars) et il ne restait que quelques dessins (autour de 40 000 dollars) en fin de FIAC. Cet œuvre, qui parle de problèmes de société tels que le harcèlement sexuel ou le racisme, trouve encore écho de nos jours...



Solo show Ali Cherri sur le stand d'Imane Farès, Paris.

Malvoisin Armelle,
 "Des solos contre le
 zapping",
 Le Quotidien de l'Art, n°
 1586, October 17, 2018, p.
 7-9

TREND

Des solo shows contre le zapping / Solo shows, an antidote against zapping

Par/By Armelle Malvoisin

Plus risquée qu'un *group show* répondant aux goûts de différents collectionneurs, l'exposition d'un seul artiste est une tendance qui prend de l'ampleur dans les grandes foires internationales.

Cette année à la FIAC, une vingtaine de galeries (hors secteur Lafayette) se sont lancées dans l'aventure du *solo show*, avec des propositions mûrement réfléchies. « *Montrer un seul artiste, en galerie comme pour des foires, a toujours été ma ligne de conduite. Cela permet une approche plus curatoriale d'un travail* », lance la Parisienne Imane Farès, qui a choisi de montrer une installation du Libanais Ali Cherri « *dans le prolongement d'un projet de l'an dernier* ». L'artiste, également vidéaste, a une actualité riche dont une exposition de groupe au Musée égyptien de Turin. Ses œuvres figurent notamment dans les collections du MacVal (Vitry-sur-Seine), de la Kadist Art Foundation à Paris et du Centre Pompidou. La galeriste

Although exhibiting the work of just one artist is riskier than a group show that can meet the tastes of different collectors, solo shows are a trend that is going from strength to strength in major international art fairs.

This year at the FIAC around twenty galleries (Lafayette sector excepted) took the plunge and opted for a solo show with a well thought through offering. “*Whether at the gallery or a fair, I have always preferred showcasing the work of a single artist. It allows you to take a more curatorial approach to their work*”, observes Imane Farès. The Parisian gallerist has chosen to present an installation by Lebanese artist Ali Cherri, “*in the continuation of last year's project*”. Cherri, also a video artist, is very much in view at the moment, notably with a group exhibition at the Museo Egizio in Turin. His works are part of the collections at the MacVal (Vitry-sur-Seine), the Kadist Art Foundation in Paris and the Centre Pompidou. Esther Schipper is also no stranger to solo shows: last year at the FIAC, her Berlin-based gallery gave over its entire (and very noticeable) stand to Argentinean artist Tomás Saraceno.

A financial risk

She is back this year with Ann Veronica Janssens. “*No other art fair in the world can boast such a wonderful location as the Grand Palais; the light is spectacular and as light is an essential component in Ann Veronica Janssens' work, the choice was an obvious one.*” Anne de Villepoix is also providing great exposure to African-American artist Derrick Adams. “*Today he has an international audience and a lot of exhibitions in museums. I have been showing his work in France for the last six years, however he is still not well known enough here. The FIAC was therefore the best spot for him*”, says the Parisian gallerist and continues: “*Of course a solo show represents a financial risk, but it always pays off, even if not right away. There are always knock-on effects after the fair, because specific projects leave their mark and people, who are overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of things on offer in a fair where even an experienced eye will become saturated, remember them. A solo show is therefore the most judicious way of helping visitors gain an understanding of new work and what is at stake. Otherwise people just zap.*”

/...



Azimi Roxana,
“Au Liban, l’art sur le qui-vive”,
L’Hebdo du Quotidien de l’Art, September 14, 2018,
p. 7-9



Au Liban, l’art sur le qui-vive

À quelques jours de Beirut Art Fair, qui ouvre ses portes le 19 septembre, état des lieux d’une scène libanaise qui résiste contre vents et marées.

Par Roxana Azimi

Incertitude. Ce mot, les acteurs culturels libanais le connaissent bien. Ils sont rompus à l’imprévu, à une économie en berne, une corruption galopante, une guerre à deux heures de là, à la frontière avec la Syrie, un gouvernement fragilisé par les Saoudiens. Sans oublier les déchets qui continuent de s’accumuler, polluant l’air et le paysage. Imaginer une permanence sur des sables mouvants est le sport national libanais. Les aléas d’un pays perméable aux fractures politiques régionales, la sphère privée s’en est fait une raison. Le Beirut Art Center est ainsi né en 2006, au pic des attentats. En 2013, alors

que l’armée américaine basée à Chypre pointait ses roquettes vers Damas, la Beirut Art Fair a reçu 7 000 visiteurs de plus que l’année d’avant. « Il y a ici une adrénaline qu’on ne peut trouver nulle part ailleurs parce qu’on sait qu’on ne peut compter que sur soi », confie la jeune galeriste Joumana Asseily, fondatrice de Marfa’ Projects. « Dans toute la ville, il y a l’énergie de la résilience », sourit l’artiste et cinéaste Joana Hadjithomas qui partage son temps entre Paris et Beyrouth. Et de poursuivre : « Cette énergie, c’est celle de l’urgence, car on a l’impression que tout peut disparaître. Ce pays te responsabilise. On reste sur le qui-vive. Les acteurs culturels ne peuvent pas avoir le luxe de la fatigue car ils savent qu’ils sont importants pour des générations d’artistes ».

S’il y a bien une femme qui ne s'est pas essoufflée, c'est Christine Tohme, fondatrice en 1993 de l'association Ashkal Alwan et du forum Home Works organisé tous les deux ans. Cette forte tête a persévétré contre vents et marées, défendant des artistes aujourd'hui plébiscités internationalement comme Walid Raad, Akram Zaatari, Rabih Mroué ou Marwan Rechmaoui. Même constance du côté du Beirut Art Center lancé par Lamia Joreige et Sandra Dagher et soutenu par de fidèles collectionneurs comme Marwan Assaf. « Ashkal Alwan a du mal à lever des fonds comme nous. La question partout est celle de la pérennité », soupire /...



« Les acteurs culturels ne peuvent pas avoir le luxe de la fatigue car ils savent qu’ils sont importants pour des générations d’artistes. »

Joana Hadjithomas, artiste et cinéaste.

Azimi Roxana,
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L'enquête / Au Liban, l'art sur le qui-vive

Marie Muracciole, actuelle directrice du Beirut Art Center, qui doit trouver chaque année auprès des mécènes son budget d'environ 500 000 euros. « Quand quelqu'un me dit qu'il va donner des sous, je ne le prends pas pour argent comptant, ajoute-t-elle. Les gens adorent dire qu'ils donnent et rien n'arrive. Il n'y a pas l'idée d'un don gratuit. » À la Fondation arabe pour l'image, précieuse institution qui collecte la mémoire photographique de la région, c'est « la course aux bourses et aux donations », admet Clémence Cottard Hachem, directrice des collections. Mais au pays du cèdre, le pire n'est jamais garanti. Le Beirut Art Center, qui a vu son bail résilié, déménagera en 2019 dans un entrepôt que le collectionneur Peter Hrechdakian consent à lui louer à prix modéré. « Beyrouth, c'est aussi ça : tout ce qui apparaît comme un désastre se transforme en quelque chose de positif », sourit Marie Muracciole.

Des plaies non refermées

Malgré la fermeture intempestive du Beirut Exhibition Center, où s'étaient tenues des expositions pourtant intéressantes, de nouvelles structures ont vu le jour en trois ans. Le collectionneur Tony Salamé a inauguré en 2015 la fondation Aïshti dans un bâtiment de 20 000 m² dessiné par l'architecte David Adjaye, en plein cœur d'un centre commercial rutilant. Le musée Sursock a rouvert ses portes à Achrafieh, tandis que l'homme d'affaires



« Beyrouth, c'est aussi ça : tout ce qui apparaît comme un désastre se transforme en quelque chose de positif. »

Marie Muracciole,
 directrice du Beirut Art Center

Rami El Nimer a inauguré un espace dédié à la création en Palestine. Le Beirut Art Museum, signé par l'architecte Hala Wardé, sera érigé en 2020. Après l'euphorie des ouvertures vient le désenchantement. « Tout le monde attendait beaucoup de la réouverture du musée Sursock, mais sa programmation art contemporain est erratique », regrette une curatrice.

Comme le souligne l'architecte Youssef Tohme, « Le Liban est comme l'Homme qui marche de Giacometti, il avance même décharné ». Mais chaque avancée est freinée par les plaies non refermées. Le pays n'en finit pas de ressasser les souvenirs de la guerre civile qui s'est achevée en 1990, tout en redoutant qu'une nouvelle étincelle ne mette le feu aux poudres. L'artiste Ayman Baalbaki, 42 ans, le dit bien : « La guerre pour moi, ce n'est pas du passé ». La loi d'amnistie votée après le sanglant conflit a instauré amnésie et non-dits. Les manuels scolaires s'arrêtent d'ailleurs en 1946, date de l'indépendance du pays. Pourtant, à partir de 2004, quelques acteurs culturels ont commencé à promouvoir l'idée d'un mémorial de la guerre au sein de la Maison Jaune. Cette superbe bâtie ottomane des années 1920, devenue repaire des phalangistes pendant la guerre, voulait rassembler des communautés à la mémoire sélective sans prétendre offrir l'illusion d'un imaginaire commun. L'architecte choisi en 2009, Youssef Haidar, a gardé visibles les stigmates du bâtiment. Rénové depuis 2016, mais sans direction, le bâtiment reste désespérément vide, occupé par intermittence par des événements sans queue ni tête. Et personne ne bronche tant le sujet est hautement inflammable. Impossible de froisser les communautés. L'exposition autour d'un siècle de photographie au Liban, orchestrée cette année par le collectionneur Tarek Nahas au sein de Beirut Art Fair, s'interdit tout parti pris, livrant telles quelles les photos trouvées dans les ...



La Maison Jaune, Beyrouth.



Affiche du film *L'Insulte*
 de Ziad Doueiri.

Azimi Roxana,
 "Au Liban, l'art sur le qui-vive",
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L'enquête / Au Liban, l'art sur le qui-vive

institutions publiques et chez les particuliers. Dans ce contexte le succès du film *L'Insulte* de Ziad Doueiri, traitant de l'ancienne division entre chrétiens libanais et palestiniens réfugiés au Liban fait figure d'événement. Mais si Ziad Doueiri a pu sortir son film sans encombre, il a dû comparaître en 2017 devant un tribunal militaire pour avoir tourné cinq ans auparavant en Israël une partie de son film *L'Attentat*, enfreignant ainsi l'article 285 du code pénal libanais. La censure existe bel et bien, en particulier au cinéma. « *Elle ne frappe pas toujours d'une façon logique*, constate Joana Hadjithomas qui a vu censurées les scènes d'insulte de son film *Autour de la maison rose* coécrit avec Khalil Joreige. *Parfois on se dit que les choses ne passeront pas et elles passent ; parfois c'est le contraire.* »

Un présent inquiet

Une nouvelle génération tente de dépasser les séquelles de la guerre. Ou du moins de les contourner en privilégiant des histoires intimes ou urbaines. La ville de Beyrouth se trouve ainsi au cœur de beaucoup d'œuvres. Avec *Beirutopia*, Randa Mirza, représentée par la galerie Tanit, dénonce les dérives des promoteurs immobiliers. Voilà huit ans, près d'un chantier la jeune femme tombe en arrêt devant une affiche vantant un futur projet immobilier, image idéalisée d'un gratte-ciel qui a poussé au milieu d'un cadre plus familier. Pour Randa Mirza, ce rêve immobilier vendu par les promoteurs ne va pas sans questions : « *Que cachent ces visions fantasmées ? Qu'annoncent-elles ? Comment parler du passé de cette ville, de son présent et de son avenir ? Comment évoquer une transformation si rapide et écrasante, le manque de repères quotidiens qui s'installe entre la ville et ses habitants ?* » Avec la série des « *Paysages Tremblants* », Ali Cherri, qui connaît Beyrouth comme personne, a voulu prendre de la hauteur. Mais

la politique n'est jamais très loin. Derrière les chamboulements telluriques, se cachent d'autres profondes fractures, politiques cette fois. Les césures sur la carte évoquent la ligne de démarcation qui a divisé la capitale pendant la guerre civile. Le cloisonnement traduit les crispations confessionnelles et le sectarisme qui obèrent la société libanaise. « *J'ai voulu montrer les signes d'un présent inquiet, angoissé par les désastres passés et à venir* », confie le sismographe Ali Cherri. Toute une frange d'artistes inconnus sous nos yeux ignorent néanmoins la politique. « *Ceux qui émergent au Liban ne sont pas forcément ceux qui vont s'exporter à l'étranger*, insiste la curatrice Joanna Chevalier. *Il y a une dichotomie entre ce que cherchent les Occidentaux, comment ils se représentent ce qui se passe au Liban, comment devraient être, selon eux, les artistes libanais et la réalité sur place.* » Une réalité complexe qui se dérobe à toute synthèse.



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« Il y a une dichotomie entre ce que cherchent les Occidentaux, comment ils se représentent ce qui se passe au Liban, comment devraient être, selon eux, les artistes libanais et la réalité sur place. »

Joanna Chevalier,
Curatrice

Ali Cherri,
Paysages tremblants (Beyrouth),
2014, Lithographies, tampon encre
d'archive, 4 cadres de 70 x 100 cm.

/...



Dessent Blaire,
 "Ali Cherri & Friedrich
 Lüth. Reflexion autour de
 l'archéologie moderne et
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CROSS INTERVIEWS



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Ali Cherri & Friedrich Lüth

Réflexion autour de l'archéologie moderne et de la valeur des objets */Thinking About Modern Archaeology and the Value of an Object*

Interview de /by Blaire Dessent

Artiste et designer libanais, Ali Cherri manie le dessin, le film, l'installation, la performance, l'impression et la vidéo. Ses travaux établissent des correspondances entre des catastrophes politiques et géologiques intervenues dans son pays d'origine et les territoires voisins.
Friedrich Lüth est quant à lui professeur et directeur des relations internationales à l'Institut archéologique allemand (DAI, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut) de Berlin.

TLMag: Pourriez-vous nous parler de votre collaboration sur le projet NEARCH?

Ali Cherri : Quand j'ai postulé pour NEARCH, je venais de terminer le film intitulé *The Digger*, tourné près de Sharjah (Émirats arabes unis). Déjà attiré par les thèmes liés à l'archéologie, j'étudiais différentes possibilités me permettant d'écrire

l'histoire et de construire des récits nationaux autour d'objets. Je m'intéressais aux artefacts, qui peuvent se détériorer, casser ou ne présenter aucune valeur, mais aussi à la politique, en particulier à la façon dont les pays du Golfe bâtissent des récits nationaux autour de tels objets. C'est dans ce contexte que j'ai commencé la résidence NEARCH, dont la dimension archéologique était liée à ce que je faisais dans mon studio. Cette expérience a donné naissance à une installation baptisée *Fragments*. Dans *The Digger*, je m'étais penché sur l'absence d'un sujet qui n'a laissé derrière lui que des trous vidés de leurs objets, désormais exposés dans des musées; dans *Fragments*, je me suis ensuite interrogé sur la valeur marchande des objets, en me servant des maisons d'enchères comme de baromètres mesurant en temps réel la fluctuation du désir autour des

artefacts: plus un objet est convoité, plus son prix augmente et, à l'inverse, moins il est convoité, moins il a des chances d'être vendu. D'où vient notre engouement pour certains objets ? Je suis allé filmer des scènes dans plusieurs salles de ventes, où j'ai aussi acquis des pièces, généralement les moins chères, pour beaucoup des contrefaçons pourtant vendues avec un certificat d'authenticité et d'origine. Pour l'installation *Fragments*, j'ai disposé ces objets sur une grande table claire, tous au même niveau, sans textes ni références, dans le but d'encourager les gens à les regarder pour ce qu'ils sont et non pour ce qu'ils représentent, et pour effacer les meta-récits dont ils étaient enveloppés. Beaucoup de ces objets dégageaient par ailleurs une aura humaine, comme s'ils nous observaient en retour et que nous étions nous aussi soumis à leur regard.

NEARCH

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Friedrich Lüth: Mes deux collaborations avec des artistes, Ali Cherri et Matthew Wilson, se sont révélées très différentes. Avec Ali Cherri, nous avons immédiatement instauré une discussion ouverte et abordé d'épineuses questions de terrain, en cherchant à traiter la diversité de points de vue et d'approches qui caractérise les artistes plutôt qu'à adopter une démarche analytique propre aux scientifiques et aux archéologues.

TlMag : Ali, avez-vous déjà participé à une collaboration de ce genre entre un archéologue et un artiste ?

A.C. : Pendant le tournage de *The Digger*, j'ai travaillé avec un archéologue sur un site de fouilles, où j'ai pu observer ses méthodes de travail et découvrir l'histoire

du lieu. Sur ce projet, c'est pourtant moins l'archéologue, les objets et les processus qui ont éveillé ma curiosité que le garde qui protégeait depuis vingt ans les tombeaux vides de ce site.

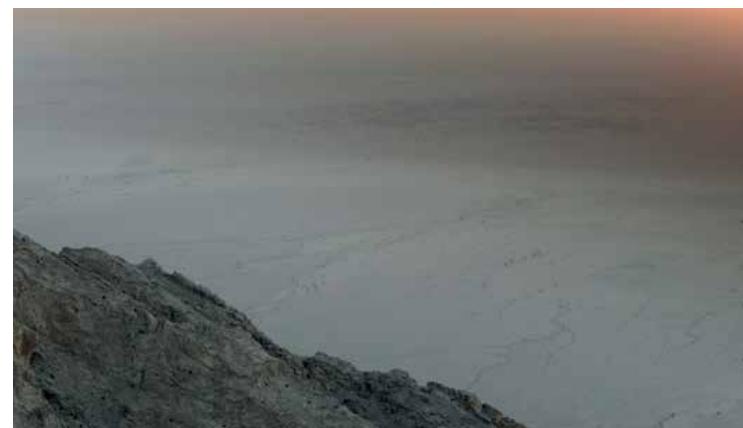
Pour NEARCH, j'ai fait deux séjours à Berlin, où Friedrich et moi nous sommes vus à plusieurs reprises. Après avoir travaillé avec d'autres archéologues et m'être fait une idée plus précise de cette profession, j'ai remarqué que Friedrich possédait une conception très ouverte de son métier et de la diversité des perspectives. Il s'est montré disposé à écouter de nouvelles idées et à discuter de nouvelles tendances et méthodes caractérisant l'archéologie moderne, qui peuvent considérablement varier d'un pays à

l'autre. Nous avons longuement discuté de l'archéologie moderne et de ses différentes pratiques. Je souhaitais en apprendre davantage sur ce que fait le DAI dans d'autres pays, notamment dans le monde arabe et au Moyen-Orient, et sur la façon dont l'Institut conduit ses fouilles. Je me suis donc tourné vers lui et l'échange a véritablement été mutuel: il s'est montré ouvert à la critique, sans se mettre sur la défensive ni se sentir attaqué en tant qu'archéologue, convenant qu'un artiste qui n'est soumis à aucune obligation scientifique peut apporter sa pierre à l'édifice.

F.L. : J'avais déjà collaboré avec des artistes: il y a une quinzaine d'années, j'ai travaillé avec un scénographe en Allemagne pour produire deux pièces



2



3

1 — Ali Cherri
 2 — *The Digger*, film, plan fixe /film still, 2015, courtesy of the artist and galerie Imane Farès, Paris
 3 — *The Digger*, film, plan fixe /film still, 2015, courtesy of the artist and galerie Imane Farès, Paris

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TLmag : Quel rôle a joué le Centquatre dans cette collaboration ?

A.C.: Il s'est révélé très fertile. J'avais un studio pendant la résidence et on m'a ensuite proposé une autre résidence d'un an qui m'a permis de poursuivre le projet. **F.L.:** Je n'y ai passé du temps qu'au lancement du projet. C'était la première fois que j'y allais et j'ai trouvé une source d'inspiration dans cet environnement et cette expérience. C'est un lieu très différent. J'aime à présent y retourner quand je suis à Paris et que l'occasion se présente. J'ai aussi vu l'exposition de clôture, « *The Materiality Of The Invisible* », au Centquatre. Je n'avais aucune idée de ce que les artistes allaient produire et il m'a semblé très intéressant de voir les résultats.

TLmag : Comment en êtes-vous arrivé à participer à ce projet ?

F.L.: J'avais participé à un projet consacré à l'archéologie et à l'Europe contemporaine ; c'est à partir de là que j'ai été sélectionné pour NEARCH. Au DAI, nous travaillons sur des projets menés dans le monde entier ; la mission de notre bureau consiste à instaurer des liens et des coopérations entre des scientifiques allemands et étrangers. Nous avons des antennes à Téhéran, Istanbul, Damas et Sanaa (bien que ces deux dernières aient récemment fermé leurs portes) ; nous travaillons donc dans des pays difficiles auxquels nous avons un accès spécial et nous aidons les artistes à y mettre un pied (Ali cherche par exemple à aller au Soudan), ce qui est souvent loin d'être facile.

TLmag : En acceptant cette invitation, qu'attendiez-vous de cette expérience ? Ces attentes se sont-elles concrétisées ?

A.C.: Cette résidence a changé ma façon de travailler en me permettant d'approfondir mes recherches, de me rendre sur le terrain et de m'entretenir avec des archéologues et des professionnels. J'ai par ailleurs participé à des symposiums archéologiques et à des réunions professionnelles grâce auxquels j'ai pu exposer l'installation *Fragments* au musée égyptien de Turin, qui possède l'une des collections les plus importantes en dehors de l'Égypte. Donc oui, cette expérience a été capitale pour moi. ♦

www.alicherri.com
[@ali.cherri](http://www.dainst.org/dai/meldungen)

de théâtre traitant de l'archéologie. La conservation du patrimoine est une thématique très scientifique et technique : je voulais porter un nouveau regard sur ce domaine, la science et les artefacts pour faire jaillir une expérience émotionnelle de ces objets et j'ai rencontré un scénographe qui m'y a aidé. J'entreprendais pour la première fois de transformer l'observation des artefacts et des faits en narration ; cette expérience a changé le regard que je portais sur la culture matérielle. Avec Ali, nous ne cherchions pas à discuter d'artefacts en particulier, mais à aborder plus largement ce champ, dans une démarche d'exploration. Il travaillait alors sur un projet basé à Sharjah, où des fouilles de tombeaux avaient été conduites et où il avait tourné son court-métrage *The Digger*, une sorte de documentaire artistique. C'est un exemple intéressant, car nous faisons tous les deux des documentaires : nous les scientifiques, nous recherchons principalement des faits et des données, tandis qu'Ali raconte une histoire à travers les personnes qui entourent les artefacts ou en se demandant ce que ceux-ci pourraient nous conter. Il s'est interrogé sur les personnes en charge du patrimoine et sur l'usage qui en est fait. Il a commencé par constater que ces fouilles avaient été menées par un archéologue étranger, et plus précisément par un Européen ; il s'est ensuite interrogé sur le lien qu'entretiennent le garde chargé de protéger le tombeau, de nationalité pakistanaise, avec le site. Il a également soulevé une autre question : que tirent les musées locaux de cette histoire ? Tous ces éléments ont tissé une histoire bien différente de la mienne. Ali s'est demandé ce qu'il pouvait faire de toutes ces interprétations, et cette démarche m'a semblé très intéressante. En tant qu'artiste, une autre de ses idées pour *Fragments* consistait à utiliser les objets achetés sur le marché de l'art. Dans le domaine du patrimoine, nous sommes réticents à l'idée d'utiliser des objets achetés à l'étranger et aux enchères. Mais ce point de départ s'est également transformé en un intéressant dialogue autour de cette pratique, élargissant ainsi mes perspectives sur la possibilité ou non de recourir au marché secondaire et développant une réflexion autour de l'authenticité. Cette collaboration artistique n'était donc pas ma première, mais elle a été la plus intense et a donné lieu à un véritable enrichissement mutuel. Je n'aurais pour rien au monde raté cette expérience professionnelle, qui a évolué vers un contact plus personnel et m'a valu un nouvel ami.

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SEARCH

Centquatre-Paris: Ali Cherri x Friedrich Lüth

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Ali Cherri is a Lebanese artist and designer who works with drawing, film, installation, performance, print, and video, tracing correspondences between political and geological disasters in his native country and neighboring territories. Friedrich Lüth is Director and Professor at the DAI in Berlin, responsible for Cultural Heritage and Site Management.

TLMag: Please tell us about your collaboration for the NEARCH project?

Ali Cherri: When I first applied to NEARCH I had recently made the film, *The Digger*, which was filmed near Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, and I was already interested in themes related to archaeology – looking at ways of writing history and constructing national narratives around objects. I was interested in artefacts and their qualities of deterioration, of being broken or without value, as well as in politics of it, such as in the Gulf countries, and how they construct national narratives around these objects. This was the context within which I started the NEARCH residency, and its connection to archaeology connected to what I was doing in my studio, and the experience led to

a project called *Fragments*. With my film, *The Digger*, I was looking at the how the subject was absent, meaning there were just empty holes in the ground with objects now in a museum, and with *Fragments*, I was more interested in the market value of objects and looking at auction houses as a barometer in real time of how desire can fluctuate around an object—that the more an object is desired, the higher the price, (and conversely), how the less desired it is, it might not even be sold. Why is there excitement about certain things? I went to several auction houses to film and I also bought some pieces, mostly the cheaper ones, many of which were fake even though they were often sold as being authentic with a certificate and provenance. For the installation of *Fragments*, I placed these objects on a large light table, equally on the same level, without any text or reference, to encourage people to look at them, not as what they represent, but for what they are, to erase the meta narrative around them. Also, there was a strong human-like quality to many of the objects which made it seem as if they were looking back at us, as if we were subjected to their gaze as much they were to ours.

Friedrich Lüth: I worked with two artists, Ali Cherri and Matthew Wilson, and they were very different experiences. With Ali it was immediately an open discussion and we right away touched on difficult points about the field, talking about how artists had different views and approaches than an analytic process that scientists and archaeologists take.

TLMag: Ali – Had you collaborated with an archaeologist / artist in this capacity before?

AC: I worked with an archaeologist onsite while making *The Digger*, and I had observed their methodologies of working and learned about the history of this excavation site, but for that project I was more interested in the guard who had worked there for twenty-years protecting these empty tombs than the archaeologist or the objects and process. So for NEARCH, I visited Berlin twice and met Friedrich several times and, particularly now that I have worked more and more with other archaeologists and I understand the profession more, I think he is someone very open about his practice and ready to listen to different

4 — Stills from *Petrified*, part of the installation and video, *Petrified/Fragments*, 2016, courtesy of the artist and galerie Imane Farès, Paris
 5 — *The Digger*, vidéo, plan fixe /video still, 2015, courtesy of the artist and galerie Imane Farès, Paris



5.

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 "Ali Cherri & Friedrich
 Lüth. Reflexion autour de
 l'archéologie moderne et
 de la valeur des objets"
 &
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perspectives. He was open to listening to ideas, and very generous to talk about new trends or methodologies of modern archaeology, which can be very different from one country to another. We had long discussions about modern archaeology, the different practices, and I was interested in what the DAI does in other locations, such as the Arab world region and the Middle East and how they do excavations. I looked to him for information and it was a mutual exchange. He was open to listening to critique, not defensive or insecure at all in his practice, but accepting that an artist, who doesn't have a scientific point of view, can add something to the conversation.

FL: Yes, I had collaborated with artists before. About 10-15 years ago, I worked with a stage designer in Germany to produce two plays for the theatre about archaeology. Archaeological preservation is quite scientific and structured and I wanted to bring a different approach to the field and science and look at artefacts, to create an emotional experience with these objects and I found a stage designer who agreed to help me do this. So this was the first time of changing the viewpoint of artefacts and facts into telling a story, and by doing this, I saw the artefacts in a different way.

With regards to Ali, we were not talking about specific artefacts but talking about the field in a broader way, more open and exploratory. He was working on a project based in Sharjah at the time, where there were these tombs that had been excavated, and where he made his short film (*The Digger*), which was like an artistic documentary, and this is a good example, because we both do documentaries but from different approaches. Whereas we (scientists) would be more into the facts and data, Ali tells the story through the people who are around the artefacts or what the story is that the artefacts might tell. He was focused on question of who the people are who are dealing with heritage and what it is used for and here he observed that in the first place, it was a foreign archaeologist, a European, who had done the excavation and the other things was that the guard protecting the tomb was himself Pakistani, so that raised the question of what was his relationship to this site. And another question was, what are local museums taking out of that story? And that was a different story all together. Ali was looking at what to do with all these interpretations and this was very interesting to me.

As an artist, another one of his ideas (for *Fragments*) was to use artefacts he

bought from the art market, and as a heritage manager, we are not fond of using artefacts that are bought from abroad and auction houses. But this also became an interesting dialogue as well—discussing this practice and their uses, and this widened my perspective on how we could or could not use the secondary market and thinking about their authenticity.

So although this was not the first artistic collaboration, it was one of the most intensive. It was very mutual and collaborative in the best sense and I would not have wanted to miss this experience, which has developed into a new personal contact and friendship.

TLmag: How did the environment of le Centquatre-Paris play into this collaboration?

AC: It was a productive environment. I had a studio during the residency and after that I was offered a one-year residency that helped support me to continue the project.

FL: I was just there in the beginning for the launch of the project and it was my first time there. I found the environment and experience of the Centquatre very inspiring. Very different. And now I love to visit whenever I get the chance when I

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am in Paris. I also saw the final exhibition, "The Materiality Of The Invisible", at the Centquatre. I had no clue of what the artists were going to produce and it was very interesting to see the results.

TLmag: How did you come to be involved in the project?

FL: I had been involved in the project about archaeology and contemporary Europe and I was selected to become a part of the NEARCH project from there. At DAI (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut), we work on a worldwide scale under the foreign office, and our mission is to enter into cooperation and connection with German scientists and those from abroad, all over the world. We have branches in various cities such as Teheran and Istanbul, and we have special access, so we help artists get into these countries, which can be very difficult.

TLmag: When you accepted the invitation, what did you expect to find in this experience and did you find it?

AC: This residency changed the way I work because it gave me the opportunity of going more in-depth into my research, of going into the field and having discussions with archaeologists and practitioners. In addition, I went to a couple of archaeological symposiums and professional meetings and this led to the installation of Fragments to be exhibited in the Egyptian Museum in Turin, which is one of the most important museum collections outside of Egypt. So yes, it was an important experience. ◇

www.alicherri.com
[@ali.cherri](http://www.dainst.org/dai/meldungen)

6 — *Petrified Fragments*, vue de l'installation / Installation view, courtesy of the artist and Centquatre-Paris

7 — *We are the Civilised*, film /Film installation, courtesy of the artist and Centquatre-Paris

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7.

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Stones Turned: Digging into The Past, Digging into The Present

*Shadows move along ladders
under the silence of ordinary things
there is another silence:
it belongs neither to the leaves nor to the
dead*
Etel Adnan, ‘The Manifestations of the Voyage’¹

Contemporary art and archaeology appear to be very different animals—the former predominantly interested in making a dent in the present moment, the latter predominantly concerned with understanding the past. Whereas archaeologists methodically try to record and piece together the remnants of the bygone, artists seem to find *poiesis* in temporal gaps. Put differently, one can be seen as a practice of empirically connecting the dots, the other of willingly scrambling, or even, undoing them. In archaeology it is mainly human presence that is at the centre, and that directs what is being excavated. Contemporary art is, as always, much messier and going on recent production that favours the speculative, human absence and any variations thereof, seems just as important as human presence. It allows for a practice that not only is—to use McGill University Professor Christine Ross’ helpful wording “a pivotal site of temporal experimentation”²—but also one that takes temporal scale into account. Expanding on Ross, who notes that the aesthetics of contemporary art “brings together time and history, contemporary experiences of temporal passing and modern historicity,”³ it “free[s] the three categories of time (past, present, and future) [and] activates the past in the present and allow[s] it to condition the future in that very process.”⁴ Digging literally deeper into temporal layers by folding in archaeology, might to a degree, explain why at this moment in time we see a surge in artists working with and around archaeological subject matter. Given that the current political climate of polarisation, populist nationalism and xenophobia rekindles all kinds of nasty shadows of the past, whether ancient or recent, this is not so strange.

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Add to this growing awareness of decolonizing museological practices results in hard ideological and ethical questions being asked of the discipline of archaeology, and makes a fertile playing ground for artists. Questions include how archaeology is instrumentalized in furthering nationalist, nativist and other narratives. A stark example of this is the 'weaponization' of archaeology in Israel to demonstrate a biblical connection to the land.⁵ This is craftily countered by Palestinian artist Larissa Sansour in her most recent film *In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain* (2015), which I discussed in the third issue of this journal. Perhaps the starker examples of how issues of provenance, ownership, looting and the destruction of heritage and material culture have been mediated and brought to the fore, are the devastating wars in Iraq and Syria.⁶ Here Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz's project *The invisible enemy should not exist* (2007-ongoing)⁷ is an example of calling attention to the artefacts stolen from Baghdad's National Museum of Iraq during the 2003 American invasion. To this day there are still over seven thousand objects missing. In his project Rakowitz has recreated these objects from the packaging of Middle Eastern foodstuffs and Arabic newspapers, echoing how in war these artefacts often become collateral damage, lucrative throwaway items that are disposed of, not only from their (institutional) home, but worse, from their place in history. At the same time Rakowitz has attempted to reconstruct their material presence, refusing that these objects become forever lost to humanity, no matter how inadequate their substitutes.

Another recent example of archaeological controversy, in particular on the level of institutional responsibilities, is the much-debated Humboldt Forum,⁸ Berlin's latest prestige project. Planned to be housed in a rebuilt palace that oozes Prussian imperial grandeur, the Humboldt Forum is to show a vast collection of ethnographic objects, amassed – questionably – during Germany's colonial past. Critics have accused it of ignoring the atrocities committed during Germany's colonial era and the project's celebratory discourse worryingly veering into the dangerous territory of national and nationalist mythmaking.⁹ Indeed, archaeology, mythology, national identity, and nation- and state-making are inextricably intertwined.¹⁰ Testimony to this, and showing the other and extreme side of the coin, is the highly mediated destruction by the Islamic State, of pre-Islamic antiquities and heritage sites in Syria and Iraq, and even bloodier attacks on archaeological museums, such as the 2015 attack on the Bardo National Museum in Tunis, leaving twenty one people dead.¹¹

LAYERING TIME AND SPACE

In their most recent project *Unconformities* (2017), Lebanese artists/filmmakers Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige make slippery the very notions at the heart of archaeological debates: geography, historical scale, chronology, identity and belonging. The backdrop to this project is very much informed by their artistic oeuvre that spans over two decades and is primarily concerned with the politics of visual representation in the aftermath of rupture, not solely, but often related to the Lebanese Civil War (1975-90) during which the artists 'came of age'. Key to their practice is complicating configurations of time and space. *Unconformities* is in this sense a poetic interrogation of the slippage between archaeological and geological temporalities, destruction and (re)construction, as well as human and non-human subjectivities. These are big topics, personalized by focusing on places significant to their own personal and professional biographies. These places are respectively: Beirut (city of their birth, upbringing and a returning referent and site in their artistic production), Paris (their current place of residence and production), and Athens (Hadjithomas is of Greek descent and the city was a refuge for her family during the Lebanese Civil War). In and by themselves Beirut, Paris and Athens as urban, but also mythological centres, produce their own imaginaries.

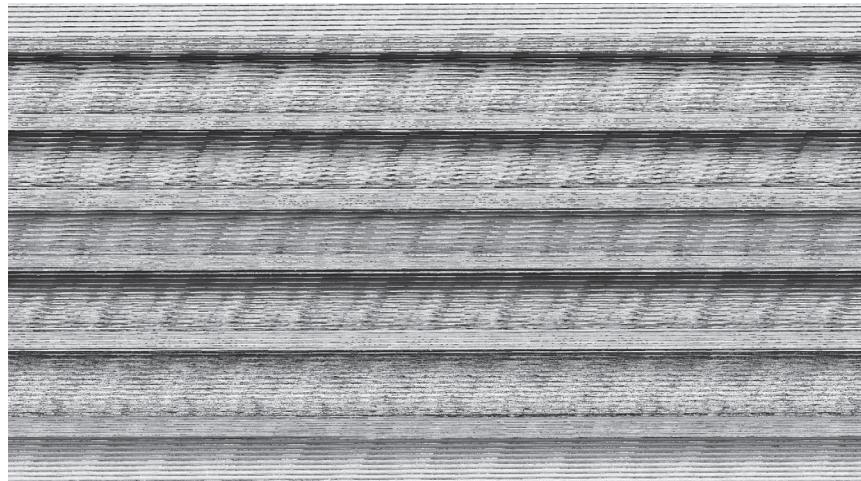
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It was the reality of rapid urban transformation in Beirut that the artists witnessed on a daily basis from the windows of their family home that initially sparked this new body of work. The reconstruction of post-war Beirut, the on-going erasure of architectural—and often by corollary archaeological—heritage sites by real estate developers for new lucrative construction is a bone of contention amongst many Lebanese.¹² To this should also be added unbridled land speculation, gentrification, and social polarisation. *Unconformities*, however, invites us to look at cycles of urban destruction and (re)construction and the effects of disaster—man-made or other—through a wider temporal lens. *Unconformities* is comprised of three components: *Palimpsests* (2017), a film showing the drilling of soil cores at construction sites in Beirut; *Time Capsules* (2017), an installation of suspended core samples from Beirut, Paris and Athens; and *Zig Zag over Time* (2017), a narrative timeline composed of photos, drawings and text. What binds these three elements together is that they each materialize, but also scramble, representations of time and space. As such, the aesthetics of each piece follows the project’s conceptual logic of ruin and creation. While the video *Palimpsests* roots the project in Beirut and serves as its contextual and catalytic framework, the other works trouble and widen conceptions of a fixed geography and temporal scale. The opening sequence of *Palimpsests* shows us the drilling of core samples, a common practice in construction to determine the properties of the soil before building. The technique, though filmed sensuously, seems crude. The cores are displayed in wooden crates, depths are marked manually, while chains and cogwheels rattle into place. This pragmatic mechanical choreography is contrasted with the archaeologist’s fine brushes, mesh nets and dexterity picking through the dirt and categorising whatever is brought to the surface.

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This figure of the archaeologist appears tiny next to the bulldozer mercilessly ploughing away. And yet it is this very tension Hadjithomas and Joreige want to draw to our attention: the archaeologist sifting through the past and the bulldozer destroying the old for the new, they are very much part of the same historical cycle. The latter is emphasized by a stunning aerial shot that pulls away from the construction site and pans out to show us Beirut while it incorporates footage the artists filmed in the aftermath of the 2006 July (Lebanon) War. In this case, the bulldozers dig through the debris of the bombing. It is here through the rubble where the city's many chronologies and ontologies, its cycles of destruction and construction, come together and form a palimpsest. This not only stretches the idea of scale, but also our own position in history. Demolition and disaster, resilience and survival: the earthquakes that destroyed ancient Beirut, the Ottoman period, the French Mandate, the Lebanese Civil War, the 2006 July War—they are all flecks on the same timeline.

VERTICAL TIME

Unconformities was first shown at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2017. But it was at the Acropolis Museum in Athens (2018), the first time ever a work of contemporary art was shown in this archaeological museum, that its potential to disrupt clearly surfaced. The Acropolis Museum, like most museums—especially those dealing with antiquities—is as much an ideological and nationalist project as it is scientific. Timelines and historiographic scripts are carefully crafted to convey a narrative that is distinctly demarcated, linear in its chronology and very much centred on the human experience. *Unconformities* however, which derives its title from the geological term indicating a break in the geological record,¹³ suggests a fluid and mutable approach to time and place. The exhibition as a whole functioned as an unconformity subtly unsettling the premise of the museum that hosted it. This is best demonstrated by the work *Time Capsules*, a mesmerizing installation of soil cores taken from Beirut, Paris and Athens. Suspended vertically in a resin, the history of these three cities is displayed and at a first glance they look remarkably similar: stones and rock. However, closer inspection reveals that to each city there are specificities and nuances in the dug up matter. Whereas two adjacent layers of rock in Paris may span two hundred years, in Beirut, it may only be thirty years. There is a continuous stretching and shrinking of time at play here. In a way, time, even if suspended and captured in a resin, continues to flow. An unintentional side-effect of the chemical preservation process used by the artists is the formation of crystals between the rocks. Like a growth they form a web around the rocks and stones, as if they were alive, enveloping the material manifestations of history with something that cannot quite be controlled or subdued. It becomes a beautiful metaphor for the idea that history is never static, but always in movement.

HORIZONTAL AND FOLDED TIME

Time moves in a linear way in the third component of the *Unconformities* project, *Zig Zag over Time*, timelines that frame the exhibition as a whole. Also here time does not necessarily move at the same pace; its rhythm is disrupted, accelerated, slowed down. Fittingly the artists chose long leporellos (zig zags) to represent their timelines that are composed of photos of the soil cores, and annotated with textual notes and drawings by various scientists with whom the artists collaborated. They include amongst others geologists, natural history museum illustrators, and archaeologists, who all have their own style of drawing and coding soil samples and time, specific to their discipline. This assembly of inter-disciplinary voices shows that the representation, as well as the interpretation, of history is manifold. Indeed, the textual notes that are featured on *Zig Zag over Time* are highly

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subjective and reveal only snippets of what the scientists told the artists, never the full story. They range from the technological such as "[r]oots, stones and concrete from the infrastructure of public networks", the ecological "[m]odern and industrial fill from the gas industry, significant pollution", to the archaeological "[n]atural red pottery clay from Iridanos river, first traces of settlement" and the geological "[d]ark grey tectonic schist, revealing discontinuous unconformities, latencies and ruptures". It is no coincidence that the artists use a representational form that highlights the timeline's ruptures: the leporello's folds are subtle yet visible pauses for the viewer. They indicate that even when chronologies seem linear and horizontal, they are always defined by their gaps.

OBJECT MATERIALS MEET STORY MATERIALS

Beirut-based art critic Ari Amaya-Akkermans observes in his review of Hadjithomas' and Joreige's exhibition in Athens that "most archaeological institutions remain off-limits to artists."¹⁴ It took the Acropolis Museum almost a decade—and much negotiation—after opening to allow for that to happen with *Unconformities*. The questioning of *who*, in the case of archaeological museums, and *what*, in the case of natural science museums, makes history, remains sensitive, if not uncomfortable for many Western institutions. This is because the very premise of their foundation—Eurocentric knowledge—is often challenged. "While not necessarily scientific or quantitative, [art projects like Hadjithomas and Joreige's] qualitatively serve to decolonize archaeological knowledge from its role in the legitimization of European historiography."¹⁵ In other words, Hadjithomas and Joreige counter an exclusive and Eurocentric gaze by foregrounding the malleability of time in order to recuperate notions of possibility and a shared history between Beirut, Paris and Athens.

Lebanese artist Ali Cherri similarly shifts this Western gaze, but he looks specifically at how archaeological museum objects tell us stories of power, identity, history and belonging. Here he is not so much interested in what the object is per se, but more in its materiality and which kind of historical narratives can be woven around it.¹⁶ To Cherri archaeological objects are by default artefacts of ruin and survival: "An archaeological site is where things survive the catastrophe of time."¹⁷ Throughout his art practice he complicates the meeting of animate and inanimate, notions of embodiment, and how we understand the latter's survival and demise. This is exemplified in various ways in his most recent works that all draw from archaeology. In his video *Somniculus* (2017) the artist's own bodily presence in archaeological museums is central, while in another video *Petrified* (2016) the objects in the museum themselves are the embodied agents of ruin and survival. The ghostly reigns in *The Digger* (2015), in which Cherri portrays the Pakistani caretaker of a necropolis in the desert of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates: here is a figure whose forgotten presence amongst the dead not only drives the narrative, but becomes spectral itself.

In all of the above works the museum becomes similar to an archaeological site: a locus where ruin and survival is displayed and where artefacts are disciplined in narrating the tale of their survival over and over again. Still, Cherri is convinced that artefacts in museums can speak to us in different ways and counter what the museum really wants them to say.¹⁸ This is most clear in the video *Petrified*, where Cherri's voice-over asks, "What are we looking at when looking at relics in a museum? We expect everything to speak to us: the beasts, the dead, the stones. And these statues are mute. They have mouths that do not speak. They have eyes that do not see us. Their eyes are petrified. They are not asking to be saved." What is interesting here is that Cherri undoes artefacts from their agency while simultaneously bestowing it upon them. This is further augmented by showing the artefacts in the dark, out of focus, in detailed close-ups, or only lit from one side. They are always

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shown in a fragmented way as if they exist out of time and are robbed from their historical grounding and meaning. In the background we occasionally hear the amplified ticking of a clock. Also here time passes, but how does time really flow then in a museum populated by these objects?

This poetic image is disturbed when Cherri introduces a second channel to the video installation. We see the hands of archaeologists brushing away the earth from human bones at an excavation site. It is very matter-of-fact with highly trained and confident gestures that are almost mechanical. It is difficult to imagine that these bones are the remains of an actual person. Nevertheless, these skeletons form the bridge from the realm of the dead to the living in the film. The following scene is filmed in an aviary where we are greeted by birds tweeting and cooing. If anything must signify life, it must be birds. However, they too in their captivity have become petrified objects of display. A remarkable flattening between the animate and the inanimate, the human and the non-human occurs in Cherri's film. Animal, bone, stone, though they remain silent and out of history in *Petrified*, they do speak to us in a different way.

It is probably no coincidence that Cherri is fascinated by taxidermy. Somehow the presence of the animal is still there. Taxidermy animals are made to look like their referent, perhaps even commemorate them, yet however lifelike, they have a very different ontology. In a way Cherri's *modus operandi* could be viewed as taxidermic, as in moving the metaphorical skin of objects so that they can exist elsewhere, in a realm between the living and the dead, outside of what is assumed, and in a place where everything can be entangled.

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FRAGMENTS OF NEW KIN

In 2017 the Archaeological Unit of Saint Denis, a suburb close to Paris, offered Cherri 300kg of excavated animal bones dating back to the tenth and twelfth centuries which had been examined, classified and catalogued, eventually taking up too much storage space.¹⁹ The Archaeological Unit had exhausted the usage from this stock and as a last resort they were given to the artist. This spurred Cherri's interest in the life cycle of objects and how their value can be demoted over time,²⁰ in this case from a living entity, to an object of science and study, to eventually a thing without use and no value. It is perhaps ironic that the only afterlife for such an object is transforming it into an artwork. Working with discarded stuff, or what Cherri calls “the debris of things,” allows him to forge new material alliances. Kinship is created between objects that take in different positions in the value hierarchy. This is beautifully articulated in his installation *Where do birds go to hide* (2017) in which he draws from the Saint Denis archaeological stock and uses the botanical principle of grafting to meld one demoted object to another: one large tree trunk harbours the small body of a taxidermy bird, on another shards of bones seem to grow like fungus. And then there's a small taxidermy bird lying on its back, with a Roman brick from the archaeological site of Ostia Antica stacked on top of it. Shifting the object's value here means shifting its skin. These works are fragile and speculative, detailed and full of life and mortality. They are open-ended and remind me how anthropologist Anna Tsing speaks of human and non-human interspecies, intersections and “assemblages” as “open-ended gatherings.”²¹ They emit glimmers of hope and possibility in dark times.

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Notes

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² Christine Ross, *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too. The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art*, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012, p. 4

³ *ibid*, p. 5

⁴ *ibid*, p. 6

⁵ The instrumentalisation of archaeology by Israel is a case in point. See for example Natasha Roth, 'Parks and Occupation: Archaeology is the new security', *+972 Mag*, 7 March 2015; <http://972mag.com/parks-and-occupation-archaeology-is-the-new-security/103855/>; accessed 27 December 2015

⁶ Cfr. Craig Barker, 'Fifteen years after looting, thousands of artefacts are still missing from Iraq's national museum', *The Conversation*, 9 April 2018; <http://theconversation.com/fifteen-years-after-looting-thousands-of-artefacts-are-still-missing-from-iraqs-national-museum-93949>; last accessed 10 November 2018, and Frank Gardner, 'Saving Syria's heritage: Archaeologists discover invisible solution', *BBC World News*, 21 March 2017; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-39331342>; last accessed 10 November 2018

⁷ Cfr. <http://www.michaelrakowitz.com/the-invisible-enemy-should-not-exist/>

⁸ Kate Brown, 'The Big Move to Berlin's Humboldt Forum Has Begun, as Pressure for Restitution of Colonial-era Objects Grows', *Artnet News*, 11 June 2018; <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/humboldt-forum-move-1293233>; last accessed 10 November 2018

⁹ For an excellent summary see Graham Bowley, 'A New Museum Opens Old Wounds in Germany', *New York Times*, 12 October 2018; <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/12/arts/design/humboldt-forum-germany.html>; last accessed 10 November 2018

¹⁰ See for an excellent discussion on the complex relations between archaeology, nationalism, colonial and postcolonial geopolitical contexts in the Levant, Chiara Cesari's article 'Postcolonial Ruins. Archaeologies of political violence and IS', *Anthropology Today* vol. 31: 6, December 2015, pp. 22-26

¹¹ Cfr. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bardo_National_Museum_attack; last accessed 10 November 2018

¹² Perhaps most debated is the reconstruction of Downtown Beirut by former Prime Minister Rafiq Harir's company Solidere. See for good discussions on the relation between war, post-war reconstruction, loss of architectural and archaeological artifacts and real estate development; <https://en.qantara.de/content/lebanons-architectural-heritage-a-race-against-time> and <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/developers-threaten-beirut-s-architectural-heritage-1.451322> and https://www.icomos.org/risk/world_report2000/leban_2000.htm; last accessed 13 November 2018

¹³ Cfr. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconformity>; last accessed 13 November 2018

¹⁴ Ari Amaya-Akkermans, 'How Archaeology has fuelled Successful Art Experiments', *Hyperallergic*, 25 May 2018; <https://hyperallergic.com/444344/how-archaeology-has-fueled-successful-art-experiments/>; last accessed 11 September 2018

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Skype interview with the artist, 13 September 2018

¹⁷ Jim Quilty, 'The art of ruins falling into ruin', *The Daily Star*, 22 August 2015; https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/f814a2_853c1d0be1f34f109c165d2ae7241900.pdf; last accessed 3 December 2018

¹⁸ Skype interview with the artist, 13 September 2018

¹⁹ Cfr. brochure of Ali Cherri's solo exhibition *Dénaturé* at Gallerie Imane Farès, 12 October 2017–16 February 2018

²⁰ Skype interview with the artist, 13 September 2018. Cherri refers to Jane Bennett's notion of demoted objects, in which she defines demotion as "the power of humans to turn nonhuman things into useful, ranked objects."

²¹ Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015

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“Moyen-Orient : ces
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Numéro, August 31, 2018

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Art

OASIS ARTISTIQUES

Chaque année, la foire Art Dubai est l'occasion d'une plongée revigorante au cœur de la scène artistique du Moyen-Orient et de l'Afrique du Nord. Visite guidée, entre légendes encore méconnues en Occident et nouvelles générations.

Par Thibaut Wychowanok

On le sait bien, Dubai est une source inépuisable de mystères. Et pas sûr que la foire d'art qui s'y tient chaque année ne lève un quelconque voile. L'événement qui réunit quelque 105 galeries issues de 48 pays a réussi à s'imposer comme une plateforme artistique incontournable du Moyen-Orient. Une aura grandissante qui n'est pas sans lien avec la proximité du Louvre-Abu Dhabi et de l'excellente Fondation Sharjah... Rien de mystérieux jusqu'à là. Pourtant, Art Dubai a aussi ses énigmes. Et la présence, dans la section moderne de la foire, des encres sur papier d'Hamed Abdalla n'est pas la moindre. Par quel mystère ses dessins à la sexualité vibrante sont-ils tolérés dans un émirat ? La galerie Mark Hachem (Beyrouth/Paris/New York) ne se prive pas, en effet, d'offrir un vaste panel des plaisirs de la chair à travers

plusieurs dizaines de dessins de l'Égyptien. Des corps représentés par de voluptueuses traces abstraites s'enfilent les uns les autres, par derrière ou par devant, aucun orifice ne boudant son orgasme. Rien de pornographique. La délicatesse des couleurs et l'élégance des mouvements élèvent ces échanges corporels extatiques vers des hauteurs spirituelles. Une sublime communion des âmes. Ces œuvres, créées en 1961, portent le plus beau des noms : *Le monde qui crée*. Né en 1917 au Caire, Hamed Abdalla s'est éteint en 1985 à Paris. Ce grand défenseur de la culture arabe, engagé politiquement jusqu'à l'exil, transformait avec génie les lettres arabes pour en faire des formes magnifiques, des êtres à part entière. Plusieurs de ces chefs-d'œuvre, qu'on rapproche de Picasso ou du Greco, étaient aussi visibles sur la foire.

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A Land Without a People (2018),
de Basma Alsharif.
Image extraite d'une série de
dix photographies. Impression
jet d'encre à partir de scans
de négatifs couleur de 120 mm,
60,5 x 60,5 cm (chacun).
Œuvre unique.

Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Imane Farès

Imane Farès

Wychowanok Thibaut,
“Moyen-Orient : ces
artistes qui bousculent la
scène artistique”,
Numéro, August 31, 2018

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Courtesy of Ateliers et Galerie mma Fédéric



Wychowanok Thibaut,
 "Moyen-Orient : ces
 artistes qui bousculent la
 scène artistique",
 Numéro, August 31, 2018

Art – Art Dubai



Détail de l'ensemble
 de 30 pièces *The World That
 Creates* (1961) d'Hamed Abdalla.
 Encre sur papier.

Le corps, il en était encore question sur le très beau stand de la galerie de Téhéran Dastan's Basement avec quelques pièces de Fereydoun Ave, le parrain de l'art contemporain iranien. L'artiste, né en 1945, a réalisé tout un corpus d'œuvres autour de Rostam, un lutteur préislamique dont l'épopée fut décrite par le poète Ferdowsi. Mais c'est bien à travers les traits d'un combattant contemporain que le héros mythique apparaît. Une vidéo hallucinée, à la limite du psychédélique, le montre aux prises avec son adversaire. Une belle allégorie, sensuelle et charnelle, des combats politiques. Une belle démonstration que le corps, plus que jamais, est l'enjeu politique majeur de notre époque.

Le corps et le politique, toujours, avec le lauréat du prix Abraaj remis lors de la dernière édition d'Art Dubai. Lawrence Abu Hamdan est né en Jordanie en 1985 et vit aujourd'hui entre Beyrouth et Berlin. Il est sans conteste l'un des artistes les plus passionnants, et pertinents, de sa génération. Le corps, chez lui, s'incarne

dans la voix et le son dont il a fait ses sujets de prédilection. Représenté à Paris par la galerie Mor Charpentier, il y présentait récemment sa série *Disputed Utterance*. Une "disputed utterance" forme le moment dans un procès où la culpabilité d'un prévenu est suspendue à la manière d'interpréter une phrase ou un mot énoncé par un témoin. Lawrence Abu Hamdan en offre plusieurs exemples à l'ironie cinglante. Comme l'histoire de ce médecin américain qui aurait dit à un drogué, de manière totalement irresponsable, qu'il "pouvait s'injecter ces choses" ["you can"]. Or, comme le démontrera l'enquête, le médecin parlait l'anglais avec un accent grec qui, à l'oral, effaçait la négatifé "vous ne pouvez pas" ["you can't"]. Chacune de ces anecdotes dignes d'un roman de Jonathan Franzen se voit accompagnée de dessins au charbon et de photographies qui reproduisent le processus de la palatographie. Une technique qui permet d'identifier quelle partie de la bouche est utilisée selon les différents sons émis. Ou quand le corps, par la bouche et la parole,

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Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Imane Farès

Wychowanok Thibaut,
 "Moyen-Orient : ces
 artistes qui bousculent la
 scène artistique",
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Art – Art Dubai



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devient une scène de crime. Avec Abu Hamdan, la voix se dévoile comme un matériau à haute teneur politique et sociale, puissance capable d'influer sur le réel (la culpabilité d'un homme) tout comme de révéler la personne que l'on est (une origine géographique ou sociale).

Lawrence Abu Hamdan n'est pas le seul trésor d'Art Dubai à trouver un écho en France. Dignement représenté sur la foire et au prix Abraaj (deux de ses artistes y concourraient), la galerie Imane Farès est installée rue Mazarine, à Paris. Depuis 2010, Imane Farès défend avec véhémence et goût des artistes issus du Moyen-Orient et du continent africain. Et pas des moindres. Ali Cherri, par exemple, sélectionné pour le prix Abraaj. Depuis plusieurs années, l'artiste d'origine libanaise se concentre sur la place de l'objet archéologique dans la construction de récits historiques. Des objets archéologiques, vases ou sculptures, qu'Ali Cherri achète notamment en maisons de vente, puis recompose et rassemble. Geste paradoxal qui désacralise l'objet ancien et le décontextualise pour en

questionner la valeur. Pourquoi valorise-t-on tel objet ? Que dit cette valorisation de l'objet archéologique, d'une époque ancienne, sur notre époque ? À quelle construction d'une histoire nationale participe-t-il ? Comme toujours chez Ali Cherri, le contexte passé se confronte au contexte présent pour mieux le révéler. Autre très bonne artiste de la galerie Imane Farès, également sélectionnée pour le prix Abraaj, Basma Alsharif présentait sur le stand de Dubai sa série de dix photographies *A Land Without a People*. L'artiste d'origine palestinienne fait bien sûr référence à la célèbre formule associée au mouvement sioniste : "Une terre sans peuple pour un peuple sans terre." Mais ici, la terre vide (le "empty" inscrit sur la photographie) n'est autre que la nature californienne. Une terre du Grand Ouest conquise par les colons américains... Une terre hollywoodienne, creusé d'une colonisation mondiale des esprits. De la Californie à la Palestine en passant par Dubai, le désert est décidément une terre fertile pour les artistes.

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Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Imane Farès

Détail de *Disputed Utterance*,
 (2018) de Lawrence Abu
 Hamdan. Impression numérique.

La prochaine foire Art Dubai se
 tiendra du 20 au 23 mars 2019.

Perbal Ingrid,
 "Les mémoires",
 Qantara, n°106, January
 2018, p. 22-23

arts

Ali Cherri,
The Three Humors, 2017.
 Deux poporos précolombiens – Alto Magdalena, Colombie, vase anthropomorphe précolombien – Chancay, Pérou, ossements animaux, X^e-XII^e siècles.
 Œuvre unique.
 COURTESY DE L'ARTISTE ET GALERIE IMANE FARÈS



Les mémoires

L'artiste libanais poursuit son exploration des problématiques archéologiques et de la construction des récits historiques dont sont porteurs les objets, de préférence peu nobles, issus de fouilles. Des « objets rétrogradés », devenus inutiles et que la recherche comme les musées mettent au rebut car sans valeur scientifique ou esthétique. Ici, il reprend ces artefacts en leur redonnant une forme, et par conséquent une place sur les cimaises et une existence. Un nouveau regard

se pose alors sur ces objets recréés. Il présente par ailleurs des lithographies et une grande toile composée de multiples collages qui occupent deux pans de mur de la galerie, dont les motifs bleus sont empruntés à des herbiers du XIX^e siècle, accompagnée d'un tronc d'arbre massif portant dans une cavité un oiseau fragile.

Ali Cherri, Dénaturé
 Galerie Imane Farès,
 41, rue Mazarine, 75006 Paris
imanefares.com
Jusqu'au 16 février

Les cavaliers urbains

Mohamed Bourouissa questionne la place de l'individu dans la société, à travers des projets sur des chômeurs ou des prisonniers. Il en explore aussi les marges et notamment la banlieue avec ses photographies de la série *Périphéries* (2005-2009), qui ont attiré l'attention sur l'artiste. Il bénéficie aujourd'hui de sa première exposition institutionnelle au musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris. Celle-ci prend pour point de départ le film *Horse Day*, réalisé par l'artiste en 2014-2015 à Philadelphie, dans le quartier déshérité de Strawberry Mansion. Durant les huit mois d'une résidence, il y a fréquenté le club hippique « Fletcher Street », un club de cow-boys noirs. Il y interroge la place de ces cow-boys, icônes traditionnelles de l'Amérique blanche conquérante.

Quatre-vingt-cinq œuvres, dont des dessins, des photographies et des sculptures, accompagneront ce projet américain.
Mohamed Bourouissa, Urban Riders
 Musée d'Art moderne, 11 avenue du Président-Wilson, 75116 Paris
<http://www.mam.paris.fr/>
Jusqu'au 22 avril

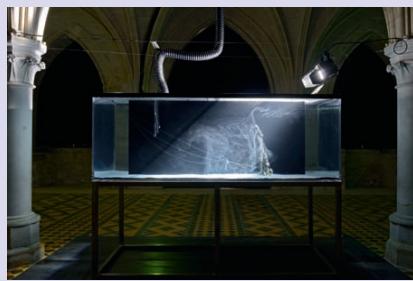
Les échos d'un lieu

L'artiste d'origine marocaine s'est fait connaître avec ses bêchers et ses aquariums devant lesquels on assistait à de surprenants ballets. Au cœur de processus chimiques conçus par l'artiste, le mélange de matériaux interagissant ensemble produisait des formes et des couleurs étonnantes. Pour cette invitation à l'abbaye de Maubuisson, Hicham Berrada présente trois nouvelles œuvres qui portent une grande attention à la lumière et à la

brèves arts

Hicham Berrada, Masse et Marty, installation / Aquarium, eau, sodium, courant électrique, bronze, projecteur HMI, 2017. Photo Catherine Brossais. Production abbaye de Maubuisson, conseil départemental du Val-d'Oise.

© ADAGP, HICHAM BERRADA,
 COURTESY DE L'ARTISTE ET DES
 GALERIES : KAMEI MENOUR, PARIS /
 LONDRES ; WENTRUP, BERLIN ET
 CULTURESINTERFACE, CASABLANCA



par Ingrid Perbal

Découvrir le monde touareg

Le musée des Confluences, à Lyon, présente une exposition sur les Touaregs, qui souhaite déconstruire les clichés entourant ce peuple nomade. La présentation se déploie en trois volets dont le premier vise à détricoter l'*« image fantasmatée »* qui s'est fabriquée à partir de la conquête coloniale. Une perception positive d'une société touarègue qui ferait preuve d'une certaine modération religieuse et où la femme serait plus libre. Le deuxième volet se place sous l'angle de l'art et de l'artisanat touaregs pour montrer une société en bouleversement. Tous les arts sont convoqués afin d'évoquer comment sont assimilées les transformations actuelles de la société et comment de nouvelles esthétiques participent à une autre manière de « représenter le monde ». Le dernier volet

met en relief le rôle des Touaregs dans la réappropriation de leur identité car *« grâce à une identité culturelle forte, les Touaregs ont pu déployer des stratégies d'adaptation et de résistance »*. Les 280 objets exposés sont pour beaucoup issus des collections du musée des Confluences, qui a bénéficié, en 2005, d'une donation de 453 bijoux provenant principalement du Niger.

Touaregs
 Musée des Confluences
 86 quai Perrache, 69002 Lyon
museedesconfluences.fr
Jusqu'au 4 novembre

nature, comme l'installation de la salle du parloir, qui reconstruit *« un biotope figé et stérile [...] , interprétation littérale et technologique du paradis décrit dans différents livres sacrés »*. Dans la salle des religieuses, l'artiste a mis en place un dispositif visant à capturer les variations lumineuses que l'on ne peut pas suivre à travers les vitraux de l'abbaye. Dans la salle du chapitre est présentée une électrolyse : deux sculptures de bronze s'altèrent durant les six mois de l'exposition là où, dans la nature, elles se dégraderaient en près de 204 ans, soit 74 803 jours.

Hicham Berrada, 74 803 jours
 Abbaye de Maubuisson,
 avenue Richard-de-Tour,
 95310 Saint-Ouen-l'Aumône
<https://www.facebook.com/maubuisson>
Jusqu'au 22 avril

CULTURE

Exposition

Images d'un temps passé 130y6

Dénaturé

À partir de 2013, le travail d'Ali Cherri s'est orienté sur l'objet archéologique, avec sa série Archéologie qui abordait la cartographie et la situation géopolitique du Proche-Orient. En 2016, il s'est interrogé, avec la série Egyptian Scale, sur la vision de l'homme occidental au sujet des sites archéologiques. La plupart du temps, en effet, l'autochtone n'apparaît dans le viseur de l'appareil photographique que pour donner la mesure des ruines d'un passé. Puis, plus récemment, Ali Cherri a ciblé l'État islamique qui n'a cessé de violenter et de soustraire de ses lieux d'origine des objets pour les vendre au marché noir. Peu après, une bourse de la Sharjah Art Foundation, en partenariat avec l'Inrap et l'Institut d'archéologie allemande, lui a permis d'améliorer ses recherches.

En 2016, il a montré son installation *Fragment* au Cape de Bordeaux, proposant un face-à-face avec un amoncellement d'objets archéologiques qu'Ali Cherri a acquis tout au long d'une année. Il n'y avait aucune indication de provenance ou de date, des objets bruts qui nous interrogeaient, nous interrogeaient hors de leur contexte. Ce questionnement, Ali Cherri l'a poursuivi avec une vidéo, présentée au musée du Jeu de Paume, où nous le voyons arpenter différents musées parisiens.

Aujourd'hui, la galerie Imane Farès nous propose sa nouvelle exposition Dénaturé. Ali Cherri conçoit le site archéologique comme un espace où les objets anciens et les structures provenant de différents lieux et époques sont enfin libérés. Les objets anciens, restaurés ou quasiment intacts, s'inscrivent culturellement avec le peuple qui les a fabriqué. De nos jours, ils atteignent quelquefois des prix astronomiques quand ils sont mis en vente ou ils prennent place dans les collections des musées. Quand aux objets endommagés, ils sont restaurés, recomposés, traités avec un soin particulier pour leur redonner une vie.

Images birmanes

Nous pouvons voir, au musée Guimet, une centaine de photographies exceptionnelles de la Birmanie datant de la deuxième moitié du XIX^e siècle. C'est un ensemble qui n'a jamais été exposé. Ces photographies de la Birmanie de la période coloniale britannique nous montrent des monuments, des scènes de la vie quotidienne et de rares témoignages de l'aristocratie. Elles nous montrent, par exemple, que les femmes birmanes étaient très élégantes et la diversité des ethnies de ce pays.

Ces photographies forment un récit aux multiples visages et paysages inattendus. Tout un monde nous est offert, entre mutation et permanence, entre diversité et unité. À côté des photographies de James Jackson (actif en Birmanie de 1871 à 1884), l'un des principaux photographes de ce fonds, il y a l'album de Felice Beato acquis en 2015 ainsi que des épreuves de Philip Adolph Klier, photographe allemand installé à Rangoun dans les années 1870.

Didier Du Blé

14 - Petites Affiches - 7 novembre 2017 - n° 222

Gleyze Valentin,
 "Ali Cherri : somniculus",
 Critique d'art [online], May
 2017,
<http://critiquedart.revues.org/25539>

Ali Cherri : somniculus

Ali Cherri : somniculus

Ali Cherri : somniculus

Valentin Gleyze

- ¹ Initiée il y a maintenant dix ans par Marta Gili à son arrivée à la tête du Jeu de Paume, la programmation Satellite est chaque année rythmée par la proposition, en quatre épisodes qui font cycle, d'un(e) commissaire associé(e). Osei Bonsu a invité Ali Cherri dans ce contexte, pour le premier chapitre de son initiative intitulée « L'économie du vivant ». L'accrochage brille par sa concision, avec une photographie grand format de l'artiste sommeillant dans la Galerie d'anatomie comparée du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle (reproduite en quatrième de couverture) et une vidéo, *Somniculus* (couleur, son, 14 minutes), qui donne son titre à l'exposition. Le catalogue est tout aussi sobre.
- ² Dans son court texte introductif, Osei Bonsu revient en quelques saillies descriptives sur le projet et avance une piste privilégiée de lecture (« La mort des choses vivantes », p. 11-12). Dans la vidéo *Somniculus*, on observe l'artiste déambuler de nuit, lampe à la main, le long de différentes galeries de musées, en montage alterné avec des vues rapprochées d'objets archéologiques et ethnographiques anthropomorphes. A l'image du titre de la pièce, du latin valent pour « sommeil léger », les gestes lents effectués sont à rapprocher de la situation du sujet en expérience de sommeil paradoxal. Cet état modifié de conscience – à la fois métaphore et paradigme – semble être la substance du discours tenu par le commissaire et l'artiste. Le sommeil d'Ali Cherri est en cela comparable à celui des objets visés, car il est affaire de surface. Vivants – au moins poétiquement –, les objets muséaux le sont dans la mesure où leur généalogie (et partant, leur constitution historique en tant qu'objet) serait installée en eux dans une forme discrète d'attente. A rebours d'un sentiment d'inertie, dans cette disposition encouragée par l'artiste, il appartiendrait au regard attentif d'interroger les objets sur les technologies de discours (coloniales, spéciistes) qui les fondent en tant que lieux de connaissance, et qui, par extension, produisent l'institution muséale.
- ³ La contribution de Fabien Danesi, dans son format, fonctionne davantage de manière oblique qu'elle n'explicite de front le propos de l'exposition (« Les artefacts inquiets », p. 17-49). Poursuivant cette forme politique d'ouverture des potentialités de la narration, appelée explicitement par l'artiste dans son texte qui clôt le volume (« Sommeil léger »),

p. 51-), l'auteur choisit de juxtaposer d'une page sur l'autre fragments écrits et photographies. On peut être sensible aux différents niveaux de citations irriguant le texte, construit à partir d'un tissu serré de références théoriques et d'images empruntées. On remarque, de plus, que l'auteur insère la présente vidéo dans le souvenir non hiérarchisé de précédents travaux de l'artiste, aux ambitions connexes. Il ne nous échappe pas ce que cette modélisation non linéaire doit entre autres aux fragments de *Sur le concept d'histoire* (1940) de Walter Benjamin, d'ailleurs cités à l'appui (p. 25). Le propos séduit par l'élégance de sa machinerie théorique, et y gagne encore en qualité d'évocation.



Ali Cherri, *Somniculus*, 2017, film set photography. Courtesy: the artist. Co-production: Jeu de Paume Paris, Fondation Nationale des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques and Capc-musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux.

Ali Cherri

[Jeu de Paume](#)

14 February – 28 May 2017

Of the three exhibitions currently running at Jeu de Paume, Ali Cherri's short film on show on the lower-ground floor is perhaps the most intriguing. *Somniculus* (Latin for light sleep) sees Lebanon-born artist Cherri continue his long-running engagement with the politics of archaeology and anthropology. The film alternates between close-ups of Cherri asleep in a pristine white bed, and footage of his night-time wonderings around some of Paris' best-known museums.

The eye is a central motif throughout. While asleep, Cherri's own eyes are lightly closed and twitching. In the museums, he shines his flashlight into the eyes of sundry statues and totems taken from their original contexts and displayed in these great museums. The glass eyes of a stuffed bear reflect the light back into the camera. Cherri deftly plays with the boundaries between private and public and questions the Enlightenment notion underpinning many museums, that to see is inevitably to know.



Wall Street International

ART

ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN ART CULTURE ÉCONOMIE & POLITIQUE MODE GASTRONOMIE SPECTACLES SCIENCE

Ali Cherri

14 févr. — 28 mai 2017 au Jeu de Paume à Paris, France



Ali Cherri. Courtesy of Jeu de Paume

6 AVR. 2017

Par sa pratique, Ali Cherri tient la chronique des tâches quotidiennes de l'homme, évoquant une vision poétique de la conservation, du patrimoine, du travail et de la présentation in fine des découvertes archéologiques dans les musées de Paris.

Dans le cadre de la programmation Satellite 10, le Jeu de Paume et le CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux ont commandé à Ali Cherri une nouvelle œuvre vidéo intitulée *Somniculus*. Le projet d'Ali Cherri s'inscrit dans un travail entamé depuis deux ans sur la place qu'occupe l'objet archéologique dans la construction des récits nationaux. En mettant en parallèle des ossements humains et d'animaux, des sculptures antiques et des objets de culte, Ali Cherri cherche à penser le musée non pas comme un conservatoire d'objets, mais comme un espace de représentation où les concepts sont associés à des objets. Au delà d'un rôle pédagogique, le musée concrétise l'écart qui sépare les objets de leur nom. Le film présente des pièces des collections du musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, du musée du Louvre, du musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac et du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle.

"Ali Cherri",
Wall Street Journal, April
6, 2017

Filmé dans les galeries désertes de divers musées parisiens, Somniculus (du mot latin signifiant « sommeil léger »), d'Ali Cherri, exprime la tension entre la vie des objets morts et le monde vivant qui les entoure. Les pièces exposées dans les musées d'ethnographie, d'archéologie et de sciences naturelles sont toutes présentées dans leur contexte culturel comme autant de survivances de l'intérêt manifesté par l'homme. Préservé et exposé comme élément d'historiographie, chaque objet est représentatif d'un lieu ou d'une époque, chaque pièce continue à vivre en tant que réceptacle de sa propre histoire. Que se passerait-il si nous sortions ces objets du contexte de signification contrôlée que nous avons construit autour d'eux ? Leur valeur idéologique en deviendrait-elle moins sensible ?

En conséquence des différentes phases qui ont jalonné le cours des XVIIIe et XIXe siècles – Lumières, impérialisme, expansion coloniale –, les musées parisiens comptent parmi les institutions les plus encyclopédiques du monde. La trajectoire du musée moderne, qui mène du cabinet de curiosités à la structure néolibérale d'aujourd'hui en passant par le projet nationaliste et l'institution coloniale, reflète les idéologies changeantes de notre civilisation. Somniculus propose au spectateur une succession de vitrines dans lesquelles les objets du musée s'affranchissent entièrement de ces régimes idéologiques. Nous percevons un lien de type prémoderne entre ces objets et nous-mêmes, dans lequel les objets ont une autonomie et une autorité qui leur sont propres.

Bien que l'ère moderne ait instauré un partage entre vivant et non-vivant, humain et non-humain, nature et culture, la visée de la pratique muséale est de faire revivre les objets du passé en réactivant des récits historiques. Les objets discontinus que donne à voir Somniculus – corps momifiés des anciens Égyptiens, animaux sauvages naturalisés, vestiges provenant de cultures non européennes – n'ont certes rien de vivant, mais ils continuent à nous parler et à nous hanter, comme s'ils voulaient transcender leur existence enclose. Ces objets ne témoignent plus d'un univers de représentation cohérent, régi par l'ordre et la classification. Ils constituent l'amorce d'une autre fiction.

Si le musée moderne semble être un espace davantage dévolu à l'objet qu'au sujet, reste que le corps humain est un élément essentiel de la construction du monde tel que nous le connaissons. Alors que l'évolution de l'homme se définit volontiers par les progrès accomplis dans des disciplines telles que l'anthropologie et l'anatomie, notre rapport aux objets exposés dans les musées est souvent de détachement passif. Ali Cherri nous rappelle que regarder n'est pas un acte politique de mise en doute de la réalité visible, mais une façon d'interroger l'origine même du regard. La caméra s'attarde sur des objets éclairés par une lampe torche ; leurs yeux brillent en réponse à notre regard, tandis que d'autres objets sont entièrement dépourvus de la faculté de voir – les regarder, c'est comme sonder un abîme ou un trou noir. Est-ce l'absence de vue ou d'yeux qui les empêche de voir ?

L'apparente nécessité qui nous contraint à voir, à ouvrir et à fermer les yeux fait signe au caractère inéluctable du sommeil et à l'ombre dont il est inséparable : la mort. Levant le voile sur ces espaces de perpétuelle signification au sein de la culture occidentale, Somniculus aiguise notre conscience de ce que voir et regarder veulent dire dans un musée. Nous comprenons, devant le spectacle d'un homme endormi dans une galerie déserte, qu'il est, lui aussi, le représentant d'une culture, d'une époque et d'un lieu. Ces fragments à travers lesquels se lit la perte, la destruction et la violence sont autant de symboles du passé des civilisations. Conformément aux cultures qu'ils représentent, ces objets ne sont ni reclus dans les profondeurs d'un passé lointain, ni immédiatement visibles sous le jour de notre présent : ils sont perpétuellement en attente d'être réveillés. Osei Bonsu

Ali Cherri est vidéaste et artiste visuel.

Né en 1976 à Beyrouth, Ali Cherri obtient une licence de graphisme à l'Université américaine de Beyrouth en 2000 et une maîtrise d'arts du spectacle à DasArts, Amsterdam, en 2005. Récemment, il a participé aux expositions suivantes : « But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise » (Guggenheim, New York, 2016) ; « Rainbow Caravane » (Aichi Triennial, Japon, 2016) ; « A Taxonomy of Fallacies: The Life of Dead Objects » (exposition personnelle, Musée Sursock Beyrouth, 2016) ; « Lest the Two Seas Meet » (Gwangju Museum of Art, Corée, 2016) ; « Matérialité de l'Invisible » (Centquatre, Paris, 2016) ; « The Time is Out of Joint » (Sharjah Art Space, Emirats arabes unis, 2016). .

Ali Cherri vit et travaille à Paris et à Beyrouth. Il est représenté par la Galerie Imane Farès, Paris.

"Ali Cherri",
Wall Street Journal, April
6, 2017



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ART

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Ali Cherri

14 Feb – 28 May 2017 at Jeu de Paume in Paris, France



Ali Cherri. Courtesy of Jeu de Paume

6 APR 2017

Ali Cherri is a video and visual artist. His current project looks at the place of the archaeological object in the construction of historical narratives. In recent years, he has unearthed systems of archaeological preservation, exploring the history of ruins and cartography in the context of the Middle East and North Africa's pre- and post-colonial histories.

Filmed inside a series of empty museum galleries across Paris, Ali Cherri's *Somniculus* (the Latin word for "light sleep") articulates the tension between the lives of dead objects and the living world that surrounds them. Artefacts from museums of ethnography, archaeology and natural sciences are all presented in their existing cultural context as the surviving objects of human interest. Preserved inside this structure of historiographic display, each object is representative of a place or a time and each artefact lives on as a container of its own history. What if we suspended these objects outside this constructed framework of controlled meaning? Would their ideological value become any less tangible?

"Ali Cherri",
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As a result of periods of Enlightenment, imperialism and colonial expansion over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, museums in Paris became some of the world's most encyclopaedic institutions. The trajectory of the modern museum, from the cabinet of curiosities to a nationalist project to the colonial institution, and on to the neoliberal structure of the present day, reflects the shifting ideologies of our civilization. In *Somniculus*, the viewer is presented with a series of windows through which the objects in the museum escape these ideological regimes altogether. We see how these objects might relate to us in a pre-modern sense, as objects endowed with their own autonomy and agency.

Although the modern era has given rise to a divide between the living and the non-living, human and nonhuman, culture and nature, the project of existing museum practice seeks to bring objects of the past to life by reactivating historical narratives. Forming a discontinuity, the mummified bodies from ancient Egypt, taxidermy wildlife and fragments of non-European cultures found in *Somniculus* seem less than alive, yet they speak to us and haunt us still, as if to transcend their contained existence. The objects no longer represent a coherent representational universe, defined by ordering and classification, but rather the beginning of another fiction.

Though it would seem that the modern museum is a space of the object rather than the subject, the human body has played an integral role in the construction of our world as we know it. While the evolution of man is often defined by anthropological and anatomical developments in science, our physical relationship to objects in museums is often one of passive detachment. We are reminded that the idea of looking is not a political act of questioning the reality before us, but a way of probing the origin of the gaze itself. A camera lingers over torch-lit objects whose eyes shine back at us, while other objects lack the ability to see altogether — their view is that of an abyss or a black hole. Is it the lack of sight that prevents them from seeing, or the absence of eyes?

The apparent necessity of seeing, the act of closing and opening the eyes, recalls the inevitability of sleep and its inescapable shadow: death. Shining a light on these spaces of perpetual significance within Western culture, *Somniculus* brings a heightened awareness to the act of looking and seeing in the museum. As an anonymous man sleeps in an otherwise empty gallery we realise that he too is representative of a culture, a time, a place. These fragments of loss, destruction and violence stand in as representations of civilizations' past. In accordance with the cultures they serve to represent, these objects are neither caught inside the deep dark past nor immediately visible in the light of our present day, but forever waiting to be awakened. Osei Bonsu

Ali Cherri was born in 1976 in Beirut. He received a BA in graphic design from the American University in Beirut in 2000, and an MA in performing arts from DasArts, Amsterdam, in 2005. Cherri has participated in the exhibitions *But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise* (Guggenheim New York, 2016), *A Taxonomy of Fallacies: The Life of Dead Objects* (solo exhibition, Sursock Museum, Beirut, 2016), *Matérialité de l'Invisible* (Centquatre, Paris, 2016), *Time out of Joint* (Sharjah Art Space, 2016), *Earth and Ever After* (Saudi Art Council, Jeddah, 2016), *Desires and Necessities* (MACBA, Spain, 2015), *Lest the Two Seas Meet* (Warsaw Museum of Modern Art, Poland, 2015), *Mare Medi Terra* (Es Baluard Museu d'Art Modern i Contemporani de Palma, Spain, 2015) and *Songs of Loss and Songs of Love* (Gwangju Museum of Art, South Korea, 2014). Ali Cherri lives and works in Paris and Beirut.

Vettier Elsa,
“Marta Gili and Osei
Bonsu”,
zérodeux, Spring 2017



Image on top: Ali Cherri, *Somniculus*, 2017. Shooting view. Courtesy Ali Cherri. Coproduced by: Jeu de Paume, Paris; FNAGP; CAPC, Bordeaux.

The Jeu de Paume is celebrating the first ten years of Satellite, a nested programme which is held every year in four chapters, with as many artists and a guest curator. Started by Marta Gili when she arrived to run the institution in 2007, Satellite has been relayed by the Maison Bernard Anthonioz at Nogent-sur-Marne and the CAPC in Bordeaux since 2014. A chance for the programme's instigator to mull over her line of thinking and the issues gravitating around the programme and the institution. Her ideas overlap with those expressed during another conversation with Osei Bonsu, the curator chosen to oversee the tenth edition titled “The Economy of Living Things”. He talks about his vision for a programme that he has just started to organize. Overlaid impressions.

Why did you initiate this programme when you arrived as director of the Jeu de Paume in 2007?

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Marta Gili: I think training curators is really important and I wanted to set up a kind of annual residency, like the one created at the Fundació La Caixa in Barcelona. In the case of the Jeu de Paume, which is, let me remind you, an art centre, I found it relevant to invite curators and artists and give them a chance to produce a work. The main aim of the Satellite programme is that each curator has the possibility of working around a subject, and then with the Jeu de Paume's different departments (exhibitions, management, communication, publishing, visitors ...), as well as with other institutions: the Maison d'Art Bernard Anthonioz at Nogent-sur-Marne (because the Fondation Nationale des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques, which it is the art centre, has been a Satellite partner since its launch) and the CAPC in Bordeaux. So there is both a conceptual and an institutional approach. This programme is also designed so that the teams work in contact with people who contribute different ideas and upset their habits. It's an exercise which has deeply affected us.

Osei Bonsu: We're always tempted, because we're guests at the institution, to disturb their way of doing things, just a tad. There's something about the attitude of French curators which I admire: their ability to upset and re-organize an institution's energy. I'm thinking in particular of Nicolas Bourriaud, who, in his exhibition "Traffic" at the CAPC, really managed to raise the question, through the show, about public participation. Satellite offers you one year to construct four narratives around exhibitions, in particular through books and activities for the audience. If you don't grasp the opportunity to ask the institution questions, you might as well put on any old exhibition.

The programme's format has developed in ten years, taking a different direction about four years ago. By inviting Raimundas Malasauskas and Mathieu Copeland to come up with exhibitions in 2011 and 2013, you seemed to be keen to promote author-curators whose exhibition proposals were often quite rhetorical, and explored the actual issue of the exhibition. Since then the format has narrowed around a simpler arrangement in which video is the imposed medium. Why this change?

M.G.: There are in fact curators who carry out exhibition tests that are almost ontological, like the ones you mention. The goal of their approaches was not solely to produce in order to show, it was to question the display itself. Others, and in particular the latest guest curators, work more with the artists by creating a narrative between them. This doesn't mean that we're attached to one form of curating more than to another. Since 2012, however, curators have only proposed video productions to the artists. This makes it easier to circulate works between the different venues represented by the Maison d'Art Bernard Anthonioz, and the CAPC. What's more, few institutions are focusing on the specific production of this medium.

O.B.: The idea of being a "satellite" curator is to be able to move around and within the institution. The specifications provide for a video element, but I've tried to emphasize, among the artists, the fact that, if they want to extend their vision beyond this medium, this was possible too. In the first Satellite 10 show, whose programme I'm in charge of, Ali Cherri is presenting his new video Somniculus, as well as a light box on the mezzanine of the Jeu de Paume, and a table with fragments of archaeological objects at the CAPC. In a movement akin to his video, these elements form an archaeological experiment around objects and the meaning they take on when they are removed from

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their original context. When artists work with video, they don't really have any place to hide. Someone told me that video is the frontier of contemporary art: it is quite direct and moving, and in many instances rooted in a narrative, even if it is not meant to be immediately readable. The artists in the Satellite programme are invited on these premises. They understand what the medium is and are well acquainted with its history.

The Satellite programme fills the institution's “interstitial areas”: a mezzanine in the stairway leading to the basement, the lobby at times, more recently a screening area... Despite its interest, there's not much about the programme in the media. Why such a discreet programme?

M.G.: I don't think the word “discreet” can be applied to the Satellite programme; the problem is that, on the whole, the production of works by emerging artists is sometimes handled rather discreetly by the media. It's true that the Satellite programme is located in areas that were not dedicated to exhibitions, but I think, in a general way, that contemporary production is not very media-oriented; the media prefer to deal with known and recognized things.

Since 2012, we've been co-producing the programme with the CAPC, which is the very opposite of the Jeu de Paume in terms of space and visibility. I'm truly all the more delighted about this because Maria Ines Rodriguez, the CAPC's director, was the second curator in the Satellite programme, which just shows that curators who've been involved in this programme have really become leading figures in contemporary art.

O.B.: When we talk about exhibition venues, what we often overlook—which is perhaps more important than the area of the Jeu de Paume—is the physical dimension of the city. I hope that when people come to see the Ali Cherri show, they will then take the metro to go to the Kadist and take part in a conversation about contemporary art and archaeology with a community which is not the same as the Jeu de Paume's public. I think it's more important that artists have a sense of their audience rather than the space that is assigned to them. In a culture of biennials, artists don't really have a chance to grasp the ecosystem around the place which will house their work. All the more so because, in my view, there is a particular intellectual history which really belongs to Paris, which must be taken into account.

Echoing the spatial arrangement of the programme, carte blanche is often given to curators and artists who are keen to explore the interstices and gaps in the predominant, and especially European, history. The proposals made by the curators Erin Gleeson and Heidi Ballet espoused the viewpoints of a Fijian scientist, of the Cham ethnic group in Vietnam... A way of experimenting beyond the monographs often devoted to European figures, which have little room for post-colonial issues?

M.G.: One of the reasons why we decided to work with video is that, from a budgetary viewpoint, it enabled us to invite artists living faraway, whom we couldn't pay a lot to travel. I'm convinced that post-colonial history is deeply connected with film narrative. The medium makes it possible to associate several micro-narratives which are dovetailed, and which we didn't think could communicate. And this often makes it possible to make a personal history based on the histories of others. Unless the opposite is the case. This was so with the programming of Erin Gleeson and Heidi Ballet. This idea

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of an exploding frontier has to be re-thought within the institution. We have to get rid of the idea of very expensive transport and insurance. Creation today advocates a freer and more democratic circulation of images.

O.B.: Most European institutions have opened up their programming to several international artists who are now better represented. As a curator born in Ghana, and brought up in England, I'm obviously very involved with the issue of internationalism. And since I've been in Paris, I can see an interesting landscape taking shape with the Jeu de Paume, the Kadist Foundation, the Villa Vassilieff, and Bétonsalon, even while the climate in France is going through the same conservative changes we can see internationally.

Since it was created, Satellite has presented a certain number of projects which have dealt with the issue of invisibility (ghosts with Nguyen Trinh Thi, empty spaces with Tomo Savić-Gecan) and played a lot on orality. Connected with post-colonial issues, is this a programme which, in your view, questions what the image doesn't express?

M.G.: What the image doesn't show, the invisible, is a theme of almost all the shows at the Jeu de Paume, and not just of the Satellite programme. But it's true that much of the contemporary art that interests me and the guest curators is the art that focuses on displacing and bypassing official narratives. The interest of here combining words is not simply to do with expressing what one doesn't see, it's to summon other images which don't exist or which one has been able to see elsewhere, and which we include in our personal narrative. In this age of image circulation, I don't think we can invent new ones, but we can create new (hi)stories thanks to their editing, montage and superposition.

O.B.: For me, holding exhibitions is having the privilege and responsibility to tell certain (hi)stories but above all the present. Giving the present a presence, this seems to me to be the main thread of “The Economy of Living Things” and most of the Satellite programmes.

The space/time division of the Satellite programme also seems to permit experimentation with other forms of narrative, and longer and more fragmented forms on the sidelines of the linear layouts of the monographs that you have encouraged since your arrival at the head of the Jeu de Paume. What does this different relation to time bring? Why is it important?

M.G.: Time is what makes the strength of the programme. What's important for us is to work for a year with a freelance curator on four projects. That person becomes part of the team. The time-frame is in effect fragmented because each Satellite show opens at the same time as our other shows. This is why, at the end of the year, the four publications devised for each project are very important. The collection of books is what remains and why it remains. Again in this attentiveness to creation, the fact of giving carte blanche to young graphic designers makes it possible to work with other areas of creation and keep an editorial trace of these 10 years of Satellite programmes. The project is established in time, and it is not very visible, but it stays there over the years. It's like art education, it's something that is worked on with time.

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O.B.: This year, the idea was really to create links between the shows and institutions, and not think of the artists independently of each other. The four guest artists will be brought together in a group show at the MABA, which, to my knowledge, had not been done before. A symposium will also bring them together at the same time to discuss their activities in a more general way. This is a way of making them the players in a discourse which is rooted in the institution, and not just attached to it. In a way, they must be a form of virus, entering the institution and making an incision in it to look inside.

What will the programme become? Will it take on new directions?

M.G.: We thought a lot about this and we've decided to carry on our approach, because we've concluded that the wealth of the Satellite programme is polyphonic: a residency for a guest curator, production of artists' works, working with emerging graphic designers, lectures, performances, screenings, shared experiences with other institutions... In a word, not being in a state of inertia, prejudice and comfort. I've learnt a great deal in the exchanges with all the people involved in the Satellite programme, because they give us a chance to see ourselves differently. Institutions have got to accept movement as a leitmotif.

Q&A WITH ALI CHERRI

The Abraaj Group Art Prize will celebrate its 10th anniversary at Art Dubai 2018. To mark the occasion, Art Dubai spoke to Ali Cherri, a shortlisted winner for the 2018 edition of the prize, about his work, his thoughts on winning the prize, and what he's most looking forward to this year.



Ali Cherri. Courtesy the Artist

Ali Cherri is a film maker and visual artist living in Beirut and Paris. His recent solo exhibitions include *Somniculus* at Jeu de Paume, Paris and CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux (2017); *Dénaturé* at Galerie Imane Farès (2017); *From Fragment to Whole* at Jönköpings läns museum, Sweden (2017); *Taxonomy of Fallacies* at Sursock Museum, Beirut (2016).

He's the recipient of Harvard University's Robert E. Fulton Fellowship (2016) and Rockefeller Foundation Award (2017).

Q: Congratulations on being shortlisted for this year's Abraaj Group Art Prize. What does this award mean to you and your career?

Being shortlisted for the Abraaj Group Art Prize is an opportunity to engage and exhibit with a great group of fellow artists and friends. I am looking forward to show my new work in Dubai during an exciting art week.

Q: Can you share with us your history with Art Dubai? Has your work been displayed during previous editions of the fair?

I have been showing work at Galerie Imane Farès's booth at Art Dubai for many years now. I have also shown a programme of video works, which are part of The Hatch curated by Maha Maamoun in 2013.

Q: I have been showing work at Galerie Imane Farès's booth at Art Dubai for many years now. I have also shown a programme of video works, which are part of The Hatch curated by Maha Maamoun in 2013.

The moving image has always been central to my work. Since my degree in performing arts where I made my first video *Un Cercle autour du Soleil*, I was looking at the place of the body within the cinematic environment. This tension between an apparatus (the camera) and a subject (the body) is a central question in my creative process.

Q: A common theme amongst your work is archaeology, explored through artefacts and landscapes. How did this particular multidimensional topic develop over time for you?

Being born in Beirut right at the beginning of the civil war, I became aware of the aesthetics and politics behind ruins, whether it's the violent war ruins, or the more picturesque historical ruins. My interest in archaeology is around this idea of what survives in a landscape of catastrophe. I see the excavation site as a place where we unearth objects that have survived the passing of time. I am interested in the whole economy that is developed around these objects; from the moment they are unearthed, till they are put

Q: In your 2016 project *Fragments*, you displayed a number of archaeological items that you came across in European auction houses. Can you tell us about the research and collecting process for this installation?

"Q&A with Ali Cherri",
December 12, 2017

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The installation *Fragments* was assembled over years of visits to auction houses mainly in Europe, looking at the commercial value of historical objects. I have built a collection of archaeological artefacts acquired on the 'legal' market, accompanied by experts' certificates of authenticity and provenance. I see the auction house as a real-time index of fluctuation of desires around these artefacts; the more an object is desired, the higher the price. My gesture is to bring these objects from the market into the museum, to look at the shift in their value system, from a commodity to a museological item. The objects are placed on a light table without labels. The dominant light that surrounds them removes all the shadows, highlighting the erasure of hierarchy. When entering the museum, the artefacts turn into objects without shadows.

Q: Can you describe some of the diverse backgrounds of the interesting items you found and eventually displayed?

One of the items is a Tiwi figure from Tiwi Island off the Northern coast of Australia. The statue is made from dense iron wood and decorated with natural earth pigments and feathers. Being male and female, this figure possibly represent one of the two key ancestral heroes for the Tiwi people, Purrukupali and Bima, who brought the first mortuary ceremonies to the island. This figurative representation of ancestral beings is supposed to give the tangible, physical potency of the spirit.

Another item is an Asmat mask from the Asmat Tribe still living in Irian Jaya, an Indonesian province. The tribe is known for their headhunting practices, but also for woodcarving skills. This mask is used as a substitute skull, where woodcarving is connected to the spirit world and to appease ancestral spirits.

I have also a tau-tau, which is an effigy made of wood by the Toraja ethnic group from the Celebes Islands in Indonesia. The tau-tau figures represent the deceased, and function as a portrait guarding the tombs. They are placed at the entrance to caye tombs either sitting or standing. The Toraja people are considered to have the most complex funeral rituals in the world.

Q: In our postcolonial world, the conversation of returning objects of antiquity to their countries of origin or original context has certainly been discussed and debated. Through *Fragments*, were you perhaps attempting to decolonize these objects and present them in a more natural narrative?

I don't consider the museum, despite the violent histories of many collections, as a rupture in the life of these objects. I am not building a fantasized 'authentic' origin where these artefacts need to return to. The question for me is not about the reversal of an unjust history, or the undoing of violence. Questions of repatriation could slowly slide into nationalist discourse that is more and more dangerous these days. My approach is not in 'undoing', but how to move forward from the museum.

Q: In *Trembling Landscapes* (2015), you examine how major cities in the Middle East have been affected by geological, architectural, and political changes. Through your work, what are some of your conclusions about these changes that have happened since the early 20th century?

I am aware how, in our region, the future is no longer a promise, but a threat for which we are all fully responsible. Today the present seems to surface as a 'worried' present; anxious about the catastrophes of the past that it seeks to overcome, and, the anticipated catastrophes of the future that it seeks to avoid. What I try to capture in this project is the eruption of the uncanny in a natural catastrophe; an event in its most pure form where human subjectivity has little space for intervention. In my film *The Disquiet* that is part of this project, I open with a quote from Bertolt Brecht, announcing how we might perceive the apocalyptic times of our current era. The quote is both disheartening as it is true time and time again: "In the dark times — Will there also be singing? — Yes, there will also be singing — About the dark times." I find this a beautiful telling image.

"Q&A with Ali Cherri",
December 12, 2017

Q: Your film *The Digger* (2015) is UAE-focused, in which there is an emphasis on ruins in the Sharjah desert. Tell us about this unique experience and the almost unheard of Neolithic necropolis that you filmed.

The film is set between Meliha, Jebel al Buhais and Jebel Hafeet on a 5,000-year-old necropolis. I was drawn to this excavation site for its post-apocalyptic landscape. I have to say I have a fascination with the archaeological gesture of excavation. Let's not forget that the uncanny lies in the act of digging up; burying is what we naturally do. Anyone or anything buried in the ground is in the realm of the dead, and to excavate or exhume is a transgressive gesture. I wanted to explore the intense charge of silence, of emptiness, of absence, and to find a cinematic temporality that could bring out the spectres of the place. In this necropolis, the human remains have long since become archaeological artefacts: the film alternates between the highly luminous outside and the inside of a museum where the bones are sorted and laid out for the visitor's eye.

Q: In the film, we come across Sultan Zeib Khan, a Pakistani man who has been protecting the ruins in Sharjah for two decades. Was there something about this arduous act and Khan that left a strong impression on you?

For 20 years, Sultan Zeib Khan has kept watch over the ruined Neolithic necropolis in the Sharjah desert. What is playing out here is the possibility for one man to become part of a landscape that overwhelms him, yet seems to need his help. Sultan is seen under the silhouette of a rock that is about to devour him or as a dwarfed figure, spade in hand walking from the back of the frame, busying himself day to day to prevent the ruin from falling into ruin. The switching between day and night or the soundscape of Sultan's singing suggests that even the greatest solitude can allow itself to be inhabited. Above all, the film underlines the paradox of these empty tombs, where death is compounded by the absence of the relics.

Q: Finally, what are you personally looking forward to at the 2018 edition of Art Dubai?

I am very excited to work with the curator Myriam Ben Salah and to discover Lawrence Abu Hamdan's new commissioned work and the works of the fellow shortlisted artists.

Perbal Ingrid,
 "Ali Cherri, se réapproprier
 le passé",
 Qantara, n°102, January
 2017, p. 22-23

arts



Ali Cherri,
The Disquiet
 (« L'intranquillité »),
 2013, vidéo HD,
 20 minutes.
COURTESY DE L'ARTISTE
 ET DE LA GALERIE IMANE FARÈS

Deux expositions au Jeu de Paume et au CAPC de Bordeaux présentent les derniers travaux de l'artiste vidéaste libanais. Ses œuvres questionnent notamment la construction du discours historique et invitent à repenser l'Histoire.

Pouvez-vous nous parler de votre cursus à l'Université américaine de Beyrouth puis à Amsterdam, et de votre choix de la vidéo comme média?

Je suis né à Beyrouth et j'y ai fait mes études. Il n'y avait pas de département Art à l'université américaine, j'ai donc choisi le design. On y avait beaucoup de liberté et mon projet de diplôme était une performance dans un théâtre. Puis je suis allé à Amsterdam pour faire un master à DasArts, une école de *performing arts*. J'y ai fait mon premier film, *Un cercle autour du soleil*. Dans la manière de construire, de penser les outils avec lesquels je travaille, je me sens plus à l'aise avec la vidéo.

Un cercle autour du soleil (2005) et Untitled (2006) sont marqués par les guerres libanaises. Comment ont-elles impacté votre travail?

J'avais 16-17 ans quand la guerre s'est terminée. La génération d'artistes d'après-guerre, que je suivais, travaillait sur le conflit, l'Histoire, la mémoire. Mais mon expérience personnelle, comme celle de ma génération, est différente. La guerre est pour moi une mémoire d'enfant, mémoire à laquelle on s'attache. Dans *Un*

cercle autour du soleil, je dis que je suis déçu quand la guerre se termine. Un enfant n'a pas envie que les choses changent car c'est perturbant.

Vous puisez alors les images pour vos vidéos dans YouTube.

Les images d'archives, avec leur notoriété, ont une certaine vérité, mais on ne sait pas ce que peuvent raconter les images tirées d'Internet. C'est devenu flagrant au début des soulèvements arabes avec les vidéos postées sur YouTube.

Pipe Dreams met en scène la conversation entre le cosmonaute Mohammad Faris et Hafez al-Assad en 1987. Que dit cette vidéo?

J'utilise les images de l'appel téléphonique transmis en direct sur toutes les télévisions arabes. Mohammad Faris a déserté l'armée syrienne en 2012. À la fin du film, des images de YouTube montrent la statue de Hafez al-Assad en train d'être démontée. Le régime a enlevé les statues pour que les manifestants ne les détruisent pas. Ces deux moments emblématiques racontent beaucoup de choses sur les systèmes totalitaires arabes. Je ne prends pas de position politique.

Ali Cherri, se réapproprier le passé

Je n'annonce pas la fin du régime syrien. Je mets en parallèle deux moments. Ce qui se passe en Syrie est horrible. Ils ont été plus intelligents, plus violents que tous les autres.

En 2010, vous réalisez *My Pain Is Real*, une vidéo très perturbante sur la violence de la guerre.

J'étais à Beyrouth pendant la guerre de l'été 2006. Cela a été horrible de retrouver tous les réflexes qu'on avait pendant la guerre civile et que je pensais avoir oubliés. Ces trente-trois jours de guerre nous ramenaient d'une manière très violente aux quinze années de guerre que je croyais avoir complètement dépassées. Après ce film, j'ai décidé de ne plus produire d'images violentes.

The Disquiet parle des risques sismiques au Liban. Est-ce

un tournant dans votre travail?
 Après la guerre de 2006, je me suis demandé ce que voulait dire le fait de vivre dans un état d'inquiétude constant. Le film s'appelle *The Disquiet*, l'intranquillité. Je voulais parler d'autres formes de catastrophes, les catastrophes naturelles, pour essayer de comprendre s'il y a une essence à la catastrophe. Je me suis dit : « Si je regarde les catastrophes naturelles, j'élimine les questions politiques de la région. »

Les ailes d'oiseau sont très présentes dans ce film. Que représentent-elles?

Elles ne sont pas la métaphore de quelque chose de précis. Elles sont de

Perbal Ingrid,
“Ali Cherri, se réapproprier
le passé”,
Qantara, n°102, January
2017, p. 22-23

expos

« L'économie du vivant ». Programming Satellite 10

Commissaire de l'exposition : Osei Bonsu

CAPC – musée d'Art contemporain de Bordeaux

7, rue Ferrère, 33000 Bordeaux

Du 2 février au 30 avril, www.capc-bordeaux.fr/capc

Ali Cherri : *Somniculus. Programming Satellite 10*

Commissaire de l'exposition : Osei Bonsu

Jeu de Paume – 1, place de la Concorde, 75008 Paris

Du 14 février au 28 mai, www.jeudepaume.org



l'ordre du jaillissement du surnaturel. Comme si on était face à quelque chose que l'on ne comprend plus. On doit lâcher nos outils de compréhension et s'ouvrir à d'autres manières de voir le monde.

Elles évoquent, comme les archives photographiques dont vous vous servez, les travaux d'artistes comme Anselm Kiefer.

Je n'avais pas fait le lien, mais c'est vrai. C'est un artiste que j'aime beaucoup. *Les Ailes du désir*, de Wim Wenders, est une référence qui revient comme l'image de l'ange de l'histoire dont se sert Walter Benjamin quand il parle de destruction. Les oiseaux et les ailes sont un leitmotiv dans mon travail.

Avec *The Digger ou Petrified*, vous explorez notamment la construction d'un récit national à travers l'archéologie. Pouvez-vous nous en dire plus?

The Disquiet posait la question de comment peut-on survivre à une catastrophe et sous quelles formes. Je lisais alors *Survivance des lucioles*¹ de Georges Didi-Huberman. Je ne voulais pas que tout soit sombre. Il faut peut-être chercher des formes de

survivance. Donc, je me suis tourné vers un site archéologique, lieu où déterre des objets qui ont survécu à la catastrophe du temps. Évidemment, surgissent alors beaucoup de questions sur le projet archéologique de la modernité, un projet occidental diffusé dans le monde arabe à travers la colonisation et qui a été récupéré par les régimes totalitaires arabes. Aujourd'hui, avec la destruction des sites, on est arrivés à la perte de l'histoire et à la faillite du projet archéologique de préservation.

Vous vous intéressez en parallèle au statut de l'objet archéologique ?

Je m'intéresse à la place de l'objet dans l'écriture d'une histoire. J'ai divisé ce travail en chapitres. Au début, je me suis intéressé aux sites archéologiques. Dans *The Digger*, j'évoque l'absence de l'objet sur les sites, objet que l'on découvre après dans un musée, dans un dispositif de narration historique. La deuxième partie consiste à regarder la valeur marchande de l'objet. Sur le marché légal, j'achète des choses qui ne coûtent pas cher, donc elles sont fausses à 90 %. Je les rapporte au musée par un autre biais. Ce qui

m'amène à la troisième partie sur laquelle je travaille aujourd'hui.

Pour votre exposition au Jeu de Paume ?

J'ai regardé les objets dans le musée. J'ai filmé au Louvre, au musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, au Muséum d'histoire naturelle, au musée de la Chasse et au musée de l'Homme. L'idée était de regarder les objets dans le musée pour comprendre ce que cette présentation apporte, change ou enlève à ces objets.

Dans *Un cercle autour du soleil*, vous lisez un texte de Mishima.

Dans d'autres vidéos, vous faites référence à Rimbaud ou à Brecht. Quel est votre rapport à la littérature ?

Mon travail et ma pensée viennent d'une lecture. En général, je fais un an de recherches dans les livres. Pour *The Digger*, c'était un an et demi de recherches et, dans le film, il y a une seule phrase de Brecht, au début. Je ne suis pas dans le discours. Je n'interprète pas un discours et je ne mets pas en images un discours existant, mais je l'utilise pour faire autre chose.

Vous travaillez entre Paris et Beyrouth. Vous avez exposé l'été dernier au musée Surock. Quelle est la réception de votre travail au Liban ?

Les questions que je pose ont toujours leur source au Liban. Solidere (Société libanaise pour le développement et la reconstruction, NdlR), qui a rebâti Beyrouth, construit, en partenariat avec le ministère de la Culture, le musée d'Histoire de Beyrouth, où seront présentés les objets archéologiques trouvés lors de la reconstruction durant laquelle cette même société a détruit 90 % du centre-ville. Il est important pour moi de poser ces questions : comment raconter une histoire à travers l'objet ? Qui a le droit de raconter l'histoire ? Quelle histoire va-t-on raconter ? Il faut repenser notre manière de penser le récit historique. ●

Propos recueillis par Ingrid Perbal

Ali Cherri,
The Digger, 2015,
vidéo, 30 min.
COURTESY DE L'ARTISTE
ET DE LA GALERIE IMANE
FARES

¹ Les Éditions de Minuit, coll. « Paradoxe », 2009.

▷ Ali Cherri, *Somniculus*, 2017.
Photographie de tournage.
Courtesy de l'artiste. Coproduction : Jeu de Paume, Paris, Fondation nationale des arts graphiques et plastiques et CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux.

Bordeaux, CAPC

L'ARCHÉOLOGIE EN SUPER 8

Vidéaste et artiste visuel né au Liban, Ali Cherri a tourné sa dernière œuvre vidéo *Somniculus* dans des galeries de musées parisiens en tête à tête avec moult pièces de collection : musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, musée du Louvre, musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Muséum national d'histoire naturelle. Si son travail consiste souvent à mettre à nu les mécanismes de la conservation archéologique, Ali Cherri



met ici en parallèle des ossements humains et d'animaux, des sculptures antiques et des objets de culte. Son intention ? Repenser le musée comme un espace de représentation où les concepts sont associés à des objets et non pas comme un conservatoire d'objets. En filmant les collections muséales mises en valeur protégées, parfois sous verre, comme plongées dans une temporalité

insaisissable, Ali Cherri souligne avec insistance l'écart qui sépare les objets de leur nom ■ **Marie Claudel-Dumet**

Ali Cherri, *Somniculus*, 2 février – 30 avril
CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux,
7 rue Ferrere 33000 Bordeaux
05 56 00 81 50
Mardi jeudi vendredi samedi et dimanche,
11 h – 18 h mercredi 11 h – 20 h

Bouruet-Aubertot
 Véronique,
 "Le monde meurtri d'Ali
 Cherri",
 Connaissance des Arts,
 March 2017, p. 97-98

nouveau talent



- 1976** Naissance d'Ali Cherri (ill. : ©DR) à Beyrouth, Liban.
- 2000** Licence de graphisme à l'Université américaine de Beyrouth.
- 2005** Maîtrise d'arts du spectacle à DasArts, à Amsterdam.
- 2007** Participe au Pavillon libanais à la Biennale de Venise.
- 2012** Participe à l'exposition collective « Mapping Subjectivity », au MoMA de New York.
- 2016** Première exposition personnelle dans un musée, au Sursock Museum de Beyrouth ; exposition collective au CentQuatre, à Paris ; Prix Harvard University-Robert E. Fulton Fellowship in Nonfiction Filmmaking.

Entre vidéos, photographies et installations, l'artiste libanais Ali Cherri brosse une perspective sur l'histoire de son pays et du Moyen-Orient.

Le monde meurtri d'Ali Cherri



Avoir vécu toute son enfance et son adolescence en pleine guerre du Liban a de quoi marquer un individu. C'est le cas d'Ali Cherri, dont travail tourné autour de ce que l'on pourrait résumer par « *une histoire de la violence* ». Depuis le départ, ses performances, où il retient son souffle jusqu'à l'étouffement, ses installations où sont retracées les failles et les secousses sismiques dans la région, ses vidéos où le drapeau national claque au vent, tentent, de manière plus ou moins métaphorique, de sonder une situation géo-politique en crise permanente. La cartographie, telle qu'elle a été dessinée à l'époque coloniale, entre en scène en 2013 avec la série *Archéologie*. Et la vision de l'homme occidental ressurgit dans la série *Egyptian Scale* (2016), où l'autochtone n'apparaît dans le viseur de l'appareil photo que pour donner la mesure des ruines du passé. Tout récemment, Ali Cherri s'est concentré sur l'objet archéologique. Comment celui-ci, aujourd'hui cible de l'État Islamique, n'a cessé d'être violenté et arraché au sol pour être déplacé à des fins d'étude, de conservation ou de marché noir. Une bourse de la Sharjah Art Foundation, en partenariat avec l'Inrap et l'Institut d'archéologie allemande, lui a permis d'affiner ses recherches et valut une résidence au CentQuatre-Paris. Exposée au Capc de Bordeaux, l'installation *Fragment* (2016) propose ainsi un saisissant face-à-face avec une foule d'objets archéologiques que l'artiste a acquis pendant un an. Aucune indication de provenance ou de date. Juste l'objet brut qui nous regarde et nous force à le regarder. Et nous pousse, ainsi décontextualisé, à nous interroger sur le récit auquel nous l'obligeons habituellement à participer. Un questionnement que l'artiste poursuit dans sa nouvelle œuvre vidéo présentée au Jeu de paume, où on le voit arpenter plusieurs musées parisiens.

VÉRONIQUE BOURUET-AUBERTOT

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www.imanefares.com

Bouruet-Aubertot
Véronique,
“Le monde meurtri d’Ali
Cherri”,
Connaissance des Arts,
March 2017, p. 97-98



Page de gauche
Paysages
tremblants
(Beyrouth), 2014,
lithographie
et tampon encre
d’archive,
4 cadres
de 70 x 100 cm.

Ci-contre
Pipe Dreams,
2011, installation
vidéo, 5 min.

À droite
Wildlife, 2014,
photographie
et caisson
lumineux,
200 x 125 cm.

TOUTES LES PHOTOS:
COURTES DE
L’ARTISTE ET GALERIE
IMANE FARÈS.



À VOIR
- « ALI CHERRI », Galerie
nationale du Jeu de paume,
1, place de la Concorde, 75008 Paris,
01 47 03 12 50, www.jeudepaume.org
du 14 février au 28 mai.

RESERVEZ VOTRE BILLET SUR
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- « ALI CHERRI », Capc-musée
d’art contemporain, rue Ferrère,
33000 Bordeaux, 05 56 00 81 50,
www.capc-bordeaux.fr
du 2 février au 30 avril.

À SAVOIR
ALI CHERRI EST REPRÉSENTÉ
par la galerie Imane Farès,
41, rue Mazarine, 75006 Paris,
01 46 33 13 13, imanefares.com

À LIRE
ALI CHERRI. SOMNICULUS,
par Osel Bonet, Fabien Danesi et
Ali Cherri, coédition Jeu de paume /
Capc-musée d’art contemporain
de Bordeaux/FNAGP (64 pp., 14 €).



Fragments,
installation au
musée Sursock
au Liban, 2016,
objets
archéologiques,
oiseau en
taxidermie, dim.
variables.

Baldner Jean-Marie
“Ali Cherri, Somniculus”,
February 22, 2017

Ali Cherri, Somniculus

EXPOSITION AU JEU DE PAUME, PARIS
mercredi 22 février 2017, par Jean-Marie BALDNER



Ali Cherri, Somniculus, 2017, photographie de tournage, courtesy de l'artiste
Filmée dans les galeries désertes de cinq musées parisiens, la nouvelle vidéo d'Ali Cherri, Somniculus ("Sommeil léger") questionne la tension entre les objets, leur contexte de représentation et notre régime d'historicité.

Veillé par l'écorché, à l'entrée de la Galerie d'Anatomie comparée du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, Ali Cherri dort, allongé sur un banc. La photographie accueille le visiteur dans l'écho affaibli de la musique électronique de Mikaël Barre et des mesures de l'album *Happy Together Filthy Forever* de Scrambled Eggs. Un palier plus bas, sur la même image, une succession d'images d'yeux blessés. Ali Cherri dort, d'un sommeil léger, "porosité entre la quiétude et l'inquiétude, l'individuel et le collectif, le privé et le public, la clarté et l'obscur [...] une revendication de sensibilité ou de réceptivité à des sensations internes et externes qui, pour un bref moment, échappent à l'omniprésence du moment."

Musée du Quai Branly. Plan fixe sur le masque royal d'éléphant. Un visiteur, une lampe torche à la main. L'artiste, rodeur ou gardien nocturnes ? Éveilleur ou chamane peut-être ? Ses pas résonnent dans le musée déserté, martèlent le fond musical. Le faisceau de la lampe balaie les vitrines, pénètre leur transparence, s'y réfléchit, s'immobilise sur les yeux et la bouche de masques anthropomorphes et de statuettes magiques.

Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature. La pointe lumineuse allume la profondeur de l'œil d'un ours, s'y déplace comme une vision à contre champ. Musée du Louvre. L'écho des pas se répercute, solitaire, dans la file des sarcophages et des collections égyptiennes. Ali Cherri s'assoit sur la chaise d'un gardien et s'endort, la tête contre un pilier. Musée de l'Homme, un enchaînement de bustes phrénologiques, la caméra se fige successivement sur chacun d'eux. Dans la succession discontinue de portraits photographiques, faces

Baldner Jean-Marie
"Ali Cherri, Somniculus",
February 22, 2017

animales et humaines, masques funéraires et cérémoniels, statues magiques anthropomorphes, momies, des yeux brillent de leur artifice, en miroir de l'éclat de la lampe ou de notre regard ; d'autres s'ouvrent en trous noirs d'une potentialité de vision impénétrable et insondable ; d'autres, présents ou inexistant, sont dissimulés ou mutilés : l'artiste se couvre le visage de bandelettes, avant de découper une fente devant les orbites.

Adoptant le point de vue d'un spectateur invisible ou de celui qui tient la lampe, la caméra s'attache, en longs plans fixes, à l'état de torpeur, d'attente réceptive et de vigilance réduite entre le réveil des objets et le sommeil de l'artiste, explore l'entre deux de l'ombre et de la lumière, de la tension du vivant et du mort qui éclipse l'ubiquité du présent, "une vision nette les yeux fermés" (Italo Calvino, cité par Ali Cherri).

Frontière ténue, rendue transitoire par des poses ou des figures prophylactiques, entre la photographie et la vidéo, qu'entretient le son, imagé par l'aplat vertical du plateau d'une platine vinyle ; démarcation incertaine entre le mouvement, ce qui s'anime, et l'inerte, ce que l'archéologie et le contexte muséal ont figé pour un temps dans une représentation historicisée et que le sommeil léger peut éveiller ; revendication d'une réceptivité revivifiante qui prend acte de la perte et dénonce aussi bien les utopies et les idéaux coercitifs que les configurations, les proclamations et les appels actuels de destruction volontaire.

Dans cette vision poétique, les objets, étrangers et résistants muets, transcendent leur être-là patrimonial, leur contexte de conservation, la violence de leur représentation ; ils sont affranchis de leur charge de témoins historiographiques, déliés des récits identitaires et culturels, libérés des significations et des cohérences instituées comme des sciences qui les disent. Face à face avec le spectateur, lui-même ensommeillé dans son régime d'historicité, ils en sollicitent et questionnent la vision et le regard ; hors de leur vitrine et de la transparence du signe, ils préludent à une autre fiction, à la dépossession, à la subrogation en un temps ni continu, ni homogène qui reste à élaborer ; ils instruisent une attente inachevée, consciente des chocs, des ruptures et des violences passées et présentes.

++INFO++

Ali Cherri, Somniculus, vidéo HD, couleur, son, 13 min., Jeu de Paume, Paris, commissaire Osei Bonsu, Programmation Satellite 10 "L'économie du vivant", coproduction : Jeu de Paume, Paris, Fondation Nationale des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques et CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux,

14 février - 28 mai 2017.

Catalogue Ali Cherri, Somniculus. L'économie du vivant, Chapitre 1, traduction Fabienne Durand-Bogaert et Jeremy Harrison, Jeu de Paume, CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Fondation Nationale des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques / Maison d'Art Bernard Anthonioz, Paris - Gand, 2017.

Réveiller le passé

ART CONTEMPORAIN Deux expositions ont ouvert au début du mois au CAPC, à Bordeaux. Chacune explore le passé à sa manière

CÉLINE MUSSEAU
c.musseau@sudouest.fr

Le projet Satellite, porté par le musée du jeu de paume à Paris, la Fondation nationale des arts graphiques et le CAPC musée d'art contemporain, est toujours l'occasion de rendez-vous particulièrement originaux et inspirés. « Somniculus », d'Ali Cherri, en apporte la preuve une fois encore, s'inscrivant dans le cadre du cycle « L'Economie du vivant » concocté par Osei Bonsu.

Au deuxième étage du CAPC, il présente à travers une vidéo et une installation comme un état des lieux de l'acte de conservation : des objets, du passé, des civilisations. Dans ce film, il ouvre les portes de musées parisiens et les traverse à la manière d'un somnambule, les yeux fermés, entraînant le spectateur dans son rêve éveillé, entre des ossements d'animaux sauvages et des objets anciens.

Bande son rock

Ils racontent un récit, mais peuvent aussi reprendre leur autonomie. La bande son tente de réveiller ces musées notamment avec le rock du groupe libanais Scrambled eggs. Dans la pièce à côté, une table lumineuse où sont exposés toutes sortes d'objets, masques, bijoux et animaux, récoltés sur le marché de l'art, dont les fluctuations varient selon le baromètre du désir, des modes ou des zones de conflit.

Il expose aussi des clichés de lieux emblématiques comme le parc Wildlife aux Emirats de Sharjah, où l'on reconstruit artificiellement des vestiges archéologiques, posant la question du futur de l'archéologie.

« Somniculus », jusqu'au 30 avril de 11 heures à 18 heures (20 heures mercredi) au CAPC Musée d'art contemporain, 7 rue Ferrère à Bordeaux. 3,50 € et 6,50 €. Fermé lundi. 05 56 00 8150.



« Somniculus » : une sorte de rêve éveillé entre animaux sauvages et objets anciens. PHOTO DR

Beau geste press, vivre son art

Beau geste press, fut une maison d'édition indépendante, qui a existé au cœur de la campagne anglaise, dans le Devon, entre 1971 et 1976. Fondée par un couple d'artistes mexicains Martha Hellion et Felipe Ehrenberg, elle a rayonné et accueilli de nombreux artistes poètes visuels, néo-dadaïstes et a imprimé leurs ouvrages. Cette exposition raconte de manière chronologique cette histoire singulière, où la vie et l'art sont mêlés. Elle présente de nombreuses œuvres ainsi que des photos personnelles.

Autour de l'exposition elle-même, un ensemble d'interventions intitulé « Quelque chose de Beau geste en commun », accueille différents ateliers et projets d'artistes de la Nouvelle Aquitaine, avec notamment une résidence en ligne « Our fortress », qui aura lieu début avril, « Bibliomatrix », un accrochage progressif de l'Ecole européenne de l'image Angoulême Poitiers jusqu'à fin mai, une publication participative « Disparate » le 5 mars prochain, ou encore un atelier d'initiation à la sérigraphie début mai intitulé « L'Insoleuse » (jusqu'au 28 mai).



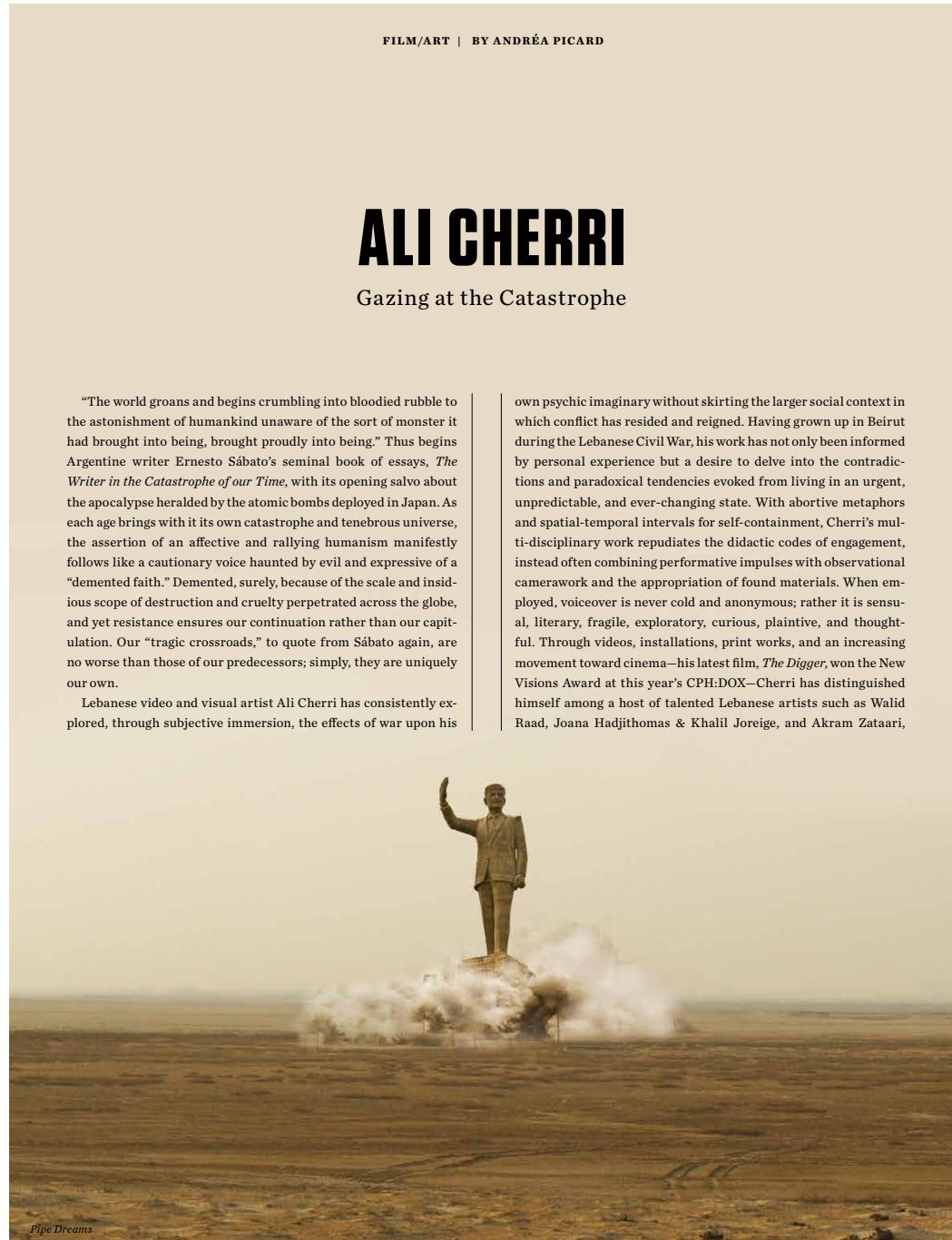
Beau geste press, une expérience artistique marquante dans l'Angleterre des années 70. PHOTO DR

Picard Andréa,
 “Ali Cherri, Gazing at the Catastrophe”,
 Cinema Scope, 2016, p.
 66-69

FILM/ART | BY ANDRÉA PICARD

ALI CHERRI

Gazing at the Catastrophe



The world groans and begins crumbling into bloodied rubble to the astonishment of humankind unaware of the sort of monster it had brought into being, brought proudly into being.” Thus begins Argentine writer Ernesto Sábato’s seminal book of essays, *The Writer in the Catastrophe of our Time*, with its opening salvo about the apocalypse heralded by the atomic bombs deployed in Japan. As each age brings with it its own catastrophe and tenebrous universe, the assertion of an affective and rallying humanism manifestly follows like a cautionary voice haunted by evil and expressive of a “demented faith.” Demented, surely, because of the scale and insidious scope of destruction and cruelty perpetrated across the globe, and yet resistance ensures our continuation rather than our capitulation. Our “tragic crossroads,” to quote from Sábato again, are no worse than those of our predecessors; simply, they are uniquely our own.

Lebanese video and visual artist Ali Cherri has consistently explored, through subjective immersion, the effects of war upon his own psychic imaginary without skirting the larger social context in which conflict has resided and reigned. Having grown up in Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War, his work has not only been informed by personal experience but a desire to delve into the contradictions and paradoxical tendencies evoked from living in an urgent, unpredictable, and ever-changing state. With abortive metaphors and spatial-temporal intervals for self-containment, Cherri’s multi-disciplinary work repudiates the didactic codes of engagement, instead often combining performative impulses with observational camerawork and the appropriation of found materials. When employed, voiceover is never cold and anonymous; rather it is sensual, literary, fragile, exploratory, curious, plaintive, and thoughtful. Through videos, installations, print works, and an increasing movement toward cinema—his latest film, *The Digger*, won the New Visions Award at this year’s CPH:DOX—Cherri has distinguished himself among a host of talented Lebanese artists such as Walid Raad, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, and Akram Zataari,

Pipe Dreams

Picard Andréa,
 "Ali Cherri, Gazing at the
 Catastrophe",
 Cinema Scope, 2016, p.
 66-69

whose respective and often ingenious practices have challenged how art responds to war and the slippery terrain that is nationhood.

Younger than many of these peers, Cherri is undoubtedly hitting his stride and making works of greater complexity and ambition. Intrinsic to many of his videos has been the act of looking: his looking at the atrocities of war and our looking at him, the interplay of active/passive observation/participation not only a theoretical study of moving images themselves but reflexive of the artist's role in general. Fascinated by the symbolic value of archival materials, such as the recording of a Lebanese radio station's interception by the Israeli army during the July war of 2006 in *Untitled (To the Lebanese Citizens)* (2006), the black-and-white photographic images of the devastation caused by a number of violent earthquakes in Lebanon in *The Disquiet* (2013), and YouTube footage from *Pipe Dreams* (2012), Cherri interrogates visual history as a form of collapsing contemporaneity whereby imagination is a constant source of re-thinking and re-seeing, and thus ultimately a form of renewal and resistance. *The Digger* and its related research projects delve into the fraught provenances, trajectories, and looting of Middle Eastern archeological objects and their roles in constructing national historical narratives. In many ways a prescient shift, Cherri's digging of the past is what is playing out rather disconcertingly in the present.

Cinema Scope: Much of your video work has dealt directly with the psychological repercussions of war. As a Lebanese artist who has lived between Beirut and Paris during such unstable times, do you feel a responsibility to make work that directly engages with world events?

Ali Cherri: I was born around the beginning of a 15-year civil war in Lebanon. I have spent most of my life in Beirut. And even after the official end of the civil war in the early '90s, this city has been in an ongoing state of political unrest, with assassinations, car bombs, a war in the summer of 2006, and now in the turmoil of a regional crisis with the war in Syria and its subsequent effects on Lebanon. So war for me is not a rupture that cuts through the quotidian; war was a chore of my childhood experience and part of a certain normality. If we consider artistic creation as being nurtured by life experience, inevitably war would be a pivotal theme in my work. I don't treat war as a singular event; it is a lens through which I try to read social, political, or personal narratives. Today, we are all children of war.

Scope: Politics in art can obviously vary wildly, and is perhaps an overly prescribed term where aesthetics are subsumed by content. Do you think social engagement within art has changed in recent times, and where do you situate your own work and focus as a moving-image artist in an age of mass production, mediation, and consumption of images?

Cherri: In recent years, I could sense how there is a demand from artists to "respond" to certain political events, and the easiness with which works that deal with "hot topics" are circulated and distributed. It's true there is a rise of the figure of the artist as activist, especially in the wake of the social uprisings in different parts of the world and the mass circulation of certain "politically engaged" artworks. But I don't think art and social practice, or creative forms of activism, are radical or specific to our times. Aesthetics are central

to politics. There are different aesthetic "regimes": different forms of organization, forms of visibility, ways of doing and making, and ways of conceptualizing. Our way of imagining, of producing images, is tightly linked to our way of being politically active. As an artist accountable to the images I produce, I try to resist the temptation of being always in response to what the media is producing. Refusing the temporality that is imposed by mass-media outlets is a way of resisting singular narratives. I vindicate slowness, laziness, and inefficiency as a posture when observing the world around me.

Scope: There is a duality or binary in much of your work, which oscillates between observation and performance. I think of *Slippage* (2007) and *My Pain Is Real* (2010) as pendants to one another, whereby your face in close-up (seen holding your breath in the former, and the template for added wounds and bruises in the latter) becomes the physical repository of trauma. Why implicate yourself in such a personal way?

Cherri: I am interested in the question of being active or passive in front of an image, or behind the camera. Who is doing what to whom? The cycle of violence where people are enacting, witnessing, recording, viewing, and reviewing violence repeatedly, in real time, is an endless loop. In many of my early works, I use myself in my films to bring in the question of authorship. Reclaiming the possession or our authority over our mediated image is essential. I shot *Slippage* during the 2006 war between Lebanon and Israel, while I was stuck like many Beirutites in my apartment, watching on TV the war as it was happening outside. By holding my breath in front of the camera, I wanted to be in control again over my life, even though this attempt keeps failing at the point where I lose my breath. In *My Pain Is Real*, while I gaze at the camera, a computer cursor draws wounds on my face taken from actual people who were injured during the July war. Despite the overtly computer-generated image, looking at my wounded face is highly disturbing. Working with explicitly violent images was an attempt to expose modes of operation of media violence. This kind graphic material is becoming less and less visible in my work. I think I don't want to produce more violence. Problematising the dissemination of violent images can also happen in other types of representation that might be more efficient.

Scope: Likewise, the texts in many of your videos include historical literary references to figures such as Blanchot or Mishima, but they are often delivered with such a strong subjective voice as to ground grand claims and political statements in an experience that can only be personal, whether imagined or real. Can you discuss this strategy?

Cherri: It is true that literary references are always present in my work, whether they are explicit or implicit. This "citing without quotation marks," as Benjamin would call it, puts these texts in a dialectical relationship with the image and the sound. These elements are used on the same level as the raw material of found footage or archival footage with no special authority or meta-narrative. Sometimes quoting is a way to take sides, to align, or identify with a certain view. But it could also be to disrupt what is happening on screen.

Scope: How has partially moving to Paris changed your experience as a moving-image artist? I ask specifically as notions of place have been central to many of your videos.

Picard Andréa,
 "Ali Cherri, Gazing at the
 Catastrophe",
 Cinema Scope, 2016, p.
 66-69

Cherri: When I want to talk about cities, or the notion of place or urban affects, Beirut is still my reference. It's the city that I know best. But bringing the image of a place brings with it the imaginations built around it. I am always arriving after an existing image. We tend to associate the imagined filmic space with existing places. And I play on this deception. Almost every time I was filming Beirut, I was manipulating the image: either I added a building here or there, or I erased some landmark, or created an impossible camera tilt. Usually these are subtle interventions but they leave the spectator with an uncanny view. Maybe being away from Beirut pushed me to explore new geographies, like the desert landscape in my latest film.

Scope: Like many contemporary artists and filmmakers, your videos include both documentary impulses and ones that veer toward fiction. While drawn from *actualités*, their investigations seem rooted in a different register. Can you discuss ideas of inspiration and process?

Cherri: Documentary and fiction are not opposed, but this does not mean that they are not different. Documentary can be seen as a type of fiction that takes the real as its point of contestation rather than an effect to be produced. This opens up to new possibilities for fictional invention. In my work I play on this growing attention of reality-driven illusory representations: to see is therefore to have witnessed the "Truth" (or at least a truth). Blurring the boundary between fact and fiction, reality and representation, is not to highlight the condition in which all images are downgraded to the status of deceptive stereotypes and in which there is no possibility of producing knowledge. By deploying essayistic or autobiographical narratives I put forward the mediated character of the experience of truth.

Scope: Both of your home cities have been the target of horrific terrorist attacks by ISIS this month (November 2015). As someone who has lived in Beirut, a city that "was eating itself" by being at war, to quote from *Un Cercle autour du Soleil* (2008), how do you experience these events differently?

Cherri: I am not sure if I can separate my experience of these two events. Of course each has its specific political reading, but what I am interested in is what do they bring out on a personal level. These are moments of synchronized emotions, as everyone, at the same time, share the same feelings: fear, anger, disgust, outrage, etc. This type of violence becomes the crash-point between the inside and the outside. Violence has become not only a collective spectacle, but it's also the place where private desire and the public realm meet.

Scope: Many of your videos employ archival materials, such as a radio broadcast captured on your mobile phone, iconic television footage, or archival black-and-white photos. Are these materials that you chanced upon for the most part, or were they researched for each project?

Cherri: These elements come from different sources; some I have collected over the years in a personal archive of "found" material; some are coming from my research into official archives. I do not dismiss factual history, but I like to mix it with dreams, memories, desires, traumas, and political ideals; bringing all this together articulates significant layers of the truth that should not be neglected. The recognition of these affective archives adds complexity to our knowledge of the past and the present rather than simply suspend-

ing them in doctrine—fiction and representation are precisely the place where these layers can be made visible.

Scope: The idea of catastrophe and human resilience is an ancient and enduring one. But so is the role of the artist as one who grapples with the trauma of the times. I am thinking specifically of a collection of essays by Argentine writer Ernesto Sábato, *The Writer in the Catastrophe of Our Time*. As each generation claims its own trauma, how do you approach or think about this idea of catastrophe and continuation?

Cherri: In our modern times, the present surfaces as a "worried" present, anxious about the catastrophes of the past that it seeks to overcome, and the anticipated catastrophes of the future that it seeks to avoid. The future is no longer a promise, but a threat for which we are all fully responsible. I tried to capture this in my film *The Disquiet*: the eruption of the uncanny in a natural catastrophe, a disaster in its most pure form where human subjectivity has little space for intervention. The film opens with a quote from a Bertolt Brecht poem, announcing how we might perceive the apocalyptic times of our current era, or of any era actually. The quote is both disheartening as it is true time and time again: "In the dark times – Will there also be singing? – Yes, there will also be singing – About the dark times." There is hope when one manages to leave the document(ary) mode of narrating and enter into speculation, in solitude and lucidity of one's own mind and beliefs.

Scope: In *Pipe Dreams*, one of your most widely exhibited works, we witness the heartrending observations of a cosmonaut, who is exceedingly moved from seeing the beauty of his country, Syria, from space, and recalls the experience with pride to the country's leader, under whose rule the nation has only continued to rage and be ravaged ever since. Was the idea for the video tethered to Syria and its ongoing conflict under Assad, or was it about an Arab astronaut's achievement in space?

Cherri: *Pipe Dreams* was made at the end of 2011, eight months after the start of the Syrian uprising and before it turned into a bloody war. The installation captures an historic phone call between the late Syrian President Hafez al-Assad and Syrian military aviator and astronaut Muhammed Faris, who was part of the 1987 Soviet space program. In this archival footage, we see the "father of the nation" questioning the "hero" about his impressions, as Faris looks down on the Syrian lands from space. Some 25 years later, in the early days of the protests in Syria in 2011, fearing vandalism, the authorities removed the statues of al-Assad in the dissenting cities in order to protect them. Haunted by the images of destruction of statues—from Stalin to Saddam Hussein—the Syrian regime attempted to turn the tide by losing the Symbol in order to safeguard the Image. This interface between two moments in recent Syrian history encapsulates the history of the entire region: the mechanisms of the construction and deconstruction of totalitarian power, the dreams and disillusionments of an entire nation. By fragmenting moments in history, reducing them to debris, I try to put them in a dialectical process.

Scope: In some ways *The Digger* is a departure, and a much more ambitious film. How did you come to the subject, and also decide upon its style, which is more cinematic than it is video essay?

Cherri: When I thought of *The Digger* I wanted it to start where *The Disquiet* had ended. While in the last shot of *The Disquiet* a per-

Picard Andréa,
 "Ali Cherri, Gazing at the
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son ventures into the darkness of an enchanted forest with eerie bird wings dangling from trees, *The Digger* opens on a night shot of my character walking down the mountainous desert like an annunciating figure. The film is set in the desert of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, on a 5,000-year-old archaeological necropolis. I was drawn to this excavation site for its post-apocalyptic landscape. I have to say I have a fascination with the archaeological gesture of excavation. Let's not forget that the uncanny lies in the act of digging up, not in the property of being buried. Burying is what we naturally do. Unearthing the earth is by definition an "uncanny" act. Anyone or anything buried in the ground is in the realm of the dead, and to excavate or exhume is a transgressive gesture. The film is constructed in a different strategy than my previous works: I wanted to explore the intense charge of silence, of emptiness, of absence, and to find a cinematic temporality that could bring out the spectres of the place.

Scope: As a general observation, your work also engages with symbols and mythologies inherent within nationhood—a prescient and ever-important subject given all that is happening today in the world and the often frightening political response to these realities. What are you working on now?

Cherri: My interest in archaeology stems from its questioning of our founding mythologies. *The Digger* is part of a larger project I have been working on for the past year. At a time when many Arab nationalist states are collapsing (Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen...), and ISIS is destroying heritage sites, Gulf countries have a big interest in archaeological excavations. Of course these are "young countries" that are still in the process of writing their history. I thought it would be interesting to see how can one write an alternative history in the desert. Western modernity was built around the city, urban life, commerce, and centres of power. I thought by going to the Arabian Desert, and with the fragility of the place, I could find alternative narratives and other temporalities than what we see in



Top: *The Disquiet*
 Above: *The Digger*

Western museums today. Unfortunately, this was a missed opportunity, and instead of finding "other narratives," these countries seem to be reproducing paradigms of Western nations in early modernity by trying to link to a pre-nomadic past. What we witness today is the collapse of the archaeological project of preservation that started with modernity: from the fetishization of historical artifacts, to the capitalist spectacle of national museums.

contemp+oray



Violent Collections | Anxious Things: Archaeology and Ali Cherri's A Taxonomy of Fallacies

by UZMA Z. RIZVI

In some measure, all collections are violent and all things are anxious. The act of collecting—of separating *something* from its context (culture, time, or place) indexes a mastery over another body/thing. Whether the material demonstrates some resilience to time or to being taken (often coded within the language of conservation and preservation), the anxious nature of being hung up to be seen, precariously lodged between two pins, placed in drawer to be studied, stuffed or

archaeology as the making of the nation, it is also just as important to recognize archaeology's complex and entangled relationship with colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism.



Still from *The Digger*, 2015

Deep in those entangled relationships, Cherri's film, *The Digger* (2015) situates the viewer between the archaeological site of Jebel al-Buhais (Sharjah, UAE), and the collections within the museum. The bodies from the graveyard of al-Buhais-18 are displayed at the museum and in the film. In the film, the bodies are first illuminated,

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pins, placed in drawer to be studied, stuffed or photographed, cannot possibly be denied, and is never benign. Once resettled in new geographies—museums, archives, on film or on video—these new spaces for artifacts that may have been roughly coterminous, but are now certainly together, endure an ontological effect by which these artifacts exist within new sets of relations that are internal and peculiar to the collection itself.

There is a new messiness of acknowledging the simultaneity of the collection and their affective properties. And this leads to an anxiety, not only on the part of that which is collected and displayed, but on the part of those of us writing, curating, and constructing histories. This anxiety is deeply embedded within, perhaps even constitutive of, the modern project of archaeology. This project is not only based on a chronology, but rather to consider archaeology as emerging from a particular philosophical outlook that creates the foundations for other similar projects of the modern era. In *Archaeology and Modernity*, Julian Thomas has enumerated some of these projects as "the emergence of nation-states, industrialization, improvements in communications and transport, mercantilism, the control of violence by the state, surveillance, constant political struggle, an increasingly urban way of life, and an experience of agitation, turbulence, and continuous change." It is this violence and anxiety that Ali Cherri's contemporary artistic practice has tapped into. His work serves as a collection of debates contending with the nature of contemporary art and archaeology.

film. In the film, the bodies are first illuminated, and then darkened. We are left anxious, and uncertain; the film itself is deathly. Cherri imparts both a real feeling to the fictional, and an unreal feeling to the real. But what is fictional in this moment is not what we are seeing or hearing or experiencing: what is fictional is the dream of what archaeology was supposed to be.

Archaeology has, in a contemporary moment, moved beyond the trope of modernity. We are no longer this failed attempt at history-making. We are no longer bound by time. Rather, we are more concerned with the material, with the methodology, and with the ways in which we might resist in this moment, making us contemporary archaeologists who have the capacity to stand out of time to critique, following what Agamben has argued about the contemporary, and collectives like Raqs Media Collective have embraced. There is a spaciousness to the contemporary and something to that faux-freedom of seriousness that it engenders. In some manner, it is as if we have all been placed into an ontologically distinct collection of concerns and are now speaking from similar standpoints.

Listening to Silence, Wind and Light: Becoming Still Life

Ali Cherri's films in this exhibition captivate the viewer through the moving image and transport their body to a place of stillness in order to become a listener. The mastery of the craft is in the depth of the image that finds its texture and intimacy through sound. His films capture the

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Installation of Fragments, 2016. Sursock Museum, Beirut

As birds are to Cherri what cats were to Chris Marker, I will begin with a consideration of strigiformes.



Still from Petrified, 2015

More commonly known as owls, six of the 195 owl species of the world are found in the United Arab Emirates. One of most common of these solitary, nocturnal birds is *Athene noctua*—or The Owl of Athena, or The Little Owl. In her 2001 book, *The Living Goddess*, Marija Gimbutas has traced the veneration of the owl as a goddess as predating Indo-European cultures. The owl featured in *Petrified* (2015), a *Bubo ascalaphus*, in contrast to *Athene noctua*, has a smaller geographic range. It is found in the MENA region, and in that sense, we might even consider it local to discourses of contemporary art and archaeology from that region. And true to its local roots, it is called the Pharaoh Eagle-Owl: a local bird that has been classified with its ancient pharaonic regional

sound of light and dark; of wind and sand. The biophony erases the nature/culture divide and emerges as a critical voice in a rearticulation of a contemporary project.



Still from Petrified, 2015



Still from The Digger, 2015

As an archaeologist, I was familiar with the conversations of the wind and sand, particularly the ones of cotton flapping responses to the wind, with grit interjecting. By transforming the viewer into the listener, we are left aware at how little many of us actually listen to hear. The trope of whether or not the subaltern can speak is flipped, and the onus of listening is upon us. Our bodies are implicated, and we are reminded that we must place ourselves within these discourses, politics, and modes of resistance in order to survive. Rather than worry about progress or accumulation—we might concern ourselves with care and transdisciplinary processes that ensure that we assess *all* lives as being worthy. And the things we live with, worthy of vitality beyond what we ascribe to them.

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history. This owl's gaze pierces through Cherri's film, capturing the simultaneity of knowledge and destruction, and the sorcery that masks the violence. This gaze excavates for us the modern dream of what archaeology was supposed to be, what it had been constructed for, and the heaviness of that burden—it is in the swiftness and agility that the violence of knowing is so powerful that by a glance and a shrill piercing sound that we come face-to-face with archaeology as indexical of modernity's failure. We stand petrified in each sense of the word—simultaneously fossilized in our own steps and completely and utterly anxious and horrified of where the promises of modernity have landed us.

The Dream of Archaeology

Modernity's dream of what archaeology was supposed to be, what it had been constructed for, that is, the utopic vision of progress linked to the science of antiquity, and the heaviness of that burden, is often most acutely realized in headlines read about death and violence as a result of archaeological, historical, and heritage debates (such as that at Ayodhya, India). Archaeology can no longer feign ignorance: as archaeologists we are fully aware of the imbricated and deeply colonial, racist, sexist, and cissexist epistemology of our field. It is also commonly understood among archaeologists that without modernity, archaeology as we know it would not exist. But then again, insofar as modernity may claim history-making through the construction of disciplines such as archaeology, it is also important to recognize that history was written for certain reasons and with deep biases. That history, the deep past, and/or the contemporary, is molded and shaped in the service of the nation. Whether it is there to contest it or promote it, in engaging with the nation, it continues to reiterate its power. Given that the project of modernity is linked to the making of history through

Ali Cherri's solo show, *A Taxonomy of Fallacies: The Life of Dead Objects*, at the Sursock Museum (Beirut) was on view until September 19, 2016.



Uzma Z. Rizvi is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Urban Studies at the Pratt Institute of Art and Design, Brooklyn, where she teaches anthropology, ancient urbanism, critical heritage studies, memory and war/trauma studies, art and social change and the postcolonial critique. Rizvi is currently a Visiting Faculty in the Department of International Studies at the American University of Sharjah, UAE. Rizvi (w/ Amal Khalaf) directed Art Dubai's 2016 Global Art Forum, *The Future Was _____*. Her work can be read in *The New Inquiry* and *Savage Minds*; recent publications include 'The Taste of Earth' (2015); 'Decolonizing Archaeology: On the Global Heritage of Epistemic Laziness,' (2015); *The World Archaeological Congress Research Handbook on Postcolonial Archaeology* (2010).

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Quilty Jim,
 "The art of ruins falling into
 ruin",
 The Daily Star, August 22,
 2015

THE DAILY STAR

ARTS & CULTURE

SATURDAY, AUGUST 22, 2015

AGENDA

LEBANON

'Forest Frequencies'
Chahtoul Camping,
near Ghazir
 Through Aug. 23
 70-240-924

This open-air electronic music festival features an eclectic lineup of local and international musical acts that cater to a variety of genres within the spectrum of electronic music. The festival also offers a medley of other outdoor activities, holistic practices and workshops for goers to partake in.

Anna Netrebko
Beteddine Art Festival,
Beteddine Palace
 Aug. 27, 8:30 p.m.
 01-373-440

Singing with guest tenor Yusuf Eyavazov – and accompanied by the Filarmonica Gioachino Rossini Orchestra, under the baton of Marco Boemi – famed Russian soprano Anna Netrebko promises to escort her audience through a program of 19th-century operatic standards, penned by such iconic composers as Puccini, Verdi, the Straussses and Dvorak.

Issa Ghandour
The Blue Note Cafe,
Makhlouf Street,
Ras Beirut
 Aug. 22, 10 p.m.
 Issa Ghandour will perform an evening of oriental music.

PERFORMANCE

'Bar Farouq'
Beteddine Art Festival,
Beteddine Palace
 Through Aug. 22, 8:30 p.m.
 01-373-440

In Hisham Jaber's new cabaret show, 14 musicians, singers, actors and dancers revisit Beirut's pre-Civil War music scene, sampling popular theater, cabaret music and dance from the '30s to the '70s, through the works of performers and composers like Shoushou, Sabah, Ferial Karim and Omar Zeenii.

INTERVIEW

The art of ruins falling into ruin

Ali Cherri's work explores the meaning and worth of heritage conservation

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Like many Lebanese artists, Ali Cherri's work is rarely shown in Lebanon. Video has been his medium of choice – whether staged in installations or as freestanding projections – though his work also includes sketches, still photography and objects.

A sample of Cherri's most recent work was on show in "Deserts," an exhibition at Paris' Galerie Imane Farès that placed his videos and stills alongside those of Basma Alsharif.

In this country Cherri's labor was most recently visible during the opening show of the 2015 Baalbeck International Festival, "Illi ya Baalbek?" – having worked on the video backdrop for the concert, a montage of Lebanese performers projected against the ruins of the so-called Bacchus temple.

The Baalbeck job is quite divorced from Cherri's real practice, of course. His most recent "Lebanese" work, "The Disquiet," a short he premiered at the Toronto film festival in 2013, is a poetic perambulation around the geological fault lines running beneath this country, and the catastrophes they portend.

Cherri's interests have recently migrated to archaeology. His latest projects steer clear of Baalbek's Roman-era ruins, but he has taken up some of the modernist constructs that informed how the old stones of Heliopolis were restored and hitched to the wagon of the tourism industry.

Still in post-production when this conversation took place, Cherri's "The Digger" takes up a story from the prehistory of the United Arab Emirates, specifically the conservation of a 5,000-year-old necropolis in the desert of Sharjah.

"The site itself is nothing spectacular," Cherri says. "It's mainly excavated tombs. What're left are empty holes in the ground. Two Pakistani guards live there throughout the year, guarding these empty holes in the ground."

"Sultan Zeib Khan, one of the guards, has been living there for 20 years. He's taken part in archaeological missions in Sharjah whenever foreign missions come into the country."

"The film follows him in his dai-



"The Digger" follows the work of a Pakistani security guard minding a 5,000-year-old necropolis.

ly routine, roaming in the desert, preserving these ruins from falling into ruin – a surreal concept.

"That's what modernity tells us we should do: Preserve the ruins in their state of ruin. And it should be a specific form of ruin – something that looks enough like a ruin to be interesting for tourists and all the industry that happens around archaeology."

"So there's this bunch of rocks on the ground that Sultan Zeib Khan has to make sure are still in place, that no animals came at night to disturb them."

"There are high-profile archaeological digs in all the Gulf countries now. I started looking into this archaeological project, trying to understand why they're digging."

"Of course they all have museums they need to fill. They're young nations writing their histories. They need these archaeological objects as proof that, 'Hey, we've been here since a very long time. We have a long history.'

"We're not just nomads who found oil and settled and built cities. We come from very far back.' There was a city next to this 5,000-year-old necropolis and the residents had civilization, commerce."

"There's also a sense that 'Our civilization was built around the city, just like everywhere else.'

"So my project is now looking at this nationalist way of using archaeology as a metaphor."

"It's very interesting. [The DAI] is questioning their way of working,

rest of the world has moved beyond this way of working with archaeology, [now it's] more about tourism."

Cherri explains that his interest in archaeology follows logically from "The Disquiet."

"It stems from the question of what can survive a catastrophe," he says. "An archaeological site is where things survive the catastrophe of time ... A desert archaeological site is a perfect post-apocalyptic landscape."

Based on the rough cut available during this interview, "The Digger" is a great looking piece of work. Shot to cinematic standards by Lebanese cinematographer Bassem Fayad, it plays upon several features of the desert landscape – the quiet, the relentless daytime scale of the place and the utter darkness of night.

Cherri's archaeological work is in the process of shifting locations. While "The Digger" was funded by the Sharjah Art Foundation, the artist is about to embark upon a residency with France's INRAP (the National Institute for Preventive Archaeological Research) that will see him join a German Archaeological Institute (DAI) expedition in South Sudan.

"The institute is interested in fos-

tering collaborations among artists and archaeologists," he says, "in work that doesn't simply use archaeology as a metaphor."

"It's very interesting. [The DAI] is questioning their way of working without the object as evidence? This is the question I'm asking ... in order to question the whole museum narrative ... and to find new ways of preservation – whether 3D scanning of sites or computer renderings or just documentation – where the copy or the archive is going to be replacing the site itself."

"Maybe we should stop lamenting the loss of the object and try to find a replacement for it."

trying to record this information, especially for objects coming from this region.

"I want to follow the life of this object from the moment it's dug out of the earth until it arrives at the museum ... where it becomes an object with a market value."

"I bought these eight statue heads, supposedly Greek from the third millennium. I got them for 180 euros. After talking with an archaeologist I found out they were fake," he laughs, "although I have a certificate from Drouot auction house."

"One of the problems in the Gulf, in the desert in general, is that objects disappear under the sand [making it] very hard to find them. That's why most of the findings are necropoli and tombs – because they used to bury their dead at the base of mountains, where the earth is more solid. It makes it easier to find things there. Most of the things located in the desert have disappeared."

"How can you write history without the object as evidence? This is the question I'm asking ... in order to question the whole museum narrative ... and to find new ways of preservation – whether 3D scanning of sites or computer renderings or just documentation – where the copy or the archive is going to be replacing the site itself."

"Maybe we should stop lamenting the loss of the object and try to find a replacement for it."

PHOTO: KAREN KUEHN

Marsaud Olivia,
 "Ali Cherri fait frémir le Liban",
 Diptyq, n° 22, February/March 2014, p. 26

ACTU | EXPOS



The Disquiet (L'intranquille), 2013, vidéo HD, 20 minutes

VIDÉO

ALI CHERRI FAIT FRÉMIR LE LIBAN

Chez Imane Farès à Paris, l'artiste libanais retrace les lignes de failles de son pays.

Les Beyrouthins ont l'habitude de dire qu'ils habitent « au-dessous du volcan » en raison de l'instabilité politique de la région et le spectre de la guerre civile. En fait, ils habitent au-dessus. L'artiste libanais Ali Cherri, qui manie aussi bien la vidéo que les installations, a construit son exposition personnelle autour de cette situation : le Liban est à la fois traversé par plusieurs failles sismiques qui, tout au long de son histoire, ont fait tangier la terre et englouti des vies, et victime de lames de fonds humaines aux pulsions meurtrières.

Dans le court-métrage *The Disquiet (L'intranquille)*, prix du meilleur réalisateur au Festival de Dubaï en décembre, Ali Cherri explique en voix-off : « Au Liban, la terre tremble entre 45 et 60 fois par jour. Personne ne sent ces légers tremblements. Moi, je les sens tous ». Le film possède plusieurs strates, comme les décombres d'un tremblement de terre, superposant images d'archives, vidéos des déambulations de l'artiste dans la nature et séquences au sein de la station sismologique qui prend le pouls du pays. Entre art, histoire et sciences, le film

donne le ton de l'exposition. Ali Cherri, préoccupé par la situation géopolitique de son pays, nous dit la force de la mémoire, affaiblie par l'amnésie des hommes. Il propose une série de photographies aériennes, retravaillées en lithographies, de villes traversées par des failles (Beyrouth, Damas, Alger, Téhéran, Erbil) et intitulée « Paysages tremblants », « Les coordonnées polaires, inscrites en rouge, tracent des lignes invisibles sous ces cités », pointe l'artiste. « Elles me font penser aux photos de villes détruites pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, mais on ne sait pas si les images se situent avant ou après la catastrophe. »

CARTOGRAFIE DU CHAOS

Continuant dans cette veine, l'artiste se fait archéologue d'un présent qui l'inquiète. Pour *Atlas 1876-2014*, il a subtilement retravaillé au fusain les pages d'un atlas géographique de 1876, dont les cartes sont rongées par des zones d'ombre comme des ciels d'orage. La pièce *Errance* est une bannière de toile peinte en noir et blanc qui, en défilant dans un mouvement continu, fait immédiatement penser au

rythme d'un sismographe. « Le rythme rappelle aussi l'étyologie du mot catastrophe, qui signifie "ce qui revient sans cesse" ... ». Pour autant, la catastrophe selon Cherri n'est jamais apocalyptique : « On vit avec en continu, il faut la comprendre pour y survivre. Et vivre avec ». On pense au roman du tremblement de terre de l'écrivaine Andréa Chedid, *L'Autre*. La catastrophe y était « Fin de monde ou bien recommencements/Mort géante ou Source à naissances ». C'est bien de cette dualité dont il est question dans l'exposition. Ainsi *Démembrement*, la dernière pièce, surprend car elle est à la fois poétique et inquiétante. C'est un ensemble d'ailes de corbeau de taxidermie cousues les unes avec les autres. « Quelle forme peut survivre à la catastrophe ? s'interroge Ali Cherri. Ce sont des fragments, des morceaux. Être morcelé, c'est une manière de survivre. »

Andréa Chedid écrivait encore : « La mort, la vie... ça ne peut pas se séparer, ça se regarde ensemble ». OLIVIA MARSAUD

Ali Cherri, « On things that move »
 Galerie Imane Farès, Paris
 jusqu'au 22 mars 2014

"Ali Cherri", in
Art Cities of the Future,
21st-Century Avant-
Gardes, Ed. Phaidon, p.
 19-21

Beirut

20-21

Ali Cherri

In 1987 Syrian president Hafez al-Assad made a historic phone call to a Soviet spaceship that was heading towards the Mir space station. On board was Mohammad Fares, an air force pilot turned astronaut, who was the second Arab and, to this day, the only Syrian ever launched into outer space. For public broadcast, Assad and Fares exchanged a few stiff lines of dialogue, with Fares playing heroic but humble son to Assad's lofty and omniscient father.

Decades later, the artist Ali Cherri came across video footage of the phone call. He was amazed by the heaviness of the symbolism and rhetoric but didn't know what to do with the material – until he found a second piece of video footage. This one, of more recent vintage, shows a small army of construction workers dismantling a statue of Hafez al-Assad in 2011, while protests were erupting throughout the country. Their purpose was to protect the statue of this late, ruthlessly authoritarian leader from the vandalism of demonstrators eager to oust his son, Bashar, from power. In a quick and brilliant move, Cherri fused the two films together to make the video installation *Pipe Dreams* (2011), one of the most evocative and ambiguous artworks to address the so-called Arab Spring.⁵

What makes the piece effective, and also emblematic of his whole oeuvre, is his attention to the vulnerabilities of the body – in this case, a body chiselled from stone that is nonetheless endangered. In other works, such as the video *Dreams in Three Chapters* (2011) and the installations *Now I Feel Whole Again* (2009) and *My Pain is Real* (2010), Cherri explores the more intimate contours of cuts, bruises and scars on his own skin. As such, he brings some of the Arab world's outsized political conflicts down to human scale. He returns

again and again to political events – from the Israeli invasion of 1982 to the war in Lebanon in 2006 – to see how they have been impressed on the body, lodged in the mind and filtered through personal experience.

The timeliness of Cherri's work, however, is often surpassed by a more abiding interest in the fragility of photographic images and the precariousness of sexual acts that, in Lebanon at least, fall outside the law. In 2005 Cherri was one of the first young artists in Beirut (after the likes of Wafid Raad, Akram Zaatari, Rabih Mroué and Jala Toufic) to have his work included in the Home Works Forum, Ashkal Alwan's raucous platform for contemporary art, which has a reputation for being as formally innovative as it is discursively challenging and occasionally combative. Cherri presented an ambitious multimedia performance titled *Give Me a Body Then*, for which he narrated his way through an impressive collection of allegedly found, gifted and stolen photographs, most of them depicting men who are naked and also dead. It was an auspicious start to the public life of his work, which peaked a second time for Home Works in 2008, where he screened *You* (2008), one of the most controversial videos ever shown in Beirut. Bookended by a urinal and a David Hockney painting with footage of a rather long and lavish blow job featured in between, the work was part of Zaatari's three-part screening program, 'Let It Be', which unified the disparate themes of that edition (sex, disaster, desire and catastrophe) while galvanizing local audiences, including Beirut's close-knit community of artists, pockets of which proved to be less progressive than they had claimed. The rift lasts to this day, and it is to Cherri's credit that he exposed it to light.



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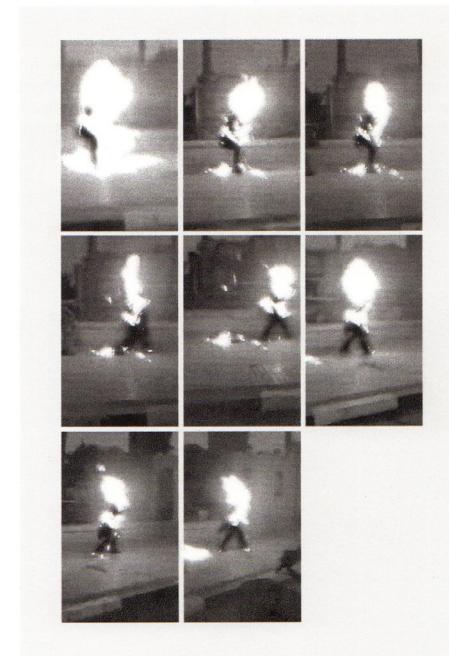
← You, 2008, video, 7 min.

← My Pain is Real, 2010,
3-channel video installation

↑ Pipe Dreams, 2011,
2-channel video installation

↑ Pipe Dreams, 2011,
2-channel video installation

→ A Fleur de Peau: I Carry My Flame,
2011, silkscreen, 54 x 74 cm



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 Aminata,
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Nadia Radwan et Aminata Tembely
Respectivement historienne égyptienne de l'art et doctorante en littérature et civilisation arabes à l'université de Genève



Le « printemps des rues » : *une création arabe contemporaine en mutation*

Les révoltes en Tunisie, en Égypte, en Syrie et en Libye ont défini le droit d'expression comme la première victoire des luttes menées par les populations. Les artistes, qu'ils soient acteurs ou témoins de ces révoltes, réitèrent la question du rapport entre l'art et les mouvements contestataires, offrant un regard nouveau sur la création arabe contemporaine.

La multiplication des expositions sur l'art contemporain arabe en Occident témoigne d'un intérêt croissant des musées et des institutions culturelles après le « printemps arabe ». Ainsi, la Biennale de Venise de 2011 a présenté « The Future of a Promise » et L'Institut du monde arabe de Paris (IMA) a accueilli, du 17 janvier au 1^{er} avril 2012, « Dégagements, la Tunisie un an après », qui se fait l'écho des différentes thématiques explorées par les artistes dans un espace situé entre l'acte révolutionnaire

(ou citoyen) et la création. Dans ce contexte, les travaux de deux artistes sont particulièrement intéressants. Témoins des révoltes arabes, Ali Cherri, Libanais, et Nidhal Chamekh, Tunisien, n'ont pas directement participé aux soulèvements. Leurs œuvres montrent une réalité perçue de l'extérieur, où le travail de l'image se situe au cœur de la réflexion. Ali Cherri exposa à l'IMA deux sérigraphies intitulées *Immolation I* et *Immolation II*, représentant un bidon d'essence et une boîte d'allumettes, une sorte de « kit sacrificiel ». Ce geste révèle la

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Figures, par Nidhal Chamekh.

© Nidhal Chamekh

détresse et la souffrance du protestataire passant à l'acte. L'artiste rend ainsi hommage à Mohamed Bouazizi, dont l'immolation en décembre 2010 a été l'un des déclencheurs des émeutes en Tunisie. La participation de l'artiste aux événements en tant que témoin est avant tout un devoir de mémoire.

« Des images méchantes et défectueuses »

Ali Cherri a présenté, du 24 novembre 2011 au 28 février 2012, « Bad Bad Images » à la galerie parisienne Imane Farès, un espace spécialisé sur l'art contemporain du Moyen-Orient et d'Afrique. Le choix du titre renvoie à des « images mauvaises, désagréables, méchantes, défectueuses, inefficaces, inappropriées, erronées, dangereuses, immorales, et principalement violentes », selon l'artiste. « Mais des images produites avant tout ». Il aborde le thème de la violence et de sa représentation à travers des figures existantes qu'il se réapproprie pour les transformer, les nuancer, les resérialiser, les « fictionnaliser » afin de déjouer la dualité : images de l'opprimé contre celles de l'opresseur. Pour ce projet, le territoire de recherche s'étend

de Beyrouth, en état de guerre constante, à São Paulo, une ville vivant au rythme des tensions urbaines, en passant par la Syrie, où les manifestants sont parvenus à faire de leurs « mauvaises » images l'événement en soi.

Ali Cherri refuse de se définir uniquement en tant que spectateur de la situation, soulignant l'importance de cette démarche qu'il associe à un devoir citoyen en tant qu'artiste arabe. Ce travail s'inscrit dans la continuité de ses œuvres précédentes. En 2006, durant le conflit israélo-libanais, il a réalisé deux vidéos sans utiliser les images diffusées par les médias, recourant uniquement à celles filmées par des habitants de Beyrouth. Procédant de la même manière pour l'exposition « Bad Bad Images », l'artiste a exploité les vidéos tournées par les manifestants, puis, à partir de captures d'écran, il les a modifiées en leur donnant un effet flouté. Il y a ici un véritable travail de décomposition.

S'inspirant de grands chefs-d'œuvre de l'histoire de l'art pour mettre en scène ses images, Ali Cherri, dans sa photographie prise en Syrie et intitulée *Le dormeur du Val*, fait référence au célèbre tableau de Jacques-Louis David, *La mort de Marat*. Sa vidéo *Pipe Dreams* est également une œuvre puissante dénonçant le régime de Damas. Dispposé face à face, un moniteur et un appareil numérique diffusent des images d'archive de

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Le « printemps des rues » : une création arabe contemporaine en mutation

la télévision russe en même temps que des images actuelles. Il s'agit d'un entretien datant de 1987 entre Hafez al-Assad, président de 1971 à 2000, et le cosmonaute syrien Mohamed Faris. Cette séquence représente les années de gloire de la Syrie. Un autre écran montre la destruction de la statue du dictateur, et père de Bachar, par les manifestants d'aujourd'hui. *Pipe Dreams* est accompagnée d'un compteur où les minutes défilent ; peut-être une allégorie des derniers instants de la dictature ? Cette mise en abîme d'un écran dans l'écran permet à Hafez al-Assad de voir sa propre chute, l'effondrement de son régime en direct, comme s'il vivait les événements actuels. Ce travail fait écho à une journée appelée « Brûler les photos » durant les manifestations en Syrie de 2011. L'artiste s'est inspiré d'un happening (sorte de rassemblement artistique improvisé) collectif qui consistait à enflammer les portraits de Bachar al-Assad, à les jeter aux toilettes, tout en filmant la scène. Ces images ont été diffusées sur des sites de partage de vidéos mises en ligne par les manifestants.



Pipe Dreams, par Ali Cherri.

❖ La Tunisie, un an après

Les travaux de Nidhal Chamekh exposés à l'IMA ont été réalisés un mois avant le début du soulèvement contre Zine el-Abidine ben Ali. Il utilise comme support le corps, en particulier



Le dormeur du Val, par Ali Cherri.

celui de la femme, interrogant ainsi l'identité politique de la Tunisie et l'identité en général en tant que concept fermé. La peinture intitulée *The Judge* représente une femme à moitié nue avec une veste militaire, un maillot de juge à la main, un bonnet sur la tête et un masque sur la bouche. Il s'agit d'une critique du politique et de la condition féminine. Ces corps représentés par l'artiste ne cherchent pas à retrouver un « moi », il est plutôt question d'aller au-delà de toute distinction identitaire. En 2010, les œuvres de Nidhal Chamekh ont été interdites à la Nuit des musées de Tunis.

Après vingt-trois ans de contrôle de la culture par l'État, il n'existe pas à proprement parler de musée d'art moderne ni d'art contemporain en Tunisie. Les espaces réservés à l'expression artistique sont avant tout des galeries, mais sur une quarantaine, seules trois ou quatre accordent une place aux artistes locaux.

Le soulèvement tunisien a révélé un nouvel espace, celui de la rue, offrant aux artistes un lieu d'expression. Ali Cherri et Nidhal Chamekh témoignent ainsi de la réalité des révoltes au Moyen-Orient. Le « printemps arabe » est devenu un « printemps des rues », une prise de possession de l'espace urbain, dont l'exemple de la ville du Caire illustre bien le phénomène.

❖ La libération artistique égyptienne

La révolution du 25 janvier 2011 en Égypte a vu naître les premières formulations contestataires et l'affranchissement du régime de Hosni Moubarak s'est traduit par la parole, définissant la liberté d'expression comme première étape d'une rupture radicale avec le passé. D'abord balbutiantes, les voix se sont progressivement élevées, s'affirmant au-delà des remparts de l'espace privé. Les révoltes ont rapidement fait place à l'acte créatif : inventer des slogans, peindre des bannières,

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des affiches, des banderoles, s'exprimer pour conjurer l'autorité d'un régime qui, sous couvert d'une semi-liberté de parole, avait longtemps réprimé le droit de s'exprimer librement.

À partir du mois de février 2011, parmi les millions de protestataires rassemblés sur la place Tahrir du Caire, de jeunes peintres, sculpteurs, réalisateurs et musiciens se sont regroupés spontanément. Artistes de renommée ou amateurs, étudiants des écoles d'art ou de l'université, tous se sont organisés en collectifs pour créer des happenings, peindre des affiches, composer des chansons, écrire des poèmes ou mettre en scène des pièces de théâtre. L'occupation de la place Tahrir par les citoyens est la première prise de possession d'un lieu autrefois dominé, contrôlé et censuré par la présence policière. Le statut de l'espace public change donc progressivement, de même que celui de l'acte créatif qui s'émancipe du cadre de l'atelier individuel ou de la galerie pour servir le mouvement contestataire, devenant ainsi une action collective et participative.

Les murs et les piliers des nombreux ponts de la capitale égyptienne sont investis par les artistes et servent de canevas à ce que l'on appelle *fam al-mada'in* (l'art urbain). Ces formes d'art nouvelles en Égypte, ainsi que dans les autres pays du « printemps arabe », font couler beaucoup d'encre dans les médias, qui annoncent peut-être prématurément le début d'un mouvement de renaissance culturelle, surnommé « révolution graphique ». Il semble toutefois réducteur d'analyser ces créations dans leur seul cadre politique spécifique, car l'iconographie de ces manifestations éphémères et évolutives dévoile le langage d'une culture alternative existant avant la révolution. Si celle-ci était jusque-là presque imperceptible, les protestations au Moyen-Orient l'ont révélée au grand jour.

Dans ce contexte, trois artistes qui ont commencé à pratiquer l'art de rue bien avant les soulèvements se démarquent : Ganzeer, Keizer et Sad Panda. Ces graffeurs ou artistes urbains exécutent leurs œuvres au pochoir et à la bombe aérosol acrylique, une activité représentant un risque. Certains d'entre eux ont été arrêtés et incarcérés plusieurs fois. Rendus célèbres par la révolution, leurs peintures murales font aujourd'hui partie intégrante du paysage. Publiées abondamment sur la Toile, elles ont dépassé les frontières du pays pour devenir les icônes visuelles de la révolution égyptienne.

Le graffiti, icône de la révolution

Ganzeer, dont le blog porte le titre ironique de *I am not a street artist or graffiti artist* (<http://ganzeer.blogspot.com>), réalise d'immenses portraits de jeunes décédés lors des premiers soulèvements. Ces images aux grands aplats de couleurs vives évoquent, d'une part, certaines œuvres sérigraphiées du pop art américain, tandis qu'elles rappellent, d'autre part, des représentations de victimes de la répression. Le culte du martyr, dont l'iconographie est déjà présente dans le paysage urbain des Territoires palestiniens ou de l'Iran islamique, prolifère depuis la révolution dans les villes égyptiennes, où se déploient les



The Judge, par Nidhal Chamekh.

effigies des activistes accompagnées de leurs noms. Par ailleurs, la thématique du martyr influence les artistes contemporains de la scène internationale, comme Nidhal Chamekh, qui travaille aujourd'hui sur un projet s'inspirant de l'ouvrage *De quoi rêvent les martyrs* du philosophe tunisien Daoudi Slah. L'artiste voit à travers la profusion d'images de morts pour la cause collées de manière désordonnée dans les rues de Tunis un côté utopique dans l'appropriation de l'espace public.

À cela s'ajoute la multiplication des représentations incarnant le « mal », tels les portraits de Hosni Moubarak ou, plus récemment, de Mohammed Tantawi, chef du Conseil suprême des forces armées. Si le pouvoir des peintures murales du Caire réside dans leur multiplicité, certaines images, à force de répétition, sont vidées de leur sens. L'artiste Ali Ali joue sur cet aspect et a présenté en mai 2011, dans une galerie cairote, son travail dans l'exposition « Thirty Hosnis ». Il y a montré 30 sériographies représentant le portrait de l'ex-président qui

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se décline sur des fonds de couleurs vives. Ces œuvres teintées d'humour s'inspirent particulièrement d'Andy Warhol. Les *Thirty Hosnis* rappellent les nombreuses affiches officielles du dictateur, autrefois placardées dans toute la ville. Une fois dénaturés, ces visuels brisent le culte de la personnalité pour figer l'image de l'ex-dirigeant dans le passé.

Dans un autre registre, le peintre de rue Keizer exécute des graffitis au pochoir titrés d'ironiques slogans. Cet artiste, qu'on pourrait qualifier de graffeur « néopop », intègre dans ses œuvres des référents de la culture populaire égyptienne et de la culture de masse américaine des années 1950. Ciblant l'élite cairote occidentalisée, il écrit volontairement ses slogans en anglais, dont l'un des plus connus est « *You are beautiful* ». Jouant sur les icônes du monde capitaliste, il met en scène des personnages tels que Marylin Monroe ou Blanche Neige. La pratique du graffiti, courante en Occident, fournit aux jeunes artistes égyptiens des exemples de maîtres en la matière. C'est ainsi que Keizer s'inspire des dessins aujourd'hui devenus iconiques de l'Américain Shepard Fairey, tandis que d'autres rendent hommage au Britannique Banksy. Se distinguant de Ganzeer et Keizer, engagés politiquement, l'auteur de la figure de Sad Panda est un artiste énigmatique portant le pseudonyme du personnage qu'il invente : un grand panda à l'air mélancolique. C'est dans le quartier d'Héliopolis, au Caire, où il vit, qu'il commence à apparaître ces représentations. Bien que l'animal soit devenu une sorte de mascotte de la révolution, Sad Panda n'affiche pas clairement de revendications. Tenant à garder l'anonymat, il affirme sur Twitter que son œuvre est avant tout personnelle et que la révolution lui a permis de poursuivre plus librement un travail qu'il pratiquait déjà. L'ère post-Moubarak a ainsi ouvert la voie non seulement à l'art contestataire, mais aussi à l'art pour l'art.

Amateurs et censure

Malgré la démocratisation de l'espace public et la multiplication des créations en milieu urbain, ces professionnels déplorent la prolifération de pratiques d'amateurs. Les images patriotiques se propagent et le drapeau égyptien, le poing fermé ou la colombe de la paix sont autant de symboles récupérés dans lesquels les artistes voient l'adoption d'une fausse voie nationaliste qui pourrait être néfaste à l'élan de créativité des rues du Caire. Ces auteurs luttent également contre une forme de censure informelle mise en place après la révolution, leurs œuvres étant régulièrement vandalisées par des partisans de l'ancien régime ou simplement recouvertes de peintures patriotiques.

En outre, ces nouvelles formes d'art évoluent de manière souple et rapide selon la tournure que prennent les événements. En perpétuelle transformation, elles constituent un baromètre de l'opinion et des revendications des contestataires. Ces artistes ciblent particulièrement le Conseil suprême des forces armées et, depuis les élections parlementaires (organisées entre le 28 novembre 2011 et le 11 janvier 2012), le parti des

salafistes. Souvent emprunte d'humour, leurs peintures sont percutantes tant visuellement que par leurs slogans. Le recours à un vocabulaire truffé de références à la fois à la culture populaire égyptienne et occidentale révèle des créations hybrides et cosmopolites.

En parallèle des créations d'art urbain, beaucoup de ces artistes ont été sollicités par les pinacothèques du Caire, qui leur ont consacré de nombreuses expositions dès les premiers mois de la révolution. En mars 2011, la célèbre galerie Safar Khan, située dans le quartier huppé de Zamalek, a organisé une rétrospective dédiée aux jeunes contestataires. Intitulée « To Egypt with Love », elle présente des photographies, des collages et des montages de médias exécutés par des plasticiens jusque-là inconnus. L'événement a remporté un succès immédiat, d'autant que le parti pris était de faire don des recettes de la vente de l'affiche de l'exposition aux familles des martyrs. D'un point de vue esthétique, les œuvres faites pour les galeries se caractérisent par une reprise des codes des médias internationaux : enfants brandissant le drapeau égyptien, manifestants escaladant les lions du pont Qasr al-Nil, étudiants résistant aux chars... Ces images diffusées en boucle ont en quelque sorte fixé et standardisé l'esthétique de l'imagerie de la révolution.

Les médias constituent également une thématique majeure du travail de certains artistes. L'impulsion des protestations ayant été donnée par les réseaux sociaux, des mots tels que « Facebook » ou « Twitter » ont été parmi les premiers à



Graffiti au pochoir de l'Égyptien Keizer.

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Le personnage de Sad Panda
 de l'artiste du même nom
 dans les rues du Caire.

étre inscrits sur les murs de la ville, voire à être personnifiés par des images héroïques. *A contrario*, la presse gouvernementale s'est retrouvée dans la ligne de mire, représentée par les symboles du mal et du mensonge. Les créations contestataires se sont ainsi illustrées à travers une virulente critique de la censure et de la désinformation menée par l'État. Le centre d'art contemporain de Darb 17 18 a organisé, en août 2011, une exposition autour de ce thème, intitulée « Maspero », du nom du bâtiment de la radio-télévision nationale. Autour de la thématique de la propagande menée par le régime de Moubarak, douze artistes égyptiens ont exposé leurs œuvres, parmi lesquelles les installations photographiques de Moetaz Nasr el-Din, les peintures d'Ali Abdel Mohsen et les vidéos de Khaled Hafez.

Démocratisation et marchandisation de l'art

Si la récupération rapide par le marché de l'art d'une dynamique artistique présente le risque de la standardisation de ces formes d'expression, elle ouvre parallèlement la voie à la démocratisation du milieu culturel autrefois dominé par un

discours unique servant les stratégies de l'État. Celle-ci définissait le choix des artistes « en vogue » qui occupaient par ailleurs souvent des postes au sein de l'administration. Faut-il rappeler que l'ex-ministre de la Culture, Farouk Hosni, figurait parmi les peintres les plus cotés du pays ?

La scène artistique, auparavant réservée à une poignée de privilégiés, accorde désormais une place aux jeunes. En juillet 2011, le musée Mahmoud Mukhtar a accueilli une collection d'œuvres intitulée « Naharda », qui signifie « aujourd'hui » en dialecte égyptien. Ce nom exprime la volonté de témoigner de l'instant présent et de faire table rase du passé. « Naharda » a présenté les réalisations de près de 200 artistes, professionnels et amateurs.

L'élan créatif du « printemps arabe », qu'il s'agisse des témoignages d'une diaspora diffusés sur la scène internationale ou des formes d'art marginales et non institutionnelles qui se manifestent dans l'espace public, ne doit pas faire oublier le risque d'une normalisation progressive des images de la révolution ainsi que les mécanismes qui changent les formes de la révolte en objets commerciaux. Ces créations soulèvent ainsi la question du rapport complexe entre l'acte créatif, la contestation et le marché de l'art. ■

NADIA RADWAN ET AMINATA TEMBÉLY

"The Poetics of Disappearance",
Daily Canvas, Issue 4,
Art Dubai Edition, March
22/23, 2013

SHOWCASE

THE POETICS OF DISAPPEARANCE

Imane Farès analyses a recent work by Lebanese artist Ali Cherri, which looks at the power and symbolism as well as the rise and fall of Syrian political figures.

I

In line with his philosophical, poetic and political dispositions, Ali Cherri carefully masters the technicality and visual nature of his works, lending them an intimate and enigmatic feel. His videos and photographs explore the realms between the real and the virtual, and the physical and the digital. His most recent work, *Dust and Other Anxieties*, is inspired by his 2012 video installation *Pipe Dreams*. The video captures a historic phone call between the late Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad and Syrian military aviator and astronaut Mohammed Ahmed Faris, who was part of the 1987 Soviet Interkosmos space programme. The father of the nation questions the 'hero' about his impressions as Faris looks down on Syrian lands from space. The conversation sees the 'eternal leader' cast a watchful eye on the children of the nation from the comfort of his office, even when they are thousands of miles away up in space. This was the end of the 1980s, a time when young revolutionaries – in Libya (Muammar Al-Gaddafi), Iraq (Saddam Hussein), Egypt (Hosni Mubarak) and Syria (Al-Assad) – asserted themselves as leaders of their countries, often taking power following coups. Power in these nations was – and in many respects still is – communicated through symbols: statues of 'founding fathers', larger-than-life billboards, speeches by leaders and of course, by the country's heroes.

In a sort of *mise en abyme*, Cherri's video installation comprises a monitor depicting Al-Assad as he addresses the cosmonaut in his spaceship through an identical monitor: an infinite loop of the image of the leader looking at the hero. Cherri juxtaposes this archival government footage with YouTube footage from early 2011 (when unrest in Syria began) in the background of the dismantling of statues of Al-

Assad across the country's protesting towns, including Hama and Daraa. The Syrian regime, fearing vandalism and haunted by the memory of destroyed statues of controversial leaders such as Joseph Stalin and Hussein, attempted to stave off the inevitable, sacrificing the 'symbol' in order to safeguard the 'image'. After all, the end is imminent when power begins to lose its monuments. This interface between two moments in recent Syrian history encapsulates the history of the entire region: the mechanisms of the construction and deconstruction of totalitarian power as well as the dreams and disillusionments of an entire nation.

In *Dust and Other Anxieties*, Cherri transposes a statue of Al-Assad – one that still stands in Lattakia – to a desert. The effigy is almost swallowed by a cloud of dust, similar to one created by a spacecraft in the process of lift-off. Through the haze, we perceive what was once a symbol of authority vanishing in a desolate landscape; it is far removed from the signs of life in the foreground, the recent passage of cars perhaps. The monument is seemingly lost in a vast, dusty and claustrophobic post-apocalyptic panorama and is almost forgotten in the background, taking up only a small fraction of the image. Cherri renders the main event a non-event: vulnerable in the midst of a majestic desert, the figure of Al-Assad becomes a haunting after-image, already a ghost of the past. This portrait of a landscape captures the moment when the figurehead begins to lose his power, both as a political figure and as a dominant, and dominating, idea. *Dust and Other Anxieties* is not a political statement; rather, it is a projection of a hazy, complex and polarised reality. It is a poetic disappearance that leaves us anxious about the void it creates. ☐

Facing page:
Dust and Other Anxieties 2013. Archival digital inkjet print mounted on dibond.
90 x 160 cm.
Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Imane Farès, Paris

Imane Farès

"The Poetics of
Disappearance",
Daily Canvas, Issue 4,
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Imane Farès

"Ali Cherri, la poésie politique", Victoire, n° 295, September 21, 2013, p. 26

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26 victoire 21 SEPTEMBRE 2013 LE POINT D'INTERROGATION

ALI CHERRI LA POÉSIE POLITIQUE

Plasticien et designer, Ali Cherri vit entre Beyrouth et Paris, où il expose notamment au Centre Georges Pompidou et à la Galerie Imane Farès. Il travaille la vidéo, la photo, l'installation, la performance et les impressions.

L'inspiration

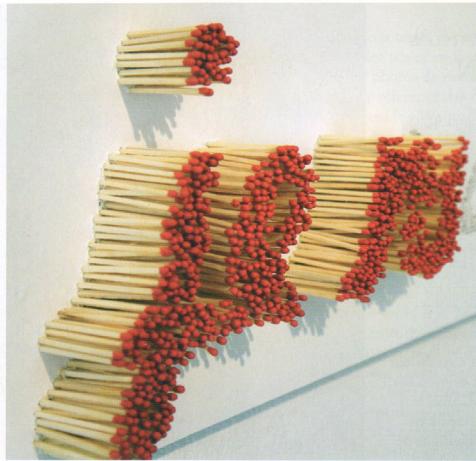
Également marqué par l'histoire de son pays, ses sources d'inspiration vont de Beyrouth à São Paulo en passant par la Syrie, toutes hantées par le spectre de la guerre et de la violence. Des paysages urbains minés, éventrés, débiquetés... captés et sublimés par l'abstraction. Entre poésie, politique et philosophie.

Les œuvres

Parmi ses dernières productions, «Le pyromane» (2012), installation réalisée à partir de centaines d'allumettes en réponse à l'acte d'auto-immolation de protestation politique. Le 17 décembre 2011, Mohamed Bouazizi, un vendeur ambulant tunisien, s'est aspergé de diluant pour peinture puis s'est immolé avec une allumette. Son acte désespéré a déclenché les soulèvements dans le monde arabe et en a inspiré d'autres. Cette œuvre souligne que cet acte n'est pas forcément le résultat d'un désir obsessionnel de mettre le feu aux choses.

Plus récemment, dans «The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters» (2013), il dénonce : De l'Irak à Gaza, du Yémen à l'Afghanistan et même aux États-Unis, le ciel est devenu un espace de menace. Le recours aux drones a débuté en 2002 et n'a cessé d'augmenter. Mais ces «robots tueurs» éteignisés, errant dans les cieux, observant et éliminant d'une manière «chirurgicale» des sujets, sont angoissants. Dans l'installation, les ailes en taxidermie détiennent l'étrange dualité d'être mortes tout en portant la vie. Elles évoquent des vautours spectraux suspendus dans l'air, qui guettent l'ennemi.

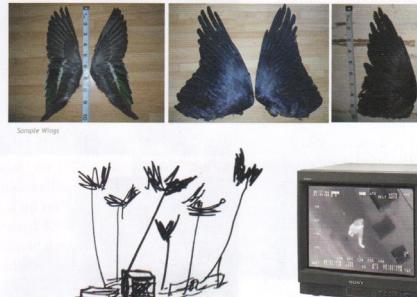
www.alcherri.com



«Le pyromane» (2012), installation réalisée à partir d'allumettes en réponse à l'acte d'auto-immolation de Mohamed Bouazizi en Tunisie.



«The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters» (2013) dénonce les drones, ces vautours spectraux suspendus dans l'air, qui guettent l'ennemi.



«Heroes-The Rise and Fall» ironise sur le personnage du héros et de son déclin.

Wilson-Goldie Kaelen,
 "A Fantasy for Allan
 Kaprow",
 ARTFORUM, September
 2009, p. 312

REVIEWS

Artforum International September 2009

of Hidalgo's art, and thus all the rooms in his show at TEA were painted in multicolored stripes of red, yellow, and purple—the colors of the Spanish Republican flag, flown until Franco's coup d'état.

A recent text that Hidalgo wrote while in Ayacata, the small village in the Canary Islands where he lives, reveals his unhurried way of seeing the world: He asserts that the world is ruled by chance, and that life is above all a form of transit, of continuous movement in space and time. What really matters is ethical action. The text continues, "Do not kill, be ignorant, harbor religions, extreme nationalism or any of the other things that are the root of all evil. Do not be racist; Let there be white, let there be black, and let there be white and black. Respect each and every sexual preference. Do not steal and brush your teeth every day." A sense of irony animates these "Notes for the Millennium" (2000), and they evoke a Mallarméan typographical chaos: The words appear inside a yellow circle on a blue background, luminous tones for a clearly Zen-inspired work.

—Juan Vicente Aliaga

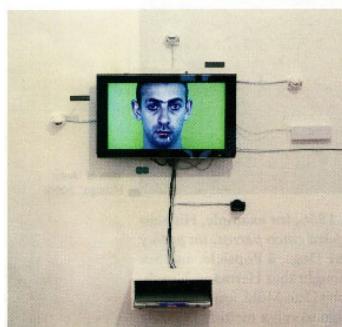
Translated from Spanish by Jane Brodie.

CAIRO

"A Fantasy for Allan Kaprow"

CONTEMPORARY IMAGE COLLECTIVE

The Contemporary Image Collective is located on the upper floor of a dilapidated villa that dates back to the 1920s. To get there, one climbs an elegant old staircase illuminated by a skylight and smoky glass windows. During the exhibition "A Fantasy for Allan Kaprow," curated by Mai Abu ElDahab and Philippe Pirotte, the light in the stairwell was refracted by a metallic blue sculpture hanging pendulously from the ceiling. The shape of the sculpture, *Homage to Roudah Island (The Result of One Month Listening to Oum Kalthoum While Building an Unfoldable Portable Nilometer)* (all works 2009), by Mariana Castillo Deball, approximates both the narrative twists and turns of the classic Oum Kalthoum song "Al-Atal" (The Ruins) and the architecture of the Nilometer, a structure of stairs and columns devised in Pharaonic



Ali Cherri, *Now I Feel Whole Again*, 2009.
 Interactive installation:
 video loop, light
 boards, sensors.
 From "A Fantasy for
 Allan Kaprow."

times to measure water levels along the Nile and maintain historical records of seasonal floods. (Used well into the twentieth century, the Nilometer was rendered obsolete by the completion of the Aswan High Dam in 1970.) The stated connection to Allan Kaprow's *Scales*, 1971, an action that instructed participants to carry cement blocks up a set of stairs and create a new series of steps along the way, is tenuous at best. Both works deal with the passage of time, incremental movements, and a seemingly arbitrary exertion of effort. But Deball's sculpture of wood, fabric, and metallic paper captures a tragic sense of decay. By giving material form to Oum Kalthoum's lyrics of lost love, it also evokes the work of another artist, the Lebanese sculptor Saloua Raouda Choucair, whose stacked wooden blocks of the '60s represent verses of modernist Arabic poetry.

"A Fantasy for Allan Kaprow" succeeded precisely because its links to Kaprow remained so loose. Conceived as a far-flung response to the traveling retrospective "Allan Kaprow—Art as Life," which opened in

2006 at Haus der Kunst in Munich and traveled through 2008, the show consisted almost entirely of newly commissioned works by eleven artists who grappled more with the intellectual rigor of the late artist's thinking than with the material traces he left behind. True, the Contemporary Image Collective filled its library with a neat display of Kaprow's scores alongside DVDs of his Happenings, environments, activities, and lectures, which visitors to the space could peruse. But the exhibition itself featured works that crucially avoided direct re-enactment or even homage.

Ali Cherri's video installation *Now I Feel Whole Again*, for example, delved into intimacy in the information age, with a screen showing the artist's face and a hand icon, that familiar tool for moving things around in various computer programs. With five motion sensors arranged around the screen, viewers triggered the activation of LED strips, which spelled out such amorous sentiments as I CAN FEEL YOU IN ME and WHEN YOU'RE AROUND THINGS HAPPEN. Cherri, who considers Kaprow's notion of the un-artist merely an intellectual exercise for young artists working in a region racked by conflict, conceived his piece as a challenge to the blurring of boundaries between art and life, artist and audience, prescribed by his American predecessor. Where contemporary artists are marginalized and the policing of sexual freedoms is mainstream, works such as *Now I Feel Whole Again* reflect a desire to seek refuge from rather than achieve contiguity with the norms of everyday life.

According to ElDahab, the participating artists initially balked at the exhibition's premise, arguing that Kaprow held little relevance in Cairo. Ultimately, he served not as a source of inspiration but as a catalyst for the artists to critique and assess their own practices. Considering Kaprow's plea for self-examination in his 1983 essay "The Real Experiment," that turns out to be a fitting tribute indeed.

—Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

TEL AVIV

Guy Raz

N & N AMAN GALLERY

Guy Raz's "Liga Terezin" project emerged from a trip to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 2006, during which the artist noticed the red uniforms of a local team hanging on a laundry line beside a soccer field outside the walls of the Terezin fortress. Raz, who played soccer during his childhood, documented these reminiscences in a straightforward style and did not return to the photos until 2008, when he undertook research at Beit Theresienstadt, an education center and archive dedicated to the memory of the nearly 150,000 prisoners who passed through the camp during its five-year existence. The revelation that a Jewish soccer league played matches every Sunday between 1942 and 1944 prompted a collaborative

effort between artist and archive. Their aspiration was to reconstitute the history of the Terezin league, whose teams were often named after the players' labor roles in the camp (i.e., the Electricians, the Gardeners, the Cooks) and whose formation changed according to the unpredictable transport schedule to the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp.

