ALMINE RECH

Ziad Antar
Liminal places and things

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Ziad Antar photographs liminal places and things. His practice revolves around the ambivalence of the relationship between reality and its technological representation. He realises photo-sculptures or three-dimensional forms within the exhibition space through a succession of formalist paradoxes. Not unlike cast sculpture, photography is a direct imprint of reality. It offers a matrix from which counter-forms can be printed and therefore its process is comparable to that of moulding. At least, this is exactly what the artist's experiments suggest, while playing with different forms of representation to create an image in between, that is, a sculptural transcription of a photograph at the limen of realism.

In Saudi Arabia, Ziad Antar has taken photographs of enigmatic sculptural forms on the Jeddah Corniche undergoing urban renovation. Made out of tarp and cordage, and not in the least concerned with aesthetics, these assemblages were installed to protect sculptures by Aref al Rayyes, Rabi Al-Akhras and, among others, Jean Arp, all of which had been commissioned in the 1980s. While these "camouflage" configurations may be reminiscent of Man Ray's *L'Énigme d'Isidore Ducasse* and further evoke the informal vocabulary of contemporary sculpture, Ziad Antar has actually elevated their status to that of found art – or, in Raymond Hains's words, 'sidewalk sculptures' – through the act of photographing them. In doing so, he has also humorously immortalized the gestures of the construction workers, who wrapped the public sculptures and thus involuntarily challenged the authority of modern art by giving the otherwise heteroclite ensemble an aesthetical unity negating the various Arab and Western artists' abstract schemes. Once his photographs are taken, Ziad Antar has operated an additional translation from two-dimensional images back to three-dimensional objects in order to create new sculptural works and complete the cycle of formalist deductions and transfers, which informs the overall history of photo-sculpture. If the artist's final sculptures have gained autonomy in the process, they nevertheless contain the memory of all the successive transformations that led to their actual shape from a modern paradigm to a vernacular, and ultimately contemporary, one.

A similar sculptural process is at play in *Solanum Tuberosum*, but on a different subject transitioning from agriculture to nature, and back again. Ziad Antar has been interested in the culture of potatoes for a long time, having previously filmed and photographed Lebanese farmers working in the Beqaa Valley. For his new installation, he has created a dialogue between a photograph, a sculpture and a document: namely, the portrait of a farmer holding freshly picked potatoes; a heap of very realistic concrete sculptures of potatoes installed in a corner next to the photograph; and a scientific manual, in which various names of tubers can be found. Thus, representation, presentation and knowledge are articulated and their respective discursive regimes complemented, while a purely ecosophical reflection is also developed through this work.

Indeed, Ziad Antar's ongoing research on the culture of potatoes, which he has been undertaking from Lebanon, his native country, to Belgium and the Netherlands, is further concerned with the history of human and economic exchanges through time. One of the most crucial roles of the artist today consists in writing counter-histories by investigating subjects, like the journey of potatoes of their agricultural exploitation, which have been so far neglected, if not completely ignored. They may be marginal, yet they are central to the understanding of our world.

- Pascal Beausse