

A lie with all the characteristics of the truth (video from Beirut)

The works of the youngest generation of Lebanese video artists give indication that politically engaged production may gain new impetus there in the years to come. Artists that have won international renown, such as Akram Zaatari, Walid Raad, Jalal Toufic, and Lina Saneh, to mention a few from the 1980s and 1990s, used video, film, and photographs to document the war in Lebanon. In their case, collating footage and photographs was driven by the fear of disappearance and death. Films were also made in a similar fashion. The therapeutic process of creating enabled their spirits to survive. They produced their works to document pure physical and psychological violence. Armed with a solid education in cinema, the new generation of artists is tackling the traumas of the Middle Eastern crises, both contemporary and from the recent past, in a similar though not identical way as the earlier generations (not counting the seismic impact of the international gallery/film market interests that have propelled such artists as Mohammed Soueid, Ghassan Salhab, Joana Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige, and Mahmoud Hojeij onto the international scene). They hardly see documenting and representing the traumatic events from their collective historical memory as an outlet for their art. In their videos they prefer to talk about leaving Beirut, about shedding the sense of guilt, about unfulfilled desires, the disintegration of the portrait, dogmas, abuse, things like that. Sharing a situation that seems almost hopeless, these young artists have state-of-the-art portable filming equipment and the precision of postproduction software at their disposal, which allows them expressive freedom. They present their dilemmas and desires, their visions and realizations in the light of entirely new, visually and aesthetically complex images, to get away from the tensions in the politically unstable region: be it their attitude to the institutions of power, the political order, the loss of historical memory, or social and interpersonal relationships, even in their own families. They develop the specific language of their videos, partly informed by the internet and mobile technology, with urban pickings. Are these ruins or the inertia of indestructible beauty? Lust for life or mortal terror? Something light and superficially playful, or serious and profoundly sensitive? Love? Sorrow? All that comes natural to them, and is real.

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