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ReConstitutions, DHC - Art, Montréal, 22 février - 25 mai 2008

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reminiscent of abstract paintings such as Malevich’s Black Square, acknowledge the cinematic heritage of crafting scenes together by hand, as well as calling to mind its forerunners in early photographic history, such as contact printing with glass plates.

The pair of reversed images titled Hopping the Light Will Save Us I (2008) celebrates photography’s ability to make the implausible—balancing a meteor rock on the back of your hand—entirely believable, through the use of stop action. In a parallel diptych, Hopping the Light Will Save Us II (2008), an extreme close-up pairing of inverted eyes stare blankly out into the room. In both sets of photographs, a sickly green glow illuminates the subject’s flesh, calling to mind the narrative convention in graphic novels of the hero’s transformation sequence. The light, proposed in the titles as a kind of salvation, inevitably comes with a price—superheroes must ultimately hide their powers and they rarely reveal their true selves without suffering the consequences.

Le grand jour takes square aim at the history, conceits, and tenets of storytelling in film and photography, while offering commentary on the construction of the lived environment and the everyday. Filtered through the lens of an analytical rewind, Grandmaison’s perceptions offer exciting promises of what lies ahead in his burgeoning career.

With five new works presented at Galerie René Blouin, Pascal Grandmaison offers the viewer his own series of “blowups.” The four pairings in the main gallery individually and collectively function as meditations on the sum of the parts of photography and cinema—lenses, views, flashes, and paper—and on the inherent complexities of references and signification.

The dates figuring in the titles of Background I: 1912–2007 and Background II: 1912–2007 (2008) acknowledge Antonioni’s lifetime, the extreme close-ups of crumpled paper refer to his use of the dead time, a cinematic trope in which the viewer’s attention is drawn to the evidence of an action that occurred outside of the narrative space. It is this aftermath that creates dramatic tension, as the viewer must infer the event rather than watch it revealed.

In a small space adjacent to the main room, Grandmaison’s piece titled Increasingly Empty Form (1928–1999 (2008), composed of twelve digital chromogenic prints mounted on Plexiglas, alludes to the life and work of another filmmaker, Stanley Kubrick. Like Antonioni’s films, Kubrick’s work bears hallmarks of his signature extreme close-ups generating dramatic tension. For his part, Grandmaison uses the close-ups of Kubrick’s biography to stress that images can’t tell the whole story. They do, however, exert their hold on the viewer by teasing out arresting moments for contemplation that become impossible to shake out of the imagination.

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ReConstructions

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Nos souvenirs sont souvent peuplés d’un mélange d’images fictives et d’images de la réalité. L’omniprésence des images médiatiques dans notre société du XXIe siècle assure à ces dernières une place de choix dans notre mémoire collective. Il n’est pas rare que l’on croise une personnalité dans la rue et qu’on la salute en pensant qu’il s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalis...
Made in Tehran – Six Women’s Views
Cicero Galerie for Political Photography, Berlin, Germany

The interest in the exhibition Made in Tehran: Six Women’s Views was immense. This is not surprising with photography by artists who call themselves “the children of the [Islamic] Revolution.” They are the next generation, after Shirin Neshat, and work in Iran, articulating urban life as they know and live it – in photo series. I was struck by their youth when I met three of the women in Berlin, and I wondered what makes their art so strikingly mature.

I asked Mehraneh Atashi how she was able to enter a traditional masculine powerhouse, the Zourkhaneh, where Persian heroes and clerics are venerated, combined with physical workouts and Sufi dances, for ecstatic experience. “I persisted, even after repeated rejections, until I got permission,” she said. “We have to fight hard to achieve our goals.” Clearly, persistence to claim a feminine space in a patriarchal society drives these women’s art. But so does the desire to attract Western viewers and collectors. Their exhibition history outside Iran is impressive; not so at home. Atashi’s “Bodyless,” for example, is delightfully reproducible with the front to describe, and date. One, which Dashti reproduced, is of a woman; the script reads (in translation): Pregnant with Effat, 1962.

Contrasting with these black-and-white images of the past, Newsha Tavakolian’s poster-sizedUntitled (2007) photographs focus on contemporary life, framed as if in passing, like news items. They take us into city streets to see women with blond-dyed hair and heavy make-up, their headscarves about to fall off, walls covered with pictures of martyrs who fought against Iraq, women in a café filled with cigarette smoke, Shirin Ebadi returning with her Nobel Peace Prize, and a child bride in her wedding gown. This beautiful but sad picture reminds us that girls are married at a young age in Iran, particularly in rural areas. Although the marriage age has been legally raised from nine to thirteen, said Amirpour, who spoke of the emancipatory effects of the Revolution, including an increase in literacy. Iranian women, she insisted, are self-aware and proud. This was conveyed in the Berlin exhibition, in which densely inscribed visual fields expressed more than words can say about the artists’ intentions.

Maria Zimmermann is a critic in Berlin.