

Sand Comes Through the Window

Taysir Batniji

6 June – 11 August 2019

Opening on June 6, 5 - 9 PM

Curated by Manal Khader

At Mina Image Centre



Manal Khader

Sand Comes Through the Window

Perhaps, in their attempt to meet, people seek to forget.

Hanna Mina, "Snow Comes Through the Window"

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Unlike Hanna Mina, whose novel inspires the title of this exhibition, in his works, Taysir Batniji does not seek to forget, but to embody the concepts of void, absence and separation. His works are pivoted on the representation of absence and the possibility of the disappearance of its forms of representation.

Batniji lives in Paris, where he works with a land from which he cannot work. In his recent work, *Disruptions*, he takes screenshots of encrypted WhatsApp conversations with his family in Gaza. At times, he would see his mother and at others he witnesses her disappearance. The scrambled images, sometimes due to poor internet connection and at other times because of war, transpose us to a space where the public and private are intertwined.

In *Fathers*, Taysir took images of fathers, whose photographs hung prominently in public spaces around the city of Gaza. The images foreshadow spaces where those photographs appear in workshops and shops around town, a majority of which may have been inherited and handed down by those absent fathers.

The images are not much of a sociological work on fatherhood as much as a research work that deals with the relationship between the photograph and the duality of presence and absence, or the idea of the presence of absence. The *Traces with water colors* collection then offers an interrogation of the aftermath of absence.

Batniji draws on the works of Bernd and Hilla Becher on water tanks, to offer a topographic document of the Israeli watchtowers spreading throughout the West Bank. In *Watchtowers*, Batniji sought to produce an optical illusion, where the viewers believe that they recognize what they are seeing, its content and its author. It is only on close inspection that one realizes

that these images have nothing to do with Becher's techniques. Here Batniji, invites his viewers to look closely on this turbulent presence as he transforms it into a record of disappearance, absence and separation.

Biography

Born in Gaza in 1966, Taysir Batniji studied art at Al-Najah University in Nablus, Palestine. In 1994, he was awarded a fellowship to study at the School of Fine Arts of Bourges in France. Since then, he has been dividing his time between France and Palestine. During this period spent between two countries and two cultures, Batniji has developed a multi-media practice, including drawing, installation, photography, video and performance...

Taysir Batniji's artwork, often tinged with impermanence and fragility, draw its inspiration from his subjective story, but also from current events and history. His methods of approach always distance, divert, stretch, conceptualize or simply play with the initial subject, offering, at the end, poetic, sometimes acrid, point of view on reality.

Already involved in the palestinian art scene since the nineties, he multiplied his participation, since 2002, in a number of exhibitions, biennials and residencies in Europe and across the world. Taysir was awarded the Abraaj Group Art Prize in 2012 and became the recipient of the Immersion residency program, supported by Hermes Foundation, in alliance with Aperture Foundation in 2017. His works can be found in the collections of many prestigious institutions of which the Centre Pompidou and the FNAC in France, the V&A and The Imperial War Museum in London, the Queensland Art Gallery in Australia and Zayed National Museum in Abu Dhabi.

Taysir Batniji's work is represented by Sfeir-Semler Gallery (Hamburg/Beirut) and Eric Dupont Gallery (Paris).

About Mina Image Centre

Mina Image Centre is a non-profit organisation, geared towards bringing to a Middle Eastern public the best of photography and artworks from the region and around the world. We look to engage a wide audience of enthusiasts and to propose a new reading for those who, until today, regarded photography as a trivial art.

The contemporary art scene in Lebanon and the region in general, has been thriving over the past two decades mainly within the realm of private initiatives. Mina Image Centre places itself among these endeavors and looks to join efforts with other existing institution in the Middle East to provide a much-needed platform for free and thought provoking artistic expression.

Why specialize in Photography? Our central interest lies in the "Image" with all its complexities and variations. We opted to launch our space with a photographic exhibition to shed light on the long history of photography. Mina looks to provide this dedicated space to debate, not only the past, but also the future of this multifaceted discipline of Art.

An artistic committee and a board of trustees head the Mina Initiative. The director of the Centre is Manal Khader, appointed by the board for a mandate of 3 years.

For additional information about our board, team members, past and upcoming events visit us on our website:

www.minaimagecentre.org



Mina Image Centre

Mina Image Centre Address:

Stone Gardens Building

Darwich Haddad St.

Port District

Beirut

00961- 70- 907011

00961-81- 281670

Opening Hours:

10 a.m- 8 p.m

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https://drive.google.com/open?id=1jzftS7T_CYtJWRySnqXPfSIRQm5Yz05K



Fathers, 2006

Color analog photographs, inkjet prints on Hahnemühle paper,
60 x 40 cm
(framed; 78,8 x 60,3 cm)

Courtesy of the artist & Sfeir-Semler Gallery (Hamburg/Beirut)

This series of “photographic portraits” made in Gaza’s shops, cafés, factories and other workplaces in 2005 and 2006 focuses on framed portraits of “masters of the house” (usually the late founder or, more rarely, the present boss) hanging behind a counter, conspicuously sitting on a shelf or hiding amidst a jumble of stuff for sale —“Unconscious compositions¹” arranged by the owners.

Beyond any sociological or cultural analysis, this series fulfill a personal interest in that state (or non-state) of present absence or absent presence —an “in-between” state. For the shopkeeper, representing absence and the relationship created between the image of the “father” and the elements that make up the photographic field delimited by the frame (the image in the image) is, in a way, an unconscious attempt to establish a link between the past and the present contextual environment. For my part, this work is also, more broadly, a way to question history and current events.

“Fathers” questions the encounter between the private and public spheres here: the portrait of the “father” —a private “shrine”, family reference, social reminder of the patriarch and public (collective) genealogical memory— and the shop, a living area (inside) as well as a place of daily, continuous, common trade (outside). Like the shop’s open door, the boundary between those spheres is porous, ambiguous, blurry. Neither public nor private, it is an “in-between” space.

Taysir Batniji, 2006, co-written with Sophie Jaulmes

1. Term borrowed from Walker Evans.



To my Brother, 2012

Series of 60 hand carvings from photographs on paper, 30,5 x 40,5 cm

In 1985 Taysir Batniji celebrated his brother's wedding with his family in Gaza. Two years later the First Intifada (1987–1993) broke out, and Batniji's brother was killed by an Israeli sniper on the ninth day of the uprising. How can personal loss be represented? Is it possible to render something absent tangible, to materialize a memory? How can we trace the porousness between the personal and the collective – especially in

the case of Palestine – when speaking of memory and of things lost? Batniji has etched a series of 60 inkless “drawings” on paper, based on family photos of his brother’s wedding. These “drawings” hark back to a happier time, one of joy and family gatherings. *To My Brother* is a fragile and poetic work which requires an intimate relationship with the viewer: stand too far away and the drawings appear as blank sheets of paper; stand closer and you will be able to trace the contours of the human shapes inhabiting these drawings, the artist’s memories, and the thin lines between an ephemeral presence and a permanent absence. Move closer still and you will be able to discern that Batniji has left out certain details, and emphasized others. As the title indicates, this series is a dedication to Batniji’s late brother Mayssara and a commemoration of his untimely death. However, this very personal history ties into a wider political context of strife in the Middle East, and it shows how personal experiences ultimately, in some way or other, become part of a collective narrative. Ultimately, Batniji’s tracing of loss and its aftermath is a story that speaks to us all: the tragic bereavement of a loved one transcends strict geographical boundaries and political discourses.

Text by Nat Muller, for the Abraaj Goup Art Prize catalogue, 2012
Spectral Empreints



Disruptions, 2015-2017

Selection of 36 screenshots, inkjet print on Canson Archive RC satin paper, 16 x 24 cm

Courtesy of the artist & Sfeir-Semler Gallery (Hamburg/Beirut)

2015/04/24

2016/08/04

2016/08/06

2016/09/04

2016/10/05

Disruptions brings together 86 screenshots taken between April 24, 2015 and June 23, 2017, during several WhatsApp video conversations with my mother and family in Gaza.

“Pixelized images, disrupted by poor connection, plunge us into a space where family communication is marked by conflict. The screenshots are dated. A possible connection is established between the disturbed conversation and the violent events taking place simultaneously in Gaza. The artist thus delivers a part of this common intimacy that stretches between two territories.” (text of the exhibition “Lignes de vie” at MacVal, Vitry-sur-Seine, March 2019)



***Untitled (Traces)*, 2016**

Watercolor on paper, 28 x 35,6 cm, 2016

Courtesy of the artist & Sfeir-Semler Gallery (Hamburg/Beirut)

For several years, the notions of emptiness, absence and tearing away have punctuated my work. These watercolors are kind of continuation of some earlier works (the series *Gaza Walls*, 2001, and the installation *Absence*, 1998) inspired from the displaying of portraits of “martyrs” in Gaza streets... All those faces themselves inclined to erasure (voluntary or natural deterioration, tearing, recovery, passage of time...). It is the uncertain status of these images that interests me here, the formal, The symbolic and deeply identitarian complexity they contain. (re)presentation of this double disappearance: the absence of beings whose existence is somehow “recognized” through the imaged presence (the poster) and the disappearance of the vehicle of the memory itself.



Watchtowers, 2008

Israeli watchtowers on the Occupied West Bank, Palestine

26 B&W photographs, inkjet prints on Fine Art Pearl paper, 40 x 50 cm

Courtesy of the artist & Sfeir-Semler Gallery (Hamburg/Beirut)

The idea for this project occurred to me during the 2004-2005 Bernd and Hilla Becher retrospective at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. I was struck by the formal likeness between the water towers, especially, and the Israeli watchtowers that have invaded Palestinian territory. That is why I decided to arrange these military structures “in the manner of” the Bechers. Like the German couple that started documenting Europe’s post-industrial heritage in the late 1950s, I tried to establish a typology of watchtowers on the West Bank. I wanted to create the illusion, a sort of “Trojan horse”, that viewers looking at these pictures think they know the subject matter and the photographers. But upon closer inspection, they

quickly realize that the images display neither the Bechers' advanced technique nor, of course, water towers. The particularly perilous conditions under which they were taken, by a delegated Palestinian photographer (born in Gaza, I am not allowed on the West Bank), himself unaccredited to carry out this "unofficial" mission, are visible: blurriness, clumsy framing, flawed light, etc. On the West Bank, there is no way to set up the same kind of heavy gear that the Bechers used, to wait several days before the light is right and to take time to frame the shot. No aestheticisation is possible. There is no way to envisage these functional military structures as sculptures, much less as heritage.

Taysir Batniji, text co-written with Sophie Jaulmes