

Pellicula

Galerie Janine Rubeiz

April 17, 2013

Leningrad

Gregory Buchakjian

Merry-go-round

Bassam Geitani

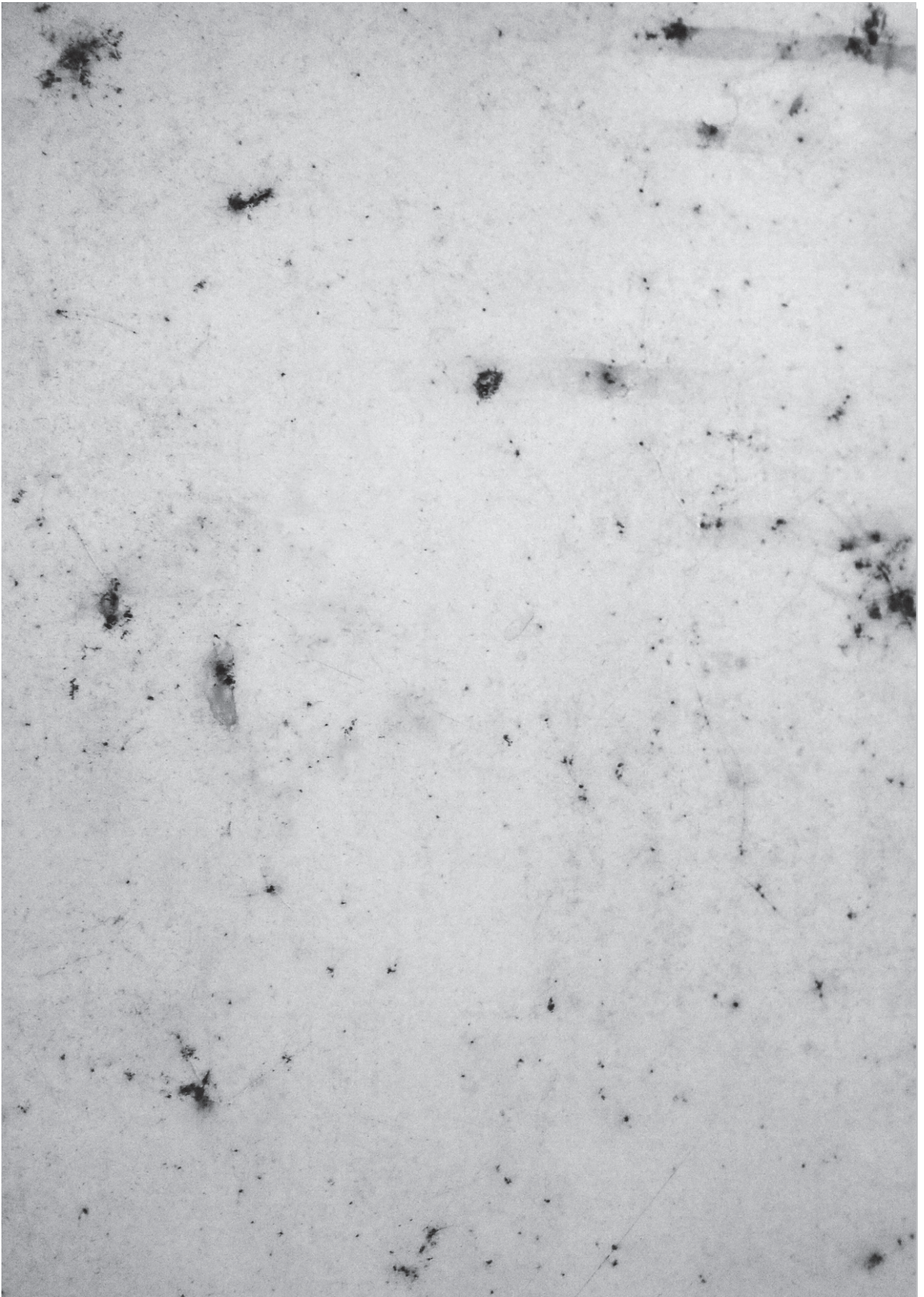
Au-delà de la Mer

François Sargologo

Circles

Hanibal Srouji





Pellicula

In 1920, American photographer and painter Man Ray composed *Elevage de poussière* (*Dust Breeding*) an enigmatic picture in which one can see linear traces in a sandy desert. Yet *Elevage de poussière* is not an aerial landscape, it is a still life, as Man Ray placed his camera over an artwork, Marcel Duchamp's *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (*The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*). Also known as *The Large Glass*, the piece – that afterwards became an icon of Modern Art – was at that time unfinished. It was laid horizontally untouched for a year, so that it collected a large amount of dust. Man Ray's two-hour-long exposure captures an accumulation of waste composed of tiny particles and pellicles.

According to the Oxford dictionary, *pellicle* [pelɪk(ə)l] designates “a thin skin, cuticle, membrane, or film”. *Pellicle* is one of the derivatives of Latin *pellicula*. Others include *película* (Spanish) and *pellicule* (French) that designate a roll of film (in both languages) and a movie (in Spanish). A single word is associated to a material that was for more than a century – till the advent of the digital age, the main medium for producing photographs, and to almost microscopic cutaneous particles that may crumble into crust. Let's not forget that *pellicule* (French) also means *dandruff*.

Photographs are therefore confronted to the menace of dismantling into rubbles and eventually disappearing. Among of the favorite topics in early photography were ruins. During the 19th century, practitioners traveled across the Mediterranean with their heavy apparatus, documenting monuments of Egypt, Greece and Ancient Near East. Could these pioneers have imagined that what was then a new media would shortly be exposed to ruin?

The *Pellicula* exhibition at the Galerie Janine Rubeiz raises the question of the fragmentation and dissolution of images as well as the memories they can carry, through multidisciplinary approaches involving painting, sculpture, writing, archaeology and, of course, photography.

Leningrad exposes touristic views of the city in what was once the USSR found in the rubble of a Beirut apartment: Stereo mounted slides have faded and shifted towards reddish / pink tone and postcards have amalgamated, after a bomb explosion, with various material (sand, debris, feathers).

Less dramatic – at least apparently – is the effect of time in François Sargolovo's *Au-delà de la Mer* (*Beyond the Sea*). This collection of photographs and narratives is, in Neda Koleilat Doany's words, “a meditative exploration of the impermanence of life and the persistence of memory” and fragile fragments that transpose the viewer into the uncertain memory of an undefined past.

Undefined and unclear also apply to the flock of children to appear in anamorphosis on the glowing silver cone / threatening bombshell constructed by Bassam Geitani. *Ronde* contrasts between the undefined jagged treatment of the components of the supposed image and the slick finish of its polished reflective center.

Associating fire and acrylic on canvas, Hanibal Srouji, in his *Circles*, generates a heterogeneous texture by fixing the debris of burnt cotton, carbon, graphite and colored pencil dust on canvas. His unframed and riven disks float on the wall as if they were infinitely enormous planets or infinitely small aggregates of pellicles, fleeting images, memories, in a state of disintegration.

Gregory Buchakjian

The author wishes to acknowledge Seloua Luste Boulbina.

IV.



"L.P (/B?) remazzi 1814-1871
Le Nouvel Ermitage. La salle de la peinture hollandaise et flamande 1860
Papier, aquarelle, 31,5 x 43,4 cm
Musée de l'Ermitage, Leningrad
A présent dans cette salle se trouve l'exposition de peinture néerlandaise du début du XVII^e siècle"

IV.



"[...]
[...] salle de [...] russe [...] 1854
[...] 30,7 x 38 cm
[...] tage, Leningrad
[...] dans cette salle se trouve l'exposition de [...] VIII^e - [...] les av. J.-C."

Gregory Buchakjian (b. 1971) is a photographer and art historian (Université Paris IV Sorbonne dipl.) living and working in Beirut. Faculty member at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA) where he was a co-founder of Atelier de Recherche (1997-2004), he focuses on critical research in modern and contemporary art in Lebanon and the Arab World. He has contributed to various publications in this field, including *War and and Other (Impossible) Possibilities. Thoughts on Arab History and Contemporary Art* (Alarm Editions, 2012) and *Hanibal Srouji* (Galerie Janine Rubeiz, 2013).

His personal work deals with the city and its history through multiple scopes including writing (*Halte*), installation (*Office Dada*), performance (*This is a slide of my House*), animation film (*What, shoes?*) and most notably, photography. After the 2006 war, his camera turned towards dark colored and gloomy images of decadent parties during which young Lebanese were trying to escape from social instability and political turmoil. Entitled *Nighthawks*, the project was exhibited in Beirut (*Comme des Garçons*, 2008) and part of the Noorderlicht Photofestival 2011 in Groningen, Netherlands.

Leningrad 2013

Installation composed of 14 elements.

Edition of 3 + 1AP

Text narrating events that took place during the second half of the 20th century, based on archive material found in the rubble of a Beirut apartment.

Typewritten on mid 1970s / early 1980s Canson 90g tracing paper.

Dimensions: 21 x 34.5 cm approx.

Reproductions of 6 postcards depicting painted interior views (by various artists) of the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, USSR; published by Aurora Editions (Leningrad, USSR); found in the rubble of a Beirut apartment.

Printed on Hahnemühle Photo Rag 308g paper.

Dimensions: 10.5 x 14.5 cm approx. (image); 15 x 20 cm (paper).

Reproductions of 2 postcards depicting wilderness in the USSR; published by [name unreadable] (Moscow, USSR, 1972); found in the rubble of a Beirut apartment.

Printed on Hahnemühle Photo Rag 308g paper

Dimensions: 9 x 14 cm (image); 15 x 20 cm (paper)

Reproduction of 5 stereo slides depicting sights of Leningrad, USSR; published by APN (Leningrad, USSR); found in the rubble of a Beirut apartment.

Printed on Hahnemühle Photo Rag 308g paper.

Dimensions: 5 x 10,2 cm (cardboards); 10 x 15 (paper)

Dimensions: 5 x 10,2 cm (cardboards); 10 x 15 (paper)

Printed on Hahnemühle Photo Rag 308g paper.

IV.



Leningrad I
9-79
Sphinx at the Universitetskaya Embankment
APN

IV.



Leningrad I
9-74
Battleship "Aurora"
APN

IV.



Leningrad I
9-82
Admiralty Building
APN

I.
Adnan K was born in Palestine on January 29, 1947. He grew up in Amman and was among the first children to join the American Community School, launched in 1955. He completed his studies at the American University of Beirut (AUB), then worked as an accountant. He inhabited the top floor of an old building in Hamra and drove a used blue Vauxhall Viva (licence number: 29008) acquired for 4000 Lebanese Pounds. Adnan K left Lebanon at an unknown date and settled in South California. In the past 10 years, he moved five times in El Cajon, Chula Vista, San Jose and La Mesa.

II.
In 1979, the so called "Abu Awd", member of the General Command of "Al Assifa" (Storm) forces within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) addressed his "respected brother Abu Said" an office agenda for the year 1979 AD/ 1399-1400 Hegira. The agenda contained a manuscript memorandum providing detailed accounts, with technical schemes, of combat procedures: Weapons operation, artisanal assembly of explosives, artillery ballistics and military strategy. The above mentioned "Abu Said" (whose personal rifle was a wooden handle Kalashnikov, registration number: 4847) lived in the same building that Adnan K. Either the two men were neighbours, or they dwelled successively the same flat.

WEAPONS →

III.
On June 18, 1986, Patriarch Mgr. Nasrallah Sfeir travelled from his seat in Bkerke to Dar el Fatwa, West Beirut, for a meeting with Sheikh Hassan Khaled, Mufti of the Republic. Meanwhile, President Amine Gemayel concluded his visit to Oman's Sultan Qaboos. These were the headlines of Al Amal, Al Anwar, An Nahar and As Safir newspapers the day after.

In the same publication, As Safir deploras growing insecurity towards members of West Beirut's Armenian community, involving kidnappings and murders. Three days earlier, jeweler Sarkis Buchakjian was released after 28 days of captivity. The tenant of the Hamra rooftop acquired and preserved - for unknown reasons - the 4 newspapers of June 19.

DETENTION?

The residence also comprises issues of An Nahar and Al Anwar from the aftermath of Gamal Abdel Nasser's death on September 28, 1970.

IV.
During the 'Liberation War' opposing the Lebanese Army led by General Michel Aoun to the Syrian Army in 1989, a shell shot from Beirut's North Eastern suburb fell on the top floor of the old Hamra building, smashing the living room, the façade and part of the roof.

Since then, the place remains in its ruined condition. In the kitchen, shelves are still filled with food whose expiry dates have passed for a long time.

Among other belongings, the rubble revealed touristic images of Leningrad/ Postcards bearing painted views inside the Hermitage Museum, postcards depicting wilderness in the USSR and stereo (dual) slides of iconic sights such as the Aurora Battle Ship.

COLLECTED: 14. 19th, 2012



Born in Lebanon in 1962, Bassam Geitani lives and works in Lebanon after a four-teen-year long stay in Paris. He holds a Masters degree from the University of Paris 1- La Sorbonne.

Geitani's painting commissioned for the "Pinceaux pour Plumes" exhibition organized by Galerie Janine Rubeiz for the benefit of the Lebanese Foundation of the National Library was acquired by the British Museum in London in the summer of 2006. In April 2010, he participated in the exhibition "Convergence - New Art Work from Lebanon", at the Katzen Art Center, Washington - DC. He had a solo show at Galerie Janine Rubeiz in 2011, "The Pendulum". His work includes installations, films and performances namely during projections of experimental films in Paris. He participated with an installation in the "Rebirth" at the Beirut Exhibition Center.

He has been awarded three prizes. Two of his works were sold during the Christie's Auction Sale in Dubai in 2006 and 2007. His work is in private collections in Lebanon and France.

Merry-go-round 2012

Wall installation 102 x 82 x 35cm, Super stainless steel Mirror and mixed media

The wall installation "Merry-go-round" consists of a red headed metallic conical formed mirror. The central cone is surrounded by an anamorphic drawing of cut metal, which is again patched with shredded pieces of children's clothes in reference to innocence.

Definitely, this system is based on the phenomenon of anamorphosis, where the design that surrounds the mirror, is restored when seen reflected on the polished metallic surface of the cone, thus, recomposing the image by reflection.

It is: children playing a merry-go-round...
Needless to say, the cone represents the head of a bomb shell..

This work aims at raising awareness of human absurdity.

Finally, this work remains interactive, where the viewer is invited to search for the perfect position in front of the work in order to see the reconstructed image.

Merry-go-round

"L'essence de l'image statique est de produire des tensions, entre différentes couleurs et (ou) différentes formes, de créer des harmonies nouvelles et équilibrées sur un support bi-dimensionnel. L'essence des jeux de lumières par réflexion est de produire en continu des tensions cinétiques lumières-espaces-temps, basées sur des harmonies de couleurs ou de clairs-obscur et (ou) de différentes formes et dans lesquelles le moment temporel et le moment visuel sont en équilibre." (Lazslo Moholy-Nagy, *Peinture Photographie Film*, 1993, p. 97)

In an age in which images have lost their reference to the "real" physical world –most of images produced today are a referent to millions of bits of electronic mathematical data termed pixels– Bassam Geitani's work investigates the relation of the static image and its "referent" on a 3-D form.

The work shown is a glimpse of Geitani's complex corpus of work that deals with visual explorations in space and time. *Merry-go-round* explores a new vision that ignites questions on mediated vision. After all, the physical world and its relation to its reflection has been a major concern for more than two thousand years now. Human vision has been speculated and the camera obscura phenomenon has been understood as analogous to the functioning of the human eye. When light passes through a hole into an enclosed space, an inverted image appears on the wall opposite the hole (Crary, 27).

Merry-go-round is an installation that consists of a central protruding stainless steel cone surrounded by a colorful mandala. It is when the viewer moves around the installation that the artwork comes to life. How does the cinematic tension, light-space-time, take place in Geitani's piece?

Jonathan Crary, in his seminal *Techniques of the Observer* (1992), is primarily concerned with the reference of images to the real world. This can be an interesting approach through which to perceive Geitani's work. The reference of the image in the artist's work depends on the viewer's position toward the protruding metallic object hanging on the wall. A visual riddle that turns into a haunting expression, Geitani's *Merry-go-round* is a mediated visual experience that offers ways to experiment light-space-time. Oscillating between the 2-D image on the wall and the reflected image on the conical shape, the viewer moves around the installation to find the 'perfect' angle in which the reflected image starts making sense. The colorful organic intertwined lines on the wall are transformed into an image of children going around and around in a never-ending mandala encircling the conical metallic shape.

The artwork demands to be seen in motion, yet it is not the artwork that is in motion but the viewer going around the cone in half circles echoing the mandala motion.

In its mutation the anamorphic drawing of cut metal and shredded colorful fabric becomes *Merry-go-round*. This anamorphic drawing is restored to reveal the image of children holding hands in a circular form rotating around the red headed cone. The artist uses this ironic representation of children reflected on a bomb-like shape cone to question the absurdity of killing children in wartime.

The work discussed here can be seen as an exploration of formal aspects of space-place in movement. It is a mediated sensory experience that not only questions the logic of vision, but also human absurdity.

Yasmine Nachabe Taan, Ph.D

McGill University



Contre toute attente, je crois que je ne me sens pas encore prêt à rentrer chez moi. Cela fait presque quinze ans que je suis parti, l'échéance du retour me fait déjà peur. Les marins doivent ressentir la même chose quand ils voient leur port d'attache se rapprocher. Le mont Liban se dessine au loin, beauté sublime.

François Sargologo (b. 1955) is a cross-disciplinary artist. His work questions different aspects of social and introspective issues focusing nearly exclusively on his hometown Beirut. Combining photography, literature, and the visual arts, impulses the basis of his creative process and is the ground-work "into the aesthetic possibilities" of his research. *Devoirs de Vacance* (*Obligations of vacancy*) an interplay essay cross-pollinating photography with painting, was his latest exhibited work (Galerie Janine Rbeiz, Centre régional d'art contemporain - Château de Tremblay).

Granted the "European Print Award" by Print Magazine for *Progress*, an artist's book (Great Britain). He has also been published in design magazines such as *Étapes Graphiques* (France), *Page Magazine* (Germany), and *I.D. Magazine* (United States).

As an art director, he has also designed various book collections for editors such as *Le Seuil* and *Fondation Bodmer Museum* in Switzerland [...]

Au-delà de la Mer

Au-delà de la Mer is a multilayered invitation narrating a lyrical vision of the ever-changing realities of the artist's hometown Beirut.

Installation composed of 25 elements:

1 book (opened and censored) displayed in a plexiglass device

12 photographs (from a series of 24) of Beirut and its suburbs

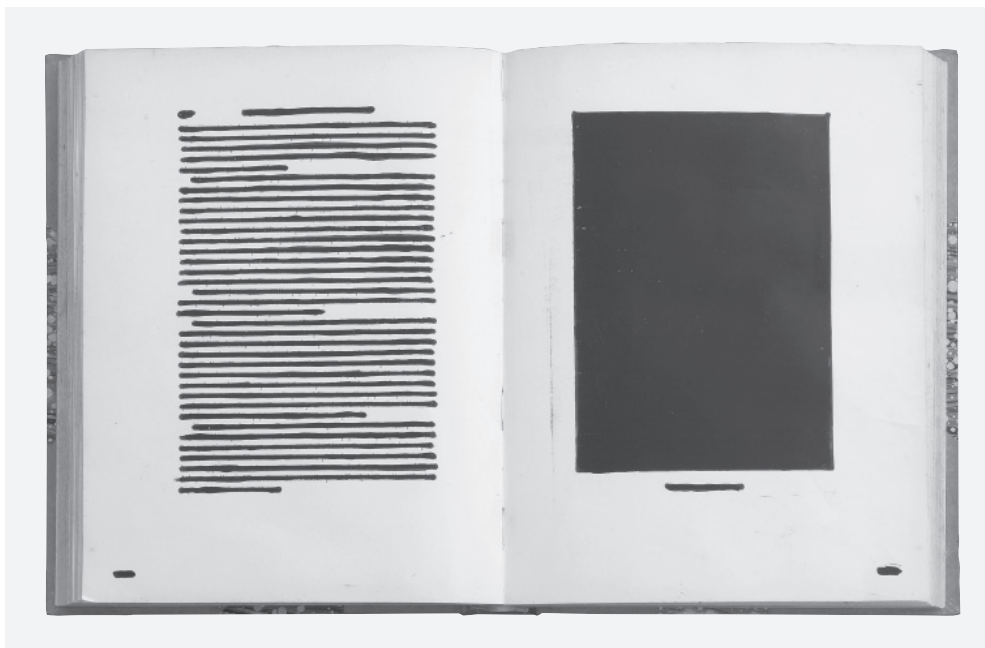
12 fictional texts

All the photographs (Color negatives and Kodackchrome slides) are lost and found material taken c. 1980-1984

Photograph dimensions: 12 x 12 cm

Printed on ultra smooth Epson cotton paper 300g paper

Reproductions of 8



Book 1. *Au-delà de la Mer*



Antoine n'appartenait pas à Beyrouth, il n'en avait ni l'ambition ni le goût. Il rêvait d'un autre possible, un ailleurs avec celle qui lui a été refusée. Il se rappela ses peurs d'enfants, il se rappela le baiser volé dans l'arrière-cour à seize ans. Demain il habitera une ville inconnue. Près de Détroit. Un divan et quelques fauteuils recouverts d'un drap blanc... Il ne se retourna pas et comprit qu'il ne reverrait jamais sa maison.

Au-delà de la Mer

Time is a construct which exists in a state of constant flux, a cascade of fragmentary glimpses of perceived reality which can only be summoned through our own personal vision and shared only through the unfolding of our collective memory. The past becomes a narrative unraveling into nonlinear acts; whispered memories turn into stories that shape our experiences of and in an undetermined world.

François Sargologo's "*Au-delà de la Mer*" is a meditative exploration of the impermanence of life and the persistence of memory. Traveling in what Umberto Eco might call the shadows of a fleeting dream – i.e. life, François wanders through the streets of his hometown Beirut and its suburbs, in a sort of time-travelling promenade. His lens captures the precarious marks left by time, the fleeting beauty of a past etched between reality and illusion. His writing echoes his lyrical vision like the pattering of a gentle spring fall and takes us on an intimate journey of mystical resonance at once remote and yet familiar. We feel the aching poetry in his photographs and listen to the elusive whispers of his thoughts. We are at once there and invisible. At home and far away.

"*Au-delà de la Mer*" is a homecoming memoir reminiscent of the Japanese notion of «Natsukashii» – a winsome nostalgia tinged with pleasure. In Sargologo's case, it is as if he is reviving the spirits lurking in the shadows, the forgotten laughter of children, the wisdom of the ages hiding in the crevasses of history. The artist's intent, if we can presume such a thing, is not to recreate what was lost but rather to invoke the buried essence of days gone by and conjure up the ever-changing realities of perception. Sargologo's work is a multilayered invitation: at once a retrospective of our collective memory and a deep personal exploration. As he takes us on his evocative journey, François' gaze is steady and assured, flirting with the tragic past but never falling prey to it, teetering on the edge of memory without forgetting the present moment. For the past is just another chimera, a construct, never finished but in constant motion, ever transformed and never still. It is within this realm of magical thinking that François wondrously captured that quintessential essence of history, by apprehending the very instant in which the impossible happens.

In this sense, "*Au-delà de la Mer*" goes beyond the mutual exclusivity of Western dichotomies; the art work is a delicate balancing act between three intertwined and yet illusionary dimensions: the past, the present, and that ever elusive horizon. Like the skilled illusionist that he is, François Sargologo tempts us with imagery and text to explore what is beyond the observable realm of the senses. The artist offers us his hypnotic vision where his visual narration combusts into one single magical moment of truth. As Plato stated, veracity does not reside in the visible; and centuries later, Roland Barthes argued that an image is never anything but its own plural description. In other words, its "meaning" is created by the person who experiences the moment. Sargologo's collected work here transforms us – the audience – from passive viewers to active participants. The artist, the art itself and the viewer become entangled in a time warp, engaged in an ever-evolving construction of narrative and significance. Every frame invites us to meander through the illusionary waves of an intimate vision only to resurface into the very presence of existence.

"*Au-delà de la Mer*" is truly a voyage into the rushing waves, a seduction of the senses through the intriguing prism of our consciousness and perception.

Neda Koleilat Doany, Ph.D
University of Texas at Austin





Born in Lebanon in 1957, Hanibal Srouji holds a Master degree in Fine Arts from Concordia University. Since 1989, he has been living and working between Paris, France and Beirut, Lebanon.

He has participated in numerous personal and collective exhibitions in Basel, Geneva, Paris, Strasbourg, Montreal, London, Tokyo, New York, California, Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

In April 2010, he participated in the exhibition "Convergence - New Art from Lebanon", at the Katzen Art Center at the American University in Washington DC and was part of the exhibition "Rebirth" at the Beirut Exhibition Center. He has received three awards from Quebec, France and Algeria. His work was sold during Christie's Auction Sale in 2006 and 2007 in Dubai.

He has also held many prestigious posts in France, Canada and the United States. He is, presently, holding an Assistant Professor's position at the LAU. His work is in public and private collections in Abu Dhabi, Canada, Dubai, France, Lebanon, Morocco, Switzerland and the USA.

Circles

The new works of Hanibal Srouji combining fire, carbon, graphite, colored pencil and acrylic on canvas, make reference to the artist's childhood memories. Experimental rendering, in line and paint, of clouds over the sea or land, leaves peaceful meditative traces on the round canvas with burnt edges. Scenes the artist used to enjoy in his younger days, which were soon to be confounded with dark puffs of smoke and columns arising from blasts of warfare.

Circles, could suggest formations of constellations when seen from afar, varying according to their installation. Yet, they call be examined up close in their details, ordered modulations of light and color on burnt canvas...

Fragments of memory as their author claims, or holes that puncture the walls of the gallery. Memory holes - in reference to George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four novel - where a memory hole is a small conduit leading to an incinerator used for censorship for documents or more symbolically facts due for destruction...

Here, once more, flames consume in smoke and dust ephemeral moments of time and space...

Srouji's new works remain intimate in the choice of the depicted subject and in their execution. The refinement of the syntax in line and color overrides what one could think of as a distressing the theme. They continue to be an invitation to meditation. The final message remains that of hope, a call to ponder upon what may seem simple in nature, or to observe the obvious and transform it into realms of anticipation.

Circles, 2013.
Fire and acrylic on canvas,
diameter 32 cm

< *Circle*, diameter 64 cm

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