Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/23284>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.23284

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 30 November 2016

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Julie Faitot, « *Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige* », *Critique d'art* [Online], 47 | Automne / Hiver 2016, Online since 30 November 2017, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/23284> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.23284

This text was automatically generated on 1 May 2019.

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Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige © Jessica Forde

- 1 Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige were born in 1969 in Beyrouth and, there, became artists. One can't help wondering how art could be of any help in such a hostile environment. It was during the Civil War, however, in a country in ruins, saturated by war and propaganda images, that their gaze was formed. In the words of the catalogue *Joana Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige: Two Suns in Sunset, Se souvenir de la lumière*¹, they were concerned with "conditions of visibility", and they experimented with different strategies

: first destroying images, in order to express the violence of the reality they were experiencing; then avoiding them altogether to escape spectacularity through the use of writing and storytelling; and finally, accepting that some images refuse to disappear, coming back to haunt us like the ghosts of the dead (*Images rémanentes*, 2003). This specific situation induces, in their practice, a relationship to politics that the monograph edited by Clément Dirié and Michèle Thériault² examines: art is not autonomous from society, rather it is the continuation of questionings, both political and aesthetic. Along with other artists in Beyrouth, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige developed their own tools to reflect, show, analyse and create with. When they examine Lebanon's history and archives through their artwork, they do so without nostalgia, precisely attempting to interact with the present and the future, as "dreamers" might. *The Lebanese Rocket Society* (2011-2015) conjures up the Lebanese space exploration program, a wholly forgotten episode of the pan-Arabic utopia of the 1960s. In the same way, film, as a medium, helps them expand their field of action, which they feel is gradually shrinking (*Je veux voir*, 2008), as they explain in a series of fascinating interviews published by Independencia.³

- 2 The way their art draws directly on life makes for heterodox working methods that reject set categories. Their projects are generated in a protean and almost organic way: *The Lebanese Rocket Society* started out as a sculpture (a life-size model of a rocket), whose construction and installation were made into a film, a photographic series, a sound installation, a rug and a performance. In the same way, the narrative forms they work with emerge from the encounter of deliberate settings with chance happenings, intertwining fact and fiction, personal essays and collective history. A whole separate catalogue is devoted to *Les Rumeurs du monde*⁴, a project at the junction of those two movements, where fraud fictions, under the guise of personal stories, become the "symptom of the state of the world."⁵ There might then be a picaresque dimension to Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's work, as suggest their relation to literature and adventure stories makes clear, in the importance they give to anecdotes — a term which, etymologically, refers to a story that has been kept secret — as well as in their understanding of individuals as singular political subjects.

NOTES

1. Joana Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige: *Two Suns in Sunset*, *Se souvenir de la lumière*, Londres: Koenig Books, 2016

2. Joana Hadjithomas Khalil Joreige, Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2013. Ed. by Clément Dirié and Michèle Thériault

3. Mevel, Quentin (interview). *Le Cinéma de Joana Hadjithomas et Khalil Joreige*, Paris: Independencia, 2013

4. Joana Hadjithomas et Khalil Joreige: *les Rumeurs du monde*, Berlin: Sternberg Press; Nice: Villa Arson; Manchester: HOME; Cambridge: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2015. Ed. by Omar Kholeif

5. Kholeif, Omar. « Spam, Spam, Spam, Spam, Spam, Spam, quel merveilleux Scam ! Une note de l'éditeur », in Joana Hadjithomas et Khalil Joreige: *les Rumeurs du monde*, Op. cit., p. 11