

**Ziad Antar** at SUPRAINIFINT Gallery, Bucharest  
**WHEN YOU LOOK AND YOU CAN'T SEE** (17 October – 24 November 2020)  
Mihaela Varzari, the curator of the exhibition, interviews the artist Ziad Antar

**Mihaela Varzari:** *Ziad, you come from Saida, where I have never been. What is it like?*

**Ziad Antar:** It's difficult to explain Saida to you, it's a very old city port and it has a lot of history going back to the Phoenicians. If you dig under the sea 1 km away from Saida, you can find cities. Today Saida is very different and I don't think there is any link between its different historical eras. There were so many different religions existing alongside each other but due to the change taking place in the Arab World, Saida became homogenous, one type of religion, namely Muslim. Life in Saida can be challenging if you don't organize yourself together with your friends in order to have exciting things to look forward to.

**MV:** *To escape, to move to Paris? At least this was my experience. I had to get away from the excruciating boredom my provincial native city had to offer twenty years ago.*

**ZA:** No, that's not me. I have my own life in Saida with my group of friends living our liberty in every single way. I like being linked to this city but the link to its history I think it's gone.

**MV:** *I know that in some of your projects, you documented the land from the sea. Could you elaborate a bit on your desire to reverse the camera; and was the photographic work I saw at Nottingham Contemporary, within the group exhibition 'From Ear to Ear to Eye' (2018) such an example?*

**ZA:** The Lebanese always looked at the horizon as an escape point. What if we turn around, literally, and look at each other by turning the camera towards us with our own mistakes and bad behavior? I documented the changing of the shore between Saida and Lebanon, while being on a fishing boat. The work you saw was part of this series.

**MV:** *It has become apparent from engaging with your work, that you capture things while still in the process of transformation and that you seem to develop one project from another where time becomes important. One of the consequences is that the aesthetics is completely arbitrary. We know by now about your interest in chance, in the hazardous, which in your case it also emphasizes the process. We know that you are not interested in laying bare certain realities or in issues related to memory per se, as many artists from the region do. What does become obvious is your interest in exposing the materiality of the photographic image. In your exhibition 'After Images' where you collaborated with the curators Hans Ulrich Obrist and Manal Khader, you used an old analog camera without a lens. It feels like you exhausted the medium, you used it and abused it, if I may say so, and*

*created these 'blurs'. For the exhibition WHEN YOU LOOK AND YOU CAN'T SEE, you presented this series, plus 'Dark Matter'. How did the blurs come into being?*

**ZA:** I don't seek out the hazardous. My working method starts with the research, I then go and visit the place, and I always wait for things to change, for a chance, like with the 'Expired' series (2011) where I worked with film from Studio Scheherazade, which is Hashem Madani's studio in Saida. The film had been technically expired since 1976 and the photos dated from the 1950's. In the case of 'After Images', I applied the same pattern. It was important for me to visit the region of Asir in Saudi Arabia, where the Lebanese historian Dr Kamal Salibi cited the villages, where according to him, the true stories in the Bible took place. All these are not enough for me to finalize my approach. It isn't about the blurs, it's more about the colors, actually. The use of the camera is attached to my pattern of 'trial and error'. When I visited the mountains of Asir for the first time, the place said nothing to me. During my second visit I continued documenting until this camera without lens affair came about. I was given by my family an old camera but while in Saudi Arabia the lens went missing and I carried on shooting. I was interested in the patterns of colors the women paint the interior of their houses, the Majlis in particular. They resemble the rainbow, a tradition which goes back many centuries of course, in Aseer province of Saudi Arabia, and I think in Northern Yemen. Men wear crowns with vibrant flowers and the traditional clothing, as opposed to that of the rest of Saudi Arabia, embrace many of the colors of the spectrum. Linking Salibi's theory to the story of the rainbow of Noah, and using the camera without lens which gives only colors, I somehow connected the dots after several visits, while continuing my research and living in Asir. So, what I am trying to say in response to what you call blurs, is that they aren't blurs, they are impressionistic, just as in paintings.



Ziad Antar, *Cairo*, from the series *Expired*, (2012). Courtesy of the artist

**MV:** *I have three questions to ask you arising from your answer; did you travel to Saudi Arabia at your own initiative, or was it a commissioned work or anything like this? Secondly I'd like to make clear for our readers what Salibi's theory is, and then...*

**ZA:** Sorry, allow me to interrupt. Not at all, it wasn't a commission. I was reading Salibi for some time when I met him, and I had no idea what I was going to do. Sadly he passed away and we never got the chance to talk more but during our conversations I couldn't explain to him that my intention was to go there first and then I was going to see how things will pan out. He told me that if I didn't want to go there to see, why don't I use google maps. It wasn't clear for me at the time that I could go there as an artist to assess the situation in order to find out how to take things further. I couldn't tell him I had no answers, that I was going there to discover but actually this was exactly what I was doing.

**MV:** *So, in a way you were looking for the fiction, trying to understand the fiction of the Bible.*

**ZA:** Yes, exactly. I don't use the camera as a tool for recording or showing, I am using the camera as a device for exploration, or transforming. This is the camera for me.

**MV:** *In one of your interviews, you said something really nice, that you don't document the moment, you document an era.*

**ZA:** Exactly. Or an idea, as the mountains of Asir aren't shown as mountains, they are shown as colors.

**MV:** *And then the Bible becomes even more fictionalized, in the same way that Dr Salibi's theory becomes intertwined with fiction.*

**ZA:** Yes, it's true. He states from the beginning of the book that he presents the results of his research and more archeological work is needed but that he did his own part. In the same way that I also played my own part. I added more ambiguity and more feelings to what he wrote.

**MV:** *You could say that you are documenting fiction.*

**ZA:** Yes, you could say that. We are referring to a controversial story, which Dr Salibi's thesis proposes, namely that the origin of the Bible is in the region of Asir, in Saudi Arabia.

**MV:** *I checked out this word, majlis and it appears that it means a separate building, or a lobby outside or within the house, reserved for guests only. If it's the case, then it reminds me of the traditional 'the big house' in Romania. For example my grand-father who was a forester in a village in Romania and enjoyed some kind of social status as a result of it, because almost no one had stable jobs, had a separate 4 bedroom house completely empty, while the whole family lived in a one bedroom small house. The big house was reserved for guests only. Is it the same?*

**ZA:** Yes, in way, yes.

**MV:** *Generally speaking the cultural links through folk or more recent history between Romania and the Middle East aren't sought out, and of course everyone wants to be associated with Western Europe. Not long ago, 40 or so years ago, under communism, my dad worked in Iran as a wine engineer for a few years, and he wasn't the only one. Your dad, you told me, used to travel from Lebanon to Romania to buy seeds before '89. We were part of a different international political axis while now Romania, as part of NATO has troops in Kabul since 2001 fighting terrorism. I mentioned manele music to you before, a very successful and authentic cultural product in Romania. It's made by the Roma, and it has its influences in Middle East, via Serbia, Bulgaria, and it's mixed with Romanian folk and contemporary pop as well etc. Also, anecdotally I could mention the shock my mum had when I told her that 'sarmale', stuffed wine leaves, the national dish of Romania, was originally from Middle East. We should not divagate so much and return to your practice, but nevertheless this is something that interests me tremendously. I'd like you carry on and talk about your project, 'Derivables II' I saw as part of the exhibition 'Liminal places and things' at Almine Rech Gallery in London in 2017, and then again exhibited by the Thames, in front of Tate Britain, organized by Selma Feriani Gallery, around the same time or a couple of years before in 2015.*



Ziad Antar, *Derivables II*, 2014. Courtesy of the artist

**ZA:** I used again the same approach in order to create a sculpture, how a two dimensional image can be transformed into a three dimensional object. What I did was to start by documenting. I used the product of the camera, which is an image, in order to arrive at a new reality, as I did for 'After Images'. This new reality is intended to ask more questions, like what is the importance of the

geography in a story coming from the Bible. The geography can be here, can be there, can be anywhere, and this is somehow my answer. The question of geography became relevant also for the project 'Derivables II'. While in Jeddah Corniche in Saudi Arabia, I documented a public park, which had a number of sculptures wrapped up for protection during the renovation of the area. I then added another layer by translating them again into 3D, which ended up looking quite different from the initial objects. Only later on I found out that they were artworks by Aref al Rayyes, Rabi Al-Akhras and, among others, Jean Arp, all of which had been commissioned in the 1980s.

*MV: So you uprooted these sculptures altogether, since we, the viewers never see what's behind the wrapping. Because they are wrapped up, as if before any ceremony taking place, it creates a tension there, but we aren't offered the satisfaction of ever seeing what's behind, which is great of course. The location is suspended, not because it isn't important, or the context which comes with is not relevant, but it seems to me that you do it in order to unveil the fiction of the origin and bring to light the arbitrary. This makes me wonder whether intentionally or not you are dealing or reselling with the Western Canon. After all your sculptures exhibited in the park in London were installed right next to a Henry Moore, 'Locking Piece' (1963-64), and inevitably became interlocutors.*

**ZA:** I am not sure if it does. Can you explain your question a bit more, please?

*MV: Let's see.. I am referring to the imposition of the Western Canon on the Eastern Europe, Romania for example, or Lebanon in the Middle East, where France had a strong cultural influence. This imposition cuts both ways, it can be part of the curricula for art, it is meant to 'modernize', and I'm aware it's a problematic word to use, as well as self-imposed cultural dominance, where out of fear of being left out, a culture knowingly or unknowingly, part of the official art or underground, it depends, rushes through all the artistic movements of the XX century, shall we say. I am not passing on a judgment here, since it can have a great effect, or on the contrary. In Romania there was an original response to Post-Modernism in literature in the 80's. There is however, correct me if I am wrong, a new type of imposition coming from the West which demands that the local context be explored at all times by the local artists, if you know what I mean.*

**ZA:** I can give you an example on this from my series 'Expired'. I was invited to take part in a photography exhibition in the U.S. and out of all the photographs from the series, they chose the ones on the Arab World. I got back to them and said that the archive contained more photographs from Western Europe or US than the Arab World. I got a reply where they cc-ed me by mistake saying that the work is interesting but we are not interested in his point of view on us. This is a problem which shows what stable, developed countries think of the underdeveloped countries. The same struggle appears with ex-USSR countries, which were always named in relation to Soviet Union. It was a struggle to end this idea and propose themselves as artists, not just ex-Soviet Union. Now we have the same problem, where some western curators and museum directors, are still looking for the exotic in the Arab World, and sometimes I feel that we are

judged superficially. My approach is more like, I am making art like you do, I am experimenting.

**MV:** *What you are saying is that you learnt a lot from the historical avant-gardes, either French or Russian, from experiment film etc you lived in Saida, Beirut and Paris, and you are entitled to make art on whatever subject you see fit. We have arrived back to the issue of geography and its fictions. I heard somewhere this sentence, 'Forget about history, the geography is more relevant' but cannot where. That's not to say that one shouldn't try to understand their own context, the history in relation to its place in the world, its geo-politics let's say but not when it becomes as a constrain, again maintained by the dominant cultures. In other words the pressure of identity politics, which can be extremely beneficial but not when one cannot ever get rid of it.*

**ZA:** What was interesting for me when I photographed the sculptures was the transformation from photography to sculpture, not that the sculptures being wrapped up was synonymous to veiled women in Saudi Arabia.

**MV:** *The veil women are required to wear is an important issue but a too facile and convenient analogy to make, I must say. So, not everything is forbidden in Saudi Arabia, there are still public sculptures.*

**ZA:** Of course not. In the 70's Saudi Arabia had an important public art scene, way more interesting than in Europe. They spent billion of dollars and brought everyone, exhibited powerful art and created the biggest public art in the world at the time. That is what interests me, not this analogy with the veiled woman.

**MV:** *I get you. I agree. I'd like to ask you now about your work with digital photography. The second series of the show is 'Dark Matter', where you experimented with your phone. You have approached digital photography rather cautiously and late in the day, if I may say so. What's your reason?*

**ZA:** When I work with analog there is a big time lapse whenever you take big decisions to shoot. With digitalization the image has changed its objective when we have surpassed 100,000 images per week, then from 1 million per week to several billion per day with the digital phone and camera.

**MV:** *Sorry to interrupt, you know the famous saying, 'it's easier to take a new photo than to find one.'*

**ZA:** It's easier I think to erase an image than to take one. We delete a lot of images today and this approach wouldn't work for me while doing a portrait, or working on 'After Images' and documenting in Saudi Arabia because I would end up deleting all of them. What is a nice image? No! I am not interested in this. I am documenting an idea, a decade, an era or something like this. If I think of what is a good or a bad image, while using digital, then I will erase all the images, and my project will be zero images. When I use analog, I have the time to breath in, to think about what I am doing every day taking images of the sun. I asked myself in the 'Dark Matter' project where I used my phone, where are all these images

going? What are they saying today? Everyone takes up the role of the photographer, documenting the 'I', this where I am now, this is what I am doing now, even if the person who takes the photograph isn't in the picture, s/he is still saying 'I'. So, it was a kind of restriction for me when I am thinking of what photography is today. It became also violent, because this digital easiness was used also by ISIS terrorists in their famous videos showing them cutting heads, where the emphasis was on 'I', I am cutting the head; I am cutting a head! People became so happy with this narcissistic point of view of the usage of photography, saying only 'I', so I decided to take pictures using this device that it has no point of view, total black images, black for who? For the screen, the screen of the telephone, of the computer.

*MV: We are both interested in narcissism, and we actually did a little project on this subject at the University of Kent a few years ago. So, you kind of conveniently moved from photographing the sun into going into the dark completely, into the night.*

**ZA:** Yes, total darkness. I wanted to use this device, the phone, in order to see how a new reality can emerge if you add a bit of luminosity, to see what happens to this total black image. It did create something else, I shall call it reality, which could be a painting or something like this, not necessarily photography, or not how people are using photography today.

*MV: I like both series, equally mesmerizing and poignant. What did you think of my interpretation of the image from the series 'Dark Matter', which had the beam lights, where I suggested it might have been in the night by a drunk friend of yours at a concert.*

**ZA:** Yes, the one you liked from the beginning and you put it in the exhibition. It wasn't taken at a concert. I don't know where it was taken because I asked random people and my friends to take total black images. What it's nice in your interpretation is that it creates fiction on what's happening in this picture. I start from total black images, then I add luminosity and in some cases something will emerge, or nothing at all.

*MV: We wanted to put on an evening with Lebanese Cinema but because of the crazy times we live in, it became impossible. Could you tell me if there are any significant influences within Lebanese cinema you might be indebted to? I know you studied film in Paris and you have been using video in your work. They are obviously two different things altogether.*

**ZA:** I cannot get into a discussion about Lebanese cinema because it's a big subject for me but I can tell you about a workshop on video art I did with the artist Akram Zaatari. I cannot tell you about video art on the scene because I don't follow and I do my own videos. If you want to understand how I fit into the Lebanese video art scene, I cannot tell you, you should speak to someone else.

*MV: Going back to the subject of exotisation or self-exotisation, on what non-Western artists are encouraged to talk about, I'd like to ask you how do you*

*approach war in your art. After all, you do come from a region where history is being written and re-written every day. I know that you are very tentative and you never approach it directly.*

**ZA:** I speak more about the struggle than about the war, the struggle to be a country. I did a series with the police men, I don't know if you saw them.

**MV:** *I did and I didn't. I only saw one image in the The Guardian newspaper, the English version, does it count?*



Ziad Antar, *Not shot from below ... Policemen*, (2007). Courtesy of the artist

**ZA:** When I documented the policemen on Harley Davison in Beirut I spoke more about the relation of the Lebanese individual with power. It is a very difficult relationship because you can choose to believe there is a country, in other words you can be subjective on this issue, which is not normal to have this kind of, so called freedom. The title of the series is 'Not shot from below...Policemen' (2007), and indeed as an artist I had the choice to photograph them from below or from above, but I didn't want to enter a power relationship. I took the picture from the viewer's point of view, showing that as a state employee, it's a decision he can take, which is really bad. During the shooting, I realized that for them it was more important what they wanted to do in life than taking their jobs seriously. In a normal country you have the power of the government which is meant to tell you what's good, what's bad and you must obey and I am not speaking about dictatorship or democratic country. In Lebanon this relationship is still very blurry. You can decide if you want to pay taxes, or obey the police, put the seat belt, you can decide. In Lebanon you have the choice. The series is about the struggle to be a country.

**MV:** *We all want stronger governments in Europe, dedicated to working for their people, not a bunch of managers indebted to trans-national corporations but this is another subject altogether. Your series reminds me of the American experimental film pioneer Keneth Anger, much interested in homo-erotic-fetishistic aesthetics, as in his short film 'Scorpio Rising' from the 1960's.*

**ZA:** I'm sure it does, it's that kind of look.

**MV:** *And we have arrived at the subject masculinity, the fiction associated with its codes and social constructions but I am sorry we don't have any time left. First of all thank you so much for making time for me, and while the whole world is experiencing all sorts of deep or surface anxieties, because of the virus spreading, you survived the explosion in August in Beirut, and you are lucky to be alive! We joked that your exhibition might have had post-mortem in the title.*

# WHEN YOU LOOK AND YOU CAN'T SEE

## SUPRAINFINIT Gallery: Ziad Antar

Curated by Mihaela Varzari

17 Sep – 24 Oct, 2020

### Curatorial essay

The exhibition WHEN YOU LOOK AND YOU CAN'T SEE brings together works in photography, video and sculpture by the Lebanese artist Ziad Antar spanning the last 10 years. The main exhibition space of the SUPRAINFINIT Gallery hosts the 10 photographs from the series *After Images* (2016) and *Dark Matter* (2017), as well as the video *La Souris* (2009). The vitrines' walls, visible only from outside, introduce the third series of photographic works, *Cactus* (2014) and are part of an installation that include a public sculpture.

*After Images* is the result of Antar's long term engagement with photographing the Arabian Peninsula, emirate by emirate. His visit to Asir, south west region of Saudia Arabia, was related to a controversial theory by Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi, which advocates that the origin of the Bible is in Arabia, specifically the region of Asir. Knowing he was going to take pictures in Arabia, Antar used an old camera, passed on to him by a relative, only to realize that once he arrived at Abha airport, the lens had gone missing. What followed was a photographic documentation of the region using a lens-less camera, and it resulted in these blurs of light and color, sumptuous and sensorial, which portray no specific place at all. Some of them seem to be taken under seawater, others are luminous and capture the sun itself, and if you squint a nuclear explosion may appear, or amorphous shapes colored in black and white shadows. Hans Ulrich Obrist, the co-curator together with Manal Khader of Antar's exhibition *After Images: Stories from the Mountains of Asir* (2016) observes, in his curatorial text, the liberating function of these non-representations, these smears of color. He comments: "They are a statement against sacredness and offer a possibility of freedom in a very turbulent landscape."<sup>[1]</sup> This challenging of religious doctrine and convention through radically profane readings of them, recalls a similar irreverence that Antar enacts upon photography itself. In using it against its intended purpose, as he sets out to do in his lens-less landscape images, we may recall Maurice Blanchot's ideas concerning the image and fascination, whereby the image must pass through a series of deaths in order to become visible and fully severed from its referent. Antar's treatment of the photographic image; the deliberate over-exposure, lack of clarity, absence of perspective; are the very opposite of the attributives we usually associate with photography's principle

strengths, but which are also, nevertheless, possibilities of the medium, specifically its unavowable possibilities.

The title of the exhibition WHEN YOU LOOK AND YOU CAN'T SEE evokes a blind spot; a visual typology and an economy of seeing, that Antar's works are invested in. Albert Camus anti-hero Mersault is also familiar with a kind of blind spot – he suffers a visual outage on a beach in French Algiers, and kills an arab. No other reason is given for this murder than this momentary blindness caused by the overwhelming sunlight. The blind spot, for Mersault, functions as an alibi for his murder, as it does in Antar's works but for different reasons. Here it legitimizes, without judgment or sentimentality, a state of affairs. The landscape speaks for itself. From blinded, dazzled, by too strong a light, such as that of sun, to the final limit of day, which is night, the series *Dark Matter*, the second photographic works in the exhibition, rejoin Antar's investigation into what may constitute visibility. Over the recent years, Antar amassed a vast collection of photographs taken with his mobile phone in the night, and he asked his friends to send him night photographs. The images would then be overexposed in Photoshop until some shapes or colors emerge. The resulting images are undeniably arbitrary; undistinguished patterns of pixelated surfaces, some of them in vibrant synthetic colors, others muddier or even opaque. *Dark Matter* raises a series of questions related to digitalism; the first, an older issue, goes back to the French avant-garde, and asks what it means to be an artist in an era oversaturated by images; the second addresses the persistence of an ever expanding narcissism, perhaps a symptom of the pervasiveness of social media. Antar turns his phone away from himself and transforms it into a collective experience by involving his friends to play along for fun, who upon request sent over shots taken in the night. The photograph of beams of light in the dark has been selected for its suggestive traces of a shared physical experience, and we are left to speculate on the source of its origin; a drunk friend during a concert in the middle of the night or merely an accidental pocket photo. In both series what started as a documenting project, ended up with an 'archiving' of light and a production of aberrant forms and color, whereby the medium of photography becomes the main character.

Living in an area where Antar comes from, in many ways, marked by conflict, proxy or otherwise, his work indirectly touches upon Lebanon's recent troubled history. The video *La Souris* amusingly captures that uncomfortable truth specific to almost all power based relationships; that of complicity. A simple setting is composed of a toy mouse being repeatedly directed at a real mousetrap. Lucky in its few chances to cheat death, finally the trap snaps shut. The unexpected ending shows the mouse sitting parallel to the trap in some sort of perverse pact. Trained as a film maker, Antar demystifies this medium by using it in its most rudimentary way, a thread which runs throughout his entire practice, whereby lack of facilities and means of production are taken as artistic provocations.

Antar's videos are translations of his ideas into the realm of the moving image, as already noted, and this process of mediation is responsible for his photo-sculptures, the results of transforming photographs into three-dimensional

objects. And so the third photographic series present in the exhibition covers both of the gallery's vitrines, but visible only from outside. While documenting Beirut, also known as the city of cacti, Antar decided to photograph them; an exercise perhaps in self-exoticization through an over-identification with such a recognizable national symbol. Close to the gallery's vitrines, in a public mini park, a sculpture in cement and resin representing a mature cactus has been installed. As enigmatic as it is, to make a replica of a cactus, it reflects Antar's artistic practice, which develops intuitively away from conceptualization, and only after a work is complete, certain explanations emerge. There is another reason made apparent more recently, which Antar explains, namely how cacti were used as fences in Prehistory, for protection against animals, as well as for marking private property; hence the inevitable wars. The cactus, according to Antar, has trapped streaks of violence within its history. We shall see how the people of Bucharest will react upon encountering this prickly, solitary, self-sufficient, hard to handle and difficult to love plant in concrete, and how it will stand as an autonomous piece of artwork.

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[1] *After Images: Stories from the Mountains of Asir*, Contributions by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Yahya Amqassim, Manal Khader, Yasmina Jraissa, Kaph 2016, p.18

[1] *Post imagini: Povesti din Munții Asir*, texte de Hans Ulrich Obrist, Yahya Amqassim, Manal Khader, Yasmina Jraissa, Kaph 2016, p.18

## **Eseu curatorial**

### **Mihaela Varzari**

#### **Traducere din engleză în română de Mihaela Varzari**

Expoziția CÂND TE UIȚI ȘI NU POȚI SĂ VEZI reunește lucrări de fotografie, video și sculptură ale artistului libanez Ziad Antar, realizate pe ultimii 10 ani. Principalul spațiu expozițional al Galeriei SUPRAINFINIT găzduiește cele 10 fotografii din seria *Post imagini* (2016) și *Materie neagră* (2017), videoul *Șoarecele* (2009). Pereții vitrinilor, vizibili doar din exterior, introduc a treia serie de lucrări fotografice, *Cactus* (2014), și face parte dintr-o instalație care include o sculptură publică.

*Post imagini* este rezultatul implicării lui Antar pe termen lung cu fotografierea Peninsulei Arabe, emirat cu emirat. Vizita sa în Asir, în sud-vestul Arabiei Saudite, a fost inițiată de controversata teorie a istoricului libanez Kamal Salibi, care susține că originea Bibliei se află în Arabia, în mod special în regiunea Asir. Știind că urma să fotografieze în Arabia, Antar a folosit un aparat de fotografiat vechi, cadou de la o rudă, pentru a-și da seama că odată ajuns la aeroportul din Abha, lentila dispăruse. Rezultatul a fost o documentare fotografică a regiunii folosind un aparat fără lentile. Consecința a fost aceste pete de lumină și culoare, luxuriante și senzoriale, care nu desemnează spații specifice. Unele dintre ele par a fi imagini subacvatice, altele sunt strălucitoare și captează soarele iar dacă vă încruntați o explozie nucleară se poate întrezări iar altele prezintă forme amorfe colorate în umbre alb-negru. Hans Ulrich Obrist, co-curatorul împreună cu Manal Khader al expoziției, *Post imagini: Povești din munții Asir* (2016) a lui Antar, observă funcția eliberatoare a acestor non-reprezentări, acestor urme de culoare, în textul curatorial. El comentează: ‚Sunt o declarație împotriva sacralității și oferă o posibilitate de elibertate într-un peisaj foarte turbulent.<sup>[1]</sup> Această provocare adresată doctrinelor și convențiilor religioase printr-o interpretare profund profană, devine simultană cu ireverența pe care Antar o adoptă față de mediul fotografic. Folosindu-l împotriva scopului său principal, așa cum își propune să facă în imaginile sale de peisaj realizate fără lentile, putem aminti ideile lui Maurice Blanchot referitoare la imagine și fascinație, cum că imaginea trebuie să treacă printr-o serie de morți pentru a deveni vizibilă și complet desprinsă de referent. Manipularea imaginii fotografice de către Antar; supraexpunerea ei deliberată, lipsa de claritate, absența perspectivei; sunt opuse atributelor pe care le asociem cu principalele puncte forte ale fotografiei dar care devin cu toate acestea palpabile posibilități ale mediului, mai ales posibilitățile lui ‚tănuite‘.

Titlul expoziției CÂND TE UIȚI ȘI NU POȚI SĂ VEZI evocă un punct mort; o tipologie vizuală și o economie de vedere, care îmbogățesc lucrările lui Antar. Mersault, anti-eroul lui Albert Camus, este de asemenea, familiarizat cu un fel de punct mort - suferă o întrerupere vizuală pe o plajă din Algerul francez, și ucide un arab. Niciun alt motiv nu este oferit pentru crimă decât această orbire momentană cauzată de lumina copleșitoare a soarelui, care i-a provocat orbire temporară. Punctul mort, pentru Mersault, funcționează ca un alibi pentru crima sa, așa cum se întâmplă în lucrările lui Antar, dar din diferite motive. Aici legitimează, fără a emite judecăți și fără vreo urmă de sentimentalism, o stare de fapt. Peisajul vorbește de la sine. De la orbire, uluire, de o lumină prea puternică, precum cea a soarelui, până la limita finală a zilei, care este noaptea, *Materie neagră*, a doua serie de lucrări fotografice din expoziție, se alătură analizei lui Antar asupra a ceea ce constituie vizibilitate. În ultimii ani, Antar a format o colecție vastă de fotografii făcute cu telefonul mobil, precum și de către prietenii săi, care, la cerere, au trimis fotografii făcute în timpul nopții. Imaginile au fost apoi supraexpuse în Photoshop până când au apărut unele forme sau culori. Imaginile rezultate sunt incontestabil arbitrare și variază între modele neidentificabile ale suprafețelor pixelate, unele dintre ele variind de la culori sintetice vibrante până la griuri întunecate aproape de negru. *Materie neagră* ridică o serie de întrebări legate de digitalism; prima, adresată de avangarda franceză, care întreabă ce înseamnă să fii artist într-o epocă suprasaturată de

imagini; a doua abordează persistența narcisismul în continuă expansiune, poate un simptom al omniprezenței rețelelor de sociale. Antar își re-direcționează telefonul, și îl folosește pentru a crea o experiență colectivă prin implicarea prietenilor, care la rugămintea lui, îi trimit fotografii făcute noaptea amuzându-se. Fotografia care captează raze de lumină în întuneric a fost selectată pentru că sugerează urme ale unei experiențe fizice comune și ne permitem să speculăm sursa sa de origine; un prieten beat în timpul unui concert în toiul nopții sau doar o fotografie accidentală de buzunar. În ambele serii, ceea ce a început ca un proiect de documentare, a sfârșit prin „arhivarea” luminii, care la rândul său a creat aberații de formă și culoare, prin care mediul fotografic devine personajul principal.

Locuind în zona din care provine Antar, în multe privințe, marcată de conflicte, proxy sau de altă natură, opera sa se suprapune indirect cu istoria tulbură recentă a Libanului. Videoul *Soarecele* surprinde, într-o manieră destul de ilară, un adevăr inconfortabil, cu unele excepții, specific oricărei relații bazate pe control, și anume cel al complicității. Un mise-en-scène simplu este compus dintr-un șoarece de jucărie care este îndreptat în mod repetat către o capcană de șoareci reală. Norocos în puținele șanse de a trișa moartea, în final capcana se închide. Finalul neașteptat arată șoarecele așezat paralel cu capcana într-un fel de pact pervers. Educat în regie de film, Antar demistifică acest mediu folosindu-l în cel mai rudimentar mod, un fir roșu care parcurge întreaga sa practică, în care lipsa facilităților și a mijloacelor de producție devin provocări artistice.

S-a remarcat deja că videourile lui Antar sunt traduceri ale ideilor sale în domeniul imaginii dinamice. Acest proces de mediere este responsabil pentru foto-sculpturi, rezultate ale transformării fotografiilor în obiecte tridimensionale, procedeu deja folosit cu alte ocazii. A treia serie fotografică prezentă în expoziție, acoperă pereții ambelor vitrini ale galeriei vizibile doar din exterior. În timp ce documenta Beirut-ul, cunoscut și sub numele de orașul cactușilor, Antar a decis să-i fotografieze; un exercițiu de autoexotizare prin identificarea excesivă cu un astfel de simbol național recunoscut. În imediata apropiere a vitrinelor galeriei, a fost amplasată într-un mini parc, o sculptură în ciment și rășină reprezentând un cactus matur. Oricât de enigmatic ar fi crearea unei replici, acest aspect reflectă practica artistică a lui Antar, care se dezvoltă intuitiv, departe de conceptualizare și numai după finalizarea unei lucrări, anumite explicații sunt oferite. Există și un alt motiv, pe care Antar îl explică mai recent, și anume modul în care cactușii au fost folosiți în loc de garduri în Preistorie, pentru protecție împotriva animalelor, precum și pentru marcarea proprietății private, de unde inevitabil survin și războaie. Potrivit lui Antar, istoria cactusului are întipărită în ea violență. Așteptam reacția bucureștenilor la vederea acestei plante spinoase, solitară, autosuficientă, greu de manevrat și dificil de iubit, turnată în beton; și cum va reuși să existe ca o piesă de artă autonomă.