

frieze

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translucent circles, triangles, rectangles and squares that generate each composition. The structures transform the original human gestures into cold, stylized frames that know no strain or tremor. The temporal and formal unpredictability of the original performances – it was impossible to determine their precise length, or to predict the exact configuration of each new group – becomes a permanent sculpture, or, in the artist's words, 'a memorial'. But if most memorials are monuments – that is, embedded in a rich substrata of symbolic references – 'Memorials for Intersections' is a delicate and literal tribute to the truisms of algebra and, in particular, to the branch of mathematics that – by observing the characteristics of groups – celebrates touch, union and confluence.

Despite being fixed, the colourful plastic surfaces have a relative mobility: even if they cannot be removed or interchanged, they can be slightly rearranged. This reiterates the transience of the initial impulse, as well as articulating the relationship between gesture, documentation and object. Despite this process, the simplicity and playfulness of each memorial bears a disconcerting plainness that claims direct filiation to the best minimalist and constructivist traditions. The transparent geometrical figures that stand on the large metal frames assume shifting tones throughout the day, an ever-changing structure that reverberates the live acts that originated it.

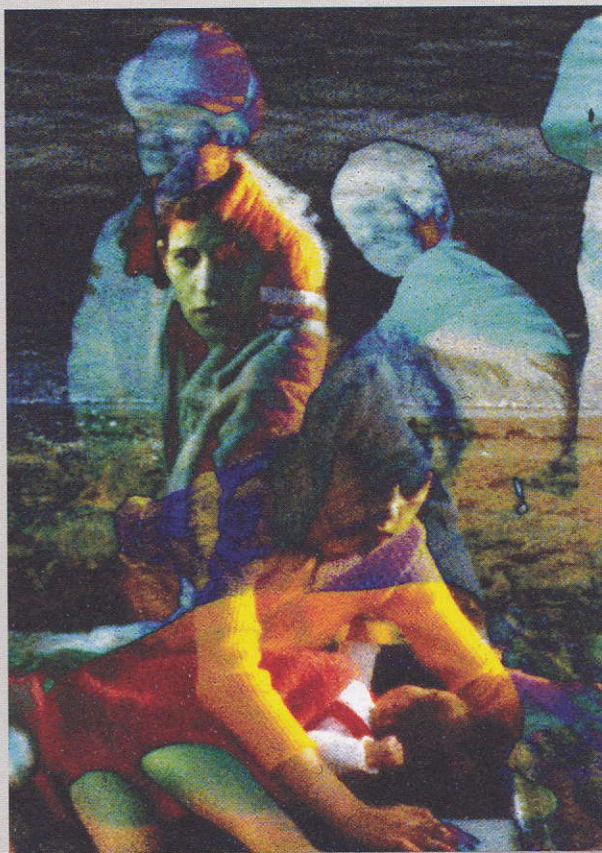
The memorials can mean many things: they can be the transubstantiation of the hands that hold the shapes; a crystallization of the produced variations; the result of a faulty photographic documentation, or even the distilled remnants of a country's troubled past. Yet, they remain a solid body of sculptural figures that have a life and a presence of their own, regardless of their stratification. And so it seems that, yes, a performance can indeed become a very good sculpture.

FILIPA RAMOS

1
Haris Epaminonda
Chapters, 2013, 16mm film
 transferred to DVD,
 four-channel video installation

2
Amalia Pica
Memorial for Intersections #1,
 2013, colour-coated steel
 and Perspex, 1.8 x 2.2 x 1.1 m

3
Setareh Shahbazi
 from the series 'Spectral Days',
 2012, c-type print,
 dimensions variable



3

SETAREH SHAHBAZI

Gypsum Gallery, Cairo

On a visit to Iran in the summer of 2009, the Berlin-based artist Setareh Shahbazi stumbled upon a vast trove of forgotten family photographs. Trips to the countryside, elaborate games of dress-up, passport mugshots – they were all there. She hadn't seen these images in years and, in many cases, couldn't really remember them or their contents. Scanning each photograph, she played with them – overlapping disparate forms, adjusting colour palettes, cropping in and out, messing around with composition. The net effect of these experiments was the cultivation of an almost hallucinatory air, a collision of faces, times, textures and shapes.

Late last year, a series drawn from these experiments, entitled 'Spectral Days' (2012), was shown at the newly opened Gypsum Gallery in Cairo. In two cosy rooms, some 40 works were simply hung – frameless and using office clips – and arranged in a motley patchwork of formats and sizes. From afar, the works assumed a slightly weathered air, as if they had been laid out to rest in the desert, accumulating sandy sediment and absorbing contact with other people, other places, other times. Often, their constituent parts – for these images are mostly born of encounters with other images – form an indiscernible tangle: faces lie over faces, eyes are cut out, backgrounds are occluded and images hold within their bounds an exploding piñata of warm, even psychedelic, colour. One work composed of two overlapping photographs results in the disappearance

of the features of someone's face; another yields a phantom nose. Each possessed of a unique aura, the assembled works seem to hover halfway between lived experience and conjecture, documentary and fiction – tracing, you might say, the mysterious manner in which memory works. (Did that really happen? Did I imagine you there? Were you there? What was I doing? I must be mixing things up.)

Stepping back, the series represents a shift for Shahbazi, who is best known for her precise, computer-generated images in Marvel Comics-inflected pastel shades that sit somewhere between the aesthetic of Pop art that of a child's colouring book. Those works, often inspired by archival images, evoke the frame as a stage – a place of hugely unlikely encounters. And so, a lush jungle might mingle with a Corbusian housing complex, or a lion might roam around the Giza pyramids alongside an oversized naked baby. That particular image universe is a sea of moving parts, each infinitely interchangeable with the click of a mouse. While 'Spectral Days' also produces unlikely encounters, Shahbazi has moved away from using other people's archives as source material (in the past she has been known to dip into the Beirut-based Arab Image Foundation's archive, for example) and toward drawing on her own. Having jettisoned the personal for years – possibly because it seemed sappy or nakedly strategic in an identity politics-fuelled art world – she has come to mine it for the show at Gypsum. This is welcome and serves the work well.

The new work, it should be said, is different in another important way: the artist has let go of the photograph as a sacred form. For fetishists of the archive with a capital A, Shahbazi has committed the gravest of sins, estranging these 'originals' from their roots by hurling them into other, distant places. In this way, the works assembled here may be more akin to painting than to photography – marked by a painterly freedom, painting's imaginative possibilities, and a state of not being tethered to any discrete reality. And like paintings – as opposed to, say, pastiche collages – these compositions exist as single works, almost as if marking a moment in time. Again, the analogy to the precise moment a memory is triggered seems an apt one.

If it's true that taking photographs ruins the workings of one's memory, 'Spectral Days' seems to point to a world in which memories, in turn, leave their marks on photographs as physical traces. Could this possibly make them more true? Could the hazy enigmatic workings of the subconscious leave fingerprints – the antidote to Roland Barthes's argument that a photograph is a 'mad image, chafed by reality?' In and out of focus, these images seem to be soiled by wear, light and sundry collisions and confusions. They fray, tear and wither in time – a bit like the surface of a painting that has been left too long in the sun.

NEGAR AZIMI