Haunting images, imagined truth.

On the work of Léa BELOOUSSOVITCH

Most images around us appear and vanish like passengers in a transit zone: always on the run, unable to stay. Others have the capacity to touch, or perhaps hunt us – they are a thorn in the flesh of our digitized, supersaturated media society. One of them is the photograph of three year-old Aylan Kurdi whose drowned body was washed up on a Turkish beach last September. The shocking image had a significant effect on the shifting public perception of the ongoing refugee crisis and opened a sparking debate around the ethics of the circulation of such pictures. These emotional exchanges were recently nourished by an obscure contribution of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei who published a highly stylized, black-white image that is showing a re-performance of the iconic Aylan Kurdi-photo. Critics claimed that Ai's photograph added absolutely nothing to the fast-moving debate and mostly contributed to the flourishing career of the artist himself. Without any doubt, the simple duplication of an excessive emotional picture hindered the creation of an 'informed' public. On the other hand, one must recognize that such images have significant agency – they need to be published and seen as a testimony of political and ethical injustice. So, how can artists contribute and entangle viewers on a deeper level beyond the mere surface of such fraught images? And what are the ethical ramifications of recirculating such images for the public?

The works of artist Léa Belooussovitch (*1989, Paris) aim in the heart of those questions and deal with the research-based, hybrid documentary image. They use the possibilities of the reframed media image as artistic strategy to inquiry the promise of truth linked to photography/ film and ask how to transform a 'matter of facts' into a 'matter of concern'.

The large felt drawing **Ile de Lesbos, Sept. 2015** (color pencil on felt, 110x180cm, 2016) is based on an extremely emotional photograph of an exhausted refugee who is welcomed by coastguards during his arrival at the beach of Lesbos. Belooussovitch transformed the fraught image freely out of her imagination into an abstract composition with color pencils on felt. As in her other felt drawings (Syrie-province d'Idleb-2013 or Liberia et al.) the original image documenting an act of violence and suffering, rests invisible. The viewer gets only the title and needs to re-imagine the pictured event as well as the 'information' behind it. In doing so, the abstract, colorful composition offers a delusive beauty that raises the question what can be seen and what is left to the viewers' imagination. Besides, the use of an organic material plays an important role for her translation process: Felt that became essential in the works of artist like Josef Beuys, where it stands for warmth and protection but also for a questionable mystification of the artist's own biography. Belooussovitch negotiates such autobiographical readings and uses the enigmatic material instead for a cathartic act that transforms an emotionally charged media image into a deceitful beautiful, complex drawing based on her own imagination. The absence of the pictured crime, of an 'event' in her abstract compositions positions itself against an overconstructed media image, questioning what viewers believe in and about a photograph as a document with indisputable historical/political value.

The video **The Hunt** (1'14", loop, 2016) uses found footage of amateur animal hunting videos that the artist discovered on various online hunting platforms. From the extremely long documented hunting processes, Belooussovitch extracts only the ending sequences of the final shooting and presents them in a never ending loop. While the original videos are an emotional documentation of the act of killing, often illustrated with loud rock music and personal comments on the excitement of shooting, the video concentrates on the short, brutal moment of dying. In doing so, the artist isolates the video material from its frightening background and shows the silent moment of death in its pure and uncompromising form. She hereby questions the spectacular framing in media as well as the rapid re-circulation and repetition of such image material on diverse platforms.

The two framed photographs **Inconnue** (2016) and **Sans titre** (2016) are part of the series **Les Oubliées** and use a forensic image technic to challenge the indexical status of photography: The artist found a box of old molded photographs in the basement of her mother and made a selection of several images that she cleaned, scanned and extremely enlarged. Through the reframing of the pictures– two small portraits of the artist's mother – the materiality of the old, yellowed photographs becomes visible: a hair on the photo paper, dust and irregularities in the toner overlap the former portrait. The pictured subject is replaced by its own materiality that documents the process of time, inscribed on the photo paper as light and color. The almost abstract, marble-like compositions play with the indexical character of photography and treat the medium as one that falsifies 'reality' and memory.

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