

SAID BAALBAKI *Doing and acting in tandem*

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Paola Yacoub

I'd like to begin by thanking Said Baalbaki for his participation in the ARP program. I will just say a few words as to why Said's work interested us for this research program, and why we feel an affinity with him.

Said not only paints to produce objects for display.

If I have well understood, for him, the action of painting also uncovers the hidden layers of memory, revealing *the relations that form between a soul and a material*.

Painting also means contributing to the analysis of a historical situation.

But this ability to analyze is inherent to the act of painting.

For Said Baalbaki *to act is also* – to quote him – *to reflect on what he is doing*.

He conjures: *A magic trick. An apparition. A disappearance. An absorption. A rejection*.

The reflexivity of his action is crucial for us.

Said will discuss one of his major works, *Memories of stones*. Stones *live* in Beirut allow for a smooth course from lithography, a technique of etching on stone, to the city's stones, its ruins, its reconstruction: to the drama of Beirut, in short.

Once again, we come across an example of the intersections between diverse domains that we are exploring. Here, intersections form between etching, architecture, urbanism and history.

We are already aware of the historical significance of stones in the region. One need only think of the sacred stone of Elagabalus in Homs, a baetylus, probably the remains of a meteorite, both phallus and God. Elagabalus ordered it be carried in a long procession through Rome. On a stone, art, mythology, politics and war were already completely intertwined.

By addressing in this way the implications of such work on stone, Said incorporates the question of the interpretation of his work, and it is a very strong choice. He alludes to the difficulty of being in history, and at the same time writing it. It is a recurrent, nagging undertaking, in politics as in art. Louis XIV asked Racine to chronicle his reign. No luck – the chronicle was burned.

It is this dilemma, the interpretation of his action, in action, that Said evokes. Hence the importance of dialogue with a historian, here Gregory Buchakjian, who I thank wholeheartedly for joining us for this talk.

I'll now hand over to Said.