

On Experiencing the Mountain

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From the artist's website: www.nadimasfar.com

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The Lebanese landscape has marked the country's popular imaginary throughout its modern history, as the quintessential idyllic symbol of the country's then-recently obtained independence. Whether in the form of landscape paintings depicting nascent towns against a stratified scape of land and sea in Mustafa Farroukh's paintings, or in Fairouz's songs about daily life in rural Lebanon, landscape has emerged as a medium of national and nationalist imagination: a central component of the Lebanese imaginary. *Experiencing the Mountain*, an ongoing project that the artist has devoted his time to since 2014, is a work that engages with this tradition while setting the ground for a contemporary encounter with a de-nationalized landscape. The work revisits questions central to the medium of landscape: what is the relationship between territorial violence and pictorial beauty? What types of physical, material violence have the Lebanese wars impressed on the seemingly serene, mute mountain-scapes that surround us? What role can have representation and « beauty » in the specific context of the country? The work departs from maps, geological surveys and historical accounts of the Lebanese landscape, and proceeds to multiply the views, working from thousands of photographs taken at hundreds of sites across the entire country, forming until now an archive of twenty thousand images representing multiple seasons, multiple lights, multiple angles. The work also draws inspiration from a range of experiments in photography and land art, especially the work of Robert Smithson, in which "site", as a concept and as an experience, plays a key role in the fashioning of photographic and spatial dispositifs that grapple with the pictorial and material qualities of land and landscape. The encounter generated by *Experiencing the Mountain* is marked by a tension between planning and contingency. The artist meticulously scouts for his locations and fills in the voids in his database-like landscape project. At the same time, the beginning of each trip is destabilizing and disorienting, prone to countless surprises. Engulfed by the affective and sensorial powers of the scenes before him, the photographs exit the boundaries of the survey and design instead a dispersed sensual space that is at once personal and material—plastic, haptic, erotic.