

Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter.
Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

Samuel Beckett, *Worst ward Ho*, 1983

This first solo show of Francis Alÿs in Lebanon and the whole region spreads out around a new animation film that stays in the core of the space.

"*Exodus 3:14*" shows a woman repeatedly tying a simple knot in her long hair that unknots. The reiteration of this small event contaminates and taints the many other works, early or recent, that Alÿs has gathered, through the different way each of them explores zones of turbulence, from the motions at the core to the spread-out effects, ranging from the miniscule to the monumental.

Knots'n Dust reflects on the notion of turbulence, from instability to total chaos, from meteorological phenomena to geopolitical manifestations, from a simple knot in the hair to an ascending spiral. Knots represent links and bonds, as well as resistance and binding. They are the smallest unit in the making of a fabric yet they are its sine qua non condition: a continuous surface that can bring some opacity, some support for projection, inscription, hiding, drawing and building.

This show occurs in a country literally surrounded by endless conflicts and repressions and that is populated by million of refugees. Between the traces and the oblivion of the country's wars and wounds, between memories of a faraway golden age and the never ending (re)construction of an increasingly globalized metropolis, Beirut seems to produce a space inside of the tornado, in its eye, with a vision of history frozen in monochrome. You can see it as a space for freedom or for alienation. You can build on it or drown in it. But it will not be the same for everyone nor will it be forever.

As in many of Alÿs's work, every affirmation walks along with its opposite, any gesture comes with its own undoing. *Doubt, doubt again & doubt better*. This poetic step invites the spectator to engage in larger issues throughout deceptively insignificant details.

Further than the installation of "*Exodus 3:14*" where the material of the film literally envelops the work itself, Alÿs has gathered paintings, drawings, sketches, postcards, workbooks and notes. This exhibition gives focus to the preliminary, the intuitions, the rebounds, the traces or the result of the process of making, showing the course and the detours of the ideas, each element building links between apparently disparate works. Alÿs's work is characterized by fragments that borrow from one another, sometimes exchanging statuses. Studies and sketches become paintings, and some paintings are also templates that can multiply. On display are six small canvases connecting tornados to hair, whilst they associate with the motion of sketching.

At the end of the space you can find a complete archive of all the artist's films. This is also a way to bring a significant practice of his to the space: performances. Most of these films are recordings of travels or walks that become demonstrations, discrete disruptions of public space and order. This corpus, that the artist releases freely on his website, represents a political as well as poetic statement. Benign acts, like passing by or playing games, become a way of interpreting the space, a place, the world we live in so to make some meaning shift, change, or even subvert. Their modesty is a strength, as sometimes doing nothing is doing something, and doing something is doing nothing.

With *L'imprévoyance de la nostalgie (Dad)*, 1999, a knot becomes something close to a lock, an interdiction to leave that doesn't hold to anything, an impeachment. The piece seems contrary to Alÿs's walks and explorations, standing for immobility. As with the unexpected association between hair and tornados, Alÿs's work produces visual bonds between the body and its environmental situation. The work however, through its title, relates the work to oblivion and loss.

Tornado is a 33 min video where the artist chases “dust devils” and attempts to enter their eye with a camera in hand. Francis Alÿs then films their windless core, a monochrome of dust that literally abstracts him from the outside world. As a local echo of this series, the show includes photographs taken by Alÿs in the streets of Beirut in 2015 during a sand storm.

Was this yellow dust traveling with the wind from the uncultivated soil of the neighboring countries Iraq and Syria, where war previously held most of the agriculture? In many regions there, the soil is not fixed anymore by roots and plants and has become volatile after years of conflicts. The desert walks and flies away, the political situation draws a migrant landscape from one desolated country to a modern metropolis that receives a veil of dry mud.

In a new series of postcards there are sentences written with Alÿs’ finger onto the windshields of cars covered in dust. These sentences are small spirals again, reversing to contradict and at the same time offering a way to understand the absurdities life can produce, and to free ourselves from some rationality that prevents our success.

Exodus 3:14, the new animation film, portrays a female character completing a benign and beautiful gesture that the loop transforms in a Sisyphean task. With this knot, a vortex opens itself; the hair infinitely undoes itself as in a gesture of self-absorption in which the woman appears both engaged and detached. The film is projected on thousand drawings that were necessary to produce his 3’20” 2D animation, physically illustrating a recurrent theme in the artist’s work: the massive disproportion in between effort and result, in between work and labor. Exodus 3:14 also activates a game of opposite actions: joining and unraveling, arranging and disrupting, doing and undoing, drawing and erasing. Untangling knots is the only thing a machine is unable to do. Knots require and epitomize the work of our hands.

Knots (walks), produced in Mexico in 2006, occupies the light well of BAC, produces its own code of registering the incidents of a walk: the small reactions, movements and accidents that happen to the stroller. These notes are written with different knots accompanied by their translation on a sheet of paper, tying the knots to actions and situations. The result is memory of some sort, once the code is learned, can be read eyes closed by running the rope through one’s fingers like a rosary or an Incan quipu. But it also illustrates the way Alÿs once again establishes a certain commonality between his actions and the research of a vocabulary of sculpture.

The Camguns are composites of cameras and weapons, constructing sculptures that stand guard. They are visual transcriptions of the word “shooting”. The circle they compose invokes the uncanny, as though the Camguns are strange birds, both standing in the world of representation and eliciting games of deadly roles.
