



View of *Tornado*, 2000–2010, video, color, sound, forty minutes.

BEIRUT

Francis Alÿs

BEIRUT ART CENTER

Jisr El Wati Building 13, Street 97, Zone 66

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A cryptic question appears in one of Francis Alÿs's many studies for *Tornado*, 2000–10: “What relationship can one build with a tornado?” The words “pure present,” hastily scribbled underneath, are far from a full-fledged response but offer an important clue for understanding the microcosm that is the artist's first solo exhibition in Lebanon. Above all, the phrase suggests an unadulterated sense of being in the moment, the pursuit of a self momentarily yet perfectly suspended, or, in the words of art historian Michael Fried, the “primacy of absorption.”

To what end does (self-)absorption function in Alÿs's work? In the forty-minute video *Tornado*, the artist chases or keeps watch over dust devils with a handheld camera. Once inside the tornado, all sense of direction is obliterated: Ubiquity of motion, recorded by the camera as a billowing brown monochrome, becomes the only reality to which one is beholden. Dissolution of extremities—in this case, conceptual, not physical—also takes place within the minimal visual economy of the video *Do/Undo*, 2008, in which Alÿs

nimbly flicks papers inscribed with the words “DO” and “UNDO” back and forth. This repetitive act allows the words to melt into each other despite their meanings and perhaps serves as a blueprint for *Exodus 3:14*, 2014–18. Titled after the biblical verse in which God says to Moses, “I am that I am,” this new work comprises six hundred and thirty-nine drawings and the stop-motion animation derived from them. Here, the U-shaped spatial configuration of the drawings, hung or suspended in a grid, gently evokes the whirl of a tornado and guides the viewer through the incremental movements of a woman trying to make a knot out of her own hair. In the video, projected onto a blank paper among these drawings, the woman shows no sign of fatigue or frustration with her task. Doing immediately leads to undoing, keeping her entirely, and forever, absorbed.

— Gökcan Demirkazık

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