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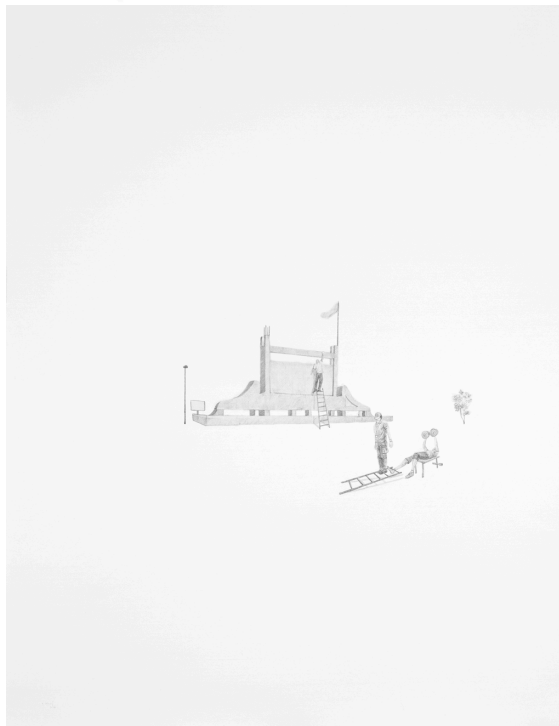
Massinissa Selmani

GALERIE ANNE-SARAH BÉNICHOU

For his exhibition “*Les choses que vous faites m’entourent*” (The Things You Do Surround Me), Massinissa Selmani presented drawings from four series created over the past three years. A sense of suspension and disorientation hovers over these works. Clearly, the artist has learned the Surrealists’ lessons about the hidden subversive power in the most ordinary things, and about art’s potential to break open even the toughest outer skin of reality. One strategy, which Selmani uses in the “*Promesses*” (Promises) series, 2017, is juxtaposition, in which the artist combines two everyday scenes in order to create vignettes that seem possible, if not plausible, yet at the same time touched by irony or even on the verge of sliding into nonsense.

Selmani’s tiny figures, drawn with delicate strokes that dispense with any gestural quality, are rendered with great realism, although they rarely cast shadows, except when they encounter an architectural barrier. They make no contact with the ground and seem out of scale with the few architectural elements in their proximity, for instance in works from the series “*Entre le ciel et moi*” (Between the Sky and Me), 2017. Billboards, fence posts, enclosures, control towers, facades of houses under construction, transparent walls and structures whose only role is to organize the white space of the sheet of paper—in Selmani’s work, these bring to mind theater sets.

Massinissa Selmani,
Entre le ciel et moi #2
(Between the Sky and
Me #2), 2017, graphite
and colored pencil on
paper, 41 ½ × 31 ½".
From the series “*Entre
le ciel et moi*,” 2017.



And there is a lot of white in these drawings. It envelops figures as well as objects, rendering the division between external and internal space indistinct. Usually associated with absence, emptiness, silence, and latency, or with narrative ellipses, whiteness in this case results from the erasure of the context surrounding the images. Selmani sources his pictures from photographs printed in newspapers, yet the drawings and titles retain no trace of the political events they once illustrated, and the titles often evoke the theme of memory. All of this probably relates to the artist’s adolescence in Algeria during the 1980s, when he leafed through newspapers that were full of dramatic events that made him want to keep reading—starting with the last page, the one that had political cartoons. But we can also deduce

his fascination with printers and photocopy machines (his father managed a copy shop), which is probably also connected to his use of recycled paper in the “*Résolutions*” series of 2017.

In other cases—for instance, in the series “*Altérables*” (Perishables), 2014—the support is translucent. Working on tracing paper applied to a copy of a photo, Selmani makes a few pencil strokes, just enough to simultaneously confuse and open up the meaning of the photographic image. He experiments with superimpositions in his drawings, with different layers patched together with adhesive tape, but in *Mémoires potentielles. Altération #1* and *Mémoires potentielles. Altération #2*, both 2013–17, he also projects his drawings onto screens made of Plexiglas, wood, and paper, multiplying possible framings and furthering his inquiry into the relationship between drawing and photography. These projections feel embryonic, perhaps indicating a direction he will develop in the future, constituting yet another attempt to expand drawing, an endeavor that is the foundation of his practice.

Though Selmani limits himself to a single medium, his practice has no dearth of references to the history of both painting and photography. In fact, many of his works bring to mind Belgian Surrealist Paul Nougé’s photographic book, *Subversion des images* (1929–30, published 1968), where, as in Selmani’s drawings, skillfully studied staging renders incongruous the relationships between figures, isolated between the walls of a house, and the objects that surround them.

—Riccardo Venturi

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.