

WHAT CAN A DOT BECOME?

curated by **Stéphanie Saadé**

3 May - 13 July, 2019

Opening 3 May 2019, 18 - 21h



Stéphanie Saadé, *Contemplating an Old Memory*, 2017, 24-carat gold cast of a lentil seed, live lentil sprout of the same seed, plates, iron, water, dimensions variable

Ismaïl Bahri
Charbel-joseph H. Boutros
Stéphanie Dadour
Sirine Fattouh
Stéphanie Saadé
Lei Saito
Vincent Verhoef

AKINCI is proud to announce the exhibition *What Can A Dot Become?*, curated by Stéphanie Saadé. The exhibition centres around the primary sign of the dot. Modest, but certainly decisive, it is what connects the artworks of the 6 artists gathered for this occasion in the space of AKINCI: Ismaïl Bahri, Charbel-joseph H. Boutros, Stéphanie Dadour, Sirine Fattouh, Stéphanie Saadé, Lei Saito and Vincent Verhoef.

The dot is present in all of the shown works, in a direct or indirect way, intentionally or not. Of different sizes and shapes, sometimes with no visible shape at all, it is, more than a pattern, a structuring element declined into a constellation of endless potentialities.

What can a dot become? The validity of the dot is questioned in the title of the show: isn't it too little or too unimportant to become anything at all? In the show it becomes a hole, a ball, a figure, a seed, a star... These dots of different natures oscillate between the tiny and the immense, the earthly and the cosmic, the political and the poetical. We are led to explore these multiple dimensions.

Seven of **Sirine Fattouh's** (Lebanon, 1980) *Sleepers* (2017-2019) are scattered in the gallery; Formless at first sight, the small pebble-like figurines are actually representations of sleepers, realised during insomnia nights. While the artist was unable to sleep, she shaped the sleeping figures, giving them the relaxed and peaceful features of the one who is hugged by Morpheus' arms. Fitted to the palm of the hand, the pretty silver figures appear like magical talismans that one could carry to conjure the impossibility of sleeping. Cast in brass and coated in silver, they become mirrors in which the artist's sleepless face first reflects, merging symbolically with that of the sleepers. The visitor is also allowed to manipulate them, finding her/his own face mirrored on the uneven shiny round surfaces; they offer another image of oneself, as can happen in dreams, in Morpheus' mirror. In *From Syria to Palestine: El Autostrad*, realized in collaboration with **Stéphanie Dadour** (Beirut, 1980), the Lebanese territory is reduced to two dots: North and South. The highway draws a straight line between the dots, which the two women borrow as they drive and film, keeping aside from villages and their particularities.

Another work, this time by **Charbel-joseph H. Boutros** (Lebanon, 1980), evokes sleep and unconsciousness. The subject characterises largely the artist's practice, and his work *Night Cartography* (2011-2019) is at the start of several other series all aiming at materializing sleep. Here, sleep takes the shape of a black hole – we can remember the first photo ever taken of a black hole, recently released in the press – laying a dark veil onto the paper. The circular stain sucks us into a moment of absence of the artist: the actual work is based on the utmost moment of inactivity, that of sleep and unconsciousness, the opposite of how the working process is usually imagined. The artist seems to apply the rational method of mapping to this irrational moment, in which rules can be changed, roles inversed and laws, such as the one of gravity, ignored. Essentially, the artist defines his artistic and political posture as that of a sleeper.

Vincent Verhoef's (The Netherlands, 1982) paintings also transport us elsewhere, propelling us to faraway time-spaces rather than inside ourselves. The artist represents historical events of great importance in the most abstract way: dots on a background. These dots actually correspond to the precise position of the "sun, moon and other celestial bodies" on the particular day when the events took place. Events that changed the face of the earth such as "the 4th of September 476, the day when the last Western roman emperor, Romulus Augustus, abdicated", "the 14th of July 1789, the day of the storming of the Bastille", or more recently September 11. Did the stars stay impassive on these days, following their usual trajectory, or is it not their specific alignment which determined the course of the events? The painted cosmic portraits seem to want to establish a connection between the two, bringing us back to notions of chance, fate and destiny. Here, fortune is told in the past tense, in a forensic approach sounding the stars. The use of contemporary technologies and software to determine their position contrasts with the purposefully naive aspect of the paintings; the work of a human being trying to paint the sky.

Also drawing a portrait of the sky, **Lei Saito** (Japan, 1980) imagines in *Un morceau du ciel tomba et continua à rouler jusqu'à sa disparition, il devint l'horizon* (2011) a tale of origins, where a piece of the sky would have fallen down and rolled, becoming the horizon. We see a constructed environment in which a black ball keeps getting smaller and smaller. A "corrupted perspective" in the words of the artist, who playfully disturbs our perception of space and reality. Is it the same balls which are at our feet in *Points de Fuite* (2018)? We could literally imagine sending them back up if it wasn't for their weight, fragility and preciousness. The colours of the spherical paintings lead us to conceive the moment when the sky lost a piece of itself: at a magic hour such as dawn or dusk or simply at a random moment of the day or night? And the place where it happened: which parts of the world have such skies?

In **Stéphanie Saadé's** (Lebanon, 1983) *Contemplating an Old Memory* (2017), the dot takes the shape of a seed. One is fixed in gold and therefore in time while the other is expected to grow during the exhibition: on the opening day water is poured on the natural seed, potentially pulling it out of dormancy and into life. The chosen seed is a lentil, an important nutritional element, the growth of which will document the passing of the exhibition. This particular seed also has the elementary shape of the circle, a perfect natural dot. Another story of birth and growth is told with *Aller à l'École* (2018): a tiny blouse on which is embroidered a path. This path is the first one that the artist took to go to school, embroidered on a blouse worn by her prior to going to school. The concept of destiny surfaces back in a different way: instead of considering historical events, we are invited to look at an individual's micro-history.

Finally, in **Ismail Bahri's** (Tunisia, 1978) film *Revers* (2017), a star's portrait of another kind is put to the test: that of a person incarnating beauty and youth. Printed on a glossy magazine page, the page is crumpled again and again until the disappearance of the image on it. Every time, after crumpling the page into a ball, the artist opens it up again, giving us to see the transformations of the star's face. The wrinkles of the paper become wrinkles on her/his face. At some point, the image's materiality is transferred onto the artist's hands, which become covered in residues of ink and paper, while the magazine page becomes completely white, blank and matt. A possible invitation to start anew... The apparatus fabricating dreams and illusion is destroyed. The work addresses through a soon obsolete support, paper, the surge of images which we are daily confronted with, and fuel.