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What Can A Dot Become?

curated by Stéphanie Saadé

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

About

This 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 lead 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



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

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.

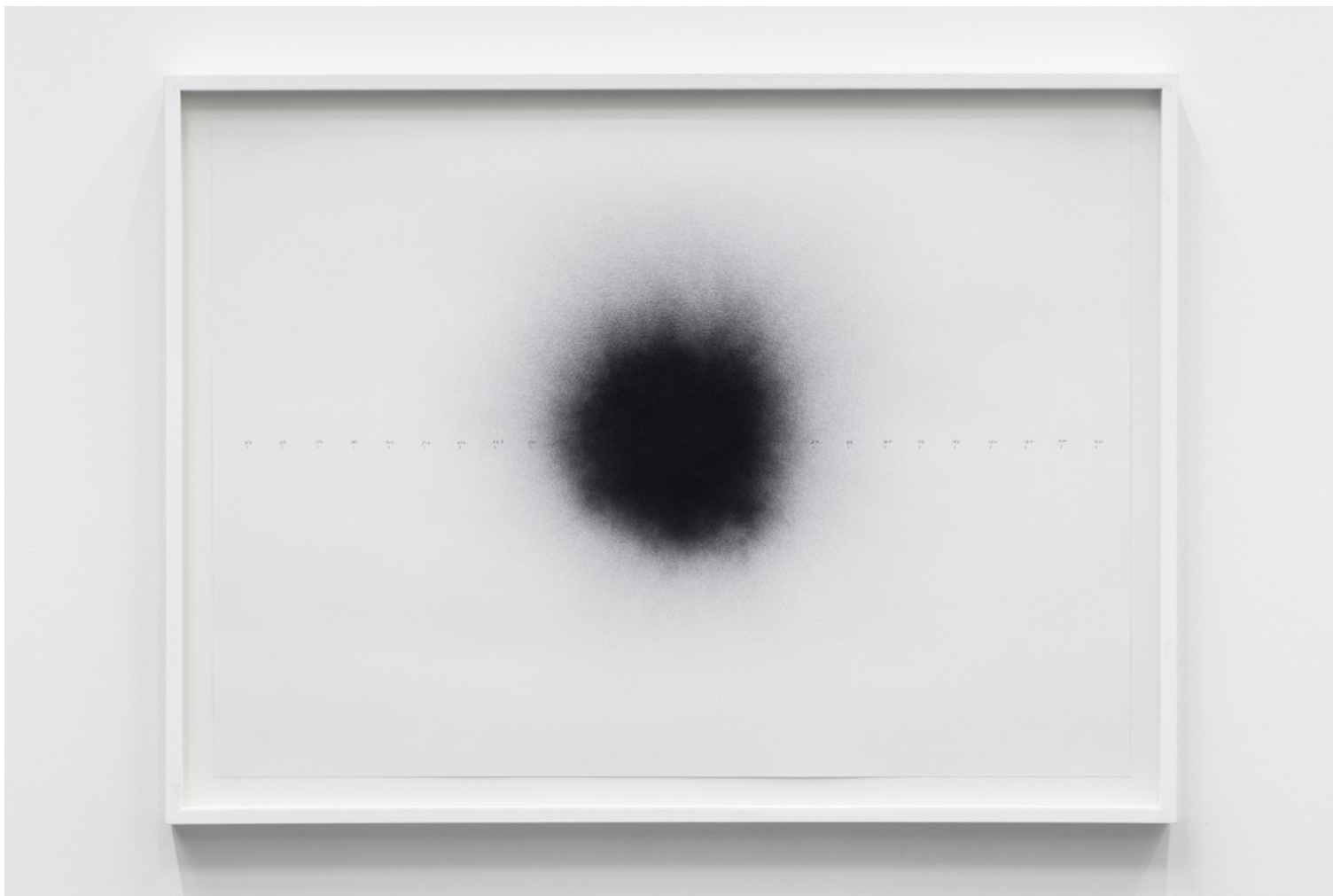
Also drawing a portrait of the sky, **Lei Saito** (Japan, 1980) imagines in *Un morceau du ciel tomba et continua à rouler jusqu'à sa disparition, il devint l'horizon* (2011) a tale of origins, where a piece of the sky would have fallen down and rolled, becoming the horizon. We see a constructed environment 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 crimped again and again until the disappearance of the image on it. Every time, after crimping 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 his/her 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.



What Can A Dot Become? Overview at AKINCI, 2019 (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)



Charbel - joseph H. Boutros, *No Light in White Light / Night Cartography*, 2011 - 2019, Carbon and black spray on paper, 50x70 cm
The time slept is erased from the white day, each night produces a new drawing.



What Can A Dot Become? Overview at AKINCI, 2019 (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)



Stéphanie Saadé, *Going to School*, 2019, worn blouse embroidery, 25 x 25cm (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)

A tiny white blouse, worn by the artist and kept by her mother, who had also worn it as a child, is embroidered with the first trajectory taken by the artist to go to school. The path is combined with a piece of cloth worn prior to going to school.



What Can A Dot Become? Overview at AKINCI, 2019 (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)



Sirine Fattouh and Stéphanie Dadour, *From Syria to Palestine: El Autostrad*, 2019, Full HD video film, 4 hours

Two cameras are placed in a car driving along the Lebanese highway from North to South, from the Lebanese-Syrian border to the Lebanese-Palestinian border. The journey takes place in one stroke, following the rhythm of a typical day. It takes a little over 200 km or 4 hours without traffic to discover a set of places linked by a road, a receptacle of multiple identities.



Vincent Verhoef, (a mapping of the celestial bodies), from left to right:
4-9-476, day of abdication of Romulus Augustus, 2018, oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm
14-7-1789, storming of the Bastille, 2018, oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm
09-11-2001, 11 september attack on the Twin Towers USA, 2019, oil on canvas, 100 x 120cm
(photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)



What Can A Dot Become? Overview at AKINCI, 2019 (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)



Lei Saito, *Vanishing Points*, 2018, Oil painting on plaster ball, 30 cm diameter (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)



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 in: *What Can A Dot Become?* Overview at AKINCI, 2019 (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)

A lentil seed is moulded and cast in gold, without being damaged. Water is poured on the opening day on the same original lentil seed, which eventually sprouts and grows. The cast and the growing plant are exhibited side by side.

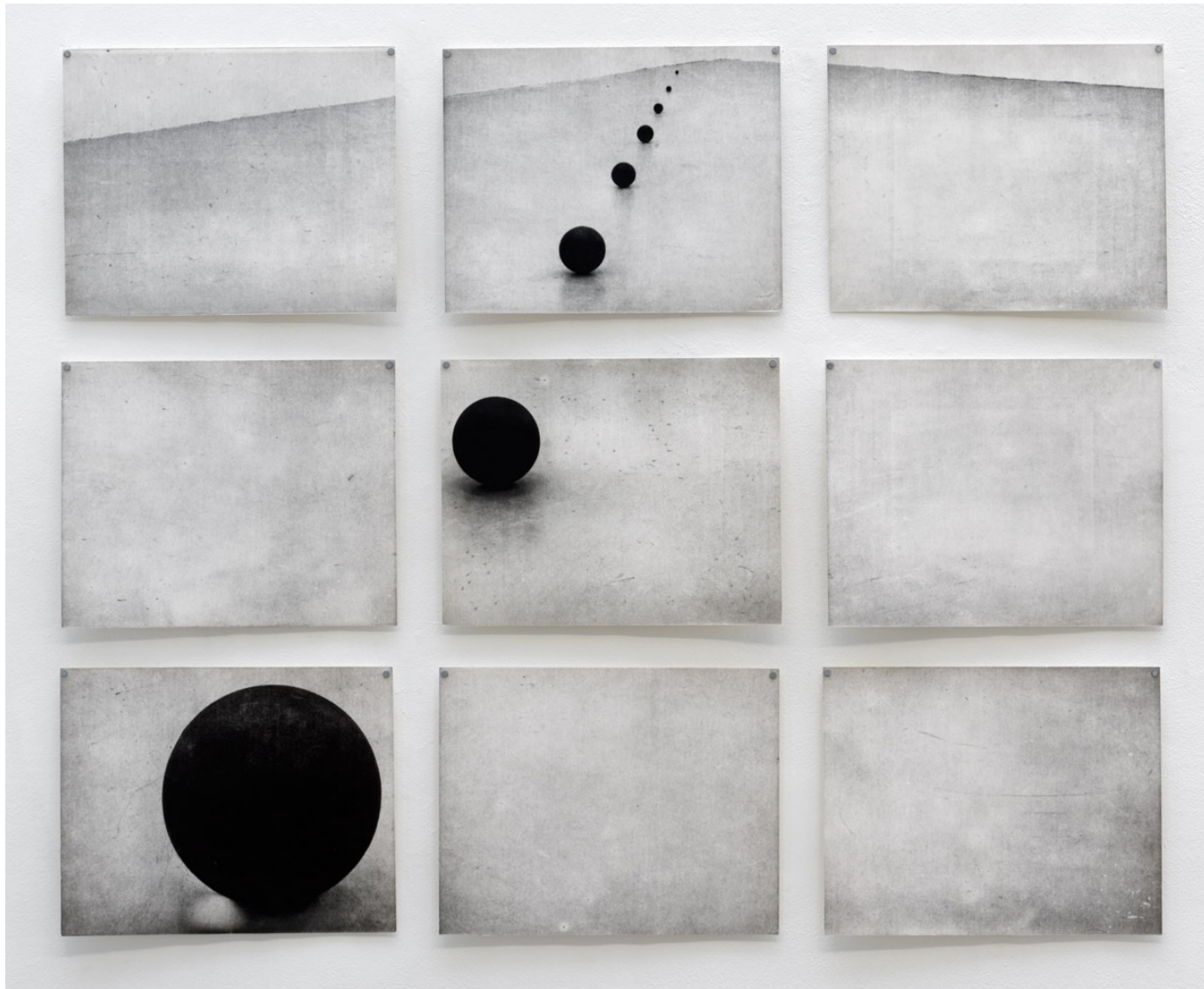


Sirine Fattouh, *The Sleepers (7 individual ones)*, 2019, Clay, brass, coated with silver, approx. 10x5 cm, (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)

'The Sleepers' is a project initiated in 2017 as a result of recurrent insomnia. Each sculpture corresponds to a night of insomnia. The silver sleepers can be held in hand and reflect the face of the person holding it as well as the surrounding space.



What Can A Dot Become? Overview at AKINCI, 2019 (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)



Lei Saito, *Un morceau du ciel tomba et continua à rouler jusqu'à sa disparition, il devint l'horizon*, 2011
Photogravure, 134 x 165cm (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)



What Can A Dot Become? Overview at AKINCI, 2019 (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)



(left) Ismaïl Bahri, *Revers*, 2016/17, HD video projection, 5 min.

Through the simple, repetitive process of crumpling a page from a magazine, 'Revers' contemplates notions of disintegration, reproduction, transmutation and, centrally, impermanence. The video repeats the crumpling and subsequent straightening of the pages, highlighting a ceaseless cycle. As each page is slowly crumpled time and again, the imagery fades, and we are left with the imprint on the artist's hands—the result of repetitive contact and the residual accumulation of heat and information.

(right) Vincent Verhoef, *Saturn*, 2019, oil on canvas, 70 x 80cm

in: What Can A Dot Become? Overview at AKINCI, 2019 (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)



Charbel - joseph H. Boutros, *Dream Salt*, 2014, sugar and salt, size variable
in: *What Can A Dot Become?* Overview at AKINCI, 2019 (photo: Gert Jan van Rooij)



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