

Open studios – Artists in residence

achref bettaieb



Achref Bettaieb
photo credit: Haouari Abdeljalil

**villa
arson**

November 29, 2023

Room 14

nice

Born in 1994 in Tunis (Tunisia), Achref Bettaieb is a video artist whose films, photographs and multimedia installations explore the contrasts and complementarities of human behavior, social rhythms and the interplay between the visible and the invisible.

He studied video editing at the School of art and decoration in Tunis. His experience in the film industry and various media departments as well as his passion for skateboarding within his urban community, have greatly influenced his work and shaped his visual language.

He has participated in various group shows in Tunis, such as *Building Blocks* at B7L9 (2021) and *The Further you throw it, the nearer it gets* (2021). His video work has been shown in Tunis in the K OFF section at Gabès Cinéma Fen (festival of cinema, video art and virtual reality) and at the Dream City festival in 2022.

He is currently working on understanding movement and rhythm in different forms in space and time.

Gil Lekh: Can you introduce yourself?

Achref Bettaieb: Basically, I'm a documentary video editor, which is how I earn my money. My video installation work was originally inspired by skateboarding. I started skateboarding when I was 13, and I took videos to give value to this practice: through documentation and a certain gaze. It all started in 2020, when I did my first installation. There were three video projectors, a hexagonal format with a 2 x 2m structure that you enter. It rolls you up, it's a loop device. That's what got me interested in movement and dynamism in my video work. These questions came to me: how do we see things? How do we connect them? In the background, in cinema, as an editor, there's always this reflex to connect things together, to create a narrative between everything you have. That's how my work changed two years ago. It's no longer about skateboarding, it's about focusing on everything: where I find movement, where I find rhythm. I document, I sort, I edit to connect, to answer a question or create a question. Last year, that evolved again. I still have this reflex if I find objects and I recover them. There's that moment when I say to myself: "take it". During my residency, I found a lot of burnt objects that I collected, and these were very powerful elements that supported a video. It's evolving, there's a continuity in my work to create links.

G. L.: How do you carry out your research at Villa Arson and in Nice?

A. B.: At Villa Arson, I'm conducting research on the dynamics of the glimpse and the unnoticed. It's a short time in my long working process, but I've figured out how to proceed. I go out every day and film everything around me, everything I see and every object I find that seems interesting to be part of my research. What I come up with are video captures, big puzzles that I try to connect to see what these factors bring to an image. There's a key shot or object, always present in my work, that I wait for and that triggers everything.

G. L.: Does the territory you find yourself in influence your creative process?

A. B.: Looking back at my work over the years, this is the second time I've done it in a sparsely populated area. Location is everything, Nice is quiet but I'm usually in livelier places. I was in Marseille for a few days and felt that life there was more in tune with me. Here I observe the social rhythm, how human beings function as a group or as individuals. In my current project, there's a bit of the human being and his environment. It's something that won't be so clear-cut in the way it's installed. A play of light will appear, and the shapes will be distorted by the glass. For the OVNi festival in Nice, I'm showing a few old projects, one of which I worked on during a residency in Gabès. Although it wasn't premeditated, the subject is marked by the environment, as my research took place in a region full of chemical industries. Spending a month there, I found myself surrounded by it. The work I did inevitably reflected this. What I mean is that my working process is always backwards. The idea I'm working on is final, it doesn't come from the beginning, there is no beginning. In this project, the burnt elements that I found connect with the video, which is itself post-apocalyptic. I usually film people, but in this video there's no one, just their traces.

G. L.: Your work involves documenting and collecting objects and images. How do you manage to link all these materials together? And what does it mean to you to collect all this?

A. B.: This research into the theme of dynamism, movement and rhythm in the glimpse and the unseen develops into a kind of reflex to find. I came up with the idea of using these bits of glass in front of the screen, saying to myself: "maybe this will give several layers of images through texture, different forms of interpretation and reading". These are the two ends I've found, and I'm working with them. As it works in reverse, I always adapt my research to what I find. For this residency, a few objects inspired me to link these long videos, like the one of the trace, to reflections on glass: "what does it look like over time?" I relate this to our fast-paced lifestyle. In four hours, it goes unnoticed. That's what it's like to find lots of objects, try to connect them and find a good path.

G. L.: What is "finding a good path"? Does this have anything to do with you and your way of being? Skateboarding played a role in your work. Does a philosophy of this sport play a part in your process?

A. B.: Yes, they're very closely related things that make me up. Skateboarding and editing have links that I'm exploring. To do an "ollie", a skateboard jump, you have to compose a movement in four beats that we don't perceive. It's separate and happens in a second: four beats in a single, hyper-fast moment. And that's super important in film editing in terms of rhythm and construction. It's an example of a link that helps me understand other dynamics, in terms of rhythm and time. I'm wondering about my interest in these connections.

G. L.: There's a certain aesthetic to your videos. Do they reflect your interpretation of the world?

A. B.: It's very intimate, and I always try to strike a balance. For example, in *Resurrection*, two projects have merged. One on skateboard culture since 2004 and the other on homeless people. One evening on my way home from a shoot, my apartment was robbed and all my equipment was gone. I'd been hit. I was left with a few after-effects, which I shared with my mates. I filmed everything that was left in my apartment falling out of the window. It's very emotional. This aesthetic is only a capture of images that already exist.

G. L.: You say that your creative process allows you to arrive at a point that is not the beginning, where the subject is not defined. Is this where the text comes in?

A. B.: Yes, the text comes at the end. Often poetry, like for *Phonetic*, I use a quote from Dodinsky that helped give more meaning to my visuals. I thought about it and came up with this poem that makes the video feel like an audiovisual fable. Each time it takes shape in the questions: How to present it? How to find it? How to edit it? It's always this form that I love to exploit.

Residence organized in partnership with 32bis contemporary art center in Tunis.

Wednesday November 29, 2023

6pm – 8pm
Open studio Achref Bettaieb
Room 14 (access from level +1)

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