

Art Review:

Pascal Hachem

Bring the Boys Back Home

Selma Feriani Gallery

14 October - 27 November

"I have to keep myself running", muses Lebanese artist Pascal Hachem. "I want to be flexible. Okay, for the last two exhibitions I've worked with mechanised objects, but while I was working on these pieces, I also sat under a bridge for two hours, holding a tabletop over my head" (this last for a performance installation called *Under the Table Under the Bridge*, staged in 2009 north of Beirut).

This month, London's Selma Feriani Gallery is hosting *Bring the Boys Back Home*, Hachem's first solo show in the UK. As this article went to press, the artist was keeping mum about the shape of the show. The only thing he could say for sure was that it would be new. Place is central to the thirty-one-year-old Beirut artist's creative process – both to the subjects he takes up and the language he uses to express them. Not only is he happiest making work specific to the space where he's exhibiting, but he finds it wrenching to show the same work in two different spaces.

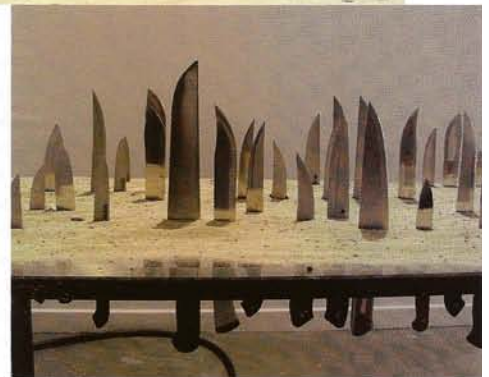
He felt that dislocation with *I'll Race You*, which he views as his strongest Beirut-based work. It was created at the end of 2008 for the two-day collective exhibition *Hopes and Doubts*. Inspired by the erasure of Beirut's architectural patrimony in reckless postwar development, Hachem's work consisted of a row of six hammers. Each was affixed to an electric motor, which drew the hammers back, one by one, to strike the concrete wall of the space – the ruins of the pockmarked City Center cinema. This corn-kernel-shaped shell is a remnant of modernist architecture in reconstructed downtown Beirut. *I'll Race You* was then immediately shipped to an exhibition at the Fondazione Mario Merz, in Turin. Hachem doesn't say the meaning of the piece was lost when it was relocated, but he appears physically uncomfortable as he describes moving it.

Hachem works across a range of media, including performance. His contribution to 2007's Kairo Ramallah Express festival, in Bern, was the eight-minute *How to Cross a Checkpoint in an Express Way*. Here he casually removed a dozen or more layers of clothing before his audience – which, most obviously, replicates the Palestinian checkpoint experience. The work for which he has attained notoriety, though, has been his mechanised art, which at times has the savour of Rebecca Horn. Not all his recent work is mechanical, but it made an appearance in *in.nate.ness*, his Italian solo debut, at Rome's Federica Schiavo Gallery over the summer. His *Hush Hush* (2010), for instance, finds a number of stone cubes, upon which rest pairs of children's white cotton Y-fronts, backside up. Poised vertically above each stone is a wooden stick, each of which is, in turn, affixed to a mechanism that raises it 80cm into the air before dropping it upon the underwear. Over several hours, the repeated impacts leave stains upon the white cotton.

Hachem says *in.nate.ness* grew organically out of specific aspects of each room in the gallery and also from being resident in Rome, where he spent three months before devising the works. "I tried to tackle... the issue of child abuse", Hachem says of the exhibition, a theme that came to him, in part, he says, from the show's proximity to the Vatican.

In.nate.ness opened alongside *Slow Food* (2010), a site-specific installation in the city's Cestia Pyramid – an Egyptian-style tomb said to have been erected for the emperor's banquet chief in the first century BC. The monument's origin, and the traces left by tomb-robbers, inspired Hachem's work. Upon a piece of white fabric on the floor he placed a single plate. Around its edge he placed 2,000 forks, tines down, one atop the other so that they radiated from the central circle in an irregular pattern, like a continent. The plate rested atop a pair of thin metal rods connected to electric motors. These shifted the plate ever so slightly, causing the forks to ripple in a manner not unlike reflective dominoes.

It will be interesting indeed to see how Hachem's new work ramifies within the confines of Selma Feriani Gallery, and in the sprawling expanse of London without. *Jim Quilty*



from top: *I'll Race You*, 2008, installation (steel, wood, engine and mechanised hammers); *4 Metrics*, 2007 (installation view, Amman, Jordan), public intervention, wood strip, screws, existing old bench structure; *Keep Sharpening Your Knife and It Will Blunt*, 2010, steel structure, knives, desert sand, plastic, engines, electrical box