

Artwork Maurizio Cattelan

# N O M A S N O 1 3

XII



# T I M E





D I S P A T C H E S  
F R O M A N A R T F L Y E R

I too am a nomad, an artflyer tracing out my personal constellation of stars, interviewing and photographing those people whose creative work moves me. I have learnt that travel does broaden the mind and the senses, as they say. But in the past few months when air traffic was brought to a near standstill, I wished to stay attuned to my travel mindset. Reflecting and recounting past travel experiences, it’s vaguely like reliving them. Over the past ten years I have been to Lisbon, Paris, London, Limberg, Wuppertal, New York City, Brussels, Abu Dhabi, Hydra, Patmos and Milan. My companions are always the same: a notebook, a voice recorder and a camera, but every shoot means a different staging.

March

I am standing beneath a ladder on which Nicolas Party is perched putting a pastel leaf on a tree. Natural light enters from a big skylight giving a chiaroscuro effect to the artist who works with intense focus and precision. He colors, then carefully blends the color with his fingertips and finally lightly taps the painting on the back to sprinkle a thin layer of pink powder on the floor, very much like powdered sugar. When he feels that the pastel is ready, he approaches a mobile station that he keeps nearby and sorts his used pastels in the plastic containers that are divided by color. One floor up is his desk where he keeps several softcover sketchbooks and constantly alternates between them, filling them with detailed pencil drawings of landscapes, rocks, and trees his preferred theme lately. He flips through one sketchbook and stops at a still life drawing depicting two vessels. Inspired by Giorgio Morandi’s visual literacy, he tries to follow his method of observation that sees all the atoms of an object in a constant state of movement and decay.

November

I am walking through a lush date palm tree garden in Al Ain Oasis, 90 miles east of Abu Dhabi. Sunlight enters through the green spiny leaves spotting

the ground with soft smudges of light. There, beneath the thick canopy of palm trees, I see Pakistani artist Imran Qureshi working on an impermanent site-specific floor painting. He splashes an ancient irrigation system with blue paint, very much like an action painter spontaneously dribbling and splashing a canvas. The act is profoundly energetic, powerful and expressive. He then sits down as he has been trained to do in the tradition of Islamic miniature painters and makes deeply expressive drawings of white delicate foliage and creates the illusion of a stream that could have been there all along feeding the lush landscape. For a different part of the oasis, where the channel travels through a drier landscape, Qureshi splashes the canal with red paint echoing sparse vegetation and death. But again, drawings of spectacular verdant foliage emerge on the emotional red surface as a sign of regeneration and hope.

March

I have been invited to stay for the convivial lunch at Urs Fischer’s studio. Cooked on the premises by his assistant, the daily meals are integral to his playful approach to food. Fruit and vegetables are a recurring motif in Fischer’s visual vocabulary. Problem Paintings, a series of black and white portraits of Hollywood stars with enlarged images of fruit, vegetable or other objects superimposed to conceal their features. Printed on a large surface, a movie still of actor Kirk Douglas from the 1964 movie Seven Days in May is currently in the studio waiting for Fischer’s intervention which has not ripened yet. Fruit may not be on the table this time as the artist is considering combining the Douglas portrait with an abstract painting, but the food motif has been diverted to a different series. Appreciating its organic qualities, Fischer has turned to clay and is making five empire style couches. Four of them support figures of naked women in the style of Antonio Canova’s Pauline Bonaparte as Venus Vectrix but the fifth supports, with a touch of irreverent humor, an oversize carrot.

June

Once again, I see an artist perched on a ladder. Kiki Smith, having turned to Hydra, the largest constellation in the sky, is fitting together like pieces of a puzzle all its elements - Capricorn, the owl, the snake, the cat, the chalice – for the site-specific installation on the Greek island of Hydra for the Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art. Above me in the stalls of the former slaughterhouse, she works on the highlights of a flat bronze half-human half-animal hybrid sculpture. And there with her hand on the sculpture, I see the faded light blue constellation tattoos on her skin that spread also onto the artwork like decorative bronze stars. To her the night sky is a constant source of fascination or rather the balance embedded in the universe that holds seemingly disparate things together. And this idea of creating a multilayered narrative with seemingly disparate works seems to be what I am about. All the creative people I have interviewed are like twinkling dots of a constellation close to each other in the sky but really far apart in space. What they have in common is — artflyer.

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