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No Dress Code

Aziz Hazara

28.04. – 17.06.2023

In a festival held to celebrate words

در جشنواره یی که برای بزرگداشت واژه ها بر پا شده بود

They did not allow the "truth".

"حقیقت" را راه ندادند

Because it was not wearing formal clothes

زیرا لباس رسمی بر تن نداشت

Aimee Philips, "مطرد (Disqualified)." Übersetzt von ب. و (Erfan, June 1977) 92.

The "formal clothes" mentioned in the poem can be interpreted as a metaphor for the narratives developed by those in power to construct "truths" that protect their influence. In the context of Afghanistan, it is long overdue to reevaluate the dominant narratives of the past two decades. The "formal" truths constructed by the United States and its allies, as well as the Taliban in their struggle for power, have suppressed the truths that do not align with the prevailing narrative.

Aziz Hazara's solo exhibition *No Dress Code* presented at PSM during Gallery Weekend Berlin 2023, brings together a selection of photographs, site-specific and audio installations that address the social and political lives of bodies, things, and environments at the mercy of the global military and aid industrial complex. Through these works, the artist demonstrates how war consumes, contaminates, and reconfigures every aspect of an environment and way of life, turning them into an active ground for the exercise of power and influence and preventing any attempt at resistance.

In his large-scale photographic installation *I am looking for you like a drone, my love* (2021-2022) Hazara presents a panoramic view of the massive amount of discarded material, including electronic waste, military technology, and other trash left behind by the American occupation after their withdrawal from the Bagram Air Base outside of Kabul. This overwhelming image provides a visual testament to the bigger reality of the material debris of war, its environmental toll, and its contaminating presence upon local life. Also on view is Hazara's ongoing project *Coming Home*, which takes this material investigation a step further by depicting the process of gathering and shipping back twenty tons of this material waste back to the United States, in an effort to trace the economic and material routes of the so-called "War on Terror".

In *Bushka Bazi* (2023), a new multi-channel sound installation, Hazara reconfigures yellow plastic jerrycans into portable speakers. Each speaker plays sound recordings from the artist's archive of Kabul's soundscapes, gathered over the past decade. The jerrycan was first made widely available through the influx of foreign militaries and aid. It was quickly repurposed as a tool for transporting water in a country that still lacks wide access to clean water. Astonishingly, the Taliban regime implemented it as a triumphant weapon of war. By marrying the sounds to these symbolically significant yet mundane objects, Hazara effectively draws out their expanded role in shaping the local environment.

Altogether, Hazara's works stage a powerful festival of naked truths that invite critical reflection on the still-destructive legacies of war. With his usual poetic and poignant style on full display, *No Dress Code* offers the viewer the opportunity to move beyond the formal "truths" that have disrupted our true understanding of Afghanistan's contemporary realities for decades. It offers an expanded view of history that focuses on the sanctity of life and the physical environment that surrounds it.

Muheb Esmat