

in Sala Gran from 27/05 to 29/06

# FIRAS SHEHADEH

## *I CAME FROM THERE*

'Where are you from?' is a simple question. A straightforward question, the answer to which ought to sum up and support – at least that is what the person asking expects – a concise idea regarding the identity, origins and sense of belonging of the person being asked. The contexts in which the question is posed may be very broad and diverse (the start of a friendly relationship, an official document, a system of control, statistical analysis, a language class, etc.). In every case, the expectation is that the reply should also be simple. I'm from here, I'm from there, that's my background, I belong to this place. Yet the answer is not always easy. Indeed, it might even be impossible to give a response at all.

The artistic practice of Firas Shehadeh (Amman, Jordan, 1988) is a constant attempt to offer possible answers to this recurring question. Answers which, in his case, bring into play all the contextual, historical and experiential factors that define his identity as a Palestinian refugee: firstly, a socio-political history marked by colonialism, wars and alienation; and secondly, a present that leads him to use the relational ambits of art as systems to defend with emotion a complex sense of belonging. An official record and a personal record that ideologically enable him to question the dominant historical account and champion through form a type of sensorial, direct and shared experience. When all is said and done, a precise state of balance which, despite the political militancy that imbues his work, distances it at the same time from the usual stances of activist art.

In *I came from there*, Firas Shehadeh posits a staged and almost a performative answer, an environmental construction into which the artist incorporates various registers (text, light, sound, etc.), his purpose being to convey to the spectator the sense of intensity and complexity that comes from trying to identify his identity. He takes as his starting point a poem by Sargon Boulus (1944-2007) in which this Iraqi poet starkly presents the physical and psychological consequences of the war through an account of a meeting between two friends in an inhospitable spot. This appropriation from literature raises the importance of language and the text in Shehadeh's work and, through the exhibition space, invites us to the relaying of a specific message: the emotional description of a diffuse and blurred 'there' that is in a state of

upheaval. It is a message that directly addresses the spectator by confronting them with an open dialogue between the piece and their own sense of belonging.

*I came from there* advocates a type of individualised and particular experience. In the dark, enclosed interior of the Espai Cub, a bright neon displays a phrase in Arabic: the title of both the exhibition and Boulus' poem. It is a piece that draws on the legacy of Minimalism that Shehadeh combines with a surround soundtrack consisting of field recordings made in various scenarios of war, such as Israel's most recent invasion of Gaza in 2014 and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. A compilation of situations and events that give direct testimony of the territorial and political instability of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular and of the Arab world in general.

Depending on the visitor's status, *I came from there* generates numerous layers of interpretation through a framework of reception that is close, in fact, to religious liturgy, the source of its performative aspect. An Arabic-speaking spectator will immediately grasp the neon message, which is in a code that those of us who are not Arabic speakers will inevitably find incomprehensible. Nevertheless, Shehadeh complements his installation in the Espai Cub with a poster of Boulus' complete poem in four languages (Arabic, Catalan, Spanish and English).

In short, *I came from there* is the most accurate answer that Shehadeh can find to the question 'Where are you from?' It is a way of bringing into the exhibition space the only point he can make: 'I come from whence I have been brought by an entire political, social and economic history'.

Having completed his studies in architecture in Amman, in 2008, Shehadeh began his artistic career by presenting his art in the Arab world and Europe. He has shown work in art centres and at events such as the Darat al Funun space, run by the Khalid Shoman Foundation (Amman), the 64th Berlin International Film Festival, the biennial Qalandiya International (Ramallah) and the Madatac Festival 06 (Madrid). In 2009, he co-founded the Torabyeh political hip-hop project, which he is the producer of. Between 2010 and 2013, he worked at Darat al Funun as creative director and assistant curator. *I came from there* is his first solo exhibition in Barcelona.

27/05/15 – 05/07/15

Sala Gran  
**David Bestué**  
*Realismo*

Espai Cub  
**Firas Shehadeh**  
*I came from there*

15/07/15 – 06/09/15

Sala Gran  
**Mar García**  
*75°*

Espai Cub  
**Germán Portal**  
*Salón de lo intocable*

16/09/15 – 01/11/15

Sala Gran  
**Xiana Gómez**  
*Cultura de dormitorio:  
Narraciones de  
adolescencia femenina*

Espai Cub  
**Federico García Trujillo**  
*Frames Rocío*

19/01/16 – 27/03/16

Projecte de Comissariat  
**Anna Manubens**  
*Visceral Blue*

Tardor 2015

Projectes deslocalitzats  
**Enric Farrés**  
**i Joana Llauradó**  
*El visitant ideal d'una  
col·lecció sentimental*

**Salah Malouli**  
*Projecte Rosoum,  
estrategias para un cómic  
árabe independiente*