

Marie Ward

"The watcher, the symbol, and the bad seed"

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Organized by Ali Hassanzadeh

Beyond the panopticon, there is a dark forest. Men run naked through the leaves then stop, frozen like deer in the headlights of onlooking eyes. They face each other through the strange choreography of exercise routines in a stadium void of other spectators besides themselves. "Colonists on their own land, they look away, not to see the gangrene forming" (*Un mal sous son bras*, 5:19). The effects of political domination are felt at every level, including the body. Desires are produced in the dangerous rhythms of surveillance and secrecy. One slides easily from watcher into watched, then back again.

The water flowing through fountains is a far cry from the coast of Beirut. There, a cow is floating dead. There, a low-fi virtual model of the city is set to what they thought the future would sound like at the turn of the millennium. The opulence and luxury of capitalism sours into bad taste, waste, an endless loop. What pours out will be recycled, but it might take centuries. In its manipulated states, water is pressurized to gush from public parks and manicured gardens. By studying the fountain's entropic jouissance, the installation *Les eaux d'artifice* recalls Kenneth Anger's 1953 film of the same name. But seeing the fountain as ornament, as something used to decorate baroque architecture and bourgeois property, is already an indication of colonial violence. In various Arabic cultures, fountains are symbolic of a spiritual order. That this association has become obscured points to the same mechanism by which the open waters of the Mediterranean are transformed into sites of suffering, of death. "From the limbo rose the murmurs of those who had gone before me." (*Un mal sous son bras*, 0 :50)

Sometimes the remedy for shame is revenge. Sabotage begins by shedding the solar calendar days of imperial France, giving preference back to moonbeams. Although they may sound like characters in a moralistic fable, the Heroine, the Falcon, the Fox, and the Lion were the names of French warships that occupied Lebanon and the Mediterranean basin in the 19th century. Their stories, told dutifully in logbooks, were those of salutations, receiving diplomats, polishing ships and then themselves for the veneer of superiority. Poems of the banal, these documents evacuated any real morality, replacing it with the administrative muck of order, protocol, and absurd disciplinary codes. Now these old myths find themselves set against iconic iPhone blue, a digital reprise of what once was waves. This is productive agitation, a mode of reframing power that allows what (and who) has been repressed to catch a new current. Political and fantastical imaginaries of liberation are already taking root; a seed is already sprouting toward the light of the moon.

—Lou Ellingson

Marie Ward (born 1996) studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts in Beirut. For her film *Un mal sous son bras*, the artist was awarded the Tank short film prize at the 43rd Cinéma du Réel festival and was selected in the French competition for the 2021 edition of the Côté-Court festival.