



Beach.

in Beirut



recognizability remains equally elusive; it is rather a mundane similarity which, alongside all of the oppressive disconcertment, establishes a certain familiar intimacy and insinuates—at least—a number of things.

The puffed up and windblown pieces of clothing emerge from the unsheltered openness of the picture planes, and, in the unrecognizably orderly disorder of jumbled shoes and suitcases, appear as phantoms, shadows and reflections of bygone occurrences. Nevertheless, it is they themselves that demand nothing other than a present of their own, and which manifest themselves with consummate efficaciousness within a new present at the very moment of painterly convergence. In defiance of any purely biographical reading, Baalbaki's pictures can still by all means be said to convey a certain amount of experience; their true strength, however, gains expression through their very capacity to allow others to live past, current and yet undetermined experiences.

Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you

A painting such as *AM STADTRAND (CITY LIMITS)* seems full of melancholy plaintiveness, as distant as an old and faded photograph. From afar, one remains undecided as to what 'city limits' ought to signify. Is it the ruins of a city, a bombed out expanse of rubble or gaping rocks that are depicted? Only upon further inspection does the gaze falter. It becomes clear that what lies fallow there is nothing other than an immense herd of suitcases, left behind by who knows who. Also left behind are the remains and belongings of uncountable and dimly lit fates of human fates. One can only speculate as to the horror of the circumstances, as to who was displaced or forced to flee in distress; no explication is provided. Though the viewing present and the painter's memories collide in moments such as these, all are perceptually preserved in paint. After all, one does not live among the sticky decal images of history; instead, one's own life must be brought into a renewed present with stalwart determination.

Painting loses its memory along with the experiences that were once etched into it, despite the fact that these were never its own; it slips from out of memory's grasp, in order, to some extent, to recall with nostalgia toward the future how things could have been, and to play with the idea of allowing a memory to come forth that had otherwise been suspended by history, so that this memory can begin to paint out its very own story. The facts are not established by the experiences of a certain person, but the person—regardless of how abhorrent the conditions may have been—rather becomes native to a memory, even when the latter is merely imagined. In this way, Mohamad-Said Baalbaki's paintings exist within the imperfect tense; they possess an unfinished temporality, certainly an imperfect present, but also an undetermined past, whose future, with a grain of memory and a grain of childliness, is yet to be defined—just like the inconspicuously miniscule paper boat in *AM STADTRAND*, which, despite all experienced brutality, soberly floats along, moving onward to reach a destination that is yet to be determined.

I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

And hope in a handful of paint.

Christian Malycha
Translation: Nathan Moore



City Limits, 2008
An Stadtrand
Oil on canvas, 195 x 300 cm

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock)
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

T.S. Eliot THE WASTE LAND