

Akram Zaatari, This Day at Ten

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WIELS

WIELS presents the first solo exhibition in Belgium by Lebanese-born, Beirut-based artist Akram Zaatari (b.1966). Zaatari showed one of the most celebrated works at last year's Venice Biennale, *Letter to a Refusing Pilot*, and brings this film installation to WIELS, together with three works that revolve around a letter, or the writing of a letter. The title of the exhibition refers to Zaatari's cinematic essay from 2003, the similarly titled *This Day*. Ten years later, with the war in Syria escalating and unsolvable Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he uses the work as a prism through which to bring the past and the present into focus. Zaatari's work is a meditation upon images, their meaning and function, and the ways in which they circulate.

Closely linked with the practice of archiving and opening up a collection, he has developed a very personal montage style, open and documentary with subjective voice-overs or text overlays. Zaatari thus gives a voice to the people portrayed and the photographers, and juxtaposes these subjective documents with the great historical developments and conflicts of the age. Zaatari profiles himself as one of the people spearheading the renewal of documentary filmmaking and photography, and more specifically as a lucid observer of images from the emotionally laden Middle East, a region that has long been divided and scarred by war. Providing evidence to counter Western stereotypes of the Arabs, their culture and nature is a driving force for both Zaatari and the Arab Image Foundation, of which he is a co-founder. Writing a letter is simultaneously both proof and testimony: a personal reaction to events, and the registration of what takes place. In the exhibition, during the excavation of *The Letter for a Time of Peace* (2007), we encounter the voice of a resistance actor from war in Southern Lebanon. *Letter to a Refusing Pilot* is an evocative, poetic narrative dedicated to the former Israeli pilot who refused to bomb the school in the city of Zaatari's birth.

Curator : Dirk Snauwaert