Video installation "On the other side of the sky: An Epilogue in Three Parts" by Haig Aivazian at Mercer Union, Toronto. Shot of the Burj Khalifa, Dubai, now the world’s tallest structure.

The Burj Khalifa, beautiful and cold, looks like it belongs on the cover of some Ray Bradbury novel; its proportions inhumanely unapproachable like a thousand-year-old philosophical debate.

The subject for Haig Aivazian’s video is an Indian man who leapt to his death by walking off the edge of the Burj. An online Indian newspaper reads,

"The man was 38 years old, his name was Athiraman Kanan, he jumped off the world tallest building on Tuesday."

It continues, "He has been identified as an Indian national resident of South Indian state Tamil Nadu. He left behind his personal notebook and took off his shoes before jump."

In his piece, Haig lassos together American actor Tom Cruise, French Nouveau Realist Yves Klein and Athiraman Kanan, an Indian resident of which little is known. Haig’s piece officially opens with a shot of the Burj against an ‘International Klein Blue’ sky. Each time I come to the piece, I sit down to view and listen at a various points of entry — an image of Tom Cruise hanging off the Burj for a stunt for "Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol"; a photograph of Yves Klein making his famous leap (Leap into the Void / Le Saut dans le vide); the image of Indian window washers trickling down the side of the Burj; a blurred out sunset burning red like a sacred fire that reduces the dead down to dust.
Part of the narration speaks to Tom Cruise’s love of doing his own stunts with Haig speaking to the fact that the thrill that feeds Tom Cruise’s need for the stunt of leaping from the Burj “just for the adrenaline rush” demonstrates that Cruise “lives to defy death”. He hurts himself off into the sky but not without a camera to document the act as it is the digital replay of the act that grounds it into reality even if only for the sake of an audience’s entertainment.

Video installation “On the other side of the sky: An Epilogue in Three Parts” by Haig Al-Azrak at Mercer Union, Toronto. Shot of French artist, Yves Klein, executing a stunt for his Nouveau réalisme conceptual work titled “Le Saut dans le vide / Leap into the Void”.

After the opening scene of sky and skyscraper, the photograph of Klein, jump off a building into the space below, follows. The image, which was printed as the cover of Dimanche, an artist book in the form of a broadsheet, was distributed at a press conference on November 26, 1960 at Galerie Rive Droite, Paris and was made available for purchase on newsstands around Paris on that day.

In Dimanche, Klein declared:

“Le Saut dans le vide / Leap into the Void is Un Homme Dans L’Espace-Le Peintre de l’Espace se Jette Dans le Vide / Man In Space! The Painter of Space Throws Himself into The Void! As part of a Nouveau réalisme performance piece, Leap Into the Void was a spectacle that Klein and cast documented distributed sealing the performance into a historic reality that grounded it to the timeline of 20th Century Western art.

In his own piece, Haig compares Kanan’s jump from the Burj to Klein’s leap and claims that like Klein, Kanan is also a “painter of Space, a figurative and a realist”. As a release from the never-ending psychological pain that came from his separation from HOME, Kanan’s last act was a symbolic one, as he committed suicide by falling from the building that his employer helped erect; a seemingly necessary act as perhaps suicide was perceived to be the only way, as a migrant worker, he could fracture his employment contract.

Haig boldly states that the suicide of Kanan was the real inauguration of the Burj Khalifa rather than the ‘official’ inauguration with its pomp and circumstance of ten thousand fireworks witnessed by a massive international audience. “Kanan’s death is only visible because of the Burj. He leaps from it and lands on it. The only thing that this leap into the void manages to do is to finally materialize the Burj and confirm its veracity.” For the truth is that the unimaginable building that grew to be the Burj Khalifa is rooted in a reality of the oppression of thousands of transient and dislocated migrant workers, hundreds of whom have chosen, like Kanan, to leap off the Burj.
Klein claimed that his first artistic act was as an adolescent while lying on a beach in Nice with friends. He says "I was to sign my name on the other side of the sky during a fantastic "realistic-imaginary" journey." He spiritually perforated into the beautiful blue of a cloudless sky.

Maybe as Alirahman Kanan leapt from the VOID his life had become (a reality where his requests for leave from his job were continually denied) he now felt the weightlessness as the burden of the Burj was left behind him. Maybe in Kanan’s final performance there was relief to his anguish as he wrote his name on the other side of the sky.

Video Installation "On the other side of the sky: An Epilogue in Three Parts” by Haig Aivazian at Mercer Union, Toronto. Shot of a burning sun setting in a red sky:

“In his video The Unimaginable Things We Build (2011), Haig Aivazian challenges the hype, anticipation and rhetoric of success surrounding the Burj Khalifa. On 4 January 2010, the tower was launched with ten thousand fireworks that lit up the sky to mark the feat in engineering. Aivazian describes this event: “a large fiery spark suddenly engulfed the top of the building, and quickly came tumbling down the entire structure. Soon, all that could be seen was the giant fire and the resulting smoke. Meanwhile the smoke and explosions that accompanied it enabled the spectators to imagine its destruction." The artist’s montage combines cell phone and video footage capturing the screams of spectators and the sound of the fireworks, with an interview with mega-star Tom Cruise, there for the purpose of a location film shoot in which stuntmen rappel down the glass exterior of the building “just for the sake of an adrenaline rush." While examining the violence intrinsic to building and development, Aivazian draws parallels between the superficial celebrity culture and myopic vision of such iconic buildings.” (sited from exhibit program by the curator; Srinivasa Mitra)

"CHANGING STAKES: CONTEMPORARY ART DIALOGUES WITH DUBAI"

"CHANGING STAKES: Artist Talk by Armin Linke" October 22, 4pm

Other Resources:

Green Cardamom Gallery, London, England (Dealer for Hajra Waheed)

The Third Line Gallery, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Sharjah Biennial 2011

Art Forum on Sharjah Biennial

Armin Linke’s participation is supported by the Goethe-Institut and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura.
The Third Line Gallery: Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Sharjah Biennial 2011

Art Forum on Sharjah Biennial

Armin Linke's participation is supported by the Goethe-Institut and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura.

Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen's participation is supported by the Danish Cultural Agency.

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