



# ARTFORUM

[aqua2702](#) | [log out](#) | [ADVERTISE](#) | [BACK ISSUES](#) | [CONTACT US](#) | [SUBSCRIBE](#)
 [search](#)
[ARTGUIDE](#) | [DIARY](#) | [PICKS](#) | [NEWS](#) | [IN PRINT](#) | [FILM](#) | [500 WORDS](#) | [VIDEO](#) | [PREVIEWS](#) | [TALKBACK](#) | [A & E](#) | [BOOKFORUM](#) | [中文版](#)

All material in the Artforum Archive is protected by copyright. Permission to reprint any article from the Artforum archive must be obtained from Artforum Magazine.

## Hale Tenger, Sharjah Biennial, "September 11"

12.01.11

AUTHOR: MURTAZA VALI

Every other March, the opening of the Sharjah Biennial coincides with Art Dubai. The former's critical aspiration and ambitious sprawl combines with the glitz and glamour of the fair to make an overwhelming surfeit of contemporary art. Amid this year's March Madness, Hale Tenger's multichannel video installation *Balloons on the Sea*, 2011, at Green Art Gallery, provided much-needed space for reflection. Inspired by a common distraction along the Bosphorus in which patrons pay to shoot BB guns at floating balloons, the work's main projection featured a single, colorful string of the inflatable objects accompanied by a spare, plinking score. A maze of smaller screens behind the main one depicted individual balloons bursting and coming back to life, intimating resilience in the face of violence, while Tenger's simple inversion of the image in the main projection, causing the balloons' reflection to dissolve as it rippled upward, lightened loads and lifted spirits.

At the biennial, a sinister feeling permeated the freshly whitewashed courtyard that had previously been the site for Mustapha Benfodil's censored installation *Maportaliche/Ecritures Sauvages* (It Has No Importance/Wild Writings), 2011. Censorship, of course, is never complete; it simply makes a ghost of what it purports to erase. After the work's removal, the biennial felt particularly haunted, and I noticed the recurrence of "spectrality" as a formal trope. Shumon Basar, Eyal Weizman, and Jane and Louise Wilson's video installation *Face Scripting: What Did the Building See?*, 2011, procedurally scanned the spaces traversed by phantom assassins. In Judith Barry's multisite video installation *Cairo Stories...*, 2010–11, talking heads remained visible just long enough to testify to their struggles as Cairene women. And disembodied voices propelled the dramas of a hijack standoff in Naeem Mohaiemen's *The Young Man Was ... (Part 1: United Red Army)*, 2011, and CAMP's *The Neighbour Before the House*, 2009–11, the latter depicting a simple reversal of the daily conditions of surveillance in Jerusalem, which prompted expressions of mischievous glee from the Palestinian families who were the film's protagonists.

Peter Eleey deployed a comparably allusive approach for "September 11," his exhibition as memorial at MoMA PS1. The show's only weakness—its unabashed Americanness—also became a resounding strength. Avoiding representations of the tragic events, images overburdened with affect, he instead used works that mostly predated the attacks. Artworks became premonitions, as the show emphasized their semiotic contingency. The exhibition made me question whether Janet Cardiff's moving *The Forty Part Motet*, 2001, which was first installed at MoMA PS1 shortly after the attacks, becoming an ad hoc site of mourning, could also lament the victims of the wars launched under the aegis of 9/11.

#writer#

*Murtaza Vali is a critic and curator based in Brooklyn and Sharjah.*