

Lovers Without Mausoleum, 2021

If we look closely at the artworks of Mahmoud Maktabi, then we notice a series of repeated actions – temporary and transient in nature – which have been performed over several years in different places. In all cases, these actions stand for themselves and merely mark the place and then disappear again. Moreover, although the artist uses his own body for these actions, his works are far from performative in nature. Rather, the use of body is a matter of marking a place performatively, and as such, occurs without any intervention and leaves behind only a kind of sketch with a short-lived lifespan. The distribution of these actions over several years signals a concept that is deliberately kept open and may perhaps come to an end over time. Maktabi's works can therefore be understood as an open question or an open offer. If one accepts his offer of art, then a connection to the place and to the natural landscape is established because man, as the dominant force, withdraws.

In the series of works, *Bridge*, the artist concentrates on the single action of making a bridge with his body in both natural and architectural landscapes. His movements are familiar and are reminiscent of gymnastic exercises such as when he bends his body backwards to the ground with bent legs and hands. When we consider the short time of the action, this work can be understood as a temporary sculpture in space, or as a temporary drawing in the landscape. In this manner, the artist has performed the work in Iran in 2008, in South Korea in 2014, in India in 2015, in South Africa in 2016 and in Turkey in 2017. Similarly to this work another series entitled, *Winged Trees*, involves a body-mediated temporary marking across different settings and places. For instance, the artist depicts his hands as two wings, both the left and the right, seen protruding from behind a tree. These actions can be understood as an artistic attitude, one which recognizes that the leaving of traces represents a basic human motivation, whilst simultaneously rejecting any form of permanent intervention in nature or in the existing situation.

Since 2016, Maktabi has been engaged in a series of works entitled, *Lovers without Mausoleum*. The title refers to a verse from the poem by Iranian poet – Mohammad-Ali Moalem Damghani (1951) – which was turned into a song by one of the most important contemporary singers of Persian classical music – Mohammad-Reza Shajarian (1940-2020). This song is very present in the Iranian collective memory. On the one hand because of its content, and on the other because of the popular personalities of both the poet and the singer in Iran. *Lovers without Mausoleum* is also an open ongoing concept which Maktabi has repeated in different locations. In fact, Maktabi has executed the work in seven regional and international locations. Similar to the other projects presented here, the artist limits himself to a single action in this work – arranging and setting upright objects found in a previously lying state. Maktabi understands the act of setting objects upright as a kind of bringing to life, and thus, within the span of one

day – from sunrise to sunset – the artist works with materials found in a lying state, such as natural stones, river stones and bricks, as well as rubble, fallen tree leaves and dry earth on the riverbed. His work in the current exhibition, *Dear Fractured Stones*, focuses exclusively on found natural stones. This is an installation that covers an area of approximately 3.5 x 26 meters and is executed not far from Tehran, in Chin Kalagh. The artist describes this project as follows:

“Love is the main subject of my artworks. I think about lovers from many years ago, but not famous one. I seek stories of these lovers in different countries, in folk culture and ask ordinary people to tell me about them. I installed different materials vertically as a memorial thing to remember lovers, lovers without Mausoleum and without names. Nature is not an idealistic place for me. These installations are symbols of Tombstones and living at the same time. I find another life under the materials. [...] For me, the thing is simply falling and standing, the vertical arrangement of objects, and all I have found here is to re-establish life, as much as its silence is reminiscent of death.”

(from the artist's own statement)