

## Area

Al Quoz (41)  
 Barsha (7)  
 Bur Dubai (15)  
 Deira (7)  
 DIFC (13)  
 Downtown Dubai (2)  
 Dubai Marina (4)  
 Dubai Media City (2)  
 Emirates Hills (1)  
 Festival City (2)  
 Jumeirah (12)  
 Jumeirah Lakes  
 Towers (3)  
 Karama (1)  
 Knowledge Village (1)  
 Nad Al Sheba (3)  
 Others (15)  
 Oud Metha (1)  
 Rashidiya (2)  
 Satwa (2)  
 Sheikh Zayed Road (5)  
 TECOM (1)  
 Umm Suqeim (3)

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## The politics of deception

### Artists Alessandro Balteo Yazbeck and Media Farzin on their Statute of Limitation exhibition

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Picture 1 of 2

#### Alessandro Balteo Yazbeck and Media Farzin talks to Peter Feely about his latest show of video artworks that address the Cold War.

Part of a group exhibition which focuses on the Cold War, Alessandro Balteo Yazbeck and Media Farzin's videos recontextualise the US government's Cold War agenda and emphasise the propaganda and manipulation which occurred at the time. With subsequent wars on terror, cyber attacks and misuse of private information, these issues carry an unsettling relevance today. We chat to the artist about his stance on the issues and the show at the Green Art Gallery in Al Quoz.

#### What do you find fascinating or disturbing about the rhetoric and imagery used during the Cold War?

Cold War rhetoric is still very present with us today – communism or terrorism, the 'free world' continues to use the media to sway public opinion in its favour, and resorts to violence where 'hearts and minds' aren't quite won. In the early years of the Cold War, the greed and ambition was sometimes highly visible – for example, what you see in the source material for our video *Chronoscope, 1951, 11pm*. Our video uses footage from a 1950s US television programme called *Longines Chronoscope* (it was sponsored by the watch company) that would invite knowledgeable people to discuss current events. Their language was often so nakedly entitled and ambitious that we didn't need to do much more than edit their words into a conversation, a debate about global power and domination.

#### Do you think this kind of manipulation of the public is still a problem today and is your work trying to highlight this?

By looking at current conflicts as the continuation of decades of manipulation and suspicion, and the result of long colonial histories (whether implicit or explicit), they become a lot less irrational. It's the same ideological standoff, with [different](#) actors and cover stories – and the US still has a massive military arsenal trained at those it considers enemies all over the world.

#### Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* parodied the Cold War. Do you see any comedy in the absurdity of this sort of rhetoric?

Peter Sellers is wonderful in everything, isn't he? *Dr Strangelove* is a great comedy, but also chilling, especially in view of what we've learned about nuclear accidents since then. Of course, for our purposes, *Dr Strangelove* is also a very clear-sighted critique of the Cold War strategy

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of deterrence.

**Can you explain how you decided what parts of dialogue you chose to use in your videos and how you obtained the footage?**

The footage is in a public archive – it's available through the US National Archives and Records Administration, which is the repository for many US government documents, and also some donated materials such as *Longines Chronoscope* that relate to government activities. We chose interviews that best encapsulated the speaker's views, but also parts that most suggested a dialogue, a larger Cold War conversation about oil and access to resources.

**Do you think politicians should be held more accountable for their actions than they are now and do you describe yourself as political?**

We are political in the sense that we try not to avoid the networks of power that we ourselves are caught up in. Our work looks to history – of art, politics, technology or economics – to understand what has brought us here. But we would not describe our work as that of an activist in any sense. We present facts, then entangle them within larger configurations, and leave the judgment to the viewer.

**Do you think it's important that people understand the meaning of the title of the exhibition? 'Statue of Limitation'.**

The title comes from the work of one of the artist's in the show, Judith Sönnicken. It's essentially a play on words: how do you make a statue of a limitation? That is, how do you represent something that recedes, that is dependent on what it limits? It's such a playful and perplexing idea to wrap your head around, it's like mental gymnastics. But like many works in the show, it poses a question, and then invites the viewer to think about it, and also to think with it.

**Do you think the issues which are raised in your show are relevant to Middle Eastern audiences?**

That remains to be seen! We're not making work for a particular region or social group. We see our work as a conversation, starting between ourselves and shared with others who might be curious or sceptical about art, history or politics, who might be open to hearing our stories.

**Do you have an opinion about the subject of intellectual independence from society?**

We're not sure what you mean by that. The intellectual as someone independent from society? Or a society as being intellectually independent from other societies? Certainly it's important to think both with and against one's time, to understand what constitutes a social or public sphere, but also remain critical of the status quo, to constantly interrogate what we are given by the media or public opinion.

**What will your next art project be?**

We are working on the next chapters of the *Chronoscope* material, 1952 and 1953, and also another series, 'Cultural Diplomacy: An Art We Neglect' (which was our first collaborative work together, begun in 2009). The last chapter of that series looks at propaganda in the work of Charles and Ray Eames. 'Eames-Derivative' was just exhibited in Graz and New York, and we'll be showing it next year here in [Dubai](#).

**The Lowdown**

**Exhibition:** *Statue of Limitation* runs until January 4 at [Green Art Gallery](#), Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz (04 346 9305).

**Artists:** Alessandro Balteo Yazbeck and Media Farzin

By Peter Feely

Time Out Dubai, 19 November 2013

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