

Videozone – Eric Baudelaire – The Ugly One, 2013, 101 min.

In his films, photographs and installations French artist Eric Baudelaire explores history; its sources, images as well as its modes of representation and perception. »The Ugly One« is at once feature film and documentary – about love, remembering, forgetting and about a city. It tells the story of Lili (Juliette Navis) and Michel (Rabih Mroué), who encounter one another in post-civil war Beirut. In their conversations the couple tries to reconstruct a past that also carries the theoretical construct of a future. Their discussions with comrades – former members of the Lebanese Communist Party – revolve around the operation »fog in daylight«. It remains unclear whether this terrorist strike is still being planned or has already been carried out. Meanwhile the fate of the young girl Elena becomes the psychological projection for Lili's feelings of guilt, or her desire to give life.

The film was developed in cooperation with the Japanese filmmaker and former left-wing radical Masao Adachi, who was described, on Interpol's wanted posters, as »The Ugly One.« Adachi was an avant-garde filmmaker before becoming a member and spokesperson for the Japanese Red Army. A first filmic collaboration between Adachi and Baudelaire was »The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 Years Without Images« (2011), which already unfolds a portrait of Adachi. For their second collaboration, the latter wrote a deliberately impossible script, which Baudelaire constantly rearranged during the shoot. In the script, the act of terror, the mission itself, forms the essence of the narrative, whereas the film focuses on the protagonists as sensitive individuals within the spectrum of war and terror who are driven by the need to (re)construct a meaning and a purpose of their militant actions. The overlapping of languages in the dialogues – Arabic, English and French – underlines the difficulty of the attempt to grasp both past and present or even to draft a future. This is juxtaposed with Adachi's voice over in Japanese, recalling his memories and his version of the story, which superimpose, and at times contrast, with the images on screen. Images and dialogues appear as fragments, like memories, and become a many-layered political narration, in which the borders between fact and fiction, between times and generations become blurred and at the same time are confronted with one another. »The Ugly One« is not only a reflection on terrorism – as a main issue of our time. It also questions the authorship in history, the claim for genuine truth and the historicity in film, as well as the genesis and sustainability of individual and collective memory.

Courtesy the Artist and Poulet-Malassis films

