

paintings of fictional spaces from classical mythology or didactic stories, such as Mantegna's *Triumph of the Virtues* (1502) with religious scenes. These images seem to come to life, and the constant attempt to find answers and explanations for complex iconographies is temporarily abandoned to allow figures and spaces to resonate more freely.

Room five is dedicated to 'Devotional Paintings and Portraits'. A small, intimate space, it is dominated by the genre of *sacra conversazione*, to which are juxtaposed secular images such as the celebrated portrait of Doge Leonardo Loredan (Bellini, 1501-02). The reduced scale of this room evokes the intended use of these paintings, originally meant for private devotion and display.

Finally, the last room, 'Antiquity', dedicated to paintings that take up ancient subjects, is dominated by the monumental *Triumphs of Caesar* (Mantegna, c.1484-92), in an intricate display of perspectival space and complex viewing relations. These massive paintings are contrasted with Bellini's smaller sculptural monochrome panel of around 1506. In this case, the association is fruitful as it displays different imaginative approaches to early modern constructions of the past and of ancient art. The differences in size, colour and animation between the *Triumphs* and the monochrome panel are eloquent, and while captions remain vague, they gently guide viewers through these complex images, at least to an iconological level.

The subheading quoted at the start of this review is perhaps the clearest indicator of the curators' conservative methodologies. That vague claim rests upon generic ideas of 'high art' and does not seem to offer a meaningful contribution to neither widespread nor scholarly understandings of Bellini and

Mantegna's artworks. Throughout the exhibition, captions insist on questions of attribution and patronage, constantly referring to rigid canons of 'Renaissance beauty'. The exaggerated value attached to the concept of 'genius' might be attractive to a certain public, but indicates a refusal to engage with more compelling debates regarding image production and visual analysis. Critical questions are avoided and replaced by an all too familiar discussion of early modern art. More importantly, the numerous juxtapositions and comparisons often fail to form a solid argument.

The attempt to attract a 'safe' demographic and to encourage acts of performative connoisseurship strongly limits the impact of this exhibition. Relying on outdated modes of engagement with images, it reinforces a problematic rhetoric of intellectualism, rather than expanding the interpretative possibilities of early modern artworks. Despite its potential, 'Mantegna and Bellini' seems to impose new boundaries, and viewers lose the opportunity to engage independently with such remarkable paintings.

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**Chad Elias, *Posthumous Images: Contemporary Art and Memory Politics in Post-Civil War Lebanon*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2018, 264 pages, paperback, ISBN 9780822347668, \$25.95.**

From 1975-1990, Lebanon was plagued by political turmoil and civil strife, fomented by unending sectarian conflict and repeated

foreign invasions. In his book *Posthumous Images*, Chad Elias examines the work of contemporary Lebanese artists such as Joana Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige and Akram Zaatari who are united by their orientation towards this fraught context and its afterlives. Known in popular discourse as the ‘war generation’, these artists were born between the mid-1960s and early 1970s and came of age as the civil war reached a crescendo, their own formative years unfolding against this upheaval in the identity of the nation-state. Elias brings these artists together not only because of their generational affiliations but also because of their shared mobilisation of lens-based media. Film, photography and video are all represented in these practices, whether in the form of installation, lecture-performance or documentary. Elias closely examines the ways in which these artists interrogate the unresolved trauma of the wartime era in Lebanon and give visual expression to its continually unfolding temporality. Rather than picture the immediate effects of the conflict, these practices, Elias argues, investigate the damage this collective violence has inflicted on representation itself. In this way, Elias contends that images do not passively register collective trauma, but rather are the very tools through which a violent past is etched into public consciousness.

An awareness of the centrality of images, both to the recollection of the past and to the reimagining of the future, animates the practices that Elias unpacks. Exemplified by the work of Walid Raad and the Atlas Group, many artists reclaim archival documents and collect eyewitness testimonies in order to complicate hegemonic narratives of the almost two-decade long conflict. Yet, as Elias argues, these works are equally suspicious of a

counter-history that might disproportionately privilege the voice of the ‘subaltern’. While Elias does not elaborate too extensively on the use of this particular term, he convincingly illustrates these related points in his chapter on Rabih Mroué’s multimedia performance *Three Posters* (1999) and Akram Zaatari’s video *Al Shareet bi-khayr* (*All Is Well on the Border*) (1997) entitled ‘Resistance, Video Martyrdom, and the Afterlife of the Lebanese Left’. Elias demonstrates how, by reanimating the archive of images and videos staged by those who resisted the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, these artists enter into the technologies and representational strategies of the defeated Lebanese left without any romantic attachment. Rather than simply operate in a mode of recovery, these videos, Elias claims, ‘center on strategies of staging and reenactment to unmake the language of resistance, denaturalizing its relationship to the bodies that serve to articulate its scripts, whether willingly or not’.<sup>1</sup> Elias’s discussion is particularly useful in thinking beyond nostalgia: he persuasively argues that not all attempts to revisit failed leftist projects can be dismissed as melancholic; rather, these practices can provide the condition of possibility for imagining, what Elias terms in the book’s final chapter, alternative ‘futures past’.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps Elias’s most significant contribution rests in his pointed rebuke to conventional psychoanalytic models of memory—ones that, over-determined by Freudian notions of repression and latency, exaggerate the inadequacies of the visual to fully grasp the always-ineluctable traumatic moment. Instead, Elias convincingly foregrounds war as an expansive field of representation, as a form of collective violence that is waged by and through

images.<sup>3</sup> This reframing allows him to attend to lens-based media as a site of political agency in its own right—a living archive through which contemporary Lebanese artists can speak or, in some cases, a lacuna to which they can offer a response. Elias provides an alternative model for examining these elisions in the chapter ‘Latent Images, Buried Bodies’, which investigates how contemporary artists invoke the thousands of Lebanese citizens who were disappeared by Israeli and Syrian forces during the civil war. In one section, Elias analyses Lamia Joreige’s *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere* (2003), a video work that is constructed from testimonies collected by the artist in Beirut’s former wartime checkpoints, a decade after the close of the war. Rather than hypostasise the fallibility of witnessing or foreground the unknowable status of a missing person, the video, Elias claims, presents intergenerational networks of gossip and hearsay as legitimate forms of public memory that can counter official narratives of forgetting.

Although ‘Latent Images’, as well as Elias’s book more broadly, certainly offers an alternative framework for examining the production of images in the wake of collective violence, these arguments could have been further strengthened by a discussion of the ways in which conventional theories of

trauma, particularly in their overemphasis on the Holocaust, fail to grapple with nonwestern racial dynamics. These questions may have been particularly interesting in light of the race-making practices of Israeli settler-colonialism and its impact on the lived experience and living memory of the Lebanese civil war. Nonetheless, *Posthumous Images* is a rigorous work of scholarship that offers a timely intervention into existing discourses on lens-based media and memory. The book offers a clear and important route to thinking beyond the widely accepted inadequacies of the visual without recourse to conventional models of documentary truth. By attending to the specificities of the Lebanese context, Elias demonstrates that meta-historical commentary is never an adequate replacement for robust historical inquiry and detailed visual analysis. A much-needed intervention into art historical discourse, *Posthumous Images* will motivate scholars to re-politicise and diversify questions of memory and thus to restore a radical belief in the agency of representation.

1 Chad Elias, *Posthumous Images: Contemporary Art and Memory Politics in Post-Civil War Lebanon*, Durham, North Carolina, 2018, pp. 57.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 159–175.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 16.

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