



## CRACKED

a solo exhibition by Tom Bogaert

from 7 September through 21 September 2011  
hours: daily from 10am to 5pm or on appointment  
opening reception: Wednesday 7 September - 7pm  
artist talk: Friday 9 September - 7pm

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**Zico House is proud to present the 4th chapter of an Accidental Orientalist's travels through the Middle East: 'CRACKED'**

In July 2011, Tom Bogaert was the artist-in-residence at Zico House in Beirut, Lebanon. The residency was a personal, tropical, historical, and intellectual investigation combining art and non-art, the high and the low, and indeed the ordinary with the extraordinary.

The three main works featured in the solo show, CRACKED are 'pavement popsicles', 'cracked windshields' and a 'mausoleum' which are linked together through Bogaert's larger ongoing project 'Impression, proche orient' (IPO). Drawing on his experience as a European living and working in the East, it is the artist's intention to interpret understandings of the region - or lack thereof - from the inside out. As an outsider with the privilege of being given access to the inside, the aim is to use irony, gesture and narratives from the region by means of artistic production. The artist refers to himself as the *Accidental Orientalist*.

'**pavement popsicles**' is a one-channel video installation featuring a painted papier-mâché model of a segment of a Beirut roundabout - glass curb markers included. Curb markers are glass lenses designed to reflect light back to an approaching vehicle. Using optics as its light source the markers illuminate curbs and medians at night and they are ubiquitous yet under-represented elements of Beirut's nightlife.

The video - made in collaboration with Siska - shows Tom Bogaert fixing broken glass curb markers by placing exact copies of the markers made out of ice in the gaps created by the missing lenses. The ice versions of the lenses are modeled after original lenses obtained from the Municipality of Beirut after a 5 days quest deep inside the hot and humid core of the city's management system. The average melting time of the ice lenses stands at 20 minutes depending on the time of day and whether they are exposed to direct sunlight or not. By using ice the artist is commenting on permanence and impermanence and what is noticed or unnoticed if it disappears. In a constantly changing and developing city like Beirut, would someone notice an artist wanting to fix Beirut - for twenty minutes - the popsicles melting in the sweltering heat - words: 'ephemeral' 'futile' 'blip on the radar screen'. Bogaert came to Lebanon for a 3 weeks residency thinking he would be able to understand like so many residents before and after him - hubristic - but in the end all he will leave behind - contribute to the 'beautification' of Beirut are 20 minutes improvements...nothing more nothing less.

When covering events such as civil wars, journalists tape 'Press' and 'TV' signs on the windshield of their cars. The artwork '**cracked windshields**' goal was to somehow provoke and find protection under a taped 'ART' signage. Tape as an amulet, words like magic water protecting Mai-Mai warriors from bullets. During the course of the residency Bogaert became dissatisfied with the aesthetic and conceptual starting point and outcome of the project. The artist subsequently turned to cracked windshields salvaged from car glass repair shops and turned them into maps of Beirut.

In a nod to the popular anger at al-Assad's rule sweeping across neighboring Syria and intrigued by the silence of artists in the Arab world, the artist placed a new 3 meter high cardboard model

of his Syrian 2010 '**Mausoleum**' in the exhibition space. A video of a 'minecraft' (an online multi-player video game) version of the architectural presentation accompanies the make-shift sculpture.

In the summer of 2010, Tom Bogaert started working on the Syrian chapter of his 'Impression, proche orient' series. The base for Bogaert's project in Syria is president Bashar al-Assad's story that he wasn't supposed to rule Syria. "I never cared about this position," he told the American Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in 2007. "I'd be comfortable not being here." Bashar al-Assad is a British-trained ophthalmologist and the eye doctor's tumbling E eye chart is the alpha and omega of the Syrian IPO chapter. Does Dr. Bashar still dream about tumbling Eye Doctor E charts and the course for Syria they might chart: left, right, up or down? President Bashar's father Hafez and brother Basil are buried in a vast echoing mausoleum in the city of Qardaha. This M ("E down") shaped mausoleum might be how President Bashar's Mausoleum will look like.

Tom Bogaert ended up in the Orient by accident and he does realize that the issue of Saidian Orientalism - prejudiced outsider interpretations of the East as surveyed by Edward W. Said - that pervades his work is problematic. Constant self-examination and -criticism have indeed confirmed that there is very little moral higher ground for him to be left standing on. At the same time Bogaert seeks to be more than a mere *Accidental Orientalist*. Edward W. said: "there is, after all, a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of co-existence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate..."

### **About Tom Bogaert**

Before dedicating his life to art, Belgian artist Tom Bogaert documented genocide and human rights abuses in Africa, Europe and Asia. He worked as a lawyer for Amnesty International and the UN refugee agency. The artist does not see his artwork as an extension of his refugee work, although it does directly confront the intersection of human rights, entertainment and propaganda.

Bogaert is a conceptual artist and works primarily with video, sculpture and installation. The work is often inspired by geopolitical contexts. He tends to investigate what some might think of as difficult themes and subjects. To keep a sense of openness for the audience, the artist always tries to maintain a degree of lightness and humor in his work.

Tom Bogaert stopped practicing law in 2004 and participated in the Elizabeth Foundation Studio Center in New York City. He had his first solo exhibition in NYC in 2008 with the legendary *Jack the Pelican Presents* gallery and he has widely exhibited in Europe, the Middle East and the US. Bogaert's work has been written about in publications such as The New York Times, Al-Akhbar, JO-magazine, NY Arts Magazine, Baladna, Artist for Artist and The Miami Herald.

The first exhibition of 'Impression, proche orient' (IPO) was at Makan Art Space in Amman, Jordan in April 2010, after a three months intensive residency. Since then Bogaert has gone on to create IPO chapters in Syria with Le Pont Gallery in Aleppo, as well as in Ramallah and Birzeit, Palestine in collaboration with Triangle Arts Trust | Al-Mahatta Gallery. Further IPO investigations planned for 2011 include Gaza City with Eltiqa Artist House and Nablus with ArtSchool Palestine and the Museum of the University of Birzeit.

Tom Bogaert lives and works in Amman, Jordan.

[www.tombogaert.org](http://www.tombogaert.org)

the exhibition is organized in partnership with:



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