



The Distance is Always Other

Chris Coekin and Noel Nasr

Photography Exhibition and Book Launch

ArtLab, Beirut

From May 4th until May 23rd, 2018

Opening: May 3rd, 6 – 9 pm

Dongola Limited Editions is pleased to launch its first artists' book, ***The Distance Is Always Other***, a collaborative project between Lebanese photographer Noel Nasr and British photographer Chris Coekin. ***The Distance Is Always Other***, which began as a visual investigation, became Dongola's first major publication, to be released with a corresponding photography exhibition curated by Abed Al-Kadiri at ArtLab, in Beirut, from May 3 until May 23, 2018. The book, designed by renowned Iranian artist Reza Abedini, includes a text by Lebanese writer Fadi Tofeili. An artistic exploration grounded in archival documentation, ***The Distance Is Always Other*** highlights the socio-geographical transformations in Lebanon over the past forty years.

The project started with the appropriation and subsequent investigation of a photographic archive originally produced in 1973 by an elderly American couple, identified only as Bob and Ann, documenting their journey from Beirut to Baalbek. The couple used a basic stereo camera, which produces two images, one just slightly after the other, from the same viewpoint. The archive comprises vernacular images capturing the Lebanese landscape through various prisms—urban, domestic, exotic—revealing details of a country on the brink of civil war.

Coekin uncovered the archive online in 2016, and collaborated with Nasr to trace the footsteps of the couple, re-visiting the same locations photographed in 1973. Assuming the role of geographical investigators, Coekin and Nasr painstakingly pieced together the original route, attempting to photograph several destinations from the tourists' identical perspective. Mimicking the structure of stereo camera film, the photographers overlaid two photographs of the same subject to form a single image.

This series responds to the original found archive by playing with the American couple's aesthetically coded "tourist" images, unexpectedly produced at a time of simmering regional turmoil. Nasr and Coekin reinterpret the tropes of those snapshots, sacrificing angle and perspective to achieve, as closely as possible, images deliberately capturing the same locations as the originals. Through their process of experimentation, the photographer duo inadvertently expose the instability within the Lebanese landscape. They provide crucial evidence of the social, demographic and architectural changes caused by the lengthy civil war and subsequent reconstruction. These various layers of evolution are identifiable through the juxtaposition of archival and contemporary images.

Fadi Tofeili's text foregrounds the interdisciplinary nature of this project, drawing parallels between the archive and the proliferation of Egyptian moving images in Lebanon during the 50s and 60s. Reza Abedini's design echoes Coekin and Nasr's forensic process: the design itself forms a visual essay incorporating a gamut of textures, transparencies and pictorial information, showcasing illustrations and notes taken by the photographers throughout their research. Abedini's use of juxtaposition on a formal and conceptual level reinforces the idea of superimposition and duality in both the artists' work and the photographic archive.

A custom-made stereoscopic viewer and reel accompany the book, recreating the experience of the original Viewmaster through which Bob and Ann's archive would have been seen. The reel contains the seven images from the original archive. The book is sheathed in a box-cum-camera bag, complete with shoulder strap, alluding to the photographic journey, crowning what is intended to be an interactive and engaging experience.

Chris Coekin is a British photographer based in London. His work is predominantly collaborative, and primarily concerned with contemporary British culture in relation to personal experiences. He works mainly with photography and often combines text, ephemera, audio and archival imagery in his projects. He is currently a senior lecturer at the University of Creative Arts in England. His work has been exhibited regionally and internationally in institutions and exhibitions such as the FOAM Museum, Amsterdam; People's History Museum in Manchester; and documenta 14, Athens.

Noel Nasr is a Lebanese photographer based in Beirut. His projects are mostly inspired from his daily life experiences and are often for therapeutic motives. He holds an M.F.A in Photography from the University of Kent, 2006. In 2011, he completed an M.F.A in Photography at the University of Ulster, Belfast. Since 2007, he has been the coordinator of the Photography Program at the Notre Dame University-Louaize (NDU).

Fadi Tofeili is an author, poet and Lebanese translator. He is the co-founder and chief editor of Portal 9: stories and critical writing about the city. He studied interior design at the Lebanese University and got a master in American Studies from Amsterdam University. His writings were published in Lebanon since the 90 s in different publications. He is the author of three poetry books and of many translations in Arabic. His latest book, *Iqtifa' Athar*, was published by Ashkal Alwan in 2014.

About Dongola:

Dongola creates limited edition art books offering unconventional perspectives on art and contemporary topics in the MENASA region today. Based in Beirut, and named after the ancient Nubian city of trade, commerce and culture, Dongola is an experimental intellectual and cultural venture. Like Dongola, we can all be forgotten. By prompting new modes of production and critique in the overlapping fields of culture, literature and history, our books offer critical reflection, interdisciplinary inspiration, and a commitment to examining contemporary social issues.

Dongola

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Original reel from 1973.



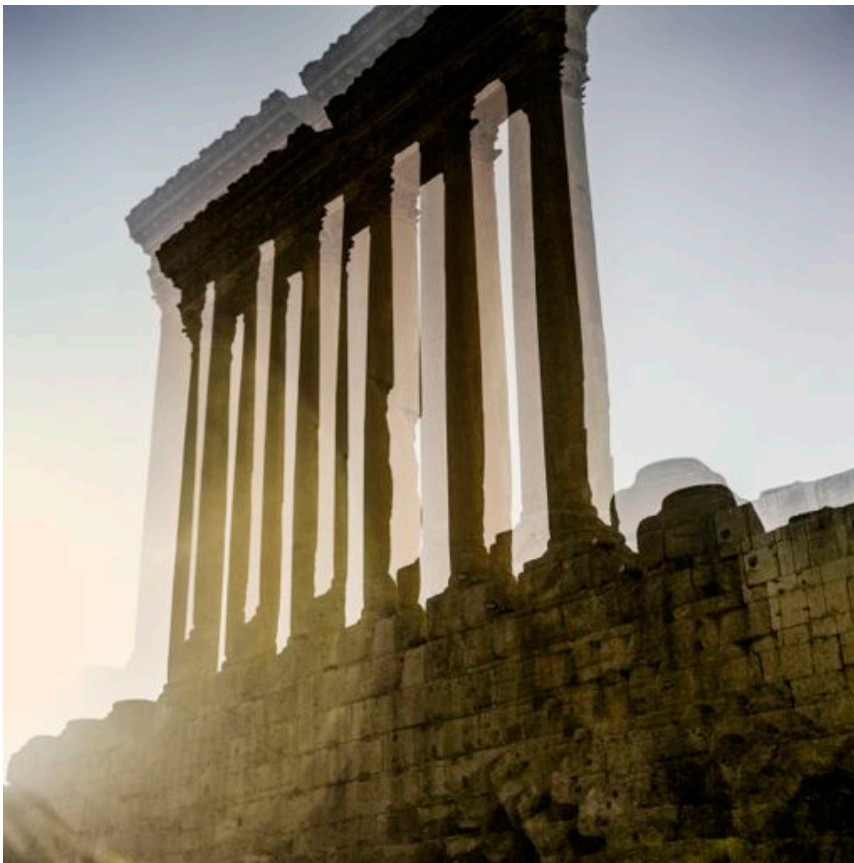
Example of stereo camera used by Bob and Ann.



Bob and Ann found archive from 1973.



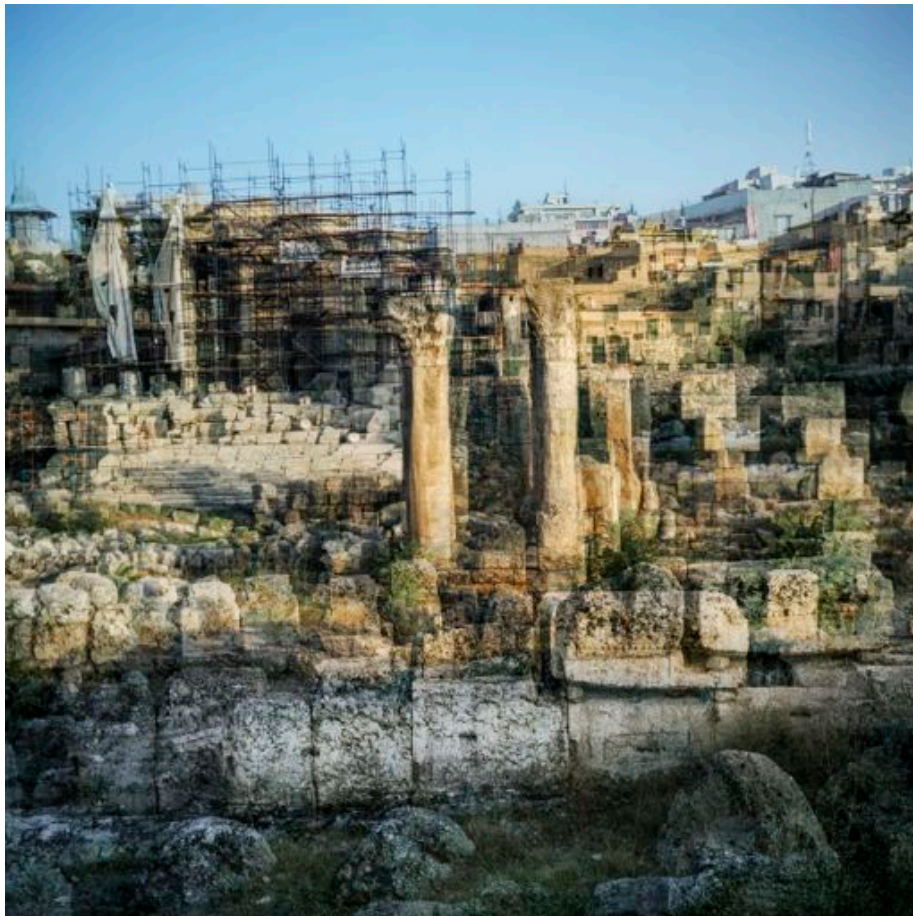
Stereoscopic images of Bob and Ann in Baalbek. Columns of the temple of Jupiter.



The Distance is Always Other, Chris Coekin and Noel Nasr, 2016, Digital print on photo paper.
©Chris Coekin and Noel Nasr.



Stereoscopic images of Bob and Ann showing the ruins in Baalbek.



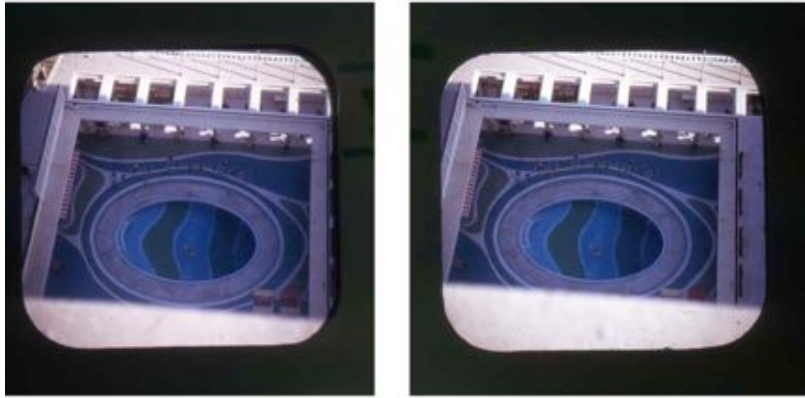
The Distance is Always Other, Chris Coekin and Noel Nasr, 2016, Digital print on photo paper.
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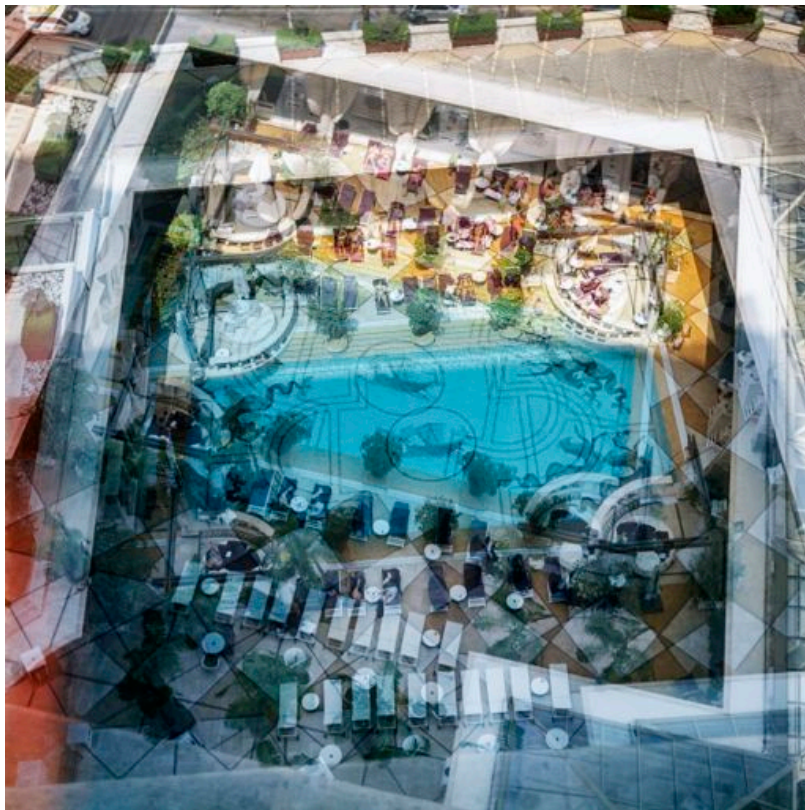
Stereoscopic images of Bob and Ann showing the old train railway on the way to Baalbek.



The Distance is Always Other, Chris Coekin and Noel Nasr, 2016, Digital print on photo paper.
©Chris Coekin and Noel Nasr.



Stereoscopic images of Bob and Ann of the Phoenicia pool in 1973.



The Distance is Always Other, Chris Coekin and Noel Nasr, 2016, Digital print on photo paper.
©Chris Coekin and Noel Nasr.



The Distance Is Always Other

Artwork Chris Coekin and Noel Nasr

Text Fadi Tofeili

Concept Abed Al Kadiri

Design Reza Abedini

Limited edition of 173 numbered and signed by the artists, and includes an original photograph, inkjet print on fine art paper.

The book is accompanied with a custom-made mini-viewer and custom reel, re-imagining Bob and Ann's archive by physically recreating them. The reel is composed of seven images, which in their turn recount the journey that the tourists had back in 1973. The box, which contains the book, is in the shape of a camera bag, alluding to the photographic journey and producing an interactive experience, where one wears, holds, scrutinizes, reads and narrates their own version of the story.