

Basim Magdy

(Asyut, Egypt, 1977)

For around a decade, Basim Magdy has been using a particular technique for the processing of film which he calls 'film pickling'. It is indeed a genuine pickling of the photographic material, which for a certain length of time is steeped in corrosive liquids for domestic use such as vinegar or Coca-Cola. Contact with such liquids triggers a series of chemical reactions that he only manages to foresee in part and which, depending on the length of the pickling period, the quality of the film and of the acid used, determine the degree of deterioration and the colouring that will come out in the final image. In a historical moment defined by the obsolescence of analogical techniques, the artist turns his gaze back to the most material qualities of film. He does not get dragged into vague nostalgic sentiments: instead it is his fascination with the countless distortions which this artisanal treatment manages to provoke that convinced him to experiment with a range of cheap and readily available substances. The pickling operation allows him to obtain images with an acidic sheen, with chaotic double exposures and marks caused by the infiltration of light on the film before having been fully developed.

Magdy's works – apart from photographs and short films, he also creates installations and works on paper midway between painting, drawing and collage – are non-linear narratives of a science-fictional future yet a melancholic one, characterised by the crumbling of the promises and dreams of mankind. The protagonists are isolated and unable to react: placed in front of the inevitability of their own failures, they are driven by a blind hope to repeat their past mistakes. The artist, critical with regard to the idea that the passing of time necessarily implies growth and progress, even imagines a world from which mankind is absent. All that's left are empty volcanic landscapes (*Investigating the Color Spectrum of a Post-Apocalyptic Future Landscape*, 2013), fragments of expressionless statues and stuffed animals (*The Many Colors of the Sky Radiate Forgetfulness*, 2014) and incomprehensible chat messages between bots (*New Acid*, 2019).

One characteristic of Magdy's work is the widespread use of the written word: in the long and poetic titles of his works, all too ambiguous to provide any useful key to their interpretation; in the captions that replace the narrative voice in his short films yet which run out of sync with the images on the screen; and lastly, in the texts that he displays on the wall, endowed with a sense of cynicism that strikes at the heart of the viewer-reader. Even the sentence transcribed in the installation purchased for the collection, *Clowns* (2014), sounds like a ruthless comment with regard to the structures that run our world: "After much contemplation and debate, the clowns that run this degenerating society agreed there was only one way to explain the status quo to the masses: they are clowns too, which leaves everyone without an audience."

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