

Rä di Martino

(Rome, Italy, 1975)

Rä di Martino, beginning with her earliest works, has focused on the relationship between the illusory and the real. Initially cinema and theatrical stage sets were the field in which she conducted her research, in a quest to pinpoint the mechanisms of construction of fiction, in order to expose them, clarify them, and test their resistance to revealing their deception. Her method in some ways is similar to the procedures of deconstructionism in literary theory: the misfiring of the mechanism seems to be the first step toward analysis. She does this, however, not through a summation of obstructions, as Debord did in his films, but through a sequence of surgical incisions in each pocket of unreality of which the cinematographic fiction is made: the scenic interruption in *360°*; the exchange of characters in *Between*; the repetition and inversion of the narrative flow in *The Red Shoes*; the incongruity between scene and actors, also in *The Red Shoes*; the incongruity between expressive modality and content in *August 2008*; the expressive paroxysm of the actor who moves beyond credibility in his acting in *Can Can*.

However, the provisional conclusion of this collection of orchestrated scenic errors is, somewhat surprisingly, the steadfast force of the illusory persuasiveness of the filmic language. It does not matter how many times and in how many ways the flow is obstructed, and as long as the light of the projection remains on, the enchantment does not wane.

A different and consequent phase of study begins with a shift from the internal functioning of cinematographic language to the documentation—photographic for the most part—of certain aspects that remain at the edges of the grand illusion and, in fact, are its remains, its ruins.

Di Martino went to photograph the remains of certain imposing film sets in the desert in Tunisia and Morocco: often colossal structures but made entirely of plasterboard or other light materials that are at a high risk of obsolescence. There is something majestic about these “elephant cemeteries,” a fascination that, instead of unmasking the ephemeral construction of the unreal, gives it solidity and weight. It matters not that they are made of wood and paper; they are still ruins of our civilization, and, like all ruins, they have a fundamental power; they construct origins for the present, giving image and proof of the past. The past in question in *No More Stars (Star Wars)*, 2010, is paradoxically that of the most well-known science-fiction saga that cinema has ever produced. What we look at in the artist’s shots are the ancient remains of our distant future, or how cinema has been able to describe it, with its inescapable anachronisms, complete with cloaks, swords, and candlesticks, suggesting that the future is always and in any case medieval. The convoluted temporal arabesque for we who are watching what remains of our past idea of the future once again does not exclude the concreteness of the imagination and, indeed, squeezes the skeleton of its existence even more tightly amid the spires, despite the absence of both time and place. (EV)