

Driant Zeneli

(Shkodër, Albania, 1983)

The dream seems to be the most pertinent dimension of Driant Zeneli's work. He interprets the dream as fantasy and longing, but also as utopia and commitment, projected into the future, or even as a dimension of failure, of a goal not fully materialized, whose history and story nonetheless constitute a value.

One of his first works, *When I Grow Up I Want to Be an Artist* (2007), is a video that depicts a dialogue between the artist and a painter who turns out to be his father. The painter portrays Zeneli's face in the celebrative style typical of socialist realism, a style he had been compelled to follow for many years, in order to make a living from representatives of the Albanian regime. While painting, he describes—and while describing he reveals—his dream, a desire for art that has yet to be created, betrayed because of political conditions and practical necessities. This is an example of the positive value of failure, for through the father's story the dream is ignited in the mind of the son.

In not dissimilar fashion, *The Dream of Icarus Was to Make a Cloud* is a video that records the true foundational myth of failure: Icarus and his flight toward the sun, his error at daring too much and his consequent tragedy. In fact, however, Icarus is one of the most romantic and stirring figures in classical mythology, and his dream continues to nurture others, in a chain of desires that Zeneli gathers together, in an attempt to rise into the sky to create a cloud: the most impalpable, volatile, and pure of celestial manifestations, yet exceedingly difficult to reproduce. The artist himself emphasizes how much technology, how many heavy contraptions are necessary for man to create something as light and natural as a cloud. Failure, and the very reason for the continuity and survival of the dream, seems to already reside in this hodgepodge of a preparation.

His most recent video, *Those Who Tried to Put the Rainbow Back in the Sky*, 2012, tells the story of three characters and a duck who live on a cement ship, built amid abandoned fields. One day they see a fragment of a rainbow—it too made of heavy cement—that has fallen near the ship, and they decide to lift it onboard. They discuss at length how to accomplish this and decide that the only correct thing to do is to put the piece of rainbow back in the sky. The narration unfolds from morning to evening in a single day, just as the video was shot in a single day, since Zeneli wanted this story to have the temporal unity of ancient Greek tragedies. A cathartic value emerges from the framing of that piece of heavy rainbow, the curve of which, resting on the ship's deck, rises up like a bridge span toward the sky. Once again it is an image of the propulsive power of impossibility that ends up encouraging its opposite: oneiric possibility and the responsibility—of the artist in particular—to dream. (EV)