

Patrizio Di Massimo

The video piece by Patrizio Di Massimo (Jesi, Italy, 1983) entitled *Oae* (2009) is the account of a real and metaphorical journey into Italy's colonialist past in Libya and in what remains, today, of those dark years of Italian dominion.

The 13-minute film made by the artist along the streets of today's Tripoli, during a trip taken in 2008, combines archival material and pieces from cinematographic fiction inspired by fascist rule in Libya (from 1911 to 1940), in a constant overlapping of past and present, individual experience and collective denial. As a travel journal, *Oae* is an account that is full of ellipses and ambiguity, as if the real protagonist were not the memory of the colonialist past as much as its negation by both sides. By combining bits of the everyday with fragments from the film *Lion of the Desert* of 1981 (a film censored in Italy by Andreotti's regime because it was "prejudicial to the honor of Italy's armed forces") *Oae* stages an absence and a taboo, something that the artist himself defines as "a part of Italy outside Italy. The persistence of this identity that is hard to resist and has a hard time existing." As the camera scours the streets of Tripoli in search of those sculptures of Italian propaganda that were destroyed, or buildings representing Fascist Rationalism now partly repainted green, an intermingling of different foreign languages mediated in English provides an audio commentary for the images, as if it were the symphonic orchestration of a permanent cultural disparity and permanent reciprocal misunderstanding.

The work's title comes from the ancient Phoenician name *Oae*. In its ghostlike and suppressed existence, the history of Italian colonialism in Libya is re-evoked by the ruins of Leptis Magna at the theater of Sabratha, by the golden ring – symbol of Libyan resistance that appears at the beginning of the video, and by the ride along the coastal highway by car that ends the piece.

Patrizio Di Massimo also describes his motivation for creating *Oae*: "While maintaining an enormous respect for all the victims of colonization, both Libyan (*mujaheddin* and civil) and Italian (soldiers), I tried to create an autonomous reality that didn't use history in an opportunistic manner—which Italian politicians tend to do today when speaking about the guilt of our compatriots in Libya—nor in a revisionist manner. Because of this my presence is not the main subject of the video. The main subjects are the lack of understanding, the languages that mix, the raw and poetic images that are both stereotyped and vertical."

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