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Omer Fast
Continuity
May 8 - June 19, 2013

Employing a documentary form that fuses personal accounts, reportages, interviews and reenactments, the films of Omer Fast explore a boundary zone between reality and fiction. Among several works that feature protagonists of recent wars and armed conflicts, *Five Thousand Feet Is the Best*, 2011, is a striking example. It focuses on a US Army drone operator talking about various aspects of his job. The man’s account, filmed in a Las Vegas hotel and brought to life in flashbacks using actors, comes over as a disturbing mix of real facts and narrative digressions, vacillating between documentary and action movie. In front of the camera the man is refractory, reluctant to recount events in Afghanistan and Pakistan of which he was the cause and evidently troubled by the psychological effects of a war he participated in at arm’s length, safely ensconced in a control room in the United States.

In the film being presented here, this blurring of fact and fiction gives rise to a disconcerting psychological complexity. The central figure of *Continuity*, 2012, which is often seen as a work about loss and grief, is a young soldier called Daniel, returning home after serving in Afghanistan. The scenario is played out three times, with different actors taking the role of Daniel, so viewers are offered several versions of the same story. The film's initial images show a married couple driving from their home to a train station, where the uniformed youth awaits. Back at the house, the three share a meal and the young man retires to his room. The sequence of scenes then starts over. Gradually, there develops within this increasingly complicated circular structure a bizarre atmosphere where coherence is lost and it becomes harder and harder to distinguish the real from the unreal. The intimacy between parents and son is ambiguous, with a powerful sexual undertone, and the narrative thread is interrupted by surrealist scenes – a dromedary wanders down the middle of a road running through a pine forest, for example – and sudden horror-film effects. The film ends with a battle scene almost identical to the one portrayed in 1992 by Jeff Wall in *Dead Troops Talk (A Vision After an Ambush of a Red Army Patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986)*. Our consternation is considerable when we grasp that the repetition is not simply a filmic device, but real – a continuity. What appeared at first to be a classic family reunion is in fact a ritual enacted by the couple, who hire a series of young “escorts” to play the role of their son, killed in Afghanistan. Considered to be one of the few scenarios by **Omer Fast** to have a beginning and an end, *Continuity* ultimately portrays a situation in pursuit of its own resolution.

Drawing a parallel with a technique used in cinema, Omer Fast explains the significance of the work's title:

Continuity is a technical concept in filmmaking and relates to the production of a sense of linear time from disparate shots. In a mainstream film, different temporal and spatial techniques are used to smooth over the inherent discontinuity of the material from which a story is made. When thinking about the work, I was interested in how this concept applies psychologically in the context of loss and mourning. The film shows a middle-aged couple whose son appears to have died while serving in Afghanistan. We see them continuously reenacting their encounter with the son and other scenes of domestic life, which occasionally veer into the sexual or the surreal. There is no sense of closure or catharsis: we only see the couple compulsively performing their domestic roles with different young men, in spite of the inherent rupture and crisis that accompanies them.



Omer Fast is among those contemporary artists whose goal is an in-depth analysis of the space and narrative form of cinema. The narrative structure of his works is often likened to the one employed by Akira Kurosawa in his famous 1950 film *Rashomon*, which tells the story of a murder through the different accounts given by four witnesses, including the killer. This multiplication of viewpoints, which allows the presentation of different versions of the same events, breaks with the usual linearity of cinema. As *Continuity* so effectively shows, another aim of the current exploration of film in contemporary art is to define a new relationship between reality and fiction. Showing a kinship with the storytelling tradition – as witness the central place he gives to the personal account – Omer Fast is interested in how narratives are constructed, but also in how they are transformed at the moment of transmission. The story takes on life and form through the experience of the teller. In several of his films, Omer Fast even makes cinema part of its own representational structure by introducing into the film different aspects of its production, casting, dubbing, subtitling and set.

MARIE FRASER, Chief Curator



Omer Fast, who was born in Jerusalem in 1972, lives and works in Berlin. He received his BA from Tufts University (1995) and his MFA from Hunter College (2000), in the US. Solo exhibitions of his work have been held recently at a number of prestigious institutions, including Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2013), The Power Plant, Toronto (2012), the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus (2012), Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (2011), the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland (2010), the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2009), the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley (2009), Kunstverein Hannover, Hanover (2008) and Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna (2007). He participated in the Whitney Biennial in 2002 and 2008. His film *Five Thousand Feet Is the Best* was presented for the first time at the 54th Venice Biennale, in 2011, and then in 2012 at DHC/ART in Montréal, in the exhibition *Chronicles of a Disappearance*, curated by John Zeppetelli. *Continuity* was made for DOCUMENTA (13), held in 2012, in Kassel, where it had its premiere screening. Omer Fast is represented by gb agency, Paris, and Arratia, Beer, in Berlin.

Curator: **LOUISE SIMARD**, Head of Multimedia Events

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Continuity, 2012

Digital film, colour, sound, 39 min 22 s, loop
Courtesy the artist; Arratia, Beer, Berlin; and gb agency, Paris.
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