

Ali Kazma, Time master

By Miriam Rosen (<https://mowwgli.com/en/author/miriam-rosen/>) on January 8, 2018

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If Ali Kazma lets us discover whole areas of human activity through his videos of individuals at work - craftsmen, workers, artists, scientists - we never see him working himself. Hence this attempt to return the objective on a real craftsman 2.0 who currently present at the Jeu de Paume in Paris about twenty videos installed by him.

Mowwgli: First of all , you told me that you take a lot of pictures before you shoot. With what type of device?

Ali Kazma: It depends. Sometimes I have time, which means a five or ten day license, and sometimes shooting is very short. Ideally, I go there, I wait a little, I look around me, I observe the place before photographing ...

I have a Canon 5D SLR, which I sometimes use for video too, if I do not need to turn on the shoulder to follow an action. It's a camera that takes great videos and I have very good lenses. There are so many options: change the lens, take my time, use a tripod. But sometimes I need the camcorder, whose ergonomics are better, for example, to film artisans or factories. That said, the lighting, the framing, the angles of view do not weigh so much on the choice. I know the possibilities of each device well.

Mowwgli: Did you work like that in the vast spaces of the North, in the Svalbard Archipelago?

AK: What happens there is that I record a lot.

Mowwgli: Videos or photos?

AK: Both. *Safe* (2015), the one in the World Seed Reserve, is shot with a Canon 5D, and *North* (2017), where it is an abandoned coal mine, with an XF300 camcorder. Why the camcorder for *North*, where I would normally use the Canon lenses? By turning *Safe*, I saw how difficult it was to change lenses because you can not remove the gloves - as soon as you touch the metal, your hands are frozen. But I understood that it was necessary to use a zoom with a wide angle that would give more speed without removing the gloves.

Mowwgli: And if we go to editing now?

AK: For me, editing is one of the best parts.

Mowwgli: That's why I'm asking the question! (laughs)

AK: If you think about the different stages - preparation, filming, editing, presentation - it's the editing that takes the most time. This is where you take the raw material and you give it shape, you sculpt it.

Mowwgli: What software do you use?

AK: Final Cut Pro. I have been using it for twelve years. I try not to change too much cameras or software, I keep them as long as possible. I am not driven by technology but by what is happening in my mind.

If I show you my notebooks (*he pulls out one*), you see that first I see everything, then again, taking very detailed notes. Then I start editing, look again to see if something is still missing. I do not know how many notebooks I have filled with numbers and notes, like the notebook of a madman.

Mowwgli: And the sound? Sometimes it's clear he was there ...

AK: Still, it's still saved with the image. But sometimes there is only what is called the *room tone*. When the sound is very weak, we hear it badly, especially in an exhibition space, but it is still there

Mowwgli: You do not add one?

AK: In 99.9% of the cases, no. But if, for example, I'm filming *Clock Master* (2006), and someone says off-camera: "Mr. Gurgan, can I get a toast, please? I take it off. I say that the reality was wrong and that it is necessary to remain faithful to the sound of the image and to restore the sound environment. But it's very rare.

Mowwgli: Finally, there is the presentation of your videos, which returns to a real scenography. Is this an approach that has evolved with access to larger places? I saw that just before starting the "Obstructions" (2005-2015), you realized a project with small videos presented in the window of a shop in Istanbul.

AK: Yes, it was *Today*. The videos were shot every day and shown every night. But I experiment with the possibilities of different scales from the beginning. The second time I showed *Clock Master*, I projected it on the facade of a building in Istanbul and the video became an architectural work. On a smaller scale, there is also an architectural dimension but we do not imagine it that way.

Mowwgli: And it's always you who design the exhibitions, until the last detail?

AK: Of course! This is where everything makes sense, or not. If you do not take care of the details yourself, you will not go anywhere. And not only this time, but also next time, because it's from this stage that you learn.

Mowwgli: If we can take a step back now - as you do with more recent videos that explore places and spaces - I'd like to talk about your own journey. "Ali Kazma, born in Istanbul, lives in Istanbul", it's very simple. But in fact, you went to the United States at the age of 20 -

AK: 19 years old, even!

Mowwgli: - and you stayed there for ten years.

AK: 4 years in Colorado, then 1 year in London and about 6 years in New York.

Mowwgli: Why Colorado?

AK: Well ... I was thinking of studying in Syracuse, in upstate New York. But when I saw the underground galleries dug to allow students to circulate in the winter, I thought it would be too cold. And Colorado was so different from everything I knew: I grew up in a city and knew nothing about mountains, nature. I was young, I wanted to live something else, get out of my comfort zone.

Mowwgli: When you go abroad at the age of 19, you quickly learn that there is not only one way to do things.

AK: Absolutely. I think everyone should do it, get out of the comfort zone, do not settle too much in places and habits.

Mowwgli: What did you think about studying?

AK: Architecture. But as soon as I started, I realized that I was not very talented, that the navigation of the space did not come to me naturally. I was not the worst but certainly not the best. I was mediocre. And when I do something, I do not want to be mediocre. So, I stopped. Then I realized that I had a better apprehension of time. For me, time is like a space and I can feel it very concretely. But I gradually went to the movies.

Mowwgli: So you went to New York, via London, to study at the New School for Social Research. What kind of program?

AK: There were two parts, theory and production. The teaching of production was very concrete, technical, but on the theory side, we had good teachers, like Bill Viola, who was a god for us. And things were always happening. The school had a good screening room. There was the Independent Cinema Film Forum, the Jonas Mekas Anthology Film Archives ... And we worked very hard, everyone was doing their best.

Mowwgli: Parallel to these different experiences abroad - Boulder, London, New York - there is also Istanbul, Turkey.

AK: I have never put forward the fact of being "Istanbul " because I do not want to be labeled. When one is "of" this city, one becomes exotic and for me, this is not a sales pitch. It is rather a source of misunderstanding. Coming from a city like Istanbul, it's almost too much! If you want to go back 8,000 years, you are 8,000 years old. You have the Romans, the Byzantines, the Ottomans, the Turkish Republic. And Istanbul has always been a place of confrontation, of a sometimes productive and sometimes difficult violence, a point of confluence, of constantly changing mixtures.

I would say that all this gave me an ability to survive the realities of today, when the whole world became what I know of Istanbul. I always knew who I am, where my family comes from and my own story. But I also understood that in very close places, there were people who were not necessarily like me. When you ride in a taxi, you look at the guy who drives and you immediately understand that he is different from you. Although he is Turkish, he has another look, another understanding of life. As in any big city, of course, but maybe it's more "spicy" in Istanbul.

Mowwgli: For me, this multiplicity of looks translates into stories that go beyond the usual categories of documentary video or art video.

AK: Exactly. The distinction is unimportant.

Mowwgli: I would say it's more visual testing.

AK: Absolutely. Film essays. I like this definition.

Mowwgli: And the test is inherently critical.

AK: Of course! But without making it obvious. I do not want to do propaganda. I do not see the point in telling people what they already know. Whenever I make a film, or, say, write a essay, I try to learn. I try to appropriate something, to integrate it into my

understanding of the world. I try to make comparisons with what I have already seen but, like any thinker or artist, I believe that the world could, and should, be better. It is not enough to say, "OK, everyone must be very kind, help each other". Something needs to be added to life in order to improve the understanding of the world. My job is to complicate life, increase opportunities.

Mowwgli: Indeed, in most videos, I feel a destabilizing element, anxiety. Even in *Calligrapher* (2013), there is all the beauty of gestures and writing but also the scratching of the calame ...

AK: That's the key to this video. I did not know that calligraphy made such a sound but when I heard it on the spot, I realized that it is about the resistance of the calame on the paper, that it is necessary to exert a force in order to move it. So it was very important for me to be able to record this movement which is not always fluid, pretty, sweet.

Mowwgli: In order to get the viewers out of their comfort zone, as you say.

AK: Yes, because filming is like using a magnifying glass. By filming, you look through a magnifying glass and you discover things you do not usually see. There are always unforeseen! When I realized *Brain Surgeon* (2006), I did not expect him to open the patient's skull all of a sudden, without any preparation. He was like a carpenter and it really shocked me. And it's always like that, because reality has more facets than you imagine.

Practical information:

• Exhibition

ALI KAZMA "Underground"

Until 21 January 2018

Jeu de Paume

1 place de la Concorde

75008 Paris

<http://www.jeudepaume.org>

(<http://www.jeudepaume.org>) • Artist book

Ali Kazma. A Journey Around Our Minds, Text by Alistair Hicks.

Istanbul, Umur Publishing, 2017. € 20.

ISBN: 9783980682152

(available at the Jeu de Paume bookstore)

• Video

Filmed portrait: Ali Kazma comments on the exhibition

"Subterranean"

<http://www.jeudepaume.org/?page=article&idArt=2924>

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(<http://mowwgli.com/en/26615/2017/10/23/souterrain-ali-kazma-deterre-linvisible-propose-jeu-de-paume-exposition-plus-lumineuse-quil-ny-parait/>)