

## **On Adem Shex Hady's photographs**

With all the global attention on ISIS, the Middle East, Islam itself conceived as a global entity, and often ill-fitting interwoven narratives of the three, there today cannot be enough so-called counter-narratives. We would be hopeful that the arena of museums and art spaces internationally would take on the responsibility of working with artists who, to some degree, produce these counter-narratives. The thematics of large-scale exhibitions, such as at the Venice Biennale, might even become formed by them. Instead of examining how effective these so-called counter narratives are, because that is my first association in writing this text, instead I am immediately interested in a “settling effect” when looking at the photos of Adem Shex Hady. From my own context, living and working in the west, and having brief, albeit often daily glances at the east (specifically, Iraq and the surrounding region) that are mediated by and over-saturated with, for sake of brevity here, televisual and digitized problematics and agenda-ridden opinions, I could only feel grounded, in a sense, that I was seeing something real in Adem Shex Hady's photographs. I can, in a way, briefly meet these men, women and children.

And then, I cannot.

Photography is itself constantly a problematic medium – as defined by truths, half-truths and manipulations since its inception. Adem Shex Hady's photographs step a little bit beyond this question, for us, as viewers well away from his situation. While we may greatly associate photography that portrays this region with destroyed and severed bodies, thus the immediacy of war's impact on the living and upon civilisation, Adem Shex Hady's images of these people, all bound visually to one another by a long, thick cord (from photo to photo) insist upon an urgency and humanity specific to Iraq's situation today, and speak about the violence without directly demonstrating it to us. Indeed, the photographs reveal the vulnerability of these people living today, and I am aware that the artist himself is greatly perturbed by the spurring of dangerous ideologies and actions by extremist groups such as ISIS. For me, these photographs go further than connecting these civilians to each other in their perilous circumstances. Indeed, these are people who are going about their ordinary lives as everyone simply wishes to, whether they can or not. The cord that comes into each image and wraps itself around these people also depicts our own connection with them, and our own complicity in what is developing in their region. Western governments have fuelled the fires of the violence and suffering in Iraq and its surrounding areas. Or they have simply sat by. We cannot forget the negligence and pure stupidity of the 2003 US-UK invasion of Iraq, which destabilized this region, destroyed countless lives, and has produced a generation educated by the cruel facts of total war. How individual men, women and children have coped with this situation is something we should not disconnect from our own circumstances. And today, do we continue to judge our western nations' wisdom in how they continue to respond to (or ignore) the conditions of post-invasion Iraq and its neighbouring areas? These photos spell these circumstances out to me. I am bound to these men, women and children, as

evidently as Adem Shex Hady's photographs remind me, clearly and painfully. These images bear upon us our responsibilities as global citizens.