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Alex Ayed

TRANSUMANZA

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ZERO... is glad to present the first Italian solo show by Alex Ayed.

How does a goat feel towards a sculpture? Which connections could exist between an object and an animal other than the essential concerns of utility and need? Is there even such a thing as art in the eyes of animals?

Claiming exclusive access to art could definitely draw the line between us and all other species. As if our vanity couldn't stop us from widening the gap and irremediably separating us from the living. In that sense, should we not be reminded of the old proverb that says humans can build anything, but a bird's nest.

There was a time when humans and animals lived together in a symbiotic way. The transhumance for instance, from which the exhibition title is inspired, has been a yearly pastoral migration for thousands of years in the Mediterranean region as well as in other parts of the world which usually takes place around mid-spring. Passing through lands and villages in a joyful manifestation of life, shepherds would displace their herds of animals, traveling for hundreds of kilometres from the drylands to the green plains in the mountains in order to provide food for their animals during the warmest months of the year. The practice as it was originally conducted has progressively disappeared in western countries over the 20th century, caught up by modernity and the expansion of urban areas as well as restrictive bureaucratic procedures regarding the movement of animals across the lands, further expanding the distance that separates humans from other living creatures.

For his first exhibition at ZERO.. Alex Ayed decided to initiate the seemingly light gesture of passing through the gallery space accompanied by a herd of goats and chickens, using the idea of displacement as a pretext for a number of events, narratives and encounters to occur in a concealed period of time during which the elements of the exhibition would empirically be self-generated. During the week prior to the opening, the exhibition space was prepared in order to receive the presence of animals while in transit. As a result, the pieces presented in the show were mainly thought as objects that could allow the animals to be sheltered in the space, such as the goat pen or the chicken coop installed in the elevator.

Installations and objects emerged out of necessity around the notion of care while the primary function of the gallery was left aside. Sculptures were installed higher to prevent the goats from eating them.. an easy way to get rid of aesthetic concerns on spatial display. Another aspect involved the presence of Beppe, a man whose function was to watch over the goats and hens during the day. Somehow, Beppe also became part of the exhibition by his only presence and interaction with the animals and other visitors. Unfortunately his goodwill was only met with failure when dealing with the overwhelming energy of a goat preparing for an expedition, crushing the lightly built fence in an effortless attempt. While the hens were expected to produce eggs during their stay, the chicken coop was modified and improved day after day in order to optimise the production of daily eggs through higher comfort. But the question remains.. how many chickens can fit in an elevator?

Ayed's intention to create a situation that could generate the necessary energy to trigger unpredictable actions and destabilising events has become a recurrent aspect of his practice over the past few years which has more recently led to collaborating with live animals. Another recurrent gesture involves the use of found objects drawn from his personal archive or collected along nomadic journeys around the Mediterranean which he assembles into poetic clues, acting as the fluid that links the elements to the space and the viewer.

After having spent a few days in the space, the herd left along with the artist, leaving behind their remains, embalming the space with the stench of a freshly departed.

