

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Entering Ashrafieh's Alice Mogabgab Gallery, you will fall upon a massive disco ball, vivisectioned dollar bills, embroidered toilet paper and a fountain splurting a fluid that's not water. These works have been gathered to form Belgian artist Samuel Coisne's "Sweet Cuts." This exhibition displays around 10 series, all dealing with fragility and violence while challenging viewers' received notions. "I cut a lot [of things], empty and sculpt them," Coisne told The Daily Star. "I try to give equilibrium through fragility, something poetic." "La source," 2013, Coisne's fountain installation – in collaboration with French artist Nicolas Gaillardon – is likely quite unlike the ones the public has seen before.

While approaching the piece, the first thing the viewer senses is its strong smell. She then realizes that this fountain is not projecting a stream of liquid chocolate – as some may think at first glance – but petroleum. Upon closer inspection, it's revealed that this thick black oil is oozing and dripping over a gold bar placed atop the fountain. The artist explained that he wanted to play between the relative worth of both materials: Gold is being soiled by petroleum, as though their preciousness were canceling each other out.

Other onlookers might be intrigued by the depiction of this country found in Coisne's "Lebanon." Using a wood panel as its base, the artist has formed a contemporary map of the country, using a single, carefully cut strip of textile to mark out its borders and network of roads. This work reflects a vision of Lebanon that is not unlike an earlier depiction of his own country.

"Before doing this piece," he said, "I did one on Belgium the same way, explaining that we had governmental issues." Like Lebanon's citizens, Belgians lived for approximately one year without a government, so it felt natural for Coisne to produce another piece to illustrate the situation in this country.

The attention to detail is evident in his artwork, and the fact that he has used a unique piece of textile brings originality to the piece. Everything holds itself, yet it is very fragile at the same time. Not all Coisne's works convey the same impressions.

A huge disco ball hangs in the gallery, under the title "Discoworld" (2008). The walls around it have been covered with black textile, emphasizing the glittery aspect of the work. Unlike standard-issue disco balls, this one doesn't sparkle with joy and festiveness. Rather it depicts how the world keeps turning despite the many tensions and difficulties that race across its face. Coisne explained that he had removed many facets of the disco ball in order to form a shiny globe of the world.

Coisne and the equilibrium of cutting

Like many Belgian artists, Coisne employs humor and absurdity in some of his works. Some viewers may be surprised to see three rolls of toilet paper among the objects on proud display in a gallery. With these embroidered rolls, the artist wants to demonstrate the sacral quality that can be ascribed to an everyday object. His main aim, he said, was to "take the object out of its context and make something else out of it." The same approach is evident in his treatment of the currencies of the U.S., the U.K., EU, China and Japan. With "Money

Lace,” and “Untitled,” both from 2013, dollar, sterling, yen and yuan notes have been cut decoratively, with the aim of inviting viewers to rethink the importance ascribed to them. Coisne’s transformation of the currencies suggests that worth can be stripped away from a piece of printed paper, just as it can be invested in it. The artist also works with the common impression that the value of an object simply evaporates when it’s broken, using broken glass and wood panels as media.

A triptych of three panels of broken glass, “Constellation” confronts viewers with a vision of renewal or renaissance. Coisne wanted to create something new while provoking viewers’ curiosity in and analysis of his works.

This intent may also be read in his use of broken wooden panels in his work “Landscapes.” The landscapes of the title are formed by the bits and pieces projecting from the boards’ fissures. Some viewers have seen canyons here, while others have found villages.

The works in Coisne’s exhibition offer a myriad of thoughtful constructs to inspire a reassessment of notions like money, power, violence and the absurd.

*Samuel Coisne’s “Sweet Cuts” are on display at Alice Mogabgab Gallery until July 31
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