

## FOUR ENCOUNTERS WITH SCULPTURE

RAYYANE TABET

In *Four Encounters with Sculpture*, Rayyane Tabet combines found material and short diary entries to explore four encounters with places, objects, and events. The project attempts to question sculpture as concept and material.

Giant Rock is the world's largest freestanding boulder. It is located in the Mojave Desert in California. In 1947 George Van Tassel decided to lease the land on which the rock sat and move his family there. In the years that followed, the rock became a gathering point for pilgrims who believed that it was a marker placed on Earth by extraterrestrials. To attract the creatures' attention and in an attempt to communicate with them, Van Tassel decided to drag his 1950 Crosley up the boulder and park it twenty-one meters in the air. Every night, he would climb the rock, turn on the car, and activate the headlights, in the hopes that someone out there would see him down on Earth. When I was living in California I spent some time around Joshua Tree. One night, while camping at Giant Rock, I thought I saw the headlights of a car in the distance, but it was just the moon.



After returning from a trip to Tell Halaf in 1922, my great-grandfather, Faek Borkhoche, took his wife Victoria out to spend a day on the Corniche in Beirut. There he posed for a photograph in front of Pigeon's Rock, one of the city's major landmarks. Borkhoche had spent the last three months following Baron Max von Oppenheim on a dig in Syria to document the discovery of a large Hittite temple complex. Following the excavation, the ruins were sent to Aleppo where a full-scale replica of all the elements was made from plaster and donated to the city's museum. The originals were shipped to Berlin to be donated to the German government. Upon his arrival, von Oppenheim was surprised to find that the city conservators had declined his donation due to lack of storage space in the museum. Being the son of a rich banker, he opened his own museum in an abandoned factory. During the bombing of Berlin, the museum caught fire and most of the objects brought back were destroyed. Only the large statues made from basalt stone survived the fire. However, firefighters had thrown cold water on the hot basalt to douse the flames, shattering the statues into thousands of pieces. Days later, von Oppenheim came to inspect the damage and proceeded to pick up the fragments and place them in boxes. At the end of the war he went back to the city's museum armed with 27,000 pieces and said: "Take these fragments, one day you will need them. Besides, like this, they take up almost no space."



On the morning of September 1, 2006, I went to buy a cup of coffee from a shop on Third Avenue and 7th Street in Manhattan. As I was waiting for it I noticed someone had left their copy of *The New York Times* on the counter. The front page showed trucks filled with debris from various sites around Beirut slowly making their way to dump the rubble in the sea and produce a makeshift mountain. On my way out, I took the paper. There is one main highway going south out of Beirut. During the July War, it was obliterated. A year later, I was driving that highway, now riddled with detours, to the beach in Tyre. As I drove on a back road above the coastline, I watched the sea. On the hill below, a series of strange forms appeared, compelling me to stop. Not understanding what I was seeing, I got out of the car and began to walk towards them, counting. Twenty-two incomprehensibly large cylindrical structures dotted the landscape. A fence blocked my path towards them, and a shepherd was tending his flock there. I asked the man about the shapes, and his response was: "This is what is left of the Trans-Arabian Pipeline Company." That moment never left my mind. A year later, I found a brochure published by this company in 1950 to celebrate the completion of the world's longest pipeline connecting Saudi Arabia to the South of Lebanon. On one of the brochure's last pages was a photograph of a man standing on a hill contemplating the terminal facility just before it was inaugurated. Fifty-seven years later I was standing in the same spot looking at the remains of an industrial ruin.



I bought a postcard from a flea market in Venice. It shows a man surrounded by large slabs of marble facing the mountainside from which they were cut. The back of the postcard read: "*October 6, 1932: Today the obelisk left for Rome.*" On November 4, 1932 Benito Mussolini inaugurated the only modern obelisk in Rome. It was made from Carrara marble, stood 37 meters tall, and weighed over 300 tons. In order to transport the obelisk from the Apuan Alps, sixty oxen were tied to the stone and dragged it from the mountains to the Tiber River. Following the fall of fascism, all memorials of Mussolini were removed. However, the engraving "MVSSOLINI DVX"—Mussolini Leader—on the base of the obelisk was five centimeters deep and could not be erased. For years visitors believed that the top of the obelisk was made of pure gold until one day a man climbed the stone and came back with the disconcerting news that what was thought to be gold was just an illusion of glittery stones.



13. AP. ANIA-CARRARA - CAVA MARMO CIPOLLINO

