



Alessandro Balteo Yazbeck's work traces complex entanglements within the transmodern world. The artist is currently engaged with charting their presence in the arena of oil. At the center of his recent installation, *UNstable-Mobile*, was a Calder-like sculpture. The object cast a diagrammatic shadow which replicated an Iraqi oil field map from the 2001 Cheney Energy Task Force Report onto a shallow, white pedestal. Viewers were invited to circulate around the piece with the Task Force map and two other published documents in hand, a list of foreign suitors for Iraqi oil contracts and a schematic showing Iran's oil deposits to be richer than Iraq's.

Additional elements in the exhibition space continued to plot the global convergence of desires, events and materials with Iraqi oil. Mounted on a wall, for example, were the front and back covers of a *New Yorker* magazine. The issue's verso carried a Chevron ad compelling readers to contrast the vastness of gas reserves in Russia, Iran, and Qatar with the trivial amounts had by the U.S., while inside a Seymour Hersh article proclaimed the Iraq war to be a pretext both for the control of oil and for an invasion of Iran. On another wall, several factual anecdotes were printed. Most notable was the occurrence of Iraq's independence from British rule in 1931, the same year that Duchamp used the term "mobile" to describe Calder's motorized sculptures. "Mobile," the audience learned from this text, is a pun in French meaning both "motion" and "motive."

Calder's suitability as a conduit for the map went beyond this particular historical coincidence and play on words. His archetypal cloud form was a stunning match for the graphic shape of map's oil fields. Moreover, Kineticism, his genre of sculpture, embodied the political reality wrought by the Iraq war – the heightened instability that now characterizes the region.

For Balteo Yazbeck, who is Venezuelan and of Italian-Lebanese heritage, Calder's resonance with the Iraq situation echoes another intersection between kinetic art and oil. Modern kineticism was enthusiastically imported, produced and collected in Venezuela as oil revenue flowed into certain sectors of the society the

1950s, 60s and into the 70s. An international avant-garde that included Moholy-Nagy, Arp, Malevich, and Vasarely in addition to Calder came to emblemize the modernization, cultural prosperity and educational progress of the period. Balteo Yazbeck understands the existence of such art in his homeland not only to have been a corollary of oil development but to have legitimated and decorated the rise of his nation. Kineticism as symbol of national advancement has been further reinforced by the degree of international recognition given to Venezuelan art made in this style, and Kineticism as a metaphor for political circumstances fits this country as well as it does Iraq.

Calder played perhaps the leading role in initially making kinetic art a potent sign of Venezuelan progress. He, after all, was the artist chosen to create a fantastically monumental work for the ceiling of the Aula Magna auditorium at the Ciudad Universitaria in Caracas. This 1954 masterpiece — nearly the largest work Calder made—is heralded as a national treasure and crowning achievement for both artist and country.

Despite the prominence of oil as well as kinetic art in narratives about Venezuela, the symbiosis between oil and culture, let alone art, remains hidden. This is also true globally. According to the artist, the cultural, social functions of oil are deeply repressed wherever one might look.

Few artists have ventured into the forbidden territory of oil. Ronaldo Peña, for whom it has been an ongoing concern, is Balteo Yazbeck's only precedent in Venezuelan sculpture. Among other South Americans to have addressed oil issues through sculpture is Alfredo Jaar. Balteo Yazbeck can be distinguished from both by his concern with historical connections between oil and art. In this regard, his project is aligned with Jason Middlebrook's *APL* installations from 2003, which illustrated Land Art's unanimity with the American oil industry during the late 60s and 70s. Some of that movement's most seminal works formally and conceptually mirror the massive industrial endeavor of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Whereas Middlebrook ultimately targets American consumption, Balteo Yazbeck points to the American war in Iraq. His redeployment of historical, sculptural form graphically projects the impulse behind the war and his exposure of global trajectories of interests also warns of the avenues by which the tragic conflagration might spread.

Lisa Ann Favero, 2007