

Adrian Paci *The Wanderers*



the wanderers, 2021, 2 channel video installation

The Space We Inhabit, The Time That Absorbs Us

Text by Alessandro Rabottini

Walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them

— Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*

Things and people, like meanings and words, move in time and space. Some of us have the good fortune of crossing a border for pleasure or to gain knowledge. But for many others, walking means painfully leaving something or someone behind. And while there are objects that survive for centuries unscathed and well conserved, others come down to us in a state of disrepair after a long journey. We can interpret the scratches that wear away the surface as signs of tenacity and durability, as happens with the wrinkles and scars that make the beauty of a face feel closer to us. For the countless relocations that bring with them a sense of philosophical and existential exploration, there are equally countless others that bear signs of sadly irreparable breaks, departures that will never correspond to any return.

Adrian Paci has been weaving together the stories of a vast humanity in transit for over twenty years, a humanity captured in those moments and passages in which it manages to carry something with it, while nonetheless leaving many things behind. From these stories that span the past of his native Albania and the present with its global conflicts, Paci preserves the episodes of a never-ending epic: a face plucked from a mass narrative, the sound of an unheeded voice, the instant of a recording whose bearings have been lost.

The Wanderers, in the fragmentary nature of an elusive narrative and the coexistence of different media, is an exhibition that embodies an impulse that lies at the heart of Paci's artistic practice, a kind of empathy that involves the conservation of the fragment along with the pursuit of proximity. The deeper meaning of migration comes into play, not only by acting on bodies and within memories, but also in the life of images and meanings when they "migrate" from one medium to another.



the wanderers, 2021, 2 channel video installation

The double video installation that gives the show its title takes us into a rural and contemporary Albania, with glimpses of various landscapes and the countryside surrounding the city of Shkodër, where Paci was born. He frequently returns to this city for the activities of Art House, a venue for art and interaction the artist opened in 2015 for the local community.

On the left, in limpid black and white, we see a snowy and almost deserted road. Human beings and animals sporadically appear, filmed in slow motion, and the setting changes depending on the weather conditions, ranging from dense fog to clear skies. On the right, the grain of the image – this time in color – becomes more textured and filmic, while the movement of figures along the road gets more intense and frequent, entering the frame of the shot only to leave it shortly thereafter. In what might seem like a secular procession lacking in symbols, the long tracking shot clearly implies a higher degree of staging with respect to the images on the left, which more spontaneously record different locations and moments from late 2020 and throughout 2021. The movement of the camera also suggests a sort of disjunction between the two screens: to the left, the lens follows the direction of the motion, moving forward, while on the right the camera retreats, allowing the figures walking down the road to briefly take possession of the field of vision, almost as if they were making an appearance on a stage.



still voices, 2022, installation view, haifa museum of art, haifa, photo by elie posner

There is something solemn, precious and surprisingly humane in the way Adrian Paci manages to make use of an image that might seem overused, almost hackneyed in its literary character, namely that of walking on a road as a metaphor of the human condition. *The Wanderers* takes us through the mountains in northern Albania and introduces us to those who live in their midst, transcending the particular conditions of the landscape and its community to offer us a glimpse, an experience of the fleeting, ineffable existence of each person, spectator or actor. We might almost wonder if it might be appropriate to respond in turn to the simplicity of Adrian Paci's language, the almost humble quality of his gaze, with an equally simple gaze and an equally humble form of writing and interpretation. One wonders if it is necessary to add anything to the image of human and animal beings moving on a road, cyclically emerging from the landscape and vanishing from view.

The Wanderers is also the title of an oil painting included in the exhibition, because painting – alongside moving images – is a fundamental part of Paci's practice. A profound and productive exchange exists between these two fields of expression, painting and the technologies of shooting: whereas Paci's paintings use still images taken from VHS tapes, television programs and cinema as sources of imagery, his video and film works often have a rather painterly quality, opting for a certain temporal suspension with respect to the timing of linear narration. Furthermore, while in his videos and films Paci is often able to separate individual faces and stories from the indefinite flow of history and the masses, rescuing their uniqueness, in painting he seems to move in the opposite direction, dissolving the particular physiognomic features of one or more faces in the chromatic mixture, pushing the specificity of a single given story back into the flow of time.

The title itself is assigned in this case to an image that shares a geographical region of origin – Albania – with the setting of the video installation of the same name, but embodies another time, another story. Again we see figures walking, in what looks like a grassy meadow, yet the painting is based on a still from a home movie, showing a wedding that took place almost 30 years ago. Likewise, the images in the five canvases of the *Dancers* series come from a VHS tape connected with a private celebration, and seem to immortalize people dancing together. The act of dancing in a group, once each of the five film stills has been isolated and transposed into painting, shifts into something ambiguous, almost a form of collective, disoriented ambulation.

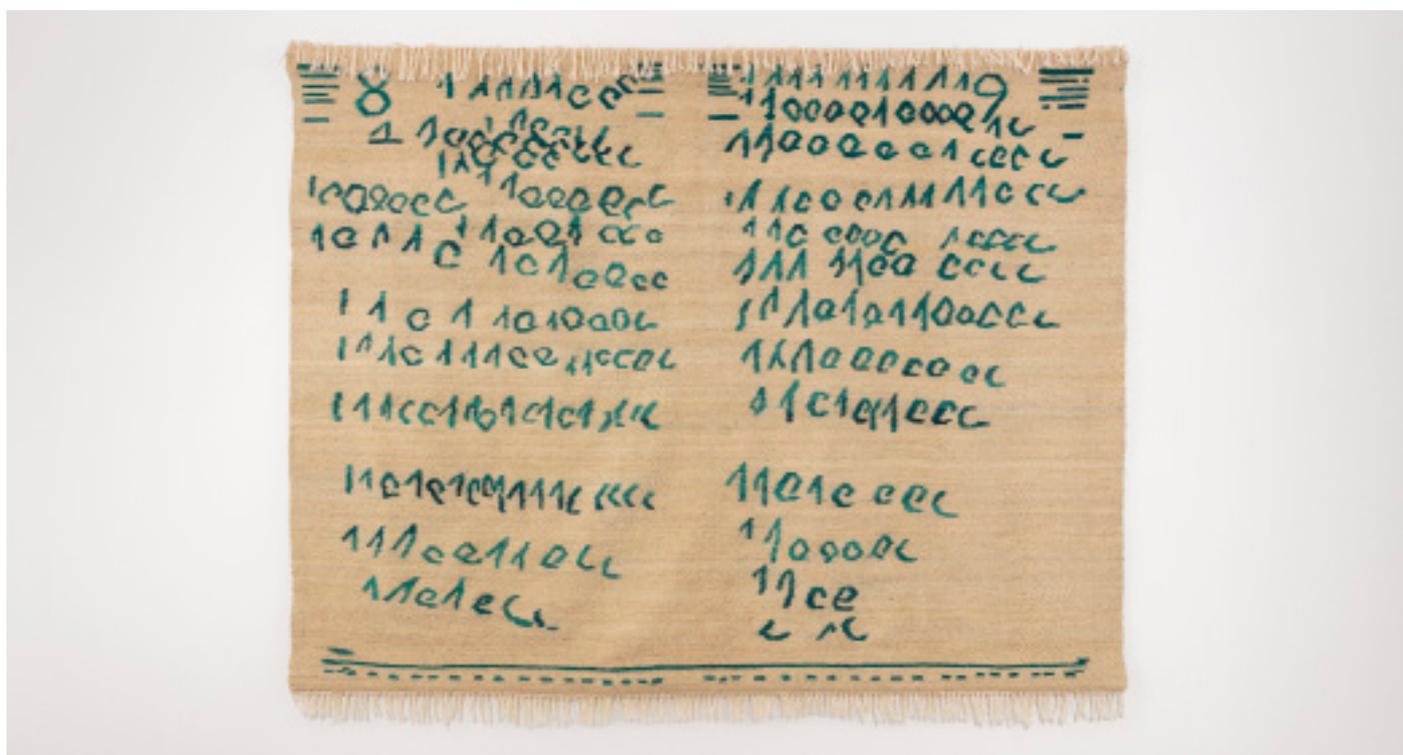


dancers, 2022, oil on canvas, 64 x 83,5 x 4 cm / 25.2 x 32.9 x 1.6 in

The whole exhibition could be interpreted as a meditation on how bodies move in space before being absorbed by time, and how the movements of each person in this space that is the world form unwitting orbits of temporary attraction and inevitable distancing.

The exhibition is completed by three untitled textile works that apparently function as an abstract counterpart to the presences and images we have come across thus far. The suspicion might arise that we are looking at a secret language: signs appear on one of these rugs that might be a binary code, while in the other two the signs seem to be more arbitrary, though they still organize the space in an equally sequential manner. Woven on hand looms, these carpets have been produced by a group of women who have settled in Shkodër after an internal migration from the mountains of northern Albania in the 1990s, forming a small crafts community that works with wool and

other materials. Adrian Paci asked them to weave the rugs on the basis of drawings he supplied to them, in which he retraced several pages of a notebook he was given by a man with Asperger syndrome. The dense signs that fill those pages, and in which they move, usually take the place of verbal communication, while here they become a space of transition: an individual language that goes beyond everyday conventions of communication and becomes articulate in and through the body. The signs are transferred to another surface by the hands of those who preserve skills of craftsmanship passed down over time. In the material space of the weave an equally material intertwining of signs takes place, which pass through multiple hands and form a similarly tactile koine: the hands that have produced this individual way of writing, the hands that have copied this writing in the form of a design, and finally the hands that have interpreted that design, weaving it on a loom.



untitled, 2021, wool, 185 x 230 x 1 cm / 72.8 x 90.6 x 0.4 in

Ultimately , The Wanderers is an exhibition that outlines landscapes, be they mountain vistas or inner landscapes. An exhibition that is both cartography and choreography, a space of sedimentation crossed by the movement of stories and bodies, a space marked by the trajectories of images and materials in transit, in search of a surface to inhabit.

Does the road wind up-hill all the way? Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take the whole long day? From morn to night, my friend.

— *Up-Hill*, Christina Rossetti

The Wanderers will be open April 1st through May 7th, 2022