

VISUAL ARTS

CHARLES DESMARAIS *Art*

Kadist photos

Video still from "Aldona" (2013), which follows a blind woman through a park populated by ghostly stone remnants of the Soviet era in Lithuania.

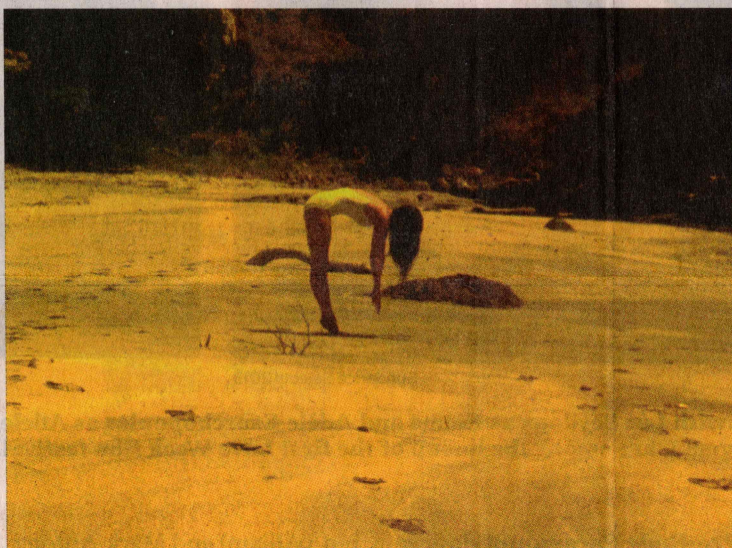
Monuments help face shameful past

Some people think the history of oppression can be erased. As if to ink through the painful record, destroy the monument to tyranny, you might somehow reset time. Undo the harm.

Memory is a powerful weapon, and noxious memory is all the more potent. Destroy the evidence, though, and you blunt the authority of recollection.

A quiet but intensely powerful exhibition at the nonprofit gallery Kadist refutes the idea that we can shed the pain by turning away from it. "If These Stones Could Sing," on view through April 21, presents only nine works, though it can take more than an hour to view the four videos that comprise the bulk of the show.

Organized by Marie Martraire, a French curator in charge of Kadist's Asia programs, the exhibition is meant to call attention to the human body and its prospective relationship to public monuments: soft versus hard, mobile in opposition to fixed, flexible in the face of the brittle. Movement and gesture are central to this poetic theme, and even the exhibition layout requires the viewer to make bodily accommodations — looking up, as if at a figure on a pedestal, turning downward as one would toward a grave. An excellent brochure considers aspects of "this constructed space we call



If These Stones Could Sing: Noon-5 p.m. Wednesday-Saturdays. Through April 21. Free. Kadist, 3295 20th St., S.F. (415) 738-8668. www.kadist.org

history."

A four-minute performance by an Israeli group called Public Movement, the nominal opening work of the exhibition, must be experienced either on a limited schedule or in the mind's eye. "Falling Wall" involves the wall of its title and a small troupe of dancers, embodying the physicality of a memorial, its frail hold on history and the threat it might pose as destiny.

The photographer Shitami Motoyuki contributes three photographs of Shinto gates, originally erected on the American island of Saipan and places in Russia and Taiwan by Japanese occupiers during World War II. Overgrown, forgotten, or toppled and repurposed as park furniture, these former symbols of military and religious conquest have now become pitiable markers of weakness.

"Stone Deaf" is the title of two works included by the Dutch artist Milena Bonilla. The first is a video that bears witness to the meanderings of insects across a stone carved with an inscription we can't



Above: Milena Bonilla's "Stone Deaf" (2009); the second part of the video work shows a graphite rubbing of the stone's text. At left: Sriwhana Spong's "Beach Study" (2012) presents the body as a structure in the landscape.

make out at such close range. The second appears later in the exhibition: a graphite rubbing of the entire stone, on which we read its commemorative text.

In "Aldona," Emilija Škarnulyte follows a blind woman through a park populated by ghostly stone remnants of the Soviet era in Lithuania. The old woman sees with her hands the silenced heroes who, in life, would have been far out of reach.

Bangkok artist Arin Rungjang and New Zealander Sriwhana Spong both employ dance in their video works. Spong's piece is the least directly engaged in the exhibition theme of monument, though

the body itself is presented as a structure in the landscape, a monument to a place no longer accessible.

Rungjang's 2017 work, the last in the show, runs a sometimes tedious three quarters of an hour, but it repays the time investment with a dreamlike interweaving of history, Thai and German, recent and Nazi-era. A famous Bangkok landmark, audaciously called the Democracy Monument, plays a central role.

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