

The Fugitive

Elena Bellantoni, 2009

The twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall sparked a renewed interest in understanding the political struggles that divided a nation for over forty years. In *The Fugitive*, Berlin-based artist Elena Bellantoni tells the story of an anonymous character who one day finds himself transported into a different state of reality. Secure in the familiarity of his own room, the man peers into a mirror and compulsively dives through it, as if pulled by a gravitational force.

He tumbles out of a box into an open space. A large wall creeps into the picture as he pushes the box away. Trapped and scared, he attempts to escape through a hole in the ground. When he re-emerges on the other side of the wall, he is immediately apprehended by two imposing figures. It is here that the protagonist as well as the police assume their actual faces and identities, ultimately humanizing this particular slice of history.

By way of minimal illustrations that are animated in a constant process of drawing, erasure, and re-drawing, *The Fugitive* bears evidence of the artist's hand. The darkening page, filled with indelible marks and smudges, functions as evidence of make-belief, of a fantastic narrative that acts as a buffer between the story and us. Bellantoni confronts us in the final instant with a chilling photographic still that unveils the truth: our cartoonish figure is in fact a real person. As the viewer's fictional lens is abruptly shattered, so too are the hopes of this man to live in freedom.

Sunshine Wong

Neda

Marco Giani, 2010

In June 2009, Neda Agha-Soltan was shot and killed as she was en route to a demonstration in Tehran that protested the allegedly rigged Iranian election. Her last horrifying moments were captured on video by two passers-by, put onto the internet, and disseminated. Both videos spread virally, transforming Neda into an icon for the opposition's struggle.

Marco Giani plays the part of a detective as he analyses the media frenzy surrounding her death and martyrdom. By presenting the videos in question alongside network reportages of the incident, Giani creates a diptych that solicits a comparison of narratives: an apparently spontaneous recording of an incident and its subsequent portrayal by mainstream news. This is further substantiated with an extensive document detailing some alarming glitches in the source material as well as inconsistencies in the witnesses' stories, most of which have been overlooked in the lionisation of the young woman's death.

As the viewer, we are presented with a dilemma of whom to trust -- the journalist or the artist -- and how to extract the fact from fiction. Being the devil's advocate naturally removes Giani from the sensationalism that is now commonplace in mass media. From a critical distance, he beckons the viewer to reconsider what and how news is shown; to look with a dispassionate eye before investing belief in media outlets -- or him.

Sunshine Wong