



Emmanuel Tussore

## Syrian suds

In *Study for a Soap*, artist Emmanuel Tussore eulogises Aleppo using its flagship product.

**B**etween 2012 and 2016, the violence and the scale of the devastation that took place in Aleppo earned the city the nickname “Syria’s Stalingrad”. This was not only the country’s most populous city, but also a Unesco World Heritage site celebrated for its ancient architecture, classical Arabic music – and soap. For 4000 years, Syrian artisans made natural olive and laurel oil bars in a tradition that is now nearly lost.

In reaction to the destruction, French/American artist Emmanuel Tussore presents *Study for a Soap*, for which he used bricks of Aleppo soap to carve architectural ruins. A life-size wall of soap welcomes you as you enter his exhibition, which combines sculpture and architecture with photo and live video. Tussore’s large and small handcrafted sculptures transcend mere

gimmick to act as a poignant testimony of physical destruction brought on by war. Gallery director Yasmine Benhadj-Djilali, an Arab-German architect and designer, was immediately drawn to this work from her own years spent researching war-torn cities like Beirut. By “addressing the destruction of cultural artefacts in and around Aleppo”, she says, “the soap’s meaning shifts from the refined gesture of the civilized man to the symbol of a destructive brute force.” In other words, what you might find in one bar of soap is actually the turbulent history of human civilisation. — SH

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*Through Nov 23* Emmanuel Tussore: *Study for a Soap* ★★★★★☆ Benhadj & Djilali, Mitte

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