

CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN GENÈVE

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PRESS DOSSIER

The Maghreb Connection

Movements of Life Across North Africa

24.02.2007–22.04.2007

CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN GENÈVE

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THE MAGHREB CONNECTION

Movements of Life Across North Africa

(3rd floor)

24.02–22.04.2007

Private View: 23 February at 6pm

Conference by Michel Agier Saturday 24 February, from 4pm to 7pm, with contributions from Ursula Biemann and the artists of the exhibition

The Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève is proud to present "THE MAGHREB CONNECTION - Movements of Life Across North Africa", an international project of art and research directed by Swiss artist URSULA BIEMANN. This project features works by artists DOA ALY (Cairo), YTO BARRADA (Tangier), RAPHAËL CUOMO/MARIA IORIO (Geneva), HALA ELKOUSSY (Cairo), CHARLES HELLER (Geneva) and CAMILLE PONCET/MOUHAMED COULIBALY-MASSASSI (Geneva), in collaboration with media/design activists OBSERVATORIO TECNOLÓGICO (Malaga) and the photographer ARMIN LINKE (Milan).

THE MAGHREB CONNECTION focuses on systems and modalities of migratory movements which constitute the Maghreb and Mediterranean area. From a range of aesthetic positions, the project seeks to develop discursive and visual representations of the growing complexity of North African mobility in relation with the development of the European Union.

In parallel to the agreements about "free movement" inside the European Union, its external borders are becoming increasingly sealed. The migrant Maghrebin populations and those sub-Saharanans who use the Maghreb as transit zone are now likened to a threat. While this notion of an invasion - largely spread by the European media - seems to legitimate the restrictive political measures concerning immigration, European economy is extending further into the Maghreb to establish giant transnational logistic centres and to find cheap labour for outsourced production. At this point, one can assume that the relations between Europe and Africa have entered a new post-colonial phase.

In the Maghreb, migration flows rely on - and intersect with - other forms of organized mobility such as existing nomadic movements, tourism, roaming martial formations including rebel groups, and migration related humanitarian personnel. The junction of these movements generates synergies, conflicts, and sometimes surprising alliances. THE MAGHREB connection aims to develop a visual representation of these different movements. This geographic approach (geography being understood as a signifying system that allows us to understand the relation between subject, movement and space) focuses on specific zones of transit migration, such as Agadez in Niger, Lampedusa in Tunisia, Oujda and Tanger in Morocco or Laayoune in occidental Sahara. After in depth research and investigation, the artists present in the exhibition a series of works under various forms, such as cartography, video, photography, text or animation.

A fully illustrated catalogue, bilingual English/Arabic, is published by Ursula Biemann and Brian Holmes and supported by the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève to document the exhibition. It includes texts by Medhi Alioua, Ali Bensaad and Achille Mbembe, Keller Easterling, as well as research documentation on the artists' projects. The exhibition was presented at Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, from 11 December 2006 to 13 January 2007, before travelling to Geneva.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND IMAGES, please contact Aurélien Gamboni on +41 22 329 18 42, e-mail: presse@centre.ch

prohelvetia

A project initiated and supported by Pro Helvetia

In collaboration with Geneva university of art and design and Postgraduate study programme CCC critical curatorial cybermedia; Institut für Theorie der Gestaltung und Kunst (ith), HGKZ, Zurich; The Townhouse Gallery, Cairo

Supported by Heinrich Boell Foundation, Hôtel Beau-Rivage and Pernod Ricard Swiss.

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IN PARALLEL WITH: I AM MAKING ART - 4 Studies on the Artist's Body, 24.02 - 22.04.2007

NEXT EXHIBITIONS: MARTIN BOYCE / FERNANDO SÁNCHEZ CASTILLO, 25.05-05.08.2007



Ursula Biemann, «Sahara Panels», photograph, 2006



Yto Barrada, «Sleeper», photograph, 2006



Raphael Cuomo/Maria Iorio, «Sudeuropa», video, 2006



Doa Aly, «Chinese Sweet, Chinese Pretty», video, 2006



Charles Heller, «Crossroads at the Edge of Worlds», video-essay, 2006

For all images: Courtesy The Artists

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WORKS PRESENTED IN THE EXHIBITION

« Sleepers » and « A Live Full of Holes », 2006
Series of photographs by Yto Barrada

Yto Barrada is a Moroccan-French artist from Tangier presently involved in the dynamic of the Strait. Her ongoing photo project "A Life Full of Holes" seeks to expose the metonymic character of the Strait through a series of images that reveal the tension — that relentlessly animates the streets of her hometown — between its allegorical nature and immediate, harsh reality. Before 1991 any Moroccan with a passport could travel freely to Europe. But since the EU Schengen Agreement, visiting rights have become unilateral across what is now legally a one-way strait. Today the Strait is the main gateway for illegal immigrants, bound north with their own vocabulary, legends, songs, rites, and language.

« Crossroads at the End of the Worlds », 2006
Video-essay by Charles Heller

The video « Crossroads at the End of the Worlds » by Charles Heller is based on a research trip in Morocco in July 2005, in collaboration with Ursula Biemann, where they documented the illegal migrations circulating through Morocco, as well as the methods of controlling them. This project focuses on the four main transit migration axes in Morocco: Oujda, Tangier, Rabat, Laayoune. It engages in the dialectic mobility/segregation, which marks the major spatial transformations today and questions the political meaning and the ambivalence of these ex-territorial zones, both formal and informal, that dot Morocco's territory.

« Agadez Chronicle », 2006
Installation of 4 videos by Ursula Biemann

Historically, the vast territory of the nomadic Saharan tribes was split in five nations - Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger and Chad. In each of these countries, Tuaregs have been a minority within their national culture. As a distinct linguistic and cultural entity, they maintain nevertheless their identification as a people across the boundaries. Tuareg culture has worked out a system of information, a specific topographic literacy, with itineraries and means of communication. Their unique expertise is in high demand since a steady flow of sub-Saharan migrants transit Agadez before crossing the desert to reach the Maghreb. The video documents the various players in the Agadez migrant-transportation racket.

« Sahara Panels », 2005
10 photo-text panels by Ursula Biemann

Based on surveillance photographs by the Gendarmerie Royale du Maroc, the 10 panels tell the story of subsaharan transit migrants hiding out in the dunes and waiting to be brought by smugglers to the coast and set over to the Canary Islands. The photographs show the spontaneous migratory architecture of survival generated in the process and the strategies of camouflage used by the migrants to hide from the police.

« Western Sahara », 2004 and « Uranium Mine Niger », 2006
Photographs and photo book by Armin Linke

The Italian photographer presents photographs from two series related to Saharan mobility. A recent work from 2004 on the Saharawi War Museum at Rabouni Algeria, exhibiting a model of the mined and militarized wall between Sadr territories and Morocco. The wall was built to keep the Polisario rebels in check but it also prevents migrants from moving north. Today, the wall is responsible for thousands of subsaharan migrants having to take an immense detour on foot through the deserts of Niger and Libya, rather than directly crossing North into Morocco. The second series was produced during the collaborative trip with Ursula Biemann to the Uranium Mine at Arlit, Niger in March 2006.

« Chinese Sweet, Chinese Pretty », 2006
Video by Doa Aly

A few months ago, Chinese door-to-door saleswomen began to make their appearance in the streets of the upper-middle class neighbourhood of Cairo. They walk about with huge handmade fabric bags stuffed with goods made for domestic use: slippers, night gowns, underwear, and occasionally make-up, mostly cheap made-in-china jumble. The video documents the Chinese women in their flats and on their sales tour in various domestic settings, unpacking and repacking the textiles. The piece also includes interviews and text pointing to the language fragments they learn in Arabic in order to operate in this alien environment.

« From Rome to Rome », 2006
Animated video by Hala Elkoussy

The village of Shubra Al-Nakhla (Sharquia, Egypt) has been dubbed “Rome” because large number of villagers who have gone to settle in Italy over the past 10 years. Surrounding villages also bear Italian epithets such as Naples, Florence and Milan. In February 2006, the artist went to Ezbet El Saraya aka Milan - Egypt, where she conducted interviews with local young men who attempted the illegal crossing to Italy via Libya. In Rome in July, she conducted interviews with prototypical “rags to riches” Egyptian young men and collected visual material of their surroundings and of the city. In collaboration with Walid Taher, a comic book illustrator living in Cairo, she turned this material into a video animation fable, centered around a reading of heroism that is strongly linked to the reality of the everyday.

« Sudeuropa », 2006
Video by Raphaël Cuomo/Maria Iorio

The ongoing project focuses on the situation of the Italian island Lampedusa, located between Africa and Europe where the southbound movement of large numbers of tourists enjoying their beach vacation cross the northbound movement of migrants leaving the Africa shores in the attempts to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean. The video examines the ways in which European and Italian politics materialize on location by reconfiguring space, time and the daily life on the island, by evoking the presence of the migrants on the island, excluded from social life and made invisible in their detention in asylum camps ; and by showing the places of their departure, enclosure and deportation.

« Définition Migratoire », 2006
Videocartography by Massassi Coulibally/Camille Poncet, Geneva university of art and design, Postgraduate study programme CCC critical curatorial cybermedia

Over the regional logic documented in the above projects lies the map of supranational organizations who design and affect policies and practices regarding the movement of people, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and whose headquarters are both located in Geneva. This videocartography focuses on the role of these institutions in the production of knowledge, and their influence on current European migration politics.

« Cartographie du Maghreb », 2006
Observatorio Tecnológico & Fadaiat

Fadaiat means « transit spaces » in Arabic. It is the name of a political, technological and artistic laboratory based on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar which has specialized in radical and creative cartographies. Working along similar, and complementary lines to the above, the collective Observatorio Tecnológico del Estrecho contribute innovative cartographies to the exhibition, generated in a spirit of radical design as aesthetic strategy. A major publication documenting their activities will be released shortly.

PROJECT TEAM

Direction: Ursula Biemann
Assistant: Charles Heller
Production Manager of Cairo exhibition: Ayman el Nouby
Editor publication and translator: Anselm Franke
Design and distribution of publication: Actar Barcelona

EXHIBITIONS

The Townhouse Gallery, Cairo : 11.12.2006–13.01.2007
Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève : 24.02–22.04.2007

PARTICIPANTS

Doa Aly (*1976, Cairo)
Yto Barrada (*1971, Tangier)
Ursula Biemann (*1955, Zurich)
Raphaël Cuomo (*1977, Delémont)/Maria Iorio (*1974, Lausanne)
Hala Elkoussy (*1974, Cairo)
Charles Heller (*1981, Switzerland – USA)
Camille Poncet/Mouhamed Coulibaly-Massassi
Observatorio Tecnológico & Faiat
Armin Linke (*1966, Milan)

PARTNERS

A project initiated and supported by Pro Helvetia
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Geneva university of art and design and Postgraduate study programme CCC critical curatorial cybermedia
Institut für Theorie der Gestaltung und Kunst (Ith), HGKZ, Zurich
Townhouse Gallery, Cairo
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