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# **Bouchra Khalili**

Texts and press

Tema del Mes: **FRONTERAS**  
Editor/a Residente: **INESKA (INÉS R. ARTOLA)**



### LA FRONTERA SUR DE EUROPA

Adonay Bermúdez

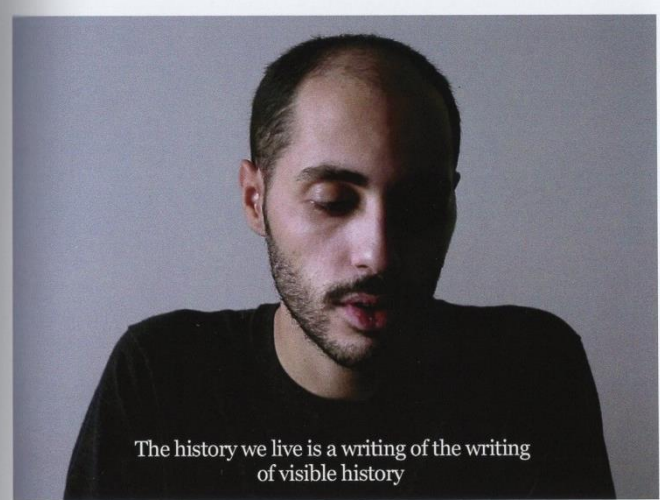
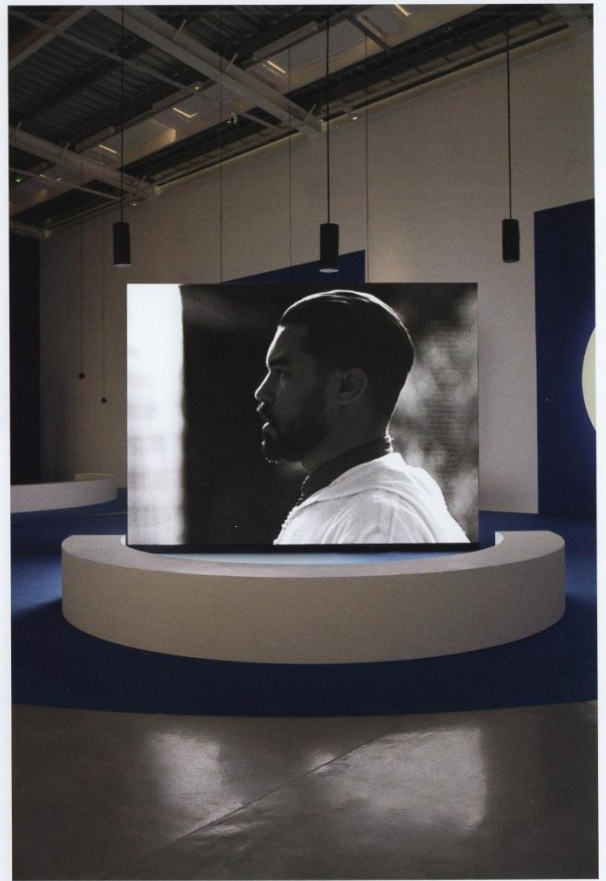
Recientemente, dentro de la exposición colectiva *Núcleo Contemporáneo* comisariada por Adriano Pedrosa para la 60a edición de la Biennale di Venezia (2024), se pudo contemplar un tapiz bordado de grandes dimensiones realizado por Bouchra Khalili (Marruecos, 1975). En *Sea-Drifts* (2024) la artista franco-marroquí aborda una compleja investigación sobre las rutas migratorias, específicamente sobre las que unen el norte y oeste de África con las Islas Canarias. Khalili emplea el tapiz teñido con índigo natural como estrategia para recordar las rutas comerciales del siglo XVI y, de paso, subvertir y redefinir la función y concepción tradicional de mapa y, por tanto, las nociones también de territorio y frontera.

Bouchra Khalili, en un interés por visibilizar las experiencias de los africanos y africanas en una de las rutas migratorias más mortíferas del mundo, sumerge al espectador en medio de una difusa frontera líquida que se interrumpe con una maraña de líneas blancas que conectan archipiélago y continente. Pese a que la artista omite cualquier otro elemento, la fuerza de ese azul índigo abofetea y seduce a partes iguales, provocando que el público se sienta partícipe de la misma. Ese tono de azul inunda también un gran lienzo titulado *Poema del Atlántico. La noche* (1918-1919) de Néstor de la Torre (Gran Canaria, España, 1887-1938), una obra y artista claves en la historia del arte de Canarias. *Poema del Atlántico. La noche* fue concebida como una exaltación de la naturaleza donde se explora el misterio, violencia y vastedad del océano bajo la luz de la luna.

## The Power of Storytelling BOUCHRA KHALILI

Bouchra Khalili, born in Casablanca in 1975, is a Moroccan-French artist, who grew up in a country which, after achieving independence, sought its identity in a diversity of peoples, cultures and languages. From 1962 Algiers had been the center of the Pan-African Union providing a home for many resistance organizations. These early experiences shaped Khalili's political consciousness and formed her artistic sensitivity, as shown in such works as *Foreign Office* (2015), which in various ways illuminate the interconnectedness and influence of the Pan-African movement. While a video permits the leaders to speak and photographs of their residences provide space for themselves and their ideas, the representations of ground plans and localizations make an analytical perspective on the structure and network concealed behind these locations possible.

The Paris-trained artist, whose work *The Mapping Journey Project* (2008-2011) most recently reached a wide public at the Venice Biennale, works in a multimedia and transdisciplinary style. With a great love of detail, she combines performative and documentary strategies. Khalili places traditional storytelling, which she adopts from her Moroccan heritage, firmly at the center. By telling personal stories, she questions official, often one-sided historical representations and gives a new profile to the voices of people otherwise unheard. Her art is therefore both political and poetic, as it beautifully transcends the boundaries between documentary reality and artistic fiction.



**BOUCHRA KHALILI**  
von links // from left  
*Foreign Office*, 2015  
Mixed-Media-Installation  
(Fotografien, Siebdruck  
auf Papier, Video: 25')  
// mixed-media installation  
(photographs, silkscreen  
print on paper, video: 25')

Ausstellungsansicht  
// exhibition view  
„Bouchra Khalili: Between  
Circles and Constellations“,  
Sharjah Art Foundation,  
2024



July 9, 2024 at 11:31 pm

# Moroccan artist Bouchra Khalili gives voice to the stateless

In her work, currently on show both in Athens and at the Venice Biennale, Moroccan Artist Bouchra Khalili highlights the power of storytelling for the disenfranchised subjects of history.



As a child in Casablanca, artist Bouchra Khalili was impressed by an ancient world map created by Moroccan traveller, geographer and botanist, Muhammad Al-Idrisi. This map, which showed south as north and vice-versa, offered a decentralised representation of the world, which left a long-lasting impact on her.

It seems that, since then, all Khalili has done with her art practice has been "decentralising", and slanting the viewer's perception of north, south, up, down.

Known for her complex and multilayered narratives and a gift for plunging into the folds of the intelligentsia and the cultural world of the past century, today her profoundly intellectual art touches on the most pressing issues of our time, especially in regard to migration, colonialism as well as the intermingling of North African and European politics.

Her multimedia practice mainly involves film, video and art installations, aimed to spur critical and ethical reflections on citizenship, community and political agency, from the point of view of those who lack them. And, not surprisingly, maps and our biased perception of geography remain an ongoing interest for her.

Her "Mapping Journey Project", currently on display at the Venice Biennale, captures migrants' journeys across the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. Poetic and informative at once, this project was developed over three years, from 2008 to 2011, investigating the Mediterranean migration routes, and it remains a powerful and relevant work today.

# Bouchra Khalili: All Tomorrow's Revolutions

Stephanie Bailey Features 14 June 2024 artreview.com



**Khalili's 'activation of history' through film brings archival content into the present and commends it for the future**

Around the time of the 2010–12 Arab uprisings, the artist Bouchra Khalili began developing a series of projects that address the histories of emancipation and liberation in North Africa and the Middle East. Taking issue with how Western media described the uprisings as a 'Facebook Revolution' – "as if the Arabs needed Facebook to start a revolution", the artist pointed out in a 2017 conversation – Khalili realised the importance of asserting the region's history as both revolutionary and global.



We are only in the beginnings

The video *Garden Conversation* (2014) illuminates that legacy by imagining a conversation between Rifian resistance leader Al Khattabi, who led a war against the French and Spanish colonial armies in Northern Morocco from 1921 to 1926, and Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara, who fought in the Cuban Revolution. According to oral accounts, the two men met in Cairo in 1959 but no documentation exists, so Khalili wrote a script based on their writings and interviews. Filmed in Melilla, a Spanish enclave in Northern Morocco whose continued existence signals the colonial spectre of occupation, a young Moroccan man and woman (neither of them trained actors) play Khattabi and Guevara respectively, and discuss tactics of liberation. "The present time is made of struggles," the woman says, "but the future is ours."



Khalili produced *Foreign Office* (2015) next. A digital video, silkscreen print and series of photographs focus on Algiers between 1962, when Algeria gained independence from France, and 1972, during which time the Algerian capital hosted liberation movements from around the world, including the Black Panther Party and the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde. In the film, two Algerian students, Ines and Fadi, narrate this moment of transnational solidarity based on oral accounts, texts, photographs and videos documenting the presence of figures like Nelson Mandela, who trained with the Algerian National Liberation Front, and Black Panthers Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver, who attended the first Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers in 1969 and established the Panthers' international branch in the city.

L U M A L I V E

## Interview with Bouchra Khalili

"When archives do not exist, what remains to tell suppressed histories?"

[Watch the video here](#)



Bouchra Khalili talks about her exhibition of two distinct but interrelated works: *The Circle and The Tempest Society*.

This set of works departs from Khalili's extensive research on Le Mouvement des Travailleurs Arabes (MTA, Movement of Arab Workers) and its theater groups, Al Assifa (The Tempest in Arabic) and Al Halaka (The Circle in Arabic, which is also referencing the tradition of public storytelling that is common in North Africa).

In this interview, the artist explains how Arab workers have used performance art to denounce injustice and spread the word.

DURATION	03m 10s
DIRECTOR(S)	Victor & Simon
PARTICIPANT(S)	<a href="#">Bouchra Khalili</a>



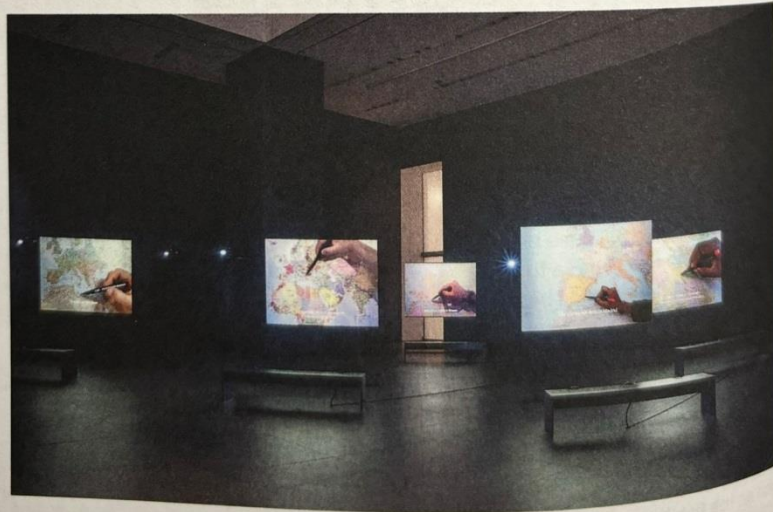
## Bouchra Khalili

CASABLANCA, MOROCCO, 1975  
LIVES IN VIENNA, AUSTRIA

Bouchra Khalili is a French-Moroccan artist and scholar whose multidisciplinary practice develops collaborative strategies of storytelling with members of communities excluded from citizen membership. Khalili's *The Mapping Journey Project* was developed over three years across the Mediterranean migration routes of North and Eastern Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Khalili gathered participatory stories from migrants she met at local train stations and other public spaces. The eight video installations of *The Mapping Journey Project* document stories alongside the hands of migrants who mark on a map the arduous path across the geopolitical terrain of land and sea. In our contemporary

era of Land Back and settler colonial genocide, *The Mapping Journey Project* is a long-standing call for self-determination of diasporic and Indigenous communities. *The Constellations Series*, the closing chapter of *The Mapping Journey Project*, poetically reformulates and illuminates the video installation. The eight silkscreen prints translate the narrated journeys in the form of constellations of stars, referring to ancient astronomy as rooted in mythology. Khalili invites viewers to actively project themselves into the constellation to collectively imagine other ways to belong.

—Tracy Fenix



# BOUCHRA KHALILI

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez

## ■ Constellations pour une écoute et une pédagogie attentives

Bouchra Khalili est une tisseuse et les nombreuses histoires portées par les protagonistes de ses films constituent les fils de son travail. Elle tisse ses films en une constellation visuelle et sonore où, d'un film à l'autre, les protagonistes se parlent, s'écoutent et apprennent les uns des autres. Bouchra Khalili transmet aux protagonistes sa capacité magique à apporter une dimension universelle, à donner forme aux alliances et relations auxquelles on ne prête pas encore attention, mais permettent de protéger l'existence d'espaces civiques.

Les yeux et les oreilles sont concentrés sur la conversation, les mains sont parfois immobiles, parfois en léger mouvement pour montrer, dessiner, lire ou composer des assemblages de documents et de photos. Les scripts construits autour des subjectivités qui habitent les espaces filmiques de Bouchra Khalili procèdent naturellement de ses inlassables recherches et de ses longs échanges avec les personnes qui les ont vécues. Leurs corps communiquent avec nous, qui regardons, aussi de manière non verbale, nous permettant de comprendre que les faits historiques des récits qu'ils et elles racontent pourraient bien être les nôtres. Une sorte d'écoute radicale est en cours. Lorsqu'une personne parle, très souvent, Bouchra Khalili commence par nous montrer l'interlocuteur ou interlocutrice qui tourne la tête, fixe la personne qui parle dans les yeux, est là, invitant le spectateur ou la spectatrice à prêter attention à ce qui est dit avec la même bienveillance, en solidarité. Les histoires racontent des faits, sans pathos, et produisent un effet de distanciation qui crée paradoxalement les conditions de la rencontre avec les spectateurs et spectatrices, à qui est offert un espace de réflexion sur soi. Les protagonistes performant de manière à incarner une voix collective potentielle.

## Constellations for attentive listening and learning

Bouchra Khalili is a weaver and the many stories carried by the protagonists within her films are the threads with which she beautifully operates. She is weaving films together into a visual and acoustic constellation, where protagonists are talking, listening to and learning from each other, from one film to another one. Khalili is extending onto the protagonists her magic capacity of worlding, of giving form to the alliances and relations that have not been taken care of yet, but are the promises that keep possible civic spaces together.

Eyes and ears are engaged in attentive conversations, hands are still or slightly moving, showing, drawing, reading or composing assemblages of documents and photos. The subjectivities that inhabit Bouchra Khalili's cinematic spaces are performing scripts which are organic result of her long-term research and the extended conversations with the protagonists that lived them. Their bodies are communicating with us, the viewers, also on a non-verbal way, enabling us to understand that the historic facts within the stories that they are telling could very much be our own. There is a kind of radical listening going on - when someone speaks, very often Bouchra Khalili lets us first see her or his interlocutor turning their head, looking the speaking person in their eyes, *is there*, thus inviting the viewer to pay attention to what is being said in a similarly caring way, in solidarity. The stories are told in factuality, with absence of any sentimentalism, and produce a distancing effect that paradoxically creates the conditions of the encounter with the viewers who are given a space of self-reflexivity. Protagonists perform the scripts so as to embody a potential collective voice.

The installation presented for the Prix Marcel Duchamp is a site-specific composition of several of Khalili's works from different periods, and one soon understands that they have all been involved in an ongoing conversation for a while.

*The Constellations* (2011), a series of silkscreen prints, play with a recognisable form of a celestial map of stellar constellations on a deep blue surface, only to take the viewer by surprise. In Khalili's renowned video installation *The Mapping Journey Project* (8 single channels, 2008-2011), we observe hands of people who have undergone migration routes, physically inscribing them onto



L'installation présentée pour le Prix Marcel Duchamp est une composition conçue spécifiquement pour l'espace, à partir d'œuvres de différentes périodes de Bouchra Khalili, dont on comprend vite qu'elles font partie d'une conversation qui dure depuis longtemps. Les sérigraphies *The Constellations* [2011] jouent avec une forme reconnaissable de carte du ciel sur fond bleu intense, uniquement pour prendre par surprise la personne qui regarde. Dans sa célèbre installation *The Mapping Journey Project* [huit vidéo-projections, 2008-2011], nous voyons des mains dessiner au marqueur les routes de migrations forcées sur des cartes officielles tandis que la personne qui les a vécues raconte son voyage. Les sérigraphies traduisent ces itinéraires en constellations d'étoiles abolissant ces frontières. Les deux œuvres sont des témoignages d'existence et de lutte pour la survie.

Dans la dernière scène de *The Tempest Society* [2017], un diagramme dessiné sur un tableau noir par les trois protagonistes forme un autre type de constellation. Il tisse des liens entre des personnes réelles et des événements récents qui parlent de solidarité, de résistance, de désobéissance civile, de droits de l'immigration et de mouvements antiracistes. Citoyens grecs et citoyennes grecques d'origines diverses, les protagonistes de *The Tempest Society* racontent leur expérience des soulèvements anti-austérité sur la place Syntagma en 2011 et 2015, et font le lien avec les récits d'activistes antiracistes vivant en Grèce et exclus de la citoyenneté, entrecoupés d'interventions musicales et fictionnelles.

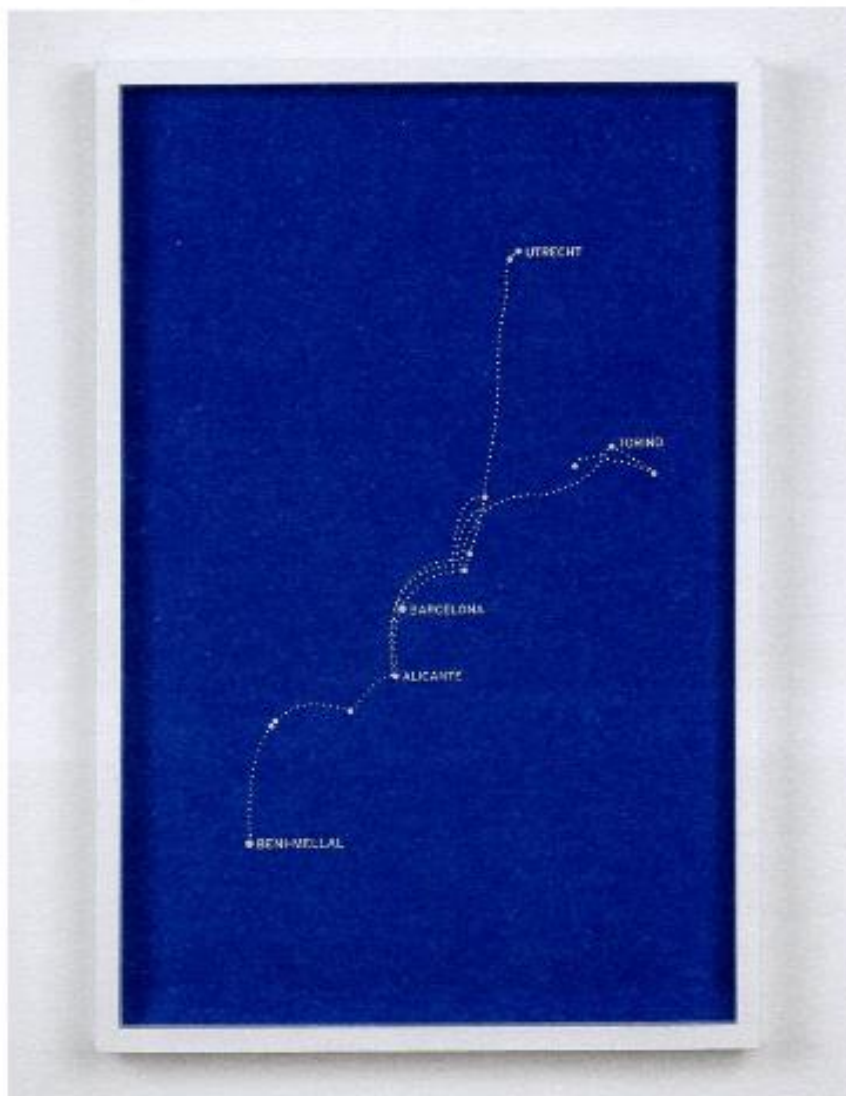
Le mot Al Assifa, situé au centre du diagramme, attire comme un aimant tous les autres éléments autour de lui. Il s'agit du nom d'un collectif de théâtre, fondé à Paris par Mohamed Bachiri [Mokhtar], Geneviève Clancy et Philippe Tancelin. Entre 1972 et 1978, associant mouvements antiracistes et actions pour les droits des travailleurs migrants, il se produit dans la rue ou pendant des manifestations et donne des performances théâtrales. La vidéo *The Storytellers* [2023] rassemble d'anciens membres d'Al Assifa et d'Al Halaka [une troupe de théâtre sœur, basée à Aix et Marseille] qui mettent en scène des poèmes écrits collectivement pour leurs pièces. Pour les protagonistes de *The Tempest Society*, Al Assifa est un point de départ historique, une source d'inspiration pour la lutte antiraciste dans la Grèce et l'Europe contemporaines.

La composition se termine par la vidéo *Questions & Answers* [2017-2023] qui n'a encore jamais été diffusée. Conçue comme une performance impliquant les protagonistes et *Les amis de The Tempest Society*, un groupe fictionnel constitué des personnes qui ont accompagné Bouchra Khalili dans son travail de recherche et de production, elle forme elle aussi une constellation d'écoute attentive. Les trois protagonistes de *The Tempest Society* répondent aux questions posées et discutées pendant le tournage du film, révélant la lucidité de l'artiste qui s'interroge sur sa position par rapport à l'art contemporain et au public en général.

official state maps with a thick marker pen and accounting their journeys. The stellar constellations on the prints reveal themselves as itineraries of these same paths. Both works bear witness to the subsistence and struggle of survival.

Another kind of constellation appears as a diagram, drawn onto a blackboard by the three protagonists in the scene concluding *The Tempest Society* (2017). There it weaves connections between existing personalities and events from the recent past that speak about allies, resistance, citizen disobedience, immigration rights' and antiracist movements. The protagonists of *The Tempest Society*, all Greek citizens from different background, tell and align their own experiences of the anti-austerity uprisings in Greece at the Syntagma square in 2011 and 2015, and to the antiracist activists based in Greece who appear and perform in the video with their own testimonies as well as with musical interventions. In the heart of the drawn diagram, pulling all elements together as a magnet, stands the name of the Arab-French political theatre collective Al Assifa. Operating between 1972 and 1978 in Paris and founded by Mohamed Bachiri (Mokhtar), Geneviève Clancy and Philippe Tancelin, the collective performed street plays, demonstrations, theatre performances that brought together antiracist movement and immigrant workers' rights actions. In the video *The Storytellers* (2023) the original members of Al Assifa and Al Halaka (a sister theater group of Al Assifa, based in Aix and Marseille), perform poems that have been written collectively for their plays. The protagonists of *The Tempest Society* refer to Al Assifa as their historical point of departure, an inspiration for thinking through the antiracist activism in contemporary Greece and Europe.

The composition is closed by the video *Questions & Answers* (2017-2023) which has never been shown before. Conceived as a performance with the protagonists and *The Friends of The Tempest Society*, a fictional group made of collaborators who worked with Bouchra Khalili on the research and production of *The Tempest Society*, it creates once more a constellation of attentive listening. Questions that were raised and discussed during the shooting of *The Tempest Society*, are answered by its three protagonists, bearing witness to the artist's acute self-reflexion about her own position in relation with the contemporary art domain, and the public in general.



The Constellations, fig. 7, 2011.  
 Silkscreen print on paper, 62 x 42 cm.  
 From *The Constellations Series*, 2011,  
 8 silkscreen prints on paper,  
 62 x 42 cm each. Adagg, Paris, 2023

#### Remerciements

Bouchra Khalili exprime son admiration à tous les poètes civiques, conteuses et conteurs, témoins et fantômes, sans qui ses œuvres n'existeraient pas.

Elle remercie pour leur participation à *The Tempest Society* (2017), *Questions & Answers* (2017-2023) et *The Storytellers* (2023) : Hedi Akkari, Isabella Alopoudi, Katerina Barbojia, Ghani, Smaine Idri, Malak, Mustapha Mohammad, Philippe Tancolin, Elles Kiama Tzougoras. Bouchra Khalili dédie *The Constellations* à la mémoire de Dkwil Enwezor, qui a rendu possible la production de cette œuvre.

Elle remercie son producteur Alexandre Kauffmann, et Alex Mor, Philippe Charpentier, Arthur Gruson (mar charpentier, Paris / Bogote), et Miguel Angel Sanchez et Jordi Vernis [ACN, Barcelone] pour leur soutien à sa participation au Prix Marcel Duchamp. Elle remercie TAD/AF et son équipe, Angela Lampe et l'équipe du Centre Pompidou pour leur confiance et leur patience.



*The Tempest Society*, 2017. Digital film. 60'. Color. Sound. Commissioned for documenta 14 [Athens / Kassel]. Co-produced with Ibsen Awards. With the support of FNGAP [Paris] and Holland Festival, Adagp, Paris, 2023



#### Acknowledgments

Bouchra Khalili expresses her deepest admiration to all the civic poets, storytellers, witnesses and ghosts without whom her works would not exist.

For their participation, commitment, and their trust in the making of *The Tempest Society* (2017), *Questions & Answers* (2017-2023) and *The Storytellers* (2017-2023) and *Questions & Answers* (2023) she expresses her deepest gratitude to Hedi Akkari, Isabella Alopoudi, Katerina Barbojia, Ghani, Smaïne Idri, Malek, Mustapha Mohammadi, Philippe Tancelin, Elias Kiama Tzogonas.

Bouchra Khalili dedicates *The Constellations* to the memory of Okwui Enwezor who made possible the production of this work. She extends her thanks to her producer Alexandre Kauffmann, and to Alex Mor, Philippe Charpentier, Arthur Gruson (mor charpentier, Paris-Bogota), and Miguel Angel Sanchez and Jordi Vernis (ADN, Barcelona) for their support in her participation to the Prix Marcel Duchamp. She thanks ADIAF and its team, Angela Lampe and Centre Pompidou's team for their trust and patience.

# Barcelona Gallery Weekend

Patrick Langley



Bouchra Khalili, *The Magic Lantern*, 2019–22. Multimedia installation, dimensions variable. Installation view at ADN Galeria, Barcelona, 2023. Image courtesy of the artist and ADN. Photo by Roberto Ruiz.

Eric Farrés Duran's show at Bombon Projects was among the most on-the-nose exhibitions at this year's Barcelona Gallery Weekend (BGW)—and not just because of the glasses. That technologies that purport to measure the world are not reliably accurate is less troubling, his work proposes, than the tendency to act as if they are. These stark and satirical pieces reference optometry (pairs of dysfunctional glasses, such as one with two holes in its lenses, on freestanding plinths), museum display practices (a canvas turned to face the wall, another with nothing on it but a few tips for cleaning glass), and shooting (a wall papered with rifle targets). One work—a glass-fronted frame containing smashed museum glass—reduces the theme to the point of absurdity: not the “cracked looking glass” of Joycean modernism but an art that flaunts its own shattered illusions. The spectacles are broken, but they haven't yet been replaced.

BGW's ninth edition, which featured works by more than sixty artists exhibited in twenty-seven galleries across the city, showcased the robustness and vitality of Barcelona's gallery scene. As such, it set an ironic context for a shared concern of several exhibitions: fragility. This manifested in the use of delicate materials—glass featured prominently in more than one show—and in an emphasis on process rather than polish, aura rather than object. Patricia Dauder's elegant “Interiors” at ProjecteSD seemed at times to combine both tendencies. *Vestigis #1 (Cases desaparegudes al carrer Degà Bahí)* [Vestiges #1, Disappeared Houses on Degà Bahí Street, 2022] was a strikingly large and contrastingly frail piece made by taking impressions of a wall in a partially demolished building in Barcelona. The result is a kind of fresco across four hanging strips of cotton muslin, the pastel hues of which suggest different living spaces and layered histories retrieved from invisibility.

Bouchra Khalili's rich and deeply researched *The Magic Lantern* (2019–22), in her retrospective “Fanning the spark of hope in the past” at ADN Galeria, is narrated in chapters. Speaking directly to camera, the storyteller traces the history of “revolutionary technologies,” from magic lanterns to Portapak, via the phantoms of the French Revolution, anti-colonial resistance in the Congo, Carole Roussopoulos's footage of the 1970 massacre of Palestinian refugees in Amman, Jean Genet, the Black Panthers, and the struggle for Palestinian liberation. What makes these technologies revolutionary, Khalili suggests, is their ability to summon ghosts—to revive the dead erased by history. These mediums (what else to call them?) militate against amnesia by forcing the past to inhere in the present, yet they are fallible, even fragile; like museum glass, they can break. Roussopoulos's footage, as Khalili notes, was later wiped, and only a few images of victims—such as a woman whose face is badly scarred by napalm—remain.

At House of Chappaz, Fito Conesa's *Vocativo* (2023), another video installation in a BGW notably light on moving image, captured a sense of history repeating at a smaller scale than Khalili's centuries-straddling work. Conesa, who often works with music, wrote a short piece for a harpist and filmed her performing it from sight three times over several weeks. The score remained identical, except for cues (“wish for the tickling to pass,” for example) in place of notation about tempo, volume, and so on, inviting the performer to shift the affective texture of the piece according to her own subjective understanding of the artist's unconventional cues. The three recordings were projected as a triptych on a wide screen hung from the ceiling. Synced so that they began at the same moment, they gradually fell into and out of step, recalling Steve Reich's work with phases and tape loops. This deceptively gentle work was a reminder that if performance is a space of fragility, a present moment that is always passing away, it is also an act of recuperation—a chance to play the past again, and differently.

LA VANGUARDIA

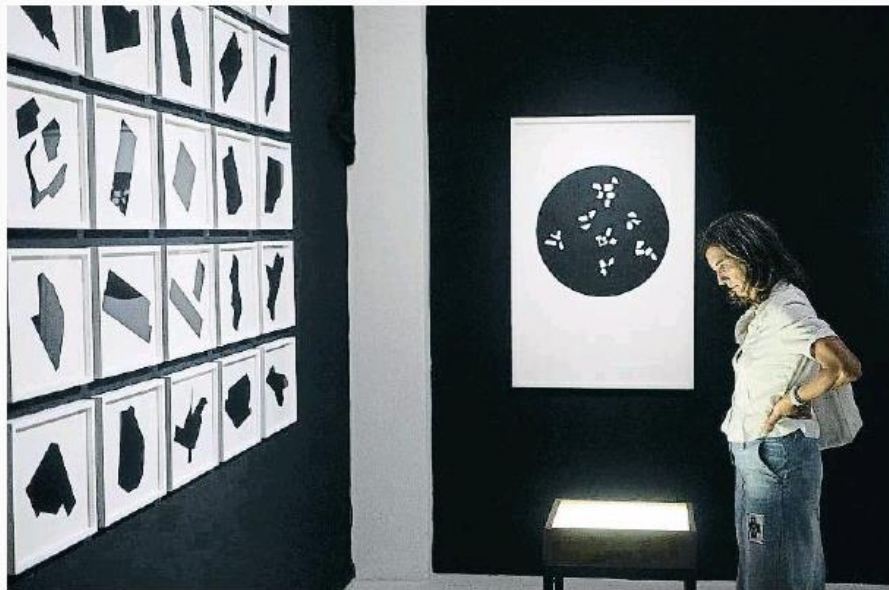
## Atmósferas, hongos y también IA

Un paseo por el Barcelona Gallery Weekend, iniciativa de la Art Barcelona, que abre este fin de semana las puertas de 27 exposiciones a coleccionistas y a amantes del arte

Artes · Fotografía

16 sept. 2023 [+2 más](#) Juan Bufill Barcelona

Este fin de semana se celebra el Barcelona Gallery Weekend, una iniciativa de la asociación Art Barcelona que marca anualmente la apertura de la temporada de las galerías de arte y que ...



Parte de la exposición que se puede disfrutar en la galería ADN

ARTE

# Barcelona Gallery Weekend: diez exposiciones que no debes perderte

Hasta el 17 de septiembre, las 27 galerías de Art Barcelona inauguran exposiciones de artistas como Ignasi Aballí, Berta Cáccamo, Anna Bella Geiger o Joan Fontcuberta

15 septiembre, 2023 - 02:50

GUARDAR

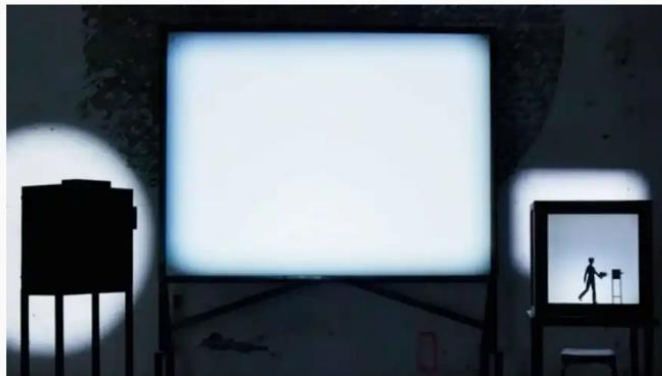
EN: ARTE GALERÍAS DE ARTE

Saioa Camarzana

Marcada en el calendario desde hace ya 9 años, Barcelona Gallery Weekend pone en marcha la temporada galerística en la ciudad Condal. Entre el 14 y el 17 de septiembre, coincidiendo con **Apertura Madrid Gallery Weekend**, **las 27 galerías de Art Barcelona inauguran de manera conjunta exposiciones de artistas como Ignasi Aballí, Berta Cáccamo, Anna Bella Geiger o Joan Fontcuberta.**

Como es habitual, el evento cuenta con un programa de actividades que incluye visitas guiadas a galerías, conversaciones con artistas, galeristas y comisarios y talleres además de las ARCO Gallery Walks. **Seleccionamos diez exposiciones que no puedes perderte** en esta edición en la que se dan cita cerca de 70 artistas procedentes de 20 países.

## *Fanning the spark of hope in the past*, de Bouchra Khalili. En ADN



The Magic Lantern' (2020-2022, VideoHD), de Bouchra Khalili

La exposición que la galería ADN dedica a Bouchra Khalili continúa con la que le dedicó el MACBA a principios de año. *Fanning the spark of hope in the past* reúne una selección de trabajos realizados por la artista entre 2008 y 2022 en los que aborda asuntos como la autorrepresentación, la movilidad global, la resistencia, la solidaridad internacional, el feminismo y la colaboración.

Moviéndose entre distintas disciplinas como el cine, la fotografía y el textil, la exposición pone de relieve 20 años de trayectoria en los que la artista **nos hace partícipes de la memoria reprimida y la historia silenciada.**

## 'Bouchra Khalili. Entre círculos y constelaciones' en MACBA (Barcelona)

16  
FEBRERO 2023

EXPOSICIONES  
de **Carolina Ciuti**

La exposición reúne once proyectos multidisciplinares de la artista franco-marroquí, y sugiere una reflexión sobre los modos de producción historiográficos, la lucha anticolonial, la memoria colectiva, la cultura visual y la oralidad.



Vista de la exposición 'Bouchra Khalili. Entre círculos y constelación' en MACBA, Barcelona. Foto de Miquel Coll, 2023.

Me acerqué a la práctica artística de **Bouchra Khalili** (Casablanca, 1975) en 2013; hacía poco que cursaba un master en arte contemporáneo y empezaba a entender las razones de mi fascinación por el vídeo. La palabra 'vídeo' debe su origen al verbo latín *videre* que significa 'ver'; ampliando el significado intrínseco en su etimología, podríamos decir que el vídeo es una herramienta que nos permite entrenar la mirada e, incluso, aprender a 'ver'. Una vía alternativa para observar y representar lo que nos rodea.

En medio de esta exploración, una de mis profesoras me recomendó el trabajo de Khalili y, especialmente, la instalación audiovisual *The Mapping Journey Project* (2008-2011). Fragmentando la narración en ocho pantallas, el proyecto pretende dibujar una práctica alternativa para la creación de mapas, desde la perspectiva de las personas que se vieron obligadas a cruzar fronteras ilegalmente. En cada vídeo que compone la instalación, un plano fijo muestra una mano que, con un rotulador, dibuja encima de un mapa los caminos turbulentos de esos desplazamientos forzados. Simultáneamente, una voz en off relata el viaje de manera objetiva.

Cuando dos años después empecé a trabajar para el festival y feria de videoocreación LOOP Barcelona, aprendí que ese mismo proyecto había sido presentado en la edición de 2011 de la feria por GALERIEOFMARSEILLE, recibiendo una Mención de Honor. *The Mapping Journey Project* es de hecho un trabajo bastante representativo de la práctica de la artista franco-marroquí. El proyecto toma como punto de partida ocho viajes clandestinos para construir una cartografía alternativa basada en el gesto, el dibujo y la palabra hablada. A través de esta exploración audiovisual que atraviesa el Mediterráneo, Khalili arroja luz sobre una geografía de la resistencia, visibilizando así una constelación de historias no documentadas.

En esta misma línea, la exposición *Bouchra Khalili. Entre círculos y constelaciones* –que se podrá ver en el MACBA-Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona a partir de este jueves 16 de febrero y hasta el domingo 21 de mayo de 2023– sugiere una reflexión sobre los modos de producción historiográficos, la lucha anticolonial, la construcción y transmisión de la memoria colectiva, la cultura visual y la oralidad –todos elementos comunes en muchos de los proyectos de Khalili.

La exposición –co-producida por el museo junto con **Sharjah Art Foundation** y comisariada por **Evira Dyangani Ose** y **Huiwai Chu** –fue concebida como un único cuerpo de trabajo, una constelación para abordar desde diferentes puntos de vista. Los once proyectos multidisciplinares que componen el recorrido expositivo, fueron realizados por Khalili a lo largo de los últimos diez años. Articulándose alrededor de una serie de obras audiovisuales magistralmente instaladas, y todas con sonido en abierto! –elección deliberada para reforzar el concepto de transmisión oral colectiva, como nos cuenta Huiwai Chu durante la visita posterior a la rueda de prensa,– el conjunto presenta nuevas miradas sobre la deconstrucción de la historia, recopilando experiencias individuales que representan, sin embargo, voces colectivas.

«La exposición no formula conclusiones, sino que plantea una serie de preguntas, que son las mismas que yo misma me hago, como artista y persona franco-marroquí», explica la artista. «¿Cómo podemos construir un sentido de pertenencia y comunidad que esté liberado de la concepción tradicional de ciudadanía? ¿Cómo podemos transmitir aquellas historias que no fueron documentadas y archivadas?». Khalili afirma que, para aprender lo que significa pertenecer, quizás sea esencial construir una forma de memoria colectiva que empiece con mantener vivos los testimonios de aquellas personas que fueron marginalizadas.



Vista de la exposición 'Bouchra Khalili. Entre círculos y constelación' en MACBA, Barcelona. Foto de Miquel Coll, 2023.

A la combinación de múltiples narrativas, y de relatos comunales, tanto históricos como presentes, también hace referencia el título de la muestra. Si por un lado apunta a la manera de hilar conceptos creando constelaciones de sentido, por el otro alude a *Al-Halqa*, literalmente 'el círculo' o 'la asamblea', una tradición centenaria de Marruecos que consiste en presentar relatos orales en espacios públicos, en los que se entremezclan intereses sociopolíticos y aspectos de cultura popular.

*Al-Halqa* caracteriza, también, a los protagonistas de las dos obras que abren y cierran el recorrido expositivo, ambas inspiradas en el legado del Movimiento de Trabajadores Árabes (MTA), y sus grupos de teatro, en Francia durante la década de 1970. Estrenada en el marco de documenta14 y situada en Atenas, *The Tempest Society* (2017) presenta a Isavella, Elias y Giannis, tres jóvenes atenienses de distintos contextos, que reflexionan sobre la igualdad, la democracia y su relación con el teatro en tanto que espacio cívico. Inspirándose en la noción de «poeta civil» formulada por Pier Paolo Pasolini, la obra celebra el legado del grupo de teatro parisense *Al Assifa*. *The Circle* (2023), instalación producida gracias a la implicación de Sharjah Art Foundation, Luma Foundation y la Fundación MACBA, es una secuela de *The Tempest Society* y gira alrededor de las figuras de Mia y Lucas, ambos de ascendencia magrebí y establecidos en Marsella, mientras excavan en ese legado olvidado de la historia de la inmigración. Simultáneamente, antiguos miembros del MTA y de los grupos de teatro asociados al movimiento vuelven a poner en escena algunos fragmentos de sus actuaciones.





Vista de la exposición 'Bouchra Khalili. Entre círculos y constelación' en MACBA, Barcelona. Foto de Miquel Coll, 2023.

Como explica la directora del MACBA y co-curadora de la exposición Elvira Dyangani Ose, en general la muestra celebra a una artista que, gracias a su incasable trabajo, ha sido parte de un importante «*historiographical turn*» [giro historiográfico] dirigido a poner en valor los testigos de la historia, así como todo los relatos que permanecen eliminados o indocumentados –respondiendo, de esta manera, a una de las nuevas líneas del museo que quiere poner el acento en la lucha anticolonial y en la recuperación de narrativas silenciadas.

*Entre círculos y constelaciones* no es simplemente una exposición para visitar, sino también un espacio para habitar, transitar, vivir y volver una y otra vez. Y no solamente por la atención que cada una de las piezas audiovisuales requiere, sino también porqué esto es lo que significa sentarse en círculo y conectar con una/s historia/s.

«*It takes time!*», dice sonriendo Dyangani Ose, al acabarse la rueda de prensa. Por lo que recuerda que la entrada del museo tendrá validez durante un mes y que el público podrá acudir a la institución todas las veces que quiera –otra resultado de la reformulación del museo propuesta por la nueva dirección.



Reviews BERLIN

## Bouchra Khalili

Callie's

By Ana Teixeira Pinto ☺



Bouchra Khalili, *The Magic Lantern*, 2020–22, 4K video, color and black-and-white, sound, 27 minutes.

The phantasmagoria was a form of entertainment popular in the late eighteenth century in which mobile magic lanterns were used to project fantastic images that conjured ghosts and demons. At the time, many viewers believed they were witnessing genuine necromancy, the spectral, flickering projection surface functioning as an interface between the living and the dead. Nomadic *lanternistes* also disseminated the news via their portable projections. *The Magic Lantern*, 2019–22, a film-based installation by French Moroccan artist Bouchra Khalili, delves into the dual origins of cinema, which emerged at once as a form of entertainment and a tool for mass education—and, by extension, emancipation.

At times, these two often divergent tendencies intersected. In 1798, the film tells us, the phantascope (a film projection machine) brought George-Jacques Danton, beheaded in 1794, back from the grave, affording bereaved citizens an opportunity to both mourn and channel fallen revolutionaries. Étienne-Gaspard Robert, alias “Robertson,” patented an optical stage in the crumbling Couvent des Capucins, on which he made ghosts appear, awing his audiences until French police shut down the shows.

The sight of a ghost, according to literary theorist Sladja Blažan, always exposes the entanglements of horror and history, which is perhaps another way of saying that the past often haunts us with demands we find difficult, if not impossible, to fulfill. *The Magic Lantern* is a film about haunting as an inherent characteristic of cinema, and the ways through which the history of the moving image is entwined with the quest for social change, with every failed revolution littered with discarded or discontinued optical technologies. Whereas the phantoscope channeled the ghosts of the French Revolution (which still haunt Western political theory), Khalili's Sony Porta-Pak camera channels Swiss documentary-video maker Carole Roussopoulos, summoning the undertheorized histories of anticolonial struggles.

It was Jean Genet who persuaded Roussopoulos to buy a Porta-Pak camera with her severance pay from *Vogue*. The first video she shot with it was *Jean Genet parle d'Angela Davis* (Jean Genet Talks About Angela Davis), 1970, which showed Genet denouncing the US justice system in the wake of Davis's arrest. The following year Roussopoulos filmed *Le F.H.A.R.*, its title deploying an acronym for Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action). During Black September, a conflict between the Jordanian Armed Forces and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), King Hussein of Jordan ordered the shelling of Amman and Irbid. Roussopoulos recorded the survivors of the napalm attacks for her video *Hussein, le Néron d'Amman* (Hussein, the Nero of Amman), 1970. When *Le Néron d'Amman* began to circulate, Roussopoulos and her collective, Vidéo Out, were contacted by Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther Party's exiled minister of information who had founded its international section in Algiers. Cleaver wanted to learn how to use this "revolutionary machine for revolutionaries" in order to "produce our own information" free from dependence on "other people's cameras." The early portable-video technology provided the tools for exploring counterhistories and anticolonial subjectivities, but, paradoxically, *Le Néron d'Amman's* wide circulation led to its erasure, as the tape—the only extant copy—eventually deteriorated from wear and tear. In *Magic Lantern* we see the few remaining stills, which survived because they were included in Roussopoulos's *Munich*, 1972. *The Magic Lantern* calls them spectral images—ghosts, if you will—who make once-lost histories reappear, even if fleetingly.

Here, as is often the case in Khalili's work, the method becomes the content: Montage approximates a forked temporality that scrambles the polarity between nostalgia and militancy. Temporal and spatial ellipses conjure a multitude of ghosts that haunt both the history of cinema and, perhaps more importantly, the history of revolution and, by way of their haunting (to paraphrase sociologist Avery Gordon), demand our engagement, our commitment, or at least our attention. For Khalili as for Jacques Derrida, the ghost is not just a revenant but also an *arrivant* who undoes linear time by arriving uninvited from the future to unsettle the past.



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## A PHILOSOPHY OF THE CAUTERIZED WOUND

TOBI HASLETT ON THE ART OF BOUCHRA KHALILI

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**MELANCHOLIA IS BORING.** No matter how violent the anguish or extravagant the sense of loss, to be melancholy is to be locked in a single, insistent, freezing feeling. The melancholic is obsessive; obsession stalls the self. Torpor, irritation, and relentless self-reproach are the only moves available to the gloom-addicted psyche. But that gloom is crossed with pleasure—a cynical relief. Walter Benjamin lambasted the poet Erich Kästner for his luxurious devastation, that air of “left-wing melancholy” that saps the political will. Catastrophe didn’t galvanize Kästner so much as feed his princely woe, so his futile, coiling, bourgeois verses were encrusted with cliché. “Now the hollow forms,” wrote Benjamin, “are absentmindedly caressed.”

The films and videos of the Moroccan-French artist Bouchra Khalili are transfixed by “hollow forms.” She’s riveted by the force of the nation-state and drawn to the radical past. Yearning, exile, failure, estrangement, and the shattered aspirations of anticolonial revolt—these are the lugubrious materials from which she assembles her sensibility. But her work is brisk and lucid; it’s scraped clean of wretched feeling. There’s no Kästneresque indulgence or flamboyant sense of doom. (Though the legacy of Western Marxism preoccupies

and consumes her.) She moves with glassy discipline across a field of ruthless crisis: the agony of austerity, the lives of stateless people, and the dilapidated hopes that drove third-world guerrilla wars. The themes are not identical but linked by parallels, ellipses.

Or fixed in *constellations* (to invoke Benjamin once more). “I’ve always wanted to go to Italy since I was a kid,” pronounces an offscreen voice in Khalili’s *The Mapping Journey Project*, 2008–11. “So I left Bangladesh in December 1999.” A brown hand grips a marker and draws a line across a map:

He told me I had to go first from Dhaka to Russia  
No, that’s wrong  
I went first from Dhaka to New Delhi  
Where I spent two days  
Then, I left from Moscow  
Which is here  
I arrived in Moscow  
After a week in Moscow  
The man told me we had to leave for Skopje  
In a country called Macedonia.

This is from *Mapping Journey #5*, 2010. The lines cut across nation-states and graze the Caspian Sea

before twisting across the Mediterranean and stopping, at last, in Rome. The man recites a malevolent litany: refusals and deportations, detentions and escapes:

When I arrived in Skopje  
They told me that my papers looked a little fake  
They told me “You cannot enter the country.”  
And they called the police  
And I was jailed for 8 months and 20 days, something like that  
Afterwards they sent me to Bangladesh . . . The man I paid to go to Italy said “Wait a few months, we’ll find another road.”

An appalling five-year gauntlet collapses into eleven minutes. But the man’s voice is wiped of affect; as one of the thousands of migrants who yearly attempt to enter the European Union, he carves a jagged, modernist form on the map’s abstracted plane. It’s a letter of an impossible alphabet, the stamp of a stateless person on what Benedict Anderson dubbed “the logoization of political space.” These political spaces include occupied Palestine, North Africa, and the vast Eurasian landmass. Lines jut from Morocco to Spain, from Algeria to France, from Somalia through

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Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya, and Egypt. Some are harsh and ragged; others are valiant arcs. (In Khalili's silk-screen "The Constellations Series," 2011, they're sloping, dotted lines.) Imposed on the pompous squiggles that delineate nations, every kink or curve or angle marks the clash of self and state.

*The logoization of political space:* I'm piqued by Anderson's phrase, with its trivial little jingle. Yes, the border is a logo—an aesthetic confection and repetitive ploy. But how to depict the flight of *invisible* people, all the threats and elaborate prompts that send them slicing through hostile territories? What place is left for desire in a world devoured by capital? *I've always wanted to go to Italy*, says the migrant—and that want is met with borders, bureaucrats, and armed police, a rigid, glinting matrix of malicious calculation. This, then, is "the migrant crisis": The

bullied, roving poor try to slip into the fortress only to reveal the vicious difference, in the terms of Étienne Balibar, between those who circulate capital and those circulated *by* it. The latter peddle their devalued labor until they're hunted and expelled. So *The Mapping Journey Project* presents a motif that dominates much of Khalili's recent work. She displays a surface—a map, an iPhone screen, a table covered in photographs—that is then acted on by a disembodied hand. That hand is often brown. Pitched against its background, it becomes a symbol, a fleshly glyph. It writes, but has also been written on; it makes messages, gestures, traces, and signs, but is already tattooed by the "sign" of race—thrust into a dialectic of vulnerability and will.

That will is brusque, insurgent. Shining over Khalili's work are the examples of Chris Marker and



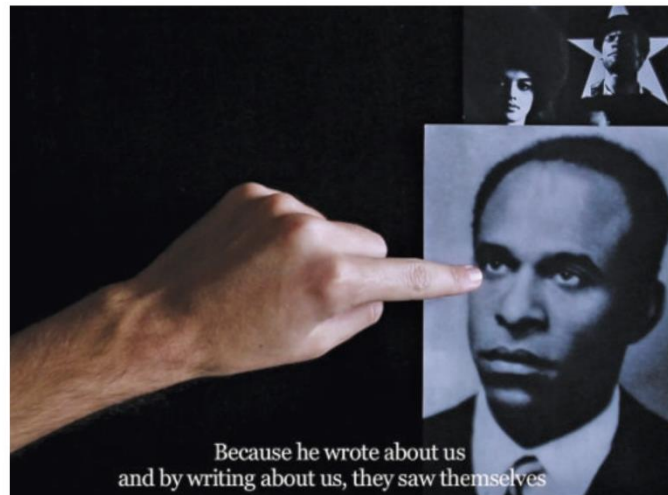
## The films cleave to contemporary conflicts—but are absorbed by the blasted past.

Jean-Luc Godard, as she takes the shape of the former's essay films—with their loops and rippling logic—and studs it with the agitprop of the latter's Maoist period. (Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin's *Tout va bien* [1972] opens with a hand that signs production checks—a bit of Brechtian insolence that seems to deface the cinema screen.) The result is an abstract radicalism and an intriguing reflexivity, as the global struggles of the 1960s and '70s are one of Khalili's subjects. Why *also* lift the syntax of the Left Bank and Nouvelle Vague? Or, to put it another way: What relation is she forcing between history, style, and crisis?

Pulped economies, uneven development, the expulsions and displacements caused by war, disaster, debt—crises obsess Khalili. But the films themselves glide forth with a startling tonal calm. She makes limpid, meticulous works of stately pacing and simplicity,

qualities that stretch, membrane-like, over massive, throbbing tensions. (The influence of the communist directorial duo Straub-Huillet is clear.) The films cleave to contemporary conflicts—but are absorbed by the blasted past. Her works are attached to political suffering—but retreat from sentimentalism. They are mournful, glacial, drifting, affecting—but have abolished left-wing melancholy.

The melancholic drowns in a sumptuous delirium. But Khalili sets out to parse discrepant scales of space and time. The state dreams of *mastering* those scales, of imposing breaks and continuities—between past and present, between subject and collective, and between ethereal principles and the rugged stuff of life. So the state flashes through her art and compels her delicate attention, manifesting as fantasy, as metaphor, and as implacable machine. In her work, lives pass through



Because he wrote about us  
and by writing about us, they saw themselves



Ancient Greece  
resurrected in Africa

The state may be a smashing, merciless fist. But for certain exploited peoples, statehood was and is a dream.



FRELIMO:  
Mozambique Liberation Front

the state apparatus like light shot through a prism, fanning into an array of revealing ideologies. *The Mapping Journey Project* relies on the techniques enforced by states: seriality, regimentation, and the clipped, official account. But by withholding the migrants' faces, Khalili banishes the kind of image that could incriminate or expose. We're left with absent, moving witness; a severed, scrawling hand; and the abstract trace on paper of the roaming *sans-papiers*.

But an irony rolls through Khalili's oeuvre. The state may be a smashing, merciless fist and an ingenious aesthetic logic; it may bristle with punitive technologies and spring from the will to dominate. But for certain exploited peoples, statehood was and is a dream. The anticolonial rebels who pass through Khalili's films, such as *Foreign Office*, 2015, and "The Speeches Series," 2012–13, lunged at the utopia of a postcolonial sovereignty. So the brown hands in *Foreign Office* blot little points on a map of Algiers, the so-called capital of the Third World, which in the '60s and '70s played host to the headquarters of leftist groups and governments in exile. As in *The Mapping Journey Project*, an offscreen voice recites a list—this time, of revolutionary organizations. Each name proclaims a hope:

PAIGC: African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde

FRELIMO: Mozambique Liberation Front

ANC: African National Congress

MPLA: People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola

MPAIAC: Movement for the Independence and Self-Determination of the Canaries Archipelago

African-American Information Center

FPLN: Portuguese National Liberation Front

Fatah: Palestinian National Liberation Movement

FPLP: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

DFLP: Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine

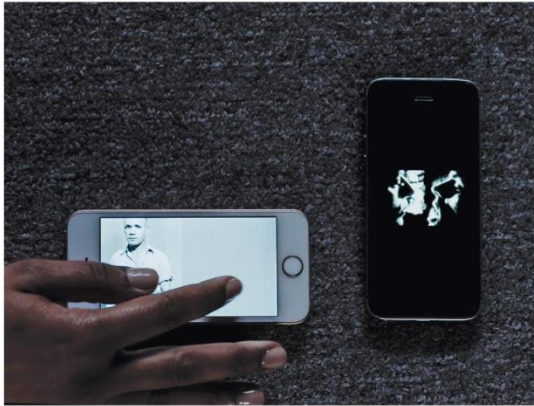
*National, Independence, Liberation, Front, Movement*: The words are braided through this litany of bygone revolt, and would arrive at a kind of incantatory rhythm were it not for Khalili's style. The tone is taut, declamatory, constructing a brittle parataxis. A link emerges between the lines of *The Mapping Journey Project* and the blotted, plotted points—namely, that the latter's stateless people march through the debris of crumbled revolutions. The implosion of postcolonial economies, the scourge of civil war, the sclerosis and reaction of erstwhile leftist states: This is not the future dreamed of by Amílcar Cabral or Frantz Fanon.

But it's exactly what they feared. "After independence," Fanon warns at the close of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), "the party sinks into an extraordinary lethargy." But how to resist lethargy, drive out gloom, banish nostalgia, and advance the fight? How

Opposite page, top: Bouchra Khalili, *The Tempest Society*, 2017, 2K video, color, sound, 60 minutes.

Opposite page, bottom: Bouchra Khalili, *Foreign Office*, 2015, HD video, color, sound, 22 minutes.

Right: Four stills from Bouchra Khalili's *Twenty-Two Hours*, 2018, 4K video, color, sound, 45 minutes.



to draw lessons from past revolutions without lapsing into misery or the pleasures of the backward glance? (Wendy Brown's 1999 essay "Resisting Left Melancholy" is strapped to this question.) "We have inherited only disenchantment," a woman says to a man in *Foreign Office*, her voice distant and impassive. *The Tempest Society*, 2017, takes the '70s theater group Al Assifa (Arabic for "The Tempest") as its subject and militates against disenchantment. Al Assifa sought to establish a cultural wing of the struggle of migrant Arab workers in France, who were then allied with anarchist insurgents and the Mao-Spontex party Gauche Prolétarienne. The troupe cast workers in their productions, part of a radical vogue that reached its apex in Marker's film collective Medvedkin Group. So photographs of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Antonio Gramsci—the former a "civic poet," the latter an "organic intellectual"—fill Khalili's screen as she takes them as precursors for the occupation of Athens's Syntagma Square. This is a

fight against austerity, itself an imperial echo. Aerial footage of Syntagma—maplike and abstract—plays as a man recalls the referendum protests of 2015:

That night and the next two following, we said *No*  
We said *no*  
To those who want a Europe without politics,  
Without popular will,  
Without *demos*,  
Without democracy.

This is a refusal of refusals—and the key to Khalili's ethos. In the place of political melancholy, she deploys the art of the double negative. She defeats left-wing defeatism and resolves to forfeit loss. So the rigor of her films—their disciplined geometry—strikes me as both a nod to an older didacticism and a kind of philosophy of the cauterized wound. Born into an era of evacuated aspirations, she displays clipped, clenched, determined reserve. Her latest video, *Twenty-Two Hours*, 2018 (which will be on view in Khalili's exhibi-

tion opening this month at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), is narrated by two black American women who stare at the camera, locked in a statuesque posture that is frontal, immovable. They recount the history of the Black Panther Party in a tone that is crisp, attentive—and shorn of fluttering romance: "What remains of the story is sometimes images / Sometimes sounds / Sometimes memories / Sometimes witnesses / But always words." Between past and present there are no reassuring continuities—only abrupt alignments, shocking symmetries, striking echoes, rhyming forms. Against an enveloping melancholia, Khalili pits the fact of dispersion and caesurae and startling gaps. Hers is a world slung between map and constellation, plan and promise—that vital impossibility that we once knew as utopia. □

*"Bouchra Khalili: Poets and Witnesses" is on view March 21–August 25 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*

TOBI HASLETT HAS WRITTEN ABOUT ART, FILM, AND LITERATURE FOR *N+1*, *THE NEW YORKER*, AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS.

# The Boston Globe

ART REVIEW

## Seeing Black Panthers, Jean Genet, and a simmering revolution in '22 Hours'

By Murray Whyte Globe Staff, March 28, 2019, 3:35 p.m.



A still image from Bouchra Khalili's video piece "22 Hours." (COURTESY, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON)

How long do the ghosts of revolution linger, haunting the battlegrounds of a failed insurrection? That's a question with which Douglas Miranda has long struggled — now a graying specter himself of a bright and dangerous time. Miranda was 21 when he traveled from his home in Boston to New Haven to help organize a rally for the jailed Black Panther leader Bobby Seale; it was April 1970, and Miranda, "efficient, intelligent, a smart tactician and a brilliant speaker," as described in Bouchra Khalili's new video piece at the Museum of Fine Arts, was about to encounter an unexpected ally: the French writer and activist Jean Genet, who had slipped into the country for that very occasion.

That moment and its long, slow fade into the shadows of half-remembered history is at the core of "22 Hours," the 45-minute work Khalili started making while an artist in residence at the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University in 2017. Khalili, who is Moroccan, came to Boston with the project in mind. She knew Genet had spoken here at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1970, part of a nationwide tour; in his MIT address, he had called the Panthers the most "brilliant, luminous, and poignant part of American society." Linking up with activist networks here led her slowly to Miranda, who, after many years in Texas, had recently returned. She had what she needed: a witness, after so long — someone who was there, and could tell what he had seen.

You might be tempted to imagine "22 Hours" as a documentary. It isn't, though elements of that form root her work in the unshakable bedrock of fact. It presents history as though viewed through an electronic keyhole: Khalili's narrators, Quiana Pontes and Vanessa Silva, two young black local activists, recount events in dispassionate tones; Miranda, the gravel voiced sage, adds his firsthand accounts. Images, of Genet, of Miranda, of Seale, and more, appear on iPhones lying flat in front of the camera.

It feels almost like a seance — one generation invoking another, long past, a plea for guidance in a time just as turbulent. Miranda, now paunchy and bearded with a knot of silvery dreadlocks, arrives less to offer advice than perspective: "The Party already exists in history. It can't be replicated," he intones, flatly, when they ask if the Panthers could have an impact today. "We must learn from its history and further develop its ideas and aims . . . to challenge the status quo."



It's a clinical thing to read, but in the raspy rumble of Miranda's voice, it feels less dry than lucid — clear-eyed wisdom from a vessel of history, the witness who was there. (When asked if the Panthers failed, he says, unruffled: "It's a fair assessment. We were defeated.")

The sober tones of the present project into the future and chafe with the stridency of the past: Growing more famous for his public attacks on authority after the 1968 riots and wildcat strikes throughout France, Genet had aligned himself with social revolution at home and elsewhere. In March 1970, the Panthers came to Genet in Paris to ask for his help. He agreed, and they left the next day.

He spoke on behalf of the Panthers with a fiery urgency. In a TV interview with CBS San Francisco on March 21, 1970, Genet looks like a spring wound tight — his body clenched, his hands locked. He calls the Black Panthers "the only really revolutionary movement in America" at a time when dilettante youth protests — sit-ins, love-ins, smoke-ins — were common. When asked why he has come, he answers two ways: to make as widely-known as possible the danger that Seale and the Party are facing, and second "to be the witness in Europe to the injustice and racism that exists in this country." (Khalili has included the clip in her work, but you can watch it on YouTube.)

Genet, censored in the United States, had already been denied a visa to enter the country once. This time he simply snuck in. He arrived with the party in crisis and the temperature rising: Seale was awaiting a murder trial; Huey Newton, Seale's Black Panther cofounder, was in jail for manslaughter. The Party was closely monitored by the FBI as a domestic terror organization; by fall of that year, the activist, intellectual, and Panther associate Angela Davis would be arrested and jailed for her alleged involvement in a murder plot. Over months spent in the United States, Genet would speak for them all, using his celebrity to draw crowds and media coverage.

In public appearances, on radio and on TV, Genet burned with a genuine rage. "What people call American civilization will disappear," he growled, in French, to a crowd of thousands on the Yale campus on May 1, 1970, a rally in support of Seale. "It is already dead because it is founded on contempt . . . the contempt of the rich for the poor, the contempt of whites for blacks." With the Panthers, he had found kinship. "He knew he was like us," Miranda says. "He knew that outlaws . . . have to make their own rules."

Why exhume this faded chapter, bring back to light its impassioned failings? Khalili, surely, can see in our own radically-polarized moment a ripeness for revolt. *Plus ça change*, Genet might think, were he able to see the widening chasm between have and have-not, and race relations locked into a familiar, destructive pattern (Genet died in 1986). With her narrators, Khalili offers hope, and Miranda advice.

"In revolution, we fail until we win," he says, his deadpan brightening ever so slightly. As Genet might say: Vive la révolution.

#### **BOUCHRA KHALILI: 22 HOURS**

At Museum of Fine Arts, 465 Huntington Ave., through Aug. 25. 617-267-9300, [www.mfa.org](http://www.mfa.org)

ARTE >

## Mi patria es mi 'laptop'

La marroquí Khalili muestra en Sevilla obras de extrema sobriedad realizadas por todo el globo



ROGELIO LÓPEZ CUENCA

27 NOV 2017 - 18:11 CET



'The Wet Feet Series. Lost Boats. Flag', de 2012.

Salvo las contadas y honrosas excepciones en que se ha hecho con rigor, la norma que ha regido la selección de muestras de arte contemporáneo marroquí en España ha sido la de la explotación de un exotismo orientalista, que parece diseñado para satisfacer un sentimiento de superioridad respecto a nuestro vecino del sur. Exposiciones sin más tema que el "arte contemporáneo marroquí", o aún más a granel, "árabe", entendido como un oxímoron, y que suelen acoger la obra de autores autodidactas, *naïves* o con toques de semi-artesanía, una especie de curiosidad excéntrica. O peor, que toman como pretexto unas pretendidas afinidades con artistas españoles, de quienes los marroquíes serían aplicados epígonos. Todo impregnado de un insufrible tufo paternalista y neocolonial.

Muy corto es el número de artistas marroquíes a quienes se haya dedicado una exposición personal en una galería de arte en España. Y en un museo, aún menos. La circulación de las producciones culturales del Marruecos contemporáneo viene determinada por su aprobación previa por parte de los centros de poder autorizados a este fin, es decir, que su legitimación depende de su grado de traducibilidad a la lógica cultural hegemónica.

No es ajena a estas circunstancias la obra de [Bouchra Khalili](#) (Casablanca, 1975), que no es desconocida en España, pues ha menudeado en exposiciones por lo menos desde 2003, y cuya inclusión en la programación del MoMA, en el circuito de bienales y en la última [Documenta de Kassel](#) hace que esta exposición en el CAAC, coproducida con el [Jeu de Paume](#), no pueda ser más oportuna. Representa una excepcional oportunidad para romper con el habitual paradigma anecdótico y acercarse a un conjunto de piezas producidas en los últimos diez años.

La mera enumeración de los lugares en que han sido realizadas las obras — Argel, Florida, Hamburgo, Génova, Nueva York, Atenas— da cuenta ya de un fenómeno que se ha convertido en marca de lo más sobresaliente de la producción artística contemporánea: una vertiginosa movilidad que no puede dejar de interpretarse en relación con las exigencias de deslocalización propias del capitalismo globalizado y su necesidad de una fuerza de trabajo en permanente estado de disponibilidad, desarraigada —los artistas no son una excepción: mi patria es mi *laptop*—. En sintonía con esa transportabilidad, las nuevas prácticas artísticas exhiben entre sus rasgos distintivos una progresiva desmaterialización de sus soportes, reducidos a la fotografía y el vídeo, contenidos de fácil transmisión a través de archivos digitales.

**Mujer en la diáspora —  
formada en Francia—,  
fuerza un lenguaje al que  
interroga y obliga a  
pronunciarse sobre su  
condición política**

El trabajo de Bouchra Khalili puede entenderse bajo esta perspectiva, que ha recuperado y revalorizado el léxico formal de las prácticas del arte conceptual del pasado siglo. La artista, sin embargo, al mismo tiempo se desmarca de ese legado gracias a su actitud de distanciamiento respecto a uno de sus formatos más tópicos, el archivo. Frente a la banalmente abrumadora exhibición de documentación, Khalili la somete a un sofisticado proceso de edición, de selección y montaje que se oculta tras la aparente naturalidad de su puesta en escena. Su extrema sobriedad, su aspecto de inmediata transparencia abre la puerta a un campo de tensiones cuya complejidad se ve activada con una eficacia tan formidable como sutil a través de procedimientos atravesados por el cine documental y la experimentación teatral.

Elipsis, fuera de campo, traducción, citas textuales y testimonios... el desplazamiento es aquí el recurso fundamental: las obras zigzaguean entre la cita erudita y la memoria personal. Igual que el mapa y sus fronteras son recorridos por las cicatrices y el relato de los supervivientes del viaje, que han desafiado desde su propio cuerpo una geografía construida contra la vida, la forma es subvertida por un uso que la desmonta y vuelve a armar como escritura de resistencia para unas identidades en tránsito. Como el *broken english* o las creolizaciones de la lengua del amo, en que hombres y mujeres migrantes, refugiadas hablan de la frontera desde la frontera misma, Bouchra Khalili, mujer ella misma en la diáspora —formada como artista en Francia— fuerza un lenguaje al que interroga y obliga a pronunciarse sobre su condición política. Y a nosotros, hipócritas lectores, a empezar a *desorientar* lo que creíamos que sabíamos.

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*Bouchra Khalili*. CAAC. Sevilla. Hasta el 4 de marzo de 2018

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# El CAAC inaugura la exposición 'Bouchra Khalili', un recorrido por la trayectoria de la artista marroquí

El Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo presenta la exposición de la artista marroquí Bouchra Khalili (Casablanca, 1975), que ha sido coproducida por el CAAC y el Jeu de Paume de París. La muestra, que se abre al público este jueves 2 de noviembre, se podrá visitar hasta el 4 de marzo de 2018. Posteriormente viajará a París, donde se exhibirá del 5 de junio al 23 de septiembre de 2018.

02/11/2017 12:37

SEVILLA, 2 (EUROPA PRESS)

El Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo presenta la exposición de la artista marroquí Bouchra Khalili (Casablanca, 1975), que ha sido coproducida por el CAAC y el Jeu de Paume de París. La muestra, que se abre al público este jueves 2 de noviembre, se podrá visitar hasta el 4 de marzo de 2018. Posteriormente viajará a París, donde se exhibirá del 5 de junio al 23 de septiembre de 2018.

Se trata de una amplia exposición comisariada por Juan Antonio Álvarez Reyes y Marta Gili, en donde a través de nueve instalaciones compuestas por vídeos, fotografías y serigrafías, se hace un recorrido por la trayectoria de esta creadora. Según se subraya en un comunicado, la obra de Bouchra Khalili se desarrolla entre el ensayo visual, las prácticas documentales que van más allá del *cinéma vérité* y cierto conceptualismo político.

La exposición que se presenta en el CAAC de Sevilla y que viajará al Jeu de Paume de París en 2018, es la más amplia organizada hasta el momento sobre su producción, y en ella se incluye una extensa selección de sus trabajos fechados entre 2008 y la actualidad.

Con esta muestra el CAAC inicia una nueva línea expositiva centrada en el análisis de un espacio geopolítico cercano física e históricamente (el Norte de África y Próximo Oriente), al tiempo que continúa el estudio de la constitución política del presente a partir de las crisis migratorias y de los refugiados que han afectado a Europa de manera intensa en los últimos años. Andalucía, por pasado y por presente, se encuentra en esa encrucijada.

Ampliamente reconocida internacionalmente, Bouchra Khalili ha participado en las principales citas del arte contemporáneo: las Bienales de Sharjah (2011), Sídney (2012), Moscú y Venecia (2013), además de la Trienal de París (2012) y la última documenta de Kassel (2017). Al mismo tiempo, ha expuesto individualmente en el MoMA de Nueva York, en el Palais de Tokyo de París o en el Macba de Barcelona.

## LA EXPOSICIÓN

En el recorrido expositivo se ha primado la alternancia entre obras más centradas en las historias personales derivadas de las migraciones, y aquellas otras en las que la teoría crítica con el colonialismo, la filosofía política o las prácticas de resistencia tienen un mayor peso. Al mismo tiempo, las proyecciones monocanal o multicanal se alternan con fotografías, del mismo modo que la imagen oscila entre el testimonio y el ensayo.

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LONDON

**Bouchra Khalili**

LISSON GALLERY

Against the background of the refugee crisis in Europe, Bouchra Khalili's works tracing illegal border crossings around the Mediterranean take on renewed urgency. By empowering those who undertook the perilous passages to tell their own stories, the eight videos of *The Mapping Journey Project*, 2008–11—each a fixed frame showing only a paper map on which a hand can be seen drawing with permanent marker a zigzag route, narrated by the migrant who took it, so that the viewer must imagine for herself the arduous experience—present a critical alternative to the media's coverage of the crisis.

But to reduce *The Mapping Journey Project* to this sadly timely subject matter would be to miss its broader scope. This range was already suggested by the inclusion of a map of the West Bank and a young man's account of circumventing checkpoints on his way from Ramallah to East Jerusalem to meet his fiancée. The video redirects the suite's overall focus from the refugee crisis to acts of individual resistance to state power. Rather than objective representations of geography that provide simply a sense of orientation and scale, the maps in *The Mapping Journey Project* appear as political constructs and means of control, which Khalili's protagonists subvert with traces of individual movement across borders. National borders disappear entirely in "The Constellations Series," 2011, a related group of eight silk-screen prints, where the zigzag routes are each reproduced in white on a dark-blue ground, like a pattern of stars in the sky, evoking celestial navigation and translating the illegal crossings into poetic visions of a limitless world.

Khalili's wider concerns with resistance to state power became even more evident when the cartographic works were seen alongside a more recent multipart installation, *Foreign Office*, 2015, which includes a video showing two young Algerians reconstructing the forgotten history of post-independence Algiers as a center for international liberation groups, such as the Black Panther Party, by marking a map of the city and assembling photographs of political activists while recounting pieces of knowledge about the past. Going back and forth between

various languages, including Algerian Arabic, Kabyle, English, and French, the two narrators explicitly and implicitly raise questions not only about identity, but also about language and oral tradition—how they are shaped by history and shape its transmission in turn. The former locations of foreign offices marked on a map in the video provided the pattern for *The Archipelago*, 2015, a pale-blue silk-screen print of a chain of "islands of resistance" that was also a metaphor for solidarity, while some nostalgic-looking photographs of empty buildings that once housed the liberation movements were actually more ambiguous, as the buildings were examples of colonial architecture. With these photographs dispersed across the gallery, including in the room where *The Mapping Journey Project* was installed, far-reaching questions emerged in the space between the two bodies of work: Given the continuing injustices of the postcolonial period and the absence of political utopias, has individual border crossing replaced political organization as a means for radical change, and is migration a new form of revolution?

Khalili uses geographical maps and oral narrations to render visible subjectivities that have been marginalized by nation-states in the aftermath of empire. And yet counter-mapping as artistic strategy is not without problems. In contrast to the enigmatic abstractions in the silk-screen prints, the lines running across territorial boundaries in *The Mapping Journey Project* could seem to be too straightforward a way of mapping against hegemonic structures, if it were not for the complex dynamic between image and audio, screen and offscreen space, and visibility and invisibility. As a powerful statement of resistance to the current order and a defense of individual realities thwarted by nation-states' borders and dominant histories, Khalili's exhibition in London resonated far and near.

—Elisa Schaar

Artforum's December Issue designates "The Mapping Journey Project" by Bouchra Khalili as one of the best shows of 2016. The exhibition was on display at MoMA The Museum of Modern Art from April to October, 2016. The work is also considered among the best in 2016.



### EMEKA OGBOH

Bouchra Khalili (Museum of Modern Art, New York) Bouchra Khalili's *Mapping Journey Project*, 2008–11, is projected on eight video screens arranged in a dark room. To see the work in full, the viewer must move about the gallery space, passing from one screen to the next as if partaking in his or her own migratory journey. The videos feature the voices of refugees telling the stories of their emigration over footage of hands drawing lines on maps, which seem to beckon the viewer onward. Simple yet powerful.

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trespass. The hedges of *In Life (II and IV)* are shot at close quarters, creating dark winter-denuded thorny screens through which to wonder at what can't quite be made out. All were taken either at dawn or dusk, in the formal gardens of the Irish Museum of Modern Art – an apt site for thoughts of exploration and intrusion.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, materials are made to reveal different qualities. *The Time Between* is a pair of carved coal pieces, polished until they shine like the diamonds they share a carbon structure with. The works are separated, one on the wall and the other on the floor on the other side of the gallery. Do they fit 'back' together as a pair? Something about Kilfeather's installation and placement makes you think that they might. The title refers not only to the space-time between them, but also to the millennia it took to create the material, which in another context would be in a basket, ready to go up in a puff of smoke.

Kilfeather's installation deals with time (in terms of aeons), materiality and the tenuous balance between the natural and the made: vast themes paradoxically expressed through minimal means. An earlier work, *Quarter* – a huge woven veneer structure shown at Oonagh Young Gallery in 2014 – commanded the space in a minimal yet massive intervention; here, she has achieved the same sense of dominance with smaller gestures. It seems that, with each body of work, Kilfeather gains confidence: to edit extraneous elements, reduce scale and, in the process, distill her ideas into their purest form – as with Zen. This exhibition brings that process a step closer.

GEMMA TIPTON

SWEDEN

## Bouchra Khalili

FÄRGFABRIKEN, STOCKHOLM

With the ongoing civil war in Syria alone compelling hundreds of thousands of refugees to flee to Europe in 2015, earlier this year Sweden implemented border checks on the train route from nearby Copenhagen. Denmark followed suit by closing its hitherto open border with Germany. How things have changed for countries previously considered leading lights of liberal humanitarianism.

Installed throughout the main floor of Färgfabriken, a former factory located in a suburb of Stockholm, Casablanca-born, Paris-educated Bouchra Khalili's exhibition, 'The Opposite of Voice-Over', features a number of single- and multi-channel video works made between 2008 and 2013. Khalili is primarily concerned with documentary and political representation, and her work at its best upends the dehumanizing effects of categorizations like 'migrant' and 'refugee'.

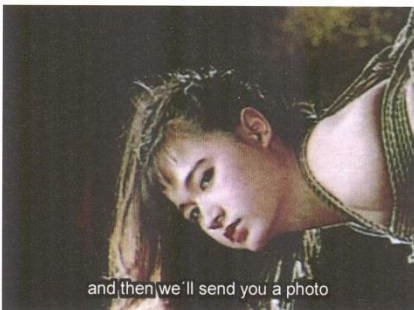
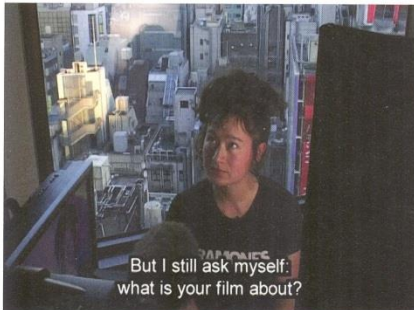
It's important to note that, while all the featured works have been exhibited widely, this is Khalili's first solo exhibition in Scandinavia; so it's easy to assume that the violence in Syria is a driving force behind its staging.

Installed in three corners of the open-plan rectangular space, *The Speeches Series* (2012–13) is a three-part video shot in Genoa, Paris and New York. Built around first-person stories told to camera, it sees a number of migrants recall their experiences of adjusting to a new country. In the Paris instalment, migrants deliver political and literary texts from memory. In the New York segment, a man remembers how he hoped to be met with working-class solidarity after arriving in the US, but instead encountered racist resentment from his colleagues. Another person speaks about how the quality of life and work is the same (or even better) in his home country. The only benefit offered in his adopted homeland is slightly higher pay.

Formally speaking, Khalili's videos seem workaday, but that aesthetic light touch – the stated reluctance to impose a voice-over – allows the work to be led by its featured voices. The narrators are left to describe how they define themselves and how they are defined by others: their journeys, their lack of citizenship, the borders they cross, the countries they decide to set their hopes upon, their pasts and futures.



## 2007



Hito Steyerl  
*Lovely Andrea*

Hito Steyerl's *Lovely Andrea* begins with a male voice-over asking: 'Hito, our trip to Tokyo is almost over. But I still ask myself, what is your film about?' It's a good question with a deceptively simple reply: it's about Steyerl going in search of a bondage picture of herself, taken 20 years earlier. That said, along the way, *Lovely Andrea* raises fascinating questions, such as: what connects a deleted scene about New York's Twin Towers featured in the 2001 Hollywood film *Spiderman* with Japanese bondage culture circa 1987? The answer? Both are about censorship and the intricate webs – literal and metaphorical – that tie people up. Eventually, Steyerl finds the photograph and the man who took it; but what she also finds and perfects with *Lovely Andrea* is an upbeat, freethinking, feminist form of filmic essay that ties together pieces of pop culture and bits of social reality into a coherent political argument. Bondage, here, becomes an allegory for how power and exploitation permeate supposedly 'free' societies. It's an approach that has had a tremendous influence on a generation of artists coming of age in the years since 2007 – the years of social media, global crises and hard-won civil rights that are newly under threat. — Jörg Heiser

1  
Mike Kelley  
*Day Is Done*, 2005, installation  
view at Gagosian Gallery,  
New York

2  
Zanele Muholi  
*Nandi: Vokwano*, NY147  
*Gugulethu*, Cape Town,  
2011 (from the series 'Faces and  
Phases', 2006–14),  
2011, silver gelatin print,  
76 × 50 cm

3  
Hito Steyerl  
*Lovely Andrea*, 2007, video stills

Courtesy  
1 The Mike Kelley Estate,  
and Gagosian Gallery,  
New York • 2 the artist and  
Stevenson Gallery,  
Cape Town • 3 the artist and  
Andrew Kreps Gallery,  
New York

Gerard Byrne  
*1984 and Beyond*

Spartacus Chetwynd  
*The Fall of Man*

Lukas Duwenhögger  
*The Celestial Teapot*

Haris EpamInonda  
*Statue #1*

Mario Garcia Torres  
*Share-e-Nau Wandering*  
(A Film Treatment)

Douglas Gordon and  
Philippe Parreno  
*Zidane A 21st-Century  
Portrait*

2007

Maurizio Cattelan  
*Untitled*

Paul Chan  
*Waiting for Godot in  
New Orleans*

Otolith Group  
*Otolith II*

Taryn Simon  
*An American Index  
of the Hidden  
and Unfamiliar*

Dayanita Singh  
*Sent a Letter*

Artur Żmijewski  
*Them*

2008

Lara Almarcegui  
*Rubble Mountain, Murcia*

Duncan Campbell  
*Bernadette*

Roger Hiorns  
*Seizure*

Amar Kanwar  
*The Torn First Pages*

Bouchra Khalili  
*The Mapping Journey  
Project*

Sharon Lockhart  
*Lunch Break*

Daria Martin  
*Minotaur*

2009

Yael Bartana  
*Wall and Tower*

Lara Favaretto  
*Momentary Monument,  
Trento*

**Bouchra Khalili: Foreign Office**

Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 18. 2. – 17. 5. 2015

by Ellie Armon Azoulay

"Foreign Office". Bouchra Khalili's solo exhibition at Palais de Tokyo, is an intriguing attempt by an artist from a younger generation of a postcolonial nation to revisit history and address some gaps in the language and memory of this nation through the use of visual archives. The exhibition, built as a time machine, takes a storytelling approach and manoeuvres its way through three transmissions: geography, history, and language. A silk-screen print entitled "The Archipelago" (2015) separates the screening of a twenty-two-minute digital film called "Foreign Office" (2015) and the display of fifteen photographs.

This journey through time is led by a young male character and a young female character functioning as narrators who switch between languages—Algerian Arabic, Kabyle, French, and English—while rummaging old photos, reading and quoting texts, and also playing music and protest songs related to Algiers's revolutionary era between 1962 and 1972. They use storytelling while at the same time examining their role as storytellers in order to reflect on the responsibilities and complexities of such historical explorations.

The words announced by Amfkar Cabral, the leader of the liberation movement in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, at the press conference of the first Pan-African Festival, held in Algiers in 1969, are quoted in the film: "Christians go to the Vatican, Muslims go to Mecca and revolutionaries to Algiers." In the exhibition, the story of revolutionary Algiers starts much earlier with a series of colourful photographs documenting the current state of sites that were once prominent to the spirit of liberation. Presented here are, among others, the site of the former Hôtel Victoria in the Télemly district, where Karl Marx resided during his three-month sojourn in Algiers in 1882 and where Black Panther Party leader Eldridge Cleaver stayed during his first visit to Algiers nearly ninety years later; the former base of Algerian writer Kateb Yacine, the Hôtel El Saïr, which was also the residence of the Black Panther Party delegation during the 1969 festival; the headquarters of the PAIGC delegation (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde); and the headquarters of the DFPLP delegation (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine). All of these deserted sites echo both the grandeur aesthetic of French colonialism and its decay.



Bouchra Khalili:  
Foreign Office.

With contributions by Katell Jaffrès and Thomas J. Lax (fr./eng.).  
SAM Art Projects, Paris 2015.  
80 pages, 16.5 x 22.5 cm, numerous b/w and colour illustrations.  
€ 15.- / ISBN 978-2-9551961-0-6



Bouchra Khalili, Foreign Office, 2015. Installation view at Palais de Tokyo, Paris. Photo: Aurélien Mole.

"Why do these stories look so unreal? As if they had never existed, or as if they came from another planet?", the female narrator asks. "But talking about them makes them more real, because there are pictures, faces, names and words", the man answers. "Even though some images were made in Algiers, the city remains absent, and even though people are there, we are invisible", she then replies.

The film opens with the image of an improvised staging of a "foreign office" decorated with nineteen images. All are portraits and represent historical events, except one showing the manual of a portable video camera used by Eldridge Cleaver to film "Congo Oye" (1971). The woman narrator says: "A colonial light that spread everywhere: in Africa, in Latin America, in Asia, in the Caribbean; into the heart of the West. We wake up from a nightmare that lasted 132 years." The male narrator replies: "The whole world looked at us. A world hated us. Another world admired us and a third world learned from us." The narrators survey the vibrant atmosphere in the city and cite the names of the liberation movements that came to Algiers with their famous and non-famous leaders, wondering "Why do they come here?"

They position Frantz Fanon's portrait on the table and say: "Because he wrote about us, and by writing about us, they saw themselves. They understood that we were like them, that we were with them. That we belonged to this invisible and mute humanity; who was coming to history." Romantic aspects of the revolution are intertwined with critical tones: "How does this story end?" They remove the portraits one by one and state: some died before their time (Fanon, Cabral, Malcolm X), while others gave up, returned their jackets, went into exile, or became dictators like Agostino Bento.

In the final part of the film, Khalili lets the woman express her feelings of entrapment within the historical narrative and the present in a very moving way: "We have inherited only disenchantment and history in pieces. They wanted to change the world, and we just want to move away from this world." Or, by contrast, the man replies and basically justifies the conceptual

frame to which Khalili is devoted: "These stories, they are there, all around us. And if we collect small loot, then it must be shared. Sharing images and stories, narrating them, translating for others, as if the word was always translation, and as if language is always born of translation." Through these multiple voices, Khalili plays elegantly between despair and critique, as well as obligation and responsibility.

## Bouchra Khalili's 'The Speeches Series': A Reflection from Europe

Nick Aikens

Bouchra Khalili's video trilogy *The Speeches Series* (2012–13) is carefully loaded with historical and political purpose. The attention it pays to the specificity of site and language calls one's own context into question, meaning I should acknowledge at the outset that my reading of the work comes from the vantage point of mainland Europe. This currently seems to be a territory whose sense of identity and political union is unable to articulate itself under a din of nationalist voices – with a growing band of listeners. The scope of Khalili's films, however, allows the artist a means with which to formulate a position that – although given from a particular context – opens up a space for different forms of political and subjective identification to take shape.



Bouchra Khalili, *Speeches – Chapter 1: Mother Tongue*, 2012, digital film, 23min, from *The Speeches Series*, video trilogy, 2012–13. Installation view, *Intense Proximity: La Triennale 2012*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Polaris, Paris

As with each in the trilogy, the first video, *Mother Tongue* (2012), is comprised of five speeches. The protagonists, migrants living in Paris, deliver passages from different political, literary or poetic texts by Aimé Césaire, Abdelkrim Al Khattabi, Malcolm X, Mahmoud Darwish, Édouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau. They are recited from memory, performed to the camera in the speakers' mother tongues – oral languages such as Moroccan Arabic, Dari, Kabyle, Malinke and Wolof – all of which, except for Dari, have no written script. Those involved were, Khalili explains, found through a combination of research and chance encounters with no casting, just a desire to be part of the film. This calls into question the status of the films (and

those involved), which hovers but never settles somewhere between performance, documentary disclosure and collaboration.

The first of the speeches, 'Discourse on Colonialism', which Césaire, a founder of the Paris-based Négritude movement, wrote in 1950 and published five years later, is perhaps the most compelling and sets the tone for the trilogy. Delivered by a woman named Naoual in Moroccan Arabic, the text speaks most explicitly to conditions still shaping Europe today. 'Europe', Naoual quotes, 'is incapable of solving the two major problems to which its existence has given rise: the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem.' These two issues – so vast in their scope – pervade, in different guises, the whole of *The Speeches Series*. Naoual goes on: 'So unless Europe undertakes on its own initiative a new policy founded on respect for peoples and cultures, Europe will have deprived itself of its last chance with its own hands drawn up over itself to lift the pall of mortal darkness.' Speaking from her home in 2012, Naoual gives the speech coolly and calmly – not recited from a sheet but translated from the original, committed to memory, internalised and then performed to the camera in her own language. Spoken from within the suburbs of Paris by a Moroccan, two months before the presidential election in which Marine Le Pen's Front National came third with eighteen percent of the national vote and two years before the party would top the French polls in the European elections with their wish 'stopper l'immigration, renforcer l'identité française', Césaire's words resonate not only with a sense of foreboding but also regression.<sup>1</sup> Le Pen's sentiment is echoed now across Europe with the rise and recent success of populist

[http://www.afterall.org/online/bouchra-khalili\\_the-speeches-series.a-reflection-from-europe#.VLQA2NkKaX8](http://www.afterall.org/online/bouchra-khalili_the-speeches-series.a-reflection-from-europe#.VLQA2NkKaX8)

right wing nationalist parties (the UK Independence Party, Italian Northern League, Belgian Flemish Interest, Slovak National Party and Austrian Freedom Party, to name a few). Such brooding nationalist rhetoric has racism at its core, and is the backlash of Europe's colonial exploits and its historical amnesia towards questions of migration and so-called national identity – a point made clear by Césaire even in 1950.

'As the speeches move to that by Abdelkrim Al Khattabi, the Riffian political and military leader who defeated the Spanish in 1921 in North Morocco, the historical distance between speaker and words spoken extends, but their relevance to those delivering them and their listeners grows stronger.'

As the speeches move to that by Abdelkrim Al Khattabi, the Riffian political and military leader who defeated the Spanish in 1921 in North Morocco, the historical distance between speaker and words spoken extends, but their relevance to those delivering them and their listeners grows stronger. Sadija says in Dari (a Persian dialect spoken in Afghanistan): 'Is there any prejudice that forces Europe to close the doors of its political circles to those who suffer?' The setting – of a modest kitchen table in a dimly lit room – reinforces the sense of the chasm that exists between Europe's political elite, particularly the

newly elected nationalist parties, and the minority groups and immigrants they target for political gain.

Not only do the words pertinently address contemporary Europe, but the delivery hums with an understated and deeply subversive force. In the opening lines of a text by Édouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau, delivered by Naïma in Kabyl, a dialect spoken in Algeria, we are told: 'one of the most fragile assets of identity, be it personal or collective, and also the most valuable is that it continuously develops and grows stronger'. This identity is built up on screen as Naïma speaks and takes on her own political agency through delivering Glissant's words. The use of these texts in *Mother Tongue*, lifted from other contexts, histories and struggles and brought to bear in the here and now, helps to articulate the identity of those who speak; it performs what Stuart Hall saw as 'find[ing] in the mirror of history a point of identification or recognition for yourself.'<sup>2</sup> The dialects become invigorated through the words, histories and ideology of those who wrote the speeches that are being recited. To hear Malcolm X's founding address for the Organisation of Afro-American Unity in 1964, delivered from contemporary Paris in Malinke (a Malian dialect), not only demonstrates its bearing on Western Europe today, but also filters it through the language and history of a country that had been colonised by the French. Speaking across geographies and history the speeches perform a process of creolisation, something Glissant defined as 'not prompted solely by the defining of [...] identities, but by their relation to everything possible as well – the mutual mutations generated by the interplay of relations'.<sup>3</sup> Such 'mutual mutations' embedded within Khalili's *Speeches* give it its layered yet deliberate dynamism.

The complexity of *Mother Tongue* gives way to a more direct format in the second of the videos, *Words on Streets*, shot in Genoa in 2013. Here five migrants to Italy deliver speeches to the camera in Italian. In contrast to the domestic settings of *Mother Tongue*, here the speeches are all given in public space, recalling the Italian tradition of civil poetry famously revived by Pier Paolo Pasolini in his 1957 poem 'The Ashes of Gramsci'. Similarly, the choice of Genoa as a location for *Words on Streets*, which was commissioned for the 55th Venice Biennale, is significant. The city has one of the largest population of migrants in Italy, and is where the country's first self-organised, autonomous group of migrants was formed (which Djilly, the last of the speakers, discusses). More recently, it hosted the infamous 2001 G8 summit, the scene of a number of human rights violations.<sup>4</sup>

[http://www.afterall.org/online/bouchra-khalili\\_the-speeches-series.a-reflection-from-europe#.VLQA2NxDaX8](http://www.afterall.org/online/bouchra-khalili_the-speeches-series.a-reflection-from-europe#.VLQA2NxDaX8)



Bouchra Khalili, *Speeches - Chapter 2: Words on Streets*, 2013, digital film, 18min, from *The Speeches Series*, video trilogy, 2012-13. Installation view, *The Encyclopedic Palace*, 55th Venice Biennale, 2013. Photograph: Francesco Galli. Courtesy the artist and la Biennale di Venezia

Thus, as with many of the references in *Speeches*, Genoa's past lurks silently as the significant backdrop against which the protagonists deliver their speeches – articulating their relationship to the country they call home, but in which they are legally and socially seen as outsiders. In the first speech a woman called Malu says of her quest for citizenship: 'I will win this right not because I love this country or know the language or the constitution but because ten years will have passed of paying taxes and that's what the law says.' In the fourth of the speeches Simohamed, a young Moroccan, explains how, seventeen years after coming to Italy as a child, he was formally sworn in as a citizen, and told by an official: "thank you and welcome", as if I [he] had just arrived'. Alice, a self-assured nineteen-year-old, says in her speech, 'I am an Italian disguised as Chinese. What is your country when you don't feel like you belong to one or the other?'

These speeches make explicit the gap between formal citizenship and the reality of living in a country, working or studying there – what the sociologist Saskia Sassen has called 'effective nationality' or 'informal citizenship'. The notion of 'effective nationality' is a specifically contemporary condition that Sassen sees as arising from years spent in a country carrying out the life and role of a legal citizen – attending school there, holding a job, raising a family – but without formal recognition. As Sassen points out, immigrants' 'identities as members of a community of residence assume some of the features of citizenship identities', with the only difference being they were born elsewhere, or in the case of Europe, outside the EU. What emerges in the biographies of the informal citizens of *Speeches* is a far more complex notion of citizenship and identity, of people's relationship with the place they call home. *Words on Streets* particularly attests that the notion of an exclusive nationality is hard to reconcile with the contemporary, globalised world, where the flow of money runs across borders irrespective of regulation. Yet calls for national identity and a national voice continue to gain traction in Europe. And although the EU strives towards its federal aims, and prides itself on the free flow of trade across its member states, the movement of people and each different country's laws pertaining to citizenship are neither unified nor wholly understood. Navigating between her collaborators' personal narratives and those authored by others, Khalili's videos reveal the reality and contradictions born of Europe's colonial history and the subsequent migration flows that ensued, yet the responsibility for which most European countries fail to acknowledge or, worse still, neglect in legal processes.

[http://www.afterall.org/online/bouchra-khalili\\_the-speeches-series.a-reflection-from-europe#.VLQA3NxKaX8](http://www.afterall.org/online/bouchra-khalili_the-speeches-series.a-reflection-from-europe#.VLQA3NxKaX8)



Bouchra Khalili, *Speeches – Chapter 3: Living Labour*, 2013, digital film, 25min, from *The Speeches Series*, video trilogy, 2012–13. Installation view, 'Bouchra Khalili: solo project', Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), 2013. Commissioned by PAMM, Miami. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Polaris, Paris

By constructing the films through monologues, singular voices speak to and for a globalised mass, irrespective of the speaker's place of birth or current home, whether they are speaking in their language or that of others. The subjects of the speeches are not of one particular race, colour or history. Rather, taken together they amount to a comparative narrative of migration and political exclusion, creating what Fatima El-Tayeb has referred to as 'a non-essentialist and non-linear political strategy', whereby stories and histories feed off and become emboldened by one another.<sup>5</sup> We move from single life stories to narratives that speak to and for a faceless multitude.

In the final sequence of *Words on Streets*, Djilly, a middle-aged Senegalese man, addresses the camera from a shipyard. He talks of his involvement in political movements in the 1990s that fought for immigrant workers' rights, and these movements' eventual demise. Djilly's story lays the basis for the shift into the third and final chapter of the series, *Living Labour*, shot in New York last year. In *Living Labour* the five subjects deliver speeches they wrote to camera, from memory, in English, French and Spanish – a mix of their mother tongues and adopted languages, synthesising the format of the first two chapters. The stories told focus on the conditions of undocumented workers in the US, whom Khalili positions as the contemporary working class, refuting the widely held view that in a time of globalisation we can no longer talk of such class division. In the opening speech a man called Kante sets the tone as he speaks with fierce precision in French: 'America is a prison for its immigrants. The bars of this prison are injustice, racism, lack of moral values and loneliness'. The rousing words of Malcolm X from the first chapter echo in the air; there too a call was made to fight the 'barking of the police dogs' and the injustice of a 'rotten' state 'by any means necessary'. Nearly a year before the police killings in Ferguson, Cleveland and New York that have brought the endemic nature of institutional racism into public consciousness, prompting tens of thousands to take to the streets, Kante's words wrench those of Malcolm X and the civil rights movement into the present.

In many ways what emerges in the third chapter is a coming together of the strands explored in the other two videos. In the foreground are the stories of the conditions of undocumented workers in New York, on whom Kante tells us the economy relies. He, for example, has a degree in accounting but has worked in a supermarket for years. 'Precariousness', he says, 'is the rule.' Mahoma, who although undocumented formed a union with colleagues, stresses the need for this contemporary working class to find 'strategies

[http://www.afterall.org/online/bouchra-khalili\\_the-speeches-series\\_a-reflection-from-europe#.VLQAaNxKaX8](http://www.afterall.org/online/bouchra-khalili_the-speeches-series_a-reflection-from-europe#.VLQAaNxKaX8)

and tactics that will give real victories'. Here is a narrative told from the US but whose story is echoed the world over – one of no rights, oppressive labour conditions and low wages.

The power of the spoken word and the agency imparted on and by those who formulate and articulate their own position is emphasised in these three videos. It is the ability to speak, as Jacques Rancière wrote, citing Aristotle, that distinguishes man from animal and makes us political beings, allowing us 'to discriminate between the just and the unjust'.<sup>6</sup> Yet, as Tony testifies in *Living Labour*, here it goes further: 'Language', he says, 'was a weapon.' How the fifteen people speaking in the videos draw on different histories and experiences then structure, frame and formulate a narrative parallels the way in which identities are formed. Hall eloquently wrote: 'identity is ultimately a question of producing in the future an account of the past, that is to say it is always about narrative, the stories which cultures tell themselves about who they are and what they came from'.<sup>7</sup> Khalili's videos invite us to consider how we tell stories about ourselves – what exactly is it that we want to articulate, from where and to whom? It also implies that one story must be read as part of an evolving, often conflicting series of narratives and histories. Writing from Europe, where increasingly xenophobic, nationalist narratives have taken hold, the need to acknowledge the different histories that have brought us to this point and the responsibility we must take for them, seems more urgent than ever.

#### Footnotes

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1. 'Stop immigration; reinforce French identity'. See the website of the Front Nationale: <http://www.frontnational.com/le-projet-de-marine-le-pen/autorite-de-letat/immigration/> ↑
2. Stuart Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', *New Left Review*, vol.1, no.209, January/February 1995, also available at <http://newleftreview.org/1/209/stuart-hall-negotiating-caribbean-identities>. ↑
3. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, p.89, also available at <http://caribbean.commonsworld.org/commonsworld/files/2011/03/Glissant-paths.pdf>. ↑
4. See, for example, Nick Davies, 'The Bloody Battle of Genoa', *Guardian*, 17 July 2008, also available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/jul/17/italy.g8> ↑
5. Fatima El-Tayeb, 'Creolizing Europe', *Manifesta* journal, issue 17, February 2014, also available at <http://www.manifestajournal.org/issues/futures-cohabitation-0#page-issuescreolizingeurope0>. ↑
6. Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (2004, trans. Steven Concoran), Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009, pp.23–25. ↑
7. Stuart Hall, *op cit*. ↑

# New York Observer's Gallerist

## The Meaning in Mapping: Bouchra Khalili's Border-Crossing Video Art at the New Museum

BY NIKKI LOHR 8/07/2014 3:22PM



"The Mapping Journey Project" (2008-2011) at the New Museum  
(Courtesy of the New Museum, Photo: Benoit Pailley)

In the middle of a lofty gallery in the New Museum, four movie screens floated, suspended from the ceiling by wires. Projected onto one of them was a map of the Eastern Hemisphere. A hand clenching a black marker hovered, drawing a pattern of mysterious lines from Russia to Bangladesh to Africa. The hand pointed to Macedonia and, in a resigned drawl, a man began to speak in Italian. Subtitles flashed on the screen: "I was in prison there for 8 months and 20 days. Something like that."

This man is one of eight illegal immigrants who talked about their turbulent escapes to Europe with the artist Bouchra Khalili for her video series "The Mapping Journey Project" (2008-2011). The eight videos are currently on view at "Here and Elsewhere," a show featuring over 45 contemporary Arab artists that will fill all five exhibition floors of the New Museum until September 28.



The films all show a similar scene. Each one opens to an image of a map and soon a hand with a marker appears. You never see their faces – just a hand, with the occasional hint of a shirt or a shadow of lips moving. In just a few minutes, each person traced and narrated their roundabout journeys. Sometimes, lines were retraced while a person described being sent back home by border officers. At other times, the pen would rest on one spot for a while, making a thick pool of ink as a person described having to wait there for months for another boat to come. Some spoke in Italian, others in varieties of Arabic, and some in English. No matter the language, they all spoke in the same detached, matter-of-fact tone as they told horror stories of travel companions dying or moving through miles of desert on foot. Their trips took anywhere from a few months to five years.

Ms. Khalili, 39, was born in Casablanca and is one of the few artists in "Here and Elsewhere" to have shown in the United States before this exhibition. Though she also works with photography and prints, most of her pieces in the past few years have been videos—many of which experiment with different ways of narrating the journeys of illegal immigrants. In her 2008 video, *Anya*, for example, Ms. Khalili showed in real-time the boat trip that a young Iraqi woman took from Asia to Europe across the Bosphorus straight, while the girl's voiceover recounted 12 years of living undocumented in Istanbul.

Ms. Khalili says she does not see these people as migrants, but as members of a political minority, whose journeys are acts of defiance. "Ultimately this is what 'The Mapping Journey Project' is about," she said in an email. "How a human being is still able to resist though he/she is trapped in the nets of arbitrary power."

To find subjects for "The Mapping Journey Project," Ms. Khalili traveled to European cities known for being transitory points for migrants. She never went in search of someone from a specific country. Rather, she started the process by becoming immersed in her location. Then, like clockwork, the people she was looking for would emerge. "The encounter occurs from the moment I accept to get lost in a city," she said. "It's a mysterious process, even though it relies on a method."



Still of *Mapping Journey #7*, from "The Mapping Journey Project."  
(Courtesy Bouchra Khalili and Galerie Polaris, Paris)

Ms. Khalili would then spend hours talking to the person off-camera—asking them questions about their travels and allowing them to flesh out their narrative. “Those conversations participate in a process of empowerment,” explained Ms. Khalili. “The narrators become the authors of their own narratives.” When they had developed their voice, she would give them the map and the marker and film their narrative in one shot. She’s quick to clarify that the videos are not interviews. She does not interrupt with questions and she does not edit after shooting the films.

Perhaps that is what makes her work so powerful. The narratives are not scripted. The camera does not have a filter. The work feels as raw and real as it is. Ms. Khalili deftly brings these stories out of her subjects, but ultimately the stories and voices do not belong to her. And so, she has respectfully and tastefully imposed as little of her voice on them as possible.

For some, the journey is not over. In one of the pieces, a woman traced her journey from Mogadishu, Somalia to Bari, Italy with a blue marker. Unlike most others, she made an arrow at each place she stopped. Her final arrow rested on Bari and pointed hopefully north. She explained that she wants to go to Norway or England. “Now I live and work here and I’ve learned Italian,” she said as she traced and retraced the dark blue arrow. “But staying here I don’t like.”

Culture

🕒 Jun. 22, 2013 | 12:30 AM

## An Arab in Venice



👤 Kaelen Wilson-Goldie | The Daily Star

VENICE: "You welcomed me twice: once as a dancer, once as an immigrant," says Malu Guttierrez, a Peruvian living and working in the Italian city of Genoa. "Maybe one day you will welcome me a third time, as a citizen."

"I got used to you, I was changed by you," says Alice Chan, a young woman who speaks Italian to her grandmother – who answers her granddaughter in Chinese.

"I am a tenant of a citizenship that was given to me as a favor, not as a right," says Simohamed Kaabour, who moved to Italy from Morocco 17 years ago and describes the time until he was eligible for a European passport as belonging to another world, an invisible country.

Guttierrez, Chan and Kaabour are three of the five subjects featured in Bouchra Khalili's 19-minute video "Words on Streets," 2013, part of an ongoing, three-part project called "The Speeches Series," which she started in 2012.

Born in Casablanca, Khalili has an abiding interest in the movements of 21st-century migrants. For nearly a decade, she has been making videos, installations and works on paper exploring ever-more complicated variations on the most classic of journeys, leaving one's country behind to strike out in search of a better life.

Khalili's subjects do not inhabit a world of romantic longing and boundless ambition. They do not adhere to the American dream. Rather, they give shape and substance to the shadowy underworld of illegal immigration, where status is almost always alien, and the passage clandestine, dangerous and brutally expensive.

"Words on Streets" is premiering this summer in a small building located at the far end of the Arsenale, Venice's former shipyards. Alongside the Giardini, a sprawling public garden, the Arsenale serves as one of the two main sites for the Venice Biennale.

Now in its 55th edition, the biennale typically consists of three parts: national pavilions, collateral events and the main exhibition. The latter's blockbuster group show is usually (but not exclusively) assembled by a single curator, whose task has shifted over the years from taking the pulse of the art of our time to formulating an argument about the place of art in the history of ideas.

In 2003, the Italian-American curator Francesco Bonami decided to break the biennale down into parts. He enlisted a small army of colleagues – including French curator Catherine David – then about six years into her multifaceted "Contemporary Arab Representations" project – to take on a part of the international exhibition, entitled "Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer" and divided it into ten sections.

David's contribution introduced the world to the work of seven artists from Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine – including Walid Raad, Tony Chakar, Bilal Khbeiz and Paola Yacoub. Most had already exhibited internationally, but this was one of the most mainstream presentations of Beirut's contemporary art scene, which had been slowly building in coherence and critical impact throughout the postwar period.

A decade later, that show seems to have generated some false hope.

## French-Moroccan Artist Bouchra Khalili Maps the Migrant Experience

by Coline Milliard

12/01/13 8:59 AM EST



A still from Khalili's "Speeches: Mahmoud Darwish," 2012, digital video, 4 min. (Justin Lane)

Filmed through a door's glass panels, a young woman speaks in Arabic. "A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization," read the subtitles. "A civilization that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a stricken civilization. A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization." The woman appears to be musing on the world's current state of affairs; perhaps she's being filmed in Europe, or in North Africa.

The woman, Naoual, is actually reciting a text assembled from fragments of the 1950 essay "Discourse on Colonialism" by Aimé Césaire, a poet and politician from Martinique. Like the four other subjects in Bouchra Khalili's video installation *Speeches*, 2012, currently on view at Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Naoual was asked by the artist to pick a reading from a selection ranging from a 1922 open letter to the European powers by Abdelkrim Al Khattabi, the Berber

leader in the Rif War, to Édouard Glissant's 2007 essay "*Quand les murs tombent*." Together, Naoual and Khalili translated the chosen text into Naoual's native language, the vernacular Moroccan Arabic. She then learned the words by rote and regurgitated them for the camera — digested, and having acquired in the process an unsettling contemporary currency.

Like Naoual's native tongue, the other languages in Khalili's film, some of which exist only in oral form, are all spoken by immigrants living in and around Paris: Dari from Afghanistan, Kabyl from Algeria, Malinke from Mali, and Wolof from Senegal. "All these languages are first of all the languages of minorities represented in France," the artist tells me from her Berlin studio. "Not all of them have a tradition of literature, but they have in common a powerful oral tradition. My work deals with language issues, minorities' speeches, and discourses, so I wanted to approach this question not through minorities' own words, but by confronting their thoughts with famous political texts, essays, poems, and letters."

Watching *Speeches* can be a slightly uncomfortable experience. Because she asks her subjects to mouth words that might be completely remote from their experience, the artist could be accused of superimposing the prestige of celebrated thinkers onto the often grim reality of exile — of slapping an intellectual gloss on a fetishized foreignness — for effect. When I venture that interpretation, Khalili is quick to emphasize the collaborative nature of her project. The participants "immediately understood why those texts are relevant in regards to their own vision, their own thoughts, their own relationship to current history," she says. "Anzoumane Sissoko, for example, chose the Malcolm X text for a very specific reason: Sissoko works as a cleaner, but he's also a very dedicated activist, and he has been interested in the figure and legacy of Malcolm X for a long time."

As critic Elisabeth Lebovici pointed out when discussing *Speeches*' first showing, at the Palais de Tokyo's Triennale last summer, what is primarily at play in this piece is a dynamic of empowerment. Yet Khalili's video installation doesn't just allow those mostly absent from public discourse to speak out (albeit in the protected field of art and through a recognized, authoritative text); it isn't a simple recontextualization of pieces of literature, a straightforward conflation of oral and written traditions, or a mere highlighting of the identity politics ingrained in the very question of language. Rather, it is an astute splicing of them all. "This is pure intuition," says Khalili, despite the work's erudite references. "I had this feeling that

through a practice of intensive displacement, I could experiment with another type of relevance."

*Speeches* is a textbook example of a conceptual strand running through the artist's filmic and photographic work: the use of hyperspecific situations to evoke much broader, sometimes global, concerns. Metonymy is Khalili's signature device. Each of the stories she introduces arrives pregnant with other, untold narratives that the artist knowingly embraces. In her best-known series of video works, "The Mapping Journey Project," 2008–11, Khalili dissects the invisible fluxes of clandestine travel by asking eight illegal migrants to draw on a map the route they followed from their homeland to Marseille, Bari, Rome, Barcelona, Istanbul, and elsewhere. One subject's trip is shorter than the rest, but no less fraught with difficulty: A Palestinian man, filmed in Ramallah, who explains the convoluted path he has to follow to visit his fiancée in neighboring East Jerusalem. For each interview, the screen shows nothing but a hand tracing the journey with a marker pen.



## Oral, Paradoxical; and Political

BY ADNAN YILDIZ

Bouchra Khalili explores a series of questions about the way reality is experienced by political minorities. As the artist explains to Adnan Yildiz, these ways vary, becoming complex and stratified. They may be based, for example, on a form of alienating portrait—in *Speeches*, five émigrés recite fragments from different authors, as though they were their own, selecting pieces that are close to their own ideas—or they may be based on hanging images, as in the film *Anyya*, in which the protagonist is narrated by a voice-over. Khalili's projects are thus extremely focused and yet, at the same time, they reveal an ambiguous gap between what is shown and what is concealed, hovering on the fringes of the visible, which are often inhabited by minorities.

*Lost Boats Fig. 2*, 2012. Courtesy: Galerie Polaris, Paris



Lost Boats Fig. 1, 2012. Courtesy: Galerie Polaris, Paris

**Adnan Yildiz:** I would like to start with a question that I ask often, recently: how can you describe your practice for people who are not from the art world?

**Bouchra Khalili:** Well... I can hardly describe it even to art practitioners or to myself. So if asked, I say that I'm an artist who works with video, installation, prints, photography, depending on the projects. And when I'm asked what my work is about, I say it is done to ask questions, first of all to myself: what are the margins of power? Where are they located? Who inhabits them? How to produce an image of what is situated at the margins of the visible, in terms of both politics and aesthetics? Not a simple answer. But I guess there is no simple answer.

**ay:** How has *Speeches* been conceptualized and produced? What can you say about the quotations and actors? Are they actors? Are they acting? Are they performing?

**bk:** I had the *Speeches* series in mind for a long time prior to filming it. The invitation to participate in "La Triennale" at Palais de Tokyo came at the right time, though minority languages and dialects have had a prominent role in my work from the very beginning. I would say that this is related to a question I've been exploring for years, which I can sum up as follows: "How to narrate the realities experienced by political minorities? What is the impact of language on the way those realities are told?" And, more specifically: "How do members of those communities produce their own discourse about their own individual lives, subjectively, in their own words and their own language?" If I am exploring those issues, perhaps it is because I was born and raised in Morocco, and because I have two mother tongues, including one—Moroccan Arabic—that is an unwritten dialect, but with a long and powerful oral tradition.

**ay:** So the resource is the text-based imaginary, and linguistic experience?

**bk:** I think it is also related to my long-term interest in Pier Paolo Pasolini's oeuvre, and his contribution to film semiotics. In his essays about cinema, Pasolini defined film language as the "written language of reality... which expresses reality through reality". In my work, this language of reality is one's mother tongue, one's language with all its peculiarities. The various languages and dialects you can hear in my videos are also those of minorities, the expression of their singularities and their positions on social, political and territorial peripheries.

For the *Speeches* series, I asked five exiled people living in Paris and its outskirts to choose, translate, memorize and recite fragments of essays and speeches by

writers, poets and activists, such as Malcolm X, Mahmoud Darwish and Edouard Glissant, among others. All the texts discuss and suggest methods of resistance. Not one of participants in the project is an actor. And the approach we have developed was also based on the idea of not acting or performing, but focusing on the text, oral speech, the power of the word, which was much more interesting because through the translation process and the memorizing, a form of "digestion" could happen. For the participants, those words literally became their own. This was also possible because they chose their own text, to reflect their own opinions and thoughts. So the process was mostly based on translation and memorization, with a sort of Brechtian distancing effect. This may seem like a paradox, since now I am using a concept inherited from avant-garde theatre, but it is important, because this distancing effect was a way to approach orality as part of the image, orality as an expression of the critical function of subjectivity and free speech, as well as an invitation made to the audience to exercise critical self-reflection. This distancing effect is also at stake in the embodiment process itself: the narrators are and are not the writers and activists portrayed. They literally embody multiple and complex identities.

**ay:** Considering the formal aspects of the presentation, the way you are focusing on gestures, hands and faces... do you see a relationship between this piece and the tradition of portraiture? How was your experience with its presentation and reception at the Triennale?

**bk:** Working with film and video, I try to develop a cinematic approach based on metonymy. For example, in *The Mapping Journey Project*, one sees maps, hands holding permanent markers, the drawing of illegal journeys. In *Speeches*, faces and hands embody words, as well as poetic and political statements, and complex identities that cannot be restricted to the term "immigrant". I'm mostly interested in details, the way they can be combined, what they hide and what they reveal. There is also a dialectical method involved, based on the articulations between what is shown and what is invisible, and from there an attempt to open up the image to an imaginary dimension.

For the *Speeches* series things became more complex, because I included a process of "creolisation" and displacement, in terms of language, history, culture, time, space, identity and gender. I think this intensive process of "creolisation" leads to a practice of portraiture with multiple layers, and I tried to define it through the idea of the "distancing effect". For example, in the series we have women embodying male identities: Seynabou—a Senegalese woman—is Mahmoud Darwish, and Naïma—a Kabyl woman—is Edouard Glissant. Naïma and Seynabou speak in their mother tongues, but the words they say were written by two men, two of the most prominent poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose mother tongues were Arabic for Darwish, and French and Creole for Glissant.

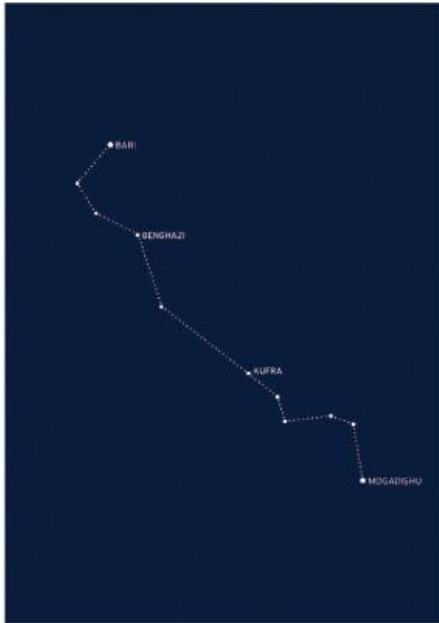


QY: So you relate it to portraiture?

bK: I'd say that if *Speeches* is related to a certain tradition of portraiture, it is the one that was developed by a certain modern cinema, articulating different layers of representation, and exploring the status of cinematic presence, as for example in the films of Straub-Huillet or Duras, which I admire a lot. In this tradition, the portrait does not try to define an identity, it is considered an "opaque" presence.

For example, when working on *Speeches*, I often watched and thought about an extraordinary short film by Straub-Huillet entitled *Toute révolution est un coup de dés* (*Every Revolution is a Throw of the Dice*, 1977). The device is extremely minimalist: 9 people, at Père-Lachaise cemetery, sitting on the grass and reciting, one by one, verses of a poem by Mallarmé: *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*.

The film is a tribute to the Paris "Commune", and the victims of the repression in 1870, filmed near the wall where the last communards were executed, and in the cemetery where they are buried. But what I looked at attentively was precisely how Straub and Huillet articulated the power of language, the act of speech, the power of the human face, along with a specific environment. That's



why all the *Speeches* were filmed in locations belonging to the narrators' everyday lives—home or work—to intensify this process of "stratification". Where the reception of the piece at the Triennale is concerned, I can't say much, since I had to leave Paris the day after the opening. But I have had the chance to show *Speeches* in London and Berlin as well, and I have been very impressed by the reactions of the audience, and the accurate questions I was asked.

QY: As someone with an Istanbul background, I am challenged by the story of Anya, and how she talks about her experience of the city. When the camera is moving on the seaside of Istanbul, it strengthens the part that she hides away from the police... How did you develop the narration and the filmic language in such a poetic relationship. Which one appeared first?

bK: I've been fascinated by Istanbul for years. The first time I went there it was in the winter, and it was snowing. I spent days walking around, exploring various neighbourhoods. Near Aksaray train station I could hear people speaking various Arabic dialects going out from the station and walking on a street covered with snow. I was extremely touched by this image, which embodied the very specific paradox of Istanbul, torn between two continents—Asia and Europe—situated at a complex intersection between the Balkans, Western Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Precisely for this reason, for more

than twenty years now the city has also been a major hub on routes of migration, mainly from Asia and the Middle East, but also from Africa. That's how I approached *Anya*, when I decided to make this digital film. The question I asked myself was how to show Anya's trajectory from Iraq to Istanbul, where she had already been waiting for 12 years for a visa to go to Australia. And how to portray Istanbul itself, with its ambiguous, floating topography. That's why the video is based on one long tracking shot, literally reproducing a journey between the Asian shore of Istanbul and the European one, while Anya narrates her own journey, her long wait and an everyday life marked by latency. Therefore I could not avoid visually exploring the gap between what is shown and what is hidden, between visible and invisible. In Istanbul the border between all the worlds that meet there is invisible, just like Anya herself, living at the margins of the visible, where she is forced back into clandestinity. I then try to produce images that are not made only of what is seen, but form a kind of "latent image". In this "unseen image" sound plays a major role, precisely because I do think of sound as an image. Anya's face is not shown, but she's there, her voice haunts the space, she's behind every single image, and through the combination of sound and image a kind of third image emerges, which is projected throughout the whole video. In *Speeches*, one can see that the same



process of articulation between what is hidden and what is revealed is also at stake. For example, in between the shots, I used intervals—black screens—that refer both to temporal ellipses and to the ellipses produced by the editing process of the texts. When one watches the videos, there's an impression that each text is all one piece, but in reality they were literally edited, as the videos are edited. I guess this articulation between what is shown and what is pictured by viewers somehow forms the core of my work: it is in this "in-between" that the "image" is located, in this ambiguous interval.

QY: There is a close link between *Anya* and *The Mapping Journey Project*, no?

bK: In *The Mapping Journey Project*, the map plays this same role of a surface for projection. The maps of the Mediterranean that I used are a clear representation of political control and oppression. Through the voice, the narrative, the drawings and gestures, they become a page, a surface from which a counter-cartography, a counter-map, a geography of resistance emerge. But I think it goes beyond that. All my projects share this attempt to approach transitory spaces, waiting and latency, but also processes of empowerment, formulation of gestures and discourses of resistance elaborated and told by members of political minorities themselves.

QY: But a political minority changes from one context to another; so isn't it also about a potential discussion of power and social change?

bK: That's why all my projects are located in very specific locations, focusing on very specific trajectories. Precisely because I'm interested in how the most particular experience can be universal, how it cannot be restrained by pre-established categories. So, it's not only the context that changes, because there's no desire to make examples out of any of the experiences and lives narrated in my videos. I would rather say that they are all different and absolutely singular. But that's precisely why each of them challenges power. All of them are an expression of resistance, a very peculiar form of resistance.