

YTO BARRADA

M - MUSEUM LEUVEN

The new exhibition by Yto Barrada (1971, Paris) continues her recent work around fossil evidence, palaeontology, museology and natural history in Morocco. Barrada touches on themes including the power of imagination; humour, play and creativity; forms of memory, ‘authenticity’ and tradition. In the artwork here, techniques of imprint and stain, of impression and colour transfer, carry other, more elusive ideas too.

Barrada’s photographs, films, sculptures, books and installation refer not only to the interwoven histories of colonialism, tourism, ethnography and the consumer society, but also to various strategies of resistance to these forms of power. Her work itself might be regarded as a form of resistance, and she – like the fossil sellers, smugglers, magicians and false guides who are among her subjects – depends on playfulness, ingenuity and humour as key strategies.

YTO BARRADA Yto Barrada was born in France in 1971 and grew up in Tangier and Paris, where she studied history and political science at the Sorbonne. She continued her studies at the International Center of Photography in New York. Yto Barrada has shown her work all over the world in both museums and at film festivals, and her artworks have featured at Biennales and centres of the arts. She has won a series of prestigious prizes in recent years. Barrada was nominated this year for the ‘Prix Marchel Duchamp’ – an annual prize awarded to an important French artist.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

- **KADOC** | Vlamingenstraat 39, 3000 leuven | thu: 10:00-22:00, fri-sun: 10:00-18:00
- **MUNICIPAL PARK** | Sint Donatuspark, 3000 leuven | from 01/10 thu-sun: 09:00-19:00
- **UNIVERSITY LIBRARY** | Ladeuzeplein 21, 3000 leuven | thu: 10:00-22:00, fri-sun: 10:00-18:00
- **ANATOMICAL THEATRE** | Minderbroedersstraat 52, 3000 leuven | thu-sun: 14:00-18:00
- **M - MUSEUM LEUVEN** | L.Vanderkelenstraat 28, 3000 leuven | thu: 10:00-22:00, fri-sun: 10:00-18:00

Most of Tracing the Future is free. The only ticket you have to buy is for Yto Barrada’s exhibition at M. That ticket also allows you to visit the In Search of Utopia exhibition, the permanent collection and the other exhibitions at M.

WWW.UTOPIALEUVEN.BE

Curators: Stéphane Symons, Hilde Van Gelder, Eva Wittocx

Exhibition organized as part of the urban project Utopia and realized by the Commission of Contemporary Art of the KU Leuven and M-Museum Leuven conjointly with the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography, Art and Visual Culture, the Higher Institute of Philosophy.

Tracing the Future enjoys the support of: vzw KU[N]ST Leuven, the Flemish Community, Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, KADOC, Campusservice, Monuments and Architectural Maintenance Division, Art and Heritage Of ce, University Library and Research Fund KU Leuven, the City of Leuven, Visit Leuven, M HKA - Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Research Foundation-Flanders and Allan Sekula Studio.

TRACING THE FUTURE

30-09-16 × 20-11-16

Is Thomas More’s Utopia still a source of inspiration for artists today? Tracing the Future addresses this question by bringing together films and installations, both recent and new work, by leading contemporary artists of today. These artworks offer a critical look at the ecological, political and social impact of modern-day utopias. They refer to the success but also the failure of the quest for the ideal world. The selected artists draw our attention both to unattainable utopias from the past and to contemporary issues.

ADRIEN TIRTIAUX

BOVEN DE MUUR - MUNICIPAL PARK

Does a utopian society mean that we have to blend public and individual needs? Is it possible to reconcile our personal desires with collective wishes? Adrien Tirtiaux’s *Boven de Muur* is an installation that poses interesting questions. The construction is unusual in the way it links the freely accessible city park in Leuven with several private gardens on Vlamingenstraat. You are invited as visitor to enter the artwork, which you can then explore via stairways, bridges and platforms, some of which take you right into someone’s garden. Other parts, by contrast, have been adapted to the wishes of the householders and remain private.

You can also view *Boven de Muur* as a social sculpture. The process leading up to the work was an important part of this project, in which the residents of Vlamingenstraat were actively involved. They got to know each other better during a series of information evenings, and the participants themselves got to choose what would be placed on their property. In this way, the artwork gradually took shape. Some opted for a shared terrace or a bridge welcoming visitors into their garden, while others preferred a screen to provide privacy or not to get involved at all. Tirtiaux’s sculpture literally breaks through the boundary between public and private. It challenges you to think about how far you’d be prepared to go in opening up your property

for the general good. Would it make us more inclined towards a utopian society in which possessions are distributed equally and everyone has ultimate freedom? Or does it actually have precisely the opposite effect?

Boven de Muur was specially designed for *Tracing the Future*. Tirtiaux made it from materials including wooden beams, scaffolding and white shrink film. The first info evening for the residents was held as early as May this year, since when the artist has been in close contact with them to design the construction. It took about a month to build. Participants continued to sign up for the project even after construction began, which meant the shape of the installation continued to evolve until the last minute.

ADRIEN TIRTIAUX (1980, Brussels) lives and works in Antwerp. Having trained as an engineer and architect, the artist has followed a complex trajectory with highly varied projects. Tirtiaux experiments with spatial interventions and surprising actions, but also with carefully conceived sculptures and drawings. The relationship of these works with their surroundings is always crucially important. Tirtiaux has exhibited his work at venues like the *Kunsthalle São Paolo*, *Extra City* in Antwerp and *Stroom* in The Hague.

With the support of the Flemish Authorities



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MARTIN LE CHEVALLIER

MÜNSTER - DUUR 48' - KADOC

‘The sense of experiencing the end of history was uplifting. The world was going to be reborn and we were the chosen ones.’ This call to use force to establish the Kingdom of God on earth sounds surprisingly topical, yet the words were written in 1534. The installation *Münster* takes us back to that time in the heart of what is now Germany. *Münster* alludes to the recapture of the city from Anabaptist occupation and reflects on the relationship between religion, politics and violence. The double film installation is a theatrical pastiche of a historical event and poses questions of universal relevance.

In the left screen, we see two soldiers from the army that has come to liberate *Münster* from its occupiers. The screen on the right shows the situation within the walled city. The Anabaptists sought to establish a radical new regime there under the leadership of John of Leiden (1509–1536). The lengthy conversations and hesitant attitude of the soldiers contrast with the revolutionary zeal of the Anabaptists.

Münster presents Anabaptism as a movement with simultaneously religious, socioeconomic and political ambitions. These ideals are at odds with the commentator’s voice, which describes increasingly frequent eruptions of violence, along with moral decay, polygamy

URSULA BIEMANN & PAULO TAVARES

FOREST LAW - DUUR 43' - KADOC

How can we protect the rainforest – our planet’s ‘lungs’ – from unlawful intruders? *Forest Law* by Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares seeks an answer to this question. The multimedia installation analyses a conflict raging in the oil and ore-rich region on the fringe of the Amazon Rainforest in southern Ecuador. The region is the traditional home to peoples like the Quichua from Sarayaku and the Shuar. In terms of biodiversity it is one of the world’s most remarkable areas. The state is under immense pressure right now from the operations of oil companies like Chevron and Texaco.

In addition to video material, we are presented with archival documents, maps, photographs and soil samples. There are personal testimonies, but also hard evidence. Large-scale lawsuits are also referenced, which the indigenous population has launched in an attempt to obtain protection. *Forest Law* likewise alludes to protests against Chinese copper companies engaged in open-cast mining, thereby exposing the immense interests that are at stake here.

Environmental rights have now been enshrined in the Ecuadorian constitution. Legislation like this is revolutionary, but has yet to protect the land sufficiently from mining and oil extraction practices. *Forest Law* aims to spark a discussion that transcends the purely legalistic: by allowing local people to speak for themselves at length, the installation calls for a clear and lasting cultural shift. Biemann and Tavares underpin their stance by drawing inspiration from the influential book *Le contrat naturel* (1990) by the French philosopher

and even cannibalism. As the film progresses, we see the situation in the city degenerate into nihilism and apathy.

Münster’s theatrical mise-en-scène makes us think about the impossibility of really knowing what happened in history. The film includes several references to the later rise of communism and fascism, for instance, thereby problematizing its own historical character. The film ends with a striking image of the two 16th-century soldiers stranded in today’s Münster: a disconcerting clash between two different historical periods and a warning against any attempt to seek a supposed absolute truth.

MARTIN LE CHEVALLIER (1968, Fontenay-aux-Roses) is a French visual artist. He studied graphic design at the Ecole Supérieure d’Art Graphique and video art at the National School for Decorative Arts. His work has been shown at the *Centre Pompidou* (Paris), the *Centraal Museum* (Utrecht), and the *Turin Biennale*, among others.

A Tracing the Future coproduction and world première.

Michel Serres, in which he argues persuasively for a binding pact between humanity and the earth. A pact that would also require us to suppress our unbridled appetite for raw materials.

URSULA BIEMANN (1955, Zurich) is an artist, theoretician and curator. Her video essays document her research into social ecology, mobility, migration and gender issues. Her work has been shown at venues including *Bildmuseet Umea* (Sweden), *Helmhaus* (Zurich) and the *TEK Film Festival* (Rome).

PAULO TAVARES (1985, Massarelos) lives in São Paulo, Brazil, where he works as an independent architect and researcher at the Faculdade de Arquitetura. His work explores the visual and spatial policy surrounding territorial disputes and climate change in the Amazon region and other border regions in the developing world.

With the support of Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia

THE OTOLITH GROUP

MEDIUM EARTH - 42' - UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

‘Who does the earth think it is?’ asks the voiceover in *Medium Earth*. The question implies that humanity is capable of grasping the essence and deepest thoughts of nature. The video shows images of expansive desert regions in southern California, with cliffs and sprawling valleys. All this natural magnificence is underpinned, however, by a savage history of interacting tectonic plates. The imploring soundscape and voiceover added to the video suddenly give this seemingly laconic desertscape a dark and apocalyptic appearance.

Medium Earth also shows us places where natural forces have penetrated the urban zone. The camera zooms in, for instance, on cracks in the concrete in an underground car park in Los Angeles. Nature and culture are brought together here in an interplay of visible and invisible fractures. Southern California’s fault lines not only generate unstable and destructive forces, therefore, they are equally capable of uniting regions and cultures. This is why the medium we hear in the video describes different countries as parts of a body connected by a kind of primal agony.

ALLAN SEKULA

MINING SECTION (BUREAU DES MINES) - ANATOMICAL THEATRE

In 2005, the US artist, writer, critic and activist Allan Sekula (1951-2013) travels to Leuven to participate in a large-scale exhibition dedicated to Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier (1831-1905). The dialogue with Meunier’s practice continues in what comes to be Sekula’s final work: the open and unfinished *Ship of Fools / The Dockers’ Museum* (2010-2013). It is part of the collection of M HKA, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen.

While *Ship of Fools* consists of thirty-three framed photographs and two slide projections – images taken by Sekula between 1998-2010 while traveling the seas, *The Dockers’ Museum* encompasses ca. 1250 artefacts, metonymically related to the world of seafarers and dock workers. These “objects of interest” – sourced and purchased by the artist via eBay – are not readily to be understood as works of art. Rather, they manifest Sekula’s two-fold “cargo cult.” What is more, Sekula conceives *The Dockers’ Museum* as a counter-museum within the contemporary art institution, seeking to construct “a kind of imaginary life world of a phantasmatic collective.”

From the work’s inception at M HKA and triggered by the very objects he collects, Sekula outlines several sections for *The Dockers’ Museum*. This research presentation departs from the so-called “*Mining Section* (Bureau des mines),” also identified by the artist as the “Bureau of Mines.” Taking into consideration the spatial logic of Leuven’s Anatomical Theater as well as Sekula’s complicity with this historic site, refashioned in the nineteenth

The motionless crags and mountains are like the centuries-old, physical memory of extremely slow and innocent natural evolutions. Yet *Mother Earth* can also lash out unexpectedly with unimaginable aggression. Various natural disasters sow catastrophe and calamity. This tension between nature and history, stability and dynamism, darkness and light, hardness and softness forces us to consider a nature that always has the last word.

THE OTOLITH GROUP is a London-based collective arts platform founded in 2002 by Anjalika Sagar (1968, London) and Kodwo Eshun (1966, London). They use video and sound in their work to reflect on visual and aural culture. The group engages in research, creates installations and produces publications. Its work has been shown at *dOCUMENTA (13)* and *Manifesta 9*, and the Otolith Group was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2010.

century to house Meunier’s studio, the proposed display – connected to an adjacent room as temporary storage – is, for the most part, composed of unpositioned material from *The Dockers’ Museum*. These extend from and point to Sekula’s “Bureau of Mines” both formally and thematically via cross- and inter-sections.

Embracing the non-conclusive nature of his last work, as well as Sekula’s own working method of rewriting and reediting his material, the presentation unfolds as a set of speculations, while allowing to be guided by the work’s intrinsic forces. These are forces that spiral outward, beyond museum practices and the art-system at large: “outward towards the world.”

ALLAN SEKULA: MINING SECTION (BUREAU DES MINES) inscribes itself into a larger research project Art Against the Grain of “Collective Sisyphus:” *The Case of Allan Sekula’s Ship of Fools / The Dockers’ Museum* (2010-2013) jointly developed by the University of Leuven (KU Leuven, Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography, Art and Visual Culture) and M HKA, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen.

Curator of *Allan Sekula: Mining Section* (Bureau des mines), with works from the collection of the M HKA: Anja Isabel Schneider