Traduttore, Traditore

Karen Greenwalt and Katja Rivera

Bani Abidi
Arturo Hernández Alcázar
Carlos Arias
Luis Camnitzer
Alejandro Cesarco
Bethany Collins
Brendan Fernandes
Dora García
Emily Jacir
Katia Kameli
Harold Mendez
Paulo Nazareth
Sherwin Ovid
Michael Rakowitz
Raqs Media Collective
Emilio Rojas
Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan
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Contents

A groundbreaking exhibition that explores translation beyond its linguistic meaning, *Traduttore, Traditore* considers the political dynamics of power and infrastructure that influence the movement of people, goods, ideas, and language across borders. Art historians, curators, and UIC PhD candidates Karen Greenwalt and Katja Rivera have created an exhibition that employs an expanded notion of translation that includes cultural and economic exchange alongside the linguistic. In their thoroughly researched and theorized work, Karen and Katja reveal not only how contemporary artists navigate and expose issues of difference, but the difficulties of translation in the so-called global world. Grounded in a commitment to incisive and ethical curation, Karen and Katja have curated an exhibition that presses for an expanded, inclusive art history. *Traduttore, Traditore* is published on the occasion of the exhibition presented at Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois at Chicago November 3 to December 16, 2017.

Traduttore, Traditore is the pilot exhibition in a new program at Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois at Chicago to support the production of in-depth exhibitions developed out of the research work of PhD candidates or recent PhD graduates of UIC's Department of Art History. UIC Art History candidates are in the process of producing significant new scholarship on a wide range of art and cultural practices. Exhibitions developed out of that work bring that new thought to a broader audience, while providing the PhD candidates mentorship in curatorial practice and the opportunity for engaged publishing in exhibition catalogues.

We are grateful to catalogue essayists Esra Akcan and Aruna D'Souza, whose essays, "Migration of Words" and "*Sea of Poppies* and the Possibilities of Mistranslation," brilliantly consider the ethics of translation. Examining recent theories of translation, Akcan demonstrates that indeterminacy is key to ethical translation, that context and agency are necessary for translating between zones considered untranslatable. D'Souza analyzes Amitav Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies* to forefront the impossibility of perfect translation and to show not only how mistranslation can be generative but that justice need not be predicated on comprehension. Their essays complement Karen and Katja's essay, which comprehensively expands on the background and implications of the exhibition artworks at the same time that it problematizes current art historical frameworks.

Many thanks to the School of Art & Art History and the Department of Art History, College of Architecture, Design and the Arts, University of Illinois at Chicago and the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, for their support of the exhibition. The Cultural Services of the French Embassy in Chicago provided key support for the first US presentation of Katia Kameli's artwork in the United States. Our appreciation to the Cultural Services' Fabrice Rozie, Laurence Geannopulos, and Tanguy Accart who were especially were key to facilitating the support. Thank you to the individual donors whose generosity underwrites this and other Gallery 400 exhibitions.

We are very grateful for the major support the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation provided early on for this catalogue. Additional catalogue funding was provided by the Department of Art History, University of Illinois at Chicago and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

Thank you to the galleries Alexander Gray Associates, New York; Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco; Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago; Tanya Leighton, Berlin; MARSO Gallery, Mexico City; Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago; Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo; PATRON Gallery, Chicago; and Taymour Grahne Gallery, London for their assistance on the exhibition and the catalogue.

Many thanks to artists Bani Abidi and Harold Mendez who gave public talks about their work. And to Maggie Queeney of the Poetry Foundation who presented and directed a poetry discussion and creative writing workshop using the exhibition and artworks as prompts. Our thanks to the UIC Native American Support Program, The Language Conservancy, and Florentine Films/Hott Productions for their partnership on the screening *Rising Voices/Hótȟaŋiŋpi*, which focuses on the loss of Lakota language and current revitalization efforts.

Thank you to Frederick Eschrich and Anton Jeludkov who beautifully designed this catalogue. The staff of Gallery 400 produced the exhibition

with enthusiasm, care, and perseverance. Many thanks to Assistant Director Erin Nixon; Public Programs and Engagement Manager Demecina Beehn; graduate assistants Erin Madarieta, Rachel McDermott, and Megan Moran; interns Claire Doonan, Ryn Osbourne, and Liz Vitlin; and the Gallery's tireless installation preparators Kyle Schlie, Alexandra Schutz, and Nate Braunfeld.

We are grateful to the artists Bani Abidi, Arturo Hernández Alcázar, Carlos Arias, Luis Camnitzer, Alejandro Cesarco, Bethany Collins, Brendan Fernandes, Dora García, Emily Jacir, Katia Kameli, Harold Mendez, Paulo Nazareth, Sherwin Ovid, Michael Rakowitz, Raqs Media Collective, Emilio Rojas, Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan, Edra Soto, and Stephanie Syjuco; we are grateful for their enthralling, inventive, affective, and humane work. In their work, we find a care and ethics possible in translation.

Lastly, the greatest appreciation is due to Karen Greenwalt and Katja Rivera who over the three years of developing this exhibition and catalogue have, in the most open fashion, allowed artworks and artists to redirect and/or expand their thinking and intentions; so ably adopted many of the responsibilities for the exhibition, including grant writing and production problem-solving; extended their efforts, going above and beyond to facilitate the production of works by artists unable to come to Chicago; and generously shared their thinking with multiple groups of visitors. Though inspired by and related to the research of Karen's and Katja's PhD dissertations, *Traduttore, Traditore* is a singular achievement, staking out new intellectual territory and asserting art's role in redefining and changing our world.

— Lorelei Stewart, Director, Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago

Our work on *Traduttore, Traditore* stretched over three years and we are profoundly indebted to Gallery 400 Director Lorelei Stewart, who shepherded this project from its inception and whose mentorship and guidance ensured its success. Gallery 400 is consistently at the vanguard of exhibitions and programming and University of Illinois at Chicago is fortunate to have somebody with Lorelei's experience and insight at the helm. We give our sincere thanks for her encouragement, support, and friendship.

This exhibition was borne out of many discussions around our dissertation research and several of the ideas in the catalogue emerge from our forthcoming dissertations. In addition, the theories of translation that we encountered in the seminars and writing of former UIC professor Esra Akcan, now at Cornell University, were instrumental in our conception of this exhibition. Her teaching and scholarship on translation, architecture, and global art have been an inspiration and we are grateful for her enthusiasm and encouragement of this project. We were thrilled when Esra Akcan and Aruna D'Souza generously agreed to contribute to this catalogue. Their thoughtful essays provide further insights into the concept of translation and thus allow a richer reading of the works included in the exhibition. We are so grateful.

The realization of this project depended on many people at UIC's School of Art and Art History. First and foremost we want to thank the Public Programs and Community Engagement Manager at Gallery 400, Demecina Beehn, whose guidance, kindness, and dedication furthered this project in countless ways. Thank you to Erin Nixon, the Assistant Director at Gallery 400, and the Gallery 400 graduate assistants and interns, especially Erin Madarieta, Rachel McDermott, and Megan Moran. Gallery 400's amazing team of preparators—Kyle Schlie, Alex Schutz, and Nate Braunfeld—deserve special thanks for their expertise, dedication, and good humor throughout the installation. Thank you to UIC Lab Specialists Chris Markin, Paul Dickinson, and Shane Hope for your help in bringing this exhibition to fruition.

Special thanks to the Department of Art History for their enthusiastic support of this project. In particular, we must thank the chair of the department, Martha Pollak, and our dissertation advisors Catherine Becker and Hannah Higgins. This exhibition would not have been possible without their encouragement and stalwart support.

A great many institutions demonstrated remarkable generosity in making objects available for loan to the exhibition and facilitating communication with artists. For their essential cooperation and support, we extend our thanks to the following colleagues: Ursula Davila-Villa and Gena Beam at Alexander Gray Associates, New York; Sofia Mariscal, Lorena Moreno, Allegra Papa, and Maylen Bourget at Marso Gallery; Caio Carpinelli and Renato Silva at Mendes Wood DM; Monique Meloche and Aniko Berman at Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago; Emanuel Aguilar, Julia Fischbach, and Rachel Haber at PATRON Gallery, Chicago; Rhona Hoffman, Anastasia Karpova Tinari, and Olivia Graham McManus at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago; and Emily Henson from the Michael Rakowitz studio.

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Thank you to our friends and family who made it possible for us to pursue this project and encouraged us at every step. Daniel Pickhardt has championed both the exhibition and publication from the very beginning. Special thanks also to Marissa Baker for her assistance and steadfast support in every stage of this project.

Our final and profound thanks goes to the artists who agreed to participate in *Traduttore, Traditore*. We have been floored by their ongoing generosity and collaborative spirit and have been much enriched by the experience of working with each of them.

— Karen Greenwalt and Katja Rivera

Traduttore, Traditore

KAREN GREENWALT AND KATJA RIVERA

Traduttore, Traditore uses translation as a means of exploring the changes—of language, customs, currency, and even memory—that occur when people cross borders. The exhibition brings together a group of artists from around the world who engage with processes of translation to expose, question, and challenge global circuits of economic and cultural capital. Each artist in *Traduttore, Traditore* provides a distinct lens through which to view these issues, offering insight into how people, ideas, and culture circulate in an increasingly interconnected world. This is, perhaps, because many artists have firsthand experience with the ways in which globalization impacts lives. Many artists in the exhibition claim multiple cultural and ethnic heritages, some have left their homelands—by choice or by force, and still others use their work as a means of investigating the ways our world has, in fact, been interconnected for centuries.

By definition, translation includes any act of change or movement from one place to another; its primary association with language is a relatively recent phenomenon. *Traduttore, Traditore* therefore employs this liberal understanding of translation in order to address the tensions that emerge from encounters across time and space. Proposing translation as a method by which to understand contemporary artistic practices, the exhibition explores how artists navigate and expose issues of difference, and how they negotiate change across national, linguistic, cultural, and economic borders. While some of the artworks in the exhibition actively utilize processes of translation, others unmoor the term from its linguistic meaning and explore the changes that occur as a result of movement. Shaped by their specific cultural history and geographic location, each artist in the exhibition provides a unique perspective on the difficulties of translation in the globalized world. Using translation as a way to map moments of cross-cultural contact, from different points of view, the exhibition reflects an inclusive vision of art history that rejects a canonical, monolithic model built on a teleological view of history.

The global turn in art has made it clear that we—as art historians—can no longer limit ourselves to Eurocentric frameworks. As Aruna D'Souza writes, the world today "seems much bigger than the one our discipline has imagined for itself since its formation in European universities at the turn of the last century."[1] While our discipline plays catch-up by adding courses and exhibitions on the art of the Global South, it is important to acknowledge that the very foundation of art history is rooted in a Eurocentric discourse. An additive approach does nothing to problematize the way in which our discipline was constructed.[2] In other words, easy inclusion without considering the original reasons for exclusion is not an answer—it is necessary to question our systems of reference. Not only is there an obvious need to consider artistic practices outside of American and European contexts further, but moreover, it is necessary to consider how those practices—either in form or content—speak to exchanges between people and cultures.

Scholars have proposed various models for understanding the cross-cultural movements and interactions of the contemporary global world. Many of those invested in writing a global art history have looked to postcolonial thinkers—such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha—who have sought to expose how power is created through language and discourse. Spivak, for example, argues that representation of the subaltern—a term used for disenfranchised populations left out of social, economic, and political power structures—is not possible within current frames of reference.[3] Nor is it possible to represent the voice of the subaltern within the hegemonic language. While the "Other" should be represented, representation must always be problematized until existing frames of reference are deconstructed.[4] In other words, we might say that because the language of art history is rooted in the hegemonic voice, the "Other" cannot be heard until we can deconstruct the discipline. Deconstructing our frames of reference or, in other words, our very language, is a utopian ideal. Because of this, it is imperative to continually point to the problems inherent in our discipline. In this way, theories that emerge out of postcolonial, postnational, and feminist scholarship all acknowledge the problem of representation within the discipline.

We therefore propose translation as a framework to engage with the intertwined histories of a global art. Translation acknowledges that movement and exchange are not devoid of geopolitical considerations. In other words, as Esra Akcan writes in her book *Architecture in Translation*, "These are zones of exchange; but they are zones filled with uneven relations, geopolitical hierarchies, tensions and anxieties, which in turn foreclose translations' potential to be a prerequisite for a cosmopolitan ethics."[5] Understanding art, culture, and creative

practices as acts of translation requires the acknowledgment that exchange is reliant on a system of hierarchical power structures—this understanding exposes the social, economic, and political issues at stake when we talk about globalism.

Current frames of reference in art history (e.g., Western and Islamic) separate the world into fixed identities that assume self-contained histories. Translation highlights the incommensurability of the discipline and allows us to problematize and counteract these grand narratives because it acknowledges the movement of language, ideas, people, and currency. In this way, the artworks in *Traduttore, Traditore* disrupt hegemonic narratives and allow us to reconsider the categories that define Western art historical discourse. Translation facilitates new ways of understanding multiple and diverse (art) histories, offering an alternative to ill-defined concepts such as hybridity that have become inundated by a scholarly discourse that has all but rendered the ideas illegible.[6] Contextualizing and theorizing the term "translation" enables us to reflect on the realities of the world as it continues to move toward an increasingly interconnected yet neoliberal economy.

Taken from the Italian aphorism that roughly translates to "translator, traitor," the title of this project therefore speaks to the misunderstandings, losses, and fragmentation that manifest during this process of exchange. While the sentiment behind "traduttore, traditore" can easily be grasped—he who translates, betrays—the play on words, its consonance predicated on a simple vowel change, gets, as it were, lost in translation. As Arthur Danto notes, the meaning of the axiom "is self-verifying; we traduce it by translating it. 'The translator is a betrayer' may be true as a proposition, but the (English) sentence requires evidence, whereas the Italian one is grounded in a vowel change, and the tongue plays with the shift of meaning entailed by a slight shift in speech."[7] Put another way, the Italian words "traduttore" and "traditore" are paronyms—derivatives of each other that sound nearly identical. This slippage highlights the betrayal that can take place in an act of translation: it is necessary to leave behind the author's original meaning and intent, changing its form in order to make it comprehensible to someone else.

Alternatively, writer Jorge Luis Borges famously argued that "the original is unfaithful to the translation," suggesting that the act of translation opens new avenues of understanding that may not have been fully realized in the original language.[8] Indeed, a central component to some theories of translation is that this act is a source of enrichment. Two important effects of translation are that of opening up a culture, which allows for the transmission or transferal of foreign influences, as well as that of expanding the boundaries of language. At its core, linguistic translation is fundamental to human communication and is about understanding. The inherent difficulties of translation, however, expose the labor and complexity that are hallmarks of cross-cultural interactions.

Some linguistic theorists maintain that language is self-contained—in other words, that each language is its own world and that nothing can or should be translated. Other theorists, however, contend that translation is and should be possible, but they differ on whether to maintain fidelity to the original text or make concessions that move the text toward the "target" language. The two sides of this debate are summed up by the words of Friedrich Schleiermacher in his essay "On the Different Methods of Translating," in which he states, "Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader."[9] The question therefore becomes: should the translator maintain fidelity to the original words, regardless of the potential difficulties of comprehension in the foreign language or culture?

Or should the translator give only an impression of the original words in order to convey the greatest understanding of the overall text in the foreign language? Thus, an inherent contradiction emerges, as Akcan outlines in *Architecture in Translation*: "On the one hand, the premise of absolute translatability may trigger the total assimilation of one place in another. On the other hand, the belief in untranslatability may draw sharp and fixed borders around places."[10] Put another way, translatability, the easy transportation of ideas from one culture to another, has the potential to create a hegemonic universalism. But the absence of it creates borders that are impossible to cross, potentially resulting in isolationism. This double bind points to the inconsistencies intrinsic to globalism.

Translation allows us to reflect on moments of cross-cultural exchange and think about issues of migration, diasporic communities, economic disparity, transnational networks, and the myriad other conditions brought on by the promises and failures of globalization. The term "globalization" first took root in the 1990s to describe the rapid growth of global market economies. According to neoliberal discourse, it ushered in a more interconnected way of life, with increased mobility, ease of communication, and freedom of capital. But globalization fails to acknowledge how political and economic power influence the complex and uneven flow not just of capital, but also of people, images, and ideas. While global economies have become increasingly interdependent, isolationist attitudes and policies have only intensified, particularly in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. The "global war on terror"—led by the United States and its allies—only served to highlight the disparities brought on by globalization. The resulting xenophobia, as well as increased security at thoroughfares and borders, have created tensions that continue to be felt internationally and that, to this day, impact global movement.

The artists in the exhibition draw attention to the complicated processes, circuits of exchange, and contradictions intrinsic to globalism, underscoring the power differentials that define its uneven processes. In *Insults* (2009) , for example, Luis Camnitzer reproduces one phrase in vinyl on the gallery walls in the six official languages of the United Nations: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish (p.114). Camnitzer makes one key adjustment in each version by changing the language identified in the statement to match the language with which the phrase is written. For example, in English, the phrase reads, "All those who can't read English are stupid," while in Spanish, it reads, "Todos los que no saben leer en español son estúpidos" ("All those who can't read Spanish are stupid"), and so forth. With wry humor, Camnitzer confronts and dismantles our limited world views. The nature of the work renders the insults ineffective: the person being disparaged will never find out because they cannot read the language. Rather than insulting those who cannot read the language, the end result is self-satisfaction on the part of those who can. Here, Camnitzer takes on the mantle of the treacherous translator—although he ostensibly provides a faithful translation of the phrase, he is in fact always giving preference to the language in use. The work therefore reflects the potential of language, and translation, to both unite and divide us in a global world.

Other artists in the exhibition address the imbalance of power in a global economy. While some may benefit from the unregulated movement of capital and goods, others—as Arturo Hernández Alcázar points out—exist in a liminal space where their labor and lives are undervalued and rendered invisible. In *Columna del trabajo (salario mínimo)* (2016), Hernández Alcázar draws attention to the inequitable exchange between immigrant labor and wages (p.110). Eight tools lodged into the wall are topped with a total of $5.71 in change—the equivalent of one hour's wage for an undocumented Mexican immigrant in Illinois. This number presents an approximation, as tracking the earnings of undocumented immigrants can prove difficult, and many report

that they have had wages withheld. The work acts as a visual metaphor for the disparity between labor and wage in the immigrant community, while also poignantly speaking to the impact of that labor on the physical structures that surround us.

Some artists—such as Bethany Collins, Sherwin Ovid, and Paulo Nazareth—consider how geographic and cultural contexts influence our understanding of objects and histories. In her book *America: A Hymnal* (2017), Collins constructs a history of the United States through the song "My Country 'Tis of Thee" and its many translations (p.120). The artist includes one hundred versions of the song written between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. The different lyrics speak to passionately held causes throughout U.S. history—including suffrage, the confederacy, and abolition. Burning away the similarities in each song, Collins highlights the differences that construct a history of the United States; each translation reflects an alternative conception of American national identity. Sherwin Ovid similarly considers the movement of music in *Masquerade Bandage for Motherboard* (2016) by highlighting the influence of West African Yoruba poetry on calypso, a musical genre from Trinidad that is rooted in social commentary (p.134). His book—which includes braille translations of old calypso songs and folktales alongside graphite drawings of scarifications that are part of rites of passage in Yoruba culture—examines the history of black expressivity through coded devices. Exhibited with sugar sculptures of the tools used to mark the book, Ovid further reflects on the origins of calypso—the arrival of French sugar planters and their slaves originally brought the Yoruba to Trinidad. Exploring histories of black expression, Ovid draws from his experiences of migration as a space of exchange and transformation.

While Ovid investigates migration through the lens of history, Paulo Nazareth, on the other hand, explores the contemporary experience of border crossing in a project in which he walked from Santa Luzia, Brazil, to New York City in 2010. Described by the artist as a "residence in transit, a residence by accident,"[11] the journey resulted in photographs, notes, drawings, and a performance. The project subtly mimics the seventeenth-century colonial practice of European painters documenting foreign landscapes, including that of Brazil. *Notícias de América* (2011/12)—an excerpt of this project—is a series of portraits the artist took alongside residents of the places through which he passed (p.132). Nazareth, who claims a mixed racial heritage, describes this project as a result of his interest in how his identity as a black man shifted and was perceived as he traveled north. He stated: "Being mixed-race and travelling through the Americas, my skin changes every day. At home the labels are not so well defined . . ."[12] Nazareth's project speaks to the fluid nature of identity, which is so easily determined by geographic and cultural context.

While Nazareth reflects on how identity changes across national and cultural borders, Emily Jacir considers how identity renders the act of crossing borders challenging—if not impossible — for some. While for many people, travel has never been easier, in *Where We Come From* (2002–03), Jacir reminds viewers that travel and movement are not the same for everyone (p.126). The artist began her series with a question that she addressed to Palestinians living in exile: "If I could do something for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" The seemingly simple question belies the complex lives of those for whom Jacir performs these tasks: Palestinians who face severe Israeli travel restrictions within the country. *Traduttore, Traditore* includes one work from this series whose respondent, Maha, asked Jacir to "Climb Mount Carmel in Haifa and look at the Mediterranean from there. I have always dreamed of climbing Mount Carmel, but as a West banker I cannot enter the 1948 areas." As a US passport holder, Jacir was able to fulfill this request and twenty-nine others, ranging from the mundane (paying bills) to the comical (taking a Palestinian girl on a date), from a longing for

family (visiting a mother's grave) to a yearning for homeland (drinking water from their parents' village).

Where We Come From contains both the textual description of the requests, in both English and Arabic, alongside the photographic (or in one case, video) documentation of Jacir completing the task. The viewer's easy transition from text to photograph—between wish and realization—underscores the impossibility of these Palestinian exiles realizing their desires.[13] The requests—written and therefore read in the first person—become our desires: "*I* have always dreamed . . . *I* cannot enter the 1948 areas." We begin to identify with the exiled, desiring the same things. In this way, Jacir implicates the viewer in the action, into the reality of movement in the globalized world.

While many artists in the exhibition engage with the contemporary moment, others focus on historic events and their continued relevance. In *Elmina Castle* (2016), for example, Harold Mendez explores the history of the West African slave trade and the residue of the trauma that occurred there (p.130). Mendez's photograph of Elmina Castle in Ghana—a major post along the Atlantic slave trade—exists as a sort of memorial. Marks on the ground are evidence of the human presence —and terror—of that history. The artist's shadow in the photograph suggests a layering between the past and present, becoming a ghostly apparition that recalls the long-absent bodies. Mendez's lens doubles as the viewer's eye and —through the placement of the work low on the gallery wall—we begin to identify with the shadow on the ground. In this way, we become implicated in this painful history, in the same way that Jacir entangles viewers in the arduous experience of exile.

Further exploring Africa's long history of colonial exploitation, Brendan Fernandes's *Devil's Noise* (2011) reflects on the South African apartheid government's implementation of Afrikaans as the official language of instruction in the nation's schools (p.122). The resulting 1976 student protests employed collective silence; the work takes its title from a protest sign that stated, "We Will Not Speak Your Devil Tongue." Fernandes's hand-bound books include the artist's poetry stamped in gold foil on the spines. When placed next to each other, the books create a concrete poem that speaks to the history of South Africa's marginalized populations. While language is often understood as a form of expression, *Devil's Noise* explores the power of language and its potential to be used as a tool of domination and oppression.

Meanwhile, Alejandro Cesarco and Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan consider the translation of histories—of traumatic events in particular—into the present. Cesarco describes his film, *Zeide Isaac* (2009), as a "work of fiction rooted in reality" or, we might say, rooted in history (p.116).[14] The film portrays the artist's *zeide*, Yiddish for grandfather, who is a Holocaust survivor. Although the film mimics a documentary in which a subject is interviewed about their experience, *Zeide Isaac* is in fact the performance of a script, written by the artist in collaboration with his grandfather, about his grandfather's memories of the Holocaust. Transformation—from first-hand experience to a retelling, from one language into another, from individual to collective memory—is central to *Zeide Isaac*. The work therefore examines not only the limitations and possibilities of testimony, but also the vagaries of memory.

Shanaathanan's artist's book, *The Incomplete Thombu* (2011), moves beyond mere statistics to record personal experiences of displacement (p.142). After years of rancor between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority—arguably a legacy of the British colonial policy of divide and rule—a civil war erupted in Sri Lanka that lasted from 1983–2009. The war killed up to 100,000 civilians and displaced hundreds of thousands more. Taking its name from a type of Dutch colonial document that registered ownership of property, *The Incomplete Thombu* mimics a colonial bureaucratic file by documenting Tamil displacement during the conflict. Shanaathanan records these stories by asking

Tamil civilians to draw their lost homes from memory. The artist overlaid their drawings with his own architectural renderings. Both of these works consider how memories are transformed and reflect what art historian Aamir R. Mufti has referred to as "an art of dispossession . . . an aesthetic practice concerned with the foundational unlivability of modes of modern life, with the dialectic of rooting and uprooting whose most emblematic and ubiquitous figure in our own times is the stateless refugee."[15] Cesarco and Shanaathanan recall histories of political violence, of rooting and uprooting, that have resulted in a loss of homeland.

While these works by Mendez, Fernandes, Cesarco, and Shanaathanan are seemingly situated in the past, they visualize William Faulkner's oft-quoted statement: "The past is never dead; it's not even past."[16] Put slightly differently, history can serve not only as a reflection of the past but as a way of holding a mirror up to our present. Similarly drawing on the past, several artists in the exhibition take the transmission of history and knowledge as the starting point for their projects. Many, in fact, actively allow their research to inform the formal qualities of their work. In *Stream of Stories* (2016), for example, Katia Kameli charts the influences of Jean de La Fontaine's fables—tales of morality featuring animal characters considered classics of French literature—to the *Panchatantra*, a collection of animal allegories that originated in India (p.128). These stories traveled across the region, with versions translated into Persian and then Arabic, in the stories titled *Kalīla wa-Dimna*. In *Traduttore, Traditore*, Kameli presents a portion of the larger project, including a set of prints that reproduce the story of a lion as it appears in the *Panchatantra*, *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, and Fontaine's fables; a collage called *The Animal Seized with the Plague*, which combines illustrations taken from the three versions of the stories reproduced in the prints; and a diagram that charts the movement of these stories. The artist supplements these with three videos—interviews with a translator, professor, and curator who discuss, respectively, theories of translation, the history and context of these fables, and the importance of Fontaine in French culture. In bringing together these various elements, Kameli foregrounds the act and history of translation presented through texts, videos, and images that reflect her research.

Michael Rakowitz's *The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours* (2015) explores the transmission of skill across generations as a form of resistance against cultural erasure (p.136). Taking its title from a Turkish saying used when an apprentice was given over to a master, the installation highlights the role of the architect as a cultural translator. Members of Turkey's Armenian population crafted the Art Nouveau moldings and friezes found on Istanbul facades, which bear witness not only to a tradition of craft, but also to the tragic chapter of Turkey's history: the 1915 Armenian Genocide that resulted in 1.5 million deaths, an event the Turkish government still fails to recognize. The installation includes a series of plaster casts from original molds and the rubbings of architectural fragments found throughout Istanbul, which act as visual reminders of an Armenian presence in the Turkish city, providing a counternarrative to official histories. By tracing the movement of Art Nouveau architectural facades, Rakowitz considers how architecture is translated in different locations. Moreover, *The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours* further offers tradition as a means of preserving historical and cultural memories.

Other artists invoke the archive more directly. Emilio Rojas's *Trittico Aldrovandi* (2017) reinterprets a fifteenth-century herbarium—a catalog of preserved plants—and uses the dandelion, tomato, and mandrake as metaphors for migration (p.140). Rojas connects the spread of these plants to colonial exploitation. The artist emphasizes how the dandelion—a flower brought to the Americas by English and French colonizers as a reminder of home—is today an invasive species; how the tomato, which is native to the Andes, was transformed into an emblem of Italian

identity; and how the mandrake—a plant with toxic and hallucinogenic properties that was linked to witchcraft and evil—was depicted as an encircled dark, female body, underscoring how darkness was linked to moral deviousness through visual culture. The artist's hands—which appear in each of the photographs—intervene in this archive, calling attention to the history of classification in Europe. Produced as an edition of five, in each version Rojas incorporates three phrases in one of the five colonizing languages of the Americas: English, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. In each translation, the phrases read: "We are here because you were there," "My roots are as strong as your fears," and "Our virtues have not yet been discovered."

Further contextualizing the work of these artists, two essays included in the catalogue expand on ideas of translation and serve as an investigative and interdisciplinary space alongside the exhibition. Grounded in two distinct fields—literature and linguistics—the contributions of Esra Akcan and Aruna D'Souza offer insights that open up new avenues for considering the works included in *Traduttore, Traditore*. Akcan grounds the exhibition within the theories of and debates around linguistic translation, while D'Souza considers the productive possibilities that accompany moments of translation or mistranslation.

In her essay, Esra Akcan asks: "What if we were to think about artworks through the longstanding and perpetually irresolvable question on the translatability and untranslatability between languages?"[17] Beginning with George Steiner's 1975 book *After Babel*, Akcan addresses and dissects his theories on translation and proceeds to juxtapose them with the theories of linguistic translation of Jacques Derrida. The two sides of the debate are summed up with the words of Schleiermacher cited above, in which he outlines the dilemma of the translator: do you move the reader towards the text or the text towards the reader? In other words, should the translator maintain fidelity to the original words, as Derrida would urge, regardless of the potential difficulties of comprehension in the foreign language or culture? Or, as Steiner urges, should the translator give only an impression of the original words in order to convey the greatest understanding of the overall text in the foreign language? Focusing on this debate, Akcan argues that there are political and ethical issues at stake in translation.

Akcan's exploration of the socio-political dimensions of translation help elucidate Bani Abidi's film *Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner* (2004), which uses translation to address Pakistan's long histories of subjugation to imperialism and the precarious relationship between Pakistan and the United States after September 11 (p.108). In the film, Abidi commissioned a Pakistani brass pipe band to learn and play the national anthem of the United States. The video depicts the band listening to a recording of the anthem played by a traditional brass band and their subsequent attempts to transpose and play the melody. Originally part of the British colonial military, pipe bands continue to play throughout Pakistan today. Abidi took this colonial symboland used the band to address American neo-imperialism. Much like the act of linguistic translation, the difficult work of translating this musical score exposes the labor and complexity that are hallmarks of exchange. The final result is a foreignizing of the song, rendering it strange and—at times—largely unrecognizable.

Abidi's work maps moments of cross-cultural contact, revealing encounters across and between India, Pakistan, England, and the United States. But, of course, one must also acknowledge the inherent power relationships between these countries. The struggle of transposing this music underscores the difficulty of reaching across borders. However, Abidi not only speaks to Pakistan's history of colonization, but also reflects on how the country has absorbed foreign influences, often translating these

imported objects and histories into emblems of identity. The pipe band today is a marker of Pakistani-ness. Throughout the duration of the video, the U.S. national anthem, too, becomes transformed. These zones of contact—the result of imperialism—become spaces for subversion in Pakistan.

These moments of contact are less direct, though no less powerful, in other works in the exhibition. In *Tropicalamerican* (2014), Edra Soto meticulously collaged the leaves of tropical plants into U.S. flags, which she then photographed and digitally rendered (p.146). Although flags traditionally symbolize the permanence of sovereign nations, Soto's use of organic material renders these objects ephemeral. Not only do the leaves suggest an eventual deterioration, their green color injects a strangeness into this familiar symbol of national identity. Soto's use of tropical material connects these objects to a distinct geography, creating an association between a national and regional identity. The geometric forms of Soto's *Manual GRAFT* (2016) are directly influenced by *rejas*, the iron screens that adorn residences across the island of Puerto Rico (p.144). Used as a barrier between public and private spaces, the screens are both ornamental and functional—although decorative, they provide a measure of security and facilitate ventilation in the hot Caribbean climate. While their precise history is unknown, *rejas* most likely originated in Spain, influenced by West African and Islamic architecture. Soto's ongoing translation of the *rejas* serves to map Puerto Rican history and culture onto various cities in the continental United States. Both works reflect long histories of contact between the island and its colonizers, addressing the ways in which the foreign has been absorbed and translated in Puerto Rico.

In *Cargo Cults* (2013–16), Stephanie Syjuco explores the myriad ways the "West" constructs identities of an ethnic or exotic "Other." (p.150) Using items purchased from the likes of Forever 21, H&M, Urban Outfitters, Target, Gap, and more, Syjuco stages photographs that recall ethnographic studio portraiture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In doing so, she reminds us that identities have long been constructions of popular fantasy that have been forged through long histories of colonization, occupation, and exploration. By purchasing the items on a credit card and ultimately returning them to the retailers, Syjuco embeds within her project an investigation into the circulation of value.

Akcan concludes her essay by saying that the debates surrounding the impasses of the translatability or untranslatability of text are both rather conventional and offer little nuance. "For this reason," she continues, "I came to think that the challenge for contemporary art is indeed to cross those borders of translation that have long been in the making, and to advocate for the translatability of the hitherto untranslatable."[18] Dora García's *The Messenger* (2002–ongoing) echoes Akcan's call to see translation as possible, while at the same time remembering the divide that exists between languages and cultures (p.124). For this work, a performer[19] ventures into the city to decipher a message in an unknown language that has been sent to her by the artist. The performance enacts the struggles that accompany acts of translation. Documented through the performer's diary, the work records her experiences and visualizes the labor behind the performance.[20] By existing in the streets and the circuits of everyday life, the performance engages a (sometimes unwitting) public—confronting their preconceptions, prejudices, and daily realities. The success of the work is predicated on two individuals striving to understand each other. In other words, as García states: "It is only through the Other that we understand ourselves."[21]

At the same time, the work speaks to ideas of mistranslation or even untranslatability; there is, of course, always the potential that the performer might receive an incorrect translation or not get the message translated at all. This subtle reminder of the vulnerability and possible failure of translation is deftly explored

in this catalogue's other essay, written by Aruna D'Souza who reflects on Amitav Ghosh's 2008 novel *Sea of Poppies*. D'Souza examines the productive space that opens up in either acts of mistranslation or the inability to translate. *Sea of Poppies*, set in the nineteenth century, charts the passage of the ship *Ibis* as it transports human cargo and other goods along colonial trade routes. At the center of the story are the ship's crew and passengers, a mélange including American sailors, French convicts, opium factory workers, lascars, rajas, and sahibs. This clash of culture, class, and race also involves a clash of language. The ensuing misunderstandings become a lens for D'Souza, who explores these encounters as sites of possibility for creating new meanings and understandings.

In particular, D'Souza looks to Raqs Media Collective's *The Translator's Silence* (2012) as a work that willfully refuses to translate the three languages central to it: English, Bengali, and Hindustani (p.138). Including three poetic fragments from Pakistani poet and author Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Bengali poet and musician Rabindranath Tagore, and Indian poet Agha Shahid Ali, the takeaway uses the rich legacy of South Asian poetry to reflect on the relationship between language, borders, and nations. The poetic fragments speak to India's partition in 1947, the subsequent 1971 Pakistani civil war, and ongoing conflicts between India and Pakistan. By recalling these events—all legacies of British colonial rule—and coupling them with the viewer's need to translate the words, the artists suggest that in a willing encounter with the other, the stranger can become the beloved if we are able to listen to each other's silences. D'Souza argues, "This work stages incomprehension rather than understanding"[22] and goes on to quote an interview with the artists in which they discuss how the inability to read some of the text might compel the viewer to reach out to someone who speaks that language. In this way, the failure of translation may lead to new discoveries.

In a similar way, Carlos Arias's *Bilingual* creates a platform in which languages press up against each other, in ways that are sometimes comprehensible and, at other times, confusing (p.112). On a large canvas, the artist has embroidered a series of words that are written the same in both English and Spanish. Some have the same meaning in both languages, while others do not. By placing them together, Arias investigates what he describes as the "border," the space between the two languages. In so doing, he creates a "long, absurd poem."[23] When taken out of their linguistic context and placed together, these words come to occupy a third, in-between space. Much like in Ghosh's novel, the meeting of two languages has the potential to create a third, pidgin language—an idea alluded to in Arias's work.

Finally, Bethany Collins's *Comprise, 1982* (2016) provides an important conceptual thread that runs throughout the exhibition (p.118). In her dictionary series, Collins explores contronyms — words that contain in their definition opposite meanings. In this case, the difference—although subtle—is between the part and the whole: comprise can mean "to include; contain" or, alternatively, "to consist of; be composed of." Collins's definitions emerge from the second edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* and, as a 1983 *New York Times* review of the revised dictionary stated, "What is most interesting about a dictionary revision, of course, is what it tells us about the revision of the society that speaks its language."[24] In other words, a dictionary can be seen as a document of social change—the values, preoccupations, and trends of a society.

Collins explores and documents the complexity of language, reminding us that it is neither benign nor apolitical. Similarly, *Traduttore, Traditore* posits that the movement of people, culture, and ideas is not the result of neutral exchanges that are devoid of political and social ideology. More subtly, however, *Comprise, 1982* helps to frame conceptions of a nation,

which, after all, *contains* its citizens while simultaneously being *composed of* its citizens. Borders themselves can also be thought of as contronyms—they simultaneously admit and expel, bind and unbind. The dualities that Collins explores point to the inconsistencies inherent to globalism. Many of the artists in *Traduttore, Traditore* draw attention to these aporias, underscoring the realities of the so-called globalized world. Through a variety of media and approaches, they depict and highlight moments of historical, linguistic, and cultural translation, explore mechanisms of translation, and, at times, function as translators themselves.

1 Aruna D'Souza, "Introduction," in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, ed. Jill H. Casid and Aruna D'Souza (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2014), viii.

2 See, for example, Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999).

3 See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

4 The "Other" is a term that emerged from phenomenological discourse in order to distinguish from the self; it is a binary opposition that defines the self in contrast to what it is not. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said reveals how the colonial "Other" was constructed as a means of justifying the domination and subordination of a group of people. This constructed other assumes a false binary that foregrounds Eurocentric, hierarchical discourse. But its use stresses the idea that even when the "Other" is speaking, it is in the language produced and perpetuated by the West, thus eliminating any potential for representation. Post-colonial theory, for example, relies on a European philosophical framework to theorize experiences of colonialism and imperialism. In this way, the agency of the so-called "Other" is always deferred until a moment when language is deconstructed.

5 Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 17.

6 The term hybrid—at its most fundamental—refers to the combining or mixing of cultures. As defined by Homi Bhabha, however, the hybrid speaks to the dialogue of the different, which in turn disrupts power relationships. In "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817," Bhabha's example of the Bible translated into a native language speaks to the book's "split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* [London: Routledge, 1994], 153). In other words, the repetition and translation of a book (in this case, the bible) involves a change—or a subversion. This points to how spaces of authority can be transformed into spaces of rebellion. To help elucidate the term, Bhabha uses the metaphor of the stairwell in the introduction to *The Location of Culture*. The stairwell, he argues, is a liminal space that constructs difference by asking you to go up and down in perpetual motion. Bhabha argues that this back-and-forth prevents either identity from settling into a fixed place. He goes on to say: "This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Ibid., 5). For Bhabha, this moment of hybridity escapes traditional hierarchies through a constant negotiation between both identities, opening up a third space that challenges the conditions of both originals. However, since Bhabha's use of the hybrid, the term has come to be one of the most widely used—and misused—of postcolonial theory, as well as one the most heavily critiqued terms.

7 Arthur C. Danto, "Translation and Betrayal," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 32 (Autumn 1997): 61.

8 Jorge Luis Borges, "On William Beckford's Vathek," *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (Penguin Books, 1999), 239. First published as "Sobre el *Vathek* de William Beckford," *La Nación* April 4, 1943, 1.

9 Friedrich Schleiermacher, "From 'On the Different Methods of Translating'," in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet, trans. Waltrand Bartscht (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 42.

10 Akcan, *Architecture in Translation*, 17.

11 Quoted in Guilherme Trielli Ribeiro, "The End of the End of Art: The Itinerant Poetics of Paulo Nazareth," *Revista Landa* 5, 1 (2016): 438.

12 Quoted in Machteld Leij, "Paulo Nazareth," Africana.org, Arena for Contemporary African, African and Caribbean Art, uploaded May 10, 2015, http://africanah.org/paulo-nazareth/.

13 T. J. Demos, "Desire in Diaspora: Emily Jacir," *Art Journal* 62, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 69.

14 See interview in this catalogue, p. 76.

15 See Aamir R. Mufti, "Zarina Hashmi and the Arts of Dispossession," in *The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora*, ed. Saloni Mathur (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2011), 174–95.

16 William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1919), 85.

17 See essay in this catalogue, p. 35.

18 See essay in this catalogue, p. 43.

19 In Chicago, local artist Tamara Becerra Valdez performed the piece.

20 See website for *The Messenger* at http://doragarcia.org/inserts/themessenger/index.html

21 See interview in this catalogue, p. 82.

22 See essay in this catalogue, p. 55.

23 See interview in this catalogue, p. 72.

24 Ken Kalifus, "Words and Pictures," *New York Times*, January 16, 1983.

Migration of Words

ESRA AKCAN

Nothing which is harmonized by the bond of the Muses can be changed from its own to another language without destroying all its sweetness.

Dante[1]

When you translate you should go as far as the untranslatable; then you catch sight of the foreign language and the foreign nation for the first time.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (trans. André Lefevere)[2]

Too much fidelity is infidelity . . . Translation is to rethink an idea thought in one language in another language.

Nurullah Ataç (trans. Esra Akcan)[3]

Every single labor for translation is a medical injection on language.

Yunus Kazım Köni (trans. Esra Akcan)[4]

Does lingual translation show the proximity or distance between languages? Is translation evidence of the porousness or impenetrability of borders? What if we were to think about artworks through the longstanding and perpetually irresolvable question on the translatability and untranslatability between languages? Can this question create a platform to discuss the epistemological and ethical dimensions of artworks that are not necessarily lingual?

Translation has indeed been used to assert the "kinship" between several languages. George Steiner's magisterial work *After Babel* of 1975, for one, placed translation within a broad field of concerns.[5] Far from treating translation with the limited meaning of the conversion between languages, Steiner showed the similarities between intralingual and interlingual translations and highlighted the importance of translation to the study of language, philosophy, and culture. Steiner's book, which is often appreciated as a revival of the hermeneutic tradition, came as a challenge to the prevalent structuralist and positivist lingual theories of the time. For him, translations premised on positivist principles did not sufficiently challenge the idea of language as smooth and value-free communication. He argued that meanings were culturally constituted; hence, the translator could not be considered a technician who could mechanistically convert a text from one language to another. Steiner criticized the "scientific" theories for "drastically schematizing" language,[6] and for reducing the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of human speech in the name of universal deep structures. Falsifying the foundations of biological, neurochemical, and structuralist studies of language, Steiner concluded that "the study of language is not now a science,"[7] but an "art."[8] The translator, likewise, was an interpreter, in the hermeneutic tradition's sense of the word. This indispensable interpretation, the "hermeneutic motion," did not make a translator unfaithful to the original, but, on the contrary, it was only through certain alterations that the translator could be responsible to the source and receiving languages. Steiner saw translation as an interpretation, a "violent" distortion if necessary, a "penetration and appropriation."[9] He not only redefined the notion of fidelity but also challenged the authority of the original usually assumed in lingual translation studies. Referring to Friedrich Schleiermacher's notion of hermeneutics where a translator/interpreter may know better than the author, Steiner advocated the possibility of a translation surpassing the original through a discovery of hidden meanings and potentials not yet realized in it.[10] "'Translation,' properly understood, is a special case of the arc of communication which every successful speech-act closes within a given language."[11] The writer's examples were selected to show not only how translation operated as a connection between texts, but also how a verbal event may reappear in other verbal and non-verbal events in societies that shared what he called a "cultural field."

As charming as these ideas on the creative potentials of translation in an expanded sense may sound, we have to ask how exactly Steiner came to the conclusion that a translator "may know better" than the author, and what exactly he meant by the "cultural field." Steiner's intention was not to claim that *any* translation fulfilled the hermeneutic responsibility. Thinking through translation, his main aspiration was towards a theory of cultural continuity in general. One of Steiner's unique analogies was defining the process of cultural production as something "topological."[12] "The relations of 'invariance within transformation' are, to a more or less immediate degree, those of *translation*. . . Defined topologically, a culture is a sequence of translations and transformations of constants."[13] Yet, it was here that Steiner fell into a conservative and Eurocentric definition of culture and translation—at least when speaking about translations that seem to matter to him: In his framework, different cultures must have had different topological fields, but Western European culture and civilization must have shared the same. "Western art is . . . about preceding art; literature about literature," Steiner declared and continued: "The word 'about' points to the crucial ontological dependence, to the fact that a previous work or body of work is, in some degree, the *raison d'être* of the work in hand. We have seen that this degree can vary from immediate reduplication to tangential allusion and change almost beyond recognition. But the dependence is there, and its structure is that of translation."[14] In this framework, the history of the "West"

must have been nothing but the perpetual process of translation within the same topological field. Given that Steiner had rejected biological universality in explaining culture, and if he then defined "Western culture" as one that operates through perpetual translation within the same topological field, his theory left the question of translations beyond the "Western topological field" unanswered. His words confirm: "Our Western feeling patterns, as they have come down to us through thematic development, are 'ours,' taking this possessive to delimit the Greco-Latin and Hebraic circumference."[15] Even though Steiner expanded the horizon of translation by demonstrating its close relationship to cultural production beyond language, he downgraded the potential of translation to mediate between the hitherto separated "topological fields." In that, he conserved the constructed category of the "West" as a topological field irreducibly distant and untranslatable from the "non-West." Steiner therefore maintained a geographical limit in the hermeneutical interface between cultures. Praising translation as a medium that establishes continuity within a cultural family that he called a "topological field," Steiner hardly commented on opening a language to the exterior of its "topological field" (if any), to an incommensurable system, to the foreign. This hardly welcomes the productive and corrective discontinuities that might be introduced to a place through translation.

For the sake of clarification, it would be useful to compare Steiner's version of the myth of the Tower of Babel to that of Jacques Derrida. For Steiner, the myth of Babel foretold "a day of redemption on which translation will no longer be necessary."[16] That would be the day when a universal language which needs no translation "re-enters" the chaotic world of multiple languages; a language that arises, for Steiner, in conjunction with the Kabalistic end of history.[17] For Derrida, on the other hand, this day will and should never come. Derrida used this myth to introduce a discussion of proper names, which are not translated in their cross-textual travel. But untranslatability, for Derrida, was not limited to proper names alone. He treated translation as an indispensable but ultimately unattainable task due to the incommensurable difference between languages and due to the indeterminacy of meaning within the same language. (It was not possible to fix meaning within the source language itself, not to mention the impossibility of the unproblematic translation of this "meaning" into another incommensurable language.) Translatability was nothing but the premise of traditional philosophy, which claimed that meaning and truth came before language, and should thus be equivalently rephrased in any language. Providing evidence for the untranslatability of languages was crucial for Derrida, because this confirmed the failure of traditional philosophy itself, whose "origin" was the "thesis of translatability." Namely, traditional philosophy "defines itself as the fixation of a certain concept and project of translation."[18] Derrida used the myth of the Tower of Babel as a metaphor to destabilize the humanist premise of the shared substance between different languages, which was expected to allow translators to make foreign texts their own, to enable them to represent the foreign within their own frame of reference. Instead, to Derrida, neither transparent language nor absolute translation was possible.[19]

This ethics of untranslatability has also become crucial in unpacking the historical violence of translation in colonial contexts, as those translations that maintained the myth of the superiority of the colonizer can hardly be considered neutral exchanges between two languages. Gayatri Spivak, the English-language translator of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, criticized the translations from "non-Western" languages that failed to engage genuinely with the cultural and rhetorical context of their originals, and that treated them in relation to English norms. A commitment to ethical translation required the translator to

"surrender" to the rhetoricity of the original, even if this brought one face-to-face with the untranslatability of languages.[20] To give another example, in her book *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*, Tejaswini Niranjana offered a theory of translation that came to terms with geopolitical context. She criticized studies for being oblivious to political consequences and asymmetric relations of power operating in the process of translation.[21] An unproblematized translation that covered over the incommensurable differences between languages, one that ignored the impurities and impossibilities of translation, would have suppressed the irreducible heterogeneity between cultures, and domesticated the "other" in the "self."

The theoretical possibility or impossibility of translation, namely the untranslatability or translatability of languages, was one of the central questions that occupied my mind while writing several versions of my book that eventually culminated in *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House*. For example, a similar discussion to that between Steiner and Derrida had taken place in Turkey in a much more direct way during the period covered in this book, namely while the authors involved were responding to the challenges raised by an article and in conversation with each other. The Translation Office launched in Turkey in 1938 was home to heated discussions about methods of translating foreign texts into Turkish. In the newspaper article "The Gaps of Turkish," the novelist Reşat Nuri Güntekin had complained about the untranslatability of European texts into Turkish due to the lack of appropriate concepts in the receiving language. He had argued that the "poverty" of the Turkish language in expressing European ideas was particularly exposed during the act of translation.[22] In their responses to Güntekin's essay, Nurullah Ataç and Yunus Kazım Köni advocated two pointedly separate approaches. Ataç argued that the alleged gap, which was not in the language but in the translator, could be filled by assimilating strategies that rephrased the meaning of an original sentence, not necessarily by following word-for-word correspondence, but by rewriting it in Turkish.[23] This required appropriating the foreign text within the norms of the Turkish language.[24] Such appropriations—which could include changing words and fragmenting or combining sentences—were desirable for the sake of communicating meaning and making translations easily accessible to readers. Conversely, Yunus Kazım Köni advocated what might be called "foreignizing translations" (a term later coined by Lawrence Venuti)[25], which deliberately opened themselves to the foreign language, even if this resulted in their own awkwardness.[26] Responsibility to translation required that translators enriched the receiving language with new concepts and forms, rather than freezing it within existing norms as Ataç would have argued. The difficulty of translation between any two languages did not need to indicate the gaps of the receiving language, as Güntekin had claimed, but rather the contemporary distance between the two languages, which could, and had to be, reduced through translation. This made it all the more necessary to treat translation as a "medical injection on language,"[27] as a medium where a language opened itself to another and "expand[ed]" itself [*genişletmek*].[28] In Köni's eyes, foreignizing translations transcended the limits of Turkish, and enriched it further by exposing it to a different language. In his words, "the aim of a translation should not be to look like an original text written in the receiving language. This would mean that the translation had remained within the confines of the receiving language, which would be a limited benefit for this language."[29] Instead, a translation better "serves" the receiving language, even if it sounds awkward, when it "creates an acquaintance between languages, brings them closer, builds a 'change' in their relation, [. . . when] it earns on their behalf something they did not have."[30] This debate over appropriating and foreignizing translations, which arose in response to the dilemma between the translatability

and untranslatability of languages, was indeed similar to what Schleiermacher had expressed as the necessary choice to be made between "moving the reader towards the writer as much as possible" as opposed to "moving the writer towards the reader as much as possible."[31] In addition to formal and aesthetic ones, such a choice had wide-ranging ethical and epistemological implications.

Analyzing architectural artifacts in history through the lens of their multiple makers' convictions about translatability and untranslatability and their choices between appropriating and foreignizing translations, in *Architecture in Translation*, I came to understand and appreciate those that took the harder action of translating between zones that were traditionally deemed untranslatable. This book participated in the recent theories that have presented countless reasons to reject the conventional notion of translation as a "neutral bridge between cultures," or as a secondhand copy that fabricated the myth of the "original." It defined translation as the process of transformation that takes place with the transportation of people, ideas, objects, technology, information, and images from one or more places to another—a definition that avoids passive metaphors and depoliticized explanations. This definition of translation invited the consideration of, first, the sociopolitical context, and second, the agency of all parties in cross-geographical vectors. The book recorded not only the liberating, but also the colonizing, effects of translation, the geopolitical tensions and psychological anxieties that emerged at each moment of translation. It also advocated for a commitment to a new culture of translatability from below and in multiple directions for truly cosmopolitan ethics and global justice. It conceived commitment to this ethics of translatability as a prerequisite of perpetual peace.[32]

Defending the translatability between languages, cultures, and peoples that are already traditionally understood to possess a "kinship" or be in the same "cultural field" would be quite conventional. So would defending the untranslatability between those that have traditionally been segregated from each other as if they were self-contained and isolated categories. For this reason, I came to think that the challenge for contemporary art is, indeed, to cross those borders of translation that have long been in the making, and to advocate for the translatability of the hitherto untranslatable.

1 Dante quoted in Reuben A. Brower, "Bibliography by Bayard Quincy Morgan," in *On Translation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 271.

2 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1826), *Maximen und Reflexionen*, JWG *Werke* (Hamburg: Wegener, 1967). Translated as part of the annotated anthology: André Lefevere, *Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977), 39.

3 Nurullah Ataç, "Tercümeye Dair," *Tercüme* 1, No. 6 (March 19, 1941): 505.

4 Yunus Kazım Köni, "Tercümeye Dair Düşünceler," *Tercüme* 5, No. 26 (July 19, 1944): 159.

5 George Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

6 Ibid., 495. For Steiner's explicit critique of Chomsky, especially see: p. 97–114, 293–311, 495–498.

7 Ibid., 309.

8 "What we are dealing with is not a science, but an exact art." Ibid., 311.

9 Steiner uses these adjectives to describe Hölderlin's translations, which he favors as the finest hermeneutic gestures. Ibid., 340. Challenging "mechanical translation" of the 1950s and early 1960s, Steiner referred to Friedrich Schleiermacher, August Schlegel, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Paul Valéry, Ezra Pound, and Walter Benjamin as his sources, together with the work of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer as the philosophers of a revised hermeneutic tradition. Ibid., 249–50.

10 Ibid., 318.

11 Ibid., 49.

12 Ibid., 448. Topology is a branch of mathematics that deals with the relation between points whose fundamental properties remain invariant even if the shape is changed.

13 Ibid., 448, 449.

14 Ibid., 485.

15 Ibid., 486.

16 Ibid., 474.

17 Ibid., 498.

18 Derrida, "Roundtable on Translation," in *The Ear of the Other*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 120.

19 Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," trans. Joseph F. Graham, in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, eds. R. Schulte and J. Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jacques Derrida, "Roundtable on Translation."

20 Gayatri Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

21 Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

22 Reşat Nuri Güntekin, "Türkçenin Eksikleri," *Ulus*, July 25, 1944.

23 Nurullah Ataç, "Tercümeye Dair," *Tercüme* 1, No. 6 (March 19, 1941): 505–507; "Tercüme Üzerine," *Ulus*, August 14, 1944, republished in *Tercüme* 5, no. 26 (July 10, 1944): 155–157.

24 Ataç, "Tercümeye Dair," 505. For instance, while deliberating on how to translate "*Je ne mange jamais*" (I don't/never eat), Ataç finds the direct translation "Ben asla yemem" (I never eat) inadequate. It is most likely that the author makes a deliberate reference to the French idiom "*Je ne fume jamais*" (I don't smoke), as if the speaker treats eating as an unnecessary and addictive act, and so the translator needs to find an adequate idiom in Turkish, even if this changes the original words. Ibid., p. 155.

25 Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York: Routledge, 1995); see also Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1998); and Lawrence Venuti, "Translation, Community, Utopia," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2000).

26 Yunus Kazım Köni, "Tercümeye Dair Düşünceler," *Tercüme* 5, No. 26 (19 July 1944): 157–159.

27 Ibid., 159.

28 Ibid., 158.

29 Ibid., 159.

30 Ibid., 158.

31 Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersezens" in *Sämmtliche Werke* (1813; repr. Berlin: Reimer, 1838); English translation: "On the Different Methods of Translating," trans. Waltraud Bartscht, in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 42.

32 Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

Sea of Poppies and the Possibilities of Mistranslation

ARUNA D'SOUZA

There is a scene in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* where Serang Ali, a Rohingya seaman en route from the Americas to China on the *Ibis*, is called in to translate for the ship's second mate, Zachary Reed, a freed black man from Baltimore passing as white to his English superiors. He is questioning Jodhu, a Bengali boy who has recently been taken on as a lowly crewmember, about Paulette, the daughter of a French botanist who settled in Calcutta some years before. Jodhu's mother was Paulette's wet nurse, and the two grew up, the narrator tells us, "head to head at her breast."[1] Zachary has recently met Paulette and fallen in love, which is apparent to everyone but Zachary himself. Serang Ali, recognizing Zachary's true heritage and seeing his future success as a subversive form of revenge on the racist British shipping magnates who employ them, is determined not to allow his boss to sacrifice said future for the vagaries of the heart.

Serang Ali translates Jodhu's story: a heart-wrenching tale of the dramatic death of Paulette's mother in his family's boat as they attempted to ferry her across the river to get medical help; his own mother's devotion to Paulette; the unusually intimate relationship between Jodhu's mother and Paulette's father; Paulette's unconventional upbringing outside of the strict morals and manners of the British Raj; Paulette's father's generous and profligate nature; his death and Paulette's subsequent destitution; and her eventual adoption by Mr. Burnham, the owner of the ship on whose decks they now stand. Here is Serang Ali's retelling:

> Launder say father-blongi-she go hebbin. That bugger do too muchi tree-pijjin. Allo time pickin plant. Inside pocket hab no cash. After he go hebbin cow-chilo catchi number-two-father, Mr Burnham. Now she too muchi happy inside. Eat big-big rice. Better Malum Zikri forgetting she. How can learn sailor-pijjin, allo time thinking ladies-ladies? More better keep busy with laund'ry till marriage time.[2]

Perhaps you do not quite understand what Serang Ali is saying in this passage? Not to worry—as it turns out, Zachary doesn't, either. In a sense, that is the point of Ghosh's book, which is full of moments of inadequate or outright mistranslation. Ghosh, in addition to a novelist, is an anthropologist and student of linguistics, and he puts his knowledge to compelling use in this, the first book in his *Ibis* trilogy. *Sea of Poppies* revels in the beauty and contradiction of languages' particularities and their hybridity, in their geographic locatedness and their propensity to travel and morph, and in their speakers' and readers' aspirations to be understood and our inevitable failure to be comprehended. And through all this translation and mistranslation, the story proceeds anyway.

The novel is set in the early years of the 19th century (1838, to be precise) in a port city—not just *a* port city, but in some ways *the* port city—Calcutta, one of the major hubs of the capitalist enterprise known as the British Empire. Port cities are, by nature, sites of intersection: of bodies, trade routes, economies, cultures, and, above all, of languages. The characters we encounter are all connected in some way to a ship, the *Ibis*, on a journey spanning the globe. It has recently completed a long haul from the Americas, where it transported slave laborers (slavery still legal there) and gathered cotton in return; to England, where it swapped out that cotton for other commodities; around the coast of the African continent, where it picked up more goods and "indentured labor" (a category only in its merest technicalities different from slave labor, allowing the business of empire to continue despite Britain's outlawing of slavery itself); to Mauritius, where it dropped off said "indentured labor" to work on plantations; to Calcutta, where its owner is based. The hope is that it will eventually go on to China carrying opium, the main currency of Britain's colonial adventures that was at that moment under threat by the Chinese who recognized it as a form of colonial violence, but not before making another run to Mauritius to deliver Indian "indentured laborers," sold into servitude to pay off the debts accrued through the harsh economic exploitation of their British overlords.

The lascars on the *Ibis*—a motley crew of sailors who hopped on at various points in the journey—hail from all parts of the globe. As Zachary slowly realizes as he acculturates to life onboard, "they came from places that were far apart, and had nothing in common, except the Indian Ocean."[3] They learned to communicate with each other in Lascari, a hybrid language produced out of a funky stew, a "motley tongue, spoken nowhere but on the water, whose words were as varied as the port's traffic, an anarchic medley of Portuguese calaluzes and Kerala pattimars, Arab booms and Bengal paunch-ways, Malay proas and Tamil

catamarans, Hindusthani pulwars and English snows—yet beneath the surface of this farrago of sound, meaning flowed as freely as the currents beneath the crowded press of boats."[4] It is a language, in other words, not tied to land or country but to movement, migration, trade routes, and the space between.

Other characters in the book share this experience of linguistic flow—and occasional stoppage—for different reasons. These include a French woman who is more comfortable in Hindi than in English, and who is isolated both because her mother tongue is so rarely spoken in this place and because she is seldom allowed to converse in Hindi due to social expectations of "memsahibs." Even those characters unambiguously located in a linguistic milieu experience a sense of dislocation, as they interact with an increasingly diverse population as they travel closer and closer to the city of Calcutta; South Asian peasants go unheard both because of their varied, rustic dialects and because of their caste or class status.

But it is significant that the Englishmen and women in the narrative are as difficult to understand as anyone else—this book does not make a joke of people's inability to speak "proper English." Rather, it sets its sights on the narrative possibilities and comic effect of the incomprehensibility, and even impossibility, of a so-called common language, or of finding any linguistic middle ground. The British superiors—the ship's officers, the owners of the shipping companies, the colonial officials and businessmen—many of whom were born and bred in the colonies, may be indifferently educated, but do not at all lack the pretentions of their race on that account. They are also no easier to understand than the lascars or the locals. Their dialect is liberally sprinkled with a coarse and misformed Hindi—the result not just of mangled grammar, but also because of the eccentricities of transliteration between incompatible alphabets. Their form of English is full of vocabulary and idioms that the contemporary reader will find hard to parse. The irony, as Ghosh pointed out in an interview in 2008, is that most of the words that cause us to stumble appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as the record of a time in which English was much more open to Asian influence than it is now.[5]

Even Zachary Reed, speaking American English, is at a loss at times as to how to navigate this linguistic territory. In this passage, he gets a dressing down by Mr. Doughtry, the British captain, for not knowing the meaning of a word:

> This naive, if well-meant, remark earned Zachary a firm dressing down: it was about time, the pilot said, that he, Zachary, stopped behaving like a right gudda— "that's a donkey in case you were wondering." This was India, where it didn't serve for a sahib to be taken for a clodpoll of a griffin: if he wasn't a fly to what was going on, it'd be all dickey with him, mighty jildee. This was no Baltimore—this was a jungle here, with biscobras in the grass and wanderoos in the trees. If he, Zachary, wasn't to be diddled and taken for a flat, he would have to learn to gubbrow the natives with a word or two of the zubben.
>
> Since this admonishment was delivered in the strict but indulgent tone of a mentor, Zachary plucked up the courage to ask what "the zubben" was, at which the pilot breathed a patient sigh: "The zubben, dear boy, is the flash lingo of the East. It's easy enough to jin if you put your head to it. . . .But mind your Oordoo and Hindee doesn't sound too good: don't want the world to think you've gone native."[6]

A financially ruined local raja speaks what is, to our ears, a perfect form of the Queen's English, but even this doesn't ensure that he is understood. One of the running jokes in the novel is that any time he refers to major European intellectuals, his colonial counterparts have no idea who he's talking about, mistaking them for local members of the British community.

"You must not imagine, sir," he said to Mr Burnham, "that I am an ignorant native, to be spoken to like a child. If I may say so, your youthful Queen has no more loyal subject than myself, and none who is more keenly aware of the rights that are enjoyed by the people of Britain. Indeed I am thoroughly familiar, I might add, with the writings of Mr Hume, Mr Locke, and Mr Hobbes."

"Please do not speak to me, sir," said Mr Burnham, in the chilly tone of a man who wishes to snub a name-dropper, "of Mr Hume and Mr Locke. For I would have you know that I have been acquainted with them since they served on the Bengal Board of Revenue. I too have read every word they've written—even their report on sanitation. And as for Mr Hobbes, why I do believe I dined with him at my club just the other day."

"Fine fellow, Hobbes," Mr Doughty broke in suddenly. "Got a seat on the Municipal Council now, if I'm not mistaken. Went pig-sticking with him once. The shikarees scared up an old sow and a brood of piglets. Came charging at us! Scared the Nick's knackers out of the horses. Old Hobbes was tossed—right on a little suckling. Dead on the spot. The piglet I mean. Hobbes was unscathed. Damnedest thing I ever saw. Made a fine roast too. Piglet I mean."[7]

Some of the funniest moments in the novel occur, strangely enough, not through malapropism but because two people understand a word they're both using perfectly—even if each one means something very different in their use. Such is the case when Mrs. Burnham, the British memsahib who is Paulette's temporary guardian, interrogates the young Frenchwoman on the nature of her association with Zachary Reed:

Suddenly, as her suspicions deepened, the BeeBee [Mrs. Burnham] cut herself short and clamped her hands on her mouth. "Oh! dear, dear Puggly [Paulette]—tell me—you haven't...? ...you haven't... No! Tell me it isn't so!"

"What, Madame?" said Paulette, in puzzlement.

The BeeBee's voice sank to a whisper. "You haven't compromised yourself, Puggly dear, have you? No. I will not credit it."

"Compromise, Madame?" Paulette proudly raised her chin and squared her shoulders. "In matters of the heart, Madame, I do not believe that half-measures and compromises are possible. Does not love demand that we give our all?"[8]

In the face of all this linguistic (not to mention cultural) confusion, Ghosh refuses to translate for the reader.[9] We are thrown, just as these characters are, into a confusing mélange of meaning, and left to make our way through the narrative.

And make our way we do. That is what strikes me as so remarkable about *Sea of Poppies*: the fact that despite, and sometimes even because of, this constant misunderstanding, the story progresses, and characters fumble their way through the world. Time passes, history is made, unmade, remade. The book asks us to imagine ourselves in a world with only the merest wisp of a common language—an English that has been forced by its speakers in myriad directions and has been infiltrated by many other tongues, thanks to colonialism and trade. It ends with an uprising, an explosive event that is impelled by incomplete understandings, but that opens a space for future entanglements, movements, actions, and encounters.

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Translation is a practice that strives for an impossibility, a chimera of perfect understanding across the chasm of language, ideology, and culture. One undertakes it knowing that it will always be a failed project, that some notions are simply untranslatable, that even if one finds the perfect words to express a foreign notion, that notion will not lose its foreignness entirely. But still we persist, in our belief that translation is necessary for understanding, understanding is a prerequisite for empathy, and empathy is an antidote to cruelty. To make our world more fair and just, we must be able to fathom each other fully—our ability to be kind is predicated on our ability to relate to those on whom we bestow that kindness. We imagine that a productive collectivity only emerges from a shared language, or at least from an inability to translate near-seamlessly between languages.

The problem, of course, is that I don't want to have to wait until people understand me for them to treat me as fully human, and vice versa. And I don't want to believe that a sort of coming together—a consensus—has to emerge before we carry on with the task of dismantling the aspects of our lived experiences that are untenable, violent, and inhumane. But even more than that, I don't want to lose the beauty inherent in misunderstanding—in the incompatibility of two systems of sign making, in the glitches that occur when words and thoughts and ideas don't match up, when new ideas are formed out of the ashes of mistaken readings and stubborn, even perverse, resistance to comprehension.

Harold Bloom, in his classic work of literary theory, *The Anxiety of Influence*, described the way younger poets opened a creative space for themselves through a process of *misprision*—a willful misreading of the poetry of their elders.[10] In a sense, Bloom was recognizing the way that mistranslation, misreading, and misunderstanding are not just failed attempts to translate, read, or understand, but, indeed, can be *generative* and *creative* acts—acts which make new forms of enunciation, new languages, possible.

Communication through the thicket of mistranslation is an act of generosity. It is a declaration that I value your speech without it having to be on my terms. It is a recognition that I will never fully understand what you are saying, because I do not share your experience, linguistic or otherwise. It is a willingness to grasp what I can know, and live with what I cannot. It is too bad, in fact, that those of us who speak a common language are lulled into thinking that we know each other—too bad that we do not have a constant reminder of the vast distances between us, no matter our linguistic proximity. Because justice, kindness, and fairness, to my mind, are based not on understanding each other, but on finding each other's humanity despite our incapacity to understand.

This ethics—a call to the collective—is a notion that underpins *The Translator's Silence* (2012) by Raqs Media Collective, one of the works in *Traduttore, Traditore* (p.138). This work stages incomprehension rather than understanding, by juxtaposing languages (English, Bengali, and Urdu/Hindustani) in ways that visually and linguistically suggest translation as a form of palimpsest, not as a conversion of one language to another, but an unreadable accumulation of signs. In an interview with the scholar Avishek Ganguly, we see how this plays out through the gift of a refusal to translate.

> Avishek Ganguly: What if the ability to read the language of the original, as a way of knowing the enemy, transforms into the occasion for inviting the companionship of the stranger?
>
> Jebeesh Bagchi (Raqs Media Collective): [. . .] I remember

there was a certain degree of confusion about that when it was shown here, because it seemed that at most only two of those three languages could be comprehensible to our audience.

Shuddha Sengupta (Raqs Media Collective): [. . .] When people ask us, "How am I supposed to know what the other languages are saying?" our response is always, "Find someone who can read it for you."... So the work involves the search for someone who can read a poem to you in a language you don't understand. That person is usually someone you don't know.[11]

In one of the most moving passages of Ghosh's novel, he illuminates the capacity of languages—borne of and circulated through systems of global exchange, empire building and wealth extraction, and migration—to transport even the most freedom-bound people across time and space, not just in their own minds but as part of a collective project of world-building. Neel Rattan Halder is a rich landowner and minor raja who has been convicted of forgery in a sham trial and is being sent as punishment to work in the plantations of Mauritius, a journey that will cause him to lose caste, lose face, and most of all lose his liberty. On the way there, he asks a fellow prisoner, a Chinese man named Ah Fatt, about his origins.

"Where's *your* home, Ah Fatt? Tell me about it. Is it in a village?

"Not village." Ah Fatt scratched his chin. "My home very big place. Guangzhou. English call Canton."

"Tell me. Tell me everything."

Hou-hou...

Thus it happened that while the *Ibis* was still on the Hooghly, Neel was being transported across the continent, to Canton—and it was this other journey, more vivid than his own, that kept his sanity intact through the first part of the voyage: no one but Ah Fatt, no one he had ever known, could have provided him with the escape he needed, into a realm that was wholly unfamiliar, utterly unlike his own.

It was not because of Ah Fatt's fluency that Neel's vision of Canton became so vivid as to make it real: in fact, the opposite was true, for the genius of Ah Fatt's descriptions lay in their elisions, so that to listen to him *was a venture of collaboration, in which the things that were spoken of came gradually to be transformed into artefacts of a shared imagining.*[12]

Ah Fatt's description takes several pages of the novel, morphing from a personal recollection into its own narrative, one that is dissociated from any particular storyteller. It becomes something quite distinct—a novel within a novel, one that sets the stage, quite literally, for the next installment in Ghosh's trilogy, *River of Smoke*, which will take place in Guangzhou. The collaborative project of understanding each other across the chasms of incomprehension, then, is not a barrier to narrative drive, to the unfolding of lives and events, but a necessary prerequisite. For what is fiction but a matter of friction, of troubling our journeys in ways that are both delightful and harrowing? And what, for that matter, is life or politics, but that same thicket of bewildering signs that we experience, alone and together, out of which we make our fragile and contingent worlds?

1 Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 69

2 Ibid., 201.

3 Ibid., 13..

4 Ibid., 108.

5 Amitav Ghosh, "Caste, Colonialism, and a *Sea of Poppies*," interview by Jacki Lyden, *All Things Considered*, November 9, 2008, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96713674.

6 Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*, 50.

7 Ibid., 123–24.

8 Ibid., 287–88.

9 A "Chrestomathy," written in the form of a treatise by the ruined raja, with translations of many of the more opaque terms in the novel, has been on the author's website since the book's publication in 2008, but did not appear in the original edition. It is written as the (fictional) subaltern's counterpart to the so-called *Hobson-Jobson*, otherwise known as *The Anglo-Indian Dictionary*, the encyclopedic 1886 tome compiled by Henry Yule and Arthur Coke Burnell, on which Ghosh and other writers (including Salman Rushdie) have relied.

10 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), passim.

11 Raqs Media Collective, "Invoking the Translator: A Conversation with Raqs Media Collective," interview by Avishek Ganguly, *Public Books*, August 8, 2016, http://www.publicbooks.org/invoking-the-translatora-conversation-with-raqs-media-collective/.

12 Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*, 390-91. Emphasis added.


Traduttore, Traditore
November 3–December 16, 2017
Curated by Karen Greenwalt and Katja Rivera
Traduttore, Traditore brings together a group of artists from around the world who employ processes of translation to expose, question, and challenge global circuits of economic and cultural capital. Exploring translation beyond its linguistic meaning, Traduttore, Traditore considers the political dynamics of power and infrastructure that influence the movement of people, goods, ideas, and language across borders. Taken from the Italian aphorism that roughly translates to "translator, traitor," the title of the exhibition speaks to the misunderstandings, losses, and fragmentation that manifest during this process of exchange.
Traduttore, Traditore is supported by the School of Art & Art History and the Department of Art History, the College of Architecture, Design, and the Arts, University of Illinois at Chicago; The Cultural Service of the French Embassy in Chicago; Institute for the Humanities, University of Illinois at Chicago; and a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.


EXIT

Bani Abidi

b. 1971, Pakistani
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What was the impetus for making *Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner was made in 2004, a year after I returned to Pakistan from the US, where I had lived for six years. It was around the time that Afghanistan was attacked by the US, and Pakistan's airspace was being used by the US Air Force. I was just struck by how Pakistan had historically always been at the crossroads of imperial interests, and what the implications of that were. The brass band itself is a remnant of the British Raj, and I was interested in employing these out-of-commission bands to literally "learn a new tune." No one in Pakistan was really required or expected to play the US national anthem, it was an artistic gesture. I recorded the Star Spangled Banner from the internet on a cassette tape and replayed it for them. So there was already one generation of loss. What came out as a result was a cacophony of sound, and no one really cared much about how bad it sounded. The band had been hired to learn and play this song; they did it while cracking up about the quality of the performance. So they had some form of agency, which I enjoyed about the performance. Their agency lay in the total lack of accountability toward the real piece of music, in it being a flimsy rendition.

Why did you choose to work in double channel video? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

The choice of working with video is very important for me. The kind of expectations I have of meanings being revealed and experienced over time work best in this medium. I used two channels or more for different purposes in each work. My earliest videos were about cultural and identity politics between Pakistan and India, and a mirroring of myself performing in those videos was based on the concept of twins. In this video, the double channel has been used to show the exterior context of a particular space where a certain action is happening.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

All my videos are inspired by things that reside in my mind and in my surroundings, a combination of older and newer interests. *Shan Pipe Band* was rare in the immediacy of my reaction to a particular political situation. I generally prefer not to respond to the news headlines of the day. Topicality, and generally using art as a visual response to current political issues is very limiting, in my mind. And it's a huge tendency in today's art world: very easy liberal political positions mirrored in artistic practices.

Arturo Hernández Alcázar

b. 1978, Mexican
lives and works in Mexico City

How do you understand the concept of translation?

Translating is always lying, deviating; it is always arbitrary. But translations are also the product of very complex processes—historical, linguistic, idiomatic—related to power in its political, theological, philosophical, and cultural practice. Mexico, for example, is a knot of Hispanicized nomenclatures born of misunderstandings and phonetic translations, mainly from Nahuatl to Castellano[1], by conquistadors and evangelizers, transforming in a radical way the sound shape and it relation to the world.

We always translate, we do it all the time. We translate gestures, sayings, ways of moving or speaking. Languages, too, of course. To answer this question, I centered myself on this idea of lying: the first lie was the first word spoken or vice versa.

What was the impetus for making *Columna de trabajo (salario mínimo)* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

Columna de trabajo (Work Column), like much of my work, was born out of a concern to enunciate the world and time we live in—the velocity and cross-over of relationships and correspondences between elements and materials that make up the world. The constant collision or coupling of these elements. *Columna de trabajo* came from a play of elements found in specific contexts and that are familiar to us: tools and money; which, when placed in a precarious balance, speak of an unstable relationship between work and its remuneration, specifically tools of construction and destruction and coins that add up to either the minimum wage obtained by an illegal worker in the United States (in this case) or the basic costs of life: transport, coffee, bread, a basic menu (in *Black Horizon in a Precarious Balance*, another version of the work from 2012).

Something that also interests me is the lack of adhesion. There is no security or stability in the work but rather a search for the accident, to go toward the most unstable form. In the installation, the black tools are impacted on the wall. The coins are accumulated in a pile on the ends of the tools, and when they fall (due to any circumstance, wind, earthquake, accident), cannot be taken from the ground and replaced, but rather new coins must be accumulated by the institution or gallerist, or the collector who shows the work. I think there is another statement here about the tensions between *accumulation* and *detritus* that exist in the neoliberal context of the precariousness of work. There is always an implicit action in the piece—the form itself is the result of an action in a diversity of situations and contexts. What we see is somehow a residue, again, the wear and tear of a complex operation. I understand this action as an *action on foot*: to lift the tools off the ground, use them, take them to the place where the walls will be attacked. Attack them—one stroke—accumulate time in placing the coins, leave the dust and material from the wall, the coins that fall. The piece is also perhaps a kind of materialization that allows you to recognize who is looking at the objects.

Why did you choose to work with smoked tools with coins? What is the relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

Since I went ahead and already answered some of this question, I will attempt to tell you the history of the work:

Smoke cancels, covers, voids. Starting from the first war, the enemy's fields were burned to make them dependent. Smoke, the pillar of smoke, covers the media attached to the system. It is a land, a town in the night of the Chiapas mountain being burned by paramilitaries. The smoke is black.

I was always fascinated with tools. My father is an engineer but also an activist for the workers' movements and independent unionism in Mexico. Let's say that these are images and elements I have always lived with. Studying unmethodically (that is, outside of the academy) the issue of the workers' movements and their gradual crushing by the neoliberal model, my view of these objects changed in the following years. In the early nineties, I began to love old markets, which in Mexico and other parts of the world (as I have seen since), are not so much hoarding antiquarian fairs but fractioned properties, surrounded by a periphery of sidewalks, cracks of an urbanism engendered in cement in which objects are offered on the floor in their last useful and economic possibilities. It was in that context that I encountered functional work tools offered at very low prices, the figure of the worker selling his last means of work––before his own body––in order to bring the bread home. With tangible elements, he made concrete the current problems of work insecurity and the strangulation of the worker.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

From beginning to end, my work has to do with social and political issues. My research focuses on dispersions and collisions that occur in geological, historical, political, economic, and social spheres. I would call it the material form, the residue of the constant shock that gives *reality* a certain shape. I look to chance, improvisation, and encounter—the foundations of the critical formulation I appeal to in my work. I am very interested in the work being a way of knowing someone, what someone says and thinks about their own time, and that this possibility is a sort of fertilizer for what I think would be freedom. It seems impossible for me to dissociate my work from its context, the desire and the power to affect it is unconditional.

1 Castellano is another term for the Spanish language, which takes its name from the Castille region of Spain.—Ed.

Carlos Arias

b. 1964, Chilean
lives and works in Puebla, Mexico

How do you understand the concept of translation?

I understand it in two ways: first as a change of idiom and/or language, and second as another material space in which a field of reality is carried into an expressive medium.

What was the impetus for making *Bilingual* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

I'm interested in the idea of the border as a moment where a space opens up for the development of political subjects and ideas. By embroidering more than four hundred words that are written the same in English as in Spanish, I meant to restrain the quality of the word that no longer corresponds to its original language and is shared. What is interesting to me is that they are in general very old words derived from Latin and Romance languages. They allude to themes that are important to society: politics, law, medicine, race, sex, and geography. I ordered the words as a long, absurd poem—it should be read in order—and took advantage of the unease any word that is related to coitus and other sexed subjects creates. These words sometimes make connections within the text and give it significance through the gravity, strength, or displacement of a word and its meaning.

Why did you choose to work in embroidery? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

It seems to me that the technique and concept form one amalgam of ideas and products. By embroidering, I put my subjects and ideas in a "different" situation which creates an opportunity where the actual meaning of the work always refers to the material constituting it, creating a unitary sense of image-text-material.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

The work refers to current issues because by the simple act of using a technique relegated to fine art, embroidery is converted into a political tool that engages various themes involving social subjects such as gender, the disjunction between high art and popular art, and the power of image—in today's world—while confronting the presence of the material itself.

Luis Camnitzer

b. 1937, Uruguayan born Germany
lives and works in New York

How do you understand the concept of translation?

I grew up bilingual in Spanish and German, and later added English and Italian. It's like traveling from one bubble to another, changing feelings while simultaneously being able to observe previous and present ones critically from different points of view. Art, in that sense, is yet another language, one that fills all the holes of spoken language and opens new unspoken or unspeakable ones. People who are educated monolingually are basically being lobotomized and forced into a monodimesional perspective that acts as an intellectual prison.

What was the impetus for making *Insults* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

Insults are a form of therapy that—beyond the release—only work if they are received and if the receiver feels hurt. But, in essence, they tend to describe the insultor and not the insultee. In Uruguay we have a wonderful and poetic insult: "Son of a thousand whores." The poetry is lost in Spanish, because it became a conventional statement. If the poetry were preserved, the insult would lose efficiency. Yet, nobody empathizes with the message, since usually and so far, motherhood is still restricted to individual women. The insult, therefore, doesn't make sense and only expresses the odd belief that quantity increases quality. The idea of Insults was to remove insults from the recipients entirely and show how stupid the whole procedure is. It's a backhanded insult to the insulter.

Why did you choose to work in vinyl installation? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

Efficiency. The first time I installed *Insults*, I handwrote them on the gallery wall. I also considered hiring a graffitti artist to do them on a big scale, and to make big highway signs. These are all valid ways of presenting them.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

I don't think they are time-specific. Not that I presume it to be a classic piece by any means, but it certainly is timeless. I was only thinking about insults—about the poetry of some, about the arbitrariness of others (sometimes we don't even know the meaning of the words we use).

Alejandro Cesarco

b. 1975, Uruguayan
lives and works in New York

How do you understand the concept of translation?

Translation is the process by which something communicated in one language is conveyed in another. Translation transports concepts and cultural forms between speakers and receivers, across linguistic contexts, and over time. In this way, we could consider translation as a form of caretaking for a work: it carries it across different contexts to ensure the work's continuity and renewed influence. Translation is also the agency through which the binding force of our guiding narratives is relaxed or reshaped.

What was the impetus for making *Zeide Isaac* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

Zeide Isaac is a portrait of my grandfather, who at the time was 94 years old and a Holocaust survivor. The story is told through my own memories of him, by way of a short script I wrote and had him perform. It is a work of fiction rooted in reality. The work, more than being a traditional interview/portrait, addresses the possibilities, limitations, and responsibilities of testimony. Testimony is to some extent a way of reconstituting identity. The script speaks of the role of testimony in the psychological evolution of the witness and of the collective conscience. My grandfather, in this case, represents the embodiment of memory, attesting to the past and to the continuing presence of the past in the present. The layering of narrative voices and the passage of time between the event and its retelling, from firsthand experience to third generation, is allegorically implied in the video by my grandfather's passage from witness to actor.

Why did you choose to work in film? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

I chose to work on 16 mm film becuase of the physicality of the medium. Film imagery is indexical in the sense that imagery results from the imprint of real light on a light-sensitive surface. I wanted the work to carry the direct imprint of my grandfather's body.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

Isn't meaning always dependent on context?

Bethany Collins

b. 1984, American
lives and works in Chicago

How do you understand the concept of translation?

I have found that language is a kind of prism through which I can interrogate all other topics. And struggling with the consistent duality of language—its potential and its inevitable failure—is the basis for my making.

What was the impetus for making *America: A Hymnal* and *Comprise, 1982* and what do you hope viewers take away from these works?

Comprise, 1982 is a part of my *Contronym* series. Contronyms are words that have evolved over time to contain their own opposite meanings. In these works on paper, contronym definitions from the *Webster's New World* or *American Heritage* dictionary are transposed onto American Master's paper, then obscured with Pink Pearl or Black Magic erasers. Opposing definitions or idioms remain legible—poetically charged through their isolation—while all other meanings exist only in traces and residue.

America: A Hymnal consists of one hundred versions of *My Country 'Tis of Thee* from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Since the debut of the lyrics written by the Reverend Samuel F. Smith on July 4, 1831, the lyrics of *My Country 'Tis of Thee* were retitled and rewritten at least one hundred times. Each rewriting was in support of a passionately held cause—from temperance and suffrage to abolition and even the Confederacy—and articulates a version of what it means to be American. In its many lyrical variations, *America: A Hymnal* is a chronological retelling of American history, politics, and culture through one song.

Why did you choose to work in toner and graphite on American Masters paper for *Comprise, 1982* and do *America: A Hymnal* as a book with laser cut musical notations? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

The content is embedded in the material. The contronym definitions in *Comprise, 1982* are pulled from an *American Heritage Dictionary* (from 1982), transposed onto American Master's bright white paper and then erased with Pink Pearl erasers. For *America: A Hymnal*, while the differing lyrics for each version of *My Country 'Tis of Thee* remain legible, the hymnal's unifying tune has been all but burned away. The choice of surface and tool to obscure is equal to the text.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

What other choice is there, but to respond to the world.

Brendan Fernandes

b. 1979, Canadian born Kenya
lives and works in Chicago

How do you understand the concept of translation?

I understand translation as a process of decoding to make one form of language comprehensible to someone who may not otherwise be able to understand it. Language, for me, could be both the spoken and the written, but it can also be nonverbal forms of communication like dance or Morse code. Translation is a means of facilitating correspondence: a way of delivering thoughts and ideas from one to another. For me, the process of translation has the potential to create critical mass and solidarity across boundaries otherwise enforced by language. Because it allows for common understanding and bridging gaps in understanding, translation is a very powerful tool for expression.

What was the impetus for making *Devil's Noise* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

The impetus for *Devil's Noise* was to bring attention to the ways that the Apartheid government in South Africa used language as a means to control black South Africans and people of color. In 1974, the government decreed that all children in the school system would be taught in Afrikaans. As a result, black children and children of color were faced with the barrier of learning in a foreign tongue, the language of the oppressor. This was enforced as a means to further alienate these groups by limiting their education and setting them apart from their peers. Language should be a tool for freedom and give people the right and ability to express themselves. Likewise, education should be a tool to develop and grow a child's mind, but in this instance language and education were used in opposition to children, leaving children of specific racial backgrounds undereducated and unable to access the same level of understanding as their peers.

These policies were of political consequence. They put language in the position of hegemony and disregarded other dialects and tongues of the nation, structuring conflict and institutionalizing difference and division.

In making this work I aimed to bring awareness to this specific moment in time, but to also question how language has been used as a tool to control communities.

Why did you choose to do the work as hand-bound books with gold foil stamping and black linen paper? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

Devil's Noise is in two parts: a film and a book installation. The books are hand bound with black covers that have lines of my poetry stamped in gold foil on the spines and front covers. Books are a means of disseminating and communicating ideas. They are the tools to educate, read to others, and to gain knowledge. The pages of my books are filled with black linen paper. These fully inked pages symbolize the people of South Africa who were marginalized and barred from education because of their skin color. I see them as "invisible" books, books with no visible markings within them, so they are "empty" on the inside. When set beside each other, the books create a pile that acts as a concrete poem. The poem speaks to the power of language and the way that it was manipulated in South Africa to alienate and further disenfranchise marginalized groups.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

This work is specifically about South Africa—the 1974 Afrikaans decree and the ensuing riots in 1976—but I hope this specific example also resonates with contemporary political and linguistic conflicts. I think that today we are again living in precarious times and that we are facing similar moments in which people are questioning their civil rights. Governments continue to be corrupt. In making this work, I aimed to bring awareness to this specific moment in South Africa but also to give an example to people in our current time and place to think about, to reconsider, and to reevaluate the state of our rights and freedoms—and the ongoing fight for them.

Dora García

b. 1965, Spanish
lives and works in Barcelona

How do you understand the concept of translation?

I think it's possibly the one and only brain activity. We translate from input to perception, from perception to reaction, from reaction to archive, from archive to learning, from learning to unlearning, from new to old, from old to new, from past to future and from future to past. We live in a present of constant correspondences between a term and the possible equivalents of that term.

What was the impetus for making *The Messenger* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

It is only through the Other that we understand ourselves.

Why did you choose to work in performance? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

I like to work with performance because the feedback of the public and the situation is immediate, because it is closer to behavior and personal choices, because it is closer to life—although that last expression needs a lot of nuance. It is, let us say, the best discipline to interfere with reality. Obviously, there is a relationship between the work and its media—the work is the media and the media is the work.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

It would only be logical, since I live immersed in those social and political issues.

Katia Kameli

b. 1973, French-Algerian
lives and works in Paris

How do you understand the concept of translation?

As a Franco-Algerian artist, I have always had to switch between two different cultural identities, so the idea of translation is important to me. This concept embodies the fact that to establish a possible cultural exchange, a stranger has to subscribe to local cultural principles or situations, and must reinterpret them in light of his or her personal history.

So, as an artist, I consider myself a translator who always transforms the source language, importing significant loanwords to enrich narratives while simultaneously restoring the original's legacy. But to me, translation is not only a passage between cultures or an act of transmission, it also functions as an extension of meaning, a 'third space' enabling the emergence of other visions, forms, and positions.

What was the impetus for making *Stream of Stories* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

Stream of Stories is an installation in which I call into question the artificial literary and artistic boundaries separating Islamic and Christian cultural heritage.

The starting point was the origins of a classic text in French literature, *Les Fables de La Fontaine* written in the seventeenth century. I travelled back to the sources from which La Fontaine admitted he was inspired. From the first appearance of those animal allegories in the *Pachantantra* in India, to their translation into Arabic in the *Kalīla wa Dimna*, and their modern European counterparts, *Stream of Stories* reflects how these various interpretations of the text are meaningful of the context within which they have been produced. As every translation is both literal and cultural, a fusion of languages and cultures is often operating.

Today, public discourse in Europe can easily shift to isolationist rhetoric and right-wing politics, so throughout *Stream of Stories*, I seek to put forward another story, one of a long-standing global history, porous borders, and intellectual exchanges between Islamic, Indian, and European heritage. It invites viewers to explore an in-between space at the crossing of tradition and contemporaneity.

Why did you choose to work in installation with texts, video, and sculptural elements? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

I have developed a research-based practice: historical and cultural facts are often enriching the plural forms of my poetic and plastic imagination. This interdisciplinarity is at stake in *Stream of Stories*, too. The installation features masks of the fables' animal characters, screen-printings, illuminations, and videos of interviews with translators and historians. I mix techniques that are characteristic of Islamic art—such as collage, illuminations, and hand-gilding—with contemporary aesthetics/mediums, so the ideas of historical crossings and cultural exchanges are visible both conceptually and physically. These various techniques are also a way to give the viewer several levels of understanding and offer them the possibility to explore their own path, from local stories to a more universal context.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

As I said earlier, cultural confusion crystallises most of social and political conflicts of our times. La Fontaine's fables are a major influence in French culture, and as any cultural emblem, it can easily be the object of dubious re-appropriation. It is crucial to me to point out the similarities between various cultural backgrounds in order to open a reflexive path that can generate a critical stance and allow for the rewriting of history and narratives.

Harold Mendez

b. 1977, American
lives and works in Los Angeles

How do you understand the concept of translation?

I'm constantly translating in terms of looking at a photograph or a negative and thinking about how it translates into a positive version. If you think about the experience of witnessing an event, that becomes a sort of record and, in the process of making a photograph, you think about translating that into something more tangible, like an object. I'm not satisfied with a pristine or precious print, somehow my hand has to be present—through maltreating the surface or doing something to the object so that it is translated.

The other thing I think about is that growing up, because my parents are both immigrants, when they didn't have a firm grasp of English, my older brother and I were the ones who had to translate for them. For us, that always created a sense of embarrassment, and of course looking back I feel bad that my parents had to ask us for help. So, the idea of translation is part of the everyday growing up in the immigrant experience.

What was the impetus for making *Elmina Castle* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

I had gone to Ghana through an exchange program to look at the tradition of natural dyes and pigments in West Africa. I had already experimented with cochineal, which I use in a lot of my sculptures, and I was making sculptures and using natural dyes. I ended up staying a few months after this program and I made two trips to the coast. On the second visit, I went to Elmina Castle. I already knew about Elmina Castle, because I had read about and seen films on it and its history prior to going to Ghana. The photograph I ended up taking is in one of the rooms where slaves were held. It's a small room with a small window, which is almost—or maybe even half—the size of the actual photograph. The smell in the room was so powerful, and it's because you are standing on feces and blood that have hardened over time.

I had taken a few photographs of the actual space and there was a moment where I was by myself and the sun cast a shadow of my head onto the floor. I felt it was a kind of haunted space, as if people were still in there, so I took a photograph of my own shadow. That implicated myself as someone standing on that history, but I was also thinking about Elmina Castle as a memorial, if you will. It's a historic monument, known as "the last passage." Elmina Castle embodies an absence, but also a ghostly presence. I took this photograph in 1999 and I thought about it frequently, but I didn't know what to do with it. I didn't feel like it made sense to place it in any other context with any other work until just last year. I took the slide with me to the Rauschenberg residency [last] August and somehow it made sense to look at the photograph again. I then came across this bronze material that Rauschenberg had left there, and so I made the frame—what I had envisioned was something very tight, in the way that the room in Elmina Castle is tight. I made these frames and placed them out into the ocean where they would get oxidized; so there is this other form, not of translation, but some kind of alchemy. The material was quite heavy, but I also felt that the subject matter and the history were so heavy. I was looking at the bronze as something that had

material value but was also thinking about the history having material value. So it took a long time to figure out what to do with this work, which started in 1999. Something about the slow process feels right in terms of practice.

I'm asking the viewer to slow down. The work is installed low on the wall, so that the viewer has a perspective of standing in that site. Photography in particular can be very fast, and the image can have a kind of aesthetic sensibility. I'm always fighting against that, which is why I take a long time to produce images or I maltreat the images, because I want to be sure they're not fast, and that there isn't a quick consumption of the image, although that is, of course, still possible. If anything, what I'm hoping for—in addition to slowing down—is that the viewer will recognize that history is not such a fixed thing. There is a potential for another narrative and there is material to learn from.

Why did you choose to work in film/photography/installation? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

When I've made works of image transfers I'm essentially excavating this material, as there is all this paper pulp that I have to remove in order to reveal that image. There is no manipulation in Photoshop. I arrive at photography by thinking about sculpture—I'm thinking about objects in the world. I'm distrustful of photography, as I already mentioned, because it has a potential to be manipulated and because there is an element of speed. By handling the photograph, I'm retaining something that is closer to the actual object in the world as an object.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

Some of my work, such as *American Pictures*, alludes to the current political situation. This sculpture is a direct stand-in for the body in thinking about the violence in America against black, brown, and immigrant bodies. In other cases, it's not so direct. I stay away from the literal or overly didactic. There is a sense of the poetic involved in my work. There is a conceptual thread that runs through all of my work. This is also why I work slowly and methodically, to figure out how I want my work to be in the world. That's all very conscious.

Sherwin Ovid

b. 1978, Trinidadian
lives and works in Chicago

How do you understand the concept of translation?

The concept strikes me as an impulse or desire to understand one another. What follows in the wake of that desire is how we access that understanding. The problematic aspect of understanding is in the motivation to do so. I think there are other ways of understanding that are about the organic utility of ideas expressed in language that is always cross pollinating and in a state of flux. In other words, a cultural migration across borders.

What was the impetus for making *Masquerade Bandage for Motherboard* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

Masquerade Bandage for Motherboard came from a desire to explore encoding a translation of folkloric and linguistic strands of the past in braille. I am interested in knowing how the medium of braille carries other kinds of content that could expand the affective possibilities of legibility. The fact that braille has to be felt makes for an embodied experience. The prerequisite in trying to gain access to the information is slowing down. In many ways, it runs counter to the speed of current technologies that promise to increase the expediancy of translation. In the process of translating the stories, access has been rendered with more nuance and opacity because I think our attempts of translating stories within the black experience can engage multiple registers of the sensory experience.

Why did you choose to work in sculpture (sugar sculptures and an artist-made book)? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

The production of a book seemed most appropriate as a platform to stage the two main texts that were my primary sources. In both cases, the recovery and preservation of oral histories in text seem to address a fear of their annihilation. My own version of the book brings together these sources that make very different claims to knowledge and translation. Sugar has strong historical implications as a catalyst in the transatlantic slave trade, and its attendant economies rendered black bodies as objects and tools. The sculpture of the awl was particularly significant because it was the tool responsible for Louis Braille losing his eyesight. The tools used to make the book were transformed into sugar so they could embody notions of being eaten or consumed toward nothingness. A “lick” on many islands in the Caribbean also doubles as a term to describe lashes of physical punishment, in addition to its meaning to taste with the tongue.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

I aspire to make work that is assertive in declaring the right to black existance and humanity on its own terms. The question of the human being has become more relative, often through the lens of science fiction. The experience of black people in the Americas has been, by and large, a tenure of occupying both subject and object positions. The afterlife of this historical catastrophy of disposession has been reconfigured in new forms, and I find it imperative to address this in my work. One of the undeniable modes of black expressivity for sustaining life within states that perpetualy deny black humanity is music. I think close attention should be paid to expanding the ways we share and process our collective past into an embodied experience.

Michael Rakowitz

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b. 1973, Iraqi-American
lives and works in Chicago

How do you understand the concept of translation?

The concept of translation is something that, for me, is about removal in many ways; there's something about it that involves a certain loss. When you translate language, for instance, there is always something that gets lost. It also happens with visionary architectural drawings, when one translates a concept from paper into the real world, there is a certain erosion of the fantasy. As a student, I was intrigued with the projects by architects that couldn't get done, because it speaks about the limitations of our culture and world. But it also indicates vision and shows a certain kind of passion for a culture that has not yet come to be, a culture that can accommodate a structure like that.

I was talking to Lucy Byatt, a curator in Scotland, about hospitality in relation to my work. She was saying that, for her, translation is the most radical form of hospitality these days. I thought that was so interesting, especially with the backdrop of the immigration crisis. If you think about where we are in the world—with people being dispossessed and displaced—this idea of translation being available is an essential bridge to be built. And it's not always available when somebody finds themselves coming out of the traumatic space of fleeing and trying to belong to a new place.

What was the impetus for making *The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

This is always tricky, because I think one of the most rewarding parts of being an artist is that people project and take away things that you could never have imagined. So I don't like overdetermining my projects. But I will say that *The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours* was very much a work that was done site specifically in Istanbul. It was about conjuring the ghost—the uncomfortable apparition—of the disappeared Armenian community that was a part of the Armenian Genocide in 1915. It was about looking at the artisanal trace of somebody like Garabet Cezayirliyan, who was the plaster artisan whose archive I was working with, and to see this one body of work that he produced. The story of the Armenian craftspeople is like the stories of the Kurdish and Greek craftspeople in the Ottoman empire. The artisans were, more or less, minorities and they were the ones that did the work—for example, they became architects, whereas Turks would not be architects. The architectural ornaments that one finds throughout Istanbul is an indicator of the traces of Armenian fingers and hands that bear silent witness to the disappeared Armenian community. And if these ornaments were to disappear, like their authors did, Istanbul would be a kind of blank city, without any of its flourishes. And I want viewers to ponder that, to meditate on that.

The project in Istanbul was really about being able to say things like, "Armenian Genocide," which can't be spoken without consequence there. As an artist, I got to leave. But there are other people whose bodies bear the marks of trying to speak truth to power in a place like Turkey. And the work was vandalized a few times in Istanbul. There was a long table that had everything from the dog bones, to the ram horns, and everything else that was more or less used to reinforce the plaster. I wrote the provenance of each of those objects in pencil on the plywood and, in Istanbul, wherever it said Armenian or Armenian Genocide, there was somebody who was constantly blotting out those words. I don't want to say that the takeaway was to be provocative, but it was meant to have people look at their city and to understand just how much the structure of the city was Armenian. It had a lot to do with being able to speak about it, but not necessarily do it in a way that was expected. To concentrate on the architectural heritage, the lineage of so many of these craftspeople, and also to talk about those rare times when things overlap.

"The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours" is the Turkish phrase that parents say when they give their child over as an apprentice to a master. That, to me, was really interesting. It's another form of translation—of being able to think about that phrase, and think about the bones of the building, and the skin of the building, and what happens when you lose the population that made that skin.

Why did you choose to work in installation with vitrines, plaster casts, and rubbings? What is the relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

The rubbings—called frottage—have traditionally been done with everything from charcoal to using something like a spoon and picking up the dirt that is on the tombstone or architectural ornament. What I used in *The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours* was something called a heel ball—a kind of wax-based shoe polish. The most popular color that still exists in the archives of this long-forgotten way of making shoe polish was a red one called oxblood. I thought that was really interesting in relationship to the way we were using the bones of the dogs that were exiled from

Istanbul to Sivriada when they were trying to modernize the city in 1910–11. People who have written about the Armenian Genocide and also the Holocaust talk about how the first genocide of the twentieth century was actually committed against dogs in Istanbul. So I was trying to move beyond the completely anthropocentric understanding of genocide. Picking up on a trace, and echoing with the casts that were made from Garabet's archive of molds.

But the rubbings were also a way to expand the project beyond the scope of the molds that were available to me, allowing me to tell the story of other buildings throughout the city. Most of the rubbings were made by Armenian students in Istanbul—so it was their fingers and hands that were picking up the traces of their ancestors' fingers and hands. I think about the provenance of how things get made more than just about the material resonance. It could have been a different kind of paper or a different kind of cotton, it could have been anything. For me it was important that I worked with people in the city.

In terms of the actual casts, we used the ground up bones of dogs and livestock that were descended from farms of the dispossessed Armenian community in places likes Anatolia. The idea that the bones would go into the mixture was echoing the way in which the molds that Garabet made survived. Before silicone existed, animal bones would be used to make the molds because it gelatinizes and creates a really strong material, enabling the molds to survive all these years. I started to think about what would happen if the bone went from the mold and into the actual casting, so we mixed the ground up bones into the plaster itself. It was a bit like the transmission from mold to cast, in the same way as the transmission of knowledge from master to apprentice.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

What I try to do with my work is to look broadly at the way history continues to unfold and the way that we understand history. I hope that I'm always speaking to something that's happening now. I've done works about the Iraq War and Palestine, and the things that deeply affect my family, affect me, and that were a part of my upbringing. But, for instance, one of the things that was circulating as a critique of the Istanbul Biennial in 2015 was that there wasn't any work dealing with the Kurdish crisis at the time. I thought that was really tone deaf—it was wanting the Biennial to suddenly be something that was about current events. But it's about the amnesia and refusal to acknowledge the traumas of the Armenian Genocide that allows for something like the continued persecution of the Kurds to happen. It's the ability of a country to keep itself from reckoning with its past that enables it to continue this denial and to allow this abuse to happen over and over again. In that sense, I hope that when I'm doing projects that are about the looted Mesopotamian artifacts and the disavowed architectural history of Istanbul, that in some way it's speaking to now. Every one of those artifacts that's looted and ends up in another country and cannot be returned because it's too dangerous for them to go back mirrors the story of the Iraqi refugee. They end up in those third party countries and are unable to return because it's too dangerous. It's about these looted lives and interrupted lives. The approach that I have is to look at history as a kind of 360 degree landscape, not something that is only in front of you. This is what I hope happens in the work.

Raqs Media Collective

founded 1992, India
live and works in New Delhi

How do you understand the concept of translation?

We once heard someone say, "My mother tongue is translation." We think that sums up our attitude to living with, across, and between languages. And here, by languages, we don't just mean the forms of speech and writing that people use to communicate with each other, but also codes of practice, of form and gesture, and even the syntax of the silences between and beyond utterance.

What was the impetus for making *The Translator's Silence* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

The Translator's Silence incises three poetic fragments from three beloved poets of South Asia—Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Rabindranath Tagore, and Agha Shahid Ali—to make a work that plays with text, language, light, shadow, and the act of reading. The work lays the textual fragments in Bengali, English, and Urdu on a folded and perforated paper surface that makes it possible for a viewer to shift between the three languages. When the paper is folded, the incised text of one language allows light to pass onto the surface below it, which has another language. Faiz, Tagore, and Ali are poets who are read across three borders. Faiz, who opted to stay in Pakistan, writes in Urdu, and is read in both India and Pakistan. Tagore is read across the Bengali-speaking regions of India and Bangladesh. Agha Shahid Ali is read wherever Kashmiris, Indians, and Pakistanis gather to have difficult conversations, often in English. The Faiz poem used here invokes the necessity for Pakistanis to reconcile with the second partition, which took place when Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) became independent. It speaks of those who thought they knew each other (as Pakistanis) and were estranged, finding a future embrace as strangers. Tagore presents a simple poem about embracing strangers, reminding his readers that one's life becomes full with encounters with strangers. Ali, a Kashmiri poet who lived in Brooklyn and wrote in English, finds an echo of Kashmir in the ravaged history of Palestine. In the poem used in our work, which is dedicated to Edward Said, he speaks of how estranged destinies may at last be reconciled by the exile, a "beloved stranger."

Why did you choose to do your work as a laser-cut take-away? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

This take-away, which takes the form of a fold between utterances, embodies a gift of that silence. It needs to be unfolded, held, held up against the light, and then folded again. The work is portable, and asks to be passed from hand to hand. It creates a relationship of intimacy. Through the contingency of how the object must necessarily be turned and handled in order to be read and the way it asks for mediation between untranslated fragments, the work thaws the frozen state of declarative utterances about strangeness and familiarity.

Depending on how one holds it, the shadow and illumination through each incised language falls on the others. In this way, the work operates in the spaces between languages, and in the zones where multiple languages overlap each other.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

None of the fragments in the work is translated. The shift from one language to another is unmediated. Reading this work necessarily requires its viewer to find a "stranger"—a person who speaks an unknown language—to understand what it has to say. The work's reading of the three fragments suggests that "stranger" may become the "beloved" when even adversarial destinies, such as those common across partitions and "lines of control," are reconciled through the power of a willing encounter with all that is unknown in the other.

This encounter, across languages, memories, desires, and nightmares, may lead to a loss of words at first. Perhaps the strangers who undertake meeting each other this way will need to translate each other's silences before they can listen to each other's words. We think that this is a necessity today.

The Translator's Silence carries within it a sense of the unspeakable that exists at fault lines or at borders that have witnessed massive violence, an erasure partly caused by the massive violence that accompanied the partition of the subcontinent at the end of British colonial rule in India.

Ultimately, this work offers a welcome to the presence of strangers. It reclaims poetry as the fulcrum of a conversation between people. It recognizes that translation is an intimate and subjective process, one vulnerable to transmission, loss, and interpretative gain.

Emilio Rojas

b.1985, Mexican
lives and works in Chicago

How do you understand the concept of translation?

I come to translation through the tongue of La Malinche, through Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* translated by Borges, through Anzaldúa's Spanglish, and through the indigenous voices that live inside me as and have learned the colonizers' languages. I come to translation as a tool for my own survival. The translator as a traitor but also as a trickster, with the power of opening meaning into being, of playing with words: their origins and their potential for transformation. I am what Octavio Paz described in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*—I am a son of La Malinche, the mother of the mestizos, yet for me she is no passive object of conquest or symbol of betrayal, nor just the tongue or organ of Cortés.

We can also think about translation—especially while speaking and writing in the languages of the colonizers of this continent—as a constant erasure of other worlds, the indigenous tongues of these territories that have been covered under a blanket of silence and genocide. The idea of the translator as a traitor is not new in the literary world, nor the idea of the mythological mother as a temptress or betrayer. The Italian proverb "traduttore, traditore" claims that the translation is untruthful to the original, and any translator betrays the author. My allegiance is always to the listener, to the viewer, the reader, the participant. La Malinche combines these three archetypes—the mother, the traitor, and the translator—and is fundamental for to understanding translation itself as a bridge. We are taught from when we are children that traitors should be punished, and if you support them, then you become a traitor yourself. In La Malinche's figuration as the mother of a nation, we cannot fully embrace a mother who has betrayed us, and since this mother also represents our indigeneity, we are constantly rejecting our ancestral origins.

If myths like the translator as a traitor have been proven mistaken by authors such as Borges, can we demystify La Malinche as a traitor in order to accept our indigenous syncretism? Then we can see translation as a tool of resistance, of survival, a bridge to empathy, to understanding, to creating a third language, a bridge-language, a place where both can coexist. Or as Subcomandante Marcos, former spokesman of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, stated in 1994: "El mundo que queremos es uno donde quepan muchos mundos. La Patria que construimos es una donde quepan todos los pueblos y sus lenguas, que todos los pasos la caminen, que todos la rían, que la amanezcan todos."

What was the impetus for making *Trittico Aldrovandi* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

The impetus for *Trittico Aldrovandi* was a long engagement with and research of the ideas of botanical colonialism and the Columbian exchange. How are we complicit with the past we inherited? How are we accomplices of the history of what we consume in the present? The tomato traveled from the Andes to Italy, transforming our experience of gastronomy, and all of Italian cuisine is based on its flavor; the potato saved Europe from famine, as did corn.

The work centers on the decolonial and metaphorical study of dandelions as an invasive species and began as an investigation into the historical implications of colonialism through botany. The research began with the collection of fifteen thousand dandelion heads, over half a million seeds that became the raw material for investigating the historical implications of colonialism through botany. Through the central axis of a plant commonly considered a weed, I mean to establish a reflection around the ways in which we can decolonize our bodies and the ways we consume presently without looking at the origin of our products, their histories of oppression and the current neocolonial exploitation, and the relations that we engage in every time we eat a banana for breakfast.

Why did you choose to work in photography with debossed text? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

The Aldrovandi Herbarium (1551–54) contains over fifteen volumes and five thousand specimens, and is the oldest and largest surviving catalog of plants. I was fortunate enough to be allowed to work with this collection from the University Library of Bologna as a way of engaging with the history of colonialism and its relationship to classification, which started with the seemingly harmless cataloging of plants and animals, and degraded into pseudo-scientific racism. Photography was a way for me to capture the essence of this herbarium; the prints

are the same size as the actual book. Due to the perspective, my hands appear to be slightly larger than life-size. I'm also interested in photography as a tool of colonialism, a key factor of the Westward expansion.

I chose a vine, a root, and a flower from the selection of five thousand plants. Each becomes an allegory, and the hands and the debossed text collapse history to the present sociopolitical crisis of immigration. The letterpress technique is also known as blind embossing. Since there is no ink involved, the debossed text becomes apparent as the viewer approaches the work, revealing a new layer of the work, as if the photos were books speaking back to the audience who decided to engage. In this exhibition there is also the problem of translation, since most Americans do not speak Italian, then there is a second degree of engagement to read the label and understand the text.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

Each edition of the triptych is written in one of the five colonizing languages of the Americas: Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, French, and English. The debossed Italian phrases in this version read: "We are here because you were there," "My roots are as strong as your fears," and "Our virtues have not yet been discovered." The first photograph is the first drawing of a tomato in Europe, the second is a mandrake, and the third is a dandelion.

"We are here because you were there" was a slogan used in the 1980s by black and Asian anti-racist protestors in the UK, pointing to the nation's long history of colonialism, imperialism, and exploitation. The same could be said about US interventionism in Latin America: the Monroe Doctrine, the banana republics, CIA-backed dictatorships like the Pinochet regime, Puerto Rico's status as "foreign in a domestic sense," the independence of Panama (which the US supported to control de Canal), The School of the Americas, etc. In other words, you came and exploited us, created political turmoil, instated dictators, supplied weapons, created economies of dependency, and now you complain that we are in your land taking your jobs. In the same way, the tomato and all of the products brought through the Columbian Exchange did not end up in Europe for free. I was baffled by how many Italians who saw the exhibition had no idea that tomatoes were not Italian. They love their ragù, their polenta, their coffee, their pasta, and their gnocchi, and never learn the history and origin of the things they consume. Ignorance is the basis of fear, empathy and human relations are its antidote.

The text "My roots are as strong as your fears" is debossed in the only human figure in the herbarium, which depicts the mandrake as a dark-skinned nude female figure. The mandrake, which has toxic and hallucinogenic properties, was linked to witchcraft and evil. It comes as no surprise that the nude female figure is a dark body, which relates it to the misconceptions of darkness and evil that we continue to perpetuate today. Brown and black immigrants and refugees are discriminated against and, in many cases, considered criminals. Lately, Mexicans have been labeled rapists and thieves. The placement of the mandrake within the triptych is intentionally higher and centered to denote the importance of the female figure, to elevate it to the place of an icon. As migrants, as we become uprooted from our places of origin, thinking of our whole bodies as root systems can become a strong metaphor for our own survival, strong enough to withhold any type of fear or xenophobia. My roots, my origins, my communities, my resilience are as strong as your fears of my existence.

"Our virtues have not yet been discovered" is a reference to Ralph Waldo Emerson's words from *Fortune of the Republic*. In his book first published in 1878, Emerson defines a weed in relation to United States wealth linked to cotton, slavery, and the Civil War:

> Our modern wealth stands on a few staples, and the interest nations took in our war was exasperated by the importance of the cotton trade. And what is cotton? One plant out of some two hundred thousand known to the botanist, vastly the larger part of which are reckoned weeds. What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered.

Nowadays, dandelions are considered weeds, yet they were first brought to the Americas by English and French colonizers as a reminder of home. I have heard many times, in many countries, that migrants are a weed, yet the US economy would collapse without our often-invisible labor. In my analysis of the dandelion, it is both the colonizer and the colonized that has returned to the "motherland," to the invader's backyard. And even though we grow where we are not wanted, we thrive because we are resilient.

1 La Malinche was Cortés's indigenous translator and the mother of his mestizo child. Her portrayal has varied throughout Mexican history, but she is generally depicted as a traitor.—Ed.

2 "We want a world in which many worlds fit. The Nation which we construct is one where all communities and languages fit, where all steps may walk, where all may have laughter, and where all may live the dawn." *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, Documentos y comunicados* Vol. 3, 2 de octubre de 1995–24 de enero de 1997 (Editiones Era, Mexico City, 1997), 89.

Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan

b. 1969, Sri Lankan
lives and works in Jaffna, Sri Lanka

How do you understand the concept of translation?

It is an act of creation and destruction operating on many levels.

What was the impetus for making *The Incomplete Thombu* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

My personal experience of displacement and the loss of property, friends, relatives, and neighbors was the impetus behind this work.

Why did you choose to do the work as a mass-produced artist's book through Raking Leaves? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

In 2011, during the production of the book, there was a complete ban on memorialization and commemoration connected to the Sri Lankan civil war that ended in 2009. Art projects dealing directly with the casualties of war were surveilled by the state. This forced the war victims to live with their situation in silence. The book registers the memories of displaced civilians who carried the burden of the war. In this context, the form of the book, due to its mass production, made a kind of mobility possible for the work and the content to cross boundaries of state, surveillance, and art. It also provided intimacy by the fact that it could be held in the hand or carried as one of your personal possessions. The form of the book as a document also conveyed the content of the work more forcefully and accessibly than a single painting or installation could have. The way a book is a construction with layers of paper helped create the layering of truths. Superimposing a person's recollection of their house with an architect's rendering of that same structure juxtaposes how different registers of displacement occur.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

My work does not aim to speak about current social or political issues. It is only a reflection upon a situation around me. *Thombu* was conceived as an artist's book so that it could be inserted into the existing network of numerical data, accounts, and reports about the conflict. This small act of resistance is, in itself, meaningful through the questions it raises about the possibility of other narratives and accounts.

Edra Soto

b. 1971, Puerto Rican
lives and works in Chicago

How do you understand the concept of translation?

Translation puts things in perspective; it helps us understand our place in the world. Translation also gives us the opportunity to adapt and test our empathy toward others. Through translation we can decipher others' thoughts and ideas. Translation can also be seen as transformation, transaction, or convergence. I have used the term "translation" to refer to art making plenty of times, trying to explain process.

What was the impetus for making *Tropicalamerican* and *Manual GRAFT* and what do you hope viewers take away from these works?

At the time *Tropicalamerican* manifested, I was doing a residency at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. This place immediately pointed me toward Rauschenberg's legacy and his sense of patriotism. My mind was already congested with news related to Puerto Rico's status, financial situation, and relationship with the US. While at the residency, which is located on beautiful Captiva Island, Florida, I was able to appreciate tropical plants through the Captiva light. It was a splendid summer and the leaves were extremely vibrant. It was then that it occurred to me to use tropical leaves to create collages. I never had the confidence or even the interest to create patriotic art. My argument came from a personal place, the only place I respect when it comes to art making. It was meaningful. *Tropicalamerican* became a bridge between my personal experiences as a Puerto Rican and a legacy of patriotic art that artists have subscribed to for centuries.

Similarly, *GRAFT* has become a bridge between my two homelands. Puerto Rico and the US are the two places I have lived in for almost the same amount of time. *GRAFT* aims to discuss postcolonialism through architectural interventions using decorative elements of domestic vernacular architecture from Puerto Rico.

Why did you choose to work in silk (originally) and as an architectural intervention? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

Yes. I think material carries content and it is important to me to create a compatible connection between the subject and the material. When people ask me about my use of material in my work, I reply that there's not a specific type of material that I fully commit to, because that would be limiting.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

I care about participating in current conversations and issues pertinent to what's happening in our world. I usually begin from a personal place. Art allows me to take a subject and turn it into a global conversation. I can have the feelings of an activist at times, but it is clear to me that first and foremost I am an artist and that's how I speak to the world.

Stephanie Syjuco

b. 1974, Filipino
lives and works in San Francisco

How do you understand the concept of translation?

Every translation—whether textual or cultural—is an approximation or best guess, decided upon by the translator, and even employed as a manipulation of sorts. In my own work I use the stutters, gaps, and misfires of mistranslations in order to point toward the power structure of what an "original" meaning holds dear.

What was the impetus for making *Cargo Cults* and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

I had been researching "dazzle camouflage," graphic black-and-white designs that were painted on WWI battleships in the UK and US in order to confuse enemy fire. Dazzle camouflage was not meant to hide the ships, but to create a visual disruption that made it hard to discern what direction they were moving in or which end to shoot. The edges of the ships appeared as a mass of confused lines and shapes. At the same time, I was noticing a popularity in graphic black-and-white "ethnic" patterns on mass-manufactured clothing, in many cases ones that were completely fictional, vaguely exotic, and a jumble of cultures, but all feeding a desire for a taste of something "Other." I was doing a residency at the Bemis Center in Omaha, Nebraska, and decided it would be a critical contrast to do a series of fictional ethnographic photographs of different Filipino tribes, but using only clothing purchased from local shopping malls. Akin to ethnographic photos taken at the turn of the century, the images use me as a stand-in for these composite fictions and are purposefully eye-catching and restless in their patterning.

I hope viewers see these works as a form of critical play—there is no reality behind the images, and even no sense of my own identity actually being depicted. They are complete constructs and rely on the viewer's memories of similar images to trigger ideas of what we think of as belonging inside or outside of a culture or ethnicity.

Why did you choose to work in photography? Do you see a relationship between the content of your work and your choice of media?

I was purposefully referencing early enthographic photographs, specifically ones documenting the many tribes in the Philippines, which was once a colony of the United States. By rendering the images in black and white, I could produce stark contrasts and heighten the disruptive patterning, as well as point toward these vintage "types." Grayscale calibration charts interrupt the images or are placed alongside the figures, in a similar way to how color charts were used to "correct" an image after it was taken. Photography, a non-neutral field with its rich history as an anthropological and ethnographic tool, became a means to showcase the work.

To what extent do you hope your work speaks to current social and/or political issues?

I am an American. The complexity of what that means in these political times is being flattened into something that excludes people who look "foreign"— whether through cultural dress, race, or religious garb. Now even the vaguest impression of difference makes you un-American. Cultural nostalgia and its attendant amnesia is reinserting a narrative of a time when America was a simpler place. When I began this work in 2013, I was thinking more about globalization, flows of culture, and consumerism. Today, in 2017, I can't help but see this project as an amplification of all that is feared in America—the Other body, the shifting culture, the undiscernable identity as manifested in the overabundance of pattern and print—while at the same time it is desired in small, entertaining doses, and at a distance. I made this work in American's heartland, Omaha, Nebraska, and I insist that I am an American.

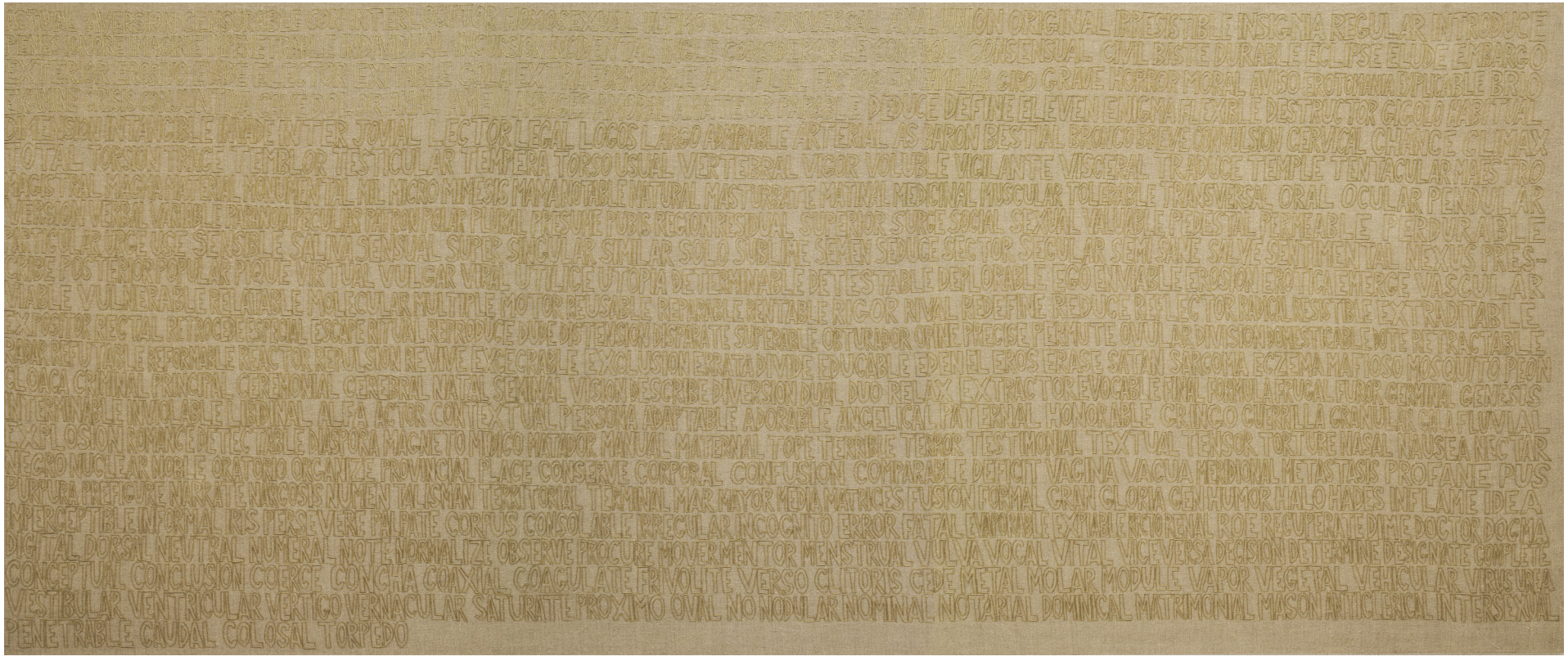
BANI ABIDI

Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner, 2004

Two channel video
7:30 min.

ARTURO HERNÁNDEZ ALCÁZAR
Columna del trabajo (salario mínimo), 2016

Smoked tools, coins
Dimensions variable



CARLOS ARIAS
Bilingual, 2014

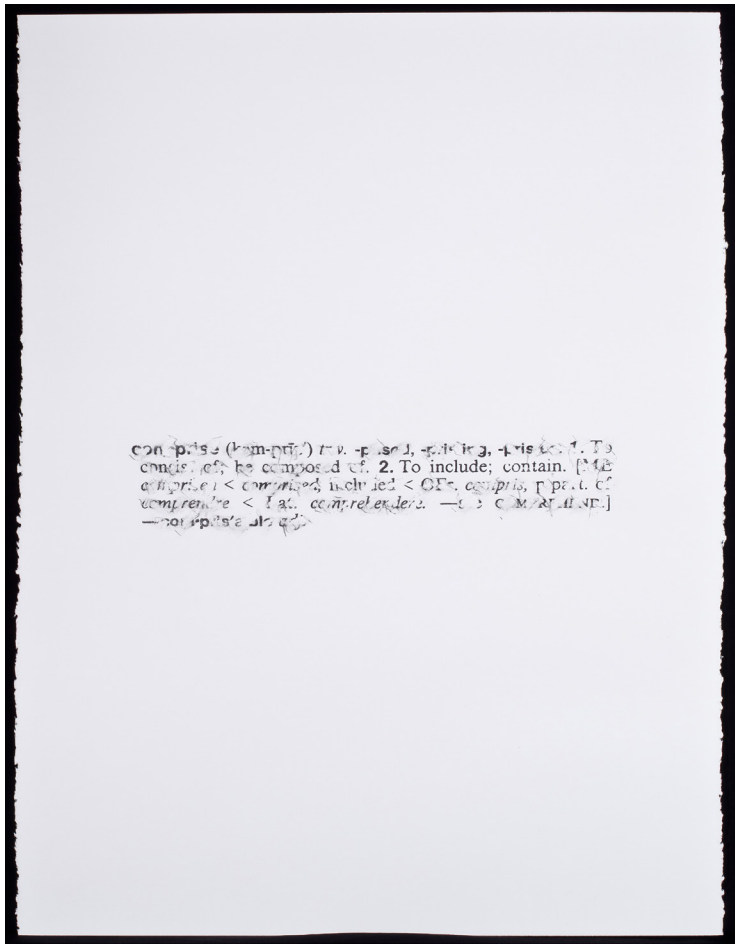
Embroidery on unbleached flax
45.3 × 110.2 in.

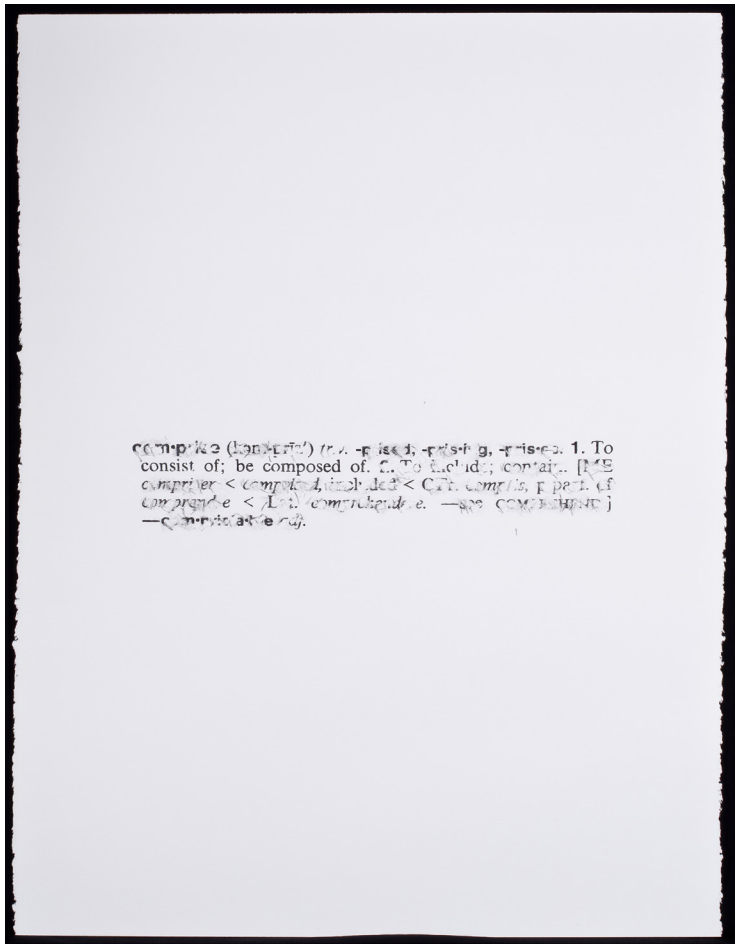
LUIS CAMNITZER
Insults, 2009/2017

Vinyl
Dimensions variable

ALEJANDRO CESARCO
Zeide Isaac, 2016

16 mm film transferred to digital video
6:00 min.

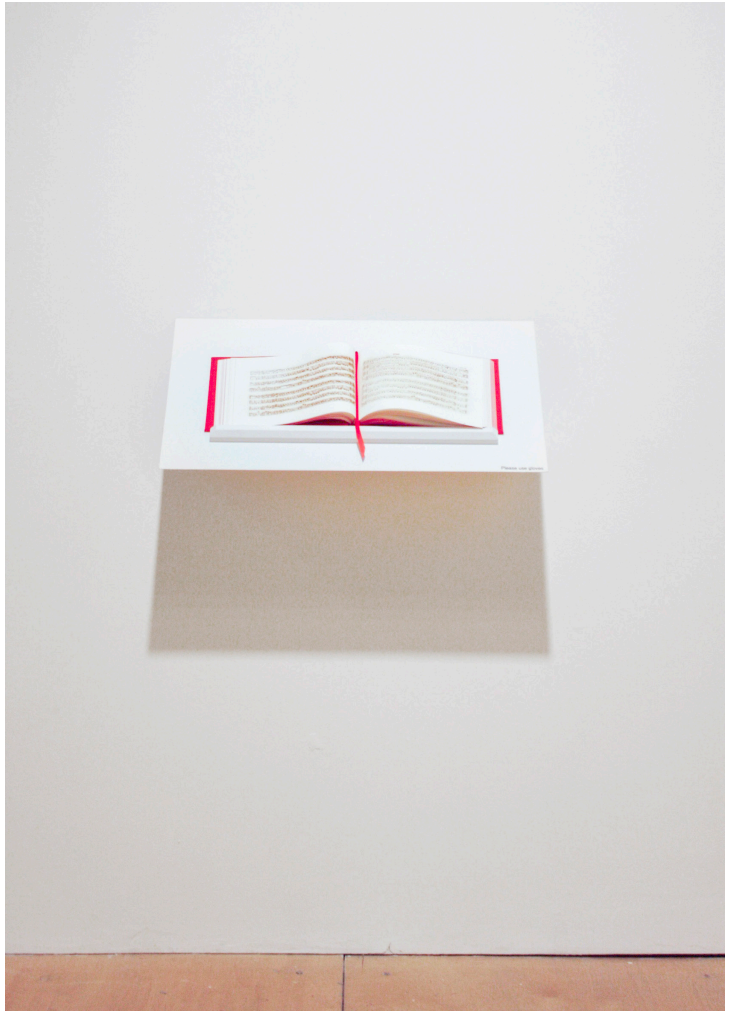




BETHANY COLLINS

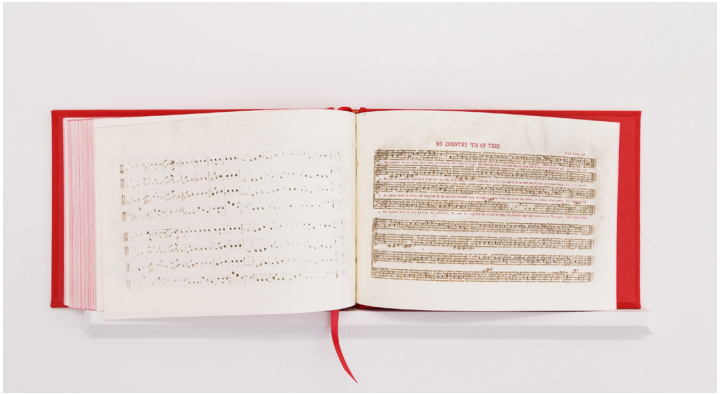
Comprise, 1882, 2014

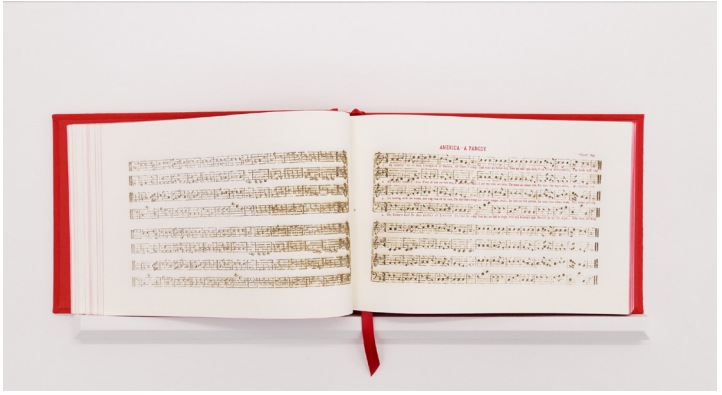
Toner and graphite on American Masters paper
30 x 44 in.

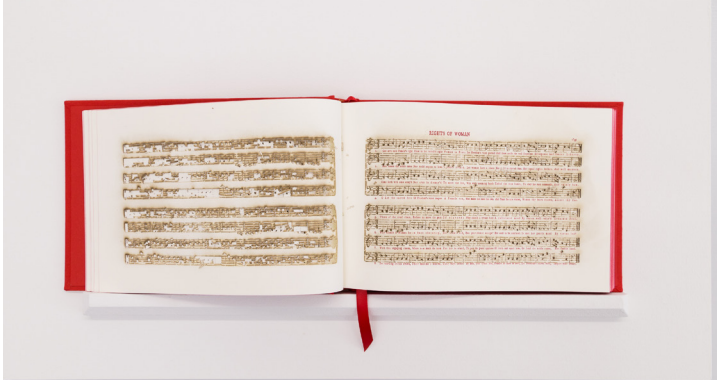


BETHANY COLLINS
America: A Hymnal, 2017

Book with 100 laser cut leaves
6 x 9 x 1 in.





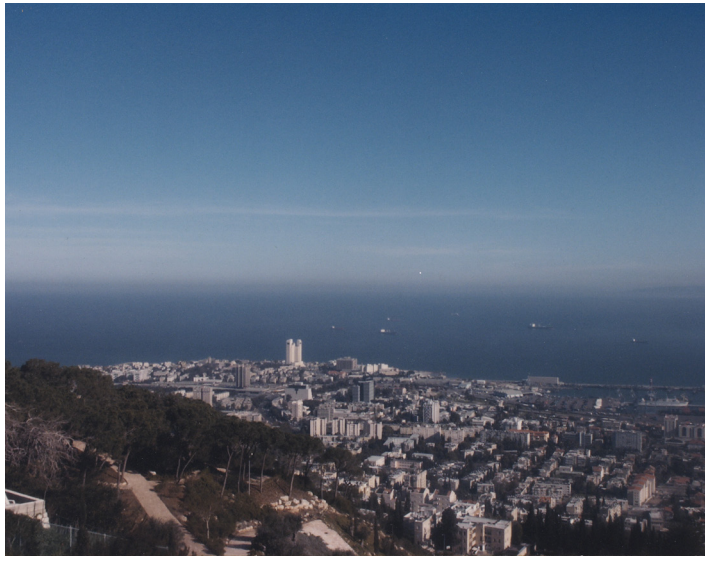


BRENDAN FERNANDES
The Devil's Noise, 2011

Hand-bound books with gold foil stamping, black linen paper
Dimensions variable

DORA GARCIA
The Messenger, 2002–ongoing

Performance, website
(performed by Tamara Becerra Valdez)



EMILY JACIR
Where We Come From (Maha), 2002–03

Framed laser print, c-print mounted on cintra
Text: 9.5 x 11.5 in., photo: 9 x 12 in.
Edition of 3

KATIA KAMELI

Stream of Stories, 2016

Installation with archival pigment prints,
wall vinyl, videos
Prints: 47.25 x 31.5 in.; collage: 11 x 9.5 in.;
videos: 8:07 min., 10:13 min., 24:16 min.

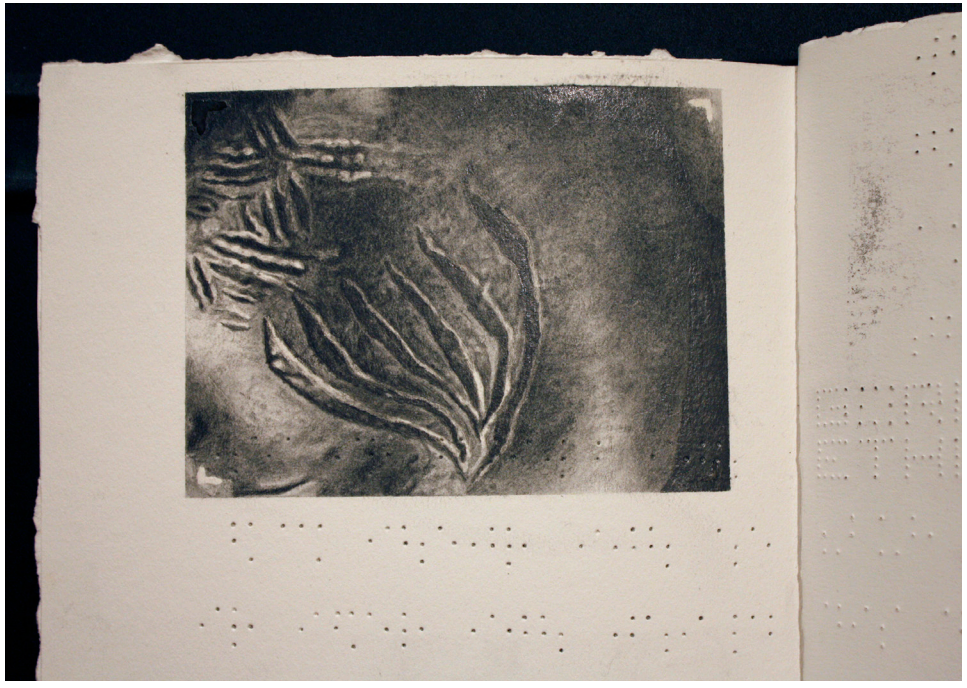
HAROLD MENDEZ
Elmina Castle, 2017

Archival pigment print transferred from color
slide film taken in 1999, mounted on dibond
with unique artist's bronze frame
13 x 19 x 2 in.

PAULO NAZARETH

Untitled, from *Notícias de América (News from the Americas)* series, 2011/12

Five photographs printed on cotton paper
7.1 x 9.4 in. each

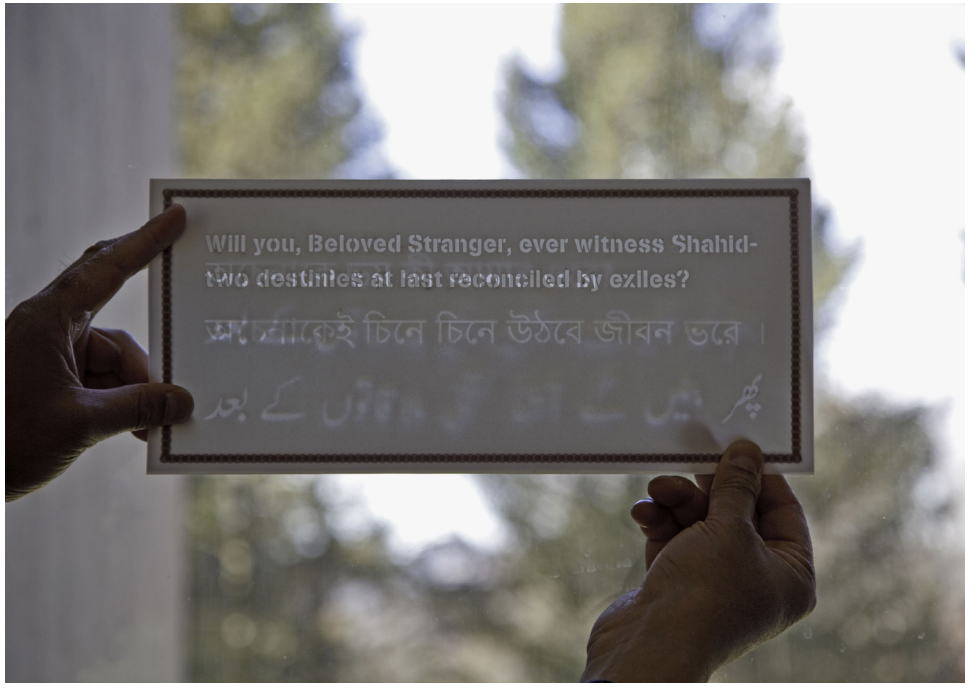


SHERWIN OVID
Masquerade Bandage for Motherboard, 2017

Hand-made book, sugar sculptures
Dimensions variable

MICHAEL RAKOWITZ
The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours: Architect as Dragoman, 2015

Mixed media
Dimensions variable



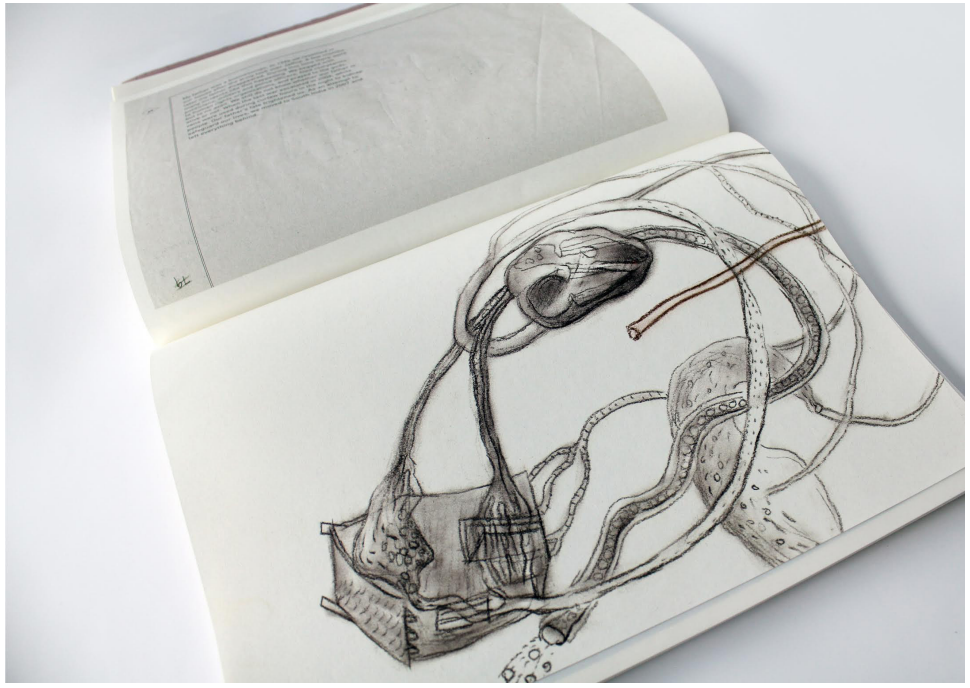
RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE

The Translator's Silence (Takeaway), 2012

Laser-cut text on heavy translucent paper,
Closed: 4 x 9 in., open: 12 x 9 in.

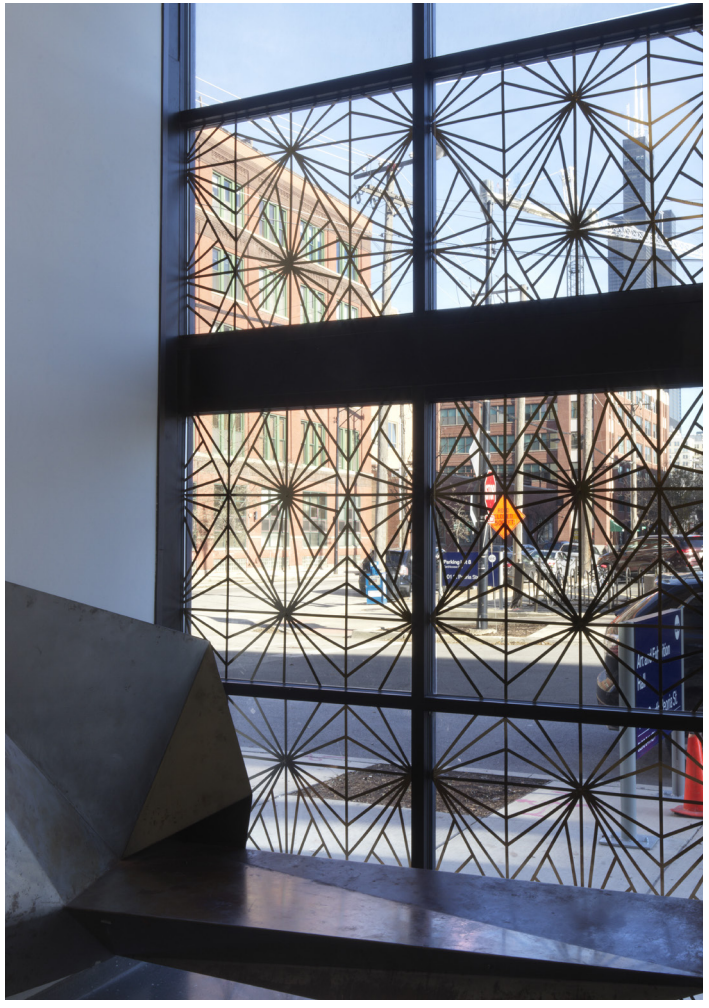
EMILIO ROJAS
Trittico Aldrovandi, 2017

Fine-art photo prints with debossed text
on Hahnemühle cotton paper
24 x 32 in. each



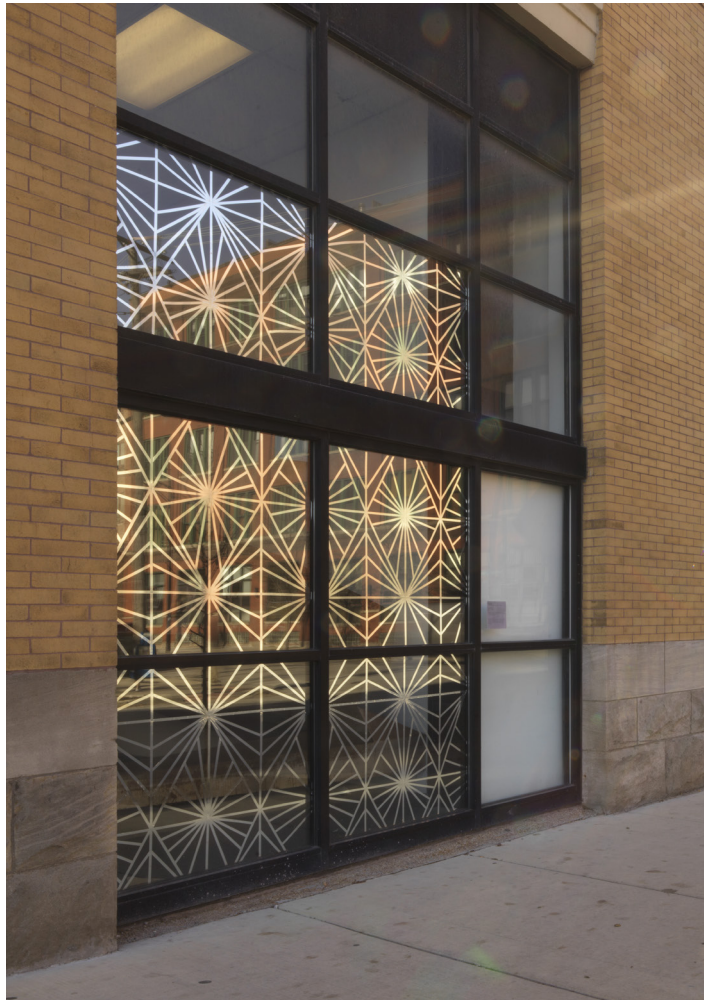
THAMOTHARAMPILLAI SHANAATHANAN
The Incomplete Thombu, 2011

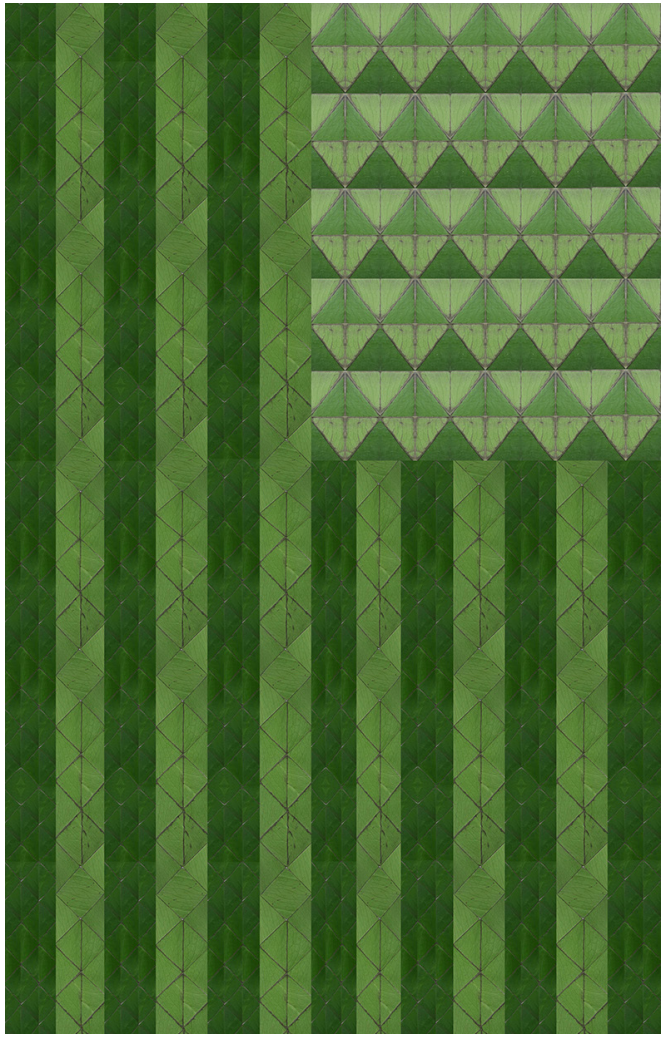
Artist's book
11.75 x 9 in.



EDRA SOTO
Manual GRAFT, 2016

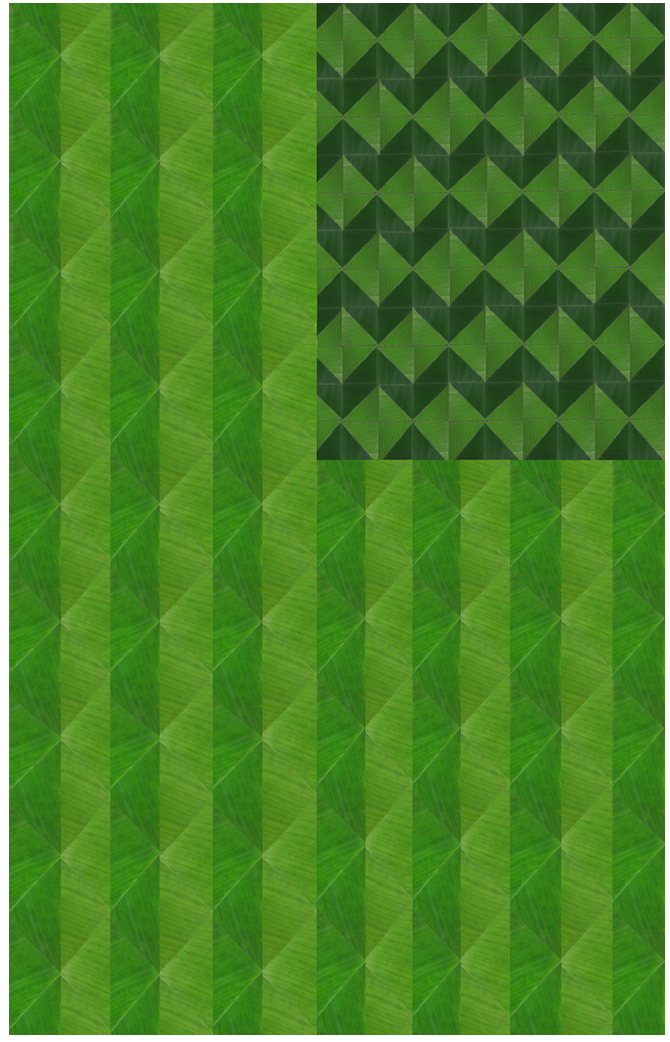
Metallic adhesive
Dimensions variable

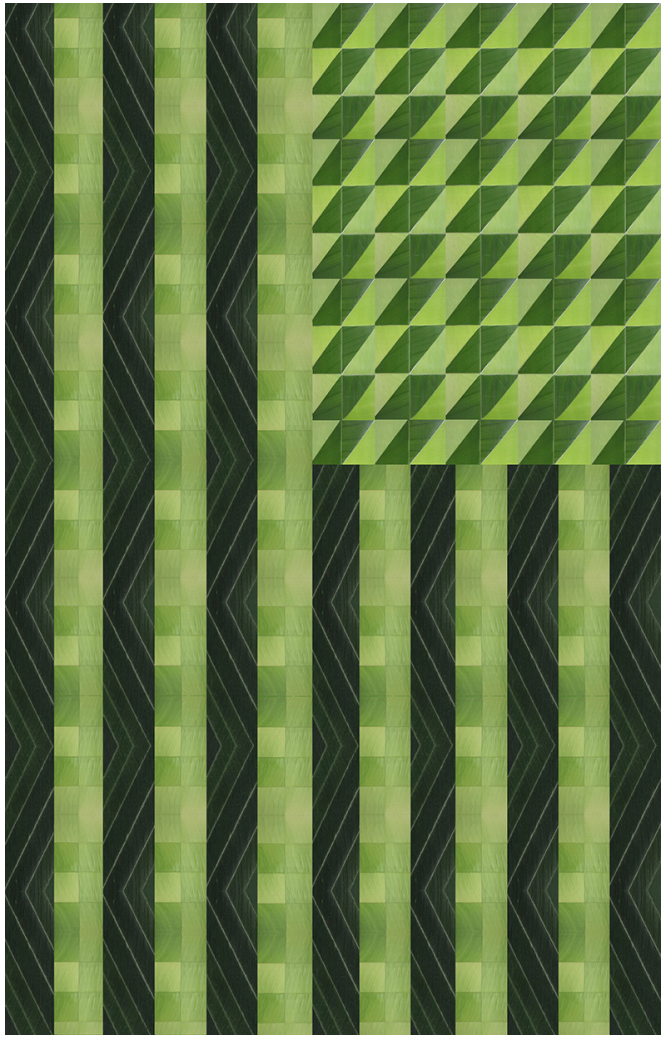




EDRA SOTO
Tropicalamerican, 2014

Three inkjet prints on paper
67 x 43 in. each





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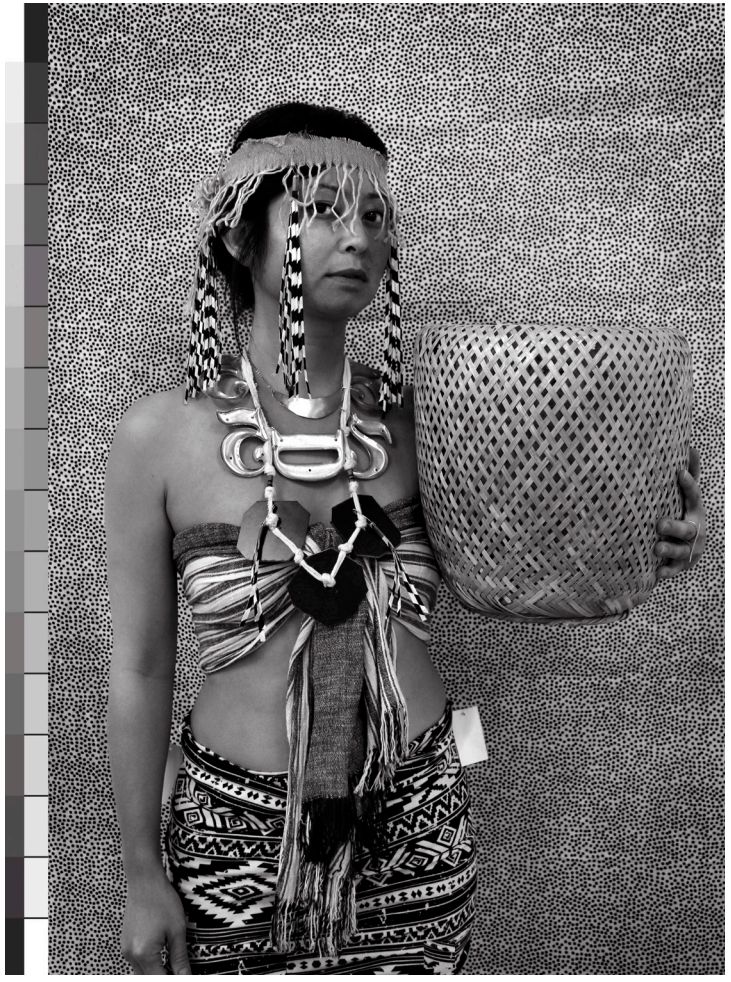

STEPHANIE SYJUCO
Cargo Cults, 2013–16

Two archival pigment prints
40 x 30 in. each

Bani Abidi (b. 1971, Pakistani, lives and works in Berlin and Karachi)
Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner, 2004
Two channel video, 7:30 min.
Courtesy the artist

Arturo Hernández Alcázar (b. 1978, Mexican, lives and works in Mexico City))
Columna del trabajo (salario mínimo), 2016
Smoked tools, coins, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Marso Gallery

Carlos Arias (b. 1964, Chilean, lives and works in Puebla, Mexico))
Bilingual, 2014
Embroidery on unbleached flax, 45.3 × 110.2 in.
Courtesy the artist and Marso Gallery

Luis Camnitzer (b. 1937, Uruguayan born Germany, lives and works in New York)
Insults, 2009/2017
Vinyl, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York

Alejandro Cesarco (b. 1975, Uruguayan, lives and works in New York)
Zeide Isaac, 2009
16 mm film transferred to digital video, 6:00 min.
Courtesy the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin

Bethany Collins (b. 1984, American, lives and works in Chicago)
America: A Hymnal, 2017
Book with 100 laser cut leaves, 6 x 9 x 1 in.
Courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago

Comprise, 1982, 2015
Toner and graphite on American Masters paper, 30 x 44 in.
Courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago

Brendan Fernandes (b. 1979, Canadian born Kenya, lives and works in Chicago)
The Devil's Noise, 2011
Hand-bound books with gold foil stamping, black linen paper, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago

Dora García (b. 1965, Spanish, lives and works in Barcelona)
The Messenger, 2002–ongoing
Performance, website (performed by Tamara Becerra Valdez)
Courtesy the artist

Emily Jacir (b. 1972, Palestinian, lives and works around the Mediterranean)
Where We Come From (Maha), 2002–03
Framed laser print, c-print mounted on cintra, text: 9.5 x 11.5 in., photo: 9 x 12 in.
Courtesy the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago

Katia Kameli (b. 1973, French-Algerian, lives and works in Paris)
Stream of Stories, 2016
Installation with archival pigment prints, wall vinyl, videos
Prints: 47.25 x 31.5 in.; collage: 11 x 9.5 in.; videos: 8:07 min., 10:13 min., 24:16 min.
Courtesy the artist

Harold Mendez (b. 1977, American, lives and works in Los Angeles)
Elmina Castle, 2016
Archival pigment print transferred from color slide film taken in 1999, mounted on dibond with unique artist's bronze frame, 13 x 19 x 2 in.
Courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago

Paulo Nazareth (b. 1977, Brazilian, lives and works throughout the world)
Untitled, from *Notícias de América (News from the Americas)* series, 2011/12
Five photographs printed on cotton paper, 7.1 x 9.4 in. each
Courtesy the artist and Mendes Wood DM

Sherwin Ovid (b. 1978, Trinidadian, lives and works in Chicago)
Masquerade Bandage for Motherboard, 2016
Hand-made book, sugar sculptures
Courtesy the artist

Michael Rakowitz (b. 1973, Iraqi-American, lives and works in Chicago)
The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours: Architect as Dragoman, 2015
Mixed media, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago

Raqs Media Collective (founded 1992, India, live and work in New Delhi)
The Translator's Silence (Takeaway), 2012
Laser-cut text on heavy translucent paper
Closed: 4 x 9 in., open: 12 x 9 in.
Courtesy the artists

Emilio Rojas (b. 1985, Mexican, lives and works in Chicago)
Trittico Aldrovandi, 2017
Three fine-art photo prints with debossed text on Hahnemühle cotton paper, 24 x 32 in. each
Courtesy the artist, Gallleriapiú, Italy and Galería José de la Fuente, Spain
Project in collaboration with the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna

Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan (b. 1969, Sri Lankan, lives and works in Jaffna, Sri Lanka)
The Incomplete Thombu, 2011
Artist's book, 11.75 x 9 in.
Courtesy the artist

Edra Soto (b. 1971, Puerto Rican, lives and works in Chicago)
Manual GRAFT, 2016
Metallic adhesive, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

Tropicalamerican, 2014
Three inkjet prints on paper, 67 x 43 in. each
Courtesy the artist

Stephanie Syjuco (b. 1974, Filipino, lives and works in San Francisco)
Cargo Cults, 2013–16
Two archival pigment prints, 40 x 30 in. each
Courtesy the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery

Esra Akcan is an Associate Professor in the Department of Architecture and the Director of the Cornell Institute for European Studies. She completed her architecture degree at the Middle East Technical University in Turkey, and her Ph.D and postdoctoral degrees at Columbia University in New York. Before coming to Cornell, she taught at UI-Chicago, Humboldt University in Berlin, Columbia University, New School, and Pratt Institute in New York, and METU in Ankara. Akcan received awards and fellowships from the Graham Foundation, American Academy in Berlin, UIC, Institute for Advanced Studies in Berlin (Transregional Studies Forum), Clark Institute, Getty Research Institute, Canadian Center for Architecture, CAA, Mellon Foundation, DAAD and KRESS/ARIT. She is the author of numerous books and articles, including *LandFill Istanbul: Twelve Scenarios for a Global City* (2004), *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey and the Modern House* (2012), *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History* (co-authored with Sibel Bozdoğan, 2012) and *Open Architecture: Migration, Citizenship and the Urban Renewal of Berlin-Kreuzberg* (forthcoming March 2018).

Aruna D'Souza is a writer based in western Massachusetts. Her essays on art, cultural politics, museums, and feminism have appeared in *Art News*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Momus*, *Bookforum*, and *Art in America*, and in catalogues for the Museum of Modern Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Wexner Center, the Musée des Beaux Arts in Monaco, and others. She is a regular contributor and serves on the editorial advisory board of the online criticism journal *4Columns*. She is the author of *Cézanne's Bathers: Biography and the Erotics of Paint* (Penn State Press, 2008) and editor of the forthcoming volume of collected essays by Linda Nochin, *Making it Modern* (Thames and Hudson).

Karen Greenwalt is a PhD candidate in art history at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) where her research focuses on global contemporary art with an emphasis on the art of South Asia. She has received several awards in support of her dissertation research, including the Dean's Scholar Fellowship from UIC (2016–17), the Chancellor's Graduate Research Fellowship from UIC (2015–16), and a junior fellowship from the American Institute of Pakistan Studies (2015). Greenwalt has worked at the Art Institute of Chicago in the Departments of Contemporary Art and Photography, and as a curatorial graduate assistant at UIC's Gallery 400. She has taught courses in global art and South Asian art at UIC and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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Traduttore, Traditore

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