

Leading up to an exhibition the artist engages in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

The conversation aims to get an insight on how the initial ideas for the project develop, to paint a picture of the otherwise untraceable choices in the artist's process, practice and the making of this exhibition.

Ghita Skali
in conversation
with
Lara Khaldi
As part of the
exhibition
NATUURLIJK

**Does Elon Musk
have a watering can?**
2023, Video with a
ChatGPT conversation

**Natuurlijk:
back to the future**
2023, installation with
tulips and hagelslag

Natuurlijk
2023, installation with a
20 min. video, dog sofas,
plastic stools with high
carbon print, beaded
curtains with superficial
leaves.

The video starts every hour
and runs every 20 minutes.

Installation
2023
Butt cleaners, shelves,
years of online and offline
hunting of butt cleaners,
marble/mosaic stickers,
plastic trees,
reflective floor.

All the butt cleaners
are free to take via a
reservation system.
You can choose your new
ass friend and come to
pick it up in July!

BUTT CLEANERS R US
2023, 120 x 40 x 3 cm
Neon, reappropriation

Ghita Skali in conversation with Lara Khaldi As part of the exhibition **NATUURLIJK**

For more information about this and other projects,
check our website or scan the QR-code.

1646.nl



Ghita Skali

Ghita Skali is an artist based in Amsterdam. She studied in France, first at Villa Arson, Nice then at the post-graduate program of the Fine Arts School in Lyon. She was a De Ateliers (Amsterdam) participant between 2018 and 2020.

Lara Khaldi

Lara Khaldi is a curator and artist. She was a member of the artistic team of documenta fifteen. Khaldi worked as head of the Media Studies Programme at Alquds Bard College 2018-2020 and has taught at Sandberg Institute 2020-22. She is currently the director at de Appel Art Centre, Amsterdam.

Subject: Introduction - Email Conversation

Thu, 30 Mar 2023

From: Ghita Skali

Dear Lara,

Thank you ! I'm really happy to have this conversation with you.

Here is a first draft of the video

A lot of things are missing (ambient music absent, no colour grading, and some scenes are going to be shorter). I am editing now, one of the last scenes, which I filmed last week in Casablanca, with Kabareh Cheikhats'.

Here are the lyrics²:

Thu, 30 Mar 2023

From: Lara Khaldi

Hi Honey hi Ghita,

Thanks for this. I meant I was curious to know more about what Ghita is presenting. Thanks for the link, I see now that she will be presenting a new video work, and it would be great to watch it before we start the exchange. Ghita, can I get a link to the video? It could also be our first e-mail exchange where I ask you for the link :-)

Many salams,

L.

نحن نحن ملايير من أدبار النظيفة / انتم رهط لا يدري ما معنى النظافة
يا أدبار العالم اتحدوا على القيم

دبري ناعم دبرك خشن / دبرك عبد دبري حر
دبرك لا يعرف الماء

فكر فكر في شجر / في توليبي و في الزهر
استعمل ماء المطر / في غسل شرجي الدبر

لا تشتت الامازون / بمنديك المليون
كل هذا لا يهون / في سبيل ما سيكون
حظوظك منعمة / للأجيال القادمة

نحن نحن ملايير من أدبار النظيفة / انتم رهط لا يدري ما معنى النظافة

إِبْتَرَدَ , إِسْتَحَمَ , إِغْتَسَلَ, اسْتَعْوَمَ, رَحَضَ , شَطَفَ , طَهَّرَ , نَطَفَ
لا تَدْنَسْ , لا تَلَوِّثْ , لا تَنْجَسْ
كفاك نشرا للخراء

Warmly,

Ghita

Subject: Natuurlijkkk akeed

Sun, 9 Apr 2023

From: Lara Khaldi

Dear Ghita,

Apologies I didn't get to send you the email on Friday. Y. left to take N. to kindergarden and returned with him, it turns out even the BSO was off that day, this is the second time it happened to us.³ LOL. So we took him to all our meetings! It was not so bad, but I didn't get any email time. Now I'm scared of opening my work email because of the barrage of emails I couldn't respond to on Friday.

Anyway, it was really great to have lunch together the other day! I found the video *Natuurlijk* quite hilarious. I was wondering about the use of humour in your work, as you often address issues using humour. The tropes in *Natuurlijk* of the 'white man' obsessed with tulips (symbolising his nationalist culture which is funny because it's also cultivated nature) and the trope of the plastic watering can or cleanliness assigned to the immigrants is a reversal of the racist trope of how the other, or immigrants are dirty.⁴ I thought the wittiness of your joke lies in how the same watering can that is for the tulips is now being appropriated and changed to that of butt cleaning, both making mockery of the culture of preservation of the tulips and the shock and inability of comprehension nor adaption of the Dutch white man. The mockery is also extended to the Auntie on

her high ethical horse at the shop, where she appears as an angel from the heavens lecturing him about hygiene. I really found all of it quite familiar. The defining moment being the end scene, where the man is seeing his neighbour eating a miniature orange after he discovered the use of the watering cans, and thinks that the one he had eaten in the first scenes of the film might be shit contaminated! I think here is another quite witty moment, because you leave it to us to make a judgement, whether it is contaminated as an act of underlying revenge, or worse; that the knowledge of 'the others' culture makes us more suspicious of them.

I didn't mean to do a 'reading' of your work, as I don't want to reduce it to that... So maybe I start with this simple question of why you employ humour in your work, has it worked before; in the sense that the audience opens up in different ways, does the humour make the critique more digestible :-)?

Salams,

Lara

Mon, 10 Apr 2023

From: Ghita Skali

Dear Lara,

It's nice to read you ! I'm writing to you on the train from Deventer.

I am going to try to answer your question about humour with some thoughts I had this week-end.

I just spent 48 hours in the province of Overijssel. My friend just drove me from Diepenheim to Deventer to catch the train. On the highway, flipped dutch flags were hanging in the fields. It is a sign of protest against government plans to cut nitrogen emissions in half by 2030 by the right-wing populist "Farmer Citizen Movement" which is using the slogan: no farmers, no food.

Yesterday, we visited the Open-Lucht museum⁵. It made me think in a weird way of the museum for resistance tourism near Mleeta in Lebanon which I visited six months ago.⁶

Ok, this sentence seems weird. 😊
But here are my thoughts:

These kinds of museums are obvious in their ideological purpose to produce national symbols. In a superficial way and through the notions of tradition and culture, it produces a lure of homogeneous identity with a barefaced intention of nationalism. Western

¹ Kabareh Cheikhats (كباريه الشبخات) is a Moroccan chaabi (folk music) cabaret theatrical performance troupe based in Casablanca. In the performance, led by Ghassan El Hakim, male actors play the roles of women, paying homage to the Cheikhats, popular female entertainers such as Fatna Ben Lhoucine or Haja Hamounia. The troupe also performs a repertoire of Aita, a folk style associated with the countryside of Morocco, including Kharboucha, Zohra Al-Fassia, Bouchaib Al Bidaoui, as well as Hadda Ouakki, who sings Atlas Amazigh musical styles. (Source: Wikipedia)

² Translation of the song: We, we are billions of clean anuses. / You are a small group who don't know what cleanliness means. / Oh, anuses of the world! / Unite on values! / My anus is neat. Your anus is coarse. / Your anus is a slave. My anus is free. / Your anus doesn't know water. / Think! Think about the trees! About the tulips and the flowers! / Use the rainwater! To wash your asshole! / Don't destroy the Amazon, with your millions of napkins. / All of this is underestimated, For the sake of what will happen. / Your fortune is off. For the next generations. / We, we are billions of clean anuses. You are a small group who don't know what cleanliness means. / Cool down! Shower! Wash! Ablute! Purify! Rinse! Disinfect! Sweep up! / Don't pollute! Don't contaminate! / Enough spreading your shit!

³ Dutch out-of-school care system.

⁴ Tulips were "imported" in the sixteenth century to the Netherlands from the Ottoman Empire. Directly started what is called the Tulip mania (Dutch: tulpenmanie). This was a period during the Dutch Golden Age when contract prices for some bulbs of the recently introduced and fashionable tulip reached extraordinarily high levels. The major acceleration started in 1634 and then dramatically collapsed in February 1637. It is generally considered to have been the first recorded speculative bubble in history. (Source: Wikipedia)

⁵ The Open-Lucht museum is a Dutch Open Air Museum which opened in 1918 and which covers an area of around 44 hectares with around 100 historic buildings, farmhouses and mills. (Source: Open-Lucht museum website)

⁶ The Museum for Resistance is a war museum operated by Hezbollah in Lebanon. It opened in 2010 and was inaugurated by Noam Chomsky. (Source: Wikipedia)

countries are full of these kinds of 'cultural' amusement parks. As usual, it comes as no surprise.

In a certain way, the Hezbollah museum was for me a counterpoint which obviously was also problematic. I questioned my own joy to be in front of this attempt to institutionalise this discours via the canon of the museum in a village in Lebanon. All these thoughts were ubiquitous in the six hours I spent there while I couldn't restrain myself from buying a handheld fan with printed images of missiles surrounded with black laces in the souvenir shop.

At the Open-Lucht museum, I didn't feel joy. I was irritated and upset at myself to still be annoyed after a few years in Europe by this kind of setup. I also laughed a lot. Enormous land filled with flat fields, windmills and a hundred houses to show the Dutch heritages. Many farms where performers wearing wooden clogs were saying for example: "I represent a poor farmer of the 19th century". Plastic sausages, fake potatoes, Delft blue plates, boats, tulips... And then some sheeps and goats lost in between a camping car, a Rietveld summer house, a kroketten shop, a minimalist church, a beer brouwerij, and of course again windmills. Some white guilt here and there when the war is mentioned and of course an amazing victimhood narrative explaining the hard work needed by this population - while totally dismissing colonisation - to be a powerful nation today. (Dear meritocracy, we obviously needed you around).

My highlight is the 'Chinese restaurant': a house setup to show some 'diversity'. *"In the 50s, the Dutch were well and truly won over by these Chinese - Indonesian dishes, which had been adapted to their taste."*⁷

Anyways, I just wanted to share with you some of these thoughts. As you can see, irony is totally integrated in what I'm describing. I'm not adding it. Really, how can we in 2023, be in a totally artificial flat land and look at someone wearing wooden clogs, while having a plastic sausage hanging on top of their head and pretending to work in a windmill as in the 19th century without laughing?

I would love to do a saison 2 of *Natuurlijk* in this set-up.

I think I use irony as a resilient tool. I wonder how much is also cultural. I grew up surrounded by this ability to transform collectively and individually the tragic in a good laugh. It is also a way for me to put aside a victimhood position and it's clearly empowering.

It also gives me the strength to tackle heavy concerns while enjoying the process. For example, I am tired of explaining that racism is wrong. Also, it is not my job to educate anyone about these important topics. Reversing via irony these situations is among other things, a gesture of revenge, with some pettiness. But it's fun! And I'm happy you used the word hilarious to describe the work! I also enjoy your comment about the aunty producing a female gaze

against toilet paper. I really, on purpose, try to avoid a moralistic approach in my practice. Self-laugh/love is maybe also a needed self-critic with some pettiness?

Anyways, I will stop here. My train is entering Den Haag Centraal station.

Warmly,

Ghita

Wed, 12 Apr 2023

From: Lara Khaldi

Funny! We also ventured out of Amsterdam this weekend. We went to see the Afsluitdijk.⁸ Y. is listening to a podcast about the history of the Netherlands and he wanted to see it. We read about it all the way there, N. got so bored he slept. I've kind of known how important the dykes are here, but seeing this one is different... I thought of you, and of the title of your work in relation to 'Natuurlijk'! As culture here is based on controlling nature. Nature is dangerous and fatal here, because once culture (control of nature) dwindles, it means the very land will recede and be flooded (back) by water...

Amazing that you've been to Mleeta! I was there light years ago. It is indeed bizarre, what I thought was interesting about it is that it reveals rather than makes esoteric. I guess Hezbollah needs to show that their enemies are not omnipotent, that they are vulnerable, exposable, and not invincible. I think a lot of military museums use this as a war tactic. Opposed to the modern or contemporary art museum, which makes objects seem mysterious, holy, and removed from life.

⁸ The Afsluitdijk is a major dam and causeway in the Netherlands which was constructed between 1927 and 1932 in Friesland province, over a length of 32 km and a width of 90 metres. (Source: Wikipedia)

⁷ Extract of the presentation text from the museum

Yesterday I went to an amazing talk at De Ateliers by Grace Ndiritu.⁹ Arrived late (natuurlijk) and had to leave early (natuurlijk). She was speaking about museums and restitution. She mentioned that in order to be able to control the narrative at the museum because the objects are thought to be dead, and so, she attempts to introduce animism¹⁰ at the museum to see what happens. I think museums will always attempt to control a certain nationalistic, flat narrative, however there are always slippages, and signs here and there where objects, images of people attempt to emancipate from that narrative. It is strange that the history of the modern museum starts from storming and taking over the Louvre, a palace! Where the objects and the building itself turn into a symbol for the end of the corrupt royal regime. But I guess with colonialism, the objects within the museum also follow the same logic: evidence of the capture and taming of people and their culture. So as you say at the museum you visited, we are shown that these poor farmers were able through hard work and toil to build great things, masking class struggle and the history of colonialism.

Ok I'm late again. Need to run... natuurlijk.
Till later
x L.

Wed, 12 Apr 2023

From: Ghita Skali

Oh nice you went to Afsluitdijk! I wanted to go for a while but I didn't manage yet. I read about it a little bit while doing research about the Netherlands.

I remembered reading that the literal translation is "shut-off dyke". As you wrote, this Dutch control freak vibe of dominating nature (with the latent risk of being flooded-again by water) is quite impressive but for me it is deceiving how the word dyke then took a whole other meaning when I moved here.¹¹ I mean, I was aware of this definition but let's say before, it was more related among other things to "I want a dyke for president" » clearly not having the same dykes in mind.¹² 😊

Concerning Mleeta, I like what you wrote about revealing instead of making it esoteric. Not showing the enemy anymore as invincible is a strong gesture which in this geography has a totally different meaning. Then, I wonder how the 'cultural amusement parks' are maybe in between war museums and

modern/contemporary art museums? It would be fun to have a scale with the positionalities of these structures (while of course, also, taking in consideration the cities where they are and their fundings).

When I read your words "the museums as institutions masking class struggle and the history of colonialism", it made me think of two other points about the Open Lucht museum:

- Performers vs wax bodies: in the farms, the windmills and some other working spaces from former centuries, they had performers. For the Kroketten, the bakery and the friteshuis, they had... workers. For the hospital, the Amsterdamse house from the seventies, and for a communion (among other scenes), they had wax sculptures of human beings. They also had a wax sculpture for the peeing set up (yes, in the middle of a road, you can see a public toilet with a waxed man peeing and you have the sound of the urine).

I would love to attend a meeting where the board committee is deciding which bodies from which centuries should be alive or in wax...

- Of course, in this amazing cultural amusement park, the presence of 'alterity' was mainly the Chinese restaurant I described to you.

As usual, it covers up a larger discrimination of class, race and gender...

But then, let's leave these amusement parks and go back to the modern/contemporary museum through 'the evidence of the capture and taming of people and their culture!' It makes me think of many ongoing conversations about what we do with colonial archives. I gave a class three years ago in France where my initial intuition was to visit and to create a debate around the exhibition *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today*. But at the same time, an awful book (which I will deliberately dismiss to quote), full of colonial pictures was on sale. The book is an expensive print on fancy paper. This was around the beginning of December and it was horrifying to see many people getting it as a Christmas present. It is 544 pages with more than 1200 images to show « the fascination for the other », « the violent fantasy », ... Concretely, pictures of Moroccan women forced to be prostitutes in the area of Bousbir, in Casablanca, shirtless Algerian young

⁹ Grace Ndiritu (born in 1982) is a British-Kenyan visual artist who started in 2012 a new body of work under the title Healing the museum. Ndiritu believes that most modern art institutions are out of sync with their audiences' everyday experiences and the widespread socio-economical and political changes that have taken place globally in the recent decades, have further eroded the relationship between museums and their audiences and she believes museums are dying. In 2018, she founded the fashion and economic research project COVERSLUT, which focuses on dealing with issues of democracy, race, gender and class politics. Among the essays she wrote: "Notes To a White Left World: Activism in this Current Political Crisis" (2017), "Love in The Time of Trump: The Problematics of Kanye West" (2018). (Source: Wikipedia)

¹⁰ Animism from latin: anima meaning "breath, spirit, life" is the belief that objects, places, and creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence. Animism perceives all things - animals, plants, rocks, rivers, weather systems, ... - as animated and alive. (Source: wikipedia)

¹¹ Dyke is also a slang term, used as a noun meaning lesbian. The term has been reappropriated to imply assertiveness. (Source: Wikipedia)

¹² "I want a president" is a poem written in 1992, by the New-York city based feminist, activist and artist Zoe Loenard (born in 1961), in support of HIV activist groups. At that time, the poem was distributed among friends who photocopied and shared it. The text was written after the announcement of the poet Eileen Myles to enter the 1992 race for president of the United States against George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot with an "openly female write-in campaign". Leonard expresses the desire to see elected officials with different backgrounds, struggles and experiences than the ones usually represented. She ends her poem with "I want to know why we started learning somewhere down the line that a president is always a clown: always a John and never a hooker. Always a boss and never a worker, always a liar, always a thief and never caught". (Source: Wikipedia)

women, postcards of, again, shirtless teenagers from Vietnam, nude women on all fours in fields...

Many activists and thinkers wrote accurate critiques about this book and how using the word 'violence' will not then 'make it ok' to look at these pictures (which are also part of an impressive market of collectors specialised in this kind of images).

It was an emergency to speak about this and to put aside a little bit the exhibition about the black model, while it obviously echoed a lot. This book is clearly the worst gesture of what we can do with colonial archives (by reshoving it with their sexual load in a fancy print for a Christmas present, without contextualising their provenance, and making any research about the persons photographed, and all this of course made under the supervision of an entitled French white historian).

More recently, the Abu Ghraib display at the Berlin Biennale also created some debates and I am sure, you have a lot of other specific stories in mind. I am sharing these two things to discuss with you our responsibilities towards these images. It is a slippery territory which I try to tackle at the end of the video with the song "Anuses of the world, unite on values!" which is on the rhythm of the Dutch song "15 Miljoen Mensen".¹³

Here we are, I just threw the hot potato to you. 😊 So I leave you with it and I am going to sleep before installing the

300 butt cleaners in the show tomorrow morning.

Layla Sa3ida,

Ghita

Mon, 17 Apr 2023

From: Lara Khaldi

Hi Ghita,

I waited for the hot potato to cool down before I answered, but maybe too long! I was on my way to Brussels when I started this email, and now it's Monday!! So this is going to be a chopped up cold potato :-)

How was installing the 300 butt cleaner cans? You mentioned they will be free for taking after the closing of the exhibition. What do you think people will use them for? I think no one will be able to use them as plant watering cans after seeing your video! I wonder about your earlier versions/drafts on exhibiting the water cans, as I suspect it is an intentional decision not to exhibit it as an art object, or to do both. Exhibit it as an art object, and by doing that, changing the whole discourse and use around it. In a sense you're aestheticizing the watering can during the exhibition, making it de-functional temporarily while transforming its use, then releasing it back into function, but a different one. In a sense artists have a very similar power as the museum in changing the narrative about museumified objects. As it is not only the museum which

enforces particular narratives about history and culture, this also happens in culture itself.

I'll start from the end of your email. I had to look up "15 Miljoen Mensen". I had no idea the song in your video was based on a Dutch song. My Dutch is not good enough to fully understand the criticism in the song... But I see that the video might have inspired yours. So I'm curious, how did you come about the song and what prompted you to write the new lyrics?

This question of yours 'what are our responsibilities towards these images', is a great question to ask ourselves as image producers. And I guess it prompts the question of what are our responsibilities towards the persons in these images which we choose to show and which we gain cultural capital from...

I will write more Ghita, but I'm afraid if I don't send it to you now it will slow down our conversation. So I will send more thoughts tonight after I re-watch your new edit.

Tahiyiyati,

L.

Tue, 18 Apr 2023

From: Ghita Skali

Saba7ou Lara,

It was fun to install the butt cleaners with Honey and Olimpia. The different forms, sizes and colours made me a little bit dizzy though. It goes from animals shapes, to witches, to portable *shatafas*, to buckets, to regular cans, to plastic bottles with some jokes in the middle: a gasoline can, a small bin, an Utrecht reusable water bottle, a children's watering can of 10cl near a 50l one...¹⁴ There is an elephant, a bee, a parrot, a dog, a fox, a chameleon... It is a bum zoo...

Visitors can reserve their butt cleaner from the opening and come to pick it up for free on the last days of the show. You are right when you speak about aestheticizing this object. Although, there is a clear decision to have a shop vibe (with the shelves, the stands and the big quantity). The vitrine has a neon sign saying "Butt cleaners R us" In front, there is a sex shop and a vespa shop with amazing vitrines. I wonder how people will interact in this street with this new vitrine. I was dreaming for a while to have a 'everything at 2 euros' shop exhibition. But even while having these references and trying to make the objects usable after the show, the butt cleaners are suspended temporarily and looked at.

¹³ "15 Miljoen Mensen" is a dutch song by Fluitsma & Van Tijn made in 1996, which was originally intended for a commercial for Postbank (predecessor of the bank ING) and is considered as a kind of a second national anthem. The slogan is: "15 Million people. / On that very small piece of earth. / You don't write laws to them. / You leave them alone."

¹⁴ "A shatafa (from the Arabic: شطّافة) is a commode shower, a toilet shower, a bum shower or a bum gun. It is a hand-held triggered nozzle that is placed near the toilet and delivers a spray of water used for anal cleansing and cleaning of the genitals after using the toilet for defecation and urination, popularised by Arab nations where the bidet shower is a common bathroom accessory. (Source: Wikipedia) Today, the word shatafa is also used by Arabic speakers for portative bum cleaners which are used in cities where there is no hand-held nozzle in the toilets.

That said, releasing back the objects to their functions (or to alternative functions) is important in my practice. I like to think of my artworks as gestures existing in the reality of the art world but still having meanings in other realities. The exhibition is just this suspension where these gestures are labelled artworks. As for another work of mine, titled *Ali Baba Express* which is a series of interventions where I collaborate with carriers to bring illegally verbena from Morocco to Europe, the pile of tea is an artwork but is also a redistribution of production budget and at the end, just a lot of tea for us. :-) Also, there is always an attempt to switch the narrative: I imagine the city of Den Haag with some people walking around in July with watering cans while knowing their cleaning purpose.

Concerning the song, I actually discovered first the new version which is called "17 Miljoen Mensen".¹⁵ Here is an extract : "(...)17 Million people. / On that very small piece of earth. / You don't prescribe them the law. / You let them keep their dignity. (...) I call my mother with a quivering voice / Because of what the Prime Minister said we must do / Well intentioned but sneaky, quite a bit scary / and I think about / All the worries about health and jobs."

I had homework to do about this song in my Dutch class. Of course, instead of doing the homework, I spent some time doing research and losing myself in the

¹⁵ "17 Miljoen Mensen" is a new version of "15 Miljoen Mensen" made in 2020 and performed by Davina Michelle with Snelle which speaks about the Netherlands in the pandemic and the lockdown.

¹⁶ "The mint tea " is a song made in 2015 by the singer Naima Bendaoud.

¹⁷ "El Fol Wel Yassmin / الفل والياسمين " is a song by Ahmed Mounib.

older version of "15 Miljoen Mensen". There is a self-production of cliché which is bizarre. This self-production of clichés is (unfortunately?) universal. It made me think of many other songs. Among others, the Golden Palm could go to شاي بالنعناع, filmed in Nice where 'an Orient girl' is mentioned.¹⁶ A friend shared with me recently this one: تعالى نلضم اسامينا.. الفلة جنب الياسمينه قنا، سوهاج، الاسماعيلية، بنت الصعايدة بحرية it is more cute though.¹⁷

"Anuses of the world, unite on values! " was co-written with Ghassan El Hakim and Amin Naouni who are part of Kabareh Cheikhats. Ghassan and Amin are also the ones performing the song. We already worked together on other projects and the reversal of irony is a tool we use often with some self-mockery (to avoid the moralistic position again). We thought about self-producing an entitlement in the culturally loaded notion of hygiene (while still saying to the 'trope of the white man' "stop spreading your shit"). I also think it is again an attempt to switch the narrative?

Warmly,

Ghita

Sun, 23 Apr 2023

From: Lara Khaldi

Dear Ghita,

Apologies for my late reply. It's been a busy and exhausting week and I had to work yesterday, so I spent today with the kiddo. N. and I went with his friend and dad to the Naturalis Biodiversity Center in Leiden. Natuurlijk I thought of our conversation! This museum is like a graveyard. If it does say anything it is that biodiversity is dead. It's full of taxidermied animals, and they always freak me out. Although I think the museum is revealed for what it is when taxidermied creatures are presented. It is a place where the dead cannot even rest. There were also huge dinosaur skeletons, which was very exciting for N. and his friend. Everything was exhibited within a black box, with dramatic theatre lights on them. It is a very strange graveyard/ amusement park. I will have nightmares tonight. Boris Groys writes something quite interesting about graveyards and museums, as they've always been compared. Adorno famously writes that museums are like mausoleums, but Groys writes that in fact graveyards are much more interesting, because the corpses are not exhibited. And so stories abound, and the narratives about the graveyard changes from mouth to mouth. While the museum, because of the power of capture it has over the corpse/object, the narrative is controlled, and announced dead. So the dead at the graveyard are living through oral culture, and the living in the museum are quite dead, presented in the museum as past.

¹⁸ Translation: Workers of the world unite!

I like what you write about *Ali Baba Express*, I remember seeing it at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and thinking about how it must have presented a dilemma for the museum, as it is living and might bring insects and all kinds of life into the museum, which must be kept out to preserve the -dead- collection. I guess this circulation of objects in and out of the exhibition space allows for a loss of control, a redistribution of meaning, material and symbolic resources...

There's something really sad about this song "15 Miljoen Mensen". I can't put my finger on it, almost a sense of loneliness. I'm not sure I understood all the lyrics, but it's quite self critical. Your new Arabic version is hilarious. The connotations of a leftist slogan which the generation of our parents repeated many times (يا عمال العالم اتحدو) converted into butts.¹⁸ And I guess it makes sense here, it is about the oppressed uniting, because it seems while we sing it in our isolated nationalist broken (or stateless) states, in the diaspora - when we actually finally meet - we tend to turn on and play identity politics on each other. The Kabareh Cheikhats look like Djinn and reminded me of Fawazeer Ramadan aesthetics (formidable Sherihan for example).^{19 20 21} The whole video is a dreamlike combination of a local TV comedy and an 80s Egyptian Fawazeer. It works somehow:-)

Indeed tropes are self produced everywhere, but by reproducing them (albeit critically) aren't you worried one could step into the minefield of the impasse of the binary? Us and them? I often fall into it myself, it's muddy, I could go on about it, but I want to throw you the last minute hot potato :-)

I guess this is my last email. I've enjoyed the conversation, there's still a lot to write about. I wish we didn't know it would get published. I was thinking today about performativity and how much there is of it in the 'art scene,' how I miss real heated conversations, ones that meander and are improvised, where people learn something from speaking to each other. There's a lot that's staged here. I understand it, it's a more professionalised art world, where everyone is prescribed a role... anyway, I also would have been much less discreet if this exchange were to be published in 5 years rather than 5 days.

Good night my dear, I hope you're done installing and having a rest.

تصبحي على وطن²²

Mon, 24 Apr 2023

From: Ghita Skali

Dear Lara,

No worries. The last week seemed hectic but it's great you managed to get some time off with N.

I also wish we didn't know this conversation would get published. It was strange to want to share my thoughts and my doubts with you while knowing it is going to be read (later on) not only by you. This staged reality where our roles are prescribed is a little bit disturbing. Although, our paths crossed a few times in the last years and I am also happy we took the time here to exchange about this project.

I will try to handle here the last minute hot potato you are throwing to me: in the muddy territory of tropes, thinking criticality will save us from the minefield of the binary is again a lure. But still... I have the naive hope that caricature is finger-pointing the limits and the ridicule of the tropes in general. I love the fact you thought about Fawazeer Ramadan aesthetics ! My attempt is to step a little bit aside from the binary (us/them - global/south - etc) by investing these aesthetics.

Don't get me wrong, my answer is not a cheesy statement where fiction could be the solution to the binary minefield. I just wonder how, while trying to disentangle historical/social/ethical nodes, we could be clear about our positionalities and then get + invest our agency differently. I will try here to illustrate a little bit this desire in the context of what you formulated beautifully: our isolated nationalist broken -stateless - states, in the diaspora.

So here is my illustration: a few years ago, I was living half-time in Germany where the immigration office had no clue about how to handle my file (I was at the same time still having an Egyptian working permit, while being in an irregular immigration situation in France in between a student and a working position. All this, with a Moroccan passport. Nothing new, the reality of a cultural worker with a passport from the Global South being in between countries with relatively precarious contracts and trying to figure out a legal situation). The Germans gave me a

'Fiktionsbescheinigung'. This is a fictional immigration certificate letting you be in the country while not allowing you to do anything else (being an artist is anyways not considered as 'doing something'; so I was officially not allowed to work but it didn't bother them to give me this paper while knowing I was in their country doing an artist residency). This official fictional paper was a strange identity revelation (while being a pain in the ass: it wasn't allowing me to leave Germany. This 'precariousness' was painful. Meanwhile, I was realising -again- my privileges to have an official paper (even with the word fiction), to not be stuck in a refugee camp, or in a low-cost flight with a police-man sitting near me and taking me 'back' I don't know where...)

While again being refused my right of circulation, I enjoyed being officially fictional in Europe and I was laughing a lot about the ridicule of this situation. I think it is this feeling I am trying to invest in my practice. My answer to the muddy territory of binary is the Fiktionsbescheinigung. I am in between the tropes of the white guy and the aunty on her ethical horse (among other tropes), with the load of the colonial archives on top of my head and trying to figure out how to navigate in this mess with a strong desire to laugh. I think we only have interstices to inhabit to get agency and to do art, while of course not dismissing what I call the historical/social/ethical nodes and trying to be honest about our (different and moving) positionalities. Again, I am not sure about all this. I am just sharing thoughts. :)

¹⁹ Jinn (Arabic: **جن**, jinn) – also romanized as djinn or anglicised as genies – are invisible creatures in early pre-Islamic Arabian religious systems and later in Islamic culture. Like humans, they are accountable for their deeds, and can be either believers or unbelievers. Since jinn are neither innately evil nor innately good, Islam acknowledged spirits from other religions and was able to adapt them during its expansion. Jinn are not a strictly Islamic concept; they may represent several pagan beliefs integrated into Islam. Although generally invisible, jinn are supposed to be composed of thin and subtle bodies, they can change at will. They favour snake form, but can also choose to appear as scorpions, lizards or as humans. (Source: wikipedia)

²⁰ Fawazeer Ramadan (Arabic: **فوازير رمضان**) was an Egyptian television show broadcast during the month of Ramadan. It involved riddles (fawazeer) presented in musical form, with awards given out to the winners. The show began in the 1960s and lasted until the year 2000, being broadcast irregularly. Many prominent Egyptian actors and entertainers participated in the show, most notably Sherihan, Fouad el-Mohandes, Nelly, and the Tholathy Adwa'a El Masrah trio. Sherihan's performances in particular have had a strong cultural influence in the Arabic-speaking world. (Source: wikipedia)

²¹ Sherihan (Arabic: **شريهان**) (born in1964) is an Egyptian actress, singer and classically trained dancer.

²² Literal translation: May you wake up to a state nation.

I will say bye with the blessing and the nostalgia you mentioned of يا عمال العالم اتحدو. And wishing you too: تصبجي على وطن. A literal translation could be: "may you wake up to a state nation". I am not sure where this expression comes from. Our conversation needs to go on print so I can't research it now.

So here is my personal relation to this expression for the readers of our exchange: تصبجي على وطن is often used around me by friends from the Arab world who are a little bit disillusioned. The expression is loaded with some cynicism but contains a little bit of hope. Wishing someone to may wake up to a state nation has the underlying message that there is no state we know deserving the name 'nation', because they all stink in all the hemispheres. Instead of saying sleep well, sometimes we greet each other with the hope to wake up in a different state-nation, a state-nation which doesn't stink anymore, or at least a little bit less.

So, here we are: I am wishing you too to wake up to a less stinky state-nation. Maybe the nation state of the Fawazeer Ramadan?

Warmly,

Ghita



NATUURLIJK

by Ghita Skali - 2023

Joep de Jong: Willum Geerts

Neighbour: Shah Tabibi

Bloemenmarkt worker: Dana Claansen

Person in shop 1: Malcolm Wamunza

Person 1 in the market: Dragon Van Buurt

Person 2 in the market: Andy Arduin

Person 3 in market: Selman Aqiqi

Person in shop 2: Rajiv Kaushik

Person in shop 3: Zahia Saman

Teenagers in shop 4: Said Hakim and Soraya Donkersloot

Person in shop 4: Delilah Lili

Tourists: Gaëlle Farah, Henna Hyvarinen, Pedram Sazesh, Sophie Soobramanien, Annette Wolfsberger and Emiel Zeno.

"Anus of the world" is co-written and performed by:

Ghassan El Hakim and Amin Naouni (from Kabareh Cheikhats).

Director of photography: Jasper Masthoff

Sound: Nico Bunnik

Assistant director and script coach: Gaëlle Farah

Production Assistant: Fatemeh Heydari

"Anus of the world" filmed by: Hakim Habbi

Sound mixing and sound design: Monzer El Hachem

Editing advisors: Salim Bayri and Jasper Masthoff

Shoulders warmers:

Salim Bayri, Kaoutar Chaqchaq, Ayla Mrabet and Aude Christel Mgba.

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