

Contested landscapes, emergent archives

Aug 29th / Sep 13th 2019
Orient-Institut Beirut, Rue Hussein
Beyhoun 44, Zokak el-Blat, Beirut

The transformation of landscapes with its related political and environmental conflicts is characterized by a historical oblivion that has been contested by art interventions. This exhibition brings together contemporary audio-visual artworks that intervene in the forgotten and transformed landscapes of the global South, particularly of the Middle East and South America. The selected works reverberate the lived experience of environmental degradation and conflict as loss, mourning and survival reflecting complex temporalities and emergent spaces. By understanding the landscape as archive with its ontological, material and metaphorical depth, they address historical oblivion, regeneration as well as the archival (un)availability of cultural heritage to discuss landscape as a media-reflexive dimension in the global history. They contest the hidden history of violence in the forms of forced disappearance, displacement of rural communities or agricultural-technological modernization by contouring a new geography of plants, seeds, artifacts, linkages and narratives of resistance. Forming a part of an eco-criticism, the audio-visual artworks reveal and make tangible the psychic and material sedimentations of forms of violence and economic history investigating their impact on the landscapes, more specifically, in Lebanon and Colombia. The exhibition relates to the archive as a creative force and to emergent material archives as depositories to unfold ambivalences, contradictions, and the incommensurability of cultural work and the memory of landscape. It aims to discuss the long lasting degradation of landscapes contesting the often invisibilized environmental and political violence.

(Liliana Gómez)

1. The Fairest Heritage (2016)

Uriel Orlow, Switzerland / UK / Portugal

Video HD, 5'22", loop

In 1963, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of Kirstenbosch, the national botanical garden of South Africa in Cape Town commissioned a series of films to document the history of the garden, the Cape Floral Kingdom, and the jubilee celebrations with their 'national' dances, pantomimes of colonial conquests, and visits of international botanists. The films' protagonists of scientists, visitors etc. are all white – the only Africans featured are labourers. Considered neutral and passive, flowers were excluded from the boycott until the late 1980s and so botanical nationalism and flower diplomacy flourished unchecked at home and internationally.

The films have not been seen since 1963 and

were found by the artist in the cellar of the library of the botanical garden. Orlow collaborated with actor Lindiwe Matshikiza who puts herself and her body in these loaded pictures, inhabiting and confronting the found footage and thus contesting history and the archive itself.

2. From Syria to Palestine: El Autostrad' (2017)

Stéphanie Dadour, Sirine Fattouh, both

Lebanon / France

Video installation HD, 240', loop

Two cameras were placed in a car driving along the Lebanese highway from north to south, from the Lebanese-Syrian border to the Lebanese-Palestinian border. The journey takes place in one stroke, following the rhythm of a typical day. It takes a little over 200 km or 4 hours without traffic, to discover a set of places linked by a road, a receptacle of multiple identities.

3. Economías de Imágenes de Guerra: Resonancias (2016–2019)

Claudia Salamanca, Colombia

Video HD, 9'38", loop

This video exercise emerges as an appropriation of the archival material of the exhibition "Radiar Memorias. diálogos con el Carare" that was realized by the Fundación Sub/Liminal, Colectivo RES and the Asociación de Trabajadores Campesinos del Carare (ATCC) in Colombia in 2017. It traces the memories of a peasant resistant movement via the back and the front of existent and non-existent images, their traces and bifurcations.

4. Notas de pie de página al libro Las Plantas de los Dioses de Richard Evans Schultes y Albert Hofmann (2019)

Claudia Salamanca, Colombia

Video HD, 10'35", loop

Art-book and video. This work intervenes in the famous book by Richard Evans Schultes and Albert Hofmann, "Plants of the Gods." The intervention takes two copies, in one, it deletes the images and in the other, it deletes the text.

The synchronization in the video works as an attempt to shift the relationship between the visual and the textual in the hallucinogenic plants' ethnobotany literature.

5. Algunas observaciones sobre el paisaje (2019)

María Ordóñez, Colombia / Switzerland

Video, 14'54", loop

This audiovisual essay approaches diverse landscapes and waterscapes related to the disappearance of people in Colombia. Inspired by narratives and devices (as optic prosthesis), it deals with closeness and distance as a medium for intervening in a space (material and symbolic) into which diverse bodies are embedded.

The essay was realized in close exchange with people, communities, and some institutions, that are immersed, affected, and/or related to the complex armed conflict in Colombia. Some of them prefer their names be kept unrevealed.

Exhibition Map

