

# PRINCE CLAUS FUND IMPACT AWARDS 2022



F o n d s

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# FOREWORD

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HRH Prince Constantijn, Honorary Chairman  
of the Prince Claus Fund

This year, for the first time, we celebrate the awardees of the Impact Awards—a biennial event that recognises trailblazing artists and cultural practitioners. Alongside our Seed and Mentorship Awards, the Impact Awards spotlight individuals whose practice has made a positive contribution to their societies. Each of these artists has worked closely with their communities to effect change, speaking up for the silenced and dispossessed, and working to strengthen embattled communities within the public sphere of their societies.

These six awardees all come from different parts of the globe, but each has had a vital impact on the communities within which they work. In Brazil, the philosopher, activist and writer Ailton Krenak has devoted his life to advocating for the indigenous peoples, famously facing up to the Brazilian Centrão in the era-defining 1987 Constituent Assembly. In Senegal, the acclaimed director Alain Gomis, founder of the Yennenga Centre in Dakar, spearheads a renaissance of filmmaking in West Africa. In Morocco, the artist Hassan Darsi's architectural interventions in Casablanca seek to repurpose the city for its inhabitants. Staging his work in and amongst the urban layers left by the European modernists, Darsi establishes alternative logics to read the city within the context of its colonial history. Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara's public protests in Havana engage with the landscape of Cuba's political life, for which he has been incarcerated. In Argentina, the writer and activist María Medrano, founder of YoNoFui, works with women caught within the country's carceral system amid an increasingly regressive drug policy, and growing concern from human rights organisations of the conditions of Argentine prisons. Finally, the architect May al-Ibrashy's work to protect the cultural heritage of historic Cairo sees her mediate between governmental and civic bodies, pushing against an avarice for development on one side whilst advocating the benefit of heritage on the other.

These awards reflect the Prince Claus Fund's commitment to honouring culture and its impact on social and political change. These are individuals who truly show how through their practice and unyielding personal activism, the status quo can be thoroughly shaken and change can be provoked. Their commitment to the needs and priorities of their communities illustrates the powerful role that culture can play across the world in transforming social, economic and political contexts.

CULTURE AND  
COMMUNITY

# INTRODUCTION

Marcus Desando, Director of the Prince Claus Fund  
Ila Kasem, Chair of the Prince Claus Fund

The current relentless stream of news about wars and disasters can overshadow the fact that the world is full of creative people. In the context of these serious situations around the world, the Prince Claus Awards offer a reminder that across continents and generations, many people are working peacefully to make the world a better place. Through our Seed, Mentorship and Impact Awards, presented to individuals at different stages of their careers, we hope to recognise those whose practice makes positive change in the world possible.

Chidumaga Uzoma Oriji is one such individual. A Seed Awardee, Oriji is a creative technologist and visual artist from Nigeria. He observes that art is capable of “showing us what a better world could look like, giving us tools to dream with, inspiring us, uplifting us when everything else is falling apart, giving us hope.”

Our work at the Fund is dedicated to supporting such efforts and making them more sustainable. In this book, you will see how the work of our Impact Award recipients makes a positive difference in their societies, how it inspires others and why it deserves much broader recognition. Our ambition at the Fund is not only to celebrate achievement but also to nurture it at earlier stages and ultimately to be part of creating a strong global cultural ecology.

Creatives face major obstacles at every stage of their careers. For the recipients of the Impact Awards, recognition of their hard-fought achievements is important. At the same time, each region has its own social, political and cultural context; each artist has their own talents and vision. Heavy-handed intervention is not what is needed. The Fund has been at the forefront of unrestricted funding because we believe the artists we support know best how to invest in themselves to further develop their visions.

Early evaluations of the first year of our Seed Awards reinforce our faith; we learned that the vast majority of the 100 recipients spent their grants on equipment and production costs and they felt their Prince Claus Seed Award was very significant for their careers.

With all of our Awards we work at bringing artists together through exchanges and mobile labs in various intersecting ways, around themes, as well as across disciplines and generations. These connections create energy, as Seed Awardee Alice Penda, a visual artist from Cameroon wrote about the Prince Claus Mobile Lab she attended in September in Ghana, put it “I discovered people who could actually move you with sounds, gestures, words, or colors... The connection was intellectual, emotional and somehow electrical.”

Such connections can take on a life of their own. By nurturing them, we are contributing to our vision of a global cultural ecology, one that is sustainable, founded on mutual respect, trust and a great deal of enthusiasm. By a “global cultural ecology” we don’t envision a homogenised mono-culture, but something more like a tropical rainforest brimming with infinite varieties of flora and fauna which nurture each other. A world that recognises the need for culture and gives space to a diversity of ancient and local art forms that, in turn, provide a continuing wellspring for surprising hybrids, as well as new and innovative variations.

## HOW WE NURTURE

# PRINCE CLAUS FUND IMPACT AWARDS 2022

Once every two years the Prince Claus Fund recognises six artists and cultural practitioners with the Prince Claus Impact Awards. The Impact Awards are designed to acknowledge artists, creatives and inspirational leaders who have shown transformative power, consistent dedication and engagement within their contexts and beyond. These Awards are granted to artists whose practices are artistically inspiring, offer new perspectives and deal in creative ways with pressing social and/or political issues. They stand as testament to the positive, critical and crucial role that arts and culture can play across the world.

The Impact Awards is a nomination-based process for which the Fund invites cultural actors and experts from its global network to nominate individuals they believe fit the profile and deserve greater recognition. An international, independent and interdisciplinary jury is responsible for reviewing the nominated candidates and selecting the final six Impact Award recipients.

During their deliberations the jury has centred the importance of honouring individuals whose commitment and engagement with their community is clear and direct. They have chosen artists and cultural practitioners whose work is of exemplary quality while at the same time addressing issues that have contemporary relevance and urgency. The jury believes they are role models for a new generation, helping cultural expression to thrive. For each of these practitioners the jury is of the opinion that receiving the Impact Award will amplify their work and encourage them to continue and deepen their longstanding engagements.

Each of these individuals' work is looking to specific communities, geared at changing both local and global realities and rooted in heritage whilst working towards an open and inclusive future. The jury commends them for their resilience, outspokenness and determination, and for dedicating their lives to addressing pressing social matters, creating opportunities for change by engaging local communities and amplifying their voices to reach audiences across the world.

# PRÊMIOS IMPACTO PRÍNCIPE CLAUS 2022

Uma vez a cada dois anos, o Prince Claus Fund reconhece seis artistas pioneiros e profissionais da cultura com o Prince Claus Impact Awards. Os Impact Awards são pensados para reconhecer artistas, criativos e líderes inspiradores que demonstraram poder transformador, dedicação consistente e engajamento dentro de seus contextos e em toda a sociedade. Esses Prêmios são concedidos a artistas cujas práticas são inspiradoras, oferecem novas perspectivas e lidam de forma criativa com questões sociais e/ou políticas prementes. Eles são um testemunho do papel positivo, crítico e crucial que as artes e a cultura podem desempenhar em todo o mundo.

O Impact Awards é um processo baseado em nomeação para o qual o Fundo convida atores culturais e especialistas de sua rede global a nomear indivíduos que acreditam se encaixar no perfil e merecem maior reconhecimento. Um júri internacional, independente e interdisciplinar é responsável por analisar os candidatos indicados e selecionar os seis finalistas do Prêmio Impacto.

Durante suas deliberações, o Júri focou na importância de homenagear indivíduos cujo compromisso e envolvimento com sua comunidade seja claro e direto. Eles escolheram artistas e profissionais culturais que abordam questões contemporâneas que têm relevância e urgência e que acreditam ser modelos para uma nova geração. Para cada um destes profissionais, o Júri é de opinião que receber o Prêmio Impacto irá ampliar o seu trabalho e incentivá-los a continuar e aprofundar esses compromissos com suas comunidades.

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O trabalho de cada um desses indivíduos está voltado para comunidades específicas, buscando mudar as realidades locais e globais e enraizadas no patrimônio histórico-cultural dessas comunidades, enquanto trabalham para um futuro livre e inclusivo. O júri os elogia por sua resiliência, franqueza e determinação, e por dedicar suas vidas a abordar questões sociais urgentes, criando oportunidades de mudança ao envolver as comunidades locais e amplificar suas vozes para alcançar públicos em todo o mundo.

O júri compartilha nossa crença de que a cultura pode afetar pessoas e sociedades e afirma que esses artistas provaram isso por meio de suas práticas artísticas diversificadas, inspiradoras e engajadas. Eles representam a mudança e estendem a mão com generosidade e esperança para a próxima geração. Estamos honrados em apresentar esses seis indivíduos a vocês.

# LES PRIX PRINCE CLAUS IMPACT 2022

Une fois tous les deux ans, la Fondation Prince Claus attribue un prix Prince Claus Impact à six artistes ou praticiens de la culture. Les prix Impact rendent hommage à des artistes, des créateurs et des leaders inspirants qui ont fait preuve d'un pouvoir de transformation, d'un dévouement et d'un engagement constants dans leur contexte et au-delà. Ces prix sont accordés à des artistes dont la pratique est source d'inspiration, ouvre de nouvelles perspectives, et traite de questions sociales et/ou politiques de manière créative. Ces artistes témoignent du rôle essentiel, positif et critique de l'art et de la culture à travers le monde.

Le processus de candidature des prix Impact commence par des nominations : la fondation invite des acteurs et des spécialistes de la culture issus de son réseau mondial à nommer des personnes qui répondent à ce profil et devraient selon eux être mieux reconnus. Un jury international, indépendant et multidisciplinaire est chargé de l'étude des candidats nommés et de la sélection définitive des lauréats des six prix Impact.

Au cours de ses délibérations, le jury a souligné l'importance de mettre à l'honneur des personnes qui s'engagent et participent à la vie de leur communauté de manière directe et évidente. Il a choisi des artistes et des praticiens de la culture dont le travail est de qualité exemplaire et qui en plus s'attaquent à des questions d'une brûlante actualité. Le jury considère qu'ils sont des modèles pour la nouvelle génération et qu'ils contribuent à l'épanouissement de l'expression culturelle. Pour chacun d'entre eux, le jury pense que le fait de recevoir le prix Impact augmentera la portée de leur travail et les encouragera à poursuivre et approfondir leurs engagements sur le long terme.

Le travail de chacune de ces personnes s'adresse à des communautés spécifiques et vise à changer des réalités à la fois locales et mondiales. Ancré dans l'histoire, leur travail est en même temps orienté vers un avenir ouvert et inclusif. Le jury félicite les lauréats pour leur résilience, leur liberté de ton et leur détermination, et pour le fait qu'ils consacrent leur vie à des questions sociales urgentes en faisant participer les communautés locales. Ils créent des opportunités de changement et permettent à ces communautés de mieux faire entendre leur voix pour atteindre des publics partout dans le monde.

Le jury partage la conviction de la Fondation Prince Claus que la culture peut avoir un impact sur les personnes et les sociétés, et estime que ces artistes en témoignent par leurs pratiques artistiques multiples, inspirantes et engagées. Ils représentent le changement et tendent la main avec espoir à la prochaine génération. C'est un honneur pour nous de vous présenter ces six personnes.

# PREMIOS IMPACT PRÍNCIPE CLAUS 2022

Una vez cada dos años la Fundación Príncipe Claus reconoce a seis innovadores artistas y a profesionales de la cultura con los Premios Impact Príncipe Claus. Los Premios Impact tienen como finalidad reconocer a aquellos artistas, creativos y líderes inspiracionales que han demostrado ejercer un poder transformador, una dedicación constante, y un compromiso dentro y más allá de sus propios contextos. Estos galardones se conceden a artistas cuyas prácticas son artísticamente inspiradoras, ofrecen nuevas perspectivas y abordan, de manera creativa, cuestiones sociales y/o políticas apremiantes. Constituyen un testimonio al rol crucial, crítico y positivo que pueden desempeñar la cultura y las artes en todo el mundo.

Los Premios Impact son un proceso sobre la base de nominaciones, en el que la Fundación invita a actores culturales y a expertos de su red mundial a que nominen a personas a las que consideran que se ajustan al perfil y que merecen un mayor reconocimiento. Un jurado internacional, independiente e interdisciplinario se encarga de realizar un examen de los candidatos nominados y de seleccionar a los seis candidatos finalistas de los Premios Impact.

Durante sus deliberaciones el jurado se centró en la importancia de honrar a personas cuyo compromiso y dedicación a su comunidad se manifiesta en forma clara y directa. El jurado eligió a artistas y a profesionales de la cultura cuyo trabajo es de calidad ejemplar y al mismo tiempo aborda cuestiones que tienen relevancia contemporánea y urgencia. El jurado considera que estos artistas son modelos a seguir para la nueva generación, que contribuyen a desarrollar la expresión cultural. El jurado es de la opinión que recibir el premio Impact hará que cada uno de estos profesionales pueda ampliar su trabajo y los anime a seguir e intensificar sus compromisos de larga data.

La labor de cada una de estas personas se dirige a comunidades específicas, está orientada a cambiar las realidades locales y globales, y está enraizada en el patrimonio, a la vez que trabaja en pro de un futuro abierto e inclusivo. El Jurado los quiere elogiar por su resiliencia, su franqueza y su determinación, y por dedicar sus vidas a abordar cuestiones sociales apremiantes, creando con ello oportunidades para el cambio, y amplificando las voces locales a través de la cultura para que puedan llegar a audiencias de todo el mundo.

El jurado comparte nuestra convicción de que la cultura puede tener un efecto en las personas y en las sociedades, y sostiene que estos artistas lo han demostrado mediante sus prácticas artísticas comprometidas, inspiradoras y diversas. Ellos representan el cambio y contactan con generosidad y esperanza con la siguiente generación. Nos sentimos honrados de presentarles aquí a estas seis personas.



# تقرير لجنة تحكيم جوائز الأمير كلاوس للتأثير ٢٠٢٢

يكرم صندوق الأمير كلاوس مرة واحدة كل عامين ستة فنانين وممارسين ثقافيين رائدين من خلال جوائز الأمير كلاوس للتأثير. تم تصميم جوائز Impact Awards لتكريم الفنانين والمبدعين والقادة الملهمين الذين أظهروا قدرة على إحداث التغيير وتفانيا ملتزما ومشاركة داخل سياقاتهم وخارجها. تمنح هذه الجوائز للفنانين الذين تكون ممارساتهم ملهمة فنيا ويقدمون وجهات نظر جديدة ويتعاملون بوسائل إبداعية مع القضايا الاجتماعية و/أو السياسية الملحة. وهي بمثابة شهادة على الدور الإيجابي والحاسم الذي يمكن أن تلعبه الفنون والثقافة في جميع أنحاء العالم.

وتقوم جوائز التأثير على أساس عملية الترشيح. يدعو الصندوق الجهات الفاعلة الثقافية والخبراء من شبكته العالمية لترشيح الأفراد الذين يعتقدون أنهم يتناسبون مع المعلومات التعريفية المطلوبة ويستحقون قدرا أكبر من التقدير. لجنة تحكيم دولية ومستقلة ومتعددة التخصصات مسؤولة عن مراجعة المرشحين واختيار الفائزين الستة النهائيين بجائزة التأثير.

وركزت لجنة التحكيم خلا مدولاتها على أهمية تكريم الأفراد الذين يكون إلتزامهم ومشاركتهم مع مجتمعهم واضحا ومباشرا. لقد إختاروا فنانين وممارسين ثقافيين تتسم أعمالهم بجودة مثالية بينما يعالجون في ذات الوقت القضايا ذات الأهمية المعاصرة والإلحاح. وتعتقد لجنة التحكيم أنهم قدوة يحتذى بها لجيل جديد مما يساعد على إزدهار التعبير الثقافي. وترى لجنة التحكيم أن حصول كل واحد من هؤلاء الممارسين على جائزة التأثير سيكثف عملهم ويشجعهم على مواصلة وتعميق مشاركاتهم الطويلة الأمد.

وتنظر كل أعمال هؤلاء الأفراد إلى مجتمعات محددة موجهة نحو تغيير الحقائق المحلية والعالمية على حد سواء و تكون متجذرة في الثقافة والتراث مع العمل من أجل مستقبل مفتوح وشامل. وتثني لجنة التحكيم عليهم لمرونتهم وصراحتهم وتصميمهم وتكريس حياتهم لمعالجة المسائل الاجتماعية الملحة وخلق فرص للتغيير وإعلاء الأصوات المحلية من خلال الثقافة للوصول إلى الجماهير في جميع أنحاء العالم.

تشاركنا لجنة التحكيم إيماننا بأن الثقافة يمكن أن تؤثر على الناس والمجتمعات، وتؤكد أن هؤلاء الفنانين أثبتوا ذلك من خلال ممارساتهم الفنية المتنوعة والمهمة والملتزمة. إنهم يمثلون التغيير ويتواصلون بسخاء وأمل بإتجاه الجيل القادم. ويشرفنا الآن أن نقدم لكم هؤلاء الأفراد الستة.

# BRAZIL LITERATURE & PHILOSOPHY

AILTON KRENAK

BRASIL  
LITERATURA & FILOSOFIA



Ailton Krenak at the National Encounter for Indigenous Dance and Culture, Serra do Cipó, 1997. Courtesy Ailton Krenak

Ailton Alves Lacerda Krenak is an indigenous leader, environmentalist, philosopher, poet and writer. Currently an honorary professor at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Krenak is considered one of the great leaders of the Brazilian indigenous movement, and is recognised for his activism in support of indigenous people and culture. He is the protagonist of one of the most memorable moments for indigenous activism in Brazil, where during an assembly which drafted the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, he painted his face according to traditional indigenous custom, to protest against the setback in the fight for the rights of the indigenous people of Brazil.

Krenak has succeeded over the last years in providing a safe space for indigenous leadership to be developed throughout the country. He is often referred to as a mentor and a leader to younger generations of indigenous leaders, activists and politicians. He has played a major role in the development of indigenous organisations that have emerged over the last years. Environmentalists, anthropologists and other individuals, who are intimately involved within indigenous rights movements in Brazil, constantly attest to Krenak's role in building bridges between indigenous people and the rest of Brazilian society and politics—especially during the last years where Krenak has taken action to denounce the indigenous rights violations of President Bolsonaro and his government.

In his writing Krenak puts forward different philosophies of what shapes the human relationship with nature. In *Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo* (“Ideas to Postpone the End of the World”, 2019), he overturns deeply held Western ideas about humanity by claiming that our world is at an ecological and economic precipice, and proposes a shift in our thinking and actions that is necessary for the survival of the earth. The result is an impressive piece of social criticism, environmental and ecology studies, history and politics.

His most recently published book, *O amanhã não está à venda* (“Tomorrow Is Not for Sale”, 2020) responds to the pandemic in a form of reminder of our human condition as an integral part of nature, susceptible to plagues, death and extinction, like any other species. He states: “It is as if we had several children playing and, imagining this childhood fantasy, they continued to play indefinitely. But as we become adults, [...] we're devastating the planet, digging a huge gap of inequalities between peoples and societies.”

Ailton Alves Lacerda Krenak é líder indígena, ambientalista, filósofo, poeta e escritor. Atualmente professor honorário da Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Krenak é considerado uma das grandes lideranças do movimento indígena brasileiro, sendo reconhecido por seu ativismo em prol dos povos e da cultura indígena. Ele é o protagonista de um dos momentos mais memoráveis do ativismo indígena no Brasil, onde durante uma assembléia que redigiu a Constituição brasileira de 1988, pintou o rosto segundo o costume tradicional indígena brasileiro, para protestar contra o retrocesso brasileiro na luta pela os direitos dos povos indígenas do Brasil.

Krenak conseguiu nos últimos anos fornecer um espaço seguro para o desenvolvimento da liderança indígena em todo o país. Ele é frequentemente referido como um mentor e um líder para as gerações mais jovens de líderes indígenas, ativistas e políticos. Ele desempenhou um papel importante no desenvolvimento de organizações indígenas que surgiram nos últimos anos. Ambientalistas, antropólogos e outros indivíduos que estão intimamente envolvidos nos movimentos pelos direitos indígenas no Brasil atestam constantemente o papel de Krenak na construção de pontes entre os povos indígenas e o resto da sociedade e da política brasileira—especialmente durante os últimos anos em que Krenak tomou medidas para denunciar a violações de direitos do presidente Bolsonaro e seu governo.

Em seus escritos, Krenak apresenta diferentes filosofias sobre o que molda a relação humana com a natureza. Em *Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo* (2019), ele derruba algumas ideias ocidentais profundamente arraigadas sobre a humanidade ao afirmar que nosso mundo está em um precipício ecológico e econômico e propõe uma mudança em nosso pensamento e ações que são necessárias para a sobrevivência da terra. O resultado é uma peça impressionante de crítica social, estudos ambientais e ecológicos, história e política. Em seu mais recente livro, *O amanhã não está à venda* (2020) responde à pandemia em forma de lembrança de nossa condição humana, como parte integrante da natureza, suscetível a pragas, morte e extinção como qualquer outra espécie. Ele afirma: “É como se tivéssemos várias crianças brincando e, imaginando essa fantasia infantil, elas continuassem brincando indefinidamente. Mas à medida que nos tornamos adultos, (...) estamos devastando o planeta, cavando uma enorme lacuna de desigualdades entre povos e sociedades.”

## AILTON KRENAK IS HONOURED:

- FOR HIS VITAL CONTRIBUTION AND SUPPORT TO INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS IN BRAZIL THROUGH HIS ORIGINAL THINKING AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION
- FOR GAINING ATTENTION AND FOCUS FROM AN AUDIENCE BEYOND HIS OWN CONTEXT FOR THE DISAPPEARING OF INDIGENOUS LANDS
- FOR CHALLENGING ACADEMIC CONVENTIONS BY DEVELOPING A NEW, ORIGINAL AND INDEPENDENT INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION
- FOR CREATING ACCESSIBLE WORK NOT LIMITED TO THE CONTEXT OF BRAZIL, THAT MAKES US RETHINK OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE AND INDIGENOUS GROUPS, BUILDING RESPECT AND COUNTERACTING PREJUDICE
- FOR PROVIDING CITIZENS WITH GENUINE INFORMATION CRUCIAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CLIMATE JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABLE WORLD
- FOR HIS LIFELONG COMMITMENT AND ACTIVISM, USING PERFORMANCE TECHNIQUES TO AMPLIFY VOICES THAT ARE SILENCED

## AILTON KRENAK É HOMENAGEADO:

- POR SUA VITAL CONTRIBUIÇÃO E APOIO AOS MOVIMENTOS INDÍGENAS NO BRASIL POR MEIO DE SEU PENSAMENTO ORIGINAL E PRODUÇÃO DE CONHECIMENTO
- POR GANHAR ATENÇÃO E FOCO DE UM PÚBLICO FORA DE SEU PRÓPRIO CONTEXTO PELO DESAPARECIMENTO DAS TERRAS INDÍGENAS
- POR DESAFIAR CONVENÇÕES ACADÊMICAS DESENVOLVENDO UMA TRADIÇÃO FILOSÓFICA INDÍGENA NOVA, ORIGINAL E INDEPENDENTE
- POR CRIAR UM TRABALHO ACESSÍVEL NÃO LIMITADO AO CONTEXTO BRASILEIRO, QUE NOS FAÇA REPENSAR NOSSA RELAÇÃO COM A NATUREZA E OS GRUPOS INDÍGENAS, CONSTRUINDO RESPEITO E COMBATENDO PRECONCEITOS
- PARA FORNECER AOS CIDADÃOS INFORMAÇÕES GENUÍNAS CRUCIAIS PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO DE UMA JUSTIÇA CLIMÁTICA E UM MUNDO SUSTENTÁVEL
- POR SEU COMPROMISSO E ATIVISMO AO LONGO DA VIDA, USANDO TÉCNICAS DE PERFORMANCE PARA AMPLIFICAR VOZES QUE SÃO SILENCIADAS

# IDEAS TO POSTPONE THE END OF THE WORLD

Lilia Moritz Schwarcz

Ailton Krenak descended on this world to bewitch us like a sorcerer practicing magic and rituals while at the same time illuminating instances of beauty and gloom. He was born in Minas Gerais, on the Krenak land bordering the middle Doce River, where he learned to revere nature and listen to the forest. On relocating to the state of Paraná, the philosopher took his people and his land along with him. There he trained as a journalist and graphic artist without neglecting ancestral teachings and shamanic cosmologies.

So much so that, by the 1980s, he was actively engaged with the indigenous movement. Krenak founded the Union of Indigenous Nations (UNI) and in 1985, the Indigenous Culture Center, an NGO in the Serra do Cipó region (MG). However, his calling in life has always been to fight for peace. Bringing together the might of more than 300 indigenous peoples implied the advocacy of joint claims, such as the right to land and the conservation of their languages, cultures and lived experiences.

Krenak achieved prominence nationwide as a member of Brazil's Constituent Assembly in 1987. His speech-performance lingers in the memory of Brazilians as a signpost for those guardians of the environment and the forest who remained silenced for too long. On the podium, while going over a distressing history of violence in the soft but firm voice of those who have seen struggle, he stained his face with black genipap dye, keeping to an indigenous tradition when preparing for a ritual. "The indigenous peoples' blood has drenched every hectare of Brazil's eight million square kilometers. You are witnesses to this," he told the audience of mostly white male politicians. His intervention was decisive for the "indigenous rights" chapter of Brazil's 1988 Constitution, aka the Citizen Constitution.

The philosopher activist is constantly reinventing himself. Krenak is an artist whose paintings do not separate culture from nature. He has also earned recognition as a writer whose books have changed Brazil's self-image while showing the world the importance of Amerindian perspectivism: *Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo* ("Ideas to Postpone the End of the World", 2019), *A Vida Não é Útil* ("Life is not Useful", 2020) and *O amanhã não está à venda* ("Tomorrow is not for Sale", 2020). In 2020, he won the Juca Pato Award for Intellectual of the Year, which acknowledged an indigenous thinker as a Brazilian philosopher for the first time. Since 2016 Krenak has been lecturing at Universidade de Juiz de Fora, where he was granted an honorary doctorate. His lectures "Culture and History of Indigenous Peoples" and "Arts and Crafts of Traditional Knowledge" show how our vain philosophy has much to learn from indigenous cosmologies.

However, the Krenak people continue to suffer the wrath of Western society. In 2015, their territory was seriously affected when the Mariana tailings dam collapsed. Krenak stated that a greed-driven disaster had sickened the river. "Watu, our name for that river, is an entity; it has personality. It is not a 'resource'."

When COVID-19 hit Brazilian indigenous peoples, Krenak became an urgent messenger. As an outspoken intellectual, he has warned of the unsustainability of capitalism and its impact on human life and Mother Earth. “We are experiencing the planet’s fever in response to rising temperatures and natural disasters [...] We are being detached from the Earth’s body”.

After so many years, Ailton Krenak’s words remain of essence. “We have been disorganising life, with consequences that might affect the notion of a shared future.” However, in his quest to “postpone the future”, Krenak lives with his people in the Doce River Valley. Their village is his “natural laboratory”. Living in isolation on this land but connected to the fast-paced Western world, he leaves no question unanswered. Anyone privileged to receive his inspiring messages is given presents: emojis showing all variations of green and Krenak’s unmistakably upbeat mood: “It has been a beautiful day; they will pass, and we will flock.”



Ailton Krenak, then president of the National Indigenous Union, paints his face with black genipap grease in a traditional gesture of mourning while defending the popular amendment on the indigenous population at the Constituent Assembly in 1987. © Luiz Antonio Ribeiro / CPDoc JB / TV Câmara

# IDEIAS PARA ADIAR O FIM DO MUNDO

Lilia Moritz Schwarcz

Ailton Krenak pousou nesse mundo para nos encantar. Encantar enquanto feiticeiro que pratica sua magia e rituais; encantar como ato de iluminar belezas e tristezas, também. Mineiro da região do médio Rio Doce, terra dos Krenak, foi por lá que aprendeu a escutar a floresta e respeitar a natureza. Quando de mudança para o Paraná, o filósofo levou sua gente e sua terra consigo. Por lá se formou jornalista e artista gráfico. Mas jamais esqueceu dos ensinamentos ancestrais e das cosmologias xamânicas.

Tanto que, já na década de 1980, lá estava ele dedicando-se ao movimento indígena. Funda a União das Nações Indígenas (UNI), e em 1985 cria o Núcleo de Cultura Indígena, ONG localizada na Serra do Cipó (MG). Sua vocação sempre foi pela luta como forma de paz. Aliás, consolidar a força dos mais de 300 povos indígenas, implicou defender reivindicações conjuntas, como o direito à terra e à preservação de suas línguas, culturas e vivências.

Krenak ganharia projeção nacional com sua participação na Assembleia Nacional Constituinte de 1987. Seu discurso/ performance ficou na memória dos brasileiros, como um sinaleiro desses povos protetores do meio ambiente e da floresta; por tanto tempo silenciados. Pintou seu rosto com jenipapo preto, num tradicional costume dos indígenas quando se preparam para um ritual, ao mesmo tempo que, com sua voz doce e firme, típica daquele que conhece a luta, enumerou um constrangedor histórico de violências. “O povo indígena tem regado com sangue cada hectare dos 8 milhões de quilômetros quadrados do Brasil. Os senhores são testemunhas disso”, disse ele para uma plateia de políticos, basicamente brancos e homens. Sua atuação acabou sendo decisiva para o capítulo sobre direitos indígenas incluído na Constituição Cidadã de 1988.

Mas o ativista filósofo não para de se reinventar. Artista que com suas tintas não separa cultura de natureza, Krenak é também escritor consagrado. Publicou livros como “Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo” (2019), “A Vida Não é Útil” (2020) e “O amanhã não está à venda” (2020), que mudaram a forma do Brasil se enxergar, e mostraram ao mundo a importância do perspectivismo ameríndio. Em 2020 ganhou o Prêmio Juca Pato de Intelectual do Ano, que pela primeira vez reconheceu um pensador indígena como filósofo do Brasil. Desde 2016 Krenak leciona na Universidade de Juiz de Fora, onde recebeu de título de Professor Doutor Honoris Causa. Por lá ensina as disciplinas «Cultura e História dos Povos Indígenas» e «Artes e Ofícios dos Saberes Tradicionais», revelando como nossa vã filosofia tem muito a aprender com as cosmologias indígenas.

Seu povo segue, porém, sofrendo com a sanha da sociedade ocidental. Em 2015 tiveram seu território atingido pelo rompimento da barragem de Mariana. Krenak afirmou que o desastre da ganância adoeceu o rio. “Watu, que é como nós chamamos aquele rio, é uma entidade; tem personalidade. Ele não é um ‘recurso’”.

Os indígenas brasileiros também padeceram com a COVID-19, e Krenak virou mensageiro urgente. Contundente, o intelectual tem alertado sobre insustentabilidade do capitalismo, e seu impacto na vida humana e na mãe terra. “Estamos experienciando a febre do planeta, diante do aumento da temperatura e dos desastres naturais (...) Nos descolamos do corpo da Terra”.

Passados tantos anos, as palavras de Ailton Krenak seguem sendo imprescindíveis. “Estamos desorganizando a vida e as consequências disso podem afetar a ideia de um futuro comum”. Entretanto, para “adiar o futuro”, Krenak vive na aldeia do Vale do Rio Doce, junto ao seu povo. Esse é seu “laboratório da natureza”. Isolado em sua terra, mas ligado nesse mundo veloz do Ocidente, ele nunca deixa resposta “em branco”. Quem tem o privilégio de receber suas mensagens inspiradas é sempre presenteado com *imagens* com todas as variações de verde e seu inconfundível bom humor: “o dia ficou bonito; eles passarão e nós passaremos”.



Stills from the documentary *Ailton Krenak—The Dream Stone* (“O Sonho da Pedra”, 2017), by Marco Altberg. © Marco Altberg



# CONVERSATION WITH AILTON KRENAK

Fariba Derakshani

# CONVERSAÇÃO COM AILTON KRENAK

FARIBA DERAESHANI *Can you tell us a little about your background and where you grew up?*

AILTON KRENAK My personal history never interested me, and yet I already have some biographical notes in works I published three decades ago, where the long story of the struggles of indigenous peoples is presented; and my family is present in the many times we were threatened and forced out of our territory of origin in the Rio Doce valley, or Watu. Since I was young, I have been involved in the struggle for land rights of our indigenous people, the Krenak, or *botocudo* as Brazilian literature about indigenous peoples puts it. Early on, I had to articulate the implied biography of a collective subject, organising and inspiring the struggle for identity of the indigenous peoples of my country.

FD *Why is biography important to your work?*

AK A life of work for the common good is an expression of this importance, as though both trajectories, the personal and the collective, are the same record.

FD *How does your own personal story relate to the history of your community?*

AK That narrow sense of living in a community, where you are born and develop as a person and also as a member who takes part in community and family days, is a state of belonging for the collective subject. In my case, it is remarkable that I was involved with the mobilisations for the inclusion of new civil rights for Brazil's vast indigenous population in the new Federal Constitution of 1988.

FD *How did you become a writer and journalist?*

AK The many forced departures in which we were displaced from our region of origin in the Rio Doce valley in the east of the state of Minas Gerais to states in the south of the country gave me the opportunity to learn and practise Brazil's dominant language, and with the Portuguese spoken by the country's general population. I could write journalistic articles, do communication projects for the social movement and even launch the first radio programme with indigenous subject matter and up-to-date news and information about the situation of the original peoples of the Amazon and north-east who did not have a voice.

FD *What are the challenges the indigenous communities of Brazil face today, and how have they changed during your lifetime?*

AK Many long-standing challenges still persist, but we have now won formal equal

FARIBA DERAESHANI *Você pode nos contar um pouco sobre sua história e onde você cresceu?*

AILTON KRENAK Minha historia pessoal nunca me interessou, e mesmo assim ja tenho algumas destas notas biográficas nas obras que publico a tres decadas, onde a longa trajetoria de lutas dos povos indígenas é apresentada, e minha família presente nas repetidas vezes que fomos ameaçados e retirados do nosso território de origem no vale do Rio Doce, ou Watu. Desde jovem fui engajado na luta por direitos territoriais de nosso povo originário Krenak ou botocudos ,como registra a literatura indigenista no Brasil. Cedo eu tive que expressar essa implicada biografia de um Sujeito Coletivo, organizando e inspirando a luta identitária dos povos indígenas no meu país.

FD *Por que a biografia é importante para seu trabalho?*

AK Uma vida de trabalho no interesse comum é expressão desta importância, como se ambas trajetórias, a pessoal e coletiva fossem o mesmo registro.

FD *Como sua própria história pessoal se relaciona com a história de sua comunidade?*

AK É uma condição de pertencimento para o sujeito coletivo esse estreito sentido de viver a comunidade onde nasce e desenvolve sua formação como pessoa e também como membro colaborador nas jornadas comunitárias e familiares. Sendo que alguns de nós ultrapassa a fronteira local e regional. No meu caso é marcante a relação com as mobilizações por novos direitos civis a uma vasta população indígena no Brasil, com sua inscrição na lei brasileira de direitos, que é nossa Constituição Federal, desde o ano de 1988.

FD *Como você se tornou um escritor e jornalista?*

AK As várias saídas forçadas de nosso território de origem , no vale do Rio Doce, região leste do estado de Minas Gerais, em deslocamento para estados do sul do país me deram a oportunidade de aprender e praticar a língua dominante no Brasil, e com o português falado pela população geral do país pude escrever matérias jornalísticas, realizar projetos de comunicação para o movimento social e mesmo inaugurar o primeiro programa de rádio com temática indígena, com notícias e informações atualizadas sobre a realidade dos povos originários da Amazônia e nordeste, que não tinham voz.

FD *Quais são os desafios que as comunidades indígenas do Brasil enfrentam hoje, e como eles mudaram durante sua vida?*

rights, and have expanded relationships and links with non-indigenous societies in various regions in the country. In recent decades, our communities have gained access to education in schools and even universities, where we have trained doctors, engineers and technicians. With these advances, we have been able to emerge from invisibility and obtain national political representation. We already have large numbers of indigenous people in important positions in elections across the country, such as mayors and deputies in the National Congress. I can see a growing participation by our indigenous communities in Brazilian life, despite the desperately disadvantaged conditions we face and our communities being exposed to political violence by the state apparatus. For example, right now a threat of genocide hangs over part of these populations in the Amazon region.

FD *How have you seen your position within the debates around the position of indigenous people within Brazil before and since emancipation?*

AK Many indigenous leaders have struggled in the past and over recent decades, especially since the 1990s, to change the brutal situation of legal discrimination against our original peoples; indigenous and non-indigenous people have been allies in the struggle for human rights and the rights of nature. One of the most significant milestones was legally overcoming the status of state tutelage, greater participation in public life and advances in representation in political institutions.

FD *What is your relationship to education and how does it fit into your wider project?*

AK We take part in initiatives aimed at debating and creating alternatives in the field of pluralistic indigenous school education, because we are an expressive linguistic and ethnic diversity of indigenous peoples. Continuously correcting paths and seeking technological and pedagogical change inspired by plurality and diversity can show the way to a better response to a pedagogy of the Earth.

FD *You've spoken about how European humanity is disconnected from the earth; what you call a zombie humanity. How did this understanding emerge for you?*

AK We are building artificial paradises, where a small number of humans can live very well from a material viewpoint, while billions of other human beings are excluded from this privilege, and are becoming a zombie humanity. This understanding is becoming increasingly widespread in the field of human and climate

AK Muitos desafios históricos ainda persistem, mas já conquistamos a igualdade formal nos direitos, além de ampliar as relações e vínculos com as sociedades não indígenas em várias regiões do país. Nas últimas décadas, nossas comunidades acessaram o ensino escolar e mesmo as universidades onde formamos médicos, engenheiros e técnicos. Com esses avanços lograram sair da invisibilidade e obter representação política nacional. Nas eleições nacionais já contam com grande número de pessoas indígenas em lugar de destaque, como prefeitos e deputados no Congresso Nacional. Vejo uma crescente participação de nossas comunidades indígenas na vida brasileira, mesmo em condições de desvantagens gritantes e expostas à violência política do aparelho de estado. Agora mesmo, paira uma ameaça de genocídio sobre parte destas populações na região amazônica, por exemplo.

FD *Como você enxerga sua posição nos debates em torno da posição dos povos indígenas no Brasil antes e desde a emancipação?*

AK Muitas lideranças indígenas lutaram antes e durante as últimas décadas, em especial a partir da década de 1990 para mudarmos a realidade brutal de discriminação legal contra nossos povos originários, indígenas e não indígenas foram aliados na luta por direitos humanos e da natureza. Uma das marcas mais significativas foi superar legalmente o estatuto da tutela do estado, maior participação na vida pública e avanço na representação política institucional.

FD *Qual é a sua relação com a educação e como ela se encaixa em seu projeto mais amplo?*

AK Participar de iniciativas voltadas a debater e criar alternativas no campo da educação escolar indígena plural, visto que somos uma expressiva diversidade linguística e étnica de povos indígenas, a contínua correção de rumos e busca de atualização tecnológica e pedagógicas inspiradas na pluralidade e diversidade pode apontar rumos a uma melhor resposta a uma pedagogia da terra.

FD *Você falou sobre como a humanidade européia está desligada da terra; o que você chama de humanidade zumbi. Como surgiu para você este entendimento?*

AK Estamos construindo paraísos artificiais, onde poucos humanos podem viver muito bem do ponto de vista material, com bilhões de seres também humanos excluídos deste benefício, e se constituindo em humanidade zumbi. Esse entendimento está cada vez mais se ampliando pelo campo das ciências humanas

sciences where the Earth is perceived as a living organism. We are separating ourselves from the Earth, which also means disconnecting ourselves from the creation of earthly life—from the Earth. Scientific understanding is not a fantasy.

FD *How has the Covid pandemic shown up the disconnection between humankind and the natural world?*

AK Extreme climatic events are becoming increasingly frequent, the pandemic could be a warning of this disconnection between one species—humans—and the deep ecology of the Earth organism. This separation is unimaginable for other forms of life that flourish among us, like the Covid virus for example.

FD *How can we integrate a more interdependent understanding of the world into our political and ethical lives? What is the role of spirituality in this?*

AK Seeking an option to live without as much artificiality and hear the message of billions of other living beings in the biosphere of planet Earth would display a path that is more consistent with the spiritual sense of existence and of life itself in this vast organism also called Gaia.

e também do clima onde a Terra é percebida como organismo vivo e separar se da terra, é desligar se também da produção de vida terrana—da Terra. Um entendimento científico não é uma fabulação.

FD *Como a pandemia de Covid mostrou a desconexão entre a humanidade e o mundo natural?*

AK Estamos cada vez mais experimentando eventos climáticos extremos, a pandemia pode ser um alerta desta desconexão entre uma espécie—os humanos, da ecologia profunda do organismo Terra. Separação inimaginável por uma outra forma de vida que prospera entre nós, como esse vírus da COVID por exemplo.

FD *Como podemos integrar uma compreensão mais interdependente do mundo em nossa vida política e ética? Qual é o papel da espiritualidade nisto?*

AK Buscar uma opção por viver sem tanto artificialismo e ouvir a mensagem de bilhões de outros seres vivos na biosfera do planeta Terra, mostraria um caminho mais coerente com o sentido espiritual da existência e da própria vida nesse vasto organismo chamado também Gaia.



Stills from the documentary *Ailton Krenak—The Dream Stone*.  
© Marco Altberg



Ailton Krenak at Sierra do Cipó.  
Photo © Gessimar Medeiros



SENEGAL  
FILM

ALAIN GOMIS

SÉNÉGAL  
FILM



Alain Gomis in action. Courtesy Alain Gomis

Alain Gomis is a Senegalese-French film director and screenwriter whose work offers a unique vista over the acute differences and deep bonds that continue to define the relationship between francophone Africa and its diaspora. He is best known for his films *L'Afrance* (2001), *Aujourd'hui* (2012), *Andalucia* (2017), and *Felicite* (2017), which depict stories of young immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, while exploring themes of foreignness, the individual and the invisible.

Gomis studied art history and cinematography at the Sorbonne University in Paris. By the age of twenty-six, he had already made three short films: *Tourbillons*, *Tout le monde peut se tromper* and the documentary *Caramels et Chocolats*, and he directed his first feature film, *L'Afrance* ("As a Man") in 2001. Each of his four features centre around wilful characters that are caught out by difficult circumstances that force them to question their place within a world that seems indifferent, and even hostile to their plight. Ultimately, the films expand to pointedly question the relationship of the individual and citizen to an uncaring state, while also examining the tensions and contradictions of the multi-ethnic and multi-tribal local communities redefining French and African cities today.

In 2018, he founded the Yennenga Center in Dakar, to promote independent film production in Senegal and Africa. It is the first cultural centre dedicated to cinema in Senegal, and focusses on fostering local talents in film creation, broadcasting and technical skills. The centre partners with local associations, national and international festivals, and film libraries to make both African and international film heritage accessible to a community of filmmakers, locals and film lovers. Additionally, it offers cultural activities, projections, discussions, exhibitions, workshops, a post-production studio, and equipment rental. In 2021, the space initiated a free educational program that trains 24 young African artists over the course of two years. This program teaches a range of topics and skills, such as film production, including cinematography, editing, colour grading, sound editing and sound mixing.

Gomis plays a vital role in the promotion of film on the African continent. Through his work he addresses the complexities of identity, foreignness and agency, drawn from his personal experiences dealing with dual nationality and the search for belonging.

Alain Gomis est un réalisateur et scénariste sénégalais-français qui offre dans ses films une vision exceptionnelle des différences extrêmes et des liens profonds qui caractérisent aujourd'hui encore les relations entre l'Afrique francophone et sa diaspora. Il est surtout connu pour ses films *L'Afrance* (2001), *Aujourd'hui* (2012), *Andalucia* (2017) et *Félicité* (2017) qui racontent l'histoire de jeunes immigrants d'Afrique subsaharienne, tout en explorant diverses thématiques comme l'extranéité, l'individualité et l'invisibilité.

Alain Gomis a étudié l'histoire de l'art et la cinématographie à la Sorbonne à Paris. À l'âge de vingt-six ans, il a déjà réalisé trois courts métrages : *Tourbillons*, *Tout le monde peut se tromper*, et le documentaire *Caramels et Chocolats*. Son premier long métrage, *L'Afrance* (*As A Man*), date de l'année 2001. Les quatre longs métrages qu'il a réalisés mettent en lumière des personnages volontaires confrontés à des situations difficiles qui les obligent à s'interroger sur leur place dans un monde apparemment indifférent à leur sort ou même hostile. Au fur et à mesure de leur déroulement, les films traitent avec beaucoup de finesse de la relation des individus et des citoyens avec l'État vécu comme indifférent, tout en explorant les tensions et les contradictions des communautés locales multi-ethniques et multi-tribales qui se manifestent dans les villes françaises et africaines aujourd'hui.

En 2018, Gomis fonde le centre Yennenga à Dakar, pour promouvoir la production de films indépendants au Sénégal et dans le reste de l'Afrique. C'est le premier pôle culturel dédié au cinéma au Sénégal. Il a pour ambition de former et d'accompagner les jeunes talents locaux dans le domaine de la création, de la diffusion et de la technique de films. Le centre noue des partenariats avec des associations locales, des festivals nationaux et internationaux et des cinémathèques pour permettre aux cinéastes, aux locaux et aux cinéphiles d'avoir accès au patrimoine cinématographique à la fois africain et international. Il propose également toutes sortes d'activités culturelles, des projections, des entretiens, des expositions, des ateliers, ou encore l'utilisation d'un studio de post-production et la location de matériel. En 2021, l'espace a lancé un programme éducatif gratuit qui forme vingt-quatre jeunes artistes africains sur une période de deux ans. Le programme propose toute une palette de formations, notamment la cinématographie, le montage des images, l'étalonnage, le montage et mixage du son.

Gomis joue un rôle essentiel dans la promotion du cinéma sur le continent africain. Dans ses films, il traite de sujets complexes tels que l'identité, l'extranéité et les institutions en s'inspirant de ses expériences personnelles liées à la double nationalité et à une recherche d'appartenance.

## ALAIN GOMIS IS HONOURED:

- FOR HIS BRAVERY IN DEMOCRATISING THE ACCESS TO FILMS AND FILM PRODUCTION TOOLS TO THE SENEGALESE COMMUNITY
- FOR ENGAGING, TRAINING AND CONNECTING YOUNG AFRICAN ARTISTS, CREATING A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE SENEGALESE ARTISTIC SCENE
- FOR ENCOURAGING A NEW GENERATION TO CREATE THEIR OWN NARRATIVE AND GIVE THEM THE CONFIDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE TO SHARE THEIR STORIES THROUGH FILMMAKING
- FOR BEING A CATALYST TO THE FUTURE OF THE GROWING AFRICAN ARTISTIC AND FILM SCENE
- FOR HIS ABILITY TO TRANSLATE LOCAL SOCIAL ISSUES TO A WIDER AND INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE THROUGH EFFECTIVE AND EMPATHETIC STORYTELLING
- FOR HIS INTERNATIONAL CAREER AND GENEROSITY IN GIVING BACK TO HIS COMMUNITY BY CONTINUOUSLY CREATING LOCAL SPACES FOR LEARNING AND EXCHANGE THROUGH FILM

## LE PRIX IMPACT EST DÉCERNÉ À ALAIN GOMIS :

- POUR SA DÉTERMINATION ET SON COURAGE DANS LA DÉMOCRATISATION DE L'ACCÈS DE LA POPULATION SÉNÉGALAISE AU FILM ET AUX OUTILS DE PRODUCTION CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE
- POUR L'ENGAGEMENT, LA FORMATION ET LA MISE EN RELATION DE JEUNES ARTISTES AFRICAINS, CRÉANT AINSI UN IMPACT POSITIF SUR LA SCÈNE ARTISTIQUE SÉNÉGALAISE
- POUR AVOIR ENCOURAGÉ UNE NOUVELLE GÉNÉRATION À CRÉER SON PROPRE RÉCIT ET LUI AVOIR DONNÉ CONFIANCE ET LES CONNAISSANCES NÉCESSAIRES POUR PARTAGER SON HISTOIRE À TRAVERS LA RÉALISATION DE FILMS
- POUR SON RÔLE DE CATALYSEUR DE L'AVENIR POUR LA SCÈNE ARTISTIQUE ET CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE AFRICAINE EN PLEINE EXPANSION
- POUR SON APTITUDE À FAIRE COMPRENDRE LES PRÉOCCUPATIONS SOCIALES LOCALES À UN PUBLIC PLUS LARGE ET INTERNATIONAL GRÂCE À UNE NARRATION EFFICACE ET EMPATHIQUE
- POUR SA CARRIÈRE INTERNATIONALE ET SA GÉNÉROSITÉ CONSTANTE À L'ÉGARD DE SA COMMUNAUTÉ EN CRÉANT INLASSABLEMENT DES ESPACES D'APPRENTISSAGE ET D'ÉCHANGE AU NIVEAU LOCAL PAR LE BIAIS DU CINÉMA



# A VISION FOR POSTERITY

Mahen Bonetti

I met Alain Gomis in the formative years of his filmmaking practice, which came at a pivotal time, an era of transitions in African cinema. The era, challenging generic expectations of “African cinema”, inaugurated varieties of aesthetics, perspectives, inflections and contexts primed on exploring the nuances of African social realities and experiences.

Remarkably, Gomis does not assume that all it takes to make a significant film are prescriptive stipulations or deferment to conservative sets of values. As an artist who, effectively, balances expectations with own prerogatives, his inspirational wellsprings spout from deep within the heart; he celebrates cultural diversity, and negotiates the vagaries of expectations on his *own* terms.

In incorporating diverse elements, especially individual liberties, the nature, dynamics and trajectories of his *oeuvre* provide astute contexts for re-reading contemporary African social experiences, evolving configurations of societies, cultural formations and intrinsic tensions, beyond facile notions of “globalisation”. This invites audiences to engage these experiences as multifaceted, complex, and, as each narrative unfolds, prevailing assumptions are challenged. These intricate, critical connections between realities and representations pose questions to humanity. The questions, remarkably, widen contexts that reiterate our common humanity through compassionate visions of the world, imbuing his films with unique features, significance and artistic merits.

Quite affable and uncommonly resourceful, Gomis’ creative flair, artistic zest and humane inclinations radiate resplendently in his works. His films contest labels and are neither simplistic “morality tales” nor escapist or derivative narratives. Through different forms, they bring critical insights through the characters, themes and experiences. Not surprisingly, the characters quest for self-definition and actualisation mix with diverse forms of creative expressions, adding distinctive layers of meanings to the narratives. As such, his films not only reflect a passion for the arts, they each in many ways spotlight the value of creative freedom and its wide-ranging relationship to identities, human struggles and quests to overcome.

Notably, his creative rationale and visions manifest in the films as acts of resistance. Given his multicultural background, especially as a proud member of the African diaspora, it is not incidental that migration, race, everyday struggles, psychological challenges, prospects of alienation and displacement feature robustly in his films. Their complex manifestations transcend spaces, borders and orders. To him, resistance is about voice, agency, articulating different reference points, novel frontiers of expressiveness and capacities for cross-cultural exchanges that invite critical insights and reflections. Remarkably, Alain has won the Golden Stallion twice, at FESPACO, the most prestigious film festival on the African continent.

Thank you, very much, for honouring his diverse attributes, creative verve and deep-seated humanism.

# UNE VISION POUR LA POSTÉRITÉ

Mahen Bonetti

J'ai rencontré Alain Gomis au cours de ses années de formation de cinéaste. C'était à un moment clé, à un véritable tournant de l'histoire du cinéma africain. Cette période qui remettait en cause les attentes génériques de ce que l'on appelait le « cinéma africain » a vu émerger toutes sortes d'esthétiques, de perspectives, de mouvements et de situations prêts à explorer les multiples nuances des réalités et les expériences sociales africaines.

Pour Gomis en particulier il ne suffit pas d'utiliser les stipulations normatives ou un renvoi à des valeurs conservatrices pour faire un film important. En artiste qui équilibre de manière efficace les attentes du public avec ses propres prérogatives, il fait jaillir ses sources d'inspiration du plus profond de son cœur et célèbre la diversité culturelle tout en composant avec les attentes souvent imprévisibles, et ce, à sa manière à lui.

En incorporant des éléments divers, en particulier les libertés individuelles et la nature, la dynamique et les trajectoires de son œuvre fournissent un judicieux contexte permettant une relecture des expériences sociales africaines contemporaines. Il le fait en mettant en avant des configurations de sociétés, des formations culturelles et des tensions intrinsèques, par-delà les notions faciles de « mondialisation ». Ce faisant, il pousse les spectateurs à reconnaître la complexité et la multiplicité de ces expériences et, au fur et à mesure du déroulement de chacune de ces histoires, les assertions courantes sont remises en question. Ces liens complexes et critiques entre réalité et représentation suscitent des questionnements qui nous concernent tous. Ces interrogations, de manière extraordinaire, donnent un sens plus large aux situations présentées, rappelant notre humanité commune à travers une vision du monde empreinte de compassion, et conférant aux films de Gomis ce caractère unique, associé à une grande valeur artistique.

Le talent créatif de Gomis, son énergie artistique et son humanité rayonnent de manière resplendissante dans les œuvres de cet homme affable et d'une rare ingéniosité. Ses films défient toute étiquette. Ce ne sont jamais des contes moralistes et simplistes ou des histoires banales pour s'évader. Par le biais de différentes formes, ses films apportent un éclairage critique à travers les personnages, les thèmes et les expériences. Pas surprenant alors que la quête des personnages pour l'autodéfinition et l'actualisation associées à diverses formes d'expressions ajoutent au récit différentes couches de sens. A ce titre, ses films non seulement reflètent une passion pour les arts, mais de bien des façons, ils mettent en avant la valeur de la liberté d'expression et le grand intérêt que porte le réalisateur aux identités, aux quêtes humaines et aux difficultés à surmonter.

Son raisonnement créatif et sa vision se manifestent dans ses films comme des actes de résistance. Etant donné ses origines multiculturelles, et sa fierté d'appartenir à la diaspora africaine, ce n'est pas par hasard que la migration, la race, les difficultés du quotidien, les défis psychologiques, les probabilités d'aliénations et de déplacement figurent en bonne place dans ses films. Leurs manifestations complexes vont bien au-delà des espaces, des frontières et des ordres. Pour lui, la résistance est une question de voix, d'agence, d'articulation de différents points de référence, de nouvelles frontières d'expressivité et de capacités d'échanges interculturels qui invitent à une réflexion critique. Fait remarquable, le réalisateur a reçu par deux fois l'Étalon d'or au Festival panafricain du cinéma et de la télévision de Ouagadougou (FESPACO), le plus prestigieux festival du cinéma sur le continent africain.

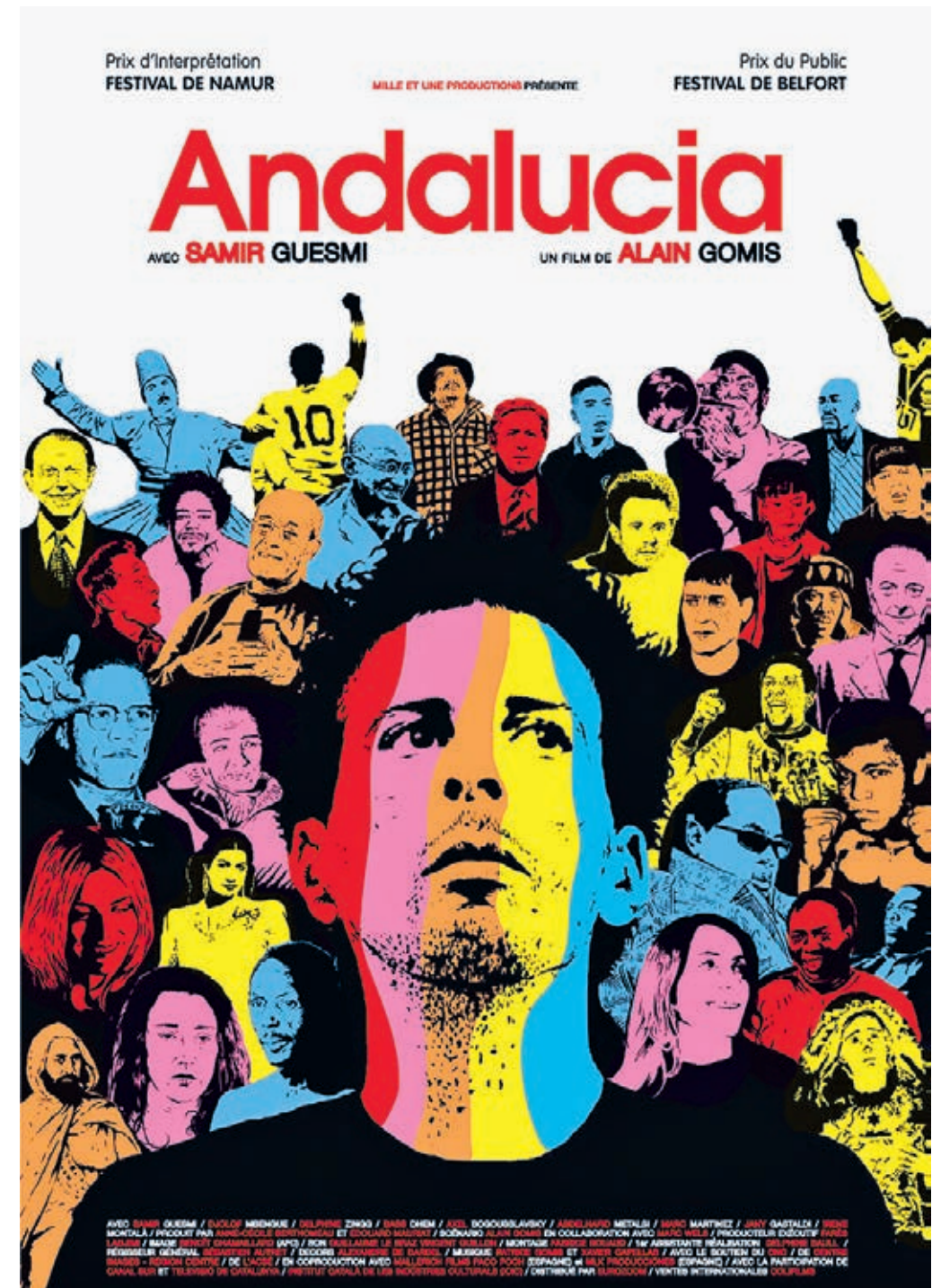
Je vous remercie infiniment d'avoir rendu hommage aux nombreuses qualités d'Alain Gomis, à son esprit créatif et à son profond humanisme.



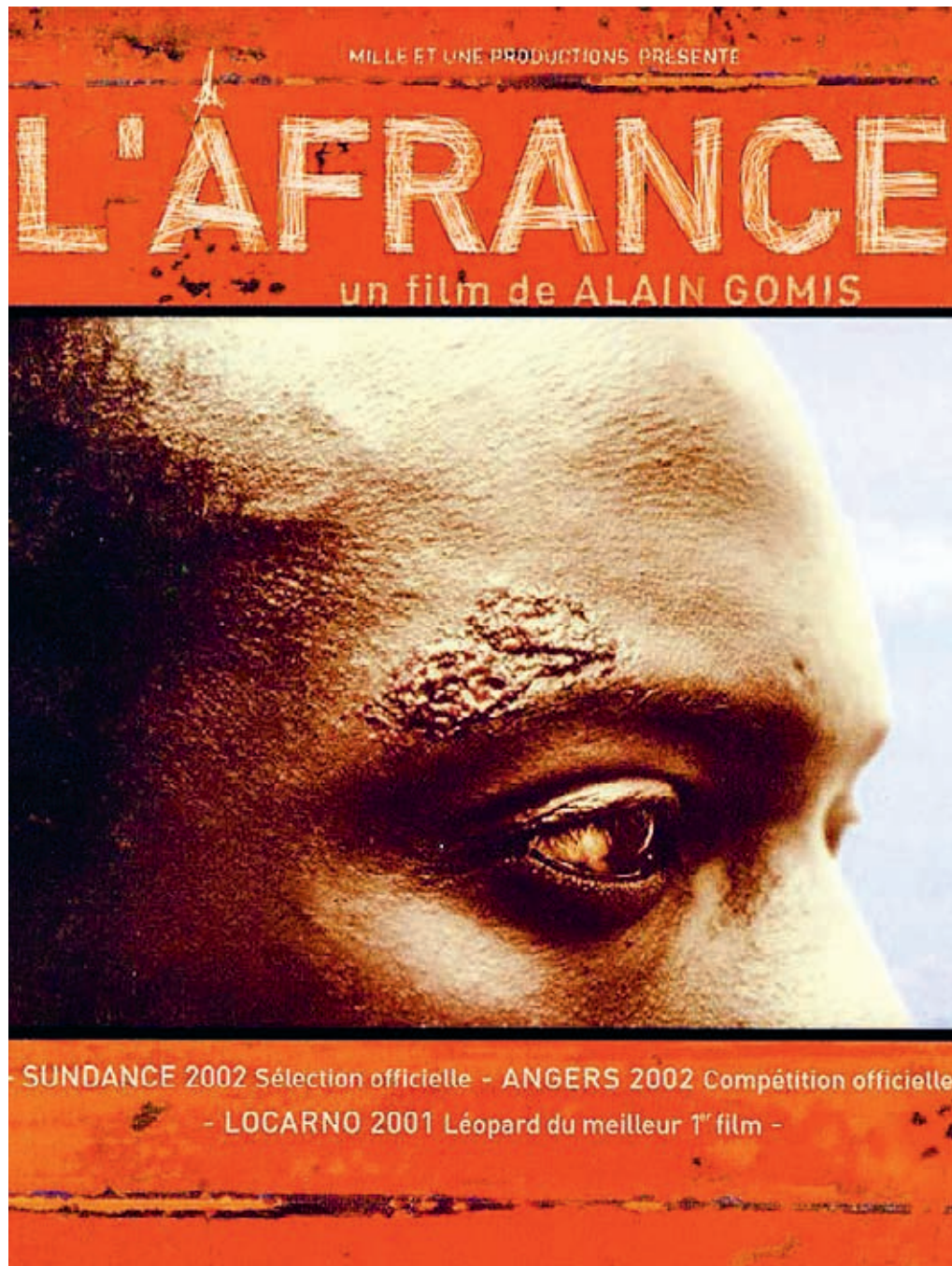
Poster for *Tey (Today)* (2012). Courtesy Alain Gomis



Poster for *Félicité* (2017). Courtesy Alain Gomis



Poster for *Andalucía* (2017). Courtesy Alain Gomis



Poster for L'AfFrance (2021). Courtesy Alain Gomis



Poster for Rewind & Play (2022). Courtesy Alain Gomis

# CONVERSATION WITH ALAIN GOMIS

Fariba Derakshani

# CONVERSATION AVEC ALAIN GOMIS

FARIBA DERAKSHANI *How did you begin working with film?*

ALAIN GOMIS I realised I wanted to make films by watching them. I loved being engrossed in movies, for hours, on TV, oblivious to everything else. Then at school we were shown Ozu's silent movie entitled *I Was Born, But...* and I remember my surprise. It is about two young brothers who move to the suburbs of Tokyo and had to fit in among other children while discovering that their father who was all-powerful at home was merely an employee elsewhere... These children spoke to me. So making a film meant sharing a common, and yet very different, experience with others. This led me to start wanting to make films and to weave communal spaces together. Having failed the examinations at the Paris film school, I ended up studying art history at university by accident, and then the history of cinema. I made a number of short films on my own and I studied screenplay and I decided to submit a screenplay for my Master's thesis. It was the story of a Senegalese student in Paris who discovered that, despite what he claimed every day in grand political discussions, he did not want to return home. He was arrested, humiliated, and yet, like many people I knew, my family, my friends... he did not want to return. The question was why? That was the question I asked myself. I—who had grown up in France and dreamed of an opposite journey. I was familiar with this phenomenon of dreaming of a return, but then always in a medium-term future without it actually ever happening. It is the phenomenon of the provisional, of the “pending”, of the country of origin becoming a dream, a memory softened by distance and time, which had become so difficult to turn into a reality, which itself was much harsher. Above all, this distance and this time, which had turned us into foreigners, was finally much less difficult to live with “here” than “there”.

FD *Your work has engaged with migration, agency and identity, and often addresses themes of death and life. What brought you to these questions?*

AG I was interested in migration, but from the inside, not from a European point of view, in an attempt to defend the humanity of migrants or their rights, as was obvious... But I was also looking for that common ground that helps create films. I did not want my character to be Senegalese so he was called El Hadj, from the name of the pilgrimage to Mecca. He had been exiled, as we all are in a certain way as soon as we leave home, as soon as childhood is lost, and had to face what he saw himself becoming and what he had to accept, far removed from

FARIBA DERAKSHANI *Comment avez-vous commencé à travailler avec le cinéma ?*

ALAIN GOMIS J'ai voulu faire des films en regardant. J'ai aimé être dans les films, des heures, à la télé, et rien d'autre n'existait. Et puis à l'école, on nous a montré *Gosses de Tokyo* (I was born but) de Ozu. Et je me souviens de ma surprise. Ces enfants qui déménageaient dans la banlieue tokyoïte et devait se faire une place parmi les autres enfants, et découvraient que leur père tout puissant à la maison, n'était qu'un employé au dehors... Ces enfants me racontaient. Ainsi faire un film c'était partager une expérience commune, bien que très différente. C'est ainsi que j'ai commencé à vouloir faire des films, à tisser des espaces communs. N'ayant pas réussi les concours d'école de cinéma de Paris, j'étudiais l'histoire de l'art à l'université par accident, puis l'histoire du cinéma. Je faisais quelques petits films dans mon coin, et j'étudiais le scénario. J'avais choisi de rendre un scénario pour mon mémoire de Master. L'histoire d'un étudiant sénégalais à Paris qui découvrait que malgré ce qu'il prétendait tous les jours dans de grandes discussions politiques, il ne voulait pas rentrer. Il était arrêté, humilié, traité comme on traite ceux dont on voudrait qu'ils restent invisibles, et pourtant, comme beaucoup que je connaissais, de ma famille, de mes amis... il ne voulait pas rentrer. Pourquoi ? C'était la question que je me posais. Moi qui avait grandi en France et qui rêvait du chemin inverse. Je connaissais bien ce territoire du retour rêvé, toujours dans un futur à moyen terme, et qui n'avait jamais lieu. Le territoire du provisoire, du « en attendant ». De la terre d'origine devenue un rêve, un souvenir adouci par la distance et le temps, qu'il était devenu si difficile de retrouver dans la réalité, elle beaucoup plus crue. Et surtout cette distance et ce temps qui avaient fait de nous des étrangers étaient finalement bien moins difficile à vivre « ici », que « là-bas ».

FD *Votre travail traite de la migration, de l'identité, et aborde souvent les thèmes de la mort et de la vie. Qu'est-ce qui vous a amené à ces questions ?*

AG Je m'intéressais donc à la migration, mais de l'intérieur, pas d'un point de vue européen, essayant de défendre l'humanité des migrants ou leurs droits, tout ceci était évident... Mais je cherchais ce territoire commun qui fait les films. Je ne voulais pas que mon personnage soit un Sénégalais, c'était El Hadj, et il portait un nom de pèlerin. Il était exilé comme nous le sommes tous d'une certaine manière dès que l'on sort de la maison, dès que l'enfance se perd, et devait faire face à ce qu'il se voyait devenir et qu'il devait accepter, loin du personnage héroïque

the heroic character he had once hoped to embody. He was living a banal story which I hoped everyone would be able to associate with, that of a young man who found himself facing his convictions.

I was fascinated by this adventure and wanted to continue exploring what some people call identity, as a dichotomy, as this amusing dialogue between oneself and one's image in the mirror, as well as with what it represents for others. It was therefore not a question of migration or identity, but of this strange journey to be made during a lifetime, from a particular point, a self which would join all the others in a specific location. A self that could question its finitude.

I was discovering cinema as a work of unity and diversity, of connection. However, this diversity was being questioned. Was it not fake? After all, it was a discourse, a thought not inherent in the language we used, the one I learned in my screenwriting classes, and didn't the production structures, the sponsors, engage us in a falsely communal, and ultimately imposed mode of storytelling? This classical structure of the narrative, inherited from Aristotle, had been seized upon by a strategy of efficiency, of emotional and economic efficiency. Could we, in this way, reach this long-awaited mutuality, or were we merely taking a seat at the table of domination? Were we reproducing a pattern to support the structures we claimed to denounce?

The battle of the narrative is everywhere, not only as a battle of viewpoints, but as a battle of types of narratives. From a cinematographic point of view the question was simple: should we speak or make people feel something? Making people feel something of course appears to more profound because it would be a question of reaching a present which would touch this inexpressible thing, that which exists before being pronounced, before being translated, and which is therefore already slightly lost. This hoped-for space, this mutuality which, in order to be achieved, must not be made subject to any pre-established rules.

Music could, in particular, inspire us because it consists of multiple structures, of full and empty spaces, of movements and of improvisations. It reaches directly accessible parts within us that have no name.

FD *More recently you have founded the Yennenga Center in Dakar, which promotes independent film production in Senegal. What led you to open this centre?*

AG The Yennenga Centre exists for these reasons. First of all to provide a resource that was cruelly lacking given that there were no post-production studios in West Africa to

qu'il avait espéré incarner un temps. Il vivait une histoire banale dans laquelle j'espérais que tous pourraient se reconnaître, celle d'un jeune homme qui se retrouvait face à ses convictions. Passionné par cette aventure, j'ai voulu continuer à explorer ce que certains appelle l'identité, comme un dédoublement, comme ce drôle de dialogue entre soi et son image dans le miroir, aussi bien qu'avec ce qu'elle représente pour les autres. Il ne s'agissait donc pas de migration ou d'identité, mais de ce drôle de trajet à faire dans un temps de vie, depuis un point particulier, un moi qui a son endroit précis rejoindrait tous les autres. Un soi qui pouvait interroger sa finitude.

Je découvrais le cinéma faisant œuvre d'unité et de diversité, de lien. Or cette diversité était à mettre en question. N'était-elle pas feinte ? Finalement le langage que nous utilisions, celui appris dans mes cours de scénario, ne contenait-il pas en lui-même un discours, une pensée ? Les structures de productions, les bailleurs de fonds, ne nous engageaient-ils pas à un mode de récit faussement commun, finalement imposé. Cette structure classique du récit, héritée d'Aristote, avait été saisie pour une stratégie d'efficacité, efficacité émotionnelle, efficacité économique. Pouvait-on accéder par ce biais à ce commun tant espéré, ou ne faisons-nous que rejoindre une place à la table de la domination ? Reproduisons-nous un schéma porteur des structures que nous prétendions dénoncer ?

La bataille du récit est partout, non seulement en tant que bataille des points de vue, mais en tant que types de récits. D'un point de vue cinématographique la question était simple : doit-on dire ou faire sentir ? Faire sentir paraît bien sûr le plus fort car il s'agirait d'atteindre un présent qui toucherait à cet indicible, ce qui existe avant d'être prononcé, d'être traduit, et donc déjà un peu perdu. Cet espace espéré, ce commun qui pour être atteint ne doit être soumis à aucune règle préétablie.

La musique pouvait nous inspirer particulièrement, faite de structures multiples, de pleins et de vides, de mouvements, d'improvisations. Elle atteint des régions en nous, en accès direct, qui ne porte pas de noms.

FD *Plus récemment, vous avez fondé le Centre Yennenga à Dakar, qui encourage la production cinématographique indépendante au Sénégal. Qu'est-ce qui vous a poussé à ouvrir ce centre ?*

AG Voilà pourquoi, le Centre Yennenga, pour tout cela. D'abord avoir un outil qui faisait cruellement défaut, puisqu'en Afrique de l'ouest il n'y avait pas de studios de post-production, qui permettait de faire un film de A à Z, sur place. Pour une indépendance véritable

enable a film to be made on site from start to finish. Resources were needed to ensure that the stories to be told, and the ways of telling them, were truly independent as well as, of course, in order to learn how to use, explore and appropriate them. Which stories? Written for whom? How? And without permission of course.

To imagine oneself as an actor and not just a spectator of films from somewhere else. To talk to yourself, your neighbour, and the world. To realise that saying "I" from one's own location is also to speak for all, to allow oneself to think that "my" story is worthwhile. Worthwhile here and worthwhile everywhere, as long as it is honest, as long as "I" am honest, which is no small thing. That each one might pour something into the pot of the universal, as into a formless and bottomless container.

A space for professionals and amateurs, all kinds of associations, adults and children... Working in a collective and accepting the different points of view as the very nature of the collective... In short, "no one is bound by the impossible", but everyone is invited to take part in the adventure.

d'histoires à raconter, de façons de les raconter, il fallait pouvoir avoir les outils mais bien sûr pouvoir apprendre à s'en servir, à les explorer, pour les détourner eux aussi. Quelles histoires ? Écrites pour qui ? Comment ? Et bien sûr, sans permission.

S'imaginer acteur et non seulement spectateur de films venant d'ailleurs. Parler à soi, à son(a) voisin(e), et au monde. Réaliser que dire « je » depuis son endroit c'est aussi parler pour tous, s'autoriser à penser que « mon » histoire, vaut. Vaut ici, vaut partout, pour peu qu'elle soit honnête, que « je » sois honnête, ce qui n'est pas peu de chose. Que chacun puisse verser au pot de l'universel, comme dans un récipient sans forme, comme dans un puit sans fond.

Un espace pour professionnels et amateurs, des associations de tous genres, des adultes et enfants... Travailler en collectif, accepter la divergence des points de vue comme nature même du collectif...

Bref, « à l'impossible nul n'est tenu », mais à l'aventure, tous sont conviés.



Stills from *Andalucia* (2017). Courtesy Alain Gomis





Stills from *Andalucía* (2017). Courtesy Alain Gomis

Stills from *Rewind & Play* (2022). Courtesy Alain Gomis



Still from *Félicité* (2017). Courtesy Alain Gomis



Still from *Félicité* (2017). Courtesy Alain Gomis



Still from *Félicité* (2017). Courtesy Alain Gomis







Still from *Félicité* (2017). Courtesy Alain Gomis



Stills from *Petit lumière* (2017). Courtesy Alain Gomis



# MOROCCO VISUAL ART

HASSAN DARSI

المغرب  
الفنون البصرية



حسن دارسي هو فنان تشكيلي من الدار البيضاء تعزز أعماله التفكير النقدي حول الأماكن العامة والمواطنة في مدينة تعج بعدم المساواة الاقتصادية وفي بلد محدود حرية التعبير. طور دارسي ممارسة تركز على الزخرفة والأماكن العامة. وشارك دارسي في عام ١٩٩٥ في تأسيس La Source du Lion (عين السبع) وهو مختبر ثقافي يجمع بين المفكرين والفنانين والصحفيين والطلاب وعامة الناس لمناقشة دور الفن في المجتمع. تستنطق أعماله في الأماكن العامة الحضريّة لإنشاء وإستخدام المساحات في المدينة وتؤرخ و تؤرشف ذكريات وتواريخ متعددة وتخلق جماهير ومشاركين جدد في الفن.

أنتج دارسي سواء بشكل فردي أو مع La Source du Lion (عين السبع) مشاريع فنية مهمة في تاريخ الفن المعاصر في المغرب. ومن أبرز هذه المشاريع مشروع حديقة الإرميتاج (٢٠٠٢ - ٢٠٠٨) الذي ركز على حديقة الإرميتاج المهجورة التي تعود إلى الحقبة الإستعمارية في الدار البيضاء. وقام جنباً إلى جنب مع المجتمع المحلي الذي يعيش في الحديقة وحولها بصياغة خطة لإنشاء مساحات مجتمعية لرواية القصص والفن والراحة. في سلسلة من تدخلات الفنانين تسمى —Passerelles artistiques بوابات فنية— تحولت أجزاء مختلفة من الحديقة إلى مساحات حقيقية من العجائب. إعتد هذا المشروع على إبداع الفنانين من مختلف التخصصات والناشطين الحضريين وسكان الأحياء ومسؤولي المدينة لإعادة التفكير بشكل جذري في فائدة وجمال مساحة مهجورة مع إحترام ذاكرتها وتاريخها.

وقام حسن بالإضافة إلى هذا العمل بعدد من التدخلات الهامة في المغرب وكذلك في جميع أنحاء أفريقيا وأوروبا بما في ذلك سلسلة بورتريهات العائلة التي عملت على الدعوة إلى لقاءات جديدة وتاريخ للهويات غير المرئية في المناطق الداخلية الحميمة من حياة المدينة. وبدلاً من دخول المنازل والنقاط الصور يدعو دارسي الناس إلى المشاركة في عروض عن أسرهم من خلال إحضار عرض معهم إلى داخل مجموعة كانت بمثابة نسيج مشترك بين الجميع. ويعترف هذا النموذج التشاركي بأن إحدى مسؤوليات الإنتماء إلى مجتمع ما هي الإستماع إلى الأصوات المكونة له.

أعاد دارسي تعريف الفن في السياق المغربي من خلال إشراك الجمهور المغربي الأكبر من خلال معارضه. وكان مفتاح ذلك هو تجاوز إستخدام الفضاء العام كمجرد موقع عرض وعوضاً عن ذلك الإنخراط في الفضاء بطريقة تلتزم بإجراء حوارات موسعة ومستدامة بين الفنان والجمهور.

Hassan Darsi is a visual artist from Casablanca whose work promotes critical thinking about public spaces and citizenship in a city that is rife with economic inequality, and in a country with limited freedoms of expression. Darsi has developed a practice centred on gilding and public spaces. In 1995, Darsi co-founded La Source du Lion, a cultural laboratory that brings together thinkers, artists, journalists, students and the general public to discuss the role of art in society. His actions in urban public spaces interrogate the creation and use of space in the city, chronicle and archive multiple memories and histories, and create new audiences and participants in art.

Both individually and with La Source du Lion, Darsi has produced art projects that are significant in the history of contemporary art in Morocco. One of the most notable of these is *Le projet de la maquette* (“The Model” 2002–2008), which focused on the abandoned, colonial-era L’Hermitage park in Casablanca. Together with the community who live in and around the park he drafted a plan to create community spaces for storytelling, art and repose. In a series of artist interventions—called *Passerelles artistiques*—different parts of the park were transformed into true spaces of wonder. This project drew on the creativity of artists from different disciplines, urban activists, neighbourhood residents and city officials; to radically rethink the utility and beauty of an abandoned space while respecting its memory and history.

In addition to this work, Darsi has staged a number of important interventions in Morocco as well as across Africa and Europe, including the Family Portrait Series, which worked to invite new encounters and chronicle unseen identities in the intimate interior of city life. Rather than entering homes and taking images, Darsi invites people to participate in the staging of their own family by bringing an object with them onto a set that acted as a fabric shared by all. This participatory model recognises that one of the responsibilities of belonging to a community is to listen to its constituent voices.

Darsi has redefined public art in the Moroccan context by engaging the larger Moroccan public through his exhibitions. Key to this is going beyond the use of public space as mere display location, and instead engaging with the space in a way that commits to having extended and sustained dialogues between the artist and the public.

## HASSAN DARSI IS HONOURED:

- FOR HIS SINCERE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MOROCCAN COMMUNITY THROUGH PARTICIPATORY IMAGINATIVE ART PROJECTS
- FOR USING ART AND PUBLIC SPACE TO ADVANCE THE DEMOCRATISATION OF ARTS AND CULTURE LOCALLY
- FOR IDENTIFYING, CREATING AND SHARING TOOLS OF AGENCY WITH THE COMMUNITY THROUGH HIS PROJECTS
- FOR HIS COMMITMENT TO MOBILISE THE COMMUNITY AROUND HIM WITH ARTISTIC PROJECTS THAT PRESENT ALTERNATIVE REALITIES
- FOR HIS RETHINKING OF SOCIETY AND URBAN SPACE THROUGH ART, AND CHALLENGING THE IDEA THAT ART TAKES PLACES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF INSTITUTIONS
- FOR CREATING SPACES FOR IMAGINATION AND INSPIRING THE FUTURE GENERATION OF ARTISTS TO EMPOWER THEIR COMMUNITIES THROUGH ARTS AND CULTURE

## يكرم حسن دارسي:

- لمشاركته المخلصة مع المجتمع المغربي من خلال مشاريع فنية خيالية تشاركية
- استخدام الفن والفضاء العام لتعزيز ديمقراطية الفنون والثقافة محليا
- تحديد وإنشاء وتبادل أدوات الوكالة مع المجتمع من خلال مشاريعه
- لإلتزامه بتعبئة المجتمع من حوله بمشاريع فنية تقدم حقائق بديلة
- لإعادة تفكيره في المجتمع والفضاء الحضري من خلال الفن، وتحدي فكرة أن الفن يحدث في سياق المؤسسات
- لخلق مساحات للخيال وإلهام جيل المستقبل من الفنانين لتمكين مجتمعاتهم من خلال الفنون والثقافة

# MAKING SPACE TRULY PUBLIC

Omar Berrada

Hassan Darsi deserves every accolade. The beauty of his work alone would be enough. But his defense of the commons, his insistence on collective processes and his ethical rigor have made him a mentor, a model and an inspiration for a whole generation of artists and cultural practitioners, in Morocco and beyond.

I first met Hassan in 2005, after hearing about his landmark work, *Le projet de la maquette*, which took on Casablanca's Parc de l'Hermitage and its long history of neglect. There, artists came together with a territory and its inhabitants around a shared concern for public space. Under the aegis of La Source du lion, the independent art collective run by Hassan and his partner Florence Renault, they embarked on creating a large-scale architectural model of the park, including an inventory of all the objects and detritus it contained, as a way of calling attention to its decay and paving the way for a future rehabilitation. Commissioned by no one, in solidarity with all, artists invented ways of taking action in the city. On the musty rot of urban policy, a fresh breeze was blowing.

In an aesthetically conservative and socially mercantile context, where art is often reduced to collectible objects, Hassan helped me understand that the work of an artist can and must be much more. That art is not merely decorative. That it is more than a balm for weary souls. That it amounts to nothing if it fails to make us see otherwise and question the power structures to which we have grown accustomed.

Hassan's most recent project, *Kariati Hayati* ("My Villag, My Life", 2018), in the Benslimane region, is emblematic of this. Communities of small farmers had become targets of aggressive intrusions by industrial quarries causing social and environmental destruction. Hassan Darsi felt the need to propose a collective project through which villagers could organise in order to stand together against the disproportionate powers looming over them. A project attuned to their environment and skills, and that would also provide them with an income: to create an agro-ecological village whose production would be marketed in the city. With its collective structure and horizontal methodology, this project has an anti-extractivist ethos in absolute contrast to the industrial intruders.

*Kariati Hayati* is more ambitious than a simple critique of the quarries. It enacts the refusal of a world where the commons can be privatised, where land is prey to the multinationals' appetite for extraction. Beyond criticism, it constitutes a *proposal* for rebuilding a community that has been broken to the point of no longer recognising itself as such. Through this project, a movement came into being, a struggle for survival that enlisted art as one of its tools. In such a context, the usual distinctions between art and life are secondary, as is the distinction between aesthetics and politics. By opening windows onto new ways of knowing and coming together, Hassan Darsi's work builds political horizons. It makes a shared future imaginable.

حسن دارسي يستحق كل الجوائز. سيكون جمال أعماله وحده كافيا لذلك. لكن دفاعه عن المشاعات وإصراره على العمليات الجماعية وصرامته الأخلاقية جعلته مرشدا ونموذجا ومصدر إلهام لجيل كامل من الفنانين والممارسين الثقافيين في المغرب وخارجه.

التقيت حسن لأول مرة في عام ٢٠٠٥ بعد أن سمعت عن عمله التاريخي المشروع النموذجي Le projet de la maquette الذي تناول حديقة الأرميتاج في الدار البيضاء وتاريخها الطويل من الإهمال. هناك اجتمع الفنانون مع المنطقة وسكانها حول إهتمام مشترك بالمساحات العامة. وشرعوا تحت رعاية عين السبع La Source du lion وهي المجموعة الفنية المستقلة التي يديرها حسن وشريكته فلورنسا رينو في إنشاء نموذج معماري واسع النطاق للحديقة بما في ذلك جرد لجميع الأغراض والمخلفات التي تحتوي عليها كوسيلة للفت الانتباه إلى إضمحلالها وتمهيد الطريق لإعادة تأهيلها مستقبلا. ودونما تكليف من أحد وتضامنا مع الجميع اخترع الفنانون وسائل لإجراء خطوات في المدينة. فهب نسيم منعش فوق العفن المنتن للسياسة الحضريّة.

وفي ذلك السياق المحافظ جماليا والتجاري إجتماعيا حيث غالبا ما يتم إختزال الفن في أشياء يمكن الحصول عليها أعانني حسن على فهم أن عمل الفنان يمكن وينبغي أن يكون أكثر من ذلك بكثير. أن الفن ليس مجرد ديكور. إنه أكثر من مجرد بلمس للأرواح المتعبة. أنه لا يرقى إلى أي شيء إذا فشل في جعلنا نرى خلاف ذلك وفي أن نطرح تساؤلات حول هياكل السلطة التي إعتدنا عليها.

ويعد قريتي حياتي وهو أحدث مشاريع حسن في منطقة بنسليمان رمزا على ذلك. فقد أصبحت مجتمعات صغار المزارعين أهدافا للإقتحامات العدوانية من جانب المحاجر الصناعية التي تسببت في دمار إجتماعي وبيئي. شعر حسن دارسي بالحاجة إلى إقتراح مشروع جماعي يمكن القرويين من تنظيم صفوفهم من أجل الوقوف معا في وجه القوى غير المتكافئة التي تلوح في الأفق. إنه مشروع ينسجم مع بيئتهم ومهاراتهم و من شأنه أيضا أن يوفر لهم دخلا: إنشاء قرية زراعية إيكولوجية يتم تسويق إنتاجها في المدينة. ويتسم هذا المشروع بهيكله الجماعي ومنهجيته الأفقية بروح مناهضة للإستخراج تتعارض بصورة مطلقة مع المتسللين الصناعيين.

قريتي حياتي أكثر طموحا من مجرد النقد البسيط للمحاجر. إنها تسن رفضا لعالم يمكن فيه خصخصة المشاعات حيث تصبح الأرض فريسة لشركات الإستخراج متعددة الجنسيات. وبخلاف النقد فإنه يشكل إقتراحا لإعادة بناء مجتمع تم تحطيمه لدرجة أنه لم يعد قادرا على الإعتراف بنفسه. من خلال هذا المشروع ظهرت إلى حيز الوجود حركة هي صراع من أجل البقاء جندت الفن كواحد من أدواتها. في مثل هذا السياق تصبح الفروق المعتادة بين الفن والحياة أمورا ثانوية وكذلك التمييز بين علم الجمال والسياسة. تبنى أعمال حسن دارسي أفقا سياسية من خلال فتح نوافذ على طرق جديدة للمعرفة والتوحد، إنه يجعل المستقبل المشترك أمرا يمكن تخيله.

حقا لقد جعل المساحات العامة  
متاحة للجميع

# CONVERSATION WITH HASSAN DARSI

Fariba Derakshani

محادثة

مع حسن دارسي

FARIBA DERAKSHANI *Please tell us something about your career and how you became the artist you are today.*

HASSAN DARSI After I had completed my studies in Europe in the early 1990s, I settled as an artist in Morocco. At the time artistic production was dominated by easel painting and there was hardly any space or opportunity for a young contemporary artist of my age. I needed to create a context in which I and other artists could work, exchange ideas and rethink the act of engaging in art outside of a very limited market system and, in particular, via its implication in the issues affecting all our societies. I therefore had to invent my own creative platform and that led to the creation of the Lion Source Society in 1995. The Lion Source Society allowed me to develop an artistic practice which was independent of the local market system and a complete break from the artistic forms of the time. The Lion Source Society was the first place where artists from Morocco and around the world could meet, work and exchange ideas and it has led to the development of artistic projects which provide the foundation for innovative creations in Morocco, such as the project around Hermitage Park.

FD *How has the city of Casablanca shaped your practice?*

HD Casablanca is a city at odds with people's nostalgic or romanticised fantasies of Morocco. It is a lively, bustling city that channels desires and energies and highlights unease. In a Morocco that is undergoing change Casablanca has lent itself to all kinds of artistic research and manipulation, in the very differing mediums of art, music, dance and architecture. It is a true laboratory of form and meaning that offers plenty of space for questioning, encounters and exchanges.

FD *What importance do you attach to public space?*

HD Public space is important because of its reflective quality and because it reflects our desires, our anxieties, our expectations, our successes, our failures, the possible and the forbidden. It is a space of interactive expressions between the singular and the plural, the intimate and the public, the here and the elsewhere... And, through all of the above, it determines the nature and the quality of a social project.

FD *What is the relationship between public space and citizenship?*

HD Public space is where the principles of citizenship and living together are developed. Relationships between individuals, women and men, children and adults, residents and people

من فضلك أخبرنا شيئاً عن حياتك المهنية وكيف أصبحت الفنان الذي أنت عليه اليوم؟  
بعد أن أكملت دراستي في أوروبا في أوائل تسعينيات القرن الماضي إستقرت بي الحال كفنّان في المغرب. في ذلك الوقت كان الإنتاج الفني يهيمن عليه الرسم على الحامل ولم يكن هناك أي مساحة أو فرصة لفنان معاصر شاب في عمري. كنت بحاجة إلى خلق سياق يمكنني أنا وفنانين آخرين من العمل وتبادل الأفكار وإعادة التفكير في فعل الإنخراط في الفن خارج نظام سوق محدود للغاية وعلى وجه الخصوص من خلال ارتباطه بالقضايا التي تؤثر على جميع مجتمعاتنا. لذلك اضطرت إلى إختراع منصتي الإبداعية الخاصة مما أدى إلى إنشاء جمعية عين السبع في العام ١٩٩٥. مكنتني جمعية عين السبع من تطوير ممارسة فنية مستقلة عن نظام السوق المحلي ومنفصلة تماماً عن الأشكال الفنية في ذلك الوقت. كانت جمعية عين السبع هي المكان الأول الذي يمكن فيه للفنانين من المغرب وحول العالم الإلتقاء والعمل وتبادل الأفكار وقد أدت إلى تطوير مشاريع فنية توفر الأساس للإبداعات المبتكرة في المغرب مثل المشروع حول حديقة الأرميتاج.

كيف شكلت مدينة الدار البيضاء ممارستك؟

الدار البيضاء هي مدينة على خلاف مع الحنين إلى الماضي أو تخيلات الناس الرومانسية للمغرب. إنها مدينة نابضة بالحياة تتميز بالصخب تقوم بتوجيه الرغبات والطاقت وتسلط الضوء على عدم الإرتياح. وفي المغرب الذي يمر بمرحلة تغيير سخرت الدار البيضاء نفسها لجميع أنواع البحث الفني والمعالجات بوسائل بالغة الإختلاف من الفن والموسيقى والرقص والهندسة المعمارية. إنها مختبر حقيقي للشكل والمعنى يوفر مساحة كبيرة للتساؤل واللقاءات والتبادلات.

ما هي الأهمية التي تعلقونها على الأماكن العامة؟

الأماكن العامة هامة بسبب طبيعتها العاكسة ولأنها تعكس رغباتنا وقلقتنا وتوقعاتنا ونجاحاتنا وإخفاقاتنا والممكن والمحظور. إنها مساحة من التعبيرات التفاعلية بين المفرد والجمع والحميم والعام، هنا وفي أي مكان آخر... ومن خلال كل ما سبق فإنها تحدد طبيعة ونوعية المشروع الإجتماعي.

ما هي العلاقة بين الأماكن العامة والمواطنة؟

المساحة العامة هي المكان الذي يتم فيه وضع مبادئ المواطنة والتعايش. وتعتمد العلاقات بين الأفراد، نساء ورجالا والأطفال والبالغين، والمقيمين والأشخاص العابرين على نوعية وطبيعة ذلك المكان العام. في رأيي المكان العام مدرسة مفتوحة وتشاركية وإبداعية تضع تعريف أي مشروع إجتماعي وتجعله أكثر حيوية.

عملك يرتبط بالأفكار المتعلقة بمشاركة المواطنين في مشاريعك. كيف تشرك مشاريعك المواطنين وتخلق حواراً معهم؟

إنها دائماً مسألة لقاءات وتبادلات وتعاون حول القضايا المتعلقة بالمساحات المعيشية، وبالنسبة لي فهي دائماً ممارسة جديدة في التفكير في الشكل وعملية مفتوحة أمام

passing through, depend on the quality and nature of that public space. For me public space is an open, participative, creative school that defines any social project and makes it more alive.

FD *Your work engages with ideas relating to citizen participation in your projects. How do your projects engage and create a dialogue with citizens?*

HD It is always a question of encounters, exchanges and complicity around issues relating to living spaces and for me it is always a new exercise in thinking about a form and a process which is open to multiple opportunities for citizen participation. These processes are also moments of sharing and passing on know-how and desires exchanged around a given area.

FD *These participatory works emphasise the agency and imagination of individuals and communities. Why are they important to you?*

HD The choice of intervention spaces in my projects is the result of coincidences and encounters, but also and especially of the intrinsic context, questioning, desires and challenges. All my participative projects which are related to public spaces require the sharing and passing on of knowledge and know-how. On each occasion it is a question of building, imagining, restoring and renewing our desires. The proposals can be juxtaposed like transparent layers that do not reject each other, but rather promote each other.

FD *What led you to introduce gilding into public spaces?*

HD Coincidence. A shop selling false golden adhesive rolls in a popular district of the city. It was more the discarded cuttings that littered the floor that caught my eye than the kitschy furniture with its golden adhesive covering. I began by collecting these discarded adhesive gilded scraps and recycling them on paper as fragmented memories of an event.

FD *What is the meaning and significance of gold in these mundane or everyday contexts?*

HD The beautiful or the fake. The paradox, or how to use gold to enhance drama. To signal danger, to symbolise power, but also humanity's decline. My intention is to subvert the power and allure of gold into signals of drama and danger. One example of this is the "Gold of Africa" work on Tenerife, at a jetty built to protect a marina for Western tourists, but on which the bodies of drowned African migrants are washed up. The gold causes interference on these huge concrete blocks exposed to the sun, they signal a danger and dazzle users of the marina.

فرص متعددة لمشاركة المواطنين. أيضا هذه العمليات لحظات من تبادل ونقل للدراية والرغبات المتبادلة حول مجال معين.

تؤكد هذه الأعمال التشاركية على قدرة الأفراد والمجتمعات المحلوبة على الفاعلية والخيال. لماذا هي مهمة بالنسبة لك؟ إن اختيار مساحات التدخل في مشاريعي هو نتيجة للمصادفات واللقاءات وأيضاً بوجه خاص للسباق الجوهري والتساؤل والرغبات والتحديات. تتطلب جميع مشاريعي التشاركية المتعلقة بالأماكن العامة مشاركة ونقل المعرفة والدراية. و في كل مرة يتعلق الأمر ببناء رغباتنا وتخيلها وإستعادتها وتجديدها. يمكن وضع المقترحات جنباً إلى جنب أسوة بالطبقات الشفافة التي لا ترفض بعضها بل تعزز بعضها البعض.

ما الذي دفعك إلى إدخال التذهيب إلى الأماكن العامة؟ أنها صدفة. كان هناك متجر يبيع لفائف لاصقة ذهبية مزيفة في حي شهير في المدينة. وكانت القصاصات المهملة التي تناثرت على الأرض هي التي لفتت إنتباهي أكثر من الأثاث الصغير بغطائه اللاصق الذهبي. بدأت بجمع هذه القصاصات المذهبة اللاصقة المهملة وإعادة تدويرها على الورق كذكريات مجزأة لحدث ما.

ما هو معنى وأهمية الذهب في هذه السياقات المعتادة أو اليومية؟

الجميل أو المزيف. المفارقة، أو كيفية إستخدام الذهب لتعزير الدراما. للإشارة إلى الخطر، لترمز إلى القوة، ولكن أيضاً إلى تدهور البشرية. مقصدى هو تخريب قوة وجاذبية الذهب وتحويله إلى إشارات من الدراما والخطر. أحد الأمثلة على ذلك هو عمل «ذهب أفريقيا» في تناناريف على رصيف تم بناؤه لحماية مرسى للسباح الغربيين كما يتم فيه غسل جثث المهاجرين الأفارقة الغارقين. يتسبب الذهب في تداخل في هذه الكتل الخرسانية الضخمة المعرضة لأشعة الشمس والتي تشير إلى الخطر وتبهر مستخدمي المرسى.

كيف يثير فنك العام التشاركي أسئلة سياسية تتعلق بالتحول الديمقراطي والجمهور؟

ترتبط مشاريعي التشاركية بكل بساطة بحياتنا وتعبير عن مواضيع يناقشها الناس. ما يضيفه التدخل الفني هو أن هذه المناقشات بين المواطنين تصبح مشروعاً وموضوعاً جمالياً يضاف عليه طابعاً رسمياً من خلال عمل فني تشاركي. وبإيجاز يصبح التساؤل موضوعاً للفن والمتعة بحديقة الأرميتاج التي صارت نموذجاً مثالياً. لم تعد القضية هي الحديقة ذاتها حيث يبدو أن السكان والسلطات قد وصلوا إلى طريق مسدود و بدلاً من ذلك تم تقليص المشروع المتعلق بالنموذج وكذلك المشكلة الضخمة التي تمثلها الحديقة إلى مقياس ١٠٠/١ ومقياس النموذج ونموذج الحديقة ذاتها في حالتها الفعلية و إستناداً إلى بقاياها الفعلي وهو نموذج جعلنا مدركين لقضية واسعة الإنتشار في مجتمعنا وهي نقص الرعاية في حياتنا.

FD *How does your participatory public art raise political questions relating to democratisation and the public?*

HD My participatory projects are simply related to our lives and express the subjects of people's debates. What the artistic intervention adds is that these debates among citizens become a project and an aesthetic object, formalised by a participatory work of art. In short, the questioning becomes an object of art and pleasure, with the model of the Hermitage Park being a perfect example. The issue was no longer the park itself, since apparently the inhabitants and the authorities had reached a stalemate, but instead the project relating to the model, the huge issue that the park presents was reduced to a scale of 1/100, the scale of a model, a model of the park itself in its actual state and, based on its actual fragments, a model that allowed us to become aware of a widespread issue in our society, namely the lack of care in our lives.

FD *You have worked in abandoned parks and public spaces in Casablanca. What, to you, is the significance of these so-called empty spaces?*

HD *How do they shape the nature of the city itself?*

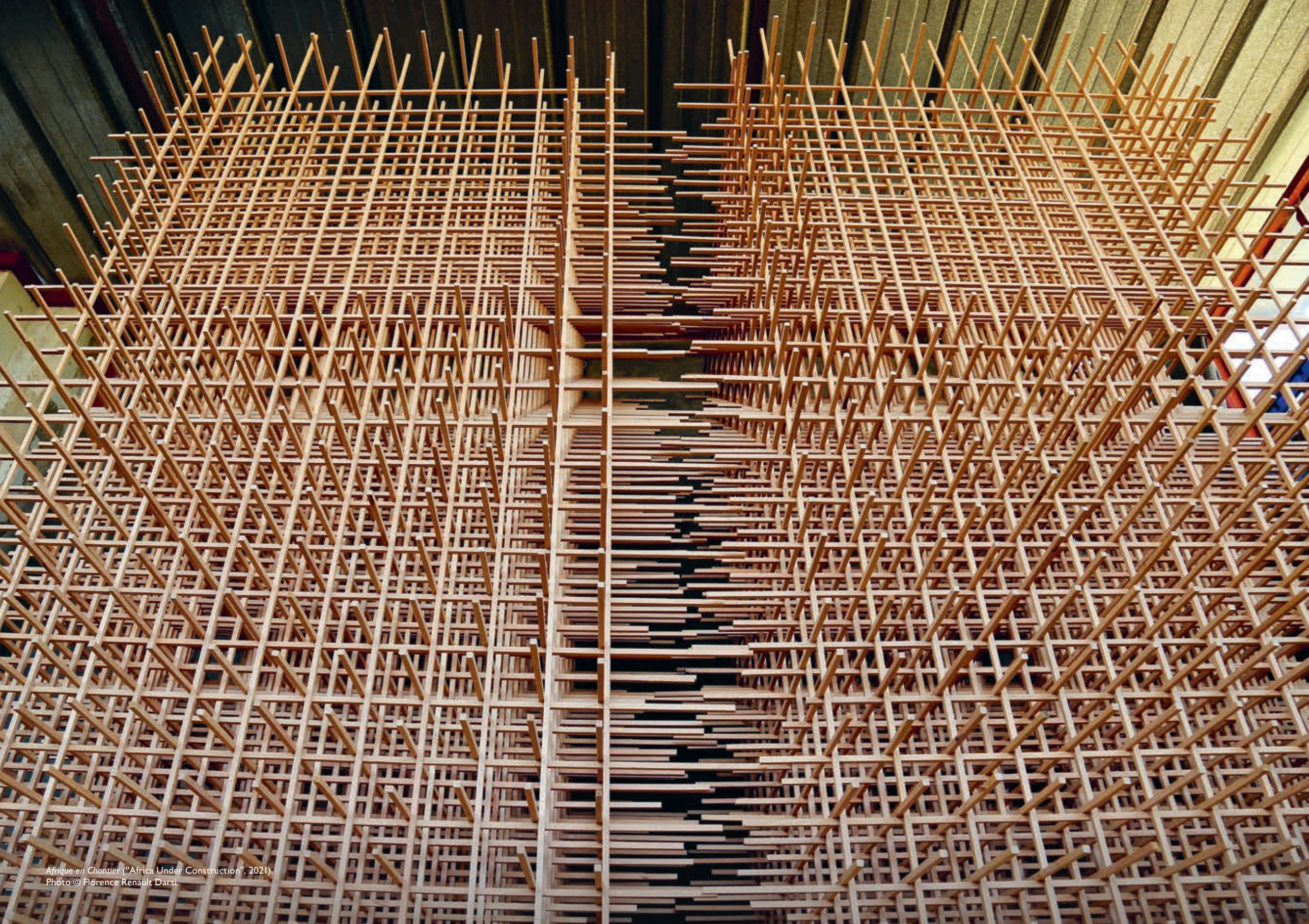
HD The uncertain nature of these spaces in our cities implies all kinds of possibilities for rebirth, renewal, reactivation... They are abandoned, neglected and forgotten places, spaces of rebellion, of wandering, of memories, of poetry... Living spaces that irrigate the whole city. They are spaces where we can work on shortcuts, distances and processes of scale. We can think of ways to enrich our soils in order to grow beautiful ideas. Today, more than ever before, we know that the survival of a community depends on how we care for spaces of freedom and imagination.

عملت في الحدائق المهجورة والأماكن العامة في الدار البيضاء. ما هي أهمية ما يسمى بالمساحات الفارغة بالنسبة لك؟ كيف تشكل طبيعة المدينة نفسها؟ تنطوي الطبيعة المتغيرة لهذه الأماكن في مدننا على جميع أنواع الإحتمالات لإعادة الميلاد والتجديد وإعادة التنشيط... إنها أماكن مهجورة ومهملة ومنسية، مساحات للتمرد، للتجول، للذكريات، للشعر... المساحات السكنية التي تروي المدينة بأكملها. إنها مساحات يمكننا فيها أن نعمل على الطرق المختصرة والمسافات وعمليات المقاييس. يمكننا التفكير في طرق لإثراء ترابنا من أجل تنمية الأفكار الجميلة. اليوم و أكثر من أي وقت مضى صرنا على علم بأن بقاء المجتمع يعتمد على كيفية إهتمامنا بمساحات الحرية والخيال.













*Façade dorée* ("Golden Facade", 2007) at Gallery Venise, Casablanca.  
Photos © Bénédicte Fouque



*Projet en Dérive* ("Adrift", 2021). Installation view at Charlevilles Mézieres.  
Courtesy Hassan Darsi



CUBA  
PERFORMANCE ART

LUIS MANUEL  
OTERO ALCÁNTARA

CUBA  
ARTE DE PERFORMANCE



Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara. Photo © María Matienzo Puerto

Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara is a visual artist and human rights defender who is known for his performances that denounce the conditions many Cubans face. Otero Alcántara leads the San Isidro Collective—an artists' collective formed in 2018 to promote freedom of expression and cultural rights in the country. Additionally, he is co-founder of the Museum of Dissidence which is a website and public art project reclaiming and celebrating dissent.

Otero Alcántara comes from a marginalised community, and has faced many challenges, which have significantly influenced his work. In his early work he created sculptures of human forms, animals and characters from comic books using salvaged materials. He used sculpture to create a “realistic copy of reality”. However, in the development of his practice Otero Alcántara wanted to have a more tangible impact with his art and to “search for work that contributed to the reality in which [he] lived”. This desire led him to performance art and an individual artistic expression that communicates complex and ironic social and political criticism.

Over the past years Otero Alcántara has been using art and cultural expressions to contest the ongoing violations of freedom of expression by the Cuban government. Otero Alcántara has made several interventions that are in direct defiance of the regulations in Cuba that have led him to being arrested numerous times. He displays his art in both public and private spaces without holding permits or obtaining permission for exhibitions and performances. As a result, Otero Alcántara has faced persecution from the police. In 2017, he was arrested for “being in illicit possession of construction materials” in relation to his work as a cofounder of the #00 biennale de la Havana, an alternative event to the official Havana Biennial, that was organised by the Museum of Dissidence. In April 2019, he was arrested for a performance in which he wore a Cuban flag draped over his shoulders, in defiance of a 2019 law dictating how the flag could be used.

Since then Otero Alcántara has faced ongoing persecution for his performances. He has had his work confiscated and has been forcibly detained multiple times. His ongoing detention has drawn protests and statements of solidarity from international artists who support his unwavering fight for the freedom of cultural expression in Cuba.

Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara es un artista visual y un defensor de los derechos humanos, conocido por sus performances que denuncian las condiciones a las que se enfrentan muchos cubanos. Otero Alcántara lidera el Colectivo San Isidro, un colectivo de artistas formado en 2018 con el fin de promover la libertad de expresión y los derechos culturales del país. También es el cofundador del Museo de la Disidencia, que es una página web y un proyecto de arte público que reclama y celebra la disidencia.

Otero Alcántara proviene de una comunidad marginada y ha tenido que afrontar muchas dificultades que han influido de manera significativa en su trabajo. En su obra inicial creó esculturas con formas humanas, animales y personajes de cómics, utilizando material reutilizable. La escultura la utilizó para crear una “*copia realista de la realidad*”. Sin embargo, en el desarrollo de su práctica, Otero Alcántara quiso ejercer un impacto más tangible con su arte e “*ir a la búsqueda de un trabajo que contribuyera a la realidad en la que [él] vivía*”. Tal deseo le llevó al arte de performance y a una expresión artística individual que comunica crítica social y política, compleja e irónica.

En los últimos años Otero Alcántara ha venido utilizando el arte y las expresiones culturales para cuestionar las continuas violaciones a la libertad de expresión por parte del Gobierno cubano. Ha realizado varias intervenciones que constituyen un desafío a las regulaciones de Cuba y que lo han llevado a ser arrestado numerosas veces. Otero Alcántara representa su arte tanto en espacios públicos como privados sin disponer de licencias u obtener permiso para exhibiciones y performances, y como consecuencia ha enfrentado la persecución por parte de la policía. En 2017 fue arrestado por “*estar en posesión ilícitamente de materiales de construcción*” en relación con su obra como cofundador de la bienal de la Habana #00, que estaba organizada por el Museo de la Disidencia como evento alternativo a la Bienal de la Habana oficial. En agosto de 2019 fue detenido repetidas veces debido a una performance en la que llevaba una bandera cubana cubriéndole los hombros para cuestionar a una ley del 2019 que dictaba cómo podía ser utilizada la bandera.

Desde entonces Otero Alcántara ha tenido que afrontar una continua persecución por sus trabajos de performance. Su obra ha sido confiscada y él ha sido detenido por la fuerza en múltiples ocasiones. Su arresto actual ha generado protestas y declaraciones de solidaridad de parte de artistas internacionales quienes dan apoyo a su firme lucha por la libertad cultural de Cuba.



LUIS MANUEL OTERO ALCÁNTARA IS HONOURED:

- FOR HIS EXTREMELY ACCESSIBLE, HONEST AND NON-ELITIST ART PRACTICE
- FOR HIS TIRELESS FIGHT FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN CUBA AND HIS STANCE AGAINST CENSORSHIP AND POLITICAL AUTHORITY
- FOR TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SPACES IN HAVANA THROUGH HIS PERFORMANCE WORK, DEMOCRATISING THE ACCESS TO ARTS
- FOR BEING A SYMBOL AND A LEADER WITHIN CUBA'S MOST INFLUENTIAL ARTISTS AND INTELLECTUALS
- FOR BEING A ROLE MODEL TO A YOUNG GENERATION OF CUBAN ARTISTS FIGHTING FOR GREATER FREEDOMS
- FOR FUSING ACTIVISM AND ART, DEVELOPING A PRACTICE THAT IS EXEMPLARY FOR THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF ART

SE PREMIA A LUIS MANUEL OTERO ALCÁNTARA:

- POR SU PRÁCTICA ARTÍSTICA, EXTREMADAMENTE ACCESIBLE, HONESTA Y NO ELITISTA
- POR SU INCANSABLE LUCHA POR LA LIBERTAD DE EXPRESIÓN EN CUBA Y SU POSTURA CONTRA LA CENSURA Y LA AUTORIDAD POLÍTICA
- POR TRANSFORMAR LOS ESPACIOS PÚBLICOS DE LA HABANA A TRAVÉS DE SU TRABAJO DE PERFORMANCE, DEMOCRATIZANDO CON ELLO EL ACCESO A LAS ARTES
- POR SER SÍMBOLO Y LÍDER ENTRE LOS INTELLECTUALES Y ARTISTAS MÁS INFLUYENTES DENTRO DE CUBA
- POR SER UN MODELO A SEGUIR PARA LA JOVEN GENERACIÓN DE ARTISTAS CUBANOS QUE LUCHA POR UNAS MAYORES LIBERTADES
- POR FUSIONAR ACTIVISMO Y ARTE, DESARROLLANDO ASÍ UNA PRÁCTICA QUE ES UN EJEMPLO DEL PODER TRANSFORMADOR QUE TIENE EL ARTE

# TRANSFORMING VIOLENCE INTO ART

Coco Fusco

In one of our last conversations before his imprisonment, Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara assured me that even though Cuban authorities harassed him, he took consolation in the support from his people, noting that his neighbors warned him when police were after him. “I got into a taxi the other day”, I remember him saying, “and the driver recognised me and told me he would drive me anywhere for free”. I doubt that other artists in Cuba, particularly those that have been subject to frequent character assassination on state media, enjoy this level of recognition. It is a sign of Otero Alcántara’s charisma and his bond with *los cubanos de a pié* [everyday Cubans], the citizenry that rarely comes in contact with the upper echelons of the Cuban visual art milieu. They embrace his ethos and follow him on social media, where his live commentary has garnered audiences of thousands.

The split between the state’s vilification of Otero Alcántara and the public support he enjoys is symptomatic of the divide in Cuban society between an elite, dominated by octogenarian military officers that have remained in power for decades, and millions of young Cubans born in the post-Communist era who feel completely disaffected by the political establishment. Otero Alcántara is at the forefront of a generation that is demanding broader civil rights and an end to police repression, institutional racism, gruelling poverty and political stagnancy. A self-taught artist and cultural organiser, he achieved prominence through a sheer force of will and clarity of vision. It was Otero Alcántara who spearheaded the activism on the island in protest of Decree 349 in 2018, a law that effectively criminalised unauthorised cultural activity. Together with a small group of self-taught artists and independent cultural promoters, he founded the San Isidro Movement and took to the streets and social media to declare opposition to the law. Their activism shocked many, but eventually politicised scores of cultural workers and changed the landscape of Cuban art forever.

Otero Alcántara’s art practice is multi-disciplinary, but it always responds to the conditions in his social and political environment. He has often used the streets of Havana as a laboratory, but when confined to his home under house arrest in 2021, he created a series of drawings of the surveillance camera outside his apartment entitled “Still Life: Transforming Violence into Art. UB 694”. In prison, he has produced more drawings of himself as a frowning clown. Prior to his internment, his practice centered on performative public interventions that dramatised the fraught relationship that members of Cuba’s large underclass have with state authorities. In 2019, when the government decreed that citizens were forbidden from wearing clothing embellished with the Cuban flag, Otero Alcántara devised an extended performance entitled “Drapeau” in which he draped a Cuban flag over his body and conducted various everyday life activities. Photographs of him sleeping, cooking, swimming and using the bathroom wrapped in his flag circulated on social media until he was detained, at which point his fellow San Isidro Group members sent out a call for photos of supporters wearing the flag. The scores of responses would eventually become a collective exhibition that symbolically reclaimed the Cuban national symbol as belonging to the people rather than the government.

When the Cuban military’s investment in hotel development led to the demolition of a monument to Cuban Communist Party founder Julio Antonio Mella, Otero Alcántara disguised himself as the fallen hero and stood outside the hotel to

draw attention to the government's hypocrisy in destroying its own revolutionary symbols in order to promote capitalism. When three little girls were killed by a balcony that fell on them while they played in the street, Otero Alcántara donned a hard hat and wandered through neighborhoods with deteriorating housing, marking buildings on the verge of collapse as a warning. His last performance before his imprisonment was a gestural retort to the 2021 Cuban Communist Party Congress: he strapped himself to a garrote, recalling its use during Spanish colonialism as punishment as a silent means of killing enemies and associating that history with the treatment of Cuban citizens by the country's ruling party.

At the beginning of Otero Alcántara's artistic career, his work was somewhat less blistering, but still engaged in social commentary. He has described his work from this period as inquisitive and restorative, as an effort to heal a fractured society. In 2013, he appeared—uninvited—in the middle of a May Day Parade wearing a giant papier mâché version of Fidel Castro's head together with a colleague that wore a similarly large Hugo Chavez head. The performance, entitled "For a Prosperous and Sustainable Socialism", made light of the euphemistic political rhetoric of a failing political order, but also spoke to the aspirations of young citizens anxious to improve their conditions. In 2015, the memorable year of rapprochement between the Obama Administration and the Cuban government, Otero Alcántara donned the spectacular costume of a female Conga parade dancer and circulated among foreign guests at the Havana Biennial, handing out business cards. By mobilising a feminine tropicalist stereotype, Otero Alcántara offered a sly critique of the perception of Cuba as an exotic locale and the situation of Cuban artists who must take on the stereotype to appeal to the global art market.

Otero Alcántara's performances are about the difficulties that poor Cubans encounter every day—the constraints on freedom of expression and movement, the dangers created by crumbling infrastructure, the fraught relations with police. The fact that he has not needed institutional validation from Cuban authorities to develop his craft, disseminate his artwork and garner favorable attention, flies in the face of a political order that seeks to control what citizens can do and what professional status they can claim. Otero Alcántara asserts his right to define himself and speak truth to power through art.



*Bodas de Papel—Unidos por el wifi* ("Paper weddings—united by wifi", 2015).  
Video stills © Yanelys Nuñez

# TRANSFORMAR LA VIOLENCIA EN ARTE

Coco Fusco

En una de nuestras últimas conversaciones antes de su encarcelamiento, Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara me aseguró que, aunque las autoridades cubanas le acosaban, se consolaba con el apoyo de su pueblo, señalando que sus vecinos le avisaban cuando la policía le perseguía. “El otro día me subí a un taxi”, recuerdo que dijo, “y el chofer me reconoció y me dijo que me llevaría gratis a cualquier sitio”. Dudo que otros artistas dentro de Cuba, especialmente los que han sido objeto de frecuentes asesinatos de carácter en los medios de comunicación estatales, disfruten de este nivel de reconocimiento. Es un signo del carisma de Otero Alcántara y de su vínculo con los cubanos de a pie, la ciudadanía que raramente entra en contacto con las altas esferas del arte visual cubano. Los cubanos de a pie, que rara vez tienen contacto con las altas esferas del arte visual cubano, lo siguen en las redes sociales, donde sus comentarios en directo han conseguido una audiencia de miles de personas.

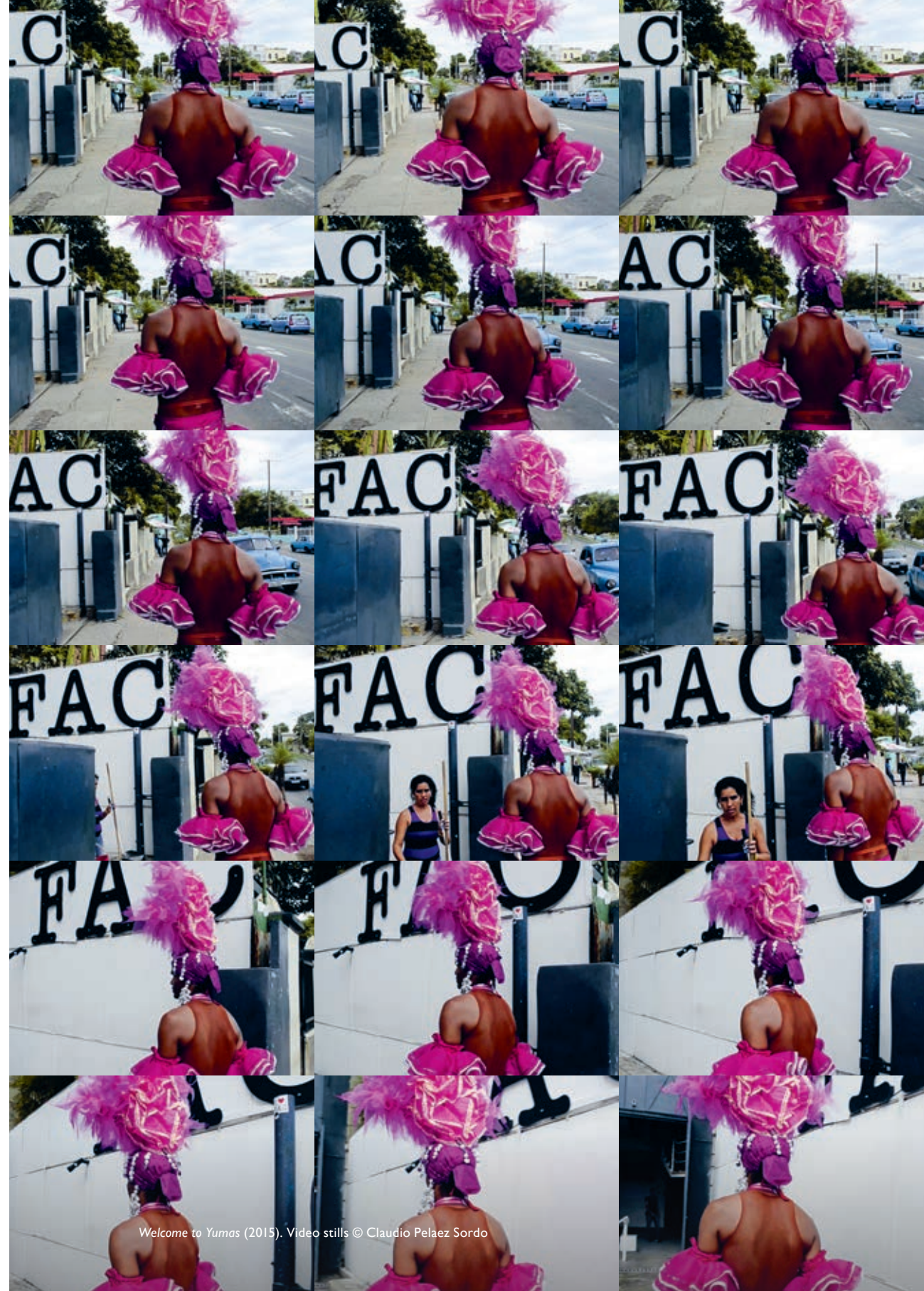
La división entre el vilipendio del Estado a Otero Alcántara y el apoyo público del que goza es sintomática de la división de la sociedad cubana entre una élite dominada por militares octogenarios que han permanecido en el poder durante décadas y millones de jóvenes cubanos nacidos en la era poscomunista que se sienten completamente desahucados del *establishment* político. Otero Alcántara está a la vanguardia de una generación que reclama la ampliación de los derechos civiles y el fin de la represión policial, el racismo institucional, la pobreza extenuante y el estancamiento político. Artista autodidacta y organizador cultural, alcanzó la fama gracias a la fuerza de voluntad y la claridad de su visión. Fue Otero Alcántara quien encabezó el activismo en la isla en protesta por el Decreto 349 en 2018, una ley que efectivamente criminalizaba la cultura no autorizada. Junto con un pequeño grupo de artistas autodidactas y promotores culturales independientes, fundó el Movimiento San Isidro y salió a la calle y a las redes sociales para declarar su oposición a la ley. Su activismo escandalizó a muchos, pero acabó politizando a decenas de trabajadores de la cultura y cambió el panorama del arte cubano para siempre.

La práctica artística de Otero Alcántara es multidisciplinaria, pero siempre responde a las condiciones de su entorno social y político. A menudo ha utilizado las calles de La Habana como laboratorio, pero cuando estuvo confinado en su casa bajo arresto domiciliario en 2021, creó una serie de dibujos de la cámara de vigilancia situada fuera de su apartamento titulada “Naturaleza muerta: Transformar la violencia en arte. UB 694”. En prisión, ha producido más dibujos de sí mismo como un payaso con el ceño fruncido. Antes de su internamiento, su práctica se centraba en intervenciones públicas performativas que dramatizan la tensa relación que tienen los miembros de la gran clase baja de Cuba con las autoridades estatales. En 2019, cuando el Gobierno decretó la prohibición de que los ciudadanos llevaran ropa adornada con la bandera cubana, Otero Alcántara ideó una larga performance titulada “Le Drapeau” en la que se cubría el cuerpo con una bandera cubana y realizaba diversas actividades de la vida cotidiana. Fotografías de él durmiendo, cocinando, nadando y usando el baño envuelto en su bandera circularon por las redes sociales hasta que fue detenido, momento en el que sus compañeros del Grupo San Isidro enviaron un llamamiento para que se hicieran fotos de simpatizantes con la bandera. Las decenas de respuestas acabarían convirtiéndose en una exposición colectiva que reivindicaba simbólicamente el símbolo nacional cubano como perteneciente al pueblo y no al Gobierno.

Cuando la inversión de los militares cubanos en el desarrollo de hoteles llevó a la demolición de un monumento al fundador del Partido Comunista de Cuba, Julio Antonio Mella, Otero Alcántara se disfrazó del héroe caído y se plantó frente al hotel para llamar la atención sobre la hipocresía del Gobierno al destruir sus propios símbolos revolucionarios para promover el capitalismo. Cuando tres niñas murieron a causa de un balcón que les cayó encima mientras jugaban en la calle, Otero Alcántara se puso un casco y recorrió los barrios con viviendas deterioradas, marcando los edificios a punto de derrumbarse como advertencia. Su última actuación antes de ser encarcelado fue una réplica gestual al Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba de 2021: se ató a un garrote, recordando su uso durante el colonialismo español como castigo como medio silencioso para matar a los enemigos y asociando esa historia con el trato que reciben los ciudadanos cubanos por parte del partido gobernante del país.

Al principio de la carrera artística de Otero Alcántara, su obra era algo menos ampulosa, pero seguía haciendo comentarios sociales. Ha descrito su trabajo de este periodo como inquisitivo y restaurador, como un esfuerzo por sanar una sociedad fracturada. En 2013, apareció -sin ser invitado- en medio de un desfile del Primero de Mayo llevando una versión gigante de papel maché de la cabeza de Fidel Castro junto a un colega que llevaba una cabeza de Hugo Chávez de tamaño similar. La actuación, titulada “Por un socialismo próspero y sostenible”, se burlaba de la retórica política eufemística de un orden político fallido, pero también hablaba de las aspiraciones de los jóvenes ciudadanos ansiosos por mejorar sus condiciones. En 2015, el memorable año de acercamiento entre la Administración Obama y el gobierno cubano, Otero Alcántara se puso el espectacular traje de una bailarina de desfile de Conga y circuló entre los invitados extranjeros a la Bienal de La Habana, repartiendo tarjetas de visita. Al movilizar un estereotipo femenino tropicalista, Otero Alcántara ofreció una crítica astuta a la percepción de Cuba como lugar exótico y a la situación de los artistas cubanos que deben asumir el estereotipo para atraer al mercado del arte mundial.

Las actuaciones de Otero Alcántara tratan de las dificultades que los cubanos pobres encuentran cada día: las restricciones a la libertad de expresión y de movimiento, los peligros creados por las infraestructuras en ruinas, las tensas relaciones con la policía. El hecho de que no haya necesitado la validación institucional de las autoridades cubanas para desarrollar su oficio, divulgar su obra artística y obtener una atención favorable se enfrenta a un orden político que pretende controlar lo que los ciudadanos pueden hacer y el estatus profesional que pueden reclamar. Otero Alcántara reivindica su derecho a definirse y a decir la verdad al poder a través de su arte.





Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara as Miss Bienal, for the 12th Habana Bienal (2015).  
Photo © Emanuelle Mozzetii



*Los perros también van al cielo* ("Dogs also go to heaven"), from the series *Con todos y para el bien de unos cuantos* ("With everyone and for the good of a few", 2012–2013).  
© Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara







¿Donde está Mella? ("Where is Mella?", 2017).  
Photos © Yanelys Nuñez

ARGENTINA  
LITERATURE

MARÍA MEDRANO

ARGENTINA  
LITERATURA



María Medrano. Courtesy Association YoNoFui

María Medrano is an Argentinian writer, poet and editor. In addition to their artistic and poetic practice, Medrano is a prison abolition activist and co-founder of YoNoFui, a non-profit trans-feminist organisation that works in arts and crafts projects with formerly incarcerated women and individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community. YoNoFui amplifies their voices beyond the prison walls, allowing the reassembling of their identities in the face of a punitive and unjust reality that tends to neglect the potential of their life trajectories.

Medrano's encounter with people deprived of freedom began in 1996 when they worked in an investigating court and had to take a statement from a Russian woman who had been detained. Contrary to what any judicial official would have done, they decided to visit her in prison for three and a half years. From this experience, they published the book of poems *Unidad 3*. In 2002, they were invited by the House of Poetry of Buenos Aires to give a workshop in Unit 3 of Ezeiza Prison, the same unit where they visited the detained Russian woman. They left their judicial career to dedicate themselves to prison abolition and began the work of the collective YoNoFui.

Medrano is a pioneer in developing collective spaces and community networks that rethink how we relate to each other, focussing on female and LGBTQIA+ prisoners and ex-prisoners. One of the main objectives of YoNoFui is to turn prisons into productive and nurturing environments, to create concrete opportunities for people outside of prison and to create a discourse of the possibility of change. Within the prisons Medrano conducts different activities and workshops that offer women skills to become self-sufficient, such as carpentry, handmade bookbinding, textile design and photography.

In 2010, together with their colleagues of YoNoFui, Medrano founded Tinta Revuelta, an editorial collective of non-binary people, lesbian, bisexual and cis women that had participated in the writing workshop. This publishing group has used writing as a tool to invent new ways of living and socialising for women who have been marginalised by society and who are deprived of their freedom. They have published several publications including the *YoSoy* magazine that articulates reflections on prison, the effects of the militarisation of society and encounters with freedom that are experienced by the women involved.

Through YoNoFui, Medrano works to improve the relationship between women and individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community and correctional officers by enabling the "monitoring" of the penitentiary service in pursuit of defending the rights of people deprived of freedom. Outside of prison YoNoFui offers workshops and spaces for women and the LGBTQIA+ community to imagine a new life and adopt the practical skills and attitudes that can make that new life into a reality. It provides specific tools for autonomy, self-management and cooperation based on collective care, seeking to create life projects that help tackle the root causes of mass incarceration.

María Medrano es una escritora, poeta y editora argentina. Además de sus propias prácticas poéticas y artísticas, Medrano es también una activista de la abolición de la prisión y es cofundadora de la organización transfeminista, sin fines de lucro, YoNoFui, la cual trabaja con mujeres exprisioneras y con personas de la comunidad LGBTQIA+ en proyectos de artes y oficios. YoNoFui amplifica sus voces más allá de los muros de la prisión y les permite volver a armar sus identidades ante una realidad injusta y punitiva la cual suele descuidar el potencial que hay en sus trayectorias de vida.

El encuentro de Medrano con las personas privadas de libertad empezó en 1996 trabajando en un juzgado de instrucción donde un día tuvo que tomar declaración de una mujer rusa que había sido detenida. Ahí, y contrariamente a lo que cualquier funcionario judicial hubiera hecho, decidieron ir a verla a la cárcel durante un periodo de 3 años y medio. Esa experiencia resultó en la publicación del libro de poemas "U.3". En 2002, fueron invitadas por la Casa de Poesía de Buenos Aires a dar un taller en la Unidad 3 de la Cárcel de Ezeiza, que era la misma unidad donde habían visitado a la mujer rusa detenida. Ellas renunciaron a la carrera judicial para dedicarse a la abolición de la prisión y empezar con la labor del colectivo YoNoFui.

Medrano es pionera en generar espacios colectivos y redes comunitarias que replantean cómo nos relacionamos unos con otros, enfocándose en las mujeres presas y LGBTQIA+ y en las exprisioneras. Uno de los principales objetivos de YoNoFui es el de convertir las cárceles en entornos productivos y enriquecedores, crear oportunidades concretas para las personas fuera de la prisión, y crear un discurso de la posibilidad de cambio. Dentro de las cárceles, Medrano dirige diferentes actividades y talleres, tales como la carpintería, la encuadernación manual, el diseño textil y la fotografía, que proporcionan a las mujeres habilidades para que puedan ser autosuficientes.

En 2010, Medrano y sus compañeras de YoNoFui fundaron Tinta Revuelta, un colectivo editorial integrado por personas no binarias, lesbianas, bisexuales y mujeres cis que asistieron al taller de escritura. Dicho colectivo editorial ha utilizado la escritura como herramienta para poder inventar nuevas formas de vivir y de socializarse para mujeres que han sido marginadas por la sociedad y que están privadas de su libertad. Han realizado varias publicaciones en las que se incluye la revista *YoSoy*, que articula la reflexión sobre la cárcel, los efectos de la militarización de la sociedad y el encuentro con la libertad que experimentan las mujeres involucradas.

A través de YoNoFui, Medrano logra mejorar la relación entre las mujeres y las personas de la comunidad LGBTQIA+ y los funcionarios de prisión, permitiendo "monitorear" el servicio penitenciario en pos de la defensa de los derechos de las personas privadas de libertad. Fuera de la cárcel YoNoFui brinda talleres y espacios para que las mujeres y la comunidad LGBTQIA+ puedan imaginarse una nueva vida y adoptar las habilidades prácticas y actitudes necesarias para que esa nueva vida se haga realidad. Proporciona herramientas específicas para la autonomía, la autogestión, y la cooperación que está basada en la asistencia compartida, y busca crear proyectos de vida que contribuyan a abordar las causas fundamentales del encarcelamiento en masa.

## MARÍA MEDRANO IS HONOURED:

- FOR THEIR EXCEPTIONAL AND IMPORTANT COMMUNITY WORK WITHIN THE PENITENTIARY SYSTEM
- FOR USING POETRY AND LITERATURE AS A TOOL FOR CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND EMPOWERING MARGINALISED WOMEN AND MEMBERS OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY TO RE-ENTER SOCIETY
- FOR CHALLENGING THE LATIN AMERICAN PENITENTIARY SYSTEM BY WORKING ON THE BASIS OF FAIR TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION THROUGH ARTS AND CULTURE
- FOR CREATING A DISCOURSE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE IN AN ENVIRONMENT THAT IS DESIGNED TO DO THE OPPOSITE
- FOR MAKING A DIRECT IMPACT THROUGH LITERARY PRACTICE, BY HELPING (FORMERLY) INCARCERATED WOMEN AND MEMBERS OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY TO RECOVER THEIR VOICE AND TO REBUILD THEIR IDENTITY
- FOR SIGNALLING THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF CULTURE; SHOWING HOW WRITING, POETRY AND VISUAL ARTS CAN BE POWERFUL TOOLS TO RECONSTRUCT ONESELF

## SE HONRA A MARÍA MEDRANO:

- POR SUS IMPORTANTES Y EXCEPCIONALES TRABAJOS COMUNITARIOS DENTRO DEL SISTEMA PENITENCIARIO
- POR UTILIZAR LA LITERATURA Y LA POESÍA COMO HERRAMIENTA PARA CREAR OPORTUNIDADES Y EMPODERAR A LAS MUJERES MARGINADAS Y A LOS MIEMBROS DE LA COMUNIDAD LGBTQIA+ PARA QUE PUEDAN REINSERTARSE A LA SOCIEDAD
- POR SUPONER UN RETO AL SISTEMA PENITENCIARIO DE LATINOAMÉRICA TRABAJANDO SOBRE LA BASE DEL TRATAMIENTO JUSTO Y LA REHABILITACIÓN A TRAVÉS DE LAS ARTES Y LA CULTURA
- POR CREAR UN DISCURSO DE LA POSIBILIDAD DE CAMBIO EN UN ENTORNO QUE ESTÁ DISEÑADO PARA LO CONTRARIO
- POR TENER UN IMPACTO DIRECTO, A TRAVÉS DE LA PRÁCTICA LITERARIA, Y AYUDAR A (EX)RECLUSAS Y A MIEMBROS DE LA COMUNIDAD LGBTQIA+ A RECUPERAR SU PROPIA VOZ Y A RECONSTRUIR SU IDENTIDAD
- POR SEÑALAR EL IMPACTO TRANSFORMADOR QUE EJERCE LA CULTURA, MOSTRANDO CÓMO LA ESCRITURA, LA POESÍA Y LAS ARTES VISUALES PUEDEN SER HERRAMIENTAS PODEROSAS PARA RECONSTRUIRSE UNO MISMO

# BUILDING AND BREAKING DOWN DOORS

Mari Bardet

*Among the gestures of the world  
I received the gesture of doors.  
I've seen them in daylight  
shut tight or half-open  
and turning their fox-brown backs.  
Why did we make them  
to become their prisoners?*

*(...)*  
Gabriela Mistral, *Doors* (1949)

María Medrano writes poems which, like doors, open onto worlds that are incredibly exposed and yet so seldom seen. Doors that let in stories barely audible from the confinements of prisons in all their forms and existences. Doors crafted with her hands, half carpenter's and half bricklayer's, that attest to the persistent rhythm of the deprivation of freedom and the unbearable sound of the bars as they close. Doors that cut out a paradoxical frame so that the deafening silence that surrounds these places of confinement and torture, with voices, screams and murmurs that no one wants to hear, can be heard.

*time is passing you by too quickly  
and you want to speak the unspeakable*

*they call ward by ward  
you shudder at the sound of those voices calling out  
and the crush of all those people embracing...  
they go ward by ward, and you stay there 1 hour  
until the internal count is finished, only then can you leave  
-when they want, when they open the door, and the other one  
and the other one and the other one-<sup>1</sup>*

She wrote short verses like cracks in the walls, sweeping away the usual senses that continue to make prisons an almost natural landscape. She constructed doors with poetry, not to metaphorise them, nor to embellish them, nor to make them more liveable. She outlined them with the precision of the finger that traces the limits of confinement, making the sounds of the keys that open and close our mouths and our ears in each of the institutions we inhabit, reverberate.

*I stop hearing the voices  
to hear the words  
so that I can say  
that I too  
knew the language of speaking.*

*there is language, and there are languages  
within languages.*

*we should ... or we must...<sup>2</sup>*

A trajectory can be traced, from that first year of her regular visits to the prison in 1996 until 2021 and the opening of the collective house at Calle Gavilán 256 in the Flores neighbourhood of Buenos Aires, that links writing to collective

organisation. A trajectory which, says María Medrano, allowed her to “give herself a language”, and which also gave us a language, opening the door to the collective dimension of poetic language.

Yo no fui (“It wasn’t me”) was first the name of a writing workshop in the context of imprisonment that made writing a collective task. And it quickly became a code for questioning the guilt that characterises a justice system that has been naturalised as punishment. It then became the name of a collective created 20 years ago by many hands and languages that goes beyond the name itself. Thus, “Yo no fui” is a shared language of words and gestures that weave a framework of support, of “me, too”. It turns poetic craftsmanship into a cooperative of the collective adventure that sustains other possible lives, with artisan initiatives, reading and writing workshops inside and outside the prisons, a kitchen open to political alliances, and book editions and publications. Through these doors, they created a refuge where mutual support is a daily practice rooted in feminist work that questions what justice does (not) mean.

With the skill of a master locksmith, María Medrano holds and leans on the frames of the doors of the “Yo no fui” house. With an ironic gaze, they sabotage the mechanism used to automatically shut down the paths of their companions who have passed through prison, and on the well-oiled classist, racist, patriarchal mechanisms that open and close the doors of police stations and penitentiaries. Keeping that door ajar, they twist the umpteenth story of police violence, of social injustice, to continue to ignite the spark that prevents us from normalising this repeated injustice.



1 María Medrano, “6:30”, in *Unidad 3*, 1998  
2 María Medrano, “visita”, in *Unidad 3*, 1998

# ARMANDO Y DESARMANDO PUERTAS

*Entre los gestos del mundo  
recibí el que dan las puertas.  
En la luz yo las he visto  
o selladas o entreabiertas  
y volviendo sus espaldas  
del color de la vulpeja.  
¿Por qué fue que las hicimos  
para ser sus prisioneras?  
(...)  
Gabriela Mistral, Puertas (1949)*

María Medrano escribe poemas como puertas que se abren sobre mundos tan a la vista y tan poco vistos. Puertas que dejan pasar relatos apenas oíbles desde los encierros que hacen a las cárceles en todas sus formas y existencias. Puertas hechas con sus manos medio de carpintera medio de albañil, que atestan el ritmo pertinaz de la privación de libertad y el sonido insoportable de las rejas que se cierran. Puertas que recortan un marco paradójico para que salga un poco hacia afuera el silencio ensordecedor que hay alrededor de esos centros de encierro y tortura, con voces, gritos y murmullos que nadie quiere escuchar.

*el tiempo se te pasa demasiado rápido  
y querés decir lo que no tiene palabra*

*llaman pabellón por pabellón  
te da escalofrío el sonido de esas voces llamando  
y el conglomerado de toda esa gente que se abraza...  
ellas se van pabellón por pabellón, y te quedás ahí 1 hora  
hasta que termina el recuento interno, recién ahí te podés ir  
-cuando ellos quieren, cuando ellos te abren la puerta,  
y la otra y la otra y la otra-<sup>1</sup>*

Escribió versos cortos como rajaduras en los muros, barreteando los sentidos comunes que siguen haciendo de las cárceles un paisaje casi natural. Hizo puertas con poesía, no para metaforizarlas, ni para embellecerlas, ni para volverlas más vivibles. Las trazó con la minucia del dedo que recorre los límites del encierro, haciendo retumbar los sonidos de las llaves que abren y cierran nuestras bocas y nuestros oídos en cada una de las instituciones que habitamos.

*dejo de oír las voces  
para escuchar las palabras  
para poder decir  
que yo también  
sabía el idioma de hablar.*

*hay lenguaje, y dentro del lenguaje  
hay lenguajes.*

*deberíamos ... o debiéramos...<sup>2</sup>*

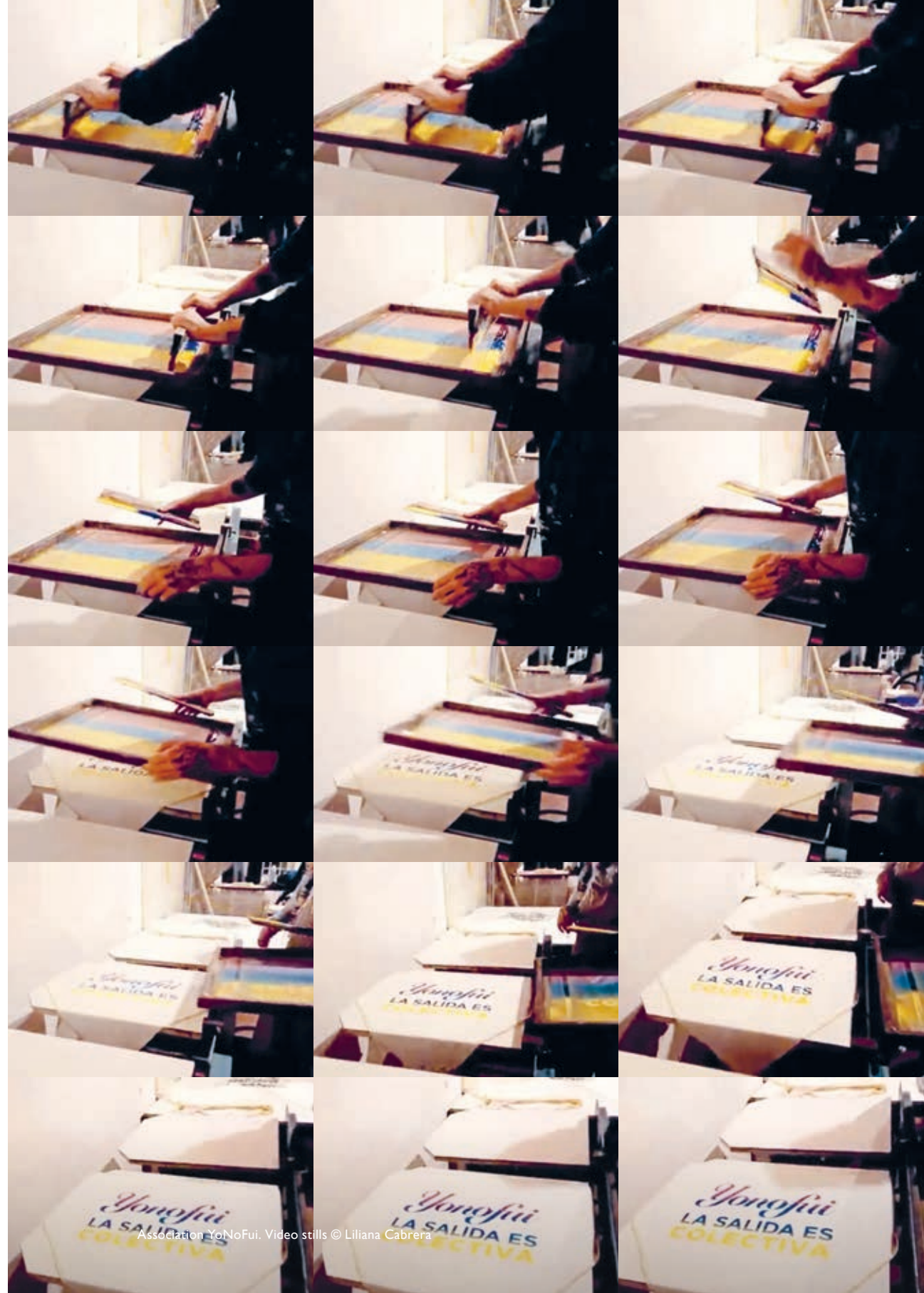
Desde aquel primer año 1996 de visitas regulares a la cárcel, hasta 2021 y la apertura de la casa colectiva en la calle Gavilán 256 del barrio de Flores en

Mari Bardet

Buenos Aires, se dibuja una trayectoria que liga la escritura a la organización colectiva. Un trayecto que, dice María Medrano, le permitió “dar(se) una lengua”, y que, también, nos dio una lengua, abriendo la puerta a la dimensión colectiva de la lengua poética.

“Yo no fui” fue primero el nombre de un taller de escritura en contexto de encierro que hizo del escribir una tarea colectiva. Y se hizo contraseña rápida de cuestionamiento de las culpas que marcan el sistema de una justicia naturalizada como castigo. Se volvió luego nombre de un colectivo creado hace 20 años de a muchas manos y lenguas que desbordan el nombre propio. Así, YoNoFui es una lengua común de palabras y gestos que se hacen trama de sostén, de “segundeo”. Hacer de la artesanía poética una cooperativa de la aventura colectiva que sostiene otras vidas posibles, con iniciativas de producción artesanal, talleres de lectura y escritura adentro y afuera de las cárceles, una cocina abierta a las alianzas políticas, y ediciones y publicaciones de libros. Se hicieron, con esas puertas, una casa refugio donde el apoyo mutuo es práctica cotidiana de un hacer feminista que vuelve a poner en cuestión lo que justicia (no) quiere decir.

Con el arte de una astucia cerrajera, María Medrano sostiene y se apoya en los marcos de esas puertas de la casa de YoNoFui. Sabotea con una mirada irónica el mecanismo con el que automáticamente se vuelven a cerrar sobre las trayectorias de sus compañeras que pasaron por la cárcel, y sobre los aceitados mecanismos clasistas, racistas, patriarcales con los que se abren y se cierran las puertas de las comisarías y de los centros penitenciarios. Manteniendo esa puerta entreabierta, tuerce la enésima historia de violencia policial, de injusticia social, para seguir prendiendo la chispa que permite no normalizar la injusticia que se repite.



1 María Medrano, “6:30”, en *Unidad 3*, 1998  
2 María Medrano, “visita”, en *Unidad 3*, 1998



# YONOFUI... FINDING OUR WAY IN THE WORLD

María Medrano

# YONOFUI O NUESTRA MANERA DE ESTAR EN EL MUNDO

*...at this point when our words are erased, the unfamiliar is commonplace, memories are buried deep within, physical contact with others is unnatural, and any interaction with money or the human body is unusual: to pick up a book is to make a political point, to talk about its content is to share new ideas, and to have access to other writers is to escape fleetingly...*

Laura Ross during her reading at the first Festival of Poetry in Prison (Festival de Poesía en la Cárcel, 2007)

When I started to question my place in the world, I sought sanctuary in writing. I was always quite shy and reserved, and writing was the medium through which I learned to express myself openly. It gave me a voice.

When I worked as an au pair at the age of 17, a widely read author employed me for a time to look after his young child. Under his influence, I started to read large volumes of poetry and practise writing. I'd leave his house every Friday with a stack of books and once a week we'd sit down to refine and go over poems verse by verse.

While it had never occurred to me to take a humanities or a law course, in 1996 I found myself working as a court clerk. The job gave me my first experience of the prison system. The very first statement I recorded was made by a girl from Belarus who had been arrested on the charge of drug trafficking. She knew no Spanish. She was cold, hungry, afraid and unaware of what was happening to her. It was a life-changing experience for me. I left my job as a court clerk and started working in a grilled chicken restaurant. I visited Anna in Ezeiza's correctional facility for women (Unit 3) over a 3-year period.

I drew inspiration from my visits to—and experiences of—the prison to write *Unidad 3*, an anthology of poems published in 1998 by Ediciones del Diego. On the back of this publication, I was invited by Casa de la Poesía in 2001 to organise a workshop at Ezeiza's Unit 3. The impact of the initial poetry workshop transcended the confines of the facility and provided a platform for women—in and out of prison—to come together in a spirit of solidarity. That was how the YoNoFui (“It Wasn’t Me”) initiative came about. At that time, emotions ran high and the air was filled with a palpable sense of collective energy. There was a growing trend of combining artistic pursuits with political and social activism.

Writing was somehow connected to the sense of solidarity from the very beginning or, to put it another way, writing was the outlet through which we expressed our solidarity:

*...en esta instancia donde se nos borran las palabras, en que lo ajeno es habitual, donde el agua de la memoria tiene pozos y no es natural un abrazo, ni la relación con el dinero, ni con el cuerpo: tener un libro en la mano es político, conversar sobre lo leído es compartir nuevos discursos, y acceder a otros escritores es poder estar afuera por un rato...*

Laura Ross durante su lectura en el Primer Festival de Poesía en la Cárcel (2007)

Llegué a la escritura cuando empecé a sentirme incómoda en el mundo. Siempre fui algo tímida y antisocial, y la escritura vino a tirarme una soga para no quedar encerrada en mí misma. Darme lengua.

A los 17 años trabajaba cuidando niños y durante un tiempo cuidé al hijito de un escritor de culto. Con él empecé a leer mucha poesía, a trabajar la escritura. Todos los viernes me iba de su casa con una pila de libros y cada semana nos sentábamos a corregir, a repasar verso por verso.

Nunca se me dio por estudiar letras, ni tampoco derecho, pero en el año 1996 me encontré trabajando como escribiente en un tribunal del poder judicial. Fue allí que me topé por primera vez con el mundo de la cárcel. La primera vez que tomé una declaración indagatoria, fue a una chica que venía de Bielorusia y que la habían detenido por contrabando de drogas. No hablaba español, venía con frío, hambre, miedo y sin entender nada de lo que estaba transitando. Este encuentro cambió mi vida para siempre: renuncié a mi trabajo en el tribunal y me fui a trabajar a un parripollo; y durante 3 años visité a Anna en la Unidad 3 de Ezeiza.

A partir de estas visitas al penal, y como parte de ese proceso, escribí *Unidad 3*, un librito de poemas que salió publicado en 1998 por Ediciones del Diego, y fue a partir de esa publicación que a fines del 2001 la Casa de la Poesía me convocó para dar un taller en la Unidad 3 de Ezeiza. Este incipiente taller de poesía traspasó las rejas y fue el impulso a tramar una red de complicidades entre mujeres privadas de libertad y otras que segundeaban desde afuera. Este fue el inicio de YoNoFui. Eran momentos de mucha ebullición y de mucha energía colectiva. Cada vez más la actividad artística se mezclaba con el activismo político y social.

De alguna manera la relación entre escritura y segundeo estuvieron desde el inicio, o mejor dicho, la escritura fue nuestro modo de segundearnos. Segundear, hacer la segunda, no dejar tirada, acompañar, bancar la toma, estar ahí con otrx, espalda con espalda. Entonces dejé de escribir poesía para narrarme en colectivo,

helping out, lending a hand, offering assistance, showing support, simply being there and standing shoulder to shoulder. I stopped writing poetry and started to speak at events in a bid to inspire others. The group we created around the concept of solidarity enabled us to find our way in the world.

While YoNoFui started out as a poetry workshop held in a correctional facility, as more and more of our sisters were released from prison, the need to guarantee the material reproduction of life was thrown into sharp relief. Money was needed. Money to eat, find a home, buy clothing, take care of the children. Money. We came up with the idea of organising practical initiatives within the group.

We dreamed of setting up our very own makeshift version of Bauhaus as a school for Hispanic miscreants. We aspired to create our very own educational workshop. Our specialist activities include drawing, serigraphy, binding, photography, textiles and carpentry, to name but a few. We have become a Vocational Training Centre approved by the Buenos Aires Department of Education. We are also recognised as a worker cooperative, an audiovisual group and an editorial group. We are currently in the process of launching a new cooperative project called “*bell, toda belleza es política*”—an aesthetics and body care centre.

#### WRITING TO CAUSE A STIR

Tinta Revuelta is an editorial group that promotes the practices of reading, writing, reflection and participation in collective projects. We set out to closely examine the positive and negative aspects of our lives, address the culture of violence, challenge the sentences passed against us and resist every way in which we are repressed by this system whose roots date back to a time long before we were even born. At Tinta Revuelta, we ask questions and we challenge the orthodoxy of the structures that underpin the status quo of punishment, imprisonment and torture. Writing to promote our interests gives us the time and space we need to ensure that every individual has the chance to be seen and heard, to learn and to establish conventions independent of those we have inherited. Tinta Revuelta gives us the opportunity to transform our lives by changing our practices and challenging our prejudices.

The formation of a group that speaks with one voice has been—and always will be—part of a survival strategy. For groups of people whose existence is called into question by their identities or social circumstances, this group

para tejerme en palabras con otras. Hicimos del segundeo un colectivo y del colectivo una manera de estar en el mundo.

YoNoFui comenzó siendo un taller de poesía dentro de una cárcel, pero luego y a medida que las compañeras iban recuperando la libertad, la necesidad de garantizar la reproducción material de la vida se hacía vital. Hacía falta dinero. Dinero para comer, dinero para alquilar, dinero para vestirse, dinero para maternar. Dinero. Fue ahí que empezamos a organizar espacios productivos dentro del colectivo.

Teníamos el sueño de armar nuestra Bauhaus sudaka, mutante y cachivache, una escuela para les desobedientes. Soñábamos con nuestra propia escuela-taller. Sumamos dibujo, serigrafía, encuadernación, fotografía, textil, carpintería, entre otras actividades. Hoy somos un Centro de Formación Profesional, una escuela reconocida por el Ministerio de Educación de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. Somos además una cooperativa de trabajo, un colectivo audiovisual, y un colectivo editorial. Y en estos días estamos lanzando un nuevo proyecto cooperativo “*bell, toda belleza es política*” un centro de estética y cuidado corporal.

#### ESCRITURAS AMOTINADAS

Tinta Revuelta, es un espacio de lectura, escritura, reflexión, y elaboración colectiva. Como parte de nuestro proceso fuimos escuchando nuestros dolores, nuestros placeres, fuimos desnaturalizando las violencias, cuestionando las condenas que cayeron sobre nuestros cuerpos y desobedeciendo a todo lo que este sistema tenía preparado para nosotros desde antes de que llegemos a este mundo. En Tinta Revuelta, nos hacemos preguntas, disputamos a las narrativas hegemónicas que traducen el castigo, encierro y tortura como gestualidades totales para mantener una normalidad aparente. Escribir para nosotrxs es darnos el tiempo y el espacio para vernos y escucharnos, para aprender y crear otras narrativas a las aprendidas. Tinta Revuelta es el modo que encontramos de transformar nuestras vidas: nuestras prácticas y nuestras subjetividades.

Haber creado un colectivo para crear una lengua conjunta fue y es un modo de sobrevivir. Para colectivos de personas que solemos ser vulneradas por nuestras identidades o por nuestras condiciones sociales, haber armado este espacio es la posibilidad para existir. Muchas personas que sobreviven el encierro nunca encuentran asidero, refugio o no vuelven a hablar nunca de la experiencia. Para nosotrxs es todo lo contrario, es el espacio para poder conversar y para escuchar lo que en ningún otro espacio se puede escuchar o decir.

gives us the space we need to breathe. Many people do not have access to support structures or safe spaces when they are released from prison, or even the opportunity to discuss their experiences. Our aim is to remedy that situation by providing a forum where people can talk about the kinds of issues that they would not address in any other context.

In this particular setting, our concept of freedom is not about the rationalisation of the penal system or the scrutiny of the actions of our sisters. It is about giving our sisters alternative ways to interact and overcome the adversity of their incarceration.

#### PRISONS WERE INTRODUCED IN COLONIAL TIMES

Prisons are centres of torture. Prisoners live in appalling conditions. They face multiple challenges. The number-one aim is to survive and stay alive. So many of our sisters have lost their lives in the past. They are also subjected to the social stigma of being a womxn, lesbian, dark-skinned, perhaps foreign, and an ex-convict, something which many in society consider to be unforgivable. It's like being branded with an indelible mark.

The concept of imprisonment was introduced in Argentina during colonial times. The model was exported by Europeans who sought to impose discipline and control on the indigenous populations of Latin America. The first prison in Argentina was built many years before the creation of the Nation State, in 1608, Argentina is one of the “whitest” countries in Latin America. Prisons are heavily populated by people of colour and people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Prisons are society's way of containing and shaping the population. This same rationale is used to justify the militarisation of our societies. Let's look at data provided by an Argentinian criminal lawyer, Claudia Cesaroni. In 2019, the primary cause of death was road traffic accidents (4,189), followed successively by suicide (3,569) and first-degree murder (2,291). These figures speak for themselves, especially if we consider that the most extensive campaigns launched both by progressive and right-wing governments focus predominantly on security, the creation of internal enemies, and the defence of private property and capital. However, no government formulates policies to counteract the causes of road traffic accidents, let alone to prevent suicide, the rate of which is so alarming that no one dares to broach the subject. The aim of capitalism in this guise is patently obvious to us: that we should live our lives exclusively

La libertad en este contexto tan particular es no entrar en las lógicas del servicio penitenciario, no devenir policía de tus mismas compañeras. La libertad es encontrar compañeras con las cuales construir otras formas de vincularnos y sobrevivir al encierro.

#### LAS CÁRCELES DESCENDIERON DE LOS BARCOS

Las cárceles son centros de tortura. Las condiciones en las que viven quienes las habitan, son desastrosas. Hay muchos desafíos. El primero es sobrevivir físicamente y que no te maten. A lo largo de nuestra historia perdimos muchas compañeras. Luego sobrevivir al estigma con el que la sociedad te etiqueta, porque sos mujer, porque sos lesbiana, porque sos marrona, porque quizás sos extranjera y porque pasaste por la cárcel, algo imperdonable para muchas personas, una marca que nunca vas a poder sacarte de encima.

Las cárceles en Argentina descendieron de los barcos de la colonización. Un modelo exportado de Europa para disciplinar y controlar a las poblaciones originarias en América Latina. La primera cárcel en Argentina fue construida en 1608, muchos años antes de la creación del Estado-Nación. Argentina es uno de los países más blanquizados de América Latina. Las cárceles están pobladas de personas racializadas y personas empobrecidas.

Las cárceles son el modo que se encontró socialmente para contener y moldear a las poblaciones. Es de este modo que se justifica que nuestras sociedades estén militarizadas: vamos a observar unos datos que nos acerca una abogada penalista Argentina, Claudia Cesaroni. En 2019, la primera causa de muerte fue por accidentes viales (4189), la segunda fueron muertes por suicidio (3569) y en tercer lugar están las muertes por homicidio intencionales (2291). Estas cifras hablan por sí mismas, si observamos que las campañas más fuertes que hacen tanto los gobiernos progresistas como los gobiernos de derecha, están centradas en las políticas de seguridad, en la creación de enemigos internos, en la defensa a la propiedad privada y al capital. Pero ningún Gobierno hace política con los accidentes viales y muchísimo menos con el suicidio, de hecho la cifra del suicidio es tan alarmante que nadie la discute. Es muy claro para nosotrxs lo que este capitalismo quiere: quiere que vivamos y que consumamos a costa de todo, no importa que vida tengamos. Por ejemplo, nosotrxs estamos muy preocupadxs porque en este momento en Argentina se están construyendo más de 7 nuevas cárceles y muchas comisarías con una

to consume, irrespective of quality of life. For instance, we are particularly concerned about the way in which the progressive government in Argentina is currently allocating considerable public funds to the construction of seven new prisons and multiple police stations, at a time when it could be focusing on alternatives to imprisonment. This is a political choice.

Moreover, we believe it is important to highlight the views that some feminist groups have in relation to public prison policies. Many schools of feminist thought (hegemonic) have agreed in recent years that sentences should be more severe. We find that stance highly contradictory. For example, if we consider that the rape of eight in every ten young girls in our country takes place in a family environment, why then do we not shift our attention to the heterosexual family and what is allowed to happen in cases where a young girl is attacked in such a way? By focusing on prisons, the spotlight is placed on crimes which have already been committed, and we want to eradicate the culture of rape by addressing its root causes.

This is a very sensitive issue because Argentinian politics has historically been—and continues to be—a multi-faceted phenomenon. But do you know the one thing on which all political eras in Argentina have agreed, whether they have been marked by dictatorship or democratic rule? The foundations of that society have always been underpinned by the prison system.

#### WRITING AND IMPRISONMENT

The relationship between writing and imprisonment is at once contradictory and stimulating. Prison, by its very nature, stifles imagination, imposes discipline and restricts any attempt at independent expression. Writing in circumstances when one's creativity is subdued by periods of imprisonment can serve as an outlet through which to embark on a journey of self-discovery, recognise one's own potential and embrace the opportunities that life has in store. At the start of our workshops, many of our sisters remark that they don't see the point of the initiative, so it is amazing to witness how their opinion changes as they engage in a range of written, rhythmic and musical pursuits. As politicians are in a position to promote creative initiatives and to adopt a more progressive approach to imprisonment, it is up to them to act.

*This text was written in response to questions sent to María Medrano*

inversión pública descomunal y esto lo está realizando un gobierno progresista que podría encontrar alternativas para poder reducir las políticas de encarcelamiento, eso es político.

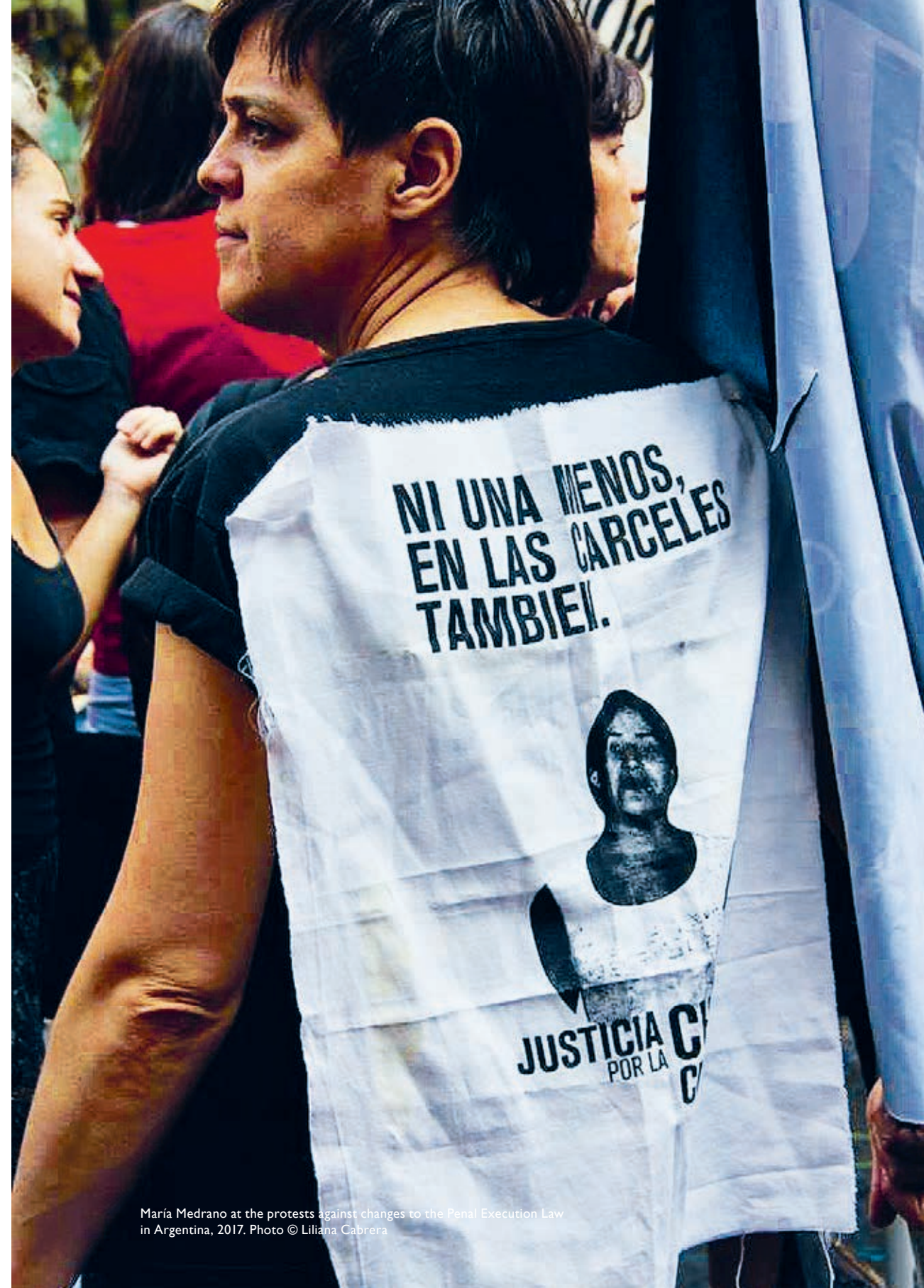
Otra cuestión que nos parece importante resaltar en relación a las políticas públicas en relación a las cárceles es la cuestión cárcel-feminismos (hegemónicos) en los últimos años que se concentran en el agravamiento de las penas. Para nosotrxs esto es muy contradictorio. Por ejemplo, si observamos que en nuestro país 8 de cada 10 niñas son violadas en los ámbitos familiares, entonces por qué no vamos directamente a cuestionar a la familia heterosexual, ¿qué es lo que una familia permite para que puedan suceder estos acontecimientos? Si vamos a poner el foco en la cárcel, estamos discutiendo sobre el hecho ya consumado y nosotrxs queremos destruir la cultura de la violación, pero antes de que suceda.

Esta pregunta es muy sensible porque la política histórica argentina tiene y tuvo facetas muy distintas. Pero ¿saben en lo único que coincidieron todas las etapas políticas en Argentina, con dictadura o con democracia? Que siempre existieron cárceles para sostener a esta sociedad.

#### ESCRITURA Y ENCIERRO

La relación entre escritura y encarcelamiento muchas veces es contradictoria y otras es potenciadora. La cárcel en sí misma es un espacio contra imaginario, un espacio disciplinador y obturador de cualquier intento de gestualidad emancipadora. El encierro provoca un recorte de las imaginaciones, es por eso que en esos momentos la escritura se presenta como una fuga, como la posibilidad de encontrarse con uno mismo, de reconocer las propias potencialidades y de imaginar otros posibles. Muchas compañeras dicen no ver ningún futuro cuando comenzamos los talleres, es impresionante en el tránsito ver cómo esto se va torciendo gracias a la escritura, al ritmo, a la musicalidad. Alimentar los imaginarios es una tarea política, hacerle un agujero a los encierros, también.

*Este texto fue escrito en respuesta a las preguntas enviadas a María Medrano*



María Medrano at the protests against changes to the Penal Execution Law in Argentina, 2017. Photo © Liliana Cabrera



YoNoFui press conference in front of the Argentinian National Ministry of Justice after the 8 March Legal Framework repressed imprisoned women's rights, 2018. The banner reads, "The 800,000 also includes the ones in jail". Photo © Luis Beltrán



María Medrano at the 8 March Legal Framework press conference, 2018.  
Photo © Luis Beltrán



María Medrano during a street action at Barrio de Flores, Buenos Aires, 2018.  
Photo © Luis Beltrán



BASTA!!!  
NO!!! MAS NIÑXS  
EN LAS CARCELES

YoNoFui

UN NIÑO  
EN LA CARCEL

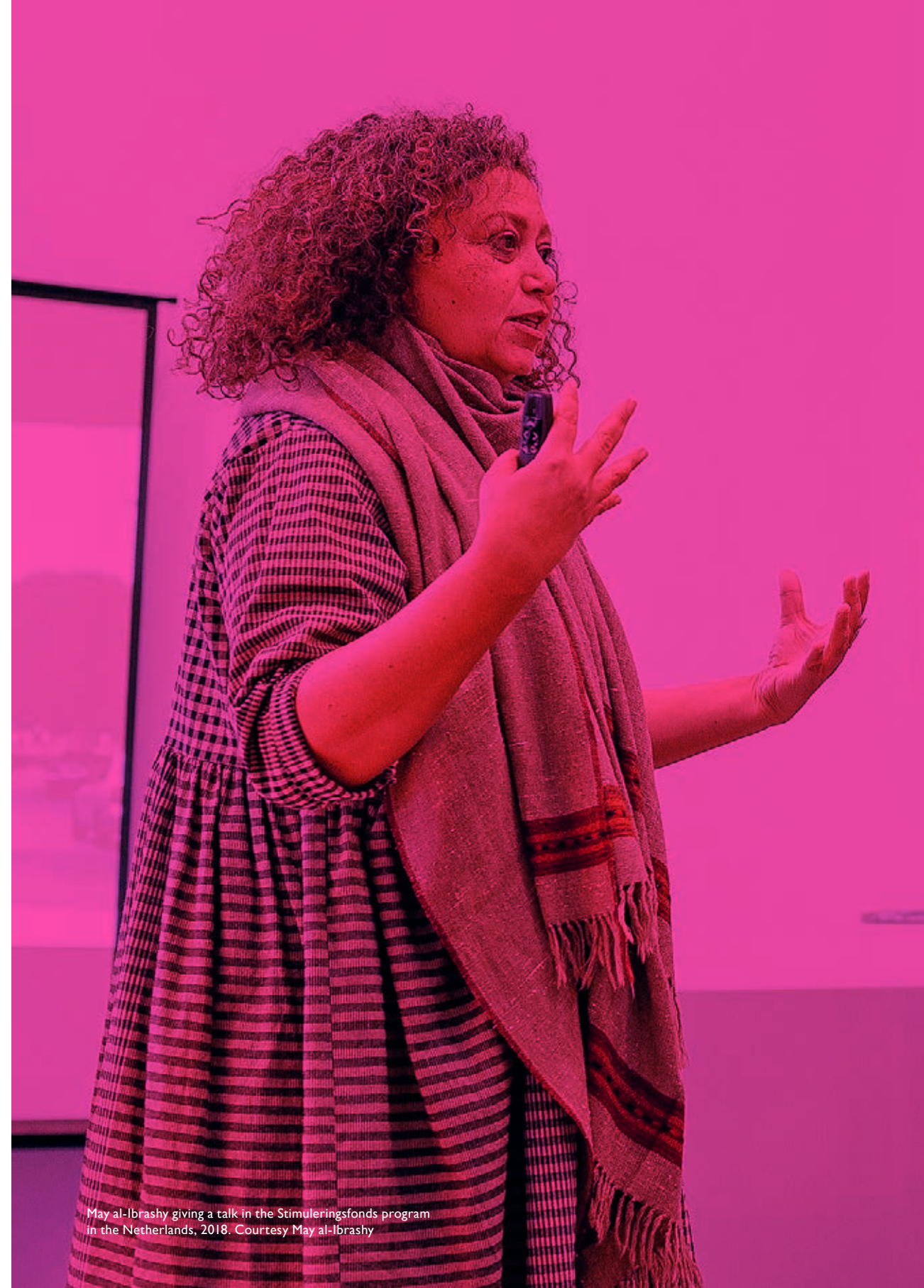
YoNoFui activation on the streets of Buenos Aires, 2019.  
Photo © Ariadna Rey

Organización política y social

# EGYPT ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

MAY AL-IBRASHY

مصر  
الهندسة المعمارية  
والتراث الثقافي





مي الإبراشي مهندسة معمارية مصرية يركز عملها على المشاركة المجتمعية من خلال الحفاظ على التراث وإعادة تأهيله والحفاظ عليه وإعادة تعريف دلالاته. وهي مؤسسة (البيئة المبنية - مجاورة) **Megawra—Built Environment Collective (BEC)**، وهي توأمة بين شركة معمارية ومنظمة غير حكومية تتعامل مع البيئة المبنية مع التركيز على النظرية والتطبيق العملي والفنون وربط التراث الثقافي بالإستدامة والمسؤولية الإجتماعية.

وتعمل الإبراشي منذ عام ٢٠١١ على إزالة الغبار واللامبالاة عن المواقع التراثية المهملة لإعادة ربط السكان بالآثار. التي وتعالج الإبراشي وفريقها في مجاورة **BEC** مفهوم التراث بطريقة مختلفة عن النهج المعتاد لمشاريع التجديد التي تتم من الأعلى إلى الأسفل والتي تقوم فقط بإصلاح المباني ثم المغادرة. تتمثل رؤية مجاورة **BEC** في ربط الحفاظ على التراث بتحقيق منافع للسكان. وهم يعتقدون أنه فقط عندما يكون التراث الثقافي نافعا للمجتمع سيصبح المجتمع شريكا نشطا في الحفاظ عليه وأنه لكي تكون الآثار والهندسة المعمارية الشهيرة في حالة جيدة يجب أن يتمتع الأشخاص الذين يعيشون وسطها بظروف معيشية جيدة. وتمتلك الإبراشي رؤية تتمحور حول الإنسان والمجتمع لحماية التراث وترميمه والتنمية المجتمعية.

وتعمل الإبراشي من خلال (التراث لنا) وهي مبادرة مشتركة من قبل مجاورة **BEC** بالشراكة مع وزارة الآثار المصرية ومحافظة القاهرة للحفاظ على تراث حي الخليفة في القاهرة التاريخية. وهي تعمل مع التراث كمحرك لتنمية المجتمع والتعليم والتنشيط الحضري. وقد أعطى العمل مع الجهات الحكومية مبادرة (التراث لنا) الشرعية والوضع الذي يمكنها من التوسط بين الهيئات الحكومية والمجتمعات المحلية.

تمتد ممارسة الإبراشي إلى ما هو أبعد من عملها الشخصي وفقد شاركت في الضغط على الهيئات الحكومية لمعالجة الظروف المعيشية في القاهرة التاريخية. وتمكنت من خلال عملها في كثير من الأحيان من إحداث تغيير حقيقي للمجتمعات المهمشة التي تعيش في المركز التاريخي للقاهرة وخلقت مفهوما مضادا ذي أهمية لتركيز الحكومة الحالية على التوسع الحضري والتجديد مما أنتج شعورا جديدا بالأمل والفخر للمجتمعات التي تعمل معها.

May al-Ibrashy is an Egyptian architect whose work centres on community engagement through heritage conversation, rehabilitation, preservation and re-signification. She is the founder of the Megawra—Built Environment Collective (BEC), a partnership between an architectural firm and an NGO that engages with the built environment with a focus on theory, praxis, arts, and linking cultural heritage to sustainability and social responsibility.

Since 2011, al-Ibrashy has been peeling away the dust and indifference from neglected heritage sites to reconnect residents with monuments. At Megawra—BEC al-Ibrashy and her team approach the concept of heritage from a different method to the regular approach of top-down renovation projects that merely fix up buildings and then leave. Megawra—BEC's vision is linking heritage preservation with bringing benefits to residents. They believe that only when cultural heritage is beneficial to the community, will the community become an active partner in its conservation, and that for monuments and iconic architecture to be in good condition, the people who live among them must have good living conditions. Al-Ibrashy has a human and community-centred vision of heritage protection, restoration and community development.

With Athar Lina (Heritage is Ours), a joint initiative by Megawra—BEC, al-Ibrashy works in partnership with the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities and the Cairo Governorate as they conserve the heritage of al-Khalifa in Historic Cairo. She works with heritage as a driver for community development, education and urban revitalisation. Working with government entities has given Athar Lina the legitimacy and positioning to mediate between governmental bodies and local communities.

Al-Ibrashy's practice extends far beyond her personal work. Elsewhere, she has participated in lobbying for government entities to address the living conditions in Historic Cairo. Through her work she has managed to create a real difference for the often marginalised communities living in Cairo's historic centre and has created an important counternarrative to the current government's focus on urban expansion and renewal, creating a new sense of hope and pride for the communities with which she works.

## MAY AL-IBRASHY IS HONOURED:

- FOR HER GROUND-BREAKING WORK WITH CULTURAL HERITAGE, WORKING ON THE PREMISE THAT HERITAGE IS ULTIMATELY ABOUT PEOPLE AND MAKING STRONGER AND MORE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES
- FOR HER PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION INITIATIVE THAT ESTABLISHES MODALITIES OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN HERITAGE CONSERVATION UNDERSTANDING MONUMENTS AS A RESOURCE, NOT A BURDEN
- FOR HER LEADERSHIP WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES, WORKING WITH THEM TO TAKE OWNERSHIP AND TO BECOME CREATORS WITHIN THEIR OWN CITY
- FOR CHANGING SOCIETY THROUGH URBAN DEVELOPMENT, WHILE CHERISHING AND HONOURING HERITAGE
- FOR HER COURAGE IN RE-SIGNIFYING MONUMENTS AND RE-WRITING HISTORY BY APPROACHING CULTURAL HERITAGE AS A DRIVER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
- FOR EMBRACING THE COMMUNITY AS AN ACTIVE PARTNER IN THE CONVERSATION ABOUT THE FUTURE OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

## يتم تكريم مي الإبراشي:

- لعملها الرائد في مجال التراث الثقافي والعمل على فرضية أن التراث يتعلق في نهاية المطاف بالناس، وجعل المجتمعات أقوى وأكثر قدرة على الصمود
- لمبادراتها التشاركية للمحافظة التي تحدد طرائق مشاركة المواطنين في الحفاظ على التراث لفهم الآثار كمورد وليس عبئاً
- لقيادتها للمجتمعات المحلية، والعمل معها لتولي الملكية وأن يصبحوا مبدعين داخل مدينتهم
- تغيير المجتمع من خلال التنمية الحضرية، مع الاعتزاز بالتراث وتكريمه
- لشجاعته في إعادة دلالة الآثار وإعادة كتابة التاريخ من خلال التعامل مع التراث الثقافي كمحرك للتنمية المجتمعية
- لاحتضان المجتمع المحلي كشريك نشط في الحوار حول مستقبل تراثنا الثقافي

# HERITAGE AS A LIVED REALITY

Noha el-Mikawy

May al-Ibrashy has been selected to receive the Prince Claus Impact Award in December 2022. This is an important and well-deserved sign of appreciation and recognition of her work and achievements. May is an engaged, principled and passionate architect who is widely respected in Egypt and the Arab region. She has enormous passion for heritage as a lived reality and a space of dignity and empowerment for the community. This award lifts up May's principled engagement with communities, which she does with great humility. This award rightly applauds her respect for the social fabric that surrounds heritage as well as the economic aspirations of those who live in and around heritage monuments, houses, markets, parks and cemeteries.

I witnessed how May's diligent work transformed an old district of Cairo, al-Khalifa, a district which contains buildings and monuments of great historical value. The district is densely populated, as most neighbourhoods in this sprawling city are. Those who live in al-Khalifa count among the poorest of Cairo, inhabiting either modern low-income housing or informal dwellings that have historic value (or surround run-down monuments of historic value). May's team spent years understanding the community's needs and aspirations, the community's complex social and economic power structures and the history of relationships between the community, local government and national government authorities.

This project, called "citizen participation in historic Cairo" (CPHC), focused on the site management of al-Khalifa brilliantly combining conservation and people-centred urban development. It studied the traffic flow in and out of the neighbourhood and the economic activities and aspirations of the neighbourhood. The project did not miss to study the complex set of regulations and institutions which license and regulate the lives of the community in al-Khalifa. The project's double bottom line was to have a positive impact on the quality of life of the residents and visitors of al-Khalifa as well as a positive impact on cultural and heritage development in a historic district of Cairo. Three years down the line, the district prides itself on having a small park that offers the only spot of green and shade where children of the neighbourhood can safely play and enjoy nature. Some of the renovated buildings house creative-writing classes inspired by the neighbourhood's history and current buzzing street life.

After two years of work, the CPHC offered three outcomes: management guidelines for heritage sites that are densely populated by low-income households; a conservation plan that categorised buildings and open spaces and offered recommended interventions that enhance the historical urban fabric and reinforce the heritage value of the district; and a management plan for stakeholders that was sensitive to the regulatory and institutional realities affecting the district. The CPHC did that with full community participation and engagement of residents, local authorities and local enterprises. This is an example of people-centred community development and heritage preservation using a highly rigorous learning and sharing of knowledge approach. May is a hugely generous professional; her expertise is made widely available to students of architecture and urban planning, heritage and community development as much as it is made widely accessible to local government officials, planners and engineers.

May is an inspiration. She never stops at stumbling blocks; she keeps going, always finding ways of least resistance. She never compromises on professional rigor nor does she ever undermine the powerful link between heritage and community. It is people like May al-Ibrashy who help sustain and celebrate the soul of a city. Congratulations May al-Ibrashy.



Athar Lina Meeting, 2021. Photo © Athar Lina



تم إختيار مي الإبراشي لإستلام جائزة الأمير كلاوس للتأثير Prince Claus Impact Award في ديسمبر ٢٠٢٢. إنها إشارة هامة ومستحقة عن جدارة على التقدير والإعتراف بعملها وإنجازاتها. مي مهندسة معمارية ملتزمة، موافقها مبدئية، شغوفة وتحظى بإحترام واسع النطاق في مصر والمنطقة العربية. تحمل شغفا هائلا بالتراث كواقع معاش وفضاء للكرامة والتمكين للمجتمع. وترفع هذه الجائزة من قدر مشاركة مي المبدئية مع المجتمعات والتي تقدمها بقدر كبير من التواضع. وتشيد هذه الجائزة بحق بإحترامها للنسيج الإجتماعي الذي يحيط بالتراث وكذلك بالتطلعات الإقتصادية لأولئك الذين يعيشون داخل وحول المعالم التراثية والمنازل والأسواق والحدائق والمقابر التراثية.

لقد شهدت كيف أن عمل مي الدؤوب حول حي قديم في القاهرة وهو حي الخليفة وهي منطقة تحتوي على مباني وأثار ذات قيمة تاريخية كبيرة. المنطقة مكتظة بالسكان مثل معظم الأحياء في هذه المدينة المترامية الأطراف. ويعتبر القاطنون في حي الخليفة من بين أفقر سكان القاهرة، حيث يقيمون إما مساكن حديثة منخفضة الدخل أو مساكن غير رسمية ذات قيمة تاريخية (أو تحيط بالمعالم الأثرية المتهمة ذات القيمة التاريخية). أمضى فريق مي سنوات في فهم إحتياجات المجتمع المحلي وتطلعاته وهياكل السلطة الإجتماعية والإقتصادية المعقدة في المجتمع وتاريخ العلاقات بين المجتمع المحلي والحكومة المحلية والسلطات الحكومية الوطنية.

ركز هذا المشروع المسمى « مشاركة المواطنين في القاهرة التاريخية » (CPHC) على إدارة حي الخليفة ببراعة جامعا بين الحماية والتنمية الحضرية التي تركز على الناس. ودرس تدفق حركة المرور من وإلى الحي والأنشطة الإقتصادية وتطلعات الحي. لم يفوت المشروع دراسة المجموعة المعقدة من الأنظمة والمؤسسات التي تمنح التراخيص وتنظم حياة المجتمع في حي الخليفة. كان الهدف المزدوج للمشروع هو أن يكون له تأثير إيجابي على نوعية حياة سكان وزوار الخليفة بالإضافة إلى إحداث تأثير إيجابي على التنمية الثقافية والتراثية في منطقة تاريخية في القاهرة. وبعد ثلاث سنوات من ذلك التاريخ تفخر المنطقة بوجود حديقة صغيرة توفر البقعة الوحيدة من اللون الأخضر والظل حيث يمكن لأطفال الحي اللعب بأمان والإستمتاع بالطبيعة. تضم بعض المباني التي تم تجديدها فصولا للكتابة الإبداعية مستوحاة من تاريخ الأحياء وحياة الشارع الصاخبة الحالية.

وبعد عامين من العمل، قدمت اللجنة ثلاث نتائج: (١) المبادئ التوجيهية لإدارة المواقع التراثية التي المكتظة بالأسر المعيشية ذات الدخل المنخفض؛ (٢) خطة حماية صنفات المباني والمساحات المفتوحة وقدمت التدخلات الموصى بها التي تعزز النسيج الحضري التاريخي وتعزز القيمة التراثية للمنطقة؛ (٣) خطة إدارة لأصحاب المصلحة تراعي الحقائق التنظيمية والمؤسسية التي تؤثر على المنطقة. وقد قامت اللجنة بذلك بمشاركة مجتمعية كاملة وإشراك السكان والسلطات المحلية والمؤسسات المحلية.

[هذا مثال على تنمية المجتمع المحلي والمحافظة على التراث الذي يركز على الناس بإستخدام نهج بالغ الصرامة للتعلم وتبادل المعرفة. مي محترفة بالغة السخاء. تتاح خبرتها على نطاق واسع لطلاب الهندسة المعمارية والتخطيط الحضري والتراث وتنمية المجتمع بقدر ما يتم إتاحتها على نطاق واسع لمسؤولي الحكومة المحلية والمخططين والمهندسين.

إن مي مصدر إلهام فهي لا تتوقف أبدا عند العقبات؛ إنها تستمر في العمل، وتجد دائما وسائل تنطوي على أقل قدر من المقاومة. فهي لا تتنازل أبدا عن الصرامة المهنية ولا تقوض على الإطلاق الصلة القوية بين التراث والمجتمع. إن أشخاصا مثل مي الإبراشي هم الذين يساعدون في الإبقاء على روح المدينة والإحتفاء بها. مبروك مي الإبراشي.

## التراث كواقع معاش

نهى المكايوي

# CONVERSATION WITH MAY AL-IBRASHY

Fariba Derakshani

محادثة  
مع مي الإبراشي

FARIBA DERAKSHANI *How did you become an architect?*

MAY AL-IBRASHY In 1989, as a disillusioned student of architecture, I walked into a 17<sup>th</sup> century historic house that was under conservation. The house, located in the heart of Historic Cairo, was surprisingly serene, its serenity framed by the beautiful chaos of a local religious celebration (*mawlid*) happening right outside its doors. Colourful tents served as temporary homes to the thousands of villagers who had come to Cairo to celebrate the birthday of al-Husayn, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad. Raw devotional songs blasted out of battered loud-speakers. Excited children got under the feet of mothers preparing a communal meal. They all hugged the house, standing there, aloof and magnificent, yet oddly in harmony with its ever-changing surroundings. It was a moment that showed me an alternative path to standard architectural practice; a path that lay within the field of shaping the built environment, but was not routinely offered to students of architecture as a viable option. I have worked in Historic Cairo ever since.

FD *How did cultural heritage preservation emerge as the focal point for you in Cairo?*

MA As a fresh graduate, I was part of a team that manually updated its cadastral maps, which dated from the 1930s. I worked on documenting the floors, walls and roofs of buildings built as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century. I learned to work with stone, lime and timber, materials we were taught nothing about in architectural school. And I listened to the sound of the streets. I learned swear words I never knew existed and made friendships I never thought possible. And while I enjoyed the almost zen-like state of mind of engaging with centuries-old buildings through documentation and conservation, I could not conceive of my job outside the context of engaging with the community that lived around and within these buildings. Historic Cairo was unfathomable without the uncertainties and serendipities of a living heritage constantly being shaped and reshaped by its community.

FD *How have you tried to build this idea of a living heritage and the parallel need for preservation into Cairo's architectural landscape?*

MA It took close to 25 years to arrive at a way of working that balances the needs of the community with the requirements of cultural heritage preservation. In 2011, in the wake of the January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution, Egypt's Arab Spring, we established Megawra, a cultural space for

كيف أصبحت مهندسة معمارية؟

في عام ١٩٨٩، كطالبة محبطة من دراسة الهندسة المعمارية، دخلت منزلاً تحت الترميم يرجع تاريخه للقرن السابع عشر. بالرغم من وقوعه في قلب القاهرة التاريخية، كان المنزل هادئاً بشكل مذهش، وكان هدوءه محاطاً بالفوضى الجميلة للمولد الذي يحدث خارج أبوابه مباشرة. الخيام التي تأتي آلاف القادمين من القرى إلى القاهرة للاحتفال بمولد سيدنا الحسين حفيد النبي محمد، الأناشيد والابتهالات الدينية المنبعثة من مكبرات الصوت المتهالكة، الأطفال تحت أقدام الأمهات المشغولة بتحضير طعام الخدمة – الكل احتضن المنزل الذي وقف متقدراً ومهيّباً، متناقضاً مع محيطه دائم التغير ومتناغماً معه في آن واحد. لقد كانت لحظة أظهرت لي مساراً بديلاً عن ممارسة الهندسة المعمارية بشكلها التقليدي المتعارف عليه؛ مساراً يتعامل مع العمران بطريقة لم يتم تقديمها لطلاب الهندسة المعمارية كخيار قابل للتطبيق.

كيف أصبح الحفاظ على التراث الثقافي في القاهرة نقطة تحول في مجال عملي؟

بعد التخرج مباشرة انضمت إلى مجموعة تعمل على التحديث البيدي للخرائط المساحية للقاهرة التاريخية والتي لم يتم مراجعتها منذ الثلاثينيات، كما عملت على توثيق الأرضيات والحوائط والأسطح لآثار يعود تاريخ بعضها لبدایات القرن الثاني عشر. تعرفت على مواد البناء من أحجار وأخشاب والجير والتي لم نتطرق لدراستها بشكل واف في كلية الهندسة. استمعت لصوت الشوارع. تعلمت ألفاظاً لم أعلم بوجودها. كونت صداقات لم أتصور أنها ممكنة. وبينما كنت استمتع بحالة الهدوء الشبيهة بحالة الزن التأملية أثناء العمل على توثيق وترميم المباني التاريخية، لم أتمكن من فصل مهنة الحفاظ عن سياق مشاركة المجتمع الذي يعيش حول تلك المباني وداخلها. فلا سبيل للتعاظم مع القاهرة التاريخية دون التعامل معها كتراث حي وحر يساهم المجتمع في إعادة تشكيله باستمرار.

كيف حاولت بناء فكرة التراث الحي بالتوازي مع الحاجة للحفاظ في المشهد المعماري للقاهرة؟

استغرق الوصول لطريقة العمل التي تحقق التوازن بين احتياجات المجتمع ومتطلبات الحفاظ على التراث الثقافي ما يقارب خمسة وعشرين عاماً. عام ٢٠١١ وبالتزامن مع ثورة الخامس والعشرين من يناير في فترة الربيع العربي، تم تأسيس مجاورة كمساحة ثقافية للمهتمين بالعمارة والعمران، تديره جمعية الفكر العمراني، يقام به برنامج للمحاضرات والعروض والورش التدريبية والجولات الإرشادية. من خلال ذلك قدمنا للمعماريين الشباب رؤية لمهنتهم أقرب إلى العلوم الإنسانية والفنون والعلوم الاجتماعية، على عكس السياق المصري الذي يعتبر المعماري فرغاً من مجال الهندسة. بدأنا بتطوير مشاريع ميدانية بالتركيز على العيش والحرية والعدالة الاجتماعية والكرامية الإنسانية استلهاماً من ثورة ٢٠١١.

أحد مخرجات هذه المشاريع هي مبادرة بحثية أطلق عليها مبادرة الأثر لنا (سميت في البداية "الأثر لمن؟" ثم أصبحت "الأثر لنا"). بدأنا بدراسة حي الخليفة الواقع في القطاع الجنوبي من القاهرة التاريخية في الفترة من يوليو

والتي من خلالها نقوم بتحويل المواقع المهملة إلى أماكن للرياضة والترفيه للمجتمع.

يتعامل مشروعنا الأكثر أهمية عل هذا الصعيد، متنزه الخليفة، مع مشاكل المخلفات والمياه الأرضية ونقص الأماكن العامة للنساء والأطفال وعدم كفاية المساحات الخضراء. حيث تم تحويل أرض فضاء تبلغ مساحتها ٣٠٠٠ متر مربع إلى غابة حضرية تُروى بالمياه الأرضية المستخرجة من محيط موقعين أثريين من القرن الثالث عشر يقعان في الجهة المقابلة من الشارع. يتم الربط بين التراث والمجتمع والبيئة من خلال المنفعة المشتركة عن طريق ربط الجهود لخفض منسوب المياه الأرضية والتقليل من الآثار الضارة للرتوية الملحية مع إعادة استخدام المياه المستخرجة لأنشطة التخضير التي تعود بالنفع على المجتمع. توفر الحديقة أيضاً أماكن للعب الأطفال والتفاعل الاجتماعي والرياضة والزراعة الحضرية للنساء والشباب في الحي. بالإضافة لتوفير فرص عمل للمجتمع عن طريق مجموعة من المحلات والمقاهي في الشارع على واجهة المتنزه. وجاري العمل على تصميم نقطتي تجميع للمخلفات الصحية بناءً على نتائج الأبحاث التي قمنا بها لإدارة المخلفات، وهي أيضاً نقاط تجميع للمخلفات العضوية التي سيتم استخدامها كسماد في الحديقة. تم تحويل التقنيات البسيطة التي تم تطويرها لتجميع المياه الأرضية ومعالجتها وإعادة استخدامها إلى دليل إرشادي باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية متاح عبر الإنترنت كجزء من إصداراتنا الدورية، أوراق مجاورة.

كيف يتم الربط بين عمل مجاورة المجتمع وسياسات العمران؟

القاهرة التاريخية ليست مدينة يسهل التعامل معها. يمكن القول إنها أحد أكثر مواقع التراث العالمي لليونسكو تعقيداً. إنها تعاني من قصور الإدارة ومن التمدد العمراني غير المنضبط. على سبيل المثال، يتم حالياً قطعها بالطرق والكباري الجديدة من أجل خدمة التطوير العمراني في المدن الجديدة. تواجه إدارات الأحياء الكثير من العقبات في تنفيذ دورها الأساسي للارتقاء العمراني بسبب سوء التخطيط، والحوكمة من أعلى إلى أسفل لضعف المشاركة المجتمعية، وعدم كفاءة الإطار التشريعي والإداري. لا يتم إشراك السكان في القرارات المصيرية التي تؤثر بشكل دائم على أسلوب حياتهم حيث ما زالت عملية إعادة تشكيل المجالس المحلية المنتخبة معلقة منذ ٢٠١١.

هذا لا يعني أننا نقوم بهذا العمل بمعزل عن الكيانات الحكومية الوطنية والمحلية. يتم تنفيذ جميع أعمال الترميم بتصريح من - وتحت إشراف - وزارة السياحة والآثار المصرية، الشريك الحكومي الأكثر دعماً لنا. تستهدف أنشطتنا الخاصة بالتعليم والتدريب الموظفين الحكوميين بوصفهم الفئة المستهدفة الأساسية، ويتم مشاركة جميع أبحاثنا مع الحكومة كأدوات لصنع القرار. تمول محافظة القاهرة بعض تدخلاتنا في المساحات المفتوحة ونقدم لهم الدعم الفني بشكل دائم. لا تبدو الأشياء سهلة دائماً، ولكنها ليست معتمدة تماماً. نجد المساندة دائماً من بعض أقوى مؤيدينا الذين يعملون داخل الحكومة، حتى لو كنا في بعض الأحيان لا نتفق مع سياسات العمران. على سبيل المثال، تقدمنا باقتراح مباشرة إلى رئيس الوزراء المصري خلال

FD Can you give some examples of these “interventions”? How and where do they engage with Cairenes?

MA After re-inventing Megawra as an architectural firm, our first intervention in 2013, focused on the conservation of the 13<sup>th</sup> century dome of Shajar al-Durr and the adaptive reuse of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century building adjacent to it into a community centre. This community centre has hosted our two-month heritage summer camp that we have run free of charge for children of the community for the last 8 years. We have since worked on the conservation of four other buildings in the al-Khalifa district, most notably al-Imam al-Shafi'i Mausoleum, in which we recently installed a visitors' centre. Our heritage education activities are transformed into kits that are available as online tools through our website. We also work with women and children on heritage-based vocational training, through which a line of products and services are developed. These craft-based products, interactive heritage activities and tours serve to sustain our work and generate income, mostly for young people and women from the neighbourhood.

Finally, in order to plan effectively for urban-level interventions, we mapped the residential neighbourhoods where we work and worked with the community to prepare thematic studies that feed into conservation and management plans and proposals for urban regeneration. We think of these studies as tools for decision makers and as baseline research for our own interventions. Our research on waste management and groundwater issues has fed into our urban interventions through which we transform derelict sites into places for sport and recreation for the community.

Our most seminal project, al-Khalifa Park, engages with problems of waste, groundwater, lack of public spaces for women and children, and insufficient green spaces. A 3000 square metre dump has now been transformed into an urban forest irrigated with groundwater extracted from around two inundated 13<sup>th</sup> century listed heritage sites across the street. In linking efforts to lower the level of rising groundwater and reduce the harmful effects of salt damp with reusing the extracted water for greening activities that benefit the community, heritage, community and environment are brought together through common benefit. The park also provides places for play, social interaction, sport and urban gardening for women and children in the neighbourhood. Street shops and cafes are planned to provide employment opportunities for the community.

إلى ديسمبر ٢٠١٢. كانت البداية بتنظيم مجموعة من ورش العمل التي تجمع أصحاب المصلحة من سكان وجهات حكومية وممارسين وأكاديميين ومجتمع مدني. تم توظيف منهجيات البحث التشاركي للسؤال عن مدى إحساس السكان بالملكية تجاه مواقع التراث المعماري الواقعة في منطقتهم. كانت الفرضية أن إحساس المجتمعات بالملكية تجاه تراثهم يزداد مع انتفاعهم بها وأن هذا الإحساس بالنفع يحفزهم على الحفاظ على التراث كمورد روحي أو اجتماعي أو اقتصادي أو ثقافي. شعرنا أن الصلة القديمة بين هذه المجتمعات ومواقعها التراثية تضاءلت بسبب سنوات من الحرمان، ولكنها لم تمت بأي حال من الأحوال. وتحتاج لإعادة تنشيطها بإعادة بناء الثقة وتعزيز الشعور بالملكية بشكل جماعي ينبع من الحق في التراث كمورد. بحلول نهاية ستة أشهر من البحث والنقاش، شعرنا أن لدينا معلومات كافية ودافعا لمواصلة العمل في الخليفة مع مجتمعها. حددنا ثلاثة خطوط عمل:

- التأكد من أن مشاريع الترميم المعماري (وهي ضرورية في حد ذاتها) تحول المواقع التراثية إلى مبانٍ مفيدة للمجتمع الذي يعيش حولها.
- تحفيز الإحساس بملكية التراث منذ الصغر من خلال تعليم التراث وربطه بالتدريب المهني من خلال الصناعات التراثية مثل الحرف والسياحة والتصميم والفن القائم على التراث.
- ترسيخ الحفاظ على التراث في البيئة العمرانية من خلال التدخلات التي تعمل على تحسين جودة الفراغ العمراني والبيئة لمصلحة التراث والمجتمعات على حد سواء.

هل يمكنك إعطاءنا بعض الأمثلة لهذه “التدخلات”؟ كيف وأين تعامل معها سكان القاهرة؟

بعد إعادة تأسيس مجاورة كمكتب معماري، كان أول تدخل عام ٢٠١٣ يركز على ترميم قبة شجر الدر التي ترجع لمنتصف القرن الثالث عشر، وإعادة استخدام مبنى من القرن التاسع عشر وتحويله إلى مركز مجتمعي. ولمدة شهرين سنوياً على مدى الثمان سنوات الماضية، استضاف هذا المركز معسكر الخليفة الصيفي للتراث والذي يشارك فيه أطفال المنطقة مجاناً. ومنذ ذلك الحين، قمنا بترميم أربعة مبانٍ أثرية في حي الخليفة، كان آخرها قبة الإمام الشافعي، حيث تم تأسيس كذلك مركزاً للزوار. كما قمنا بصياغة خبراتنا في تعليم التراث في مجموعة أدوات متاحة على مواقعنا الإلكترونية. كما نعمل مع السيدات والأطفال على التعليم المهني القائم على التراث، والذي يتم من خلاله تطوير مجموعة من المنتجات والخدمات. تخدم هذه المنتجات الحرفية والأنشطة التراثية التفاعلية والجولات الإرشادية استدامة العمل وتساهم في زيادة الدخل لشباب وسيدات المنطقة.

أخيراً، من أجل التخطيط الفعال للتدخلات على المستوى العمراني، قمنا بدراسة الأحياء التي نعمل بها وعملنا مع المجتمع لإعداد الأبحاث اللازمة لدعم خطط الحفاظ والإدارة مشاريع الارتقاء العمراني. يتم الاستفادة من هذه الدراسات كأدوات لمتخذي القرار وكأبحاث أساسية لمشاريعنا. على سبيل المثال، كانت أبحاثنا حول إدارة المخلفات ومشاكل المياه الأرضية أساساً للتدخلات العمرانية

architects and urbanists run by our NGO, the Built Environment Collective. As a co-working space with a regular program of lectures, screenings, workshops and walks, we offered young architects a vision of their profession that shifted it closer to the humanities, arts and social sciences, as opposed to the field of engineering, within which it was traditionally situated in the Egyptian context. We also started to develop field projects that were inspired by the ethos of quality of life, liberty, social justice and human dignity, the demands of the 2011 revolution.

One of these projects was a research initiative called Athar Lina (that we tellingly first translated as “Whose Monument?”, then as “Heritage is Ours”). Between July and December 2012, we studied the neighbourhood of al-Khalifa, which is located in the southern section of Historic Cairo. We organised a series of local stakeholder workshops that engaged with residents, government officials, practitioners, academics and civil society. We employed participatory research methods to ask questions related to the community's sense of ownership of the heritage sites within their neighbourhood. Our premise was that ownership comes through benefit and that communities would take care of their heritage if they felt it was a resource from which they could derive spiritual, social, economic or cultural value. We felt that the age-old connection between these communities and their heritage sites, dulled by years of disenfranchisement, was by no means dead. It needed to be reawakened through rebuilding trust and collectively re-fostering a sense of ownership that comes from the right to heritage as a resource. By the end of six months of research and debate, we felt we had enough information and drive to continue working in al-Khalifa with its community. We identified three lines of action:

- Making sure that architectural preservation projects (necessary in their own right) transform heritage sites into buildings that are relevant and useful to the community living around them.
- Engendering ownership of heritage from a young age through heritage education and linking it to vocational training through heritage industries such as craft, tourism and heritage-based art and design.
- Grounding heritage preservation in the urban setting through interventions that improve quality of urban space and of the environment for heritage and communities alike.



Two hygienic waste collection points designed based on the findings of our waste management research, are also collection points for organic waste that will be used as compost in the park. The simple technologies developed for the capture, treatment and reuse of groundwater were transformed into a bi-lingual toolkit that is available online as part of our occasional periodical, *Megawra Papers*.

FD *How does Megawra's work transition from ground-level politics into the political milieu?*

MA Historic Cairo is not an easy city to engage with. It is arguably one of the world's most unwieldy UNESCO heritage sites. It suffers from mismanagement and uncontrolled urban growth. New roads and flyovers are currently being cut through it in order to service new urban developments on the city outskirts. Municipal efforts to improve the urban environment of Historic Cairo are hampered by inadequate planning, top-down governance, insufficient participation, and a poor management and legislative framework. Communities are not included in life-changing decisions that permanently affect their way of life. Elected city councils, suspended in the wake of the 2011 revolution, have yet to be reinstated.

However, this does not mean that the work we do is in isolation from national and local governmental structures. All our conservation work is implemented with permission from—and under the supervision of—the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, our most reliable and supportive governmental ally. Our knowledge-generation and training activities target governmental employees as primary beneficiaries, and our research is all shared with the government as decision-making tools. Some of our open space interventions are funded by Cairo Governorate and we routinely provide them with technical support. Not everything is smooth-sailing, neither is it totally bleak. Some of our strongest supporters work within the government and help us from within, even if we sometimes do not always see eye-to-eye on policy. Our most significant advocacy campaign so far, for the preservation of al-Hattaba, an historic neighbourhood within al-Khalifa that had been slated for demolition, culminated in us presenting a proposal for preservation and regeneration directly to the Egyptian Prime Minister, who ordered a halt on the demolition.

حملتنا الدعوية الأكثر أهمية حتى الآن، لتطوير وإعادة إحياء الحطابة، وهو حي تاريخي في الخليفة كان من المقرر هدمه، حيث أمر رئيس الوزراء بوقف الهدم.

كيف يتطلع عملكم لتوسيع برنامجه ومعاييرته الحالية إلى ما بعد التعامل مع عمران القاهرة؟

احتفلنا هذا العام بالذكرى العاشرة لتأسيس مبادرة الأثر لنا. يأتي ذلك بالتزامن مع ما تمر به بلدنا على غرار باقي العالم من أوقات عصيبة. نحن نؤمن أن المهارات المطلوبة لمواجهة هذا الوضع العمراني المتأزم يتم صقلها في مدن مثل القاهرة ومومباي ومكسيكو سيتي. لذلك وجب علينا توجيه الوقت والمجهود في تأمل وتقييم ممارساتنا التي تم تطوير الكثير منها بشكل عضوي وبديهي، ذلك لإعادة صياغة هذه الممارسات في صورة منهجيات عمرانية نابعة من الجنوب العالمي وموجهة له. نعمل حالياً بالشراكة مع مؤسستين لتأسيس "تحيز" وهي منصة تعليمية متعددة التخصصات تقدم المعرفة والمهارات والمواثيق الأخلاقية اللازمة للتعامل مع العمران بطريقة تجسد مبادئ الإدماج والعدالة المكانية والحكمة التشاركية واحترام البيئة. وهذه طريقتنا للاستثمار في مستقبل عادل ومنصف. نأمل أن يصل أطفال الخليفة الذين انتقلوا من المعسكر الصيفي للأطفال إلى برنامج التدريب المهني، إلى التدريس يوماً ما عبر تلك المنصة التعليمية، وأن تصبح مبادرة الأثر لنا ملجأ لهم لتشغيلها وإعادة تشكيلها وتنميتها.

FD *Looking beyond current politics and the immediate Cairene environment, is your work looking to expand its current program and parameters?*

MA This year we celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Athar Lina Initiative. We do so as our country, along with the rest of the world, faces uncertain times. We believe that the skills needed for facing uncertainty are honed in cities like Cairo, Mumbai and Mexico City, and that time should be taken to reflect on our practices, many of which are developed organically and intuitively. This reflection will allow us to develop methodologies for the built environment from—and of—the Global South. We are currently working with two partner entities to establish Tahayyuz, an interdisciplinary educational platform that provides the knowledge, skills and ethical tools needed to engage with the built environment in a manner that reifies principles of inclusion, spatial justice, participatory governance and respect for the environment. It is our way of investing into a just and equitable future. We hope that the children of al-Khalifa, who grew up coming to our summer camp, and moved up to our vocational training program, will someday teach on this educational platform, and that the Athar Lina Initiative and its ethos of ownership of the built environment becomes theirs to run, reshape and grow.



Heritage education activities in a local primary school, 2013.  
Photo © Athar Lina



Heritage education activities in a local primary school, 2013.  
Photo © Athar Lina



Children's activity in Darb al-Hurs Football Pitch, 2013.  
Photo © Athar Lina

# AFTERWORD

Fariba Derakhshani

This is the first book celebrating the new Prince Claus Impact Awards, a biannual honour awarded to artists and cultural practitioners in recognition of both the excellent quality of their work and of their positive contribution to the development of their society.

This book came together at a tumultuous time. From the turmoil of war and economic crisis, the lack of free expression and diminishing hope for human rights in parts of the world; it is no surprise that community has emerged as the theme of these awards. Community enables us to question the political structures that hold us back; culture needs community to survive. When community and the solidarity that connects ourselves to other people comes under threat, so does culture.

This year, the Impact Awards honour Ailton Krenak, a vital voice in the context of Brazil's indigenous movement. That we completed the editing of the volume at the time of President Lula's historic re-election was a cause for celebration as well as raising its own challenges for the production of this book. Meanwhile the awardee Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara remains incarcerated in Cuba, and we join the many international artists and authors calling for his timely release. For this reason, we were unable to include an interview with him.

In editing this book, we sought to foreground the many voices of the awards—the awardees themselves but also those writing laudations, testimonies to their work. For that reason we have made the texts multilingual, blending the different languages of the writers and awardees. This is a gesture of accessibility to readers but also an a reminder that monolingualism continues to shut out many practitioners from cultural recognition by the mainstream.

Finally, we would like to thank all the contributors to the awards, including the jury, nominators, advisors and programme team; and to this book, in particular the authors and designers, for making all of this possible.

## PRINCE CLAUS FUND IMPACT AWARDS JURY 2022

PABLO LEÓN DE LA BARRA is Curator at Large, Latin America and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation, New York. He was born in Mexico City in 1972. He has a Ph.D. in Histories and Theories from the Architectural Association, London. He was previously the Guggenheim UBS MAP Curator, Latin America (2013–2016), Director of Casa França-Brasil, Rio de Janeiro (2015–2016) and Chief Curator at MAC Niterói, Rio de Janeiro (2017–2020). He was awarded the first Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros and Independent Curators International Travel Award for Central America and the Caribbean (2012) in honor of Virginia Pérez-Ratton. León de la Barra is on the advisory boards of the Luis Barragán Foundation, Mexico City; the Caribbean Art Initiative, Basel; CIFO, Miami and the Nasher Sculpture Prize, Dallas.

MARIAM KAMARA is an architect from Niger. She studied architecture at the University of Washington. In 2014, Kamara founded atelier masomi, an architecture and research practice tackling public, cultural, residential, commercial and urban design projects. Kamara believes that architects have an important role to play in creating spaces that elevate, dignify and provide people with a better quality of life. A collaborative project, Hikma Religious and Secular Complex, won the 2017 Gold LafargeHolcim Award for Africa and the Middle East and the 2018 Silver Global LafargeHolcim Award for Sustainable Architecture. An upcoming project, the Niamey Cultural Centre, is designed by Kamara under the mentorship of Sir David Adjaye as part of the Rolex Mentor and Protégé programme. 2019 saw Kamara named as a laureate of the Prince Claus Fund and a 2019 Royal Academy of Arts Dorfman Awards finalist. 2020 saw the New York Times name her as one of the 15 Creative Women of Our Time. Atelier masomi made its debut on the 2021 ADI100 list.

FAUSTIN LINYEKULA is known as a dancer, choreographer, but calls himself a storyteller. He tells his stories through writing, theatre, dance, still or moving images. He lives and works in Kisangani, Democratic Republic of Congo, former Zaire, former Belgian Congo, former Congo Free State, the private property of Leopold II, King of Belgians. In 2001, after eight years of traveling and working around the world, he returned to his country and founded Studios Kabako in Kinshasa, first only as a space for theatre and dance. Six years

later the studio moved to Kisangani, in Eastern DRC, and Studios Kabako opened up to music and film. Studios Kabako has since been a refuge for young Congolese and African artists, offering long-term accompaniment, from training to production and touring. Linyekula has toured in theatres, festivals and museums across Europe, Africa, Oceania and the Americas. He was the associate artist (Artista na Cidade) for the city of Lisbon in 2016, and co-associate artist for the Holland Festival in 2019. Previously, in 2007, he was named as a laureate of the Prince Claus Fund. He has also received the 2014 CurryStone Design Prize and the 2019 Tällberg / Eliasson Global Leadership Prize.

DINH Q. LÊ is an artist whose practice consistently challenges how our memories are recalled within the context of contemporary life. Lê's work has been exhibited worldwide. His solo exhibitions include *Memory for Tomorrow* at Mori Art Museum, Tokyo and Hiroshima City Art Museum; *Vietnam: Destination for the New Millennium: The Art of Dinh Q. Lê* at the Asia Society, New York; *Project 93: Dinh Q. Lê* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and *True Journey Is Return* at the San Jose Museum of Art, CA. He has also exhibited in the 2008 Singapore Biennale; The 5th Asia Pacific Triennial at the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane; The Gwangju Biennial 2006 & 2018, Korea; *Delays and Revolutions*, Venice Biennale 2003; *documenta 13*, 2012; the 2013 Carnegie International; *The Manif d'art 9—La Biennale de Québec* 2019; and *The Setouchi Triennale* 2019. Lê co-founded the non-profit Sàn Art Gallery in 2007, one of the most important art organisations in Vietnam. He received the Prince Claus Award in 2010, and was announced as one of the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Creative Arts Fellows in 2014.

MAYA EL KHALIL is an independent curator, based in Oxford, UK. As founding director of Athr Gallery in Jeddah from 2009–2016, she pioneered exhibition approaches and cultural exchange in the absence of local public art institutions, making significant contributions to the establishment and development of a contemporary art scene in Saudi Arabia. For the last decade, she has continued to work with artists, collectors and institutions to develop the identity and ideas that have defined an art scene, participating in multiple artist mentorship programs in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. El Khalil is currently collaborating with international institutions on progressive socially engaged exhibitions, developing multidisciplinary conversations that address the environmental and climate emergency, including the ongoing digital platform *Take Me to the River* in collaboration with the Goethe Institut and the Prince Claus Fund. El Khalil holds a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering and an MBA from the American University of Beirut. She is currently enrolled in MA Art and Politics at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

NOHA EL-MIKAWY is Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the American University in Cairo and former Regional Director of the Ford Foundation in the Middle East and North Africa. She is a practitioner in governance in the MENA region who led the governance regional team of the United Nations Development Program UNDP, advising several UNDP offices in the Arab region. With an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles, el-Mikawy has published two books and several book chapters on governance.

COCO FUSCO is an interdisciplinary artist and writer. She is a recipient of numerous awards, including a Guggenheim fellowship, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, Latinx Art Award, a Fulbright fellowship and a Herb Alpert Award in the Arts. Fusco's performances and videos have been presented in the 56th Venice Biennale, Frieze Special Projects, Basel Unlimited, three Whitney Biennials (1993, 2008, and 2022), and several other international exhibitions. Her works are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, The Walker Art Center, the Centre Pompidou, the Imperial War Museum, and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona. She is the author of *Dangerous Moves: Performance and Politics in Cuba* (2015). She is represented by Alexander Gray Associates in New York. She is a Professor of Art at Cooper Union. Fusco is currently preparing new works for the next Sharjah Biennial and a solo retrospective that will open in 2023.

LILIA MORITZ SCHWARCZ is Full Professor in Anthropology at the University of São Paulo and Global Scholar at Princeton. She has published several books, among them four in English: *Spectacle of Races: Scientists, Institutions and Racial Theories in Brazil* (1999), *The Emperor's Beard: D. Pedro II the Tropical Monarchy*, (2004), *Brazil: a biography—with Heloisa Starling* (2015), *The Brazil Reader* (2018) with James Green and Victoria Langland and *Brazilian Authoritarianism* (2022). She has curated exhibitions including: *Sexuality histories* (2017), *Afro-Atlantic Histories* (2018), *Women's Histories* (2019), *Black Encyclopedia* (2021 and 2022), *Brazilian Histories* (2022). She was a fellow at the Guggenheim Foundation (2006–2007), the recipient of a scholarship from John Carter Brown Library in 2007, and then the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Grant and Award in 2021. She has been a visiting professor at Oxford, Leiden, École des Hautes Études, Freie Universität, a Tinker Professor at Columbia University, and

since 2009 has taught at Princeton. She received the command of the Brazilian Order of Scientific Merit in 2010, and now sits at the Board of Directors of the Americas Division of Human Rights Watch.

MAHEN BONETTI is a film and media consultant, community organiser and former newspaper editor. Prior to founding AFF (African Film Festival, Inc.), Bonetti worked at Young & Rubicam and in the editorial and publicity department of Newsweek magazine. As founder of the African Film Festival (AFF) and executive director of the New York African Film Festival (NYAFF), she organises and facilitates all AFF programming with her team and participating partners. She has served on committees for the Pan African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO), the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, several US universities, US diplomatic offices in Africa, and many others. Bonetti has been made a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France. She is also a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in the United States.

MARI BARDET does philosophy as well as dance. She was born in a village in France and now lives in Buenos Aires. Her work and thinking cross the boundaries between theory and practice and are nourished by improvisation and somatic practices as much as by contemporary philosophy and feminist and queer/questioning thought-practice. Throughout this arc, she tenses the problems that run through bodies and politics, configuring common spaces of artistic multiplicity and situated thought. She is a research professor at EIDAES-UNSAM and directs the master's degree in "Contemporary Artistic Practices" at EAyP-UNSAM. She accompanies creative processes (*Transducciones* 2021–2022), gives independent workshops (*Critica y Clínica* con Josefina Zuain), develops stage conferences and writes books (*Perder la cara*, 2021; *Una paradoja moviente: Loie Fuller*, 2021; *Penser et mouvoir*, 2011).

OMAR BERRADA is a writer and curator and the director of Dar al-Ma'mûn, a library and artists residency in Marrakech. His work focuses on the politics of translation and inter-generational transmission. He is the author of the poetry collection *Clonal Hum* (2020), and the editor or co-editor of several books, including *Album: Cinématique de Tanger*, about film in Tangier and Tangier on film (2012); *The Africans*, on racial dynamics in North Africa (2016); and *La Septième Porte*, a posthumously published history of Moroccan cinema by Ahmed Bouanani (2020). Berrada's writing was included in numerous exhibition catalogs, magazines and anthologies, including *Frieze*, *Bidoun*, *Asymptote* and *The University of California Book of North African Literature*. Currently living in New York, he teaches at The Cooper Union where he and Leslie Hewitt co-organise the IDS Lecture Series.

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Each year the Prince Claus Fund gives 100 Seed Awards to artists and cultural practitioners who are in the first five years of their careers and whose artistic work engages with pressing social issues in their local context.

Through recognition, an unrestricted grant and the possibility of fruitful exchanges, Seed Awards give recipients the opportunity to explore, make connections with other creatives and to develop their own artistic practice at a crucial beginning stage. An open call for applications for Seed Awards is issued once a year.



Prince Claus Mentorship Awards are meant for cultural practitioners farther along in their careers, with 5–10 years' experience. They are theme-based and designed with a collaborating organisation to strengthen the artistic responses of individuals to urgent social issues. By mentoring and facilitating meaningful connections among creatives who are working on similar themes, Mentorship Awards create space for individuals to learn, grow, experiment and test out new ideas both individually and with their peers. Each Mentorship includes about 12 participants. Open calls for these Awards occur at different times of year.



Prince Claus Impact Awards are presented to established artists and cultural practitioners in recognition both of the excellent quality of their work and the positive contribution it makes to their own societies. The Prince Claus Fund invites cultural experts within its global network to nominate candidates who have shown transformative power, consistent dedication and engagement within their contexts and beyond. An international, independent, interdisciplinary jury is commissioned to make the final selection. The Impact Awards are presented once every two years.



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