

Lives  
Between

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Aslan Gaisumov  
Dani Gal  
Pawel Kruk  
Runo Lagomarsino  
Dana Levy  
Tala Madani  
Otobong Nkanga  
Enrique Ramirez  
Elham Rokni  
Clarissa Tossin

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## Introduction

The exhibition begins with a recognition of the growing number of international artists working and living between two places. Artists who were born in one country and, for a variety of reasons, have crossed oceans and borders to live in another. Because of this transition, their artistic practice and cultural identity is caught in tension between their country of residence and country of origin.

Some of the artists in the show migrated with their families as children, or were born somewhere else, but carry with them another culture through their parents, or through the color of their skin, and chose to make this paradox a aspect or impetus for their work. Others migrated later as adults, in a conscious move to improve their professional possibilities. Others simply move to survive.

In this way, these artists choose to live “in between” two places. Developing their personal and professional life in one place (working, raising a family), but when producing their work they address social and historical issues relevant “back home.” Many of them produce exclusively in their country or region of origin. Upon returning they realize they are both insider and outsider, and in a sense inhabit a third culture that exists between the two places. They come to learn the benefits and challenges of an interstitial identity.

But the exhibition takes shape not only in the artists' biographies and production process alone. Each work is evidence of a process of thinking about the migratory and the transitional, cross-cultural contaminations, evidence of explorations into a cultural narrative, or manifestations of mobility. These artists are aware of their complicity in globalism's trade routes, and are subject to the changing political climates in the two countries they live between. As a result they have a unique vantage point, and at a moment when borders are being renegotiated, and waves of refugees fleeing conflict zones have become urgent issues, both from a humanitarian perspective and as political points of contestation.

In the last few years, and especially in the last months, the terms migration and emigration are taking new significance. When our antecedents migrated to new worlds, they endured long sea voyages half way across the globe knowing they were tearing themselves away from familiar landscape, their family and culture in an irreparable way. Communication was expensive, slow and unpredictable, and few could afford a return visit.

Technical developments in travel and telecommunication in the 20th Century have changed this dramatically. Lately, the world has witnessed the influx of migrants from the Middle East moving into Europe, talking with those left behind on their cell-phones as they walk. Eventually they settle somewhere, but as soon as the political situation back home permits, they may return, or at least come back often to visit their loved ones via low-budget flights. In the meantime, they'll work and live somewhere else, all the while keeping in touch daily and routinely with all the cultural, political, social and familial ties. Today, cultural and economic detachment from their origin country is no longer a concern, and for many it's not an option.

Even before the present migration crisis in Europe, policy-makers started to shift their views away from traditional colonial concepts of migration as a threat to (a superior, white, western) culture towards a more pragmatic view. The benefits of immigration are now clear both to the influx country as well as to the emigrating one, at least in terms of the economy. Europe and the US need more low-cost working hands to adjust for their shrinking and aging population (respectively). Aid agencies dealing with development, for instance, identified long ago that the best aid delivered to communities is not the one that goes through governments, as corruption and bureaucracy make these ineffective in many countries. But instead through the hundreds of millions in foreign currency funneled each month from workers in Europe and the US directly to their families back in Africa and Central America. These are critical drivers of positive economic growth. Studies have already shown that large numbers of migrants return in the end to their land of origin, after having acquired skills, or just to retire comfortably in the warmer climate of their country of origin. Indeed, migration still appears to be one of the most natural instincts in human beings, as it wasn't until the 19th Century that nationalist movements decided people "belonged" to a certain land, and that the land, in turn "belongs" to them. Still, in spite of all the favorable economic and social data on migration, for right wing xenophobes — in governmental positions or opposed to them — migration has become a major political issue used to rally support.

The case of artists is different than the hordes of refugees flocking to Europe these days. They belong to the migrating elites, along with the intellectuals, and businessmen that normally anticipate a large migratory movement. In any case, their actual movement and insertion is, in most cases, significantly smoother than

work migrants and refugees in terms of documentation, social and professional support in their new home. Once integrated, their movement back and forth to the place of origin has always been part of their reality.

In the art-world things have been like this for a long time. Since the early 20th century artists have tended to move to cultural centers to profit from exposure and contact with other artists, a more sophisticated public, and a more robust market. Paris, then New York, London, today – Berlin, Mexico City and Brussels.

Looking at art exhibitions and catalogues in the last decade or so, we have become accustomed to reading wall-labels noting an artist “lives and works” between two or more different cities. Lagos and Paris, Brazil and Oslo, Tel Aviv and Berlin, Tehran and New York etc. These artists actually live in two places at the same time, enacting an under-acknowledged but potent form of cultural exchange, mobility and cross-pollination in their work. From this point of view, we feel that artists living and working “in between” are a key example of what migration in the present day ought to be seen as: not only a survival strategy or new way to “make a living”, but an opportunity for multicultural exchange and the enrichment of new and hybrid forms of cultural production.

## Aslan Gaisumov

### *Volga, 2015*

Aslan Gaisumov was born 1991 in Grozny, Chechen Republic, Russia, but fled with his family during the Russian occupation in the early 2000s. After living in Moscow, Gaisumov has now returned to Grozny to live and work. This semi-autobiographical video reconstructs the artist's own extended family walking, first one and two at a time in a misty field, and eventually by the dozen climbing into the car. It's both a literal and metaphorical demonstration of the compromising discomforts of departure from one's homeland, and implicitly refers to the challenges of a proper assessment of the numbers of displaced peoples. The car they travel in, the Volga, is a relic of the administrative class (known as the nomenklatura) of the Soviet era. It's an icon that recalls the aspirations of a better country and regional unity, but also a failed attempt. In the US and elsewhere, the scene suggests clowns piling into a tiny car at the circus. This may refer to the humiliation of fleeing, or the fact that the people of the Caucasus have been historically dehumanized by Russians as inferior.

## Dani Gal

### *Seasonal Unrest, 2008*

Born 1975 in Jerusalem, and now living and working in Berlin, Germany, Dani Gal pairs a 1970 documentary titled *Grenade in Gaza* — one of the first Israeli propaganda films portraying daily life in Gaza after the 1967 occupation of the strip — with a video of a foley artist producing a new soundtrack for it. The low-quality, black and white historical film is enhanced by recreating its deteriorated soundtrack and giving it a new life. The crisp presence of the Gaza reality is being recreated in Germany — nearly 40 years later. The juxtaposition of the two films exposes the mechanisms of political documentation. *Seasonal Unrest* points to the role media plays in the conflict between Israel and Palestine while exploring themes of authenticity and fiction, of distance in time and in geography, and of manipulation and political stagnation.

## Pawel Kruk

### *Pawel is a Journey, 2017*

Born 1976 in Koszalin, Poland, and currently living and working in Bolinas California, Pawel Kruk is an enigmatic artist whose work mainly involves staging performative situations. For this newly commissioned work, Kruk has asked 5 artists in Poland to provide scripts to read to visitors to the KADIST gallery. In the gallery, a beige phone hangs in the back corridor of the gallery (like a phone booth). If the visitor picks it up, it automatically dials Kruk's mobile phone number. If available, he'll answer the call (recognizing the phone number of the gallery) and read one of the scripts.

## Runo Lagomarsino

### *OtherWhere, 2011*

Born in 1977, Lund, Sweden to Argentinian parents, who descended from Italian émigrés that fled Europe during the First World War, Runo Lagomarsino grew up in Argentina and now lives between São Paulo, Brazil and Malmö, Sweden. *OtherWhere* is a collection of 168 postcards of commercial airlines. These promotional objects depict airplanes from different parts of the world and time periods. Some air companies — as well as some of the countries associated with them — have ceased to exist. On top of each postcard, the artist has meticulously positioned a line of pebbles covering the aircraft's windows, "blocking" the view both of the inside the outside of the plane. Like the postcards, these stones have traveled distances as well — having been collected by the artist and his friends in different locations around the world. Paradoxically, these little displaced stones are the ones holding down the postcards, and implicitly the airplanes, in place. In this way, *OtherWhere* builds a spiraling narrative of movement, displacement, history and precarious stability.

Loaned from the AMITAI COLLECTION

Dana Levy  
*Silent Among Us*, 2008

Born during the 1970s in Israel, but who has lived for extended periods in the US and the UK, Dana Levy has returned in recent years to live and work in New York. The video on view was shot in a small natural history museum (Beit Shturman Museum in the Kibbutz Ein Harod) in Israel, *Silent Among Us* shows a large gallery of vitrines filled with taxidermy birds and other animals. One hundred white doves are introduced by the artist, which fly and eventually land on cases, shelves, and the blades of a ceiling fan. According to the artist, the work refers to how “death, and history is very present in daily life in Israel... as a silent presence.” Birds of prey stare from inside the vitrines, while the doves fly apparently oblivious. The action and the artwork suggest survival, the sometimes haunting presence of history, and aspirations of peace in the face of restraints and the specter of death.

Tala Madani  
*Wall Painting*, 2008

Combining the abstraction of a loose brush, and a mid-century satirical comic style, Tala Madani's work suggests clashes of cultures—between Middle Eastern stereotypes and Western vices making for pathos-filled canvases. Born 1981 in Tehran, Iran, Tala Madani has lived outside Iran since the age of 14, and currently lives and works in Los Angeles. Presumably the painting *Wall Painting* (2008), as others by Madani, takes its source from either one of the highly controversial photographs taken by American soldiers of their tortured prisoners in Abu Ghraib in 2006, or some such imagery of human degradation (from whatever quarter) during the “War of Terror” widely diffused in the media. Tala Madani's paintings from this period evoke sinister situations featuring one or more balding, overweight, middle age men who act in perverted, violent, or childish ways. This painting of a painting, resembling the stripes of a flag, suggests an ill-fated attempt to blend into one's surroundings. The work can be read as a metaphor for the layering of cultures, and the immigrant's awkward attempts at assimilation—namely, the anxiety of confusing codes and misinterpreting cultural meaning.

Otobong Nkanga  
*Social Consequences I*, 2009-10

Shown here is a section of an artist book that collects drawings by Otobong Nkanga, who was born 1974 in Kano, Nigeria, and now lives and works in Antwerp. Through fragmented objects, landscapes and bodies in the series *Social Consequences I* the artist abstracts recollections from the years in her home country of Nigeria and her transition to living in Europe. Different than the previous series *Filtered Memories* (2009-2010), in *Social Consequences I*, Nkanga introduces floating appendages to collectively suggest phantom pain—the feeling of something missing that can't recovered (like memories of one's past). It suggests subjects like labor, landscape, nationhood, sacrifice, and belonging.

Enrique Ramírez  
*The International Sail*, 2017

Born 1979 in Santiago, Chile, during dictator Augusto Pinochet's violent rule, Enrique Ramírez's practice questions notions of exile, displacement, loss of memory and a changing sense of place. Growing up with a sail-maker father, his process often returns to the sea as a backdrop for his investigations of geopolitics. Currently living and working in Paris, Ramírez's *The International Sail* is the fifth in a series that features an upside-down worn out, mended and fragmented boat sail. These works epitomize the idea of perpetual movement and migration while carrying a deep personal meaning in the creative process, as the artist's father himself, still living in Chile, mends and sends the sails to his son, living in Europe. The reversed position of the sail recalls both the shape of South America itself and the Eurocentric view that in the Southern Hemisphere, everything is “upside-down.” The stitches themselves create an illusion of an alternative political geography, and the framed-cuts impose a cartographic grid.

See a text by Enrique Ramírez at the end of this booklet

Elham Rokni

*The Wedding*, 2016

Born in Iran in 1980, just after the Islamic Revolution, Elham Rokni grew up in Tehran, and immigrated to Israel at the age of 9. She now lives and works in Tel Aviv, Israel. Elham Rokni's video *The Wedding* is centered around her parents' wedding in Tehran, which took place just before the Iranian Revolution. The video incorporates brief segments of the Hollywood film *Argo* to visualize those historic months. The narration by Rokni, poses questions to her family members, and raises doubts about their recollections of the ceremony, and of the important political events of the period. Fact and fiction intermingle through the blurry lens of memory – portraying the anxiety, confusion, excitement and eventually disappointment of the transformation of a nation.

Clarissa Tossin

*When 2 Places Look Alike*, 2012-13

Clarissa Tossin was born 1973 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and lives and works in Los Angeles. Much of her practice involves projects either in or about her country of origin, or tracing cultural and economic exchanges between Brazil and the US. This series of photographs is the second part of a long-term investigation into the relationship between two related places: Belterra and Alberta – resulting in multiple projects including a two-sided topographical map sculpture and a two-channel video installation. Belterra is a rubber plantation located in the Amazon Forest, and Alberta is a sawmill town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Both of the towns were developed by the Ford Motor Company during an era of peak production. Built concurrently in 1935, they share a similar approach to worker-housing, despite being thousands of miles apart. The comparable architectural typology of the two places suggests a universal, perhaps even utopian approach to living. Tossin, in the various projects about these two places, shows how a massive corporate entity like Ford has shaped the culture of entire towns, practically and aesthetically.



## *The International Sail*

by Enrique Ramírez

Yesterday, the 28th of March 2017, I saw in the newspaper a photograph of Mexican workers writing on the wall between Mexico and the USA: “We are not criminals, nor illegals, we are international workers.”

How does one use disadvantages to produce a new reading that can be nourished by a supposed weakness? To reverse a sail is an act that inevitably quotes Torres García, and it says: *we can think that our horizon is not the north, we should look at the south, the south is our north, and it will always be that way, we are from the south, no matter where we are, we are always from the south...*

The international sail is a Laser sail. The Laser was invented in Canada in 1969 and is one of the most popular one-person sailboats in the world. Its symbol is a sun with one of its rays directed to the earth, like a comet rapidly falling. The Laser model was the first that my father copied for reproduction in his sail shop in Santiago. This sail was produced in his studio, probably at the beginning of the 90s, since my father no longer has the sewing machine that made the stitches and seams.

This sail came back to his atelier years later to be repaired. No one remembers why but it was abandoned and remained in his cellar. Maybe its fabric was too worn-out and wasn't worth the repair. Almost 20 years later I wanted to use this sail but the mice had eaten its lower side and thus the idea of repairing it was no longer appealing. That's how it was left.

When Joseph del Pesco asked me to think about a sail for the exhibition, I thought about this one, somehow as a way of reconstructing what is broken, as a way of thinking about how history is repeating itself in the world. We return to the past without enough consideration of the mistakes. This sail has the color yellow hidden behind the color black and the flag of San Francisco is black and yellow (gold in peace, iron in war).

I thought of it as a sun hiding behind history. The sail has also green tones, one might make many associations about the green and the yellow covered by the black tones. Also around the colors green and white, especially if we watch TV and the images in daily newspapers. I also thought about my homeland, Chile, because indigenous people from the Andes said that the color yellow falling from the black sky was galactic garbage (gold).

Then I asked my father if he could find this sail and if he could repair the beginning of it that had been eaten by the mice and not worn-out by the wind or the sea. The initial idea was to leave it looking like new, like a reconstructed history that had been torn and wiped off but that is then patched and mended in an impeccable way. But then I asked him not to repair the parts that were ripped by the wind and the weather, only the damages that were done by the mice, nothing else. This sail travelled to my studio in Paris and was re-repaired and patched in some places. Above all, it was dissected as a kind cartography and not as the proof of whatever it had been during its previous life. It has been altered as a way of transferring knowledge.

Later, the sail travelled from Paris to California folded in my suitcase. We arrived together to the other side of the world for the first time. I ask myself: isn't this sail an international sail? Aren't we all international? Or maybe I'm wrong and, I'm also fooling America. My father worked on this sail, I worked on this sail. This sail is today in California and many have worked for this sail to be here now. However, I don't have a working permit, are we all illegal in that case? Let's rather think that we are all international workers. This sail travelled yesterday more kilometers than all the kilometers sailed in its entire life. It crossed the Atlantic Ocean twice.

This sail is the construction and translation of a communal work. An international sail is like the reading of a map is done by those in all nations, like hands are used by those in all nations, like a stone, like all of us, like the world.

Mexican workers painted a wall, I have crossed a giant wall in order to prove that I am a person that has the right to enter in the United States of America.

This sail is international and it couldn't have existed without these three points: Santiago, Paris and California. A sail that now is framed, as a rumor about something, as a thread of coincidences, important or not, but that exist. But this sail is also a flag of war, a cartography that resists history. This sail is history, it fought against the sun, salt, wind, water; it is part of nonexistent histories that must exist, an international history with international colors and international wounds.

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