

#whatif

17 Mar–20 May 2018

What if it is possible to live and fly without burning fossil fuels? What if art is capable of eradicating poverty? What if artistic methods could be used to prove crimes against humanity? And what if documentarism could be a form of political resistance? These are some of the big questions raised by the participating artists in the group exhibition *#whatif*.

Inspired by the impact that social and political experiments have had on society, particularly in the 1960s-70s, *#whatif* presents a number of contemporary artists who are attempting to change current political structures and find ways to reshape society. The exhibition is part of CPH:DOX and shows works by a number of influential international artists and documentary filmmakers: Larry Achiampong, Lara Baladi, Forensic Architecture, Marcus Lindeen, CATPC & Renzo Martens, Naeem Mohaiemen and Tomás Saraceno.

Each artist has been given a gallery in the exhibition for their projects. CATPC & Renzo Martens redresses the capitalist economic inequality between the Northern and Southern Hemisphere. Forensic Architecture uses art and architecture to investigate crimes against humanity. Lara Baladi explores material from Tahrir Square and beyond as an act of resistance against political oppression. Marcus Lindeen and Naeem Mohaiemen both expose new sides of two social experiments from the 1970s. Tomás Saraceno examines new ways of living in the ‘Aerocene’ – a fossil-free future epoch of ecological consciousness. Larry Achiampong explores Afrofuturism and reflects upon the possibilities for unity on the African continent.

The exhibition’s hashtag title is used to open a discussion about today’s social and political development. Social media is used in the creation of social movements and hashtags have become a useful tool for gathering crowds, disseminating political beliefs and instigating change ([#BlackLivesMatter](#), [#metoo](#), [#Jan25](#), [#Resist](#)).

The exhibition is curated by Irene Campolmi and produced in collaboration with CPH:DOX. The exhibition is supported by the Obel Family Foundation, the Embassy of Sweden, DEDI – Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute and the Danish Arts Foundation.

Forensic Architecture

Ground Truth, 2016

Multimedia installation, photos, prints, video

#whatif: What if art can create legal justice?

Ground Truth is an ongoing project initiated by Forensic Architecture in 2016 to provide historical and juridical evidence of the illegalised Palestinian Bedouin villages in the northern threshold of the Negev/Naqab desert in Israel. The Israeli authorities claim that there was no Bedouin sedentary inhabitation in the area prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, but Bedouin settlements are visible in aerial images taken by the Royal Air Force when documenting the area in 1945. While forced physical displacement and illegalisation render these communities non-existent on Google Maps and aerial imaging, state-led land infrastructures and afforestation are transforming and erasing the Bedouins' land and their material cultural remains. Ground Truth combines a community-led photographic dossier with a 3DGiS platform that uses contemporary and historical images to map the presence and remnants of the Bedouins' inhabitation. This first iteration of the project presented here centers on the case of al-Araqib, a Bedouin village that has been demolished more than 125 times over the past 70 years.

Within the context of *#whatif*, a large-scale aerial view of the Negev/Naqab desert is shown along with *Ground Truth*, a 19-minute film documenting the existence of Palestinian Bedouin villages in the region through oral testimonies and a series of ground photographic documentation, which are also on display. By collaborating with Public Lab, Zochrot and the local families of al-Araqib, Forensic Architecture has literally created a 'civic' satellite. Using kites and balloons equipped with simple cameras, the organisation has collected aerial and ground views captured during multiple expeditions to provide the material evidence for the continuity of the Bedouin population on this land. These photos, which are presented throughout the exhibition, document not only the expulsion of people and the destruction of land, but also the ongoing life and resistance of the Bedouin people.

The screen resting against the wall presents the case of a killing that took place in the Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran. On the morning of 18th January 2017, police officers came to demolish several houses in the village. Yaqub Musa Abu al-Qi'an, a resident, was shot to death in his car by Israeli police as he attempted to leave the village. Following the first rounds of shots, his car collided with a group of policemen, killing one. The incident was initially described by Israeli authorities and politicians as an act of terrorism, but Israeli activists working in collaboration with Forensic Architecture have since learned that Abu al-Qi'an lost control of his vehicle after being shot by the police, and did not intentionally hit the officers. The film follows the several stages of the investigation into the shooting and its aftermath.

Forensic Architecture comprises a group of architects, artists, designers and researchers who have developed a new practice for undertaking investigations into political

controversies and human rights abuses. This practice refocuses the power of forensics, using architecture and art as an optical device to generate evidence, and cross-referencing it with a variety of sources such as new media, remote sensing, material analysis, witness testimony and crowdsourcing.

Principal investigators: Eyal Weizman. Project coordinator: Ariel Caine. Collaborators: Debby Farber, Umar al-Ghubari (Zochrot); Nuri al-Uqbi; Aziz al-Turi; Sayakh al-Turi; Hagit Keysar (Public Lab); Princeton University Conflict Shoreline Course; Forensic Architecture MA (MAFA) at the Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths.

Collaborating organisations: Zochrot, Public Lab, ActiveStills, Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF), Association of Unrecognised Villages, Michael Sfard Law Office

CATPC (2014, CD)

Produced in collaboration with the Institute for Human Activities (IHA), founded by Renzo Martens (1973, NL)

The Art Collector, 2015

Jérémie Mabiala and Djonga Bismar (CATPC)

We Who Are Here And You Who Have Come, 2015

Emery Mohamba and Mbuku Kimpala (CATPC)

Self Portrait, 2014

Djonga Bismar (CATPC)

Installation, chocolate sculptures

#whatif: What if art could redress economic inequality?

The six newly created chocolate sculptures presented here reproduce human figures – a self-portrait and a fictional art collector – and the embodiment of an abstract concept. The sculptures are replicas of the original pieces created by the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (CATPC) – the Congolese Plantation Workers Art League – a Lusanga-based collective who work in plantations that cultivate cacao and palm oil for the global market. 3D-scanned and cast in chocolate in Europe to be shown in museums and sold in art galleries around the world, the sculptures embody a controversial, yet politically striking, artistic project where art is used to redress the world's economic inequalities.

The controversy lies in the fact that the more these sculptures are exhibited in museums and international institutions, the higher the price and value goes up in the art market. When a sculpture is sold, the amount goes directly to the CATCP, thus improving the lives of the members of this Congolese artists' community. The project underlines how both the economic and cultural value of the works, similarly to that of chocolate and art, depends on the logic of the market that regulates global economic disparities.

Since 2016, the artistic production of CATPC has diversified to include performances, drawings and videos. The sale of their artworks has grossed €150,000, resulting in a net profit of €60,000 for the cooperative. CATPC invests all of its profits in buying back land to establish experimental, community-owned cocoa and palm oil gardens. This way, profits stay within the community and are used to finance further development.

CATPC was founded in 2014 as a platform for plantation workers and environmental

activists. Its main purpose is to improve the economic position of its members and their communities through the sale of critical art.

Larry Achiampong

PAN AFRICAN FLAG FOR THE RELIC TRAVELLERS' ALLIANCE, 2017

Appliqué flag

#whatif: What if the current effects of nationalism turned Western civilisations into relics and Africans across the globe identified themselves under a new Pan African Union?

Larry Achiampong's flag explores Afrofuturism and African diasporic identity. The design features 54 stars that represent the 54 countries of Africa, while the colours green, black and red reflect its land, its people and the struggles the continent has endured, respectively. The field of yellow gold represents a new day and prosperity. Achiampong has configured these Pan African colours and symbols into a form that is suggestive of a human figure in flight – an Afrofuturistic icon moving towards unity and equilibrium.

Pan African Futurism is not depicted as a utopian vision of the African continent, but one that considers aspects of responsibility in relation to the way that certain people live their lives. The flag launches a new multidisciplinary project entitled *Relic Traveller*, which manifests in performance, audio, moving image and prose. Taking place across various landscapes and locations, the piece builds on a post-colonial perspective informed by technology, agency and the body, and narratives of migration. The flag symbolises both the Pan African Union and the Relic Travellers' Alliance.

As part of the first phase of the *Relic Traveller* project, *PAN AFRICAN FLAG FOR THE RELIC TRAVELLERS' ALLIANCE* is followed by two films titled *Relic 0* and *Relic 1*, their accompanying soundtracks and an audio-visual performance titled *Voyage of The Relic Traveller*.

Larry Achiampong's body of work investigates the complex relationship between identity, migration and belonging, and ranges across aural and visual archives, live performance and sound. Through works that examine his communal and personal heritage – in particular the intersection between pop culture and the post-colonial position – Achiampong investigates constructions of the self by splicing the aural and visual materials of personal and interpersonal archives, offering multiple perspectives that reveal entrenched socio-political contradictions in contemporary society.

The film is being screened in Kunsthal Charlottenborg's cinema during the exhibition period. See web page for details.

Marcus Lindeen

The Acali Experiment, 2017

Multimedia installation, video and sound

#whatif: What if a social experiment could ensure world peace?

The installation *The Acali Experiment* by artist and film director Marcus Lindeen presents a 1:1 reproduction of the raft *Acali*, on which five men and six women of different ages, religions and nationalities drifted across the Atlantic Ocean in the summer of 1973, travelling from the Canary Islands to Cozumel in Mexico.

In keeping with other radical social experiments conducted in the 1970s, the 101-day long *Acali* expedition was conceived by Mexican anthropologist Santiago Genovés as a platform to study and analyse the nature of human beings when they are free from social norms and conventions.

In 2016, Lindeen invited the surviving members of the expedition to reunite in a film studio in Sweden. Over a period of ten days, Lindeen filmed the seven *Acali* participants discussing their memories of the expedition aboard the raft replica, which is on display in the exhibition, hoping to reveal aspects of the experiment that were never disclosed. Genovés had imagined that the experiment would prove how, when detached from civilisation and exposed to a dangerous situation, humans are, by their nature, prone to acts of violence and aggression. Instead, the participants recalled the *Acali* adventure as a challenging but touching experience that strengthened their sense of solidarity with one another. Surprisingly, the only person who attempted to disrupt the group's equilibrium was Genovés, who seemed unable to accept the notion that solidarity, rather than violence or individualism, was the predominant human instinct among the members of the group.

Set designer: Simone Grau Roney
Construction: Klas Jansson Bygg AB

The film *The Raft* will premiere at CPH:DOX film festival in March 2018 and will open in cinemas around Denmark on the 5th of September with DOX:BIO.

Lara Baladi

Don't Be Too Candid, 2018

Site-specific multimedia installation comprising a single-channel video, a web-based platform, a 320 × 320 cm, digital montage, LED tickers, images, texts, objects and paintings by Eric Busch.

#whatif: What if social media platforms could become collective archives, gathering documentation created by (all) people rather than just by governments?

In 2011, the #Jan25 hashtag used by young activists during the 18 days of the Egyptian uprising that toppled president Hosni Mubarak went viral. As the political tension grew, images and videos of a packed Tahrir Square in Cairo and other squares across Egypt were shared on multiple platforms including YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr. Today, the #Jan25 uprising remains one of the most documented and mediated events in contemporary history.

Lara Baladi's ongoing archival project *Vox Populi* is a web-based open media archive featuring photo documentation, online press articles, political satire, eyewitness accounts and videos of the 2011 Egyptian uprising and its aftermath, along with data related to other social movements worldwide. The word 'archive' takes its origin from the Greek 'arkheia', meaning 'public records'. By offering counter-images to those given by authoritarian surveillance systems and the mainstream media, it positions Tahrir Square as the contemporary archetype of social movements.

Don't Be Too Candid is the second in a series of multimedia installations 'performing' the *Vox Populi* archive. The first installation, *Be Realistic, Ask for the Impossible*, shown in KAI 10 in Dusseldorf last November as part of the exhibition *Affect Me: Social Media Images in Art*, captured the zenith of the #Jan25 revolution and its resonance with other protests, past and present, in a global context.

Don't Be Too Candid, is a critique 'à la Voltaire' of the optimistic view around creating a tangible democracy that animated Tahrir Square. Offering an ironic commentary, the central, large-scale digital montage depicts a timeline of the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its aftermath in the form of a board game. On the right, Middle Eastern countries are highlighted in red. They represent the so-called 'Arab Spring'. On the left, Western countries follow the movements associated with the Occupy protests. The timeline of events unfolds clockwise as the game moves forward. Each section of the game refers to a significant event in Egypt's political history from 2010 until today. Khaled Said, the young man who was allegedly brutally beaten and killed at the hands of the police in 2010, embodies all of the #Jan25 martyrs. He sits at the top of the game and marks the beginning of the countdown at 12 o'clock. His mother – the mother of all martyrs – holds him on her heart while overseeing the game from above. The SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces) takes power at 3 o'clock. The Muslim Brotherhood wins the presidential election at 6 o'clock and the coalition to remove the president led by the Military Chief General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi starts at 9 o'clock.

The exhibition situates Tahrir Square among other global social movements. In this context, the lion, a symbol of authority across cultures, represents power changing hands: from the state to the people and back to the state. Other iconic images from 2011 to today, such as shots of a partially erased Egyptian flag, the ‘girl in the blue bra’ and the Egyptian blogger Aliaa Elmahdy (whose blog post featuring a nude image of herself got more than one million views), echo revolutionary global icons and slogans such as “I am a man”, borrowed from the historical 1968 Memphis sanitation strike in the US.

Don't Be Too Candid offers a thought-provoking portrayal of a historical moment when the demand for social justice in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and other Arab nations inspired Occupy movements worldwide, and coincided with the tragic Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

By envisioning alternative forms of archiving created by (all) people rather than by governments alone, Baladi adds an influential political role to her practice as an artist, as she negotiates the nature of consent between different players. Tahrir Square revealed the reality of the streets but also the power of the digital world. In the square, the act of archiving the revolution in ‘real time’ was simultaneously an act of revolting. It is a civic duty and a clear sign of resistance, but also a means of contesting the political game waged by governments and groups in times of crisis. *Vox Populi* is one of many archival initiatives that contribute to recording history while acting as a form of political resistance to ensure that the significance of events like the 2011 Tahrir Square protests are perpetuated.

The installation functions as a complex visual essay, documenting – and commenting on – the 2011 Egyptian uprising and its aftermath, the shift from a military government to a youth coalition party, the attempt to gain a fair and democratic presidential election and the return of a military regime. At the centre of the game, the writing in Arabic, which reads “be yourself”, suggests that a revolution starts within oneself.

In this portrayal of contemporary Egyptian history as a large-scale board game with the world at its centre, the fate of Egyptian citizens depends on a roll of the dice, an apparently innocent gesture, but one that in the real ‘game’ of life could see them set free, controlled or sent to jail. The design of the board, which references scrolls used in Egyptian elementary schools in the 1950s and board games on the theme of the flight into Egypt, again reinforces the idea of a return to the past rather than an evolution. Re-interpreting the playful nature of games, the piece actively criticises the notion that people’s lives are little more than pawns on a board, wielded by others in positions of power.

Courtesy of the artist

Naeem Mohaiemen

Two Meetings and a Funeral, 2017

Three-channel video installation, color, sound, 85 min.

#whatif: What if the Non-Aligned Movement had survived the Cold War era's many power struggles, proxy wars, and alliances of convenience?

Two Meetings and a Funeral is a three-channel film unfolding the hopes and flaws of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a post-Bandung alliance of nations of the Global South, advocating alternatives to the polarities of the Cold War – Soviet controlled Socialist totalitarianism and American / Western European dominated UN deadlock. NAM attempted to navigate a “third way,” but parallel participation in the Petrodollar-driven “Islamic bloc” by some member countries broke apart fragile coalitions. The film’s title comes from Bangladesh’s struggle for survival as a newly independent country in 1972, which led it to both the 1973 Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) meeting in Algiers, and to its ideological opponent, the Islamist-aligned 1974 Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) meeting in Lahore.

The film travels through residues of transnational architecture (Niemeyer, Moretti, Le Corbusier, and finally a Chinese company) in New York, Algiers, and Dhaka. Ironically but sympathetically, the protagonists recognise the hope still contained in the Third World project’s dream of escaping Cold War polarities through an alliance of “non-aligned” socialist nations, while also acknowledging the toxic forms of authoritarianism that doomed the project. The film is a return to a time of many possible futures.

Commissioned by documenta 14

Co-commissioned by Sharjah Art Foundation (UAE) and Ford Foundation/Just Films (USA). Supported by Bengal Foundation (Bangladesh), Tensta Konsthall (Sweden), Arts Council (UK). Additional support by Tate Films/Tate Modern (UK).

Tomás Saraceno and Aerocene Foundation

Aerocene

#whatif: What if art can make us live and flyve without fossile fuel?

Aerocene is an open project initiated by Tomás Saraceno, exploring ethical ways of collaborating with the atmosphere and the environment. It comprises a series of interdisciplinary artistic endeavours, devising, experimenting and distributing post-fossil fuel ways of co-inhabiting Earth. One of its core initiatives involves testing and disseminating ‘lighter-than-air sculptures’ that become buoyant and are carried by the wind and the infrared radiation emanated from the Earth’s surface. *Aerocene* communicates a message of simplicity in a world of tumultuous geopolitical relations, reminding us that the air belongs to everyone and should not depend on any sovereignty: free from borders, free from fossil fuels.

To enter the *Aerocene* is to become aware that the planet Earth is part of a more extensive system, the boundaries of which are still undefined and unexplored. A community of artists, geographers, philosophers, thinkers, scientists and balloonists are undertaking the project development.

Within the context of *#whatif*, three artworks of the *Aerocene* project reveal the limitless potential of engaging with the thermodynamic imaginary:

Aerocene Explorer Backpack AE015, 2016 –

Multiple models

The Aerocene Explorer Backpack AE015 is a sculpture that rises in the air without using fossil fuels, helium or hydrogen. It challenges gravity and deconstructs aerial borders. By using the atmosphere’s thermodynamic balance, the backpack is the first step towards the decolonisation of the atmosphere and envisages a new means to travel around the planet. *The Explorer* has sensors that measure air quality, temperature, humidity and pressure. On a sunny and not too windy day, you can take off and declare your independence from fossil fuels.

Courtesy of the artist and Aerocene Foundation

Aerocene 3, 2011

Mylar transparent and metallised, tape, pump with overpressure release valve, polyester rope

Mylar transparent and metallised, tape, pump with overpressure release valve, polyester rope. The scientific experiments that inspired the design of the sculpture took place at the French National Centre for Space Studies (CNES) in the late 1970s, with the launching of infrared radiation balloons (montgolfière infrarouges – MIR) into the upper levels of the atmosphere. During his artist residency at CNES in 2012, Saraceno researched historical MIR flights, tracing their trajectories and looking into similar experiments from the past. By coining the term ‘aerosolar’ to describe the floating of the *Aerocene*, Saraceno initiated *Aerocene* as a communal movement to increase environmental awareness and seek innovative, creative ways to end current infrastructural dependency on fossil fuels.

The *Aerocene* sculpture on display is a prototype of a larger structure that can perform long-distance flights, floating at altitudes of between 20 and 40 km. The work is made from two lightweight materials: a transparent foil and a mirror foil. The mirror foil reflects the sun’s radiation, creating the insulation that prevents the structure from overheating – a crucial aspect for daytime flights.

The transparent foil absorbs the infrared radiation emitted by the Earth’s surface following the accumulation of solar heat. By balancing the temperature inside the envelope, these two materials allow the balloon to float during the night.

Courtesy of Carl Silkerby

Diving into the Ocean of Air (Working Title), 2018

Three-channel video installation

Diving into the Ocean of Air is a three-channel video installation that was filmed at the Salinas Grandes, a large salt flat in Jujuy, central-northern Argentina.

“The balloon seems to stand still in the air, while the Earth flies past underneath.” These are the words of Alberto Santos-Dumont, a Brazilian inventor and aviation pioneer, remarking on his first experience of floating through the air in one of the first balloon prototypes designed for human flight. “This is stillness in motion – the perfect condition of movement, when all of its forces are in harmony. In this moment, there is no up or down anymore. As you combine with the wind and air, you are set adrift in elemental motion.”

Courtesy of the Aerocene Foundation, with support from CCK