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Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art

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Press Release #10

Film program of the 12th Berlin Biennale

Berlin, August 24, 2022

As part of the 12th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, Rasha Salti, a member of the artistic team, is curating a film program taking place at the movie theatre Babylon on four dates over the next two weeks. The film screenings will be followed by a public conversation with the directors.

31.8./1.9./13.9./14.9.2022

Time: 8 pm

Babylon, Rosa-Luxemburg-Straße 30, 10178 Berlin

Free admission

Offering formally radical auteur hybrid and personal works, the film program of the 12th Berlin Biennale is conceived to hinge on the different programmatic manifestations and motifs of the exhibition, such as decolonizing imaginaries, thus inverting the gaze with engaging archival footage and healing through ritual and community.

About the film program:

Ali Essafi's compelling film *Qabla Zahf el-Zhalam* [Before the Dying of the Light] blends the testimony of a political dissident living in the underground during Morocco's "years of lead" in the 1970s, all the while surfacing archival traces that show the audacity of subversive artists, filmmakers, and musicians. Raphaël Grisey's riveting *Xaraasi Xanne* [Crossing Voices] also engages with archival footage, honoring the incomparable legacy of Bouba Touré, a photographer, videographer, and activist who dedicated his life to chronicling the struggles of undocumented African migrants in Paris and of migrants returning to Africa who built a unique agricultural cooperative. Vincent Meessen's *Juste un*

Mouvement [Just a Movement] blends archival footage with staged scenes and documentary footage to revisit the mysterious death of a Maoist Senegalese rebel, Omar Blondin Diop, and interrogate the reality of Chinese entrepreneurs in Senegal. And Marta Popivoda's *Pejzaži Otpora* [Landscapes of Resistance], a visually stunning feat that has blazed through international festivals, explores the forgotten legacy of a pioneering partisan woman in the resistance against Nazi occupation, braided with deep reflection on the trappings of memory.

31.8.2022, 8 pm

Qabla Zahf el-Zhalam [Before the Dying of the Light], directed by Ali Essafi (MA/FR), 2020, 70", in Arabic and French with English subtitles

Weaving a collage of rare posters, magazine covers, archival footage, and graphic novels, *Before the Dying of the Light* harkens back to the artistic scene of the 1970s in Morocco, giving voice to anti-establishment and rebellious artists and protagonists. Culling footage from a Moroccan independent experimental film censored in 1974, *About Some Meaningless Events* by Mostafa Derkaoui, where a group of young filmmakers explored the role that new Moroccan cinema should play in society, Essafi's film revives the counterculture of resistance that arose from Marxist student movements which saw cinema as a means of politicizing the general public. Dedicated to the victims of censorship and oppression, *Before the Dying of the Light* evokes a time of defiance and solidarity during the notorious "years of lead" under the monarch Hassan II.

Ali Essafi studied psychology in France. His directorial debut titled *Général, nous voilà!* [General, Here We Come!, 1997], a documentary about Moroccan veterans in the French army, was awarded the Special Jury Award at the Namur Film Festival. His films include *Le Silence des champs de betteraves* [The Silence of the Beet Fields, 1998], *Ouarzazate the Movie* (2001), *Cheikhates Blues* (2004), *Wanted* (2011), and *Ubur al-Bab al-Sabe'h* [Crossing the Seventh Gate, 2017]. Essafi moved back to Morocco in 2002 and worked as an advisor to the Moroccan public television channel for three years before returning to film directing in 2009.

The film screening is followed by a discussion in English language with Ali Essafi and Rasha Salti (member of the 12th Berlin Biennale's artistic team).

1.9.2022, 8 pm

Xaraasi Xanne [Crossing Voices], directed by Bouba Touré and Raphaël Grisey (FR/DE/ML), 2022, 123", in Soninké, French, Bambara, and Fula with English subtitles

In the mid-1970s, a group of activists from the western African diaspora, hailing from agricultural backgrounds and living in Parisian workers' residences, decide to turn their backs on factory work in order to train with French farmers in the Champagne region. Their objective was to create an agricultural cooperative in a country in the Sahel region of western Africa. In December 1976, the group founded the agricultural cooperative Somankidi Coura in the Kayes region of Mali. Using rarely seen cinematic, photographic, and sound archives by Bouba Touré, *Crossing Voices* interweaves the story of Somankidi Coura with the struggles of undocumented African migrants in France. The return of a group to the homeland follows a winding path that travels through the ecological

challenges and conflicts on the African continent from the 1970s to the present day. Raphaël Grisey accompanied Bouba Touré, one of its principal actors, revisiting his personal archive amassed starting in the early 1970s. Furthermore, the film is an act of transmission and kinship. Over the course of the film, different voices enter the soundscape to accompany Touré's voice; they bring the tale of a forgotten memory toward a possible future sung by an electronic griot storyteller.

Bouba Touré (1948–2022) lived in Paris, FR, and Somankidi Coura, ML. He studied at the University of Paris VIII, Saint-Denis, and worked in Paris as a projectionist at Cinema 14 Juillet and L'entrepôt. In the 1970s, he documented the lives and struggles of migrant workers and peasants in France and Mali and co-founded the Somankidi Coura cooperative in 1977. Touré's photographic work was presented at Bamako Encounters in 2019 and at the 8th Triennial of Photography in Hamburg in 2022, among others.

Raphaël Grisey uses video, editorial, and photographic works to assemble narratives about politics of memory, migration, and architecture. The book *Where is Rosa L. hidden* (2001–06) and the film *National Motives* (2011) study the ghosts of various political regimes in the public spaces of Berlin and Budapest. Through diverse documentary, fictional, or essayist forms, Grisey's films and installations deal with neocolonial spatial politics and decolonial storytelling and practices in agriculture and urban space (*Trappes, Ville Nouvelle*, 2003; *Cooperative*, 2008; and *Sowing Somankidi Coura, a Generative Archive*, 2015, in collaboration with Bouba Touré). He worked with Florence Lazar on the films *Prvi Deo* and *Red Star* (both 2006), which deal with justice in postwar former Yugoslavia. Other film projects were made in France amid student strikes (*The Indians*, 2011), in China among Míngōng peasant workers (*The Exchange of Perspectives*, 2011), in the social housing complex of Pedregulho in Brazil (*Minhocão*, 2011), in the Brazilian Positivist Church in Rio de Janeiro (*Amor e Progresso*, 2014), and around maroon quilombola communities in Minas Gerais (*Remanescentes* and *A Mina dos Vagalumes*, both 2015).

The film screening is followed by a discussion in English language with Raphaël Grisey and Kader Attia (curator of the 12th Berlin Biennale).

13.9.2022, 8 pm

Juste un Mouvement [Just a Movement], directed by Vincent Meessen (BE/FR), 2021, 108", in French, Mandarin, Wolof with English subtitles

"Omar is dead!" a voice cried out in Dakar, on May 11, 1973. A young militant philosopher—and the articulate Maoist in Jean-Luc Godard's film *La Chinoise* (1967)—had allegedly committed suicide in his Gorée Island prison cell. His family and friends did not believe a word of it, demanding that light be shed on this political crime. A phantom haunts the Senegalese capital, itself in a state of unrest. *Just a Movement* is a free reprise of *La Chinoise*, resituating its characters fifty years later in Dakar and updating its plot to offer a meditation on the relationship between politics, justice, and memory. Omar Blondin Diop becomes the key character. Through this cinematographic gesture that oscillates and circulates between documentary and filmed essay, Meessen questions the Senegal of yesterday and today, and the not-so-subtle neo-imperialism of a China that uses the soft powers of education and culture to penetrate the present and future of Senegal,

interfering in particular in the memorial work of reappropriating history, a current analyzed in the film by the Senegalese intellectual Felwine Sarr.

Vincent Meessen's artistic and filmic work is woven from a constellation of figures, gestures, and signs that maintain a polemical and sensible relation to the writing of history and the Westernization of imaginaries. He decenters and multiplies gazes and perspectives to explore the variety of ways in which colonial modernity has impacted the fabric of contemporary subjectivities. In his work both as an artist and a filmmaker, he likes to use procedures of collaboration that undermine the authority of the author and emphasize the intelligence of collectives. Meessen is a member of the Jubilee platform for research and artistic production.

The film screening is followed by a discussion in English language with Vincent Meessen and Marie Helene Pereira (member of the 12th Berlin Biennale's artistic team).

14.9.2022, 8 pm

Pejzaži Otpora [Landscapes of Resistance], directed by Marta Popivoda (RS/FR/DE), 2021, 95", in Serbian with English subtitles

Sonja Vujanović was one of the first female partisans in Serbia and helped lead the resistance in Auschwitz. *Landscapes of Resistance* invites viewers on an exceptional journey through her memories of revolutionary books from her student days, her wedding to a communist, the resistance against the German occupiers, and her torture after capture as a communist and antifascist fighter, all the way through to her escape from a concentration camp. Popivoda has combined Vujanović's stories with images of the places that witnessed these events, divinely shot by the cinematographer Ivan Marković and edited with "cubist" crossfades to merge the landscape with Vujanović's voice: grass and trees, a crack in the wall, slates off an old farm shed, a pool of water, deer grazing in the distance, even the chimney that is still standing. Through handwritten letters and diary entries of her life in Berlin, Popivoda connects her subject's time and struggles with her own today, confronting the current rise of fascism. Lyrical, lucid, and intimate, *Landscapes of Resistance* opens and concludes in song.

Marta Popivoda is a filmmaker, video artist, and researcher whose work explores tensions between memory and history, collective and individual bodies, as well as ideology and everyday life, with a focus on antifascist and feminist potentialities of the Yugoslav socialist project. She cherishes collective practice in art-making and research, and for several years has been part of the TkH (Walking Theory) collective. Popivoda's first feature documentary was *Jugoslavija, kako je ideologija pokretala naše kolektivno telo* [Yugoslavia, How Ideology Moved Our Collective Body, 2013].

The film screening is followed by a discussion in English language with Marta Popivoda and Ana Janevski (curator in the Department of Media and Performance at MoMA, New York).

The 12th Berlin Biennale takes place from June 11 to September 18, 2022. The exhibition is on view at: Akademie der Künste, Hanseatenweg and Pariser Platz, Dekoloniale

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Memory Culture in the City, Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin, KW
Institute for Contemporary Art, and Stasi Headquarters. Campus for Democracy.

Information on the 12th Berlin Biennale and a selection of press images are available on
the [website](#) and upon [request](#).

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Press Contact

Annika Goretzki
Press Officer

T +49 30 243459-42
F +49 30 243459-99
press@berlinbiennale.de

12.berlinbiennale.de
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Berlin Biennale für zeitgenössische Kunst
KUNST-WERKE BERLIN e. V.
Auguststraße 69
10117 Berlin

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