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Life Worlds & Image Worlds

Bani Abidi | Halil Altindere | Rasheed Araeen | Kader Attia | Doug Fishbone
Meschac Gaba | Khosrow Hassanzadeh | Pieter Hugo | Anna Jermolaewa
Jin Shi | Jompet | Agung Kurniawan | Pavel Pepperstein | Elodie Pong

The artists whose works are shown in this section react to the experience of the omnipresence of the mass media in the global world. By assimilating the boundary-transgressing visual consumption of popular culture into their repertoire of motifs, they allude, for example, to various film cultures such as Hollywood, Nollywood, and Bollywood, each of which speaks to their respective local audiences while at the same time drawing on a changing repertoire of clichés that circulate globally. This results in collective image worlds; these cross borders and connect different life worlds to one another - often simply by altering the ethnic types or local narrations. It is just this ongoing process of rewriting the same images which is addressed by those artists represented in this section. Anna Jermolaewa's photographs from her *Kremlin Doppelgänger* series (2008/2009) show that even the real world of places is fictionalized, as demonstrated by a replica of the Kremlin built as a vacation spot in Turkey that can be photographed as such although it is not the Kremlin. On closer inspection, uniforms and national symbols and even stock market news all turn out to be visual languages. So every slight shift in a given context shows just how blurred the border is that runs between image worlds and so-called life worlds. To paraphrase Édouard Glissant, the imagination transforms real worlds into "imaginaries," that is, into worlds of collective ideas.

Bani Abidi

* 1971 in Karachi (PK), lives and works in Karachi and New Delhi (IN)

...so he starts singing, 2000

Video, color, sound,
3:30 min, loop

In *...so he starts singing*, one of Bani Abidi's early works, a young woman enthusiastically recounts the plots of twenty-six Bollywood films. From among the plots thus narrated over the course of an interview project the artist carried out with her very cinephile roommate, Abidi edited a single, absurd story which was related in all of three and half minutes. This quick run-through better summarizes Bollywood as a phenomenon than do any of the many classificatory attempts by film theory: its formulaic character - angry parents oppose a pair of lovers, a ménage à trois delays involvement, villains impede the happiness of the parties concerned - allows for the creation of a clearly formulated and globally intelligible world of images. Reduced to a single narrative, the stereotypical schema stands out all the more.

The work's narrator is representative - not least by way of her sharply defined dialect and interjections in the Urdu language (the national language of Pakistan) - of the local cinema audience which becomes sucked into the undertow of images, and which internalizes



the Bollywood stories and their pictures of everyday life, fashion, and love, before situating them in their own lives. At the same time, the simple, melodramatic narrative strategy levels cross-cultural hurdles and creates points of reference for an international audi-

ence that draws its ideas about life, morals, and culture from the Indian subcontinent. Abidi thus evolves an ironic commentary on the one-dimensionality of globally circulating images, which still remain firmly attached to stereotypes. (KB)

Halil Altindere

* 1971 in Mardin (TR), lives and works in Istanbul (TR)

My Mother Likes Pop Art Because Pop Art is Colorful, 1998

C-print on aluminum Dibond, 100 × 150 cm

My Mother Likes Pop Art Because Pop Art is Colorful is one of Halil Altindere's early works to have achieved cult status, albeit not comparable to Andy Warhol's *Marilyn* (1964), that celebrated epitome of Pop art adorning the cover of the book resting in the lap of the woman featured in Altindere's photograph. However, the work is symbolic of contemporary Turkish art and its balancing act between tradition and modernity, Orient and Occident, as well as Altindere's attempt to come to terms with Western art and its influence on his own artistic work.

Disguised as a brightly colored, innocuous-looking photograph, the picture delivers an ironic statement about the reception and perception of the West in Turkey and vice versa. Altindere simply reverses the relationship between "us" and "the others": the history of Pop art is a large-format glossy catalog in an unfamiliar context - a context that seems very tradi-



tional and, moreover, private - at least to the viewer who has grown up with contemporary Western art. Much in the same way that the term Orient has frequently come to betoken the Other in the Western world, and is thus the object of numerous projections, so also has Warhol's famous silk screen now become emblematic of the exotic ethos surrounding the term foreign. Both perceptions turn out to be stereotypes.

Altindere's photograph points to an image now become cliché, while drawing attention at the same time to the potential simultaneity of tradition and modernity; something which makes visual migration at all possible and renders permeable apparently rigid boundaries. (KB)

Rasheed Araeen

* 1935 in Karachi (PK), lives and works in London (UK)

Golden Calf, 1987

Mixed media,
9 panels, 152 × 179 cm

After his pioneering role in British Minimal art, Rasheed Araeen has continued the practice of integrating the serial arrangement of panels into his work. *Golden Calf*, an early example from 1987, is an arrangement of four Andy Warhol portraits of Marilyn Monroe and panels of silk-screen photographs depicting what appears to be a crowd of mourning women in the remaining four corner sections. The Marilyn panels are arranged around and face the center of the nine-panel piece. This dramatically highlights the center panel taken up entirely by a single photograph of a fallen Iranian soldier. The close-up shows him lying in a pool of his own blood. The photograph is a document of the Iran-Iraq war, which raged throughout the 1980s. Originally published in conjunction with an Iranian newspaper article lambasting Iraq, Iran's erstwhile enemy, it was also a critique of the American imperialistic involvement in global politics.

Placing an image of Marilyn Monroe - icon of American mass media and celebrity culture - against the backdrop of the dark realities of a political warzone might initially seem to imply an indifference of the art world towards such treacherous political re-



alities. The Monroe portraits, however, also represents one of Warhol's recurring leitmotifs, death. Here, Western art fetishes are contrasted with the stark realities of the contemporary world. Araeen employs the serial repetition of images, whereby each additional image adds a new layer of meaning culminating in the image of the fallen soldier. The West's idolization and worship of dead movie stars is contrasted with the veneration of fallen Iranian war heroes by masses of mourning women. Both of the chief subjects represented become posthumous idols. (AMB)

Kader Attia

* 1970 in Dugny (FR), lives and works in Berlin (DE)

Untitled (Plastic Bags), 2008-2011

Sculpture, empty plastic bags,
dimensions variable

In Kader Attia's most recent work *Untitled (Plastic Bags)* the plastic bag itself becomes the stuff of which dreams are made. For decades, this piece of polyethylene was left over at the end of each shopping session. Although the triumphal march of the plastic bag has meanwhile collapsed for ecological reasons, it still retains something of its erstwhile promise of being able to have everything - one simply goes to the shop next door. No less caught up with the image of the colored bag, however, are associations with those smoldering suburban conflicts of migrants; the plastic bag, especially in Germany, is also intimately connected to shopping at a Turkish supermarket, or at street vendors, etc.

In *Untitled (Plastic Bags)* Attia presented nine colored copies of this machine of (dis-)illusion, which he had collected in the Middle East, in Africa, South and North America, and Europe. Before plastic became plastic art, it was filled with primary raw materials or basic foods: bottles of oil, rice, flour, cartons of milk, etc. Once removed, the imprint of its former contents



remains for a certain amount of time though it begins to fade, until finally collapsing over the course of the exhibition. With a pronounced sense of irony, Attia develops his stance towards globalization and its all too frequently suppressed downside, to which belongs the exploitation of raw materials no less than the presentation of the cultural preeminence of the West as opposed to the "Other." Only as imprint, as empty form,

does, for example, rice leave traces of its identity on the global, everyday material of the plastic bag, per se symbol of the capitalist world order. (KB)

Doug Fishbone

* 1969 in New York, NY (US),
lives and works in London (UK)

Elmina, 2010

Video, color, sound, 90 min

For the art world, globalization is an issue that manifests itself in the discourse about access to local and global forums and the necessity of social engagement; for a large part of the world's population, processes of globalization directly affect the possibility of leading a self-determined life. In *Elmina*, Doug Fishbone initiates a collision of these two perspectives on globalization at several levels. *Elmina* is a Ghanaian film by the brothers Emmanuel and John Apea that addresses the West African audience with a dramatic tale of exploitation and power; but *Elmina* is also one of Fishbone's art projects, which the artist both financed with money acquired from the art market and in which he himself played the leading role.

In the dramatized conflict between the farmer Ato Blankson and the corrupt rulers of the city, terms such as "progress" and "development" are merely pretexts for enrichment and the preservation of privileges, of conditions which culminate in most of the protagonists losing their moral integrity and, in some cases, losing their lives. Less drastic, but still conspicuous, are the conflicts broached by *Elmina* that touch on the system of globalized art: Is it legitimate to present, unquestioned, a white American in the role of a Ghanaian farmer? Does an appropriation take place here on the part of the artist, who transfers the commercial film product into the context of an exhibition, or rather by the Ghanaian filmmakers, who use the financial help of the art system to entertain their local audience? (JB)



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Meschac Gaba

* 1961 in Cotonou (BJ), lives and
works in Rotterdam (NL) & Cotonou

Musée de l'Art de la Vie Active, 2010/2011

Performance and mixed-media installation,
30 wigs (braided synthetic hair and wire supports),
2 videos (performances in Cotonou and Karlsruhe)

Produced with Laboratorio Art Contemporain, Galleria Continua in cooperation with ZKM | Karlsruhe.

Meschac Gaba became known above all for his *Museum of Contemporary African Art* (1996–2002). In this work, arranged in several stages, the artist examined the art world's mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion with respect to African art. In *Musée de l'Art de la Vie Active*, recently produced for the exhibition *The Global Contemporary*, the artist builds on his previous *Tresses* series. For performing the work he fashioned thirty wigs of synthetic hair referring to figures of global history by means of representing universally intelligible symbols, among others, Martin Luther King, Kwame Nkrumah, Jeanne d'Arc, Fela Kuti, Pierre and Marie Curie, and King Guézo of Dahomey. By placing Western icons alongside important figures of African history, Gaba calls attention to the need for a truly global history.

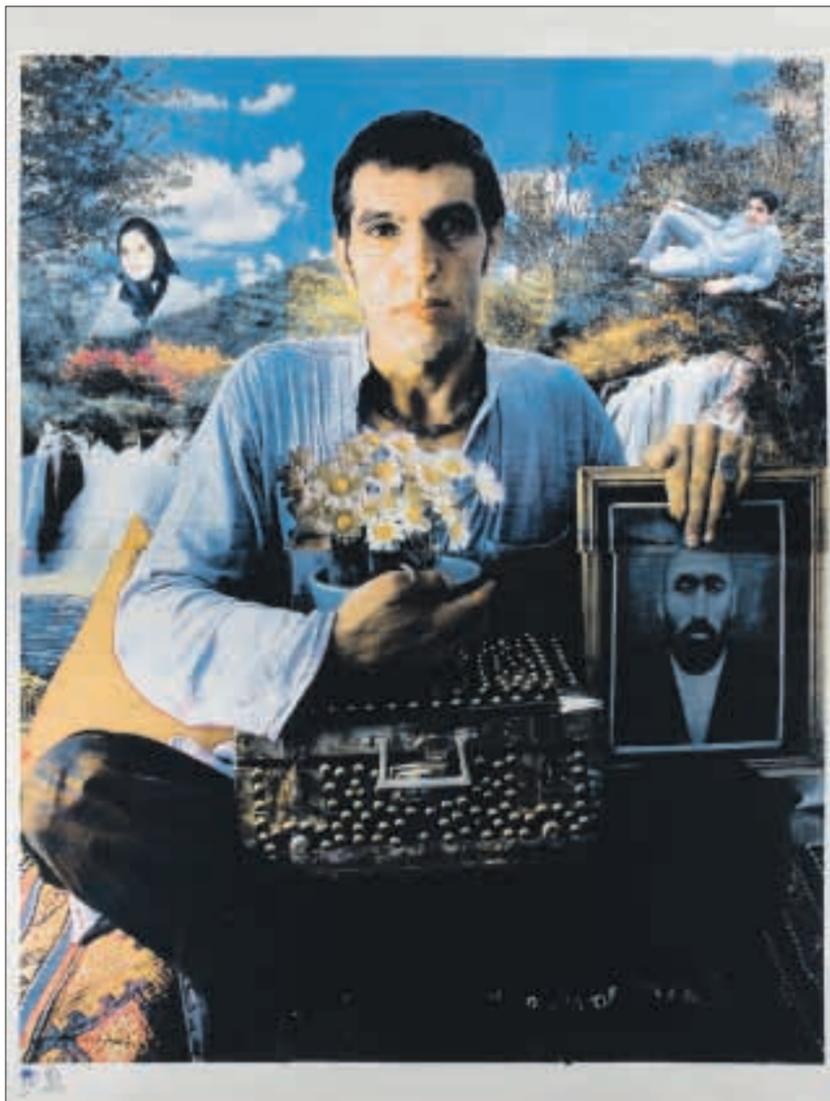
At the same time, the artist investigates the root causes of the lack of an African museum tradition (as

analog to the museum tradition established and defined in the West). By declaring Cotonou, one of Benin's cities, a museum, and by traversing it with his idiosyncratic parades, he draws attention towards the urban space and its inhabitants' strategies of survival and improvisation. In so doing, he enquires into alternative models, and into the tasks and local interpretations of the museum: "The micro-macro economy represents the survival of the inhabitants of this city

day after day. They need to create to be able to survive. In the city of Cotonou, you can see installations everywhere - it is like an open-air museum." (AM)

The second part of the work comprises an approx. two-hour performance through the center of Karlsruhe on September 17, 2011, at 11 p.m. (starting point: the main entrance of ZKM | Karlsruhe).





Khosrow Hassanzadeh

* 1963 in Tehran (IR), lives and works in Tehran and London (UK)

Terrorist Series: Nadjibeh, Azimeh, Khosrow, 2004

3 silk screens, 200 x 320 cm each

Khosrow Hassanzadeh is an internationally active Iranian painter. Starting out as an artist in Tehran in the mid-1980s, Hassanzadeh achieved international recognition with the exhibition of his *War Series* at the London Diorama Arts Centre in 1999. These paintings, based on the artist's firsthand experience of the Iran-Iraq war, have been intentionally rendered for an outsider, namely Western, perspective. The same gaze-oriented approach to artistic work was to characterize Hassanzadeh's future career: a tight-knit tapestry of issues of central importance for cultural imaginaries and depictions of conflicts between Western and Arab worlds in the aftermath of 9/11.

In the *Terrorist Series*, Hassanzadeh portrayed himself and some members of his family as "terrorists." These portraits are accompanied by images and signs indicating their nationality, belief, and history. The latter work reflects the artist's commitment to detect and then depict traditional Islamic characteristics so as to question the Western prejudice claiming that terrorism is intrinsically rooted in Islamic culture and religion: "What is a terrorist? [...] The West, with its personal definition of terrorism, gives itself the right to take over a country, while in the Middle East the West is clearly accused of being a full-fledged terrorist. In exploring these questions, I portrayed the people in whom I have the most faith: my mother and sisters."¹ (SG)

¹ Khosrow Hassanzadeh, as quoted from: Mirjam Shatanawi, "The Disquieting Art of Khosrow Hassanzadeh," in: *ISIM Review*, 18, Autumn 2006, Leiden University.



Pieter Hugo

* 1976 in Johannesburg (ZA), lives and works in Cape Town (ZA)

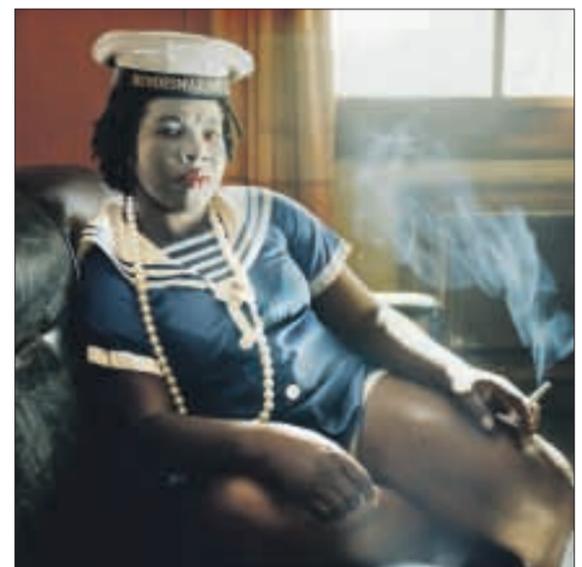
Nollywood, 2008

Photo series, selection of 8 C-prints, 102 x 102 cm each (110 x 110 cm framed)

Individual titles: **28.** *Escort Kama*, Enugu, Nigeria, 2008; **10.** *Chris Nkulo and Patience Umeh*, Enugu, Nigeria, 2008; **43.** *Emeka Onu*, Enugu, Nigeria, 2008; **29.** *Obechukwu Nwoye*, Enugu, Nigeria, 2008; **55.** *Pieter Hugo*, Enugu, Nigeria, 2009; **39.** *Princess Adaobi*, Enugu, Nigeria, 2008; **51.** *Fidelis Elenwa*, Enugu, Nigeria, 2009; **16.** *Mr. Enblo*, Enugu, Nigeria, 2008

For his predominantly documentary, sometimes staged photo series, South African photographer Pieter Hugo often draws on his subjects from the margins of African society. In the photo series *Nollywood*, he deals with a rare instance of African self-representation in the medium of film.

Following Bollywood and Hollywood, Nollywood is the third biggest film industry in the world; under the most rudimentary technical conditions, such as the use of DV camcorders, and with minimal budgets and production times, up to 2,000 films are produced for Africans by Africans annually. In formats such as VHS, VCD, and DVD, these films are distributed en



masse mainly around Nigeria and West Africa, and play a central role in the everyday life of these countries. Rooted in local imagery, with their "trashy," shrill splatter aesthetics, and realistic yet dramatically overdone and excessive plots about love, religion, violence, civil war, prostitution, politics, corruption, and postcolonial conflicts, they enjoy consistent popularity across various social milieus.

After Hugo's initial attempts to take pictures during shooting sessions on film sets failed because of the chaotic bustle of everyday production, he began to reenact typical Nollywood sets and themes in a quasi-documentary manner with actors. Thus, there arose vivid portraits of intense theatrical moments in a process of collective imagination, in which cinematic fiction was scarcely distinguishable from social reality. At the same time, Hugo ironizes the common African stereotypes and their photographic representations - letting the people he portrays look back, unruffled, at the viewer. (AM)

Anna Jermolaewa

* 1970 in Saint Petersburg (RU),
lives and works in Vienna (AT)

Kremlin Doppelgänger, 2008/2009

Photo series (selection), 50 × 35 cm each, framed

Anna Jermolaewa was brought up in Petrograd (present-day St. Petersburg, Russia). She suffered persecution in 1989 due to her editorial work for the magazine *Democratic Opposition*. She subsequently left Russia and has since been living and working in Vienna. Her video works, predominantly designed as documentaries, reflect the everyday, allegedly stable dimensions of our reality, and uncover its ambivalent, absurd, and bizarre aspects by employing a variety of filmic devices.

In the photographic work *Kremlin Doppelgänger*, shown here, Jermolaewa focuses on *the* symbol of Rus-

sian state power, present all over the world in the press in the form of pompous military parades. The artist displays a copy of history-seeped Red Square in Moscow, namely, the Kremlin Palace Hotel in Antalya, Turkey, which is especially popular among Russian holidaymakers. Here, in nostalgic surroundings, visitors may happily play in the water, sunbathe, enjoy a meal, or shop. In the video of the same name, even Mikhail Gorbachev's doppelgänger appears at the poolside and talks about his life in politics - each morning, the retired engineer stencils his birthmark on his forehead.

Jermolaewa initiates a dialog between reality and fiction, between the historic monument and its reproduction full of different content and values. She thus draws attention to the mobility, reinterpretation, and exchangeability of cultural or national ideas and their icons in the age of globalization, and the general fictitiousness of history. Which of the two phenomena is the more ominous, the original symbolic site or its copy, remains a matter of debate. (AM)



Jin Shi

* 1976, lives and works in
Beijing (CN)

Retail Business: Karaoke, 2009

Mixed-media installation, 180 × 290 × 82 cm

Karaoke is a very contemporary leisure activity. It evokes the singularity and creativity of the star combined with a friendly invitation to participate though with no unpleasant outcome. Thus, singing in karaoke bars and in front of gaming consoles we become united in universal leisure time amidst a post-materialistic utopia, in which pure consumption is expanded to evoke a sense of participation and involvement. Seen critically, the karaoke, which was developed in Japan during the 1970s, anticipated what casting shows have now carried to extremes throughout the globe: the promise to escape everyday life and to suddenly become the center of attention. In his series *Retail Business*, Jin Shi focuses on this tragically hopeful aspect of leisure society: billiards, wellness centers, or the aforementioned karaoke are shrunk to dimensions transportable by bicycle so as to augment the precarious goods touted by market vendors and itinerant hawkers. Here, DIY culture meets the necessity to improvise with whatever is presently at one's disposal, and urban glamour fulfills the desire among poor populations in megacities to temporarily forget their worries. (JB)

