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CANDICE BREITZ EXHIBITION 2017

“Alec, you’re famous! People will listen to you,” says Alec Baldwin to himself, a few moments before sharing the details of his arrest in Cairo, his journey to Italy on a desperately overcrowded fishing boat, and his eventual arrival in the unfamiliar city of Berlin on a rainy day in September 2015. Cut. Julianne Moore briefly fixes her hair. And then recounts the brutal attack that she and her children survived back home, shattering what had been a comfortable life in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and leaving her with no choice but to smuggle herself and her children – via an endless journey in the back of a windowless truck – towards an uncertain future in an unknown country. In our first encounter with Love Story, Moore and Baldwin address us via a large projection, to speak of past anguish and hope for the future, of forced migration and loss, but also of the comfort of safety, friendship and love. They send shivers down our spines. We feel for them and with them, although the experiences that they articulate are obviously not their own and – for the most part – unlikely to be ours. Such is the power of cinema. Who would deny its ability to create illusion?

Yet these narratives of escape and of fresh beginning are hardly delivered to us seamlessly. Breitz has recruited two familiar faces – two members of the global media family that we’re accustomed to welcoming into our living rooms – only to put into their mouths the stories of people who are generally treated as faceless and voiceless in our culture, only so as to introduce us to those who are typically destined to remain outside and beyond our zones of comfort: isolated in refugee camps and asylum courtroums, relegated to the basement of our social (un)conscious. Over the course of seventy-three minutes, the montage featuring Baldwin and Moore suspends us between cinema-at-its-best – a dramatized narration that moves us to tears and to laughter; and the inevitably awkward spectacle that ensues as we observe two highly-privileged celebrities attempting to earnestly channel lives that could not be more remote from their own. We are alternately moved and utterly perturbed. What business do major stars of the hegemonic American storytelling industry – with their iconic onscreen presence and professionally polished delivery – have slipping into these roles?

Alec Baldwin as a former child soldier from Angola? Julianne Moore as a refugee from war-torn Syria? The irreconcilable gap between these famous faces and the stories of displacement that they endeavour to embody on the screen before us, is reiterated formally by Breitz’s edit, which moves us at whiplash-pace between Baldwin and Moore, weaving a series of narrative fragments into a cinematic composition that in turn invites empathy and critique, credulity and disbelief. Captured in the nondescript vacuum of a green-screen set and denied the usual tricks of the trade (the actors wear their own clothes and perform without backdrops, accents or props), these two white bodies are exemplary of the exceptionalism that neoliberalism holds so dear. As they seek to animate the invisible lives of others, we cannot help but read the actors as privileged representatives of a broader economy of subjectivity, an economy in which an exclusive handful of individuals monopolises the precious currency of our attention, bathing in the visibility that we lavish on them as others are left to linger in the shadows of obscurity, their vague contours condemning them to anonymity. But there is still more of Love Story to be seen.

Descending into KOW’s subterranean gallery, we come face-to-face with six men and women, whom Breitz interviewed in Berlin, New York and Cape Town in late 2015. The script for the Hollywood montage was in fact compiled from excerpts drawn from these interviews, which Breitz now presents to us in their full complexity and duration on six large monitors. These are the faces and the lives behind the fictional montage. The dramatic intensity of our initial encounter with the work gives way to sobriety, curiosity and insight, as the interviewees articulate their lived experience, sharing memories and anecdotes against a now familiar green screen. “People don’t even care about us, you know, they would never put us on a movie screen and talk about us,” says Mamy Maloba Langa, who fled the horrific violence that was inflicted on her in Kinshasa: “The media is only interested in famous people; I don’t think all those nice people would come just to listen to my story, I don’t think so...”. José Maria João, who – as



a child soldier – spent years following the murderous commands of generals (before finally fleeing Angola for the relative safety of Namibia), has a strong message for Baldwin: “Alec, you must be happy that Candice is giving you this opportunity to give people my story, to tell them about my life. I just want to ask you to tell this story that I went through in the right way. You must get it right.” João is issuing an assignment to the Hollywood actor. Some kind of collaboration is in the works.

Breitz has in fact built a bridge over which six refugees – standing in for millions of others – have been invited to step into public view. “Some of the most pressing social issues of our times have come into the limelight only after Hollywood actors and actresses performed certain roles,” explains Shabeena Saveri, a transgender activist who was forced to leave India under severe duress. Saveri is aware of the visibility that is afforded to blockbuster cinema and contemporary art. She sets out to harness this visibility, threading her own words – as a ventriloquist might – through the body of Julianne Moore. Moore rises to the task dutifully: “I was thinking, and I put myself in the shoes of that Hollywood actress, and I was thinking that if I were her, then this story would make a huge impact, because then it would reach a much larger audience....” Saveri’s sentiments are echoed elsewhere by Luis Nava, a respected Venezuelan professor and political dissident who fled Caracas, and now lives in exile in New York; Farah Mohamed, a young atheist whose lack of religious conviction put his life at risk back in Somalia; and Sarah Mardini, who left Syria in 2015 along with her younger sister Yusra (Yusra’s participation in the Olympic Games in Rio in 2016, perhaps inevitably, attracted bids from Hollywood to turn her life story into a movie).

Each of these six stories is singular. Each demands to be heard. And each intersects with thousands of similar stories. The world is full of such stories. Who can listen to them all? Love Story asks this question pointedly, putting forward six first-person accounts that collectively amount to twenty-two hours of footage. Sooner or later, we are overwhelmed by the duration. We wander back to the condensed summary offered by Moore and Baldwin. Or we head home. Or we go to the movies. The great show trumps the truth. In an age in which cat videos and Trump’s tweets vie with stories of humanitarian disaster to capture our short spans of attention, an age in which late-night comedy has become a primary news source for so many, it is futile to insist on distinctions between fake and real news, between lived experience and fiction, between events and their representation. Instead, Breitz hacks into the operating system of the neoliberal attention economy, hoping to re-direct the flow of our attention, seeking to interrogate our capacity for solidarity.

Breitz’s montage exposes the mechanisms by means of which mainstream entertainment manipulates us emotionally, drilling into our affective being, choreographing our empathy and our relationship to community via the cult of celebrity and the disavowal of narrative complexity; a relentless combination of technology, aesthetics and performative prowess. The manipulative potential inherent in popular form is perhaps best understood, in the current political climate, by those on the right. Propaganda is hardest to dismantle and critique when it appeals to us at the level of emotion, rather than by reasoning with us. Love Story both reflects and reflects on the rampant populism of our time. The work caters to the same affective mechanisms, all the while purposefully stripping them bare; deconstructing them in order to take a clear stance against right-wing populism.

Does Love Story succeed in carving out a form of solidarity? Does the work spark passionate concern for the plight of others in a language that might be understood by many? The work is neither able (nor does it pretend) to resolve the ethical dilemma that is at the core of our fast-moving digital culture: Most of us simply don’t have the time, attention or patience that is required to hear out the very voices that can grant us an understanding of today’s economic and political cruelties. So, we surrender ourselves to the oblivion that allows such cruelties to be perpetuated. Over the past twenty-five years, Breitz’s oeuvre has scrutinised the manner in which neoliberal logic shapes

and defines the experience of subjectivity, questioning the degree to which this logic might be evaded. In presenting a dense archive of marginal voices in counterpoint to an easily accessible and digestible fiction that appropriates and dramatizes these voices, Love Story urges us to interrogate the conditions under which we are able (and willing) to exercise empathy.

Breitz suggests that the end of universal narratives does not necessarily imply the failure of far-reaching instruments of communication. There’s something to be gained when we trade a longing for truth and authenticity for the hope that new modes of storytelling can be found and disseminated, stories that might make people whom we wouldn’t willingly invite into our living rooms seem familiar enough so that we might want to change our minds. At the same time, Breitz demonstrates how readily over-simplified narratives can be instrumentalised, first to bolster illusion and then to serve ignorance. Luminous with the artist’s keen intelligence, the exhibition at KOW offers us emancipatory pleasure that is tinged with the bitter insight that we may not overcome the barrier between ourselves and those values which we hold to be morally just. Failing to put our convictions into practice may effectively signal our contribution to the diminishment of others’ prospects in life.

Love Story was commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), Outset Germany and Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg. It was first shown at the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart in 2016, accompanied by a publication at Kerber Verlag.



Candice Breitz

Love Story



Candice Breitz
Love Story



Sarah Ezzat Mardini

Interviewed in Berlin on 18 October, 2015

Fled Damascus, Syria
Granted asylum in Berlin, Germany

Sarah Ezzat Mardini was born in Damascus in 1995. From the age of five, she and her sister Yusra were trained by their father—a professional swimming coach—to be competitive swimmers. Both started swimming for the Syrian national swimming team at an early age. The highlight of Sarah’s athletic career came when she won a silver medal at a championship in Egypt at the age of twelve, after which she and other members of the national team were invited for a personal audience with Bashar al-Assad, the president of Syria.

When war broke out in Syria, Sarah’s family lost their home, and her father was forced to take a job in Jordan, leaving his wife and three daughters behind in Damascus. Life grew increasingly difficult. As friends started to leave the country to seek safety and a better future, Sarah and Yusra gradually convinced their parents to allow them to risk the journey to Europe.

Flying from Syria to Turkey via Lebanon in August 2015, the sisters made contact with smugglers in Istanbul. The smugglers transported them from Istanbul to Izmir. After a wait of four days and a first failed attempt to make the crossing over the Aegean from Turkey to Greece, Sarah and Yusra were among a group of twenty people that the smugglers loaded onto a flimsy rubber dinghy (which was designed for eight passengers). Few within the group—which consisted of sixteen men, three young women and a baby—could swim. Within fifteen minutes, the motor had failed and the boat started to fill with water. As those on board started to pray feverishly, Sarah courageously jumped into the night sea and started to push the boat in the direction of Greece. Yusra and a handful of others joined her in the dark water. After three and a half hours of strenuous swimming, they had managed to guide the boat safely to the shore of Lesbos, saving twenty lives. In her interview, Sarah vividly describes the Aegean crossing, as well as the subsequent journey that the sisters made across Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, and Austria en route to Germany.

Sarah and Yusra arrived in Berlin in September 2015. Their parents and younger sister were able to join them in December 2015. The family has applied for asylum in Germany. Sarah is currently studying German and is a passionate member of the Refugee Club Impulse, a vibrant theater group that was established by refugees, consists of refugees and advocates for refugee rights. She spends much of her time on the island of Lesbos volunteering with ERCI (Emergency Response Centre International), a non-profit organisation that provides humanitarian aid to refugees arriving in Greece. Sarah is a proud Arab who resents the rich Arab countries for their poor treatment of Syrian refugees. She is an observant Muslim. She is opinionated and outspoken. She plans to study journalism (with a focus on human rights), and to return to Syria when it becomes safe to do so.

Duration of Interview: 02:47:52



Farah Abdi Mohamed

Interviewed in Berlin on 18 October, 2015

Fled Somalia
Seeking asylum in Berlin, Germany

Farah Abdi Mohamed was born in Somalia in 1988. His father was killed in tribal conflict while his mother was pregnant with him. Raised by a hardworking single parent in a conservative religious community, the expectation was that he would grow up to be a devout Muslim. As a young child, Farah made immense efforts to “find signs” that might confirm the existence of God. Unable to find such signs, and looking around himself—at the mess of tribal war, poverty and failed nationhood that characterized the Somalia of his childhood—Farah concluded that there could not be a God. His inability to find faith was accompanied by anxiety and fear. It became clear to him at an early age, that it was dangerous to express doubt. A confession of non-belief would, at best, have condemned him to a life of stigma and isolation. At worst, there was a high likelihood that members of his extended family would feel obliged to end his life to prevent him from poisoning the minds of others, within a community in which the death penalty is viewed as appropriate punishment for those who renounce their faith.

Searching online as a teenager, Farah came across words such as ‘atheist’ and ‘atheism,’ and was comforted by the discovery that there were others that had lost their faith or failed to find faith. As his English improved—largely via use of the Internet—a larger world grew visible to him. His voracious online reading was accompanied by exposure to television series such as *Lost*, *Survivor*, and *Grey’s Anatomy*, which piqued his curiosity about life beyond Somalia. When Farah could no longer stand having to feign religiosity and attend prayers five times a day back home in Somalia, he ran away to Egypt to study. Finding that conditions were not much better for atheists in Egypt, he gradually decided to risk the journey across the Mediterranean to Europe. On his first attempt to leave Cairo, he was captured and thrown into jail for seventeen days. Upon his release (thanks to the intervention of the UNHCR), he paid smugglers to board him onto a rickety fishing boat in Port Said, alongside 322 other refugees, braving a week-long journey across the ocean (for much of which there was insufficient water and food onboard) in a desperate bid to get to Germany.

Farah arrived in Berlin in September 2015 and is currently seeking asylum in Germany. He is enrolled and studying at Kiron (the ‘international university for refugees’). He is finally able to speak his mind freely within a new circle of friends. He nevertheless continues to fear for his life, given the conservative religious views that are prevalent within the Somali community in Berlin. As such, he chose to wear a disguise to conceal his identity for this interview, in which he speaks out publicly for the first time about having left the Islamic faith. Farah Abdi Mohamed is an assumed name.

Duration of Interview: 03:32:19



Luis Ernesto Nava Molero

Interviewed in New York City on 13 November, 2015

Fled Caracas, Venezuela
Granted asylum in New York, USA.

Born in 1960 in Maracaibo, Venezuela, Luis Ernesto Nava Molero was an effeminate child who was relentlessly bullied and taunted by other children, but also sexually abused by his stepfather, who stayed home with the kids while his young mother worked long shifts at the local Chinese restaurant to support the family. His fear of disappointing his deeply homophobic mother, as well as his own internalization of the homophobia that was perpetuated by the Catholic Church, ensured that he kept silent about the abuse. He was convinced that he deserved it. His stepfather did not accompany the family when Luis’ mother decided to relocate herself to Caracas with the children to seek a better life, but Luis continued to be a victim of harassment in the capital city, where he was persistently at risk in what was an oppressively macho culture. A failed attempt to “become a straight person” by enrolling himself in a military academy eventually led him to the sanctuary of university life.

A promising, politically minded student (who looked to figures like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro as role models in the utopian early years following the Cuban Revolution), Luis soon won a scholarship to study in the Soviet Union. He arrived in Kyiv to study international economic relations as Mikhail Gorbachev was ascending to power, witnessing firsthand the growing disparities between the ideals of the Communist Party and the realities of Soviet life. He returned to Caracas in 1989, a few days prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, still a keen supporter of the theoretical potential of socialism.

Hugo Chávez’s rise to power soon led to disillusionment, as Chávez’s paramilitary regime rapidly became dictatorial and aggressive, often violently oppressing political opposition. Luis was offered a prestigious professorship at the Universidad Simón Bolívar. He continued to live his public and academic life very much in the closet, fearing the repercussions of coming out. Refusing to be silenced in his critique of Chávez, Luis was brutally assaulted by three men late one night as he left campus. The attack was intended to teach him a lesson for “being a mouthpiece of antipatriotic capitalist propaganda”—“Fuck your mother, Professor Nava—you little faggot—nobody needs you here.”

Fearing for his safety, Luis fled to the United States, where he was granted asylum as a political dissident. Today Luis lives in New York, where he advocates for others seeking refuge and freedom in the United States, and works as an activist in the LGBT immigrant community.

Duration of Interview: 03:49:58



Candice Breitz

Love Story





Candice Breitz
Love Story



José Maria João

Interviewed in Cape Town on 13 December, 2015

Fled Angola
Granted refugee status first in Namibia, and then in South Africa

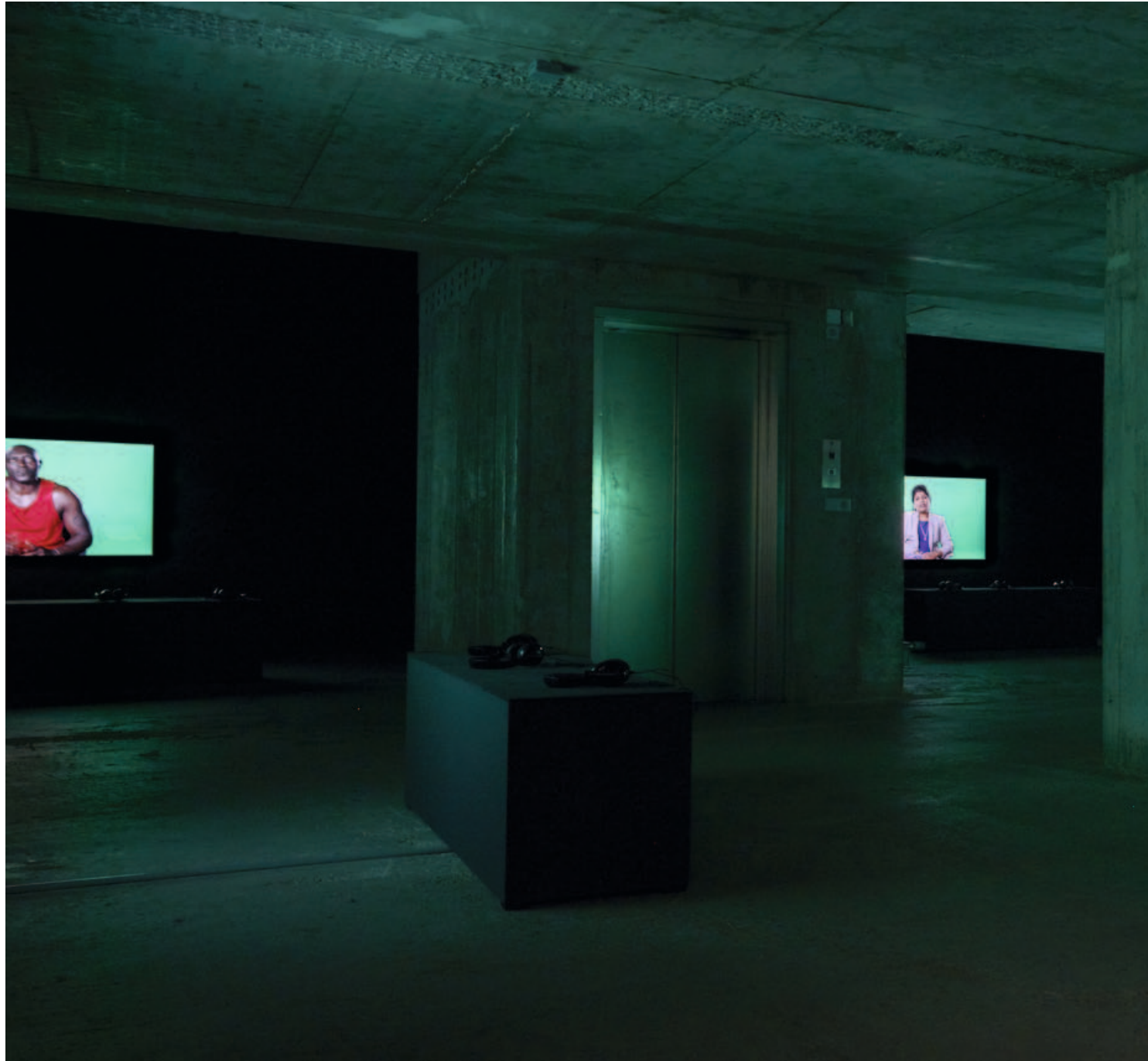
José Maria João was born in an impoverished village in northern Angola in 1970, a few years before Angola achieved independence from Portugal. His childhood was embedded in the Angolan Civil War, during which MPLA and UNITA—two of the revolutionary movements that fought to topple the Portuguese colonial regime—jostled for political power over a period of twenty-seven years. José’s family could not afford to educate him. From the age of ten, he was sent barefoot to the closest market every day (ten kilometers away from home), where he sold fruit to help support his family.

At the age of twelve or thirteen, he—along with many other young boys—was violently abducted from the market (those who resisted were killed), thrown in the back of a truck, and taken to a camp in the bush to join UNITA’s rebel militia (a militia that sought to unseat the MPLA government via guerrilla warfare). On their second day in the camp, the children were each given an AK47, and by Day Two they were participating in frequent and bloody night assaults, the aim being to take MPLA villages for UNITA.

For more than a decade, José served as a soldier in captivity. Child soldiers were indoctrinated and stripped of their humanity. They were frequently made to witness and participate in savage killings of children who had rebelled or attempted escape. There was no possibility for contact with family or any reality beyond the bush camp. Following orders was the only way to survive. José’s physical strength soon singled him out for special night training sessions, during which he was trained to embody fierce animal spirits so as to be able to lead troops ferociously into battle—“They change your mind, you start to forget that somebody gave birth to you. You feel like you were just born in the air and fell to earth. Your mind is not there anymore.” José was both a witness to—and the perpetrator of—countless killings during his time with UNITA. Around 1994, he started to hear his mother’s voice in dreams, dreams that would haunt him over several years (“Don’t kill people, it’s not good, killing people is not good, you will lose your life, you must leave...”), until he finally found the courage to flee the camp around 1997, late at night. He ran through the bush for five days to reach Namibia, burying his AK47 before he crossed the border.

Today, José is a much-loved bouncer at ‘The Power & The Glory,’ a trendy bar in Cape Town. He spends his downtime volunteering at a soup kitchen for homeless children. He sports a gold tooth (inspired by a Cuban soldier whom he met during the war), as well as a sizable tattoo of Nelson Mandela on his right bicep. Every morning at the crack of dawn, José climbs Table Mountain, which he regards both as his breakfast ritual and his source of inner peace.

Duration of Interview: 03:27:57



Candice Breitz

Love Story





Candice Breitz

Love Story



Mamy Maloba Langa

Interviewed in Cape Town on 12 December, 2015

Fled Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
Seeking asylum in Cape Town, South Africa

Born in the village of Ntala in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mamy grew up in a family that spoke Lingala and French. Soon after her birth, the family relocated to Kinshasa, where Mamy was raised. When her father took a second wife during her teen years, Mamy’s heartbroken mother left the family, abandoning her children to a stepmother who treated Mamy and her siblings with cruelty. At eighteen, Mamy could no longer tolerate the mistreatment and moved in with her husband-to-be, Foster.

Foster was making a comfortable living working as a trusted bodyguard to Jean-Pierre Bemba, the wealthy and charismatic leader of the political party that represented the strongest opposition to then President Joseph Kabila. During the heated run-up to the presidential election of 2006—an election in which Bemba and Kabila were the two frontrunners—Mamy’s husband fled Kinshasa, leaving Mamy alone with her twin babies. It was common knowledge within political circles that Kabila would exact bloody revenge on the private militia of Bemba if he were to win the election, which he did. With her husband in hiding and out of contact, that revenge was instead brutally visited on Mamy. Seeking her husband, Kabila’s thugs raided her house in the middle of the night. In the presence of her children and her young sister, Mamy was brutally tortured and abused by four men, to “send a message to her husband.”

In dire condition and fearing for the lives of her children, Mamy fled to Lubumbashi, where she made contact with a smuggler who offered to get her out of the country illegally, though the destination of the journey was never made clear. After braving a suffocating five-day journey in the back of a truck, during which she was forced to physically silence her children, she found herself in Johannesburg. She managed to reunite with her husband in South Africa, thanks to the efforts of a friendly pastor, only to soon after be violently injured by a rampaging crowd during the xenophobic attacks that took place in Johannesburg in 2008. That experience prompted the family to move to Cape Town in 2009, where a few years of stability finally followed. In 2013, her husband Foster was shot in the face and killed during a nightshift at the Cape Town club where he was employed as a manager. No witnesses came forward to support Mamy’s case, although the identity of the killer was well known within the community.

Today Mamy lives with her twins Fortune and Fortuna and her son Miracle in Cape Town. She must make the long journey across the country to Pretoria every three to six months to renew the documents that define her as an asylum-seeker. Nine years after her arrival in South Africa, the country has yet to grant her refugee status or to offer her asylum, although women who have been subject to sexual violence as an instrument of political vengeance or war are clearly eligible for asylum and support.

Duration of Interview: 04:15:35



Candice Breitz
Love Story



Shabeena Francis Saveri

Interviewed in New York City on 14 November, 2015

Fled Mumbai, India
Seeking asylum in New York, USA

Shabeena Francis Saveri was born in Mumbai, a son to her Hindu mother and Catholic father. She soon realized that there was “a girl trapped inside her.” Intensely unhappy with her boyhood, she dreamt of growing up to live a “regular, mainstream life” as a woman.

As a child, Shabeena was intrigued by the local hijra community. By the time she was a teenager, she had joined the community and begun her own life as a hijra. Hijras define themselves as a third gender, neither men nor women. They have held a place within Indian culture for centuries (as recorded in epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata), and are believed to have powers to bless or curse others. Under British colonial rule, hijras were heavily stigmatized and ostracized from mainstream Indian society. Since then, they have had little access to social support (education, employment, healthcare) and virtually no legal protection. Furthermore, under a British colonial law that is still enforced, non-heterosexual sex remains illegal in India. Any sexual act that is considered “against the order of nature” is punishable by imprisonment. Internally, hijra communities are organized according to a strict hierarchy. Each hijra has a guru who expects full obedience, and who collects a large portion of the income generated by the hijras who are her disciples. Hijras typically earn their income by dancing at weddings and births, begging (which includes extorting money from people on the streets), and through sex work.

Frustrated with the many limitations imposed on hijras, and determined to live a more dignified life, Shabeena and a friend founded the non-profit ‘Dai Welfare Society’ in 1999, intent on fostering awareness and prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases within hijra communities. Soon after founding ‘Dai,’ however, Shabeena was subjected to blackmail and physical abuse within her own community, perpetrated by a hijra superior who attempted to gain access to the government funds that had been designated for the nonprofit. Increasingly aware of other possible ways of living her life (she had by now learned, via the Internet, about the existence of transgender identity in Western countries), Shabeena found it increasingly hard to tolerate the hierarchical nature of hijra life. Looking to lead a more independent life, and to escape stigma, Shabeena broke her ties with the hijra community and fled to Chennai. Against all odds, she decided to pursue an academic career. In 2013, she was awarded a Ph.D. for a dissertation that focused on the transgender movement in Tamil Nadu, India. She has since shared her groundbreaking research at conferences and symposia around the world.

The lack of legal protection and basic human rights for transgender people in India—and related threats of violence—prompted Shabeena’s decision to leave India. She arrived in New York City in June 2015, and is currently applying for political asylum in the United States. Today, Shabeena lives her life as a “regular, mainstream woman” and feels that she has completed her personal journey. She shares her full story openly for the first time in this interview.

Duration of Interview: 03:38:49



Candice Breitz

Love Story





Candice Breitz

Love Story



Who speaks in the name of whom? In 2017, Candice Breitz will represent her country of birth at the 57th Venice Biennale – South Africa, a country in which the question of who may (or may not) legitimately occupy the space of representation, is particularly fraught. Recently, debates around the extent to which white South Africans can engage, portray or stand in alliance with black South Africans, have been amplified against the backdrop of a global right-wing backlash that seeks to reverse social justice gains. Can would-be allies whose very being is defined by socio-historical privilege, avoid simply entrenching such privilege as they endeavour to align themselves with communities who have been denied this privilege? Such questions lie both at the heart of Breitz’s Love Story, and at the core of Profile, a new work that responds to Breitz’s nomination as one of two artists who will represent South Africa in Venice this year (her work will appear alongside that of compatriot Mohau Modisakeng).

In Profile, a work that was conceived and shot in Cape Town in early 2017, Breitz absents herself from visibility before the camera, instead platforming ten prominent South African artists who might equally have been nominated to represent the country. As their collective appearance usurps Breitz’s presence, the implied self-portrait gives way to a polyphonic riff, imploding the very assumptions that conventionally guarantee the genre of portraiture. “My name is Candice Breitz,” the cast of voices insists intermittently, punctuating descriptions of who those before the camera are (or might be): man or woman, white or black, working or middle class.... Veering erratically between descriptors of race, class and gender, occupation and national belonging, the verbal palate of attributes and markers delivered by the artists varies wildly in credibility. Who is here as a self and who is here as an other?

“I’m Candice Breitz, and I approve this message,” the multi-voiced litany concludes, parodying the sentence that American presidential candidates are legally obliged to use as rhetorical authentication of their campaign ads during an electoral cycle. In the context of Profile, however, the sentence subverts the proof of authenticity it is supposed to furnish. Blurring the genre of self-portraiture with the formal language of electoral politicking and self-promotional branding, Profile re-distributes the heightened attention typically garnered by an artist due to a Venice appearance, to a range of fellow artists who – much like Breitz – appear intent on consciously disrupting any fixed notion of subjectivity. Dodging objectification, the artists featured in Profile confront the placatory ‘rainbow nation’ metaphor that is too readily applied to post-apartheid South Africa, with the country’s lived reality. In so doing, they extricate the question of who may legitimately speak for their nation in Venice from the regime of representation to prompt a debate around who should be able to speak in a discussion of the many who may not actually be the subjects when they are being spoken for and about in Venice.

Candice Breitz





Candice Breitz



Candice Breitz

Wer darf in wessen Namen sprechen? 2017 vertritt Candice Breitz ihr Herkunftsland Südafrika auf der 57. Biennale von Venedig, ein Land, in dem die Frage, wer wen repräsentieren soll oder kann – und wer nicht – besonderes Gewicht hat. Sie erhält neue Relevanz im Licht globaler reaktionärer Bestrebungen, emanzipatorische Positionen zu kapern um sozialen Fortschritt zurückzudrehen, so dass nicht nur in Südafrika jüngst auch darüber eine Diskussion wieder entbrannt ist, in wie weit es weißen Künstlerinnen und Künstlern zusteht, Geschichten, Schicksale und soziale Themen Schwarzer zu vertreten. Oder allgemeiner: Ist es ein Ausdruck von Empathie und Solidarität oder nur eine weitere Form der Bevormundung, wenn manche Menschen ihre Privilegien dazu nutzen, Positionen Dritter zu vertreten, die weniger privilegiert sind oder scheinen? Breitz' Love Story problematisiert die Repräsentation ‚Anderer‘. Ihre Nominierung, Südafrika gemeinsam mit Mohau Modisakeng in Venedig zu vertreten, hat sie nun zu einer neuen Arbeit veranlasst, die bei KOW erstmals gezeigt wird:

Profile entstand Anfang 2017 in Cape Town. Es ist ein Video-Selbstportrait, in dem die Biennalen-Künstlerin aus dem Bild tritt, um Platz zu machen für zehn andere bekannte südafrikanische Künstlerinnen und Künstlern, die ebenfalls in Venedig hätten ausstellen können. Sie ergreifen an Breitz' statt das Wort und machen gemeinsam das kunsthistorische Genre des Selbstbildnisses zum polyphonen Konzert eines kollektiven Rollenspiels. „My name is Candice Breitz“, sagen sie in die Kamera und bezeichnen sich dann als das, was sie sind oder sein könnten: Frau oder Mann, weiß oder schwarz, diese oder jener. Identität? Ein Portfolio von Attributen und einigen Stereotypen. Authentizität? Ein Album aus Zuschreibungen und ihrer (Un-)Wahrscheinlichkeit. Repräsentation? Ein schneller Wechsel zwischen Kategorien von Rasse, Klasse und Geschlecht, Beruf und Herkunft. Wer steht hier für andere, wer für sich? Wer spricht in wessen Namen?

„I'm Candice Breitz and I approve this message.“ So endet das mehrstimmige Selbstbekenntnis. Die Redewendung ist bekannt aus dem US-Wahlkampf, wo sie in Werbespots die Identität der Kandidaten verbürgen soll wie ein rhetorisches Siegel: „Ja, ich habe das gesagt und stehe zu meinem Wort.“ Doch hier unterläuft die Phrase ihre vorgebliche Beweiskraft. Irgendwo zwischen Selbstparodie, Wahlkampfkampagne und Bewerbungsvideo sammelt Profile das Kapital der besonderen Aufmerksamkeit ein, das seiner Autorin in Venedig zuteil wird, und verteilt es zugleich um auf Kolleginnen und Kollegen, die offensichtlich ebenso wie Breitz mehr Interesse daran haben, ihre Subjektivität zu zerstreuen, als daran, sie zu manifestieren – und nebenbei den Regenbogenfantasien die verzwickteren Realitäten der südafrikanischen Gesellschaft gegenüberzustellen. Dabei lösen sie die Frage, wer eigentlich Südafrika in Venedig vertritt, aus Regimen der Repräsentation und öffnen sie für eine Diskussion darüber, wer eigentlich mitsprechen sollte, wenn von vielen Menschen die Rede ist, von denen dann vielleicht gar nicht die Rede ist, wenn man in Venedig für sie und über sie spricht.

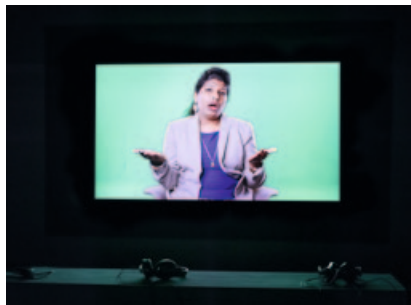
„Alec, Du bist berühmt. Dir werden die Leute zuhören“, sagt Alec Baldwin über sich selbst und erzählt von seiner Verhaftung in Kairo, von dem völlig überfüllten Boot in Richtung Italien und der Ankunft im unbekannten Berlin an einem regnerischen Tag im September 2015. Schnitt. Julianne Moore ordnet sich das Haar, ehe sie berichtet, mit welcher Rohheit ihre Familie angegriffen wurde. Wie ihr altes Leben zusammenbrach und ihr keine andere Wahl blieb, als mit den Kindern überhastet in einem fensterlosen Lastwagen tagelang ins Ungewisse zu fahren. Auf großer Leinwand sprechen Moore und Baldwin im ersten Teil dieser Ausstellung von vergangener Angst und bleibender Hoffnung, von Vertreibung und Verlust, aber auch von Geborgenheit, Freundschaft und Liebe. Gänsehaut kommt auf. Wir fühlen mit ihnen, obgleich sie Erlebnisse schildern, die offenkundig nicht die ihren sind und in der Regel auch nicht die unseren. So ist das eben im Film. Wer wollte klagen, dass er Illusionen schafft?

Doch die Darstellung von Flucht und Neuanfang geht nicht bruchlos über die Leinwand. Candice Breitz hat zwei vertrauten Gesichtern, die wir als Familienmitglieder unseres globalisierten Medienhaushalts gerne auch ins Wohnzimmer lassen, Geschichten derer in den Mund gelegt, die oft als Gesichts- und Stimmlos betrachten werden und draußen vor der Tür bleiben, in den Flüchtlingslagern und Asylgerichtssälen, den Kellergeschossen des sozialen (Un-)Bewusstseins. 73 Minuten lang ist dieses Filmereignis mal großes Kino, das zu Tränen rührt und amüsiert, mal sehen wir den beiden Vertretern einer hochprivilegierten Schaustellerklasse dabei zu, wie sie redlich bemüht ihr Handwerk verrichten, um aufzuführen, was sie nicht verkörpern können. Ein anderes mal erscheint der ganze Vorgang ärgerlich. Denn was haben Großstars der hegemonialen US-Erzählindustrie mit ihrem ikonischen Auftreten und der durchtrainierten Rhetorik überhaupt in diesen Rollen zu suchen?

Alec Baldwin als ehemaliger Kindersoldat aus Angola? Julianne Moore eine dem Krieg entkommene Syrerin? Das Kinoerlebnis reißt nicht nur an der Kluft zwischen diesen Welten, auch formal folgt Schnitt auf Schnitt: Candice Breitz' Montagetechnik wirft uns in schnellem Rhythmus von Baldwin zu Moore, von einem Schicksal ins nächste, weckt Gutglauben und Misstrauen, Empathie und Kritik. Aufgenommen vor der ortlosen Kulisse eines Greenscreen-Sets werden die beiden Mimen als weiße Hochglanzkörper inszeniert, während sie ohne jede Rahmenhandlung die unsichtbaren Leben Dritter animieren. Dabei exponieren sie sich selbst als Vorzeigemodelle einer Subjektwirtschaft, die das universelle Gold unserer Aufmerksamkeit einsammelt und einige wenige so hell beleuchtet, dass viele andere im Schatten bleiben, wo ihre unklaren Konturen als anonyme Masse herumgeschoben werden. Doch wir kennen erst die halbe Love Story.

Im zweiten Teil der Ausstellung treffen wir im Untergeschoss von KOW auf die sechs geflüchteten Frauen und Männer, die Breitz 2015 in Berlin, New York und Kapstadt interviewte und aus deren Berichten sie ihr Skript für Moore und Baldwin zusammensetzte. Auf sechs Großmonitoren begegnen wir den Gesichtern hinter den Gesichtern aus Hollywood, den Informanten des Werkes und den Leben, um die es darin geht. Was Kino und Geste war, wird jetzt Ernst, Neugier und Einsicht. Gefilmt vor dem gleichen grünen Screen sprechen sie nun selbst: „Wer interessiert sich schon für uns, verstehst Du?“, sagt Mamy Maloba Langa, die den gewaltsamen Übergriffen in der Demokratischen Republik Kongo entkam. José Maria João führt aus, wie er als Kindersoldat in Angola zu morden hatte, ehe er endlich davonlief. Er hat auch eine Nachricht für Alec Baldwin: „Er soll glücklich sein, wenn Candice ihm die Gelegenheit gibt, meine Geschichte zu erzählen. Er soll sie gut erzählen. Er muss es richtig machen!“ Es ist ein Auftrag an den Schauspieler und zunehmend wird klar: Hier wird kooperiert.

Tatsächlich hat Candice Breitz eine Brücke gebaut, über die sechs Geflüchtete stellvertretend für Millionen in die Öffentlichkeit gehen. „Einige der dringlichen sozialen Themen in unserer Gesellschaft kamen erst ins Rampenlicht, nachdem Hollywood-darstellerinnen und -darsteller diese Rollen aufführten“, erklärt Shabeena Saveri, die als Transgender-Aktivistin Indien verlassen musste. Jetzt nutzt sie selbst den Kunst-



und Kinostarbetrieb wie eine Bauchrednerin, die ihre Handpuppe sprechen lässt. Ihre Worte wird Julianne Moore später getreu wiedergeben: „Ich dachte – und stellte mir vor, in der Haut dieser Hollywoodschauspielerin zu stecken – und dachte, dass wenn ich sie wäre, dann würde diese Geschichte eine größere Wirkung haben, denn dann würde sie ein viel größeres Publikum erreichen.“ Ähnliches sagen Luis Nava, einst angesehener Professor, der als politischer Dissident aus Venezuela floh, Farah Mohamed, der seine atheistische Einstellung in Somalia nicht länger verbergen konnte, und Sarah Mardini; sie entkam 2015 dem Syrienkrieg gemeinsam mit ihrer Schwester Yusra, die 2016 bei den Olympischen Spielen in Rio antrat – und dann selbst Angebote aus Hollywood erhielt, ihre Vergangenheit in Kinostoff zu verwandeln.

Jede der sechs Geschichten ist singulär und jede will sich mitteilen. Und jede trifft auf Tausende vergleichbarer Geschichten, die Welt ist voll davon. Wer kann sie alle hören? Schon hier in der Ausstellung ist das sechsfache Zeugnis nicht zu bewältigen, das sich über 22 Stunden lang ungekürzt darbietet. So gehen wir irgendwann zurück zu Moore und Baldwin und ihrer schnittigen Kurzfassung. Oder nach Hause. Oder ins Kino. Die große Show wiegt mehr als die ganze Wahrheit. Wo Katzenvideos mit Trump-Tweets und Katastrophenmeldungen um die kurze Spanne unseres Gewahrseins konkurrieren und Comedy-Shows für viele Menschen die Tagesschau sind, wirken die Unterscheidungen zwischen Fake News und Real News, zwischen Gewissheit und Story, zwischen Ereignis und Repräsentation hilflos. Also hat sich Candice Breitz in das Betriebssystem der neoliberalen Aufmerksamkeitsökonomie gehackt, um dort Umbuchungen im Verteilungssystem unserer Solidaritätsbereitschaft vorzunehmen.

Breitz lässt uns am eigenen Leibe erfahren, wie gut sich affektive Reflexe medial ansprechen lassen. Sie zeigt, wie effektiv die Kombination von Technologie, Ästhetik und Rhetorik, Starkult und narrativen Kurzbotschaften einen manipulativen Apparat hervorbringt, der sich Einlass in unsere Einfühlungsbereitschaft und unser Wir-Empfinden verschafft. Man könnte es eine Kulturtechnik nennen, die heute augenscheinlich vor allem rechte Mentalitäten als Propagandawerkzeug so zu nutzen verstehen, dass sie sich nicht ohne weiteres kritisieren oder demontieren lassen, eben weil sie auf Gefühle, nicht auf Rationalität setzen. Love Story ist eine deutliche Reaktion auf den Populismus unserer Tage. Das Werk bedient die gleichen affektiven Mechanismen, offenbart sie jedoch durch gezielte Dekonstruktion und nutzt sie zugleich selbst, um sich dem Rechtspopulismus inhaltlich frontal entgegenzustellen.

Gelingt Love Story also eine solidarische Form, die Sinn und Leidenschaft für die Belange anderer in einer Sprache entfachen kann, die für Viele funktioniert? Die Arbeit kann und will das zeitgenössische moralische Dilemma nicht auflösen, dass den meisten von uns nicht die Zeit, nicht die Aufmerksamkeit, nicht die Geduld gegeben ist, die Stimmen ausreden zu lassen, die allein den eigentlichen Klang der humanitären und politischen Grausamkeiten der Gegenwart wiedergeben können. So nehmen wir den Wahrnehmungsverlust hin, der diesen Grausamkeiten weiter Raum gibt. Wenn Breitz' Werk der letzten 25 Jahre die Verschränkungen von Populärkultur und neoliberaler Subjektökonomie untersuchte und dabei dem Gerechtigkeitsempfinden Schneisen schlug, dann bietet Love Story – als Archiv der marginalisierten O-Töne im Kontrapunkt mit deren unterhaltsam verkürzter Mediatisierung – Gelegenheit, die Wertmaßstäbe unseres eigenen Empathievermögens zu problematisieren.

Candice Breitz zeigt, dass das Ende der großen, universalen Erzählungen nicht das Ende weitreichender Instrumente der Verständigung bedeutet, und dass wir etwas zu gewinnen haben, wenn wir unsere Sehnsucht nach Wahrheit und Authentizität gegen die Hoffnung eintauschen, Erzählungen zu finden und zu verbreiten, die uns Menschen, die wir nicht so ohne weiteres in unser Wohnzimmer bitten, so vertraut erscheinen lassen, dass wir unsere Meinung vielleicht ändern. Sie zeigt aber zugleich, wie schnell solche Erzählungen Regime errichten, die auf den Lücken unserer Wahrnehmung erst Illusionen und dann Ignoranz etablieren. Die Ausstellung bei KOW ist ein emanzipativer, klug leuchtender Genuss, dem der bittere Zweitgeschmack der Ein-

sicht beiwohnt, dass wir vielleicht von dem getrennt bleiben, was uns moralisch richtig scheint, sich praktisch als schwierig erweist und in Konsequenz unseren Beitrag zur Verknappung der Lebensperspektiven Dritter bedeutet.

Love Story was commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), Outset Germany and Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg. It was first shown at the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart in 2016, accompanied by a publication at Kerber Verlag.

Cnadice Breitz
Love Story
Exhibition 2017

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