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# FILIPA CÉSAR

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## GOLDEN VISA

or the *disposing of the discredited*

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OPENING 11 SEP . 10PM

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11 SEP - 11 OCT

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### GOLDEN VISA

or the *disposing of the discredited\**

The governmental invitation directed at wealthy non-Europeans to ease residency permits in Portugal when the applicant plans to invest over half a million Euros in the country, is linked with tax privileges and what is called the “Golden Visa.” Simultaneously, the government publicly invited unemployed and less privileged Portuguese citizens to migrate elsewhere. Two invitations, one entrance.

With Golden Visa or the disposing of the discredited as the title and entry piece to the show at Cristina Guerra Contemporary Art, César is pointing out that a visa functions as a magnet, a transit, a passage, a permit and a privilege that necessary implicates its reverse, the migration politic within the borders of gated Europe in the midst of economic crises. Here, golden also refers to the material and immaterial aspects of the primary subject of the works presented in the show — soil.

*Thus, disposing of the discredited can be analyzed as a multidimensional European project, rich in public/private partnerships: it involves letting African migrants drown in the Mediterranean sea, making life unbearable for allegedly undesirable populations such as the Roma, pushing an increasing number of insufficiently malleable employees to suicide, erasing all traces of a large proportion of the unemployed from official registers, and, in some countries such as Greece, Portugal and Ireland, encouraging more and more young nationals to migrate.*

\*Michel Feher, 2014

The exhibition comprises two further interrelated bodies of work that range from collages, research material, experimental film, sculptural objects to an opening lecture.

The film essay Mined Soil takes us on a wandering path to revisit the work of the Guinean agronomist Amílcar Cabral, studying the erosion of soil in the Portuguese Alentejo region at the end of the 40's through to his engagement as one of the leaders of the African Liberation Movement. This line of thought is intertwined with current documentation on an experimental gold mining site operated by a Canadian company and located in the same Portuguese area once studied by Cabral. The essay explores past and present definitions of soil as a repository of memory, trace, exploitation, crisis, arsenal, treasure and palimpsest. In the exhibition the film essay is presented in a spatial installation where the formal framework is a physical platform citing the shape of one of the many areas licensed for gold mining in Portugal. The installation continues with handcrafted, simulated “mock” mines that are modeled on the ones found in mined fields.

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The paper works *Operations* are extracted from research material such as technical drawings from the Portuguese military on the composition of land mines – and their strategic mapping on the battlefield – placed by the Guinean guerrilla forces during the 11 year long liberation war and photographs taken during César's research in Guinea Bissau and military archives. The collages themselves refer to living crystalline structures and geometrical operations, reflecting a multi-faceted approach towards “fixed” subjects and narratives.

From the entrance wall piece *Golden Visa*, through the installation and film *Mined Soil* and the series of works on paper *Operations*, César uses various concepts of soil to expose the possibility of challenging historical narratives, soil as an operational metaphor that unfolds how natural resources are implicated within a complex set of geopolitical conditions that inform contemporary life. Through the combination of re-activated archival material and recently shot material, César continues her careful work of an uneasy alliance of subjectivities, story telling, chronicle, documentary and experimental film.

**FILIPA CÉSAR** is an artist and filmmaker interested in the porous relationship between the moving image and its public reception, the fictional aspects of the documentary genre and the politics and poetics inherent to the production of moving images. Since 2008, César's experimental film projects have focussed on Portugal's recent past, questioning mechanisms of history production and proposing spaces for performing subjective knowledge. Since 2011, César has been researching the film history of Guinea-Bissau, developing that research into the project *Luta ca caba inda*. She is a participant of the research project “*Visionary Archive, 2013-15*” organised by the Arsenal Institute, Berlin. Selected Film Festivals include *Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen*, 2013; *Forum Expanded - Berlinale*, 2013; *IFFR*, Rotterdam, 2010 and 2013; *Indie Lisboa*, 2010; *DocLisboa*, 2011. Selected exhibitions include: *8th Istanbul Biennial*, 2003; *Serralves Museum*, Porto, 2005; *Tate Modern*, London, 2007; *SFMOMA*, 2009; *29th São Paulo Biennial*, 2010; *Manifesta 8*, Cartagena, 2010; *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*, Berlin, 2011; *Jeu de Paume*, Paris, 2012; *Kunstwerke*, Berlin, 2013; *Festival Meeting Points 7*, 2013-14; *NBK*, Berlin, 2014; *Hordaland Art Center*, 2014.

## **ALL THE MEMORY OF THE SOIL**

Olivier Marboeuf

The film essay *Mined Soil* opens with a funereal scene. Plastic bags with earth samples lie on the ground, one beside the other, like anonymous bodies waiting to be registered, abandoned in a succession; rigorously numbered. It is a crime scene, an arrangement of the dead and their cumbersome resting place, an ordering of accounts. However, this meticulous funerary rite will not be enough to silence these accounts, or to definitively place them in a vanished past. Some day they will resurface. They will be brought to light by erosion or accidental discovery; they will find their discordant voices again.

In *Mined Soil*, it is the earth, the soil, that is classified – and it tells a story that has until now been silenced in order to welcome a new episode of exploitation. As in Alain Resnais' film *Toute la mémoire du monde*—which the artist cites with this film essay in a critical perspective—the inanimate body of the archive in Filipa César's film soon cedes its place to a microphone suspended above fields. This delayed ceremony immediately poses a central question that traverses all of the artist's work: Who could be the narrator of a contemporary decolonised History? What body could become the terrain for the reading and experiencing of an account divested of its past hierarchies? A very specific operation must be invented for a 'devenir parlant du monde' (or 'becoming of the speaking world'). It is not enough to find substitutes for the garrulous and powerful of yesterday, those whose voices we haven't heard until now, to inherit a new form of life and thought in the present. It does not depend as much on who speaks as on the manner in which all regimes of knowledge are orchestrated and – here in particular – what the land says about violence done to it. The microphone suspended above the Portuguese Alentejo, an arid and agonising country harshly exploited by Canadian companies, relates to the land, to this search for an archive that breaks with the authority of books and those that produce them, welcoming a form of savage and unclassifiable knowledge.

In Filipa César's work we often find the insistent question of transmission, which is never merely a fetishisation of minority voices, lost in the deafening roar of the colonial parade. When she decides to digitalise the sound tracks and films of the INCA (l'Institut National du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de Guinée-Bissau), threatened by the vintegar syndrome, it is more than a question of conservation. Once this first mission of salvaging is accomplished – digitalised versions made in Berlin and the tapes returned to Bissau – she applies herself to her own operation: the 'mise en intrigue' – the creation of a plot or intrigue for the documents.

Similarly, when she exhumes the agronomic writings of the young Amílcar Cabral, she uses them as active principles, and tries to determine dosage and reactive conditions. Thus, all of these materials – the films and the writings – are no longer precious relics of the past, but as active ingredients in the account of the present. If the disciplines of history require us to consider the document in its context, then Filipa César's operations must be classified in another category: narrative witchcraft, alchemical practices. Accordingly, the account is no longer related, it no longer has a narrator, it appears by crystallisation – pushed like a mineral into geometry, defying the laws of space and time, ceaselessly growing in all directions. The erosion of yesterday's powers reveals it; the account is now a crystal that diffracts and rearranges all histories. The soil of Guinea-Bissau's past occupies the same space and schema as the Alentejo soil does today. The former informing the latter, sharing its secret strategies for escaping domination and ruin: not to become a poisoned, mined soil. The toxic body as figure of radical struggle.

It is in this way that we should view the artist at her worktable in *Mined Soil*, attending to her experiences. While in Resnais' film, the masculine and omniscient voice of the West declares its reference value for all men, looking down on the world from above, Filipa César invests her own body in the narrative she metabolises. But this engagement does not make her an empowered narrator. As we have said, the narrative to come will not need a narrator. The body is no longer the theater of operations, it is no longer the terrain for the reading of the facts that traverse it, that it cites and distributes. It is the catalyst and the substratum of a chemical reaction, the projection surface for a new realignment of the world.

Olivier Marboeuf is Artistic Director of Khiasma, Paris

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