

ENGLISH

GALLERIA CONTINUA

SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING **LES MOULINS** HABANA

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 Open from Wednesdays to Sundays from noon to 6pm and by appointment.

LEILA ALAOUI

Traversées

Opening on Sunday, May 13, 2018, as from noon
 Exhibition until September 30, 2018

Galleria Continua will be presenting in its Moulins space a new exhibition of photographs by French-Moroccan photographer and video maker Leila Alaoui. On show will be a number of Alaoui's serial works, together demonstrating the level of her humanist commitment. The images that Alaoui has left behind her—for the most part portraits—testify to her deep feeling for the social realities experienced throughout the world by the many outcasts whose faces are continually disappearing behind statistics or stereotypes. As an artist travelling the world, Alaoui defined her mission as social above all else. Through their portraits, the people she met testify to a difficult reality, but their faces radiate humanity, giving back to those who have been forgotten the dignity that they deserve.

Alaoui's first photographic project, *No Pasara*, is presented here in large format. Like a sort of manifesto of her commitment, the series, shot in both colour and black and white, shows the many faces of the Moroccan youth looking for a passage to Europe with all its mirages, candidates for an uncertain exile, uprooted in their own country. Alaoui, as a humble portraitist, knew how to observe them, listen to them, only taking up her camera after long exchanges, long periods together, the better to define their lives, the dreams and mirages of those known as the 'Harragas' (the burners), along with the necessity they felt for leaving their country of birth.

Crossings, with its portraits of Sub-Saharan African migrants, is also an expression of encounters. The series, which began as a video piece before becoming a series of

photographs, approaches these women and men who have left everything behind them in search of a better life on the other side of the Mediterranean, encountering pitfalls and dangers on the way, sometimes losing their life there, and tries to let them speak for themselves. Those of them who made it as far as Morocco, their voyage coming to a halt almost at the doors of Europe, carry the visible or invisible scars of this violent, unfinished voyage. The intensity of their gaze, of their voices, of their stories, is of a part with the photographs of *No Pasara*. People without land or possessions, hoping for a better life but stuck in a situation that seems to offer no escape. Morocco, Central Africa: different places, different reasons to leave. And yet there is the same uprootedness, the same hope—the same reality shattering their illusions. Alaoui determinedly fixed her gaze on this reality, making herself into the echo of these distant voices, all the while capable of retranscribing with finesse and simplicity the beauty of human beings who had thus ceased to be quite the same anonymous figures of the news.

The exhibition will also be showing the series, *Les Marocains*. This long-term project, for which Alaoui drew her inspiration from Robert Frank's *Americans*, saw her travelling through Morocco with a mobile photography studio, weaving together as she went a multifarious portrait of a country through those who lived there. Arabs and Berbers, women and men, adults and children, can all be seen together in a mosaic of traditions, cultures, and aesthetics. As a visual archive, the series sketches out the lineaments of the countless customs gradually disappearing

under the tide of globalisation. But beyond the documentary work, *Les Marocains* was also a way for Alaoui to search out her own heritage, to place against the distancing that the camera supposes an intimacy grown from her own Moroccan roots, but also from the relationships she built with the people she met on her journey. It was a definitive way for her to make a claim for an autonomous aesthetic, free of all orientalism, highlighting the dignity of a country and its individuals. In the exhibition it will be possible to see for the first time video recordings showing Alaoui at work, travelling through Morocco, setting up her equipment, meeting the people who live there. These images show us with surprising force the working conditions of the project. The noise and the dust, the almost palpable heat and smells surrounding the figure of Leila Alaoui, who we see such as she was: precise, humble, and kind.

Leila Alaoui, French-Moroccan artist, photographer, and video maker, was born in 1982. She studied photography at City University in New York. Her work explores the construction of identity, cultural diversity, and migration in the Mediterranean. She used photography and video art to express social realities through a visual language somewhere on the confines of documentary and visual art.

Her work has been exhibited internationally since 2009, including in Paris at L'Institut du Monde Arabe and La Maison Européenne de la Photographie, in Sweden at the Konsthall in Malmö, in Portugal at the Palace of Cascais Citadel, at Le Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal in Canada, and La Collection Lambert in Avignon. Alaoui's humanitarian engagement also includes photographic commissions from recognised NGOs such as the Danish Refugee Council, Search for Common Ground, and the HRC.

Commissioned by Amnesty International to make a work about women's rights in Burkina Faso, Leila Alaoui was critically wounded during a terrorist attack in Ouagadougou in January 2016. She died on the 18th of January. The Leila Alaoui Foundation was created to preserve her work, defend her values, and inspire and support artistic engagement.