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Saturday, 19 September 2020



Stamps part of the work *Rédemption* | 2012/2014 | [Barthélémy Togo](#)
Exhibition *Global(e) Résistance*, Georges Pompidou Centre, Paris (Fernanda Vilar, 2020)

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THE RESILIENCE OF RESISTANCE

Fernanda Vilar

During lockdown, in the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, social tensions did not disappear. Although, to some extent, access to public space was restricted for public meetings and political mobilization, acts of racism and police violence nevertheless triggered the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement crossed borders, and demonstrations of solidarity emerged in countries including France, Brazil and Portugal, where similar crimes against the non-white population systematically continue.

Borders have been transcended, too, in the movement some have called the “statue wars”. The toppling or disfiguring of monuments has contributed to a lively debate about how history should be dealt with or negotiated. As Paulo de Medeiros has argued, “Defacing or toppling [statues] is then at once a symptom of the profound crisis of memory we face as part and parcel of strategies of mass domination and containment that have eroded the very foundations of western democracy, and a revelation that nothing was really forgotten”.(1)

In this context, the Georges Pompidou Centre for Modern Art in Paris has recently opened the [Global\(e\) Resistance](#) exhibition, which brings together sixty works by artists from the so-called Global South (2), acquired in the last ten years. These works all present and / or elaborate strategies of resistance. They almost all fit into the category of *artivism*, a political practice of using art to denounce oppression and inequality. Christine Macel, one of the curators of the exhibition, sees these artists as questioning the museum and encouraging it to decolonize itself. They invite us to “think about a new universal that is inclusive and non-hegemonic” (3).

On entering the gallery, we are met by two huge chairs, face to face: one covered with bags and sacks and the other with a pile of stamps, inscribed with words that will accompany us throughout the exhibition. They guide our attention to history and memory: WE FACE FORWARD, LIBERTY, PEACE, HOSPITALITY, EXILE, INDEPENDANCE, GENEROSITY, SHAME ON YOU, MOVE ON, GENOCIDE, ESCLAVAGE, TRAFIC TRIANGULAIRE, COLONIZATION ... This piece, called *Rédemption* (2012/2014), by the Cameroonian artist Barthélémy Toguo, interrogates the constraints on the movement of people from south to north, in particular to Europe and the USA. These sculptures, which recall passport stamps, illustrate how borders are insurmountable for Africans and South Americans, while at the same time recalling the chairs on which supposed observers cynically surround those who hold invalid stamps which do not allow them to move.

The art in this exhibition is synonymous with resistance. Public spaces become spaces for artivism, as is the case with the interrogation of statues in the work of Angolan Kiluanji Kia Henda and Colombian Iván Argote. In the series *Redefining Power* (2011-2012), Kiluanji Kia Henda combines photography, video and performance, beginning from the pedestals of colonial monuments built by the Portuguese and destroyed at the time of Angola’s independence in 1975. In these empty spaces, the artist creates “ephemeral statues” that symbolize forms of decolonization and activism. Iván Argote, in the series

Turistas (Don García) (2012), dresses statues of former Latin American colonialists in traditional indigenous ponchos. In this way, the Colombian artist reminds us that the mantle that cloaks the glory of the colonizer was woven from the massacre of indigenous people during colonization. The work allows the viewer to rethink the colonial narrative.

Urban space and its occupation are present throughout the exhibition. Formerly colonized cities (Braddock in the work of LaToya Ruby Frazier, Johannesburg in the work of Subotzsky and Waterhouse, and Dakar in the art of Cheikh Ndiaye), are shown from a perspective that illustrates how current socio-economic problems transform landscapes. In another take on space, here linked to memory, Katia Kameli, in *Bledi, un scénario possible* (2006) examines the dystopia of Algerian emigrants who, when they embark on a ship in an Algerian port, dream that they will return to the same port. The video is an inverted narrative montage; the end becomes the beginning. Beyond evoking memory and reality, the artist questions the relationship between human beings and the city. In this sense, the work of the North American Renée Green, *Partially Buried* (1996), offers an opportunity for reflection when put alongside Kameli's work, in its approach to landscape as territory and intimate memory. Meanwhile, Congolese artist Sammy Baloji uses photographs of spaces from colonial exploration, like the mining industries in Congo, to transpose the colonial archive and create images in which the collective memory of exploration is questioned through the bodies of enslaved black people, and makes a stinging critique of the defenders of the "benefits of colonization".

In relation to contemporary issues of migration and refugees, the video [Homeland](#) (2016), by Turkish artist Halil Altindere, shows how migration marginalizes, and with what consequences. Deeply attentive to marginal artistic expression, the artist collaborates with the Syrian rapper Mohammad Abu Hajar, a refugee in Berlin, to create a video in which migration and refugees are examined using rap, and images evoking urban landscapes and transportation. In the same vein, Tunisian Nadia Kaabi-Linke, in *Parkverbot* (Köpenick, 2017) approaches the movements of migrants and homeless people through a poignant sculpture of a bench lined with long "anti-pigeon" spikes. Work on contemporary struggles also deals with questions of gender and feminism. This very rich and diverse exhibition covers, too, the Israel-Palestine conflict, South African apartheid and the subordination of non-white people in Brazil.

The diversity of work on display, and the narratives it contains of the many means available to resist discourses and systems of thought, enrich our understanding of the history of Western modernity.

The exhibition *Global (e) Resistance* runs from 29 July 2020 to 4 January 2021 at the Pompidou Centre in Paris.

(1) Paulo de Medeiros, 'Windrushes (3)', [MEMOIRS Newsletter](#), 20th June 2020.

(2) As [Maria Paula Meneses](#) writes, "the expression *global South* has increasingly come to be used to refer to countries in regions on the periphery and semi-periphery of the modern World System, which were formerly known as the Third World".

(3) Christine Macel, Alicia Knock e Yung Ma, *GLOBAL(E) RESISTANCE*, Exhibition Catalogue, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2020.

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