

***Traduttore, Traditore***

**November 3 – December 16, 2017**

**Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago**

**Expanded Exhibition Checklist**

**Bani Abidi**

*Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner*, (2004)

Two channel video, 7:30 min. loop

Courtesy the artist

In November 2003, Abidi commissioned a brass pipe band to learn and play the U.S. national anthem in order to address the precarious relationship between Pakistan and the United States after September 11 and the global ‘war on terror.’ Abidi took the old colonial symbol of the pipe band—originally associated with the British military— and repositioned the band as a means of addressing American imperialism. Because pipe bands continue to be a fixture in Pakistani culture—playing at weddings and other celebrations—the work reveals how the country has absorbed and translated foreign influences.

**Arturo Hernández Alcázar**

*Columna del trabajo (salario mínimo)*, 2016

Smoked tools and coins in balance, dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and MARSO Gallery

Lodged into the wall, the tools of Hernández Alcázar’s sculpture are topped with a total of \$5.71 in change—the equivalent of one hour’s wage for undocumented Mexican immigrants in Illinois. While this number represents an average, tracking the earnings of undocumented Mexican immigrants can prove difficult; and many report that they have had wages withheld. Not only does the artwork act as a visual metaphor for the disparity between labor and wage in the immigrant community, it also poignantly speaks to the invisible impact of that labor on the built environment.

**Carlos Arias**

*Bilingual*, 2014

Embroidery on unbleached flax, 45 x 110 in.

Courtesy the artist and MARSO Gallery

In *Bilingual*, Arias embroidered cognates—words that have the same root in English as they do in Spanish, as well as false cognates—words that sound similar but have different meanings. Through the time-consuming process of embroidery, the artist offers a meditation on the possibility for language to be both a bridge and a divide.

**Luis Camnitzer**

*Insults*, 2009/2017

Vinyl, dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York

In *Insults*, Camnitzer reproduces a phrase in the six official languages of the United Nations: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. Camnitzer makes one key shift in each version by changing the language identified in the statement to match the language with which the phrase is written. In other words, with each iteration of the phrase, the insult is directed at those who are unable to read the language. With wry humor, Camnitzer confronts and dismantles our limited worldviews.

**Alejandro Cesarco**

*Zeide Isaac*, 2009

16 mm film transferred to digital video, 6:00 min. loop

Courtesy the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin

Cesarco describes his video as a “work of fiction rooted in reality.” The film portrays the artist’s zeide, Yiddish for grandfather, a Holocaust survivor. Although it mimics a documentary, in which a subject is interviewed about their experience, *Zeide Isaac* is in fact a performance of a script written by the artist in collaboration with his grandfather about his memories. Transformation—from first-hand experience to a retelling, from one language into another, from individual to collective memory—is a central motif in *Zeide Isaac*. The resulting work thus speaks not only to the limitations and possibilities of testimony, but also the vagaries of memory.

**Bethany Collins**

*Comprise 1982*, 2016

Toner and graphite on American Masters paper, 30 x 44 in.

Courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago

This work is one in a series in which Bethany Collins explores contronyms—words that, in their definitions, contain opposite meanings. In this case, the difference—although subtle—is between part and whole: comprise can mean “to include; contain” or, alternatively, “to consist of; be composed of.” Collins’s definitions are selected from the 2nd edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* and, as a 1983 *New York Times* review of the revised dictionary stated, “What is most interesting about a dictionary revision, of course, is what it tells us about the revision of the society that speaks its language.” In other words, a dictionary can be seen as a document of social change—its values, preoccupations, and trends.

*Comprise, 1982* opens the exhibition as a frame for issues that are central to *Traduttore, Traditore*. Collins explores and documents the complexity of language, reminding viewers that language is, in fact, neither benign nor apolitical. More subtly, *Comprise, 1982* helps to frame conceptions of the nation which, after all, both ‘contains’ its residents while simultaneously ‘being composed of’ its residents. Similarly, borders themselves can be thought of as contronyms—they both admit and expel, bind and unbind.

*America: A Hymnal, 2017*

Book with 100 laser-cut leaves, 6 x 9 x 1 in.

Edition of 25

Courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago

Collins constructs a history of the United States through “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” and its many translations. *America: A Hymnal* includes 100 versions of the song written between the 18th and 20th centuries that reflect passionately held causes throughout U.S. history—including suffrage, the confederacy, and abolition. Burning out the similarities of each song, Collins highlights the differences that construct a history of the U.S. Each translation reflects a different conception of American national identity.

### **Brendan Fernandes**

*Devil’s Noise, 2011*

80 hand-bound books with gold foil stamping and black linen paper, dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago

*Devil’s Noise* centers on the 1976 student protests in South Africa, which employed collective silence as a means of protesting the apartheid government’s implementation of Afrikaans as

an official language of instruction in the nation's schools. The work takes its title from a protest sign, which stated: "We Will Not Speak Your Devil Tongue."

Fernandes's hand-bound books include the artist's poetry stamped in gold foil on the spines. When placed next to each other, the books create a concrete poem that speaks to the history of South Africa's marginalized populations.

### **Dora García**

*The Messenger*, 2002–ongoing

Performance and website (performed by Tamara Becerra Valdez)

Courtesy the artist

In Dora García's *The Messenger*, a performer ventures into the public to decode a message written in an unknown language. The performance enacts the struggles that accompany acts of translation. Presented here is the performer's diary, which records her experiences and helps visualize the labor behind the performance. By existing in the circuits of everyday life, the performance engages a (sometimes unwitting) public—confronting their daily reality, preconceptions, and perhaps prejudices. The success of the work is predicated on two individuals striving to understand each other. In other words, as García states: "It is only through the Other that we understand ourselves."

*Read the diary here: [doragarcia.org/inserts/themessenger/chicago/](http://doragarcia.org/inserts/themessenger/chicago/)*

### **Emily Jacir**

*Where We Come From (Maha)*, 2002–03

Laser print and c-print mounted on cintra, 9 x 12 in.

Courtesy the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago

Jacir began *Where We Come From* with the question, "If I could do something for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" Although it might seem like a simple question, Jacir used it to perform tasks for Palestinians who face severe Israeli travel restrictions within the country. As a US passport holder Jacir was able to complete these wishes; 30 of them in total, ranging from the mundane (paying bills) to the familial (visiting a mother's grave), from a yearning for homeland (drinking water from their parent's village) to the comical (taking a Palestinian girl on a date). As one reads the text, written in the first person, one begins to identify with the desires of the exiled. But the easy transition from text to photographic

documentation—between wish and realization—underscores the impossibility for the Palestinian exiles to realize their desires.

**Katia Kameli**

*Stream of Stories*, 2016

Installation with archival pigment prints, wall vinyl, and three videos, 10:00 min., 15:00 min., 8:00 min., dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Taymour Grahne Gallery

*Stream of Stories* takes as its premise French poet La Fontaine's 17th century fables, tales of morality that have guided French school children for centuries. The work visualizes the origin, movement, and translations of these tales from India and Iran to Morocco, and finally to France. Kameli identifies the specific moments when these cultures have marked the fables as they have been transposed. Each adaptation adds a new language and, moreover, a new cultural framework. *Stream of Stories* explores how the stories differ from one version to another, reflecting social and cultural situations specific to the countries running in this stream.

**Harold Mendez**

*Elmina Castle*, 2016

Archival pigment print transferred from color slide film taken in 1999, mounted on dibond with unique artist's bronze frame, 13 x 19 x 2 in.

Courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago

Elmina Castle in Ghana was central to the West African slave trade from the 17th to the 19th century. Marks on the dungeon's ground are an index of human presence left behind from the traumatic events that occurred there. In the photograph, the artist's shadow suggests a layering between the past and present, becoming a ghostly apparition that recalls the long-absent bodies. At the same time, Mendez's lens doubles as the viewer's eye: the viewer can identify with the shadow on the ground and, in this way, become witness to this painful history.

**Paulo Nazareth**

*Untitled*, from *Notícias de América (News from the Americas)* series, 2011/2012

Five photographs printed on cotton paper, each 18 x 24 cm

Courtesy the artist and Mendes Wood DM

In 2010, Paulo Nazareth walked from Santa Luzia, Brazil, to New York City. Described by the artist as a “residence in transit, a residence by accident,” the journey resulted in photographs, notes, drawings, and a performance. *Notícias de América*—an excerpt of this project—is a series of self-portraits the artist took alongside residents of the places through which he passed. The small size and varying quality of the photographs recall snapshots a tourist might take on their travels.

Nazareth, who claims a mixed ethnic and racial heritage, describes this project as a result of his interest in how identity was performed and perceived as he traveled north. At the same time, by inserting himself into the documentation, Nazareth’s project speaks to the fluid nature of identity, so easily changed based on geographic and cultural context.

### **Sherwin Ovid**

*Masquerade Bandage for Motherboard*, 2016

Handmade book and sugar sculptures, dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

Exploring histories and concepts of cultural transmission, *Masquerade Bandage for Motherboard* investigates the influence of West African Yoruba poetry on Calypso—a musical genre from Trinidad that is rooted in social commentary. Ovid’s book includes braille translations of old Calypso songs and folktales, examining the history of black expressivity through coded devices. By including sugar sculptures, Ovid further reflects on the origins of Calypso—the arrival of French sugar planters and their slaves is what originally brought the Yoruba to Trinidad.

### **Michael Rakowitz**

*The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours: Architect as Dragoman*, 2015

Mixed media, 52 x 31.5 x 31.5 in.

Courtesy the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago

Taking its title from a Turkish saying used when an apprentice was given over to a master, *The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours* explores the passing of skills from generation to generation as a form of resistance against cultural erasure. By comparing the architect and dragoman (or interpreter), Rakowitz highlights the role of the architect as a cultural translator. Members of Turkey’s Armenian population crafted the Art Nouveau moldings and friezes found on Istanbul

façades, which bear witness not only to a history of craft, but also the tragic history of Turkey's Armenian population—the 1915 Armenian Genocide resulted in 1.5 million deaths, an event the Turkish government still fails to recognize. The plaster casts from original molds and the rubbings of architectural fragments found throughout Istanbul act as visual reminders of an Armenian presence in the Turkish city, providing a counter narrative to official histories.

### **Raqs Media Collective**

*The Translator's Silence (Takeaway)*, 2012

Laser-cut heavy translucent paper, 9 x 12 in.

Courtesy the artists

*The Translator's Silence* uses the rich legacy of South Asian poetry to reflect on the relationship between language, borders, and nations. The takeaway sheet includes three poetic fragments from Pakistani poet and author Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Bengali poet and musician Rabindranath Tagore, and Indian poet Agha Shahid Ali.

Written in English, Bengali, and Urdu/Hindustani—the primary working languages of the three members of Raqs Media Collective—the artists suggest that in a willing encounter with the other, the stranger can become the beloved if we can just listen to each other's silences.

In 1947, the violent partition of the Indian subcontinent by the British Raj resulted in East and West Pakistan and, in 1971, after a brutal civil war, Bangladesh was formed. Upon his return to Pakistan after a visit to Bangladesh, Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote:

*we who have been rendered strangers, after so many travails  
how many meetings will it take for us to embrace each other again*

In the lyrics for his well-loved Bengali song, Rabindranath Tagore wrote:

*what fear have I of strangers,  
the cup of life will fill by knowing the unknown*

Finally, in a *ghazal* dedicated to Edward Said, Agha Shahid Ali evokes Palestinian history, reflecting on the loss of Kashmir—a region of the subcontinent that is today divided by Pakistan, India, and China—writing:

*Will you, Beloved Stranger, ever witness Shahid—two destinies at last reconciled by exiles?*

**Emilio Rojas**

*Trittico Aldrovandi, 2017*

Photographs on Hahnemühle cotton paper with debossed text, each 61 x 81 cm

Courtesy the artist, Gallleriapiú, Italy, and Galería José de la Fuente, Spain

Project in collaboration with the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna

In this series, Rojas connects the spread of plants to colonial exploitation by reinterpreting entries from a 15th century herbarium—a catalogue of preserved plants— as metaphors for migration. The invasive dandelion, for example, is a plant native to Eurasia that was initially introduced to the Americas because of its medicinal properties. The tomato, on the other hand, is a fruit native to the Andes that, once introduced to Europe, was transformed into an emblem of Italian identity. Finally, the mandrake, whose roots are in the Mediterranean, is anthropomorphized in *Trittico Aldrovandi* as an encircled dark body. The artist's hands intervening in this archive call attention to the history of classification in Europe.

Each iteration of the editioned series incorporates three phrases in one of five languages. These languages—Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, French, and English—are those of the colonizers of the Americas. When translated, the phrases read: “We are here because you were there,” “My roots are as strong as your fears,” and “Our virtues have not yet been discovered.”

*The Herbarium of Ulisse Aldrovandi (1551–54)* consists of fifteen bound volumes containing over 5000 specimens, and is the oldest and largest that has survived to the present. The volumes are in the collection of the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna. The University of Bologna is the oldest University in Europe, founded in 1088.

**Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan**

*The Incomplete Thombu, 2011*

Artist's book, 11.75 x 9 x 1.25 in.

Courtesy the artist

After years of rancor between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority—arguably a legacy of the British colonial policy of divide and rule—a civil war erupted in Sri Lanka that lasted from 1983–2009. The war killed up to 100,000 civilians and displaced hundreds of thousands more.

Taking its name from a Dutch colonial document that registered ownership of property, *The Incomplete Thombu* mimics a colonial bureaucratic file by documenting Tamil displacement during the conflict. Shanaathanan documents these stories by asking Tamil civilians to draw their lost homes from memory. The artist then overlaid their drawings with his own architectural renderings. Moving beyond mere statistics, the book records the personal experiences of those displaced.

### **Edra Soto**

*Manual GRAFT*, 2016

Metallic adhesive, dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

The geometric forms of *Manual GRAFT* are directly influenced by rejas, the iron screens that adorn residences across the island of Puerto Rico. Used as a divide between public and private spaces, the screens are both ornamental and functional—although decorative, they provide a measure of security as well as facilitate ventilation in the hot Caribbean climate. While their precise history is unknown, rejas most likely originated in Spain, influenced by West African and Islamic architecture. Soto's ongoing translation of the rejas serves to map Puerto Rican history and culture onto various sites around the city.

*Tropicalamerican*, 2014

Three inkjet prints on paper, each 67 x 43 x 1.5 in.

Courtesy the artist

To construct these U.S. flags, Soto meticulously collaged the leaves of tropical plants, which she then photographed and digitally reproduced. Although flags traditionally symbolize the permanence of sovereign nations, Soto's use of organic material renders these objects ephemeral. Not only do the leaves suggest an eventual deterioration, their green color injects a strangeness into this familiar symbol of national identity. Soto's use of tropical material connects these objects to a distinct geography, creating an association between a national and regional identity.

### **Stephanie Syjuco**

*Cargo Cults (Basketwoman)*, 2013–16

Archival pigment print on vinyl, 40 x 30 in.

Courtesy the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco

*Cargo Cults (Headbundle)*, 2013–16

Archival pigment print on vinyl, 40 x 30 in.

Courtesy the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco

*Cargo Cults* explores the myriad ways the so-called West constructs identities of an ethnic or exotic “Other.” Using items purchased from the likes of Forever 21, H&M, Urban Outfitters, Target, Gap, and more, Syjuco stages photographs that recall ethnographic studio portraiture of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In doing so, she reminds us that identities have long been constructions of popular fantasy. By purchasing the items on a credit card and ultimately returning them to the retailers, Syjuco also embeds within her project an investigation into the circulation of value.