

# THE UNGOVERNABLES

## 2012 NEW MUSEUM TRIENNIAL

LOBBY, 2ND, 3RD, 4TH, 5TH FLOORS | FEBRUARY 15–APRIL 22, 2012



“The Ungovernables,” the second New Museum Triennial, seeks to capture the perspectives, preoccupations, and energy of an inventive and informed generation of artists. Born between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, the artists included in the exhibition inherited complex relationships to history—born after the independence and revolutionary movements that destabilized the colonial relationships of the previous century only to give rise to fundamentalism, dictatorships, and economic crisis during their life time. In the exhibition, “The Ungovernables” suggests both organized and anarchic resistance and the capacity to negotiate existing ideologies and infrastructures while working to upend the foundational order of everyday life. The exhibition explores how the urgencies of a generation of artists have been defined by the context in which they have come of age and how contemporary art can offer possibilities for the present and future.

Artists’ works challenge proscribed geographic and political boundaries that currently demarcate the context in which they live and work. Invisible Borders Trans-African Photography Project, presented in the Lobby Gallery, is an artist-led initiative based in Lagos, Nigeria, that organizes annual road trips across Africa. The group documents their travels together, meets with other artists along the way, and works on individual photography projects. In 2009 and 2010, the group traveled through West Africa to the “Bamako Encounters: African Photography Biennial” (2009) in Bamako, Mali, and “Dak’Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art” (2010) in Dakar, Senegal. Not unlike these international art initiatives, Invisible Borders seeks to create a platform that supports the movement of art and ideas across national, linguistic, and cultural borders within and beyond the continent. At the opposite end of the Lobby Gallery, Ala Younis has assembled an international and intergenerational collective whose works reveal the intangible and often personal effects of militarism in the Middle East. Masao Adachi and Kôji Wakamatsu’s film *Sekigun-PFLP: Sekai Senso Sengen [PFLP: Declaration of World War]* (1971), documents the unlikely collaboration between the Japanese Red Army and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine during an era marked by emergent independence movements around the world.

According to Younis, the film is often referenced as evidence of an early alliance in which outside forces supported dissident struggles in the Middle East.

The desire to communicate across geographic borders resonates with other works in the exhibition that offer new ways to measure the distance between people. In the second floor gallery, the miniature drawings that comprise Rita Ponce de León’s *Acepto que nada es mío* [I accept that nothing is mine] (2010–12), begin with conversations with friends and family about significant social or political events that have impacted their lives. The drawings explore personal memories of public assembly, loss, celebration, and perseverance, each a microcosm of a larger world. The intimate scale of Ponce de León’s drawings conveys the vulnerability and limits of the exchange with her correspondents while inviting interpretations and projections of experiences from viewers. In his project “Time Divisa” (2006–10), José Antonio Vega Macotela bartered his time with that of inmates in a Mexico City prison, creating an alternative economy in which money was not the primary currency. In exchange for performing tasks in the outside world, the artist, in turn, asked his collaborators to document their time inside the prison using their available resources. For *Time Exchange* 302, 307, 332 341 – 348, the artist conducted research that led to the inmate’s release, while the inmate drew footsteps to chart various pathways and surveillance throughout the prison. In the gallery, the exchange manifests as two equivalent stacks of paper: the legal documents on one side and the drawings on the other.

Approaching the past with fresh perspectives, Slavs and Tatars’ *PrayWay* (2012) located in the third floor gallery assumes the shape of a prayer book stand but the scale and function of a riverbed, a type of public seating common to tea salons in Central Asia. The Persian rug-covered platform appears to hover just above the ground, not only providing space for gathering and discussion but also suggesting the transcendence of oppositional thought through the coexistence of religiosity and secularism, tradition and modernity. The works of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye evoke the genres of portraiture and history painting. Executed in series and





often featuring recurring figures, the artist's imagined subjects suggest storied lives that confront and confound conventional codes of masculinity, femininity, and race. *A Consideration Like No Other* (2011) features a Black hunter crouching with his rifle in a marsh or field of tall grass, locating the subject within a particular tradition of leisure often associated with land-owning elite, and perhaps, the social narratives of another century that still haunt the institution of art.

Danh Võ's *WE THE PEOPLE* (2011) presented on the fourth floor also explores the meanings we assign to imagery and objects. For his project, the artist has worked with a foundry to fabricate in copper full-size pieces of the Statue of Liberty, employing the same repoussé technique used to make the original. Instead of upholding her figure as a symbol of freedom, Võ sets her free—circulating pieces from one institution to the next and never wholly reconstructing her in one location. Giving shape to creation stories passed down through oral traditions in the northeast of India, Minam Apang's ink drawings employ a unique iconographic language that touch upon our need to find meaning, order, and recognition in the world in which we live. In *He wore them like talismans all over his body* (2008), the uneven washes and splatters that constitute the body of Bat, a central character of the myth, gives rise to the figuration of fish and star people, finding individuated form amid expanses of instability and chaos.

A series of residencies and public programs organized as part of "The Ungovernables" extends the real estate and resources of the New Museum to foster artistic investigation, experimentation, and exchange beyond the gallery walls. In February 2011, Adrián Villar Rojas's visited New York to process the sights and speeds of the city, informing the development of his work on the fourth floor in addition to his public work *Before My Birth* (March 1–29, 2012) presented by Arts Brookfield at the World Financial Center Plaza in lower Manhattan. For Wu Tsang's residency in June 2011, the artist brought together an ensemble of performers while also organizing investigative public programs that led to the development of his live performance *Full Body Quotation* presented in November and the 16mm film projection *For how we perceived a life (Take 3)* (2012) on view in the exhibition. From March 5–12, 2012, the new media collective and independent art space House of Natural Fiber based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, traveled to New York to present a temporary installation and two day discussion about their project *IB : EC [Intelligent Bacteria: Eschericia coli]*, *The song of the river* (2012). Developed from ecological research along the Code River and in collaboration with university scientists, the project offers a water filtration system that could be used by residents, revealing how everyday life in Indonesia is impacted by pollution of its water sources. Following an artist talk in February 2011, and the presentation of two choreographed demonstrations in Union Square and Washington Square Park in November, Public Movement's residency continues through April, 2012, with "SALONS: Birthright Palestine?" (2012), a series of performative public debates that initiate new forms of gathering and discussion throughout the city.

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