

EL USMAN
F A R O Q H I
HERE
AND A YONDER:
ON FINDING POISE IN
DISORIENTATION

E X H I B I T I O N
13.09.-21.10.2017

The HARUN FAROCKI RETROSPECTIVE is organized by Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.) in cooperation with SAVVY Contemporary, Arsenal – Institute for Film and Video Art, the Harun Farocki Institute, Harun Farocki GbR, and Silent Green Kulturquartie. Funded by the Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Europa. Thank You to media partners: taz and Cargo.

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Harun Farocki 


Senate Department
for Culture and Europe

HKW
Haus der Kulturen der Welt

cargo

 **taz. die tageszeitung**

W I T H
CANDICE BREITZ
ARIANI DARMAWAN
FEHRAS PUBLISHING
PRACTICES
SHILPA GUPTA
SAMSON KAMBALU
OLAF NICOLAI
HO TZU NYEN
MICHAEL ZHENG

O P E N I N G 13.09.2017 18:00

C U R A T O R S Antonia Alampi Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung

A S S I S T A N T C U R A T O R Cornelia Knoll

R E S E A R C H A S S I S T A N T Gwen Mitchell

P R O J E C T M A N A G E R Lema Sikod

S P E C I A L T H A N K S T O Antje Ehmman for her advice and support

T E X T Bonaventure S. B. Ndikung

C O N C E P T

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew; to what one possessed or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long cherished or a privilege he has long possessed that he is set free – he has set himself free – for higher dreams, for greater privileges.

James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 1961.¹

Oh baby, baby, baby
It's getting kind of crazy
'Cause you are taking over my mind
And it feels like ooh
You don't know my name
I swear, it feels like ooh
You don't know my name
(Round and round and round we go,
will you ever know)

Alicia Keys, *You Don't Know My Name*, 2003.²

IT IS SAID THAT THERE IS MUCH
IN A NAME .
THAT THERE IS MUCH IN NAMING .

In common parlance in predominantly Judo-Christian spaces, for example, it is believed that a Thomas tends to be a doubtful and cautious person, and a Peter turns out to become the rock, which grounds his name etymologically, but a Lot, a Jezebel, or Delilah might end up with burdens alluding to their religious connotations. The point insinuated is that people embody their names and their meanings. The myths of certain societies even go as far as saying that kids, before they are born, already embody those names, and choose their own names. But maybe this could be considered the gibberish associated with common parlance...

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If we were to leave the historical and religious etymologies and connotations aside, names still tend to carry

their weight in gold, as they open and close doors within certain societies. In recent years, there has been much outcry about selectivity for example for job interviews and otherwise, based rather on the names applicants bear, than their competencies. In her NY Times article *Appreciate the History of Names to Root out Stigma* (2015), Morgan Jerkins elaborates on the discrimination tendencies in hiring in the USA, whereby resumes with names that sounded African-American were 50 percent less likely to be invited for job interviews than identical resumes carrying names that sound like “white names.”³ Essentially, it is a narrative about racialization through naming, whereby “unusually” sounding names lead to bias. Interestingly, it seems as if names do not only reveal race, but also betray class, and of course gender. This phenomenon is everything but new, as people have always been profiled as “the other” whenever they bore the names Mohammed, Shaniq, Shimon, or otherwise.

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Naming is also a philosophy. Maybe the person who has found the most accurate words in expressing philosophical concepts of names and naming is Esiaba Irobi in *The Philosophy of the Sea: History, Economics, and Reason in the Caribbean Basin* (2006). Irobi takes the example of Igbo culture to elaborate on his thesis of names and naming as philosophy. He points out that Igbo children are not given names inspired by television series, stars, flowers, cities nor adopted from dictionaries or the bible. Rather, a child's name is a philosophical contraction of parental or community/ societal experiences at the time of his or her birth. According to Irobi, names and naming involve deep thinking and poetry that result in such complex names like Ehilegbuonefumaanodilaulo, which means “On the day you will kill an innocent man may I not be at home!” or Osonduagabaghilodo, which means “In a time of war, we do not run the race for life on a straight path,” indeed a reference to the fact that the family survived the Biafran civil war around the time of that child's birth. Thus names serve as a kind of “Eselsbrücke,” a mnemonic tool for the community, a reference and memorial to difficult confrontations and situations in their lives and through the physical appearance of the child, they celebrate the survival and overcoming hardship. Irobi was making these points in an effort to

1 Baldwin, J., *Nobody Knows My Name*, New York City, Dial Press, 1961.

2 Keys, A., *You Don't Know My Name*, t

3 www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/10/19/job-discrimination-based-on-a-name/appreciate-the-history-of-names-to-root-out-stigma

put a spotlight on alternative spaces in which or through which philosophical thoughts are expressed in pithy complex structures of meta-languages in the Caribbean, the USA or the Asian or African continent. Looking further at names and naming as a mnemonic tool, in some place like in pre-independence Cameroon, where especially in rural areas, children have no birth certificates, the age of a person is marked by the person's name, again based on an event of great impact that happened around the time of birth. Take for example a person who is a hundred years today would be identified as Mofor, which is the name given to all male children born after the first world war's battles between the Germans and the British in Cameroon in 1915/1916.

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Maybe the genealogical bridge between James Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name* and Alicia Keys' *You Don't Know My Name* was made unconsciously by Olivier Marboeuf in a lecture he gave at SAVVY Contemporary Berlin in 2014. Marboeuf used the Middle Passage and the practice of giving slaves new names, mostly names of their "masters," as his reference point to build a thesis around naming. Hailing from the French Antilles, Marboeuf posited that like many other descendants of that African forced diaspora, although he was referred to as Olivier Marboeuf, he did indeed have his other name. His African name. The name his forefathers brought with them from Africa. And while the world wasn't aware of that name, he knew his name, and wasn't prepared to reveal that name to anyone, let alone people he didn't trust. It was his secret, and sacred power. *Nobody Knows My Name*. While Marboeuf knows the names of whoever standing in front of him, he has an advantage over his opponent, as he/she doesn't know Marboeuf's true names and thus doesn't know who he really is. This resounds and reverberates in Bra Louis Moholo's anthem "You Ain't Gonna Know Me 'Cos You Think You Know Me." The chant by Mrs. Keys "It's getting kind of crazy," "It feels like ooh," "You don't know my name," "Round and round we go, will you ever know" could thus be flipped and seen in the light of the Marboeufian "Nobody Knows My Name" and "You Don't Know My Name" as leverage and vantage rather than a lamentation.

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Harun Farocki (1944 – 2014) is indisputably until this date one of Germany's most important film makers and artists. *Is* because while he passed on and his body is no longer with us, his spirit and his works are still very much alive and preoccupy us in thought and did. Thank heavens one can't reduce "sein/being" to the presence or absence of bodies.

Anyways, at some point in his remarkable being and career as an artist, writer, scholar, and intellectual, Harun Farocki, who was born in Neutitschein (German-annexed Czechoslovakia) and grew up in India, Indonesia and Germany did a slight surgical operation in an effort to simplify his name. Born Harun El Usman Faroqhi,⁴ he dropped off the middle names and modified his last name in what might be considered a germanization of the name using a "ck" instead of a "qh" common in the German language.

The reasons for this change might have been manifold, including just making appellation easier or an effort to adapt, integrate and conform. Maybe he changed the name to avoid being classified the "other" within a society in which "othering" is cultivated. Maybe he changed the name to avoid being exoticized or to avoid that his person and work are seen only through a certain prism. Maybe to enjoy certain political and social amenities, while avoiding other restraints. Maybe just for aesthetic reasons. Whatever the particular reason was seems irrelevant at the moment... of importance is to deliberate on names, naming and re-naming as philosophical, as well as socio-political tools and acts. At any rate, Baldwin comes in handy here again. If Baldwin's statement about "real change implying the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, and the end of safety"⁵ holds true, then one could consider the act of name-changing an act of breaking up from a world, an identity and a certain safety.

If Baldwin's statement that "it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long possessed that he is set free – he has set himself free – for higher dreams, for greater privileges" holds true, then one could consider the act of name-changing an act of surrendering a dream.

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It is known that Harun Farocki published, did self-interviews, signed scripts with pseudonyms. One of which was Rosa Mercedes. Here too, the reason why people use pseudonyms is multifaceted, ranging from a trial to avoid bias in the eyes of the beholder, to diversify conflicting genres like filmmaking and film critique, to avoid competition within certain fields, an effort to avoid being exotic, an effort to reveal an inner-self or inner-meaning that is otherwise under hiding, to hide authorship, to play with or hide identity issues.

4 www.nytimes.com/2014/08/04/arts/harun-farocki-filmmaker-of-modern-life-dies-at-70.html
5 Baldwin, J., *Nobody Knows My Name*, New York City, Dial Press, 1961.

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One could also see name-changing, re-naming, name-surgery in the context of the concept of disorientation, as proposed by Seloua Luste Boulbina in *Losing One's Bearings: In Praise of Disorientation. On the Necessity to Decolonize Knowledge*⁶. As the title betrays, Boulbina sees disorientation as a pivotal aspect in the decolonization of knowledge. She advocates for disorientation as a step towards becoming decentered within and outside of the self.

Disorientation should therefore not be understood as a failure or absence but as an action and a gesture. It should not occur by chance but should be sought as a desirable type of perennial indeterminacy that cannot be interrupted (...) Disorientation also involves forgetting. If memory is linked to orientation, oblivion may be preferable.⁷

So maybe the act of name-changing, re-naming, name-surgery is an effort to find poise through disorientation.

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The project *El Usman Faroqhi Here and a Yonder: On Finding Poise in Disorientation* is a research and exhibition by S A V V Y Contemporary in the framework of the Harun Farocki Retrospective. The project zooms in into a detail in Farocki's life and practice that plays a crucial philosophical, social and political role, namely the issue of names and naming. The project takes Farocki as a point of departure to reflect on wider issues of nomenclature that go beyond geographical and temporal frames.

In the research phase of the project, we looked at Farocki's private and public writings, as well as secondary texts in archives in search of materials referencing or associated with the simplification and changing of his name, as well as his usage of pseudonyms as a film maker and writer.

For this exhibition artists, filmmakers and intellectuals from here and from a yonder ruminate on naming as philosophy, mnemonic tool, as disorientation, on re-naming and its political and social implications. They address the performativity of language, naming and its role in warfare and in pornography. They revisit, question or challenge Farocki's positions and offer new ways of seeing his oeuvre.

⁶ Boulbina, Seloua Luste. *Losing One's Bearings: In Praise of Disorientation. On the Necessity to Decolonize Knowledge*. In *Incantation of the Disquieting Muse*. S A V V Y Contemporary. The Greenbox, 2016.

⁷ Ibid 6.

WORKS

01 SAMSON KAMBALU *1975 Malawi
Caesar Ku Bush – Wounded Negatives four videos on monitors and four stereographs 2017

Samson Kambalu completed a PHD at Chelsea College of Art and Design. He has won research fellowships with Yale University and Smithsonian Institution. Kambalu has been appointed associate professor of fine art at Ruskin College and fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford University. His artistic practice is site-specific, research-based and playful, and predominantly in conversation with the medium of film and photography.

Caesar Ku Bush – Wounded Negatives is a wall installation made up of sepia, black and white and negative short films of body parts – hands, feet, torso – bearing stigmata marks in the form of the female orifice. As the images are in dated filter forms they could as well be from between the late 19th century and early 20th century following the invention of film and photography. The whole installation gives off an intimate atmosphere for meditation on renaming and how it may relate to aspects and ideas of time, obsession, erotic ritual, sovereignty and spirituality. The name of Caesar Ku Bush is the artist's assumed moniker following advice on the internet on how to create a porn star name for yourself.

02 SHILPA GUPTA *1976 Mumbai
Altered Inheritances 45 images, installation, site specific 2014

Shilpa Gupta graduated from the Sir J.J. School of Fine Arts in Mumbai in 1997. Her media ranges across manipulated found objects, photography, video, interactive computer-based installation, and performance. The removal of individual identity and the obscuring of violence inherent in the notion of borders and boundaries figure heavily in her work, which is informed by events she observes in her native India. She examines the influences of politics and culture on the construction of identity, and questions perception through her work. In her work *Altered Inheritances* Gupta recounts the story of a world that is constantly in search of identity and in constant transformation. The artist gathered stories of people who, for political reasons, due to prejudice, racial discrimination or out of personal desire, decided, at a certain point in their lives, to change their surname. Initially, the search was limited to her circle of relatives and friends, but in the space of a year it was also extended to areas not known to the artist, until more than one hundred stories of changed surnames had been found. Formalized as a kind of archive, these fragments of stories cover a trajectory running from the personal to the collective sphere. "When you fill in a form, the first thing that you are asked for is your surname. This, in itself, is a moment of cancellation and of questioning," explains Gupta.

03 MICHAEL ZHENG *Tribute to the Hand*
Performance piece and video documentation 30 min.
Collaborator: Johanna Thompson

Conceptual and performance artist Michael Zheng was born and grew up in China. He studied computer science at the prestigious Tsinghua University, and then at the San Francisco Art Institute. While at SFAI, he was awarded a fellowship from Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, where he studied with Nary Ward and Xu Bing.

His thinking is influenced by his interest in Ch'an Buddhism's notion of the intrinsic nature of all things. Being present is at the core of his practice. He often uses the spatial, historical and other contextual characteristics of the site or situation as the formal materials to create his work. His works are characterized by a performative nature and are often shown in the form of site-specific interventions, photographs, video, and sculptural installations.

The performance and video *Tribute to the Hand* is inspired by Harun Farocki's way of deconstructing filmic language. By juxtaposing the narration of Harun Farocki's *The Expression of Hands* (1997) with disjointed visual and other sensorial elements Michael Zheng produces a new meaning, where hands perform and speak of love, deceit, and caress through a sensual relationship between the artist and his collaborator Johanna Thompson.

04 HO TZU NYEN *1976 Singapore
The Nameless Synchronized double projections
21,51 min Vietnamese and Mandarin 2015

Artists Ho Tzu Nyen predominantly works with video installations, film, performance and writing. The narratives he creates often appear as investigations into the history and present definition of Southeast Asia, led by real imagined characters, myths and iconic cinematic images.

His work, *The Nameless*, here on view, is part of an ongoing body of work. It is a work about a man known as "Lai Teck," a Sino-Vietnamese man with more than 50 aliases, and who served as the General Secretary of the Malayan Communist Party from 1939 to 1947, and also a triple agent (working for the British/French, and Japanese during the Occupation). The film consists of footages appropriated from films featuring the Hong Kong actor Tony Leung across two decades, a number of which feature him in the roles of traitors, informers and stool pigeons. The installation version of *The Nameless* consists of two videos played on a two sides of a screen, separated by the screen board. A Vietnamese soundtrack accompanies the first, while a Mandarin soundtrack is attached to the other.

05 C A N D I C E B R E I T Z *1972 Johannesburg
Profile Video 3:27 min 2017

Candice Breitz works predominantly with moving image installations. Throughout her career, she has explored the dynamics by means of which an individual becomes him or herself in relation to a larger community, be that the immediate community that one encounters in family, or the real and imagined communities that are shaped not only by questions of national belonging, race, gender and religion, but also by the increasingly undeniable influence of mainstream media such as television, cinema and other forms of popular culture. Most recently, Breitz's work has focused on the conditions under which empathy is produced, reflecting on a media-saturated global culture in which strong identification with fictional characters and celebrity figures runs parallel to widespread indifference to the plight of those facing real world adversity.

Profile was released by Breitz parallel to her nomination as one of two artists chosen for the South African Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale 2017.

The work interrogates the workings of representation, addressing the complex relationship between the identity of an artist and the specificity of their practice. Rather than appearing before the camera herself, Breitz collaborates with ten prominent South African artists who could equally have been selected to represent the country – namely, Igshaan Adams, Roger Ballen, Steven Cohen, Gabrielle Goliath, Dean Hutton, Banele Khoza, Gerald Machona, Buhlebezwe Siwani, Chuma Sopotela and Sue Williamson. Introducing themselves in Breitz's name, the artists describe themselves in terms of identifying markers such as race, class, gender, occupation, religion and upbringing. It quickly becomes apparent that their statements cannot always be taken at face value. Breitz deflects the spotlight of her Venice selection to her fellow artists, who in turn shift it again, prompting a series of questions regarding the question of representation, both of the self and of others. *Profile* consists of three variations (*Variation B* is shown in this exhibition).

06 A R I A N I D A R M A W A N *1977 Indonesia
Sugiharti Halim Video 10:00 min 2008

Artist Ariani Darmawan works predominantly with film. After completing her studies at the Department of Architecture in Bandung, she continued her education at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In her work that has been screened at many international festivals, she focuses on themes such as power and identity, memory, language and media.

Her work *Sugiharti Halim* follows the story of a woman and her name, given due to the Presidential Decree no. 127/U/Kep/12/1966 that obliged Ethnic-Chinese to adopt an Indonesian-sounding name. *Sugiharti Halim* shows that a name can lead to never-ending questions and offers a perspective on naming that is comical and provocative at the same time.

07 F E H R A S P U B L I S H I N G
P R A C T I C E S Kenan Darwich, Omar Nicolas,
Sami Rustom *Mirroring Language* Installation 2017
Fehras Publishing Practices is an artist collective and publishing house established in Berlin in 2015. Their work was exhibited at the Sharjah Biennale 13 and in *Apricots from Damascus* at SALT Galata, Istanbul (2016) and in *Class Languages* at District Berlin (2017). They have recently curated the symposium *Disappearance. Appearance. Publishing at Villa Romana*, Florence. The collective was founded as a response to mounting questions concerning the history and presence of art and publishing in the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and the Arab diaspora of intellectuals and of libraries and Arabic publication archives. The research of Fehras focuses on the interrelation between cultures and publishing, which includes different fields of languages, archives, and arts.

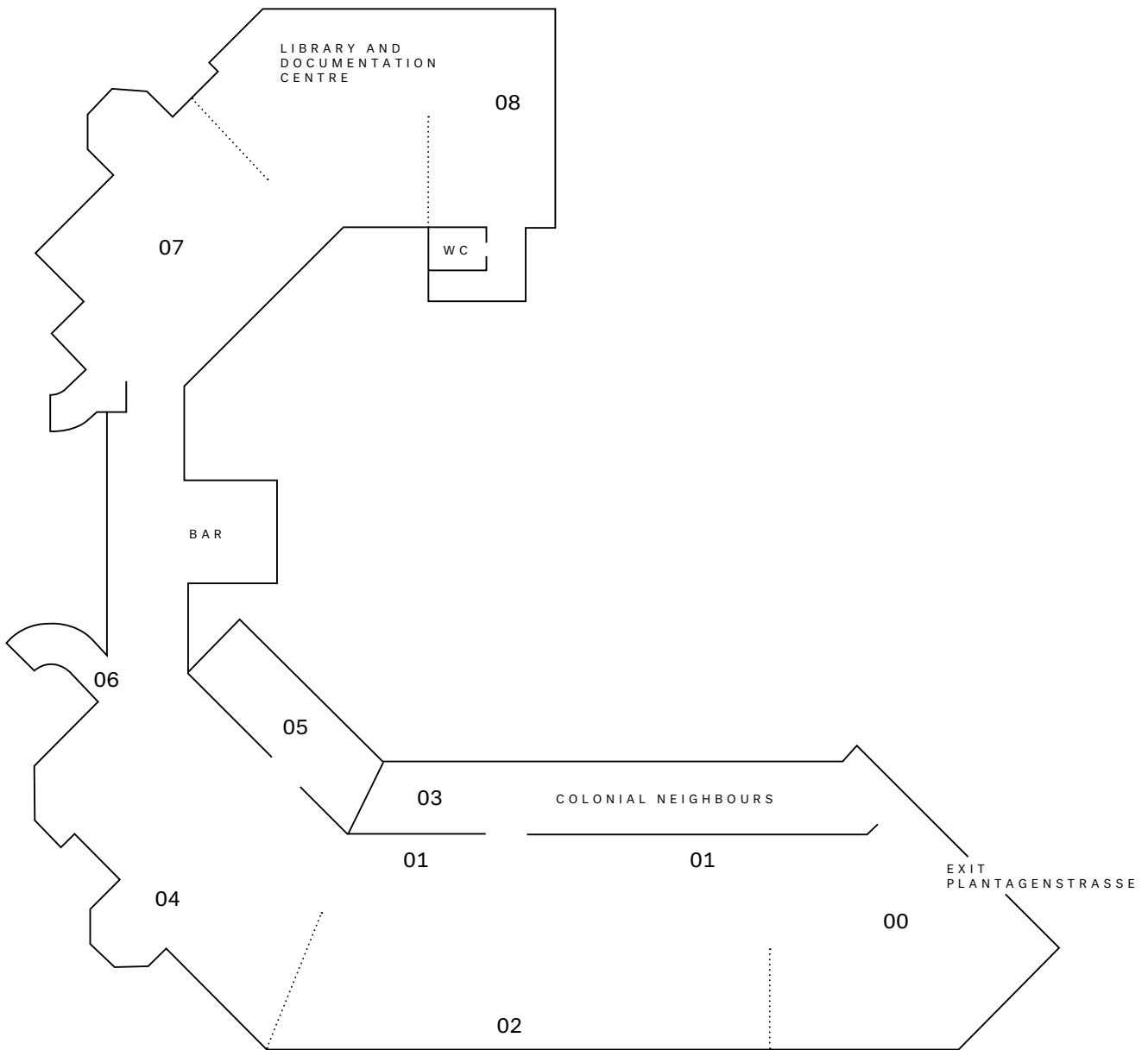
Mirroring Language is looking at “the transformation of modern Arabic in the context of the rise of Arab cultural institutions” as a phenomenon of the past decades. Fehras Publishing Practices presents at the library of S A V V Y Contemporary a collection of Bilingual art publication issued between 2003–2016 by Arab Art institutions, as well as Flash Cards containing 800 Arabic Terminologies on contemporary Art and their English equivalent excerpted from the former collection. The Terminologies are classified and arranged under various discourse categories such as the body, globalization, public space, gender, etc. The work is concerned with the emergence of a language specific to bilingual art publications issued in the last decade in the EMNA (East Mediterranean and North Africa) region from Arab Art institutions.

08 O L A F N I C O L A I *1962 Halle/Saale
LIANE, HEADSTRONG, VERITAS, WHIRLWIND, PLAIN FARE No 23. from the series *Nome de Guerres*

Neon writing plus one text sheet 29,7 × 21 cm 2006
Artist Olaf Nicolai is a Professor for Sculpture and Fundamentals of three-dimensional Design at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste München, Germany. His artistic practice transfers theories from the natural sciences and humanities into the area of the aesthetic and artistic by encompassing various media such as installation and performance. In his conceptual approach he questions the way in which we look at our environment, by dissecting familiar habits and ways of seeing in often unsettling ways.

Noms de Guerres is a series of texts in the tradition of experimental poetry. Each stanza combines several one-word lines, thus activating the metaphorical potential of the specific terms. The associative potential of such conjunctions extends to the realm of surreal scenarios. The word pool for *Noms de Guerres* derives from a research on post 1945 military actions and consists entirely of codenames used for specific actions. The texts serve as a template for neon works using so-called blacklight (UV light with a wave-length of approximately 365 nanometers) instead of coloured or white light.

FLOOR PLAN



00 Slide show of images taken by Harun Farocki, courtesy of Antje Ehmann

01 SAMSON KAMBALU

05 CANDICE BREITZ

02 SHILPA GUPTA

06 ARIANI DARMAWAN

03 MICHAEL ZHENG

07 FEHRAS PUBLISHING

04 HO TZU NYEN

08 OLAF NICOLAI

EXHIBITION 13.09.–21.10.2017 Thu–Sun 14:00–19:00

ENTRANCE Plantagenstraße 31 13347 Berlin

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