

Media Release *ALTEFABRIK Rapperswil-Jona, in August 2018

Curator: Josiane Imhasly

Forever or in a Hundred Years Denise Bertschi and Inas Halabi

16 September to 28 October 2018, Opening: Saturday, 15 September, 7 pm

Forever and a hundred years – these two periods of time are similarly abstract for humans, although they are separated by almost an eternity. Inas Halabi encountered these two quantities during a guided tour of the Gösgen nuclear power plant. When it comes to final disposal of radioactive waste, such time periods make sense. But they involuntarily create a distance to the problem, which makes it easy to ignore. The two bodies of work, by Denise Bertschi (*1983, Switzerland) and Inas Halabi (*1988, Palestine) combine processes of social repression and selective perception. Under the motto *Neutrality as an Agent*, Bertschi questions Switzerland's role as a "neutral" player in the international economic and political arena. The presentation of her latest works, which resulted from a residency in South Africa, focus on Switzerland's role during apartheid. With two videos and a series of objects and images, Inas Halabi reflects the handling of nuclear waste and the stories that surround them. One was created during a studio residence in the canton of Aargau, another in Halabi's native Palestine. She also presents a new video work produced during her recent stay in Switzerland, taking the zoo as a starting point to examine staged landscapes and the global imbalance of power relations.

Information on the accompanying program: www.kurator.ch and the enclosed flyer



INAS HALABI. WE ARE CHAMPIONS. 2016



DENISE BERTSCHI. CONFIDENTIAL. 2018

Forever or in a Hundred Years is a poetic yet somewhat absurd title. It came about as an absurd answer to an impossible question. In fact, it is a non-answer, which indicates that there are no clear or simple responses to some questions. *Forever or in a Hundred Years* could just as well be the title of a spy movie. It implies a fictional story, although the works on display are based on documentary material. As for the (secret) agents: processes of repression and oblivion are often due to complex problems, challenges and difficulties that threaten society's existence. It is also about secrets and the agents that guard them. The exhibition examines the collective unconscious, which makes society viable and therefore has a value.

Neutrality as an Agent

Denise Bertschi explores this subject with an investigation under the motto *Neutrality as an Agent*. Can the concept of Switzerland's neutrality be seen as a construct of repression?

Please ensure the gate is properly closed (2018) consists of a video and photographs taken at the almost 100-years-old Swiss Club in Cape Town. The video portrays John, the caretaker of the club for 30 years, who lives on the property of the club but does not have a key to the actual premises. Is he the embodiment of the Swiss Club's unconscious?

The activities of the Swiss as "agents" during apartheid in South Africa is explored by the zine *We say, we are fine. They say, we are not.* (2018). Bertschi interweaves illustrations and photographs from the same period, but from different places: she found the illustrations in the Swiss Club's newsletters, while the photographs are of apartheid protests in the 1980s, taken by Gertrud Vogler, a socially engaged photographer from Zurich. The perspective of the agent "We", representing Swiss communities living in South Africa, and the agent "They", protestors in Switzerland, are diametrically opposed.

In the video installation *CONFIDENTIAL* (2018), Bertschi traces the spirit of six buildings, most of them located in Johannesburg's central business district (CBD). She discovered correspondence in the National Archives of South Africa documenting the purchase by Swiss banks of vast amounts of South African gold in the 1950s. Bertschi is now trying to render these invisible deals visible, by understanding the buildings as architectural agents of the gold trade. The CBD was to become the (exclusively white) Manhattan of Africa during the gold rush; many of these buildings were abandoned after the end of apartheid.

"When you build a house, you don't have to forget to build a toilet."

Sigmund Freud might have rejoiced this statement by Ju Wang, the director of China's nuclear waste disposal programme. But the hygiene lesson seems to have failed: currently there is not a single definitive repository for high-level radioactive waste anywhere in the world. Switzerland has secured a key role in this process of global problem-solving (or is it repression?). Its current programme for evaluating a site's potential as a deep geological repository is considered a model. "We are anyway champions in the world to produce tunnels," a woman says in Inas Halabi's video *We Are Champions* (2016), which combines an audio recording of a tour she took through the Gösgen nuclear power plant with footage from a propaganda film concerning nuclear radiation, originally produced by the US Department of Defence. Could this woman from the power plant be a secret agent cooperating with the US propaganda machine from the 1950s?

Inas Halabi not only visited the nuclear power plant in Gösgen, she followed the trail of nuclear waste in the southern West Bank – and the stories and rumours that surround it. For *We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction* (2018), she drew on research by Dr. Khalil Thabayneh, who detected increased levels of various radioactive substances in several Palestinian villages south of Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor. The ten-year-old measurements have never been verified, for lack of available equipment and access to the areas. Visiting these locations herself, Halabi filmed and collected organic material. Is it true, what the villagers from Beit al-Roush once told a doctor? In 1989, they saw trucks going into the mountains, followed by a cement mixing truck. The trucks would be buried whole, they said.

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Media preview on request

Hours

Wednesday 12–18 pm, Saturday and Sunday 11–17 pm and on request

Images

Available for download at www.kurator.ch/medienmitteilung

Short Biography of the Artists

Denise Bertschi (*1983, Aarau) lives and works in Switzerland. She holds a BA from the ZHdK in Zurich and an MA in Fine Arts (Work.Master) from HEAD – Genève. Bertschi has widely exhibited her work in project spaces and institutions in Switzerland and elsewhere, including the Johann Jacobs Museum in Zurich, the MKG in Hamburg, Rosa Brux in Brussels, Artsonje in Seoul, Corner College in Zurich and the Aargauer Kunsthaus. She was awarded with the NAB-prize from the Aargauer Kunsthaus and diverse project grants from the Aargauer Kuratorium and Pro Helvetia. In 2017 Denise Bertschi spent three months in an artist residency in Johannesburg funded by Pro Helvetia. Next to diverse exhibition projects she is currently working on her PhD at EPFL in Lausanne.

www.denisebertschi.ch

Inas Halabi (*1988, Palestine) lives and works between the Netherlands and Palestine. She holds a BA in Fine Arts from Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem and an MFA from Goldsmiths College, University of London. Her work has been shown in numerous national and international venues, including the 13th Sharjah Biennial's acclaimed offsite project, *Shifting Ground*. In 2016, Halabi was the A.M. Qattan Foundation's Young Artist of the Year and she has recently been awarded production grants from AFAC (Arab Fund for Arab Culture) and Mophradat. She is currently artist-in-residence at De Ateliers, Amsterdam.

www.inashalabi.com