

Exhibition Guide

Yto Barrada

RIFFS

Deutsche Bank's Artist of the Year 2011

16 May – 8 July 2012

First Floor Galleries

Bedwyr Williams

My Bad

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Second Floor Galleries and Tower Room

Gallery Guide written by Bedwyr Williams

IKON

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This survey of work by Yto Barrada (b. 1971, Paris), comprises photographs, films, publications, installations and sculptures that engage with the everyday life and times of Tangier, the artist's hometown on the Strait of Gibraltar. Its title, *RIFFS*, simultaneously refers to the musical term, to the Cinéma Rif where Barrada directs the Cinémathèque de Tanger — and in turn to the nearby Rif mountains, a stronghold of anti-colonial insurgency in Morocco.

Yto Barrada grew up between Tangier and Paris, where she studied history and political science at the Sorbonne, and subsequently attended the International Centre of Photography in New York. Her artistic practice, which combines the techniques of documentary with a more meditative approach to imagery, drove her to return home after sixteen years abroad. Now based in Tangier, she continues to engage with the complex realities around her whilst avoiding the temptation to create imagery that is spectacular or melodramatic.

This exhibition features selected works from past series as well as new photos and films, displaying the full range of media in which the artist works. In her first series *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (2002), Barrada evokes a Tangier

where post-colonial history has met one of its dead-ends. The more recent *Iris Tingitana* (2007) extended this inquiry to the fast-growing outer edges of the city, where the monocultural vision of town planners and developers threatens to homogenise landscape and human lives.

One of the recurring figures of the show is that of the tree — physical trees and family trees — serving as a metaphor not only for resistance and strength, developing levels of vision, generational transmission, changing times, shelter, regeneration and nutrition, but also for decor and tourism.

A palm tree can become an element of fake wealth in a poor area, or some figure of resistance to savage urbanisation. In the film *Beau Geste* (2009), which introduces the exhibition, we hear the artist recount the story of a gratuitous act, a symbolic resistance, against pervasive property development. This theme is also represented with humour and insolence in *A Guide to Trees*, an artist's book by Barrada.

Yto Barrada's voice also features in *Hand-Me-Downs* (2011), a film produced for this exhibition. The artist digs into her family history and narrates sixteen 'myths' — based on unreliable narrators and unverifiable stories — illustrated with strangers' home movies and archival films from the last half-century in Morocco. Colonial traces give a visual shape to reconstructed memories made by family storytelling.

Memory and oblivion, history and unreliable narratives, as well as details and the fragmentation of everyday life, are predominant in this show.

I have no golden age that I look back on ... I'm rarely nostalgic in the sense of homesick, like missing some bygone space or childhood, or even the 'old Tangier' for that matter. Nostalgia is a drag when it's an endless re-chewing of the same old cud.

When I do feel nostalgic, it's for historical events before I was born: the end of empires, the nineteenth century national revolutions, reading Albert Londres's articles, the Dreyfuss Affair, 1848, the Mexican revolution ... the invention of nations that comes with the crumbling of empires.

Excerpt from *Tangerine Dreams and Magic in the City: a conversation between Negar Azimi and Yto Barrada* in the *RIFFS* exhibition catalogue.

This exhibition is co-curated by Friedhelm Hütte and Marie Muracciole.

RIFFS is organised in co-operation with Deutsche Bank, and supported by Institut Français du Royaume-Uni. Yto Barrada is Deutsche Bank's 'Artist of the Year 2011', an award not based on a financial reward, but positioned

as an integral part of Deutsche Bank's commitment to contemporary art. The programme includes a solo exhibition at the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin which travels to Ikon and other museums, a publication and acquisitions for the Deutsche Bank Collection.

A full colour catalogue accompanies the exhibition priced £32.50, available from Ikon Shop and online at www.ikon-gallery.co.uk/shop.

Associated Events

Cinémathèque de Tanger

Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 May, 12-5pm – FREE

Saturday 2 June and Sunday 3 June, 12-5pm – FREE

Saturday 9 June and Sunday 10 June, 12-5pm – FREE

Slow Boat is moored on the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal, Brindleyplace, outside the National Sea Life Centre

As part of Yto Barrada's exhibition at Ikon and in collaboration with Birmingham's independent Flatpack Festival, *Slow Boat* opens as a cinémathèque for three weekends during May and June.

Reflecting Barrada's work as founding director of Cinémathèque de Tanger, a rich programme of films is presented by Flatpack and members of Ikon's Youth Programme. Connections are made between Birmingham and Tangier and the film programme touches on issues surrounding migration and exile, art and theft, and the shared experience of cinematic escape. In addition we also show a number of films specially chosen by Barrada for *Cinémathèque de Tanger*.

Moored in Brindleyplace, *Cinémathèque de Tanger* is a unique space to see films, drink mint tea and watch the world go by. A full listing of each weekend's film programme will be available in early May. These events are free but due to limited capacity booking is essential by calling Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

Bedwyr Williams

My Bad

16 May – 8 July 2012

Second Floor Galleries and Tower Room

'My bad', originally a 1970s American slang expression of contrition uttered after making a bad pass or missing an opponent in basketball. In this guide Welsh artist Bedwyr Williams (born 1974) describes his ideas and pieces in the exhibition.

Ikon Under Siege (2012)

Sandbags, taped-up windows

This work is about sandbags and how I like the way that they are floppy and heavy but can be used like bricks, like big depressing pillows. When I look at pictures of wars my eyes are always drawn to the sandbags. During WWII important buildings were swaddled in sandbags as if they were putting on pads to play cricket. Some sandbags are left so long that they become fossilised and hard. Modern sandbags don't have the charm of the old hessian type. I found a picture of Ikon Gallery in its previous home when its windows were blown out by the IRA in the seventies so the gallery has been through this once already. When we discussed putting the taped crosses on the glass we had to take into account the fact that the windows already have an invisible bomb-film on the inside and that we should be careful when removing the tape.

Sentry Box (2012)

Sentry box and stool

This sentry box is based on the way a sentry box looks when I imagine one. It's more than likely based on action man toys and some war films. It's definitely European because it has a funfair look about it. The booms at checkpoints also have the same candy cane chevrons. Someone was hurt when a toilet tent was toppled at a sheep dog trials where my grandfather was competing once. If you were standing sentry and it was blown over you'd have to go with it. Like a tall dog in a tall kennel.

The Heron (2012)

Canopy pierced with falling lamp post

5m lamp post, canopy 4m deep x 2m wide x 1.5m tall

This is a bullnose canopy like the type you might see outside hotels and restaurants in New York. It's the airlock of the hotel where you are half-guest, half-pedestrian. You should be safe here it's completely possible you could be mugged or pick-pocketed or that a lamp post would fall, pierce the drum-tight canvas above you, and with a rip and a pop, dazzle you on your way out of the revolving doors. Like a heron.

Tac, Tac, Tac (2012)

Audio

This piece is a soundtrack for a gun battle using onomatopoeic words from around the world for 'bang'. People in some countries make absurd noises when they try to imitate the sound of a gun or a cannon.

It's understandable why one country's 'bow wow' or 'cockadoodle doo' is different to another but it's odd that a 'bang' can be a 'prap' to some people. I studied for a term in an academy in Vienna and there was a joke about a Toblerone in the cafe one lunchtime that I didn't understand. Everyone laughed and I felt left out.

Square Wig (2012)

Women and some men with severe haircuts send out strong messages. Although a bob is silky and super smooth, it's about power on the agenda. Being put in your place or patronised feels even worse when the face that's confronting you is framed by a valance-like haircut. Some people associated with the arts sport these cuts.

Stevenson Screen (2012)

Stevenson Screen, audio

This weather station is called a 'Stevenson screen' — it was designed by Thomas Stevenson, a British civil engineer and the father of author Robert Louis Stevenson. The screen is designed to protect the instruments from rain, wind and sunlight whilst allowing a free flow of air to give correct temperatures. Thomas was disappointed that his son didn't follow in his footsteps. What you can hear inside is the sound of the actor Fredric March transforming from Dr Jekyll into Mr Hyde from the 1931 film *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. I like to think that my performance characters are mild Mr Hydes.

Lath (2012)

Lath wall

Before plasterboard all our walls used to look like this under the plaster. If you smash a hole in most walls now you just make a hole but in the past you smashed and found these chalky ribs underneath and the horsehair that was mixed in with the plaster. You often see lath exposed in horror films or when a bullet tears through a wall. I find it creepy.

Morass Morass (2012)

Mirrored marsh surrounded by fibre optic lighting

In expensive hotels they sometimes have nicely lit oases or pools in the lobby edged with artificial trees. They look inviting, and though drunk people might jump in there for a laugh, it would be much better to lie there on your side, on the pea gravel, like an alligator motionless and watch people checking in and out through the fake bullrushes. Like Narcissus at a trade fair.

Circle of Fiends (2012)

Mahl stick reciprocal circle

Mahl sticks for painters and sign-writers are what snooker rests are to snooker players — they lean on them so as not to smudge and mess up their work. Artists with a craft skill are sometimes grumpy, these little wands look almost cute with their leather bootees but to them it's probably just a tool. This reciprocal design is a design I saw in the roof of a roundhouse of a new age village. It's all about sharing the weight, at least until it collapses.

The Hill Farmer (2012)

C-type print

This image shows me dressed as a hill farmer contemplating the wilderness or maybe just looking for missing animals or inspecting a gap in a fence. Farmers have the ultimate office environment.

In Soot I Sleep (2012)

Grubby cross-hatched fireplace

Ever since a blackbird flew down my parents' chimney and left sooty wing prints on the four walls of the living room I've been spooked by soot prints or marks. It builds up slowly over time around fireplaces and it's only when you move house that you notice it. Cross hatching is a comic strip technique that sets my teeth on edge, all those lines gradually building up to create tone.

Shitrunes (2012)

Kiln with spewed out pottery bits and bobs

These bowls are copies of the cereal bowl I eat out of every morning. I think about the tons of muesli that's passed through this bowl. It's a wonder it hasn't worn out with all that abrasion. It's amusing to me the way pottery can go wrong in the kiln. I think about all the potters through time who have carefully lifted their creations out of a cast or off a wheel, waited, glazed them, waited, and then placed them in the kiln only for them to explode in a really violent way in a hot dark space — it's like their ideas have gone poof! At school I loved it when the pot of some clod who hadn't listened to the teacher properly would disintegrate because

of an air bubble and take out some other, much nicer, pots made by the neat kids.

The Falls (2012)

HD projector and audio

This waterfall is not so far from where I live, I've been there twice in the last ten years. People walk up a long path to see it, a couple of fighter jets maybe fly overhead, and then they go home. It's like a big TV in the trees. I look at waterfalls and think I'd like to be in it trying the different ways down, climbing across it. For that I would need to be a fish with arms. I'm obsessed with water. When I run a bath I lie down and listen to it before getting into it. I even have my iPhone play 30 minutes of rain falling on a tin roof to send me off to sleep.

Liebesgarten (2012)

Sink, 2 electric toothbrushes and audio

When couples are at work their toothbrushes and knick knacks are their representatives in the house. It's not ridiculous to think in another world that they might be lovers or at least serenade.

NATCH/SIC

c.50 A5 drawings

Here are 50 drawings I made. They are of bad, good and indifferent things that I think about when going about my business. Drawing is different from everything else because you think and imagine as you draw. So my ideal situation would be listening to an enormous bath whilst drawing with an electric sharpener by my side.

This exhibition is presented by Ikon and Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, in partnership with Mission Gallery, Swansea. *My Bad* tours to Mission Gallery, Swansea from 17 November 2012 – 6 January 2013.

A full colour catalogue accompanies the exhibition priced £17, special exhibition price £15.

To coincide with his exhibition Williams has also produced a limited edition screenprint titled *My Bad*, priced £80, edition of 100. Visit www.ikon-gallery.co.uk/shop for the full range of Ikon's catalogues and limited editions.

Associated Events

My Bad Comedy

Tuesday 15 May, 9–11pm – £5 on the door

The Victoria, 48 John Bright St., Birmingham B1 1BN

Bedwyr Williams presents a night of comedy. The line-up features Johnny Sorrow and Depressing Comics. Williams also makes a performance about the shared lives of a set of reproductions hanging on the wall of a dark pub: a shoemaker working by candlelight, a young squire on a horse, some children feeding chickens and a nobleman with a dog. This event is only open to people aged 18 and over. Limited capacity, booking essential, reserve your place by calling Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

My Bad Conversation

Thursday 7 June, 6.30–7.30pm – FREE

Ikon Gallery

Join Bedwyr Williams and Tyler Cann, Ikon Curator, as they discuss the exhibition and the role of failure and humour within artistic production. Places are free but should be reserved by calling Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

For more information about these artists and our off-site programme please visit the Resource Room where you can find a selection of books, audio and film.

If you have any questions about the exhibition please ask the Visitor Assistants in the gallery.

Ikon Gallery, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS
Open Tuesday–Sunday, 11am–6pm, free entry
0121 248 0708 / www.ikon-gallery.co.uk

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