



***A Thousand of Him, Scattered:
Relative Newcomers in Diaspora***

**Edgar Arceneaux
Yael Bartana
Richard Fung
Kiluanji Kia Henda
Bouchra Khalili
Maud Sulter
Milja Viita**

Curated by Mother Tongue
[Tiffany Boyle & Jessica Carden]

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A Thousand of Him, Scattered: Relative Newcomers in Diaspora journeys through themes of storytelling and biography to examine how individuals relate to their diasporic status and its daily realities. Through the work of seven international artists - four showing in Scotland for the first time – stories and links are told and travelled from China to Tel Aviv, Togo to Helsinki. Each work individually deflects and mirrors the meanings of diaspora, its evolution as a concept over time, and the simultaneous utility and redundancy of it as a term describing a shared experience away from the homeland.

Diaspora is generally defined as the dispersal of a community from their original homeland. However, diaspora is much more complex than this: necessitating in order to be truly diasporic, additional attributes including the longing to return to the homeland and a desire for the home culture to survive and be maintained in the new habitat. The term originates in a translation into Greek of the Bible from 607BCE, when it was used to describe the dispersion of Jewish, Greek and Armenian peoples. Its use to describe forced and voluntary movements of other groups, such as the African diaspora, is a much newer development, beginning in the 1950s. The proliferating use of the term since then – as an exemplary community of the transnational movement - is in direct correlation with the increasingly prominent experiences of transnationalism and de-territorialisation; not just of people, but also global capital, technology and media. Yet the endless application of the term onto new groups of displaced peoples also points to its downfall: over-stretched to the point of redundancy, the transferral of diaspora and its baggage onto other communities always hindered by its origins in the Jewish scenario. Furthermore, whilst grouped with other migrant experiences as representative of our supposedly hyper-mobile age, running through diaspora is a conservative streak: its demands for being diasporic as exclusionary as nationalism.

It is with this struggle between diaspora and the nation-state that we begin in Yael Bartana's *A Declaration*. As the male figure rows out to Andromeda Rock off the coast of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, he replaces the Israeli flag rooted there with an olive tree; planting a symbolic act in Zionist ideology, but the olive tree also a central icon of Palestinian agriculture and sustenance. Ambiguously layered, the work confronts the possibility of foregoing nationalism for peaceful co-existence.

Confrontation is also at the forefront of Bouchra Khalili's *Speeches*. Seynabou, a young Senegalese woman faces the camera from her home in a Paris suburb, both calmly stating and challenging us with her recited words, 'I am my language.' Her language is Wolof and the words are those of exiled Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, and in the sense that it is our language which groups us, her mother tongue transplants her from this suburb back to her home territory of Senegal. The works five chapters make visible and amplify a presence and voice not normally given a public platform. This gesture is paralleled by Kiluanji Kia Henda's *The Merchant of Venice* - a homage to Shakespeare's play of the same name - which tackles the precarious employment immigrant workers are forced to accept in Europe as a stand-in for the infamous pound of flesh. The juxtaposition of the male figure against the decadent Venetian architecture heightens our awareness that his diasporic status is one borne of economic necessity; the choice to leave akin to exile, and links with the homeland maintained through money transfers and technology.

Economics again lies at the heart of the vast distance between twins Martine and Marthe; Martine working as a caregiver for the elderly in Helsinki, whilst Marthe stays back in their native Togo, working as a dressmaker. Yet Milja's Viita's poetic video installation *Coriolis - On the Planetary Wind Which United Twins* shows their sisterly ties beyond money through the Coriolis effect. Originating along the Equator, planetary winds are deflected either right and north, or left and south. With Togo placed just above the equator, Viita sees in the winds passing through Togo northbound towards Helsinki and carrying Martine with them, a visible manifestation of the forces causing their separation. Whilst the diasporic links between Martine and Marthe are firmly in place, Richard Fung's experimental documentary *The Way To My Father's Village* from 1988 is an attempt to piece together the broken links of children born into the first, second, third generations of diaspora and the enduring search for their roots. Born in Trinidad, Fung travelled to his then recently-deceased father's home village in southern Guangdong in the autumn of 1986. The artist, through his voiceover, simultaneously examines the ways in which China has been represented by European missionaries, explorers and thinkers, and the obstacles standing in the way of his search: language barriers and his forced role as that of the tourist in his father's homeland.

The dissonance presented in Fung's work extends into *Failed Attempt at Crystallization III*, a sculptural work from Edgar Arceneaux created by dipping a copy of Alex Haley's famous novel *Roots* into a highly-concentrated sugar solution until shimmering sugar crystals calcified on its surface. Rich in cultural and aesthetic connotations of slave-time plantation agriculture, the sugar crystals fossilise time and history into concrete form. That the gesture was unsuccessful and purposefully highlighted in the title of the work points towards the impossible nature of any real attempts by those in the Diaspora to attain a true sense of return to historic homelands.

The two final works in the exhibition from the Scottish-Ghanaian artist Maud Sulter - *Significant Others* and *Calliope* – bridge a gap between the diaspora and homeland. Both works on show are part of two separate series of nine works each. Positioned between Scotland and Ghana, the artist had a unique insight into the structure of both nations and the element of kinship within their specific brands of nationalism. As she wrote in her poem *Circa 1930*, 'The cultures of Ghana and Scotland / are not as disparate as they might / at first seem. Clan-based societies / with long memories and global diasporas' – a useful reminder of Scotland's own periods of mass emigration.

Significant Others is a scaled up print of a family photo from 1968, showing the artist aged eight, hand-in-hand with her mother Elsie. The print is framed by her writing in white chalk – "Blak Power Babe," "Panthers," "Mexico Olympics 1968," "Maud & Elsie" – portraying a later awareness of her position in the Black diaspora at times of significant overhauls in its politics and identity. *Zabat* takes this understanding of positioning a step further; into art history and exhibition-making. Produced to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the invention of photography in 1839, the work responded to the non-presence of black people in the celebrations marking the anniversary. Staging nine prominent black women as the nine Greek muses, Sulter used the conventions of Victorian portrait photography and the decorative framing to call for the repositioning of black women in the history of photography. In *Calliope*, the model is the artist herself, appearing as Calliope, the muse of epic poetry.

The unique constellation of artists and work in this show attempts to extend upon our current thinking on diaspora: it's ability to travel and maintain links the world over, its power and force, presence and endurance. The exhibition takes an emotive stance, looking beyond facts, numbers and anonymous faces to the nostalgic, sentimental and practical links that bond us, and how these fit within and rupture the boundaries of the nation-state. The confrontation and resistance, dejection and upheaval, affirmation and attachments made visibly on show, urge us to (re)think and define ideas of belonging and citizenship in the present and for the future.

The accompanying publication - produced in collaboration with TrAIN: Research Centre for Transnational Art Identity and Nation at University of Arts London - will be released mid-show, including contributions from John Akomfrah, Sezgin Boynik, David Dibosa, Richard Fung, Lubaina Himid and Cinthya Lana and featuring the poetry of Maud Sulter.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Edgar Arceneaux

B. 1972, Los Angeles, California. Lives and works LA.

Edgar Arceneaux graduated with an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, in 2001. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions both nationally and internationally, including the Kitchen, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Witte de With Museum, Rotterdam; and the Studio Museum in Harlem, amongst others. His work was included in the Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and in the 2nd Moscow Biennale, Moscow, Russia. Arceneaux was a USA Broad Fellow in 2007 and is currently working on the 'Watts House Project' which he co-founded; an urban development project that brings together infrastructure for art installations and low-income housing to revitalize the neighbourhood surrounding the historic Watts Towers in southern California.

Yael Bartana

B. 1970, Israel. Lives and works Berlin and Tel Aviv.

Yael Bartana is a video artist who explores the imagery of cultural identity. In her photographs, films and installations Bartana critically investigates her native country's struggle for identity. Her early work documents collective rituals introducing alienation effects such as slow-motion and sound. In her recent work the artist stages situations and introduces fictive moments into real existing narratives. Her solo exhibitions include the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, PS1 in New York, the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv, the Kunstverein in Hamburg and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. She participated in the Sao Paulo Biennial (2010 and 2006), Documenta 12 in Kassel and the Istanbul Biennial. In 2011, Yael Bartana represented Poland for the 54th edition of the Venice Biennial. Among other prizes, Yael Bartana was awarded the prestigious Artes Mundi 4 in 2010. Her work has been included in numerous public collections, amongst others at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, Tate Modern in London and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven.

Richard Fung

B. 1954, Trinidad. Lives and works Toronto.

Richard Fung is a Toronto-based video artist, writer, theorist and educator. He holds a degree in cinema studies as well as an ME in sociology and cultural studies, both from the University of Toronto. He is Associate Professor in the Integrated Media program at the Ontario College of Art and Design. His work comprises of a series of challenging videos on subjects ranging from the role of the Asian male in gay pornography to colonialism, immigration, racism, homophobia, AIDS and his own family history. His tapes, which include *My Mother's Place* (1990), *Sea in the Blood* (2000) and *Uncomfortable* (2005), have been widely screened and collected internationally, and have been broadcast in Canada and the United States. His essays have been published in many journals and anthologies, and he is the co-author with Monika Kin Gagnon of *13: Conversations on Art and Cultural Race Politics* (2002), recently updated and translated into French. Richard is a past Rockefeller Fellow at New York University and has received the Bell Canada Award for Lifetime Achievement in Video as well as the Toronto Arts Award for Media Art.

Kiluanji Kia Henda

B.1979, Luanda, Angola. Lives and works Lisbon and Luanda.

Part of a young generation of Angolan artists with an international career, Kiluanji Kia Henda's work has been exhibited internationally - from Guangzhou to Cape Town, from Nairobi to Venice. His photographs have been exhibited at the 1st Trienal of Luanda, in 2005, at 'Art InVisible', ARCO, Madrid, 2006, at 'SD Observatory' at the Valecian Institute of Modern Art, 2006 and at 52nd Edition of Venice Biennial, Africa Pavillion 'Check List Luanda Pop', 2007. Selected solo shows include; 2010: SOSO Gallery Sao Paulo; 2008: *Estrias e Diligncias*, SOSO Gallery, Luanda, Angola; *Portraits from a Slippery Look*, Goethe Institute, Nairobi, Kenya; *Expired Trading Products*, Blank Projects, Cape Town, South Africa; Selected Group Shows, include: 2010: *There is always a cup of sea to sail in*, 29a Bial de Sao Paulo, Brazil; *Self-Portrait As White Man*, Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation, Venice; *Wild is the Wind*, Savannah College for Art and Design, Atlanta, USA.

Bouchra Khalili

B. 1975, Casablanca, Morocco. Lives and works Paris and Berlin.

Raised between Paris and Casablanca, Khalili studied Cinema at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, and Visual Arts at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Arts, Paris-Cergy. Her work has been shown extensively around the world, including Intense Proximity - La Triennale, Palais de Tokyo (Paris, 2012); the 18th Biennale of Sydney (2012); MoMA (New York, 2011); the 10th Sharjah Biennial (2011); the Gulbenkian Foundation (Lisbon, 2011); The Liverpool Biennial (2010); The Studio Museum, New York (2010); The Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (2010); INIVA, London (2010); Gallery 44, Toronto (2010); The Reina Sofia National Museum, Madrid (2009); and The Queens Museum of Art, New York (2009), amongst others. She was the recipient of the 2012-13 Vera List Center for Art and Politics Fellowship, NY, 2012 DAAD-Artist-in-Residence Berlin programme, and winner of The Abraaj Group Art prize 2014.

Maud Sulter

B. 1960 Glasgow. D. 2008 Dumfries, Scotland.

Born in Glasgow of Scots and Ghanaian descent, Maud Sulter was an artist, poet, playwright, cultural historian and curator, working with installation, photography and video. She attained a Masters degree in Photographic Theory, and came to prominence through her programming of Check It at the Drill Hall, London and inclusion in the exhibition The Thin Black Line, curated by Lubaina Himid at the ICA, 1986. Her work was subsequently included in exhibitions including: Victoria and Albert Museum in 1987; the Johannesburg Biennial (1996); and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in 2003. Between 1992 and 1994, she was the Principal Lecturer in Fine Art at the Manchester Metropolitan University, and later directed and founded the gallery Rich Women of Zurich, London, which promoted cultural diversity and mid-career artists. Sulter was awarded the British Telecom New Contemporaries Award 1990 and the Momart Fellowship at the Tate Gallery Liverpool in 1990, alongside acknowledgements of her writing including the Vera Bell Prize for Poetry (awarded for As A Blackwoman). Sulter's work is held in the collections of the V&A London, Arts Council Collection, the British Council, the Scottish Arts Council and the Scottish Parliament Collection, amongst others.

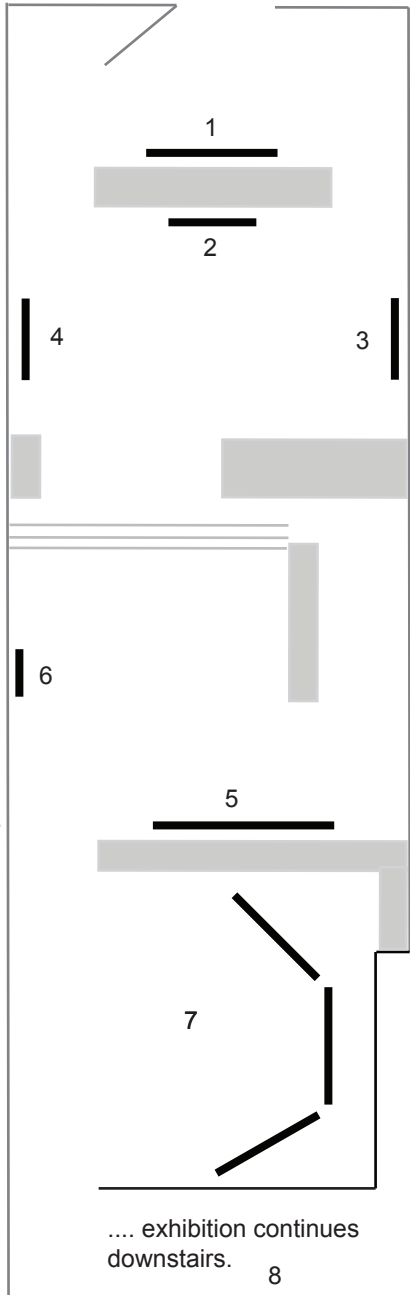
Milja Viita

B. 1974 Karjalohja, Finland. Lives and works Karkkila, Finland.

Milja Viita is a visual artist working with installations using experimental and documentary material. Her works are characterised by memories, and phenomena that are made significant by visual narration. She holds a MFA degree from the Department of Time and Space at the Academy of Fine Arts, graduating in 2005. Viita was awarded with first prize in the Siemenpuu Foundation and Artists Association MUU media art competition with her four-channel installation *Return of Birdsong* (2009). Her work has been exhibited in venues including the Contemporary Art Museum Kiasma; Helsinki Art Hall, Mänttä Art Festival; Heureka Science Centre; Suomesta Gallery Berlin. Furthermore her works has also been screened on television, and numerous film and media art festivals in Finland and internationally, such as the Festival of New Media Art Cartes Flux 2012; International Women's Film Festival Dortmund/Köln; Milano film festival 2011; FEMINA International Women's Film Festival Rio de Janeiro 2011; HLEF-Helsinki Short Film Festival 2011; and Nordisk Panorama 2007.

CURATORS BIOGRAPHY

Mother Tongue is a curatorial project formed by Tiffany Boyle and Jessica Carden in response to individual periods of research in northern Scandinavia and West Africa. The project presents exhibitions alongside discursive events, film screenings and publications, each informing a critical practice in contemporary art and cultural theory. Mother Tongue participated on the 2011/12 CuratorLab programme at Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design (Stockholm), and has curated for and partnered with organisations including, CCA: Centre for Contemporary Art Glasgow; Transmission Gallery (Glasgow); Malmö Konsthall; Africa In Motion Film Festival (Scotland); the Nordic Africa Institute (Uppsala) and Konsthall C (Stockholm). Presently, both Tiffany and Jessica are undertaking PhDs at Birkbeck University of London and TrAIN: Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation, University of Arts London, respectively.



.... exhibition continues
downstairs.

List of works:

1. *The Merchant of Venice* (2010) Kiluanji Kia Henda
Digital C-print on Kodak Endura Archive Paper

2. *A Declaration* (2006) Yael Bartana
One channel video and sound installation. 7.30 mins

3. *Significant Others* (1993) Maud Sulter
Silver Gelatin print and hand written text in white chalk

4. *Calliope* (1989) Maud Sulter
Cibachrome print
Loan from The City of Edinburgh Council Museums and Galleries.

5. *Speeches* (2012) Bouchra Khalili
Video installation. 19.55 mins

6. *Failed Attempt at Crystallization IIII* (2003) Edgar Arceneaux
Glass, sugar crystals, mirror, wood, text book: Alex Haley 'Roots'

7. *Coriolis - On the Planetary Wind Which United Twins* (2012)
Milja Viita. Three channel video installation. 18 mins

8. *The Way To My Father's Village* (1988) Richard Fung
Single channel video. 38 mins

All works courtesy the artist, unless otherwise stated.

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The curators would like to extend a special thanks to Professor Lubaina Himid MBE for her kind assistance in the presentation of Maud Sulter's work in this project.

[1] 'A Thousand of Him, Scattered', Greg Egan, Diaspora, London: Millennium, 1998.

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