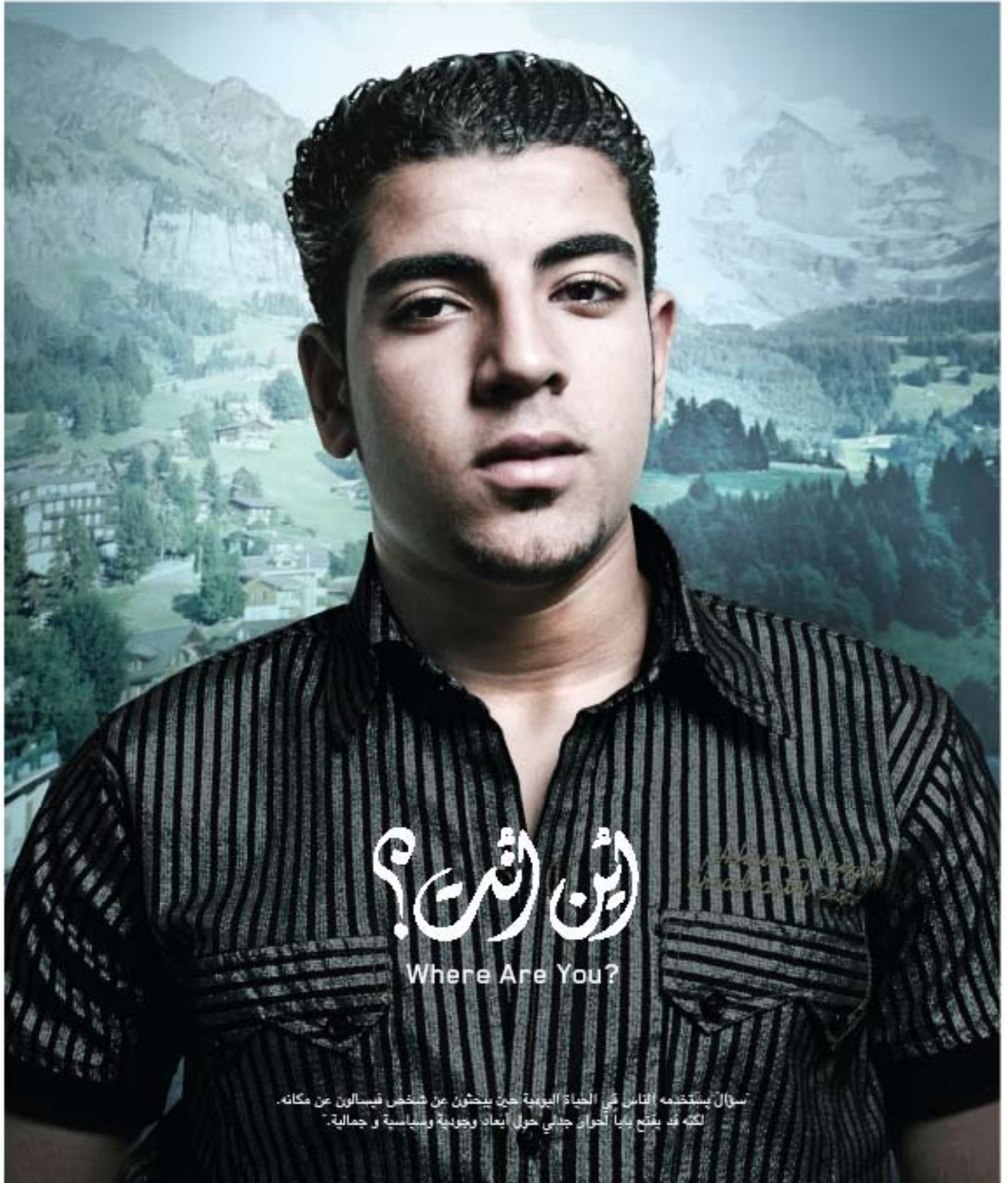




آين ان شين؟

Where Are You?

*"People ask this question in everyday communication when they are looking for each other.
But it also opens up a dialogue about existential, political and aesthetic standpoints."*



أين أنت؟

Where Are You?

تسأل يستخدمه الناس في الحياة اليومية حين يبحثون عن شخص فيسالون عن مكانه.
لكنه قد يفتح باباً لحوار جدي حول أبعاد وجودية وسياسية وجمالية.

Where Are You?

A Group exhibition with participants of the Artist-in-Residence (AIR) exchange programme, initiated by the Cairo liaison office of Pro Helvetia, Swiss Arts Council

During the last five years, Pro Helvetia Cairo Office has been focusing on building networks between artists and cultural producers from Switzerland and the Arab region, and with the exchanges, the process for results could not be tracked easily. The exhibition serves as a means for a critical self reflection and also as a concentrated public presentation of the Artist-in-Residence activities of PH Cairo. Showing a choice of various productions developed during AIR stays, which addresses the different notions connected to the system of intercultural exchange, the exhibition includes a selection of - not previously shown in Egypt - follow-up projects, with new commissions and works in progress, including performance and music.

"Where Are You?" - People ask this question all the time when looking for one another. In the context of this group exhibition: Swiss, Egyptian, Lebanese and Jordanian participants of the Pro Helvetia AIR exchange program, the concept of "Where Are You?" refers to a dialogue about existential, political and aesthetic standpoints. Artists-in-residence have to constantly redefine their own position, and try to adjust to a strange and new territory, still carrying their mental baggage with them. The gap between 'here' and 'there' belongs more and more to the general living conditions within today's global society. Take Facebook for example, you can contact your friends who are either half way around the globe. You can buy Swiss cheese in a supermarket in Cairo, and you can watch Aljazeera on a TV screen in Zurich. But still, if you go out on the street you are expected to follow local rules.

The artists participating in "Where are you" not only enlarge the perspective of the tourist gaze when they look at details of daily life and reflect on social and political issues, they also act as creative mediators in a world of confusion and disorientation. Some take a broad glance at the world, like Basim Magdy who invites the public to reflect on the implications of the Hubble telescope which opens up to dimensions far beyond our earthly atmosphere. Others focus on the direct surroundings they experience during their residency, such as the work by Swiss artists Reichlin/Wälchli and Davide Cascio, for

example. It is inspired by the ornamental tradition embedded within the urban landscape of Cairo, but also refers back to the Western discourse about geometrical art, decoration and abstraction.

Lebanese artist duo Nayla Dabyji and Ziad Bitar raise fundamental questions about the cultural and political meaning of signs and symbols. During their stay in the Swiss capital Bern they created their own fictional flag of the "Union of West Asia" and took it to different demonstrations. For example, the Tamil Tigers, The Workers' League or The 1st of May celebrations. Their project Another Member not only disrupts and widens up narrow national and political interests, but for them also was a means to find out how they can function as artists in public spaces. Maja Gusberti's video essay C.Scapes deals with the notion of public space in the Egyptian megapolis outside of the private perspective. Interviews with various inhabitants of Cairo blend together with pictures from different urban sites shot out of the windows of private homes.

Ala Younis creates a dream world with historical connotations, portraying herself in a private apartment as a woman in the 1950's who herself is imagining to be somebody else. Ingrid Wildi and Mauricio Gajado went behind the realm of fantasy production with their video interviews of Egyptian cinema operators at their work place. In "Quelque part II" they mix up different cultural notations, moving from mass culture to individual histories.

Hany Rashed refers to European media coverage in his collages where he fuses pictures of political meetings and religious ceremonies, of war, fashion and sports with his individual painterly abstractions. Press documents of historical events are altered in such a way that reality turns into fiction.

Daniela Keiser translates a picture into language and plays with the notion of a fixed identity by asking different authors to interpret one photograph she took of a blindfolded figure in a public park in Cairo. Margot Zanni also plays with reality

and fiction in her video animation “Grand solo for Ahmed” which is homage to a place which does not really exist. Tahrir Square, one of the busiest traffic circles in downtown Cairo which is normally packed with thousands of cars, appears digitally emptied on her video screen, devoid of cars, with only a single person strolling along.

Haytham Nawar jumps into real traffic, portraying the passengers of the bus line 31 in Zurich and line 13 in his hometown Cairo. Both buses travel from the rich to the poor neighbourhoods, thus serving as a meeting point of different layers of society. Nadja Solari aims to engage directly with the people on the street. As a work in progress outside of Townhouse she uses the street as her exhibition space, reacting on the vivid street life and advertisements. San Keller and Pascal Hachem also work in a performative vein and react on the given situation with interactive projects which point to cultural exchange as a lively open process.

Along side the exhibition, concerts and lectures will be held by musicians who experienced Pro Helvetia’s AIR exchange programme. Alfred Zimmerlin’s ample oeuvre as a composer has been performed in various countries. His prime interest lies in the heterogeneity of musical genres and forms, the layers of time involved in the present, and in what can be called “cultural memory” in general. His music is the result of continuous studies of the music of highly diverse times, places, and living spaces. The Egyptian musician Ahmad El Sawy and the Swiss video artist Christophe Örtli engaged in a personal cultural exchange by choosing to work together for their performance event “Sinbad”. Here the original Arabic lyrics of Sinbad’s travel stories are translated into music by El Sawy and accompanied by Örtli’s video images of travelling through nowadays` Egypt, with its tourist sites, urban dwellings and insights into private life. Conflicts between different classes of society, between different state systems and religions and the fear about the loss of cultural identity have a long tradition.

The Pro Helvetia exchange programme offers the possibility for the artists and their public to reach beyond the well known clichés of the orient and occident. Artists-in-residence are not national flags, but individuals who take the chance to become involved in an ongoing dialogue between civilizations. This includes dialogue between different art worlds, which, like planets, are constantly moving their position between financial and intellectual powers, national interests and international trends.

Curator, Beate Engel

*Beate Engel (*1964) has been the director of the Stadtgalerie Bern since 1999 and has organized a programme with guest curators there for the last two years. Since 2004 she is the director and curator of the PROGR_Zentrum für Kulturproduktion in Bern, a studio house which gives working opportunities for more than 100 artists from different fields. The PROGR runs a lively exhibition and events programme, and also offers a artists in residence programme partly in collaboration with Pro Helvetia. (www.progr.ch)*

After finishing (1993) her master-degree at the University of Cologne with Frau Prof. Antje von Graevenitz with her thesis on “Bruce Nauman und Samuel Beckett”, Beate Engel worked as an art critic for Radio DRS, WoZ, Kunstbulletin and produced a diverse range of contributions to catalogues. She finished her master studies in arts management at the University in Basel in 2003.

As a guest curator Beate Engel curated the group show “Larger than Life” - living installations by 15 Swiss artists, Kunsthalle Bunkier Sztuki in Cracow, Poland (2001) and the one man show of Christoph Büchel: Shelter II, OK-Centrum für Gegenwartskunst Linz, Austria (2002). Engel was a member of the research group on the DORE-Project “Performance and Space” at the University in Basel in 2003 and 2006. She is a member of the art commission of the city of Bern. She won the federal prize for art in 2004.

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