Traduttore, Traditore

Curated by Karen Greenwalt and Katja Rivera

November 3–
December 16, 2017

Bani Abidi
Arturo Hernández Alcázar
Carlos Arias
Luis Camnitzer
Alejandro Cesarco
Bethany Collins
Brendan Fernandes
Dora García
Emily Jacir
Katia Kameli
Harold Mendez
Paulo Nazareth
Sherwin Ovid
Michael Rakowitz
Raqs Media Collective
Emilio Rojas
Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan
Edra Soto
Stephanie Syjuco

GALLERY 400

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Traduttore, Traditore brings together a group of artists from around the world who employ processes of translation to expose, question, and challenge global circuits of economic and cultural capital. The current political climate has made it increasingly evident that uninhibited travel, communication, and trade are available only to a privileged few. Emerging from this context, the exhibition uses translation as a means of exploring the transformations—of language, customs, currency, and even memory—that occur when people cross borders. Focusing on themes of place, migration, nationalism, and identity, the artists in *Traduttore, Traditore* consider the political dynamics of power and infrastructure that influence the movement of people, goods, ideas, and languages.

Taken from the Italian aphorism that roughly translates to "translator, traitor," the title of this exhibition speaks to the misunderstandings, losses, and fragmentation that manifest during these processes of exchange. While the sentiment behind 'traduttore, traditore' can easily be grasped—the one who translates, betrays—the play on words gets, as it were, lost in translation. Put another way, 'traduttore' and 'traditore' are paronyms—the words are derivatives of each other that sound nearly identical. This slippage highlights that translation can be considered an act of betrayal: it is necessary to leave behind the author's original intent and change it—into a different form—in order to make it comprehensible to a person unfamiliar with the original language.

We propose translation as a framework with which to engage the intertwined histories of global art. Translation offers a nuanced approach for thinking about issues of migration, diasporic communities, economic disparity, transnational networks, and the myriad other conditions brought on by the promises and failures of globalization. While our economies have become increasingly interdependent, isolationist attitudes and policies have only been intensified and complicated in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. Translation acknowledges that exchange is often based on a system that is reliant on hierarchical power structures and exposes the social, economic, and political issues at stake when we talk about globalism. The term globalization first took root in the 1990s to describe the rapid growth of global market economies. According to neoliberal discourse, globalization ushered in a more interconnected way of life, with increased mobility, ease of communication, and freedom of capital. But the term globalization fails to acknowledge how political and economic power influence the complex and uneven flow of not just capital, but also people, images, and ideas. In a post 9/11 world, the global war on terror—led by the United States and its allies—only served to highlight the disparities brought on by globalization.

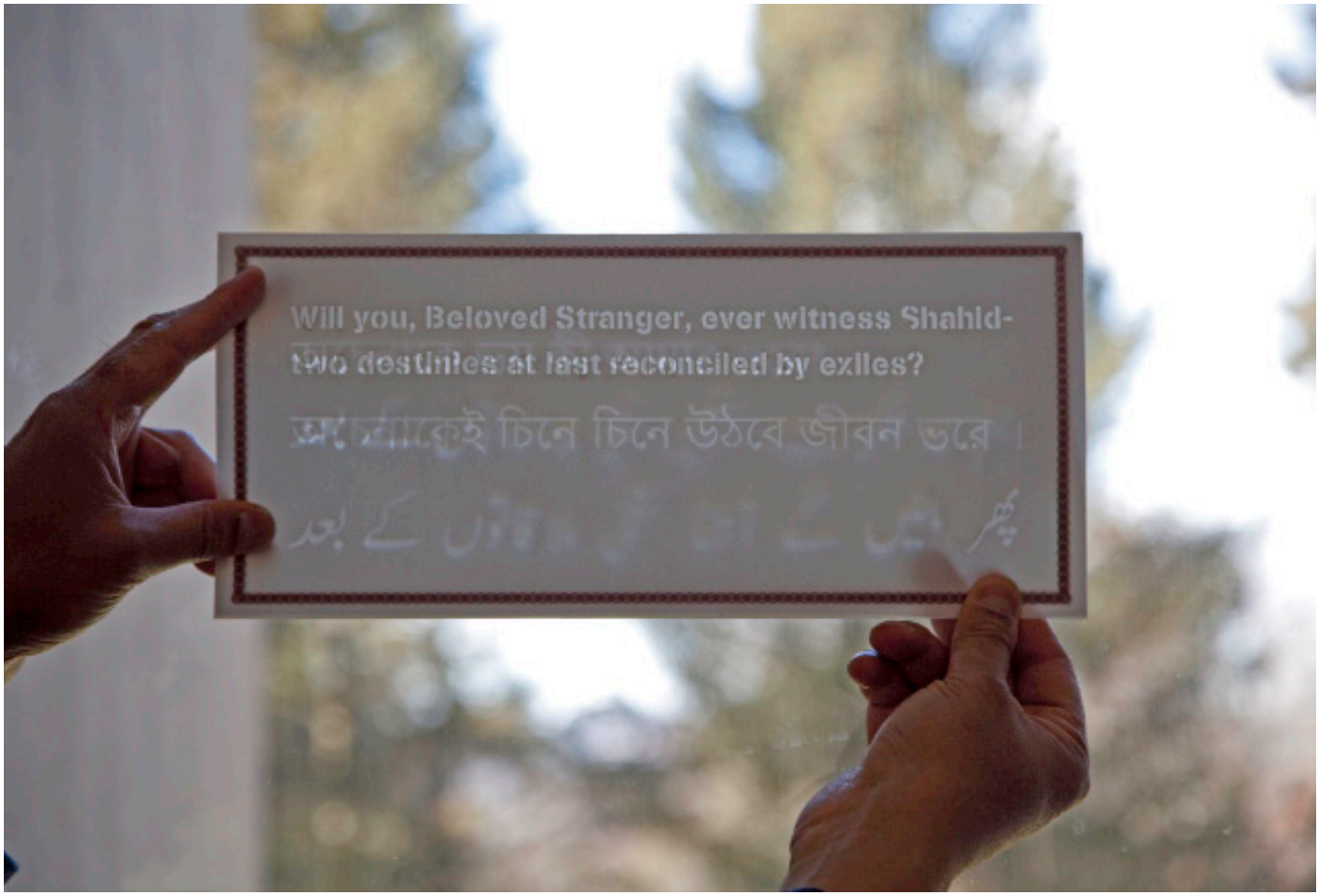
By definition, translation includes any act of change or movement from one place to another. The exhibition, therefore, employs a liberal understanding of translation in order to address the tensions that emerge from encounters across time and space. Proposing translation as a method by which to understand contemporary artistic practices, *Traduttore, Traditore* explores how contemporary artists navigate and expose issues of difference, and how they negotiate change across not just national borders, but also linguistic, cultural, and economic divides. Using translation as a way to map moments of cross-cultural contact, the exhibition reflects an inclusive vision of art history.

A broad understanding of translation anchors the exhibition—it considers not only the changes that occur with language, but also in cultural practices and economic transactions. Several artists in the exhibition use language as a means of exploring the difficulties inherent to processes of translation and the productive possibilities that accompany these moments. Dora Garcia, for example, examines this issue via a performer attempting to decode a message written in an unknown language. The performer's pursuit acknowledges the possibilities and vulnerabilities of translation. Other artists in *Traduttore, Traditore*, expose how the global economy creates systems of value and exchange. Through the purchase of mass manufactured clothing with so-called ethnic designs, Stephanie Syjuco explores the ways cultures are imagined and commodified. Finally, another group of artists considers the translation of cultural production and practices that accompanies the movement of people, often a result of long histories of colonization, occupation, and exploration. For Instance, through the performance of the American national anthem by a Pakistani pipe band—a remnant of the British colonial military—Bani Abidi investigates how the transmission of culture is not always a seamless process. Shaped by their specific cultural histories and geographic locations, the artists in the exhibition speak to a more nuanced understanding of what it means to live in a globalized world.

Today, when images are increasingly relied on as a primary medium of communication and mobilized as a means of persuasion, contextualizing the work of the artists in *Traduttore, Traditore* provides a distinct and critical lens onto the present cultural, social, and historical moment. The artists in the exhibition draw attention to the contradictions intrinsic to globalism, underscoring the power differentials that define its uneven processes. Put simply, globalism affects people differently depending on their location. While some may benefit from the unregulated movement of capital and goods, others—as Arturo Hernández Alcázar points out—exist in a liminal space where their labor and lives are undervalued and rendered invisible. For many in the so-called Western world, travel has never been easier, but Emily Jacir reminds us that this is not the case for everyone, such as the many Palestinians who face severe travel restrictions. And while many artists in the exhibition engage with contemporary issues, others focus on historic events, and their continued relevance. Harold Mendez, for example, explores the history of the West African slave trade and the index of the traumatic events that occurred there. Works such as these visualize William Faulkner's oft quoted statement: "The past is never dead; it's not even the past." Put slightly differently, history can serve not only as a reflection of the past but as a way of holding a mirror to our present moment. Through a variety of media and approaches, the artists in *Traduttore, Traditore* depict and highlight moments of historical, linguistic, and cultural translation, explore mechanisms of translation, and, at times, function as the translator themselves.

—Karen Greenwalt and Katja Rivera

Note: In order to highlight the multiple viewpoints of the artists represented in *Traduttore, Traditore*—as well as the movement of the artists themselves—the exhibition's wall labels include nationality and the current living/working city of each artist. Designations of nationality are inherently fraught at a moment when identity can be exclusionary, or worse, used as a weapon. At the same time, nationality can be a point of pride and/or cultural grounding. Given this complexity, we acknowledge that nationality (as opposed to other designations of identity) emphasizes governmentality, and that some of the common names used to assign nationality or ethnic origin can be divisive or disputable.



Front Image: Arturo Hernández Alcázar, *Columna del trabajo(salario mínimo)*, 2016. Image courtesy the artist and Marso Gallery
Back Image: Raqs Media Collective, *The Translator's Silence (Takeaway)*, 2012. Image courtesy the artists.

Related Programs:

***Voices* Lecture:**
Harold Mendez
Thursday, November 2
6pm

Opening Reception
Friday, November 3
5–8pm

***Forms & Features*:**
Translation
Tuesday, November 7
5pm

***Voices* Lecture:**
Bani Abidi
Thursday, November 9
6pm

Screening:
Rising Voices/Hóthaŋiŋpi
Wednesday, November 15
6pm

Conversation: Katja Rivera
Karen Greenwalt, and
Sherwin Ovid at UIC MFA
Open Studios
Thursday, November 30
6pm

GALLERY 400

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Traduttore, Traditore is the pilot exhibition in a new program at Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois Chicago to support the production of in-depth exhibitions developed out of the research work of PhD candidates or recent PhD graduates of UIC's Department of Art History. UIC Art History candidates are in the process of producing significant new scholarship on a wide range of art and cultural practices. Exhibitions developed out of that work bring that new thought to a broader audience, while providing the PhD candidates mentorship in curatorial practice and the opportunity for engaged publishing in exhibition catalogues.

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