

The Agency for Legal Imagination Presents:

State Traps // A Duo-Exhibition by Yazan Khalili and Jonas Staal

List of works:

I Yazan Khalili, Border Patrol (2014)

In June 2014, Khalili visited the border patrol headquarters in Marfa, Texas. While a press officer was informing him of the role of the border patrol, he noticed a huge painting (10' x 4') by Roberto Rios hanging in the space. In contrast to the Press Officer refusal to answer the artist's questions on immigration policies, the painting portrayed a striking political point of view by showing a clear division between the White European Texans, and the rest of the people on the other side of the border. Understanding the painting as a space where hidden political discourses can be exposed, Khalili is juxtaposing the border patrol "apolitical" discourse with the politics embedded in the details of this painting by integrating into it a recorded interview with the press officer.

II Yazan Khalili, The Rock on the Institution (2017)

Atop of the Palestinian Museum, located next to Birzeit University, Khalili has placed in 2017 a 'falling stone, flying stone' for the inauguration exhibition of the museum. From the Dome of the Rock to the Foundation Stone, Khalili's stone was placed on the tent of the museum, acting as if by its weight it has tented the museum's surface; thus, questioning if the museum can hold the weight of the artworks show in it, and the weight of having a museum in the context of Palestine. What comes first - the institution, or the artwork?

III Jonas Staal, The Geert Wilders Works (2005-2008)

A series of twenty-one installations consisting of photos collages of the ultra-nationalist Dutch politician Geert Wilders were realized anonymously in April 2005. The installations referenced the enormous memorial installations constructed in The Netherlands after the murders of the conservative-liberal Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn

38 Ludlow Street
New York, NY 10002
Thursday–Sunday
1–6pm



(2002), and the polemicist and filmmaker Theo van Gogh (2004). The installations are portraying Wilders as a living martyr as in the wake of the two deaths, he has claimed to be living under permanent life threats.

Wilders reported twice to the police that he felt threatened by the installations, and as a result the Public Prosecutor decided to bring the case to court. The accusation was that the artist had “threatened a member of parliament with death.” This resulted in two works: *The Geert Wilders Works – A Trial I* (Cantonal Court Rotterdam, 2007) and *The Geert Wilders Works – A Trial II* (Court of The Hague, The Hague, 2008), in which the trials were announced as ‘public debates’ and the artist presented two manifests as his defense.

IV Yazan Khalili, Robbery in Area A (2013 – 2016)

This is a story about a bank robbery that happened in Ramallah few years ago, and on how the thieves read the geopolitical condition in order to get away with their robbery. Ramallah, a city in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, became part of administrative division, controlled by the Palestinian Authority, according to the Oslo II Accord from 1993-5.

The project tries to expose and investigate how the agreement, which divided the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C, also allowed for a new economy to emerge, and establish itself on banking systems, loans, and neo-liberal structures. How both situations created a need for a theft and resistance, and on how robbing a bank in Area A can be read as both.

V Jonas Staal, New World Summit – Kochi (2013)

The New World Summit is an artistic and political organization that develops parliaments with and for stateless states, autonomist groups, and blacklisted political organizations. For the third edition of the New World Summit a triangular open air parliament was built in the main venue of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale art manifestation. Within the triangular construction, 45 large-scale hand-painted panels depicting flags of banned organizations were organized by color. Half of them depict flags of banned organizations in India, the other half organizations from abroad, thus

38 Ludlow Street
New York, NY 10002
Thursday–Sunday
1–6pm



placing India's policies of political exclusion in an international context in which occupation plays a central role.

The structure was inaugurated on December 14, 2012. Two weeks later, on December 28, the parliament of the New World Summit was raided by the special branch of the Kochi City Police, with approval of the home department and state intelligence. The panels they thought objectionable were painted over by staff of the Kochi Biennale Foundation with black and grey paints and the wall text announcing the planned summit was removed. On January 9, 2013, this painterly gesture of the special intelligence was supplemented with a charge against three members of the New World Summit, among which its founder, under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act Section 10 (4). As a residue of the performative intervention of the authorities the installation remained open to the public until the end of the Biennale.

VI Jonas Staal, New World Summit – Utrecht (2016)

The sixth New World Summit, entitled *Stateless Democracy*, took the form of an assembly that explored the possibilities of uncoupling the practice of democracy from the construct of the nation-state. For this sixth summit a temporary parliament was built in the aula of Utrecht University. It was in this hall that the Union of Utrecht was signed in 1579, which was to become one of the foundations of the Dutch state. The parliament was thus also a historical intervention, reaching back to the very origins of the Dutch state to engage its alternative in the form of stateless democracy. On the first day, enlargements of Guantánamo Bay prisoner Mohamedou Ould Slahi's *Guantánamo Diary** were installed in the parliament as can be seen in the large wall-print. In the video installed on the table in front of this print, Nancy Hollander**, a criminal defense lawyer who has collaborated with Staal already in the first New World Summit (Berlin, 2012), discusses the case of her client Slahi, who has been detained in the prison at Guantánamo Bay from 2002.

*Fifteen-year Guantánamo Bay prisoner Mohamedou Ould Slahi wrote his book *Guantánamo Diary* in 2005. But for it to be published, every single page had to be put up to the United States government for review. When it was finally released as a book in 2015, black rectangles of censorship littered the pages. The motivation for

38 Ludlow Street
New York, NY 10002
Thursday–Sunday
1–6pm



censoring Ould Slahi's original text is most telling when a black rectangle appears in the following description of a conversation between Ould Slahi and one of his guards:

"No worry, you gonna go back to your family," he said. When he said that I couldn't help breaking in [REDACTED].

It might be hard to imagine, but it seems the US government chose to classify the word "tears." In the name of national security, censorship is applied to evidence of the fact that Ould Slahi is a human subject capable of experiencing and expressing emotions. It is also a censorship of the affective dimension a reader might experience when reading Slahi's words. By cancelling testimony, a dehumanizing abstraction emerges, which can then be substituted with the images of imminent societal destruction enacted by an ever threatening "Them" in the Us versus Them divide. This is but a small example of the voids and abstractions created in the War on Terror, which has further classified whole parts of government administration, public information sources in libraries, and even geographies and human bodies in the name of national security.

Resource: Jonas Staal, *To Make a World: Propaganda Art in the 21st Century*, MIT Press (forthcoming, 2019).

** Nancy Hollander will talk about Government surveillance and censorship: the end of free speech in America at the Ludlow 38, October 28, 4pm.

VII Yazan Khalili, I, The Artwork (2016)

The main premise of this work is to deal with the question of boycott: can an artwork boycott? Also, can we take what the artwork is trying to say seriously? *I, The Artwork* is a photograph containing a contract that has been developed together with Dr. Martin Heller, a Berlin based lawyer who is specialist on art related issues.

The contract uses legal terms and language, but as an artwork can't speak in front of the law, it cannot be part of a contract, it cannot speak for itself, as it is only the artist that speak for it. Therefore, the specially produced contract fails to represent the

38 Ludlow Street
New York, NY 10002
Thursday–Sunday
1–6pm



artwork itself, yet it creates a sort of a legal and ethical loophole. The project aims to investigate the borderline between law and justice. It demonstrates how justice cannot speak through law, and how law becomes a language that includes and excludes subjects according to law's regulations and structures.

The contract through which the artwork speaks makes a clear demand regarding how the work can be exhibited, collected, and owned. But whoever exhibits, collects, or owns this artwork, can decide whether to obey these demands and conditions depending on how seriously they take the artwork itself.

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Thursday–Sunday
1–6pm

