

Ant Farm Lagos (2019)

Ants, plastic chairs, wooden map, weeds, various foodstuff
300 × 150 × 90 cm – 120 × 60 × 35 inches

LAGOS
BIENNIAL

Commissioned by the 2nd edition of the Biennial for Contemporary Art in Lagos, Nigeria

'How to Build a Lagoon with just a Bottle of Wine?'

Independence Building, Lagos Island



Ant Farm Lagos – phase 6

During his time in Nigeria Tom Bogaert worked on a new site-specific installation: 'Ant Farm Lagos', a multi-colored map of Lagos Island made of translucent 'agar-agar' – a vegetarian gelatin substitute, combined with sugar, tea tree oil, weeds, soil, black ants, and white wine. Towards the end of his residency Bogaert started experimenting with palm wine. The map is mounted on plywood cut out in the form of Lagos Island and rests on a construction of plastic stools. The ants were collected at the site of the Lagos Biennial using sugar bait traps.

The installation functions as an ant farm with the agar-agar serving both as habitat and nutrition for the ants. This allows the viewer to watch the ants turn the map into a colony around which they organize their lifecycle. 'Ant Farm Lagos' at this stage depicts what it means to be able to bend space to particular social, religious, political, and economic needs.

'Ant Farm Lagos' was made during the course of three intense weeks of map building, ant collecting, and agar-agar cooking in the Independence Building where the installation inevitably – yet faster than anticipated – succumbed to the process of decay.



Ant Farm Lagos – phase 1

'Ant Farm Lagos' is inspired by an 'ArtSchool Palestine' residency in Nablus in 2011, where Tom Bogaert mapped remnants of 'inverse geometry', a so-called 'high concept spatial technique' used by the Israeli Defense Forces in their 2002 offensive against the Palestinian resistance, and described by Eyal Weizman in his 'Walking Through Walls':

"...soldiers moved within the city across hundreds of meters of 'overground tunnels' [...] the military borrowed metaphors from the world of aggregate animal formation as 'swarming' and 'infestation'..."

We are convinced that a benign interpretation of the military concept of "the city as not just the site, but the very medium of warfare, a flexible, almost liquid medium that is forever contingent and in flux..." can be implemented in Lagos as a base for reflection and concrete action.

Lagos Biennial curatorial team

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