

*This guide is intended as an introduction to the exhibition. Please ask a **steward** if you have any questions.*

*A **catalogue** for this exhibition is available from the bookshop for a special exhibition price £12.95.*

*A free **family pack** is available from the information desk on the ground floor.*



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ARNOLFINI

T: 0117 917 2300 / 01

E: BOXOFFICE@ARNOLFINI.ORG.UK

16 NARROW QUAY, BRISTOL BS1 4QA

WWW.ARNOLFINI.ORG.UK

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Introduction
to the
exhibition

PORT CITY: ON MOBILITY AND EXCHANGE

**Galleries, Dark Studio, Reading Room, Bookshop,
Café/Bar and outside**

Saturday 15 September - Sunday 11 November 2007

As a port city, Bristol's historical and contemporary developments have been much affected by international trade and migration of people. Like all port cities, Bristol's history is also a history of the changes in trade and migration that have shaped society.

This exhibition explores some of these histories but focuses on contemporary aspects of trade and migration, the developments in the way ports function, and the increasing international migration of people which make port cities highly sensitive points of entry.

Port City is an international exhibition with a wide range of media and artists from many different countries as well as projects that have involved Bristol people and refer to local experiences within their work.

This guide covers the exhibition aspects of Port City, presented throughout the building including the Café/Bar, Bookshop and outside the building, nearby. There is also a programme of film, live art, discussions and events. Please see Arnolfini website and brochure for details.

In **GALLERY 1** is the work of **URSULA BIEMANN**. Whether adapting official police photographs or making her own documentary videos, in **SAHARA PANELS** and **SAHARA CHRONICLE**, Biemann is concerned with offering an alternative to the commonly encountered television and newspaper images of migration from Africa to Europe. The artist attempts to explore what she sees as the privileges and deprivations of mobility.

The photographs in the first section of this space use Moroccan police aerial shots of migrants' camps, trails and abandoned belongings. Biemann has overlaid these with text, recounting facts about the travels of migrants across the Sahara. Photographs show people carrying and assembling makeshift boat-kits across the desert and the traces they leave behind. Being police photographs, these often show how journeys are cut short by the perils of environment, exploitative traffickers and possible capture. As they make their way to the coast, bound for Europe, it is easy to see how the desert can be compared with the sea – both are places of movement and passage, not rest and settlement, excruciating to cross and merciless.

The routes travelled by these people can be compared with the ancient trading routes of the Tuareg and other nomadic tribes who have moved across these regions for thousands of years. These old trade routes have recently been revitalized and repurposed as a highway for illicit migration, in which The Tuareg are the guides.

Over three years the artist made field trips to Morocco, Niger, and Mauritania and started to produce short video documents. 11 of them are screened in this gallery as projections and on monitors. By using multiple images, Biemann can tell many, overlapping stories. She attempts to present these without an authorial voice or any other narrative device, with the aim that meaning can be produced by those watching and listening.

Also in **GALLERY 1** (and available in each gallery alongside this exhibition guide) is **KATE RICH's PORT CITY FREIGHT PROFILE**. It contains information about the movements of artists and artworks involved in producing this exhibition. This data emphasises the art and artists in Port City as an international, traded commodity. From this, it is possible to form stories of the journeys, short and long, simple and troublesome, involved in Port City.

On the **FIRST FLOOR** in **GALLERY 2** is **SEEDS OF CHANGE: BRISTOL**, a project by **MARIA THEREZA ALVES**. This brings together paintings, photographs and research materials with plants; all parts of Alves's research into Ballast flora around Bristol Harbourside. As her accompanying text explains, ballast flora grow from the seeds caught up with the sand, rocks, earth and other debris used to balance cargo ships. This was common practice during the period that Bristol was an active port and ballast would have been off-loaded in and around the water's edge. Like on-board stowaways, the seeds are unofficial travellers on these journeys.

The information panels and paintings are examples of plants that have made the journey. They were identified in Bristol during the period 1912-1929. Alves studied this information at the City Museum and Bristol Records Office as part of her research for this project. An important aspect of this project has been the nurturing of the plants, carried out by a wide range of people in Bristol, including British Conservation

Europe is reaching into Africa for labour and materials.

In addition to **PORT CITY FREIGHT PROFILE**, Kate Rich has also produced **UPHONE**. This is available online, via telephone and also in Arnolfini's **BOOKSHOP**. This is a voicemail and internet system for people to leave messages about Port City art, ideas and stories. Resembling a telephone-based comments book, each message is logged as a sound file on the Uphone website. Like any voicemail system, recordings also contain background noise, and are sometimes rambling, as people attempt to communicate through an unrehearsed monologue. These messages will accumulate during the exhibition and form a sound archive of peoples' responses.

Works within Port City range from Meschac Gaba's vast, utopian cityscapes and Ursula Biemann's Maghreb video survey, to the personal, Bristol experiences in Maria Thereza Alves's and Kayle Brandon and Heath Bunting's works. The variety of artists, issues, media and ways of working in Port City is representative of the complexities of, and ways of thinking about, trade and migration today; the local as well as global networks and systems of exchange.

CAFÉ/BAR AND OUTSIDE

In association with Going Public/aMAZELab, Milan, two works (plus one for the opening weekend) are sited outside the building and one in the Café/Bar. More information on these works can be found at each of the sites.

In the **CAFÉ/BAR** is **OFRI CNAANI's FLOATING SYMMETRY**. As with several of the works in Port City, this uses the Mediterranean Sea as a reference point.

JENNY VOGEL uses web cameras, news channels, and Google searches as source material for her photographs and videos. In **AD ASTRA**, posters are displayed on a brick shed near Arnolfini. They show abstracted night-time scenes recorded by web-cameras located in ports and harbours around the globe.

To find this work leave Arnolfini through the Café/Bar. The posters are displayed on the brick shed to the left.

The five flags displayed by **GRZEGORZ KLAMAN** have been made as suggested alternative designs for a flag for Poland, Klamán's home country. In **FLAG FOR DEMOCRACY**, Klamán presents variations on a design with a black stripe added to the country's traditional red and white flag.

To find this work leave Arnolfini through the Café/Bar, turn left and then right over Prince Street Bridge. L Shed is the large industrial building just over the water on the right hand side.

connected these locations during an historic period in which the British slave trade was at the height of its powers. Each telescope has been transformed into a kaleidoscope, drawing the viewer into an intimate viewing space, enticing the eye with associations of visual pleasures and childhood amusements.

In the last year, Mary Evans has taken a series of journeys to various locations implicated in these histories, recording impressions of British port cities, West African coastal slave trade forts, and southern Plantation Houses. Her interest lies in these places as sites relating to the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and as places whose identity today remains closely bound up with the representations and the re-telling of these complex histories. There are also sights and images of each place Evans has visited.

Each piece combines images of contemporary life with those concerned with 'triangular trade'. The kaleidoscopic viewfinder reflects, dissects, fractures and disperses a patchwork of quietly observed moments. DIXIE dissolves together icons of the American South – the picket fence, the Plantation House, a riverboat in Savannah. GUINEA mixes scenes of everyday life in Ghana with shots of the ocean viewed from the ramparts of Cape Coast Castle and Elmina (fortified trading and holding posts for enslaved Africans en route to the Caribbean or America). BLIGHTY collides contemporary street scenes in Bristol with architectural facades of Georgian England, reflecting the city's prosperity and power as a

trading port city in the 18th century. BLIGHTY, GUINEA, DIXIE's travelogue draws our attention to these sites as contemporary lived realities, existing somewhat uncomfortably alongside constructed representations of history as spectacle. These films reveal the historic constructed for consumption, from West African slave trade forts, to the reconstructed slave quarters of a Plantation House in Williamsburg, Virginia.

In the Reading Room there is also the **RESOURCE AREA**, with further information on the art and ideas in Port City and images from **ZAFOS XAGORARIS's** installation. This sound work was installed for the opening weekend of Port City and the photographs show its previous presentations in the ports of Istanbul and Piraeus, Athens.

In **GALLERY 5**, the **MAGHREB CONNECTION** screenings programme 8 artists' films and documentaries is curated by **URSULA BIEMANN**. Each film explores movement of labour between North Africa and Europe. Biemann's own film made with **ANGELA SANDERS, EUROPLEX**, documents the daily 'commuter' movements of workers. **CHARLES HELLER'S** video investigates the social networks and transnational spaces of people trapped between the sea and desert, unable or unwilling to return home or move on to Europe.

Each work in this programme examines the affects of increased border control around Europe at the same time as

Trust Volunteers and many people with experiences and stories about migrating to Bristol. They are represented in photographs of them with their plants.

The resulting plants are a mixture of familiar 'weeds' and lesser known species and can be seen as a living embodiment of the port's history of trade, reflecting the different routes travelled by Bristol merchants worldwide. Also included here are ideas for a Harbourside garden that might contain these plants.

LARIAM, ERIK VAN LIESHOUT's video is installed in a box, an oversized model of a tablet packet. Typical of van Lieshout's installations, getting to see the video is not easy. The video was made in Ghana when the artist travelled there to find the 'roots of hip hop.' The spread of culture, of which hip hop is one example of a global, much interpreted music style, can be seen as a type of exchange. Cultural exchange and developments such as cooking and music always happen as part of international movement and migration.

To further emphasise this African-Western exchange in goods, labour and culture, the rap that the artist is performing with the Ghanaian participants is about Lariam. This is the trade name for one of the most widely taken antimalarial drugs in Africa. It was developed and is manufactured in Europe and distributed throughout the world.

The artist's bumbling, naïve approach to his quest means the exact purpose

of van Lieshout's travels is unclear. Is he really trying to improve his rapping? Is Ghana the real root of hip hop, or is it the USA?

In **GALLERY 3**, the three collages by **MARIA MAGDALENA CAMPOS PONS** were made in Italy on a year long residency. The work is based on the artist's observations and meetings with street sellers she met when in Padua. The two portraits each show one of these sellers with their cheap products: friendship bracelets and bootlegged designer goods. As in Erik van Lieshout's video work, these paintings combine, sometimes clash, many cultural references – fashion, culture, trade and migration.

The vast model of a port city is made by **MESCHAC GABA. SWEETNESS** is an imaginary place with some of the most instantly recognisable buildings from around the world - the Eiffel Tower, the Cathedral of Brasilia, 'The Gherkin' in London. For this presentation in Bristol, a model of Harbourside apartments, 18th and 21st Century trading ships, the Wills Building at the University of Bristol and Clifton Suspension Bridge have been added – all made of sugar.

Historically, sugar is one of the most widely traded commodities in the world and its production was an integral part of the slave trade in which Bristol was a part. Gaba's use of sugar references this trading link. This sugar city also appears like a imaginary, fantasy place. Perhaps an ideal, utopian city, dreamt of by a traveller or future migrant.

Like Gaba's use of sugar, **WILLIAM POPE.L's** work **THE POLIS OR THE GARDEN OR HUMAN NATURE IN ACTION** on the back wall of this gallery also use an everyday foodstuff. Each onion is painted and piled onto a shelf in front of a mirror.

During Port City some onions will decay and others will sprout. Which onions shrivel and which grow seems random, but either way they become inedible waste. Polis, as used in the title of this artwork, is a classical Greek term for city-state or a body of citizens. Perhaps each onion represents a person. But this easy deduction is disrupted by the appearance of some of the viewers' reflections in the mirror as well as the title, which seems to suggest three titles and multiple interpretations.

In contrast to the communal, massive qualities of Pope.L's work, **YTO BARRADA's SLEEPERS** photographs show individuals. These are people in the artist's home town of Tangiers. Each is a would-be émigré awaiting their moment of passage to the North. Campos Pons's portraits show people who had successfully made the journey. **SLEEPERS** show those still on their way. What might they be dreaming of? A city like the Meschac Gaba's **SWEETNESS**? A journey similar to those in Gallery 1? Will they succeed in finding what they are looking for? As the artist has said, "Tangiers has become the destination and jumping-off point of a thousand hopes."

In **GALLERY 4, THE UNDESIRABLES** by **MELANIE JACKSON** uses animation, etchings and paper models. The theatrical style arrangement of figures against a backdrop of coastline is based on some of the media accounts of the wrecking of the MSC Napoli off the coast of Devon. This event offered a rare glimpse into the processes of the largely invisible import/export trade and the mass movement of goods across international waters. The televised images of the vast array of goods washed up on Branscombe beach – from motorbikes, to face-creams, flip-flops and electronic goods - made visible the chaotic spillage of a cargo en route from Europe to Africa. The vast scale and extraordinary juxtaposition of goods caught the imagination of the public who, prompted by the national press, came to the rural beach in their thousands to join the search for treasure.

THE UNDESIRABLES accumulates materials that re-present aspects of the story of the wreck and associated scavenging. The title refers to the term local people (and the media) used to describe outsiders who came to scavenge. Within this installation are transcripts of interviews with some of these scavengers.

During the making of this work Jackson interviewed dock and cargo workers from ports in Bristol, Plymouth and Southampton. She spoke with them about the changes in their experience and work practices in recent times. A video combining drawing and film

footage from these interviews plays in the other corner. They talk about the mystery of what they move and the inevitable stowaway human cargo that is now a feature of port life in the UK.

On the **SECOND FLOOR** in the **DARK STUDIO**, is **ZINEB SEDIRA's** two-screen video projection **SAPHIR**, filmed in and around the port of Algiers during visits by Sedira to the birthplace of her family. The video contrasts her rediscovery of the sights and sounds of Algiers with an awareness that some of the local residents often dream of escape to Europe.

There are two central characters. An Algerian man, a solitary figure, who walks across town and silently watches the arrival and departure of the daily ferries. An older woman is shown in the Es Safir Hotel. This is one of the grand landmarks of French colonial Algiers whose imposing architecture serves as a powerful reminder of a past that affects the city. The movements of both people seem directionless; parallel worlds that, though separate, often appear to intersect one another but without any conclusion.

The title 'Saphir' (which translates from French as sapphire) refers to the pure maritime light quality that is typical of Algiers and also the flickering glimmers on the horizon from the lights of Europe. These lights can be thought of as representing people's dreams and aspirations. In Arabic, 'safir' means ambassador, a person who travels between different places acting

as a representative of one country in another. These bilingual interpretations of the title sum up the complex associations of arrival and departure, of connection and separation, and of past and present.

On the landing on the second floor is a bench unit displaying a free publication by **KAYLE BRANDON AND HEATH BUNTING. AVON CANOE PILOT** is a guide book and an account of the artists' explorations and research into a stretch of the River Avon.

As a modern port city, Bristol's Harbourside area is no longer an area of industry, which has long since moved to Avonmouth. As the artists make clear in the booklet, Bristol's Harbourside has become one of the most popular areas of the city, whilst the Avon is little used. It is thought dangerous and inaccessible. Brandon and Bunting show how this is not true.

Like all guide books, this is as useful for those wanting to imagine themselves canoeing out on the river as it is for those who may wish to follow Brandon and Bunting's example and become more frequent users of the Avon.

In the **READING ROOM**, and also in the **BOOKSHOP**, are telescope-like structures by **MARY EVANS**. The title **BLIGHTY, GUINEA, DIXIE**, refers to names used in the 18th century for Britain, modern day West Africa, and the southern states of the USA respectively. The terminology reflects the artist's concern with the threads of commerce and power that