Tread Softly

Migration History and Memory in a Post-Migrant Context



A Collaborative Exhibition between students of Bard College, Berlin and the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna.

Shown at the Berlin Wall Memorial, during the International Conference, The Impossible Order: Europe, Power, and the Search for a New Migration Regime.

11th to 13th of May 2017



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Tread Softly Statement

Migration History and Memory in a Post-Migrant Educational Context.

There has always been migration. It is not migration itself but how it is framed that makes it costly, violent and subject to exploitation. In an ever more complex environment, we must experiment at the interstices, seeking possibilities between manifold limitations and restrictions. Bidding farewell to simplistic "grand" solutions, we insist on the freedom to be mindful, to build new connections, establish new practices and opportunities. "Tread softly because you tread on my dreams ": This last line from a famous poem by Yeats reminds us that the limitations of human mobility trespass upon the realm of ideas, of memories and hopes. Physical borders infringe on prospects and expectations, space precipitates into time.

Our exhibition attempts to tread softly by exploring new approaches to migration history, memory and experience in Germany. It does so in a post-migrant educational context where the students' migrant background is the norm rather than the exception.

Tread Softly Concept

The exhibits stem from the academic research made by Bachelor students in Liberal Arts at Bard College Berlin. They grapple with issues of identity and belonging, of relating migrants' memories to the memorialisation of the Holocaust in Germany, of gender visibility and invisibility, and of irony as a tool to cope with the ambiguities of migrant existence. Originally conceived as visual or audio notations which permit alternative modes of expression to the academic essay, they have become personal yet interconnected artistic statements.

The installation in which these exhibits are embedded was designed and built by Master students in Art and Architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. The students have employed means and materials which have been either loaned, given or recycled, itself proposing an important alternative to consumerist methodology. The finished installation seeks neither to master nor to serve the individual embedded pieces but instead attempts to enter into a dialogue with them. Ideally, this dialogue should construct a complex system of interactive messages and materials that is convincing and sustainable, connected to its current domicile and to future domiciles: a post-migrant installation.

Marion Detjen and Michelle Howard

Sanften Schrittes Aussage

Migrationsgeschichte und migrantische Erinnerung in einer postmigrantischen Umgebung

Migration hat es schon immer gegeben. Nicht die Migration selbst, sondern wie wir sie rahmen und interpretieren macht sie so kostpielig, gewalttätig und anfällig für Ausbeutung aller Art. In einer immer komplexer werdenden Umwelt muss Migration in den Zwischenräumen Wege suchen, muss Begrenzungen umgehen, Hemmnisse in Möglichkeiten umdeuten, mit den Lücken experimentieren. Von den vereinfachenden, "großen" Lösungen haben wir uns längst verabschiedet, aber werden uns die Freiheit nicht nehmen lassen, achtsam und aufmerksam zu sein, neue Verbindungen zu knüpfen, neue Praktiken zu schaffen und Gelegenheiten zu entdecken. "Gehe sanften Schrittes, denn Du trittst auf meine Träume": Diese Zeile aus einem Gedicht von William Butler Yeats nehmen wir als einen Hinweis darauf, dass Einschränkungen der Bewegungsfreiheit immer auch in die Sphären der Ideen, der Träume und Erinnerungen eingreifen. Physische Grenzen versperren unsere Zukunftsaussicht und -erwartung, Raum schlägt sich nieder in der Zeit.

Diese Ausstellung will, auf schwierigem Terrain, "sanften Schrittes" gehen: Sie will neue Wege auskundschaften, um Migrationsgeschichte, Migrationserinnerung und Migrationserfahrung zu erforschen, zu erzählen und auszustellen – in der postmigrantischen Umgebung einer Universität, die den migrantischen Hintergrund der Studierenden bereits als Norm kennt, und nicht mehr als Ausnahme.

Sanften Schrittes Konzept

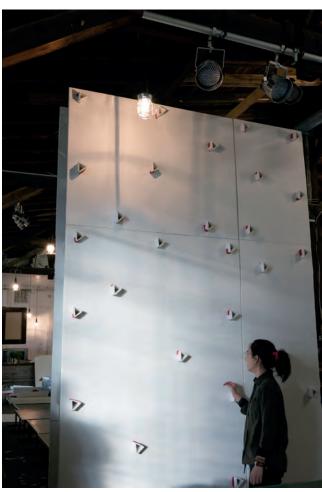
Die Ausstellungsstücke basieren auf Projekten von Studierenden des Bard College Berlin, die ihre sehr persönliche Perspektive der freiwilligen oder erzwungenen Migration mit akademischer Recherche und eigenen Ausdrucksformen verbinden. Die Projekte visualisieren oder vertonen auf vielfältige Weise Fragen von Identität und Zugehörigkeit. Ursprünglich wurden die Exponate als visuelle oder klangliche "Notationen" konzipiert, um gerade für die geflüchteten Studierenden eine Ergänzung zum akademischen Essay zu schaffen, haben sich aber während der Arbeit zu eigenständigen, und doch miteinander verbundenen künstlerischen Aussagen verdichtet.

Die Architektur-Installation, in die diese Ausstellungsstücke eingebettet sind, wurde von Kunst- und Architektur-Studierenden der Akademie der bildenden Künste, Wien, entwickelt und gebaut. Sie basiert auf Materialien, die allesamt recycled, geschenkt oder ausgeliehen sind, sucht also selbst nach Möglichkeiten des "sanften Schritts" auf schwierigem Terrain, insbesondere auch nach Alternativen zur konsumistischen Methodologie. Die Ausstellungsarchitektur will die Exponate weder dominieren, noch ihnen dienen, sondern vielmehr in einen Dialog mit ihnen treten. Durch das Zusammenspiel der Architektur und der Ausstellungsstücke entsteht ein komplexes System interaktiver Botschaften und Materialien, das sich an die jeweiligen Gegebenheiten des Ortes, an dem es aufgebaut wird, anpassen kann - eine postmigrantische Installation.

Marion Detjen and Michelle Howard













Tread Softly Alternatives

According to the sociologist, Richard Sennett, "Architects are among the few professionals who are forced to work with present day ideas of public life, and make these ideas manifest to others". One such alternative idea challenges consumerism. Thus nearly all of the materials and devices used in the exhibition were either borrowed, given to us or recycled. We opened ourselve up to the generosity of others, from sleeping accomodation to materials. A generous donation of 120 large plates of white, fire-resistant, corrugated cardboard by Auerswälde Wellpappe served as our main building material.

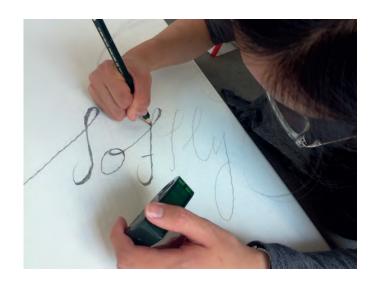
Another important reference is the architect Gottfried Semper's, "Four Elements of Architecture", specifically in reference to the importance of the Wall-Fitter in architecture. Walls are not simply dividers, the walls we built are freestanding, porous, easily dismantled, adjusted and reassembled, can withstand tension and pressure while remaining flexible and can even be climbed.

We planned, we made experiments, assembled walls that promptly fell down again, improved, failed again, and restarted. We made mistakes, and tried something else, built structures, developed techniques, tools, made compromises and finally we assembled an Exhibition.











construction materials & technology
academy of fine arts vienna
Institute for Art and Architecture

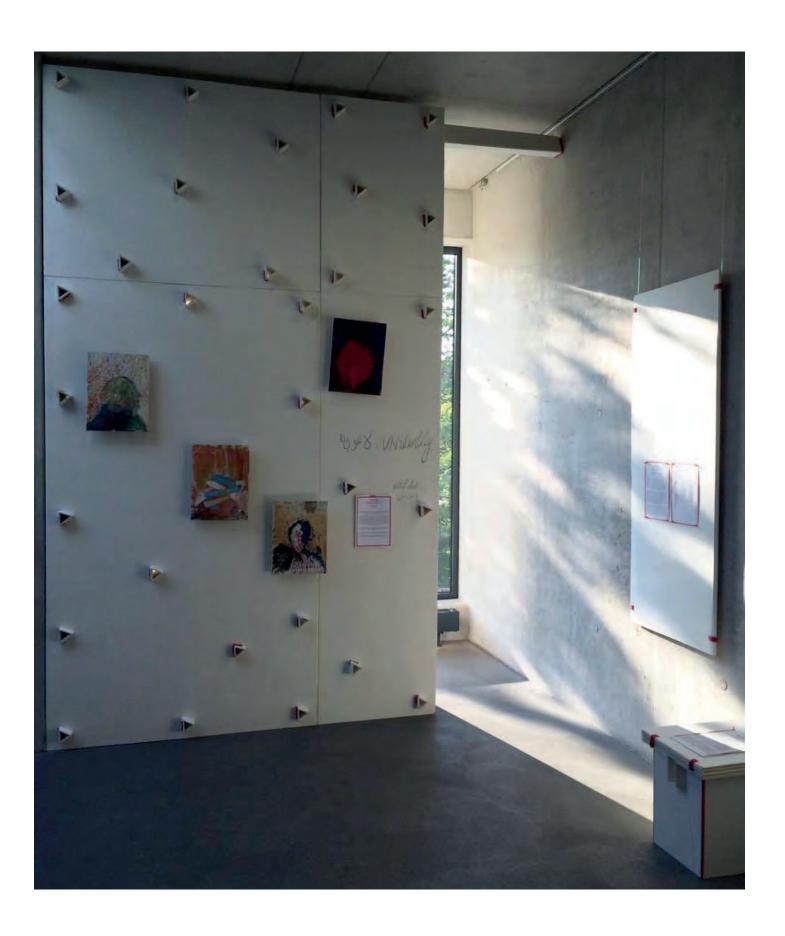
Tread Softly Calligraphy

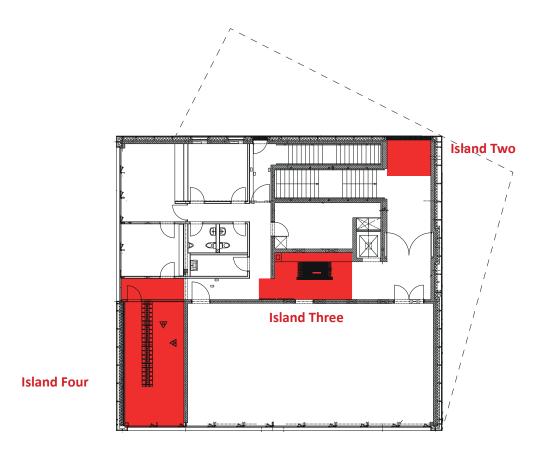
The signage for the Exhibition is made by writing in longhand using a thick 2B Pencil directly onto the white, fire-resistant cardboard, in both English and Arabic.

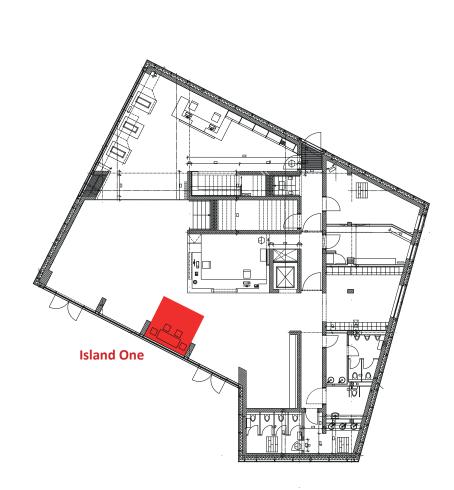
In ths way the subtle differences and surprising connections between these scripts were made visible.

With the next montage of the exhibition, this signage can be rubbed out, and written over by the next project, its traces creating a palimpsest over time.









Tread Softly Archipelago

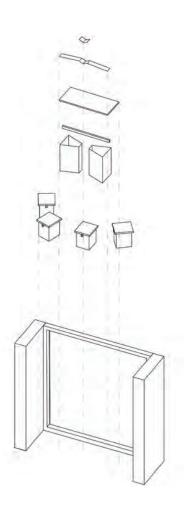
Rather than hanging a continuous band of individual pieces, we elected to establish four islands which would each house a group of works. The reasons for dong this are as layered and complex as the interactivity of the works themselves.

The philosopher Edouard Glissant had proposed a new form of Museum als Archipelago. Archipelic thought makes it-possible to say that neither each person's identity nor the collective identity are fixed and established once and for all. I can change through exchange with the other, without losing or diluting my sense of self.

In some cases the connections between works had been intended from the beginning, in others these connections were newly discovered or related to their spatial presence. Each construction, though individually conceived, is connected through their materials, white fire-resistant cardboard, cablebinders and pencils.

The Berlin Wall Memorial, (Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer) where the exhibition was installed, is notoriously inflexible - perhaps a reference to the wall it commemorates? We were both required, and felt a longing to, stand independently of it. Thus all of our construction is self supporting, even the layered cardboard walls which sometimes were over 4 meters high.





Tread Softly Island One

The first Island houses the work of just one person, Nina Lewis', "A Haggadah Migration Memory", and became our place of predilection to meet, discuss and make plans as a group., So too for those who visited the exhibition. Seldom did we see people sitting there alone, it was a fervently social place.



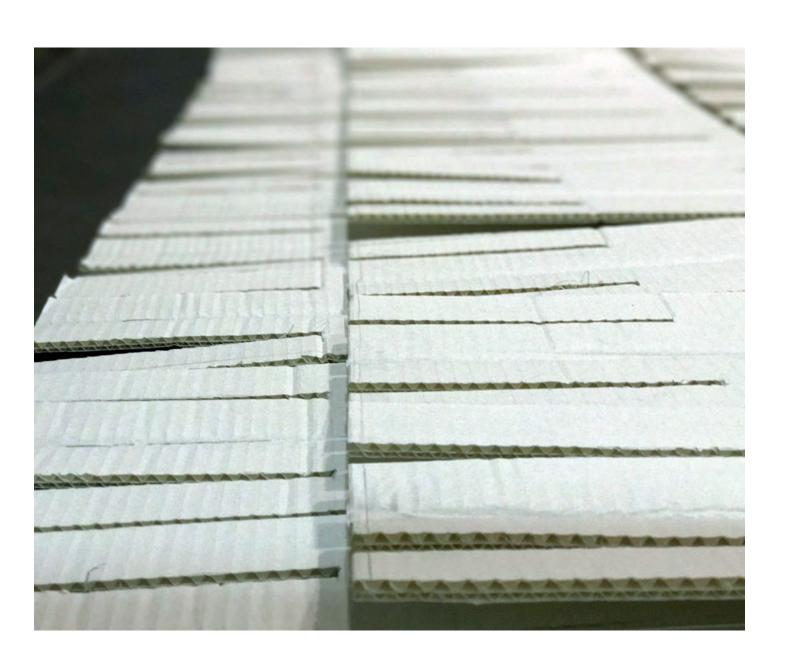


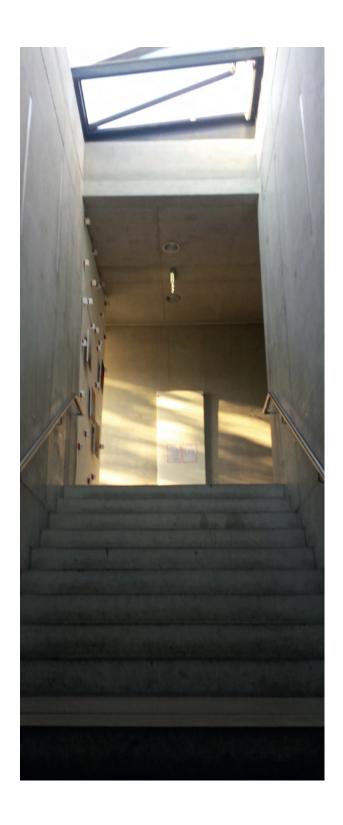
A Haggadah for Migration Memory

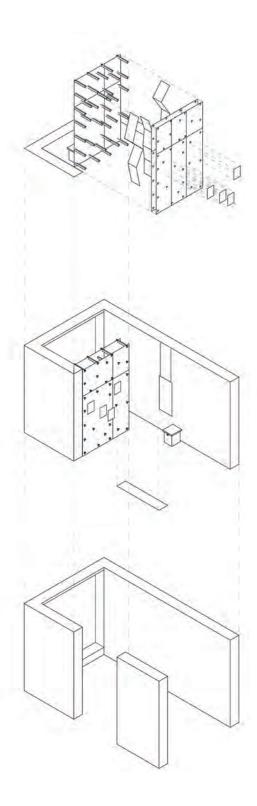
Nina Lewis

Presented here is a Haggadah that I both compiled and contributed to. A Haggadah is the book which guides participants through the ritual of celebrating the Jewish holiday of Passover. For me, Passover is the most intersectional Jewish holiday in terms of relating to the experiences of others' oppression, in order to address and commemorate one's own oppression.

Additionally, Passover is also a holiday about migration, specifically remembering an experience of forced migration. Initially I had hoped to write this Haggadah in order to both relate to the experiences of other immigration stories as well as address the themes processed in our Migration History class in a way that felt personally relevant to me. As I celebrated Passover using this Haggadah with my classmates however, questions of the universality of memory came to the foreground. We wondered what it meant for myself, as a Jewish person to share my holiday with the intention of providing it as representative of universal experiences. After we had this Passover seder, I went back through the Haggadah, writing commentary relating to this shift in understanding memory and migration. The finished Haggadah shows this conflict and shift in the narrative I had hoped to represent as well as the one I ended up representing.







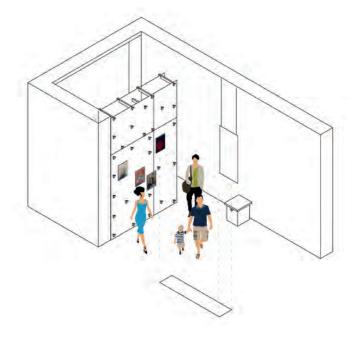
Tread Softly Island Two

The second island occupies the one generous space within the building, high, wide and bright with an open view onto a park created from the ruins of a railway station bombed in WWII. It is located to the left of the arrival point of the main staircase. We annex this space, constructing a room-high layered wall between it and the rest. Sitting or standing in this , sometimes blindingly bright, space one listens to stories about flight, migration and movement.

- -Ghaitaa Alshaar's music "Mahatat/Stations"
- -Victoria Martinez´ soundscape "Sonnenallee <> Nieder-schönhausen".

One ponders Margarete Hattingh's plant "Friedrich", and her ode to the Liberal arts.

Or, before entering, one sees first, jutting out from the wall, balanced on or between triangular elements which both support and pierce the wall, Dachil Sado's paintings or portraits "UNIdentity".







Mahatat/Stations

Ghaithaa Alshaar

"Mahatat" means "stations" in Arabic. For me, it is a musical project. Two months after I arrived from a long, tiring journey from Syria, three friends and I started to play together in a combination with Oud, Buzuq, Violin and Percussion. I play the Oud. Our journey lead through Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria and Austria. When we spent a whole day in cafes in Turkey, I listened to the music and realized how close it is to Arabic music. In Greece, the music seemed already closer to Europe, but still I could feel effects from a music that was familiar to me. In some places in Macedonia and Serbia I discovered that there is nothing like a "clean race" of music. Music seems to always be influenced by different styles from different countries. In this way, music as a living thing somehow connects to humans and to the subject of migration. People travelling and moving from one country to another bring musical

who was there already. But the musical influences somehow remain.

Understanding this, the long and hard journey from Syria to Germany became a little easier and sometimes even enjoyable.

influences with them. Many years later, you can't tell anymore who immigrated and

It is one of the most important purposes of Mahatat to show those similarities and the connection between those countries. We play music for peace and love, and to save the legacy of humanity, far away from the sounds of guns and war.



Sonnenallee <> Niederschönhausen

Victoria Martínez

This is a soundscape depicting the journey from Sonnenallee - also known as 'Little Turkey'- to Niederschönhausen, a neighbourhood predominant in old German families. The places are 14 kilometers and 10 S-Bahn stations away from each other.

Whilst listening to the journey that connects these two areas of Berlin, the auditor will be able to experience how the urban scenario of the city changes radically from one point to the other depending on the history and presence of the places. Through field recordings and samples from synthesizers, the soundscape aims to tell an audible story that gives an insight into the thought and emotional process that the everyday people in Berlin share through the urban space and its social choreographies. By immersing sonically in the contemporary routes that people share regardless from their different background, ethnicity, or age, an inclusive portray of the city's urban scene is composed, allowing for a broader narrative to be explored within the same territory.

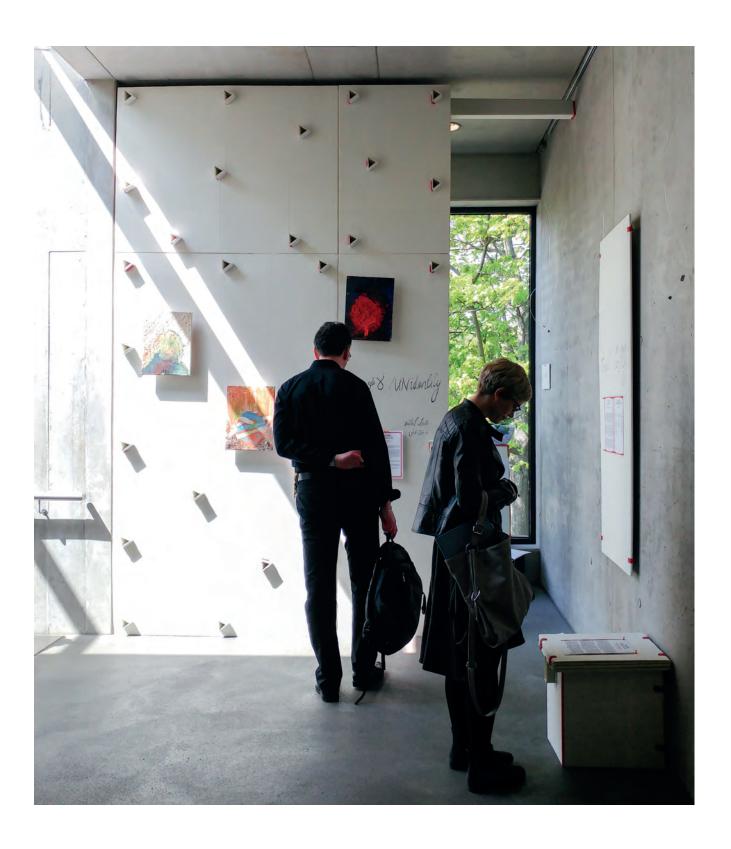




Fredrich# Marga Hattingh

The Liberal Arts is at once an ideal and a reality, an institutionalised concept that is constantly shifting shape as it is transplanted through space and time. With its roots in classical antiquity and the Enlightenment, the Liberal Arts has extended across the globe, flourishing in the United States through an exchange with Humboldtian ideals and recently returning to Europe where it first found its name. Here we see it in its openness: An organic unity in constant dialogue with its surroundings; a universal symbol of growth and regeneration -- the Liberal Arts as Plant Life is integral to the ecosystem of society. In the context of migration history, the Liberal Arts presents a unique solution to the problems of intolerance and incohesiveness in our diverse societies today. With its emphasis on cultural exchange, inclusivity, and flexibility, it is something that should be nurtured for the betterment of our human reality... but most find it inaccessible or trite. Thus suspended above our heads as the Clouds, it warrants our careful consideration.

#my personal, precious pot plant Fredrich



UNidentity Dachil Sado

Being gathered in emergency shelters decreases possibilities for asylum seekers to get to know languages, to work and to be socially active. This is a main issue in the life of asylum seekers and often leads to deep depressions.

In November 2016 I started a research on the development of depressions and feelings of asylum seekers while they experience changes in their asylum procedure and receive different kind of documents. The portraits I have been working on during three months are my interpretation of an expression of the documents, and of the personal changes of features they cause. I researched the effects of four documents that Asylum seekers can get: the German passport (eventually), the so called "white paper" (for deportation), the Duldung and the so called "blue passport". I started working on this process after collecting materials from Germans with migration background and from people who recently had to flee.

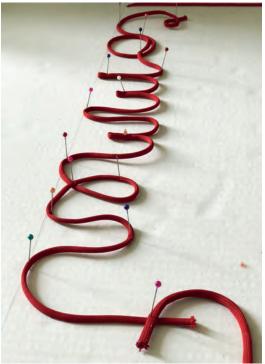
Duldung: according to the definition of the German residence law, toleration is a "temporary suspension of deportation" of foreigners who should leave the country as soon as possible.

White paper: a letter from the BAMF to a person that has been denied any right to stay in Germany and is asked to leave the country voluntarily or otherwise will be deported.

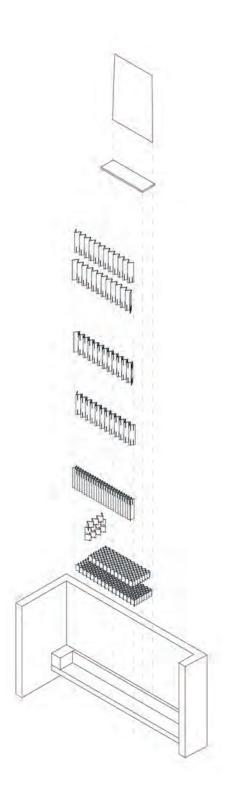
Blue passport: a travel document issued to an asylum seeker by the state in which she/ he resides, allowing her/him to travel outside that state and to return.











Tread Softly Island Three

The third island sits astride a redundant seating space in front of the conference room.

It is anti-hermetic in that it builds walls, but only at half height, contains one project, provides the vantage point for another on the opposite side, and allows the last to throw out spores in qr-codes throughout the building.

Contained ist Muhannad Kaikonnie's video-work, "A Place to Smoke - Cafe Kotti", one steps into a cafe atmosphere with the famous red velvet of that place.

Viewed are Tamar Maare's "Migration Memes" projected and pinned on the facing wall.

And spewed are Bono Siebelink and Clara Canales Guttierez's "integration Guru".





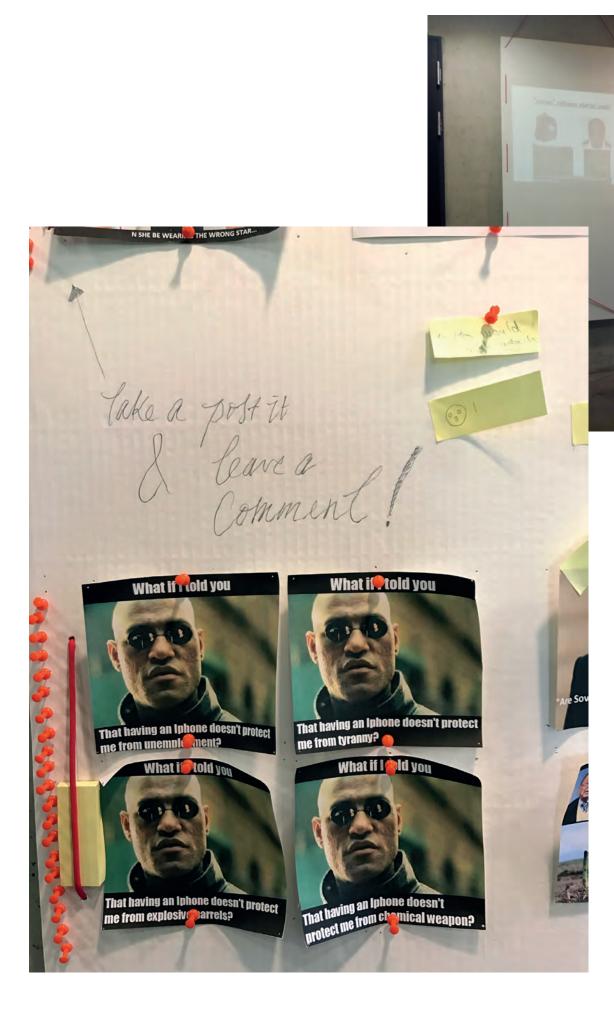
A place to smoke (Café Kotti)

Muhanad Kaikonnie

It's noisy, it's dirty, it's famous: Kottbusser Tor is the center of Kreuzberg incorporating in concrete the golden times when dentists and alike could reduce their income-taxes with odd social housing projects. Today it's the landing page for easy-jet party tourists - and a public space for political fights and demonstrations of all kind. Yet, in all that conflict and that city-jungle, there's a cosy coffee-shop sitting since ten years in the first floor next to a mafiosi sportsbooking shop, overseeing the square: Café Kotti.

Every Syrian coming to Berlin knows about Café Kotti. It's small, cult and hub for an international crowd in the shadow. But more important it's a place where I feel comfortable and I can smoke.

Café Kotti has been founded by Ercan Yasaroglu. He came to Berlin after the military coup in Turkey in the 80ties. Adults in exile don't need help, he says, but a place where they can have coffee, relax and meet. Where they are not treated as refugees.



Leave

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Migration Memes

Tamar Maare

The word "meme" was first coined by Richard Dawkins as an "idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture". The internet meme has become a new, humorous medium used to communicate ideas and commentaries on everything ranging from the most trivial everyday experiences of teenagers to the criticism of regimes and politicians. This screening consists of a collection of memes discussing issues referring to experiences of migration and "otherness" in Europe as a response to the pre-existing anti-migration memes found online. Working both specifically with stock-photos and with diverse images from the media, I am interested in exploring the medium of memes as a strictly ironic/humorous form in all its diversity and randomness, distinctness and ambiguity. A meme's success is defined by its popularity in the virtual sphere. While some memes are popular because they refer to a widely identifiable experience in a new, original manner, other memes are celebrated for a witty combination of an image with a text. However, this collection of memes offers to not look at memes and their different forms merely individually, but to rather consider them as parts of a whole which can be used to study social trends and give voice to marginalized voices in a popular platform.



Integration Guru

Clara Canales Gutierrez and Bono Siebelink

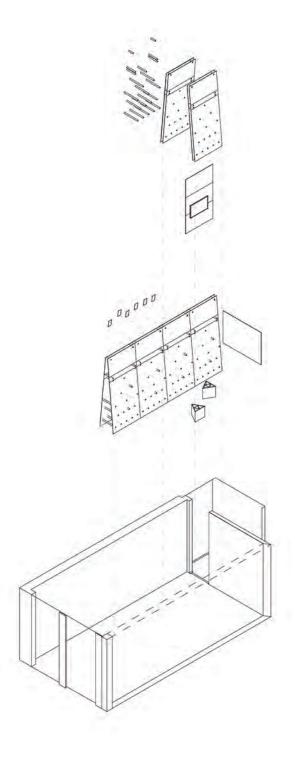
With the incoming of refugees and migrants to Germany since 2015, the attitude towards integration has been reconsidered. The German government is taking measures to accommodate and integrate non-EU-foreigners, by offering integration courses and encouraging entry to the labour market. The shift of attitude lies in the migrants' prospect of staying long-term in Germany, due to which integration becomes an investment, as migrants are expected to "return the favor" in the future.

On a social level, integration has turned into a trend. Civic engagement and the 'welcoming culture' have gained importance as informal means of integration in Germany, while the fundamental objectives of this integration are not critically assessed. The German government sells its integration programs to the German citizens and the international community, and carefully protects the inviolability of its economy and society.

The life-style blog Integration Guru addresses the digression from the essential humanitarian claim of integration, by portraying the incoherence to the idea of 'successful integration'. This involves concepts such as the German Leitkultur, the apparent commercialisation and commodification of integration and the lack of discourse about the way migrants themselves desire to integrate. Instead of targeting the conceptual validity of integration, the satirical blog format attempts to grapple with the media attention spent on integration and the lack of reflection in its institutional practice. The format explicitly addresses this incoherence in an exaggerated manner.







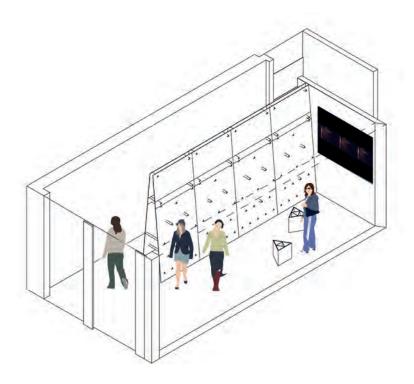
Tread Softly Island Four

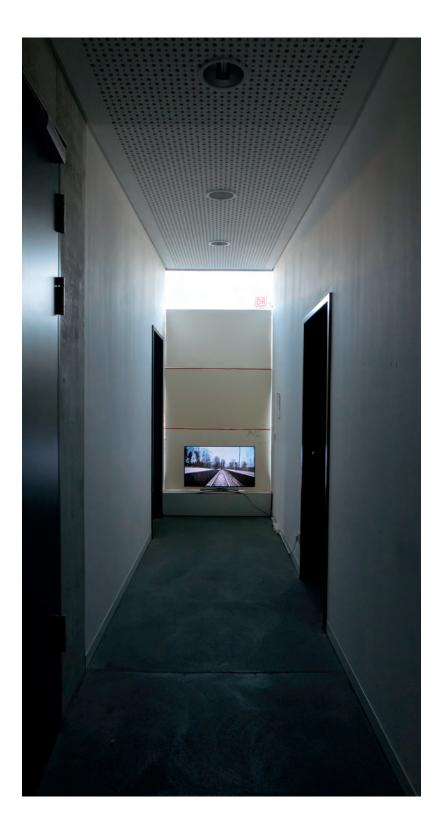
The fourth island is situated in the furthermost point of the building, when one arrives here, one must retrace one's steps to go on. We emphasised this long path by lengthening it yet more and, in so doing, creating a labyrinth to be penetrated.

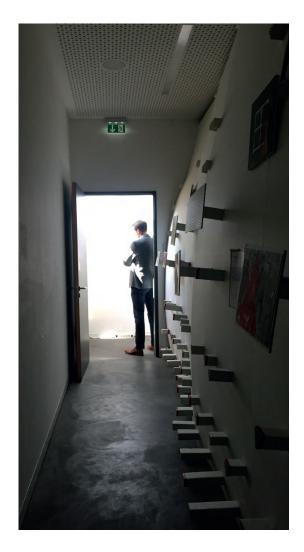
At the end of a long, narrow corridor, Joel Dombower's, video work,"Paths" occupies the glazed facade, eclipsing the intense light behind.

The paintings of Maheen Atif and Anna Gersh, "Migrant Women: A Litany for Survival", are perched on triangular mounts protruding from a seemingly flimsy curving wall which itself creates a further corridor.

One enters a darkened space, the exterior muffled by the layers of cardboard and experiences Wafa Mustafa's film, "Travels" surrounded by her compelling voice.







PathsJoel Dombrower

Memory never stands still, it is an active process with dynamic qualities that is made collective over time. How then do we move beyond a memorial's aesthetic contour and inquire into its artistic discourse and the viewer's response? Furthermore, how are these responses affected by the needs and concerns of newer generations?

As a grandson of jewish Holocaust survivors from Berlin, currently living and studying in Berlin, I have documented my experience with the memorial culture in the German capital. For the past months I have been (re)visiting various Holocaust memorial sites around the city and documenting my interaction with the memorials as well as their interaction with the city and its inhabitants.

My journey started at the Lebetzowstrasse Synagogue Memorial, where Jews where assembled and forced to walk to the two main deportation sites: Güterbahnhof Moabit and Grunewald Bahnhof. I also explore the (somewhat controversial) "Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas" in Mitte through a series of field recordings, inquiring into the sounds of the structure and ultimately its voice —thus exploring its physical and metaphysical characters.





Migrant Women: A Litany for Survival

Maheen Atif and Anna Gersh

In narratives concerning migration, even honest representations often only tell half the story. Women have largely been left out of portrayals of migration in the media, in academia, in activism and in art. This work visually expresses aspects of migrant women's daily lives in connection to feelings of belonging and dis-belonging. By exploring the daily aspects of migrant womanhood, including the seemingly mundane, this work seeks to aestheticize objects and experiences which either aid or prohibit women's feelings of belonging in the city and in Europe. Our research-creation focused on women from the Global South and questioned the impact and use of public and private space, and on the different forms of navigating the multiple discriminations these women face, including both recent migrants as well as minority women whose ancestors were migrants and who are still marked as Other.

"for those of us who cannot indulge the passing dreams of choice who love in doorways coming and going in the hours between dawns looking inward and outward at once before and after seeking a now that can breed futures

like bread in our children's mouths so their dreams will not reflect the death of ours"

excerpt. Litany for Survival, Audre Lorde







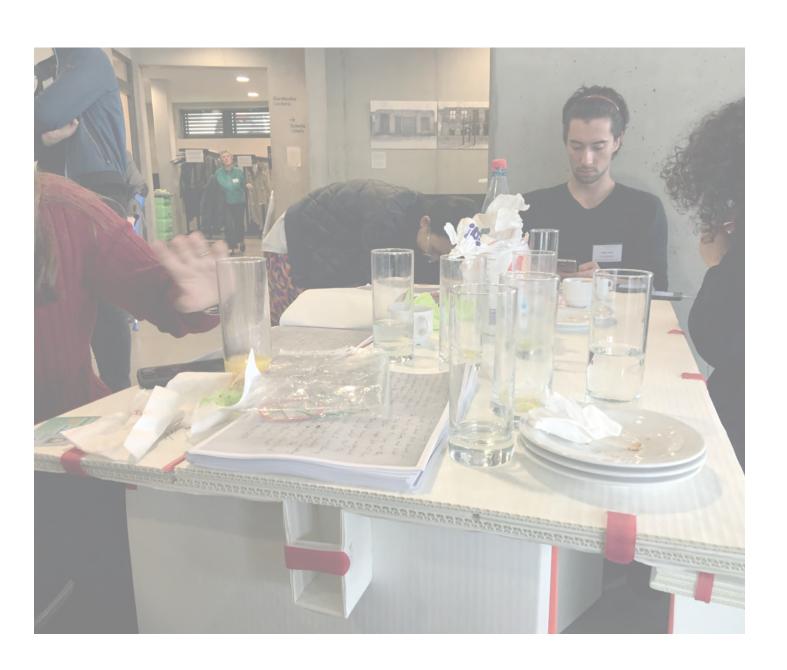
Travels Wafa Mustafa

This short film is one destination of many travels I have gone through in my life. Although these travels didn't always require taking flights or leaving one place, they involved every single image and sound I have had in mind since I was born. To be able to tell this story, I had to deal with all my memories and feelings and reorganize them.

At the beginning, I aimed to explore the German Holocaust memory together with my Jewish classmates. My point of view was one of a Syrian immigrant who was given a name of a Palestinian news agency and was raised on "the Palestinian cause". This travel raised my awareness about the Holocaust with its never-concluded historical obligations. But eventually I realized that I was exploring myself and my relationship to the absence of my father who got arrested by the Syrian regime in 2013.

Great pain can't be defeated but it can be reshaped. This is the core of what I'm trying to do.





Tread Softly Migration History and Memory in a

Post-Migrant Educational Context

Contributors

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BOX-Freiraum Carolina Mojto

Tread Softly

Migration History and Memory in a Post-Migrant Context

Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven 1899

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths, Enwrought with golden and silver light, The blue and the dim and the dark cloths

Of night and light and the half light, I would spread the cloths under your feet: But I, being poor, have only my dreams; I have spread my dreams under your feet; Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

W. B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939



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