

## Songs of the Earth

**In Irène Laub Gallery, Lucile Bertrand exhibits her story about the living: unavoidable and bewitching.**

She was recently present at the Enghien contemporary art biennial (*Miroirs III - De terre et de ciel*) and in the Saint-Gilles Artists' Tour, in collaboration with the Ixelles museum (*I feel really awake*). It is now in a gallery in Ixelles that Lucile Bertrand, a sensitive and protean Franco-Belgian visual artist, whose work has continued to strive for twenty years with strength, sharpness and great coherence, is exhibiting. This first solo show at Irène Laub's is of museum quality, under the auspices of Georges Perec (*Espèces d'espaces*) and Vinciane Despretz (*Habiter en oiseau*), exploring multiple narrative and spatial-temporal processes to show – and to hear – the world of the sensitivity, from the endangered birds songs to the Inuit's chants, from the fleeing migrants journeys to the writers itineraries.

Testimonies, current events and literary narratives: such is the abundant material on which the artist draws to bring together the particular and the universal. Territories, porous and sinuous frontiers, geographical and interior journeys, overflows: this is the common thread of an approach where aesthetics and commitment meet. The subjects are serious, of current interest, often emotionally charged, such as these two *Touristic Route/Survival Route* (2017), which welcome the visitor at the entrance: the artist has traced on rescue blankets the clandestine journeys of two hunted women. One, a Jewish woman, left Vienna in 1938 and managed to reach Switzerland five years later after 3,000 km on foot, from hiding places to grouping camps from which she managed to escape; the other left Honduras in 2014 to join her family in Texas via Guatemala and Mexico. Two journeys of women determined to save their lives: "I wanted to paint a portrait of these extraordinary people, both singular and emblematic of our times full of borders, smugglers, stolen money and barbed wire," declares Lucile Bertrand. Sutured, the landscape in relief is punctuated by a text that relates these two stories. A little further on, the triptych *The Invisibles* (2020) draws on the reports of major NGOs to establish the fragmented "landscape" of the shadowy workers who populate the planet, exploited to death, with no opportunity to assert their fundamental rights...

### THE MAP AND THE TERRITORY

How to apprehend a territory differently according to the conditions of the trip? This is the question asked by the artist in a diptych previously exhibited in New York, which shows a rocky landscape crossed by two individuals with opposite journeys. On one side, a young Belgian-Armenian pianist invited to perform in Ramallah, then on to Jerusalem and Nablus; on the other side, a worker who has secretly left the occupied territories for Tel Aviv, out of financial necessity (to go off to earn a living without a work permit on a construction site). In both cases, the journey is long, chaotic and dangerous: Lucile Bertrand has collected the narratives, juxtaposed to the landscape and the layout, this superimposition giving a biased perspective to the ensemble. This is where all the semantic richness of the artist's work unfolds, in the relationships that are created between the physical and mental cartographies of anonymous or famous exiles who, for all of them, had to learn to reinvent themselves elsewhere. The series of drawings *Des routes et des mots* (Roads and Words) shows this very simply, exposing the journeys of traveling or exiled writers, from Marguerite Yourcenar to Marina Tsvetaïeva. Crossing of oceans, borders, round trips from the country of origin, voluntary or forced exits from the intimate and geographical, even linguistic "framework"...

To all this is added a sound installation that offers a random rhythm to the tour: *They used to sing* (2020) makes the dramatic observation of the progressive disappearance of the sound diversity emitted by living beings. Lucile Bertrand has gathered a sample of these musical resources, made available by means of scores to be freely interpreted (*Chanter comme des oiseaux*, 2020) and by the diffusion of three recorded soundtracks.

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