



The Translator's Voice

MARCO/FRAC Lorraine/SFKM Award for Young Curators 2014

May 29 – August 30, 2015

First-floor galleries

Tuesdays to Saturdays (including bank holidays): 11am to 2.30pm and 5pm to 9pm / Sundays: 11am to 2.30pm

Curated by Martin Waldmeier

Coproduced by MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo, Spain / 49 Nord 6 Est – Frac Lorraine, Metz, France / Sogn og Fjordane Kunstmuseum (SFKM), Førde, Norway

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Exhibition coproduced by MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo,
49 Nord 6 Est - FRAC Lorraine, and SFKM Sogn og Fjordane Kunstmuseum

MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo
May 29 – August 30, 2015

49 Nord 6 Est - FRAC Lorraine
January 30 - May 03, 2015

Sogn og Fjordane Kunstmuseum – SFKM
October 31, 2015 – January 31, 2016

Curator: **Martin Waldmeier**

Laureate of the MARCO/FRAC Lorraine/SFKM Award for Young Curators
2014

**Xu Bing, Sylvie Boisseau & Frank Westermeyer, Erik Bünger, Luis
Camnitzer, Esra Ersen, Mladen Stilinović, Jakup Ferri, Rainer Ganahl,
Dora García, Joseph Grigely, Nicoline van Harskamp, Susan Hiller,
Christoph Keller, Zineb Sedira, Ingrid Wildi Merino**

Catalogue

*The Translator's Voice = La voz del traductor = A voz do tradutor = La voix du
traducteur = Omsetjarens Røyst.* Catálogo colectivo, 2015. Texts by Martin
Waldmeier, Béatrice Josse, Agar Ledo, Ingrid Norum, Iñaki Martínez Antelo
Texts in Spanish, Galician, French, English and Norwegian
115 p., 20 x 14 cm. PVP: 2€

Information & guided tours

The exhibition staff is available for any questions or information, as well as regular
guided tours:

Daily at 6pm

'A la carte' group tours, please call +34 986 113900/11 to book

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MUSEO DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEA DE VIGO

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Summary of the Exhibition Project

Is everyone a potential translator?

This is the hypothesis proposed by the exhibition envisioned by young Swiss curator Martin Waldmeier. Works by fifteen artists representing different generations and backgrounds create a pathway allowing the visitor to examine and rethink the place of translation in the age of globalization.

Translation is used here in the broadest sense of the word. It encompasses attempts at communication in a language other than one's own, regardless of whether it is spoken fluently or just enough to get by, or if it's heavily accented. The language of the future may emerge from this hybridization.

Mother tongue, foreign tongue, official or minority language, endangered language, lingua franca... Whatever category it falls into, language is not only a medium of communication, but it gives us a sense of belonging, creates community, and filters our experience of the world.

Equally, language is related to power, and can be used both to include and exclude those who speak differently. In a time when migration and displacement are more and more commonplace in the world, this exhibition asks: what does it mean to live between the languages? Does globalization make us all "translators"? What will be the language of the future?

A word from the curator

“In the beginning there was ... translation,” the Finnish poet and translator, Leevi Lehto, wrote. Translation is the true basis of culture, he argued, and “traffic” between cultures and languages is what lets them grow and change over time. Translation lets the foreign enter our world; it lets the foreign speak to us in a language that we can understand, and, in the process, it expands and changes our point of view.

With *The Translator’s Voice*, we invite you to join us and a group of artists from around the world to reflect on the question of translation in the global present. Today, translations are everywhere: facilitating international trade of goods, enabling diplomatic negotiations between political leaders, interpreting our daily news broadcast, permitting online communication between countries and continents, and introducing us to foreign films and literature. Much of what we know about the world has reached us through translation: as the pace and intensity of global communication and circulation are accelerating, the need for translations is growing.

It’s not only since the popular film *Lost in Translation* that the process of translation has also been associated with loss. Languages and cultures are not different ways of saying the same thing, but different ways of saying different things. Translation is therefore always an approximation, an infinitely difficult task of mediating between different expressions of human experience. How can we, then, think of encounters between languages not only as a challenge and a difficulty, but as a source of creativity and learning? How can we understand the world differently in different languages? Can translation be a place for critical or even subversive activity?

Translation is of course not a new phenomenon, despite globalization. Every encounter between cultures has always required translation, and throughout much of modern history, these encounters have been neither equal nor peaceful. While English is increasingly perceived as a hegemonic language, criticized as displacing minor and vernacular languages, its power is preceded by centuries of colonialism(s) and imperialism(s) that have imposed similarly hegemonic languages upon colonized peoples, systematically using their languages to suppress native cultures.

If one is to claim that “in the beginning there was translation,” then one must also acknowledge that, from the very beginning, translation has always been defined by the historic relations of power between the colonizers and the colonized, between centers and peripheries, between minor cultures and empires, and some of those relations continue to persist today, albeit in new forms.

The title of this project, “The Translator’s Voice,” points in two thematic directions. On the one hand, it encapsulates the idea of making visible the activity – and the voice – of translation, and the gesture of letting it take the center stage as a unique source of knowledge about the nature of cultural differences and about different ways of expressing identity through language. On the other hand, the figure of translator becomes a critical metaphor for the linguistic conditions of globalization and the postcolonial era: the growing need for – and the joy, and the pain of – learning foreign languages; the intentional and unintentional multilingualism of migrants, and the phenomenon of hybrid cultures and “accented” ways of speaking and experiencing the world.

Here, translation no longer designates just a profession, or an activity. It represents human condition, and more and more often, we find ourselves assuming the role of a translator...

Martin Waldmeier

About the curator

Martin Waldmeier is a curator and researcher. He studied History of contemporary art and of media, and obtained a Fulbright Award to pursue critical visual studies in the United States at the Arts Institute in Chicago. He is currently pursuing doctoral studies in visual cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London; his dissertation is entitled “The Artist Translator.” Martin has worked as assistant curator and residency coordinator at PROGR Center for Cultural Production and as curator and interim director at Stadtgalerie (both in Bern, Switzerland). He has also recently been the winner of Apexart’s Unsolicited Proposal Program in New York with the exhibition “Death of a Cameraman”.

Born in 1984 in Basel (CH), he lives and works in London and Warsaw.

Artists and works

XU BING

Born in 1955 in Chongqing (CN). Lives and works in Beijing (CN)

Telephone, 1996-2006

9 printed pages with markup and highlighting
Courtesy the artist



As in the popular game "Telephone", Xu Bing translated an extract from a Chinese book (that deals with the problem of translation) across 9 languages and ultimately back into Chinese. With each translation, the text changes its meaning. Each translation represents a rewriting of the text, leading to an entirely new text. What are the limits of translation? Can translation be linked to invention?

SYLVIE BOISSEAU & FRANK WESTERMEYER

Born in 1970 in Thiais (FR). Born in 1971 in Essen (DE). Live and work in Geneva (CH) & Berlin (DE)

Chinese is a plus, 2008

Two-channel video (40'), 2 photographs
30.3 x 37.4 cm each
Courtesy of the artists



Sylvie Boisseau & Frank Westermeyer explore the different motivations that inspire Europeans to learn Chinese. While the conversations among adult Germans reveal the economic nature of their desire to learn the language, for students of Chinese origin the desired proficiency is a question of cultural identity. Why do we learn languages, and what does speaking a foreign language mean to us?

ERIK BÜNGER

Born in 1976 in Växjö (SE). Lives and works in Berlin (DE)

The Allens, 2004

Video, 28'18", computer-generated voice
sample soundtrack
Courtesy of the artist



Erik Bünger finds a comical way of raising the question of the relationship between languages, gestures, voice, and cultural identity. He equates the experience of dubbing with a form of "possession" whereby the movie character takes on a new personality. In the video, he unites all of Woody Allen's voices in different languages, creating a character that constantly changes attitudes and remains incomprehensible. What is the relation between language and personality?

LUIS CAMNITZER

Born in 1937 in Lübeck (DE). Lives in Great Neck, New York (US)

Insults, 2009

Wall text in English, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese,
Russian, French and Galician
Installation, dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist & Alexander Gray
Associates, New York



Although the assertion seems at first to feed a feeling of nationalism, the coexistence of several languages makes this work ludicrously counterproductive. The artist, who in the 1960s was one of the first to use written language as his artistic medium, humorously implies that to each territory there corresponds a dominant language, and the degree of one's proficiency in it is a factor in social integration or, on the contrary, in social exclusion. How can a language, which on principle serves to communicate, be used to exclude people from society?

ESRA ERSEN

Born in 1970, Ankara (TR). Lives and works in Istanbul (TK) & Berlin (DE)

If You Could Speak Swedish, 2001

Video, colour, sound, 23 min
Courtesy the artist and collection
Moderna Museet, Stockholm



Esra Ersen is an artist who frequently works with migrant communities. For this piece, she worked with a group of refugees in Sweden, capturing their difficulties in learning Swedish. For them, learning this language means a new hope, but also signifies the loss of their native language and identity. One can learn a foreign language, but can one learn to be "at home" in a foreign language?

MLADEN STILINOVIĆ

Born in 1947 in Belgrade (ex-YU). Lives and works in Zagreb (HR).

An Artist who Cannot Speak English is

No Artist, 1992

Acrylic paint on artificial silk
140 x 250 cm.
Courtesy of the artist



Mladen Stilinović illustrates the pressure exerted on artists who increasingly feel they need to speak English in order to be recognized on the international art scene. He ironically holds up his banner to oppose the capitalist system and its globalizing vision of the world of art. Is English indispensable? Are there alternatives?

JAKUP FERRI

Born in 1981, Pristina (XK) | Lives and works in Amsterdam (NL) & Pristina (XK)

An Artist who Cannot Speak English is

No Artist, 2003

Video, colour, sound, 3 min 56 s

Courtesy Galeria Arsenal, Białystok and
Podlaskie Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk
Pięknych Collection II, Poland



12 years ago, when Jakup Ferri (who is now a successful artist living in Berlin) was an art student in Kosovo, he responded to the banner by Mladen Stilinović with this small confessional video. He hardly spoke any English at the time – so rather than making sense, he makes visible the struggle – and the embarrassment – of being an artist without speaking the art world's language.

RAINER GANAHL

Born in 1961 in Bludenz (AT). Lives and works in New York (US).

Basic Chinese, 1993-present

Study sheets (selection, 95 ex., 22.9 x 30.5 cm
chaque)

Video, colour, sound (selected material, 200'
approx.)



I Hate Karl Marx, 2010

Video, colour, sound, 5'49"



Most of Rainer Ganahl's artistic work derives from the experiences – and the many difficulties and failures – of learning languages. Throughout his artistic career, Ganahl has obsessively learned Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, Italian, Russian, Korean, Greek, as well as various European dialects. Ganahl systematically records his own efforts. *Basic Chinese* consists of a selection of study sheets from his decade-long effort to learn Chinese. Can language-learning be a form of art?

The video *I Hate Karl Marx* imagines a world where Chinese culture and language has completely dominated and pushed away Western culture. Is such a future possible? How is language related to power?

DORA GARCÍA

Born in 1965 in Valladolid (ES). Lives and works in Barcelona (ES).

Letters to Other Planets, 2005

Translation of the exhibition's press release
in 12 languages
12 x 21 x 29.7 cm.
Courtesy of the artist, FRAC Bourgogne
collection & Galerie Michel Rein, Paris



Dora García adds twelve minority languages to the press release (normally in Galician and Spanish, sometimes in English). She suggests that the use of these languages may constitute an advantage rather than a handicap, potentially reaching out to audiences that are otherwise not being addressed by cultural institutions. Who do art museums "speak" to with their exhibitions – and what language(s) should they use?

JOSEPH GRIGELY

Born in 1956 in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts (US). Lives and works in Chicago (US)

People are Overhearing Us, 2012

Pigment print on dibond, acrylic glass;
1.2 x 3.75m
Courtesy of the artist & Air de Paris, Paris



Joseph Grigely explores the creative potential arising from the encounter between oral and written forms of communication. His "Conversation Pieces" are based on the notes used in exchanges with non-hearing impaired people (the artist had lost his hearing in childhood). While the exact sense of these notes is unknown, Grigely invites us to find, imagine, and reinvent all sorts of meanings. What happens when usual ways of communicating fail?

NICOLINE VAN HARSKAMP

Born in 1975 in Hazerswoude (NL). Lives and works in Amsterdam (NL).

English Forecast, 2013

Unique live performance and video work (38')
As part of BMW Tate Live Performance Room, Tate
Modern
Courtesy of the artist



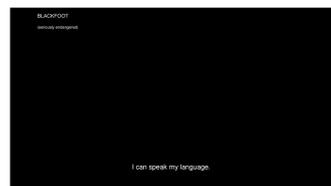
Nicoline van Harskamp recorded persons of different nationalities talking about their experiences with speaking English as non-native speakers. Brought together, these testimonies make up a scenario that is played by four voice actors specializing in dubbing and different accents. This piece examines the way English, which is increasingly becoming a global "lingua franca", is being transformed by non-native speakers. In what language will we communicate in the future?

SUSAN HILLER

Born in 1940 in Tallahassee, Florida (US). Lives and works in London (GB)

The Last Silent Movie, 2007

Video (200 min., sound and subtitles
only)
24 etchings (37 x 42.5 cm, framed)
FRAC Bourgogne Collection



Researchers estimate that approximately 25 languages become extinct every year, and with them there vanishes a wealth of knowledge about their culture, nature, and history. Susan Hiller recorded the voices of the last speakers of endangered or extinct languages. What is the value of those languages and the rich oral traditions they represent? Should they be preserved? What conditions have led to their disappearance?

CHRISTOPH KELLER

Born 1967 in Freiburg (DE). Lives and works in Berlin (DE)

Interpreters, 2008

Video installation (interpreters' cabin,
video projector, headphones,
DVD/Video, 26 min, sound)
Courtesy of the artist & Esther Schipper,
Berlin



Upon Christoph Keller's invitation to reflect on their experience, five professional interpreters talk about how their multilingual education has shaped the way they exercise their profession. Being an interpreter means identifying with the person whom one translates behind the scenes as well as immersing oneself in another language. It is also a way of belonging to multiple places, of bridging various experiences of the world. Is it really possible to "learn" how to be an interpreter – or is rather a "state of being" between languages and cultures?

ZINEB SEDIRA

Born in Paris in 1963 (FR). Lives and works in London (GB), Paris (FR) & Algiers (DZ)

Mother Tongue, 2002

[Mother and I (France) / Daughter and I (UK) /
Grandmother and Granddaughter (Algeria)]
3-screen installation with headphones, 4'33" each
Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, Palais de la
porte Dorée



Zineb Sedira acts as a translator between several generations of her family that, due to their respective migrations from Algeria to France, and later from France to the United Kingdom, no longer speak the same language. Drawing on this family history, she examines the ideas of identity preservation and loss, which are tightly intertwined with the oral transmission of family memory. How is language related to identity? Can an identity consist of multiple languages?

INGRID WILDI MERINO

Born in 1963 in Santiago de Chile (CL). Lives and works in Biel & Geneva (CH)

Otra mirada a lo insignificante, 1982-2014

25 photographic prints and texts, dimensions variable

49 Nord 6 Est – Frac Lorraine Collection



In the course of her career, Ingrid Wildi Merino, a Chilean immigrant in Switzerland, has experienced first-hand the relation between language proficiency and access to employment opportunities. Her professional development has gone hand in hand with the changing architecture of her workplaces: from the suburbs to the city center. What role does language proficiency play in climbing the social ladder? What is the relation between language, work and the architecture of the city?