

# ABOUT RETRO FUTURISTIC EUROPEAN COLONIALISM OF DOCUMENTA (13)

by Chus Martinez XIII

Organ Kritischer Kunst (OKK, Berlin) Team has researched the new waves of the Art Establishment in the “probably most creative city in the world (at least in the continental part of Europe)” as manifested by the Berlin Biennale 7 (BB7; 27.04-01.07). OKK hosted the event entitled “2012 IS THE SEASON FOR TREASON” parallel to the BB7 (27.04-13.05) in order to expose the outcomes of their research into the biennale, but also to provide the space for discussion of the crypto-fascist ideology and tactics in the broader social context. On Friday 20th July, OKK presentation *Biennialization of Political Art* will draw on their **2012 IS THE SEASON FOR TREASON** and specify its relationship to the dOCUMENTA (13), which is currently occupying the city of Kassel.

from POT press release about the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Hessen event “Biennialization of Political Art”

## 1) “Borderless” documenta

According to dOCUMENTA (13) curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, the Italians are coming back to this largest German contemporary art festival in 2012, after somewhat little presence of this nationality in the recent shows. Apparently they are coming back with a full blast in the style of 1930s! Sadly, both Berlin Biennale 7 and dOCUMENTA (13) rely on the nationalist and ethnic conceptions of identity. Simultaneously, Italian presence in documenta is the very element which allows this anti-concept concept reconquest Afghanistan (2012 documenta takes place in Kassel, Germany; Cairo, Egypt; Banff, Canada and Kabul, Afghanistan). Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev is an Italian and American writer, art historian and curator, sporting philosophy suitable for German domestic and foreign cultural policies. According to Emily Nathan from artnet.com:

One might wonder why on earth Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, the curator of Documenta (13) in Kassel, Germany, June 9-Sept. 16, 2012, would choose to hold two years of art lectures and workshops in the war-torn country of Afghanistan. The Afghan Seminars, as they are called, took place between 2010 and 2012 in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Center at Kabul University and a host of other cultural institutions -- and considering the current conditions of the country's social and political landscape, such a decision might seem naive, or even dangerous.<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, the very personality who was used in order to let documenta expand through German borders is probably the most globally famous contemporary art curator with a background in Africa. Nigeria-born Okwui Enwezor was the star of dOCUMENTA (11) in 2002. Enwezor is a son of a businessman, a probable reason for his class-determined understanding of post-colonial international relations which had made way for “non-occidental” cultures forming the core of the whole show.<sup>2</sup> While this might sound positive or in some way progressive, “the ultimate cosmopolitan” seems to have internalized the concept of art with its typical colonialist bias. Formulaic “phenomenon” of similar basis is described in Roger Taylor's 1978 book “Art, an Enemy of the People”, where author speaks about the historical founding of Jazz:

I have now said something about the social context in which a certain social project was lived

out. A set of simplifying contrasts help to clarify my meaning. Being white, an encapsulated in New Orleans social experience, was bringing blackness into whiteness, and thereby obtaining some release from being white, but at the same time not being black and remaining white. The project was contradictory, it was to be white, but not be white and to be black, but not be black (all of this from the standpoint of those who were white), it was to bring blackness into whiteness as a whiteness but at the same time that which entered as a whiteness had to be a blackness.<sup>3</sup>

So, why is documenta in Afghanistan? Back to Christov-Bakargiev, the curator attempts to relate her own present privileged living conditions with the bright days of 1970s in Kabul, when her “native” Alighiero Boetti owned a hotel together with his Afghani business partner Gholam Dastaghir. It seems that the whole “empathy” of documenta starts and ends with the business interests in an occupied country, which infamously hosted numerous European and American junkie communities in the 1960s and 70s. Christov-Bakargiev creates no contradiction when, in the name of Afghani artists, she boasts of a necessity to “radically imagine” that occupation does not exist! It is the international bourgeois who live in a Derrida-like “post-structural”, “borderless” post-colonial space: it goes without saying that such art events justify the imprisonment and torture of innumerable people who struggle to practically live-out this globalism both Christov-Bakargiev and Enwezor claim to exist for everyone. For the curators, just like for Jacques Derrida, truth only exists in text. Somewhat symmetrical to this is racial profiling exercised by the German state, where “crime statistics” provide justification for daily harassment of the non-white residents. Again, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: “In the 1990s, I liked to work with the concepts of ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ because then they were new and helped to structure the discussion. Today, I don't use these terms any more—they became too fashionable and got a false tone.”<sup>4</sup>

Alighiero Boetti, the “Poor Art” star of the most recent documenta, was “fascinated with the other cultures”, he spent a long time living in Afghanistan. An outcome of this is present in Friedricianum, one of the main dOCUMENTA (13) venues in Kassel city, in the form of yet-another Boetti's carpet-maps entitled “Mappa”. The artist employed numerous female weavers of Kabul in order to produce “his” world political maps over the years of 1971 to 1994. Alighiero Boetti's “use of an element of chance” is widely spoken about. Interestingly, this “chance” is a calculated one: while it is difficult to track down the reason for employer failing to provide his employees with correct materials (for example blue string for the colouring of the oceans in Italian's maps), yellow or pink parts of the world waters are treated as an explainable phenomenon: supposedly, Kabul locals have never seen water in their lives, neither do they have any idea of mapping: “Boetti loved this intrusion of chance into the design and from then on left it to the makers to choose which colour to use for the seas,” Tate said in its guide to the Boetti show, which ran from February 28 till May 27 2012 in Tate Modern.

Overall, is it not such “other culture” based treatment of Kabul weavers that makes “Boetti's” work “outstanding”? The following quote allows

us to leave this Bakargiev championed hopeless yet lucky bourgeois loser aside:

“(…) final self portrait, and his [Boetti's] first work using cast bronze, is an image of the artist holding a hose that sprays water onto his head. Because the head is heated, the water boils on contact creating a cloud of steam and portraying Boetti as a thinker with so many ideas that he needs to cool himself down.”<sup>5</sup>



## 2) The personal & the political

At this point I would like to mention something of a little importance to most of the dOCUMENTA (13) visitors. My friend Habibi left Afghanistan, a country where he was born, and Kabul, the city where his relatives still reside, a good few years ago. Having travelled through Turkey and the Balkans, Habibi met a network of activists and simply empathetic people who made his long way to Berlin easier. They also provided Habibi with practical support ever since, even to the extent of his Afghani friends expressing suspicion. To my surprise, in the recent months Habibi himself took an active part in the actions of networks who provide voluntary practical support for refugees in Germany.

Unfortunately, Habibi's involvement with anti-racist activities is what got him back to the refugee camp, one of those prisons Habibi was sent to the previous time my friend had been policed. Yet again, Habibi has been put behind bars for a very “personal” reason, which is his skin color: The police demanded my friend's identification papers in the train station of Thuringian city (150 km away from Kassel; Kassel is in the land of Hesse – former West Germany, Hesse is bordering the territory of Thuringia, former GDR). It is not spoken openly enough about the fact that German state still uses the historically infamous method of racial profiling in their hunt for “illegal” immigrants. On March 27, 2012, the administrative court of Koblenz, in Western Germany, dismissed a



Complained by a black German man who was asked to show his papers while traveling by train. The police officer, who was reasonable, made a call to the police aggression on the regional transportation in Germany.<sup>6</sup> It has been about 7 years since the political refugee from Sierra Leone, died in a police cell in Dessau – his case not yet resolved by the justice apparatus of Germany. — Peter Pagan, *The American*

On the other hand, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and dOCUMENTA (13) relate uneasily to the feminist slogan that “Personal is political.” While it doesn’t make much sense to add up the numbers of personally or politically motivated works in the whole of 2012 documenta, it is worth mentioning the fact that Kabul students who took part in German art program in the relationship with the same artist were advised to write on their personal experiences, and not go into the sphere of politics, most of whom reportedly accepted a full package of Eurocentric subject/object relation: (unfortunately, [Chus] Martinez [the “agent” of dOCUMENTA (13)] launched the three-hour event in Kassel with a disclaimer of sorts, a declaration that each participant would share his or her personal experiences of the Afghanistan program, and would not, presumably, address the complex political, moral and ethical questions it involves. Most speakers followed suit, describing how grateful they were for the resources Documenta had provided and what they had learned of the post-war scene of the recent expansionism into Afghanistan, which was belatedly mentioned in the article entitled “Afghan Scene” (13). Especially in times of war, some post-conflict conditions, art can be a form of healing. Arte Povera artist Alighiero Boetti from Turin, Italy, visited Kabul in early 1977, and decided to open a shop called One Hotel on Shar-e-Naw near Chicken Street, together with an Afghan called Ghulam Dastagir. He presided for the year there in the commissioning his embossed *Mappe* from 1978 to 1979. The initial impulse for organizing a part of dOCUMENTA in Afghanistan came from Povera, in its own not the scenario of war, but rather a form of continuity between the vibrant and intellectual life of the 1960s in Kabul, during the time Boetti spent there, and our own time, rejecting the state of exception that is determined by the war, and choosing to act honestly, as if the situation were not what it is. If the check point, cement walls, the conflict, occupation, and militarization in Kabul, did not exist — through the daily life required by an inevitable living in a military zone.

Exactly this Abramowicz’s 2005 book that did both: named Morandi a precursor of the “poor” art movement but remained open about his political position. “Morandi’s legacy was exhibited in MOMA in 2001 in New York Metropolitan Museum in 2008, and others). Reviews of 2005 Yale University Press published Janet Abramowicz’s “Giorgio Morandi: the Art of Silence”<sup>13</sup> state the artist’s relationship with Arte Povera movement. “An epic account covering five decades of Morandi’s life that breaks new ground. . . . Abramowicz should receive the highest praise for daring to do what other art historians have repeatedly denied: she unabashedly links Morandi as both artist and person to his predecessors, contemporaries, and descendants, arguing that ‘it was in [Morandi’s] room that the real arte povera began.” — Jennie Hirsh, CAA Reviews

While it seems that this very book inspired the inclusion of Morandi into the concept of dOCUMENTA (13) and its “subsequent” justification for the show’s presence in Kabul through Morandi’s association with Arte Povera, it is striking that Carolyn Christoph-Bakargiev states the following:

*With her Documenta, Bakargiev seems to be positioning artists as suffering something akin to the trials of Job, acknowledging the contradictions of making art in the face of war, and choosing to pursue symbols of creativity when surrounded by destruction. “For me,” she concluded, “the image of Morandi sitting in his studio painting vases, one after the other, with Fascism all around him -- that is what art can do.”*<sup>14</sup>

Christov-Bakargiev, herself “one of the world’s leading authorities on post-war Italian art and culture” associates Morandi with Povera, but nevertheless whitewashes his fascist past. To my

this cultural exchange [DOCUMENTA program in Afghanistan] (...)

2. My experience was that there [in Afghanistan] is an interest in contemporary art and culture (...)

3. I hope that the alliances and connections created between artists in Afghanistan and artists in other parts of the world through dOCUMENTA have a positive impact in the long term.

Here I would like to pose a question: is that a form of magic on Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's behalf? (quoted statements have clearly come from her camp; nevertheless, the curator uses subject “I”, but the authorship is attributed to two persons)

**3) The “retreat”**

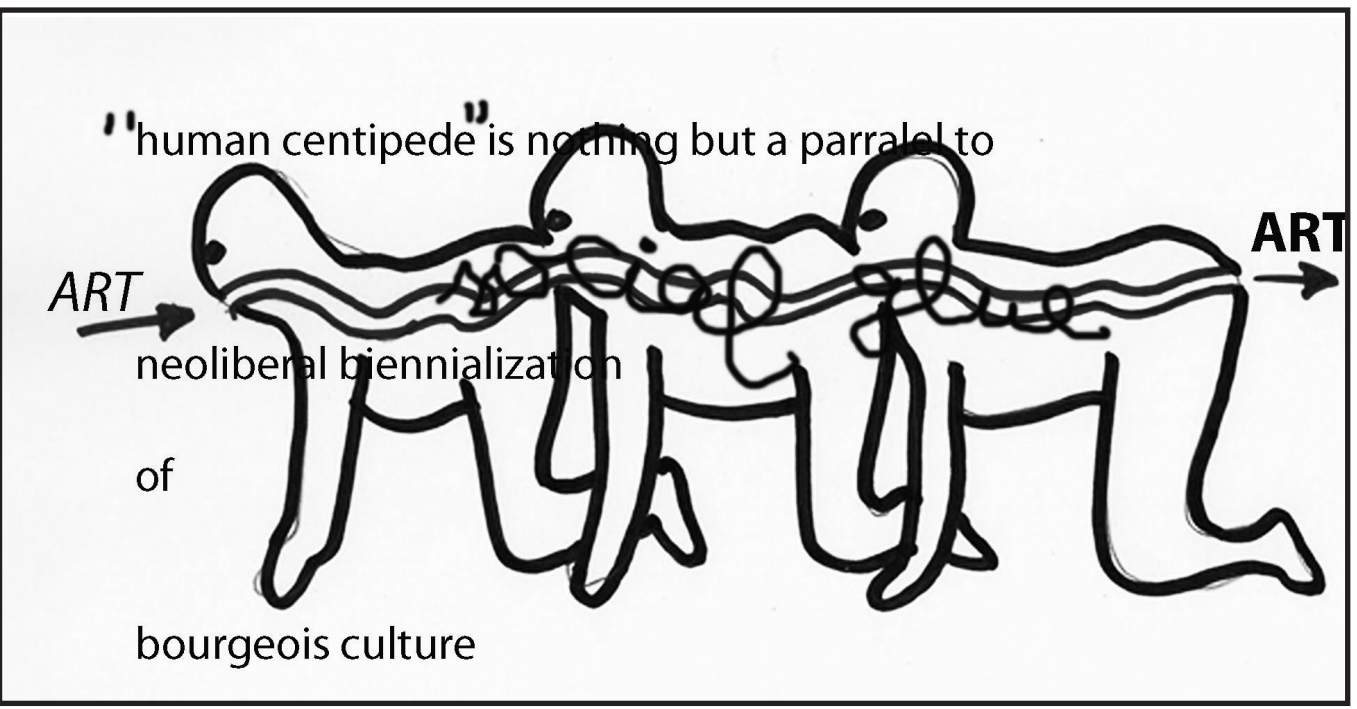
Marketing of dOCUMENTA (13) relies on a reserved colour scheme, dominated by the bright

yellow and accompanied by pastel tones of blue and green – the decision somewhat reflecting Giorgio Morandi's output. Morandi style fits dOCUMENTA brand perfectly: white Venice Biennial is denounced for its never-ending parties and Art Basel constitutes a “commercial” art fair, documenta is shrouded in a smoke of seriousness and modesty. Ever since its foundation, this art fair was meant to “heal” a broken society of post-war Germany. Started out as an annexe to the bourgeois horticultural show in the city of Kassel in 1955, the art festival was meant to show art formerly deemed “degenerate” by the Nazi party. Nevertheless, the fact that documenta was initiated at the same year as the German military was officially recreated and accepted into NATO (1955; with Kassel as one of the most important arms industry hubs in Germany), is rather striking.

Most of the show is produced with the same colour scheme like its marketing. Having spent a good part of the day in documenta, this could be also said about its contents. Humour entirely absent, eroticism was positioned in a suspiciously close proximity to both: Italian fascist star of the show Giorgio Morandi and the portrait of Adolf Hitler, therefore rendering one of the very few erotic impulses of the art fair - images featuring the Vogue correspondent Lee Miller herself – entirely unattractive. Furthermore, Anna Teixeira Pinto, in her review for *Art Agenda* points to the lack of seriously analytical contributions to documenta<sup>10</sup>, those which would have been capable of consciously deconstructing language and the “rationalism” which led to the creation of nuclear warfare, the problem continuously scrutinized in the works of Gustav Metzger.

Instead, the nature and man inflicted disasters are put side by side by the Bakargiev curatorial “everything goes as long as it fits German cultural policy” concept, where on the one hand war is justified by the supposedly universal human death instinct, and on the other art is granted “uebermensch” qualities by its un-historical appearance in the form of “energy”<sup>11</sup>, which on its own behalf leads towards the “ecology of spirit” in the form of German Nazi founded Volkswagen “motto’s”<sup>12</sup>.

Poor curatorial decisions fit well with the glorification of “Poor Art”. Alighiero Boetti has been historicized into the poor Italian art circle, but another hero of 2012 documenta, Giorgio Morandi, is also another artist related to the Arte Povera (in 2009 his paintings decorated the US White House, while Alighiero Boetti was featured in the world's largest art museums in 2012: MOMA NYC and London Tate Modern, Giorgio



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the "National Socialist Underground" (NSU) and subsequent "loss" of evidence about healthy and I took responsibility collaboration over the years. Therefore it is my suggestion that the security services in

I'm trying hard to make a simultaneous reference to the ideology of DOCUMENTA (13) curated by Carolyn Christov-Walkley and the security services in

To conclude I would like to repeat myself in saying that Heideggerian dwelling in human being around social and psychological spheres must be severely attacked by the deconstruction of the monumentally serious "alternatively modern", culture, which is not an alternative to the "alternatively presented at DOCUMENTA (13), but instead a slightly but seriously woven together: art is a historical construct which has a historical and very material function - that of more tolerant as we

Instead of absorbing everything into a universally acceptable" sphere of "participatory" contemporary art it proposes the critical distancing from such art fairs and autonomizing of the negative in art in order to counter the possibility and vanguardism of such chaotic weapons of these simply provide a moral safety (like DOCUMENTA 13) propagandistic (like Berlin Biennial 7) or community specific

valve for the continuing (in case of Berlin) or (in case of whitewash) in general and gentrification (in case of Berlin) or collapse and but follow the reasoning these processes documenta's recovery" makes much more

make the life of human

**CHUS LIFE**  
 The Chus Martinez moniker has the advantage of being one that might belong to either a European or an African since Chus as a first name does not appear to be language rpecific. In this way it is superior to any previous multiple identity we are aware of. Chus Martinez is a name that refers to an individual human being who can be anyone. The name is fixed, the people using it aren't. The name Chus Martinez can be strategically adopted for a series of actions, interventions, exhibitions, making trouble as an activist. The purpose of many different people using the same name is to create a situation for which no one in particular is responsible and to practically examine western philosophical notions of identity, individuality, originality, value and truth. Anyone can become Chus Martinez using the name. When one's previous existence consists of the acts of adopting the name, when one becomes Chus Martinez was not born, s/he was Chus Martinez simply by adopting the name. Chus Martinez is a transnational collective phantom materialised from social forces, no parents, no family, no parents, no birth. Chus Martinez is a means of entering the shifting terrain that circumscribes the 'individual' and society. Chus Martinez is a transnational collective phantom.



**oury**

# Chus Martinez XIII

## REproductive wOrkers and Lovers indUsTrIal union



today - July 28th, 2012 is the anniversary of the death of Isidore Isou and the founding of the Situationist International and founding day of REproductive wOrkers and Lovers indUsTrIal union. here is a little bedtime story as comment on declaration that "baker cannot leave her bakery":

so the baker leaves the shop and goes off to other work... but she still bakes for herself maybe for her fellow workers maybe she ends up working in a kitchen (that is not exclusively for baking...)

is the baker the same as the shop? can she refuse being a baker and still bake? can she refuse baking and still be a baker? why bake? to resist hunger? for herself? to feed others? how does she fight hunger? how can she ignore starvation all around her?

to be a baker she must by definition identify with other

people who share her passions

she wants to bake better than ever but comes across lots of problems in organisation and production

some other bakers make free kitchens for the homeless and poor she loves this but encounters many of the same shortcomings as the bakery

in particular she cannot attack her enemy: starvation

she sees many bakers around her have a very limited idea of baking and bread and cake and oven and food and eating she travels around the world meeting other bakers who use different methods of baking

she notices that all workers are in a union - except some like soldiers and bakers she wonders why is this?

she talks with other bakers in her shop and in other shops

she sees that unions are local and national but seldom achieve international structure and she knows that starvation kills thousands of people every day but mostly in other countries she sees that other people who cook food are also not in unions

she decides to re-define her own production and unionise with workers who produce food in other ways

she has "one in the oven" (an english expression for being pregnant") the anarchists say "we don't want bread - we want the bakery"

maybe she seeks the society where it is possible to bake in the morning, to eat in the afternoon, shit in the evening, kill after dinner... without ever becoming baker, fucher, painter or killer.