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LUMEN TRAVO presents

CLÁUDIA CRISTÓVÃO

A Catalogue of Possible Gestures

June 3rd – July 11th

LUMEN TRAVO gallery is pleased to present the new solo show of Cláudia Cristóvão (b. 1973) – Dakar Biennial revelation prize, 2006 – who combines on this occasion a selection of works from the recent series **The File Project** and **The Chinese Garden**. After the success of the video installation **Fata Morgana** – in which she introspects the mental construction of Africa through the memory of people who were born there but never actually lived in that continent – the artist explores further the narrative potential of especially charged locations, by bringing together different behaviours with varying levels of ambiguity.

Cláudia Cristóvão's background in film seeps through the aesthetics of her present work, which combines documentary strategies with fictional, even poetic, narrative structures. The artist uses photography (often Polaroids resembling film stills) and video to expose and put together historical references, daily behaviours and objects – as if pulling the threads of an unspoken story. A case in point are the works from the installation **The File Project**, commissioned for the São Paulo Biennial in 2006 and set in an unnamed hyper-surveilled society that is heavily based on the recent history of Eastern Germany. Here, the narrative force of unremarkable daily scenes is emphasized through the lens of a preparatory research the artist undertook into the Stasi archives. None of the images are what they seem: Cláudia Cristóvão's "documentation" unveils a world of codes with a sense of dramaturgy, which grasps the mind into different motions and dimensions – of proof, interpretation, imagination, confusion, assumptions and mental displacement. The artist goes to the extent of rearranging some scenes into still-lives based too on Stasi's listings: photographs which reveal the exact private belongings a person under arrest was allowed to take into prison.

In **The Chinese Garden**, an installation commissioned for the Thessaloniki Biennial of 2007, Cláudia Cristóvão undertakes another site-specific exploration. Produced in Shanghai, Macau and Hong Kong, the pieces reveal the tension in the usage of public spaces as stages: **The Chinese Garden**, akin to a

traditional Chinese garden, is a space of myriad perspectives and deceptive enclosures. An inevitable irony arises of works such as the video **Leap of Faith**, where a man crosses the length of a park walking backwards, to the sound of an unseen woman that uses the same space to rehearse a popular revolutionary song.

These works show Cláudia Cristóvão's explorations of the narrative potential of places and of how people's behaviours are conditioned by cultural stances and historical leftovers. Spanning many different geographies, her work rises above specificity to point out a globalized situation in which people are used to being watched by video cameras or by the look of "the other(s)" and develop their own defense strategies accordingly. Taking the role of an implicated observer, Cláudia Cristóvão's works are all tied by the notion of how places are a continuous reconstruction of the mind and how strategies of (self) inclusion / exclusion are constantly at play. In her work, regions of the world, like Africa, Europe or China become indeed 'big narratives', staged scenes in which the notion of 'society of spectacle' takes its full meaning: life is a constant performance and History is available to be re-visited and re-written. Cláudia Cristóvão shows a world in which the value of images is constantly at stake; people are continuously actor and viewer of one another, and by extent, acknowledging one another passes through a process of imagination.

Emilie Oursel