

**STUDY: WALLPAPER - TANGIER, YTO BARRADA**



**STUDY IS THE GENERIC NAME** for a series of focused case-studies of works from the collection. It involves one or a selection of artworks studied in depth: from its techniques, origin and history, to its position in the artist's practice and contemporary debates. The study is made available in a booklet.

**AN ARTWORK IS A SYSTEM** that cannot be reduced to an object or an index (certificate, instructions, etc.). It also includes the histories (material and conceptual), the trajectories (physical or virtual) and the narratives (past or to come) generated by the artwork: this is what this programme researches.

**TO STUDY IS TO DEVOTE TIME** and attention to a particular subject, to acquire knowledge. It can also refer to a piece of work done for practice or an experiment. It is in this sense that we would like to pursue – not the transmission of knowledge or the act of contemplation, but rather an invitation to act.

**STUDY IS NOT AN ATTEMPT** to capture or seize but a methodology of encounter and an insistence on provisionality as both form and content within the process of research. It is an exercise to respond to the infinite demand of a work. Not to bring forth any historical truth but to enter into a dialogue with the work.

**IN THIS SENSE THE STUDY IS NOT FINITE**, but demands the reader take up multiple positions and viewpoints. More than anything, it asks the viewer to engage with the artwork by, at least, spending some time with it.



**WALLPAPER – TANGIER IS A PHOTOGRAPH** by French-born Moroccan artist Yto Barrada (Paris, 1971) dated 2001 and originally titled in French *Papier peint – Tanger*. The second edition of the work, which exists in a series of five, was acquired for the David Roberts Collection in 2006 from Flowers East in London. At the time it was on consignment from Galerie Polaris, Paris and was exhibited as part of the group exhibition *The Living is Easy*.<sup>1</sup> The work is a 60 by 60 cm colour print mounted on aluminium with no frame, signed by the artist on the reverse. It is the only work by Barrada in the David Roberts Collection. An edition of *Wallpaper – Tangier* is also held in the collection of the MUMOK in Vienna.

**THE WORK IS PART OF 'THE STRAIT PROJECT'** (in French *Le Project du Détroit*), an investigation by Barrada into the identity of the Strait of Gibraltar started in 1998 and concluded in 2004. Various editions of the photograph have been shown as part of a series of touring exhibitions, all titled *A Life Full of Holes – The Strait Project*, at Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (Rotterdam) in 2004, Open Eye Gallery (Liverpool) and Mead Gallery (Warwick) in 2005, Jeu de Paume (Paris) and The Kitchen (New York) in 2006. The work has also been displayed in a number of group exhibitions, including the *Deutsche Börse Photography Prize* at the Photographers' Gallery (London) in 2006 and *Bouvard and Pécuchet's Compendious Quest for Beauty* at the David Roberts Art Foundation in 2012 (apart from the exhibition at Flowers East, the only time the second edition of the photograph has been on view). It was exhibited together with other works from the Collection and the exhibition was curated by Chris Sharp and Simone Menegoi.<sup>2</sup>

**UNLIKE TRADITIONAL LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY**, *Wallpaper – Tangier*, as well as all the works in *The Strait Project*, is square in format. If looked at from a distance it could seem to be a photograph of an idyllic Alpine landscape provided with all the elements that would make it a perfect mountain resort: snowy peaks, a lake with crystal clear water and pine trees surrounding it. Examining the image in more detail, a long curling seam in the centre reveals that this Alpine scene has not been directly photographed by the artist, but is in fact the image of a faded and roughly glued wallpaper. Barrada came across the image of this Alpine landscape in a café in Tangier where it had been installed as a wallpaper, hence the title of the work. Translating the original materiality of the peeling wallpaper into a two-dimensional composition, Barrada deceives the viewer with an image that draws on the clichés of landscape photography as a genre with defined characteristics. In this way the mountain scene loses its own connotations to become a place with no particular identity,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Living is Easy*, Flowers East, London, 2006. The group exhibition brought together work by a diverse selection of international and emerging photographers from Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America: Yto Barrada, Aliko Braine, Edward Burtynsky, Federico Cámara, Justin Coombes, Adams Habteslasie, Nanna Häänninen, Max Kandhola, Laura Letinsky, Neeta Madahar, Zweekethu Mthethwa, Robert Polidori, Steve Pyke, Kanako Sasaki, Mikhael Subotzky and Lolo Veleko.

<sup>2</sup> *Bouvard and Pécuchet's Compendious Quest for Beauty* was part of the *Curators' Series*, which supports international curators by commissioning special research-based projects. The exhibition explored ten categories of beauty with the intention of disobeying the traditional history of aesthetics. *Wallpaper – Tangier* was part of the section called *The Landscape as Canon of Beauty* (see appendix).

suggesting a general idea of escapism towards exotic destinations. By bringing a landscape that originally decorated the interiors of a Moroccan café to either an art gallery, a museum or the house of a collector, Barrada is able to question how the displacement of an image might affect its meaning and change the way we look at it.

**BY EMPHASISING THE WALLPAPER'S SEAM** and deliberately excluding the context of where it was installed, the artist draws the focus away from the depicted landscape and directs the attention of the viewer to the photograph itself and to its flatness. If, as Roland Barthes explains in *Camera Lucida*<sup>3</sup>, a photograph is usually never differentiated from its referent (so that when we look at it, it is not the actual photo we see, but rather what it depicts as the photograph itself is made invisible) in this case Barrada unsettles this notion and reveals to the viewer that what they are looking at is the image of an image. Although *The Strait Project* includes other photographs of tourism posters or advertisements (for example *Hoarding – Advertising for a tourist development – Brieich, 2002* and *Advertisement lightbox – Ferry port transit area – Tangier, 2003*, see appendix), these more immediately than *Wallpaper – Tangier* reveal their nature as an image of an image by having portions of the background included in the picture.

**'A LIFE FULL OF HOLES – THE STRAIT PROJECT'** is one of the artist's most extensive projects to date. Published as a book by Autograph ABP in September 2005<sup>4</sup>, it consists of a long-term research project formed by a body of photographs, archival materials and texts through which Barrada records the unique nature of the Strait of Gibraltar and the social reality of her home city, Tangier. The title of the project is borrowed from a novel by the North African illiterate storyteller Driss Ben Hamed Charahadi<sup>5</sup> which was recorded and translated into English in 1964 by the American writer and translator Paul Bowles. By telling the harsh story of a young Arab's daily struggle for survival and his efforts to remain positive and hopeful for the future, Charahadi's book reflects on the culture of 1960s Morocco and describes the country as seen from the eyes of a boy who could easily be one of the characters captured by Barrada's lens.

**BARRADA EXPLAINED THAT THE 'HOLES' IN THE TITLE** initially referred to the absence of a state in Tangier when the city was made an international zone during the colonial period. An agreement signed between France, Spain and the United Kingdom in 1923, known as the Tangier Protocol, left the city with no responsible government for more than thirty years until 1956 when it was reintegrated with Morocco, after its independence. If, according to Greek mythology, Gibraltar is where the Pillars of Hercules separated Europe from Africa and marked the beginning of the unknown world,

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3 *Camera Lucida* is a short book published in 1980 by the French literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes, as an inquiry into the nature and essence of photography.

4 Published by Autograph ABP in association with Photoworks (Brighton), Mead Gallery (Warwick) and Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art (Rotterdam).

5 *A Life Full of Holes* is the first novel ever written in the Arabic dialect Moghrebi, faithfully recorded and translated into English by Paul Bowles.

then historically this was a crossing point of continents, a site of colonial, economic and geopolitical negotiations, characterised by the constant circulation of people, goods and cultures. In *A Life Full of Holes* Barrada employs a variety of styles to portray what is considered “not so much as a place but as a state of being”<sup>6</sup>, that is the tension rooted in the everyday border condition: “people are standing there thinking all day how they’re going to make enough money to pay their passage through. You just walk in the street and you see people waiting, walking, as if they’re going nowhere”.<sup>7</sup>

**TANGIER, WHICH LIES ON THE NORTHERN EDGE OF AFRICA** where Morocco is divided from Spain by a narrow stretch of water, oscillates between the two conflicting dimensions of African illegal migration and international mass tourism and, as many borderline territories, has become a place invested with aspirations and dreams for a better future. The city represents a jumping-off point, a sort of mythologised place for all the aspiring emigrants without a visa that are denied the access to Europe. Barrada’s images reflect on the condition generated by the border’s geopolitics and on the impact that the Strait of Gibraltar has on the life of contemporary Morocco and especially on Tangier:

“Before 1991 any Moroccan with a passport could travel freely to Europe. But since the European Union’s (EU) Schengen Agreement, visiting rights have become unilateral across what is now legally a one-way strait. A generation of Moroccans has grown up facing this troubled space that manages to be at once physical, symbolic, historical and intimately personal”.<sup>8</sup>

**BARRADA APPROACHED PHOTOGRAPHY** through her studies in political science at the Sorbonne in Paris, which she attended until 1994 before moving to New York to study at the International Center of Photography. As she recalls in an interview with Charlotte Collins<sup>9</sup>, she became interested in photography while researching the roadblocks between Israel and the West Bank and the negotiation strategies employed by Palestinians who wanted to cross the border. As her research evolved she found herself “taking more photographs than notes”<sup>10</sup> until the process completely shifted and she “started to be interested in art and all the possibilities it gave to introduce the political situation”.<sup>11</sup> For more than a decade Barrada has been exploring the history of post-colonial Morocco and, as Collins writes, capturing the “pervasive sense of a people in limbo”<sup>12</sup> waiting for a chance to get on the other side of the strait.

**AS A CITIZEN WITH A DOUBLE PASSPORT** (she was born in Paris and grew up in Tangier), Barrada has always been allowed to circulate freely in and out of the country. She describes her dual

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6 Nadia Tazi in *A Conversation Between Yto Barrada and Philosopher Nadia Tazi (Extracts)*, in Barrada, Y. *A Life Full of Holes – The Strait Project*, 2005, Autograph ABP, London, p. 58.

7 Collins, C. 2006, “The Photography of Yto Barrada: A Pervasive State of a People in Limbo”, *Quantara.de*.

8 Barrada, Y. 2005, *A Life Full of Holes – The Strait Project*, Autograph ABP, London, p. 57

9 Collins, C. 2006, “Morocco Unbound: An Interview with Yto Barrada”, *OpenDemocracy.net*.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

nationality as a fundamental point of departure for her practice: “I think I was a privileged child. I crossed borders without really thinking about it. My parents are Moroccan, but I was born in France. So I’m interested because I could have had the same destiny too – to dream of Europe and never see it come true”.<sup>13</sup>

**BARRADA ASCRIBES CENTRAL IMPORTANCE** to the role that the high circulation of images plays in the construction of border dynamics. Television, magazines, advertisements and information technologies constantly transmit to Morocco the idea of an idealised West and the desire for mobility. One example of such images could indeed be the motif of exotic Alp Mountains or the Montana forests, often found in cafés in Tangier and other Moroccan cities<sup>14</sup>, where these sort of paper tableaux and glossy posters decorate the interiors. In this way, the stream of manipulated and stereotypical images, including the recurring mountain landscape that Barrada also captured in a café in Casablanca (*Homme au billard – Casablanca*, 2000, see appendix), produce in the minds of Moroccans an alienating sense of exclusion and constant longing to be elsewhere. With *Wallpaper – Tangier*, the artist explores the impact of these images, to reveal the tension and the “feeling of frustrated proximity”<sup>15</sup> that they can bring about in non-Western realities. Two other photographs included in the project show advertisements for leisure resorts and ferry boats aimed at European tourists<sup>16</sup>, and illustrate the desire for escapism as a mutual one, existing on both sides of the strait.

**TAKEN FROM UNUSUAL ANGLES**, Barrada’s photographs aim to “challenge the aesthetic fetishism that has long characterised representations of the Arab world”<sup>17</sup> and deliberately avoid the kind of picturesque and exoticized aesthetic that usually characterises the Western idea of Morocco. Other than *Ceuta Border – Illegally Crossing the Border into the Spanish Enclave of Ceuta* (1999), in *The Strait Project*, as well as in her whole practice, she consciously does not portray directly the actual attempts at crossing the border and so avoids an immediate depiction of the crisis. The artist chooses in fact to focus her attention on the city’s constant mutation and urban complexity. In her images of Tangier we find abandoned building sites, empty lots and streets, fences torn open. People are usually portrayed from behind, avoiding the camera, as if looking towards another destination in the distance while waiting to leave. Two men hug one another in the street, a woman sits alone in the lounge of a ferry and stares out the window, a girl dressed in red plays jacks facing the wall.

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13 Magharebia, 2006, “Yto Barrada discusses her love of photographing international borders”, *Magharebia.com*

14 See Collins, C. “Morocco Unbound: An Interview with Yto Barrada” and Crawley Jackson, A. “‘Cette poétique du politique’: Political and Representational Ecologies in the Work of Yto Barrada”.

15 Yto Barrada in *A Conversation Between Yto Barrada and Philosopher Nadia Tazi (Extracts)*, in Barrada, Y. *A Life Full of Holes – The Strait Project*, 2005, Autograph ABP, London, p. 59

16 See *Hoarding – Advertising for a tourist development – Brieich*, 2002 and *Advertisement lightbox – Ferry port transit area – Tangier*, 2003.

17 Collins, C. 2006, “The Photography of Yto Barrada: A Pervasive State of a People in Limbo”, *Quantara.de*.



## **“WHAT IS THE CONDITION OF A COUNTRY WHOSE PEOPLE ARE ALL LEAVING, OR TRYING**

**TO LEAVE?”**<sup>18</sup> is one of the questions asked by Barrada. The risk, she says, is that of people turning their back on whatever is happening where they live and losing contact with their local community. In her own artistic practice Barrada includes the active commitment to stay in Tangier and bring cultural resources to the city. This is why in 2006, together with a small group of artists and film-makers, she decided to establish a non-profit organisation taking over the premises of Cinema Rif, located in the city centre, and established there the independent cinema and cultural centre Cinémathèque de Tanger. With the aim of promoting dialogue and exchange, of providing a curated programme of Moroccan and international films and creating an archive of documentaries, experimental films and video art, the Cinémathèque is now an institution that plays an important role in the cultural life of Tangier and made African and world cinema accessible for a local audience.

## **BARRADA’S PRACTICE ENCOMPASSES A BROAD RANGE OF MEDIA** (sculpture, video,

photography) and has until now always featured post-colonial Morocco and Tangier as subjects of its investigation. In her films (see for example *The Smuggler*, 2006 and *Beau Geste*, 2009) and in a number of photographic projects and exhibitions, such as for example *The Sleepers* (2006)<sup>19</sup>, *Iris Tingitana* (2007)<sup>20</sup> and *Riffs* (2011)<sup>21</sup>, the city’s modernisation, the inhabitants and the images that surround them, come back as recurring themes and form a collection of narratives in which history, documents and memories merge together.

## **FACADES, STILL LIFES, ADVERTISING POSTERS AND WALLPAPERS** are often photographed by

Barrada using a frontal and flat composition to depict facts and to document reality without any explanation or fixed meaning. Rather, these images are focused on residues and moments that appear to highlight ruptures in the quotidian. In *Wallpaper – Tangier*, the creases and slightly off-centred tear in the wallpaper become the focus of the image, rather than the pastoral idyll and point to an acknowledgement that paradise is only an illusion.

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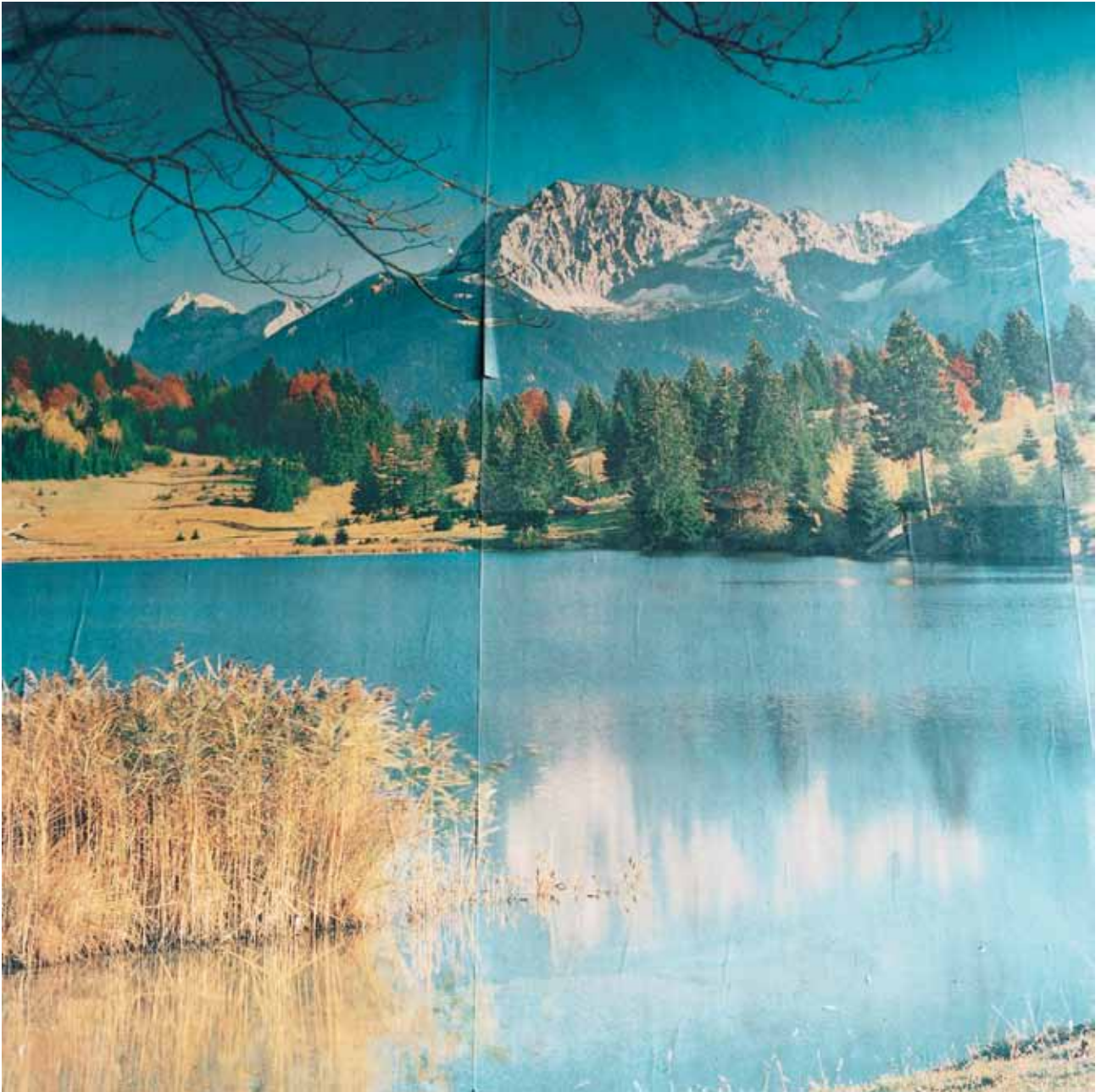
18 Yto Barrada in *A Conversation Between Yto Barrada and Philosopher Nadia Tazi (Extracts)*, in Barrada, Y. *A Life Full of Holes – The Strait Project*, 2005, Autograph ABP, London, p. 58

19 A series of photographs showing migrants sleeping in Tangier’s parks while waiting for the dangerous journey by boat across the Strait of Gibraltar towards Europe.

20 A series of photographs examining Tangier’s changing landscape and its homogenization caused by the touristic boom.

21 *Riffs* is the first survey exhibition of Yto Barrada’s work, a touring show awarded to her as the recipient of the Deutsche Bank *Artist of the Year 2011* prize.

# **APPENDIX**



Yto Barrada, *Wallpaper – Tangier*, 2001, C-Type print, Edition 2/5, 60 x 60 cm.  
David Roberts Collection, London. Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Polaris, Paris.

YTO BARRADA  
A LIFE FULL OF HOLES  
THE STRAIT PROJECT

I thought: people say it's better to have no life at all than a life full of holes. But then they say: better an empty sack than no sack. I don't know.

*A Life Full of Holes*. Driss-Ben Hamed Charhadi (1964), recorded and translated by Paul Bowles.

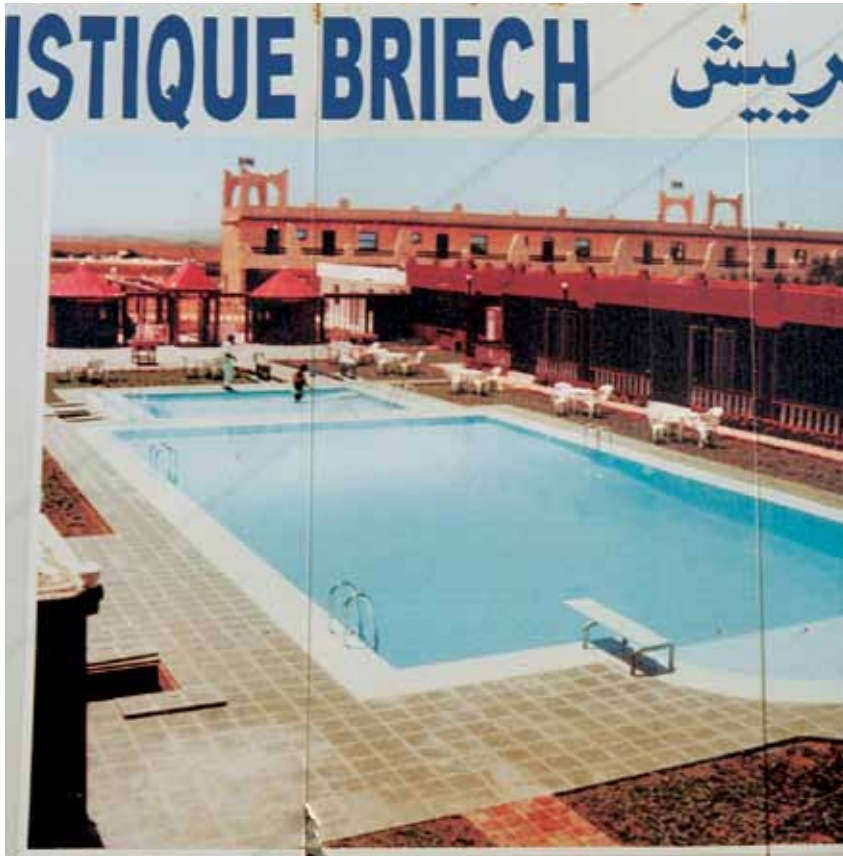
The word *strait*, like its French – and as chance would have it, Arabic – equivalent, combines the senses of narrowness and distress. The collapse of the colonial enterprise has left behind a complex legacy, bridging the Mediterranean and shaping how movement across the Strait of Gibraltar is managed and perceived. Before 1991 any Moroccan with a passport could travel freely to Europe. But since the European Union's (EU) Schengen Agreement, visiting rights have become unilateral across what is now legally a one-way strait. A generation of Moroccans has grown up facing this troubled space that manages to be at once physical, symbolic, historical and intimately personal.

Today the Strait is the main gateway for illegal immigrants, bound north with their own vocabulary, legends, songs, rites, and language. People no longer say 'he migrated' but 'h'reg': 'he burned' – burned his papers, his past, the law. Over the past two decades, the Spanish coast, visible from Tangier on any clear day or night, has lured many thousands of would-be émigrés to their deaths in what has become a vast Moroccan cemetery. Yet throughout Africa, the streets are abuzz with the exploits of 'the burnt ones' or 'the burners', and Tangier has become the destination and jumping-off point of a thousand hopes.

I try to expose the metonymic character of the Strait through a series of images that reveal the tension – that restlessly animates the streets of my hometown – between its allegorical nature and immediate, harsh reality. My work attempts, in part, to exorcise the unspoken violence of other people's departures. I, too, left Tangier, for more than 10 years; by moving back, I have placed myself amidst the violence of homecoming. There are no *flâneurs* here, and no innocent bystanders.

The subject of this book is never frankly discussed in Morocco. Yet everywhere I pursued my photographic record of northern ennui – along the 'Wall of the Lazy', in the vacant lots and housing projects, around the port – I came to recognise this fatal drive to leave that is today inscribed in a whole people.





Yto Barrada  
*Hoarding – Advertising for a  
tourist development – Briech*  
2002  
C-Type print  
80 x 80 cm  
Courtesy the artist and  
Galerie Polaris, Paris.



Yto Barrada  
*Advertisement lightbox – Ferry  
port transit area – Tangier*  
2003  
C-Type print  
60 x 60 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie  
Polaris, Paris.



Yto Barrada  
*Homme au billard –  
Casablanca*  
2000  
C-Type print  
50x50 cm  
Courtesy the artis and  
Galerie Polaris, Paris.

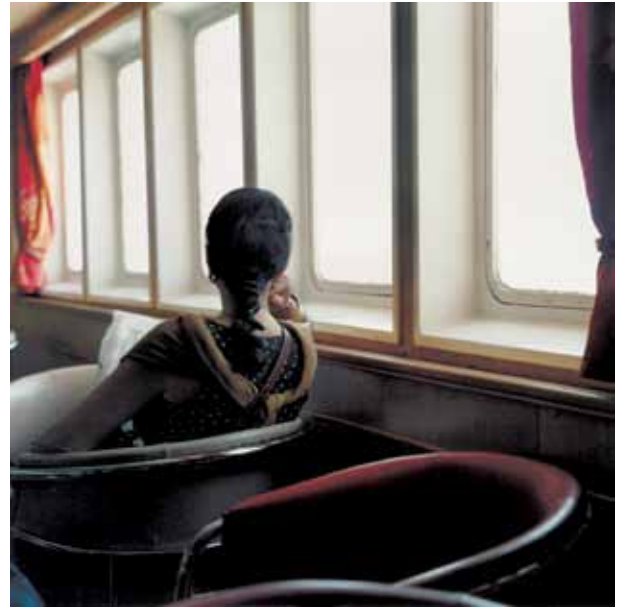


Yto Barrada  
*Ceuta Border – Illegally  
Crossing the Border into the  
Spanish Enclave of Ceuta*  
1999  
C-Type print  
80x80 cm  
Courtesy the artist  
andGalerie Polaris, Paris





Yto Barrada  
*Rue de la Liberté – Tangier, 2000*  
C-Type print  
125 x 125 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Polaris, Paris.



Yto Barrada  
*First class lounge – Ferry from Tangier to Algeciras, 2002*  
C-Type print  
70 x 60 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Polaris, Paris.



Yto Barrada  
*Girl in red – playing jacks – Tangier*  
1999  
C-Type print  
125 x 125 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Polaris, Paris.



Installation view of the exhibition *Curator's Series #5 Bouvard and Pécuchet's Compendious Quest for Beauty*, David Roberts Art Foundation, 2012. From the section *The Landscape as Canon of Beauty* (from left to right): Boyle Family, Peter Buggenhout, and Yto Barrada, David Roberts Collection, London. Image courtesy Alessandra Chilà.



<b>SUPPORT :</b>	Paper <i>print on board</i>	Photography	Other
Surface Plane :	Free of distortions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Localised distortions	Corner distortions General undulations/warping Distorsions due to cupping
Tension :	Tight <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Adequate	Slack
Tears/Splits :	None apparent <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Old/Repaired	Yes

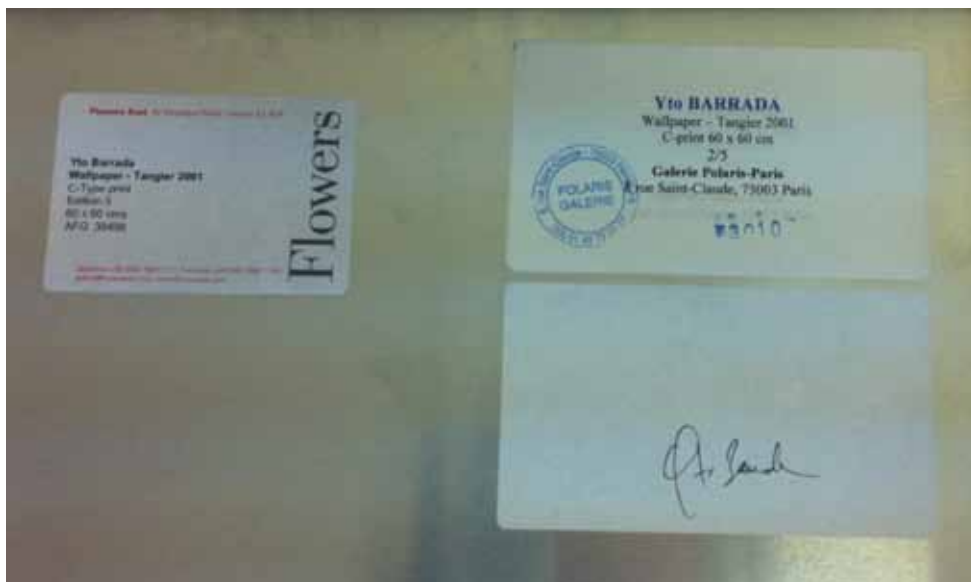
<b>Surface :</b>	Oil/Acrylic Other :	Ink/Watercolor
Appearance:	Good <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Scratches General brittle fracture network Drying cracks Visible bar lines Raised edges Discolouration Old restorations
Notes :	<i>loss of colour bottom left corner " " top left corner</i>	
Cleavage/Flacking :	None apparent <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes

Condition report of *Wallpaper – Tangier* for the exhibition *Curator’s Series #5 Bouvard and Pécuchet’s Compendious Quest for Beauty*, David Roberts Art Foundation, 2012.

## RE-EXAMINATION :

DATE	VENUE	EXAMINER + STATUS	CHANGES IN CONDITION
11.6.12	DRAF Fibrovra	NICOLETTA LAMBERTUCCI Curator	NO CHANGE
9.6.14	DRAF Symes Mews	NICOLETTA LAMBERTUCCI Curator	NO CHANGE IN CONDITION

Condition report of *Wallpaper – Tangier* for the exhibition *Curator's Series #5 Bouvard and Pécuchet's Compendious Quest for Beauty*, David Roberts Art Foundation, 2012 and for *Study #7*, 2014.



Back of Wallpaper – Tanger, 2001 with signature of the artist.

**DRAF**