



Yto Barrada, *Oxalis Crown—Perdicaris Forest—Rmilet, Tangier*, from IRIS TINGITANA series, 2007, c-print, 49" x 49". Courtesy Galerie Polaris, Paris.

## Continental Rifts: Contemporary Time-Based Works of Africa

Fowler Museum at UCLA, Westwood Village  
Through June 14

In this survey the ever-adventurous exo-Western Fowler Museum presents works that focus on Africa as a physical, conceptual, and emotional geography, by various African artists (and one Chilean) recently lauded in international supershows. Georgia Papageorge grandly evokes the rupture of the Gondwanaland landmass 135 million years ago into Africa and South America and extends the metaphor to the rift lines of apartheid and personal loss. In the visually seductive but tense double-screen video *Home and Away*, Bernie Searle floats in the Mediterranean strait between Spain and Morocco. She and we are caught here and there, neither here nor there and between somewhere and elsewhere. The extinction of the Moroccan blue iris is Yto Barrada's leitmotif through the shifting economic and cultural realities of contemporary coastal Tangiers, whence youths attempt to cross to a better life in France while old Morocco is gradually erased by tourism and development into a meaningless contemporary emptiness.

In ten exquisitely composed and luminous "cantos" shot in Angola on a musical ground of the popular song Muxima ("My Soul"), Alfredo Jaar renders visions of inseparable horror and beauty. Close-up frames annihilate any possible distance from the subjects' predicament amidst vestiges of colonialism and war, oil drilling and the progress of AIDS, all contained and countered by rituals of daily life, the promise of youth, gestures of grace, the dignified gaze of elders, and nature's vast continuity. In *Fata Morgana* (a phenomenon of fusing mirages), Claudia Cristovao hangs simultaneous video-interviews of African-born post-colonials providing their rapt, mostly borrowed reminiscences of Africa, plainly laying before us their struggle for identity and a sense of authentic living. *Continental Rifts* posits so many real and mythical Africas as resistant and shifting mirrors for our strategies and definitions of identity and desire, groundedness and alterity, putting us all on the edge of the continent.

— Stephanie du Tan

## Paul Shambroom: Picturing Power

University Art Museum, California State University Long Beach

The photograph, *Nine ICBM silos*, stands out in an ambitious traveling exhibition that "pictures power." This catchy phrase especially spotlights the *Nuclear Weapons* series: glossy, editorial shock-and-awe glimpses into the ironically banal dragon lairs of America's darkest treasure. If photography depicts power—the power to murder and create—then it seems fitting that an artist would answer through this medium the nightmarish call, real and imagined, of sinister power embodied in our civilian as well as military industries.

Shambroom's mid-career retrospective spans twenty years and is diversified in its central theme through Homeric photo adventures at high-tech factories, corporate offices, military weapons depots, small-town city council meetings, and hazmat-suit field exercises. The surprise here is the profound lack of malevolence, or even a smidgen of Orwellian flavoring, that one would expect to find at such a muscled banquet of illustrated force. The flagship image in the show, *B83 one-megaton nuclear gravity bombs in Weapons Storage Area, Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, 1995*, whose very title menaces, reveals instead the paradoxical power of a soldier's broom to subjugate a neatly-swept row of apocalyptic terror. In the *Security Series*, law enforcement personnel wearing hazmat and bomb suits seem Comedy Central-satirized, right down to the Olan Mills portrait studio hallmarks: photo-on-canvas gimmick and family member-in-nature contextualizing.

For better or worse, *Picturing Power* is mostly a harmless enterprise. But the nine landscape photographs of ICBM missile silos sited across America's Heartland reward Shambroom's Grail quest for the quintessential image of calmly annihilating power. These romantic prairie vistas wrapped in moody cloud cover or caressed with Midwest golden light offer eerie staging for what Noble Prize-winning playwright Harold Pinter qualified as ". . . this infantile insanity—the possession and threatened use of nuclear weapons . . ."

— Darrin Little



Paul Shambroom, *Foxtrot 10, Coteau, Montana* (detail of *Nine ICBM silos*), pigmented inkjet on paper. Courtesy the artist.

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