TERRA INCognITA
Unmapped Identities
Alex da Silva | Binu Bhaskar
We would like to thank Power Print for their continued support of the arts.
WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
YOU ASK,
I AM A GYPSY, A WANDERER,
BORN OF PAIN AND AFFLICTION.
LOOK AT THE MAP OF THE WORLD,
VOYAGE ACROSS IN A GLANCE.
DOUBTLESS YOU WILL NOT FIND A LAND,
WHERE MY FELLOW COUNTRYMAN
HAS NOT DRIFTED.

I AM THE MYSTIFIED SOUL
OF A SLEEP-WALKER WHO AT THE FULL MOON,
STROLLS ACROSS THE CLIFFS
OF ENDLESS DESIRES.
BY ASKING WHERE
I AM FROM,
YOU WAKE ME UP
FROM MY GOLDEN DREAM.
I FALL FROM THE HEIGHT OF DESIRES.

JALEH ESFAHANI
As a gallery we are continually striving to introduce contemporary art experiences that are unique, credible, geographically diverse and most of all thought provoking. We keep our approach to exhibiting art ‘school free’ and open as much to established international artists as to exciting emerging talent.

So when the concept behind Terra Incognita was first discussed with Binu and Alex over a year ago we were immediately captivated by the idea of a collaboration between two seasoned artists, one a photographer the other a painter, working on a dynamic concept formed through their direct life experiences and involving the respected curator and art writer Shaheen Murali.

But the real piece of magic, the irresistible piece, was the fact that they planned to complete the final pieces for the show in the gallery itself, during a highly condensed and extremely intense residency in Dubai.

A year of discussions, planning, sharing, meeting and co-ordination finally resulted in Binu and Alex arriving in Dubai. Their bags and heads filled with ideas, directions, images, materials and opinions. And, most importantly, an ambitious artistic vision.

Along with several enthusiastic assistants they commandeered the gallery meeting room and set to work. In a blur of large format printing, stitching, painting, spraying, shooting, drawing, discarding, adding, singing, debating and occasionally shouting, the large and layered artworks began to appear in various stages of completion. By degrees their work has taken over the gallery and found their places on the walls.

It has been a privilege for all of us at The Mojo Gallery to have been part of this extraordinary process. To have witnessed first hand not only the artists’ impressive array of techniques, honed over many years of artistic practice, but also the interaction of the two personalities. Each artist bringing to bear their views on life and art while trying to find a common language of expression. We watched as friction and fire mixed with respect and co-operation to produce works filled with passion, energy and intrigue. Works that command our attention as we attempt to unravel the questions posed in their many layers.

Finally on behalf of the artists and The Mojo Gallery I would like to thank Hani Mansour and Sarreeta Ravi for their unflinching support and all the hard work they have put into this project.

Kurt Blanckenberg
Director
The Mojo Gallery
TERRA INCognITA
Unmapped Identities
Shaheen Merali

If we are to map anything nowadays, then surely in prime position would be the way we map ourselves in the world - currently a very different proposition from that of the historical grand voyage undertaken by an often violating explorer, leading a bunch of sailors in their greedy need to colonise on behalf of a founding nation.

This is increasingly the era of the lonely traveller, off on a bitter sweet journey across many borders to far-flung corners of the world, reaching safety with an identity card and visa in situ, arriving on an ever-increasing volley of fast-paced, budget airlines bound for a declining number of lonely destinations across the globe. It does not matter if we reach a grand old European port or a smallholding in the evergreen tropics, it is the reaching of the destination that now makes our destiny. The travel in itself endows us with a globalised view of the world, by recognising ourselves partially from the travelling to these distinct, yet not so distant, places.

On our long haul flight we hope to find out about the “other” and, as such, we have seemed to have entered a process of being “othered” constantly, inflicted as we regularly are by the strong arm of border controls and being eluded by the divine idea of self-discovery, within a soft and tender longing that drives our passion to move up and down the world – or at least part of our world.

It is a return to a form of nomadism, of scattered references to one’s own place, as we remember parts of ourselves in small digital images that remain unprinted, turned into digital memories and discarded in due time by fresher digital memoirs.

On a treadmill we hike between zones that remain divided by their desire to be accessible and their desire to have access. It is no longer the new world versus the old world scenario as the whole world is on the act, from far-flung beaches that we still recognise as the east to smaller island nations surrounded by fathoms of ocean and bluer skies.
This pertinent poem by the late Jaleh Esfahani has many of the attributes that start to describe the tenacity and vision as well as the continuing mission, rooted in the anxiety of travel and the unknown, of the two people involved in the collaboration.

Terra Incognita is a unique collaboration, an event, a discussion, a practical set of visual assemblages, a deletion and re-drawing of ideas, histories and values between the fine art photographer, Binu Bhaskar and the painter Alex da Silva.

This exhibition, Terra Incognita, brings together two artists in a fascinating dialogue over a vivid surface that starts the process of un-mapping their unique but shifting identities; Bhaskar, born in India lives currently in Spain whilst da Silva, born in Cape Verde, lives in Holland.

A visual conversation about an often beautiful and disturbingly stitched series of photographs printed on canvas provides a series of blurred borders, both as a physical experience and as a space of perception. Their visual discussions, debates and seminal confrontational questions about historical division, the place of acceptance and historical manipulation takes the viewer on a journey of intense power, in an aesthetic and provocative manner.

They share, through a series of intense recordings, a work that is a reflection of their lives, lived as an experience that constantly informs their individual artistic expressions and a coming together in Terra Incognita as a discussion, a culmination of emotive significance. This mixing of media is itself a place, a great mélange of destinies as they meet on a series of canvasses, originally produced as photographic renditions by Bhaskar, which then collide and are re-interpreted by da Silva with acrylic colours, in an ever-increasing volley of global realities, shifting the perspective and the surface in a collage of sedum and imagined majesties.

Bhaskar comes from an experimental photography practise but is as comfortable with large-scale drawings and filmmaking; all tropes which are evident in the choice of the images on canvas. In one of the images, “Totem - After Caravaggio” a sly looking young male wearing a crown of large leaves, holding a glass of red wine in one hand and a basket of vegetables in the other, clad in a Romanesque toga draped over his left arm, sits against a dark brooding background.

Unlike the other images by Bhaskar, this particular one will fit well into da Silva’s range of works with the primal colours that he tends to use in his figurative oil paintings. da Silva often paints athletic figures with aspects of the body frequently absent - torsos without heads or bodies stretched across the plane of the canvas – stressed as in some sort of Baconesque merger of the abstract and the sitter of a portrait.

Where are you from? by Jaleh Esfahani

Where are you from?
You ask,
I am a gypsy, a wanderer,
Born of pain and affliction.
Look at the map of the world,
Voyage across in a glance.
Doubtless you will not find a land,
Where my fellow countryman
Has not drifted.

I am the mystified soul
Of a sleep-walker who at the full moon,
Strolls across the cliffs
Of endless desires.

Asking where
I am from,
You wake me up
From my golden dream.
I fall from the height of desires

The result of the re-working by da Silva on Bhaskar’s “Fata Morgana” one of twelve canvases and also the starting point of the artists’ collaboration- an exercise in adjusting the photographic image to the haptic and responsive lines and colour strokes of da Silva. Much changes, much disappears and fresh strategic nuances are forged by da Silva - a transformation that makes Terra Incognita a reality. The merger of many ideas of Bhaskar’s original photographic images, stitched together into a prism with other images from his drawings, are further made into extensions of da Silva’s neurue. “Fata Morgana” becomes and stays the leading image for this collaboration.

So the paintings on top of a photographic image of Bhaskar’s, or Bhaskar’s of da Silva’s, provide a ground for further interpretation- a deliberate evacuation of perspective, often layering these liminal figures, a sense of warmth often pervades the canvas, heads bowed, in front of looming high-rises and bright beads shine on her saree. A red curtain drapes the background, cutting through the space like the insalubrious drips that trail the face of a woman in one of the portraits, (the known which remains the unknown), the blood and tears of sadness and death stream from her eyes and her nose. A river of red covers her face with a halo around her head, diamante jewellery glitters around her neck and bright beads shine on her saree.

“Everything is worthwhile / if the soul isn’t small.”

**Taken from the original:**

“Todo vale a pena / Se a alma não é pequena.”

Artistic collaboration, by its very nature, is experimental, unpredictable and spontaneous, a type of fieldwork or even soul searching, a place which is often driven by a desire rather than an expected result. Neither is it subject to the rules of restrictive fields of art, in that many collaborative practices are often about the desire to unite individual visions in the passionate flow of materials and places.

The resulting images often remain fresh in the explosive way that two territories are defined by a singular plane of vision, in a disrupted coming together, of vague interrupted narratives that forge a third space, of cancellations and trippy spaces that obscure and provide a new territory wherein we all fathom meaning. This sense of unpredictability, inventiveness and palimpsest can often leave the viewer with a feeling of being outside of its collaborative nature - and this is often its difficulty.

Collaboration is such a strategy, a break from the given paradigm of industrialised creativity, the permission for the other to trespass and transgress the limits of the singular poetic, the shadow or imaginings and the mechanics of the artist as a hero.}

The poet, Don Paterson, states “In art, the only true crime of ignorance is the discovery of the cliché. The flower of genius, on the other hand, is its innovation- being the revelation of what we hadn’t known we’d always known.”

Whilst recently working on these canvases, da Silva wrote the following remark as a status of the day:

“There are known knowns. Those are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things we know we don’t know, and there are also unknown unknowns. These are things we don’t know we don’t know. Like the insalubrious drips thattrail the face of a woman, in one of the portraits, (the known which remains the unknown), the blood and tears of sadness and death stream from her eyes and her nose. A river of red covers her ghostly face with a halo around her head, diamante jewellery glitters around her neck and bright beads shine on her saree. A red curtain drapes the background, cutting through the space like the insalubrious drips that trail the face of a woman. A river of red covers her face with a halo around her head, diamante jewellery glitters around her neck and bright beads shine on her saree. A red curtain drapes the background, cutting through the space like the insalubrious drips that trail the face of a woman.

But, there are also unknown unknowns. These are things we don’t know we don’t know. Like the insalubrious drips that trail the face of a woman, in one of the portraits, (the known which remains the unknown), the blood and tears of sadness and death stream from her eyes and her nose. A river of red covers her ghostly face with a halo around her head, diamante jewellery glitters around her neck and bright beads shine on her saree. A red curtain drapes the background, cutting through the space like the insalubrious drips that trail the face of a woman.

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...
The drama flows from these canvasses, dripping, fresh, enlivened, pulsating, germinating and off-loading the migrants’ wealth - which remains their body, their ideas of home and a return to some sort of sanity. They recall, they have rediscovered right before us what makes them happy, now that they are made in an image that peels away their emotional baggage in the drips of the rod and the yellow and in the safety of the white spaces that surround them, like a halo or a photoshopped lasso.

Both artists respond to the challenge of making these twelve works in twelve intense days of printing, stretching and painting. Twelve days of mastering dialogue, intensely looking over each other’s shoulders and listening to the murmuring of prayer. The studio is no longer a safe haven whereas the creative can slowly become fertile ground, there is an imposed deadline, a serious urge to find the visual answers and to reply with respect and trust.

An ambition, a challenge and the concept of similarity is born, finding the known between the two, making from the unknown a seamless invagination, regardless of how it results. Is it the nature of artistic practice to create a place of research and to reach certain altitudes through continuous ambition?

Ordinary Citizens
I write from the memory of talk and fleeting images, of conversations on Skype with smiling faces from across the ocean. We three have debated from the start of this exercise, which culminates in Terra Incognita: Unmapped Identities, an exhibition at the Mojo Gallery, Dubai, at the time of Art Dubai. So many different facets were to be considered, the stresses of tight periods of time, within which to formulate thoughts into images and words, had to be negotiated and the results displayed for the public. On a number of occasions da Silva had mentioned ‘I am doing what normally takes me a year in a few weeks’. It is this level of duress that is partly reflected in the resulting images as well as in their modulations, created by snatching information as the work developed, leading to this text.

This collaboration between two artists, Bhaskar and da Silva, has involved a much larger group, the gallerist and his staff, the studio assistants, hammering away to make stretchers and to accommodate all the innovations that are mustered on a daily basis. Furthermore, the artists’ own complex contract beyond the planning but in the making had to be enacted. A face-to-face creative commune and friendship has been forged in making this exhibition by encouraging a series of works to be dramatically born.

One can question its necessity, if this was a one off exercise by these two artists, but the visual arts have for a very long time been constructed under such duress. Many commissions have a tight schedule, site-specific works need to be made and often unmade within limited opportunities, residencies advocate a relaxing of your own environment to be fixed into someone else’s or somewhere else, and often artists find themselves within a time-based economy of space hire and working with resources on their downtime. Artists do facilitate many aspects of the real time world, as it operates in a greater haste, defined by a globalisation that is more attuned to fast rather than anything slowed down. It is a testimony to Bhaskar and da Silva, that these works, finely executed, remain robustly genuine in terms of ideas that bring forth both their Caribbean and Indian roots in the striking way they have elaborated on the conditions of humanity with colours that stream from these canvasses.

The pathos, the stringent motion of their subjects, the eerie mystifying faces of the women and the children, the backyards and the shrine-like cameos are all forged within limitations that have made them even more relevant as they stare back at us. Starting at us to question their arrival, their birth, their condition and the violated porn of being here in the now. Distressing readings of these times when so much is possible but its tendency to shrink into the hands of the begotten and the foolishly advantaged—leaves much space to consider—where have we arrived?

It is with these thoughts about the contemporary that artist who are forging dialogues, visual tropes to understand this mighty climax that we call home, mother Earth, a place that is suffering from a subsidence of love and its glory to be civil— or civilisation is much to be contested as a working reality of a goal that can be attained. Bhaskar and da Silva are two of its keen witnesses staring at this abyss as the abyss stares back.

Shaheen Merali is both a curator and writer, currently based in London. Between 2003-8, he was the Head of Exhibitions, Film and New Media at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany curating several exhibitions including The Black Atlantic; Dreams and Trauma: Moving images and the Promissed Lands, and Re Imagining Asia, One Thousand years of Separation. In 2006, he was the co-curator of the 6th Gwangju Biennale, Korea.

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GOLDEN DREAM | Mixed media on canvas
231 x 133 cm | 2012
OUTROS | Mixed media on canvas
160 x 50 cm | 2012
TODOS LOS DIAS | Mixed media on canvas
178 x 148 cm | 2012
INCONNUE | Mixed media on acrylic
65 x 90 cm | 2012

YATRA | Mixed media on canvas
113 x 80 cm | 2012
Terra Incognita

A vida demora suspensa no vazio
No espaço que habita a labuta e o dor.

O resplandor dos homens é estático
Modelada em estímulo e corpo.

E o silêncio instala na memória
O que cada instante instaura de si mesmo.

A vida demora intensa no seu casulo de truão
Devota e escondida ao dorso de um feto.

Antes que encontre o ritmo certo e o desencanto
As mãos imaginam ruínas em sequência do sol.

Crescem-versos amontoadas à um canto
O monge concebe este jardim, cada fragmento de alma.

A vida demora pequena pelo umbigo da pássaro
Os olhos de cetim e sua mão impiedosa.

E a mulher que caminha pitante pê
Sob os rituais de destino estão hoje encarnada.

Cohendo os estilhaços da luz
Sêmear-se indecifrável que permanecemos nos caminhos.

A vida na sua Incognita de terra e cai
E o que a terra nos propõe.

AdéNerada

AdéNerada born in the year nineteen hundred and sixty seven on the seventh day of September in Lisbon.

Spirit childhood and adolescence in Cape Verde, Mindelo.

Publications:
Instituto Cabo-verdiano do Livro e do Disco; Esteira Cheia ou a Abismo das Coisas, 1999, editora Angelus Nova, Coimbra. Dispersed collaborations in various magazines and newspapers.
ALEX DA SILVA BARBOSA ANDRADE


Followed the Post graduate in the year 2000 at Minerva Academy, Groningen/The Netherlands.

ARTIST STATEMENT

I learn by going where I have to go. My journey is represented in my art and my art is a reflection of the human condition.

The relation between a painting and imagination, eroticism, dreams have always been a constant theme for me. It is the relationship, the struggle and fragility of feelings that inspire me. Self destructive love, imagination, mystery, compulsiveness, addiction, masculinity, mistreatment, tragedy, love, continuity, dreams, patiencelessness, fear, cold, heat, night, day, peace, war. It is a journey of pleasures and torments. What I am relating is a story about dark and private theatre. Some parts of the paintings are abstract using automatic techniques and careful study, I am exploring physical expressions of emotion. The paintings draw attention directly to their own physicality. The colors and textures are symbols. The story of passion and reflection is improvised.

Once I paint, a story or an idea is born...
And then the story takes place, such as theater or living...
I spend hour after hour whilst I paint, observing my creatures and thinking about the good things they are involved in.

Basically, it’s my way of writing poetry.

Like all addictions and strong love and emotion, painting is my pleasure and my terror.
WORKSHOPS/ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

2012: The Mojo Gallery, artist in residence, Dubai, U.A.E.
2012: Bag Art Camp, workshop, Bergen, Norway
2010: Workshop ‘home & abroad’ (Triangle Network), Sintra, Portugal
2003: Appelboom, La Pommerie, artist in residence, Saint Setiers, France

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2012: 2012 Terra Incognita with Binu Baskar, Mojo Gallery, Dubai, UAE.
2012: For you/Pa bô, gallery ZeroPointArt, Cabo Verde.
2011: Gallery Arco 8, Açores.
2010: Love Supreme, Mon Art Gallery, Curaçao.
2009: A Journey not a destination, Carmina Galeria, Açores.
2009: Cartas do Fim do Mundo, Galeria Abraço, Lisbon, Portugal.
2003: La Pommerie, residence, Saint Setiers, France.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2011: Duo Exhibition at Neumünster Abbey Cultural Centre, Luxembourg, Luxembourg.
2010: Home and Abroad, Sintra, Portugal.
1996: Centre of Art and Culture, Keulen, Germany.
1992: Cultural Centre of Mindelo, Cabo Verde.
FILMOGRAPHY
2012: Directing Chico’s famous cheek ball – short fiction, 7 mins.

CURATED EXHIBITIONS
2008/Now: Curation of various exhibitions at Art Gallery ZeraPointArt, Mindelo, Cape Verde
2008: Founding Art Gallery ZeraPointArt Mindelo, Cape Verde
2007: Teaching drawing on the University of Mindelo, Cape Verde (Architecture class)

ASSIGNMENTS
2012: Slavery Monument, realized in 2012 and to be revealed in 2013, Rotterdam.
BINU BHASKAR

Born 1972: Keralam, India.
1989-1992: Bachelor's Degree in English Literature, Calicut University, Keralam, India.

SOLO SHOWS
2011: ‘Humantaka, Cowork Artspace, Gippsland, Australia.
2010: Humantaka, The Mojo Gallery, Dubai, UAE.
2008: ‘Ex stancol, Siedhi Art, Travancore Palace, Delhi, India.
2003: ‘Prints and Posters’ at Zyane Sheik Zayed Road, Dubai.
2000: ‘Diksha’ at Smith Street Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.
1998: ‘We Believe So We Are’, Walkie Street Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.
1997: Untitled Kasri Art Café, Keralam, India.

FILMOGRAPHY
2012: Director, Road song, Spanish documentary - fiction. 36 mins.
2012: Director, Chico's famous cheek ball - short fiction. 7 mins.
SELECTED GROUP SHOWS

2011: This is not that, Galerie Dubois, Paris, France.
2011: See you Soon, Blysdal, Berlin, Germany.
2010: See you Soon, La Galerie Minima, Paris, France.
2009: Nothing will ever be the same again, Hiris Gallery, Mumbai, India.
2008: Descubrimientos Photoespaña, Madrid, Spain.
2008: Art against terrorism, Enzo Chiesi Art, Kolkata, India.
2008: Christie’s Auction, South Asian Contemporary Art, New York, USA.
2008: White Lies, Bombay Art Gallery, Mumbai, India.
2008: Textures: Distance and Proximity, Jodhi Art, Delhi, India.
2008: Landscapes, Jodhi Art, Mumbai, India.
2008: Harmony art show, Mumbai, India.
2008: Millennium Times, Trident Hilton art exhibition, Gurgaon, India.
2007: Click—contemporary photography in India, Grooveren Vadhera gallery, New Delhi & London.
2004: Artweek gallery, Venice Biennale, India Habitat Centre, Delhi, India.
2005: Artist Collective Gallery, Mirriso North, Victoria, Australia.
2004: 11 by 13, Gallery Foundry, Melbourne, Australia.
1999: Bodies Island Gallery, Philip Island, Melbourne, Australia.
1999: Witness Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, Australia.
1995: Out of Blue, St. Martin’s Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.
LECTURES / WORKSHOPS / CURATIONS

2012: "Mojo Artists in residency". The Mojo Gallery, Dubai. UAE.
2011: "Capturing Themenessence". Photography workshop, Zero point art gallery, Mindelo, Cape Verde.
2010: Participated in "Home and Abroad" Triangle arts workshop, Lisbon, Portugal.
2010: Curated "This Location" with Ananda Surya, presenting works by Gayatri Ganuaz, Monica De Miranda, Serlia Samechia. The Mojo Gallery, Dubai, UAE.
2010: Workshops, "Essence of portrait". The Mojo Gallery, Dubai, UAE.
2010: Workshops, "Painting with light". The Mojo Gallery, Dubai, UAE.
2004: Guest Lectures, Photography Studies College, Melbourne, Australia.
1999: Conducted travelling workshops at various venues in South Gippsland, Victoria, Australia for the project "Diksha".
1998: Portrait Workshop M.S. University, Baroda, India.
1997: Curated "Cry". Group show by students from engineering and medical colleges, Manipal, India.