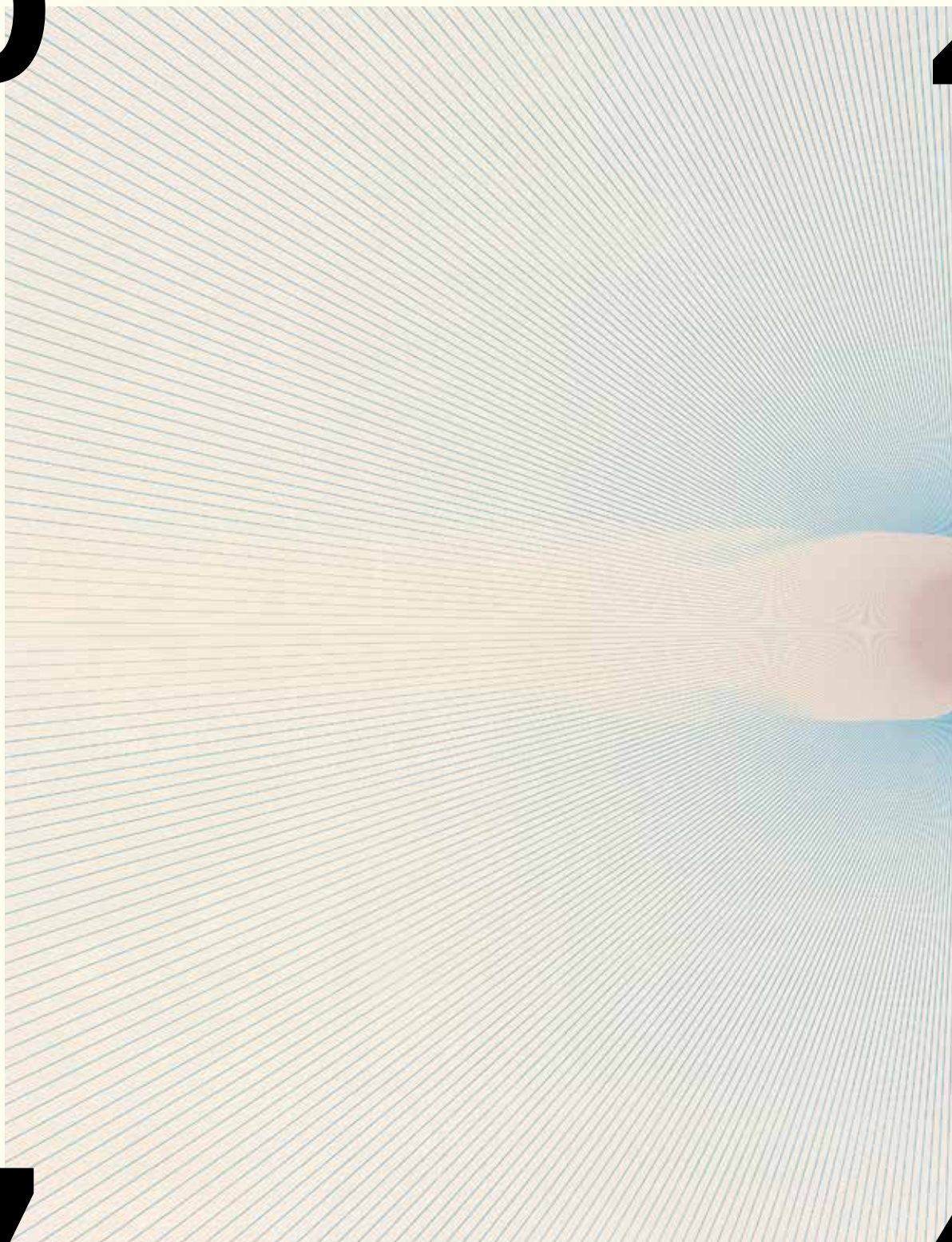


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**Lili Reynaud Dewar
Pamela Rosenkranz**

**Guillaume Désanges
Jérémie Gindre**

**Laëtitia Badaut Haussmann
Mariana Castillo Deball**

Surround Audience

by Maria Nicolacopoulou

**New Museum Triennial, New York,
from 25 February to 24 May 2015***

The New Museum's third iteration of its Triennial, "Surround Audience," invites fifty-one artists from around the world to discuss their position in society and the world, as that is interpreted and represented via an urgent need to re-identify oneself within a constantly changing socioeconomic and political backdrop. From poetry and interactive virtual reality to performances at Central Park and off-site travel, curator Lauren Cornell and artist Ryan Trecartin have attempted to incorporate all disciplines, mediums and genres of visual and interactive experience within the boundaries of the museum and beyond.

With an attempt to portray local sociopolitical settings, through the use and manipulation of diverse mediums and materials, the fifth floor of the museum encompasses testimonies from Angola, Cairo and Israel, as commentaries on the specificity of their ongoing cultural conditions. Special impact is made by Kiluanji Kia Henda's Rusty Mirage (The City Skyline) where in black and white photographs, empty geometrical installations are installed in the desert of Jordan and the UAE, as outlines of skyscrapers. These hollow modernist shapes testify to the disillusionment of neoliberalism's rapid economic growth by foreign investors, in Luanda and other similar developing cities, while creating parallels with the local tradition of sand designs, known as "sona," bestowing on the work a poetic allure.

The fourth floor, which also serves as a curatorial success, further elaborates on that theme by presenting works in a conversation surrounding the search of one's identity within the global structure of technological and socioeconomic development. Notable examples are Verena Dengler's embroidered Sponsors, Untitled and Performance Proletarians where traditional craft meets contemporary culture to comment on the degree of impact that technological progress has on civilization. The same line is followed by Oliver Laric's Untitled video, where animated clips are used to underline that effect, via the mutation of its characters. Also characteristic are Jose Leon Cerrillo's seamlessly subtle geometric structures, found throughout the space, which create a sense of immersion and embodied personal exploration of the prevailing theme, tying the conceptual to an intimate experience.

Unlike the fourth floor, the third floor's busy concentration of large-scale installations leads to a disambiguous result and a noisy experience. Alluding more to an arcade than a gallery, in combination with the absence of a prevailing theme, the lack of dialogue here forces the works to struggle for an orderly arrangement amongst things that are disconnected. Shadi Habib Allah's Untitled video, disconnected from the surrounding works, stands out as a study of a marginalized culture and a testimony to the forces of globalization. The 18min video portrays the raw reality behind the otherwise romanticized lives of the Bedouins in Egypt, as documented under unorthodox circumstances. With the artist having been smuggled into their community for prolonged periods of time and putting his life at risk, we stand witness to a visceral account of the dire sociopolitical circumstances of a culture-symbol, as that could only be achieved via an artistic viewpoint, free from anthropological inferences.

With a theme alluding to the progress of our civilization in relation to our natural environment, the second floor explores the impact of that development on social and public space. Notable works here range from Frank Benson's Juliana, as the reconfiguration of a human form as a virtual metallic hyperreal being, to Eduardo Navarro's Timeless Alex tortoise costume and Central Park's performance, dealing with the reconsideration of our contemporary digital pace. Daniel Steegmann Mangrane's virtual reality Phantom further enhances the theme by offering an immersive experience in a Brazilian rainforest and completing the floor's approach to the subjectivity of our existence.

By commenting on our relationship to material culture, the exhibition concludes on the first floor with DIS's Island installation and Lisa Holzer's But yes, but yes! and Garage Picture where we find materiality transgressing into live form, with a dominating presence, alluding to the underlying power struggle of consumerist culture.

Despite the all-encompassing generational and geographical spread of the selected artists, and the comprehensive analysis of its target issues, "Surround Audience" falls victim to the contagious one-dimensional condition of the western perspective's tendency to exhibit other cultures. With the ongoing debate on the fundamentals concerning the display of foreign cultures, justifying criteria and non-western diversity in curatorial approaches, on the specific elements that define the cultural identities and historicity of each location beyond the apparent ongoing condition, are essential in the introduction and representation of sensitive subject-matter elsewhere. We are therefore left to ponder on whose perspective "Surround Audience" is based anyway...

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* Partially on view through 06/07/15.



Shadi Habib Allah, *Untitled*, 2015. Vidéo, 18'42. Courtesy Shadi Habib Allah. Réalisée avec le soutien de / Co-commissioned with support from the A.M. Qattan Foundation, Ramallah, Palestine; Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE; Green Art Gallery, Dubai; New Museum, New York.