



INTRODUCTION

ISOE?

„In Search of Europe: Considering the Possible in Africa and the Middle East“ is an interdisciplinary research project at the [ZMO](#) (Zentrum Moderner Orient) in Berlin funded by the [German Ministry of Science and Education](#) (BMBF) from June 2010 to May 2014. In tandem with the six researchers, Daniela Swarowsky – the curator and producer of the exhibition – is working on an artistic

exhibition project scheduled for 2013 at the [Kunstraum Kreuzberg/ Bethanien](#) in Berlin.

In each ISOE exhibition NEWS, we will introduce different parts of our exhibition project and zoom in on the working process and research in progress, providing insight into our collaborative methodologies, which make ISOE truly interdisciplinary.

[General ISOE concept paper](#)



ISOE team w/ Metod Blejec and Karem Ibrahim

WHY ART?

Creative and artistic formats seemed very suitable to the topic of “creative engagement with possibility”, which is an underlying thread of the research project. Herein lie both the challenge and the potential of art in collaboration with research: exploring the emergence of new forms of cultural production, in its affirmative forms as well as in critical distance to Western standards.

The first key aim of the exhibit is to give visual expression to current and historical social discourses related to the affiliated research topics. The second key aim is to open up to a larger audience research topics that are not normally easily accessible, without losing depth and complexity or compromising artistic autonomy when commissioning art to illustrate or interpret research.



© Anissa Michalon

THE EXHIBITION

Swarowsky’s concept for the exhibition is to link each researcher with an artist, ideally from the region or country in which the research is located. Six artists will be commissioned to produce new work in an ongoing dialogue with one researcher each. The goal is not a

mere translation or interpretation of scientific research into artistic media, but rather artistic visions around the topics of the research. In addition, Swarowsky tries to set up co-operations with cultural players in most of the countries of research. Small-scale pre-events in the format

of debates or screenings aim to give space to local actors’ commentaries and discourses around the topics of research in preparation for the exhibition.

[ISOE exhibition concept paper](#)

TRAVEL & RESEARCH

Since the beginning of the research project, Daniela Swarowsky has been involved in an intensive exchange with the researchers through numerous individual meetings and three project workshops about the format and content of the exhibition and what the researchers expect from a collaboration with artists.

Because meetings with artists and art institutions in the countries of the various research projects are at the core of the preparations, Swarowsky has also been traveling quite a bit, doing her own kind of field research. During her first trip to Egypt in October 2010, she had several meetings to introduce the ISOE project and look into possible co-operations in both Cairo and Alexandria (including [Darb1718](#), [Goethe Alexandria](#), [ACAF](#), [Gudran](#), [Townhouse Gallery](#), [Austrian Cultural Forum](#)). She also accompanied project member Samuli Schielke on his fieldwork and conducted first video interviews with him about his work as a researcher. In January

2011, Daniela Swarowsky attended [Manifesta 8](#) in Murcia, Spain, one of the important international biennial exhibitions for newly produced work by upcoming artists. February brought her to London. The places to go were [Iniva](#), The Institute of International Visual Arts with its longstanding history of working with culturally diverse artists, curators, and writers and its famous [Stuart Hall Library](#). Other meetings were with [The Center for Possible Studies](#) und [The Delfina Foundation](#), both of which facilitate artistic exchange and dialogue among the UK, the Middle East, and North Africa.

Only a month later, Daniela Swarowsky went to Istanbul. The artist archive of the former [Platform Garanti](#) (now SALT) offers a great opportunity to research artist's portfolios and view their work on video. She visited exhibitions and artists' studios and networked with important cultural figures, having many talks to understand the dynamics of the present and past Turkish society

and specifically the various positions of contemporary art production. The main focus of her trip was to research artists who could have an affiliation with [Leyla von Mende's research project](#).

In April, Daniela Swarowsky went to Lisbon, where she investigated Portugal's colonial- and dictatorial past in preparation for [Vanessa Dias' project](#) about the Mozambican art scene. She also followed up on two artists whose work she saw at Manifesta 8: [Catarina Simao's Off Screen: On the Mozambique Film Archive](#) and [Filipa Cesar's video Four-Chambered Heart](#).

In June, Swarowsky travelled to Paris in preparation for [Aïssatou Mbodj's project](#).

This visit is described in more detail below in ISOE FOCUS #1.

NEW OFFICE

At the beginning of June, An Seebach joined Daniela as curatorial assistant. Simultaneously they opened their new exhibition office based in Berlin Mitte, at the Geisteswissenschaftliche Zentren/ GWZ, Schützenstrasse 18.

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"Mosse-House", Schützenstraße 18

INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN ACTION

In Daniela Swarowsky's understanding, the exhibition project is also a research project of its own, trying to test its relevance and to collect feedback in a bigger societal framework. To give a better understanding and lively account of her way of developing a curatorial concept, let us look closer into Swarowsky's latest collaboration with one of the ISOE project's researchers: Aïssatou Mbodj, who lives and works in Paris.

Aïssatou Mbodj suggested Swarowsky should come in June of this year because of the *3eme édition du Festival de Cinéma dans les Foyers de travailleurs migrants* organized by [Attention Chantier](#) taking place in the foyers – migrant hostels mostly used by West African migrants, often sans-papiers. Aïssatou Mbodj wanted to introduce Swarowsky to her sites of research, which are usually not open to the public.

THE CURATOR'S ACCOUNT

"As a first step and to learn what has been already produced around this topic, with lots of input from Aïssatou, I researched artistic, photographic, and journalistic productions around the theme of West African migration to and within Paris, especially from Mali and Senegal, not exclusively related to the foyers. During the viewing and research process I came to the conclusion that there is already something like a 'genre' of representation of otherness and migration and decided to take this as my research question. I wanted to explore whether "the visual representation of (African) migration as a genre" was a topic



© Vicent Leroux, from his series "La Commanderie"

for French image producers. Was it a blind spot worth exploring? To what degree did they question the images reproduced by the media and to what degree did they struggle not to reproduce these clichés?

With this research question in mind I set out, partly with, partly without Aïssatou, to have meetings with artists, photographers, journalists, gallerists, and other cultural players. While viewing a lot of work around the aforementioned issues, I interviewed the artists, asking how they approached the African migrants, how they had earlier imagined depicting them, and what audience they bore in mind.

Apart from these meetings, I had a few random encounters and discussions with mostly illegal migrants from North and West Africa, learning about their struggles and witnessing some brutal police operations at a demonstration in support of Tunisian sans papiers as well as the *Marché aux Voleurs*, a meeting place for migrants and a daily flea market where illegal migrants try to sell second-hand items to assure themselves a daily meal and to avoid ending in criminality."

Daniela Swarowsky, August 2011

FROM THE RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

"I took this moment as a chance to re-visit places I had already been to, benefiting from Daniela's perspective: an expert look at artistic works and performances but also a refreshing approach, since Daniela is not completely immersed in the French debates. One of the challenges of the project is considering how to bring these debates back to Berlin in a way that will make sense to a wider European audience. Daniela's connections also opened up new contacts for me on my own fieldwork site and made me enter new spaces. Among many interesting discussions and encounters, I particularly appreciated the meeting with [Anissa Michalon](#) and Claire Soton, two photographers whom Daniela had previously identified and whose works sounded quite in line with my approach to West African migrants' experiences and lives between one foyer and one village in Mali. The meeting proved extremely interesting and will be followed by further discussions and exchanges to assess the

possibility of a collaboration. As a whole, for me this experience was an exciting way to approach my own fieldwork in a different way. The daily discussions and informal talks with Daniela while going to an appointment or visiting an exhibition space were also

good moments to share impressions on the spot, as well as to get a better understanding of the exhibition project and its process, as well as Daniela's way of working."

Aïssatou Mbodj, September 2011



© Anissa Michalon, from series "Natifs de Bada" in collaboration w/Claire Soton

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Let us talk about some conclusions! Aïssatou Mbodj and Daniela Swarowsky are considering setting up two events in two locations in 2012 that could be suitable to test their ideas: the first is the yearly Filmfestival at the Foyers, which they found an interesting setting for a possible ISOE pre-event in 2012. They suggested to the director of the organization a collaboration in which they would be in charge of one evening during the festival, screening two films and organizing a debate related to Aïssatou Mbodj's research and Daniela Swarowsky's theme.

The challenge would be to communicate their ideas to the mainly West African audience at the Foyer and to see how to engage with them in a way fruitful for both sides. They would invite other researchers and cultural activists to join them in preparing the debate. The second idea was to organize a discursive event in a cultural/art setting around Daniela Swarowsky's theme "The visual representation of (African) migration / otherness as a genre", inviting French image producers (artists, photographers, anthropologists, journalists) and theoreticians.

The third result of their research was the encounter between Aïssatou Mbodj and the artists/photographers Anissa Michalon and Claire Soton, whose impressive body of photographic work around Malian-Parisian migration qualifies them as interesting artistic collaborators for Mbodj in the exhibition.

Daniela Swarowsky's and Aïssatou Mbodj's ongoing task is to follow up on the connections established in Paris, negotiate with the prospective collaborators, and develop their ideas for the Paris 2012 events further.

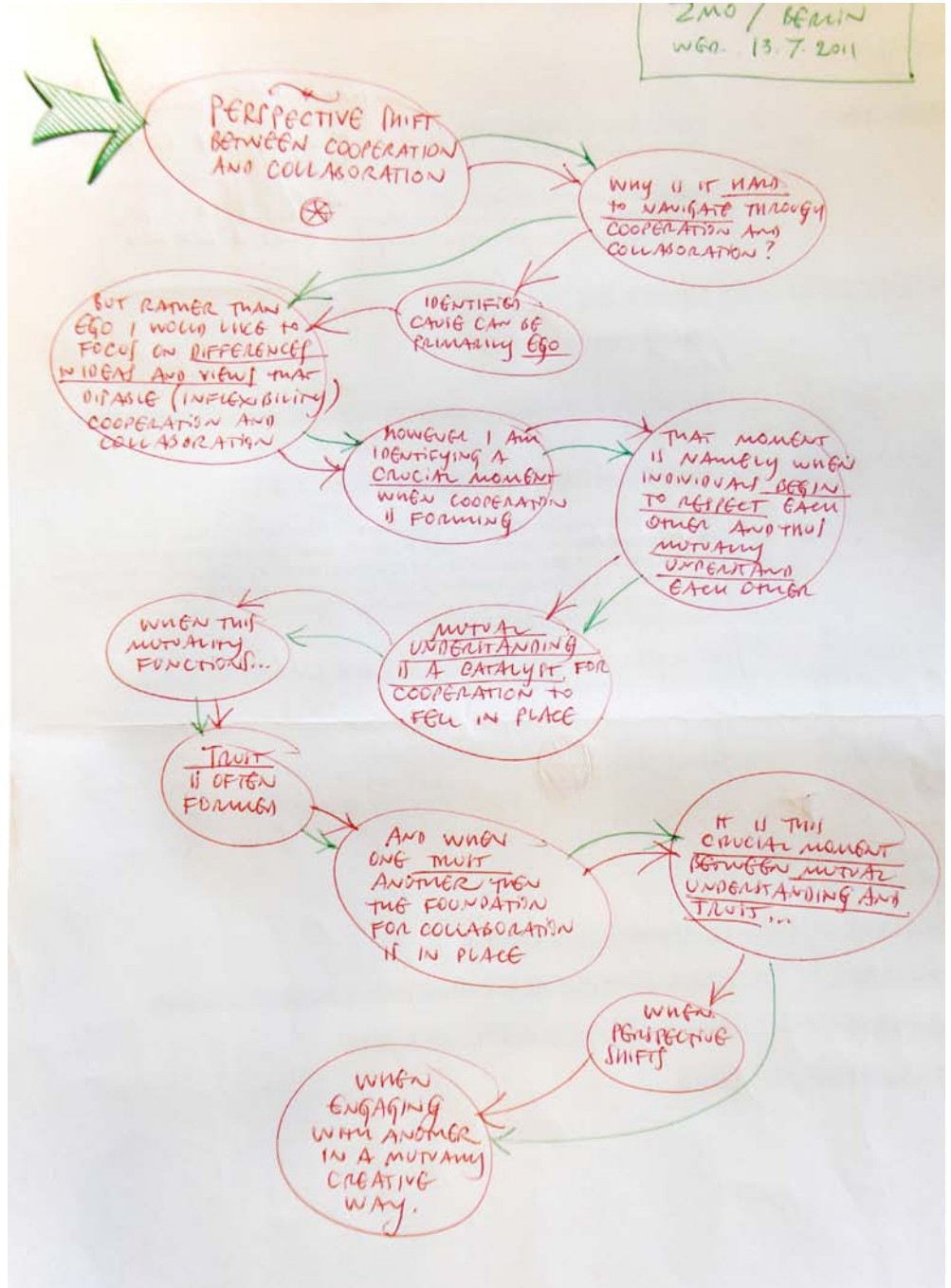
WORKSHOP: COLLABORATION OR COOPERATION?

Daniela Swarowsky initiated a workshop for the research group at the ZMO on 13 and 14 July. Her intention was to focus on collaborative practices in the arts, look into the conceptual differences between collaboration and cooperation, and reduce the skepticism about this subject still found among some researchers. Daniela Swarowsky invited two guest artists, with whom she conceived the 2-day workshop: **Karem Ibrahim** and **Metod Blejec**, both based in London. They were not only invited to present their own work, but also to moderate and intensify the discussion about possible collaboration between art and science within the project.

To provide more insight, we will zoom into one of the many sections of this workshop: Metod Blejec's "Walk & Talk", his strategy to vitalize the exchange of ideas. The instruction was that one artist and one researcher form a couple and walk for half an hour around the Rehwiess, a meadow close to the ZMO, trying to find common ground.

FEEDBACK AFTER THE WORKSHOP

"The three days we worked hard really bore a lot of fruit, I think. I believe we all got the most out of it. In regard to the researchers, I think they did really well. As skeptical as they seemed at first, they made the most of our time together as I can hear in their feedback. I rarely meet people who are so inquisitive! Bettina, Vanessa and Leyla were really asking the right questions (...). I felt they left after those two days informed and excited about their cooperation/ collaboration endeavors with artists in the



© Mapping by Metod Blejec, July 2011

future. We managed to make a whole lot of difference (I think), made many points clearer, and closed the divides between arts and science a little bit."

Metod Blejec

"The Walk & Talk with Metod Blejec was

very illuminating. Before this talk I had no concrete idea what a cooperation or collaboration between a researcher and an artist could look like. During the Walk & Talk (...) I lost many of my reservations about collaboration. Especially because we agreed that a collaboration

has to start (...) with a dialogue between two individuals - independently from their positions as researchers or artists. To start such a collaboration as 'Leyla' and not as 'Leyla, the researcher' seems much more fruitful, because then it is possible to take a much more open approach."

Leyla von Mende after walking with Metod Blejec

"...This was like an exercise for field-work: how to make an artist talk. The questions I asked are my research questions..."

Vanessa Diaz after her walk with An Seebach, German artist and assistant to the curator

"We touched all kind of subjects around our work(s). I guess our main concern was how one could become/be/stay innovative and meaningful with one's own projects. I liked it because it was the first time I made this round with a colleague at Rehweise and I think I would do it again if I really want to

discuss something with somebody. Of course it was too short in order to be substantial. It was also too short in order to formulate further questions. I understood that art is about ideas, intervention, and being playful. And in

comparison research is about comprehension, being serious and not as much subjective."

Bettina Gräf after her walk with Karem Ibrahim



© Metod Blejec

ISOE PROJECT TEAM

RESEARCHERS

Dr. Samuli Schielke, ZMO Berlin, head of ISOE
Dr. Bettina Gräf, ZMO Berlin
Leyla von Mende, M.A., ZMO Berlin
Vanessa Diaz, M.A., ZMO Berlin
Dr. Knut Graw, Catholic University of Leuven
Dr. Aissatou Mbodj, CNRS, Paris

EXHIBITION

Daniela Swarowsky ZMO Berlin, curator and producer exhibition
An Seebach, ZMO Berlin, curatorial assistant

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EXHIBITION LOCATION

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