

my view on
**under
standing
over
views**

A site-specific installation of collected pieces of paint, black silk-threads and spotlights. Commissioned by the 9th Sharjah Biennial 2009

Tunis, Berlin, Bizerte, Paris, Cologne, Kiev, Venice, Marseilles and Naples are some of several urban spots where I collected pieces of paint for *under standing over views*, a site-specific installation, which I showed at the Ninth Sharjah Biennial 2009. I collected the fragile slices of paint fallen off walls throughout residencies and journeys I made in the last three years. They are hardly to consider as fragments of ruins, but rather they testify in the permanently “evolving” state of a city, its typical kind of gestation and hustle that match together the decompositions and reconstructions of urban spaces at the same time.

Finally, the cartographic figure of the United Arab Emirates will give the shape to the collected fragments of paint from several European and African cities. The map hovers 2,10 m above the floor; the overlaid and juxtaposed paint slices are hanging on black silk threads from a grid that is installed under the ceiling of the exhibition space. The size of this floating plain is about 16 m², this means that the entire form too large to be capture at once. Above the map three spotlights project light and, hence, create a shadow on walls and floor. Thus the visitors can hardly get an “overview” of the mapping. Certainly, they are free to get an impression out of an ample distance to the swarm object but what they get is a deformed image in which the swarm of paint slices is inseparably linked to a shimmering shadow. On the other hand they can turn around and place themselves “under” the installation to examine particular details of the different pieces of paint but even then it is not possible to match them together into an objective image of the whole cluster of fragments, its body and space.

This rather aesthetical aspect seems to correspond with the subject of different countries and mobility, itinerancy or—in a more politically used word—the reality of migration. Like the viewer, who cannot see the real form of the installation immigrants often do not have a clear idea of the target country but a certain imagination which is carried by hopes, myths and prejudices, and deformed by the geographical and cultural distance. But when they experience life in a different country and culture the get only particular insights, which cannot easily be matched into a global view on the region. Since they are moving and their points of view are changing they can create a proximate image to the reality of other countries and cultures, which never becomes entirely visible.

With *under standing over views* I intend to work on the tensions between actual perception collective memories, the splitted experience of different countries and cultures and the common geographical and cultural identities attributed to particular regions. I try to explore the shadow as an analogy to the made-up geo-political representation and policies in the sense of classifying individuals with abstract statements and objects such as nations, religions, ethnicities, etc. in other words the cartographic language and the representational knowledge. My work is opposed to views, which transmute into overviews and prejudices by forgetting or neglecting the complexity and the unique character of a context, region and situation. It’s an attempt to express the impossibility and the uselessness of defining a point of view instead of getting the chance to understand the particular insights, details, and the diversity and complexity of each geopolitical social and cultural situation.

The idea for the installation evolved slowly. First, there has been the collecting of slices of paint for more than three years without any clear idea what for. But in my artistic practice I am used to collect groups of things and objects without a decisive purpose. In some cases the work will end up

not until many years or not at all. This was also the case of my collection of the fallen pieces of paint. The idea what to do with them triggered in my mind when I thought about sending some of the Berlin pieces to a friend of mine who lives in Marocco. He too is an artist who also is gathering a great deal of things in his art studio. I was thinking about my letter and the description of the pieces of paint and I wanted to attach a sample. This is how the idea of the interrelationship of the circulation of things and mobility came across the problematic of borders and migration, geographical identities and the real experience of living in different countries and cultures, and the exploitation of foreign workers and the difficulties of integration came up to my mind.

The interpretation and the perception of *under standing over views* are intimately correlated to the symbolic aspect of colors, material and the shape of the cluster. I understand the pieces of paint as the first degree of the idea of painting since they have lost their support and as they are made of time and pigment and embody the action of coating and *painting*. The various wall units or pieces of paint represent the major material with which I wanted to realize the installation. Each piece was fragile and had to be solidified with paper and glue for the transport and the hanging in Sharjah.

The work is a site-specific (in-situ) not in the sense of a determinate space but of a country. The installation is therefore not only possible in Sharjah but also in some other places in the UAE. The idea of this work is intimately related to my experience in Dubai and in Sharjah between the years 1990 to 1995, when I was 12 to 17 years old. Treating the impressions of the adolescent who I was, the project evokes some of the serious issues I personally was confronted with: the first gulf war, the Emirates as a melting pot for numerous nationalities, traditions, languages, etc., and of course the problems and chances of immigration and integration. The self-referential problematic, which erases here would be contradictory if the project would be realized elsewhere. *Under standing over views* would transmute into overviews and the mapping would switch from the negation into a confirmation of geographical identities represented by the abstract cartographic language. Thus the original place for this installation can only be in the United Arab Emirates.