

A River Runs Between Our Streets #2

15 Days

Imran Perretta, 2018, 12 min, digital

UK

15 days is inspired by the time that Imran spent in Calais with former inhabitants of the refugee camp known as the Jungle, who are now living in surrounding woodland.

'There's a canon of imagery around the crisis that deals with abjection and pain and sorrow and borders and police and violence, reaching its apex at the moment that the Alan Kurdi photo came out (the young boy that was found washed up on the shores of the Mediterranean). Depicting a migrant in the wake of that canon of imagery is incredibly problematic. The public imagination has been poisoned by so many of these images and as such it's impossible to show someone without the weight of prejudice on their shoulders, written all over their face.

The visual material that we ended up archiving was actually a complete absence of humanity. On a sort of ideological level but also on a physiological level. There were literally no humans there. We were going into the camps and filming after they'd been evacuated, which is the terminology that the police use. There was also a record of the violence and the struggle between groups of people, so in a way we are working with a completely different visual canon around the crisis that wasn't one of human misery and the huddled masses, it was actually what's left behind once the state intervenes and that's something that I think has not really been documented in the way that we managed to do it, as people that were afforded the privilege of being able to just walk in.'

— Imran Perretta, *Migrant Agency and the Moving Image*, Arts in Society 2018.

Nocturnal White Hunter / Nocturne Blanc-Chasseur

Sylvain George, 2015, 24 min, digital

France

In the dark night, near the docks of Calais, a young man

recounts his journey, before the police interrupt him and make arrests.

[Calais] is a city that has been the site of numerous representations in the media, whether documentary or fictional. Representations that do not suit me. Either because they identify with the dominant powers or because they privilege the "spectacular," or even because they adopt a sentimental, humanitarian, or miserabilist approach to the realities, portraying the migrants not as political subjects, but as victims. I radically reject all of these forms of overreaching positions. The intolerable realities that exist in Calais stem directly from political decisions, from public policies, and not from fate or destiny. Going to Calais for me consists at once in a work of dismantling certain representations, and as much as possible, in producing awareness and knowledge through a careful presentation. This is cannot be dissociated from taking ethical, aesthetic, and political positions.

Sylvain Georges studied philosophy and worked as a social worker until he turned to film making in 2004. Since then he has made a sustained body of work interrogating themes of migration, social movements and representation.

— *ENTRETIEN SIGNAL: An Interview with filmmaker Sylvain George* by Caitlin Horsmon and Jason Livingston, 2013

And Their Letters / Et Leurs Lettres

Mieriën Coppens & Elie Maissin, 2023, 23 min, digital, Belgium

A short film as part of a wider project, resulting from a dedicated and long-term collaboration with the Brussels activist collective *La Voix des Sans-Papiers*.

Over the years, Coppens and Maissin have collected dozens of hours of vulnerable film material, of which they ultimately use only a few minutes. This is related to the interplay between inside and outside, between light and dark. Filming is not the same as making movies. Editing, the process in which they refine the filmed material, requires taking a position once again.

It is a form of revisiting, re-evaluating, and reflecting. For this, it is crucial that they do not work alone but as a pair, engaging in continuous dialogue. This dialogue extends to the people they film, spend time with, grow older alongside, live a life with, and learn to observe and listen to. These individuals are members of the collective *La Voix des Sans-Papiers*. Life with the collective extends from the houses and rooms where they work, eat, and film to the editing room—their worlds interweaving. They assert that they don't create the films they desire; instead, they claim that 'les images sont résistantes,' as if it is the images themselves that resist.

— Pieter Van Bogaert, *The survival of the fireflies* in HART 2022

Mobile Men

Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2008, 3 min, digital
Thailand

Commissioned by *Art for the World*, a UN aligned NGO briefed with fostering artistic understanding of human rights, as part of a larger portmanteau project *Stories on Human Rights*.

For these [migrant workers] mobility itself is something like a political act. The title could serve as a double pun, alluding to the edicts banning the ownership of mobile phones (the video itself has the snatched look of a mobile movie) as well as the restrictions in individual travel. But as much as an act of defiance against the military authorities, the transformative act of movement equally offers a release from the dismal realities of the static world.

— Rob Dennis, *Mobile Men: Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Migrant* in Vertigo v.4, 2009

Crossings

Robert Fenz, 2006/7, 10 min, digital
USA

Crossings is an abstract portrait of the border wall. Both sides are confronted. The film is a short installment on a larger project that investigates insularity in both geographical and cultural terms. It is also my short reflection on *From the Other Side*, a film I worked on in 2002 by Chantal Akerman (filmed at the United States-Mexico border).

— Robert Fenz

Atlantiques

Mati Diop, 2009, 16 min, digital
France / Senegal

A story about boys who are continually travelling: between past, present and future, between life and death, history and myth. The short film is a direct precursor to Diop's debut feature, *Atlantique*, which focuses on the experience of the women who are left behind as their male counterparts emigrate.

Diop's films blend together fiction and non-fiction, the mythic and the every day. This is a way of extending generosity into a world that sorely lacks it – even at her most surreal, fantasies are not so much about a flight from the world as imagining how it could be better. Both *Atlantique* and the short film that precedes it are about dreams foreclosed at the very moment they are opened. Tangible dreams about gaining a better future are dampened by the knowledge that other things must therefore end, while the dream of crossing the Atlantic itself contains the possibility of death. Young men leave for Europe, and women reshuffle their lives in their wake. Through layered, textured storytelling, Diop explores what closure might look like in worlds where economic inequality and political violence have made such abrupt endings so common.

— *Mati Diop's 'Atlantique' ('Atlantics') Turns To The Women Left Behind* in Another Gaze, 2019

Tell Me the Story of All These Things

Rehana Zaman, 2017, 22 min, digital,
UK

Tell me the story Of all of these things attends to the strategies of social conditioning that affect how we analyse bodies, identities and relationships. It brings together a staged cooking demonstration, a nebulous animated body, screenshots from Prevent's e-learning website (the UK government's 'anti-radicalisation' programme) and an intimate, candid interview with the artist's sister Farah. As Farah relates the roles she has performed throughout her life - as mother, wife, house/worker, single woman, and skier - the narrative is interposed by a swaying and amorphous simulation of a female figure. Moving through a pixelated camouflage background the figure executes a series of banal and embodied movements – speaking on the phone,

dancing and walking with a particular set of purposes. Exploring the social structures and performances of identity in modern society, the film presents lived experience as constituted by processes of disassembly.

— Rehana Zaman *Speaking Nearby* exhibition guide, CCA Glasgow, 2018

Oumoun

El Moïz Ghammam & Fairuz Ghammam, 2017, 15 min, digital, Belgium / Tunisia

Fairuz Ghammam plays the recording of a spoken letter to her elderly grandmother in Mahdia, Tunisia.

The untranslated recording in Arabic at the beginning narrates aspects of Grandmother Houda's life that are obscured within the image of her as an old woman. For Arabic-speaking audiences, the recording infuses the image of Grandmother Houda with a consequential past that perhaps seems inconsistent with the cluttered decor of her dwelling or with the banal nature of her conversation present in the time of the film's viewing. For a viewer who does not understand Arabic, these aspects of her life remain hidden in the present image onscreen until the recording is played a second time with English translation. (I do not know whether the film has subtitles in other languages as well.) For the non-Arabic-speaking viewer, it is only at the end of the film when, upon receiving the translation of the recording, Grandmother Houda's past is returned to her image. The image itself remains a static, medium shot of her throughout the short film, but the subtitles of Fairuz's recorded letter allows non-Arabic-speaking viewers to perceive something else in the image of Grandmother Houda. We can perceive something of the futures she set in motion, whether by sending her sons to Europe, participating in the trade unions, living under French colonization, or raising her large family.

— Kara Keeling, *Making Future Love Tonight and the Cosmic Audience* in *Woche de Kritik*, 2021

Sorry, My Somali Is Not Very Good

Warda Mohamed, 2021, 3 min, digital
UK

A young Somali woman has trouble with her mother tongue and gets the encouragement she needs on a phone call with her father.

Learning To Speak to My Daughter (Mother's Dictionary)

Sophio Medoidze, 2006, 3 min, digital
UK

How to speak to your bilingual daughter when your English is not good? Sophio Medoidze records the phrases she overheard other mothers say to their children and re-enacts them in her kitchen.

International Dawn Chorus Day

John Greyson, 2021, 15 min, digital
Canada

On May 2, 2020, at the height of the first lockdown, two news stories grabbed my attention. First, that a filmmaker named Shady Habash had died in suspicious circumstances in Egypt's notorious Tora prison. Second, that the next day would celebrate the 36th annual International Dawn Chorus Day.

For me, these two stories combined to deliver a peculiar gut punch. Seven years earlier, I'd been locked up in that same prison, jailed in a roundup with hundreds of others in the aftermath of the Rabaa Square Massacre. As I learned more about Shady's life and work and death, and watched his videos, and read his final despairing letters that friends had smuggled out of prison, his words viscerally brought back memories of Tora. Staring at the dawn ceiling, watching the night shadows recede into the cool grey of morning. Straining to hear the faint call of the dawn chorus. "Prison doesn't kill, loneliness does."

I emailed friends and family on six continents, asking them to record their dawn choruses the next morning, shooting on their phones. 40 responded, bemused by the request, perhaps welcoming a change from the daily grind of their lockdown routines. Gathering the footage, my editor Kalil and I started to shape their clips into a whimsical zoom-grid, premised on the idea that birds from around the world had gathered to talk about Shady, trading theories, and questions about what might have happened.

And then, a month later, Sarah Hegazi took her life. I was part of an ad-hoc queer group in Toronto, providing support to the dozen LGBT refugees from Cairo who'd just arrived, fleeing Sisi's dictatorship. They'd

been arrested the year before for flying a rainbow flag at a Mashrou Leila concert. Sarah was one of them, and I'd met her a couple of times. She was unforgettable -- intense, passionate, deeply committed to radical change, tortured by nightmares of the three months she'd spent in prison, battling her demons the warmest of brave smiles.

Filming at her memorial, I was overwhelmed by the anecdotes and tears that poured forth from so many. She had touched many hearts and lives. Yet nothing could prepare any of us for the groundswell of tributes that followed, a wave across Europe and the Americas and the Arab world, in the months to come: vigils, concerts, songs, murals, poems. Bird songs.

For me, the stories of Shady and Sarah are bird songs, swooping and dipping like swallows at sunrise, joining the flock of so many Egyptian activists and artists, wrongfully incarcerated by the regime. In January this year, a Cairo chef was arrested for making cupcakes with penis decorations. In February, a film editor faced her eighth month behind bars, locked up for trying to deliver a letter to her brother, also imprisoned. Last week, the prisoners of Scorpion wing voted to continue their hunger strike, protesting the overcrowding.

International Dawn Chorus Day is dedicated to Shady and Sarah and to every Egyptian enduring the horrors of wrongful detention.

— John Greyson

This project is co-funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. Making management of migration flows more efficient across the European Union.