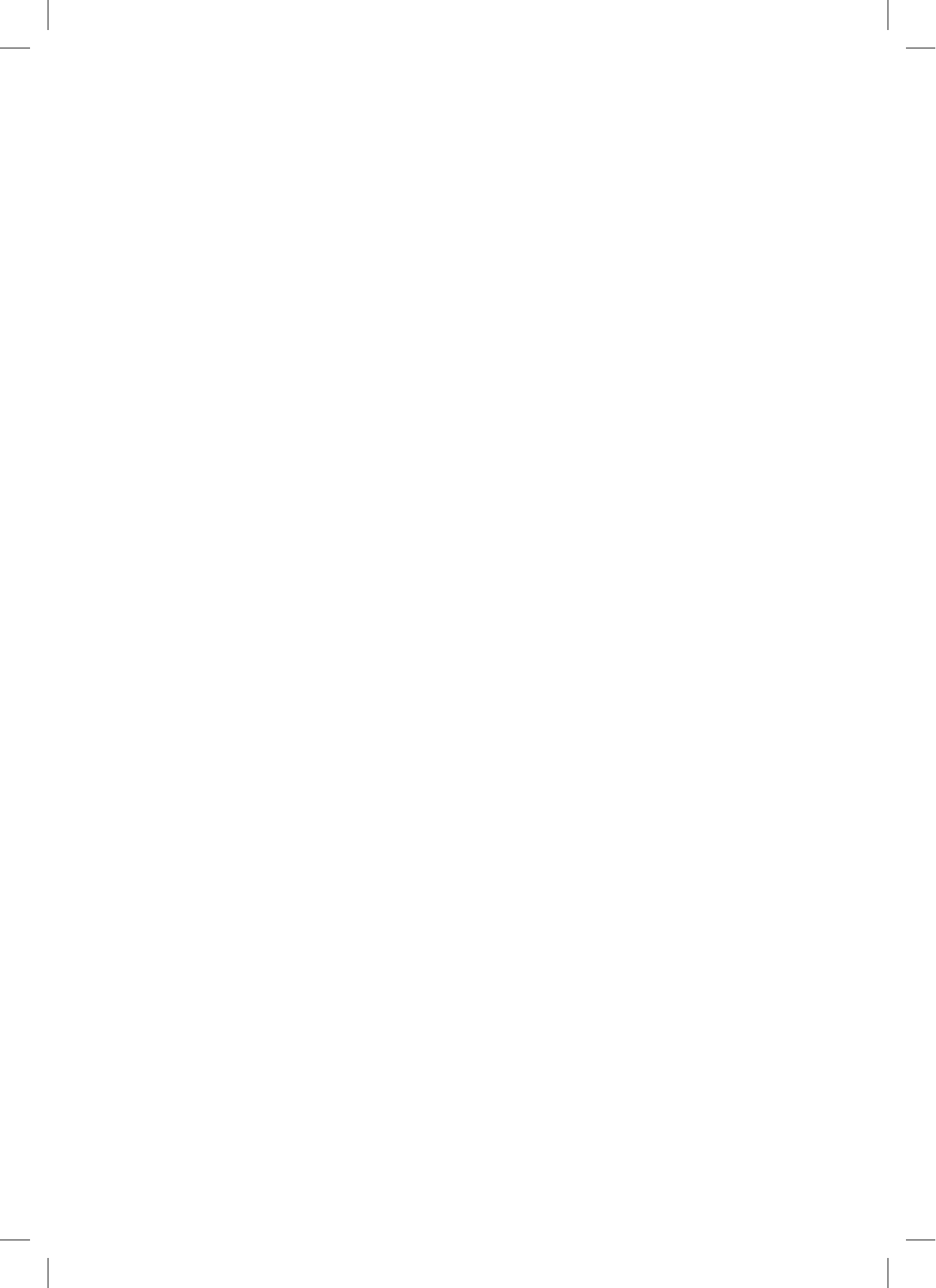


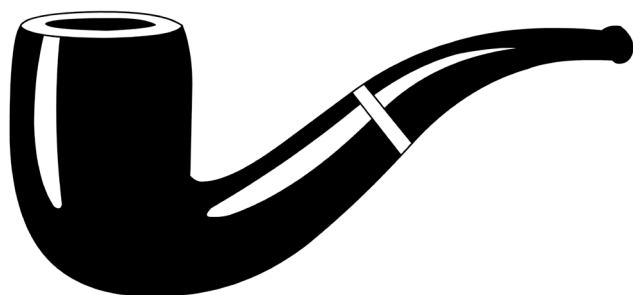
Crawl2: Three Moves

Francis Alÿs | Arlo Mountford | Gemma Smith

13 Nov - 4 Dec

BOXCOPY | 2010





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Previous page: Arlo Mountford | *Passed optimism*, (detail) 2010
Digital prints on acetate and overhead projector | Dimensions variable | Collection of the artist

Above: Arlo Mountford | *The Triumph* (still) 2010
Single channel video installation, 16:9 HD, stereo, 9:11 minutes | Collection of the artist

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CRAWL2: THREE MOVES

Arlo Mountford has a talent for playfully tearing history books into confetti and marvelling at the combinations left on the ground. Mountford takes Pieter Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death* c.1562 as the backdrop for his animated work *The Triumph* 2010. In Bruegel's work, skeletons ravage the landscape and though the people are dying from different means, they all face the same end. In Mountford's work, the skeletons are replaced by black stick figures. They hold shields, wear tunics, wave flags and banners, carry placards under their arms and storm across the screen with flaming torches that have *Fountain*, *Brillo box*, *Black square*, Oppenheim's fur-lined cup and saucer, and other iconic artworks stamped upon them. Alongside corpses, works by Picasso, Calder, Andre, Smithson, and others litter the landscape.

Songs of revolution fade into the soundtrack by Jimi Hendrix, Patti Smith, and Woody Guthrie. This mélange of radical ideas across generations reminds us that each one has its own revolutionary impetus, which the following generation use as a jumping off point for their own rebellion. These failed revolutions, both social and artistic, are not mourned by Mountford; instead he tips his comic hat to them. In *The Triumph* we watch modernist art stars superseded by characters with genitals for faces, but we know that even the Chapman brothers will face the same end.

Francis Alÿs is another artist who makes an appearance in *The Triumph* with a can of dripping green paint. A reference to *The green line* 2004 in which Alÿs walks across Jerusalem redrawing the green line the Israeli Minister of Defence drew on a map as part of the ceasefire following the 1948-49 Arab-Israeli war. Alÿs recently uploaded many of his moving image works onto his website www.francisalys.com, some of which are restricted to online viewing, while others are in the public domain free to download in accordance with creative commons licences.¹ This generosity

of spirit has enabled the screening of *The Modern Procession* 2002 (single channel version) as part of this touring exhibition. It documents a Sunday morning procession on 23 June 2002 in which living artist Kiki Smith and (reproductions of) Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*, and Alberto Giacometti's *Standing Woman #2* were carried on palanquins by art lovers. They were transported from the Museum of Modern Art's residence in Manhattan through the streets of New York and over the Queensboro Bridge to its temporary location in Queens. The mood was set by a Peruvian brass band, which called New Yorkers out of their houses and neighbourhoods to join the swelling crowd. By taking MoMA's icons to the streets and by making *The Modern Procession* freely available to download, Alÿs does away with the singularity of modernist masterpieces by making them freely accessible to all.

While this work can be linked to religious pilgrimages all over the world, it ends with a few quick shots of religious icons, clad in tinsel and tied to pilgrims' backs as they walk along the side of a busy highway in Mexico. Alÿs declared that *The Modern Procession* was created to 'welcome MoMA's most sacred icons to the Periphery'. It is a celebration of MoMA's move to a radically different socio-economic neighbourhood; Queens has a higher than average African American and Hispanic population and the largest Asian community in all of the suburbs of New York. In this sense the work is also a playful nod to the modernist art histories that have been written from outside Europe and North America.

While Mountford and Alÿs play with the iconic art works of the movement, no discussion of modernism would be complete without touching on the specific concerns of painting. Gemma Smith paints Duchamp's infamous career change to full-time chess player back into the art world in her chessboard paintings. Smith's first move is to paint a geometric shape onto the surface of a chessboard and it is from here that the game begins. She plays each following shape and colour off against one another and the grid below them.

Smith literally paints on and over the grid that held the modernists under its sway. Her loop paintings rely on the same logic, they begin with a surface painting and become like the grid of the chessboard. Smith then builds on this, carefully making her moves in loops of paint, negotiating what has already been put down and affecting all the moves that will follow. Through this process, Smith takes the sternness of modernism and turns it into a playful dance of colour.

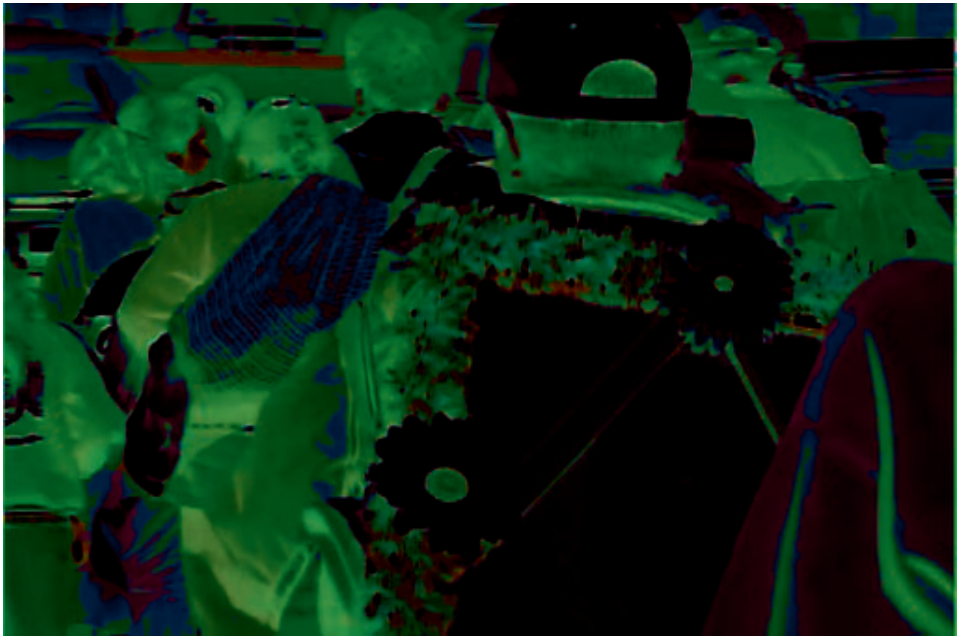
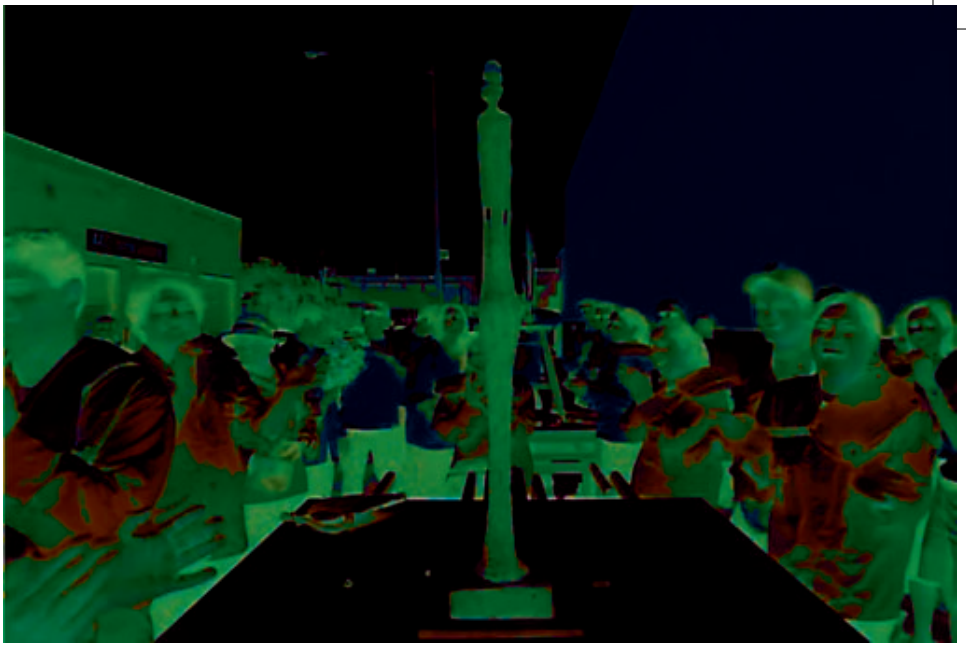
While the works in this exhibition are all touched by elements of modernism, the weight of history has not become a beast of burden. All three artists are able to tap into it with a sense of playfulness, and this is what makes their work so alluring.

Ellie Buttrose

1. 'These videos can be downloaded and shared with others as long as the authorship is credited and there is a link back to the website of the author. These videos cannot be altered in any way or used for commercial purpose.' www.francisalys.com



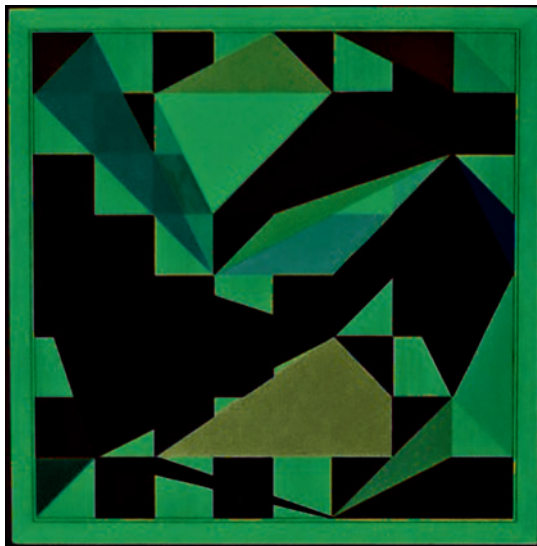
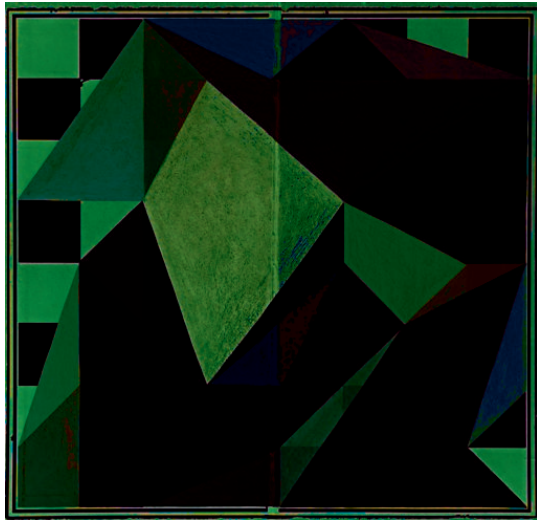
Francis Alys | *The Modern Procession* (stills) 2002 | Single channel version, 7:30 minutes
Courtesy of the artist (www.francisalys.com) and Creative Commons





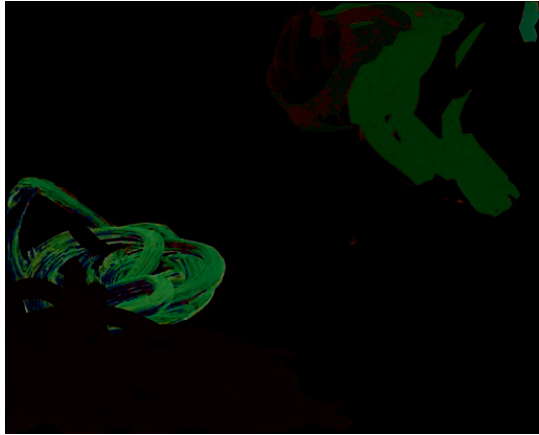
Arlo Mountford | *The Triumph* (still) 2010
Single channel video installation, 16:9 HD, stereo, 9:11 minutes | Collection of the artist





Top: Gemma Smith | *Chessboard painting (folding)* 2007-10
Synthetic polymer paint on chessboard | 41 x 42.2cm | Collection of the artist

Bottom: Gemma Smith | *Chessboard painting #11* 2008
Synthetic polymer paint on wooden chessboard | 40 x 40cm | Collection of the artist



Top: Gemma Smith | *Loop* 2010
Synthetic polymer paint on board | 34 x 27.5cm | Collection of the artist

Bottom: Gemma Smith | *Soft battle* 2010
Synthetic polymer paint on board | 34 x 27.5cm | Private collection, Brisbane



Arlo Mountford | *The Triumph* (still) 2010
Single channel video installation, 16:9 HD, stereo, 9:11 minutes | Collection of the artist

From the utopian ambitions of the modernist movement through pop culture piss-take and the confusion of life in the 21st century, each artist in *Three Moves* engages with a dizzying spectrum of forms and ideas. Works by Arlo Mountford, Gemma Smith, and Francis Alÿs all muck around with Marcel Duchamp's famous maxim that 'art is a game', variously poking fun at, reconfiguring, or playing with an array of visual referents, from the familiar to the foreign.

These artists have all embarked upon meticulously researched projects spanning diverse conceptual gestures. In his version of a modern day procession for instance, Alÿs sends replicas of iconic 20th century artworks on an amble through the streets of New York. This gently mocking indictment of the art cult sees masterworks born aloft by a throng of po faced 'believers', who each play their parts with aplomb: from the respectfully reverent to the beatifically beaming. The marchers' measured pace is set by a brass band, and their path strewn with rose petals – fanfare deliberately reminiscent of a saints day celebration. This act of public worship, albeit recontextualised and thrice-removed, retains the utopian spirit of the procession, along with its ability to reinvigorate spiritual faith through spectacle. With this simple action and appreciation of the carnivalesque, Alÿs seeks to truly democratize the sacred space of the art gallery by doing away with it altogether.

Modernist mockery is again at work in Mountford's gleefully apocalyptic animation, where Pieter Bruegel's iconic painting *The Triumph of Death* c.1562 is willfully mashed up with tongue-in-cheek references drawn from art history and trash culture alike. Mountford applies his typically sardonic and witty approach to explore the contextual relationship between contemporary art practice and its perceived past. Abstracted figures – sometimes identifiable as idols and artists – take aesthetic cues to shift between scenes, appropriating ideas and images along the way. Indeed, 'name that reference' could keep you entertained for hours on end, so dense are the visual layers that comprise this animated wunderkammer. From art history in-joke and artist cameo to pop culture romp, this is a one-stop shop where 'everything must go', ransacked by roaming hoards of near-featureless stick figures familiar from toilet doors everywhere.

Like Mountford, Smith too subverts art history for her own purposes. The chessboard is at once a 'found' surface and home to an inventive game of push and pull between spatially interconnected geometric forms. Though these works appear detached and cool in their intent, they are the product of chance as much as anything else, and Smith's desire to play is the spark for her intuitive creativity. This quality has been taken to its (il)logical extreme in later paintings, where Smith chases a series of casual doodles across the ground, stream of consciousness style. Her playful methodology remains unchanged however, and the 'found' forms in this instance are her own loosely conceived underpaintings, reimagined variously as gestural tangles of exuberant colour. Smith's painterly games pay homage to the visual language of the 20th century avant-garde, yet at the same time are subject to an idiosyncratic set of rules that pivot on the point of ambiguity, between the real and the illusory, the casual and the formal, the structured and the free-form.

In each of these radically different processes, the artists engage with historical narratives and cultural paradigms in order to unravel their structures and send them spinning off in new directions – presenting elusive scenarios that abound with interpretive potential. Rather than breaking free from the past, these artists meet it head on, mining the annals of art history in order to 'make it new' – to ham it up, break it open, and take it out to the streets. Three artists, three moves: It's a nonsensical game between irony and intellect where art wins hands down.

Bree Richards



Arlo Mountford | *Passed optimism* (detail) 2010
Digital prints on acetate and overhead projector | Dimensions variable | Collection of the artist

Melbourne-based artist **Arlo Mountford** employs a witty and often sardonic approach to explore the contextual relationship between contemporary art practice and its perceived past, working primarily with interactive installation paired with sound, video and animation. Mountford has exhibited regularly since 2002, and his work has been shown in a number of significant group exhibitions including: 'NEW010', Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2010); 'Contemporary Australia: Optimism', Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2008); and '21st Century Modern: Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art', Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (2006). Mountford's most recent solo exhibitions have been at Centre of Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (2009); Grantpirrie, Sydney (2009); The Art Centre Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok (2009); Conical, Melbourne (2008); and Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne (2007).

Gemma Smith is well-known for exuberantly coloured sculptures and paintings that play with pictorial depth and geometric abstraction. Smith's work has been shown extensively throughout Australia, featuring in major group exhibitions including: 'Cubism & Australian Art', Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen (2010); 'Temperature 2', Museum of Brisbane, Brisbane (2009); 'Contemporary Australia: Optimism', Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2008); and 'Primavera', Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2008). Smith has recently held solo shows at Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney (2008, 2010); Milani Gallery, Brisbane (2008, 2010); and Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne (2009).

Born in Belgium and now based in Mexico City, **Francis Alÿs** has produced a complex body of work that uses allegorical and poetic methods to address social and political realities. A simple action is often the starting point for his practice, either by the artist or others, which is then documented in a range of media spanning video, painting, performance and drawing. Alÿs has been the subject of several major solo exhibitions at WIELS Centre d'Art Contemporain, Belgium (2010); Tate Modern, London (2010); UCLA Hammer, Los Angeles (2007); Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg (2003); and Museum of Modern Art, New York (2002). Alÿs has been included in major biennales including São Paulo (1998, 2005); Istanbul (1999, 2001); and Venice (1999, 2001, 2007); as well as numerous international group exhibitions.

Boxcopy is dedicated to supporting artists in developing experimental and innovative practices.

Ellie Buttrose and **Bree Richards** are independent exhibition makers and writers who currently work at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. They would like to thank the artists and acknowledge the support of the teams at Crawl, Seventh, and Boxcopy, Zoe de Luca, Coral Gillett, Mellissa Kavenagh, and Ben Wickes.

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Francis Alÿs | Arlo Mountford | Gemma Smith

Curated by Ellie Buttrose & Bree Richards

13 November - 4 December 2010

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