

PHOTO, MEDIA AND DIGITAL ART

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For Immediate Release (April 29, 2015)

YTO BARRADA EXAMINES THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF MOROCCO IN NEW EXHIBITION AT PREFIX

(Toronto) – **Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art**, in partnership with A Space Gallery, is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in Canada by award-winning French-Moroccan artist **Yto Barrada**. Featuring a selection of photographs and video installations, this dual-venue exhibition is curated by Scott McLeod and Vicky Moufawad-Paul and presented as a primary exhibition of the Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival.

The **first opening reception** for the exhibition will be held on **Thursday, May 7 from 7 to 10 PM** at **Prefix**, located at 401 Richmond Street West, Suite 124, Toronto. The curators will be present. The gallery is open from Wednesday to Saturday, 12 to 5 PM, and admission is free. The exhibition continues until **July 25, 2015**. The **second opening reception** for the exhibition will be held on **Friday, May 22, 2015, from 6 to 8 PM** at **A Space Gallery**, located at 401 Richmond Street West, Suite 110, Toronto. The curators will be present. The gallery is open from Tuesday to Friday, 11 AM to 5 PM, Saturday, 12 to 5 PM, and admission is free. The exhibition continues until **July 11, 2015**.

In much of her work, Yto Barrada explores the daily traces of the social and political changes currently underway in North Africa. Employing documentary and autobiographical strategies with a metaphoric approach to imagery, she seeks to engage with the particularities of her homeland of Morocco. Situated on the Strait of Gibraltar, the country was transformed into a transit dead-end with Spain and Portugal's signing of the Schengen Agreement in 1991. The agreement resulted in a tightening of Europe's external borders, while its internal borders dissolved. The decades since have witnessed a dramatic increase to the number of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean, often in overcrowded, unsafe boats that are tragically unprepared for the journey. Being implicated in this changing geopolitical landscape elicits actions from Morocco's citizenry that may be read as beautiful and noble, yet are so often futile.

Yto Barrada's photographic series *Iris Tingitana* (2007) documents the tension between the urban and natural environments around Tangier. Named after a flower native to the region, the series uses the wildflower as a symbol for the transformation of the city, where, like the wildflower, its marketplaces, historic buildings, and peoples are rapidly being uprooted. As developers and planners aim to brand a new, globally marketable tourist vision of Morocco, the presence of indigenous species in public space is regarded as a nuisance.

In *Beau Geste* (2009), commercial development is equally at odds with the natural environment and public spaces. The film documents a group of men as they attempt to shore up the roots of a lone and ailing palm tree in a vacant lot designated for development. Their protective act, despite its futility, is symbolic of local resistance to the rapid pace of construction in Tangier. *Playground* (2010) is a three-channel film installation similarly set in a largely vacant expanse of land. The artist captures the diverse activities occurring in this transitional space: children at play in fields and empty lots; men, as they plant and water new seedlings; and a scarred and knotty tree that sprouts a few tiny green leaves amongst the towering new buildings.

Hand-Me-Downs (2011) is a film installation that combines a range of archival material from the 1950s–1970s, all drawn from Cinememorie, a Marseilles-based archive of amateur films from former French colonies. Using the hand-me-down as a metaphor for the family stories that pass from one generation to the next, it is one of the artist's most explicitly autobiographical works. Paired with the film is a series of fifteen posters, *A Modest Proposal* (2010), which critically and satirically comments upon Moroccan history and culture, and the changes that are being marketed to its citizens as examples of progress.

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About the Artist

Yto Barrada was born in 1971 in Paris and currently divides her time between Tangier, Morocco, and New York. She studied political science at the Sorbonne (Paris) and photography at the International Center of Photography (New York). As Deutsche Bank's 2011 Artist of the Year, she received a major travelling exhibition titled *Riffs*; most recently, she exhibited her work at the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), the Whitechapel Gallery (London) and the Museum of Modern Art (New York). The co-founder of the Cinémathèque de Tanger, she received the 2015 Abraaj Group Art Prize. She is represented by Galerie Sfeir Semler (Hamburg/Beirut) and Galerie Polaris (Paris).

About the Curators

Scott McLeod is an independent writer and curator based in Toronto. The founding director of Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, he focuses on contemporary practices, with a specialization in photographic, media and digital art. With the support of the Ontario Arts Council, he is currently writing *Land and Its Discontents*, a book of collected essays on the relationships between art, property and spatial politics.

Vicky Moufawad-Paul is a Toronto-based curator and the Artistic Director of A Space Gallery. She has organized over eighty exhibitions and has curated projects for the Agnes Etherington Art Centre (Kingston), Carlton University Art Gallery (Ottawa), Museum London, Montréal arts interculturels, Latitude 53 (Edmonton), Gallery 101 (Ottawa), InterAccess (Toronto) and 16 Beaver (New York). She has an MFA in Film and Video from York University, was the founding Executive Director of Toronto Arab Film Festival and has also worked for the Toronto International Film Festival. Her writing on contemporary art has been published by *Prefix Photo*, *Fuse Magazine*, *180°*, the Arab American National Museum (Dearborn, Michigan), Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Carlton University Art Gallery and YYZ Books (Toronto).

About Prefix

Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art is a public art gallery and arts publishing house based in Toronto. A registered charitable organization, Prefix fosters the appreciation and understanding of contemporary photographic, media and digital arts through exhibitions, publications, public programmes and related activities.

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For more information, print-ready images or to schedule an interview with the artist or curators, please contact:

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