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Yto Barrada © Benoît Peverelli, d.r.



- 1 Yto Barrada was born in Paris to Moroccan parents, and divides her time between New York and Tangier. Tangier, which saw a memorable and tragic part of Yto Barrada's family history, embodies the fate of Morocco and the suffering caused by the loss of social and cultural identity. Yto Barrada's work draws from these two particularities, and sees the artist finding inspiration and substance both in family archives and in a commitment

to recreate social bonds. In this perspective, as from 2003, she gave new life to a downtown cinema built in 1931 by converting it into the Cinematheque of Tangier, which she directed until 2012. The *Rif*, named after the local resistance campaign against colonizers led by Abdelkrim Al Khattabi in the 1920s, has become a site where the combination of remembrance and gatherings around contemporary creation encourages a “redistribution of imagination”¹. In parallel with this, Yto Barrada shows her taste for “confined actions”, for instance through the use of a discipline such as botany. *A Modest Proposal* introduces the monograph published by JRP/Ringier in 2013 (p. 1-16). This project, carried out between 2010 and 2012, is a collection of drawings, texts, and photographs printed as double-sided posters. It comprises an inventory of the types of palm trees that grow in Morocco and makes use of various combinations. One of the color photographs is entitled *Vacant Lot #5* – an undeniable reference to Ed Ruscha, whom Yto Barrada discovered when she was studying photography at the ICP in New York. This reproduction encloses what makes Yto Barrada’s photographic approach so singular. The blind façades of *Vacant Lot #5. Souani, Tangier March 2009*, which are shot sideways and occupy the central part of the picture, become a backdrop for the projected shadows of palm trees – the reflections of an obsolete exoticism. On the borders of the photograph are a few indicators of an ordinary city: the signboard for a garage, glass shards on a wall glinting in the sun, and a cat, at a standstill. Although Yto Barrada defends the typological dimension of her work, she strives to differ from a purely documentary method: “there is something vulgar in an overly direct or frontal approach, something so focused on the subject that the details and complexity, in which the only valuable information resides, find themselves crushed. The indirect approach represents a form of elegance and, ironically, of precision.”² In the *Détroit* photographic series, which brought her work to public attention in 2003, the artist asserts her determination to counter picturesque imagery, while also highlighting the ennui that emanates from the city closest to an unreachable Europe. For her, Tangier is a city where “there is a coincidence between a physical, symbolic, and historical space, and sometimes, in [her] opinion, an intimate one.”³ *Détroit* collects photographs where emptiness and neglect are palpable; where “strangeness comes from false familiarity.”⁴ The pictures are arranged as a sort of backwards coverage. There is no event and there are no faces – only the presence of a diffuse social violence, indescribable because hidden. These photographs manifest the artist’s will to create a body of work that is politically inclined, in its noble sense of resistance and resignation. This is what Yto Barrada is now striving to accomplish through the use of other media than photography, such as sculpture and installation art.

NOTES

1. Muracciole, Marie. “Du nouveau sur les plantes (essai de biographie),” *Yto Barrada*, Zürich : JRP/Ringier, 2013, p. 38.
2. Nafagi, Sina. « Une Grammaire de Tanger », *Yto Barrada*, Op. cit., p. 146.
3. Tazi, Nadia. Le Gall, Guillaume. « Yto Barrada : entretien », *Fabrique de l’image/Fabbrica dell’immagine*, Arles: Actes Sud ; Rome : Villa Medici, 2004, p. 92-97.

4. Barrada, Yto. « Le Détroit, ou une ville pleine de trous », text written on the occasion of the Yto Barrada: *Gran Turismo Royal* exhibition at the Galerie Polaris in Paris in 2003, partly reused in *L'Œil photographique : œuvres majeures des collections du Centre national des arts plastiques*, Clermont-Ferrand : FRAC Auvergne, 2013, p. 272.