

## Lydia Ourahmane

### Echoing connectivity and conflict through mobile phones

Lydia Ourahmane is an Algerian born artist who lives and works between Algeria and London. She is currently the international Artist-in-Residence for Art Dubai 2016. Her work covers a wide range of materials and topics, most recently focusing on the migration from Algeria and its causes.

In 2014, Ourahmane created *The Third Choir*, a sound installation consisting of 20 Naftal-branded oil barrels, a radio transmitter and 20 phones. The phones play audio from the transmitter which is amplified and distorted by the barrels. The sounds are somehow both familiar and unrecognizable; they teeter on the edge of understanding, creating an ambience in the room that probably reflects the feelings of many migrants after arriving in Europe.

Ourahmane is an inquisitive and determined artist. To create *The Third Choir* she had to be. The work took 11 months of planning, 6 declined proposals, and hundreds of emails, phone calls and visits to acquire the permission to export the barrels from Algeria. Many of the sounds were recorded during this whole process. This work was the first art allowed for permanent export since 1962. It was important to Lydia to use Naftal oil barrels because the company controls so much of the economy of Algeria, but when oil leaves the country, it is sold under brands such as BP or Shell, which subsequently comes under criticism for the economic woes in the country.

The situation in Algeria plays a central role in another of Ourahmane's works, *Too Late for Ambition*. The creation of the work involved a public stoning of a neon sign; the sign reads TOO LATE FOR AMBITION, in English. The work lives on as a six-channel video installation including five-channel audio, broken neon tubing and rocks. It is set in one of the main hangouts for migrants or those who facilitate them and youths going about their frustrated days and nights. The chaos of the situation is echoed in the stilted jerky movements of the camera, the roar of the crowd. Even the size and number of video screens add to the overwhelming feeling of the work.

In a piece directly about the migration, *Haraga (The Burning)*, Ourahmane received three one-minute videos from Houari, a 25 year old who had attempted crossing into Spain earlier in the year. He shared video he shot during the crossing. The migrants in the videos are hopeful and excited, sharing what they are going to do when they reach Europe. Unfortunately, they were caught and sent back to Algeria. For use in her work, Ourahmane set the videos to play on your phone when you connect to a Wi-Fi network running in the gallery.

This is a similar setup to her piece for Art Dubai, *Felt Fiction*. The work will be displayed on visitors' phones when they connect to the free Wi-Fi available throughout the fair, each time getting a

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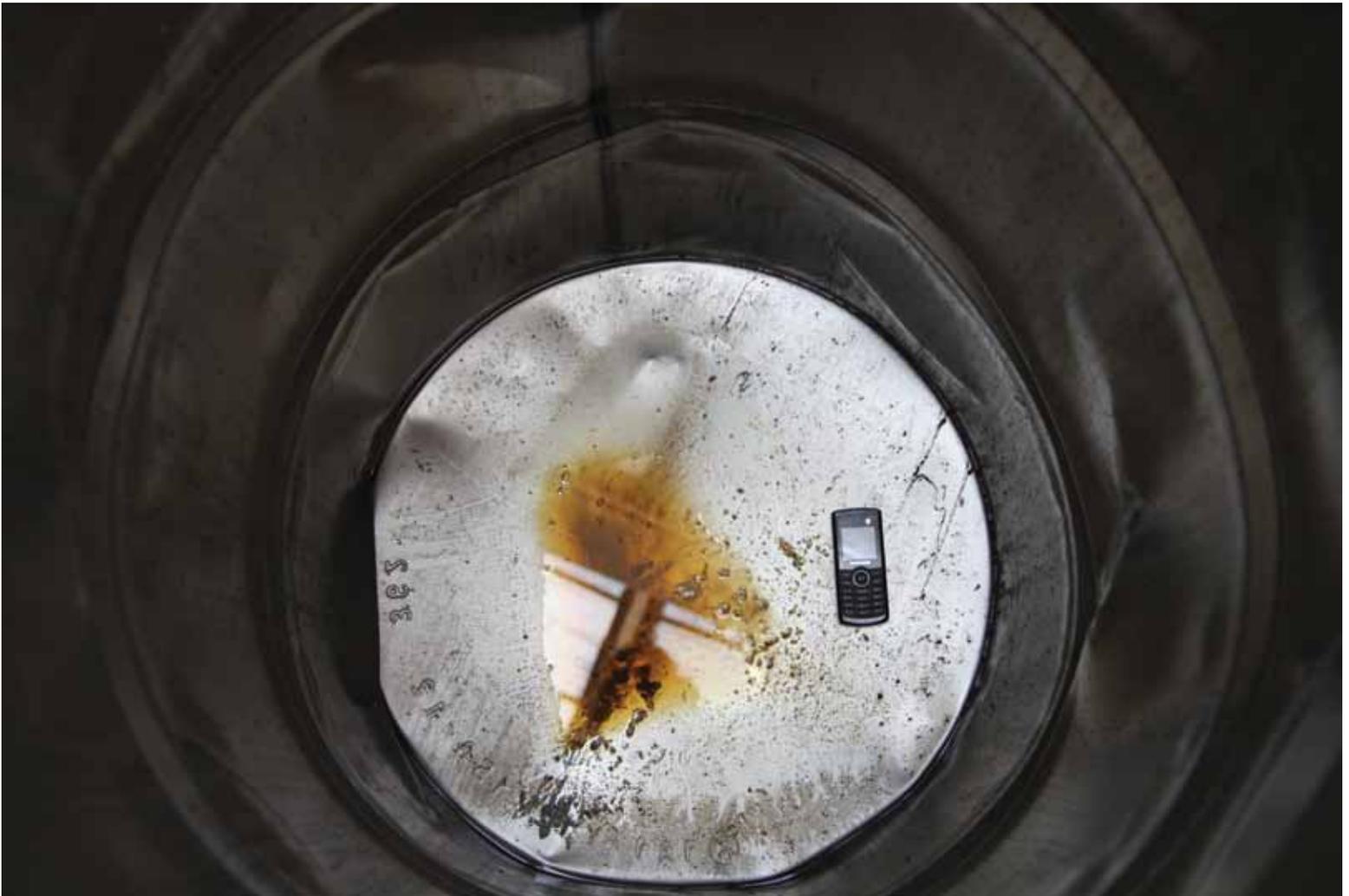
different snippet of the overall piece. Ourahmane says, "It's always about connectivity and using pre-existing access points." Phones are so much a part of our existence now, she says, "that platform is so relevant for today." Text plays a primary role in the work, which deals with oversaturation of perception. The video clips, some shot by the artist and some found, illustrate the script that Ourahmane wrote during the residency.

Overall, Ourahmane's work deals with the systems that humans are governed by, systems which we build but often follow without thought. She feels that we have the ability to change them but that the traditional format of protest is sometimes ineffective in this regard. She works within the language and "with the tools of these systems to instigate a possible other."

*A.i.R Dubai is organized by Art Dubai, in partnership with Dubai Culture and Arts Authority (Dubai Culture), Tashkeel and the Delfina Foundation.*



*The Third Choir* (2014); 3x5 m; 20 Naftal Oil Barrels imported from Algeria, CZ5HE Radio Transmitter, 20 Samsung E2121B Phones





*Too Late for Ambition* (2015); Dimensions Variable; 6 channel video, 5 channel sound, broken neon, stones; screenshots



