



THE SHORT AND THE LONG OF IT (2.0)

Uriel Orlow

Campagne Première Berlin

Chausseestrasse 116, 10115 Berlin, Germany

02 October 2010 - 13 November 2010

Uriel Orlow

While the focus of "The Short and The Long of It" is a real event, Uriel Orlow is more intent on permitting us glimpses than revealing the whole picture. Spilling evocative images and letting out the narrative like yards of rope, Orlow in turn leads and obscures our reading of carefully edited artefacts, images and texts, so that the momentum of our own curiosity dictates the extent of our fragmentary understanding.

The installation relates to an incident that unfolded during the outbreak of the 'Six Day War', or the 'June War' in 1967. The conflict between Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Syria re-inscribed the US/USSR divide of the concurrent Cold War, as well as the ongoing Arab-Israeli confrontation. In short, as a result of heavy artillery fire and sunken trawlers at either end of the Suez Canal, 14 cargo ships of various nationalities were stranded for eight years in the Great Bitter Lake, a large body of water at the canal's midpoint where ships pass one another before re-entering the one-way traffic.



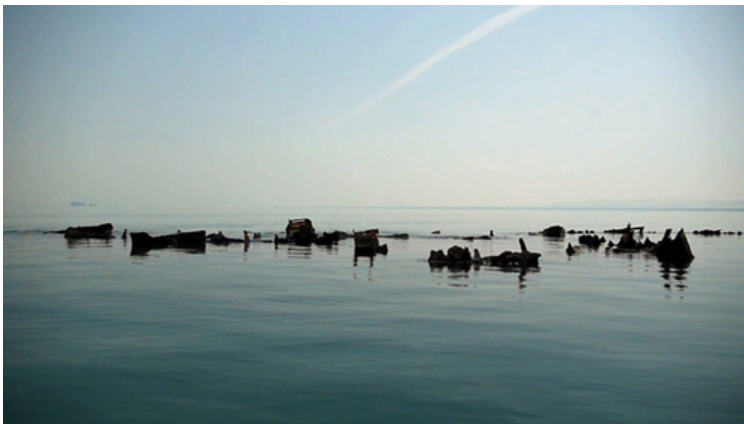
Trapped in the eye of a political and military storm, this rum collection of commercial seafarers formed the Great Bitter Lake Association (GBLA), a pan-national alliance whose main aim was, firstly, to survive; secondly, to create a functioning society between ships; and thirdly, to fill the days, months and years ahead. The GBLA mirrored the evolution of civilisation in microcosm, quickly developing from a programme of contingent survival

to one that incorporated robust infrastructures of communication, formally organised leisure pursuits and casual frivolity. Specially designed postal stamps effectively declared the lake as a territory to be factored into global geographies, while onboard Olympic Games converted what Noam Chomsky has referred to as the 'irrational jingoism' of the official Olympics to a pan-national gesture of resilient, playful solidarity.



The GBLA might consequently be thought of as a utopian society where antagonisms between nations, creeds, classes and so on have been eradicated; the itinerant essence of a ship, and the globalism it embodies, setting it apart from the territorializing war of attrition that raged around it. On the other hand, the reality may be less idealistic, with the hard-boiled commercial shippers' insistence that crew remain to safeguard vessels and cargo marking an imperative that simply pitches all hands against looters instead of one another.

Orlow does not indicate which interpretation he favours. He is careful to encourage broad historical, formal or theoretical inferences over specific politics. A video interleaving vintage photographs and Super8 film shot by crewmembers with the artist's own recent footage on location is paired with a series of text slides that names moments of particular relevance, general importance or personal interest from the eight years of the ships' confinement. This three-way comparison of timeframes and events creates a complication of concurrence, consequence and dissociation, giving rise to a sense that time is pleated, causality radiating and that this rippling expanse of saltwater somehow communicates diagonally through time.



The accompanying selection of found material sets up a similar dynamic field of information, where historical representation is ribboned through with facts, associations, symbolism and poetics. Images of a glut of apples rotting in their boxes, for instance, becomes an exemplar of the flow of capital abruptly halted by the canal's closure; a snapshot of men in drag hints at the socio-sexual impact of confinement; Orlow's drawings of fish that continue to migrate from the Red Sea to the warmer Mediterranean waters express admiration for the ingenuity of nature and its own temporality, while a sober image of photographic slide boxes remind us of the persuasive archival processes at work here. But, whereas nostalgia articulates the weighty pain of partition from a personal past, Orlow's open-handed presentation permits us to retrieve from the shadowy margins a history that is buoyant with the potential of the indeterminate.



Orlow has exhibited widely including solo projects at Laure Genillard, London (2010), Les Complices*, Zurich (2009), Habres & partner, Vienna (2009), Jewish Museum New York (2008-9), Blancpain Art Contemporain Geneva (2008-9) and Argos Brussels (2008). Group exhibitions in 2010 include *Hydrarchy*, Gasworks, London, *Over the Counter*, Kunsthalle Budapest, *Yesterday Will Be Better*, Aargauer Kunsthaus, *The Revenge of the Archive*, Center for Photography, Geneva, *Us*, South African National Gallery, Cape Town, *Paradise is Somewhere Else*, Galerie Anita Beckers, Frankfurt and *Jerwood Drawing Prize*, UK touring exhibition. His work has also been shown at Tate Modern London, *Third Guangzhou Triennial* at Guangdong Museum of Art China, Kunstmuseum Bonn, ICA London, Whitechapel Gallery London, Shedhalle Zürich, the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Locarno Film Festival, Visions du Réel, Nyon and the Biennale of the Moving Image, Geneva. Orlow has published several artist's books and has written for a number of publications.

(Images: **Uriel Orlow**, *AK-47* (from the series 'Water Archives'), 2010, photographic pigment print on Hahnemühle paper, 32.5 x 21 cm ; Photograph by Jonathan Blair; *Untitled*, from the series 'What Cannot Be Seen' , pigment ink on baryta paper, 44.3 x 74.3 cm, 2010; *Untitled* (from the series 'Bitterlake Chronicles'), 2010; *Limbo*, 2010 HD video with sound, 13'; *Installation View*; Courtesy of the artist & Campagne Première Berlin)

Posted by [Abhilasha Singh](#) on 08.11.10 | tags: digital ink installation photography pigment mixed-media video-art