

YTO BARRADA

WITTE DE WITH

Reading a description of Yto Barrada's *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project*, which features photographs of Barrada's native Tangiers, might suggest that it fits into Witte de With's recent run of earnestly politicized exhibitions, which have sometimes taken on the character of postgraduate anthropology projects. Redressing far-flung injustices is a noble calling but no guarantee of compelling material.

Yet Barrada largely transcends the merely worthy through her stylistic breadth and inventiveness. Throughout a series whose scope recalls The Beatles' white album — in which every song sounds different than the one before — we witness Barrada trying her hand at nature photography, photojournalism, painterly landscapes, satellite imagery, close-ups of archival documents, black and white domestic portraiture that nods to Cartier-Bresson, Kubrick-esque overhead shots of factory workers peeling shrimps at infinitely long tables, and even coffee-table-friendly spreads of fading tilework chipped by the sun.

But these photos' plentiful visual charms never undermine their ability to speak forcefully to the charged issues just beneath the surface. Barrada's virtuosity is a tool that piques interest in her subjects' plaintive backstories. In *Autocar*, for example, we see colorful blobs of unknown, possibly computer-generated origin. Closer inspection reveals them to be the fenders of tour buses that frequently harbor young stowaways, who are said to use the bus companies' iconic logos as codes when planning their escapes.

Indeed, if any theme unites these pictures, it is the potential journey never taken, hints of escape that remain tentative: a boy with a toy boat that doesn't sail, people waiting at an airport lounge or rainy bus stop, chain-link fences with tiny holes cut out, anonymous faces staring out of windows, children touching an illuminated advertisement for a cruise ship, a ferris wheel spinning aimlessly, dead-end ravines. And everywhere, images of the Strait itself, with Spain visible on the horizon but ultimately inaccessible. Worlds away from the exotic playground fetishized by Burroughs or Bowles, Barrada's Tangiers is a bottlenecked city whose current political reality dictates that travel across the Strait of Gibraltar has effectively become the privilege of inbound visitors.

**Douglas Heingartner**

Flash Art



David Hockney  
"Yorkshire, Summer, with Power Line"  
Watercolor on paper



YTO BARRADA, *Le Trou / Gat in het hek*, 2003. C-print. Courtesy of Witte de With, Rotterdam.