

some like it hot

This spring the fourth Marrakech Biennial, HIGHER ATLAS, curated by new kids on the block Nadim Samman and Carson Chan, will elevate the Mediterranean capital with special commissions of contemporary art. i-D spoke to three of our favourite emerging artists - Jon Nash, Aleksandra Domanovic and Karthik Pandian - about their trips to Morocco.



aleksandra domanovic

INTERVIEW DEAN KISSICK

Originally from the former Yugoslavia, Aleksandra Domanovic is a Berlin-based artist working with digital modelling and animation, real-life techno parties, and monumental sculptures. She's previously investigated Eastern European football hooliganism and celebrity 'turbosculpture', and now she's constructing a luridly coloured, traditionally finished, appropriation of a colossal raised fist from the Memorial Park Bubanj in Serbia.

What are you planning for Marrakech?

I'm rebuilding an existing monument from ex-Yugoslavia that was built in 1963. It's an abstract modernist monument from the series of state-commissioned constructions that were all monuments against fascism. It symbolises three raised fists, so it's a good symbol of the revolution and resistance, and that can be combined with what's happening currently in the Arab world...

Where's the original monument?

It's in the Memorial Park Bubanj in a town called Niš in Serbia, and it was made by a Croatian sculptor, Ivan Saboli, who's already passed away. So I'm taking one of those monuments - actually it consists of three pieces, and I'm taking one piece - and reproducing that hopefully in real size. Then I'm covering it with *tadelakt*, which is a typical Moroccan limestone finishing, a 4,000-year-old technique. It functions as a patina. Tadelakt is a Berber

word meaning 'to rub', and it will automatically change the shape, it will make it softer. I think I'm going to make the monument in probably very bright blue, and change not only the surface but also the colour.

Are there any other monuments in Marrakech already?

That's the other thing that I'm concerned about. There are no monuments in Morocco, or at least I haven't been to any. This is actually the only Islamic country I've been to and everything is basically just buildings - there's no figurative or abstract monuments, there's mostly patterns and textures, always in 2D. So, I'm putting a monument in an environment that doesn't have any.

In El Badi Palace?

Yes. I think it was finished 400 years ago, by the dynasty that ruled right before the current dynasty. So the palace was dilapidated, devastated, they took all the marble away, all the fancy stuff - it looks like a ruin right now - and they built their palace just next to it. They took the surface off of it.

You've also said that something similar occurred with the revolutionary sculpture of the former Yugoslavia?

After 1991, after the first conflict, a lot of these communist or socialist monuments were systematically destroyed. For example in Croatia over 3,000 WWII monuments were destroyed, and new ones were erected to the heroes of the new war... Another thing that was interesting for me is this process of 'antiquomania', of resurrecting and re-glorifying whatever looks old and ancient. A good example of this is in the Macedonian

capital Skopje, where there's this government project called Timeless Capital 2014. They're constructing all this archaic-looking architecture in the city centre, and lots of monuments. It's everything from Greek Classicism to Baroque, a mixture of styles, and they just made a bronze statue of Alexander the Great on a horse, which is on top of a fountain and around 22 metres tall. So there's this process of antiquomania happening; and when I visited Marrakech it looked like it doesn't need that, because everything is antique anyways.

aleksandradomanovic.com

"It symbolises three raised fists, so it's a good symbol of the revolution and resistance, and that can be combined with what's happening currently in the Arab world." ALEKSANDRA DOMANOVIC



jon nash

INTERVIEW DEAN KISSICK

Jon Nash is interested in contemporary image-making: whether spending his days travelling through the Adirondack Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean on Streetview, in search of melting, monochromatic landscapes, or working in his studio on digital abstractions of BMW adverts. Now - inspired by Hollywood drifting dramas and YouTube boy racers - Jon is souping up a second-hand Hyundai, joining the Marrakech burnout scene, and racing around the *Kingdom of Heaven*.

What's your project for Morocco?

For the Biennial I've bought a 1997 Hyundai Coupe - a Korean car - and I'll be heavily modifying it, putting in new body work, suicide doors, maybe a supercharger. Then during the show a driver will come into the biennial and perform a 'burnout' in the space - so the wheels are spinning, and there's lots of smoke and lots of noise.

Wow. What's a supercharger?

That makes the engine really fast... It all comes from the film *The Fast and the Furious*. It's a big thing in car modification to take a really normal car, like your mum might have had a Honda Civic, and turn it into your own sports car. You make the engine more powerful, you change the bodywork, you put TVs in it.

So have you already bought that?

Yup, it's in an underground car park in Marrakech. I have this amazing intern called Hind and she found the mechanic, who then found the car. I wasn't there when they exchanged the money but it was in the desert, on a desert road. The keys were exchanged for a silver envelope full of money.

How will your Hyundai be modified?

I'm going to repaint it white, with some parts high gloss. There's this really sexual fibreglass thing going on with these cars, which is the opposite of the space it's showing in, El Badi Palace - it's like the film sets from *Prince of Persia*, all sand and mud. It's a 16th-century palace that was funded by a ransom paid by Portugal after the Battle of Three Kings. It's next to the king's palace.

Are you taking the car anywhere else?

Yeah, I'll be in Morocco for a month before the biennial starts, so we're going to drive the car down to Ouarzazate. It's an amazing town, they have a huge film studio there, which Hollywood uses for biblical epics and terrorist plots, for Baghdad or Jerusalem. They have the full set from *Kingdom of Heaven*, and I want to shoot some footage of cars drifting down there. I like the idea of a burnout in front of a stage set, the same with the king's palace. It's such a contrast of ideas, aspirations, themes, and materials, and I'd like to continue that.

Why don't you tell us about the mechanic you're working with?

You mean El Nino? So I tracked him down, the same way that the idea for the project came about: stumbling across YouTube videos and going through that *Alice in Wonderland* process of following videos, and jumping between them. I realised in Morocco there's this huge phenomena, subculture, of guys filming themselves doing burnouts and posting them on YouTube. Their stage is like the whole world. You see them living *The Fast and*

the Furious dream. They're really filtering out, reducing this film down into its basic performance elements: filming themselves doing burnouts, putting music to it, and putting that back online. In England this happens, for instance, in Southend in the Toys R Us car park, and all the guys will meet up on a Saturday at 1am and do burnouts and hang-out, share a mating ritual. But in Morocco it doesn't happen spatially, it happens virtually, in different places at different times; connected by keywords on YouTube, and then the comments and hits and video responses. Anyway, one of the videos was from El Nino, who's the only car-tuning guy in Casablanca.

What sort of music do they use on the videos?

The main one is the theme tune from *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, which is Teriyaki Boyz - *Tokyo Drift*. So, you can hijack the aura of a film and apply it to your own footage. The rest would be like 50 Cent, Flo Rida, Waka Flocka Flame. It's really quite cheesy, but I was out in Casablanca recently and it's an intense experience: really loud music, tyre smoke everywhere, the smell of burnt rubber.

Cool. I love Waka Flocka. So what music will you use?

Well, Lucy [Stokton] has been trying to advise me... but definitely the Teriyaki Boyz, that's a big one. We'll see, I'm kind of working on that at the moment. When I was out there with these Moroccan guys we were driving from Marrakech to Casablanca, and lots of the music they were listening to was hip hop, but they were also really into Justin Bieber - more than 19-year-old guys here would ever be - all singing along in their pimped out car! They liked Justin Timberlake as well, they liked Shaggy, we were listening to that.

What else happened on your trip to Morocco?

I arrived in Marrakech, got a motorbike, and went to the English language university and met this professor. I hung out with him for a day and he didn't have a car, so I'd drive him to his kid's school to pick up his kids on the motorbike, and he was like, 'Oh, you need a translator,' and he put me in touch with this girl who had just been working for the UN Economic Forum. Then we just went around, going to mechanics and talking to them, and eventually we ended up meeting with the right kind of guys, and hanging out with them, and shooting some footage on mobile phones of cars drifting. Yeah, it was like being eighteen!

What's Marrakech like?

They're really on it when it comes to tourism, it's very clear that they're selling this exotic experience: tradition and sand dunes, romance, sexy women. But you'll see the guys who work in the riads getting changed into trainers and tracksuits to go home, you'll see kids that don't look that unlike kids in London or New York hanging around outside famous souqs which sell little copper teapots and stuff, playing on their phones. And the same with this subculture, it's aspirational - these kids don't want to ride camels through the desert, they want to drive Ferraris and listen to 50 Cent. Hopefully I can combine those two things in one space.

So, could you talk a bit about *The Fast and the Furious*? Maybe when you first watched it?

I didn't really see it when it came out. I only saw it a few years ago. It was inspired by an article in *Vibe* magazine about Japanese drifting culture in New York, so already that was a culture that had travelled around the world. It's pretty rebellious, most of this stuff you'd get arrested for, like drifting cars in the streets and doing burnouts. It comes from quite an anti-establishment perspective... It's like any of those films - the cars and the scene just provide this structure - but it's about the underdog, the outsider who wins the respect of the group and then wins the girl. That happens in all of the films, it's a common narrative.

Do you think it's possible that, through your artwork at the Marrakech Biennial, you might win the respect of the Moroccan drifting community and get with the hottest girl in the city?

Yeah, I'm hoping so, that's the only reason I'm doing it really [laughs]...

jonnash.co.uk



karthik pandian

INTERVIEW SELVI MAY

Living and working in LA, Karthik Pandian has recently completed a series of exhibitions excavating the ritualistic connections of classical and contemporary cultures - everything from Greek mythology to German techno. At White Flag Projects, St. Louis, he explored sun worship at an ancient Mississippian settlement known as the Cahokia Mounds, and constructed his own monolithic fortification complete with hallucinatory lighting and phosphorescent materials. Although Karthik won't tell us what he's planning in Marrakech, we've heard rumours of magical, moving castles...

Your work involves a lot of research. Did you approach Marrakech in the same way you have done other projects?

That would have been difficult given the amount of time I had to spend there. But at the same time, there's an ethnographic space that opens up when I do the kind of site research that I did in Marrakech. The elements of travel and displacement, and exposing oneself to the diverse frictions that a place subjects you to, certainly relates to the type of work I was doing before. In some ways public culture in Marrakech was really interesting and important to me, just spending a lot of time in public and attempting to engage with public life and public spaces, but also detaching from that at the same time. I guess you could call it a dynamic between absorption and detachment. It's less like an art technique or strategy and more about being in the world and the way that I approach being anywhere.

What else did you do in Morocco in terms of research?

I tried to make an earlier trip to Marrakech to coincide with a particular night during Ramadan called Laylat al-Qadr, which translates loosely as 'Night of Power' - the night honouring the religious visions of the prophet Muhammad, when an angel is supposed to have visited him... In a lot of my previous work I was dealing with how celestial bodies demarcate or index a type of time - that both structure some of our notions of time, work and labour, but also impose certain difficulties for our relationship to time. And so, especially in the last project, I was dealing with the sun, the way in which the sun both lords over us, and we attempt to negotiate our own existence and relationship to it. I was really interested - approaching this project, before I knew what I was going to do at all - in the Islamic calendar. What was interesting to me even at the start was the sighting of the moon. The sense that the month can't really begin until the new moon has been sighted properly. In the history of Islamic astronomy, well, there is a long standing debate within Islam between predictive mathematical models of forming the regular calendar and, let's say, the more theological camp that is much more reliant on vision as a mode of carving out months in the calendar. These ideas were floating around in my head.

Can you tell us anything about what your work will look like?

One thing I will say about the piece is that it only comes out at night...

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