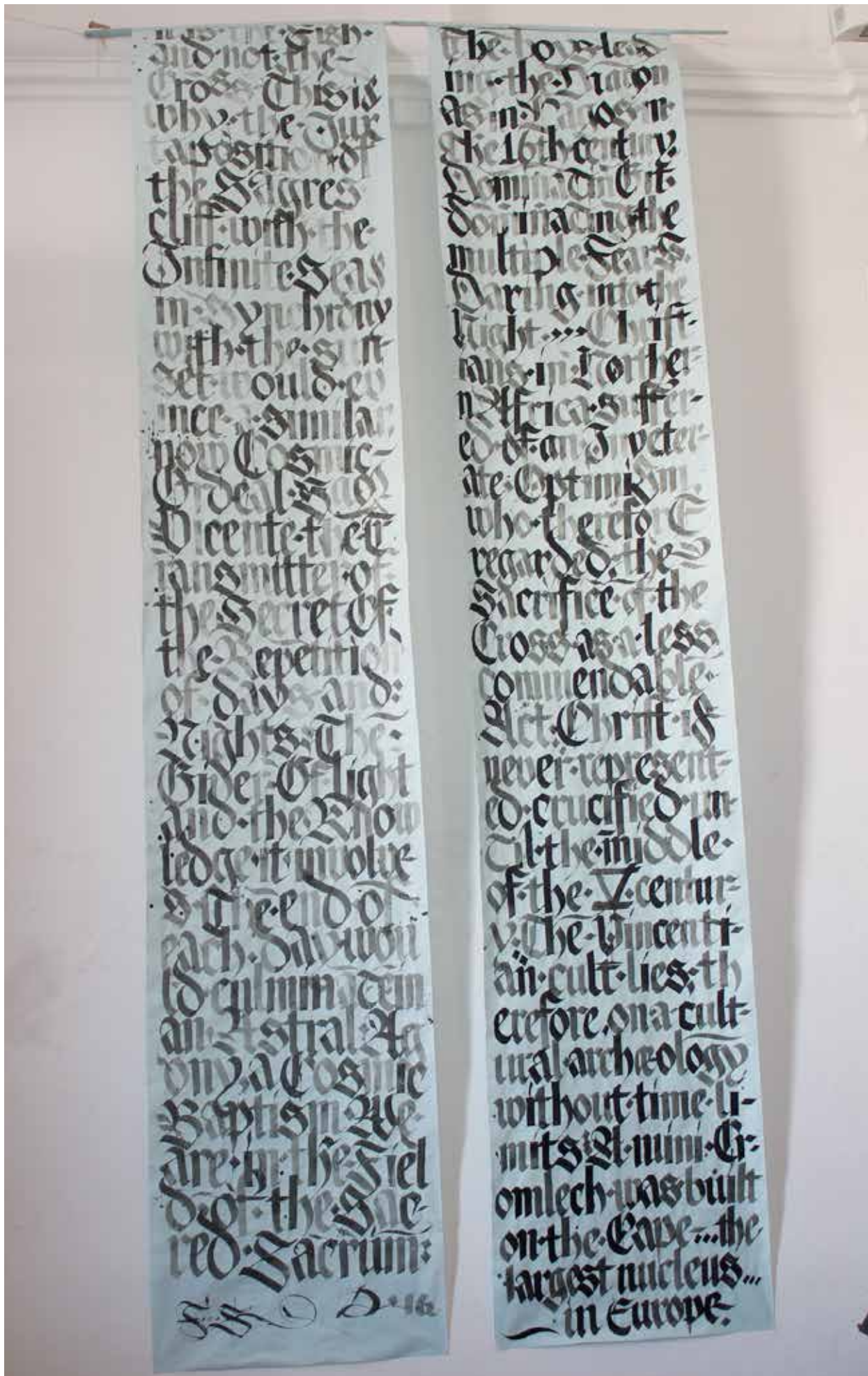




SLAVES and SAINTS

A group of works by Bettina Semmer

Made within „Pilgrimage - based on the panels of San Vicente“
an exhibition at Fort Sagres, Portugal, September 2016



Scrolls without time - ink on paper 500 x 90 cm each, cm, calligraphy by Drury Brennan, text by Jacinto Palma Dias

Bettina Semmer Slaves and Saints



Indigo Saints, pigment and acrylic medium on canvas



Bettina Semmer Slaves and Saints

My experiments at Fort Sagres

This group of works at Fort Sagres, Portugal, was made within the exhibition „Peregrinacao – a partir de las Paneis de Sao Vicente/ Pilgrimage – based on the Panels of San Vicente“ in August/September 2016

They are dedicated to Emile Akakbo from Togo, who made for me a beautiful crow mask, and to all the artists around the world.

Like the text by Jacinto Palma Dias, my works are the outcome of a rhizomatic thought process around the complex history and mythology surrounding what I would call one of the most impactful, mysterious and energetically powerful of places: Fortaleza di Sagres in the Southwest of Portugal. The four elements of what I summed up under Slaves and Saints can be described as formally diverse. They are:

1. „Indigo Slaves“, the bondage figures that are cut out from paintind canvas, referring tot he slaves of today’s bdsm world, as well as the ones that were made capturing the loot from the new territories, like gold and ivory from Africa, Indigo among others from India.

2. The second piece, consisting of body prints and letterings from Jacinto Palma Dias’ text and with calligraphy done by the famous Drury Brennan in a type face reminiscent of ancient manuscripts – books copied by hand of monks - and words painted on church walls

3. The third piece is a performance around a colonial mark stone, that exists – adorned by memorial plates, among others from the US Marines, in honour of Henry the Navigator who in the 15th century was the first to send whips beyond Cap Boujdour – in the courtyard of the fortress. By performing with two crow masks (the mould by an African artists), Fico Artista and I made statements about the myth of Saint Vincent whose body legendarily did not decompose. Upon its homecoming to Portugal, the corpse was guarded by two crows, to guard it from other birds and animals. Crows, endowed with the gift of self-realization, thus, mirroring each other, we covered the mark stone of colonialism with the shroud of a man, printed in Indigo (used here as the symbol of colonial trade).

4. The fourth of the group of works is a hidden circle drawn at a radius of 16m around a blue dot in the courtyard, echoing a mysterious „windrose“ on the other court side which could also be a prehistoric stone circle marking an energy point in the cape. The plant seeds were wrapped in indigo tinted paper, forming a dotted circular line. If the seeds should sprout, the circle would be seen for years to come. I wish for the beneficial seed to grow, blossom and continue to proliferate.

I walked that circumference several times, leaving secret marks.

I walked the 12 rounds oft he colonial mark stone.

I walked to the end oft he world.

The artist was there and imbued the place with her artistic traces.

Fernando Pessoa said: My path is through eternity all the way to the end.

This place feels like that. It is simply the end of Europe, whereby I mean the whole of the culture that shaped our minds. I also think of the eternity of the sea, the impression you get when you see rocks and waves that have been there for millions of years. More than our minds are capable of grasping. And yet this is only one world of many that were here and more to come. A blink in the eye of the gods.

Bettina Semmer Slaves and Saints

„Who wants to pass beyond Boujdour must also pass beyond pain“ is another of Pessoa's famous words, stemming in this case from *Mesajem/Message*, and referring, in my view, to the seafarers who despite trying more than 100 times in one year, could not go beyond this cape in Western Sahara, where a famous sea monster resides and storms and currents forced the ships to turn around. Only when Gil Eanes succeeded, by sailing further from the coast instead of in its vicinity, the spell was broken and the Portuguese began the circumnavigation of Africa, leaving in their trail what was the foreshadow of a brutal colonialist regime, not only of Portugal but of European countries altogether.

What does colonialism mean to an artist today? Why quote it – aren't we beyond that?

Well, this artist has been to Western Sahara, one extreme example of how the failing of de-colonization still impacts a people, their land being occupied, and their resources exploited by others. Western Sahara, where the colonial powers, Spain, still are the administrative power but don't take responsibility for the process of a decent decolonization in the territory now occupied by Morocco.

Bodily traces

So, to proceed to some interpretations, I would like to point out that making a print from the body itself, an indexical sign that says „this person was here“, is as ancient as paleolithic art, where hands were printed either directly with the paint or by blowing the paint around the hand on the surface. Over and above this simple tracemaking the body print is a portrait of someone else to state that not only I, but also someone else was here, and this can be linked to the artist and her model - the model being the male and the artist the female – as well as to the shroud tradition in Christianity.

Why Blue?

Blue was a coveted colour for dyeing clothes, the circumnavigation promoted the trade of Indigo from India, meeting in South Africa with techniques developed around the European equivalent *Isatis Tinctoris*, one of the oldest dyeing plants; the exchange resulted in the „*Sescheschwe*“, a textile which formed the denim of the Southern hemisphere, in work clothes and traditional garments up to the king's garb.

Bondage and acrobatics

The surrender of the Saints on one of the giant walls of the fortress, the body prints in the reception area, the scriptures in the church and the dance of the two crows, making tourists into their slaves are the elements of a satirical comment on the connexion of saintly behaviour and colonial looting as well as the slave trade starting in Portugal in 1482, and continuing with the ships of Henry, the prince who never went to sea.

Tourism also is a form of looting as described by Hakim Bey: „the tourist consumes difference.... Over the centuries perhaps a given sacred place attracted millions of pilgrims, and yet somehow despite all the gazing and admiring and praying and souvenir-buying, this place retained its meaning. And now – after 20-30 years of tourism, that meaning is lost. Tourism's real roots do not lie in pilgrimage (or even in fair trade) but in war. Rape and pillage were the original forms of tourism, or rather, the first tourists followed directly in the wake of war, like vultures picking over battlefield carnage for imaginary booty – for images. Tourism arose as a symptom of an Imperialism that was total – economic, political and spiritual.“ (quoted from: *Alen do turismo – A viagem intencional*, with illustrations by Federico Guzmán, Compostela 2009)

This is the other side of my comment. In „12 minutes a slave - a pilgrimage to nowhere“, I made someone whose time for the visit in the fortress is 5-10 minutes, walk around the column and spend more than the desired period to stop the running mill. Even if they circle only once, this unusual process will start a question in their mind. If not, at least I stopped them in their routine.

Bettina Semmer Slaves and Saints



Scrolls and Saint Vincent at the church - (left: ink on paper 500 x 90 cm each
right: chalk/guache on canvas, 200x160 cm, calligraphy by Drury Brennan, text by Jacinto Palma Dias)



The myth of St. Vincent, a martyr from the 3rd century, involves two crows protecting his corpse from other predators, a body that would not decay even after burning it.



Shrouds in the reception area, body prints with guache on canvas, 320 x 160 cm each



We hereby certify that

.....
has taken part in and helped realize the performance
„PILGRIMAGE TO NOWHERE - 12 MINUTES A SLAVE“
as part of the exhibition Peregrinação/Pilgrimage at
Fort Sagres, Portugal September 2016.

In the name of the artist Bettina Semmer



Tourist performing „12 minutes a slaves- a pilgrimage to nowhere“ and receiving a certificate



Center of the seed bomb circle



Indigo Saints laid out in the ground



Seed bombs dyed with Indigo



Measuring and laying out the seed bombs

Bettina Semmer Slaves and Saints



Making of...



Bettina Semmer Slaves and Saints



Bettina Semmer Slaves and Saints



Video stills: Performing the mirror dance and carrying the Indigo Saint to cover the mark stone of colonialism

Bettina Semmer Slaves and Saints



Video stills: tourists are walking in the circle, receiving a certificate



Supported with the help of Tertulia, Divam, and the Berlin Senate.

03-24 September
Fort Sagres



03/09
private view 4 p.m.

Peregrination Divam 2016
Group exhibition
after the panels of Saint Vincent

Ana Celorico Machado
Bettina Semmer
Christoph Rumpf
Joana Villaverde
Pedro Leitão

based on the essays of
Jacinto Palma Dias

Gastronomic performance by the chef José Pinheiro
at the opening

further information: tertulia-aljezur.blogspot.pt

