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# SAMUEL GRATACAP . EMPIRE

11.02.2017 - 14.05.2017

PRESS KIT

## **PRESS KIT**

# **SAMUEL GRATACAP**

## **EMPIRE**

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Press release

## SAMUEL GRATACAP . EMPIRE

**Exhibition from February 11 to May 14, 2017**

**Curators** Paul di Felice, Pierre Stiwer (Café-Crème asbl), Christophe Gallois

As a photographer whose work belongs both in the field of visual arts and photojournalism, Samuel Gratacap is interested in the phenomena of migration and transit areas generated by contemporary conflicts. His projects are the result of long periods of immersion, the time needed to understand the complexity of situations and to restore what, beyond numbers, flows, maps, geopolitical data, and media news, constitutes the heart: trajectories and personal experiences.

His ambitious *Empire* project is the result of several visits he made to the Choucha refugee camp, located in Tunisia, a few kilometres from the Libyan border, between 2012 and 2014. For several years (as of February 2011), this UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) emergency camp received hundreds of thousands of people fleeing conflicts in neighbouring Libya, as well as those in West Africa and the Horn of Africa. Although it officially closed in June 2013, several hundred refugees and asylum-seekers have continued to live there, in a state of growing abandonment.

The images that make up *Empire* reflect moments of life, adaptation to the hostility of the environment, but also commitment. They include faces, gestures, pieces of desert, makeshift constructions, protest messages, "wandering souls" criss-crossing the camp. Together they sketch the outlines of a situation in suspense: "My work," says the artist, "reflects the space-time specificities of this living place shaped by wait. Wait due to the different stages of asylum applications for refugees, combined with the tension of those suspended destinies in a same temporary site that became perennial by circumstances, to finally disappear."

Stamped with a temporality that contrasts with that of the images on which the media feeds, Samuel Gratacap's photographs also relate to a search for forms entirely driven by the desire to give substance, with accuracy, to singular experiences. Photographic prints in various formats are joined by series of polaroids, a set of images pasted directly to the wall, the transcription of testimonies, a map drawn by the artist, and video sequences. It is as though it were a question of trying to restore the singularity of Choucha's voices through these multiple bursts: "There is not one story of Choucha," says Gratacap, "but as many stories as the number of people who have lived there."

## TESTIMONIES

Presented in the exhibition in dialogue with the photos which form the project *Empire*, this 5 testimonies have been collected by the artist from the inhabitants of the refugees camp Choucha.

**The jungle** "Choucha: the result of the war in Libya. That is what makes us move and of course we are not happy but as long as we don't have any option, we can't leave. That's why you can see many people here including me, because we are still looking for a better place to rest our head and keep on going in life. Everybody has his own dream and his own mission. Different things happened in Africa which I don't like, I saw brothers kill each other, nobody cares about it and our leaders don't care about it. I am still dreaming to become a musician. Some situations tried to bring me down and writing helps me to save my head. When I found myself in the desert, I started singing and trying to give myself the force to continue. My music life is growing despite the fact that I haven't found a place to rest. No studio but a pen and paper. I keep walking: "I'm mister nobody, living in desert not groovy " for almost two years. "The picture of our future is sleeping in our tent " and no one wants to see, no one wants to know. I believe that one day my message can contribute enough for change. We deserve help. I'm really tired of seeing people suffering. We are living in the jungle and the jungle is a place where you can't really find a kind of freedom, you can see people suffering, so many tears, so many pains. That's the jungle. My everyday life inspiration is born there. I got a lot of inspiration in the jungle. You'll find your place here for lot of reasons. Choucha is like the jungle because nobody is born to stay in it." **S.D**

**I'm waiting in my tent** " We were forty-six people in a jeep when I came to Libya. The police arrested me at the border and they put me to prison for one year. Then, because of the revolution, prisons opened up. I came out and I stayed four months in Libya but no opportunities, no job there, no good life. I took the boat, I paid four hundred dollars to go to Italy, Lampedusa. But the boat got damaged, seventy-four people in a small boat, the engine stopped and the water entered inside, we waited twenty-four hours in the water. Then Tunisian fishermen and coastguards rescued us and brought us here in Choucha camp. At night I can't sleep well because of the air-pressure problem of my baby, I asked for medication one week ago, I didn't get it yet. I'm asking you what I have to do to get a better life? I'm waiting in my tent and they don't care about our health, many people have some health problems here but they don't care. I have one baby but they don't give me milk anymore, what can I do to get some milk for my baby." **Fadoma**

**Past, present and uncertain future** "Here anytime you'll be angry. I left my family to get a better life and I've lived in the desert for almost two years today. We can't eat because the cooks are protesting, they don't make food but the food is bad anyway. This place isn't a safe place to live, we are worried about our safety, about our lives. We are in the middle, between the Tunisians and the Libyans, people are making traffic here. Last year we've done a protest because of food and water, life conditions, the population of Ben Guerdane attacked the camp because we blocked the road near the camp, eight people died, seven people disappeared and many people got hurt. Why did they shoot at us? We left our countries because of our safety and now we are in danger again, confronted with the same problems, we feel insecure. We hope that in the future we could find a safe place to live. I am used to wake up in the middle of the night because my heart isn't quiet, dreams bring me back to reality: past, present and uncertain future. The daily life in Choucha doesn't give me the strength to accept my situation of rejected." **Favor**

**Interview process** "They're above the law, sometimes they make errors that they'll never admit, they make decisions before they listen to our story, before the interview. All days they bring us down and tomorrow they'll invent something to use against us. You have to understand us before you talk to us. The interview process is a perfect mechanism. This is just the way they use to maintain us and now they are fed up of us. They want us to go. This is not the place we were born and this is not the place we want to live. Some women and children have nothing to eat: this is how they offer the international protection. The camp is coming to an end, everybody knows it. We are asking the humanitarian organizations to reestablish the previous services they cut eight months ago: food and medication. We don't eat for joking we eat to survive. They sent us back to the time of slavery, they can't understand what we are passing through and now the situation is critical. We live in the full desert, we have no food, no medical support... there are children, pregnant women and everyday I'm asking myself : is that an organization which fights for human rights, for human protection and who cuts off food, water and medication from us? Today, I can't trust my own brothers because they manipulate people against each other, that's a new sickness born in Choucha. They bring discrimination between the people, they are dividing the people if they get the status or not and the refugees are not allowed to talk with the "rejected", they are not allowed to give them some food." **Bright**

**Not even a quarter of an hour** "If there was security in my country, I would not have stayed here in this camp, not even a quarter of an hour. Not even a quarter of an hour to live this misery. It's the desert, you know how it is, it's cold, in the summer it's very hot, diseases breakout. You have to think twice, the country is better but the problem is that there is no security at home. I don't understand, the United-Nations does nothing for us, refugees are dying in the desert to end up here... why so? Why? We are undesirable, I've worked with someone to paint his car, the guy left without paying me, he disappeared two months ago, so now I don't have the strength anymore, I'm no longer going to work at Ben Guerdane. It's worthless, they don't pay us, I stay here and I thank God for what he gives me. It's hard, very hard. If there was security in my country, I would not stay here, not even a quarter of an hour.

I know the road well, I know how to go home, I won't get lost, I know the desert! Stars to guide me, I know where Libya, Chad, Sudan are located, and any other country... My guide is my head, no need for a compass, just by looking at the stars, I will find my path. When it's hard, you think too much. You can rely only on yourself". **Omar**

## LIST OF THE EXHIBITED WORKS

### ***Camp de réfugiés de Choucha, 2012-2014***

25 C-prints

Different dimensions:

150 × 188 cm; 188 × 150; 56 × 70 cm; 70 × 56 cm;

37,5 × 30 cm; 30 × 37,5 cm

Production LE BAL, Paris

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Les filles du calvaire, Paris

### ***Habiter Choucha, 2012-2013***

Series of 16 black & white framed Polaroids and  
topographic map of the camp

Polaroids: 8,6 × 10,8 cm each (unframed)

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Les filles du calvaire, Paris

### ***Marcheurs, 2012***

Series of 8 colour Polaroids

8,6 × 10,8 cm each

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Les filles du calvaire, Paris

### ***Manifestation devant l'UNHCR, 2013***

16 blue back paper prints made from Polaroids 8,6 × 10,8 cm  
50 × 50 cm each

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Les filles du calvaire, Paris

### ***Vidéo n°1\_Garabouli, (non-datée, Libye)***

Video, colour, sound

5 min 52 sec

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Les filles du calvaire, Paris

### ***Vidéo n°2\_Choucha, (janvier 2014, Tunisie)***

Video, colour, sound

13 min 16 sec

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Les filles du calvaire, Paris



***Sans titre 030, série Empire, camp de réfugiés de Choucha, 2012-2014***

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Les filles du calvaire, Paris

© Samuel Gratacap



## IMAGES



*Sans titre 038*, série *Empire*, camp de réfugiés de Choucha, 2012-2014  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Les filles du calvaire, Paris  
© Samuel Gratacap



*Sans titre 024*, série *Empire*, camp de réfugiés de Choucha, 2012-2014  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Les filles du calvaire, Paris  
© Samuel Gratacap



# SAMUEL GRATACAP

## BIOGRAPHIE

Born in 1982 in Pessac, France, Samuel Gratacap graduated from the Marseille School of Fine Arts in 2010. Questioning the reality lying behind immigration figures he stepped into the administrative detention centre in Marseille in 2007. There he discovered a transitory space - the '15-15' as a man he met in an interview room called it : '15-day detention and 15-minute judgment.' Samuel Gratacap took pictures of men in search of a future, in search of what they call "luck". He also collected testimonies, which took him to the Italian island of Lampedusa. As a sort a backward journey. There again the photographer strove to reveal the 'shameful' side of the island. Shaken by the castaways' fate, some of the inhabitants gathered objects found washed up ashore. From documents which he found the photographer built a subjective story which would lead him further and further, to the port city of Zarzis in South Tunisia then to the Choucha camp a few kilometers from the Libyan border. In the summer of 2013 when international organizations officially closed the camp the migrants who did not manage to obtain refugee status headed to Libya. So the photographer reached Tripoli where he continued working in detention centres and waiting areas for daily workers.

In 2012 he was awarded a CNAP grant (aid fund for contemporary documentary photography) then the Le Bal-ADAGP Young Creation Prize in 2013. The work he carried out for two years in Tunisia in the Choucha refugee camp (2012-2014) was displayed at a personal exhibition in Le Bal in Paris in 2015 and was published by Editions Filigranes. That same year he received a special mention from the jury at the Winterthur Fotomuseum Plat(t)form event as well as a work grant from the FNAGP (National foundation for Graphic and Visual Arts) and from the agnes.b endowment fund for his project *The Castaways* (Libya) displayed at the Arab World Institute in Paris for the Biennale of Photographers of the Contemporary Arab World. Samuel Gratacap is a regular reporter in Libya for the newspaper Le Monde and he is represented by Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire in Paris.

## EVENTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE EXHIBITION



© Photo: Christian Aschman

### TALK

**With Samuel Gratacap**

**28.04.2017, 11am, Mudam Gallery, Level 0 East**

In French. Free entry. No booking required.

Events organised within the framework of the 6th edition of the European Month of Photography in Luxembourg.



© Photo: Patrick Galbats

### ON THE ROAD TO PARADISE

**Performance / Lecture by Carole Lorang**

**29.03.2017, 8pm, Mudam Gallery, Level 0 East**

In 2016, La Compagnie du Grand Boube initiated the project *Welcome to Paradise*, a documentary play which, exploring the fate of refugees recently arrived in Luxembourg, questions the meaning of living together.

With: Rita Bento dos Reis, Sophie Langevin, Jérôme Varanfrain

In French. Free entry. No booking required.

Event organised within the framework of Up to Eleven, the afterwork event, every Wednesday evening at the museum.



© Photo: Jessica Theis

### REGULAR GUIDED TOURS

Guided tours of the current exhibitions.

**LU – Saturday, 11am**

**DE – Saturday and Sunday, 3pm**

**FR – Saturday and Sunday, 4pm**

**EN – Wednesdays, 7pm and Sunday, 11am**

For individual visitors and small groups (max. 5 people).

Duration: 45 min. Tours free of charge, except for the entrance fee.

No booking required. Information: [visites@mudam.lu](mailto:visites@mudam.lu); t. +352 45 37 85 531

# SAMUEL GRATACAP . EMPIRE

**Exhibition from February 11 to May 14, 2017**

**Curators** Paul di Felice, Pierre Stiwer (Café-Crème asbl), Christophe Gallois

The exhibition *Empire* by Samuel Gratacap is organised in collaboration with Café-Crème asbl within the framework of the 6th edition of the European Month of Photography in Luxembourg.

It was originally produced by LE BAL (Paris), where it was presented from 11 September to 4 October 2015. On this occasion, it received the support of Adagp, Copie Privée, SFR, Fonds de dotation agnès b., Cnap, FNAGP and Hugues Aubry.



## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Address and information

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### Opening hours

Thursday-Monday and public holidays	10am-6pm
Wednesday	10am-11pm (exhibition spaces: 10pm)
24.12 and 31.12	10am-3pm
Tuesday and 25.12	Closed

### Entrance fee

Adults	7€
Under 26 years old, groups	5€
Mudami card (valid 1 year for 2 persons)	50€
Under 21 years old	free
Students under 26 years old	free
Wednesday, 6-11pm	free

### By car

Kirchberg -> Avenue John F. Kennedy -> Philharmonie -> Tunnel -> Mudam  
GPS: X 49.62 - Y 6.14

### Images

Available on request

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### MUDAM THANKS

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Delfin



as well as

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