

No Words
Bie Michels

This exhibition, together with *Ici et là – Here and there* in Hastings (UK), is a trans-border and international art project for Dunkerque 2013 (DK13, Capitale régionale de la culture). On that occasion Bie Michels made two video installations, each inspired by the migration from France to the UK. This extreme situation of refugees and asylum seekers trying to cross the Channel on one side, and yet arrived on the other side, presented her with an opportunity to intimately investigate the complex relations that people maintain with identity and loss, fragility and (in)stability.

The video installation '*Pas de mots - No words*' is part of an ongoing process to intimately investigate the complex relations that people maintain with objects. It is a philosophical exploration expressed through artistic form.

In a port, people and objects arrive from, and go to, many different places. This situation of constant travel presented Michels with an opportunity to ask questions about the fragility of our identity in relation to the object: How much is our identity dependent on our possessions, our 'stuff', our 'things'? In a port, there is also the presence of water, that big living 'thing' that has a huge influence on our lives. In Dunkerque/ Calais the migrants live in refugee camps, cabanes of prefab material built by the city of Dunkerque, a poignant reflection of the struggle and impotence of our society with this issue. Michels felt an inability to use words/voices in her film and she didn't want to give answers in her project. This is the reason of the title: 'No words'.

The refugees are in an extreme situation of losing and leaving their things behind them, still only having themselves. Their identity is in a very unstable and fragile situation both psychologically and socially. They seem to be non-beings, but proud of their own strength.

The film shows an installation of 6 ice cubes on a dike (Digue du Braeck) next to the water, mixed with images of a refugee camp in Grande Synthe and images taken on several places in the port. The ice cubes are in the form of little houses, the same as the cabanes of the refugee camp. The ice is a very ephemeral material that shows fragility. In each 'ice house' a cylinder is imprisoned. These objects are black, like a hole. They appear to be a void. As the ice cube melts away, they become visible and present in the environment (some places in the port), where they continue to appear as gaps.

In addition to the video installation, Michels performs an action during the opening day on the central square of Dunkirk, Place Jean Bart, flyering a poetic protest pamphlet near to the reinstalled ice houses. She wants to show the people on the street the situation of the camps and invite them to think about the question of having (having stuff versus having an identity in the society, cultural environment) and being (a person).

In La Plate-Forme (67 /69 Rue Henri Terquem, 59140 Dunkerque), the video *Surrounding Water*, the other part of the project made for the exhibition '*Ici et là – Here and there*' in Hastings (UK), is shown again.