

press release

KUNSTHAU ROTTERDAM



'The Anarchist Citizenship. Ode to Youthful Daredevils

9 February - 16 June 2019

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'The Anarchist Citizenship. Ode to Youthful Daredevils' is a project by the researcher Amal Alhaag (1983) and the socially committed artist Nadine Stijns (1977) about the people of Somaliland. Since 1991, this territory in northwest Somalia has been operating as a self-declared independent state. In 'The Anarchist Citizenship', the duo researches how the Somalilanders are giving shape to their citizenship through fashion, architecture, friendship and culture. In collaboration with the depicted women, young people and other locals – often acting as art directors – Stijns and Alhaag manage to capture the unique visual culture of the Somalilanders in their photographs. Shown on silk fabric and plexiglass, the dozens of colourful photographs present an image that is much more nuanced and varied than dominant western views would suggest.

Visual Culture

The intriguing photographs by Stijns and Alhaag show how the Somalilanders are creating their own image, inspired by oriental, East African and Mediterranean culture. Geometric images of modernist buildings, painted entrance gates and colourful petrol stations are accompanied by tie dye fabric hung out to dry, popular logos such as Gucci and WhatsApp, dollar signs and henna. They are all unique images offering a glimpse into this extraordinary country. Ultimately, however, it is the stylish Somalilanders themselves, portrayed in their self-elected poses, who force us to reconsider the stereotypical image we have of them.

Nadine Stijns and Amal Alhaag

During their first encounter in 2013, Nadine Stijns and Amal Alhaag discovered a shared love of fashion, music, youth and pop culture, and found out they were both working on projects concerning Diaspora communities. In 2014, Alhaag visited Somaliland for the first time and shared her findings with Stijns. The stories and different textiles she took with her, would finally serve as the kick-off for a project to research and capture the identity, individuality and representation of the Somalilanders. In 'The Anarchist Citizenship', the duo continually questions the relationship between the makers, the people portrayed and the spectator. With the help of photography, they show the creativity and own reality of the Somalilanders.

About Somaliland

In 1991, internal conflicts resulting from the Somali Civil War led to the establishment of the self-declared, independent state Somaliland, a territory in the northwest of the East African country of Somalia, that now operates as an independent state with 4 million inhabitants. From a global perspective, Somalia and its citizens are constantly subject to being stereotyped, a process that is reinforced by negative media interpretations. This project questions that negative image by offering the Somalilanders a podium for claiming ownership of the way in which Somaliland identity is represented.

The exhibition 'The Anarchist Citizenship. Ode to Youthful Daredevils' will be shown during Art Rotterdam, from Saturday 9 February. In that same week the exhibition 'Trouble in Paradise. Collection Rattan Chadha' will also be opened.

Photographs:

Muna, 2018, © Nadine Stijns and Amal Alhaag

Macawiis, 2019, © Nadine Stijns and Amal Alhaag

Farhiyo, 2017, © Nadine Stijns and Amal Alhaag

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