TERRITORIES
Art that doesn’t deal [...] bores us
Sabine Arlitt for Schweizer Feuilleton-Dienst

Introduction
Statement Baltensperger + Siepert

Tomorrow will be better
Text by Baltensperger + Siepert

Desire Lines

Desti-Nation

Untitled Maps

Imaginary Landscapes

Dancing Queen

About Negotiation

Drawing Boundaries

Here and Elsewhere

The Camp West
Is it possible to think outside of given thought patterns? The team of artists known as Baltensperger + Siepert breaks out of existing structures and traditional aesthetics to create space for visions.

Sabine Arlitt for Schweizer Feuilleton-Dienst, 2016

Each sheet of paper has a single line drawn upon it. Upon closer inspection, what seems to be one single, uninterrupted line is almost always made up of small segments. Some are longer, some shorter, some straight, some slightly curved. The paths these lines take might remind viewers of stock price graphs, cardiograms, seismographic charts, or the beginnings of outlines. But maybe they don’t. Paths laid out are initially received in a purely visual way. Dense, round dots look like full stops. Perhaps the visual rhythm alters when the pause is physically realized. Lines prove to be abstractions with many potential stories. Space spreads out, becoming a kind of imaginary, yet real space of awareness. Out of a moment of directionlessness and its resulting opening, viewers begin to allow the lines—which would normally be used for measuring, ordering, and comprehension—to tell their own tales. Viewers realize that they’re becoming more strongly involved in the events caused by the paths of movement, these notations in a territory expanding in the mind.

“This creates drawings with simple lines that are separated from the context and simply point out aesthetic references. Within the context they tell precarious stories of personal destinies and take the place of hope for a life in a new, better world,” writes the duo of artists Baltensperger + Siepert about their work of art, Desire Lines. Stefan Baltensperger (*1976) from Zurich, and David Siepert, born in 1983 in Bad Säckingen, Germany, asked people who were applying for asylum in Switzerland to trace the routes of their journeys on a piece of paper laid on top of an atlas. The legends describe the starting and ending points of the journeys, and provide information about how long they lasted: Tibet to Zurich, eight weeks; Jalalabad to Zurich, four months; Asmara to Zurich, four weeks; Asmara to Zurich, seven years. Whether they traveled for four weeks or seven years, how many paths of life are compressed into one line?

Of Maps and Lifelines

The asylum-seekers told their personal stories in confidence, but Baltensperger + Siepert consciously say nothing of this in their exhibitions. The map legends must suffice to illustrate a new context, as it were, in opposition to the stream of images that flood the world daily. In its sketchy minimalism, the line begins to generate self-developed concepts of images. Tibet to Zurich, eight weeks—an airplane flight must have helped here. At the same time, one becomes sensitized to how strongly the ideas and emotions of the people are influenced by the images they bring with them. Every line in Desire Lines takes its own individual course, and represents a different path. In all of their works price graphs, cardiograms, seismographic charts, or the beginnings of outlines. But maybe they don’t. Paths laid out are initially received in a purely visual way. Dense, round dots look like full stops. Perhaps the visual rhythm alters when the pause is physically realized. Lines prove to be abstractions with many potential stories. Space spreads out, becoming a kind of imaginary, yet real space of awareness. Out of a moment of directionlessness and its resulting opening, viewers begin to allow the lines—which would normally be used for measuring, ordering, and comprehension—to tell their own tales. Viewers realize that they’re becoming more strongly involved in the events caused by the paths of movement, these notations in a territory expanding in the mind.

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sn’t deal bores us.”

Baltensperger + Siepert initiate and offer the most diverse decisions about which direction to take, and about possible ways of approaching the present, as well as about what lies in the path and what points toward the future.

David Siepert and Stefan Baltensperger began working on projects together in 2007, while they were still students at the Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz (Northwest Switzerland Technical University) in Aarau. Both received visual arts degrees with an emphasis on new media from the school in Aarau, and later, both received their Masters in Fine Arts from Zurich’s Hochschule der Künste (Zurich University of the Arts). Since 2009 they’ve shared a studio in Zurich, which is not so much of a workplace as it is an office for organizational matters. The two of them usually conduct the discussions necessary for creativity while walking, where they’re outside of the limits of indoor space. Their main topic is politics, with a focus on geopolitical conditions—and hence, the conditions under which political structures related to space are built. „Our expectation of art is that it should not only question society, but also take on the responsibility for helping to shape it,” say the two artists, who are always posing the question of “what art can and could mean.” This is also targeted at exploring possible ways that individuals can define themselves in a manner worthy of human beings in a globalized world, while at the same time finding their place in it.

With the help of the art they produce, Baltensperger + Siepert want to provoke new ideas and hence, conceivable possibilities. The opportunity to contemplate something creates optional reality. Potentiality is the driving force behind their creativity. Anything that effectively manifests in material tends to have the characteristics of a tool. Their tools and equipment are channeled into the process of perception like functional—primarily upgraded—auxiliary aids; this makes it possible to perceive the hidden functions and mechanisms of existing systems, and thus make them negotiable. Among the duo’s strategies is the process of shifting boundaries. Fiction and reality are moved closer to each other; they even mix and exchange roles. Fictive manifest as real; reality is based on fiction, as it is in the videos for their piece Desti-Nation: one is an animation, the other, a staged television newscast.

A Buoy as Companion

Desti-Nation? In 2013 a mostly bright red object of practically explosive energy was jammed in between the ceiling and floor of the Galerie AB|C contemporary in Zurich. There was no way to avoid it, in several respects. It was difficult to move through the space. It was also difficult to pretend as if you hadn’t seen the object, which was equipped with a spotlight, GPS, solar cells, and an electric motor. It was difficult to take a position in relation to it. What was it, exactly, that was on display? A sculpture, a plastic intervention, an installation? There were definitely echoes of current artistic practices, yet at the same time the notion of a work tool was decidedly prominent. Desti-Nation was presented as a prototype for a kind of pilot buoy. That it also “promises North African refugees
safe passage across the Mediterranean” is background information.

The primary information was filtered through intuitive, physical, and emotional perception. This is one of the particular strengths of Baltensperger + Siepert’s works. They invent images for highly complicated, abstract contexts. “We develop tools that can be used to contemplate visions and to generate new utopias,” they parenthesize, thus declaring their concept of art. Neither is satisfied with visual paraphrasing, in the form of metaphors. They are looking for images that activate, that animate people to do something. “We’re revolting against the notion of passing ideologically based judgment on European and non-European societies according to European ideas. As we develop our tools we want to initiate changes in perspective that cross borders, while offering connecting points that trigger the need to think about urgent themes and, in the process, become aware of our own ways of thinking.” Basically, Baltensperger + Siepert are always searching for new ways for people to think and talk about the something that exists, about the world itself. “Our works are reality kaleidoscopes, observation machines, which are always shifting constantly changing perspectives into the field of view.”

It’s no accident that, although they also pursue individual art projects, Stefan Baltensperger and David Siepert generally work as a team, because in the exchange of words, conflicts are kept open. They’ve made border crossing highly productive. If you stand in front of the buoy, fundamental presumptions start to seem unfounded. You start out thinking of lighthouses, a symbol of safety. But then the buoy appears to be precariously imbalanced, almost as if it were about to tip over at any moment. You follow the curves of an aluminum ring, react physically to the slope, begin to understand the technical elements more precisely. With each new approach to the buoy, new trains of thought appear. The thoughts themselves take on the ebb and swell of waves. It becomes difficult to make decisions, and even more difficult to make the right decision.

Baltensperger + Siepert also set language in motion, so that it becomes ambiguous. The sign in the space around Desti-Nation is both a connecting and dividing hyphen, and picks up the kind of ambivalence inherent in the work. As a travel guide app, Desti’s theme is the idea of the tool. Nation brings both the state as entity into play, along with birth. Destination means determination, a task, fixing something in place, and in the realm of connotations the process of fixing something in place again collides with the movement striven for. Borders blur. „Desti-Nation starts with confronting the question of what a border actually means. What it means to be born on one or the other side of an artificially drawn line,” write Baltensperger + Siepert on their website. „In Europe, we’re experiencing how these lines are becoming more diffuse and how our image of the world is increasingly defined by economic relationships.”

Orphaned National Flags

Approaches are paths leading to knowledge, and as such, they may instigate the process of questioning oneself. The main question of what it means to be human in different cultures and in the vortex of global networks drives the two artists in their creative work. Their search for intensive exchanges with other cultures has led them to travel to distant lands. David Siepert spent a long time in the Middle East, in Egypt and Lebanon especially. Stefan Baltensperger spends more time in Asia, most particularly in Burma (Myanmar) and Indonesia. Both have been to China several times, where they’ve also curated exhibitions. In a controversial action for the 2012 Shanghai Biennial they had the various national flags of different countries sewn together uniformly in imperial red-colored fabric. In rank and file, red on red, relieved of their authority and symbolic power to shape identity, the flags hung on high, not at half-mast, but also not joyfully hoisted.

The patterns of the national flags could only really be recognized through the lines of each flag’s stitching. Unlike the situation in China, the flags were realigned in white on white in earlier versions of the concept. Lines connect and divide; they are both stitches and tears. Open borders suggest freedom, and in their process of leveling, they bring alienation. As a device, the flags hung next to each other evoked visions of a reactor. Chain reactions produce energy, but they can also lead to a void, or get out of hand. Europe is not the only place where high walls have recently been erected, border fences set up. In whatever culture each individual is located, continual trains of thought must begin, so that new conditions for the global system can be created; otherwise migration, integration, and assimilation will only bring more random wandering. The pilot buoy, whose shape makes it anything but suitable for gliding through water with the least resistance, also causes more confusion, rather than leading to safety. Its resistant ambivalence conveys, with physical urgency, the necessity of changing direction.
We demand that art not only question society, but also bear the responsibility to shape it. Art should not be limited to the spheres of the art world; it must unfold beyond it to have an impact on today’s society.
We often ask ourselves, “What does it mean to be an artist today? What is the role and/or function of art in today’s society?”. In our understanding art was, and always will be, connected to the production of new ways to see and understand the world in which we are living. Artists invented techniques and styles to create new and different perspectives of things.

We are talking about aesthetics as a science of perception. We are talking about the creation of entry points into topics that inevitably lead to deeper reflection and thinking processes. The creation of spaces for thought, short moments in which we forget the rules and contents of major discourses to allow new space for fresh ideas and new ways of seeing and understanding those fragments of what we call the world.

Our main interest is in political structures that unfold on local and global levels. One of the essential themes of our time is the division of the world into different units and their geopolitical relations.

National identities and migration are just some terms within the field we explore throughout the cycle we call Territories. We try to question the dispositives of perception by shedding light on them from alternative angles, thus allowing for different observational approaches.

Stefan Baltensperger + David Siepert

www.baltensperger-siepert.com
“Tomorrow will be better, tomorrow we will make it.”
There is a belief in tomorrow. A tomorrow that will be brighter—if not for us, maybe for a future generation. More specifically, we wish that better and brighter future particularly for our own offspring, much more than for somebody else’s descendants. It’s our responsibility, a burden, and it implies the possibility of failure.

It seems that tomorrow is more related to space than to anything else. Tomorrow happens on a stage somewhere else, and if you want to participate you need to be the actor who is there, moving toward the future, to those places where anything is possible, to write your own story of success. The further you are physically from those places, the longer it will take you to get there. You actually might never get there, or else, you’re already there, but you don’t realize it. And then there is also the day after tomorrow — but one day you will wake up and be dead!

Our personal efforts to think about the world, a tomorrow, to explore things from new perspectives usually end in complex setups and multifaceted projects. We invent imagination machines through which we dare to try and understand the world, which is, philosophically speaking, just another fiction. Machines for confusion with no answers but countless questions—this is what drives us.

We are in a whirl, playfully oscillating between definition and redefinition. Defining oneself through the other, through differences, stigmatizing not only the self, but creating the other as a fiction, a collage of exoticism and fears. A house of cards, built to collapse, endangered by knowledge and a lack of distance and imagination.

It would have been much easier if we had learned to put our thoughts into written form (on paper). But then we would have to convey our thoughts through the linear logic of words, through sentences related to the way things were before, the roots of knowledge called the dispositive. Is there any place for the thoughts of an alien? How is the individual subject embedded in the social body?

At birth we’re all allocated a place in society. We learn how to behave according to this placement and we value ourselves accordingly. This applies to social class, as well as to regional identities. We learn to identify ourselves through what we were taught to be like. Over time it becomes natural … the stigma is internalized.

It’s idle to talk about the shift of power from politics to economy that has manifested in recent decades. Players continue to push the ball across the field. De- and re-contextualizing thoughts and values, goods and individuals, and thereby accepting that individuals are subjected to and for labor, by being divided into the different functions of an economic system. Some are painters, others merchants, and others are hairdressers, barbers, or teachers. Each profession has an identity that is inherent to the subject, but each also has a stigma, encouraged by outside forces.

This stigma is a “trust machine,” but could also be called a “power selector.” The stigma of one’s profession conveys trust in certain skills, such as our trust that a hairdresser will give us a fresh and funky haircut. Or do you want your hair to be cut by a philosopher? The same could be said about the ability to bring one’s thoughts into society. The trust machine works well, and spins the wheel again and again. But shall we really limit the ability to shape one’s society to a few select people, or do we have to invent a new machine to make the subaltern heard?

We are interested in friction. Friction is often produced by confusion and unusual connections. Deviations from leading discourses, displacement and fragmentation of things we thought were clear, but actually aren’t. A multifaceted network of thoughts, emotions, and connections, right and wrong ones (the wrong ones are usually the more interesting ones). If we think about new fictions, we create a multitude of fictional spaces—third spaces located on a neutral playground that make no claim to truthfulness, spaces in which we might be able to escape our prejudices. Different shades of gray appear inside of zones that used to be black and white, defining a new field by renegotiating space. Of course, we are destined to fail, but it should not stop us from trying.

We try to spin the wheel once again, mix the ingredients and squeeze them through the pastry tube—another device, a kaleidoscope for reality.
Looking at these drawings, what we see are simple lines. Some are straight, others bend. Points and marks can be seen, sometimes fingerprints. The artist's signature is missing; instead, there are the names of two places, one in Europe and another somewhere else, followed by a period of time and a date.

For their series Desire Lines Baltensperger + Siepert did not draw a single line themselves. Instead, they involved themselves in discussions with individuals seeking asylum, who live in asylum centers in Switzerland. They asked them to tell the story of their lives, especially how they got where they are now.

During these conversations the artists asked the asylum seekers to visualize the route they traveled from their home country to where they are now, on a plain piece of paper.

What they had to say was not recorded. What is left from these conversations are simple strokes and lines, which, detached from their context, are nothing but a formal aesthetic reference. But within the context these lines open up worlds; they tell stories about precarious lives, personal fate, and the hope for a chance at a new life.
As part of our research, we got in touch with asylum seekers in Switzerland. Getting to know them and listening to their narratives, we realized how it is difficult to listen without automatically reproducing those known and common images we were fed by media and news. We think we know what people are talking about, when we actually just reproduce content from existing puzzle parts that were given us from the outside, and still we believe in our imagination without being aware of this fictitious construct in our mind.

Therefore we decided to take away the narration completely. While the asylum seekers were telling their story, we placed a piece of paper on top of a map and asked the asylum seekers to simply draw their individual routes from their home country to where they are now.

We still remember most of these stories, but we slowly started to forget the details, and one day most memories of these stories will be gone, or we will no longer be sure which memories are true and which are just fantasies, based on puzzle parts in our memory.
**top:**
Tibet - Zurich  
duration 8 weeks  
arrival in Zurich, 2012

**bottom:**
Ginda - Zurich  
duration 11 weeks  
arrival in Zurich, 2010
top:
Dera Bugti - Zurich
duration 7 years
arrival in Zurich, 2012

bottom:
Quetta - Zurich
duration 5 1/2 years
arrival in Zurich, 2012
Desti-Nation is the prototype of a guiding-buoy, promising to provide a safe crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. The buoy works autonomously; through a website it can be called to any desired location along the North African coast. From there the buoy uses its built-in GPS to lead the refugees in their boats safely to Europe.

“I think we should never underestimate the power of imagination; it is a balancing act between imagination and reality. You could say that imagination produces reality. Is it not also the imagination of a better and richer life that brings people to the point to risk their lives on the Mediterranean?”

Anna Miller, IICR expert on migration
Desti-Nation - Breaking News, 2014
STRONGER SWIMMER
Two Artists Builds an Apparatus That Could Help Refugees Navigate to Europe  Paulina Szczesniak for Tages-Anzeiger / Züri-Tipp / 2013

What is a human life worth to you? To be more precise: the life of an African? Do you find these kinds of questions cynical? Uncomfortable?

If so, then you should treat the works by Zurich-based artist duo David Siepert + Stefan Baltensperger with great caution.

Lodged between the floor and the ceiling of the gallery is a large red buoy. The buoy is equipped with GPS, GMS, solar panels, and an electric motor. Why does a buoy need all this? To guide refugees, like a moving lighthouse, from North Africa to Europe.

For anyone willing to invest 84,000 Swiss francs, Baltensperger + Siepert will release one of their self-created buoys into the Mediterranean on his/her behalf, to be booked and ordered to any place at the North African coast.

Politically speaking, this project is explosive and highly controversial. But that’s true for all projects by David Siepert (*1983) and Stefan Baltensperger (*1976), who pursue individual projects as well as collaborative work. At last year’s Shanghai Biennial, Siepert + Baltensperger provoked the host country by producing different national flags in a uniform, Chinese imperial red, which led to some being eliminated from display.

The present show also features flags, not red, but virgin white, gently fluttering in the wind. Perhaps they symbolize peace? Or capitulation? They are not so far from each other, when you think about it. Not so far apart, just like Africa and Europe!
Exploring different strategies of the creation of reality, Baltensperger + Siepert worked together with Taiwan based company Next Media, which is specialized in creating animation videos for events that were not covered with actual video footage, news agency Reuters being one of their main clients. Next Media created an explanatory animation video about Desti-Nation as functioning object, using their unique visual language which everybody is so used to from television news.

Aside from the collaboration with Next Media, Baltensperger + Siepert also shot their very own news show video. Applying visual strategies and the visual language of news Baltensperger + Siepert staged a news show that reports about the buoy, being in service in the Mediterranean already, including an experts discussion.
left:
installation shot
Swiss Art Awards
Basel, Switzerland, 2015

right:
video stills
Desti-Nation-News-Report staged news report reflecting on reality, and its creation
An abstracted silkscreen of Desti-Nation, printed on a reproduction of a 1914 trade map, showing sources of commodities in North Africa and the respective trading routes to colonial Europe.
The guiding buoy by Baltensperger + Siepert stranded in the museum also brings the topic of streams of international refugees into the museum, and establishes that the public and its values should only be seen in front of the backdrop of global activities.

The facts are that the object can actually aid in escape, can be called up and booked for free via mobile phone, and is supposed to guide refugees safely across the Mediterranean to Europe. This goes far beyond the desired and slightly provoking call to think about the current situation. Re-enacted advertising videos and news shows in international TV style aim at both media and economic exploitation of such themes. Here, the bridge isn’t too far, which might be the most important aside here, because the artists’ little colonial maps, which they’ve altered, show that refugees today travel along the same routes that colonial rulers used and continue to use to exploit their countries, both then and now. So the source of the problem here continues to be identified as a problem of prolonged colonial history that has yet to be solved.

Here, it becomes clear that we’re currently not able to turn present-day problems around without political concessions and bearable losses. The question that arises is: why is a society like ours, spoiled by consumerism, finds it so difficult to publically discuss, carry on, and negotiate conflicts. The fear of change, which increasingly feeds on the individual’s survival instincts, rather than from the progressive movement of a society bent on evolving, plays an important role in this work.

Markus Ambach, curator of the show Von den Strömen der Stadt at the Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany, 2016
Imaginary Landscapes is based on photographs of national borders that Baltensperger + Siepert collected on the Internet. To remove the borders, the artists physically cut the photographs into pieces and then rearranged what was left to create new, imaginary landscapes.

From the occasionally poor quality and low resolution of the images, viewers can see that the pictures were taken from the Internet. The algorithms of online search engines, such as Google, Baidu, or Bing, helped to shape the pool of images Baltensperger + Siepert use as an archive for this series. Accordingly, the images represent the borders most talked and written about—zones of conflict, and regions renegotiating national and cultural borders.

Through the gestures of removing border installations, the deformation of the original frame of the photograph, and the recreation of alternative landscapes, Baltensperger + Siepert open up a field for imagination to claim its space and create ways of thinking about what is in between.
Zurich-based artists Stefan Baltensperger and David Siepert have been working collaboratively since 2007. In their artistic practice Baltensperger and Siepert critically reflect on social, cultural, and political issues and expand the boundaries of contemporary art into new dimensions. They immerse themselves in systems, aiming to make them visible, while also manipulating them.

At Janco Dada Museum Baltensperger + Siepert present an installation consisting of two pieces, which offers a neutral thinking space to question common power structures. The centerpiece is based on the artists’ concept of Imaginary Landscapes, which will be presented as a huge wallpaper collage.

Imaginary Landscapes is based on an archive of photos of Israeli installations that border the neighboring countries and territories, which Baltensperger + Siepert collected from the Internet. The artists physically cut the photographs into pieces, thereby removing all border installations. The artists then recompose what is left to form a new, imaginary landscape.

With Imaginary Landscapes the artists question power structures based on national territories. Through the gestures of removing border installations and recreating alternative landscapes, Baltensperger + Siepert open a field for imagination, to claim its space and create potentially new ways of thinking about what is in between.

The second part of the installation is based on Baltensperger + Siepert’s video piece, Dancing Queen. The title is taken from ABBA’s catchy 1970s’ disco song, “Dancing Queen,” which also builds the acoustic background for this video. Acting in the video is a battery-powered toy soldier that was originally designed to crawl on the floor. From time to time, the toy soldier interrupts its movements, lies still, and pretends to shoot before he continues to gain ground.

For their video, Baltensperger + Siepert simply changed the soldier’s position from horizontal to vertical and adjusted the speed to the rhythm of the sound.

In that new position the motion, which was designed as a military gesture, transforms into a dancing move, a gesture of joy and absence of worry. With “Dancing Queen” Baltensperger + Siepert offer a simple, yet significant shift of perspective, and question the common practice of responding to conflicts with military violence.

At Janco Dada Museum the Dancing Queen video will be running in synch on three screens vertically arranged and overlapping with the wallpaper installation. Presented as a triptych, in a setting of exaggeration and multiplication, the visual expression of the installation repeats visual patterns of representations of power, but it also tries to resolve them through its bizarre appearance.

Rina Genussov, Curator @ Janco Dada Museum, Ein-Hod, Israel, 2016
Dancing Queen is based on a plastic toy soldier, which was forced upon us by some street vendors in Shanghai. These battery-powered toy soldiers were crawling on the ground and once in a while came to a halt to shoot some fictional target, before they started to move again.

Irritated and amazed at the same time by the violent nature of that toy, we started haggling and finally ended up buying one. This strange plastic toy then sat on a shelf in our studio. Once in a while we took it off the shelf to let it crawl and shoot. One day we put it on its feet and suddenly realized how the violent gesture turned into a dance-like movement.

This simple shift of perspective lead to a significant shift of reception.

This shift of perspective then inspired us to make the video piece Dancing Queen, in which a composition of this very toy soldier moves in a choreographed pattern, repeating displays of military power, with ABBA’s catchy 1970s’ disco song, “Dancing Queen,” as an acoustic backdrop.
installation shot
Dancing Queen + Imaginary Landscapes
Binz39 Foundation, Zurich, 2016
In the video About Negotiation (2014), Zurich-based artists Stefan Baltensperger and David Siepert meet a migrant worker newly arrived in a Chinese city and offer to buy all of his belongings. With their neo-colonial and immoral offer, Baltensperger and Siepert provoke a negotiation of emotional and material values as well as of cultural principles. The actual event serves as a pretext for establishing a space where debate can take place.

How do individuals define themselves in a globalized world, and what are the cultural implications in the term “value?” The English subtitles for the negotiation — between the artists, the interpreter, and the migrant worker and his partner — reveal yet another layer of discourse on cultural and linguistic differences.

Katharina Weikl, Curator of Trans Actions, a parallel event of Manifesta 11, Zurich, 2016
For their project Drawing Boundaries Baltensperger + Siepert produced various national flags. Instead of making exact reproductions of the flags, they eliminated all colors, replacing them with a simple, unifying red or white.

The point of departure for our project Drawing Boundaries is our involvement with the meaning of borders. What does it mean to be born on one or the other side of an artificially drawn line? A line on a map, sometimes natural, sometimes a man-made barrier, which exacerbates the difficulties in crossing from one side to the other. At the same we experience Europe’s borders becoming more and more diffuse, and how our world view is defined and influenced by economic relationships.
Shanghai Biennale 2012/13

the concept of the exhibition display was
done in collaboration with artist Shi Qing
Here and Elsewhere is based on Baltensperger + Siepert’s archive of border installations; the work offers silent and poetic access to a regime of division.

Baltensperger and Siepert did not rearrange the leftovers after cutting out the border-installations, as they did in their cycle Imaginary Landscapes. They carefully mounted the remains of the photographs on plain aluminum plates. The missing part of the photo is now represented by the absence of material; at the same time, it becomes a shiny, silver aluminum surface, reflecting the light and atmosphere of the exhibition space, as well as anyone viewing it. The shiny surface seduces the viewer and opens up a void that needs to be filled.
Here and Elsewhere
landscape USA - Mexico

Here and Elsewhere
landscape Pakistan - India
Camp West is a fictitious, occidental organization with terrorist characteristics. This organization recruits followers by promising to make them ready to fight foreigners. Stefan Baltensperger and David Siepert founded this fictional organization with dubious intentions and presented it in virtual space. The project thus alternates between fiction and reality.

The actual artwork is neither the video nor the exhibition, but the space of negotiation generated by the project. The art piece itself is the collection of comments and reactions on the video, as well as the thoughts provoked by the notion of such an organization. This space of negotiation and the comments can be seen as a reflection of a zeitgeist.

video stills
Camp West promotion video
with comments from different social media plattforms
A provocation, a slap in the face, if these can change anything? 

Really pathetic this camp … well, means more work for us!

Artists, who really change something are really rare. These ones definitely did not count to that group. I don't understand it … what about this video should be funny or provoking. But the director of photography did a great job I have to admit. Congratulations to the cameraman!

A provocation, a slap in the face, if these can change anything? 

There is nothing to do with art. 

Tanez Everybody can call himself an artist. And that is good. Also art can be anything. The term does not matter at all. Its important that something is done no matter if you like it or not! 20min The idea is really nice but even I could have executed it much better …

Tanez It's not clever and it's not crude. Its just boring and stupid. does it help to play with prejudice and patriotism/nationalism? Wouldn't it be nice to look for a solution? But I guess there the ideas are just missing.

20min Great activist piece! and I am not surprised that Swiss people applied for the camp. Our nations suffers from stupidity! You really should put those perverts into jail!

It really is surprising what kind of ideas people have when they are bored????? You probably would not survive a single day out in the nature … stop it and try to do some honest work! 1 person likes that! 

"future anxiety)? A fighter should know what he is fighting for and for what he is sacrificing his life, for the future or his family and for the nation! A fighter is not fighting for his future he is fighting for the future of his nation and his children. 20min [...] Artists are multiculdi dreamers, they live in their rosy phantasy world and try not to touch the ground with their feet. By the way, in my experience artists are rather scared of real work. Economically art is not really important at all. Thats why art is not of any importance form a bourgeois point of view. 

I am from Turkey but I am living in Switzerland for about 10 years now. Can I apply for the camp? 1 body is too young or too old to pick up a machine gun to eliminate parasitical elements! 20min Artists, who really change something are really rare. These ones definitely don't not count to that group. I don't understand it … what about this video should be funny or provoking. But the director of photography did a great job I have to admit. Congratulations to the cameraman!

To whom this may concern, I have seen the video of your camp and I would be more than happy to participate in your next camp. I would be especially interested in self defense. May I take my own gear and ammunition with me? 

Sweeeet guys! Congratulations that really is a great project […] my Arab friends could teach you how to grow a proper beard! 

Thank good it is just an art project and it really is nothing to laugh about. Real worries know that the most dangerous thing is an angry nation. Guerrilla without uniforms and everybody could be your enemy. Your kids, your wife. But western identity? Today you don't need an army. You just need a being company. And then there are stupid white men who think they could become worriers and then they ask others to come and bring their guns. 

Art. And that is good. Also art can be anything. The term does not matter at all. Its important that something is done no matter if you like it or not! 

The pulse!!!!!!

Yawn, should these be a provocation? I hope there were no taxes used for these project. These really would upset me.

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This is sick!!!!

I am living in the Philippines for 62 years now in the countryside. Here we also a camp: its called the jungle army. The jungle army officially does not exist and more, even though they still do exist. And one curious thing is that wherever they rule there is almost no criminality. And if somebody misbehaves they first give an oral warning and if the person does not listen they will come at night. So, you see, it really works and if Camp West would have similar structures it really might have a great impact on the Swiss society!

I really do like the project and this provocation echoes through our society … looking at all those comments I see that some of you are writing trivialities full of hate. You are your own parody and you show us how real and good the project is … thanks for this unintended slapstick. 

Comments from different social media platforms

left: installation shot

right: Kunstetage, Zurich, 2010

Kunstetage, Zurich, 2010

social media platforms