

## **Voyage, voyage**

*Voyage, voyage* is a multi-part research-based project by Belgian-born artist Tom Bogaert. The project was initially developed at the invitation of the Geneva-based artist collective Utopiana, and takes as its starting point Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of the "radicant," a family of plants—including the trumpet creeper, ivy, and the strawberry plant—that develop their roots as they go, adapting themselves to the soil, space, and time in which they move. Miming the methodology of Romanticism—examining nature in an attempt to better understand the human condition and the universe at large—Bourriaud forms a connection between this class of meandering plants, the forms of "the immigrant, the exile, the foreign tourist, and the urban wanderer," and the peregrine contemporary artist. In *Voyage, voyage*, Bogaert addresses both the concept of the radicant and Bourriaud's Romantic methodology.

With a background documenting genocide and human rights abuses in Africa and Asia for fourteen years for Amnesty International and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Bogaert has an incisive curiosity regarding the art world's intrigue with nomadic and migrating lifestyles—in both the content of myriad contemporary artworks, and the itinerant lifestyles of those who form and perpetuate its structures for viewing, distributing, and understanding. There is a notable disparity between the global contemporary art world's enthusiasm for artworks that are critical or acutely cognizant of numerous populations' lack of agency with regard to forced or restricted migration and the itinerant class of art world professionals whose migration is a reflection of global concentrations of urban-centered wealth. *Voyage, voyage* aims to formulate responses to the art world's romantic appropriation of the discourse surrounding exodus, freedom of movement, immigration, refugees, cosmopolitanism, and nomadism.

In the spring of 2014, Utopiana—a Geneva-based artist collective and transdisciplinary artistic platform—invited Bogaert to explore his ideas on the art world's obsession with nomadic and migratory lifestyles. From April to October 2014, in Utopiana's parcel of the community garden "Pote à Jean," Bogaert taught himself how to grow strawberries out of a curiosity for understanding their needs and habits, and to further press Bourriaud's equation of the radicant with the global art worker. Furthermore, Bogaert conducted musical, botanical and artistic experiments on the plants to test some of Bourriaud's claims, in particular the assertion that a radicant will survive even after its first roots are cut off.

After his initial research at Utopiana, Bogaert expanded his experiments in Morocco, growing strawberries in an innovative greenhouse installed in an exhibition space devoid of natural light. Using tanning lamps—a light source that replicates the natural solar spectrum—Bogaert's indoor installation seeks to mimic the conditions experienced by place-less traveling contemporary art works and workers on a botanical scale. Bogaert conducted further experiments on the strawberry plants, which he also used to make strawberry jam. The results of these experiments are available online, accessible via QR codes posted next to the installation. Inspired by the ubiquitous red gingham patterned lids used in the strawberry jam industry, Bogaert makes QR codes out of strawberry jam jelly presented on the screen of an overhead projector, as well as from vinyl picnic table cloths.

Finally, Bogaert invited a musician to compose a new soundtrack with special beneficial effects for strawberry plants inspired by Dorothy Retallack's 1973 book *The Sound of Music and Plants*. Her book detailed experiments she had been conducting at the Colorado Women's College in Denver using the school's three Biotronic Control Chambers. Retallack placed plants in each of the three chambers alongside speakers through which she played sounds and particular styles of music. During a period of two months Retallack observed the plants and recorded their daily progress.

Imagining an art world where we all just stay home – for a year, a month, or maybe just a minute of migratory silence, in the consideration of those for whom it is not a choice, Bogaert considers this generation's dissolution with utopic ambitions, and offers instead a microcosmic arena from which to imagine our disconnected migratory futures.

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