

## Landversation Beirut by Otobong Nkanga

10 February – 2 April 2016

Opening reception: Wednesday 10 February 2016, 6pm to 9pm

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*Landversation Beirut* is a project by Otobong Nkanga that will be exhibited at Beirut Art Center for 2 months. Originally presented in 31st Sao Paulo Biennial, Brazil (*Landversation 2014*), the project sets out to explore and compare the complex relationship between the human subject and land in Lebanon.

Set in the main space of the Beirut Art Centre, the exhibition's 'stage' is installed with a table that will be occupied by three Lebanese people with a deep connection to 'Land', people whose work requires them to consider the consequential use of 'Land'. Each participant, whether an archaeologist, a farmer or someone engaging in a land-related industrial activity, will contribute to this common theme of sharing a relationship to the Land. The table will provide a platform for meetings and conversations among those individuals and the visiting public who may also share a history and an authorship of this same land, whether cultivating it, developing laws that organize it, or protecting public space. In Otobong Nkanga's words, the notion of 'Land' "extends beyond just soil, territories, earth etc., but relates to our connectivity and conflicts in relation to the spaces we live in and how we humans try to find solutions through simple gestures of innovation and repair".

Additionally, Nkanga will present a series of early photographic works including *Emptied Remains*, *Stripped Bare* and *Things Have Fallen* mainly photographed in Nigeria together for the first time with later works like *Alterscapes Stories* and *Dolphin Estate*. In the earlier photographic series, Nkanga captures the psychological and phenomenological experience of land and landscape while accentuating at the same time the physical and spatial attributes of the built environment and as it signifies the continuous relationship between man and nature. The photographs depict landscapes as a series of disturbed interrupted movements of development and stasis that address the collapse of time and space.

*Dolphin Estate Series* consists of six images that document the first pre-fabricated housing units built in the 1990's in Lagos and how the inhabitants of those units have adapted the architecture to fit their needs, annexing uncanny scaffolding-like structures that would carry water tanks and satellite dishes, thus creating a layer of secondary architecture.

The dyptich and triptych of *Alterscape Stories* shows the artist literally "Spilling Waste" then "Uprooting the Past" on a landscape model, expressing the way mankind handles their own surroundings on a larger scale.

*Dream in One Meter Square* is an installation that consists of a photograph and an "inside" chamber which can be accessed as if one is entering the image. This "inner" chamber constitutes the backstage where the artist performs on the opening day. Realized for the first time in Sharjah Biennial in 2005, this evocative and thought-provoking piece will be adapted for Beirut.

With the main space of Beirut Art Center acting as an exterior space open to discussions, debates and circulation of language, *Landversation Beirut* also encloses its own landscape in the form of a site-specific fresco which the artist will create on one wall.

*Landversation Beirut* deals with the contradictory ways in which we inhabit the earth and are dependent on it and the dichotomy of how those two ways of dealing with it two connect. By availing ourselves of and profiting from this planet's abundant fertility we haphazardly contribute to its exhaustion, thereby creating huge imbalances that undermine its ability to continue. In response to this destruction we constantly look for palliatives, measures to repair and negate the very damage we have forced upon it. This exhibition seeks to provide a space to sit for a moment and reflect, a space to consider the various possibilities surrounding this ever-complex relationship and perhaps ,most important of all, a space for conversation.

## Biography

Otobong Nkanga was born in 1974, Kano, Nigeria. She lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium. A visual artist and performer, Nkanga began her art studies at the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria and continued at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France. She was at the residency program at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

In 2008, Nkanga obtained her Masters in the Performing Arts at Dasarts, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Her drawings, installations, photographs and sculptures variously examine ideas around land and the value connected to natural resources.

In the work of Otobong Nkanga, activities and performance permeate all kinds of media and motivate photography, drawing, painting, sculpture, installation and video, though all the different works are thematically connected through architecture and landscape. As a human trace that testifies of ways of living and environmental issues, architecture and landscape act as a sounding board for narration and the performative. According to the artist herself, she uses her body and voice in live performances or in videos to become the protagonist in her work. However, her presence serves mostly as a self-effacing catalyst, an invisible hand that sets the artistic process in motion. Nkanga negotiates the completion of the cycle of art between the aesthetic realm of display and a strategy of de-sublimation that repeatedly pushes the status of the artwork into contingency. In many of her works Nkanga reflects metonymically on the use and cultural value connected to natural resources, exploring how meaning and function are relative within cultures, and revealing different roles and histories for the same products, particularly within the context of the artists autobiography and memories. From June 2013 to June 2014, Otobong Nkanga was a guest of the DAAD Berliner Künstlerprogramm Artists-in-Berlin Program.

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