

Meriem Bennani: *Life on the CAPS*

7 May – 4 September 2022

***Life on the CAPS* explores a speculative future set on the CAPS, a fictional island in the middle of the Atlantic. Here, biotechnology has enabled people to travel by teleportation, undergo radical age reversals and buy new bodies. In a world where borders are enforced by gigantic magnetic fields and a militant brigade of drone troopers, the exhibition imagines experiences of displacement and longing, of resilience and perpetual transition. This is the first solo exhibition in a UK museum by the Moroccan-born, New York-based artist Meriem Bennani (b.1988, Rabat), and features two chapters from a trilogy of films set on the CAPS.**

Bennani is a storyteller. Her work presents an amplified version of reality, punctuated by special effects, digital animation and music. She draws on reality TV, documentary, advertising, social media and phone footage, exploring the saturation of digital technologies and the fracturing of identities within contemporary society.

Bennani's ability to bridge the imaginary and the geopolitical, the individual and the collective, owes much to her close collaboration with actors. Often working with family and friends who play 'CAPSi' versions of themselves, she describes her method as 'a mix between documentary and role play'. Bennani has said: 'Whatever issues they're dealing with in their real lives are transposed onto the CAPS because, ultimately, it *is* about the issues they have in real life.'

GALLERY 1

Party on the CAPS

2018–19, eight-channel video installation, 25 min 28 sec

Courtesy the artist and CLEARING, New York/Brussels

Shot with members of the artist's own family, *Party on the CAPS* captures an experience of postcolonial dispossession and resilience in the Moroccan neighbourhood of the CAPS. In the first chapter of the trilogy, we meet Fiona the crocodile – the island's mascot – who introduces us to the intricate world of the CAPS. This isolated community originally grew out of a detention camp, which held refugees intercepted while attempting to teleport to the United States. The violence of interference mid-teleportation has left bodies in a quantum mess, and residents live with afflictions like 'plastic face syndrome'. Over three generations, the captive population of the swamp-rimmed island has developed into a bustling megalopolis.

GALLERY 2

Life on the CAPS

2022, single-channel video, 34 min

Courtesy the artist; CLEARING, New York/Brussels; and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles/New York

The final chapter of the CAPS series extends Bennani's exploration of displacement, biotechnology and traditional forms of Moroccan music. The film interweaves a narrative of protest and liberation with the story of Kamal, a 65-year-old man who has bought himself a new body. As Bennani has said, 'It's in a way political because he's like, "I will live longer, maybe to see the day that the CAPS is liberated." Having a longer life span is being tied to lifelong political struggles.' The film culminates in revolt – a form of performance as protest – which invokes an ancient musical tradition of synchronised clapping and percussion called the *deqqa*. The score for the film was created by musician and producer Fatima Al Qadiri.

Curated by Olivia Aherne and Nicole Yip.

Life on the CAPS (2022) is a co-commission with The Renaissance Society, Chicago, where it was presented from 26 February to 17 April 2022. This commission is generously supported by CLEARING, New York/Brussels.

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