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TOBIAS ZIELONY EXHIBITION 2016

When people see no way out of their predicaments, they may decide to simply take the bull by the horns. Some then scale heights – they climb roofs, cross mountain ranges, stand on barricades. Where voices rise up unexpectedly, where bodies expose themselves to the harsh light of the public or worse, the insurgency of the political subject begins, and a boundary is crossed that separates invisibility from visibility. What fell on deaf ears is suddenly heard. Climbing roofs and mountains is one way to cross this line; George Clooney made Tobias Zielony see that going into orbit is another. More on that below.

In September 2014, a group of refugees occupied the roof of Berlin's Gerhard-Hauptmann-Schule to demand their right to self-determination. The protest was part of a collective movement that generated awareness in the German public for the political demands of migrants; some of these demands were subsequently met. Since February 2014, Zielony has followed several movement activists in Hamburg and Berlin, photographing the occupation of the roof; of Napuli Langa, who lived in a tree for five days to protest the removal of the refugee camp on Oranienplatz in Kreuzberg; and of scenes in Hamburg's St. Pauli neighborhood. Each image contributes to a narrative about the political subjectivity of the refugees, about their status as citizens.

Zielony's camera captures people on the margins of social recognition in those moments when they seek to limn their self-image. The distance between photographer and subject bespeaks the complicity that grows out of a shared uncertainty: What comes into view when someone takes a picture – forms an image – of someone else? The uncertainty does not grow any less acute when the pictures show refugees struggling for acceptance and visibility, or when they are the work of a widely recognized German photographer. It led Zielony to abandon the conventional format of the individually framed picture. Instead, he circulated his shots to initiate a polyphonic exchange of views about the protagonists of the refugee protests and their public representation. Unlike people hoping to move from the Global South to the North, photographs travel freely, and Zielony sent his in the opposite direction. Twelve daily papers in Uganda, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, and Sudan accepted his proposal to run the pictures from Hamburg and Berlin with reports on refugee movements, rebellion, and photography. Each of these contributions framed Zielony's photographs in a different way. Loosely arranged on a cycle of ten wall-mounted panels, they also served as the nucleus of his contribution to the German pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale, complemented by a newspaper in which the artist compiled essays by and interviews with his protagonists. For his fourth exhibition at KOW, Zielony has expanded his Venice project, titled THE CITIZEN, by adding two new works.

The installation STORYBOARD (MONUMENTS MEN) was made for the Gorki Theater, Berlin, in 2015. In a perhaps reckless act of simplification that flirts with the building blocks of conspiracy theories, Zielony's four glass display tables trace connections between Nazi looted art, Germany's newly confident museum and restitution policies, George Clooney's campaign against genocide and his appearance in a Nespresso advertising spot, and Napuli Langa's occupation of a tree on Oranienplatz. Are these all connected? In a way they are. In 2013, the very rooms of Berlin's Palais am Festungsgraben for which Zielony created his piece were among the locations where Clooney shot "The Monuments Men", the heroic story of the American special unit that saved artistic treasures plundered by the Nazis. Some of them are now in the care of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (the Humboldtforum, currently under construction, is highly controversial).

Clooney's work on humanitarian issues extends beyond the silver screen – it has taken him to outer space and back. Since 2010, his Satellite Sentinel Project has raised funds to help collect satellite-image evidence of crimes against international law. In the 2013 movie Gravity, Clooney then floated through space, dodging dangerous man-made debris. His dizzying metamorphoses – from movie hero to charity star, from Nestlé advertising icon to political agent – leave the facility manager of the Palais am Festungsgraben, whose observations are included in Zielony's installation, unfazed.



Tobias Zielony

The Citizen, 2015

Layout of 22 color photographs, various sizes, on 9 large-scale pigmented inkjet prints, mounted on Aludibond, framed, 222 x 160 cm each / Installation of newspapers in 2 hanging displays, 130 x 205 cm each / Newspaper, 16 pages, tabloid format, for visitors to take with them

Installation view KOW

Magdi Lel-Gizouli, one of the authors in Zielony's Citizen project, expands upon the complex set of issues, drawing connections between German migration law and the ways ethnographic collections are presented, between the refugee protests and the construction of a German arms factory in his native Sudan. Is this reality? Or fiction? It is a storyboard for a narrative about reality.

Some stories sound fictional, but the fears and events behind them are certainly genuine. In 2014, the residents of a refugee home in a former high school in the Moabit neighborhood of Berlin told Zielony that they heard voices and saw ghosts in the showers at night. As it turned out, one of the city's largest synagogues had once stood nearby, as had a railway station where Jewish citizens had been herded onto trains to the concentration camps. Zielony conducted interviews and shot footage he has now assembled into a new film (THE GHOST, 2016). Voices sometimes speak up when we least expect them to, and even when we hear them – some of us prefer not to – we do not always believe what they tell us. Zielony's film captures the fear and anxiety that the barrier between the past and what is happening today might be lower than common sense likes to imagine.



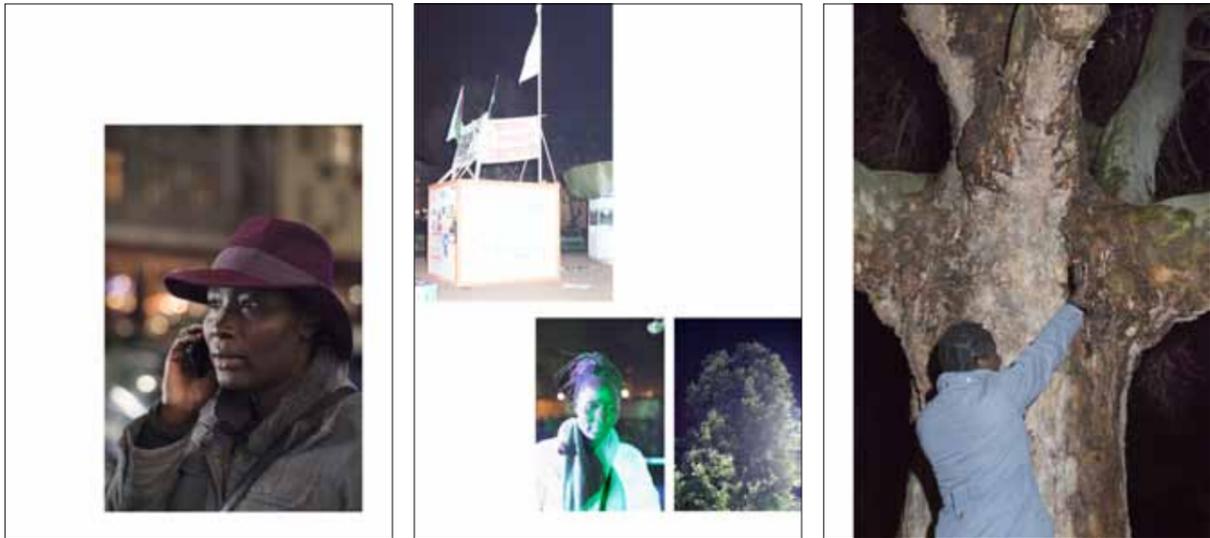
Tobias Zielony

The Citizen, 2015
Newspaper, 16 pages, tabloid format, for visitors to take with them



Tobias Zielony

The Citizen, 2015
Installation view KOW



Tobias Zielony

The Citizen, 2015

Napuli and the Tree, 2015
 Archival pigment print (3 parts)
 222 x 160 cm each

Napuli Paul Langa
 Sudanese activist Napuli Paul Langa spent five days in a tree in Berlin to oppose the eviction of a refugee protest camp in Berlin-Kreuzberg in 2014. She had been politically active in the nonviolent peace movement in Sudan und Uganda and had to flee the region after arrests and threats to her life in reaction to her political involvement.



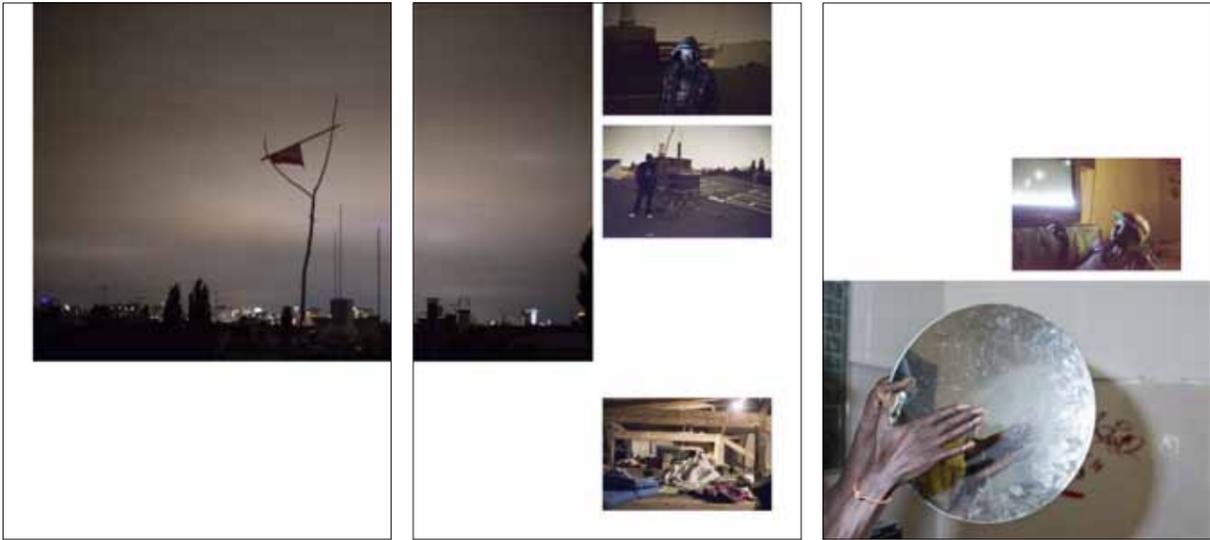
Tobias Zielony

The Citizen, 2015

Untitled, 2015
 Archival pigment print
 222 x 160 cm

Untitled, 2015
 Archival pigment print
 222 x 160 cm





Tobias Zielony

The Citizen, 2015

Ahmad Al-Nour on the Roof, 2015
 Archival pigment print (3 parts)
 222 x 160 cm each

Ahmad Al-Nour
 Alnour is from the Fashir region in Sudan. Together with other refugees, Alnour occupied a vacant school building in Berlin. In May 2014, the police tried to evict the school without any prior warning. A small group of activists resisted the eviction for nine days by protesting on the school's rooftop and by announcing to rather commit suicide than to leave the building.

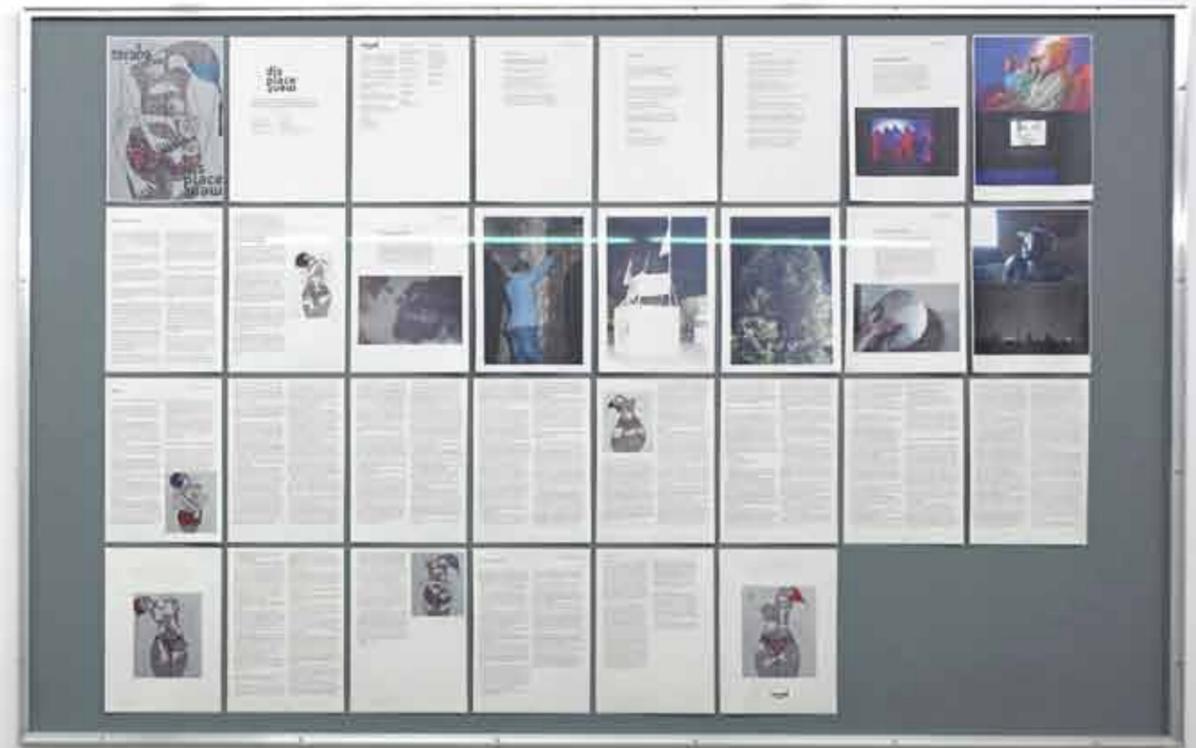


Tobias Zielony

The Citizen, 2015

Lampedusa in Hamburg, 2015
 Archival pigment print (3 parts)
 222 x 160 cm each

Richard, Ali, Jeano, Patrick
 Jeano, Patrick, and Ali are activists of the refugee group Lampedusa in Hamburg. They are from Ghana and Cameroon and were working in Libya until the war started in 2011, when they were forced to leave Libya and cross the Mediterranean sea to Italy. Later they were also forced to leave Italy and decided to come to Germany. Some members of the group lived secretly in the basement of the alternative cinema "B-Movie".



Tobias Zielony

The Citizen, 2015 (Newspapers)
130 x 205 cm each

- The News, Kunle Ajibade, Nigeria, Jan 26, 2015
- La Météo, Jean François Channon Denwo, Cameroon, Jan 22, 2015
- The Citizen, Magdi Elgizouli, Sudan, Feb 23, 2015
- Al Ayyam, Magdi Elgizouli, Sudan, Mar 3, 2015
- The Citizen, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Sudan, Apr 22, 2015
- Daily Graphic, Apr 25, 2015
- Daily Monitor, Chinara M. Wanjama, Uganda, May 6, 2015
- Saraba Magazine, Victor Ehikhamenor, Nigeria, Mar 2015



Tobias Zielony

The Citizen, 2015
Newspaper, 16 pages, tabloid format, for
visitors to take with them



Tobias Zielony

The Citizen, 2015
Installation view, KOW



Tobias Zielony

Ghosts, 2016
HD video, 16:9, color, sound with English
subtitles
2:44 min

Installation view KOW



Tobias Zielony

Storyboard (Monuments Men), 2015
Mixed media installation
120 x 664 x 65 cm

A scene from George Clooney's film *The Monuments Men* (2014), filmed in the Yellow Salon at the Palais am Festungsgraben. The film dramatizes the military MFAA (Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives) program, a special unit established by the Allied armies during World War II and tasked with the restitution of wrongfully expropriated valuable works of art. George Clooney wrote, directed and co-starred in the film. Matt Damon, Bill Murray, John Goodman, Justus von Dohnányi and Cate Blanchett also appeared.

Set pieces for the film *The Monuments Men* at the Palais am Festungsgraben.

Stairwell at the Palais am Festungsgraben in Berlin. Actor Matt Damon had to walk up and down this structure several times until the director was satisfied with the take, as the former building caretaker reports. The Palais am Festungsgraben (Palace on the Moat) was constructed in 1753 and served as the office of the Prussian Ministry of Finance beginning in 1808. The last person to hold the office was Johannes Popitz, a national conservative critic of the Nazi regime who was put to death at Berlin-Plötzensee for conspiring in the 20 July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life. The building sustained heavy damage during World War II. Beginning in 1947, it served as the House of Culture of the Soviet Union, then as the Society for German-Soviet Friendship after 1950. Since reunification, sections of the building have been used as film sets, restaurants and event spaces.

By his own account, George Clooney uses a portion of his earnings from Nespresso advertisements for the Satellite Sentinel Project, founded in 2010. He stated: "Most of the money I make on the (Nespresso) commercials I spend keeping a satellite over the border of North and South Sudan."

In 2007, George Clooney responded to a critical question on his collaboration with the Nestlé corporation: "I'm not going to apologize to you for trying to make a living every once in a while. I find that an irritating question."

"Mister Clooney is behind the funding of this impressive godlike project to observe wars from the universe. His Satellite Sentinel Project takes images from the high skies to document how wars rubble societies and rubble buildings. Of course, you cannot observe a society nor can you observe a war from universal distance. He takes up the place of a god. But he isn't, he is a false god. He is just a symbol. He occupies a vacuum, a vacuum of representation." Magdi El-Gizouli



Tobias Zielony

Storyboard (*Monuments Men*), 2015

Mixed media installation

120 x 664 x 65 cm

The former Stadtschloss (City Castle) in central Berlin was demolished by East German government decree in 1950 and the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic) was erected on the site in 1973. The new building was the seat of the East German parliament, the Volkskammer (People's Chamber). Stones from the demolished palace were supposedly built into the Gorki Theater. The Palast der Republik was torn down on the grounds of asbestos contamination in 2006. In 2007, the German government launched an architectural design competition for the reconstruction of the Stadtschloss, the cornerstone ceremony followed in 2013. As an instance of historical revisionism, the project has been controversial from day one. The ethnology collection from Berlin-Dahlem is to be housed in the center of the new palace.

Sculptures and other decorative elements for the rebuilt castle are being reconstructed at the Schlossbauhütte (Palace Workshop) in Berlin-Spandau. The building once served as the British Army's Alexander Barracks in former West Berlin, and had been used by both the Nazis and the Prussian Army prior to that. The neighboring 19th-century Prussian officers' residence currently houses a refugee shelter.

Muslim woman's hijab as prototype for traditional female attire in predominantly Muslim countries, exhibited at the Ethnological Museum in Dahlem.

Carved ivory tusk from the collection of the Ethnological Museum. Critics maintain that this piece is an example of looted art on the caliber of the artworks seized during the Nazi era.

Empty vitrine for an exhibit on barter trade.

Installation by the Angolan artist António Ole at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin - Dahlem, part of the contemporary African exhibit.

This photograph shows a soldier posing between carved ivory tusks. He adopts the artistry and uses the status symbols of a people he came to oppress to adorn himself. The accompanying text offers information on the history of the Berlin collection from the Kingdom of Benin. It explains that most of the artifacts were initially brought to London after the British Army pillaged and destroyed the Royal Palace of Benin in 1897. From there, they were acquired for the ethnology museum in Berlin by its director at the time, Felix von Luschan.



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120 x 664 x 65 cm



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Storyboard (Monuments Men), 2015

Mixed media installation

120 x 664 x 65 cm

A digitally enhanced infrared image. Kaka, Upper Nile State, South Sudan, 2 April 2014. It shows 1071 burnt huts. The image was taken for the Satellite Sentinel Project, which George Clooney co-founded and backs financially, by a satellite belonging to the DigitalGlobe corporation. The Satellite Sentinel Project gathers photographic evidence from satellites to detect and document human rights abuses by Sudanese dictator Omar Al-Bashir. These photographs are made publicly available on the internet. TIME Magazine quoted George Clooney as follows: "We are the antigenocide paparazzi. We want them to enjoy the level of celebrity attention that I usually get."

DigitalGlobe is the world's leading provider of satellite imagery for governments, military, and companies like Google. Images are generated by a number of company-owned satellites. DigitalGlobe's main client is the United States Department of Defense.

"Border monitoring is essential for maintaining national security. An insecure border can open a country to terrorism, drug trafficking, weapons proliferation, smuggling, and illegal immigration." DigitalGlobe

On 11 February 2015, a group of refugee activists occupied the Sudanese Embassy in Berlin in protest of Omar Al-Bashir and German governmental backing of his politics. From their press statement: "We are refugees and political activists from Sudan. Today we occupy our Embassy in Berlin in peaceful protest, to make our political position against the Sudanese government clear. (...) Our message to the German government: Enough is enough! Guarantee Sudanese refugees the right to stay in Germany! Stop cooperating with the criminal regime in Sudan and supporting it economically!"

Former state-owned Fritz Werner Arms Factory at Berlin-Marienfelde. With the financial backing of the West German government, Fritz Werner built a munitions factory near the Sudanese capital of Khartoum in 1959, after armed conflict had broken out in southern Sudan. That facility, today owned by the Sudanese state, manufactures to this day the majority of munitions for the military conflicts that still persist in the region.

Sudanese refugee activist Napuli Paul Langa spent five days in a tree in Berlin to oppose the eviction of the protest camp at Oranienplatz in Berlin in 2014. She had to flee Sudan and then Uganda after her life was in danger because of her work for human rights groups in both countries. She became one of the leading figures in the refugee movement in Berlin.

Refugee activist Napuli Langa in an interview about the five days and four nights she spent in protest in a tree in Berlin-Kreuzberg: "I spoke to the tree and said, 'please hold me. I really need to sleep.' I was sleeping and dreaming as well. Can you believe it? My mother gave birth to me in a garden. In the tree I dreamed of the garden and our house was burning. When I woke up from this dream, I was about to fall from the tree, but I managed to grab a branch. I was half-sitting, half-leaning against the trunk. I trusted the tree that it would hold me. In the tree I came close to death, but I felt very calm because I thought about the garden I was born in, which being in the tree reminded me of."



Tobias Zielony

Storyboard (Monuments Men), 2015
Mixed media installation
120 x 664 x 65 cm

Wenn nichts mehr geht, bleibt oft nur die Flucht nach vorn. Für manche führt sie nach oben: aufs Dach, über die Berge, auf die Barrikaden. Wo Körper und Stimmen sich unerwartet erheben und exponieren, da beginnt der Aufstand des politischen Subjekts, das eine Grenze überschreitet, die Unsichtbarkeit von Sichtbarkeit und Ungehörtes von Gehörtem trennt. Dass man diese Grenze über Dächer und Berge hinaus auch im Orbit überschreiten kann, brachte Tobias Zielony auf die Fährte von George Clooney, dazu aber später.

Im September 2014 okkupierte eine Gruppe von Geflohenen das Dach der Berliner Gerhard-Hauptmann-Schule, um für ihre Selbstbestimmungsrechte zu protestieren. Sie waren Teil einer kollektiven Bewegung, die politische Forderungen von Migrantinnen und Migranten in die deutsche Öffentlichkeit trug und teils erfolgreich durchsetzte. Einige Aktivisten dieser Bewegung hat Tobias Zielony seit Februar 2014 in Hamburg und Berlin begleitet. Seine Fotografien der Dach-Okkupation, Bilder von Napuli Langa, die auf einen Baum kletterte und dort fünf Tage ausharrte, um gegen die Räumung des Flüchtlingscamps auf dem Kreuzberger Oranienplatz zu protestieren, Aufnahmen auf St. Pauli, sie alle arbeiten mit an einer Erzählung über die politische Subjektivität der Flüchtlinge, über ihren Status als Bürger.

Menschen am Rande gesellschaftlicher Akzeptanz lichtet Zielony in Augenblicken ab, da sie vor seiner Kamera ihr Selbstbild suchen. In der Distanz zwischen dem Fotografen und seinem Gegenüber liegt die Komplizenschaft einer geteilten Ungewissheit darüber, was sich zeigt, wenn jemand (sich) von jemandem ein Bild macht. Handelt es sich um Bilder von Geflohenen, die um ihre Anerkennung und Sichtbarkeit kämpfen, wird diese Ungewissheit nicht geringer, und sie wird es auch nicht, wenn die Bilder von einem anerkannten deutschen Fotografen stammen. So nahm Zielony Abstand vom fotografischen Einzelbild und seinem üblichen Rahmen, brachte seine Aufnahmen in Umlauf und machte sie zum Gegenstand eines vielstimmigen Kommentars über die Protagonisten der Flüchtlingsproteste und ihre öffentliche Darstellung.

Er nutzte die Reisefreiheit, die Bilder im Gegensatz zu Menschen auf dem Weg von Süden nach Norden genießen, in umgekehrter Richtung. Zwölf Tageszeitungen in Uganda, Nigeria, Kamerun, Ghana und dem Sudan folgten seiner Einladung, die Bilder aus Hamburg und Berlin zum Anlass zu nehmen für journalistische Beiträge über Flucht, Aufstand und Fotografie. Beiträge, die Zielonys Fotos je neu rahmten. Auf der Venedig-Biennale standen sie 2015 im Zentrum seines Beitrags für den deutschen Pavillon, ergänzt durch eine von ihm selbst herausgegebene Zeitung mit Texten und Interviews der Protagonisten seiner Bilder. Letztere verteilte Zielony in einer offenen Anordnung der Motive über einen Zyklus von zehn fotografischen Wandtafeln. In seiner vierten Ausstellung bei KOW ergänzt Zielony das Venedig-Projekt THE CITIZEN mit zwei neuen Arbeiten.

Für das Berliner Gorki Theater entstand 2015 die Installation STORYBOARD (MONUMENTS MEN). In waghalsiger Verkürzung, die mit konspirationstheoretischen Formeln flirtet, spannt Zielony auf vier Vitrinentischen einen Bogen von der Nazi-Raubkunst über neudeutsche Museums- und Restitutionspolitik bis hin zu George Clooneys Anti-Genozid-Kampagne und seiner Nespresso-Werbung sowie Napuli Langas Baum-Besetzung am Oranienplatz. Hängt das alles miteinander zusammen? Irgendwie schon. 2013 drehte Clooney – unter anderem in den Räumen des Berliner Palais am Festungsgraben, für die Zielonys Arbeit entstand – seine Heldengeschichte "The Monuments Men" über eine amerikanische Spezialeinheit zur Rettung der vom Naziregime erbeuteten Kunstschätze. Schätze, die heute zum Teil die Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz verwahrt (Stichwort: Humboldtforum).

Clooneys Einsatz für die Menschheit reicht über die Leinwand hinaus ins All – und wieder zurück. Sein Satellite Sentinel Project finanziert seit 2010 Satellitenaufnahmen zur Dokumentation von Völkerrechtsverbrechen. 2013 schwebte Clooney dann in Gravity zwischen bedrohlichem Satellitenschrott durch den Weltraum. So schwindelerregend

gend seine Metamorphosen vom Film- zum Charityhelden und von der Nestlé-Werbeeikone zum politischen Agenten, so nüchtern die Kommentare des Hausmeisters des Palais am Festungsgraben, der in Zielonys Installation über Clooneys Dreharbeiten vor Ort berichtet. Magdi Lel-Gizouli, einer der Autoren in Zielonys Citizen- Projekt, fügt dem komplexen Geschehen weitere Verbindungslinien hinzu: zwischen deutschen Migrationsgesetzen und ethnografischen Sammlungspräsentationen, den Flüchtlingsprotesten und dem Bau einer deutschen Waffenfabrik in seinem Heimatland Sudan. Real? Fiktiv? Ein Storyboard für eine Geschichte über die Wirklichkeit.

So fiktiv manche Geschichte klingt, so real manche Ängste und Ereignisse, die hinter ihr stehen. 2014 berichteten die Einwohner einer Flüchtlingsunterkunft in einem ehemaligen Gymnasium in Berlin-Moabit Tobias Zielony, sie hätten des Nachts in den Duschräumen die Stimmen Verstorbener gehört, man habe dort Geister gesehen. Unweit der Schule war einst eine der größten Synagogen Berlins, und unweit von ihr fuhren die Züge ab, die jüdische Bürger in Konzentrationslager brachten. Zielony machte Interviews und Filmaufnahmen, die er nun zusammenführt (THE GHOST, 2016). Manche Stimmen melden sich unerwartet, für manche unerwünscht, und nicht immer glaubt man ihnen. Zielonys Film hält die Angst und die Sorge fest, die Schwelle zwischen vergangenen und gegenwärtigen Ereignissen könnte niedriger sein, als der gesunde Menschenverstand sich vorstellen mag.

Tobias Zielony
Exhibition 2016

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