



Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, Media Release

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Oræ – Experiences on the Border

Pavilion of Switzerland at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition –
La Biennale di Venezia

Project-team:	Fabrice Aragno, Mounir Ayoub, Vanessa Lacaille, Pierre Szczepski
	Collaborators: Noémie Allenbach, Benoît Beurret, Jürg Bühler, Annabelle Voisin
Commissioners:	Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia Madeleine Schuppli, Head of Visual Arts; Sandi Paucic, Project Leader; Rachele Giudici Legittimo, Project Manager
Preview:	20 and 21 May 2021 (for details see biennials.ch)
Exhibition:	From 22 May to 21 November 2021

The exhibition in the Swiss Pavilion at the Biennale Architettura 2021 in Venice ties the physical reality of the Swiss border to its political and social issues, thus drawing up a new perception for these inhabited territories. The outbreak of the pandemic in the middle of the work process gave the project additional relevance.

For the 17th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (22 May - 21 November 2021) the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia chose to entrust the exhibition in the Swiss Pavilion to a Geneva-based team of architects and artists: Mounir Ayoub and Vanessa Lacaille from Laboratoire d'architecture in Geneva, as well as filmmaker Fabrice Aragno and artist sculptor Pierre Szczepski. With its project *Oræ – Experiences on the Border* (*oræ*, Latin for «borders»), the team investigates the subject of borders taking into account both the political and spatial dimension of the territory and its sensitive and social perception. «Studying the Swiss border in these times means envisaging it not only as a line on a map, but also as a space to be experienced; not only as a limit, but as a beginning», the authors of the project say.

The project-team engaged in participative processes and proposed different political and poetic experiences. They began first onsite with a roving study at the end of 2019, where the team travelled with a truck fitted out as a studio to meet inhabitants of the border between Switzerland and its neighbouring countries. At each stage, participants were invited to construct an imaginary or real place of their choice at a border, while video recorded the process.

Over the course of the project, the Coronavirus pandemic suddenly changed people's perceptions of borders giving new relevance to the project. Within this context of restrictions,



the team decided to re-visit the border regions with a mobile forum to meet inhabitants in order to challenge new perceptions on the topic through writing workshops. The mobile forum was designed and built by the Bern University of Applied Sciences and architecture students. It offered a space for dialogue to build common knowledge around the new experiences of the border. Madeleine Schuppli, Head of the Visual Arts division at Pro Helvetia notes: «Being a participatory process, *Oræ - Experiences on the Border* draws our attention to a territory and its complex social and cultural structure - it offers a voice to people who are otherwise less heard. This way, the project puts the periphery at the centre and challenges common ways of thinking about borders, limits and permeability.»

The material collected on site will be presented in the Swiss Pavilion in Venice. *Oræ - Experiences on the Border* is a project about the borders and its inhabitants. It reveals political and poetic dimensions of that space. «Little by little, relations replace measures and references change. Certainties blur and furtive memories creep in. Another map appears. Feelings and places, often ordinary, begin to resonate together, a new territory becomes possible», the authors of the project state.

Publication

In addition to the exhibition in the Swiss Pavilion, a book will be produced in collaboration with Lars Müller Publishers. The guide illustrates the creation of *oræ*. It is a non-hierarchical succession of fragmentary narratives coming from borders and the imaginations of those living in their vicinity. The publication includes testimonies gathered during the research, as well as dialogues with personalities from the world of the humanities and social sciences, creating a set of stories that resonate with the project.

About the team

Fabrice Aragno, filmmaker
Born in Neuchâtel in 1970
Lives and works in Lausanne, Switzerland

Mounir Ayoub, architect (le laboratoire d'architecture)
Born in Tunis in 1980
Lives and works in Geneva, Switzerland

Vanessa Lacaille, architect and landscape architect (le laboratoire d'architecture)
Born in Paris in 1980
Lives and works in Geneva, Switzerland

Pierre Szczepski, artist sculptor
Born in Caen in 1991
Lives and works in Geneva, Switzerland

Collaborators - Noémie Allenbach, architect; Benoît Beurre, mediator; Jürg Bühner, architect and Annabelle Voisin, video artist

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International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

The Biennale Architettura takes place every two years, alternating with the Biennale Arte. The Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia is responsible for the exhibitions in the Swiss Pavilion.

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