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Questionnaire: Bouchra Khalili

BY BOUCHRA KHALILI
30 OCT 2018

Q: What do you wish you knew? A: How to build a time machine



Muhammad al-Idrisi, *Map of the World*, c.1154, as copied by Ali ibn Hasan al-Hûfi al-Qâsimî in 1456. Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons

What images keep you company in the space where you work?

I've never had a studio. All of my projects were developed in specific locations: Algiers, Athens, Istanbul, Melilla and Ramallah, among other cities. Whether I'm at home or away, there are no images around me while I work. But there's sound: I'm a radio addict.

What was the first piece of art that really mattered to you?

In Casablanca, where I was born, we had no art museum. What we had were cinemas and books. The first image that really impressed me was a *Map of the World* (c.1154) by Moroccan traveller, geographer and botanist Muhammad al-Idrisi and commissioned by Roger II of Sicily. I saw it in a book on the Islamic Golden Age. The image is an exquisite circular map that shows South as the North and vice-versa: what we would call today a decentred representation of the world.

If you could live with only one piece of art what would it be?

Al-Idrisi's *Map of the World*.

What is your favourite title of an artwork?

Angst essen Seele auf – literally, 'Fear Eats Soul Up', the title of a famous 1974 film by Rainer Werner Fassbinder and one of my favourites. The title is a literal translation of a colloquial expression in Moroccan Arabic.

What should change?

When reading the news, I often think to a sentence spoken by Tancredi, the Prince of Salina's nephew in *The Leopard* (1958) by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa: 'For everything to stay the same, everything must change.' The prince is witnessing the fall of the aristocracy with the Italian *risorgimento*; while his nephew joins the revolutionaries to better defend and preserve his class privileges. Maybe what should change is how 'change' is labelled. It is not change if it does not aid oppressed groups in the first place.

What should stay the same?

Everything that can bring us together.

What could you imagine doing if you didn't do what you do?

Learning as many languages as possible. A linguist, maybe?

What music are you listening to?

These last months, I've been listening to Oumou Sangaré's latest LP, *Mogoya*. I've listened to Oum Kouloum, almost every day for as long as I can remember. I'm looking forward to the forthcoming record by Kery James, the French-Caribbean political hip-hop artist. And Rachid Taha, who passed away in September: an icon for many of us, he was among the first to embody the voice of the struggle for equality by French citizens of African descent.

What are you reading?

At the moment, I'm re-reading *Scritti corsari* (Corsair Writings, 1975) by Pier Paolo Pasolini, and reading the recently released *Histoire populaire de la France* (People's History of France, 2018) by French historian Gérard Noiriel, inspired by Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (1980).

What do you like the look of?

The look of my two-year-old niece when she is learning a new word.

What is art for?

I very often ask myself the same question. I wish I could believe that it can change the world. But if it doesn't change the world, at least it can help us to think about how we can make it better

Published in frieze, issue 199, November/December 2018.

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Bouchra Khalili is an artist based in Berlin, Germany. In 2018, she has had solo exhibitions at Jeu de Paume, Paris, France, Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany, Secession, Vienna, Austria, CAAC, Sevilla, Spain, and Maxxi, Rome, Italy. In 2017, her work was included in documenta 14, Kassel, Germany, and Athens, Greece, and La Triennale di Milano, Italy.
