

For Statements artist **THU VAN TRAN** (1979, Ho Chi Minh City) offers a metaphorical reflection about collective memory and the principle of recollection. An artist born in Vietnam and exiled in France, Tran questions recent European history and links it implicitly to the torments of the Belgian colonisation of the Congo.

Fed by her own uprooting, this young artist has dreamed up a project of great maturity that casts light on a dark collective past. Her idea associates an exploration of symbolic places in the former Yugoslavia with a corpus of works with their roots in the Joseph Conrad novel *Heart of Darkness*, an instructive account of the effects of colonisation in the Belgian Congo. One could compare the exploration by Tran in lands marked by the folly of men to the progress of Marlow, Conrad's main character, along the Congo River. In both cases, there is apparent progress that suggests a moment of clarity, understanding and redemption, whereas the journey is only heading towards total darkness, a blur and disorientation, whether real or symbolic.

The project consists of two groups of works with a common theme; on the one hand, the film and documents relating to a crossing of the former Yugoslavia, and on the other hand works evoking *Heart of Darkness*.

During her journey, in Bosnia (from Tuzla to Neum), Thu Van Tran filmed historical sites and landscapes lit by means of a transportable light machine (called the *Cyclops*, consisting of a powerful halogen spotlight, a battery). She filmed by stealth, in broad daylight as well as at night, showing moments rather than descriptive shots. Her approach may seem naive or even absurd since in broad daylight, she is lighting what we can already see plainly, and in a vain attempt, she tries to illuminate the darkness of night. Her desire is to enter the thickness of the night, but with the idea of "making it visible".

To accompany this work, Thu Van Tran shows under glass and placed on discreet shelves made from hevea wood, sixty sheets ranging in colour in a scale from white to the darkest black. Transcribed texts on these pages, initially perfectly legible, then more and more difficult to decipher, are the full translation into French of *Heart of Darkness* by the artist herself. She understands English without speaking it perfectly. She only used an English-English dictionary to achieve her purpose. So she puts herself in the position of a blind person groping to find her way around, to give meaning to her research. Translation is a metaphor for a process of discovery, exploration and difficulties overcome. To complement this project, Tran's translation is published in paperback in a print run of several thousand copies intended for the public during the fair. The books are stacked, giving them a sculptural appearance, and are available free of charge.

Finally, under the title *We live in the flicker*, Tran displays photographs based on photograms reproducing excerpts from the book in English concerning light and darkness ("*The white patch had become a place of darkness*",...). The blue pigments of the initial photograms are not fixed and therefore disappear over time. Slowly but inexorably. We could see a moment of light that returns to the darkness.