

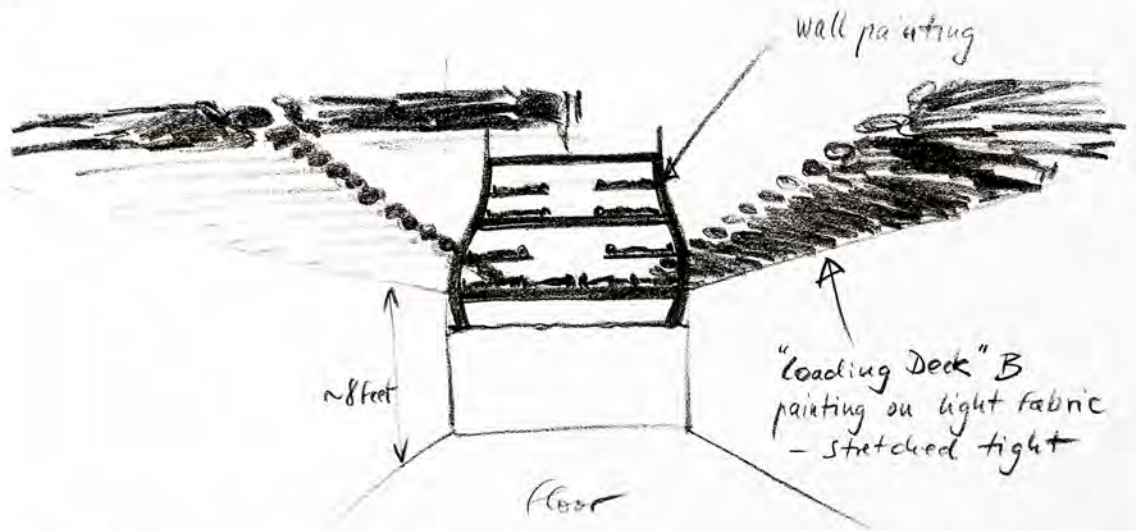


Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, Berlin

LIFE~BOAT



LIFE~BOAT is a show on boats and utopia. It addresses diverse topics through things related to cruising and boating throughout cultural history. It explores our relationship to and obsession with boats and the sea. The physical aspects of the uncontrolled, often dangerous, bodies of water are ever present as they create the psychological need for men to overcome nature's force. Water is a connecting *and* dividing element. The longing to reach an island, a coast, a promised land is stronger than the dangers and the struggle to get there. Therefore, artificial bodies are created in various shapes to carry and protect us. Boats are enlarged versions of our own bodies; they are metaphors for longings and projections where dreams and nightmares fuse into each other and provide telling examples of social and political hierarchies. Boat and civilization are closely linked to images of survival and wars of conquest.



Our goal for LIFE~BOAT is to reposition subjects in new spaces and contexts in ways that not only question dominant masculinist hierarchies and discourses, but also demand



dialogues about the very concept of borders within Western cultural institutions, such as western and oriental, civilized and primitive. Museums are inhabited by collected memories of civilizations. In LIFE~BOAT, we question their content in relation to contemporary habits of collecting and display in order to restructure and change the role museums play in society. Post-colonial and human rights issues must also be evaluated in relationship to collections and their display. What moves history? Where is history headed? For Adorno, the art object and the aesthetic experience of the art object contains a truth-content. In this sense an unprepossessed view of the facts will create new dynamics between the exhibits and spectator and his personal experiences. The display will lose its aesthetic innocence, just as the viewer gains a critical consciousness exploring *the container of memory*.

The conceptual ideas for LIFE~BOAT are based on three major paintings by Antoine Watteau, Théodore Géricault and Emanuel Leutze. We have collected and will interpret multiple subjects, using prints and drawings, maps and letters, pictures and sculptures, photos, fiction and documentary films, newspaper clippings, videos and advertisements, ship models and boat relics. Through this material we encounter elements of familiar places in the most unlikely of territories and discuss cultural conversion in relation to cultural mobility. By using and exposing diverse material we represent the spherical projection of the geography, crossing physical boundaries. This encounter of naval topics and objects is a *Wunderkammer*, a model boat of the world en miniature, which exposes cultural hybridity in an abstract kind of travel.

The desire for living in a self-sufficient entity, a fully equipped boat, ready to take off and leave things behind is a universal dream. *Noah's Ark* is a biblical example of a container vessel on a rescue mission, while Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* (Basel 1494) depicts all the human virtues and vices, which calls all those who devote their energies to discover strange lands to be among the fools, heading for Narragonia, the island of fools, a desired utopia where they'll find *gold isles and naked people*, but the ignorant passengers of that vessel are stranded in oblivion and don't actually care about the real things in life.





THREE KEY PICTURES are departing points for the show: Watteau's *Embarkation for Cythera* (1719) in Berlin (Charlottenburg Palace), Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819) in Paris (Louvre) and Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851) in New York City (Metropolitan Museum). Too precious to travel, the images will be transformed into sails, implying the connection to time and the link to present topics.



Watteau's "Embarkation for Cythera", 1719
UTOPIA / CRUISING / LOVE BOAT



Gericault's "Raft of the Medusa", 1819
DISASTER / BOAT PEOPLE / RACISM

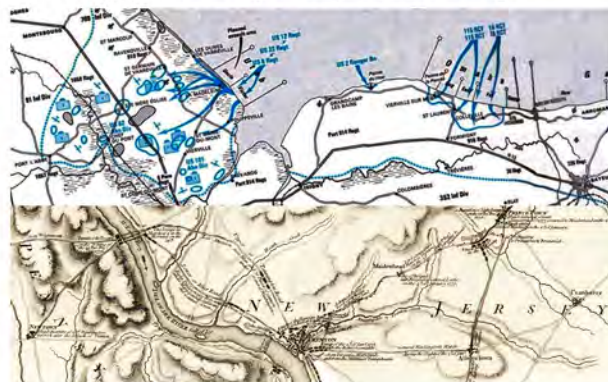


Leutze's "Washington Crossing the Delaware", 1851
POLITICS / WAR / LEADERSHIP



We open the discussion on utopia, drama and politics by questioning these pictures, drawing lines to contemporary issues, to cultural identity, cultural transmission and collective cultural memory. These eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings constitute three symbolic departures in the exhibit:

- (1) Utopia/Cruising/Love Boat
- (2) Disaster/Boat People/Racism
- (3) Politics/War/Leadership





The society of the twenty first-century spends it's spare time on cruises modeled on TV series like *Love Boat*, far different from Robinson Crusoe's island where the uncanny encounter with anxiety forces man to action and invention. Today, time-limited nomads are hardly shaken by the unknown. The luxurious cruise liner becomes an island itself, filled with controlled excitement. There is no self-invention other than the question of cruisewear and personal items and the diversity of choice of cabins and classes. Thrilling encounters during a hypothetical shipwreck are simulated in survival TV series like *The Island*, illustrating repugnant ideas about mastering a life in an uncivilized wilderness.

The structure of LIFE~BOAT is based on languages of intervention and on contrasts. We work with dialogs that connect different aspects of travel through varied geographic and cultural spaces, using pictures and language. The title of the show quotes Hitchcock's movie *Lifeboat*, a propaganda film from 1944 with an emphasis on moral debates where eight



< Max Ernst,
"Seelenfrieden", 1929
(from: La Femme 100 Têtes)

"Fighting Chair"
21th Century >



vastly different people are stuck together in a lifeboat after a shipwreck. The slightly transformed title of our show imposes the relevance of film and media in the exhibition, challenging the spectators' cinematic recollection. It's an ever-changing flow of *close-ups* and *blow-ups*. Counterparts from different times and cultures cross paths, providing new insights on aspects of societies. The transformation and transgression of the obvious makes the obvious look *exotic* and the exotic *familiar*, creating a contemplative, seductive environment which takes the audience on a surprising cruise.