

Babi
Badalov

Xenopoetri

2.2.2024–
28.4.2024

Exhibition
leaflet

MUSÉE CANTONAL
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Rooted in the experience of migration and marginality, the work of Babi Badalov (*1959, Lerik, Azerbaijan) explores the question of communicability. How do we interact with people who don't share the same alphabet, the same set of references? How can we create a common space for relating to others? The result is a prolific body of work strongly influenced by the aesthetics of collage.

Badalov's career as an artist cannot be separated from his experience of exile. The artist grew up in one of the fifteen former republics of the Soviet Union at the crossroads of Persian and Azeri cultures. He settled in Saint Petersburg (then Leningrad) in the 1980s and became one of the faces of the underground milieu opposed to the Soviet regime. In 2011, Badalov was granted political asylum in France after living illegally in the United States, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Naturalised as a French citizen in 2018, the feeling of being a stranger lingers nevertheless. Fluent in seven languages, without fully mastering any of them, the artist places writing and language at the centre of his work. By elaborating complex plays of words and experimenting with ornaments, he stresses the ambivalence of language, which symbolises both the difficulties of communication and the crossing of borders.

Drawing plays a central role in the artist's practice. Giving free rein to his pen, Badalov covers pages of his sketchbooks daily, which then serve as a base for the rest of the work. Some of these sketchbooks attest his graphic research. Others bear witness to his learning of the French language. Still others incorporate elements gleaned from the street, often with a political content. Business cards, fragments of election posters, administrative documents, prescriptions, and photo booth pictures offer a kaleidoscopic image of a particular era while also providing humorous commentary. His drawings often start from existing images; with the line continuing the initial motif to create visual games. Badalov transposes this method to a much larger scale to compose his on-site murals, where he also incorporates paintings done on recycled cloth.

Rarely exhibited, Badalov's paintings from the late 1980s already demonstrate an interest in collage. They reveal a formal vocabulary that mixes references to Russian Constructivism and decorative calligraphy. The titles speak of a process at work in a world that was – in the USSR of 1989 – on the verge of being completely reconfigured. What comes to the fore is an off-kilter point of view that observes the world from the periphery, seeking its path from the experience of oppression and rejection. An anarchist, punk and homosexual, as he defines himself, Badalov had to bid farewell to his native country in order to conquer his freedom. Starting in the 2010s, he came up with a different way to embody this view by creating visual poetry that resists being assigned to any one language in particular while being dominated by the use of *Globish*, a simplified version of English that takes shape in exchanges between non-native speakers and is sometimes called “broken English”. It is a poetry forged from a broken language in which error is standard, a tongue that is beyond norms, brimming with accents and full of spoken words.

In 2022, Portuguese artist Mauro Cerqueira (*1982) filmed Badalov following in Jean Genet's footsteps in Morocco. A poet of freedom and foreign lands, a delinquent, a man with no ties, no home, no country, Genet is a figure of inspiration and admiration. The camera records the trip that takes Cerqueira and Badalov from Tangiers to Larache, where Genet is buried, while stopping at the Gare du Nord and room 205 of Jack's Hotel in Paris, where the writer died in 1986. Recording moments from rural life, *O suor da noite - Babi e Genet* [Sweat in the Night – Babi and Genet] is punctuated by Badalov's reading of *The Man Condemned to Death*, a long poem written by Genet in 1942 while he was incarcerated at Fresnes Prison near Paris. In the French of a foreigner and with his singular pronunciation, Badalov pays tribute to Genet's language. By looking at these parallel lives made of wandering, and exploration, Cerqueira brings together two artists who have made poetry a homeland beyond borders.

Biography:

Babakhan Badalov, known as Babi Badalov, was born in 1959 in Lerik, Azerbaijan. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Baku from 1974 to 1978.

Since the late 1990s, his work has been shown in numerous solo exhibitions, including at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris (2022); the New Museum of Modern Art, Saint Petersburg (2018); the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp (2018); the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2016); the Kunstraum, Munich (2015) and Karvasla in Tbilisi (2004).

Babi Badalov also took part in the Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2016); the Jakarta Biennial, Indonesia (2013); the Manifesta 8, Murcia, Spain (2011) and the first Thessaloniki Biennial, Greece (2007). In Switzerland his work has been shown in group exhibitions at the Shedhalle, Zürich (2018); the Kunstmuseum, Bern (2011) and the Manoir de la ville de Martigny (1993).

Babi Badalov's work is found in the collections of a number of important institutions, such as the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and the Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Publication:

Pierre-Henri Foulon (ed.), *Babi Badalov. Xenopoetri*, with texts by Pierre-Henri Foulon and Julie Abbou (Fr./Eng.), 52 p., 23 ill., Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, 2024 (coll. Espace Projet, n° 5) CHF 8.– at the MCBA Book- and Giftshop
→ shop.mcba@plateforme10.ch

Events:



Guided tours for the Amis-e du Musée (in French)
Thursday 22 February, 6:00pm
Tuesday 19 March, 12:30pm
With Pierre-Henri Foulon

Guided tours (in French)
Thursday 14 March, 6:30pm
Thursday 4 April, 6:30pm
With Eleonora Del Duca, assistant curator

Reservation required for all events
→ mcba.ch/agenda

Further information:
Access, hours
→ www.mcba.ch

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