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Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz, my friends all drive Porsches...¹

In the last thirty years, everyone has been using Tijuana as one of the symbols for the frontier between North and South. However, in the Europe of Schengen we have our own Tijuanas. The strait of Gibraltar in the South of Spain is one. Sure, it is less mediatized and we only hear about it during Summer time, *tourist guilt oblige*. This part of Europe has always been subject to conflicts but also exchanges and a very special relationship of hate and love is palpable on both "Orillas" of the Mediterranean, annually leaving thousands of anonymous bodies lost somewhere in between². On either side, one can distinguish the other coast and easily visualise the proximity with Africa or Europe. Whether it is France, the Netherlands or Spain, all European countries are now living in another era where the co-existence of different cultures is replacing the dominance of the "mainstream", nationalist culture. **Pilar Albarracín**, an Andalusian woman artist who was invited by the curators³ to participate in *Project Rooms*, created a very unexpected piece called *El Viaje*. She introduced an automatic device into a special customized car, an old Mercedes 200D, a model she called "Habibi",

and placed it in the centre of this international art Fair. A common denominator for the whole of Africa would certainly be the transport problem, and the car, and especially the good old Mercedes, is still a symbol of recognition and wealth. The flux of migration at certain times of the year is such that one cannot avoid it. This car represents the achievement of a certain status: you've made it up there in the North and now you're bring it back down. Pilar Albarracín decided on the opposite journey, taking it from the South back up to the capital. And so, during ARCO, hundreds of people had the opportunity to take part in the very special experience of *El Viaje*. Under her delegated supervision, the public were invited to share for two minutes a ride in the old motor as if one were in a cab in Tangier with it's potholes, bumps and the odours of North African countries. Between the saffron and the acrylic carpets, the passengers (re)discover the proximity one can share in a collective taxi, this way of mixing together on a journey which can seem to last forever or, on the contrary, to last for a split second as you let yourself float away for a

TITLE

El viaje (The Journey), 2001

ARTIST

Pilar Albarracín

GALLERY

Juana de Aizpuru, Madrid and Seville

moment. Saffron, coriander, cinnamon, cloves and mint mixed with deodorant spray appeal to your senses in an unexpected way for a visit to an International Art Fair. With *Rai* music at full blast out of the cheapo radio-cassette, Pilar Albarracín wanted the passengers to be confronted with another notion of Time⁴, as if they were driving through herds of goats and sheep ...the spectators looking at this car, wondering if they want to be part of the journey or not.... *El Viaje* corresponds to a way of enjoying and detraumatizing the tense situation between Northern and Southern countries in order to bring to light connections other than the negative and recurrent political correct ones. Pilar Albarracín's dynamic resides in her way of being always on the cutting edge between vernacular expressions using rituals,

stereotypes and a way of putting the spectator in the awkward position of a "voyeur". Be it through photography, video or performance, she gives the viewer the space to (re)appropriate his own references to share in her work. For a couple of years now this young woman artist has been working on the very complex issues of the status of woman and immigration. Her project *El Viaje*, invites us to leave our ego outside, in a world that has forgotten to laugh at itself, because art is a process of confrontation and (re)invention.

¹ Janis Joplin, "Mercedes Benz", 1971

² Sami Naïr, *Las heridas abiertas. Las dos orillas del Mediterráneo: ¿un destino conflictivo?*, El País-Aguilar, 1998.

³ Salah Hassan, Rosa Martínez, Octavio Zaya

⁴ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Objects*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1983.

PILAR ALBARRACÍN
El viaje, 2001

Video performance and photograph

