

1 Robert Shapazian, "Interview with Anna Boghiguian," in *Bidoun Magazine* 8 (Fall 2006) <http://bidoun.org/articles/anna-boghiguian-and-robert-shapazian>

2 Ibid.

3 Here I am thinking specifically of W.G. Sebald's novel *The Rings of Saturn* (1995) and the idea of walking through memories of trauma in a series of short vignettes.

4 Anna Boghiguian, *AN INCIDENT: Script of an incident as imagined by Anna Boghiguian* (Montreal: SBC Gallery, 2014).

## Anna Boghiguian: *Cities by the Rivers* SBC Gallery, Montreal Oct. 31, 2015 — Jan. 16, 2016 by Yasmin Nurmington-Por

*Cities by the Rivers* is the second exhibition in SBC Gallery's Focus Program, *Água Viva*. This series of exhibitions is inspired by Brazilian author Clarice Lispector's 1973 plotless novel of the same title, which translates literally to "living water." A continuation of artist Anna Boghiguian's ongoing interest in borders, or boundaries, and the figures that traverse them, this interest in what divides people is similar to Lispector's examination of the separation between the subjects of "you" and "I." In *Cities by the Rivers*, Boghiguian explores how boundaries are historical, lived and inscribed transgenerationally through memory. While *Água Viva* was the inspiration for SBC's current Focus Program, and was the beginning of conversations between the artist and curator Pip Day, the novel is not directly cited in the exhibition; however, *Água Viva* provides a useful framework for approaching Boghiguian's difficult work, or the task of following someone else's stream of consciousness. The artist's emphasis on water, borders and narrative structure has resulted in a collection of works from the artist's travels in Egypt, India, Ethiopia and Brazil with new works made in situ in Montreal, another city surrounded by water.

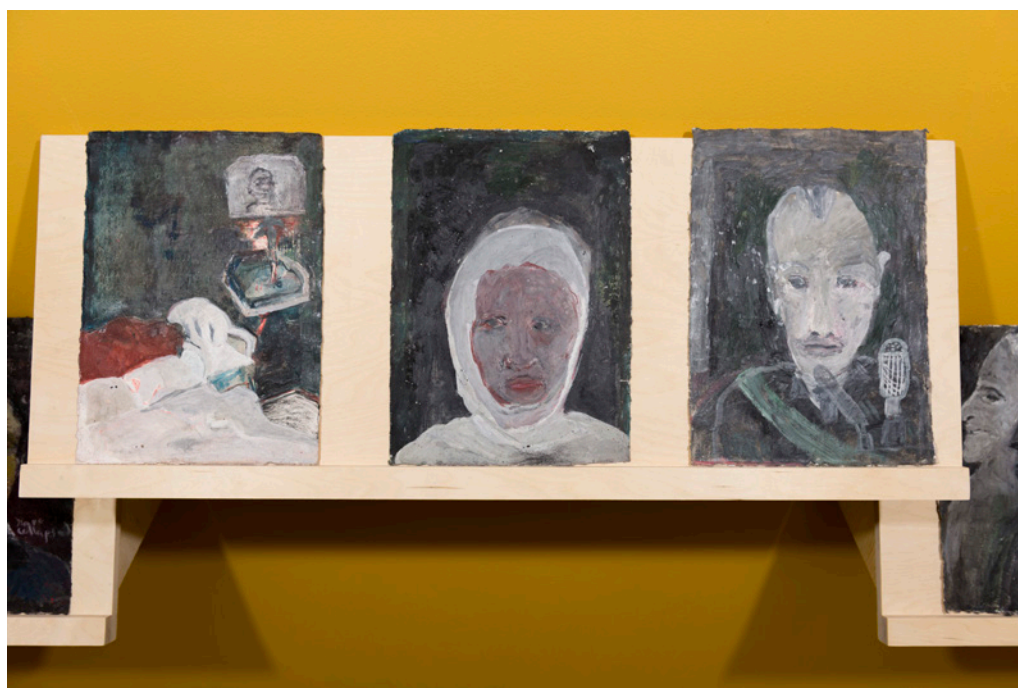
Boghiguian travels extensively. Journeying, walking and the figure of the traveller are important to her production; on trips she develops a series of loose drawings and sketches, often working in spurts after periods of rest.<sup>1</sup> In a way, *Cities by the Rivers* gives the impression of being a travel journal taken apart and reorganized into geographical categories on the gallery walls. This deconstructed stream of consciousness, reconstructed temporarily in the gallery space, shares affinity with Lispector's writing style, especially as is evidenced in *Água Viva*, which reads as an internal monologue between two subjects attempting to get at an *it* or a *thing* that is beyond writing. Notably, Lispector's narrator is a painter experiment-

ing with writing, while Boghiguian's paintings at times merge with text. Perhaps the strongest connection between the two is their sensorial approach: Lispector builds intricate descriptions that allow her readers to visualize her profile of plants, animals and colours while Boghiguian makes direct sensory connections through appeals to smell, sight and sound.

The smell of honey fills the air in the hall outside the gallery, explained by a corridor of honeycombs inside. Bees and honey are integral to this exhibition, especially as metaphors for migration and civilization as a group that swarms, or moves, together. Wax (sourced locally in Quebec) is a common material used by Boghiguian in her paintings. Walking through the corridor of honeycombs, there is a sense of a stillness in the absence of buzzing as the hive has been deconstructed and vacated, and some of the combs have been replaced by paintings. Passing through the corridor leads to a series of nine paintings entitled *Cairo Portraits*. Displayed on shelves, the portraits of ambiguous authority figures (perhaps police, military or border control officers), an image with a shadow and one of a vacant room, accompanied by the use of dark colours and wax, endow the space with a heaviness — which leads to questions about the corridor. Are the honeycombs bricks that lead to an empty chamber? And who are the authority figures?

Across from the honeycomb corridor is a timeline drawn and written on the long gallery wall that is populated by figures: Boghiguian's *Walkers* from her travels in Ethiopia. These illustrations are a mixture of illustration and collage painted with wax and affixed to wooden supports attached to the wall and floor. The timeline begins with a description of a pre-historical dispersal of peoples to different parts of the world; importantly, each civilization settled where there were bees. As the timeline progresses, a non-cohesive narrative of migration is constructed using various historical and fictional references, the sheer size of which requires viewers to read while walking along the wall. Conceivably, the viewer also becomes a *walker*. Significantly, this is where Boghiguian addresses the subject of "you" directly:

"You walked from village to village, or you hiked to go to a destination. You felt maybe the presence of those who walked to escape, while leisurely you got a ride, or used your legs to take you on a ride."



Anna Boghiguian, *Cities by the Rivers*, 2015, installation view at SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal.  
PHOTO: PAUL LITHERLAND;  
IMAGE COURTESY OF SBC GALLERY

Returning to *Água Viva*, and the question of “you” and “I,” it is unclear if Boghiguian is addressing the viewer, herself, refugees or other *walkers*. Presumably, although not overtly stated, some of the *walkers* are contemporary refugees, painted with beeswax specific to a geography and community, forced to travel with only memories, or traces, of home. Recalling the vacant honeycomb corridor, these figures have left their homes for unknown destinations.

At times, experiencing the narrative Boghiguian weaves and unravels feels akin to walking through someone else’s memory, or perhaps a Sebaldian<sup>3</sup> form of ruin. Regardless, Boghiguian draws attention to the extensive history of world migration and the precarity it entails, the open-endedness of which allows the mind to travel through personal memories. Notably, these memories are not told, but shown through dream-like illustrations and collages that permit a different entry point into imagining, as opposed to depicting, a relationship to war, displacement and migration. Unexpectedly, I was drawn back to stories of my grandparents escaping Eastern Europe during and following World War II: my maternal grandparents slept in marshes and hid on a small sailboat to escape Estonia and flee to Sweden, and my paternal grandmother, at 22, doped her newborn so that she wouldn’t cry as they walked through the mountains from Slovenia into Austria to claim refugee status. Momentarily, I felt closer to Boghiguian’s walks.

The final works in *Cities by the Rivers* are a selection of audio pieces that complement the *Cairo Portraits*: Franz Schubert’s *Military March* (1818), Boghiguian’s *Recording of an Incident* (2014) and Amy Winehouse’s *Back to Black* (2006), which allude, respectively, to an attack, an incident and a retreat. *Recording of an Incident* is a script “imagined” by Boghiguian about a 16-year-old girl living in Cairo, who is ostensibly arrested for drinking tea in public with her friends and, unable to monetarily satisfy her captors or renounce her desire for a “better life”<sup>4</sup> to them, is imprisoned. As such, Boghiguian draws attention to the arbitrariness of rules, boundaries and borders and the people who get caught in between. Experienced alongside the *Cairo Portraits*, Boghiguian’s imaginary *Incident* alludes to a nightmarish or dystopian envisioning of the world. Furthermore, her distinctive choice of beeswax draws attention to the crumbling ecology of bees that, according to Boghiguian, once decided where civilizations should begin. It is perhaps through the weight of her materials that Boghiguian grounds her streams, or rivers, of thought into more concrete observations about what it means to be on the periphery, a so-called migrant. In this way, Boghiguian extends an invitation for us to walk with her on her travels, to let our memories become intertwined with hers and discover our own *Água Viva*: living water, stream of consciousness.

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***Writing Topography: The Marion McCain Exhibition of Contemporary Atlantic Art***  
The Beaverbrook Art Gallery  
Fredericton, New Brunswick  
Sept. 26, 2015 — Jan. 10, 2016  
*by sophia bartholomew*

You can feel it in your body before you know what it is that you’re looking at. Walking a straight line into *Writing Topography* puts you at the intersection of Amanda Dawn Christie’s *Spectres of Shortwave: Radio Towers Like Windchimes* (2014–2015) and Stephen Kelly’s *Open Tuning (WaveUp)* (2008). Together, these sound works produce a deep sense of foreboding throughout the entire first floor of the exhibition, and invoke the haunting sense of a near-future societal collapse. It’s difficult to locate, but this dark premonition seems to figure more strongly here than in other parts of the country, living hand-to-mouth with a greater distrust of globalized economic systems, and a strong orientation toward everything local. Above anything else, the artworks in this exhibition are informed by this widespread skepticism: relaying it, remedying it.

By anchoring auditory material in physical space, these first works remind us that the world is thick with frequencies whose presence and impact we generally ignore. *Open Tuning (WaveUp)* encrypts oceanic wave information as sound and movement, with four speakers travelling up and down, back and forth, eerie and erratic. In *Spectres of Shortwave: Radio Towers Like Windchimes*, six sections cut from the shortwave radio towers that once inhabited the Tantramar salt marshes resonate with sounds gleaned when the towers were active: heavy crossbars float weightlessly, suspended from the ceiling.

The converging hums animate impossible criss-crossing grids of hydro wires in Robert Bean’s composite photographs *Études for Marconi* (2014), and are apt accompaniment to Eleanor King’s *Logging Roads of New Brunswick* (2015), which uses Google Earth