

NOVEMBER

THE FRESHMAN: DJART

Alexandra MacGlip reviews DJART, a travelling cultural biennial, which made its debut in Algiers in November.

It was the product of two years' research by organiser Trans-Cultural Dialogues (TCD), a platform of young curators from the Euro-Mediterranean area. DJART set out to encourage the democratisation of culture and promote art, as a way to share knowledge, discourse and diverse practices. Its framework was conceived in response to a survey conducted among the local community.

DJART is a contraction of Djazaïr (Algeria) and art, which sounds like *'jar'*, for 'neighbour' in Arabic. As TCD's Xavier de Luca explains, the idea of 'neighbour' was "essential to our work process, as we wanted to strengthen the links between the inhabitants of the city of Algiers, by promoting culture not as a privilege, but easily accessible to everyone and free, and to give space and focus to the projects and creations of young artists and cultural workers coming not only from Algeria but also from the Maghreb and the Mediterranean region."

FOR THE PEOPLE


DJART's emphasis was on public art. Renowned calligraffiti-artist eL Seed created a large mural on Lalla Mina Restaurant on Boulevard Didouche Mourad with a rendering of lyrics by the celebrated Algerian singer Dahman Al-Harrachi. Meanwhile, local graffiti artists decorated the city through a series of workshops while Walid Bouchouchi placed stickers on buses and stairwells in his AKAKIR Invasion and Nicene Kossentini's sound installation shared tales of Algerian daily life. Louise Dib's Safari Typo invited participants to document urban signage while Housseem Mokeddem led an open-top bus tour to abandoned buildings bound up in Algerian history, including the 'haunted house' Les Deux Moulins.

Placette Ben Boulaid, with its bronze statue of the revolutionary leader, playground and astro-turf football pitches, formed the heart of DJART. Salim Lamari and a group of enthusiastic architecture students worked into the night there building street furniture from recycled materials. It also hosted packed gigs by Barcelona's Yacine & The Oriental Groove and Oran's reggae-rockers Democratoz, and two performances by British artist Adrian Lee. Commissioned by independent curator Yasmina Reggad, Lee's Puppetmaster was a generous and challenging work tailored to engage an Algerian audience unfamiliar with

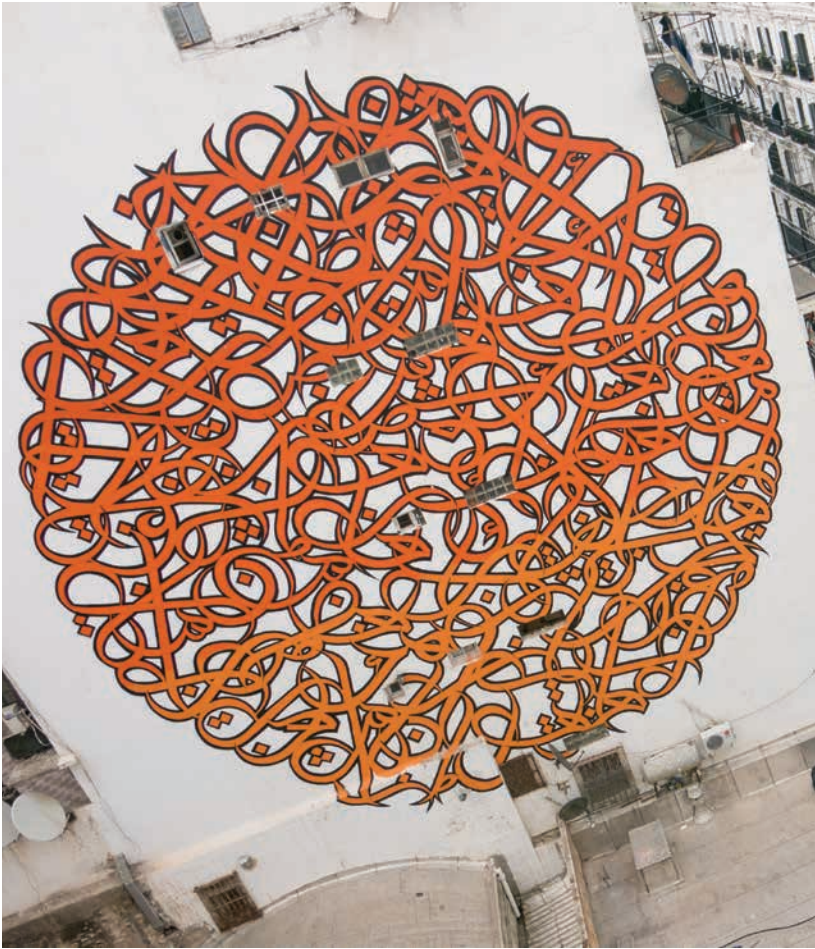
performance art, which it achieved brilliantly. Lee was keen to make a work on a subject local young people who use that space would have a connection with: football. "I based my performance on the movements of the Algeria manager Vahid Halilhodzic during the Algeria vs Germany World Cup game, that Algeria lost 2-1. Although I edited the game to just eight minutes and showed almost no action, the atmosphere during my performance was electric. There were chants and cheers as the Arabic commentary cut in and out and the movements of Halilhodzic became symbolic: sometimes leaping about; calmly adjusting his tie after Algeria scored; sitting stock still as they conceded a goal," says Lee.

VOICE AND VISIBILITY

As an umbrella for local and regional collectives, DJART also hosted a series of discussions on Art in Public Space and Artistic Mobility. De Luca was thrilled with the public response to DJART and the warm support they received from people involved at every level. "I have never seen so many diverse young people getting together in Algiers. DJART courageously took many risks in addressing and 'intruding' into the public realm and getting people back onto the streets," said Reggad, also programme curator at aria (artist residency in Algiers) founded by Zineb Sedira. "TCD have given a voice, visibility and empowerment to young people beyond the border of Algiers. At the same time as giving hope to older generations. For the first time I fully sensed the power of the expression 'the next generation.'"

Through its positive activation of Algiers' public space by night, DJART has begun undoing the psychological legacy of the curfews of the Black Decade and laid strong foundations for future activities. It has also lessened Algeria's cultural isolation by building new regional networks, which offer a counter-narrative to the haraga phenomenon of young men desperately seeking to cross the Mediterranean to find work in Europe. "We hope this experience will encourage the young generation, not only in the Algerian context, but also on an international level, to take the initiative with their innovative cultural projects," says de Luca. 

For more information visit www.transculturaldialogues.net/djart-2014



Clockwise from top left: el Seed's *Algiers Mural* on Didouche Mourad Building (2014); el Seed in the process of painting the mural; Views of Adrian Lee's performance *Puppetmaster* (2014).
Photography by Atef Berredjem.

Photography by Hichem Merouche unless otherwise specified. Images courtesy Alexandra MacGilp and DJART.

