The Borders of Europe: A Roundtable Discussion

Present are Yoeri Albrecht (director of the debate center De Balie, Amsterdam), Valentijn Byvanck (director of the institute Marres, House for Contemporary Culture, Maastricht), Hedwig Fijen (founder and director of Manifesta), and Steven ten Thije (project leader at L’Internationale), who responded to a number of points raised in the discussion from a museological perspective. Also taking part in the discussion are the guest editors of this issue, Sjoukje van der Meulen and Nathalie Zonnenberg. Moderated by Margriet Schavemaker (curator and Education, Interpretation, and Publications Manager, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam). Transcript and edits by Esmee Schoutens.

In response to the theme, The Borders of Europe, guest editors Sjoukje van der Meulen and Nathalie Zonnenberg invited four players in the cultural field to discuss the borders of Europe and the role of art and culture within the European project since 1992. All four participants in the discussion organize cultural projects that center on or are related to Europe. In 2016 Yoeri Albrecht organized the first edition of the biannual Forum on European Culture in De Balie with DutchCulture. The forum offers thinkers and artists a platform to imagine the idea of Europe. In 2017, with Gijs Frieling and twenty artists, Valentijn Byvanck co-curated a joint artwork at Marres, The Painted Bird: Dreams and Nightmares of Europe. It involved painting 750 square meters of the historic building’s surface area, and was accompanied by a soundtrack. Hedwig Fijen is director of the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, Manifesta, which she founded in 1996; an exhibition that explores the changing DNA of the European climate, together with the underlying geopolitical and sociopolitical agenda, from the perspective of art and culture. Every two years the roving biennial takes place in a different location in Europe: from Rotterdam in 1996 to Zurich in 2016. Manifesta opens in Palermo in June 2018. Finally, Steven ten Thije is the project leader of the platform The Uses of Art – The Legacy of 1848 and 1989 (2013–2018), initiated by L’Internationale, a confederation of six European museums for modern and contemporary art. L’Internationale proposes a space for art within a non-hierarchical and decentralized internationalism, based on the values of difference and horizontal exchange.
among a constellation of cultural agents. With exhibitions, symposia, publications, education programs, and staff exchanges, L’Internationale seeks to foster a substantive, long-term partnership in the museum world.

The discussion is divided into three parts. Part one reflects on the title of this issue of Stedelijk Studies and includes a discussion about Europe’s borders and the significance of the year 1992 for art and culture; part two looks at the funding that the European Union (EU) provides for art and culture, in addition to European cultural policy; part three examines the future of Europe and the role of artists in shaping that future.

1. The boundaries of Europe / 1992 as reflection moment

Margriet Schavemaker:
I think it’s a good idea to begin this discussion with a brief introduction by the editors on the specific theme of this issue, *The Borders of Europe: Art and Cultural Memory in the EU Since the Maastricht Treaty*.

Nathalie Zonnenberg:
One of the crucial questions we want to ask in this issue is what makes Europe, Europe? Is it the different nations? Or is there a shared identity? And is that identity bound up with national identity?

In the debate on European identity, much is said about borders—both internal and external borders. The German philosopher Ulrike Guérot, who was an advisor to the EU for twenty years, gives an analysis of European identity on the basis of shared history. She believes that we need to look further than the individual nations and discover how Europe was represented in the past. Guérot also asserts that a European identity was in existence long before the nation state. To illustrate this, she refers to a sixteenth-century map of Europe made in the form of a woman, in which the various parts of the body together comprise the body of Europe (fig. 1). The head is Spain (then the Habsburg Empire), the Danube the aorta, with one of the arms composed of Great Britain (formerly England) and Denmark. If the arm is severed it will die, and the body—and, in a metaphorical sense, Europe—will no longer function properly. Thus, Guérot digs even deeper into history to assert that, even then, a European identity existed that transcended nation states.

The question, then, is: does the Maastricht Treaty mark a watershed in the development of European identity? With this, is Europe “ripe for a republic”? Or is it simply the latest in a succession of treaties that will have little impact on European identity?
Sjoukje van der Meulen:
I'd like to briefly explain the subtitle of the issue, “Art and Cultural Memory in the EU Since the Maastricht Treaty.” [The year] 1992 was, of course, intentionally chosen as a moment to reflect on art and culture. It is now twenty-five years since the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, and this is seen as an important historic moment, a milestone in the European unification process. Since then we have also spoken of “the old Europe—and the new,” to use the words of historian Tony Judt.3

On the one hand, 1992 is an important year for the economy, marking the introduction of the Economic and Monetary Union which gave rise to the euro and the establishment of the banking union. On the other, it is striking that, in 1992, there was no cultural vision of the EU, or at least not one that was particularly well-defined. Which is surprising, given that it was Jean Monnet who, when looking back on the European unification process since World War II, said, “If I had to do it again, I would begin with culture.”4 We chose 1992 because, after the fall of the Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, it is a year that is associated with a new historic phase of the EU, one that ranges beyond the “East-West” notion of Europe, in which scant attention was given to the field of culture.

Yoeri Albrecht:
To be perfectly frank, I think that 1992 is a pretty irrelevant date. Of course, it’s of relevance for political scientists of the last thirty years, but not for historians and philosophers. The EU is, without question, an important topic, but Europe goes back much further than that. And I think that if you subscribe to the thought that Europe is a conglomerate of nations, you also buy into the nineteenth-century idea that the national state is the perfection of human society. For a long time, nationalism was an emancipatory concept and a movement that precipitated the urge for greater equality and the disappearance of the aristocracy, but I think that it’s now become a very dangerous idea. Every idea is born and dies. By calling 1992 an important moment you’re very close to supporting the idea that Europe is, and should remain, a union of states.

Hedwig Fijen:
[The year] 1992 is a benchmark, but there are many other conceivable measures. I believe that it’s principally about the question: what do we mean by Europe? The first Pan-European ideal was proposed in 1931, in the aftermath of the horrors of World War I. It’s interesting to note that this first Pan-European ideal was to include the colonies, too. In other words, it wasn’t confined to the European territory, but Europe in its extensive, colonial version—an ideal that is beginning to lose ground in the postcolonial discourse. In essence the Pan-European ideal was about peace, which, I think, was also the basis of the later European collaboration. How can we prevent people and countries, principally France and Germany, from having continued access to coal and steel for the purpose of weapons manufacture? I’m
currently rereading Stefan Zweig in this context. He writes about the internal cultural borders in Europe and how we can reframe the cultural differences between the French and Germans.\textsuperscript{5}

**Steven ten Thije:**
Let me start by saying that even though I haven’t read the Maastricht Treaty, I do believe it was a defining moment in the development of the European Union—also in a cultural sense. Art and culture may not have been given the central role that we—as workers in the cultural sector—envisioned, but with the advent of the euro and the increased integration of the European member states, culture has certainly achieved greater prominence.

I consider 1992 more of an indicator that marks the moment when the European Union made a step towards embedding the peace after World War II more deeply in the remarkable “non-continent of Europe” (after all, it is not bounded by seas). Europe was (and, in a certain sense, still is) a region in which a variety of major powers have been locked in conflict for centuries—during which process they also occupied half the world. This is the Europe of the endless “struggle of Empires,” which in the past also included Russia and, to some degree, the Ottoman Empire. [The year] 1992 was the year when a structure was designed to create a long-lasting political system for the political shape of this conflict in the Union; a system once more under threat of destabilization thanks to Brexit. But since the announcement that the last Balkan states can become member states in 2025, I’m feeling a bit more optimistic that we’ll be able to continue this experiment, at least in continental Europe.

**Valentijn Byvanck:**
When we organized The Painted Bird in Marres, some artists said, “I have no idea what Europe is.” When you bring up nationalism or the European dream, you soon get into territory that’s too large for artists to work with. At the same time, Europe also provides plenty of experiences that artists are able to explore. In border towns like Maastricht, for instance, borders raise all kind of issues: public transport doesn’t go further than the Dutch border, the Arts and Culture Pass isn’t valid over the border, and so on. The existence of nations and national borders has an almost unfathomable impact and importance, especially if you live in a border area, than any dreams about Europe’s downfall or continuation.

**Sjoukje van der Meulen:**
Of course, the intention isn’t to ask artists to create work on a theme such as Europe, although there are a number of reflective artistic projects that offer us perspectives within the debate on Europe. However, as these projects take place all over Europe, when brought together they offer fascinating insights. In New Unions, Jonas Staal created a compelling work that engages with the political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in the EU and the potentials for an
“alternative union” (fig. 2). Thomas Bellinck also explored the EU in his parody of the heavily criticized *House of European History*, a fictional museum about the history of the defunct “former” European Union (2013) (fig. 3).

Valentijn Byvanck:
I can go along with that. I wasn’t trying to imply that we told artists, “You have to depict this scene from history.” We used it as an experiment to see what would emerge. The exhibition prompted a lot of artists to explore a part—or all of—the European project, and when you bring all of that together, ideas start to surface. I find it hard to speak of this in terms such as “reflection on Europe” or “result” but, like politicians and economists, our aim was to define the fiction of Europe.

Hedwig Fijen:
The question is, what could Europe be? Is Europe an idea? An artificial idea based on the development of the nation state in the late nineteenth century? But the question is also: as the arts sector, how could we help to define it? After twenty-five years of Manifesta, I’ve reached the conclusion that many artists and thinkers have trouble shaping this identity. There’s no such thing as an all-embracing, homogenous European culture. Curators, artists, or thinkers have no desire to burn their fingers by trying to identify or represent a so-called European culture.

Over the last twenty-five years, certainly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, you see that art is often used to challenge the injustices and inequalities in the world. This was recently the focus of documenta 14, for instance. Until the 1980s this was approached from a Western hegemony and, to a great extent, turned a blind eye to colonial perspectives. Now you see that this issue has become a part of the discourse. The perspective of the Other, and the perspective of the other on Europe, on what we all think, do, and produce here, is one of the most fascinating visions at present. As early as the 1960s, Frantz Fanon opined that “the model Europe” is dead. The model Europe had assumed a variety of toxic forms and should be abandoned. He doesn’t explicitly describe what this obsolete model enshrined, but specifically refers to slavery, economic oppression, colonial suppression, and the expropriation of property, in which sense he offers another perspective: that the model Europe is over, and a new model needs to be found.

Yoeri Albrecht:
Europe is, I think, a hollow idea that needs to be fleshed out. If it isn’t fleshed out by playwrights, writers, or philosophers, it will remain hollow until eventually becoming one-sided or dangerous. I think that if you ask artists to create something about the EU, they’ll blow a fuse. And rightly so, because, as an artist, your role isn’t to share the propagandist narrative of this or that institution. I experienced this for myself when I was seeking contributions for the *Forum on European Culture*. Some participants got the idea I was asking them to
say something about the EU while I was actually curious to hear their associations with Europe.

**Margriet Schavemaker:**
Hedwig, what are your experiences in Palermo in preparation for Manifesta 12, which will take place there in June 2018? Do you feel the city will be representative of important European issues currently at play?

**Hedwig Fijen:**
What’s interesting is that the mayor, Leoluca Orlando, positions Palermo with its specific sociopolitical history in North Africa or the Middle East, rather than Europe. He described Palermo as a modern-day Beirut. This is partly the legacy of forty-five years of mafia domination, the American bombing of 1943, and the historic civilizations and past and present inflows of migrants to the island that still shape Palermo’s identity today.

Migration, as well as the agglomeration of all the civilizations around the Mediterranean, has transformed the city into a condensed society, where all faiths and cultures mingle and live together in relative peace. In Palermo, for instance, there’s less xenophobia towards migrants than in many other European regions. This pluralistic society and complex urban environment is a huge source of inspiration for artists and thinkers.

2. Financial support for art and culture in Europe

**Nathalie Zonnenberg:**
Are you familiar with the House of European History in Brussels? This institute/museum, which is founded and financed by the European Parliament (to the tune of some fifty-five million euros), reflects on European history (of the twentieth century) and European unity with a collection, exhibitions, education projects, cultural events, publications, etc. The museum’s core mission is “to strengthen the knowledge of all generations of European citizens of their shared history and, by so doing, help to foster reflection on the present and visualize the future of Europe.”

The House has been heavily criticized by various parties, and the question is: is the House a legitimate investment in art and culture in Europe? What are your views of this kind of financial support provided by the EU for a cultural project?

**Yoeri Albrecht:**
In the EU there is no mandate to invest in culture at European level. Essentially, the EU is the successor to the European Community for Coal and Steel, which was established with the prime objective of creating shared sovereignty over vital raw materials like coal and steel and energy, in order to make future outbreaks of war materially impossible. This idea worked extremely well, but the cultural factor was always circumvented because the national states are very protective of their own identity and culture. And this
equates to no money, no mandate, no approval, and no consensus concerning the allocation of money to culture. That’s the black hole at the heart of the European project.

**Hedwig Fijen:**
It’s a little more nuanced than that. In the 1990s there was a degree of political support for the European Project, and at that time there was a European orchestra, and many other so-called multilateral cultural organizations.

**Yoeri Albrecht:**
Yes, but that European orchestra was all there was! And the European orchestra was under threat of extinction because of funding cuts, and everyone worked frantically to lobby for money and keep the orchestra going. But the costs aren’t even included in the budget. A small amount of funding was earmarked for the House of European History, which is out-and-out propaganda. Instead of investing that money in Manifesta, or offering a platform for culture, the money had to be funneled back to Brussels to give us all lessons in our own history. Which, of course, is problematic because, whose view of history are we actually seeing?

**Sjoukje van der Meulen:**
I’m always a little skeptical when the term “propaganda” is bandied about. We don’t have to automatically dub every project Europe launches as propaganda. But I agree with you on the rest. Yet isn’t this partly the fault of the cultural field? I’m actually jealous of economists because, through trial and error, they’re unstinting in their efforts to build an economic union. Is there some way that art and culture can lobby more actively for a better distribution of cultural funds?

**Yoeri Albrecht:**
There is very little funding for art and culture. And the monies available are small budgets that are always linked to specific agendas.

And there is, of course, also a lobby of the national states that are bent on maintaining their national cultural policy. They’re adamant that Brussels shouldn’t gain control of this policy. But in the end they’re blocked, of course, by the European Council, one of the most powerful bodies. Nationalism is involved, and seems to be quite a grandiose, bombastic presence here, too, I think.

**Valentijn Byvanck:**
Does this have anything to do with the fact that in Brussels people aren’t very keen on experimental culture? There seems to be a kind of “cultural war” between us and those who are perfectly prepared to spend 100 million euros on art, as long as it’s the kind of art that appeals to them, too. On top of that, the objectives of Brussels are far better served by economics and politics. Those objectives have
greater credibility, particularly when it comes to establishing peace and solving global issues.

**Sjoukje van der Meulen:**
I think we should consider this a moment to reflect: of course, we can point the finger at Brussels, but we also need to look at ourselves, at the cultural field. As far as I’m concerned, both sides are a little to blame.

For instance, I had no idea that someone with a law and economics background, Tibor Navracsics, is the European Commissioner for Culture. That’s a very bad start. Clearly, there’s a lack of transparency in Brussels about exactly where the cultural funding is, and on top of that, we’re dealing with a EU commissioner who is more interested in how culture can be used as a force for economic development.

**Hedwig Fijen:**
So you’re saying that we should position ourselves much more as cultural infrastructure and lobby European politics to invest in culture?

**Sjoukje van der Meulen:**
Exactly.

**Hedwig Fijen:**
In the time I have worked at Manifesta, I’ve understood that many institutions, individuals, politicians, and artists have done that, but precisely for the reasons you both mention [Yoeri Albrecht and Valentijn Byvanck]. Europe ended up being sidelined by national cultural policies. Why is it that national representation and identity are still so prominent in 2018? Why do Germans spend thirty-seven million on documenta, for instance? And this while the big question was “unlearning”; unlearning our own methodologies, of our own ways of thinking and how we look at art. I’m not saying the curation wasn’t without flaws, but a staunch argument is entirely in line with Germany’s underlying political narrative, the “wiedergutmachen.” Like flagellants, they still have to whip themselves every day and let the world see the injustices and inequalities. And for that they’re prepared to shell out thirty-seven million! The French, on the other hand, have an entirely different story.

**Valentijn Byvanck:**
A kind of appeasement.

**Steven ten Thije:**
I think that every major political structure has a strong cultural component. But what I’m specifically interested in, and what I hope is a direction in which the EU will continue to develop, is maintaining art and culture here as part of a democratic political structure in which powers are kept
separate reasonably effectively. Art is a force that emanates from within the political fabric and is relatively independent of the financial elite. I don't personally have a problem with us being judged within the political structure; political needs are bound to be projected onto us to ensure the connection with politics. I think that we, as a sector, need to fight hard to highlight this special construction and be actively involved in thinking of ways to best expand upon it.

**Yoeri Albrecht:**
The funny thing is that if, as an outsider looking in, you ask non-Europeans what they think is our unique selling point, they say: culture. And the only sure-fire economic growth factors that are identified in all the projections are travel, leisure activities, culture, documentas, biennials, etc. And what's more, they are quantifiable.

In 2012 the conference *Imagining Europe* was held at De Balie. We invited Chinese, Brazilian, and Indian professors of political science, as well as culture makers, to share their views of Europe. Amitav Ghosh, for example, said, "Do it, Europeans! Do it because of the current political climate! Do you think Americans are going to do it? Are the Chinese going to do it? No. We Indians haven't managed any such thing, so please, you have to do it!"

**Sjoukje van der Meulen:**
Do what?

**Yoeri Albrecht:**
Engage in ethical political conduct. Politics that is driven by an ethic. And the strange thing, to my mind, is that Europe doesn't do this. You're right when you say that the cultural sector should position itself better and lobby more actively. But each member state has its own cultural landscape, which makes it practically impossible to set up a lobby as a cultural sector. The entire word "lobby" is more or less a no-go.

**Hedwig Fijen:**
Maybe the institutes are afraid of their autonomy—that's a point we've not touched on yet. I always say to politicians, "We take the money and run." Once the Manifesta is over, we're required to account for and quantify a great many aspects, of course. The Manifesta team produces all kinds of booklets and folders for the ROI (Return on Investment). But in principle, you give us money and we don't want any kind of political pressure to influence the artistic process. That's why I no longer have any interest in collaborating with Brussels.

**Steven ten Thije:**
From the context of my own work over the last few years, I think there may be too little attention given to the interest of "the institution"—with which I don't mean the purely
European institutions. The current institutions, such as the museums I work with, often already have an extremely robust network in Europe. In the end, to me Europe isn’t an overarching entity—it’s a practice, first and foremost. It’s an ongoing interaction in which we share stories and learn from each other’s diversities. That’s the positive side, which goes hand in hand with all the friction it generates, too. For this reason, as the EU, we shouldn’t simply invest in temporary projects, but also create space for institutions to expand their operation with a long-term “European addition.” If we create networks like that, a system of underground rivers as it were, which intermingle and connect different European regions, that’s when art and culture can really work. Obviously, that will take money, and I hope that the EU will invest more generously in culture. I know this sounds improbable in the Netherlands, but the European political community is so diverse, and Germany and France so decisive, I believe it could easily happen. I think it’s an investment that will be worth every euro invested a hundred times over, in terms of its impact on the quality of the emerging European community.

Valentijn Byvanck:
For a long time I’ve considered nationalism an unimaginably powerful organizational idea, very possibly the most successful ideology of the last 150 years. But I feel that art and culture are making a fascinating leap from the local to the global, and skipping the national level. Culture makers are always focused on the here and now, and make that the subject of a project. If artists are successful, that’s communicated at a micro-local level, the world over. Maybe that’s why the arts and Brussels are such mismatched bedfellows.

Hedwig Fijen:
That’s very well-positioned, and I think it’s very powerful, but how do you envisage, for instance, the European Capital [of Culture]? Is that still something that’s relevant? Or is it just a marketing concept?

Valentijn Byvanck:
I think it is, but a marketing concept can also spark extraordinary projects. And this also revolves around “take the money and run.” That money has to go somewhere, and people are going to run with it.

Yoeri Albrecht:
I think you’re right. Art is, of course, extremely personal. It’s the most personal experience imaginable, and that appeals to a great many people, if you do it well. Art stems from someone’s life and personal environment. That’s why nationalistic and European art is often such a failure—those are political concepts. In the case of philosophy, it’s different; novels can touch on political philosophies, too. But the special thing about European culture and Europe is, I think, that it is actually an experiment “to overcome the national state.” The mindset that forces us to think along the
national borders of the last few hundred years, that’s a handicap.

3. The future of Europe

Nathalie Zonnenberg:
How do you visualize the future of Europe? Will Europe continue to exist? To return to the vision of Ulrike Guérot: does the future of Europe lie in the past, in a time long before the nation states were formed? Then, there were larger zones with a shared identity and cultural values that transcended the national.

Yoeri Albrecht:
I think that Europe has an incredible future ahead. The idea of Europe fills me with hope, yet at the same time it’s absolutely imperative. It’s an experiment, a social experiment, and that’s something an artist—and definitely a philosopher—can get excited about. And we’ve no idea exactly where it ends. Nobody knows.

I’d say that we need to continue the Europe experiment, but we’ve arrived at a point where we need to flesh out the idea. Europe shouldn’t become a national state-with-benefits. That’s a danger, as bad as Europe disintegrating. For me, Europe is a fantastic idea, but one that’s insufficiently discussed, considered, and adapted. The idea of Europe needs to be defined and, if not continuously revised, is destined to remain an amorphous idea. Over the last twenty-five years, Europe has been shaped mainly by civil servants, politicians, businesspeople, and economists. It’s a shame that the thinkers, poets and artists have been so little involved—and kept at a distance—from this process.

Hedwig Fijen:
You don’t visualize Europe falling apart? Don’t you think the idea and the political and financial unity have an expiry date?

Valentijn Byvanck:
I think it’s a dream, Yoeri. The decline of Europe is, of course, one of the most powerful cultural-historical movements associated with European thinking. We’re formed in the mold of the Hellenic and Roman model of civilizations: rise, flourish, and die. Civilizations that have faded into obscurity are lauded in later years for their cultural unity. In Europe, though, it is the differences that are so vitally important—that’s what makes Europe.

Hedwig Fijen:
But who wants anything more than this enormous individuality and diversity? That’s why a term like “European integration” is so problematic. What, exactly, is an integration trajectory? Who integrates with whom and, most
importantly: who wants us to integrate? And what are citizens and artists meant to do with this?

**Margriet Schavemaker:**
Right now, I think we’re also very focused on bringing to light things that have always been kept hidden and marginalized in the past—topics that are foregrounded by postcolonial discourse. The identity politics associated with this proposes a thinking of differentiation, based on diversity and acknowledgement, and the many problematic factors this entails. This is an extremely urgent topic, and one that will be a focal area in years to come, here at the Stedelijk Museum as well.

**Hedwig Fijen:**
That’s right. I think that this—rather than European cultural integration—is a topic of far greater interest to cultural institutes and artists.

Isn’t this a time of redefinition and reinterpretation? Through alternative interventions, rewritings, and critical scrutiny of everything we thought to be true. In Palermo, I see artists hugely inspired by this. For thinkers and artists, it’s fascinating that seeing things from a new perspective also gives you other stimuli for re-envisioning your own culture.

**Yoeri Albrecht:**
Rewriting has a very nasty association for me. *You can’t overcome your history by denying it.* And that’s very much bound up with rewriting. In my view, something else is going on. I’m more inclined to say it’s about assigning a new meaning, or adding meaning. But rewriting, certainly if done by powerful bodies, is particularly dangerous.

Europe is a culture that defers, experiments, and values freedoms. There’s definitely a layer beneath the surface that developed long before the emergence of nation states—although I don’t share Guérot’s views on this point. After all, you might just as well say that European history is the history of Julius Caesar, a violent conqueror, of Charles V, who spent much of his reign at war, and of Hitler. That’s tantamount to redacting history. There’s an underlying shared culture, and that’s why, for the future, it’s so important to create a platform for imaginings. That’s something Europe should spend a billion a year on. If you give the European cultural institutions and artists the space, I’ve every faith in the future of Europe. Back in 1968, the motto was “L’imagination au pouvoir,” and that’s just as valid today, but needs space to thrive!

**Hedwig Fijen:**
I agree with you that imagination should be allowed to play a role in defining what Europe is. But this needs to happen within a legal context. I think that the biggest issue facing Europe in the decades ahead is migration. How can we deal
with the issue of migration differently? Is Europe going to “seize up,” get old and fat, or are we going to redefine what migration means? Concepts like social welfare, human rights, civil rights, and labor migration will need to be closely examined. One of the biggest themes of the upcoming Manifesta in Palermo will probably be “mobility as a human right.” Shouldn’t we give everyone, as world citizens, the right to mobility? This would radically change our approach to migration. And if so, we’d probably define what we refer to as Europe entirely differently.

Valentijn Byvanck:
I’m very pessimistic about how Europe can return to a commons. In the 1990s ethnographer James Clifford wrote that European culture is so incredibly successful because, unlike any other culture, it incorporates everything that enters. Now, we’re making every effort to bring to the fore everything we’ve appropriated, not only in the arts, but in a much broader sense. This means that the project that Europe is still successfully conducting will be the target of more criticism.

When I think of the future of Europe, Benedict Anderson and his book on nationalism, Imagined Communities (1983), come to mind. If you follow Anderson, he offers numerous recipes to build community through imagination, just as nationalism can. Contemporary visual art is merely a pale shadow of this. The arts and culture sector lacks nationalism’s ability to construct community.

Hedwig Fijen:
Indeed. The question is: what can art do? What role can art play in solving major geopolitical problems? In this area I’ve been inspired by Lieven De Cauter, a Belgian philosopher. In his essay in the book Art and Activism in the Age of Globalisation (2011), he ends on an extremely cynical, skeptical note. Can a Jonas Staal effectuate real change in his own small microtopos, or should we sit down together with artists and politicians? Should an artist like Francis Alÿs, with his imagining of migration, meet with Leoluca Orlando, the mayor of Palermo, and a number of jurists to hammer out a new vision of migration politics (fig. 6)? Alÿs can visualize this, but is unable, and perhaps has no inclination, to bring about concrete political change.

Steven ten Thije:
I hope we’ll get a move forwards and a move backwards. Europe still sees itself as a twentieth-century construction whose purpose is to allow the European states to peacefully coexist. This didn’t succeed in the Balkans, and I think we need to give that much more thought. I think this has its origin not simply in political failure, but in the reluctance to see the larger historic connections, too. In the nineteenth century the Balkans were a kind of colonial European province on their own territory, and were liberated by the implosion of the Ottoman Empire. The major states inflicted unimaginable damage with all kinds of political games. The
fact that they exploded again at the end of the twentieth century shows me that the EU had little idea that Europe had scant control of its own colonial reflexes. It may sound very trendy to say this, but Europe should make decolonization its primary project. Not simply as a means of atonement, but chiefly as a way to move forward, towards a positive idea of what Europe and the Union could be. This will be a huge undertaking, but one in which art could also play a part. Art helps us to see—not only who we were, but who we are, and who we can be. And in our current world, we need all three very badly.

4. Quote from Jean Monnet: “Si c’était à refaire, je commencerai par la culture.”
6. “Yet it is very true that we need a model, and that we want blueprints and examples. For many among us the European model is the most inspiring. We have therefore seen in the preceding pages to what mortifying setbacks such an imitation has led us. European achievements, European techniques, and the European style ought no longer to tempt us and to throw us off our balance.” Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963), 312.