

RENDEZVOUS

Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen

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Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen
Rendezvous, 2009, video, 4'02"
Courtesy of the artist.

In *Rendezvous*, Danish artist and filmmaker Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen juxtaposes portraits of migrant Indian workers in Dubai alongside images of their families who remain in their homeland of Kerala. Generally hidden away from the image of a prosperous society that is projected in the United Arab Emirates, Larsen positions these expatriate labourers in the foreground, giving them not only a face, but a further context that exposes both the conditions that brought them there in the first place and the system that often keeps them there indefinitely.



Writing about the background to this work, Larsen has noted that 'an earlier work of mine from 2005, depicts an Indian embroider called Ali who lives and works in Sharjah. Looking at it now this photograph seems embryonic in the manner in which it anticipates *Rendezvous*. Captured from inside the embroidery workshop where Ali works looking out, the image shows a curtain, which partially reveals a sign across the road reading "Ideal Lad" (the full sign reads "Ideal Ladies Salon"). For me, Ali is an ideal lad. Like millions of other expatriate labourers he has moved thousands of kilometres away from home to work and sends most of his low salary back to his family in India so that they can survive'.

'Before starting filming', Larsen continues, 'I asked the workers to think of their families and vice versa. It is within this emotional context the audience finds themselves placed physically. When installed, the portraits are projected onto two screens opposite each other, leaving space in the middle for the audience to stand. Accompanied by a soundscape created in collaboration with Mikkel H. Eriksen, the poignant and poetic nature of *Rendezvous* suspends the viewer metaphorically and physically between the gazes of those on-screen and in those feelings of hope and longing between worker and family.'

Larsen's workers, like the countless millions living similar lives the world over, are the price of prosperity for some at the cost of abject misery for many. They are, to use Guy Standing's phrase, indicative of a new emerging social class: the 'precariat'. It is this class that, through chronic and pervasive economic insecurity, is increasingly denied the security of community and, to quote Standing, 'any social memory on which to draw to give them a sense of existential security'. In Larsen's work, we are given a glimpse of what that memory could consist of and what forms of precarious security - family and friends - are denied these nomadic workers in an age of sinuous capital and the opportunistic ideology of neo-liberalism.

Rendezvous was commissioned by the Sharjah Art Foundation for Sharjah Biennial 9 and featured in the recent exhibition *Changing Stakes: Contemporary Art Dialogues with Dubai* at the Mercer Union Gallery in Toronto, Canada, alongside works by Haig Aivaizian and Lamy Gargash, among others.

Anthony Downey

About the author

Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen was born in Denmark, in 1971, and lives and works in London. Larsen has an MA in Media Art from the Slade School of Fine Art, and his work has been exhibited extensively, most recently at the *Thessaloniki Biennale 3*, Thessaloniki, Greece (2011), *Looped*, Salt Lake Art Centre, Utah, USA (2011), *Changing Stakes: Contemporary Art Dialogues With Dubai*, Mercer Union, Toronto, Canada (2011) and *Folkstone Triennial*, Folkestone, UK (2011).