

# Atelier Morales and “The New Silk Roads: Time, Space and Existence”

By Francisco Puñal Suarez

This new and ambitious artistic project is constructed around a series of photographs rendered with pencil and watercolor that together form a large-scale travel notebook, recording a journey of over 13 000 km along the mythic silk road.

What architects/photographers Juan Luis Morales and Teresa Ayuso have accomplished is epic, something never before attempted in its totality. These artists of Cuban origin, who reside in Paris, have undertaken a project that will forever mark their artistic careers. A glimpse into their creative process is now possible, through 15 works on display at Palazzo Bembo for the exhibition, “Personal Structures”, organized during the Venice Biennale and on view until November 24.

What compelled you to engage in this exhausting almost entirely by land journey that started in Shanghai and ended in Hamburg and during which you crossed numerous cities, historical sites, landscapes and territories in China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Belarus?

“The answer lies in an artistic vision, a desire to investigate, to document a transcendental trade route between east and west, to discover historical sites, to capture with the camera a rich and unique architectural legacy. It was a challenge whose success depended on a great deal of cultural baggage, patience and physical strength.”

The artists go on to explain: “In Venice we are showing a group of mixed media works in which a horizontal panoramic photo is printed in the center of a sheet of Bamboo paper. In the empty space that remains all around the image we draw with pencil and watercolor certain fragments outside of the frame of the photograph that we want to conjure up. In every photograph we try to identify, imagine and highlight traces of the old silk route.”

This project was financed by Global Forum Resources with the support of the United Transport Logistics Company/Eurasian Rail Alliance. Its goal is to encourage dialogue and reflection about new connectivity of knowledge and goods in today's modern world and in particular in Europe and Asia where commercial and cultural exchanges have thrived for countless years.

The artists recount: "There were three legs to our journey along the new northern silk road (from Shanghai to Hamburg) and in each country we were accompanied by a local team. The first leg (July to August 2018) covered China- from Shanghai to Korgos, Kazakhstan- from Khorgos to Shymkent, Uzbekistan- from Tashkent to Nourkous. From there we flew over the Caspian Sea to Baku in Azerbaijan, then onwards to Shaki via the north and back to Baku via the south.

The second leg (November 2018) covered Russia and Belarus from Minsk to Kaliningrad. And in the third leg we journeyed by plane to Hamburg, Germany.

The very cities, landscapes, people, cultures, religions, languages and economies that we encountered have the potential to give life to the perennial dream of a connected world. We hope that in so doing the fragile balance between space, time and existence achieved across centuries will be preserved in this legendary silk road.

Our itinerary, which purposely overlapped with some of the routes taken by Marco Polo and Baron Von Richthofen, revealed many emblems that once seen could not be forgotten. The constant challenge was to capture the vast accumulation of information and the varied images encountered, in order to discern the recurring signs that help form a redundant memory on which the silk road's temporal transcendence is based.

Each new encounter pointed to the legendary caravans while also reflecting new forms of connectivity for current and future transcontinental trade. We witnessed the permanent traces left by a magnificent past, and in constant evolution as we moved forward.

In each new and spectacular landscape or city photographed, we became aware that the importance of each site added to the beauty of its surroundings, a connection impossible for us to capture with our cameras. That is why we have supplemented our photographs with drawing and painting; in order to capture, with an illusion, the intangible aspects of this mythic voyage.

Our challenge as artist-travelers was to keep hold of the thread connecting us to those oases imagined by traveling-merchants during moments of total delirium and exhaustion in a quest to transport goods, knowledge and beliefs- a

feat beyond the limits of the humanly possible leaving in its wake a trace of hopes, fears, ambitions and the desire to dominate.”

*The cities, landscapes, people, cultures, religions, languages and economies that we encountered have the potential to give life to the perennial dream of a connected world. We hope that in so doing the fragile balance between space, time and existence achieved across many centuries will be maintained across this legendary road and its surrounding territories.*

Global Forum Resources is currently working on organizing a travelling exhibition for this project, to be presented in the countries visited by Atelier Morales during their journey. There will also be a book with a selection of works from the project.

For more information go to

<http://www.gfrsilkroadsproject.com>

The Artists:

Juan Luis Morales y Teresa Ayuso (Atelier Morales) are internationally recognized photographers and architects.

They are of Cuban origin and are based in Paris. They have participated in numerous gallery-based projects (Nina Menocal, Bernice Steinbaum, and Natalie Obadia among many others) spanning cities such as, Berlin, Havana, Mexico City, Miami, Paris, Frankfurt, Heidelberg and Zurich. Their work has been shown in many international art fairs (e.g. Art Basel, Miami, Armory Show, NY, Scope, London, MACO, Mexico City, HOT Art, Basel, ARCO, Madrid, and Biennials in Prague, Havana and Venice). Museum exhibitions have included Centre Pompidou in Paris, The Museum of Latin American Art in Los Angeles, Kunstverein in Heidelberg, Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt and Pérez Art Museum in Miami.