

ARTFORUM

“Found in Translation”

SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM | NEW YORK

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Brendan Fernandes, *Foe*, 2008,
still from a color video, 4 minutes 39 seconds.

One could be forgiven for coming to understand this wave of globalization over the past twenty years as a clash of civilizations doomed by religious and linguistic separation. The Tower of Babel scenario is a leitmotif highlighted by everything from Hollywood film to the war on

terror. Nonetheless, according to Édouard Glissant (among others), globalization has always entailed a process of translation that is not only necessary but productive. The latter view is the starting point of this show, which features eleven artists working with film and video.

The art by this global cast can be at times demanding, and the conceptualization of each piece and the attendant wall text explaining it are linguistic projects unto themselves: Carlos Motta's video installation features six Colombians reciting historic political speeches in public forums—an important intervention in political memory, but one that, in the context of the Guggenheim, relies heavily on explanatory text; Keren Cytter's reimagining of a Julio Cortázar text is a nebulous act of literary palimpsesting. A number of the works are lengthy, with Omer Fast's *Godville*, 2005, clocking in at fifty minutes; for many, “Found in Translation” will warrant repeat visits.

In spite of the material's density, the individual acts of translation here are, at their best, a sort of revelation. Canadian-Kenyan-Goan multimedia artist Brendan Fernandes works through a J. M. Coetzee text with the help of a Yale speech coach in *Foe*, 2008—the video, a complex game of postcolonial mimicry and biopolitical acculturation, is remarkably intimate and heartfelt. One cannot help but laugh when mingling with multiple projectors in Sharon Hayes's *In the Near Future*, 2009, a record of the artist's multilingual, deadpan resurrections of charged protest slogans. It is in these moments, when the art itself yields brief flickers of serious play and knowing reversal, that something new—and deeply moving—is revealed.

— Ian Bourland