

SUPERFLEX is known for employing strategies of “extreme participation” in such projects as the creation of a park in Copenhagen designed for diverse neighborhoods, which included picnic benches from Armenia, a Thai boxing ring, litter bins from the UK, and a swing set from Iraq. The group’s short film *Flooded McDonald’s* (2009) has toured internationally, showing a life-size replica of the ubiquitous fast-food restaurant gradually flooding with water, an overt hint of the inability of institutions to cope with the threat of climate change. On the side of a London gallery, **SUPERFLEX** designed a billboard of a euro coin with its value missing. The collective is recognized for artworks with wit and subversive humor that address serious social and cultural concerns. **SUPERFLEX** describe their works as tools—thereby suggesting multiple areas of application and use.

SUPERFLEX: European Union Mayotte is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator.

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DANISH ARTS FOUNDATION

Related Programs

Artist Talk: SUPERFLEX

Thursday, October 25, 6:30 pm



Guaraná Power Bottle. Courtesy the artists and 1301PE Los Angeles. Photo: Jeppe Gudmundsen-Holmgreen.

Gallery Guide
Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

September 7–
December 30, 2018



SUPERFLEX

European Union Mayotte



SUPERFLEX, *European Union Mayotte* (still), 2016. Two-channel video installation (color, sound), 9:42 minutes, 3:54 minutes. Courtesy the artists and 1301PE Los Angeles.

People in precarious boats cross vast bodies of water in search of a better life. This is an image that has become all-too familiar, seen frequently in the perpetual news cycle and on social media feeds. *European Union Mayotte* is filmed in the Comoros Islands—a former French colony just north of Madagascar. A sovereign island nation since 1975, the Union of Comoros consists of four islands, including Mayotte and Anjouan. Mayotte, however, reaffirmed its ties to France, and thus the European Union, and since 2014 has been acknowledged by the EU as its outermost region. Mayotte receives important economic benefits from this relationship.

fiberglass boat by hand on the island of Anjouan. Every year, thousands of people risk their lives in these small boats to cross 45 miles of the Indian Ocean to Mayotte. The second screen shows one of these boats overloaded with passengers, floating in the sea without a horizon line or a destination in sight.



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Audio Tour

Visit camstl.org/audio or ask for an iPod at the front desk to hear directly from Bjørnstjerne Christiansen and the curator on the audio tour.

The installation on view consists of two screens. The larger projection documents the construction of a

The Danish art collective SUPERFLEX—Jakob Fenger, Børnstjerne Christiansen, and Rasmus Nielsen—became aware of the relationship between France, the Comoros Islands, the EU, and Mayotte while working on another project on a nearby island. During the making of *European Union Mayotte*, the refugee crisis in Europe peaked. The work is representative of the collective’s artistic practice: addressing social and cultural concerns and exploring the nature of globalization and systems of power.

Formed in 1993, the collective SUPERFLEX combines art, science, technology, and engineering to explore issues of social and economic inequality in an attempt to effect change and present solutions to common problems. SUPERFLEX examines socioeconomic models, corporate structures, and systems of politics, finance, and production to reveal underlying mechanisms and paradoxes. The group calls their artworks “tools,” which are meant to be used, appropriated, and further transformed by others. Their pieces are less objects than experiences, operating as interventions that engage or disrupt preexisting codes and forms, often inviting public participation, and using humor and play to challenge social structures. Across their 25 years of collaboration, the artists have worked in such diverse locations as Africa, Texas, Bangkok, and Japan, pursuing politically charged projects such as the production of a soft drink called



The Comoros Islands.



SUPERFLEX, *Jardin La Nurserie*, 2017. Courtesy the artists and 1301PE Los Angeles.



SUPERFLEX, *Flooded McDonald's* (still), 2008. Digital video, 21 minutes. Courtesy the artists and 1301PE Los Angeles.

Guaraná Power, which exposed multinational corporations’ monopoly of guaraná, a plant common to the Amazon region.

Perhaps their best known project is *Flooded McDonald's* (2009), in which SUPERFLEX built a life-size replica of a typical 1980s McDonald’s restaurant, slowly flooded the space with water, and worked with the artist collective The Propeller Group to produce a video of the process. The post-apocalyptic—and somehow slapstick—video points to impending economic and environmental catastrophes: the financial crisis, global warming, and perhaps even specific disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. The collective enters existing structures and critiques from within. In fact, their name was adopted from a ferry they rode between Sweden and Denmark, the Superflex Bravo; the group revelled in the generic, corporate sound of the name, and are amused by the many other applications and companies that result when googling “Superflex.”

In 2015 SUPERFLEX was commissioned to create *Jardin La Nurserie* (The Nursery Garden) for three hospital communities on the islands of Réunion and Mayotte, located in the Indian Ocean near Madagascar. The artists began a hospital plant nursery in an attempt to prompt holistic thought about human

bodies and hospital healthcare. During their time on these islands, SUPERFLEX became aware of the very specific relationship of the Comoros Islands to France, and issues around migration. The artists spent two weeks on the island of Nzwani (Anjouan) filming fiberglass boats—called *kwassa kwassa* in the local dialect—being made by hand. Residents of this island nation, part of the Comoros Islands, make perilous journeys on these unsteady ships to reach Mayotte, an island that became part of France in 2014. Extreme inclement weather has made the short 45-mile journey from Nzwani so deadly that more than 50,000 migrants have perished as of January 2016.

European Union Mayotte exposes the underlying issues of social and economic imbalance, and the need for economic access. The video was made at the height of the migration crisis in Europe in 2015, in which millions of refugees sought and are still seeking asylum in the EU—a time that could be labeled “the year of the migrant.” Although the video focuses on the treacherous passage of the Nzwani people, we see an underlying optimism in the imagery on screen: the diligent, manual labor of the boat-maker and the quiet patience of the asylum-seekers in the *kwassa kwassa* as they float toward an unknown destiny.