

Press Release: Brunei Gallery, SOAS
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG
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Retracing Heinrich Barth and Stories from Agadez: Life as it is now

An exhibition by Julia Winckler, artist and senior lecturer in photography at the University of Brighton. The exhibition features an interactive digital space, contemporary photographs from Northern Niger and historical artefacts on loan from the Royal Geographical Society and many private lenders. This is the first large exhibition to explore the legacy of Heinrich Barth and includes stunning photographs taken by Hausa and Tuareg community photographers in Agadez.



19th century German explorer Heinrich Barth was one of the first Europeans to recognise the significance and richness of African history and culture. Travelling under the Arabic name Abd el Kerim, he crossed the Sahara desert and over the Air mountains into Central Africa, recording his journey in the five volume Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa 1849-1855.

Arriving in Agadez in 1850, Barth recorded in his journal: "I would advise any traveller, who should hereafter visit this country, to make a long stay in this place". Since the 15th century Agadez had been a significant trading centre and transit point for caravans traversing some of the oldest trading routes in the world.

The expedition sponsors in the British Foreign Office envisaged a commercial outcome in the form of trade agreements with various African sultans. Barth modified these aims, making the main task the geographical exploration of Central Africa. Inspired by this account and fired by tales of a mysterious room containing a trove of ancient artefacts connected to Barth's expedition, Julia Winckler, artist and senior lecturer in photography at the University of Brighton, journeyed to Niger. Retracing Barth's footsteps and drawing on her combined interests in African studies, Anthropology, and Photography, she has interwoven a narrative based around her encounters and impressions. Her artistic response features shifting viewpoints and addresses questions of identity and memory.

In addition she facilitated the participatory project *Stories from Agadez: Life as it is now*. This captures the experiences and images of eight African non-professional photographers, most of whom recorded their own lives for the first time through photography. The resulting images document the hardships and achievements of a local community. One of the photographers, Sarhid Hamadalher explains: "I have taken pictures of the life that people live here. I hope that these photos will make you discover the beauty of this country and the fantastic potential it holds. I like photography because it allows us to relive the past and it is also a great passion of life".

Today Agadez is the largest city in Northern Niger as well as the capital of the Air region which is currently experiencing major political unrest. At present a journey to the Air would not be possible.

An outreach and education program, workshops and exhibition-related talks in association with the Centre for African Studies at SOAS create opportunities for gallery visitors, community groups and primary and secondary pupils to respond to work in the exhibition.

For further details of the exhibition and events please visit www.soas.ac.uk/gallery

More information on the project can be found at: www.retracingheinrichbarth.co.uk

Open: Tuesday – Saturday 10:30 – 17:00 Closed: Sunday and Monday but for Sunday 8th June open all day

Admission Free T.020 7898 4046 (recorded info) E. gallery@soas.ac.uk

