

2019 - 2020

PROTECT THE STRONG

- YOUSSEF BOUBEKEUR -



- FOREWORD -

According to the Living Planet Report of 2018 and the LPI (Living Planet Index), which measure global biodiversity, there has been a 60% reduction in the size of wildlife vertebrate populations over the period 1970-2014. This is a worrying figure in the context of what is called the Great Acceleration, during which unprecedented planetary change has been brought about by demographic explosion and economic growth.

*

Protecting endangered wildlife species has become a major challenge for the human race.

PROTECT THE STRONG

Foreword

Premise
page 4

Youssef Boubekour
page 5

Protect the strong : the project
page 8

Introduction : the Barbary lion
page 9

Context
page 10

In-situ
page 12

Itinerary
page 14

Photo-staging
page 15

Presentation
page 27

Chapter 1 : The African elephant
page 28

Collective writing
page 30

Contacts
page 31

- PREMISE -

Protect the strong is an in situ global artistic project, combining chapters of both sketches and photography, and whose aim is to raise awareness and draw attention to the fate of wildlife. The project was created by visual artist **Youssef Boubekour**.

The beauty and strength of nature's powerful creatures have always inspired the imagination and incited greed. The animals are tracked, pursued, hunted down, even slaughtered, and this vulnerability is, paradoxically, as absolute, as it is moving. *Protect the strong* is a representation of this. « *The animals are presented as souls lost in the wilderness, like refugees, but strangers in their own land.* ». Youssef Boubekour's animals are human-like shadows, clothed but fragile, wandering haunted landscapes of which they were formerly keepers and over which they were supposed to rule.

The humanisation of animals is the central theme of the artist's work. He gives each character a unique look - savage, proud, haughty - and explores the paradoxical relationship of civilisation with the violence associated with animality.

“Who is the savage, which one is violent: the hunter or the hunted?”

By setting up this unexpected one-on-one, this strange crossover, Youssef Boubekour holds up an unorthodox mirror to whoever glimpses at his work: a simple exchange of looks, which bring into play the feeling of otherness and the frontiers of humanity.

- YOUSSEF BOUBEKEUR -

“Mankind is an animal locked outside of its cage” Paul Valéry

This quote from Paul Valéry grabs our attention. And upsets us. It asks us to take a deep look at the human condition and our animal side; we aspire endlessly to freedom, and yet we feel burdened and alienated by it.

Youssef Boubekour's 'bestiary' plays with these very questions : a gallery of portraits of transfigured animals, captured in a fleeting moment of humanity. *« Through a simple look or expression, I'm trying to show the disturbing proximity between humans and animals. Working on the expression is vital, not to say obsessive. Do animals show affection, doubt, desire ? Love ? Or is it humans who sometimes display the most brutal savagery ? Is human dance the expression of an evolved and civilised sophistication, or on the contrary, that of an instinctive, physical bestiality ? »*

Artist and illustrator from Paris, with a passion for drawing, Youssef Boubekour trained as an architect at the Paris La Villette school of architecture, and then at Tokyo's Waseda University. In Japan, Youssef worked in the architects' studios of Tezuka & Tezuka and Sanaa.

Japanese culture is one of his major influences. The way that work is extremely highly valued, the rigour involved and the close attention to detail, all correspond to the meticulous and painstaking art of ballpoint pen drawing. Over and above his relationship to his craft, what fascinates the artist even more is the particular link between civilisation and nature, which are recurring themes in Japanese architecture.



While still a student in 2007, Youssef Boubekour met French artist JR, and they worked together in Israel and Palestine on a street art project, since made famous under the name Face2Face. Youssef has continued to collaborate regularly with JR on different projects around the world. The influence of street art and working in the open-air is clear to see in Youssef's work.

In 2015, he contributed to the first edition of the collective exhibition "Seules les traces font rêver" in France. His work was instantly successful with visitors, and it was clear that he had a captive audience. For the second edition of the exhibition, Youssef was given carte blanche for an exhibition at the superb 29Maubourg.

The same year, he met the young gallery owner, Vincent Tiercin, who was setting up his Art&Craft Gallery (Paris, France) in the 13th district of Paris. The two men became friends, and in March 2018, Vincent was entrusted with organising a solo show at his gallery dedicated to Youssef's work, entitled 'Out of his cage'. The exhibition was a huge success among visitors and contemporary art collectors alike. Since then, the artist has worked tirelessly in order to set up his pet project *Protect the strong*, reflecting his global humanist philosophy.

« Why is it that the suffering of an animal affects me so much ? Why is it that I can't bear the idea of an animal suffering, so much so that, on winter nights, I get up to make sure that my cat has enough to drink ? Why is it that I feel related to all creatures great and small, why does just the thought of them fill me with feelings of kindness, tolerance and affection ?

Why are animals as much part of my family, as humans are, and on the same footing ? »

Emile Zola, extract from
« Love of animals », 1896

PROTECT THE STRONG

- PROJECT -

Emile Zola's incredibly moving text 'Love of animals' was the literary inspiration which gave rise to the project: the desire to convey a message and shine a spotlight on the animal condition, in particular the condition of 'wild, free-roaming animals.' Since there is no legislation or regulation acknowledging what wild animal species feel, they are not protected in the same way as animals in captivity. Some species are completely extinct in the wild, and others are on the verge of extinction.

The aim of *Protect the strong* is to break down the barriers concerning the condition of wild animals around the world, to make communities aware of the situation, to support practical measures already undertaken by hundreds of NGOs and groups, and to spread the message which might help to save these endangered creatures. This heartfelt project, which ties in neatly with the artist's global artistic approach, has been conceived and devised into chapters of a story which must be written collectively. Each chapter deals with a wild animal threatened with extinction in its natural habitat. The animals will be drawn life-size, standing proudly and with a nostalgic look, and set in their surroundings, hovering like a shadow of an all-too recent prosperous past. The story that *Protect the strong* aims to share will be introduced by a prologue recounting the complete disappearance from the wild of the *Barbary lion*.

Youssef Boubekour has spent time following wild animals to the four corners of their natural territories, enabling him to depict the essence of these endangered species. His drawings will be displayed in their original context, and then captured by camera for posterity. The printed versions will bear witness to what's happening in situ, and will make up the common language shared in the collective story of *Protect the strong*.

Introduction

.....

- THE BARBARY LION -



- CONTEXT -

Up until the middle of the 20th Century, the **Barbary lion**, or Atlas lion, subspecies of the African lion prospered in the mountains and forests along Morocco's Atlantic coasts, before becoming extinct in the wild. The lion's disappearance was brought about by a variety of factors and causes mainly linked to human activity: its natural habitat was transformed due to regional urbanisation, the need to protect local communities from attack, drought, over-exploitation of the land, excessive hunting, not to mention the geopolitical situation of the last century. All these factors which had nothing to do with the lion's specific animal condition or habitat.

The Barbary lion: symbol of Morocco

The lion has been a typical emblem of strength within many civilisations around the world and throughout the ages. As the king of beasts, the lion was favoured by monarchs. It symbolised strength, power and fairness, majesty, courage, and gold (which was considered as the 'king' of metals); it was also synonymous of respect, intelligence, as well as terror, thanks to its status in the animal kingdom. As the proud lord of the Atlas Mountains, the lion was depicted in Moroccan heraldry, particularly on its armour: a royal golden crown, decorated with pearls and a star, below which the escutcheon was held up by two felines. Although, in the language of western heraldry, the lion, the leopard, the leopon and lipard* are all considered as the same species, it's interesting to note that the two felines holding up the royal Moroccan shield depicted two wild animals only native to North Africa: the now extinct Barbary lion and the endangered Barbary leopard. Moreover, as if to reinforce the symbolism of the lion's power in Morocco, it's worth noting that the national football team are nicknamed the « Atlas Lions ».

* leopard-lion hybrids

According to stories and accounts by the oldest inhabitants of the Middle Atlas region, the lions were last seen in the 1940's, roaming their territories during cold winters. As for Algeria and Tunisia, the last lions became extinct at the end of the 19th Century. This explains why Sultan Moulay Hafid ordered the last of the Barbary lions to be rounded up and captured in 1912. They were presented to the Sultan by the 'Chioukh' (group of Sheikhs) and tribal chiefs, and kept in captivity at the Royal Palace of Fez. The last surviving descendants of these 'royal' lions are now spread around the world's zoological institutes, including notably those protected in the Rabat National Zoo.

In the fight against the Barbary lion's total extinction, an agreement was signed in 2009 between the High Commission of Rivers and Forests and the Fight against Desertification (Morocco) and the English group 'Wildlink International', with the aim of setting up a worldwide programme for the preservation and support of the Barbary lion. The agreement includes reproduction schemes, medical care and scientific research of the Barbary lion. These programmes take place in Rabat's National Zoo, where there are around twenty Barbary lions, the largest number of its type to be found in one place.

- IN SITU -

Team

Youssef Boubekour, visual artist
Vincent Tiercin, director Art&Craft Gallery, Paris
Julie Guinamant, project leader
Abdel Hadi Boubekour, franco-arabic translator
Elliot Broué, photographer videographer

Country : Marocco

Regions : Marrakech, Ouarzazate, Dades Valley, Ouzoud, Rabat

Dates : june 2019 / from june 3-14 2019 (11 days)

Work on site : drawings, installations, photographs, photo and video reporting, lithographs.

The aim in this introductory chapter about the Barbary lion, now totally extinct in the wild, is to target five spots in the High and Middle Atlas region, where the lions used to be found, in order to introduce a nostalgic element of the lions' spirit back into the area. The artist intends to interact with local communities, collecting accounts of when the lions were last seen, recording views and true stories, depicting the relationship, both cruel and kind, from when humans and animals used to cohabit. The artist also aims to work on producing lithographs with local craftspeople.

Listing, collecting, understanding, exchanging, raising awareness and supporting are the keystone elements of the Protect the strong project, which will enable Youssef Boubekour to better understand the place wild animals have in the world and in relation to humans, to help in the protection and preservation of wild animals, and to engage humanity in the overall, vital struggle for maintaining the world's biodiversity.



Sketches in situ

- ITINERARY -

Marrakech > Ouarzazate > Dades Valley > Ouzoud > Rabat



- PHOTO-STAGING -



example of staging, non-contractual image

« *Souls lost in the wilderness...* »



example of staging, non-contractual image



example of staging, non-contractual image

*...the animals are presented like refugees,
strangers in their own land...*



example of staging, non-contractual image



example of staging, non-contractual image

...human-like shadows, clothed but fragile...



example of staging, non-contractual image



example of staging, non-contractual image

*...wandering haunted landscapes of which they were
formerly keepers and over which they were supposed
to rule...»*



example of staging, non-contractual image



example of staging, non-contractual image



example of staging, non-contractual image



example of staging, non-contractual image



example of staging, non-contractual image

- PRESENTATION -

The first phase of the work dedicated to the Barbary lion will be presented to the public in the form of an exhibition at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 in Morocco, and then in France. It will consist of original drawings, photos, joint pieces of work with local artisans, films and videos, illustrating the journey, as well as detailed information on the project. The artist's sketch books, drawings and drafts, as well as his research will also be on display. The whole project will be available on a specially designed digital platform and can be followed on social media.

Profits from this exhibition will go, on one hand, towards funding the writing and setting up of **Chapter 1** dedicated to the *African Elephant* in Namibia, supporting existing or potential collective action in the field, and, on the other hand, towards compensating the artist and his team involved in the development of the project *Protect the strong*.

The exhibition will be accompanied by conferences, workshops and other events aimed at raising awareness of the condition and preservation of wildlife and biodiversity more generally. Making citizens and animal lovers aware of the situation is vital, in order to inspire and encourage enthusiasm for action to be taken, both on the individual and collective level.

The presentation of the work will be a springboard for debate and the exchange of ideas. It is vital to appeal to the social conscience of populations, which have become urbanised, and disconnected from nature and wildlife. The general public themselves can help to relay the process: by telling their own stories, everyone can feel involved in the larger story of humanity.

Chapter 1

- THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT -

Elephants, in particular the **African elephant**, are the largest and most imposing of any existing land-based species. Both admired for their intelligence, and as symbols of memory and wisdom, and yet their ivory tusks remain one of the most prized trophies of poachers.

The population of the African elephant has dramatically fallen during the last 200 years: there are only 415,000 elephants presently, compared to 3 to 5 million at the turn of the 20th Century. Their Asian cousins are themselves on the IUCN's red list of endangered species (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources), as their population has been cut in half over the last three generations. In spite of the prohibition of the ivory trade in 1989, poaching still exists, and along with land and agricultural redevelopment, inter-community conflict, as well as climate change, these are all factors connected with human activity which have brought about the African elephant's gradual disappearance.

In **Namibia**, the driest country in sub-Saharan Africa and the richest in Southern Africa in terms of biodiversity, the species is endangered, and certain measures have been taken, which are in need of support. The country is one of the first African countries to have written the protection of the environment into its constitution. This has helped to bring about an evolution in mentalities and given birth to a true desire to preserve and protect the ecosystem.

*

It's up to us to write this chapter together...



example of staging, non-contractual image

- COLLECTIVE WRITING -

A project on such a scale is in need of the funds and resources on an equivalent scale. In order to set up the introductory phase of the project, as well as create the subsequent chapters dealing with other endangered wildlife species, we are appealing to your understanding and generosity.

All funds that we can raise will help to launch the in situ work around the *Barbary lion*, including: writing and setting-up of the *Protect the strong* project, the journey, carrying out and installing the work in the field, shooting film and video, directing and editing a video documenting the project, collaboration with local craftspeople, and the creation and running of a digital platform to relay the project's content. In order to promote the cause of animal welfare, these tools and resources must all be created, thus enabling everyone involved to be kept informed of both the process and the evolution of the project.

All offers of corporate or private sponsorship, partnership or simple donations will be gratefully received, and in return for services rendered, appropriate perks will be available.

