

For immediate release

## FRANCIS ALÿS

### REEL-UNREEL

January 10 – February 9, 2013

Opening reception: Thursday, January 10, 2013, 6–8 PM



*REEL-UNREEL*, Kabul, Afghanistan, 2011 (still).  
In collaboration with Julien Devaux and Ajmal Maiwandi. Video, 19:28 min.

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of recent work by Francis Alÿs, on view at the gallery's 525 and 533 West 19<sup>th</sup> Street spaces in New York. *REEL-UNREEL* includes a film the artist made in Kabul, Afghanistan, depicting a street game played by local children, as well as a series of paintings of color bars. The film will be screened throughout the duration of the show.

Belgian-born Francis Alÿs's multifaceted actions and works in various media occupy a unique position within the contemporary art world. Widely

known for his distinct and poetic sensibility towards social and geopolitical issues, the artist has described his practice as "a sort of discursive argument composed of episodes, metaphors, or parables." His works, as Mark Godfrey has observed, are defined by their "fantastical absurdity...their transience or incompleteness, their imaginative imagery, and most of all...their enigmatic openness to interpretation." The artist's numerous projects have involved pushing a melting block of ice through the streets of Mexico City, circumnavigating the globe in order to avoid crossing the border between Mexico and the United States, walking through Copenhagen under the influence of a different drug each day for a week, and filming his attempts to penetrate the eye of a tornado.

Produced for dOCUMENTA (13), the video *REEL-UNREEL* (made in collaboration with Ajmal Maiwandi and Julien Devaux) takes its point of departure in the classic street game in which children keep a hoop in continuous motion with the help of a stick. Yet, in Alÿs's version, the hoop is replaced with a film reel. The camera follows a flock of boys as they excitedly chase the reel down the hills of Kabul, with one boy unrolling the strip of film and leading the way, while another follows him, rewinding it. The title *REEL-UNREEL* alludes to the real/unreal image of Afghanistan conveyed by the media in the West: how the Afghan way of life, along with its people, has gradually been dehumanized and, after decades of war, turned into a Western fiction.

While the video offers an alternative to the habitual mainstream media coverage of Kabul, a series of accompanying paintings by Alÿs reminds us of the difficulty of representing the daily reality of war through any medium. Deceptively

(continue to next page)

looking like abstract geometric paintings, these works show a repertoire of color bar combinations that the artist came across between 2010 and 2012, the period during which he was scouting, preparing, filming, and editing the video in Afghanistan. Used by video engineers as test patterns in between televised programming, color bars are electronically produced to correct chrominance and luminance on TV screens. Alÿs's painted versions, thus, are bound to fail as illustrations. Yet more so than challenging the issue of medium specificity, they reflect the artist's impossibility of converting his experiences in Afghanistan into images. As he has noted, "Over those two years, the activity of obsessively painting color bars became an indispensable pendant to my travels in Afghanistan. Whether they reflect my difficulty to translate what I felt, or whether they simply became a therapeutic exercise at home in order to digest the flood of information received upon each visit, the viewer can decide."

Born in 1959 in Antwerp, Belgium, **Francis Alÿs** originally trained as an architect. He moved to Mexico City in 1986, where he continues to live and work, and it was the confrontation with issues of urbanization and social unrest in his country of adoption that inspired his decision to become a visual artist. Since 2004, his work has been represented by David Zwirner, where he had his critically acclaimed solo exhibition, *Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Become Political and Sometimes Doing Something Political Can Become Poetic*, in 2007.

Alÿs was recently the subject of a major survey, *Francis Alÿs: A Story of Deception*, which was on view from 2010 to 2011 at Tate Modern, London; Wiels Centre d'Art Contemporain, Brussels; and The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York. Over the past decade, he has had several solo exhibitions at prominent venues, including the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2010); The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (2008); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2007); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Portikus, Frankfurt (both 2006); among others.

In 2012, Alÿs's work was featured in dOCUMENTA (13), where a selection of his new color bar paintings were installed in a former bakery in Kassel's city center and *REEL-UNREEL* was screened at a satellite venue in Kabul. He has participated in a number of international group exhibitions, including the São Paulo Biennale (2010, 2004, and 1998); Venice Biennale (2007, 2001, and 1999); Shanghai Biennale (2002); Istanbul Biennial (2001 and 1999); and the Havana Biennial (2000 and 1994).

Work by the artist is found in public collections worldwide, including the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan; The Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and Tate Gallery, London.

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