



**YTO BARRADA: THRILL, FILL AND SPILL**  
**26 SEP 2025 - 11 JAN 2026, MAIN GALLERY**  
**EXHIBITION GUIDE**

For over 20 years Yto Barrada's multidisciplinary practice has told stories of borderlands and strategies of resistance, researching cultural phenomena and the ways knowledge is archived or erased. This exhibition, featuring new and existing works, maps these concerns onto colour theory, abstraction, the climate crisis, and Barrada's hometown, Tangier. The title *Thrill, Fill and Spill* is a reference to a gardener's rule: a focal plant (thriller), companions (fillers), and those that trail or overflow (spillers). Barrada turns this popular design concept into an allegory for creative thought - anchoring, accumulating, overflowing.

Barrada's work often looks to Modernist art histories. In 1964–65, American artist Frank Stella painted a series of striped paintings said to be inspired by the textiles he saw during a tour of Morocco. Barrada's own striped works, often hand-dyed and sewn, reference both Stella and the Modernist artists of the 1960s Casablanca School. The paint scheme also references French artist Daniel Buren's use of copyrighted 8.7cm stripes. Local authorities recently whitewashed one of Daniel Buren's public art commissions, *D'une arche aux autres. Travail in situ*, Casablanca (2015) without his knowledge.

Many of the textiles on view were coloured with plants from *The Mothership*, Barrada's artist-led eco-campus, artist residency and dye garden in Tangier. Plants grown at *The Mothership* have colonial history tangled in their roots. These colours are also records of labour, migration, and appropriation. Throughout history the dyeing techniques - Indian, Indonesian, North African, West African - have been borrowed, misattributed, reclaimed, and sometimes erased altogether. For Barrada, dye sits at the intersection of colonial trade, women's labour, ecological fragility, and oral transmission.

**"I think of dyeing as transversal in that it has the beauty of the history of art — it touches industrial development and technology and science — and it is also still considered a female low art."**

The original artworks *Colour Analysis (Tintin in Palestine, 1 and 2)*, 2025 are based on two versions of a cartoon by Hergé. The 1939 comic book *Land of Black Gold* depicted the famous reporter Tintin in British Mandate Palestine, where he encounters forces of Palestinian resistance during the Great Arab Revolt of 1936-39 and the Irgun, a Jewish paramilitary group whose aims included opposing British limitations on Jewish immigration. Later, 1970s versions of the comic shifted the setting to the fictional Middle Eastern country of Khemed, removing references to Palestine and the Irgun. Barrada applies a unique analytical system to the differing panels of these graphic novels. Using overlooked American colour theorist Emily Noyes Vanderpoel's 1902 grid method, Barrada translates each version into geometric colour fields, which become diagrams of political redaction as much as of natural hues.

**"I like things to be mysterious at the beginning. I like when there is a tension between clarity and opacity – a first approach where you think something is very strange, and then a second possible meaning emerges."**

*Tangier Island Wall*, 2019 takes the visitor to Tangier Island – another Tangier – located in Chesapeake Bay, Virginia, USA. This island's small community and their crab fishing livelihood is increasingly threatened by rising sea levels due to the climate crisis. Barrada's porous "seawall" of crab traps references the inhabitants' wish (promised but not delivered by President Trump) for a complete seawall to protect the island. The artist describes this as a 'beau geste' – a noble act, but one that is ultimately futile. Here the crab traps are arranged in a circle to echo the shapes found in the SLG's Orozco Garden. The crab traps contain a packing material known as "void fill", referred to by the artist as 'entrails of paper', and used in other works within this show. Void fill as a material symbolises the circulation of commodities, echoing themes that are central to Barrada's work, which frequently investigates the movement of goods, people, and cultures.

Expanding on concepts of perimeters and defensive structures, *Untitled (13 maquettes for MoMA PS1 Courtyard Commission "Le Grand Soir")*, 2025 is a series of 13 model sculptures that reflect the long tradition of human pyramids in Morocco. Originally employed by warriors in 15th century Morocco as a tactical means to scale enemy fortifications, the formation of human pyramids was also a spiritual practice. Over time, human pyramids evolved into a form of acrobatic expression, and by the 19th century they had been adapted into circus performances for Western audiences. This series of wooden sculptures are models for an outdoor artwork commissioned by and exhibited at MoMA PS1, New York, from 2024 to 2026.

*Untitled (Casablanca Unit Blocks - With Bettina)*, commissioned by the São Paulo Biennial, references the work of multidisciplinary artist Bettina Grossman. Barrada had an artistic relationship with Grossman and became responsible for Grossman's estate upon her passing in 2021. This work makes connections between Bettina's work, which depicts foliage in New York, Modernist urban planning design for migrant worker's homes in Casablanca, and abstract shapes designed by Barrada.

*Continental Drift*, 2021 assembles footage taken over eight years across the US and Morocco. The footage documents the Grand Socco plaza, home of *The Cinémathèque de Tanger*, the arthouse and cultural center which Barrada founded in 2006 and offers a first glimpse of *The Mothership*. The work also introduces Tangier characters like a public writer, a snail vendor, and Jerry B., who like Barrada, is an avid collector of all things from magic lantern slides to fossils. In a brief sequence, the camera has a close encounter with the aging thug who 'disappeared' Barrada's own grandfather in the 1950's.

Barrada is renowned for her commitment to a sense of place, building communities and fostering cultural exchange, as exemplified by founding *The Cinémathèque de Tanger* and *The Mothership*. Artistic exchange is reflected in this exhibition through a residency which British-Japanese artist Emma Ogawa Todd undertook at *The Mothership*. Rooted in Barrada's interest in play and children's learning, the residency will culminate in creative workshops for young people as part of the SLG's Communities and Learning Programme.

**Exhibition curated by:** Sarah Allen, Head of Programme, SLG, in dialogue with the artist

**Exhibition design:** Mira van den Neste

**Installation:** David Angus, Gallery Technical Manager and Flavia Dent, Gallery Technician, SLG

**Registrar:** Sharon Strom, Registrar and Producer, SLG

**Yto Barrada thanks:** *Continental Drift*, in memory of Meryl Butler. Thanks also to Ragini Bhow, Emma Redmond, Sean Gulette, Mia Casey, Hasnae Bentaouyt, and Patchwork.

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