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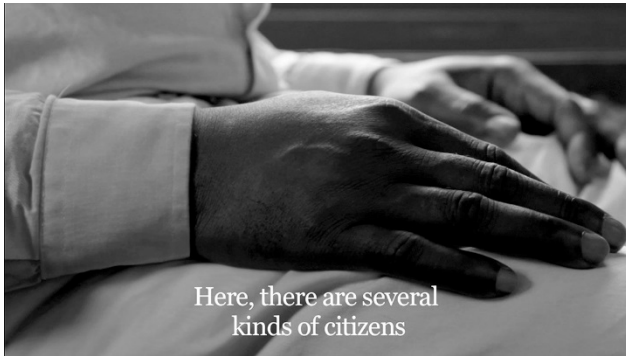
## THE BOX

March 1–31, 2017

### Bouchra Khalili

*Speeches—Chapter 3: Living Labour* (2013)

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Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Polaris, Paris.

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#### Speeches—Chapter 3: Living Labour

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Moroccan French artist Bouchra Khalili uses video, photography, installations, and printmaking to explore how language, the body, and geography can be activated as a form of political resistance. She focuses on individuals who live in the margins—most often migrants who are exiled by force or by choice, for political or economic reasons—and uses a documentary approach to uncover the collective power of personal narratives and the possibility of creating social agency through the act of speech.

Khalili's *Speeches Series* (2012–13) consists of three similarly structured videos that use the voices and images of immigrants to investigate language, citizenship, and labor. In *Chapter 1: Mother Tongue* (2012), Khalili collaborated with five immigrants exiled from their home countries and living in Paris. She invited each of them to translate and recite sections of major political and literary texts by figures including Malcolm X, Aimé Césaire, and Mahmoud Darwish, covering a range of topics from colonialism and national identity to political resistance. As the subjects speak, the ideas of these influential thinkers are made personal, simultaneously removed from and connected to their original historical contexts. *Chapter 2: Words on the Street* (2013) features five immigrants living in Genoa, Italy, who present their own original speeches on subjects of citizenship, patriotism, and belonging. Spoken in Italian, not in their native tongues, the individuals consider the philosophical and pragmatic aspects of what it means to be a citizen. A woman named Malu states, "I will win this right not because I love this country or know the language or the constitution but because 10 years have passed of paying taxes and that's what the law says."

The larger philosophical ideas that Khalili and her collaborators explore in the first two videos crystallize in the work on view here. In *Chapter 3: Living Labour*, five undocumented (or formerly undocumented) workers living in New York speak of their personal experiences, articulating the frustrations of working in a country that relies on them economically but offers them no basic political or social rights. Rendered invisible by a country that advertises possibilities and opportunities, they tell stories that point not to dreams but to the structural oppression of capitalism, where low wages and poor conditions are the norm. Kanté, formerly an accountant in Mali who now works in a supermarket, says, "America is a prison for its immigrants." Aliouné, who made his way to New York via Morocco, Turkey, and Germany, and who now works as a street merchant, observes, "If you're poor, this country's not for you." He goes on to describe a lonely existence, working long hours and never feeling entirely safe. And yet Aliouné's purpose is clear—he is supporting his family back home. Despite their oppressive conditions, statements of hope and of resistance are peppered throughout their stories. Mahoma, who describes being exploited as a dishwasher, talks about organizing his coworkers to fight for better working conditions and wages. Tony, a farmer from Mexico who now works in the food industry, tells how he finally gained citizenship and is helping other undocumented immigrants navigate the system: "You are taught and then you teach."

Collectively, the testimonies in *Living Labour* serve as a potent and timely reminder that speech itself is a powerful mode of resistance. The articulation of personal narratives by those who are marginalized is a means to build agency and establish an undeniably legitimate identity. As nationalism, xenophobia, and racism feed an oppressive system that keeps undocumented immigrants silent and invisible, Khalili's work prompts us to listen and consider the ways in which our individual experiences intertwine and diverge, each as valuable to this country's history (and future) as every other.

Commissioned by Pérez Art Museum Miami for *Bouchra Khalili, Living Labour*, a solo project curated by Diana Nawi, December 4, 2013–February 23, 2014.

Bouchra Khalili was born in Casablanca, Morocco, in 1975. She studied film at the Sorbonne Nouvelle and fine arts at École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Paris-Cergy. Her work has appeared in numerous solo and group exhibitions around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the 55th Venice Biennale. Khalili is a founding member of La Cinémathèque de Tanger, an artist-run nonprofit organization based in Tangier. She is the recipient of a SAM Art Prize (Paris), a Vera List Center for Arts and Politics Fellowship (New School), and a Videobrasil Residency Award (São Paulo). Khalili lives and works in Berlin and Oslo.

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#### Bouchra Khalili

*Speeches—Chapter 3: Living Labour*, 2013

25 mins., video

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