

BETWEEN THE STREAMS

OXO Tower | London
2003

OPENLAB COMPANY



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Installation based on a photographic report of Nils Carstensen on the the South Sudan situation Installation designed by Laura Colombo & Luca Ruzza
| Location: OXO tower London

While the famine is getting worse in Sudan's Bahr al Ghazal Province, the situation has improved in southern Blue Nile. Sudanese aid workers, defying a government ban on relief work and some of the worst roads in Africa, have turned a looming famine into a manageable food crisis. By Nils Carstensen Kurmuk, Sudan. July 1998.

"Let them fall"

Willie takes a quick step sideways and looks on as two 300 litres diesel drums hit the wet sand with each their muted but heavy THUUUMP!

For a moment the men gathered around the tractor remain silent as they try to catch their breath. The late evening symphony of croaking frogs and chirping crickets engulfs the group. All torches have been switched off and the river crossing is bathed only in the monochrome silvery light of a hazed but almost full moon. There is hardly a wind and the day's heat is still sticking to the ground.

Willie wipes the sweat off his forehead and puts the cap back on. He is 28 years old, wears a T-shirt, which was white when he started out this morning, and a pair of black jeans. His face is concerned and there is authority in the voice as he speaks.

"Leave the sick guy on the trailer. Everybody and everything else has to come off."

It's past ten in the evening and they have been trying to cross the stream for three hours. Flat on their bellies and half submerged in water, they've had to dig the tractor out after three failed attempts. They've built a track of large flat stones through the river and up its banks. The stones had to be found and carried from along the river and the nearby bush. All along mosquitos have been feasting on their half naked bodies.

It is the fourth time they're stuck at a river crossing in a day's drive. What should have been a four, or at most six hour trip, has so far lasted 13 hours and they are still only half way to their destination - the town of Kurmuk in eastern Sudan.

The three women passengers and their children all get off the trailer and wade across the low flowing stream. The problem is not the level of the water but the weight of the tractor and its trailer in the wet loose silt and sand of the river bed.

Some of the men have started talking about giving up for the night. This is the last attempt, if the tractor cannot cross with the trailer all emptied, they'll have to wait for the next day and a small miracle in the form of a passing truck which can pull them out.

"Khaliffa, get ready on the tractor. Everybody else pushes."

Khaliffa, stripped to his underpants, gets in the drivers seat and very slowly he lets the tractor roll a few inches backwards before he releases the clutch and hits the accelerator. The left rear wheel starts spinning and mud, sand and water is thrown in a cascade at the pushing men. Then both wheels catch on to something solid and the tractor starts moving, jumping and dancing out of the low water, up the black muddy bank and it is in the clear with the men stumbling and falling in the darkness behind it. [...]