

Artangel

Kutlug Ataman

Küba

From 22 March 2005

Commissioned by Artangel

Kutlug Ataman's *Küba* arrives at New Oxford Street Sorting Office

"I was the original founder. There was no one here. Yes. I began it. We built a shack, by morning we'd finished the walls and put in windows and a door. We had no concrete. We used mud. There was no water here. They brought oil-drums of water at night. No one noticed it for three or four months. Then they came and caught us. ... There are three hundred thirty-two, three hundred thirty-three houses. They named this place Küba."

Bahri, Küba founder and resident

The area known as Küba, in southern Istanbul, first emerged in the late 1960s as a hideout for left-wing militants, but has gradually absorbed other 'outsiders' of diverse ethnicity, religion and political persuasion, all united in their defiant disregard for state control. Kutlug Ataman, who describes Küba as "first and foremost a state of mind" has spent more than two years immersing himself in the life of its residents, mapping its physical and psychological territory through the lives of forty inhabitants in forty individual DVD portraits. These inhabitants of *Küba* will travel as a community to London in March 2005 to be seen on domestic television sets of different shapes and sizes through which they tell their stories. The community will take up residence in what was London's largest Royal Mail sorting office, a 272,500 sq.ft, nine-storey building located on New Oxford Street which ceased to operate in the 1990s. *Küba* is the second Artangel project to have a presence on Oxford Street; the first was *Breakdown* in 2001, when almost 50,000 visitors saw Michael Landy destroy all his possessions in a former C&A store at Marble Arch.

From London, *Küba* continues on to Vienna, Stuttgart and Sydney before returning home to Istanbul in 2006. *Küba* began its journey in Pittsburgh in October 2004 where Ataman's installation — a commission for Artangel — won the prestigious Carnegie Prize.

Living in Küba develops a strong sense of identity, an identity that has no political, ethnic, gender or religious affinities. Avni, a schoolboy, has already learnt about local attitudes to police intervention, and in describing them, seems to encapsulate Küba's indomitable spirit: "If they think the police are right, they'll let them take him, but if not...they stand up to them". Emine recounts the deaths of both her sons through heroin addiction; Bozo scrapes a living as a hired gambler to finance his son's studies. Nothing is predictable in the narratives, movingly expressed by Erol, a would-be fashion designer, as he evokes his passion for the beauty, colour and gentleness of the birds he breeds.

Ataman rejects conventional documentary techniques to make uncompromising yet inspiring portraits, believing that 'talking is the only meaningful activity we're capable of'. He is intrigued by the blurred line between truth and fiction, and the way in which documentary manipulates our perceptions of reality. In his earlier work *Never My Soul* (2001), the protagonist, Ceyhan Firat discusses her life as a transvestite in two inter-cut films shot as both documentary and scripted story. Having himself left Turkey after the military coup, Ataman now lives between London,

Istanbul and Buenos Aires. As well as winning the Carnegie Prize last year, Ataman was also nominated for the Turner Prize 2004.

Küba is also available as a 176pp full-colour photo-album with an introduction by Bill Horrigan, Curator, Media Arts, Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio and extracts from the testimonies of all forty *Küba* residents. Priced £24.95 (available for the special price of £20.00 during *Küba* in London).

Symposium: Where is Kuba?

Saturday 7th May 2005, 14:00 – 18:00 hrs. Tickets £7.50 (concessions £6.00)

Is Kuba a place or a state of mind? Each inhabitant defines Kuba differently, but many speak in terms of escape and freedom. Speakers from a range of backgrounds will debate Kuba's wider implications, including Kutlug Ataman, Irit Rogoff (Professor of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths University of London) and AbdouMaliq Simone (Assistant Director, International Affairs Program, New School, New York).

For further information and images please contact Janette Scott at Artangel on 020 7713 1400 or js@artangel.org.uk

Notes to editors:

1. *Küba* at The Sorting Office, 21-31 New Oxford Street, London, WC1. Opening hours for the exhibition and *Kuba Kafé* café: Tuesday – Sunday 11am – 7pm, Thursday until 9pm. Free admission. Call the Kuba information line on 020 7713 1402 or see www.kuba.org.uk
2. *Küba* is commissioned by Artangel, London in co-production with 54th Carnegie International 2004/2005, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York; Theater der Welt, Stuttgart (16 June – 10 July 2005); Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (T-B A21) (September, 2005), Vienna and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (22 June – 4 September 2005). Film production by Yalan Dünya, Istanbul.
3. *Küba* is funded by Arts Council England with the support of Film London.
4. Artangel is supported by Arts Council England, London; The Company of Angels and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
5. Kutlug Ataman's four-screen film installation *The Four Seasons of Veronica Read* was the hit of the 2002 Documenta 11, Kassel, Germany. Since then his work has been purchased by private collectors and museums such as the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich. He has had solo exhibitions at the Serpentine Gallery, London and GEM Museum voor Aktuele Kunst, The Hague and shown at Lehmann Maupin, New York, Tensta Konsthall, Sweden and Istanbul Contemporary Arts Museum. He has been awarded Best Director and Best Film at various film festivals including Berlin International Film Festival.
6. Artangel gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Consolidated Developments, Morley and Electra who have kindly provided the London location for *Küba*.