

Bayeux 2.0



2017
288 x 65 cm
Embroidery, Wool on linen

Finished 950 years ago, the historic Tapestry of Bayeux is an embroidered cloth nearly 70 metres (230 ft) long and 50 centimetres (20 in) tall, which depicts the events leading up to the Norman conquest of England (1064–1066).

The story illustrated in the embroidery is long and presents a complex series of events and relationships from the viewpoint of the winner. This narrative certainly does fall into the category of propaganda.

Tanja Boukal uses this tapestry to tell a different story. She recreates - authentically down to the smallest level detail - parts of the medieval embroidery, composes and combines scenes to tell the propaganda-story of the EU against potential refugees.

The only part changed are the texts:

“Do not risk your life by trying to flee to Europe” (Official Facebook page of the Germany Embassy in Afghanistan), “Es wird nicht ohne hässliche Bilder gehen” (Austria’s Minister for Foreign Affairs and Integration Sebastian Kurz, Interview, published in the newspaper Die Welt, 13. Jan 2016) and “Nos rues ne sont pas pavées d’or” (Theresa May and Bernard Cazeneuve, France’s Minister of the Interior, Joint open letter published in the newspaper Telegraph, 01 Aug 2015).

This are quotes from interviews and campaigns. These exclusionary messages are couched in terms of humanitarian concerns. Neither of these examples explicitly says ‘We do not want you here’; rather, they imply that, for the target reader’s own good, their own safety, they should not come ‘here’.

So the narrative continues and the messages raise interesting questions about the intended audience. The declared primary audience is potential migrants but the actual intended audience is much wider and includes European publics as well as the governments of migrants’ countries of origin.

Bayeux 2.0 contains a story shaped by a purpose, a purpose which is determined by the circumstances of its commissioning and use like the original Tapestry of Bayeux.