Search the words "Sahara desert tour" or "Morocco fossil holiday" on the Internet and find hundreds of results. Companies like Sahara Tours 4×4, Atlas Geo Tours, and GeoWorld Travel, most based in and around Casablanca and Fez, promise the near-unlimited collection of goniatites, graptolites, trilobites, and other materials from Cretaceous sites. By all accounts, Morocco is open country for mineral and fossil seekers. While laws exist to protect aspects of the nation's geological and cultural heritage, they are spottily enforced. Fossil tourism, much like the safaris of Eastern Africa, is big business: a ten-day trip can run as much as $3,500 per person, with the promise of collecting and exporting at least sixty pounds of fossils including, but not limited to, Middle Jurassic Period dinosaur bones that are 160 million years old.

Yto Barrada's series of photographs from *Dinosaur Road*, part of her larger body of work *Faux Guide* (2015), tracks a road through the High Atlas mountains—a range in central Morocco—plied by government agents, local geologists, paleontologists, and mineral- and fossil-hunting tourists alike. Barrada, who splits her time between Tangier and New York and has long investigated geographical territory as a site of power and material exchange, pictures the road as it curves over and between arid, red hills. Inactive mineral mines and related industrial factories can be seen in the near background, reminding the traveler that the history of paleontology in North Africa and elsewhere is entangled with the history of European colonialism and land exploitation. In Niger, the first dinosaur bones were incidentally discovered in 1963, when French mineral companies were digging for uranium; it's a story that came to be repeated throughout North and Central Africa in the decades to come. On one geo-safari website's testimonial page, an "adventurer" points out how interesting it was to remove precious objects so close to the mines where another kind of extraction was done by his recent, imperialist forbearers: "I felt history was coming full circle." One of Barrada's collages assembled for this portfolio—a photograph of the "dinosaur road" landscape and a thrown-away, vernacular geological painting in the style of Mohammed Melehi—could be understood as a reference to a history of territorial overlay.

Dinosaur Road ultimately leads across the Atlantic to the Arizona Mineral & Fossil Show in Tucson, which has been active since the 1950s and is considered one of the most impressive fairs of its kind in the world. Yet instead of picturing the bustle, Barrada looks toward an empty hotel pool, a fluorescent-lit closet, the handwritten label "Dino Bones" on a storage box. These photographs, like the landscapes and archaeological museums Barrada shot six thousand miles away in a different desert, are devoid of the animal remains themselves. Except for a single worker vacuuming the carpet of a convention center ballroom, human beings too are absent.

Barrada's subtle imagery suggests that without the objects or the people who seek them out, we are left looking for narrative in the land itself, which is continually shaped by human and planetary intervention. After all, the High Atlas mountain range, through which "dinosaur road" runs, was formed by the tectonic merger of Africa and America millions of years ago—and Tucson had far fewer hotels and gem fairs before being colonized by Spanish missionaries in the sixteenth century. Maneuvered by occupying governments, local politics, scientists, farmers, tourists, and looters alike, *Dinosaur Road* offers cultural history as a cycle of discovery and myth, erosion and ruin. Some kind of full circle.

Yto Barrada
Dinosaur Road

Carmen Winant

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