

Manifesta 5
Various venues

Donostia/San Sebastián June 11 to September 30

(...)

To the credit of the two curators, Marta Kuzman and Massimiliano Gioni, the art they have chosen is, for the most part, very good. Several of the most impressive works are stridently anti-nationalistic and plead passionately for integration over separation (which, again, is slightly ironic since one of Kuzman and Gioni's few positive statements is that they were inspired by the drive towards Basque autonomy).

Eyal Sivan & Michel Khleifi's documentary, *Route 181*, 2003, travels the Israel-Palestine border and, in four and a half hours of film, you sense they have unearthed barely a fraction of the multiplicity of voices that undermine any notion of a fixed Arab-Jew polarity. Muslim schoolchildren living in Israel show scant interest in Islamic martyrs from the past and insist they are Israeli, while Jewish protestors at a border checkpoint try to deliver milk for babies in the Occupied Territories only to be met with violence meted out by their own army. Most of the interviewees simply can't understand how it has come to this. A Moroccan immigrant recalls that, when the Germans were rounding up the Jews in North Africa, the locals were instrumental in helping them to hide. He throws his hands in the air with frustration: 'We were saved by the. Arabs!' *Route 181* argues that most people are naturally eirenic, and infers that the blame lies squarely with the callousness of the respective governments. One Tunisian immigrant, mourning the death of her youngest son in Lebanon, explains that she now despises Israel because it continues to send its sons to die senselessly. 'Sharon and Arafat should both be taken out and sho1', she fumes, 'With their mothers!' There is a weariness of sacrifice on display, a sense that the politics of armed revolution have had their day.

(...)

If there is a prevalent theme in Manifesta 5, it is that there are not many things, and fewer people, that are worth taking too seriously. Humour is all about deflating egos and satirising the complacency of those who claim an all-encompassing ideology. As George Orwell wrote in *Funny, But Not Vulgar*, 1944: 'The aim of a joke is not to degrade the human being but to remind him that he is already degraded.'

PRYLE BEHRMAN
critic and curator