

GGING CAM

John Pasha in "Stamp Me" by Youssef El Guindi, directed by Sahar Assaf, as part of Golden Thread's 2023 ReOrient Festival. (Photo by David Allen Studio)



Stamp Me

by YUSSEF EL GUINDI

Airport.

AHMED, standing. He has a carry-on roller bag with him. He also has a document pouch hanging around his neck or waist. Every so often he'll shuffle forward as if moving in a line. He starts at the back of the stage and will zig-zag his way to the front—following the path demarcated by the stanchions—over the course of the play.

AHMED

What have I forgotten, what have I forgotten? There's something, there's always something.

Tip of my tongue,
top of my brain,
back of my pocket: ID.

Front: passport.

I have my, my, where is it?

Don't get ahead of yourself.

Birth certificate: pouch;

pouch: return ticket.

I have my address contacts.

My list of non-address contacts.

I have my whereabouts logged for the past 6 months.

"Who have you been in contact with?"

As a matter of fact, sir, I can tell you that.

"What did you talk about?"

Really?

"What is your income? Goals? What are your dreams?"

Dreams?

"Yes."

Other questions. They might ask for passcodes.

Shit.

Have I scrubbed everything I need to scrub?

"No, sir, I'm single."

Say engaged: They'll think you have someone to come back to, even if you don't.

But don't lie, you're a terrible liar. Be honest.

Not too honest.

They'll poke. They'll find out everything.

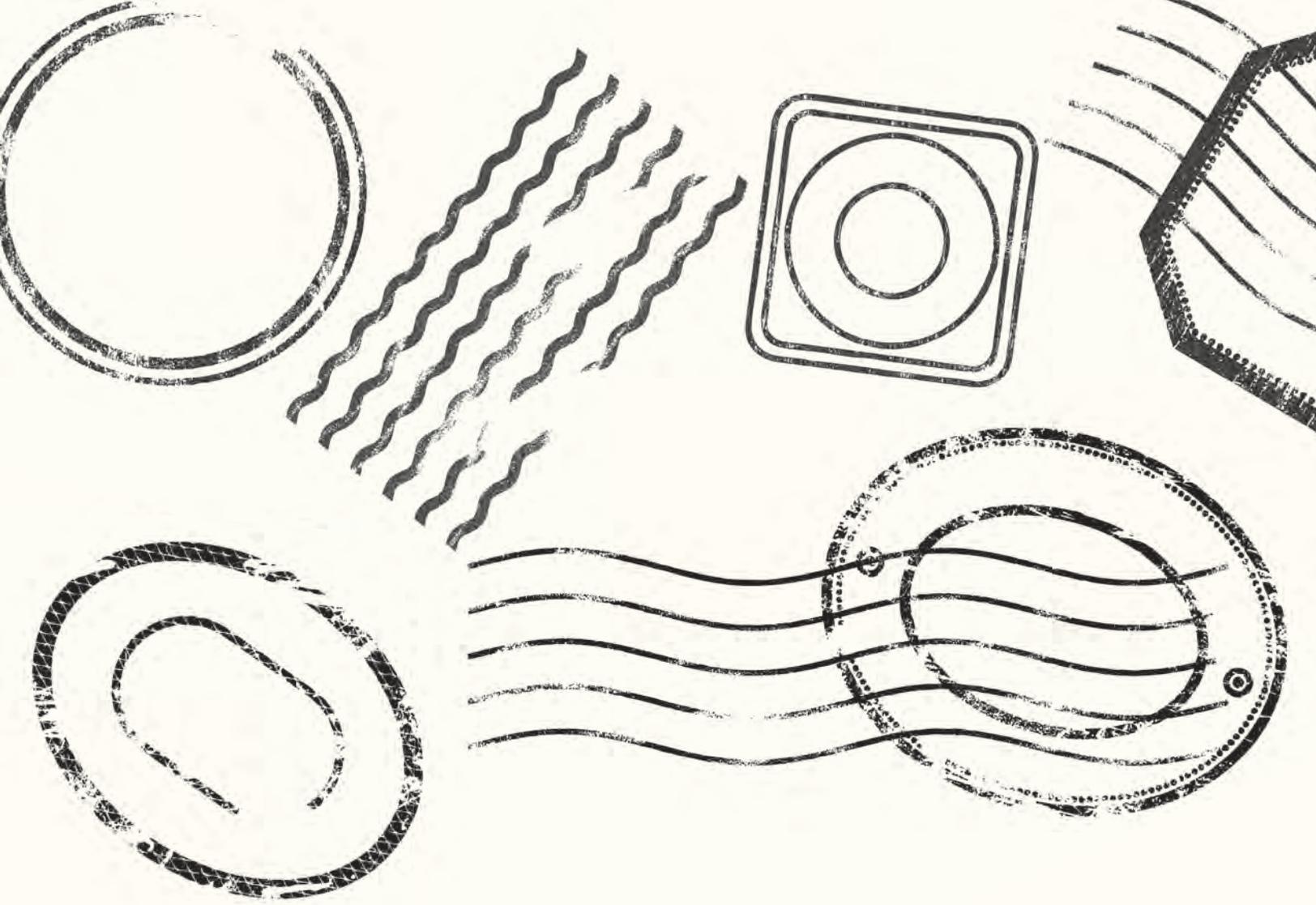
Their super-duper uncanny eye will reveal your darkest, dirtiest,

even your secretest fantasies.

But don't be paranoid. You'll hyperventilate. If you hyperventilate they'll think you're hiding something.

Relax.

...



They just want to know who you are. Who are they letting in?

Can you make yourself into the sort of person they let in? Smile. That's a start. Am I smiling enough? Am I over-smiling? My face feels frozen and I'm sweating. Don't wipe and draw attention to your sweat.

Shit you just wiped. Calm the fuck down.

All you have to be...

(Breath.)

is yourself.

But don't think the truth is your friend.

Do not be an open book.

An open book, yes, but to the right page. Otherwise one wrong word and they'll throw that book at you. The one with all those laws that stop people like you from getting in.

"What are your intentions?

What are you plans?

What are your expectations?

Who are you?"

(Touching where his documents are.)

Documents:

Passport.

ID.

Birth certificate.

Bank statements.

"I'm not destitute, sir, I'm a better class of visitor, if I say so myself. You can count on me to be a welcome addition to your great country even for the short time I'm here."

Phone.

Don't take it out now, they might want to see it.

Passcodes.

Did I scrub my phone of all naked pics?

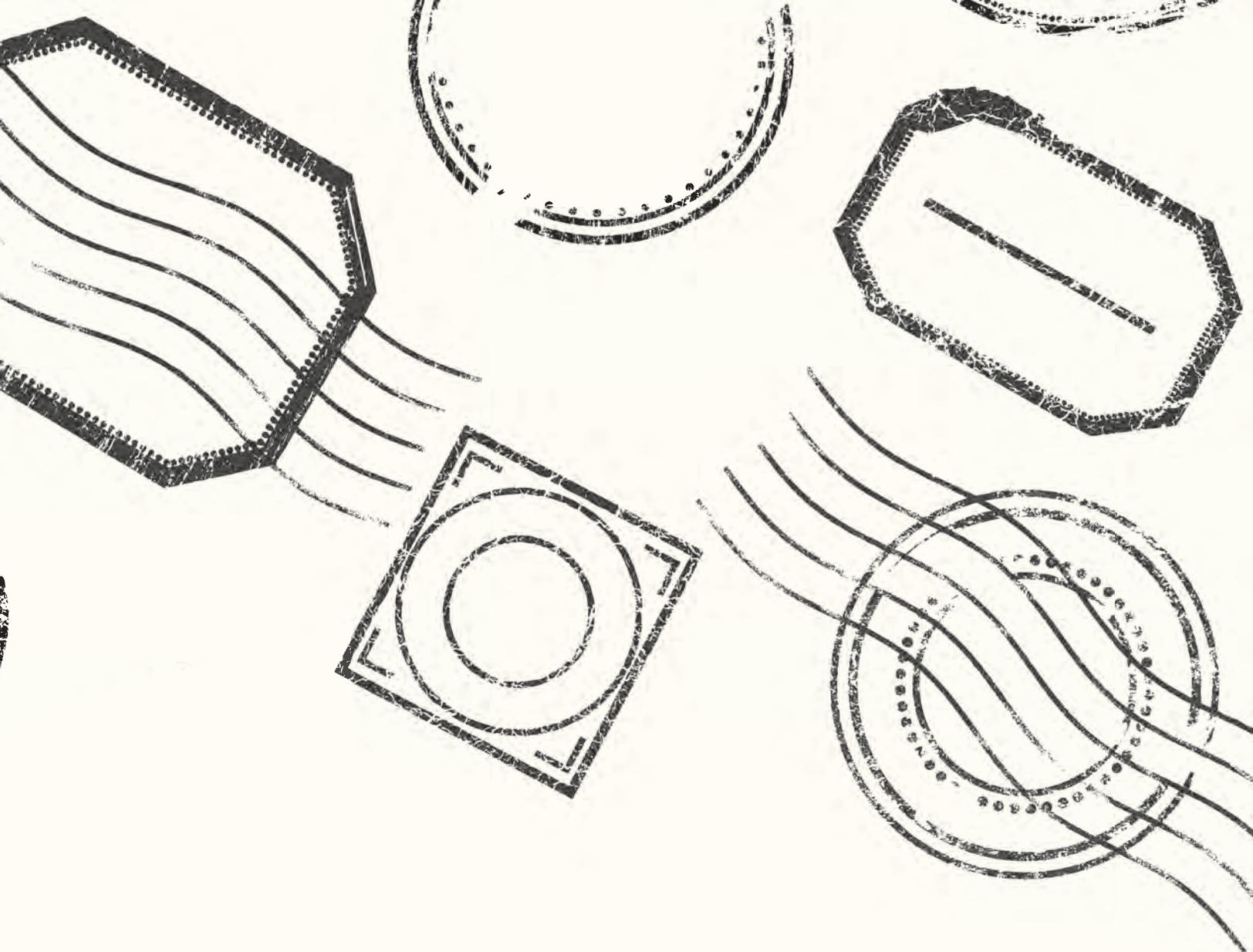
Yes.

(Not sure.)

I did?

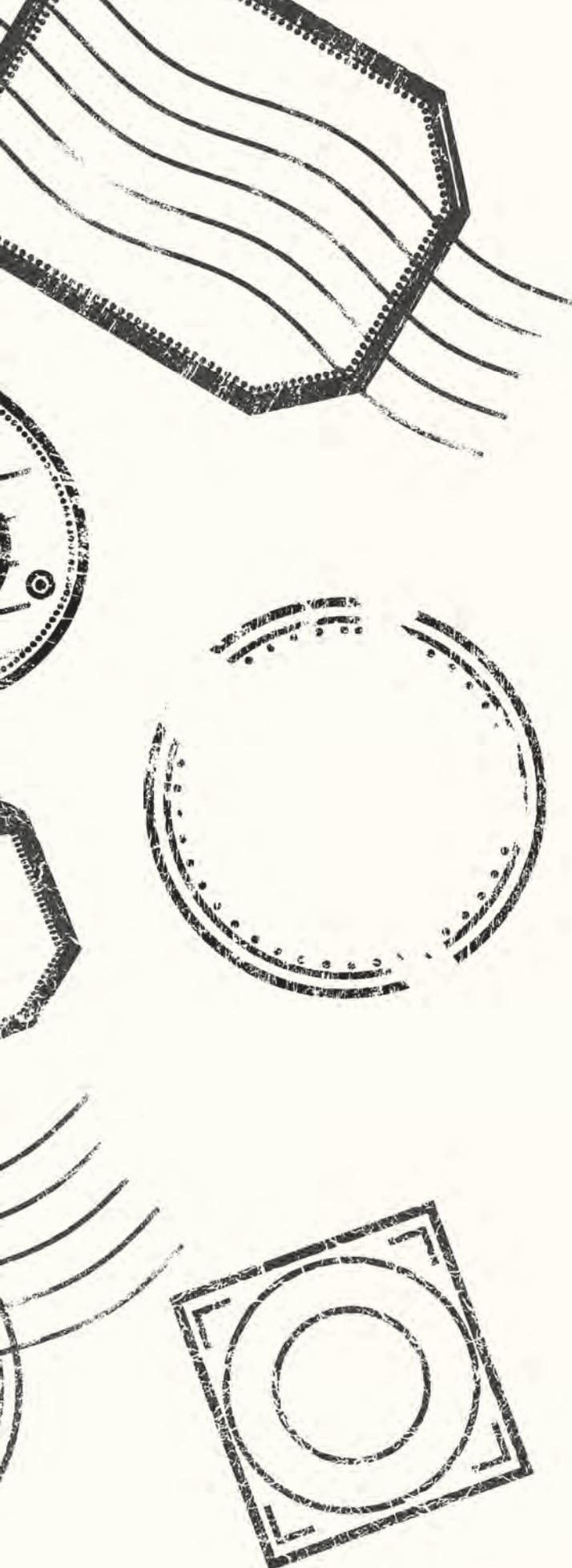
What if I didn't.

(Considers.)



You can't check now with people behind you...
and those cameras.
(Glances up at the surveillance cameras.)
Wait.
Did I remove that dick pic?
Did I?
How many dick pics do I have?
Fuuuuuuck.
Relax. They probably won't ask to look at your phone.
Is it better to say I sleep with women or men? It might
come up. Does it still make a difference?
I forgot to check the latest trends.
Is sounding progressive still good?
Not too progressive. Lean on the conservative side. "Sir:
I'm not a danger to the moral integrity of your country. As
a matter of fact I sleep with..."
(Unsure of which gender to name.)
Who?
And what if I want to claim asylum later? If I say I'm

straight now they might hold that against me later if I say
I'm not. "I love your cuisine, sir." "Ma'am." it could be a
"ma'am." "I dream of your dishes, oh my God. The French
can keep their steak frites and mille-feuille, give me
hamburgers and apple pie any day. And yes, I eat meat, sir,
unless you're a vegan which, more and more, right? I have
to say, tofu?
Fake bacon?
Some of those fake cheeses:
(Makes the "it's-delicious" fingertips kiss.)
tastes like cow. Just like cow milk. If you asked me to do a
taste test right now I'd be like:
(Makes a gesture of amazement/mind being blown.)
This doesn't come from cows? Really? You're saying this
is almond milk? Shut up.
And your national drinks, oh my God, Coca-Cola?
Without Coca-Cola, sir,
well...
you couldn't teach the world to sing, could you. And



personally, true story: One time I was feeling so hopeless, sooo—
with my—frankly—deeper in the toilet than it usually is,
I mean this is like a quick aside, but,
it was, completely, my life,
turd-infested,
like the turds had shark fins and were just circling around me.
Cloudy with a chance of shit, but:
all I had to do was pop open a Coca-Cola and just the sound of
that fizz—
(Loud sound of fizzing.)
made me—
feel...
well—
like I could teach the world to sing.
It's true. My spirits lifted. I was depressed one moment, the next:
gratitude.
That drink, sir.
With that unique sound, and that taste. It was like a church choir,
if church choirs could sing the sound of fizz, combined with the
taste of sacrament in liquid form...
Sir, ma'am, that this drink came from your country, I will be
forever,
(Does he become emotional?)
I mean forever.
No exaggeration but I think I would like a Coca-Cola placed
inside my coffin. Because if it lifts my spirits when I'm alive.
You know. Maybe. Right? Ha ha.
No, sir, I'm not on any medications. I'm just very excited to step
into your country.
I do have a certificate saying I am mentally fit to travel. I was
surprised when told that was now a requirement.
I have proof of sanity right here in this pouch. I will not be taking
advantage of your excellent healthcare system.
I'm in tip-top. If it wasn't a brag, I'd say in spite of being awake
for the past few days getting ready for this trip, standing in a
hundred lines to get a visa, a visa, God be praised,
a birth certificate,
bank statements,
an airline ticket,
mental health evaluation,
sending in a stool sample,
a urine test,
a blood test,

barely eating,
I'm still—I feel like I could go another week without sleep or
food. The dream of this, coming here, the nutritional value of that
dream,
has fed me,
so much.
I am not a Christian, sir, thank you for asking,
I'm a Muslim.
Correction, an agnostic. I get the two confused. Actually they're
totally different. You could say I believe.
Just believe.
Mostly in atheism.
Until I start praying when life becomes a little too horrible and
then I'm back to being a Muslim.
With a hint of agnostic.
Though I do admire Christianity. I'd definitely be a Christian if it
came naturally to me.
My life is not, it is not at all bad. Sorry if anything I'm saying
gives you that impression. I am not trying to escape anything. I
have an amazing, oh my God so...I can't wait to get back to my
life once my visit to your great country is over. I know I'll return a
better man. I feel the change happening already even meters away
from being let in. Waves of whatever this country is selling is
washing over me. I mean,
I have to tell you,
just being in line, this line,
this particular line that's leading me to you, it's...
it's like I'm in a line of pilgrims.
Yes.
Like I'm walking, what's that called, the "Via Dolorosa"?
That's what this immigration line feels like. Like a holy
experience. To have traveled so far...
and be this close. And know I'll soon be speaking to you in
person to show you everything about my life and explain what an
exceptional and totally harmless person I am,
who should be allowed in,
who won't cause anyone, any of your fine citizens any harm,
who may even bring a smile to the naturally born of your country.
I feel—
not like I'm approaching a border, no:
my coming conversation with you feels like I'm snaking my way
to a confessional. Where I'll get to tell you all about myself and
have you...

yes, it will feel like a kind of blessing from you. That's what this line feels like: a pilgrimage. That ends with your blessing. Blessing me as I know you will, because while I have my faults, I'm an imperfect man I'll admit, I'm also an honest man, an educated man. I may have to eat shit every day of my life, but in spite of that, when I start to tell you who I am you will see no hint of bitterness from those daily—
frankly—indignities,
humiliations—that we just have to accept, just accept, it seems. The pollution of disrespect you have to breathe in every day if you just want to catch your breath from the daily gut punch that now feels like a government taxation on your psyche. “We will make you feel less than human to keep you in line.” Again, I am not running away, sir, ma'am, I'm a tourist, I am not seeking refuge from the lack of—
basic—
decency, for God's sake, is that too much to ask for?
To be treated as a child of God? A human? In my own country?
Can't I get respect for just that? And not be treated as something to be spat on by little men in uniforms with insignias that make them think they can lord it over you with all the heart of a mosquito out to suck on your blood and drain you of all the joy that should come with just being alive?

...

You'll find no trace of—any of that coming out of my mouth. If you could see into my heart, sir, ma'am, you'd see only—
hope.

Joy.

Because I know if I am patient enough, if I can show you enough proof of the real me, you'll see. You'll know. You'll know who I am. You'll see into my soul. You'll love my soul. You'll want to have lunch with it and introduce it to your son, ha ha.

(Correcting himself.)

Your daughter. No, sir, ma'am, I have no intention of trying to stay in the country by marrying a citizen. That would be unethical. To sneak in sexually? So to speak, sleeping my way to citizenship? That would make me a citizenship whore.

It would be a terrible way to take the oath of allegiance. Which I've memorized. Purely for fun.

Sir,

Sir,

Ma'am.

To be in such a line, I already feel...
it's like,
yes—again,
it might sound weird,
but it's like I really can hear the choir of a thousand Coca-Cola
cans being opened.
(A rising crescendo of soda cans being popped open and fizzing.)
Glorious.
(Listens to the sounds.)
How can it not make you dream of better days?
(Listens some more, then:)
Sir,
sir,
ma'am,
ma'am.
Please.
Please.
Let me?
Let me in?
Stamp me?
My passport?
Please?
Bless me. With a stamp. Please?
*(At the front of the stage now looking out at the audience. Perhaps
he holds his passport out like it's a begging bowl.)*
As only you can. Stamp—
Stamp me?
Stamp me?
...
Stamp me?
Stamp me?
...
Stamp me?
Stamp me?
Please?
Please?
Stamp me?
(Hold for a beat.)
Stamp...?
(Hold for a longer beat.)
Me?
(Hold for a short beat. Blackout.)

(END OF PLAY)

