

7.9.–24.11.2019, Katia Kameli: *She Rekindled the Vividness of the Past*, Kunsthalle Münster



Press release:

“What language do you speak, stranger? ... Tell me, where are you from? From far away? It doesn’t matter, here everyone is an outsider. Sit down please and join my circle of listeners.” It is with these words that Abderrahim Al Azalia invites visitors of the Kunsthalle Münster to enter the Halga—the circle of listeners—and listen to his narration. Normally, Abderrahim Al Azalia tells his stories on the Djemaa el Fna, the central market place in Marrakesh; however, in Katia Kameli’s film he is wandering through the shell construction of Marrakesh’s opera house. And unlike what one might expect, one does not hear a story that originates in the Arabic region and is passed down orally through the generations, but rather his interpretation of the Bollywood film *Dosti* (1964). The art of storytelling has always been an inherent part of the Arabic culture; with *The Storyteller* (2012), a film about this traditional artform stands at the beginning of Katia Kameli’s exhibition at the Kunsthalle Münster—her first solo show in a German institution. As a kind of prologue, the work introduces central issues related to the historical authenticity of narrations.

With *Katia Kameli: She Rekindled the Vividness of the Past*, the Kunsthalle Münster presents an exhibition about narration and thus invites its visitors to deal with both the construction and deconstruction of history. A special focus lies on the complex relationship of colonialism and post-colonialism, including post-colonial remembrance. In the context of her preoccupation with the history of Algeria, the French-Algerian artist illustrates that the term post-colonial is not at all limited to a temporal thereafter; it is in fact closely linked to the social conflicts of contemporary society. In her works, Kameli explores the power of narratives, the role of the “image factory” and its influence on the formation of a national identity. She examines how colonial and post-colonial history manifests in images and how their existence but also their absence continue to impact the political heritage of a country. She investigates which role images play in the production of knowledge, which political and cultural power they possess, not only concerning Algeria’s current historiography but also in a quite general sense. Kameli raises questions about prevailing power structures, including those related to definitional power on the visual level. In this regard, she not only focusses on the past but also reveals in which way the past inscribes itself into the present and the future—not least represented by the images of the mass protests in Algiers that started in February and have found their way into the third chapter of her Algerian Novel.

Katia Kameli's multi-part video work Le Roman Algérien (The Algerian Novel, 2016, 2017, 2019) is at the centre of her exhibition at the Kunsthalle Münster. In addition to the first two chapters, here, the newly produced third chapter will be on view for the first time. Based on a variety of iconographic sources—above all postcards, photographs or their negatives—the artist looks into the complex relationships of a nation to its history in the three chapters of her Algerian Novel. Serving as a point of departure is a photo kiosk in the inner city of Algiers that basically functions as an open archive performing memory work on a day-to-day basis. The kiosk's wall of pictures appears like a mosaic made up of individual fragments of Algerian history, whereas the presentation does not follow any specific order but rather can be described with the Warburgian classification principle of good neighbourliness.

In the first chapter the street becomes a stage: one sees the kiosk's customers combing through the collection and listens to different inhabitants of Algiers discussing the particular meaning the images have for the history of their country. The artist employs a diversity of voices, allows different people to speak their minds, yet attaches special importance to the women of Algeria. Her works inspire the viewer to reflect upon the stories as much as on the voices telling them. What one also encounters in the films are various kinds of *mis en abyme*—the image within the image. Through the direct and indirect perception of the images and occurrences, Kameli lays bare the layers of Algerian history, exposes their complexity and their continued effect. The images of the first chapter become the starting point for the second, in which the philosopher Marie José Mondzain comments the latter. Next to Mondzain's commentary, the second chapter features the voices of the Algerian author, lawyer and feminist Wassyla Tamzali and Louissette Ighilahriz, Algerian author and former member of the Conseil de la nation and the *Front de libération nationale* (FLN). Also in the third chapter, Kameli has given several Algerian women a say, including the photo journalist Louiza Ammi, working in a field long reserved for men, the slammer Ibtissem Hattali and the Algerian author, director and university professor Assia Djebar, who is considered one of the most renowned authors from the Maghreb. Kameli has enabled these women of different generations to raise their voices and to recount the Algerian history from their perspective. In this chapter the analysis of history is based primarily on photographs or images of Marie José Mondzain and Louiza Ammi, and on found footage from the Film *La nouba des femmes du Mont-Chenoua* (1976) by Assia Djebar. Owing to the concept of the image within the image, the source material is extended by an additional level, thus opening up a new space for debate—turning re-reading into an artistic method.

It is the presentation of all three chapters at once that succeeds in tracing the complexity of history or rather of stories. The way Kameli draws on oral history, as it is employed methodically in different human sciences, allows her to create a story beyond a public memory shaped by omissions and voids and thus implies an expansion of the latter by several as yet unwritten chapters. But Katia Kameli does not primarily aim at digging out accounts of a past that had been lost or kept obscured. It is rather a question of finding, through her work, a concrete form for the complex interrelations between images, with all their contradictions and historical implications.

The four films are supplemented by photographic works, collages and drawings by Kameli, in which she likewise probes the ambivalence of historical narration and remembrance. For her two-part work Trou de Mémoire (2018), the artist took a picture of the memorial *Le Grand Pavois d'Alger, Monument aux Morts d'Algers* (1928) by Paul Landowski, or rather of a version reworked by the Algerian sculptor M'hamed Issiakhem. In 1978 Issiakhem had enclosed *Le Pavois* in a sarcophagus of concrete. Though the colonial monument was hereby overwritten, the precedent basic structure continues to show through—somewhat like in a palimpsest. The different facets of history manifested in the imposing structure, which is at once monument and counter monument, have turned it into a symbol of the plurality inherent in history, a symbol of an altered perspective on history. Based on a collage of postcards, Katia Kameli unveils the monument's past, thus giving insight into what lies behind the façade. Like for her films, she employs the principle of montage, enabling her to show several conditions of the monument simultaneously and to dig into the entanglements of history. For her work Bledi a possible storyboard (2002), all with the idea of perhaps realizing a film, Kameli transferred selected details of historical photographs onto transparent paper. Here also, a story somewhat resembles a sequence of images, where the artist's playful approach to the materiality lends the motives an ephemeral character—merely

suggesting rather than fully formulating them. Kameli's work is complemented by a picture that Louiza Ammi took during the Algerian civil war. The photo shows a man and a woman in front of an exploded car. Holding the woman in his arms, the man covers her eyes. She should not see what he sees. Neither do the observers see the incident, instead it is the man's shocked expression that they are confronted with. Like the images of negatives in lightboxes, of which the originals are also from Ammi, this picture is also featured in the third chapter of *The Algerian Novel* and here appears as an echo of the film in the exhibition space, an echo of history.

Katia Kameli looks at forgotten or missing images. She sorts, analyses and reworks, to then create a path that leads into Algerian history and contributes to reconnecting with the latter. Through her works the artist thus hints at a longing to free such images of their vagueness and to infuse them with a truth, a controllable truth. At the same time, they spell out that there is, ultimately, no such thing as definiteness but rather a multitude of stories calling for investigation.

Curator: Merle Radtke

Biography:

Katia Kameli is a French-Algerian artist. Following her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, she graduated from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Bourges in 2000. She received a postgraduate degree in New Media in 2003 from the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Marseille.

Kameli's work is closely linked to her personal experience of dual identities, exploring multiplicity and the 'in-between'. Through video, photography, installation, she investigates intercultural spaces, intersecting identities and their construction. Thus, she positions herself as a hybrid, using a 'third space' that enables the emergence of other visions, forms and positions. This 'third space' questions historical accounts and can generate a critical stance that allows for the rewriting of hegemonic narratives.

Her work has found an audience and gained recognition on the international artistic and cinematographic scene. Her most recent solo-exhibitions include: *À l'ombre de l'étoile et du croissant*, CRP/ Centre régional de la photographie (2018); *What Language Do You Speak Stranger*, The Mosaic Rooms, London (2016); *Futur*, Artconnexion, Lille (2016); *Taymour Grahne Gallery*, New York (2014); *7 Acts of Love in 7 days of Boredom*, Transpalette, Bourges (2012); *Duty Free*, Videochroniques, Marseille (2012). She participated in numerous groups shows that include: *Biennale de Rennes* (2018); *Tous, des sang-mêlés*, Mac Val, Paris (2017); *Cher(e)s Ami(e)s*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2016); *Made in Algeria*, Mucem, Marseille (2016); *Entry Prohibited to Foreigners*, Havre Magasinet, Boden, Sweden (2015); *Where we're at*, Bozar, Bruxelles (2014); *Lumbumbashi Biennale*, Congo (2013); *Pour un Monde Durable*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Portugal (2013); *Le Pont*, Museum of Marseille (2013); *Dak'art*, Dakar Biennale (2012; 2018); *Higher Atlas*, Marrakech Biennale (2012); *Bamako Biennale*, Mali (2011).

- Accompanying programme:
- 06.09.2019, 7 pm, opening
 - 07.09.2019, 12 pm, Kunsthalle Münster, artist talk with Katia Kameli and Merle Radtke, director Kunsthalle Münster
 - 14.09.2019, 2 pm, Kunsthalle Münster, bike tour with the historian Philipp Erdmann, Stadtarchiv Münster
 - 13.10.2019, 3 pm, Kunsthalle Münster, guided tour with the art historian Phuong Phan
 - 24.10.2019, 6:30 pm, Cinema Münster, movie screening 1, curated by the film scholar Olivier Hadouchi
 - 04.11.2019, 6:30 pm, Cinema Münster, movie screening 2 by the film scholar Olivier Hadouchi + lecture
 - 18.11.2019, 9 pm, Cinema Münster, movie screening 3, curated by the film scholar Olivier Hadouchi
 - 24.11.2019, 3 pm, Kunsthalle Münster, guided tour with Merle Radtke, director Kunsthalle Münster

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