



Contemporary Culture from the Arab World

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Katia Kameli

*What Language Do
You Speak Stranger?*
16/9/16—3/12/16

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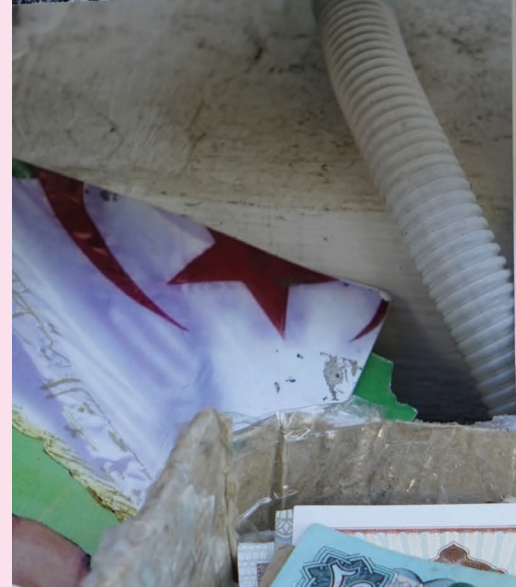
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Katia Kameli

What Language Do You Speak Stranger?

16 September - 3 December 2016

Private View: 15 September, 6.30-8.30pm

Tuesday-Saturday 11am-6pm, FREE

The Mosaic Rooms present the first UK solo exhibition of French-Algerian artist Katia Kameli. Drawing together both new and recent work, this exhibition takes the audience on a journey exploring the power of storytelling, historical authenticity and national identity. The films and installation presented here showcase some of the artist's central concerns: issues of dual identity, multiplicity, and the potential for residing in an 'in-between' space. The exhibition is staged at a time when such questions of selfhood, history and nation are particularly resonant.



Facing page *The Storyteller*, Video HD, 12min, 2012.

Cover Detail from still from the video *The Algerian Novel (Chapter One)*. HD video, 16min, 2016.

The exhibition opens with *The Storyteller*. Commissioned for the 2012 Marrakech Biennale, this video installation is set in Morocco, and visitors are invited to imagine they are the audience in Al-Halqa, the traditional storyteller's circle. On screen they watch the performance of a professional storyteller the

artist met in Marrakech, recounting his tale on the balconies of the city's unfinished Theatre Royale. The story's unexpected source slowly becomes apparent, this is not a tale passed down through oral tradition but instead drawn from a 1964 Bollywood movie, *Dosti*. Kameli's film cuts between the movie itself and



the storyteller who translates it into his own form of oral narration. His movements across the stage mirror and flow into the characters' in the film, and like them he makes his living from street entertainment. We watch the storytellers performance captured in the very form that has given him the sources to create new content: film. This cycle of interpretation, reiteration and intervention becomes for Kameli representative of the nature of historical narrative and identity, both of which are constantly shifting and being rewritten.

The installation *Stream of Stories* is the first part of an ongoing body of work in which Kameli interrogates the origins of a classic French collection of fables. Written in the 17th century, La Fontaine's fables are a major influence in French culture, read to children over generations, with phrases passing into

common speech. This work uncovers earlier versions of the stories from which La Fontaine admitted he drew his inspiration. Originating in India with the Panchatantra, these animal allegories and fables travelled across the region, translated into Persian and then Arabic in 750 AD. With each adaptation, a new cultural perspective was added to the tales. The installation features masks of the fables' animal characters, prints, text pieces and videos of interviews with translators and historians. A pair of prints become visual amalgamations of two of the fables and their various versions, compositing illustrations from the 13th to the 20th century to create a singular image of differing aesthetic styles and interpretations. A text piece focuses on a single fable's presence in the Panchatantra, Kalila wa Dimna and La Fontaine. Here the three texts



Above and left View of some elements from the installation *Stream of Stories*, HavreMagasinet Länskonsthall, Boden, Sweden, 2015.

are each beautifully screen-printed with hand-gilding highlighting the changes in the story as it travels across regions and cultures. It is a significant choice of fable in today's terms: first appearing as a story about a vulnerable, foreign individual offered a place of refuge in a society, only to be turned against, it examines issues of power, manipulation of speech, and the mass against an individual. The installation meticulously traces the journey of narrative and its transformation through the act of translation, both literal and cultural.

Seen by Kameli as 'an immersion into Algeria's history,' *The Algerian Novel* is a documentary film that looks at a street stall in Algiers, where a father and son sell postcards and reproductions of archival photographs. We watch customers peruse the collections and hear inhabitants of Algiers, students, historians and writers reflect on the significance of the images to the history of their country. A woman talks of how customers often seek pre-colonial images, in a quest for a 'purity' of a time before; another voice explains that some of the pictures feature people censored from the official history taught in schools. The piece reflects on the potential of archival photographs and individual collections to convey issues of modern history to contemporary audiences. Following the independence of Algeria from France in 1962, France moved important Algerian archival material, along with materials from its other colonies, to its archives in France. Without access to 'official' material documenting modern history within Algeria, stalls such as this become a significant means for people to compose their own visual accounts of their country's past. Three stills from the film are projected on light boxes allowing the viewer to more closely examine and reflect on the range of imagery, from a portrait of Franz Fanon to hand-tinted photographs and scenic postcards, the colonial and the postcolonial. *The Algerian Novel* throws into question historical narratives as we see people's personal search to make sense of their country's past, future and their own national identity.



Above Stills from the video *The Algerian Novel (Chapter One)*. HD video, 16min, 2016. All images courtesy of the artist.

About the artist

Katia Kameli is a French-Algerian artist, born in 1973 in France. Through video, photograph, installation and print, she investigates intercultural spaces, intersecting identities and their construction. Her work has gained recognition on the international artistic and cinematographic scene. Her most recent solo-exhibitions include: *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: *Made in Algeria*, MuCEM, Marseille (2016); *Mare Nostrum*, Prospectif Cinéma, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2015); *Entry prohibited to foreigners*, Havre Magasinet, Boden, Sweden (2015); *Where we're at*, Bozar, Bruxelles (2014); Lubumbashi Biennale, Congo (2013); *Pour un Monde Durable*, Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisboa (2013); *Le Pont*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Marseille (2013); Dak'art, Dakar Biennale (2012); *Higher Atlas*, Marrakech Biennale (2012); Bamako Biennale, Mali (2011).

Exhibition supported by



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The Algerian Novel was commissioned by MuCEM
Stream of Stories research funded by CNAP

Autumn Events

Those Nights of Magic and Myth Wednesday 21 September, 7.30pm

Immerse yourself in the power of stories with Chirine El Ansary's free rewritings of cycles from *The One Thousand and One Nights* in this 50-minute storytelling performance. Presented by Filotico Arts.

Tickets £8/£5 concs

Image Keepers

Thursday 29 September, 7pm

Zineb Sedira will discuss her two-part film on a photographic archive documenting the Algerian war of independence and beyond. It is centered around Safia Kouaci, the widow of Mohammed Kouaci, one of the rare Algerian photographers who documented the struggle for independence.

FREE

Remembering Assia Djebar

Thursday 6 October, 7pm

Writer, translator and filmmaker, Assia Djebar is considered one of North Africa's most influential writers in French. The event will reflect on Djebar's life, works and achievements, as well as ponder questions of language and translation, and also the interface between literature and cinema.

FREE

Artist Talk

Saturday 8 October, 12pm

Join Katia Kameli in discussion with independent lecturer, curator, and art

critic Simon Njami about the work in her first London solo show at The Mosaic Rooms, and her wider practise.

FREE

Yaz Fentazi Trio

Thursday 13 October, 8pm

Algerian Yaz Fentazi Trio perform a vibrant evening of rootsy Gnawa, Chaabi, and Andalusian music. Yaz Fentazi (oud), Samir Nacer (percussion) and Robyn Hemmings (upright bass) draw on the rich musical tradition of jazz, blues and North African music, with Fentazi's own original compositions. Presented by Arts Canteen.

Tickets £12 in advance

Stories in Transit

Thursday 20 October, 7pm

With displacement being lived on such a large scale today, to what extent can a tale become a home? Writers Omar Berrada and Marina Warner ask how stories travel and discuss storytelling as imaginative shelter in situations of exile and dispossession.

FREE

An Evening with Tahar Ben Jelloun

Wednesday 26 October, 7pm

Join the distinguished award-winning French-Moroccan novelist Tahar Ben Jelloun on publication of *About My Mother*, translated into English for the first time. He will be in conversation with Rosie Goldsmith. Part of Nour Festival.

FREE

Friday Late: Far Away & Long Ago...

Friday 28 October, 7pm

Join us for an evening inspired by the installation in our current

exhibition, *Stream of Stories*. Guests will be taken on a musical voyage from India to Persia across to Europe, and get involved in crafting activities inspired by the fables and animal masks, whilst enjoying a selection of cocktails! Part of Nour Festival.

FREE

Contested Archives: Colonial Photography from Algeria

Tuesday 1 November, 7pm

Prof. Martin Evans, Bruno Boudjelal and Dr. Siobhán Shilton reflect on the role of colonial photography in mediating Algeria's past since the country's independence in 1962. The panel discussion will also reflect on archives as sites of historical and political contestation which continue to determine Algerian-French relations.

Part of Nour Festival.

FREE

The Sudanese Dining Experience

Thursday 3 November, 7-10pm

Diners will enjoy the rare opportunity to sample the deliciously diverse food and the culinary customs of Sudan. Sharing plates with friends and strangers alike, this supper club with Omer Eltigani will provide an immersive experience into an ancient tradition. Part of Nour Festival.

Tickets £35, Limited availability

Rewriting a Best-Seller

Wednesday 9 November, 7pm

Dr Christine van Ruymbeke discusses the six medieval Persian versions of the fables of Kalila wa Dimna. The event

will examine this singular rewriting phenomenon and attempt to highlight the reasons for the remarkable success of this text in the Persian cultural area.

FREE

The Pan-African Festival of Algiers

Wednesday 16 November, 7.30pm

Screening of film by artist William Klein which uses a range of visual materials as well as archival footage of African anti-colonial struggles alongside sequences from the first Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers in July 1969. Introduced by Olivier Hadouchi, followed by a conversation with Hadouchi and Ros Gray.

Tickets £6.50

Humanitarianism and the Migrant Crisis

Thursday 24 November, 7pm

How should citizens, NGOs and governments respond? Join Peter Gill and Natasha King as they discuss the problems facing contemporary humanitarian solutions and the potential of alternative responses and activism to the migrant crisis, with a special guest.

FREE

The Palestinian Novel

Wednesday 30 November, 7pm

Author Bashir Abu-Manneh launches his new book which is the first study in English to chart the development of the Palestinian novel in exile and under occupation from 1948 onwards. He will be in conversation with Razia Iqbal.

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