

Press Release

KATIA KAMELI

What Language Do You Speak Stranger?

16 September - 3 December 2016

Private View: 15 September, 6.30pm-8.30pm

Exhibition Open: Tues-Sat, 11am-6pm, FREE

The Mosaic Rooms, 226 Cromwell Road, London SW5 0SW



The Storyteller, Katia Kameli

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

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, then Arabic in 750 AD. With each adaptation, a new cultural perspective was added. The installation features masks of the fables' animal characters and video of interviews with translators and historians. It meticulously traces the journey of this narrative and its transformation through the act of translation, both literal and cultural.

The Storyteller, commissioned for the 2012 Marrakech Biennale, is a video installation set in Morocco. Here, the visitor becomes the audience in Al-Halqa, the traditional storytellers circle, watching the performance of a professional storyteller the artist met in Marrakech. He performs his tale on the balconies of the city's unfinished Theatre Royale. The story has an unexpected source, not passed down through oral tradition, it is drawn from a 1964 Bollywood movie, *Dosti*. Kameli's

film cuts between the movie and the storyteller who translates it into his style of narration. His craft is mirrored by the film's protagonists, who also make their living from street entertainment. For Kameli, the piece represents historical narrative and identity, both of which are constantly shifting and being rewritten.

In *The Algerian Novel*, the street is the stage for a different kind of storytelling. Seen by Kameli as 'an immersion into Algeria's history' this documentary film 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. Historic narratives are thrown into question as we see people's personal search to make sense of their nation's past and future.

In this exhibition Kameli invites us to reflect on the stories we are told, the voices who tell them and how narratives of national identity are taught. The quest for truth and a fixed sense of origin is something the exhibition refuses to resolve.

Katia Kameli, born in 1973 in France, has exhibited widely internationally in both solo and group shows. These include Centre Pompidou, Paris (2016); Mucem, Marseille (2016); Galerie du Jour, Paris (2015); Taymour Grahne Gallery, New York (2014); Bozar, Bruxelles (2014); Lubumbashi Biennale, Congo (2013); Gulbekian, Portugal (2013); Museum of Marseille (2013); Dakar Biennale (2012); Marrakech Biennale (2012); Bamako Biennale, Mali (2011).

For further details, images and interviews contact: press@mosaicrooms.org or + 44 207 370 9990.

Notes to Editors

- Katia Kameli is available for interview. Images and biography available on request.
- The exhibition marks the last in a run of three solo presentations by women artists.
- Entry to the exhibition is free. The Mosaic Rooms are open from 11am-6pm Tuesday to Saturday.
- The exhibition will be accompanied by a public programme of talks and events.
- The Mosaic Rooms are a leading London-based non-profit cultural organisation dedicated to supporting and promoting contemporary culture from and about the Arab world. They provide an international platform for the arts, particularly new work, and create opportunities for collaboration and professional development between artists, collectives and organisations from the Arab world and the UK. They do this through their free-entry contemporary art exhibitions, multidisciplinary events, artist residencies and learning and engagement programme. They work in partnership with national and international organisations to disseminate their arts programme to the widest possible audience. The Mosaic Rooms' programme is run by Rachael Jarvis, Director. The Mosaic Rooms form part of the A.M. Qattan Foundation.
- The Mosaic Rooms are located on the corner of the Cromwell and Earl's Court Road in Kensington, London.

This exhibition is supported by:



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