



## Press Release

### *Performing Colonial Toxicity*

Samia Henni

22 March - 16 June 2024

Preview Night: 21 March, 6-8pm

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

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



Installation photo of the exhibition *Performing Colonial Toxicity* (2023) by Samia Henni at Framer Framed in collaboration with *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution*, Amsterdam. Photo Maarten Nauw.

The Mosaic Rooms presents *Performing Colonial Toxicity*, an archival survey exhibition documenting France's secret nuclear programme in Algeria during and after the Algerian Revolution (1954-62). This expansive research project, put together by architectural historian and exhibition maker, **Samia Henni** unfolds across a series of audio-visual assemblages — each consisting of maps, photographs, film stills, documents and archival testimonies.

Between 1960 and 1966, the French colonial regime detonated four atmospheric atomic bombs, thirteen underground nuclear bombs and conducted other nuclear experiments in the Algerian Sahara, whose natural resources were being extracted in the process. This secret nuclear weapons programme resulted in the toxification of the Sahara, and spread radioactive fallout across Algeria, North, Central and West Africa, and the Mediterranean (including Southern Europe), causing irreversible and still ongoing contaminations of living bodies, cells and particles, as well as in the natural and built environments. The archives of the French nuclear programme remain closed over fifty years later, historical details and continuing impacts remain largely unknown.

*Performing Colonial Toxicity* presents available, offered, contraband and leaked materials from these archives in an immersive multimedia installation. Henni's research straddles between oral histories and investigative reportage, bearing witness to the suppressed history of French colonial violence and its ongoing impacts in Algeria. This performative archive presents undisclosed information through varied means, inviting viewers to read between the lines and reflect upon gaps and absences in colonial histories. The installation sets forth a lingering feeling of visceral, psychic, and environmental trauma as a result of France's program of experimental bomb detonations in the Sahara.

The exhibition emerges from a broader research project, which also includes the publication *Colonial Toxicity: Rehearsing French Nuclear Architecture and Landscape in the Sahara* (If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, Framer Framed and edition fink, 2024) and an open access digital database entitled *The Testimony Translation Project* Experimenting with different methods of spatialising and circulating suppressed information, the project's three-part structure constitutes a powerful call to action to open the still-classified archives and to clean/decontaminate the sites: both crucial steps for exposing the pasts, presents and futures of colonial toxicity.

*Performing Colonial Toxicity* moves to The Mosaic Rooms from Framer Framed, as part of our work to platform interdisciplinary artistic practices and highlight colonial histories lived impacts.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Deep thanks also go to the interviewees who have generously accepted to share their expertise and experience, including: Larbi Benchiha, Patrice Bouveret, Roland Desbordes, Bruno Hadjih, Gabrielle Hecht, Penelope Harvey, Jill Jarvis, and Roxanne Panchasi, as well as the translator-participants who have committed their time to translating Henni's selection of testimonies, including: Raoul Audouin, Adel Ben Bella, Omar Berrada, Megan Brown, Séverine Chapelle, Simona Dvorák, Hanieh Fatouree, Alessandro Felicioli, Anik Fournier, Jill Jarvis, Augustin Jomier, Timothy Scott Johnson, Anna Jayne Kimmel, Corentin Lécine, Natasha Llorens, Miriam Matthiesen, Martine Neddham, M'hamed Oualdi, Roxanne Panchasi, and Alice Rougeaux.

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## NOTE TO EDITORS

### Artist biography

**Samia Henni** is an architectural historian, exhibition maker and educator. Working through textual and visual strategies, her practice interrogates histories of the built, destroyed and imagined environment – those produced by processes and mechanisms of colonisation, forced displacement, nuclear weapons, resource extraction and warfare. Henni's research has culminated in the award-winning book *Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French Army in Northern Algeria* (gta Verlag, 2017, EN; Editions, B42, 2019, FR); *Colonial Toxicity: Rehearsing French Radioactive Architecture and Landscape in the Sahara* (If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, Framers Framed and edition fink, 2024); and in the edited volumes *War Zones* (gta Verlag, 2018) and *Deserts Are Not Empty* (2022, Columbia Books of Architecture and the City). <https://www.samiahenni.com>

### About The Mosaic Rooms

The Mosaic Rooms are situated on the corner of the Cromwell Road and Earl's Court Road in Kensington, London, a short walk from the V&A and Design Museum. The Mosaic Rooms are open 11am–6pm Tuesday to Sunday, entry is free.

The Mosaic Rooms are a non-profit art gallery and bookshop dedicated to supporting and promoting contemporary culture from the Arab world and beyond. We do this through contemporary art exhibitions, multidisciplinary events (including film screenings, current affairs, talks, book launches and more) artist residencies and learning and engagement programme. We work in partnership with local, national and international organisations to disseminate our arts programme to a wide and diverse audience. Previous collaborations include partnerships with Chisenhale Gallery, Delfina Foundation, ICA, Shubbak Festival, London Design Festival, among others. They are a project of the A. M. Qattan Foundation.

### About the A. M. Qattan Foundation

The A. M. Qattan Foundation (AMQF) is an independent, not-for-profit developmental organisation working in the fields of culture and education, with a particular focus on children, teachers and young artists. Founded and registered in 1993 in the UK as a charity (no 1029450) and as a charitable company limited by guarantee (no 2171893), it has had a registered branch in Palestine as a nonprofit organisation (no QR-0035-F) since 1998. The Foundation's operations are mainly in Palestine, with interventions in Lebanon through Selat: Links Through the Arts, and in the United Kingdom through The Mosaic Rooms.

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