



Monira Al Qadiri, Divine Memory, 2019
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Monira Al Qadiri In the IBB Video Space

3.11. – 29.11.21

Monira Al Qadiri works in the media video, sculpture and performance. One major focus of her work is the socio-cultural impact of the oil industry, along with its history and future. Another frequent theme is her questioning of (gender) identity. She often builds her works on autobiographical experiences, not least of her time spent growing up in Kuwait. The IBB Video Space at the Berlinische Galerie is showing two intricately related works: “Behind the Sun” and “Divine Memory”. The programme is completed in the Virtual Video Space by a third work: “Diver”.

Behind the Sun (2013)

“Behind the Sun” is composed from shots of burning oil fields. When Iraqi troops withdrew from occupied Kuwait after the Second Gulf War in 1991, they set fire to about 700 oil fields in an effort to halt the advance of coalition forces. The sight of this huge conflagration, which totally destroyed an ecosystem, left a deep, disturbing impression on Al Qadiri as a child.

Many years later, she came across pictures by the photographer Adel Al Yousifi, who captured the burning oil deposits in some 25,000 photos and films.

Al Qadiri combines a selection from this VHS footage with religious monologues from the Kuwait Television Archives, thereby referencing Werner Herzog’s well-known film “Lessons of Darkness” (1992).

Unlike Herzog, however, Al Qadiri resorts to neither a bird’s eye view nor a foreign narrative voice. In fact, she is decidedly concerned with reclaiming the narrative of these events from a Kuwaiti perspective. At the same time, “Behind the Sun” also engages in an ambivalent interplay of image and sound: the eulogies to the Creation are blatantly at odds with the destructive power of the flames, and yet we are captivated by the tremendous beauty of this work.

Divine Memory (2019)

In “Divine Memory“, Al Qadiri also works with sound recordings from a 1990s television archive. Religious poetry and a video game soundtrack contrast with underwater recordings of octopuses. A kind of music video is created, celebrating natural phenomena: The work attempts to delve into our innate memory as creatures of this world, perhaps a pre-human genetic memory, so as to stimulate feelings of awe and wonder at the construction of being.

Diver (2018)

“Diver” is both a personal story and the story of an entire region. It centres on pearl diving, which was an important sector of the Gulf economy before the discovery of oil. The artist’s grandfather worked as a singer on pearl-diving boats that often spent many months at sea. This piece pays homage to an age that seems so unfamiliar as to be almost unreal. For “Diver”, Al Qadiri uses a recording of a pearl-diving song from the 1960s, contrasting its rawness with footage of synchronised swimmers in iridescent suits. The shimmering outfits evoke both pearls and oil, forging a link of a kind between two very different periods: before and after a whole region fully invested in a resource that will, in the foreseeable future, come to an end.

“Diver” (2018) in the Virtual Video Space: [berlinische-galerie.de/en/exhibition/virtual-video space/](https://berlinische-galerie.de/en/exhibition/virtual-video-space/)

About the artist

Monira Al Qadiri is a Kuwaiti visual artist born in Senegal in 1983. In 2010 she was awarded a PhD by Tokyo University of the Arts for her research on the aesthetics of sadness in the Middle East stemming from poetry, music, art and religious practices.



Her work explores unconventional gender identities, petro-cultures and their possible futures, as well as the legacies of corruption. Venues to have shown her work include Haus der Kunst, Munich, Kunstverein Göttingen, Gasworks, London, Palais de Tokyo, Paris and MoMA PS1, New York. She lives in Berlin.

IBB Video Space

Since 2011 the IBB Video Space has been screening artists who work with time-based media. The programme, which changes every month, features not only established names in contemporary video art but also up-and-coming artists rarely seen in museums to date. For these, the Berlinische Galerie seeks to facilitate an institutional début.

Each month brings a new encounter with work that raises questions about the medium and about social or political issues. Importance is attached to including marginalised perspectives and to shedding light on the impact of power structures.

More video works online:
bg.berlin/virtual-video-space

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Preview

1.12.21 – 3.1.22 Christian Niccoli

Press images

berlinischegalerie.de/en/press-release/monira-al-qadiri/

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Admission
12 €, concessions 9 €

Berlin's Museum Sunday
On the first Sunday of every month
Free Admission
Next date: 7.11.21, 10 – 6 pm

Wed–Mon 10 am–6 pm
Tue closed