

# MOUSSEM CITIES



# ALGIERS

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EXPO OUSSAMA TABTI,  
LOUISA BABARI, MOURAD KRINAH

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# Oussama Tabti

Oussama Tabti is a visual artist who graduated from the *École Supérieure des Beaux-arts* in Algiers and the *École supérieure d'art d'Aix-en-Provence*. He is currently a student in the post-graduate course at the HISK in Ghent. Oussama Tabti lives and works between Brussels, Algiers and Marseille. His work takes a critical look on a hermetic geopolitical space, made up of impassable borders and navel-gazing cultures. In his own way, he denounces the difficulty of moving in a world that is certainly globalised, but also distrustful, frightened by the foreigner and by difference. In 2019, Tabti participated in the Algeria pavilion at the Venice Biennale. He also won the Paris Fine Arts prize at the 64th Salon de Montrouge. His works have been presented in several exhibitions around the world. They are part of many collections.

## Oussama Tabti

### *Stand-by*

Installation, digital print on paper, 2011

Oussama Tabti was barely three years old when a political and military conflict broke out, one of the bloodiest since his country's independence. One series of armed conflicts was followed by another between 1991 and 2002. These were – depending on one's point of view – called 'the years of terrorism' or 'the civil war'. In both cases, it was a period of great violence, during which between 150,000 and 200,000 people lost their lives, mainly in massacres against civilians.

At that time, the army, loyal to the government, fought against various militias of Islamist guerrillas. It was a very controversial period, full of obscure and delicate questions, and remaining a taboo subject today, for both public opinion and the media. How can we represent this complex, problematic – and for a certain population still 'vivid' – historical time today? With what vocabulary can we describe the tension of a society torn

apart between religion and secularism on the one hand, and between democratic freedom and surveillance in the name of security on the other?

By consulting publications at the French Institute in Algeria, Tabti discovered that the loan and return dates of the books presented a temporal space of 'inactivity', corresponding to the period of conflicts mentioned above. In this work, history is expressed in the form of a parenthesis, of inactivity, of silence: readers who no longer go to the library, books which are no longer borrowed or read, missed exchanges, lost conversations. Through an aesthetical form reminiscent of conceptual photography of the 1970s, Tabti shows us the burning archives of a historical time which, while being both recent and alive in the memory of citizens, remains a fact that is excluded from historical representation – objectified and shared by this same community.

More generally, Tabti's work invites us to reflect on the mechanisms of representation or denial that each society applies to the embarrassing and uncomfortable facts of its own history.

— *Bartomeu Mari*

## Oussama Tabti *Sweet Home*

Installation, video and drawings on wooden table, 2019

'Les Chibanis' is a name given to former North African workers who came to France during the so-called 'Les Trente Glorieuses' (litt. 'The Glorious Three Decades'), the period from 1945 to 1973. In *Sweet Home*, some gentlemen tell us, through drawings, about their living conditions and the unhealthy accommodation in which they lived after they arrived in France.

# Louisa Babari

Louisa Babari is a Russian-Algerian artist, born in Moscow. She works between Paris and Algiers. Her artistic production consists of discursive works that document processes of decentralization, her own family archives, and questions related to architecture and reconstruction, language, text and translation. Her works have been exhibited at Centre Georges Pompidou, the Kadist Foundation and Musée du quai Branly (Paris), the Mac Val Museum (Val-de-Marne), the David Roberts Art Foundation (London), the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations (Marseille), and at the Dakar Biennale.

Louisa Babari & Célio Paillard

*Corps à Corps*

Video, 8'17", 2015

Louisa Babari & Célio Paillard

*Close combat*

Video, 9'10", 2016

*Corps à Corps* and *Close Combat* are an audiovisual project made up of two video's that are constructed around the thought of Algerian psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. The text of the French-Algerian philosopher Seloua Luste Boulbina, an artwork/partition in two languages — French and English — evokes Frantz Fanon's experience, in the late fifties, in the Algerian city of Blida-Joinville. Fanon, chief physician at the local psychiatric hospital, is measuring the extent to which colonial domination is inscribed in the bodies of his patients. Luste Boulbina's words do not simply report this revolt, they prolong and amplify it, so that it remains alive and operative.

Louisa Babari  
*Lecture*

Sound piece with credits, 3'21", 2017.

Made without images, with the help of my daughter Almée Oulahbib, then aged six — who started learning to read and who trained to read aloud — *Lecture* invites ones to hear, to listen to the reading of a child. The extract is Jacques Vergès' pleading in favour of the heroine of the battle of Algiers, arrested and questioned by French paratroopers (*Pour Djamila Bouhired* [For Djamila Bouhired], Algiers July 14-15, 1957). I chose an extract in which facts were related, free from explicitly violent passages. But by reading this account made factual by my child, it was obvious to what point this absence in name only. That is, that a child's approximate reading of a war episode immediately made one think of war from a child's point of view. That this immediacy operated as operates a translation, from one text to another (transforming while remaining faithful) and pointed, on the one hand, to the sudden clarity of the story, and on the other hand, to the utmost difficulty to grasp it.

# Mourad Krinah

**Mourad Krinah is a visual artist, graphic designer and curator. He lives in Algiers. His works question the mass of images conveyed by the media. He reworks, decontextualises and recontextualises images by sometimes reinterpreting canonical works and mixing his own photographic and video work with images from the press or from search engines, in an approach close to musical sampling. His works have been exhibited among others in New York, Venice, Dakar, London, Dubai, Tunis, Johannesburg, Milan, Marseille and Rabat.**

## Mourad Krinah *(They) Occupy Algiers*

Wallpaper, digital print on paper, variable dimensions, 2013

The title refers to the Occupy Wall Street movement, born in New York in the early 2010s and followed around the world, and whose famous Guy Fawkes' mask (from Alan Moore's comic book *V for Vendetta*) was one of the symbols. The title therefore ironically refers to the popular will to occupy public space at the moment it was the security system that was the most visible element.

And so the aim of this work is to test the viewer's perception in order to engage him or her in a critical position. The process is based on the stylization of a pattern and its infinite multiplication, which gives the whole the impression of a geometric composition, which is reinforced by the use of wallpaper. A decorative object, that is an object that lines interior spaces and furnishes lives without us paying attention to it any longer. Only careful observation allows the spectator to identify the dark and disturbing nature of the pattern. This device, based on a game of visual discrimination, appears as the metaphor for the flood of media images which causes their loss – of readability and meaning.

Mourad Krinah  
*La Valse du Samedi*

Series of four images, digital print on paper, 100×100 cm, 2011

*La Valse du Samedi # 3 – Tribute to Paolo Uccello* uses as its source image an aerial photo of demonstrators surrounded by the Algerian police during a demonstration in 2011. The title refers to *The Battle of San Romano* by Italian Renaissance painter Paolo Uccello, in which bodies and weapons are so detached from each other that the resulting image is almost abstract. According to Krinah, the way in which mass media images are broadcast or framed by their context, generates the disinterest and disidentification of the spectators.

— *Natascha Marie Llorens*



# Algeria, a Frenetic Art Scene

**By Nadira Aklouche Laggoune, Art critic, curator, History and Art Theory teacher, Director of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Algiers (MAMA).**

The 2000s are for the Algerian art scene, of which the capital Algiers constitutes the crucible, a historic moment, marking a turning point in its art history. From the ‘construction’ of a local artistic modernity by the pioneers of the 1950s, followed by the will, in the 1960s and 70s, to develop new aesthetic languages — which in turn would boost artists in the 1980s — Algerian art has evolved and has become structured. But this trajectory experienced a rupture in the 1990s with the irruption of terrorism which, for 10 years, stunned the Algerian art scene. The momentum carried by the generation of visual artists who were then in their thirties was halted, exhibition places disappeared, the local modernist avant-garde was decimated, and artistic creation was in ‘stand-by’ until the 2000s.

With the end of terrorism, and as often happens following periods of crisis or conflict, the 2000s brought a new breath that stimulated the effervescence of the art scene. Carried by new generations who have not lived through this terrible period, aged between 20 and 30 years, this breath of fresh air inaugurates a period of artistic production that takes part in the international art scene. Its artists are nurtured in the culture of film, the web, photography, multimedia; there are new approaches and visual concepts, including in more classical mediums.

This frenetic artistic activity is not limited to the visual arts, but concerns several areas of contemporary creation. These incisive, critical discourses are especially flourishing in Algiers. They tackle (often with merry derision...) the issue of socio-cultural and political reality, exposing their new ways of expression in the alternative spaces of freedom they appropriate: friends’ apartments, commercial premises made available by

admirers, abandoned sites, urban spaces. Here, they express their vision of sharp observers of social and political realities.

The transformations, conflicts, and economic mutations that transform the cultural forms and contents will stimulate them to produce works that redefine the relationship of art to reality, and the traditional conditions which form its basis. This is an art that breaks with the narrow and reductive vision of cultural or identity specificity, as well as with a preconstructed sense imposed by patrimonification and ubiquitous commemoration (and its aestheticising and institutionalisation) – that leaves no place at all for symbolisation.

These artists — painters, filmmakers, writers, photographers, street art artists, videographers, installation artists — produce works that oppose this aesthetic status quo, creating openings, gaps in the unanimity of taste. They do so to break with a culture of passive consumption, by investing in new areas such as archives, history, the relationship to public space, other figurations etc. — acting as creators and citizens at the same time.

Today, the current Algerian art scene advances problematics such as the symbolic gap – a fundamental one – and critical distance. They are fundamental for the emergence of these different and offensive outlooks and thoughts, all constituting forms of resistance to cultural and artistic standardisation and opening up a wider field for their relation to the world.

# About Moussem Cities Algiers — Brussels February 2020

With the festival Moussem Cities, Moussem and its Brussels partners are focusing on a metropolis in the MENA region. These are cities with a rich and culturally diverse history, but especially cities that, thanks to their artistic dynamics, play a vital role in contemporary societies. Moussem Cities is a platform for artists that focuses on an urban artistic context, while fostering an exchange with Brussels.

After our editions around Tunis, Beirut, Casablanca and Damascus, we now invite you to discover Algiers. Founded in the 4th century B.C. as a Phoenician colony on Amazigh soil, this port city was occupied consecutively by the Romans, the Vandals, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Turks and the French. After the independence of Algeria in 1962, Algiers became the capital of all postcolonial utopias. The Algerian capital is now one of the largest cities in the Maghreb. It is the city of youth, despair and hope. It is this young generation that recently has surprised the world, coming out massively on the capital's streets to demand political and social reforms.

Moussem Cities is a project by Moussem Nomadic Arts Centre in collaboration with: Bozar, Kaaitheater, Nova, Passa Porta, VK Concerts, Itinérances.

**Info & tickets: [algiers.moussem.be](http://algiers.moussem.be)**

[algiers.mousseem.be](http://algiers.mousseem.be)



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