

Monira Al Qadiri. Holy Quarter

- From March 10 to June 12, 2022
- Curated by Manuel Cirauqui
- Film & Video Gallery (103)

From March 10 to June 12, 2022, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao will be running *Monira Al Qadiri. Holy Quarter*, the first exhibition of 2022 in the Film & Video Gallery, a museum space devoted to showing fundamental works of video and moving image art, and sound and video installations.

On this occasion, the work on view is a video and sculpture installation by Monira Al Qadiri (born 1983), a Kuwaiti artist born in Senegal and currently living in Berlin. Using multiple mediums, Al Qadiri's work explores uncharted territory of colonial history, oil cultures and the formation of identities in the Middle East. In a region whose geostrategic influence is closely tied to its energy resources, local ways of life have undergone radical transformation at a time when the impact of industry on the planet's ecosystems has been accelerating. In its desert sand landscapes, which record the highest temperatures on the globe, the artist finds potential narratives that project us simultaneously toward a prehistoric past and toward an increasingly less hypothetical future of global overwarming and desertification.

Holy Quarter (2020) takes us on a dreamlike journey through the vast expanse known as Rub' al Khali that covers parts of Saudi Arabia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The depth of the film's aerial shots is only comparable to the deepness of its soundtrack, composed by Fatima Al Qadiri, the artist's sister and frequent collaborator.

Using sound as its guiding thread, *Holy Quarter* is based on the story of British explorer Harry St. John Philby, who crossed the Arabian desert in the 1930s in search of the mythical lost city of Ubar, an "Atlantis of the sands" that according to the Quran was destroyed by divine wrath in time past. Instead, he found the remains of one of the most important visible meteor impacts on our planet. Even today, mineral fragments of the impact can be found around the Wabar crater, which Philby first took for a volcano. Monira Al Qadiri views these stones, reminiscent of black pearls, as like the emissaries of a cosmic and collective spirit.

In a slow, deep voice, the "spirit of the crater" accompanies the images through speech and is materialized in the exhibition space in an impressive set of sculptures. These iridescent, blown glass pieces, at once delicate and massively thick, evoke both black pearls and huge drops of crude oil.

"I have been working on the aesthetics of pearls and oil for a long time, and I am trying to relate the historic moments pre- and post-oil in the Gulf Region. Especially because, before oil, the main industry was that of pearl diving. These sculptures blend the past into the present and the future; they speak of oil and extraction, of economies, and of how they develop. Oil changed the historical narrative in the region abruptly and dramatically," says Al Qadiri.

In the film, the stones speak in first person—We are Wabar—to tell the story of their arrival on our planet. They express dismay at the imminent catastrophes, and also encourage us to work together to revert their course. In a kind of dream that cuts through time and space, Monira Al Qadiri confronts the viewer with ideas beyond those of Western modernity and colonialism, creating an intermedial work that in its use of poetic language, image, and musical creation, addresses problems that exist at a global scale.

Monira Al Qadiri. Biography

Monira Al Qadiri (born 1983, Dakar, Senegal) lives and works in Berlin. Her career has been shaped by her international education and her sustained questioning of Middle Eastern identities. Born in Senegal, she studied to be an artist in Japan, where she received her doctoral degree, and lived in Lebanon for some years prior to settling in Germany. Al Qadiri is considered one of the most important members of her generation of artists from the Persian Gulf, and she is the co-founder of the emblematic artists collective GCC. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions in numerous institutions, including UCCA Dune (2022), the Art Gallery of Burlington, Ontario (2021); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2020); Kunstverein Göttingen, Göttingen (2019); the Circl Pavilion, Amsterdam (2018); the Sursock Museum, Beirut (2017); Gasworks, London (2017); Stroom Den Haag, The Hague (2017); Sultan Gallery, Kuwait (2014); and Tokyo Wonder Site (2009). She has also participated in important international arts events such as the Venice Biennale (2022), the Seoul Mediacity Biennial (2021), the Guangzhou Image Triennial (2021); the Asia Pacific Triennial, Brisbane (2018); and the Athens Biennial (2018).

Film & Video (room 103)

The Film & Video Gallery is a space devoted to video art, video installation and the moving image. It exhibits works from the collections of the Guggenheim Museums and from other international institutions. Since it opened in 2014, the Film & Video Gallery has shown works by a number of singular artists, including Christian Marclay, Ragnar Kjartansson, Fiona Tan, Ken Jacobs, Amie Siegel, Pierre Huyghe, Michael Snow, Javier Téllez, Diana Thater, Allora & Calzadilla, William Kentridge, Alex Reynolds and Sharon Lockhart, among others.

Educational activities:

***Dark Genesis*. Performance by Monira Al Qadiri and conversation with the artist (March 10)**

On the occasion of the opening of the exhibition *Holy Quarter* (2020) in the Museum's Film & Video Gallery (103), Monira Al Qadiri will present her performance piece *Dark Genesis* on March 10 at 6.30 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

After the performance, Manuel Cirauqui, curator of the Film & Video program at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, will chat with the artist about this piece and her work *Holy Quarter*, followed by a question-and-answer session with the public.

Cover image:

Monira Al Qadiri. Holy Quarter

Holy Quarter (2020)

Installation, 20-minute film and glass sculptures (film still)

Commissioned by Haus der Kunst, Munich

Courtesy the artist

© Monira Al Qadiri

For more information:

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All information about the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is available at www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus (press room).

Press Images for
Monira Al Qadiri. Holy Quarter
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

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For further information, please contact the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Press Department: tel. +34 944 359 008 and email: media@guggenheim-bilbao.eus

Monira Al Qadiri. Holy Quarter (film still)

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Monira Al Qadiri. Holy Quarter (installation view)

Holy Quarter (2020). Installation view at Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

20-minute film and glass sculptures

Courtesy the artist

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