

INTERVIEW WITH AMINA MENIA

AM: Hello! I'm Amina Menia, from Algiers.

You know like the SIM card that is linked to your phone and doesn't work elsewhere? I'm exactly like this. I'm like, I'm rooted in Algiers, and I always work on Algiers. My concern is about Algiers, my city. I use the city, urbanity, and the architectural language as my own language because for me it's very interesting in terms of metaphors. I interrogate the public space, the urban landscape. It's just to explain: what is my society? To kind of understand what is the behavior of my society. But in a wider meaning, what I'm targeting is to understand the passage of time and the living together. This is more what I'm concerned about.

In my context, you know, as living in Algeria, it's a very heavy context in terms of historical and political things. So, the series "Chrysanthemums" is ever evolving. It's been like, ten years? I am collecting images and photographs from these monuments. "Chrysanthemums" is about, you know, monuments, or stelae, that commemorates war, because you know in Algeria, we knew, of course, through France—we knew the First World War and the Second World War, and we had our own war for independence, so you can see war everywhere. It's one of the main topics in Algeria. And for "Chrysanthemums," the title comes from a proverb, or a sort of expression that is used in French, by French politicians, made famous by President Charles de Gaulle, who said, "Now I'm useless, I'm just good for inaugurating chrysanthemums." Which means, well, we do not inaugurate flowers, of course, and chrysanthemums are the flowers that we usually use for funerals, in French tradition, I think. I don't know if it's everywhere in the world. But, in November the 1st, it's Toussaint in French, it's Toussaint. It's dedicated to the dead. So in French tradition, chrysanthemums are the flowers that we use for this. So, it means that, of course, we do not inaugurate flowers, and we inaugurate things that are dead. So, this is what it means, that, to be politically void, to be politically useless.

So, in the series, in the "Chrysanthemums" series, there are two types: what I call, like, political stelae, what I call, because it is, you can find from foundation stones, to a small monument or small plaque, or small objects to commemorate war, or martyrs, or all the people that were dead in a battle, or in war or in larger way. So, what I have noticed is that all over Algeria, the political ones, let's say the political ones—the foundation stones, or you know, the plaques where you have "the President has inaugurated this thing, blah, blah, blah, on that date"—they are always vandalized. Most of the time it's vandalized because they are sure they will be, that it won't be followed by a project. I don't know, because, you know, because of demagogy, because of all the false promises and that we don't keep, so they are sure that the project is not happening, or it happens always too late, or you know, there is suspicion of corruption, there is suspicion. You know, when you don't believe in your rulers, in your government, when you don't believe in them. So, you know, when it's broken: the links, and the commitment, and the trust is broken, then you cannot.

It's sort of like a public grievan[ce] on a public object that people are using, you know, to maybe transmit a sort of message that we're not happy with that, we don't believe in that, we don't belong to those projects, and at the same time, all what is dedicated to war or to commemoration of war is sort of sacred, restored, very well protected and conserved, and even, I mean, renovated very regularly. So there is a real shift, there is a real difference between both of the monuments.

So, it's always evolving. I'm collecting images and images for this series. So you can see what you see here in the Wallach Gallery, it's made on a sort of billboard, you know. It's trompe l'oeil. It's like, it's just sort of denunciation of something that is fake, something that is temporary here. There is—because, you know, the photography is very documentary-like, it's life-size, it's—there is nothing. And then behind, what I do want to express is that, see this simulacre? This fake, yeah, this is why it is shown like this. I have already also proposed them as a mini-series of twelve in a slideshow, also, but this is my favorite presentation. I love that one because you confront, you're in a direct dialogue with the object.

CITATION INFORMATION

For the transcript:

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