

INTERVIEW WITH MASSINISSA SELMANI

MS: So, I'm Massinissa Selmani, and today is the 23 of October.

My work is made by emptiness. I'm really obsessed how to produce art with, like, the minimum of means. One of the biggest influence[s] for me are the movies of Peter Watkins. He's a British filmmaker, and his documentaries are between fiction and reality, so you're all the time lost, so you have to make your own opinion, and I like this way to work, this idea to make art.

For me, it's something really important, like, to have a space to the viewer to make its own history, own interpretation.

My work is first about the practice of drawing. Since a few years now, I've tried to work how to produce forms around drawing, so I call it "drawn forms," so for me it's related also to, sometimes to some documentary forms: how to think drawing as a documentary forms. So it has to deal with testimony sometimes, with history, with heritage, with memory. There is also another dimension which is, like, work around the question of drawing as material, as a way of thinking, and also, I also like to do animation films, also, where there is kind of confrontation between tragedy and comedy.

The installation that I'm showing, it's called Unexpected Distances. It's the second scenario. I call it like this because I did the first version at the Sharjah Biennial in 2017. And the idea was around the question of elasticity and tension, and how to materialize this through drawings. So I did the first—what I call kind of, scenario—and I did this, the second one, and each scenario is related to the video on the floor. There is this rod of wood, which is a kind of cursor, and this tracing paper around, which is kind of also, kind of territory where this cursor is moving because there is also kind of a graduation in this tracing paper. And in the floor, there is a small drawing. This drawings represent the idea of maybe riot or something tragic. And there is another part, which is just rolled paper and metal rod, and also that suggests this question of tension and something, maybe contained by something else.

Like, all the works are not directly related to Algeria, and even when it's related to Algeria, there is also behind, like, questions around photography, around video, around, like, the practice itself, also. Like the work that I'm presenting here, the animation is directly related to Algeria, but the other works, no. It just came from different experimentation in the studio and some accidents sometimes.

Yeah, I think it's probably the first time that I take part [in] this kind of exhibition. I'm always afraid, like, the work become[s] kind of exotic or something, but here what I really liked is, like, the curator took the works as they are. She didn't try, like, to have her point of view of us. I have the feeling that she starts from our works to build the exhibition, and it's probably something that make[s] us feel really comfortable to work together and to exhibit together. And there is

also another reason which is like more simple: it's just the pleasure to exhibit again with some friends.

In Algeria what is very difficult is that—I have the feeling that—everything, it happened in Algiers, and Algiers is very small art scene. I mean, there is no professional galleries or this kind of stuff. So the artists like to show their work outside of Algiers. It's—they can do it, but sometimes, maybe it doesn't have an impact in their work or in their career or something. So I live in France, but I'm often in Algeria. All my family is there, so I try to go often. For the diaspora, it's different. I mean, it's—for an Algerian, it's not the same thing if I'm based in France or in London, for example. Because in France, there is this heritage, history, between Algeria and France. So it's—there's kind of, kind of heavy history between us. So, I don't know. So, sometimes people have to move outside to show their works and so some of us decided to stay in Algeria, others moved for different reasons.

I don't know if you follow all the demonstrations since March until now. We have, sometimes, like, in our visual heritage—we have probably the one from the Independence. And for me, in this century's, probably the first most important visual heritage and visual common heritage that we have altogether. Like, if you are in the demonstration in Algeria, not only in Algiers, but in all the cities, it's really, really something fascinating. So the first time, for example, my friends, non-Algerian friends asking, “Are you doing something?” I said, no, I was in Algeria, I was on the street, I cannot. I'm supposed to be an artist, but I cannot fight against that—it's so beautiful and so powerful. Because it [came] like that, and you cannot resist. I said, I thought maybe, like first, as an artist, maybe my way to work, also, I need time to, like, to think about everything and to produce something through that. I think sometimes, also, it's good to take time: to have, like, global analyze because it's going too fast, and the situation is—I mean, imagine, during—since March to now, there is no violence, there is no—it's just incredible what is happening now in Algeria.

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