

INTERVIEW WITH NATASHA MARIE LLORENS

Why do a show about Algeria? Why do a nationalist show? Why do it in New York?

NML: So, my name is Natasha Marie Llorens, and I curated *Waiting for Omar Gatlato*.

I think for me, the most important part of the show is the diversity of voices and the diversity of representations that are created by people who have a relationship to Algeria. The idea of the show was always to create as much horizontality between one place and another as possible, because that horizontality would allow for, like, a free dissemination of associations between them. You would be able to read them together and separately with much more autonomy, I felt. But how you get someone who has access to like, a foundry and like, a professional crater, and has two galleries—one in Berlin and one in Paris—and is, like, in negotiation for one in LA. Like, how you match that work with the work of people who are working in a context where there's no galleries, where there are no exhibition spaces that are devoted to their development, where they have to invent structures to professionalize and do that between them. I just think that there—as a curator, right? Not as an art historian, but as somebody who's responsible for the infrastructure, it's just really complicated.

One of the problems that I immediately ran into when I was doing studio visits for the show was the sense that people who live in Algeria have a really rigid language around authenticity, which is related to a history of trying to, like, legitimize Algerian nationalism in the face of colonization, and so there's a lot invested in what gets to be Algerian, and who gets to be Algerian and how Algerian-ness is described for really valid and justifiable historical reasons. And in the diaspora, there's a lot of tension around what it means to be French if you're of North African descent, especially if you're a racialized subject. And I think that the position within the diaspora is trying to find a way to claim Frenchness as something that one can legitimately claim as an immigrant, or as the next generation, or the third generation of people who have moved from a North African context, and what it means to claim sort of like a hybrid Algerian identity. It just, all of those questions within a French context are, like, shot through with racism, structural racism and the experience of exile and the loneliness of that.

I have a family history with the context. My father's family settled there many generations ago and lived there as colonists, and so, I was always fascinated by, like, the difference between what they perceived about Algeria, and what my father's generation was able to perceive about Algeria as someone who he left when he was twelve, and what I was able to perceive about Algeria as someone who had never been, and—but had the weight of history passed down to me. And I just felt like it was a really generalizable position of inheriting something and trying to find forms to work through everything that you don't choose, but you have to live with.

Trying to get to the place where I could have a conversation with people from a context related to Algeria—from my position—was always like, you know, like, answering questions and having to

be really responsible to my own history over and over again, and having difficult conversations about how the history impacts different kinds of bodies differently. There were a lot of those kinds of really confrontational discussions, which I think inform the subtlety and the complexity of the final result, but were personally challenging.

I think it's an incredible opportunity for the artists, but it's also, like, a really fascinating thought experiment as a curator to say, okay, so, there's this work that I think is incredible that, like, that has no access to visibility. What would it take to make this work visible, in the center, in the center of the way that the art world thinks about itself? I would never have expected to have that opportunity. As someone who thinks really deeply about the exhibition as a political form, as a space for encounter and a space for gathering, it's just really nice to have the opportunity to think this out at this scale and have other curators—my colleagues, people that I went to school with and had grown up curatorially with—be able to respond to the thought experiment, as a political experiment in what it takes to make something visible responsibly, horizontally.

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#### CITATION INFORMATION

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