

KADER ATTIA DESCENT INTO PARADISE

MO.CO.

22.06. 2024

→ 22.09.2024

EXHIBITION KADER ATTIA *DESCENT INTO PARADISE*

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1970 in Seine-Saint-Denis, Kader Attia has created a body of work that cannot be reduced to one single medium, yet it is marked by a visual language of his own. Making use of drawing, collage, photography, video, sculpture, and installation to suit each of his unique projects, he raises questions about today's society, exploring its flaws, fears, traumas, uprootings, and hopes of reparation. Travel also plays an important role in both his history and his work, invoking marginalised cultures as well as individual fates. The first rooms of the exhibition bear witness to this.

For *Descent into Paradise*, Kader Attia drew inspiration from the way the body wanders through the architectural structure of MO.CO., its journey from the top to the lower floor as a metaphor for the sky towards the earth and its depths, thus proposing a reflection on repair and transcendence that questions the notion of verticality, as a vital and spiritual movement. Like the rain that ravages and transforms natural and human creations, paradoxically an elevation can also be played out in a downward flow, allowing the unpredictable resulting form to reveal for the artist the unexpected meaning of Beauty.

As in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the descent into hell begins with purgatory. It is marked, among other things, by hypocrisy, the blind spots of democracy, the injustice that imposes silence, and the death that haunts sea crossings. On the floor below, hell is the place of all suffering,

KADER ATTIA. DESCEN

KADER ATTIA. DESCENT INTO PARADISE

KADER ATTIA. DESCENT INTO PARADISE

KADER ATTIA. DESCENT INTO PARADISE

of the war that inevitably generates resistance, but also rebirth. Finally, in the basement floor, the artist presents his vision of paradise, the place where Nature and its restorative power offer us the chance to grow in harmony with our environment, the cradle of human civilisation; a moment of meditation, up-in-the-air, far from the endless destructive creation imposed by conquering capitalism.

EXHIBITION KADER ATTIA DESCENT INTO PARADISE

INTERVIEW

**KADER ATTIA /
NUMA HAMBURSIN
C.E.O., MO.CO. MONTPELLIER
CONTEMPORAIN**

[EXCERPTS OF THE CATALOGUE]

**Interview conducted
on April 3rd, 2024 in Berlin,
beyond Greifswalderstrasse,
located in East Berlin.**

Numa Hambursin: Does this city of ruins, chaos, reconstruction, and cemeteries filled with ghosts also feed into your work? In addition to your thinking, does it colour your work in some way?

Kader Attia: Yes, it's a city where the wounds of the past are still wide open. My work over the last twenty years or so has consisted of considering the question of repair. I became interested in this when I realized that contemporary art wasn't concerned with this subject. The first thing was to understand why it wasn't being talked about. I then wondered about the idea of the injury. It's impossible to imagine repair without first thinking about the injury. You can't think about repair without "thinking the injury". Healing the injury [ndr pun on the French words "penser" : to think / "panser" : to heal]. The word repair comes from the Latin reparare, which means "to return to the original state". This Latin origin is found in all European languages. Reparaturen in Germany, riparazione in Italian, repair in English, reparación in Spanish, and so on. This is not the case in non-Western cultures, whether Arabic, Chinese, or African languages, where the very notion of repair is not at all driven by this root. In fact, we never return to the original state: we return to an idea of the original state.

KADER ATTIA. DESCEN

KADER ATTIA. DESCENT INTO PARADISE

KADER ATTIA. DESCENT INTO PARADISE

KADER ATTIA. DESCENT INTO PARADISE

I am friends with a restorer at the Pergamon Museum who repairs broken porcelain and other objects. Her name is Anne Goebel, and she is an extraordinary person. She was taken by my thinking because, for her, repairing a piece of beautiful nineteenth-century porcelain that has been broken implies that you can no longer see the trace of the break, even under a microscope. She works with high-tech tools—epoxy resins and so on. You can't tell the difference. What's more, she repaired this marvelous object for me, this Berber pottery [Kader Attia takes the object from his bookcase and hands it to me]. When you see the beauty of this object, which was probably made by a Kabyle grandmother deep in the Algerian mountains... I mentioned it to Anne Goebel and told her: "For the first time in my life, I'd like to ask you to repair this identically to its former state." She also found the object beautiful, and repaired it. I actually like the contradiction in this. I'm contradicting myself here, because for me, repair...

NH: Yes, for you, repair is something visible.

KA: It is visible. Which leads us back to Berlin, where the injuries are gaping, visible, and yet where the city claims to embrace the future of humanity through progress and modernity, even though it advocates reparation by erasing the injury, by returning to an original state. This line of thinking seems very tenuous to me.

On the contrary, we need to accept these injuries and make sure, like Freud did for the unconscious, and using the city as a metaphor, that they are accepted by everyone. I said earlier that all the people who came before us haven't really disappeared. They have left traces of their presence, unconsciously, through us, through their descendants. And all these descendants, in processes of collective individuation, have combined their traces and developed language, art, taste... That's what humanity is all about.

[...]

NH: Many of the works you create are directly inspired by, or shaped by a journey, a wandering, a place you come across.

KA: Yes, an encounter. For me, travel combines the three aspects we're talking about today: the notion of beauty, the notion of time, and the notion of space. Time is perhaps the most interesting. You can find yourself on the other side of the world today, in Angkor or Caracas, but it will take you a week to really be in Caracas, in your head. I'll never forget the first time I went to Caracas, my first time on the American continent. The plane was empty and I was able to lie down across four empty seats. I remember the sun streaming through the plane when it was supposed to be midnight. On a journey, the relationship with time is troubling and gives a ubiquitous character to the traveler's consciousness. It's exhilarating

and it opens your mind: you're a bit dizzy because you're tired, but you're awake because it's beautiful. Like a trance. Like the surrealists going into trances to create automatic writing. They were fascinated by dreams. Travel is a daydream.

[...]

NH: At the time, how did you combine your philosophical or political thoughts with your poetic concerns, which I think are one of the main threads running through your work? You are often seen as a political artist, omitting the essential poetic element that was at the root of our project. Were you already thinking about the connections between these two aspects of your work?

KA: Yes. You know, these questions about poetry, philosophy, and politics now lead me to think that each individual is made up of several personalities. I have a political personality, but I also have a personality as a poet. One night, at the end of the 1990s, I came home very late from a party, early in the morning in fact, and I was amazed by the sound of an empty beer can rolling along the pavement, pushed by the wind, in a Paris that was waking up in silence. On the basis of poetry, I have a lot of hope for humanity. There's nothing more nourishing than the slowed-down time provided by a moment of emotional beauty. Poetry intersects with politics, even in politically engaged work. At the MAC VAL, I showed a work called *Ideas can't be imprisoned*, with grids studded with rocks.

Very simple elements, a grid and rocks, create poetry. This work is also political through its symbolic, but its message comes under a polysemic political dimension.

[...]

NH: Let's return to the question of beauty, which is at the heart of our discussion. Without giving too much away, this exhibition grew out of a conversation we had about its importance in your work. I remember saying to you: "Obviously everyone talks about the political aspect of your work, that's often what we remember, whereas I, perhaps through personal taste, through distortion, have always been attracted by the sense of poetry, of beauty, which runs through your work." Can you tell us about the starting point for this exhibition?

KA: It was an important starting point that allowed me to explore the complex dimension of beauty, using Senghor's phrase as an example. There are an infinite number of beauties, including in the can of beer I mentioned earlier, after a drunken evening, when you're a bit bedraggled, a bit intoxicated, without being completely drunk.

I was still quite conscious, so I was moved, but a little drunk, so I was sensitive. For me, beauty is that double that you can never reach. It is the object of desire that we are forever seeking. Lacan said "the object (of desire) is lost forever", and we humans spend our time chasing after the first object of pleasure, of primitive enjoyment, the first contact with

our mother, with the mother's breast, endlessly. Unfortunately, successive capitalist modernities have exploited this quest for the object of desire, for enjoyment, as a means of getting people to consume and exploit them.

Beauty is a pharmakon: it is both the remedy and the poison.

EXHIBITION KADER ATTIA DESCENT INTO PARADISE

WALKTHROUGH

The exhibition tour begins with a succession of works that allow us to embrace the variety of media in Kader Attia's practice, all the while evoking many of the themes developed in his work.

Travelling, a unique horizon for us to share, the repair that sublimates the wound, the effects of capitalist exploitation, the necessity to slow down in order to look, understand, discuss, and exchange better are all milestones set in these first rooms, before being developed in the next rooms - purgatory, hell, and heaven.

“*Oil and Sugar #2* is a video of four and a half minutes. It shows a cube made up of smaller white sugar cubes onto which black oil is poured. The more the cube drinks the liquid, the darker it becomes. As time passes, the ultra-stable shape of the cube also weakens, until it falls, and eventually disintegrates.

This white cube is a metaphorical reference to the space of modern art. It is a blank space/time, which the artist will use as a basis for turning this form into a narrative for the audience.

At one point, as it turns black, the big sugar cube also resembles the Kaaba, Islam's holiest monument, with no equivalent.

In both cases, the black oil destroys the white symbol associated with purity, the driving force behind the modern rational belief.

This fusion of white sugar cube and black oil is also charged with a socio-political referent on the collusion between money, religion, and art.

Nowadays, oil is the driving force of the global economy. It has reigned since the end of the 19th century as the raw material on which the global economy depends. It is both

KADER ATTIA. DESCEN

KADER ATTIA. DESCENT INTO PARADISE

KADER ATTIA. DESCENT INTO PARADISE

KADER ATTIA. DESCENT INTO PARADISE

its strong and weak points. On the one hand, oil is totally opposed to sugar, which is sweet, white, and solid, but on the other hand, they are very similar in many ways. So, like salt and sugar in their times, oil embodies a coveted power. Before oil, sugar played an important role in the conquest of colonies, as it did in Africa, South America, Oceania, and the Caribbean. Today, as oil becomes increasingly scarce, it is all the more coveted and plays a central role in geopolitical forces on a global scale.”
Kader Attia

FIRST FLOOR / PURGATORY

Purgatory brings together works rooted in history, religion, as well as sociological and architectural context. We see a *Dead Sea* made of clothes stripped of their bodies, a luminous Democracy whose devilish nature is revealed, a pilgrimage of beer cans folded in half, and stones caught in a fence.

Following the Modern Genealogy, 2012-2018

This series of collages highlights the links between modern and traditional architecture in Africa and South America. It challenges the Western genealogy of progress-oriented architecture, while borrowing forms found in colonised territories.

“One of the paradoxes of our contemporary history is probably the encounter with and dispossession of non-Western cultures by the Western world. The former colonial space, and more specifically the Afro-Arab space, was both the ideal field for experimenting with modern projects that the administration didn't want to see in metropolitan France, as well as

the ideal ground for inspiration: a space where, as in the town of Ghardaïa, Arab-Muslim and Afro-Arab culture have merged for centuries, in what already looks like a pre-modern melting pot.

The collages I present here illustrate and evoke this genealogy, which structures and is at the origin of the modern architecture practised by architects such as Le Corbusier, and, after him, other names such as Roland Šimounet, Fernand Pouillon, Michel Écochard, and several members of the Team Ten group.”
Kader Attia

Halam Tawaaf, 2008

“This work deals with both an ancestral mystical and metaphysical tradition, as with its mutation in contemporary society. Through their anthropomorphic form, the beer cans are likened to pilgrims as well as to the damned, to the infinite cyclical circle of man who forgets himself in passive and dependent behaviours, such as drug and alcohol addictions, ‘artificial paradises’ as Charles Baudelaire called them, but which make life a hell on earth.”
Kader Attia

GROUND FLOOR / HELL

On the ground floor, we enter a space in motion. From top to bottom to top: appropriations, colonisations, liberations are recalled through works that unfold in three dimensions, appealing to the senses and memory.

The obvious is often what is first seen, before unfolding in a necessary

complexity. The broken faces sculpted on dead wood of *Culture, Another Nature Repaired* are also a reminder of the interplay of artistic forms between early modernity and pre-modern African art; as well as an indication of the wounds of nature; as well as a conversation between a material that resists and the work that the sculptor brings to life. “Working on these sculptures haunts me because it is both formal and emotional. Thanks to the technique of axe carving, I discovered that a sculpture is a series of injuries to the material. But wood also has natural wounds that sometimes express a sign that I welcome—or even honour—in my sculpting process, writing emotion with its help. Emotion comes from the Latin term *ex movere*, which means ‘an outward movement from the inside of the soul.’ That’s exactly how I work on these busts. It’s both physical and intellectual, because you have to master the axe and free your spirit, otherwise you end up with an overly controlled aesthetic. I like accidents in the process... Mistakes are part of the process because they are unexpected, and accepting them is the beginning of repair. The images of soldiers that inspire my work all date from the First World War; the technique I learnt in Africa. But over the last seven years or so, I’ve combined this axe technique with the use of Western tools such as scissors. What I like is to mix both techniques, because it’s intense and fast, both precise and random... Like the violence of the blows on the wood, the representation of these injuries is also violent. The injury is also the repair...” Kader Attia

After passing under the prostheses floating in space, like an explosion

suspended in time, near the trees of slingshots symbolising the rhizomatic instinct of resistance that leads to revolution, ready to blossom each time it is stifled a little more, we can hear the sound of a trickle, then of a downpour produced by moving sculptures activating rain sticks. The sound accompanies the movement and echoes an infinite cycle in which rain falls and is tirelessly reborn.

BASEMENT / PARADISE

Gradually, we descend into Paradise. The place where the injury is recognised and repaired. Greeted by masks covered in mirrors (*Mirrors and Masks*), we are immediately invited to look at our fragmented reflections on the surface of an object from a pre-modern African culture, long said to be primitive. This culture was the source of inspiration for some of the greatest modern Western artists, such as Braque and Picasso, in implementing their Cubist theories, which fragmented the heritage of perspective from a single vanishing point to a multitude of perspectives, as these pre-modern non-Western cultures have always practised.

“Applying these fragments of mirror to the sculpted surfaces of a reproduction of an original mask is a way of repairing an erasure. That of the contemporary amnesia the West seems to be comfortable with, veiling the legacy of Tradition over Modernity, of Tradition over Contemporaneity.” Kader Attia

A diptych film then plunges us into *Pluviality #1*. Rain symbolises a cyclical movement: vapour rises and falls in drops that nourish and transform. The gentle power of Nature that leaves its mark over a

long period of time is reflected in the architecture filmed at several sites in northern Thailand: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Chiang Saen... Statues and temple walls are invaded by the forest, the stone is marked by striations. This peaceful metamorphosis is enhanced by a story of physical and spiritual transformation told by a medium. The body of a young boy is possessed by a female spirit during a ceremony. Resisting her, he falls ill.

By accepting her, they are reborn. The analogy between body and architecture is extended to the force of the blossoming that follows the metamorphosis, in another rebirth. “The film *Pluviality #1* is an exploration of how the transition from one state to another echoes the endless transformation of the order of things by rain, the wise force of Nature, including buildings and objects that have been made to withstand the test of time. At times this transformation is so unexpected that it’s hard for us to admit it, when the simplest thing is to just accept it.”
Kader Attia

EXHIBITION KADER ATTIA DESCENT INTO PARADISE

BIOGRAPHY OF THE ARTIST

Born in Dugny, France, in 1970, Kader Attia currently lives and works between Berlin and Paris. Having grown up between France and Algeria, Kader Attia uses the experience of these different cultures to nourish the intercultural and interdisciplinary approach of his work. For many years he has explored societies' views of their own history, particularly in relation to deprivation and repression, violence and loss, and how these affect the evolution of individuals and nations, both of which are connected to collective memory.

This research has led Kader Attia to the notion of repair, a concept that he has developed philosophically in his writings and symbolically in his work. Since the principle of repair is a constant in nature—and therefore in humanity—any living, social, or cultural system can be seen as an infinite process of repair, closely linked to loss and injury.

Among his recent exhibitions are 'J'Accuse !,' Berlinische Galerie, Berlin; 'On Silence,' Mathaf, Doha; 'Fragments of Repair,' BAK – basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht; 'Kader Attia. Remembering the Future,' Kunsthau Zürich; 'Kader Attia: MATRIX 274,' Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley; 'The Museum of Emotion,' Hayward Gallery, London; 'Scars Remind Us that Our Past is Real,' Fundacio Joan Miro, Barcelona; 'Les Racines poussent aussi dans le Béton,' MAC VAL, Vitry-sur-Seine; 'The Field of Emotion,' The Power Plant, Toronto; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; SMAK,

Gent; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Musée Cantonal des Beaux Arts de Lausanne; Beirut Art Center; Whitechapel Gallery, London; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin. His work has been presented in collective shows and biennials, such as 15th Sharjah Biennial; 3rd Thailand Biennale; 12th and 13th Gwangju Biennale; 12th Shanghai Biennale; 12th Manifesta, Palermo; 57th Venice Biennale; dOCUMENTA(13), Kassel; Met Breuer, New York; Kunsthalle Wien; MoMA, New York; Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris, or The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, to name a few.

He was also the artistic director of the off-site project 'Long Live the Independence of Water' at the 13th Sharjah Biennale at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar (2017).

Kader Attia was awarded the Joan Miró Prize (2017), the Yanghyun Prize (2017), the Marcel Duchamp Prize (2016), the Cairo Biennial Prize (2009), and the Abraaj Capital Art Prize (2009). He also curated the 12th Berlin Biennale (2022).

He is a graduate of the École supérieure des arts appliqués, Paris (1993), the Escola Massana de Artes Aplicades, Barcelona (1994), and the École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs, Paris (1998).

WEEKLY EVENTS

GUIDED TOURS (IN FRENCH)

4pm Guided tour with a cultural mediator.
Wednesday to Sunday
Included in the admission ticket

FLASH VISIT (IN FRENCH)

12.30pm – 1pm At lunchtime, a 30-minute tour with a selection of works
from the current exhibition.
Every Friday
Included in the admission ticket

FAMILY VISIT (IN FRENCH)

11am – 12.30pm A visit followed by a workshop for families.
For 3-6 year olds and 7-12 year olds
Every Sunday
Admission fee 3€

WEDNESDAY SALON'S WORKSHOPS

The cultural mediators team invites you to a creative
workshop on the current exhibition.
Every Wednesday
Free

PUBLIC DEPARTMENT

The Public Department offers special tours and creative
workshops linked with the programme for constituted groups
from institutions and associations.

Information and booking:
+ 33 (0)4 99 58 28 02
mocoreservation@moco.art

GROUPS

MO.CO. welcomes adult groups for a guided tour with
an in-house guide.
Visits in French, English or Spanish on request for groups.

90 € for groups of 15 people or less
150 € for groups of 15 to 25 people

Information and booking at
mocoreservation@moco.art

For a full schedule of events and cultural activities linked
to the exhibition, see the program of MO.CO. Montpellier
Contemporain and online www.moco.art

ALSO ON VIEW ...

22.06
→ **22.09.24**

EXHIBITION BEING MEDITERRANEAN

The exhibition Being Mediterranean invites us to lose ourselves along the Mediterranean coast and dive into a reflection on the world. The exhibited artists develop their practices from the countries that border the Mediterranean. They may have been born there, live and work there, or be inspired by it from elsewhere to offer us works in a wide range of forms and aesthetics.

With Nelly Agassi, Diana Al-Hadid, Andreas Angelidakis, Chiara Camoni, Ali Cherri, Aysha E Arar, Simone Fattal, Mounir Gouri, Nour Jaouda, Melike Kara, Elias Kurdy, Teresa Lanceta, Sanaa Mejjadi, Mladen Miljanović, Sara Ouhaddou, Adrian Paci, Zoë Paul, Aïcha Snoussi, TARWUK, Elif Uras, Adrien Vescovi et Marina Xenofontos.

MO.CO. Panacée– 14, rue de l'École de Pharmacie - Montpellier.
From Wednesday to Sunday, from 11am to 7pm

28.06
→ **12.07.24**

MO.CO. ESBA GRADUATES 2024 EXHIBITION THERE IS NO REASON TO BE AFRAID

Yiseul Bae, Meryam Benbachir, Ana•tole Bloch, Nicolas Foix, Tipoume Garin, Margaux Horel, Damien Huguenin-Virchaux, Cassandre Lecocq, Daphné Royant, Audrey Sales Albella, Kit Szasz, Clothilde Venot.
Guest curator: Lila Torquéo

Over the course of the past five years, the School has immersed itself in ghosts, fantasies and feelings. The twelve artists graduating this year have asserted their desire to tame the spectres that separate them. The exhibition builds on their critical, luminous and physical methods to capture auras and attempt to give a tangible form to repressed memories.

MO.CO. Esba gallery – 130 rue Yehudi Menuhin - Montpellier.
From Tuesday to Friday, from 1pm to 6pm
Free entrance. Find out more at moco.art/fr/esba

21.09
→ **15.11.24**

EXHIBITION MARIE FÉMÉNIAS LE TONNERRE MONTE DOUCEMENT. DANS LES HAUTEURS DU MONUMENT - [THUNDER CREEPS UP SLOWLY INTO THE MONUMENT'S HEIGHTS.]

In partnership with MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain.

Abbaye de Fontfroide - Narbonne - www.fontfroide.com

11.10
→ **18.12.24**

EXHIBITION NICOLAS AGUIRRE CARPACCIO, THÉÂTRE D'ANATOMIE - [CARPACCIO, ANATOMICAL THEATRE]

In partnership with MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain.

Kiasma - Castelnau-Le-Lez - www.lekiasma.fr

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

MO.CO.

13, rue de la République - Montpellier
Accessible to people with reduced mobility

ACCESS

Tramway
Lines 1, 2, 3, 4 - Station gare St Roch

Car
Gare St Roch and Comédie parking

OPENING TIMES

From Tuesday to Sunday
From October to May → 11am to 6pm
From June to September → 11am to 7pm

CONDITIONS ADMISSION PRICES

Full price individual admission: 8 €
Reduced rate individual admission: 5 €
Free admission, see conditions online
Free access on the first Sunday of the month
Annual subscription MO.CO. SOLO PASS: 20 €
Annual subscription MO.CO. DUO PASS: 35 €
For further information or to make a reservation
mediation@moco.art
reservation@moco.art

ON LINE

www.moco.art
facebook.com/montpelliercontemporain
instagram : @montpelliercontemporain

CATALOGUE

“Descent into Paradise. Kader Attia” is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue with unpublished texts by Mohamed Amer Meziane, Sabrina Kassa, as well as an interview of Kader Attia with Numa Hambursin. The graphic design was entrusted to Jean-Michel Diaz.
Bilingual edition, French-English.
Publishers: Bernard Chauveau Edition – Couleurs Contemporaines / MO.CO.
Montpellier Contemporain
Publication available from July, 29th.



MO.CO. MONTPELLIER CONTEMPORAIN: ONE INSTITUTION, THREE SPACES

MO.CO. is an artistic ecosystem, ranging from training to art collection, production, exhibition and mediation, encompasses an art school and two art centres: the MO.CO. Panacée (laboratory for contemporary creation) the MO.CO. (gallery dedicated to international exhibitions), and an art school: the MO.CO. Esba.

The EPCC MO.CO. benefits from the support of Ville de Montpellier, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole, Direction régionale des affaires culturelles Occitanie and Région Occitanie / Pyrénées-Méditerranée.

