

## KADER ATTIA

Born 1970, Dugny, France

Lives and works Berlin and Algiers

### ***Ghost*** 2007/2017

aluminium foil

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne

© the artist

I'm fascinated by the devotion shown by people praying, in any religion. It's the idea that when they pray, they transform the space. It becomes silent. After this, it [returns to] what it was again.

– Kader Attia, 2017

*Ghost* comprises a dense mass of aluminium foil figures, kneeling and bending forwards in states of prayer. Loosely based upon the artist's mother – whose body he modelled when first making the work – *Ghost* uses a simple, ordinary household product in its fabrication which is wound around the body, over and over, until a semi-rigid surface is built up. The foil is then moulded carefully by hand around the shoulders and spine of the model, revealing human contours, and lifted off the body to form an empty shell.

Absence and presence are persistent themes within Kader Attia's art. On approach, *Ghost* appears to be a huddled mass of bodies, but they are revealed as empty shells when viewed from the reverse angle. The relationship of emptiness and fullness has preoccupied religious scholars and philosophers for centuries; as the artist observes, the void left by the figures in *Ghost* is as important as the surrounding forms.

This iteration of *Ghost* was produced with the assistance of

Jacqui Shelton

Annette Allman

Flory Ambarita

Haley Ball

Erika Beiza

Tyson Campbell

Georgia Cooper Stanbury

Anna May Cunningham

Lynden Cunningham

Anita Davies

Sophia D'Urso

Emma Hakansson

Emily Hubbard

Zoe Jackson

Emma Jansson

Jessie Mae McClure

Ciara Murphy

Sarah Murphy

Brett Parisi

Tilly Perry

Dominic Reid

Kashi Ruffilli-O'Sullivan

Mino Wu

Gia Jiayao Zhou

Anne Dribbisch

Beatrice Gabriel

Chloe Martin

## KADER ATTIA

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### ***Inspiration/Conversation*** 2010

2-channel digital video, projection, colour, sound

13:55 minutes

Produced with the assistance of Doual'Art, Douala

Courtesy the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne,

Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong and Galleria Continua,

San Gimignano, Les Moulins, Beijing, Habana

© the artist

*Inspiration/Conversation* was filmed in the city of Douala, Cameroon, while Kader Attia was undertaking a wider project there on the theme of water. One day the artist found an empty, discarded plastic bottle in the street. Picking it up, he began to think about the ways in which it could be transformed as an object, and given a 'second life' through art.

'Appropriation', or the adoption and transformation of an object from one context to another, is an ongoing theme in Attia's work. He has spoken about the methods of repair used in traditional societies, to mend domestic objects such as bowls and wooden masks – namely, staples, stitches, and other types of mending which become a part of the object's 'life' over time. He differentiates this approach to that commonly taken in the West, in which the aim of repair is to return an object back to its original state.

Linking the concepts of appropriation and repair as an endless cycle of change and renewal, the bottle in Attia's video becomes a makeshift musical instrument. Presented across two inverted screens, like a conversation, it is 'played' by different performers who inhale and exhale into the neck, crunching and crackling the plastic.

### ***Reenactments*** 2014

helmet from the French colonial army, wood, strings

50.0 x 21.5 x 16.0 cm

Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

© the artist

KADER ATTIA

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***Asesinos! Asesinos!*** 2014

134 wooden doors, 47 megaphones

dimensions variable

Vehbi Koç Foundation Contemporary Art Collection, Istanbul

© the artist

*Asesinos! Asesinos!* transforms wooden household doors into a vast marching formation. Split into halves, then hinged to form A-frames, the doors have a distinctive human-like quality that is enhanced by the presence of megaphones on top of some of them. The work's title – which translates as *Murderers! Murderers!* – encourages this association, suggesting a public gathering or protest march. While Attia's work implies noise, the megaphones remain silent in the gallery. Speaking about the work, Attia has described the powerlessness and silencing of individuals in the face of oppression, censorship, or totalitarian rule.

Doors, Attia notes, are loaded with meaning. They are everyday domestic and architectural forms as well as powerful dream symbols, associated with passage to another realm. Their domestic function as the entry point to the home is particularly meaningful to Attia, who explains that he first conceived of the work during the American 'subprime' mortgage crisis of the late 2000s. This devastating financial crisis saw thousands of individuals and families across the country lose their homes, following a collapse in housing prices which led to a deep recession in the United States, Europe, and beyond.

KADER ATTIA

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***Oil and Sugar #2* 2007**

single-channel digital video, projection, colour, sound

4:30 minutes

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne

© the artist

*Oil and Sugar #2* takes two basic products of consumerism and trade as its focus, transforming one through the addition of the other. At the beginning of the video we see a neatly stacked arrangement of white sugar cubes that resembles an architectural structure. Just outside the screen, a hand pours crude black oil onto the sugar stack; it slowly caves inwards and slumps, dissolving into the base of the dish that supports it. Largely silent, *Oil and Sugar #2* is punctuated by occasional background noise and birdsong from outside the artist's Paris studio, where the work was filmed.

Kader Attia has spoken about his interest in different aspects of religious devotion, from prayer (as expressed in the adjacent silver foil installation *Ghost*) to the architecture of worship. The square represented by the sugar cubes recalls the *Ka'aba*, a cubic building situated within the holiest mosque at Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The building's transformation across history – from an ancient pre-Islamic place of worship, to Islam's holiest site after Mohammed – is alluded to in the video.

KADER ATTIA

Born 1970, Dugny, France

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***The Culture of Fear: An Invention of Evil*** 2013

metal shelves, antique magazines, books, print media, metal screws  
dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne and  
Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

© the artist

*The Culture of Fear: An Invention of Evil* is made up of multiple stacks of pre-fabricated steel shelving units. Visitors are invited to walk between the towering structures, encountering the books, journals and loose sheets that are fixed to their shelves.

Attia describes the work as a statement on perceptions of difference or 'otherness', in this case Western representations of a non-Western 'other'. 'Modernity', he says, 'as a European concept has to do with the perception of superiority. It's not only about race, or racism, but a process that has denied the history and legacy of ancient traditions.'

The growth of popular media imagery relating to terrorism and radical Islam today perpetuates this thinking, he says. Feeding a culture of hostility, fear and prejudice, it is borne out of sweeping cultural stereotypes that can be traced back to the failures of colonialism and the modern, Western mind itself.

KADER ATTIA

Born 1970, Dugny, France

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***The Debt*** 2013

2-channel digital video, projection, colour

based on the original 2-channel slide presentation

9:33 minutes

Courtesy the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne, Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Les Moulins, Beijing, Habana

© the artist

*The Debt* is a two-screen video projection of imagery that Kader Attia has assembled from various historical and modern sources.

Doubling or pairing is a recurring element in the artist's work, providing a way to reveal comparisons between different narratives and disciplines. In this case, he says, most of the time when people speak about Africa – especially in relation to the International Monetary Fund – it is in the context of poverty and 'a debt'. Attia grew up with regular conversation about African debt, yet no one acknowledged the 'debt' that Europe owed to Africa in regards to the devastating legacy of colonialism and slavery. Neither did they acknowledge the debt owed to the many African soldiers who fought and died at war on behalf of European armies across the 19th and 20th centuries.

KADER ATTIA

Born 1970, Dugny, France

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***Reflecting Memory*** 2016

single-channel digital video, projection, colour, sound

48:00 minutes

Courtesy the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne, Lehmann  
Maupin, New York and Hong Kong, Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna and  
Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Les Moulins, Beijing, Habana

© the artist

***Untitled*** 2016

Algerian bread

(also called bread of the Aurès Mountains or 'Matlouh')

Algerian bread kindly provided by Ovens Street Bakery, Brunswick

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne

© the artist

KADER ATTIA

Born 1970, Dugny, France

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*Untitled* 2014

116 stained glass fragments, metal screw hooks and fluorescent lights

292.0 x 176.0 cm

Courtesy Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehmann Collection

© the artist



KADER ATTIA

Born 1970, Dugny, France

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*Untitled* 2016

neon, ancient wooden sculpture from the Sakalava ethnic group,  
wooden plinth

160.0 x 21.0 x 26.0 cm

Mordant Family Collection

© the artist

KADER ATTIA

Born 1970, Dugny, France

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***J'Accuse*** 2016

teak, steel rebar, single-channel digital video, projection, colour,  
sound

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne

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