



PRESS RELEASE 13.10.2014

THE MIDDELHEIM MUSEUM PRESENTS KADER ATTIA'S FIRST SOLO MUSEUM SHOW IN BELGIUM: CULTURE, ANOTHER NATURE REPAIRED

This fall, French-Algerian artist Kader Attia will exhibit thirteen new wood sculptures in the Het Huis pavilion at the Middelheim Museum. The sculpture group will be confronted with reinterpreting the monumental open-air work *Al Aqsa*, containing more than 350 cymbals modelled on the octagonal floor plan of the eponymous mosque in Jerusalem. This is the artist's first solo museum project in Belgium. Attia's 2012 installation *The Repair from Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures* was one of the absolute high points of the *DOCUMENTA (13)* show and marked the genesis of a continually expanding series of works on the arresting theme of 'Repair', which the artist explores in his signature style.

Kader Attia

Based in Berlin, Kader Attia travels around the world for exhibitions and especially research projects that he explores in lectures and through his work.

For Attia, the concept of Repair is the fundamental principle underlying historical developments, rather than evolution, progress, or decay. He identifies the principle of Repair in both nature and culture, in the natural sciences — by comparing it with Darwin's theory of natural selection — and in political science — the Repair of social injustice, Proudhon's anarchism positing that 'property is theft', Frantz Fanon's anticolonialism — and, last but not least, in art.

The artist describes the concept as a form of reappropriation, of rediscovery. What fascinates him is not the putting back together of that which has broken, but rather the emergence of a third, creative and hybrid form that could not exist without the first two. Through reappropriation, disparities dissolve: equality/difference, then/now, superior/inferior, traditional/modern, exotic/familiar.

***Culture, Another Nature Repaired* at the Middelheim Museum**

The evolution of this artistic vision across a host of installations employing widely divergent media makes the Middelheim Museum a logical choice for the artist. At the Middelheim, the past is viewed as a continuous source of insight for the present; the museum's collection of modern sculptures offers lessons and inspiration for collaboration among today's artists and for the creation of new works.

Through his installations, Attia shows observers how the meaning ascribed to objects and materials grows and coalesces throughout history. As cultures interact, often in the context of colonial



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domination or conflict, they leave distinct and remarkable traces of this connotative interplay. The sculptures Attia will exhibit in Het Huis are busts, arising from the artist's collaboration with traditional craftsmen in Bamako (Mali) and Brazzaville (Congo). They were inspired by a series of photographs of *les gueules cassées* (the broken faces): soldiers badly disfigured in the First World War, many of whom were drafted from the colonies. These portraits of mutilated war victims do more than just reveal the brutish nature of urgent medical treatment a century ago; under Attia's touch, they are transformed into a new representation of human existence, forged from the fusion of influences arising in African-Arabian and Western sculpture. In these two cultures, the ethics and aesthetics of the human body are understood and experienced in two entirely different ways. Attia draws from both to create a new and inventive hybrid.

In so doing, Attia demonstrates that neither art nor time is a matter of progress or decline, but rather of combination, rearrangement, convergence, divergence, and intersection. In harmony with André Malraux's famous assertion that *il n'y a pas de hiérarchie en Art* (there is no hierarchy in art), Attia shows us the deviant shapes of the wounded faces and their repair during the First World War, where cutting-edge techniques arose from the purely traditional procedures used to make faces presentable on the battlefield.

The use of documentary material from World War I is therefore no accident. Fueled by the challenges with which Western countries were confronted, this period launched the blind race toward modernism — deaf and blind to what had gone before.

In contrast to the 'blank slate' conviction that dominated modernism, Attia remains convinced that we must better learn to live with one foot in the past and one in the future. Only then can we amass relevant insights to guide us in charting our course. As philosopher Bruno Latour asserts, "We have never been modern".

Elements of this same logic can be found in Attia's 2009 installation *Untitled (Al Aqsa)*, which debuted that year at Les Tuileries in Paris. The reference in the title instantly calls to mind the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, which, in light of the recent conflict in the region, lends the work a profound and political meaning regarding the Israel-Palestine question. But the composition of cymbals on steel rods evokes an equal association with plants or water lilies, making not only its installation in the museum's former flower garden logical, but also its place within the Western sculptural traditions of land art and sound sculptures: the wind and rain ensure that the installation engages in dialogue with the natural elements and serves as their extension. The 350 cymbals sway back and forth like bronze leaves, inviting visitors to make contact with pebbles and coins. That makes the installation the object of musical and simultaneously silent contemplation, a piece that makes us think about our place within the natural world and about the contempt with which we



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treat it today. Once again, disparities dissolve: between nature and culture, between observer and artist. The musical element can also be linked with the mixing of cultures that gives rise to new forms of creativity; the tapping of the rain against the swaying cymbals calls to mind the blues and jazz. But the massive number of cymbals—suggesting an earsplitting cacophony—also evinces something alarming, some kind of threat, as if disaster is on its way.

The Middelheim Museum

The Middelheim Museum is a unique organization where the dynamic interplay between art and nature has been creating an extraordinary experience since 1950. The open-air museum displays modern and contemporary sculptures in a verdant parklike environment. Works by Auguste Rodin, Henry Moore, Rik Wouters, Juan Muñoz, Panamarenko, Chris Burden, Dan Graham, Ai Weiwei, Roman Signer, Philippe Van Snick, and more provide a unique overview of more than one hundred years of sculpture.

Every year the museum invites renowned or promising artists to exhibit their work. In the past the museum has already collaborated with such artists as Berlinde De Bruyckere, Wim Delvoye, Yoshitomo Nara, Paul McCarthy, Chris Burden, John Körmeling... From 25 October 2014 through 29 March 2015 Kader Attia is our guest in the former flower garden “Hortiflora” and the semi-open pavilion built by Robbrecht and Daem Architecten “Het Huis”, with his exhibition *Culture, Another Nature Repaired*. The group show *Allegory of the Cave Painting. The Other Way Around* will start concomitantly in the Braem Pavilion.

With 305,000 visitors per year, the Middelheim Museum is a gateway to modern and contemporary art for young and old, from nature lovers to art experts, where culture and recreation come together in perfect harmony.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Kader Attia. Culture, Another Nature Repaired

From 25 October 2014 through 29 March 2015

In the Het Huis pavilion

Opening on 25 October at 14:30

Kader Attia: Artist Talk

Saturday 25 October at 12:30

Location: T.105 Auditorium, Groenenborger campus, Antwerp University (UA), Groenenborgerlaan



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171, 2020 Antwerp
Entrance: free of charge

Accessibility

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www.middelheimmuseum.be

Hours:

October through March: 10:00–17:00
Open every Tuesday through Sunday
Closed on Mondays, 1 November, 25 December and 1 January

Admission:

free

Kader Attia will also present, from 16 December 2014 to 22 February 2015, an imposing installation at the **Centre for Fine Arts (BOZAR)** in Brussels. This work, entitled ***Continuum of Repair: The Light of Jacob's Ladder***, offers his interpretation of the Biblical story of Jacob's ladder and connects ideas about religion and science with his concept of "repair". More info on www.bozar.be

PRESS INFORMATION

Images and extra information can be downloaded via the City of Antwerp's FTP server:

<https://pers.antwerpen.be> (from the folder MNE/MID/KaderAttia)

User name: ftp_pers

Password: 98BernersLee

Please note: the link, user name and password are for the press only and may not be given to third parties.

For more information and interview requests:

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