

SHORES OF SAHARA-SAHEL: WAVES, FORMS, FUTURES

Master Symposium

As part of the symposium series *Gender and Equality in the Arts*

11 – 12 October 2023

On-site and online:

Auditorium D 1.04, Tower Building, Basel Academy of Art and Design FHNW

→ **LIVESTREAM**

Institute Art Gender Nature HGK Basel FHNW
in collaboration with Culturescapes 2023 Sahara

With contributions by Phoenix Atala, Binta Diaw, Adji Dieye, Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi (crazinisT artist), Yarri Kamara, Benaouda Leb dai, Rania Mamoun, Yara Mekawei, Kettly Noël, Temitayo Ogunbiyi, and Mohamed Sleiman Labat, among others

Moderated by Chus Martínez and Quinn Latimer

Research: Marion Ritzmann

Press: Anna Francke

12 October 2023, 4.30 pm

Performance *The Dust in Bed* by Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi [crazinisT artist]
der TANK

The symposium is open to the public and will be held in English.

More information and program: dertank.ch

Program Culturescapes 2023 Sahara: culturescapes.ch

“For centuries,” Benaouda Leb dai notes, “the Sahara was a space of human and cultural transhumance.” Neither uncrossable nor empty, as it is often narrated, this prismatic region—a vast desert space of dunes, volcanic mountains, salt flats and rocky plateaus, village oases, and prehistoric seabeds—was long a site of social and artistic transfer and epistemological exchange, before being cast into a colonial system by Europe, and turned into a racialized border, shore to shore. Ibrahima Baba Kaké himself once wrote: “Those who thus separate Africa into two different entities make a historical nonsense. The desert must once again become a catalyst... Restoring relations initiated by the ancestors, stopped by the colonial system, is a necessity.”

Under the sign of this necessity, and in the deep shadow of a changing climate that is violently disrupting the Sahara’s disparate ecologies, the autumn symposium of Institute Art Gender Nature HGK Basel FHNW will be devoted to the artistic and cultural productions, lines of political and aesthetic thought, and epistemologies of the Sahara, and the accompanying Sahel. Titled *Shores of Sahara-Sahel: Waves, Forms, Futures*, the symposium will be held in collaboration with the Culturescapes 2023 Sahara festival, and will take place on 11 and 12 October 2023, at Institute Art Gender Nature HGK Basel FHNW. Over the course of its two days, the symposium and its artists, thinkers, writers, performers, poets, translators, choreographers, and composers—all come from or engaged with the Sahara-Sahel, or their diasporas—will consider some of the ideas, performances, poetics, politics, fictions, materials, and movements that continuously emerge from this kaleidoscopic space.

Simultaneously, the symposium's participants will reflect on their own artistic and social practices in light of the Saharan region's effects and affects. That said, if light is the irradiating trope of colonial enlightenment, the symbol of knowledge in imperialist thought and violently extractive and exploitative political practices, this gathering will attempt to engage with a more decolonial idea of the Sahara and the rich opacities that constitute it. Should the Sahara be understood as ancient space of connection, circulation, and trade—from its northern to its southern shores, its dunes and volcanic mountains to its lush savannahs—so it might also be seen as a contemporary site of interchange between strikingly singular societies and communities on all sides of the desert, that aspect of the region most often imaged and imagined.

Indeed, the desert has long been a source of inspiration and ideas for artists, writers, and thinkers from both within and without its specific climates. The Sahara—as fact and metaphor both—has resulted in literatures, cinemas, bodies of political and philosophical thought, and social practices and movements that cross not just the desert but the world, often standing in for some larger allegory of place and one's body reflected or alienated within it, a story of self, surveillance, and social world.

What are the images that the Sahara has evoked over time, in history, on the one hand, and in art and literature, on the other? Benaouda Lebdai asked once. To this query we might add others: What are the forms and futures that the Sahara, and its peoples and nonhuman spirits, its ecologies and migrations, necessitate now? How to see the Sahara through a more decolonial prism, per Yarri Kamara? Featuring the words and works of Phoenix Atala, Binta Diaw, Adji Dieye, Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi (crazinisT artisT), Yarri Kamara, Benaouda Lebdai, Rania Mamoun, Yara Mekawei, Kettly Noël, Temitayo Ogunbiyi, Mohamed Sleiman Labat, and others, this symposium will attempt some ideas and images, poetics and practices, if not answers.

Shores of Sahara-Sahel: Waves, Forms, Futures is part of Institute Art Gender Nature's biannual master symposia series that considers artistic practice within its entanglements with gender, coloniality, language, and ecology. Among the artist talks and presentations, *Shores of Sahara-Sahel* will also include a book launch of *Sahara: A Thousand Paths Into the Future* (Sternberg Press, 2023), the Culturescapes 2023 Sahara publication edited by Kateryna Botanova, Yarri Kamara, and Quinn Latimer. A closing performance by Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi (crazinisT artisT) will take place in der TANK, on 12 October 2023.

This symposium is dedicated to the memory of artist Lin May Saeed.

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