

Kunsthaus Bregenz

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Austria



Bregenz, March 2023

Invitation to the Press Conference

Dear Sir or Madam,

We look forward to welcoming you to the press conference for the exhibition

KUB 2023.02

Monira Al Qadiri

Mutant Passages

22 | 04 - 02 | 07 | 2023

on Thursday, April 20, 2023, 11 am

at Kunsthhaus Bregenz.

The exhibition can be visited before the press tour starting at 10 am.

Monira Al Qadiri will be present.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Martina Feurstein'.

Martina Feurstein

Head of Communications & Fundraising

Kunsthhaus Bregenz

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KUB 2023.02 | Press Release

Monira Al Qadiri

Mutant Passages

22 | 04 – 02 | 07 | 2023

Press Conference

Thursday, April 20, 2023, 11 am

Opening

Friday, April 21, 2023, 7 pm

Artist's Talk

Saturday, April 22, 2023, 11 am

Press photos for downloading

www.kunsthhaus-bregenz.at



An alien lives in our midst. It is an ancient alien, one that is hundreds of millions of years old. It is a pilot of flying and non-flying objects; a heater of homes; a master of sanitation; a fashion impresario; a beauty expert; an addict of convenience; a healer of wounds; a maker of wars; a polluter of air; a killer of birds and a destroyer of worlds. This invisible chameleonic character inserts itself into every orifice of our modern existence, at times passing through entirely unnoticed. Who is this ultimate shapeshifter lurking in the background of our lives? The name of this omnipresent being is *Oil*.

Oil (petroleum) is not merely a source of fuel, but it is also the mother of a myriad of substances that we cannot live without in our daily affairs – the by-products of the petrochemical industry: gasoline, diesel, benzene, asphalt, plastic, polyester, cosmetics, medicine, paint. This Frankenstein-esque mutant transforms into so many forms that it is difficult to comprehend how many mutations it makes and to what scale it extends. Regarded as the harbinger of both fantastic miracles and horrifying curses, it has laid a double-pronged trap for us humans of the modern world, one in which we find ourselves stuck in the throes of an eternal dilemma, seemingly without any means of escaping it. Will we ever be rid of this strange condition of demonic possession we find ourselves in? Can we someday overcome this freak petroleum interval in history and pass over to a new "ever clear" reality away from the fossils' descendants? Will there soon be a scientific breakthrough that unfastens our chains, forever freeing us from the grip of the dark ooze, or will we continue our slow descent into certain climatic apocalypse, constantly bathed in it, wallowing in a dark spiral towards the unknown?

There are those of us, who are chained to oil in a different way: we enable its destructive course across the globe, generating immense amounts of wealth. Ephemeral and fleeting, the sparkling seduction that the promise of unlimited riches emanates is multicolored. It is blinding. The shimmering hues of pinks, greens, silvers, blues and purples: the iridescent sheen of oil tricks the eye, like a shiny pearl, projecting hallucinations of celebrity and

power into the mind of its viewer. “You will never be poor again,” it whispers softly. But the trickster genie makes us forget the true price of this prosperity: a mountain of irreversible debt we have accrued to the only planet we will ever know.

The dramaturgy of this exhibition follows the varying paths that oil takes, guiding us through the different formations and stories it generates; the ruptures in history and biology it has induced, the machinery and memories associated with it, and the existential questions it forces us to consider.

Monira Al Qadiri



Mutant Passages comprises entirely new works conceived for Kunsthaus Bregenz, that follow in-depth research, forms and ideas developed by the artist over the last decade around the subject of oil, culminating in this body of work.

In the foyer, large inflatable sculptures greet us, hovering overhead and within the space, coated in iridescent colorful fabrics. The work *Benzene Float* depicts scientific drawings (technically named “space-filling models” in chemical terminology) of the molecular structure of benzene, propane gas, naphthalene, and other petrochemical substances. The works’ exaggerated forms amplify their presence in modern society, confronting us with their grasp over our lives.



On the first floor, several large-scale sculptures rotate quietly, their iridescent colors shimmering and changing with their movement in space. They resemble some kind of bioluminescent marine life, especially with their recast surfaces, or some futuristic alien. But they are in fact industrial objects: drill bits used to find oil. Their dichroic colors allude to the pearling industry of the Persian Gulf, a forgotten history that has all but disappeared after the discovery of oil in the region. *Choreography of Alien Technology* aims to bridge the relationship between pearls and oil, through their colors and forms, presenting more vividly the historical gap that oil has created. The iridescent nature of the color reimagines itself as the carrier of wealth, traveling between pearls, oil, or even another future being.

On the second floor, two reddish mirror-imaged sculptures of gastropod seashells stand side by side, speaking to each other. They both have a hollow cavity in the lower half of their bodies, inviting passers-by to press their ears and heads against them, perhaps expecting to hear the sound of rolling ocean waves. Instead, they encounter an unexpected conversation between two androgynous voices, recalling how they had unintentionally changed genders while lying in the ocean. In *Gastromancer*, the impact the oil industry has on marine life is on display, and not in ways visibly known to us. The reddish biocide paint tributyltin, known as TBT, protects oil tankers from accruing algae, barnacles and mussels (in a process commonly called “anti-fouling”), but it has also caused strange and bizarre changes and contaminations in the natural environment due to its rapid leakage into the water. For example, TBT contamination causes female murex mollusks to change their gender into males, impairing their ability to spawn and devastating gastropod populations.

On the third floor, the installation *Onus* is composed of multiple solid glass sculptures of birds that are dispersed over a white floor. During the Gulf War in Kuwait (1990–91), the carcasses of birds, fish, livestock, and many other animals regularly lined the coastline and deserts of the nation – the result of massive toxic clouds fed by the hundreds of torched oil wells. It was and still is one of the worst man-made environmental disasters of all time. However, when images of these oil-drenched animals were disseminated abroad, many people believed them to be fake.



While studying at university in Japan, the artist was confronted with iconic photographs of oil covered birds taken during the war that were presented during a class as being merely exercises in propaganda. Although a witness to the destruction herself, her lived experience was questioned, and under the influence of others, was even distorted. Through these works, the artist has attempted to breathe life back into her memories by recreating these birds as glass objects, to make both tangible the destruction she witnessed, while demonstrating the fragility of our memories when images move across time, space and cultures. The work conveys the artist's burden and duty to prove the loss that has been suffered.

Biography
Monira Al Qadiri



Monira Al Qadiri (b. 1983, Senegal) grew up in Kuwait. In 2010 she received her doctorate from the Tokyo University of the Arts. Al Qadiri lives and works in Berlin. The artist has participated in several solo exhibitions at such venues as the Haus der Kunst in Munich, at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and at the Sursock Museum in Beirut. Her works have also been shown in group exhibitions at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris and MoMA PS1 in New York, at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and the Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai. In 2022 she participated in the Venice Biennale, this year her work is part of Sharjah Biennial 15: *Thinking Historically in the Present*.

KUB Billboards
Monira Al Qadiri
OR-BIT | Spectral
22 | 04 - 02 | 07 | 2023



Monira Al Qadiri will be displaying six photographs on the KUB Billboards. Iridescent surfaces, pearl-like half spheres, and colorful shapes entice the viewer into wondering what these images are. In fact, they are detailed photographs of several of the artist's works, mainly from her series of oil drill sculptures. The pieces are coated with special color-shifting paints that change with the light, evoking the color spectrum of oil and pearls.

Located on Seestraße, the busiest street in Bregenz, the KUB Billboards are an integral part of the Kunsthaus Bregenz's program. They extend the current KUB exhibition into public space.

KUB Edition
Monira Al Qadiri
Passing



Passing is a specially created exclusive edition for the KUB. The edition pays homage to the artist's newly commissioned work *Onus*, which will be presented for the first time in the exhibition. The palm-sized glass sparrow signifies a fragile and poignant reminder of the devastation and destruction of nature and the natural world in the Gulf. Each piece is uniquely made from hand-blown Murano glass.

Monira Al Qadiri
***Passing*, 2023**

Unique piece, Murano glass, hand-blown
approx. 15 × 15 × 8 cm each
25 pieces + 5 A.P.
€ 1,800

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On the occasion of the exhibition *Mutant Passages*, the first museum publication on the work of Monira Al Qadiri is now being issued. In addition to featuring documentation on her KUB exhibition and her newly created works, the catalogue also sheds light on numerous older projects by the artist, thus offering a comprehensive overview of her diverse oeuvre for the first time.

In reflective colors the large-scale hardcover book evokes the radiance of Al Qadiri's expansive sculptures. The conception of the book refers directly to the artist's biography and her practice, which unites different cultural contexts.

Texts specially commissioned by curators, writers and associates of the artist offer new perspectives into Al Qadiri's work, and an interview by Thomas D. Trummer provides personal insights into the artist's life and the thematic focus of her works.

Edited by Thomas D. Trummer, Kunsthaus Bregenz
The design of the publication was realized in close collaboration with the artist.

English | German

Hardcover, ca. 24 x 32 cm, ca. 168 pages

Publication date: June 2023

€ 42

Distribution: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Cologne

Available online after publication date:

www.kunsthhaus-bregenz.at/en/publications

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