

Zurich Art Prize 2021

Sonia Kacem

Le Superflu

Oct 28, 2021 –
Jan 16, 2022

MEDIA ORIENTATION
Oct 26, 2021, 11 am

OPENING DAY
Oct 28, 2021, 11 am to 8 pm

curated by Sabine Schaschl

In 2021, the *Zurich Art Prize*, awarded annually by Museum Haus Konstruktiv and Zurich Insurance Group Ltd, goes to Sonia Kacem (b. 1985 in Geneva, lives and works in Amsterdam). This Swiss-Tunisian artist is the 14th winner of the renowned award. Endowed with CHF 100,000, the prize comprises an CHF 80,000 budget for the production of a solo exhibition at Museum Haus Konstruktiv and CHF 20,000 in prize money.

In her artwork, Sonia Kacem distinguishes herself with a heightened sensitivity towards materials that she extracts from the everyday consumer cycle: These include very different kinds of processed products, sometimes obtained from second-hand or online stores, such as sun awnings or everyday textiles, but also substances and commodities like vinyl, paint or wood, which she discovers by chance or obtains directly from the respective production sites. The artist uses them to develop large-scale installational and sculptural arrangements, in which she plays with our expectations regarding the nature and function of the materials. Kacem is particularly interested in exploring different varieties of abstraction, transitions undergone by surfaces and volumes, or questions of scale. Her presentations open up a wide range of associations and hybrid cultural contexts. Formally, they refer to various periods and styles from art history and reflect influences from minimal art just as much as those from the Italian baroque or from Arab Islamic art.

For her exhibition at Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Kacem has continued her long-running engagement with color, pattern, decoration, ornamentation, calligraphy and the gestural. Her solo exhibition on the first two floors of the museum is closely linked to her 2019 six-month studio residency in Cairo, and particularly to the subsequent period, which was shaped by having to live and work in seclusion in Amsterdam due to the pandemic. In Cairo, the artist researched Middle Eastern non-figurative art more deeply, with its calligraphic, geometric and floral forms, whose function and significance differ from those of abstraction in the Western history of modernist art and culture. Kacem processed such research, as well as everyday impressions from that North African metropolis, in photographs, short videos and watercolors. Back in Amsterdam during lockdown, Kacem was able to use the latter in particular as a rich source of inspiration for development of a new group of wall-mounted objects, whose scale points to the domestic context in which they were produced. These are presented on the second floor, together with two earlier groups of works. On the first floor, after the artist's thorough examination of the museum's architecture, an immersive installation unfolds expansively – also inspired by her illustrated notes from Cairo, which thus conceptually form the common thread that connects the two exhibition spaces.

The longitudinal walls on the first floor bear two wooden wall-mounted structures. On one hand, the semicircular protrusions are reminiscent of oriels or balconies: architectural structures of transition between public and private space. On the other hand, they resemble ornamental half-columns that serve to subdivide or decorate facades. This mock architecture is tightly enveloped by semi-transparent textiles. The green and orange motifs printed on the fabrics come from Kacem's books of studies from Cairo. Digitally enlarged and multiplied, they reach into the three-dimensionality of the exhibition space, but without losing their connection to the originally manual gestures in watercolor. The titles of the two installation structures, *Façade Superflue (Plume)* and *Façade Superflue (Couronne)* each name the respective motif: feather and crown. Furthermore, they bring an important term into play, one that also titles the exhibition as a whole: *Le Superflu* (The Superfluous). Here, Sonia Kacem takes the supposedly superfluous and unnecessary, often associated with ornamentation and the decorative, and gives it the greatest possible scope.

The same applies to the sculptures scattered around the room, such as *Untitled (Wave)* and *Untitled (Brush Stroke)*, which also originated from small-format pictures: For this exhibition, the artist greatly enlarged her linear formations in watercolor and cut them out of honeycomb cardboard. Like the originals from which they were derived, the objects formally oscillate between brushstroke, symbol and paraph, whereas their scale is more reminiscent of artworks in public spaces. Together, the cardboard sculptures and two-part wall installation constitute a captivating scene of ornamental elements, causing interior and exterior space to merge: a true celebration of the *superflu*.

The objects displayed on the walls on the second floor also demonstrate Kacem's interest in materials, and in how the manner in which they are produced and presented evokes attributions of meaning and value. Here, there are striped sun awnings draped to form subtle folds (*Ensemble of Nine Wall Sculptures*, 2016), along with sumptuously shimmering and seemingly weightless wooden entities coated in resin (*Ensemble of 30 Signs*, 2018). The emblematic forms, which have font-like characteristics too, are also loaded with meaning. Although a certain system of repetition and mirroring of elements is evident, any attempt to decipher it ultimately fails.

In addition, there are oval, rounded rectangular, convex and concave wall-mounted objects, tightly covered with fabrics. Like skeletons, the wooden and metallic frameworks of *Ensemble of Five (Between Two Waves)* (2020/21) press against their textile mantles, creating protrusions that have a surprising and irritating corporeality. With their shiny surfaces, garish colors and mysterious shapes, the objects vie for the public's attention in the exhibition space and, like striking pieces of jewelry, create an effect that is both artful and artificial. The group of works *Ensemble of Three (Convex)* from 2021 also features shiny textile surfaces that are put into a state of tension by underlying structures. In terms of their outwardly curving forms, they bring to mind upholstered furniture, decorative column fragments or the covered mock architecture on the first floor, albeit on a smaller scale. Under the banner of *Le Superflu*, they too raise the question of their utility, function or dispensability. The artist herself describes working on the exhibited artworks created during lockdown as having been simultaneously trivial and meaningful, entertaining and essential.

Sonia Kacem studied at Haute école d'art et de design (HEAD) in Geneva (2006–2011). She has already received a number of awards and scholarships, e.g. the Fondation CAB residency in Brussels (2020), the Townhouse studio scholarship in Cairo (2019), the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten residency in Amsterdam (2016), the Kiefer Hablitzel Prize in Basel (2015), the Fonds cantonal d'art contemporain de Genève work grant in New York (2014), the Manor Art Prize (2014) and a Swiss Art Award in Basel (2013).

Sonia Kacem has had several solo exhibitions, including *Between the scenes*, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster (2019); *Did snow fall on the pyramids?*, T293, Rome (2018); *Carcasse*, Centre culturel suisse, Paris (2017); *Night Shift*, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève (2016); *Loulou replay*, Kunstverein Nürnberg, Nuremberg (2015); *Bermuda Triangle*, Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen (2015); and *Loulou*, MAMCO Genève (2014). She has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, such as *Figures on a Ground*, Fondation CAB, Brussels (2020); *Delirious*, Lustwarande Tilburg (2019); *Flatland / Abstractions Narratives #2*, Mudam Luxembourg (2017); *Stipendium Vordemberge-Gildewart*, Kunsthaus CentrePasquArt, Biel (2015); and *Time*, Oslo10, Basel (2013).

MEDIATION PROGRAM

PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS

Wednesdays at 6.15 pm and Sundays at 11.45 am

SUNDAY STUDIO – WORKSHOP FOR CHILDREN AGED 5 AND ABOVE

November 1 / 15 / 22 / 29, December 6 / 13, January 10 / 17, 11.15 am to 1.15 pm

INDIVIDUALLY ESCORTED EXHIBITION VIEWINGS

November 14, 11.30 am / 1.30 pm / 3 pm; December 12, 11.30 am / 1.30 pm / 3 pm

For more information and events, see: hauskonstruktiv.ch

The digital program and the mediation offered on site are constantly being updated and adapted to the current situation.

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PRESS CONTACT

Ladina Hurst, +41 (0)44 217 70 98, l.hurst@hauskonstruktiv.ch

ZÜRICH ART PRIZE

The *Zurich Art Prize* was set up in 2007 by Museum Haus Konstruktiv together with Zurich Insurance Group Ltd, patron partner of the museum, and now has a strong international presence. Each year, an independent artist is honored, who operates at the interfaces where the cultural heritage of constructivist-concrete and conceptual art, on one hand, meets contemporary trends on the other hand. Since 2017, the prize donated by Zurich Insurance Group Ltd has consisted of a CHF 80,000 budget for the production of a solo exhibition at Museum Haus Konstruktiv and CHF 20,000 in prize money for the artist.

NOMINATION PROCEDURE

Each year, Sabine Schaschl, director of Museum Haus Konstruktiv, invites six curators, critics and art experts to each nominate one artist, who has already made an impression as a visible force on the international art scene, and who demonstrates an intellectual extrapolation of the constructivist-concrete and conceptual heritage within contemporary art. The nominations for this year's award came from: Katia Baudin, director of Kunstmuseen Krefeld; Giovanni Carmine, director of Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen; Helen Hirsch, director of Kunstmuseum Thun; Kati Kivinen, collection curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki; Elsy Lahner, contemporary art curator at the Albertina Museum, Vienna; and Matthieu Poirier, freelance art historian and former curator at Palais d'Iéna, Paris.

SHORTLIST 2021

Alongside Sonia Kacem, the following were also nominated for the 2021 *Zurich Art Prize*: Jasmina Cibic (b. 1979 in Ljubljana, Slovenia), Jakob Lena Knebl (b. 1970 in Baden, Austria), Artur Lescher (b. 1962 in São Paulo, Brazil), Johanna Unzueta (b. 1974 in Santiago, Chile) and Jorinde Voigt (b. 1977 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany).

JURY 2020

The composition of the jury was as follows: Sabine Schaschl, director of Museum Haus Konstruktiv (chairperson); Tobia Bezzola, director of Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana in Lugano; Carin Gantenbein, head of professional liability at Zurich Insurance Company Ltd in Zurich; Friedemann Malsch, director of Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein in Vaduz; Matthias Mühling, director of Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; and Stella Rollig, CEO and scientific director at the museum Belvedere, Vienna.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

2020: Amalia Pica (b. 1978 in Neuquén, Argentina)
 2019: Leonor Antunes (b. 1972 in Lisbon, Portugal)
 2018: Robin Rhode (b. 1976 in Cape Town, South Africa)
 2017: Marguerite Humeau (b. 1986 in Cholet, France)
 2016: Nairy Baghramian (b. 1971 in Isfahan, Iran)
 2015: Latifa Echakhch (b. 1974 in El Khnansa, Morocco)
 2014: Haroon Mirza (b. 1977 in London, UK)
 2013: Adrián Villar Rojas (b. 1980 in Rosario, Argentina)
 2012: Mariana Castillo Deball (b. 1975 in Mexico City)
 2011: Mai-Thu Perret (b. 1976 in Geneva)
 2010: Ryan Gander (b. 1976 in London, UK)
 2009: Tino Sehgal (b. 1976 in London, UK)
 2007: Carsten Nicolai (b. 1965 in Karl-Marx-Stadt, now Chemnitz, Germany)