

secession

Vereinigung bildender KünstlerInnen Wiener Secession
Friedrichstraße 12, A-1010 Wien
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Press release

Karimah Ashadu

Plateau

July 2 – September 5, 2021

Grafisches Kabinett

Preview for the press: Thursday, July 1, 2021, 11 a.m.
Please register at presse@secession.at

Opening: Thursday, July 1, 2021, .6 p.m.–8 p.m.

First day of the exhibition: Friday, July 2, 2021, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Karimah Ashadu's practice examines conditions of living and working in the socioeconomic context of West Africa. The filmmaker and visual artist's new film installation *Plateau*, which premieres at the Secession, follows undocumented workers mining for tin and columbite on the Jos Plateau in central Nigeria.

The rugged landscape dotted with manmade craters and ponds has been mined for almost three thousand years. During the colonial era, tin mining expanded into an industry that had its heyday in the 1940s; after the expiration of the International Tin Agreement in 1985, the market collapsed and the mines closed, leaving the workers jobless. Unlike earlier generations of laborers, who were forced to seek employment and surrender the riches they extracted to the colonial masters, today's miners are self-employed. Buoyed by hopes of striking it rich, they accept the hazardous working conditions and heavy physical labor, digging through their land a second time in search of the minerals.

Without moralizing, Ashadu brings into focus the beauty in the everyday and people's self-reliance and struggle for emancipation. The artist explains her vision for the work:

“What *Plateau* has taught me is that, with all my films, I'm always looking for ways to consider labor as a kind of a practice towards independence. I'm really interested in industry and economy because it makes a country what it is and how people, through work, bring the country, its values and its ideas alive. And again, this ties into the notion of independence and how that plays out today. So not just independent as a country, but with regards to individual circumstances.”

In the film, workers, villagers, and landowners speak on how they see themselves in society, their lives and traditions, and reflect on the devastation of the land, on inequities and property relations as well as risks and profits. Their testimony opens up a variety of views on the complex history of tin mining and the exploitation of the area's natural resources. The protagonists' voices narrate; meanwhile, the artist's unconventional cinematographic practice charts the space between herself, the camera, and the bodies it records. Ashadu's approach to filmmaking is grounded in observation, submitting to the anatomy of motion in order to unlock novel perspectives. Her meandering gaze engages with the mineworkers' bodies, their hands and feet

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digging in the sludge, but also lingering on the rich colors of the landscape, its luminous tones of russet and ochre yellow. The cactus motif, introduced in the very opening shot, serves as a kind of guiding metaphor. The Berom people not only ascribe a vital role in the cultivation and security of the land to the plant, they also identify with its resilience and hardiness.

For the Secession, Ashadu has developed an installation that revisits and condenses various aspects of the film. Her poetic editing technique, which lets her orchestrate diverse voices, is further enhanced by the conceptual realization as a two-channel work. Brief sequences that suddenly flash up on the small screen repeatedly disrupt the narrative flow with close-up shots of hands or feet buried in mud, confronting the viewer with alternative viewpoints.

The earthy tones that characterize the film, recur in the design of the exhibition gallery and the staircase. Ashadu's installation also encompasses two photographs reworked with clay and a series of sculptures made of clay – which the artist sourced from Jos, found clothes, tinted glass and raw tin. The engraved terms reflect the ambivalence of the workers' strenuous and high-stake lives. Glass as a physical material, meanwhile, has immediate bearing on colonial power structures and mechanisms of visibility; as the artist observes:

“this juxtaposition of materials brings a very interesting balance between a sense of weightlessness and a grounding. The idea for glass comes from stories I was told during research in Jos. Back during colonial mining, apparently, the indigenes of the land weren't familiar with glass or mirrors, and the colonizers would bring mirrors and glasses and set them down in the soil, so workers felt as if they were being watched. So glass was essentially used as a mechanism of control (...) it made me think of that vulnerability of being watched.”

Karimah Ashadu was born in London in 1985 and lives and works in Hamburg and Lagos.

Plateau is commissioned and produced by Fondazione in Between Art Film and Golddust by Ashadu.

The exhibition program is conceived by the board of the Secession.

Curator: Annette Südbeck

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Artist's book**Karimah Ashadu. Open Shields**

Format: 19 x 25,5 cm

Details: Brochure, half-linen binding with copper clasp, 64 pages

Concept: Karimah Ashadu

Text: Erika Balsom

ca. 50 images

Secession 2021

Distribution: Revolver Publishing

EUR 26,40

Research images taken on my mobile phone, led by impulse and intuition at a time when this project was shaping into fruition. They embody the spirit, energy and reality of tin mining in Nigeria's Plateau state.

Cloth and clay. Dark skin—argil ashen. Bodies melt into landscape. Residues of the past present—in water, soil, crop and terrain.

Text by Erika Balsom weaves through, delving into the context and concept of the film *Plateau*.

A 1977 Commonwealth advertisement from the British *Times* interrupts the pages, outlining zealous plans for Nigeria's future. (Karimah Ashadu)

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Exhibitions

Hauptraum

Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster: VOLCANIC EXCURSION (A VISION)

July 2 – September 5, 2021

Galerie

František Lesák: Supposition and Reality

July 2 – September 5, 2021

Grafisches Kabinett

Karimah Ashadu: Plateau

July 2 – September 5, 2021

Artist's books

Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster. Volcanic Excursion. A Vision,

ca. 50 images, € 26,40

František Lesák. Supposition and Reality,

152 pages, ca. 100 images, € 35,00

Karimah Ashadu. Open Shields, 64 pages, ca. 50 images, € 26,40

Permanent presentation

Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Beethoven – Painting and Music in cooperation with
Wiener Symphoniker

Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Admission

Adults € 9,50; Pupils, students and senior citizens € 6,-

Press contact Secession

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