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Northwestern Now (//)

Acclaimed artist Kader Attia to unveil new solo exhibition

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“Reflecting Memory,” 2016, 40 min, HD film, courtesy of the artist, Lehmann Maupin, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, and Galerie Krinzinger

- First solo show in Chicago for 2016 Marcel Duchamp Prize winner
- Exhibition inspired by cross-disciplinary research at Northwestern
- Jan. 21 opening reception includes a public conversation with the artist
- Artist commission from Block Museum premiered at Centre Pompidou

EVANSTON--- Internationally-acclaimed French-Algerian artist Kader Attia, known for provocative exhibitions exploring colonial legacies, will unveil a solo exhibition of new work commissioned by Northwestern University’s [Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art](#) (<http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/>).

["Kader Attia: Reflecting Memory"](http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/view/exhibitions/upcoming-exhibitions/kader-attia.html) (<http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/view/exhibitions/upcoming-exhibitions/kader-attia.html>) will run Jan. 21 to April 16, 2017, at the Block Museum, 40 Arts Circle Drive, on the Evanston campus.

Attia is internationally recognized for a rigorous, research-based practice that he translates through a variety of media including photography, sculpture, installation and video. His work frequently reflects on the wide-ranging effects of colonialism, the repercussions of Western power on non-Western cultures and the physical and psychological impact of trauma and its aftermath, which Attia examines as a kind of "repair."

Based in part on the artist's research in the collections of Northwestern University's [Herskovits Library of African Studies](http://www.library.northwestern.edu/libraries-collections/herskovits-library/index.html) (<http://www.library.northwestern.edu/libraries-collections/herskovits-library/index.html>) and interviews with University faculty across disciplines, Attia's Block installation features collage, sculpture and an extended film-essay that premiered at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in October 2016.

Featuring new work commissioned by the Block, "Kader Attia: Reflecting Memory" is Attia's first solo presentation of work in Chicago or the Midwest. The artist's 2017 schedule also includes exhibition stops at the Sarjah Biennial in Dakar, Lehmann Maupin in New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney.

"We have been honored to host Attia here at Northwestern University as he has created his new work. He has drawn extensively on the University's 'brain trust'— its faculty, its students, the Block team and the world-renowned Herskovits Library," said [Lisa Corrin](http://www.arthistory.northwestern.edu/people/faculty/affiliate-faculty/lisa-corrin.html) (<http://www.arthistory.northwestern.edu/people/faculty/affiliate-faculty/lisa-corrin.html>), the Museum's Ellen Philips Katz Director. "His research has uncovered unexpected connections, enabling us to consider traumas of the past that remain urgently relevant."

[Kader Attia](http://kaderattia.de/) (<http://kaderattia.de/>) grew up moving between Algeria and the suburbs of Paris and used this experience of living within two cultures to develop a dynamic practice that confronts identity and cultural difference. His debut solo exhibition was held in 1996 in the Republic of Congo. Since then, his artistic career has gained major international recognition with inclusion in exhibitions such as the 50th Venice Biennale (2003), dOCUMENTA13 (2012), the 8th Lyon Biennial (2015), the 5th Marrakech Biennial (2016) and Dak'Art (2016).

Attia's work has been included in recent exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, the Tate Modern and the Guggenheim Museum. In 2016, he was awarded the [Marcel Duchamp Prize](https://news.artnet.com/art-world/kader-attia-wins-2016-prix-marcel-duchamp-709298) (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/kader-attia-wins-2016-prix-marcel-duchamp-709298>), one of France's most prestigious arts awards. His solo exhibition, "[Sacrifice and Harmony](http://mmk-frankfurt.de/en/exhibitions/review/2016/exhibition-details/article/kader_attia_sacrifice_and_harmony/)," (http://mmk-frankfurt.de/en/exhibitions/review/2016/exhibition-details/article/kader_attia_sacrifice_and_harmony/) at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, was named German exhibition of the year by the International Association of Art Critics (AICA).

Research-based practice

The artist is known for provocative, philosophical works such as the 2009 piece "[Untitled \(Ghardaïa\)](https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/34658)," (<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/34658>) a replica of an Algerian city made out of couscous, which was shown in 2016 at the Guggenheim Museum of Art, and the monumental "[The](#)

[Repair From Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures \(2012\)](http://u-in-u.com/nafas/articles/2012/kader-attia-documenta/),” (<http://u-in-u.com/nafas/articles/2012/kader-attia-documenta/>) which features rows of steel shelving and display cases bearing sculpture, photography, African art and WWI trench art, exhibited at Documenta in Kassel, Germany.

Attia’s longstanding analysis of the themes of psychological and corporeal repair is essential to his practice. “From culture to nature, from gender to architecture, from science to philosophy – any system of life is an infinite process of repair,” the artist said, describing his art.

In his Block Museum installation, Attia will expand on his long-term exploration of repair, both of the body and of society, and will probe the legacies of colonialism, slavery and xenophobia. Among its themes, the installation considers the “phantom limb” phenomenon, in which an amputee feels as if pain is emanating from a missing limb. In varying ways, the works draw parallels between this neurological sensation and traumatic historical memories that are passed on from generation to generation. Among the works on display will be the extended film-essay “[Réfléchir la Mémoire, \(Reflecting on Memory\)](http://www.selectionsarts.com/2016/10/kader-attias-year/),” (<http://www.selectionsarts.com/2016/10/kader-attias-year/>) which was informed in part by Attia’s research at Northwestern and which recently premiered at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris as part of the Marcel DuChamp Prix exhibition.

“The Block has embraced the opportunity to work with Attia throughout his process of research, knowledge production and execution, and is pleased to present this U.S. premiere of new work that extends his ongoing explorations,” Block Curator Janet Dees said.

A perfect match for Northwestern

Attia’s engagement with the Block Museum of Art originated with the work of [Antawan I. Byrd](http://www.arthistory.northwestern.edu/people/graduate-students/antawan-byrd.html) (<http://www.arthistory.northwestern.edu/people/graduate-students/antawan-byrd.html>), art history Ph.D. candidate and associate curator of the 2015 [Bamako photography biennial](http://aperture.org/blog/bamako/) (<http://aperture.org/blog/bamako/>), who served as the Block Museum curatorial graduate fellow in 2015/16. Recognizing Byrd’s expertise in contemporary art, particularly in Africa, Block Museum Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs Kathleen Bickford Berzock challenged him to research the extraordinary photography collections in the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies in order to identify an artist who might engage the material and the collection more broadly.

“I’ve always been drawn to the way Attia’s artwork occasions a re-examining of history,” said Byrd. “Attia struck me as someone who could use the language of contemporary art to imaginatively probe objects in the collection and uncover the layers of history they sustain.”

The Block Museum curatorial team of Kathleen Bickford Berzock, Antawan I. Byrd and Janet Dees brought complementary art historical perspectives to the project, connecting Kader to the team at Northwestern University library and to faculty across a broad spectrum in order realize this complex collaboration.

“Attia was a perfect match and was game to partner with us,” Berzock noted. “An artist whose work exposes and questions the very nature of archives and the creation of knowledge, as well as the legacies of colonialism in Africa, would be working in a world-renowned library of African Studies on the campus of a research university.”

Attia’s Block Museum installation evolved out of a series of research visits to the Herskovits Library,

where Esmeralda Kale, the library's George and Mary LeCron Foster Curator, and other staff connected him to the library's rare holdings. During additional research trips, the artist's scope expanded to the broader library collection and to conversation with faculty across disciplines. Instrumental to Attia's research were visits to the Northwestern Rehabilitation Institute to hear of innovative work underway with prosthetics, as well as exchanges with Todd Kuiken, Center for Bionic Medicine; John Spanias, department of biomedical engineering and surgery; Caroline Bledsoe, department of anthropology; Peter Locke, Global Health Studies; Huey Copeland, department of art history; Harvey Young, department of theater; and David McClean and Yevegenia Kozorovitsky, department of neurobiology. The artist's journey led him through topics as varied as traditional and modernist architecture, water, psychopathology and prosthetics and culminated in taped conversations with several Northwestern faculty.

"Kader Attia: Reflecting Memory" highlights the Block Museum's dedication to presenting global perspectives and capitalizes on Northwestern's long-standing investment in African and African Diaspora studies through the unparalleled resources of the Herskovits Library. The exhibition also continues the museum's commitment to commissioning new work by connecting artists to the wealth of Northwestern's multidisciplinary resources and research strengths.

"We are committed to offering opportunities for artists to experiment, to intervene in the museum's spaces and to mine the resources of a major research university as inspiration for their work," Corrin said. "We believe that the artist's voice should be central to the life of a university and that the Block has an important role to play in ensuring that students and members of the broader community we serve have contact with the creative process as an essential part of their Block experience."

Opening Conversation

The "Kader Attia: Reflecting Memory" exhibition opening is 2 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 21. Block Museum curators Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Janet Dees will give context to Attia's work and unique research. This presentation will be followed by a conversation between Attia and Northwestern faculty Caroline Bledsoe (anthropology) and Peter Locke (global health studies), moderated by Antawan I. Byrd. The reception is free and open to the public.

Sponsorship

"Kader Attia: Reflecting Memory" is organized by the Block Museum in partnership with the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies. Support for the exhibition has been provided by the Myers Foundations, the Diane and Craig Solomon Contemporary Art Fund, the Alsdorf Gallery at the Block Museum Endowment Fund and the Kaplan Institute for the Humanities.

About the Block Museum

Northwestern University's [Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art](http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/) (<http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/>) is a dynamic, imaginative and innovative teaching and learning resource for the University and its surrounding communities, featuring a global exhibition program that crosses time periods and cultures and serves as a springboard for thought-provoking discussions relevant to our lives today. The museum also commissions new work by artists to foster connections between artists and the public through the creative process. Each year, the Block

mounts exhibitions; organizes and hosts lectures, symposia and workshops involving artists, scholars, curators and critics; and screens classic and contemporary films at its in-house cinema.

Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. The Museum is closed on Mondays. Admission is free and open to the public.

Block Museum parking is available in the Segal Visitor's Center garage and the two-level lakeside lot directly south of the museum and is free of charge on weekends and after 4 p.m. on weekdays. For more information, visit the [Block Museum website \(http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu\)](http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu).

The Block Museum is a member of the [Northwestern Arts Circle \(https://artscircle.northwestern.edu/\)](https://artscircle.northwestern.edu/). The Arts Circle brings together film, humanities, literary arts, music, theatre, dance and visual arts.

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Northwestern University

633 Clark Street
Evanston, IL 60208

Phone number
Evanston
(847) 491-3741

Phone number
Chicago
(312) 503-8649

Email address
[webmaster@northwestern.edu \(mailto:webmaster@northwestern.edu\)](mailto:webmaster@northwestern.edu)