

**Hamdi Attia**  
**TOPONYMY OUTSIDE IN**

**Exhibition : 27 october – 30 november 2018**

**Vernissage : 26 october 2018 | h19**

VOICE gallery in Marrakech is pleased to invite you to the opening of Hamid Attia's solo show TOPONYMY OUTSIDE IN, on october 26, 2018 at 7 pm.

Used as tools for economic, political and military power, maps have always embodied their author's vision. As such, the cartographer is a creator, with the responsibility of transcribing a subjective point of view through images.

Atlases all seem to meet predefined stakes, highlighting certain elements, directing the gaze on the depicted space according to its author's meaning, therefore inducing territorial marking out and appropriation through the manipulation of transcribed and developed informations.

Cartography as a medium is used by many artists throughout the Arab world. Its use as a medium enables to challenge the eurocentered planispheres. The latter are nowadays viewed rather like historical objects bearing an obsolete vision of the world.

Hamid Attia's work is also transformed through his researches and the different aspects he wishes to show. It is a progressive work process gradually taking place, enriching the initial script with physical impressions.

In *TOPONOMY OUTSIDE IN*, the artist takes the part of the objective and subjective cartographer. He creates a fictive world, object of the powerful cartographer's gaze. As the emergence of territoriality goes through acts of naming and language, the history of maps is inherently linked to that of toponymy.

Toponymy is as much the translation of a political power whose names are invested with a symbolic function. By inventing as many cities and their corresponding names, it is as though the artist was resetting the meters so that a new world order can be established.

Hamdi draws inspiration from the writings of various authors, such as Marquez or Borges, in order to reaffirm the arbitrary nature of maps, borders, and the modern state. Influenced by 19<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian intellectual and activist Mustafa Kamil's well known saying "If I weren't an Egyptian, I would have wished to be an Egyptian », Hamdi Attia seeks to defy the nationalist and political certainties linked to the saying and to the collective memory of his country. By replacing the word « Egyptian » with a proper noun or a common noun, the modern and contemporary history of Egypt is turned upside down. Through *The World Map Project* and the creation of a parallel imaginary world, the artist questions his own identity « If I weren't on this Earth, I would have wished to be on my own Earth ». The viewer is therefore confronted with similar thoughts : where could he / she place himself / herself ?

Maps are again an component of memory, of subjective memory linked to a paradoxically universal and exclusive history. Nowadays, borders are equally erased with globalization and mass culture, and notably reinforced through migratory politics. Hamdi Attia plays on these elements of memory and representation

not only thanks to the toponymy of places, but also to the definition of borders, in order to use them as geopolitical claims.

The installation *A re-arrangement of the 196 Palestinian territories in the West Bank* is a transcription of the Palestinian occupied territories as well as Israel's exploitation of the territories water resources.

Here, the artist is interested in the redefinition of borders and the territorial and ecological consequences of such an occupation, whilst examining the part played by these representations in the collective memory.

One could see here a metaphore for a whole world being occupied. It is a clear positioning, both ideological and political. The viewer finds himself / herself disturbed, intimately moved, between the known and unknown elements stirred together with those the artist wishes to bring to light.

Hamdi Attia nevertheless manages to express himself in a unique manner. He disturbs the eye of the viewer. By changing the names of places, using seas as solid rather than empty spaces, as demarcation elements and concepts in their own right. Content becomes container, and the artist blurs landmarks that become a point of convergence born out of a reversion, a reversal, an obliteration. He rethinks language, drawing our attention to an esthetic vocabulary, while offering a critical exploration of the standardization of spaces.

Text by Cassandre Gil