

Press release

Zineb Sedira: UNDER THE SKY AND OVER THE SEA

16 Oct. 2009 – 31 Jan. 2010

Hall / Wing / MEDIApoint / Entrance hall /

Brunch meeting for the media on Thursday, 15 October 2009, from 10am–2pm. Artist Zineb Sedira will be present. An open information meeting for the public will be held on Friday, 16 October 2009, at 12 noon, when the artist will present the exhibition. Opening of the exhibition is on Friday, 16 October 2009, at 6 pm. Welcome!

Zineb Sedira (b.1963) was born in Paris into an Algerian immigrant family. She lived in France up to 1986, when she moved to London. Sedira works in multicultural cities and on three continents. She investigates the currents of immigration from North Africa to Europe through a hybrid of documentary tradition and Algerian and French contemporary cinema. Using video, short film and photography as her media, Sedira investigates the process whereby immigrants abandon the framework of their original culture and start to build a new identity. An identity which demands that they assimilate a new culture and its language.

Sedira's first visit to her parents' native country, Algeria, took place in 2001, after the end of the Civil War that had lasted almost a decade and a half. Her parents returned to Algeria after having lived in France for twenty-four years. The theme of her videos *Mother Tongue* (2002) and *Mother, Father and I* (2003) is the Algerian Civil War, but they are also about the powerful oral tradition of storytelling in Arab culture and the role of women as those who pass on family stories. Her visits to Algeria inspired Sedira to consider more broadly the movement of immigration from Africa to Europe and the cultural, economic and ecological consequences of globalisation.

The centrepiece of the exhibition is the immersive visual and audio work *Floating Coffins* (2009). It was shot on the coast of Mauritania, in the port city of Nouadhibou. The work juxtaposes two things on the coast: ships abandoned on shore and illegal immigration. Affluent countries in the West use the coast of Mauritania as a dumping grounds where they abandon old carriers of trade to be eaten by rust, whereas Sub-Saharan Africans use the city as a port of embarkation on their way to Europe. The area is also famous as a stopover ground of birds migrating between Europe and Southern Africa. In Sedira's pictures, the threat of ecological and human catastrophe in the area is accentuated by the stillness of the landscape; lifeless ships and human bodies floating in the sea and washed on the shore. The soundtrack by *Mikhail Karikis* combines ambient sounds recorded in Nouadhibou with composed sounds.

In *Saphir* (2006) and *MiddleSea* (2008), the Mediterranean serves as a metaphor for the historical, physical and conceptual landscape between Algeria and France. The works contrast fellow countrymen who stayed behind in Algeria with those who chose to immigrate. The female protagonist of *Saphir* returns to Algiers and takes a room near the port in a hotel dating back to colonial times. The port is like a stage where arrivals and departures and suspension of time come together with the sense of belonging or not belonging to a place. *MiddleSea* is a metaphor of the sea and of life, reflecting their changeable nature. The sea also serves as a wall between South and North, West and East. The sea is a place where histories and memories meet. It is also a geopolitical area that has spawned cultural and historical routes ever since antiquity.

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