



Mouna Karray

NOBODY WILL TALK ABOUT US



33°56'12.8"N 8°09'45.3"E



34°21'53.0"N 8°25'41.0"E



34°28'39.8"N 9°46'49.8"E



How to make
silence speak:
the quiet insistence
of Mouna Karray's
photographs

– *Liese Van Der Watt*

*"I took the road that crosses these dusty
lands, an area that is lifeless yet inhabited,
where the captive figure moves."*

– Mouna Karray, 2015

Mouna Karray's photographs in *Nobody Will Talk About Us* (2012-2015) seem to be carefully poised between the incidental and the deliberate, the random and the planned. Images of different shapes and sizes simulate a road-trip, a visual account of a journey that takes one deeper into the southwestern Tunisia, only to be repeatedly halted – the narrative interrupted as by punctuation, attention arrested – by the strange white object that is casually inserted into the landscape.

It is a startling sight: a white sack of sorts, containing... what exactly? A body restricted inside a bag does not quite describe this haunting image. On the one hand the captive body is clearly trying to free itself – the pressure points of struggling limbs visible under the cloth bag – but at the same time one is struck by the helplessness of it all: a bag dumped in a series of seemingly arbitrary settings.

What to make of this incongruent presence?

Karray explains:

"The captive body in a white bag is a metaphor for the disinherited Tunisian south, a south forgotten by authorities since independence and overlooked up to the present day. The figure embodies the solitude, confinement and restrictions placed on these people in their difficult conditions. They exist in a silent poverty, on arid soils whose foundations were rich with minerals, which have been confiscated and stripped from these oppressed – but not submissive – souls."

Karray relates how she visited this region in the 1990s after reading *Chebika* by French anthropologist Jean Duvignaud, who wrote about this tiny village in southwestern Tunisia that seemed impervious to change. Returning in 2012, she discovers a strange duality – lots of little changes have amounted to not much transformation generally. People were caught between the arrival of modern amenities such as the Internet, schools and roads, and an unchanged impoverished life, largely forgotten by the authorities and the state.

She stages a confrontation in this landscape that cannot be ignored: a body is taken – seemingly like chattel – and placed in various locations. It is an insistent presence, silently witnessing the forgotten people around it. But through its struggle and its persistent wanderings, the captive body also articulates a challenge, testifying to the lives around it and thereby forcing us to see it too, to take notice of this place and these people.

Karray is often attracted to stories that are told by unconventional means. In *Murmurer* (2009) she photographed abandoned walls and architectural sites around Sfax, her hometown, treating them as palimpsests that whisper of time and space. But whereas those images were largely uninhabited, in *Nobody will talk about us* people enter and exit the frame as they would in the snapshots that document a journey, thereby contributing to the narrative.

And as was the case with Duvignaud, the amorphous body silently observes these chance encounters, a quiet presence in every scene. In the smoke-filled brickmaking quarry with the working men, at a makeshift petrol station, next to a road waiting for a ride, in a windswept settlement, we are made to hear this story to which nobody will listen.

As in many anthropological studies, both parties are changed by their meeting – the observed as well as the observer.

Here Karray makes us, her viewers, see this landscape and these people. But they too are potentially empowered by this intervention. Asked what they think the white body-in-a-bag meant, one man answered hopefully "Maybe it's democracy".

It is at this point that photography is at its most powerful: when object and subject meet each other in such a way that both are potentially changed. Karray's use of the captive body is at once a strategic way to make us notice what has hitherto been unseen, and an ongoing trope to signify engagement and the possibility of change.

Mouna Karray

BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1970 in Sfax, Tunisia, Karray studied art and culture in Tunis before moving to Tokyo to complete an MA specialising in photography at the Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics and Arts in 2002. Currently living and working between Paris and Sfax, Karray merges socio-political themes with personal experience to explore constructions of identity and memory.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2016 *Nobody Will Talk About Us*, Tyburn Gallery, London, UK.

2011 *Murmurer*, Galerie El Marsa, Tunis, Tunisia.

Selected Group Exhibitions

2016 *Dak'Art 2016: The 12th Biennale of Contemporary African Art*, Dakar, Senegal.

2015 *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists*, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington DC, USA.

Broken English, Tyburn Gallery, London, UK.

Visible/Invisible, Fondation Blachère, Aix en Provence, France.

2014 *The Divine Comedy*, SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, USA.

The Divine Comedy, MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany.

The Sea is my Land, Triennale di Milano, Milano, Italy.

2013 *The Sea is my Land*, MAXXI, Rome, Italy.

Ici, Ailleurs, Friche la Belle de Mai, Tour-Panorama, Marseille-Provence 2013 European Capital of Culture, Marseille, France.

2012 *Bright Future Contemporary Art from Tunisia*, Ifa Gallery Berlin, Germany.

Dream City, 3rd Edition of Biennial of Contemporary Art in Public Space, Sfax, Tunis, Tunisia.

Dégagements... La Tunisie un an après, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France.

2011 *Pan-African Photography for a Sustainable World*, 9th Edition of the Bamako Encounters, Bamako, Mali.

2010 *A Useful Dream*, BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium.

Picha, Image Encounters, Lubumbashi, Congo.

2009 *Photoquai*, Musée du quai Branly, Paris, France.

Spot on Bamako 2007, Ifa Gallery, Stuttgart, Germany.

2008 *Spot on Bamako 2007*, Ifa Gallery, Berlin, Germany.

Thirtieth Pontevedra Art Biennale, Pontevedra, Spain.

Regards des Photographes Arabes Contemporains, MAMA, Musée National d'art Moderne et Contemporain d'Alger, Algiers, Algeria.

2007 *The 7th African Encounters of Photography*, Bamako, Mali.

2006 *The Revealed Image*, Museum of Kheireddine Palace, Tunis, Tunisia.

Residencies

2012 *Dream City*, 3rd Edition of Biennial of Contemporary Art in Public Space, Sfax, Tunis, Tunisia.

2008 *Je pense à toi*, Siwa O2, Odeon Theater, Paris, France.

2007 Civitella Ranieri Foundation, Umbertide, Italy.

2005 Cité Internationale des Arts de Paris, France.

2004 Centre d'Art Vivant de Rades, Tunisia.

Selected Publications

2014 Njami, Simon (ed.), *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists*, Kerber Verlag: Bielefeld/Berlin, Germany, 2014.

Magee, Carol, *There Is a There There: Place in African Cityscape, Photography and Culture*: Vol. 7, Issue 1, 2014.

2013 Bonami, Francesco and Mazzonis, Emanuela (eds.), *The Sea Is My Land*, Artisti dal Mediterraneo, Feltrinelli: Milan Italy, 2013.

2012 Barsch, Barbara and Bruckbauer (eds.), *Un avenir en Rose*, Contemporary Art from Tunisia, IFA Galerie/Kerber Verlag: Bielefeld/Berlin, Germany, 2012.

2011 Amirsadeghi, Hossein, Mikdadi, Salwa and Shabout, Nada (eds.), *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century*, Transglobe Publishing: London, UK, 2011.

2010 Njami, Simon (ed.), *A Useful Dream: African Photography 1960-2010*, Silvana Editoriale: Milan, Italy, 2010.

Published on the occasion of the solo exhibition
by Mouna Karray *Nobody Will Talk About Us*
Tyburn Gallery, London, 8 April – 21 May 2016

Publisher Tyburn Gallery, London
Design Gusto IDS, Italy
Printing Grafiche Antiga, Italy

© 2016 Tyburn Gallery

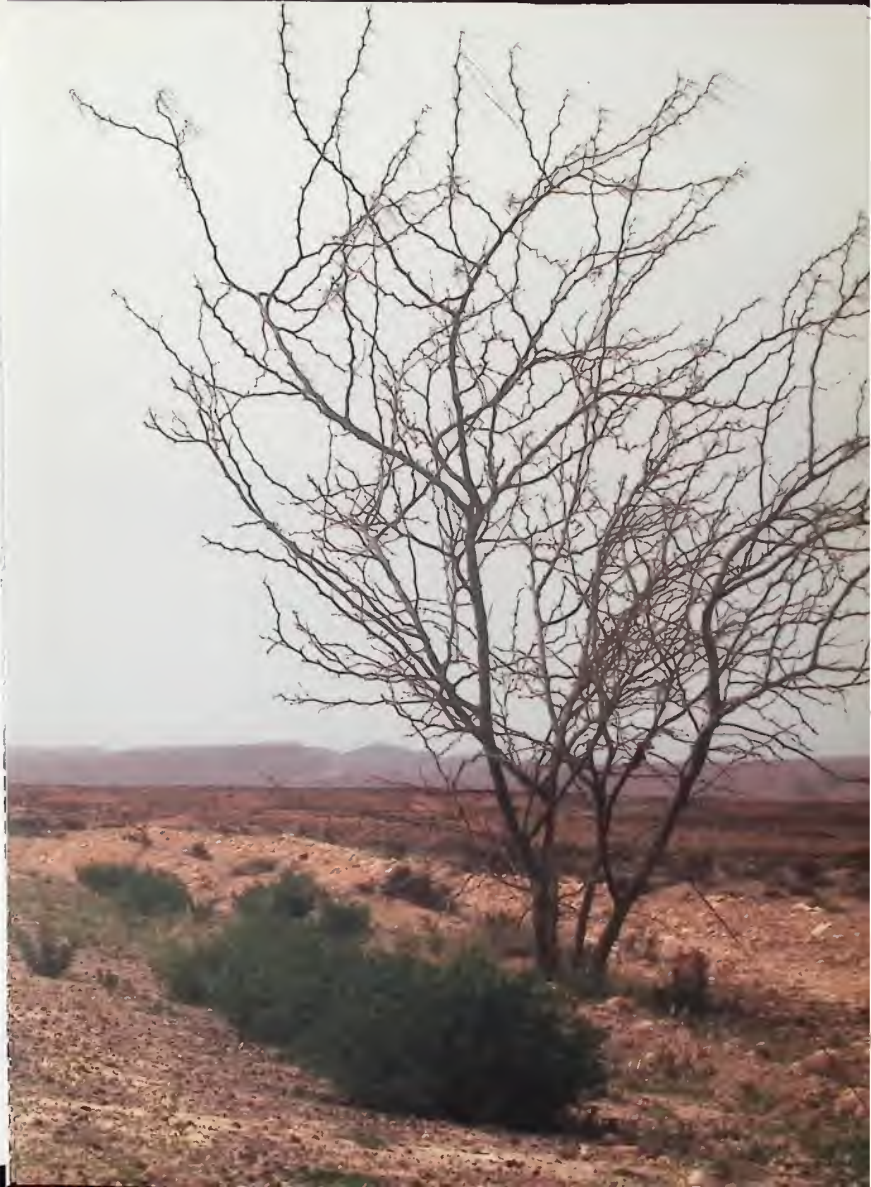
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, in whole
or in part, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by
any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
without prior permission of Tyburn Gallery.

Artworks © Mouna Karray 2016
Text © The author 2016

TYBURN / GALLERY

26 Barrett Street
W1U 1BG, London, UK
T. +44 (0)20 3388 0540

INFO@TYBURNGALLERY.COM
WWW.TYBURNGALLERY.COM



34°25'02.6"N 8°25'10.6"E



33°54'17.9"N 8°06'34.5"E







33°28'34.8"N 9°20'54.3"E

34°20'59.2"N 8°20'11.7"E



34°12'25.3"N 9°59'36.7"E



33°54'17.9"N 8°06'34.5"E



Mouna Karray

NOBODY WILL TALK ABOUT US