

Press release

Grada Kilomba **Opera to a Black Venus**

“What would the bottom of the ocean tell us tomorrow, if emptied of water today?”

21 June - 20 October 2024

Solo exhibition at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden

Press conference


On Friday, 21 June 2024, at 11 a.m. in the presence of the artist Grada Kilomba.

Registration is required by 17 June 2024 via presse@kunsthalle-baden-baden.de

Content

- About the exhibition
- About the artist
- Program
- Press contact
- Information about the Staatliche Kunsthalle

Status: 05 June 2024



With *Opera to a Black Venus*, the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden is dedicating the first comprehensive institutional solo exhibition in Germany to the internationally renowned artist, author and thinker Grada Kilomba (*1968, Lisbon, lives and works in Berlin). The exhibition shows her unique practice of storytelling, which interrogates concepts of violence and repetition – using performance, choreography, video, large scale sculptural and sonic installations. Her work has been described as a „new post-colonial minimalism“, using form, image and movement to blur the boundaries between disciplines.

The exhibition will be opened on Friday, 21 June 2024 at 7 p.m.


The staging of her works unfolds the title of the exhibition, *Opera to a Black Venus*; makes reference to the Black history of resilience and resistance, and is dedicated to the entanglement between ecological collapse and colonial injustice.

At the heart of the exhibition is the new commission *Opera to a Black Venus* (2024), a large scale video installation and *Labyrinth* (2024), a site specific spatial installation, both presented for the first time to the public, at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden.

About the exhibition

In *Opera to a Black Venus* (2024), Kilomba stages a contemporary Opera dedicated to a Black Venus, who inhabits the bottom of the sea and becomes the oracle of stories about memory and resilience. In a futuristic scenario, a desolate landscape reveals the archaeology of human existence. The artist has created a unique ensemble, with sopranos, contraltos and tenors as well as percussionists and ballet dancers to elaborate this work. The natural scenography celebrates the few remnants of living nature and encourages reflection on strategies of survival and resistance: Fragile plants, stones, rocks and sand become storytellers whispering through the wind, their stories of survival echoing off the boulders. The artist uses the boat as a metaphor to the politics of violence and draws on her subversive and poetic visual language to ask: *“What would the bottom of the ocean tell us tomorrow, if emptied of water today?”*

In *Labyrinth* (2024), a large scale installation on textile, forming geometrical rectangles, Kilomba creates paths and ways through the gallery room. The installation displays the possibility and impossibility of different routes, evoking both the transatlantic slave trade and the constant struggle for global freedom, space and movement. The use of cotton fabric, reaffirms the artist’s



practice on natural and efemeral materials such as soil, stone and wood, reinscribing the materiality of history and the sea as an archive of a violent politics. Kilomba uses these metaphorical elements as a stage to raise new questions about our shared present and future, subverting time and space and disrupting the linearity of historical repetition.

Selected earlier works, such as *Table Goods* (2017), *Illusions Vol. II*, *Oedipus* (2018), *Illusions Vol. II*, *Antigone* (2019), *18 Verses* (2022) and *Sounds of Water* (2023), will be presented in dialogue with the new works, creating a continuity in the narrative politics.


A publication project, in the form of a catalogue, will witness and document the collective process between the artist, the artist studio and the institution while making this exhibition, in dialogue with invited writers such as Denise Ferreira da Silva (University of British Columbia, Vancouver), Tamsin Hong (Sepertine Gallery, London), and Ashish Ghadiali (Radical Ecology & Black Atlantic, London).

Opera to a Black Venus (2024) is the last part of a trilogy, initiated with the large-scale sculptural installation and performance *O Barco / The Boat* (2021), commissioned by the BoCa Biennial of Contemporary Art, Lisbon, and the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden. The second part of the trilogy, *18 Verses* (2022), was commissioned by the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin. In 2022, Kilomba presented the installation and performance "O Barco", (2021) at the Lictentaler Park, where the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden is located, as part of the "Nature and State" (Summer, 2022).

Opera to a Black Venus (2024), is commissioned by the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Germany, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain. The new work and the entire exhibition will be presented for the first time as a major solo show in both museums: at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden from 21 June to 20 October 2024, followed by an exhibition at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, from 19 November 2024 to 3 March 2025.

Grada Kilomba

Grada Kilomba is a Berlin-based Portuguese artist whose work deals with memory, trauma and post-colonialism. Using performance, staged readings, video, photography and large-scale sculptural and acoustic installations, the artist scrutinises concepts of knowledge, violence and repetition. Kilomba's work is best known for her subversive practice of storytelling, in which she creates a poetic and immersive visual language and gives her own texts body,



voice, form and movement. „What stories are told? How are they told? Where are they told? And told by whom?“ are constant questions in Kilomba’s work. This year, Kilomba is the recipient of the Angela Davis Honorary Professorship 2024 at Goethe University in Frankfurt – „Grada Kilomba: The Art of Presenting Knowledge“.

She holds a doctorate in philosophy from the Free University of Berlin, and in 2023 the artist was awarded the title of Doctor Honoris Causa by the University of ISPA, Lissa-bon, in recognition of her artistic and intellectual work.

Her works have been presented in important international exhibitions, such as: Bienal sur, Buenos Aires; La Biennale de Lubumbashi V, Lubumbashi; 10th Berlin Biennale, Berlin; Documenta 14, Kassel; 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo. Selected solo and group exhibitions: Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Somerset House, London; Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Turin; Matarador, Madrid; MUAC-Museo Universitario d’Arte Contemporanea, Mexico City; Amant Art Foundation, New York; AROS-Kunsthall Aarhus, Aarhus; Bo-Ca, Lisbon; Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki; Pinacoteca de São Paulo, São Paulo; Bildmuseet, Umeå; PAC- Padiglione d’Arte Contemporanea, Milan; Kunsthall Charlottetborg, Copenhagen; The Power Plant, Toronto; Kunsthalle Baden Baden; Kadist Art Foundation, Paris; Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, Tokyo; MAAT - Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, Lisbon; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Norval Foundation, Cape Town; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; Museum Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, and others.

She was co-curator of the 35th São Paulo Biennial, *Choreographies of the Impossible*, 2023.

Kilomba’s works can be found internationally in many important public and private collections, including the Tate Modern Collection, London; Hammer Museum Collection, Los Angeles; Royal Dutch Collection, Amsterdam; Rennie Collection, Toronto; International African American Museum Collection, Charleston; Hessel Museum of Art, New York; Gulbenkian Modern Collection, Lisbon; Fitzwilliam Museum Collection, Cambridge, and many others. She has been a visiting professor at several international universities such as the Humboldt University of Berlin, the University of Legon, Accra, and the University of Applied Arts, Vienna, to name but a few. Kilomba worked for several years at the renowned Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin, where she developed the acclaimed project „*Kosmos²*“, an artistic and political intervention with refugee artists. She is the author of the highly acclaimed book „*Plantation Memories*“ (Unrast, 2008), which summarises episodes of everyday racism in the form of



psychoanalytical short stories. Her book has been translated into several languages worldwide. The artist is represented by the Goodman Gallery in London, Cape Town and Johannesburg as well as the Pace Gallery in New York.



Program

Opening weekend

21 and 22 June 2024

Friday, 21 June

7 p.m. Exhibition opening with the artist Grada Kilomba and the curators Çağla İlk and Misal Adnan Yıldız

Saturday, 22 June

11.00 Uhr Exhibition tour with the curators
Çağla İlk and Misal Adnan Yıldız

12.00 Uhr Artist talk with Grada Kilomba

Press contact

Shirley M. Schalla-Calderón

T: +49 7221 300 76 410

schalla-calderon@kunsthalle-baden-baden.de

Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Open on all holidays except December 24 and 31.

Prices

7€, reduced 5€, Friday free entry

Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden

Lichtentaler Allee 8a

76530 Baden-Baden

www.kunsthalle-baden-baden.de

The Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden is an institution of the State of Baden-Württemberg under the auspices of the Ministry of Science, Research and the Arts of Baden-Württemberg.



Baden-Württemberg

MINISTERIUM FÜR WISSENSCHAFT, FORSCHUNG UND KUNST