

Amant

Grada Kilomba: Heroines, Birds and Monsters

On view June 3 – October 3, 2021

Amant Foundation opens its doors in 2021 with Grada Kilomba: “Heroines, Birds and Monsters,” the first solo exhibition of the artist in the United States, presenting her unique form of storytelling.

Working with theory, performance, film, and literature, Kilomba reveals the narratives of the colonial past, giving space to the silenced voices whose traumas are ever present. In her own words: “What if history has not been told properly? What if our history is haunted by cyclical violence precisely because it has not been buried properly?”



Grada Kilomba, Heroines, Birds and Monsters series, Sphinx Act I, 2020, C-Print, 60 x 40 in. (Key exhibition image). Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery.

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Grada Kilomba's work is showcased across three of Amant's buildings, transforming them into a theatre stage where characters, gestures, words, sounds and props unfold into a hybrid body, exchanging roles and staging a new dramaturgy that traverses geographies and temporalities.

A World of Illusions (2017 - 2019) forms the centrepiece of the exhibition. In this large sculptural video installation, on display at 932 Grand St, Kilomba radically reinterprets three well-known Greek myths to expose the unresolved tragedies of the post-colonial condition. Drawing on her academic background in psychoanalysis, the artist dedicates Narcissus and Echo, to the politics of invisibility; Oedipus the King, is dedicated to the politics of violence; and the tragedy of Antigone, exposes the politics of erasure and the importance of ceremonial memory. Combining music, mime, and dance, she re-stages the fables, using the African oral tradition of storytelling –the Griot– and building on analogies to the modern patriarchal system through the inclusion of a postcolonial lens.

At 315 Maujer St., a set of images continues to portray the mythical narratives using different formats and methodologies. The trilogy reincarnates as a sequence of photographs with the shared title of *Heroines, Birds and Monsters* (2020), portraying the female protagonists in a sculptural pose. In *The Desire Project* (2016) the representational image disappears entirely, with text displayed as the only visual element accompanied by musical rhythms substituting for the narrator's voice. The concluding work, *Table of Goods* (2017), a sculpture born out of ritual-performance, presents as both an object and landscape of the whole exhibition. The trans-atlantic trade between Europe, America, and Africa—sugar, coffee, cacao--are interred in a pile of soil. Kilomba displays these extracted materials as a burial, a symbolic ritual of remembrance of the slave trade as historical trauma, of which the consequences on the psyche are yet to be thoroughly explored.

"Heroines, Birds and Monsters" is an exhibition that applies a new poetic, theoretical, and political framework to the colonial past, and the ways by which these narratives continue to embed themselves. "Retelling history anew and properly is a necessary ceremony, a political act. Otherwise, history becomes haunted. It repeats itself. It returns intrusively, as fragmented knowledge, interrupting and assaulting our present lives." – Grada Kilomba

The exhibition is curated by Ruth Estevez, Artsitic Director at Amant Foundation with the assistance of Isabella Nimmo, Curatorial Coordinator.

This project was produced in partnership with the Goethe-Institut. Additional support provided by Goodman Gallery.

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About Grada Kilomba

Grada Kilomba (born 1968, Lisbon, Portugal) lives and works in Berlin.

Her work has been exhibited at venues such as the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo; Documenta 14, in Kassel; 10th Berlin Biennale; 13th Lubumbashi Biennale. Recent solo exhibitions include: MUAC - Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporanea, Mexico City (2021); Bildmuseet, Umeå (2019); Pinacoteca de São Paulo (2019); The Power Plant, Toronto (2018); MAAT - Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, Lisbon (2017). Her work has been included in group exhibitions at ARoS, Aarhus (2021); Museum Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon (2021); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2021); Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2020); La Base Sousmarine, Bordeaux (2021); Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, Tokyo (2020); Kadist Art Foundation, Paris (2019); PAC - Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan (2019), among others.

Kilomba's work draws on memory, trauma and post-colonialism. Best known for her subversive writing and poetic imagery, Kilomba gives voice, body and image to her own writings, what she describes as performing knowledge. "What stories are told? How are they told? And told by whom?" are constant questions in Kilomba's body of work, using performance, staged reading, theatre, choreography, video, photography and installation.

Kilomba holds a distinguished Doctorate in Philosophy from the Freie Universität Berlin. She has lectured at several international universities, such as the University of Applied Arts, in Vienna, and the Humboldt Universität, in Berlin; and for several years she was a special guest artist at the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin, directing *Kosmos²* an artistic intervention with war survivors and political refugee artists. Her written work has been translated into several languages and published in several international anthologies.

Among others she is the author of the critically acclaimed *Plantation Memories* (Unrast, 2008), a compilation of episodes of everyday racism, written in the form of short psychoanalytical stories.

Her work has been awarded by the Jury's Honourable Mention at the Loop Barcelona 2020 and she was the recipient of the grant award by the IFFR - International Film Festival Rotterdam, 2018. Kilomba's work features in public and private collections worldwide, including the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, in Lisbon; the Tate Modern Collection, in London, among others.

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Checklist

Table of Goods, 2017

Installation with soil, sugar, coffee beans, ground coffee, cocoa, dark chocolate, and candles

Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery

A mound of soil, that resembles a grave, at the centre of the pristine and immaculate gallery room, emerges from the floor with tiny pockets filled with colonial goods. Sugar, coffee, and cocoa, raw materials with long histories of colonial extraction, are offered a final resting place. Combined with soil and interred in a pyramidal sculpture evoking a traditional burial pile, these materials bring into the present the memories of transatlantic stories and the trade routes between Africa, America and Europe. In her emotive installation, Kilomba creates a visual representation of centuries of forced labor and death, surrounded by candles, that are awaiting to be lit.



Amant Installation View – Photo: Shark Senesac

Heroines, Birds and Monsters series, 2020

6 C-Print on cotton paper mounted in aluminium, framed. 60 x 40 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery

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The sequence of photographs reincarnate the main characters of Kilomba's *trilogy A World of Illusions* (2017-2019). In this series, the artist captures the Black female protagonists in sculptural poses, mimicking the conflictuous world they inhabit, a world between heroines, birds and monsters.



Amant Installation View – Photo: Shark Senesac

The Desire Project, 2016

Three-channel video installation, HD, in black and white, sound, 2' 46", looped, with environment: printed impressions and a shrine installation composed of bowl with coffee, glass of water, pipe, tobacco, several beads, white candle and a white lillian flower.

Written, directed and edited by Grada Kilomba

Music by Moses Leo

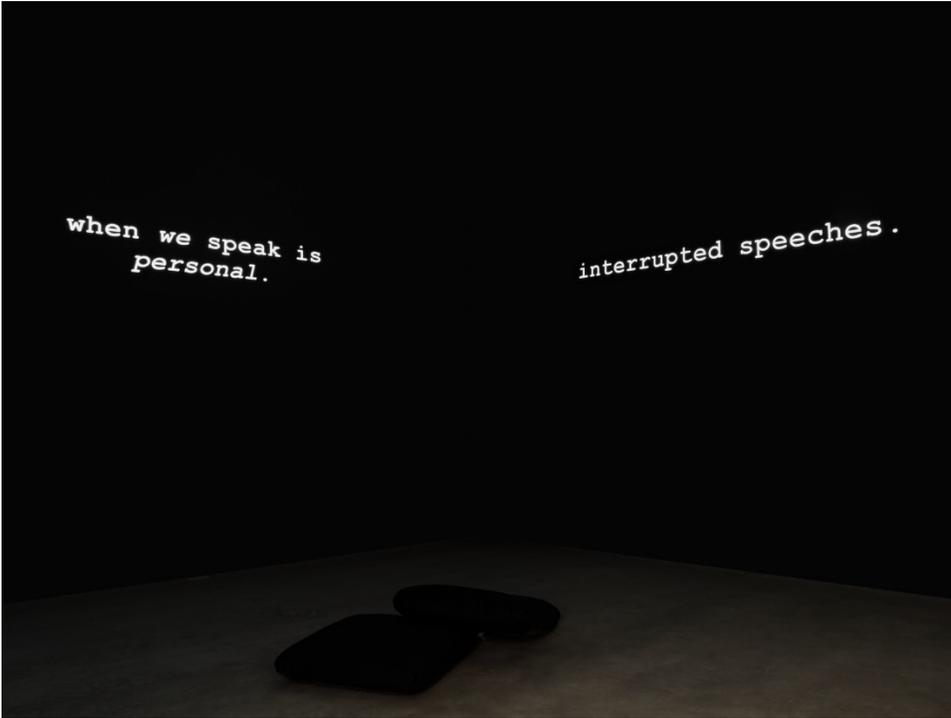
Commissioned by the 32th São Paulo Biennial

Courtesy of Marieluise Hessel Collection.

The Desire Project (2016) is a three-channel video installation in which text is presented as the sole visual element, accompanied by rhythmical drumming, indicating the emergence of a speaker who has been historically silenced. In this work, writing becomes a methodology of resilience, countering colonial processes of 'othering' and the dialectical relationship between speaking, silencing and listening.

Before entering the video installation, one passes a shrine dedicated to Anastácia, a political and religious figure historically venerated by the Black communities in Brazil. For the artist, Anastácia, the emancipated enslaved African woman whose mouth was sealed a common practice to implement a sense of fear and speechlessness, embodies the still pressing questions: 'who can speak?' 'what can we speak about?' and what happens when we speak?'

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Amant Installation View – Photo: Shark Senesac

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A Word of Illusions, 2017-2019

Six-channel video installation, HD, color, sound, installed in a triangular sculptural installation, composed by the trilogy: *Illusions Vol. I, Narcissus and Echo* (2017); *Illusions Vol. II, Oedipus* (2018); *Illusions Vol. III, Antigone* (2019).

In *A World of Illusions*, Grada Kilomba stages three well-known Greek myths and their inherent tragedies, to approach today's politics of cyclical violence.

With a certain irony, Kilomba retells the classic narratives, only to gradually twist them onto themselves, raising questions around knowledge production and power. In this sense, *Illusions Vol. I, Narcissus and Echo* (2017) becomes a story on the politics of invisibility; *Illusions Vol. II, Oedipus* (2018) on the politics of violence; while *Illusions Vol. III, Antigone* (2019), is a story on the politics of erasure and the importance of ceremonial memory. The audience circulates around the triangle, as the films can be viewed and entered at any point, destabilizing the assumed linearity of history and time.

In her storytelling, Kilomba creates a poetic imagery with an ensemble of Black actors, recounting the tales through music and mime on an empty, white infinity, metaphorically interrupting the 'white cube' with a new vocabulary, both visual and semantic. On a vertical screen, Kilomba narrates each one of the stories. As the storyteller, she takes on the role of a Griot, a repository of the African oral tradition, using voice intercalated with music to narrate postcolonial urgencies.



Amant Installation View – Photo: Shark Senesac

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Plantation Memories, 2018

Single-channel video installation of staged reading, HD, colour, sound, 14'14", looped.



Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery.