

Iman Issa

Surrogates

21 December 2019 – 26 April 2020

Exhibition text

The Egyptian artist Iman Issa's sculptures and installations point to historical as well as current cultural heritages around the world and question their social and political character.

Iman Issa was born in 1979 in Cairo and lives and works in Berlin. Her works have appeared in numerous solo and group exhibitions at venues including the Hamburger Bahnhof (Berlin), MoMA (New York), the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York), 21er Haus (Vienna), MACBA (Barcelona), the Pérez Art Museum Miami, the 12th Sharjah Biennial, the 8th Berlin Biennale, and the 2019 Whitney Biennial. The presentation at the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen is Iman Issa's first solo exhibition at a Swiss art museum.

Heritage Studies

Based on existing artifacts or ancient art objects, in the ongoing series *Heritage Studies*, since 2015 the artist has been developing sculptures whose form represents an alternative version to these objects and which create a link between history and object with supplementary texts. Iman Issa has been photographing exhibited objects while traveling and especially on visits to museums, cultural sites, and institutions since 2011.

The photographic archival material serves as the basis for sketches in which essential elements are isolated by deconstruction and new forms are imagined and generated. The artworks, which take on an altered, relevant formal language in their sculptural reinterpretation, are the quintessence of the engagement with the source materials from museums.

The individual sculptures are numbered chronologically and supplemented with textual references and labels on the walls. They deliberately establish a connection to the historical artworks, cultural goods, and events that marked the beginning of the artist's engagement with the materials. In some cases the artist describes and names the geographic origin or reveals the cultural context. The sources are paraphrased, in some cases quoted, but not fully disclosed.

Through the formal reshaping of the works, in her almost encyclopedically conceived spatial settings the artist focuses on the collective approach to art history, cultural history, and current events as well as the power of depiction. She translates historical and contemporary aspects into a new visual language.

Headshots of Three Film Extras, 2019

From the series *Surrogates*, a film about things to be used, in order of appearance, by self or others, for touching upon larger, insidious, or different things.

The artist conceived the work *Headshots of Three Film Extras* from the series *Surrogates* specifically for the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen. The installation is based on three-dimensional composites of fictional portraits of extras available for an audition. A text panel refers to a film sequence collaged from several camera shots and scenes. Here, too, the sources used remain unnamed. It is unclear what found footage, what real or fictional film excerpts or found documentary or feature film material the sequence is based on. *Surrogates* is a new and ongoing series of works by the artist.

The Revolutionary

The sound work *The Revolutionary* (2010) forms the starting point of the series *Heritage Studies*. The soundtrack is an audio piece written by the artist and generated using text-to-speech software. A male narrator with a British accent describes the biography and characteristics of an apparently fictional, revolutionary protagonist. The artist examines the meaning of the word “revolutionary.”

Book of Facts: A Proposition

In *Book of Facts: A Proposition* (2017), the artist creates a catalog for an imaginary presentation of a non-existent collection. Illustrations were deliberately removed from the catalog and replaced with graphics.

Red markings with descriptive information offer an idea of what is shown and make it legible. The formally reduced, graphic representations are supplemented with texts that provide references to various facts: stories from mythology, scientific reports, historical events, excerpts from manuals, etcetera. The publication refers to a standardized edition in the context of the exhibition which contains illustrations, text descriptions, a bibliography, captions, and an index.

Curator: Nadia Veronese