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NIL YALTER



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Considérée comme une artiste vidéo féministe pionnière en Europe, Nil Yalter cherche à offrir une tribune aux groupes socialement marginalisés à travers son travail, tels que les travailleurs immigrés, les ouvrières ou les anciens prisonniers. La question de l'exil est un élément récurrent de sa recherche et rassemble un certain nombre de questions telles que les conditions des familles exilées, en particulier les femmes. Sa pratique est basée sur une recherche, à la fois artistique et sociologique, utilisant des outils tels que la photographie, la vidéo, le dessin, les médias interactifs et le texte pour remettre en question les grands récits historiques.

Les œuvres de Nil Yalter émergent de situations politiques et sociales urgentes. La langue joue un rôle important pour elle, ainsi que les influences culturelles de l'Asie centrale, du Moyen-Orient, de la Turquie et de l'Europe occidentale. En utilisant une méthodologie quasi-anthropologique, elle reflète les conditions de vie et les voix des communautés marginalisées, jetant un éclairage critique sur la société dans son ensemble. Depuis les années 1970, son travail remet constamment en question les grands récits historiques par le biais de l'expérience subjective, et repousse les limites de la narration et de l'abstraction dans l'art contemporain.

Née au Caire, en Égypte, Nil Yalter a passé la majeure partie de sa vie entre la Turquie et Paris.

En tant qu'artiste de pantomime, Nil Yalter a voyagé en Iran, au Pakistan et en Inde de 1956 à 1958. De 1963 à 1964, elle travaille comme scénographe et costumière dans différents théâtres d'Istanbul et se consacre de plus en plus à la peinture. En 1965, elle s'installe à Paris, où elle vit et travaille encore aujourd'hui. Sa première exposition personnelle a eu lieu en 1973 au Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. En se concentrant sur des questions ethnologiques et sociologiques, l'artiste a examiné la position des femmes dans les tribus nomades du Turkménistan. Pour accompagner son œuvre la plus exposée, « Topak Ev », une tente spécialement reconstituée, elle a créé des panneaux muraux avec des dessins et des copies de photos et de textes qui reflètent la vie des nomades. Avec son œuvre vidéo féministe « The Headless Woman or the Belly Dance », elle a participé en 1974 à la première exposition internationale d'art vidéo en France et s'est imposée comme une pionnière de la performance vidéo.

Ces dernières années, Nil Yalter a participé à des expositions itinérantes telles que « Wack ! Art and the Feminist Revolution » au Museum of Contemporary Art de Los Angeles et au MoMA PS1 de New York (2007-2008) ; « elles@centrepompidou » au Centre Pompidou Paris ; Centro Cultural Banco de Brazil, Rio de Janeiro ; Seattle Art Museum (2013-2014) et « Desire for Freedom » (Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin, Palazzo Reale, Seattle Art Museum) ; Seattle Art Museum (2013-2014) et « Desire for Freedom » (Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin, Palazzo Reale, Milano, Eesti Kunstmuuseum - Kumu Kunstmuuseum, Tallinn, Muzeum Sztuki Współczesnej MOCAK, Krakau (2012-2013). D'autres expositions individuelles ont suivi, notamment au Museum Ludwig, à Cologne (2019), au MAC VAL, à Vitry-sur-Seine (2019), au WIELS, à Bruxelles (2017), au FRAC Lorraine à Metz (2016) et à Arter - Space for Art à Istanbul (2016).

Nil Yalter a participé à d'importantes expositions internationales telles que la 15e Biennale de Sharjah (2023), la 12e Biennale de Berlin (2022), la 10e Biennale de Gwangju (2014), la 13e Biennale d'Istanbul (2013), la 10e Biennale de Paris (1977), ainsi qu'à des expositions internationales dans des institutions telles que la Kadist Art Foundation, Mumbai ; le Musée d'art moderne de Rio de Janeiro ; le Musée Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam ; le MAC VAL, Paris ; et le Musée Ludwig de Cologne. Des œuvres de Yalter figurent dans de nombreuses collections publiques importantes, notamment le Museum of Modern Art New York, la Tate Modern, Londres, le Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, le Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, Istanbul Modern, Istanbul et le Museum Ludwig, Cologne.

En 2023, Nil Yalter a reçu le Lion d'or pour l'ensemble de sa carrière à la Biennale de Venise.

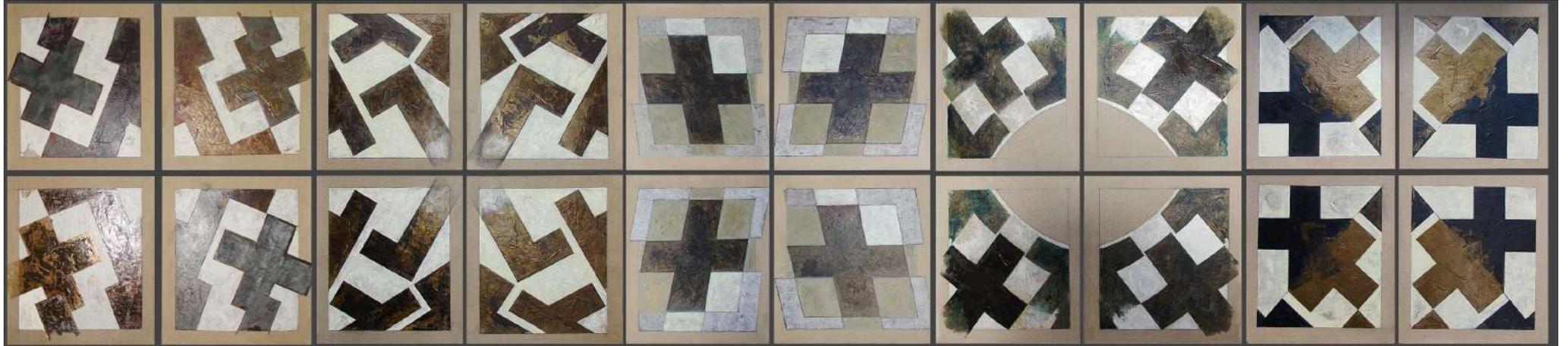


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OEUVRES & EXPOSITIONS



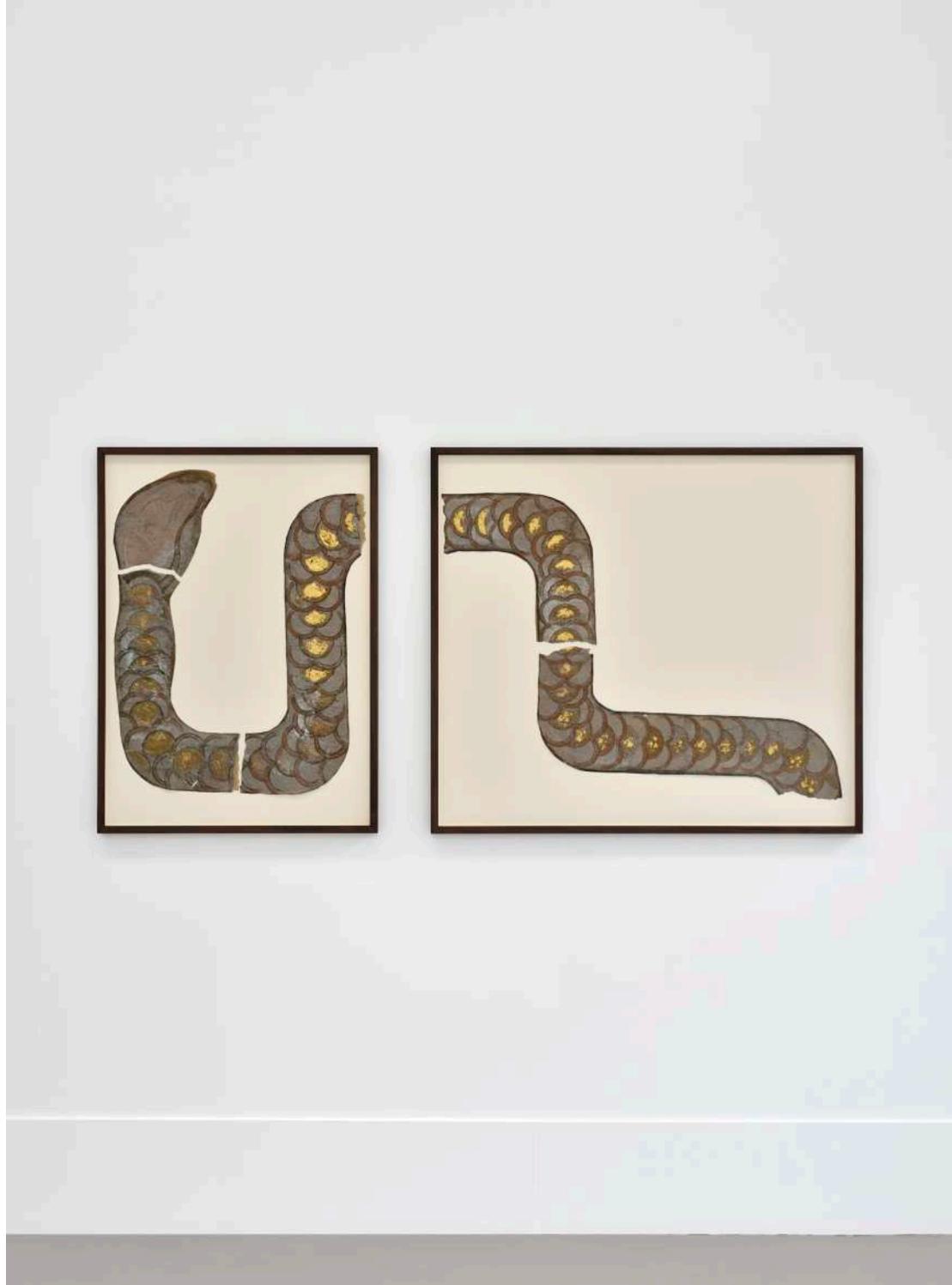




Installation interactive de 24 peintures sur toile, *La Chora* est composée de 24 variations sur l'église byzantine de la Chora à Istanbul.

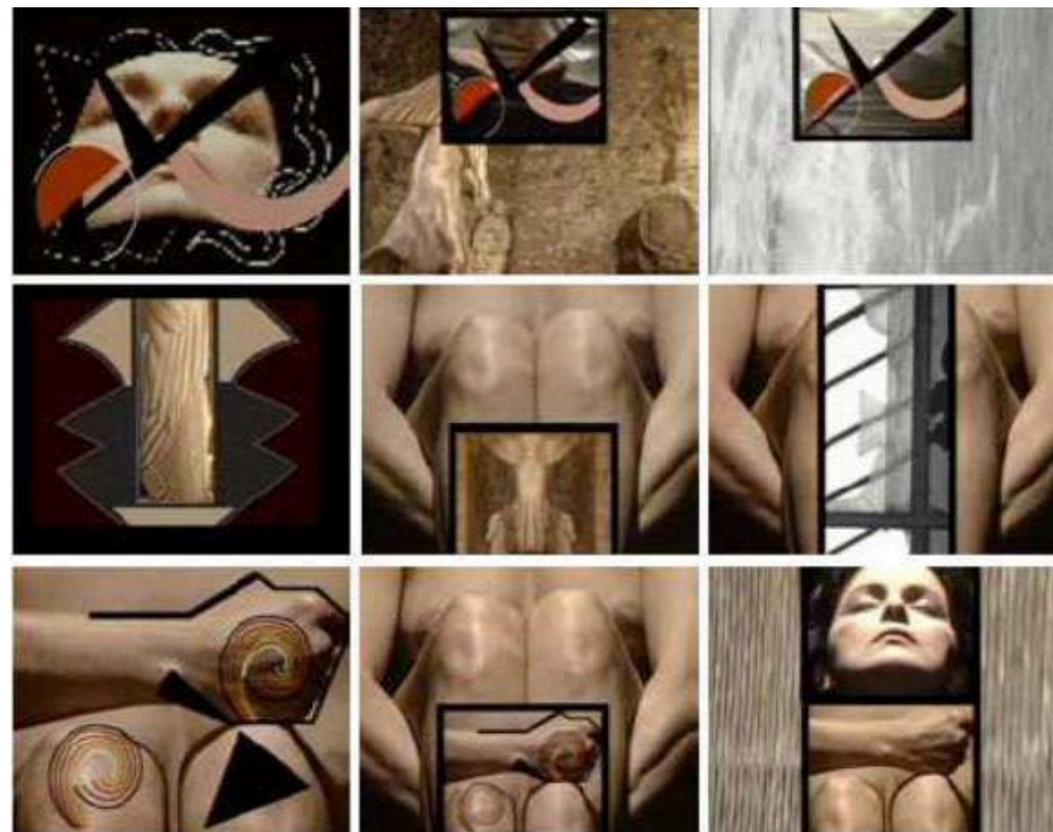
Les interactions entre les mosaïques byzantines et le pixel en tant qu'unité élémentaire constituant les images numériques, ainsi que les textes théoriques de Kasimir Malevitch, constituent l'axe principal de l'œuvre en tant que déclaration sur l'abstraction. La composition des 24 peintures sera modifiée au cours de l'exposition.





Commandé à l'origine pour une exposition commémorant le bicentenaire de la Révolution française et installé dans une petite église du Havre, *Hommage à Marquis de Sade* (1989) a été créé en hommage aux interprétations féministes du noble et écrivain français Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), connu pour avoir dépeint des fantasmes sexuels dont la violence est sans équivoque. Dans les années 1970, certaines écrivaines féministes, dont Jane Gallop et Angela Carter, ont réévalué l'œuvre de Sade dans une perspective féministe, en soulignant la façon dont il a coopté certains actes sexuels pour libérer les femmes de contraintes culturelles telles que la maternité, contribuant ainsi à leur émancipation sexuelle et sociale.

Une des œuvres les plus complexes et les plus intimes de Yalter, l'installation multi-écrans se lit comme un manifeste du style de l'artiste au cours de cette décennie, superposant l'image en mouvement avec des images de synthèse et de l'animation. Centré sur l'enfermement et le corps humain, *Hommage au Marquis de Sade* reflète l'expérience personnelle de Yalter et ses années de travail à la fois en tant que femme et en tant qu'artiste.

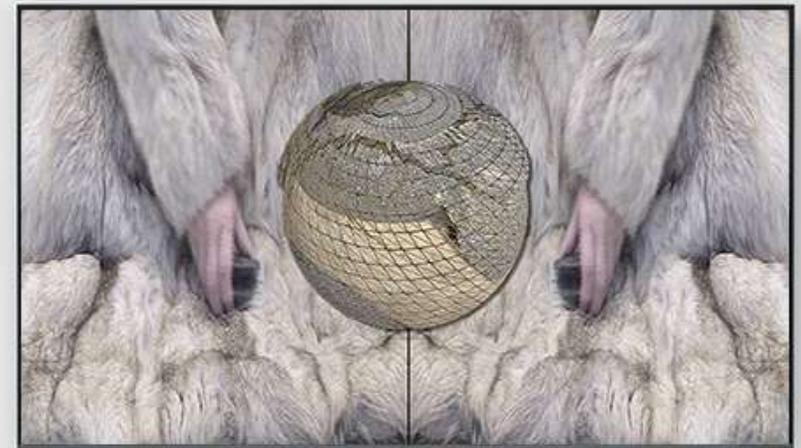




Dans *Lord Byron Meets the Shaman Woman*, Nil Yalter revient sur un thème qu'elle a exploré pour la première fois dans *Shaman* (1979) et qu'elle aborde à nouveau trois décennies plus tard, à l'âge de 71 ans. Cette fois, en utilisant les nouvelles technologies de production d'image et de son, Yalter intègre la performance, le dessin numérique, l'animation et les effets sonores pour construire un espace de rituel où le temps et la matière se dissolvent.

La vidéo s'ouvre sur des lignes de Mazeppa de Lord Byron, évoquant le passage du temps et la vulnérabilité du corps à ses effets. Elle récite également les noms des chamans, en remontant jusqu'à Khara-Cyrgan (ou Morgon-Kara), le « premier chaman » de la mythologie bouriate d'après *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* de Mircea Eliade. La voix, le corps et les invocations de Yalter révèlent une lignée de maîtres spirituels différente de celle traditionnellement associée aux hommes dans la majorité des religions organisées. Ici s'articule une lignée qui révèle le potentiel féminin de transmission et de transformation.

Avec *Lord Byron Meets the Shaman Woman*, Yalter parcourt la poésie de Byron façonnée par l'exil, l'amour interdit et la rébellion, pour affronter les préjugés entourant le corps vieillissant, en particulier la stigmatisation du vieillissement féminin. À travers ses formes nues, sa voix, ses gestes, elle réhabilite ces corps trop longtemps invisibilisés.





L'ESILIO È UN DURO LAVORO







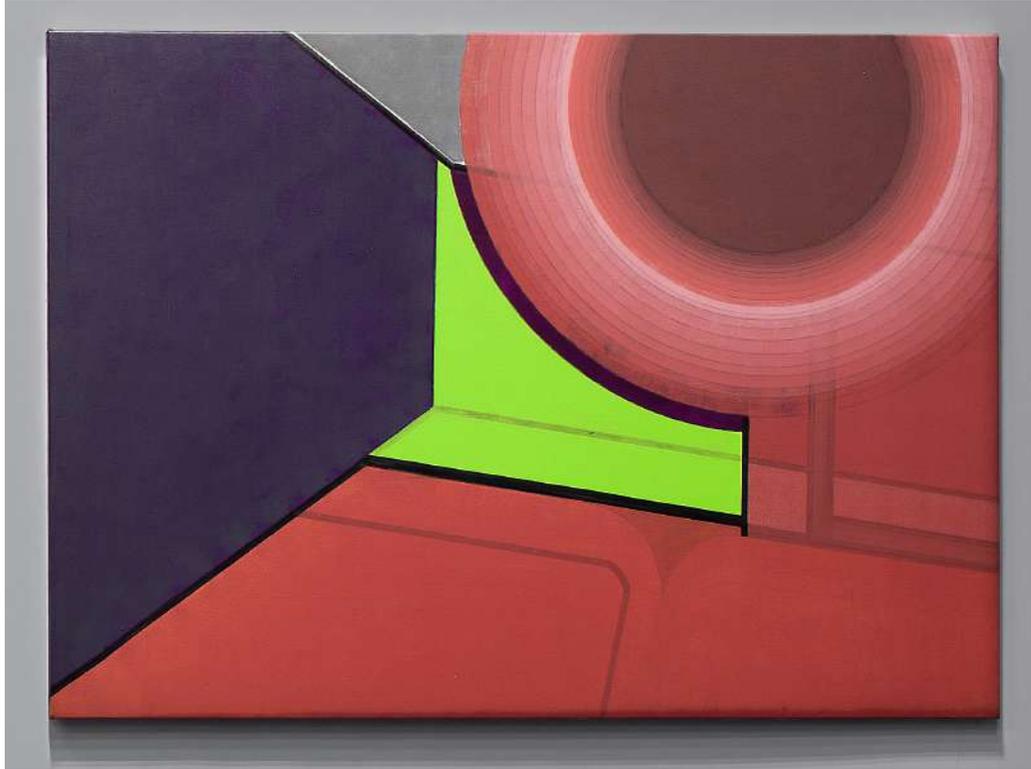


L'installation *AmbassaDRESS* de 1978 a été exposée en France pour la première fois lors de l'évènement Art Basel Paris 2024.

Composée d'une robe haute couture Lanvin de 1928, d'une vidéo, d'une série de photographies et de dessins, *AmbassaDRESS* s'appuie sur des documents d'archives et un récit historique mêlant réalité et fiction, centré sur l'épouse d'un ambassadeur anonyme en Allemagne dans les années qui ont précédé et suivi la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Selon le récit, la robe a été portée par l'épouse de l'ambassadeur lors d'une cérémonie diplomatique au cours de laquelle elle a dansé avec des personnalités du gouvernement travailliste de l'Allemagne nazie dans les années 1940. Ce fait, associé à la déclaration du personnage, imprimée sur l'un des dessins, selon laquelle il ignorait l'existence des camps d'extermination, souligne le rôle des privilèges et de l'indifférence dans la perpétuation de la violence et du génocide à grande échelle. Bien que la robe soit au cœur de l'installation, Nil Yalter s'abstient de reproduire le récit dominant qui attribue invariablement une position marginale à l'identité « féminine », comme une figure dépourvue de représentation légitime.

En exposant une série de dessins détaillant la fabrication de la robe Lanvin, Nil Yalter aborde l'institution du pouvoir et de la violence comme un processus collectif imprégnant tous les aspects de la société, y compris la culture et le design. Dans la composition subtile de Yalter, à travers des éléments visuels et narratifs fragmentés, l'anatomie d'une robe révèle l'anatomie du pouvoir. La vidéo abstraite et la série de photographies en noir et blanc qui l'accompagnent révèlent l'anatomie de la robe vue de l'intérieur, du point de vue insaisissable du corps qui la porte. La vidéo présente la symétrie de l'écran divisé, emblématique du travail de Yalter à travers les décennies et les médias, qui rappelle la grille moderniste. Chaque pli, chaque repli, ainsi que les tâches de rouille qui parsèment le tissu de la robe, sont soumis à la répétition et à l'effet de miroir. Juxtaposée à la fluidité de la soie en mouvement, la forme résultante questionne non seulement les événements historiques de l'époque, mais aussi l'abstraction en tant que stratégie artistique, capable de devenir un outil au service de l'émancipation comme de la répression.

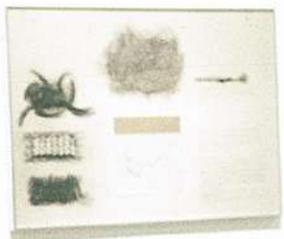
L'installation et le récit qu'elle porte incarnent une série de tensions irrésistibles entre la vérité et la fiction, la figuration et l'abstraction, la subjectivité de l'expérience et l'objectivité supposée de la vérité historique. *AmbassaDRESS* témoigne ainsi de la vision artistique et du travail de pionnier de Nil Yalter, qui reste plus que jamais d'actualité dans notre contexte contemporain.



Nil Yalter
Pink Tension, 1969
Acrylique sur toile
120 x 180 cm







NIL YALTER

1938, Cairo

Vit et travaille à Paris

Expositions personnelles (sélection)

- 2025 *Skin Story*, THE PILL, Paris, FR
2023 *Exile is a Hard Job*, L'Atlas, Paris, FR
2022 *La Convivencia*, 1 Mira Madrid, Madrid, SP
2019 *TRANS/HUMANCE*, MacVal, Vitry-sur-Seine, FR
Exile is a Hard Job, Hessel Museum of Art, CCS Bard, NY, USA
Exile is a Hard Job, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, DE
2018 *Kara Kum*, Galerist, Istanbul, TR
2016 *Off the Record*, Arter, Istanbul, TR
Nil Yalter, Hubert Winter Gallery, Vienna, AU
Nil Yalter Retrospective, 49 Nord Est – FRAC Lorraine- Metz, FR
2015 *1973-2015*, La Verrière – Fondation d'entreprise Hermès, Bruxelles, BE
MOT INTERNATIONAL, London, UK
2014 Gallery Hubert Winter, Vienna, AU
2012 *1970/1980 (Works)*, Galeria Visor, Valencia, SP
2011 *20th Century / 21st Century*, Galerist, Istanbul, TR
AmbassaDRESS, Temporary Dwellings, Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna, AU
2010 *La Femme Sans Tête*, ou *La Danse du Ventre*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Conférence un Dimanche, une Œuvre, Paris, FR
2009 *Vidéo performance*, garajistanbul, Festival Temps d'Images, Istanbul, TR
C'est Un Dur Métier Que L'Exil III, Musée de l'immigration, Paris, FR
Hommage a Nil Yalter, 20e Festival de Cinema International d'Ankara, Ankara, TR
2008 *Le centenaire de la naissance de Simone de Beauvoir*, Studio des Ursulines, Paris, FR
2006 *Alev Ebuzziya & Nil Yalter*, Galeri Nev, Istanbul, TR
C'est un Dur Métier que l'Exil 2, Institut Français d'Istanbul, Istanbul, TR
A Story of Contemporary Evolution, GaleriG-art, Istanbul, TR
2004 *Hommage a Nil Yalter*, 26 e Festival de Cinema Méditerranéen, Montpellier, FR
2003 *Histoire de Peau*, Galerie des vidéastes, Espace Landowski, Boulogne-Billancourt, FR
1998 *Terra Nomade*, Aksanat, Istanbul, Turkey
1996 *Télévision, La Lune*, Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Nice, FR
1995 *Photographie Contemporaine en Bretagne*, L'Imagerie, Lanion, FR
Télévision, La Lune, Collège Marcel Duchamp, Chateauroux, FR
1994 *Productive Memory*, cur. Necmi Sonmez, Aksanat, Istanbul, TR
Télévision, La Lune, La Tour de Roi René, Marseille, FR
1992 *Le Regard De l'AUTRE*, La Galerie Le Quai, Mulhouse, FR
1991 *Pyramis, ou le Voyage d'Eudore*, Les Instants Vidéo, Manosque, FR

- 1989 *Hommage au Marquis de Sade*, Prieuré de Graville, Le Havre, FR
1988 *Pyramis, ou le Voyage d'Eudore*, Musée de Saint – Simon, Angoulême, FR
1983 *C'est Un Dur Métier Que L'Exil*, A.R.C. Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, FR
1982 *La Mer, Le Monde Inversé*, Festival de la Rochelle, La Rochelle, FR
1981 *Femmes au Travail, Femmes au Foyer, Toprak*, Festival de la Rochelle, La Rochelle, FR
1980 *Rahime, Femme Kurde de Turquie*, Centre Georges Pompidou, La Revue Parlée, Paris, FR
1979 Paris Ville Lumière, Contemporary Art Club, Budapest, HU
Immigration, Maison de la Culture, Ris – Orangis, FR
1978 Les Habitations Provisoires Galerie Lavuun, Gand, FR
1977 *Topak Ev*, Maison de la Culture, Grenoble, FR
Grève Générale en Turquie, Galerie Jean Larcade, Paris, FR
1974 *Topak Ev*, Musée de Tessé, Le Mans, FR
1973 *Topak Ev*, A.R.C. Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, FR

Expositions collectives (sélection)

- 2024 *Foreigners Everywhere*, 60th Venice Biennial, cur. Adriano Pedrosa, Venice, IT
2023 *Signals: How Video Transformed the World*, MoMA, New York, USA
Floating Islands, Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, TR
Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE
C'est un dur métier que l'exil, n'est-ce pas? Transfo, Emmaüs, Paris, FR
2022 Berlin Biennial, Berlin, DE
De Renava Biennial, Corsica, FR
Open Space 3, Imalat-Hane, Bursa, TR
2021 *Ambiguous*, Vision Art Platform, Istanbul, TR
Arts de L'Islam, organised by Musée de Louvre, FR
Diversity United, former Tempelhof Airport, Berlin, DE
Lens'21, Mixer, Istanbul, TR
2019 *Age of Gold*, Galeri Nev, Ankara, TR
The Other is Oneself, Franz Josefs Kai, Vienna, AU
What Time Is It?, Arter, Istanbul, TR
2017 *Women House*, Monnaie de Paris, Paris, FR
Feminist Avantgarde Of The 1970s from the SAMMLUNG VERBUND Collection, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, AU
The Absent Museum, WIELS Contemporary Art Center, Brussels, BE
2016 *Temporary Dwellings*, Tate Modern, London, UK
Open Spaces / Secret Places, Biennial of Brussels (Bozar), Brussels, BE
2015 *Passing on the Value of Microhistories*, Valencia, SP
2014 *Clark House Initiative*, Kadist Art Foundation, Mumbai, IN
Exile is a Hard Job VI, Posters on the walls in the streets of Mumbai, IN

- Neighbours*, Contemporary Narratives from Turkey and Beyond, Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, TR
- Topak Ev*, cur. Adriano Pedrosa and Rodrigo Moura, MAM. Rio de Janeiro, BR
- Le Chevalier d'Eon*, Gwangju Biennial, cur. Jessica Morgan, Gwangju, KR
- Ma' Aminim*, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Saint Denis, FR
- 2013 *Paris Ville Lumière*, The 13th Biennial of Istanbul, Istanbul, TR
- elles@centrepompidou*, Centro Cultural Banco do Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, BR
- elles@centrepompidou*, SAM. Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, USA
- The Desire for Freedom*, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, DE
- The Desire for Freedom*, Palazzo Reale, Milano, IT
- Scared of Murals*, Salt Beyoğlu, Istanbul, TR
- Modernités Plurielles 1905-1970*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, FR
- 2012 *Scared of Murals*, SALT Beyoğlu, Istanbul, TR
- Le Jardin de la Spéculation Cosmique*, Galerist, Istanbul, TR
- The Fertile Crescent: Gender, Art, Society*, Mason Gross Galleries, Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA
- Video Vintage*, cur. Christine Van Assche, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, FR
- Violence-Double Spread*, Nandan Gallery, Santiniketan, IN
- Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, ND
- dress/id the language of the self*, Passerelle C'entre d'art, Brest, FR
- 2011 *Rahime*, Femme Kurde de Turquie, Long Beach Museum, Exchange+Evolution, LA, USA
- Exile is a Hard Job IV*, Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, TR
- 2010 *Donna Avanguardia Femminista Negli Anni 70*, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, IT
- Pontes Para Istanbul*, Centro Cultural Belém, Lisbon, PT
- 2009 *elles@centrepompidou*, cur. Camille Morineau, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, FR
- re-act Feminism*, Akademie der Kunst, Berlin, DE
- Rebelle**, cur. Mirjam Westen, Museum of Modern Art, Arnhem, ND
- 2008 *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, PS1MOMA, New York, USA
- WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, cur. Cornelia Butler, Contemporary Art Center, Vancouver, CA
- SAVE AS...*, cur. Derya Yucel, Trinnale Bovisa, Milan, IT
- Held Together with Water*, Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, TR
- 2007 *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, LA, USA
- WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, cur. Cornelia Butler National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C, USA
- Nuit des Musées*, Musée Rodin, Paris, FR
- Dialogues Méditerranéens*, L'été Culturel, Saint-Tropez, FR
- Modern and Beyond*, Santralistanbul, Istanbul, TR
- Gender Battle*, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela, SP
- 2006 *A Public Space Project*, Train Station, Ankara, TR
- A Public Space Project*, Train Station, Haydarpaşa, Istanbul, TR
- 2002 *Histoire de Peau*, Maison Populaire, L'Espace Culture Multimédia, Montreuil, FR
- Les Rites Circulaires*, Calligraphie, Cinema
- L'Ecran de Saint-Denis*, Saint-Denis, FR
- 2001 *L'Art Turque aux XXⁱème Siècle*, Palais de Topkapı, Istanbul, TR
- 1998 *COMPACT*, Galeries du Cloître, Rennes, FR
- 1997 *Vraiment: Féminisme et Art*, cur. Laura Cottingham
- La Roquette*, Prison de Femmes, Le Magasin, Centre National d'Art Contemporain de Grenoble, FR
- 1996 *Pixelismus*, Espaces Interactifs - Europe, Pavillon de Bercy, Paris, FR
- Paris, Ville Lumière, Habitat II*, Yuksel Sabanci Art Center, Istanbul, TR
- 1994 *Calligraphie*, Videothèque de Paris, Mutations de l'Image, Paris, FR
- 1993 *Télévision*, La Lune, Koninklijk Palace, Eldorado, Anvers, BE
- 1992 *Les Rites Circulaires*, Whitney Museum, Centre Georges Pompidou, American Center, (Transvoices), New York, Paris
- 1990 *Courants d'Art*, Galerie J&J Donguy, Paris, FR
- 1988 *Pyramis, ou le Voyage d'Eudore*, Festival des Arts Electroniques, Rennes, FR
- 1987 *Im Auftrag*, Folkwang Museum, Essen, DE
- 1984 *Rahime, Femme Kurde de Turquie*, Long Beach Museum of Art, California, USA
- Sculpture Dans l'Usine*, Musée André Malreaux, Le Havre, FR
- Sculpture Dans l'Usine*, Usine Renault Sandouville, Le Havre, FR
- Réalité*, spectacle musical de Vinco Globokar, Montreuil, FR
- Ansatzpunkte Kritischer Kunst Heute*, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin, DE
- Art-Video Français*, Tapei Museum, TW
- 1983 *La Mer, Le Monde Inversé*, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, DE
- 1981 *Femmes au Travail, Femmes au Foyer*, Typisch Frau, Bonner Kunstverein, Galerie MagersBonn
- Ateliers 81/82*, Le Harem, A.R.C Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, Paris, FR
- 1980 *Rahime, Femme Kurde de Turquie*, cur. Lucy Lippard, I.C.A. Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, UK
- Les Rituels*, A.R.C, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, FR
- French Video-Art/Art-Video Français*, Center for Media Art, American Center, Paris, FR
- 1979 *La Roquette*, Prison de Femmes, Biennale de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, BR
- Video79*, The First Decade, Rome, IT
- 1977 *Travailleurs Turcs a Paris*, Xe Biennale de Paris, Paris, FR
- Video en filmmanifestatie*, Bonnefonten Museum Maastricht, Maastricht, ND
- 1976 *Paris Ville Lumière*, La Roquette, Prison de

- Femmes, A.I.R. Gallery, The Kitchen, NY, USA
1975 *La Femme Sans Tête, ou la Danse du Ventre*, Aspects Sociologiques de l'Art Vidéo, Warsaw, PL
Une expérience d'Art Socio - Ecologique, Neuenkirchen, A.R.C. Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, FR
1974 *Topak Ev*, Projekt' 74, Cologne, DE
La Femme Sans Tête, ou La Danse du Ventre, A.R.C, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, FR
Art Vidéo Confontration 74, Paris, FR

Prix

- 2024 Golden Lion Award for Lifetime Achievement, Venice Biennial, IT
2018 AWARE, Outstanding Merit Award, Paris, FR

Collections

IMMA, Dublin, IR
Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR
TATE Modern, London, UK
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, DE
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, DE
VKV Collection, Istanbul, TR
Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, TR
Sammlung Verbund, Vienna, AU
Koç Contemporary, Istanbul, TR
Foto Colectania Foundation, Barcelona, SP
Coleccion Olor Visual, Barcelona, SP
Reydan Weiss Collection, Essen, DE
F.N.A.C. Paris, FR
L'espace multimédia Gantner, Bourgogne, FR
Aksanat, Istanbul, Turkey
Long Beach Museum, CA, USA

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TEXTES & PRESSE

I come from All of These Places : Nil Yalter
Nil Yalter and Lauren Cornell in Conversation
Mousse Magazine, 2024

Now seen as a groundbreaking figure in video, feminist and socially engaged art, Nil Yalter (b. 1938, Cairo) was not fully appreciated throughout her career—the unorthodox nature of her practice placed her at the edges of genres and movements, rendering her work somewhat unclassifiable and out of focus. Originally a painter who moved from Istanbul to Paris in 1965 to further her art education, Yalter was transformed by the trial and execution of Turkish dissident Deniz Gezmiş in 1972, a brutal event that occurred against a backdrop of political turmoil in the country. Following the Gezmiş incident, her projects, variously unfolding across collage, drawing, photography, and video, concentrated on showing the lives and conditions of precarious and marginalized populations such as recent immigrants, refugees, and the incarcerated. For the video *Turkish Immigrants (1977)*, made with a Sony Portapak, Yalter taped prolonged conversations with new Turkish arrivals to Paris in their homes, alternately quiet or riotous with children. The result was a multifaceted picture of people figuring out how to navigate a new country—a portrait that was markedly different from the narrow and xenophobic one in the news at the time, which reduced migrants to numbers and statistics. Such an approach characterizes her work from the 1970s onward, in which both she and her subject- collaborators are rendered fluid, in formation, defined by their experiences and interactions with various interlocking systems: nation, family, work. The restoration and digitization of Yalter’s media archive in the 2010s by the Bibliothèque nationale de France initiated a broad reappraisal of her work and the chance to understand it more deeply by curators, scholars and audiences alike. In 2015, her retrospective *Exile is a Hard Job*, curated by Rita Kersting, traveled from the Museum Ludwig in Cologne to the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, where I am chief curator. Nil and I spoke over Zoom on the occasion of her showing in this year’s Venice Biennale, in which she won the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement.

LAUREN CORNELL

I’d like to begin by discussing your piece *Circular Rituals (1952)*, as it expresses something fundamental about your work—and you, I think. In its latest iteration, the work appears as text on a wall, but it was originally a chant overlaid on a video interweaving footage of Turkish immigrant workers in Paris and women’s rights

activists in Algeria, and a self-portrait. This collage links seemingly disparate lives and struggles, yours included. *Circular Rituals* was commissioned in 1952 as part of a public art project organized by the American Center in Paris, the Public Art Fund, and the Whitney Museum of American Art called *Trans-Voices: French and American Artists Address a Changing World Order*. Participating artists were asked to send video “messages” to each other on urgent political, economic, and ecological issues at a turning point: the end of the twentieth century. What was the message you sent?

NIL YALTER

Circular Rituals is a manifesto, written by me. I’m a nomad, an immigrant, a Mongol, a Jew from Salonika—I come from all of these places. They are part of me, my family, my history. All these lands—Turkey, Iran, Syria, Iraq—were invaded by many civilizations with many different religions. Most Turks are from a mixed background, just as I am. You can say you’re American, or that you’re Turkish, but nobody is only one thing. Nothing, and no one, is purely pure.

I found this out in my youth. My grandmother would say that my grandfather’s mother was a Circassian. My father is a Muslim from Bosnia and Herzegovina. My mother’s lineage traces to the Ottoman Empire. Her family were Jews from the north who fled the European pogroms of the fourteenth century and converted to Islam. At first, *Circular Rituals* was sent to New York as a video “message.” Then in 2016, for the retrospective at *Frac Lorraine* in Metz, France, I transcribed the soundtrack and wrote it on the wall as “visual language,” so that it had its own aesthetics and form.

LAUREN

In 1965, you left Istanbul for Paris with the intention of learning more about art and making your way as an artist. But starting in 1980, because of the military coup d’état in Turkey, you couldn’t return there for a long time—thirteen years. Paris has since become your home, and immigration and exile have become preoccupations of yours, perhaps most stridently stated in the long-running project *Exile Is a Hard Job (1983–ongoing)*.

Where does the title of this work come from?

NIL

It’s from a poem by the great poet Nâzım Hikmet, who is beloved in Turkey. He was imprisoned for thirteen years there because of his writing and political

views. During his imprisonment, renowned Turkish poets, including Melih Cevdet Anday and Oktay Rifat, went on hunger strikes in protest, as did his mother, and international artists such as Pablo Picasso, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Paul Robeson actively campaigned for his release. Later, he lived in exile all over the world and eventually fled to Russia, where he died. “Exile is a hard job” is a powerful sentence, especially in Turkish. Hikmet was writing about himself while living in Budapest, saying that adapting—learning the language, staying alive, and surviving— takes more than courage. It’s a job, a hard job.

LAUREN

In the work, the words “Exile is a hard job” are handwritten in bold red over images from your Turkish Immigrants (1577) series and turned into posters that are then plastered (initially without authorization, with the text in German, Turkish, Arabic, Russian, Polish, or whatever is the primary language of each place) around cities, twenty to date. How do you relate to these words, to this poem?

NIL

I relate, of course. It’s been harder for me in this country than for artists who were born here, who had art training—I never had art training—and who knew the language and customs. Through my work, I have come face to face with racism and sexism. It’s often very subtle, but sometimes not. For instance, in the 1980s, the minister of culture told me that I had been offered a six-month residency in New York at PS1, where they were giving studios to artists from different countries to come, stay, and work. I was so happy. Then two weeks later, he called me back and said, “We’re sorry. We’ve decided not to give the residency to you. We’re giving it to a male artist, as PS1 is in a very dangerous district, and you’re a woman. It would be too dangerous for you, and, also, you don’t represent French art.” Can you imagine?



L'une des nombreuses provocations de cette Biennale de Venise 2024 intitulée « Foreigners Everywhere » [Étrangers partout], a été de primer deux femmes artistes âgées, assez peu connues et pourtant grandes pionnières. L'une d'elles, Nil Yalter, y expose dans le Pavillon central, section des installations multimédias, un ensemble intitulé *Exile is a Hard Job* (1983-2024) auquel elle ajoute, au centre, une reconstitution de Topak Ev, une immense yourte, celle-là même qui la fit connaître à Paris en 1973 à l'ARC (Animation. Recherche. Confrontation) et qui avait tant séduit Susanne Pagé lorsque celle-ci dirigeait cette structure créée à la fin des années 1960 au sein du musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris. Fabriquée à l'aide de métal, de peaux de mouton et de feutre, c'est un hommage de l'artiste franco-turque aux femmes des communautés nomades d'Anatolie centrale. Elle est placée à Venise au centre d'une pièce en forme de dôme, dont les parois sont revêtues d'affiches volantes, de dessins, de vidéos, etc. L'œuvre commente, documente, fait revivre la migration, l'exil.

Du Caire à Paris

Nil Yalter fait elle-même partie de ces migrants, même si ses voyages et son exil furent, dans son cas, mûrement choisis. Née en 1938 au Caire, mais de nationalité turque, elle rejoint Istanbul, puis passe sa jeunesse à arpenter l'Iran, l'Inde, les régions les plus reculées de la Turquie... Et après des années d'errances curieuses et studieuses, elle se consacre à la peinture. Une peinture abstraite occidentalisée, qui permet à cette autodidacte d'exposer dans des galeries stambouliotes. Consciente que le véritable art contemporain de son temps se trouve ailleurs, elle reprend ses pérégrinations et finit par s'installer à Paris, rue Mazarine, en 1965. S'ensuivent des années d'acclimatation, de recherches dans un Paris assez bouillonnant, de rencontres cosmopolites et d'engagements politiques. Peu à peu émerge une volonté de montrer sans pathos, dans sa vérité première, ce que le milieu artistique en général s'obstine à ne pas vouloir voir : les émigrants, les laissés-pour-compte. Son travail croise alors la photographie, l'écriture, le dessin, dans le but de documenter le vécu. Elle y ajoute le collage, les Polaroid, l'argentique, le numérique, la vidéo en pleine gestation, et tous les nouveaux moyens numériques.

La danse du ventre

Le rendez-vous a lieu à la galerie Berthet- Aittouarès, puisque l'artiste n'a pas à proprement parler d'atelier, mais plutôt des pièces encombrées de panoplies d'appareils, d'ordinateurs de toutes générations, de bandes, de carrousels de diapositives ancienne manière, de moniteurs, de magnétoscopes, de caméras, d'écrans et de nombreux dessins... Nil Yalter préfère nous raconter son travail en commentant quelques œuvres qu'Odile Berthet-Aittouarès a raccrochées aux murs pour l'occasion, quelques photographies qui avaient fait partie de son exposition organisée ici même en 2023, « Exile is a Hard Job : [C'est un dur métier que l'exil] », titre emprunté au poète Nâzım Hikmet. Parmi celles-ci, l'œuvre intitulée *La Femme sans tête ou La Danse du ventre*. La photographie représente le ventre d'une femme dont le nombril est recouvert de manière circulaire d'un fragment de texte du poète René Nelly, auteur du livre *Érotique et Civilisations*. Cette photo est tirée d'une performance filmée en 1974 dans laquelle elle faisait la danse du ventre, en ayant gravé sur sa peau la phrase « La femme véritable est à la fois convexe et concave ».

Un nouveau langage

Malgré les sollicitations incessantes depuis cette reconnaissance à Venise, les rendez-vous, et une certaine lassitude, l'artiste de 86 ans reste extrêmement précise et conserve une mémoire phénoménale des détails de ses installations passées. Elle a bien conscience d'avoir inventé un nouveau langage dans les années 1970 parisiennes, lorsque le féminisme faisait irruption sur la scène artistique, proposant des œuvres hétéroclites, décloisonnant les arts, introduisant la réalité du corps féminin. Une façon de s'exprimer arrivée tout droit des États-Unis, où s'affirmait depuis un moment une avant-garde féministe rebelle et agressive (lire l'article sur Ana Mendieta dans le n° 826 de « Connaissance des Arts », pp. 62-65).

Sur le long mur du couloir qui mène aux salles d'expositions temporaires du MAC VAL Musée d'art contemporain du Val-de-Marne, face à la baie vitrée, un ensemble d'affiches identiques se répétant forme une sorte de papier peint, barré par de grandes lettres rouges en majuscules qui composent la phrase suivante : « c'est un dur métier que l'exil ». Cette présentation restitue pour la première fois l'accrochage exact montré lors de l'exposition éponyme au Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris en 1983, manifestation fondamentale de Nil Yalter (née en 1938 au Caire, vit et travaille à Paris). Un peu plus loin, à l'entrée de l'exposition, c'est une œuvre manifeste qui accueille le visiteur en guise d'introduction. Réalisés en 1992[1], « les rites circulaires » forment un autoportrait écrit, un poème visuel, dans lequel Nil Yalter se représente multiple, revendique plusieurs identités liées à l'histoire de sa famille qu'elle met en regard avec un condensé d'images réalisées au cours des années précédentes, des images de femmes : ouvrières, migrantes, travailleuses clandestines, manifestantes algériennes... La pièce met en avant l'éclatement des identités et dévoile le visage multiethnique de l'Europe. A partir des années 1970, elle va se servir de son statut de femme exilée (volontaire) et artiste pour questionner les conditions de vie dans les communautés marginalisées, donnant une voix à ceux qui n'en ont pas, travailleur·ses, immigré·es, femmes, prisonnières..., dans des œuvres formelles issues des matériaux documentaires ou sociologiques. L'exposition met en avant les œuvres importantes pour l'histoire de l'immigration en France, tout en s'attachant aux points de vue féministes et marxistes développés par l'artiste.

Après des études au Robert College d'Istanbul, Nil Yalter commence à peindre en 1958. Autodidacte, elle s'inspire des reproductions « pas plus grandes que des timbres[2] » du Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite de Michel Seuphor, publié en 1957. « (...) Puisque j'étais déjà familière de l'art byzantin et ottoman, je me suis sentie rapidement très à l'aise avec la peinture abstraite[3] » confie-t-elle. Elle arrive à Paris en 1965 pour étudier la peinture occidentale. Sa production de toiles – elle expose en 1963 avec d'autres artistes turcs à la Biennale de Paris – connaît alors l'influence du constructivisme russe et de l'abstraction géométrique. Elle évolue au cours des années suivantes avec l'introduction de motifs inspirés des formes architecturales dans lesquels elle exprime sa vision d'une synthèse

entre Orient et Occident. Elle assiste aux manifestations de mai 68 puis participe au mouvement de libération des femmes. En 1971, elle rencontre l'ethnologue Bernard Dupaigne, responsable du laboratoire d'ethnologie du Musée de l'homme, dont les pratiques vont l'influencer durablement. La même année, lors d'un voyage en Turquie, elle est bouleversée par la sévère répression qui force les populations nomades à se sédentariser, s'installant dans des bidonvilles autour des grandes agglomérations. De retour à Paris, elle donne à sa carrière un tournant radical. Sa pratique devient protéiforme. Dessin, texte, photographie et vidéo – dont elle est l'une des pionnières – sont désormais au service d'un art engagé. Elle s'empare de l'ethnologie qu'elle déplace dans le champ de l'art, s'immergeant sur le terrain, rencontrant, écoutant, enregistrant, dessinant... En 1973, sa première exposition personnelle se tient à l'ARC / Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris. Elle a pour titre « Topak-Ev » qui signifie « maison ronde ». L'artiste y montre une yourte qui emprunte sa forme à celles traditionnelles des nomades d'Anatolie, maintenant sédentarisés de force. Une structure en métal s'est substituée à celle, conventionnelle, en bois. Abritant l'espace domestique, elle renvoie à une réflexion sur les espaces féminins publics ou privés. Cette exposition questionne pour la première fois des sujets qui vont devenir centraux dans son travail tels la condition des femmes, la réflexion autour de l'habitat ou encore les populations marginalisées. « La yourte est en elle-même un monde, un cosmos en miniature. Le toit en coupole figure le ciel, rond d'un horizon à l'autre. Les murs sont les poteaux qui soutiennent le ciel, jusqu'au foyer où se tient la femme. (...) Protégée du vrai monde – où les hommes ne lui permettent plus d'aller – [la femme] est cachée dans ce monde en réduction, simulacre, prison » écrit Bernard Dupaigne[4].

Ses pièces suivantes prennent une dimension de critique sociale. Nil Yalter est une des premières artistes à évoquer les conditions de vie et de travail des communautés immigrées en France. Elle entame des collaborations en dehors du milieu artistique, avec l'ethnologue Bernard Dupaigne, avec Jack Salom qui enseigne le turc à l'Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO) ou avec Gaye Petek du Service social d'aide aux migrants. Aux enquêtes de terrain et aux entretiens filmés, elle adjoint une recherche formelle complexe, comme le montrent ses dessins exécutés d'après photographie et les nombreux textes présents dans ses œuvres, qui l'éloignent d'une approche purement documentaire. « (...) Comme Nil Yalter ne s'en tient pas à un constat le plus scientifique possible et qu'elle veut à travers ses démarches et ses œuvres faire elle aussi bouger la réalité, plus que le terme d'art ethnologique

celui d'ethnocritique est celui qui traduit le mieux sa position dans le champ esthétique[5] ». Dans ses travaux les plus documentaires, il y a toujours une recherche d'élégance formelle. En 1975, elle réalise son premier sujet ayant pour sujet les immigrés des banlieues françaises. Son titre, « Chicago », est le surnom d'un quartier de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines donné par ses habitants en référence à la violence qui sévissait dans la ville américaine dans les années 1930. Dans sa version française, des Algériens vivent dans des HLM en état de délabrement. Une vidéo de six minutes suit des enfants en train de jouer sur un parking désert, puis au pied d'un immeuble, sur des balançoires aménagées pour eux. L'environnement est bétonné, il y a très peu d'arbres. La caméra quitte soudain les enfants pour s'aventurer le long des balcons qui animent la façade de l'immeuble.

Du linge sèche, au loin on entend les rires des enfants. Le film est accompagné de grands panneaux associant images, l'une superposée à l'autre en négatif, et texte évoquant les conditions de vie dans ces barres d'immeubles. Dans « Ris- Orangis » (1979), qui combine vidéos, photographies et textes, elle donne la parole à la communauté portugaise cloîtrée en banlieue parisienne. Ses membres, ouvriers, évoquent leur situation, leur nostalgie de déracinés, leurs difficultés à s'intégrer dans un pays trop peu accueillant. En se positionnant au plus près de ces personnes qui se sentent déconsidérées, Nil Yalter leur redonne de la dignité. Elle élabore un travail de mémoire sur l'immigration.

L'œuvre de Nil Yalter est traversée par un engagement féministe. Elle participe à la lutte pour l'avortement, contre les violences sexistes. En 1974, elle réalise sa première vidéo, « la femme sans tête » dans laquelle elle se filme exécutant une danse du ventre orientale, s'essaie à l'écriture corporelle, laissant apparaître un texte qui condamne l'excision et célèbre la jouissance clitoridienne. Chez Nil Yalter, l'usage performatif du langage en tant que texte et écriture est un acte de prise de pouvoir[6]. Plus tard, dans « Histoire de peau » en 2003, ce féminisme sera associé au corps vieillissant, notamment le sien. Elle se prolonge dans l'ensemble des vidéos de l'artiste abordant la question migratoire où elle a systématiquement interrogé des hommes et des femmes. Les témoignages de femmes migrantes sont rares. Chez Nil Yalter, elles y tiennent toujours une place égale à celle des hommes. En 1976, elle fait partie du collectif « Femmes en lutte[7] » pour la visibilité des femmes artistes, avec, entre autres, Esther et Mathilde Ferrer et Dorothee Selz, puis à partir de 1978, du groupe « Femmes / Art ». A l'instar de la documentariste militante Carole Roussopoulos,

elle est une des premières artistes femmes à utiliser une caméra, instrument d'émancipation. Nil Yalter est à la fois une militante féministe marxiste active auprès des mouvements français des années soixante-dix, et attentive aux conditions et aux représentations des femmes dans le monde. En 1980[8], elle réalise « Harem », ensemble composé d'une vidéo- performance de 45 minutes et d'une dizaine de panneaux mêlant dessins, photographies et textes, qui raconte l'histoire de deux femmes et, à travers elles, parle des conditions de vie quotidienne dans un harem oriental inspiré de celui du Palais de Topkapi dans lequel ont vécu recluses et totalement dévouées au sultan, environ un millier de femmes sur trois siècles. Avec cette œuvre, elle « se livre à une critique de l'image, dépassant l'érotisme fantasmé des femmes orientales véhiculé en Occident par des artistes comme Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres ou Henri Matisse[9] » écrit la co-commissaire Fabienne Dumont dans son essai publié à l'occasion de l'exposition. Conçue spécifiquement pour l'exposition, « Niqab blues » se compose d'une sculpture esquissant la silhouette d'une femme de dos portant un niqab, couronnée d'un motif en forme de mandorle répétant la photographie d'une femme en niqab noir dans les rues d'Istanbul. En la démultipliant, Nil Yalter masque son identité, la soustrait à notre regard.

Au milieu des années soixante-dix, au moment où elle participe aux actions du collectif « Femmes en lutte », elle milite en faveur du parti communiste turc, proche des pays du bloc soviétique, interdit en Turquie. Elle réalise ainsi plusieurs dessins destinés à illustrer les affiches pour le parti. En 1976, avec trois autres artistes, Canan Coker, Orhan Taylan et Yusuf Takbak, elle livre une série de six affiches intitulée « Grève générale en Turquie » en faveur de la démocratie. Elle montre des dessins, des photographies, des textes illustrant les luttes dans les usines turques. La série est exposée en France la même année à la Fête de l'Humanité et à la galerie Jean Larcade l'année suivante. En 1979, elle exécute le dessin de l'affiche « Liberté pour le parti communiste turc ».

Dix ans après sa première exposition au Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, elle expose dans la même institution l'installation « C'est un dur métier que l'exil » qui donne aussi son nom à l'exposition. Dans une série composée de sept panneaux mélangeant images et textes accompagnés de quatre moniteurs dans lesquels les entretiens filmés sont entrecoupés de scènes jouées, l'artiste donne à voir, à lire et à entendre les témoignages de femmes et d'hommes, clandestins turcs, évoquant leur conditions de vie en tant que travailleur·euses dans les ateliers textiles clandestins du Faubourg Saint-Denis

à Paris. La phrase de l'intitulé est empruntée au poète turc Nazim Hikmet (1902 – 1963) qui a passé la majeure partie de sa vie en prison ou en exil. Communiste, militant, il a composé une poésie d'engagement politique. Yalter donne aux panneaux la forme d'éléments d'architecture des différentes régions anatoliennes, immédiatement identifiables par la communauté turque. « C'est ce travail plastique complexe qui permet de lier la vision politique et humaine, entremêlant le reportage et la fiction dans un nouveau langage plastique[10] » indique Fabienne Dumont.

« TRANS / HUMANCE », le titre de l'exposition du MAC VAL, fait écho au fait que les œuvres de Nil Yalter qui circulent dans le monde entier depuis une dizaine d'années étaient auparavant confinées à l'atelier. Désormais, elles « transhument » en quelque sorte, d'un musée à l'autre, faisant entrer son œuvre dans l'espace public, au point de l'en déposséder. C'est aussi une référence aux migrations thématiques qui jalonnent son œuvre, autant qu'aux mutations techniques, sa pratique protéiforme indique que les médiums qu'elle utilise sont des outils au service d'un propos et d'une forme. Par son approche transculturelle, son imaginaire, sa mémoire et sa perte, Nil Yalter ouvre un tout nouveau champ de discussion qui transforme l'artiste elle-même en nomade voyageant à travers les questions d'immigration, de genre et de classe qu'elle croise avec celles de l'habitat, les croyances populaires, autant de thématiques revenant de façon obsessionnelle dans ses créations, sa façon de dire le monde. Son besoin de comprendre les communautés humaines apparaît impérieux. Ce qui caractérise son travail, c'est l'articulation entre une méthode, une pratique et des formes artistiques : la méthode s'appuie sur celle de l'anthropologie, influence une pratique alliant différents médiums, de laquelle découle des formes artistiques. La main est toujours impliquée dans la fabrication de l'œuvre : les dessins, bien sûr, mais aussi les textes qui sont toujours écrit à la main. Ses vidéos d'entretiens réalisées sur le terrain constituent une archive unique. Les témoignages de ces femmes et de ces hommes insérés dans ses œuvres plastiques, sont une contribution importante à l'histoire des immigrations. Ils viennent combler les lacunes de l'histoire. L'artiste a su conjuguer militantisme et forme, que l'on cherche trop souvent à opposer. Pourtant, à 81 ans, Nil Yalter reste peu connue du grand public et n'occupe pas encore la place qu'elle mérite dans l'histoire de l'art. Trop militante pour les uns, trop artiste pour les autres, elle a longtemps été reléguée dans un entre-deux, un angle mort. C'est que son œuvre se situe à la croisée de l'art et du documentaire. Elle se veut aussi poétique que politique, se révèle hermétique à toute catégorisation, revendique une porosité entre création

artistique et sciences humaines. Nil Yalter crée pour transmettre quelque chose. « Elle donne à voir un art inquiet qui problématise tout à la fois : la prise de parole, la position de l'artiste, le savoir collectif des communautés » indique Philippe Artières[11] précisant qu'elle « se fait le relai d'un discours tu, refoulé, proscrit ». La très grande humanité qui ressort de ses œuvres en font les témoins de leur temps. « Rien n'a évolué, seules les populations ont changé. Les nouveaux immigrés ne sont plus italiens, portugais, turcs. Ils sont Africains ou d'Europe centrale. Mais les problèmes sont les mêmes. C'est ce que je veux montrer[12] » affirme Nil Yalter. « C'est un dur métier que l'exil », apparaît comme une sentence immuable.



Nil Yalter : Museum Ludwig
Artforum By Noemi Smolik, 2019

Half a century ago, Nil Yalter broached issues that others dare not touch even today—female genital mutilation, for example. Her video *The Headless Woman or the Belly Dance*, 1974, shows her writing on her body, the text spiraling over her naked belly an excerpt from the French poet and historian René Nelli about the clitoris as the center of female sexual pleasure and the persistent practice of cutting it. Then the artist, a native of Cairo who was raised in Istanbul, performs a belly dance, her marked-up torso epitomizing the contrast between the oppression of female sexuality and the aggressive pursuit of the erotic delectation on the part of them.

The Headless Woman was one of Yalter's first videos. Moving to Paris in 1965 at the age of twenty-seven, she started out as an abstract painter. Influenced by the Russian Constructivists, she painted circles that represented the female element. Then, on a visit to Istanbul, she learned of the death sentence against the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary Deniz Gezmiş. Agitated, enraged, she wanted to take a stand, but how? She made a series of five Conceptual abstract drawings. Then she began modifying newspaper clippings and taking photographs of her surroundings. The result, completed in 1972, was the complex installation *Deniz Gezmiş*; in Cologne, it takes up an entire room by itself.

The experience led her to take an interest in outcasts—in the subaltern, to use the term popularized by the scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Yalter visited Anatolia's nomads and built a yurt, decorating the outside with drawings on sheepskins and quotations about freedom from the Russian poet Velimir Khlebnikov and the Turkish writer Yaşar Kemal. Among the nomads, women are in command inside the tent but are not allowed to leave it. Their home becomes their prison. This ambivalence is reflected in *Topak Ev (Round House)*, 1973, in which the yurt is a symbol of both empowerment and oppression.

In a work made in collaboration with artists Judy Blum and Nicole Croiset, *La Roquette, Prison for Women*, 1974, Yalter turned to women who were literally incarcerated. Photographs of objects that made their daily routines a little easier to bear—an extra blanket, a hand-rolled cigarette, a personal soup bowl—as well as drawings and a video introduce the viewer to these women's

lives. Adopting its methodology from forensics, and bringing together video interviews, drawings, text, and collages of detritus found in situ, *Temporary Dwellings*, 1974–77, documents life in immigrant communities on the urban peripheries of Istanbul, New York, and Paris.

Ambivalence is a pervasive element in Yalter's oeuvre. In "Turkish Immigrants," 1977–2016, black-and-white photographs of Turkish women are paired with black-and-white drawings in which the faces are replaced by blanks. In moving to a different country, Yalter says, these women have lost their identities. But there's also something else at stake. The human figure, the central motif of Western visual culture, is frowned on in the Islamic tradition, which instead prizes ornamentation: And indeed, the faceless drawings often take on an ornamental quality. In the most recent work in the show, *Untitled (Black Veil)*, 2018, a photograph of a woman wearing a black chador is multiplied in a kaleidoscopic manner, transmuting the sitter into an abstract pattern.

Spivak argued that when the subaltern begins to speak, no one listens, because the language operates outside the hegemonic discourse. Yalter's works, however, give voice to women in prison, migrants, and—in Diyarbakır, 2005—residents of the eponymous Turkish city who cannot read or write, letting them share their stories in a way that has us listening spellbound.

Close-Up : Change of Subject, Omar Kholeif on Nil Yalter's Le Chevalier d'Éon, 1978
Artforum, 2017

IN 2012, Turkish artist Nil Yalter's poetic *Le Chevalier d'Éon, 1978*, debuted at Galeria Visor in Valencia, Spain, giving audiences an opportunity to see what is arguably the first artwork from a Middle Eastern context to engage transgender identity. Shot with a Porta-Pak, the video at the heart of Yalter's installation had languished for years on a tape that she no longer had the means to play back, because the requisite technology had become obsolete. Then, in the late 2000s, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France offered to restore and digitize her archives. "I had forgotten this work for thirty years," she told me, "and then realized that now everyone was talking about issues of transsexuality."

Born in 1938, Yalter moved to Paris in 1965. She was active in the women's movement that materialized in France after May 1968. *Le Chevalier d'Éon* emerged from the artist's relationship with a man who, while he was involved with her, decided that he would prefer to live his life as a woman. He gave Yalter a biography of Charles d'Éon de Beaumont (1728–1810), commonly known as the Chevalier d'Éon, a French diplomat, soldier, and spy whose gender was considered highly ambiguous by his contemporaries—he was rumored to be a woman in the earlier part of his life, then began to dress and present as female in his late forties while continuing to pursue "masculine" activities such as fencing. Yalter's subject (whose identity she has not revealed) decided to transform himself into the chevalier in front of the camera, in a kind of heightened dramatization of gender transition, and asked her to document the process.

The video begins with a twinned shot of a man looking us straight in the eyes. He is masculine, wears glasses, has a slight double chin. Yalter was unable to create a split-screen effect with the equipment she had, so she used a mirror. This doubling is an iteration of the work's key gesture: the fracturing and multiplication of the image, and, by extension, the self, across genders, across screens. As we contemplate the bespectacled man, a melodramatic orchestral composition by Domenico Scarlatti envelops us. Suddenly, the man before us is topless, and we see that he has breasts. He dons large teardrop earrings. His hair has grown longer—he is transforming before our eyes, one hairstyle melding into another, one gender into another. This is not a conventionally pretty woman, but we can tell from her movements that she aspires to be a Hollywood

starlet, a Mia Farrow-type gamine perhaps. Yet there is a certain frankness to her androgyny, a seeming freedom and comfort with those details that don't conform to normative standards of feminine beauty.

The woman puts on fishnet stockings. Now she looks austere, even matriarchal—a "Gertrude Stein kind of lady," as Yalter put it, smart and sophisticated. She is posing for us—for Yalter. There is an unsettling ambiguity as to whose gaze is being courted here, an uncertainty as to how objectification, desire, and agency are intersecting. Is Yalter, a heterosexual woman, still enamored of this figure?

As soon as we ourselves begin to feel beguiled by the flirting subject, the image dissipates. The video is in fact structured as a series of dissolving vignettes. In the second chapter, our protagonist again appears as male. He is playing with a fur scarf—actually, devouring it. A TV screen sits next to him on a table, the scene we've just witnessed playing on it. Is this an act of self-examination or self-surveillance? In subsequent vignettes, the man begins to undress; he caresses the monitor. Images start to refract and double, proliferating rapidly. Now there are more than a dozen monitors, all spitting out the same image—of a vamping, androgynous siren—as if we were looking at a department-store display as the TVs are commandeered for a liberating, sensuous intervention.



The film indeed becomes an ever-deepening *mise en abyme*, as the figure we're looking at continues to recede beyond our grasp, as if to suggest that this search for self-representation can never really reach an end point. Near the conclusion of the video, we find the man lying on the ground, smoking, his legs stretched wide-open. Is this the objectified female surrendering to the patriarchal gaze? Perhaps not. In between the man's legs sits a TV, and on its screen, efflorescing lips utter the words of the chevalier.

"After having been an honest man, a diligent citizen, and a valiant soldier all my life, I triumph in being a woman and in being able to be cited forever amongst those many women who have demonstrated that the qualities and virtues, which men are so proud of, have not been denied to my sex."

In the final scene, the music swells over a shot of a TV. Above the television, we see someone's breasts, as if a topless woman were holding the appliance. On the screen, the man is shaving his chest. Fade to black.

The video is presented on an LCD monitor with a standard 16:9 aspect ratio alongside Polaroids that functioned as performative studies for the video and black-and-white photographs. These are displayed with two paintings, red, Rodchenko-like monochromes that, Yalter has said, speak to the abstraction of sexual identity. "Sexual identity is a form that is constantly being renegotiated," she has observed, and indeed, in his later years, the man in the video was to live as a woman, then as a man again. Today, he chooses to remain anonymous and acknowledges no relationship to the work. Yalter informs me that he never wanted to transition completely, and that his pursuit of hormonal treatment was minimal.

The fact that Yalter's work remained hidden for so long chimes with the experiences of a generation of Middle Eastern artists who have only recently begun to be rediscovered: Füsün Onur, Gülsün Karamustafa, Fahrlnissa Zeid, and Simone Fattal, to name but a few. Their work was initially obscured by the master narratives of their time and place, by the gender politics of patriarchy and the geopolitics of neoimperialism, and by expectations with regard to what constituted "authentic" art from the region, as opposed to a stigmatized diasporic cosmopolitanism. *Le Chevalier d'Éon* unbuckles these proscriptive tropes, along with those that govern what it means to be a man or a woman. That Yalter did this almost forty years ago, when the notion of gender identity

as a perpetual negotiation was so subversive, so genuinely radical, makes her achievement all the more remarkable.

Nil Yalter: memory, migrants and workers in 1970s-1980s France
Fabienne Dumont, 2010

The work produced by Nil Yalter since the 1970s combines the power of testimony with a wide-ranging critique of domination on many levels but specifically from women as workers and migrants. By showing these people's lives, foregrounding their perspectives and giving them value by creating works with a strong aesthetic of both formal and simple but effective beauty, Nil Yalter contributed to a socio-aesthetic movement that offered an alternative vision of history of the working-class. A principle feature of these works was to highlight women's role in poor and exploited communities and show the particular conditions of their work through testimonies that are very rare and often overlooked in accounts and artworks about working-class men or migrants. If the reception of this work, between art and documentary, was very controversial at the time, many contemporary artists are now using these types of schema (e.g. in France, Valerie Mréjen, Florence Lazar, Clarisse Hahn, etc.). In the period 1970-1980, filmmakers close to Turkish realism also produced films that dealt with the experience of immigration (Metin Erksan, Yılmaz Güney, Omer Kavur, etc.), as well as documentary and realist photographers, and separate to this, some feminist filmmakers' groups also analysed women's situation at home and at work, often exploring the gap between realism and fantasy, or mixing utopian dreams with the concrete conditions of life. In this cultural landscape, Nil Yalter's and her multiple partners' work – that is artistic partners, political and cultural partners, sociologists, migrants and workers themselves – are often seen as forming part of an anthropological and aesthetic approach in which testimonies and reality were filmed and photographed and then combined with representations in other mediums such as drawings or texts to form installations. When collected together, Yalter's works offer important insights into a history of the 1970s and 1980s lives and conditions of immigrants and workers which present a unique feminist perspective.

At the time of her arrival from Turkey to France in 1965, Nil Yalter (b. 1938) found that the abstract and geometrical paintings she was producing were completely at odds with the contemporary art shown in the Parisian art scene and at the same time she became aware of the richness of oriental civilization in Europeans' eyes. During a brief return to Turkey in 1971, she began to recognise the repression of Turkish nomads' lives, experiences and customs and started

to develop a multimedia art form that critics now call "socio-criticism". Nil Yalter's practice developed into a collective one, in many artistic collaborations or collaborations with the political and cultural networks or communities that she questions and about which her videos, photographs, drawings and writings are made. Renewed interest in her work, a more sympathetic reception and a new diffusion of her works follow both the revaluation of the work of the 1970s and of women's works conducted in art history,¹ but this revaluation is rarely interested in artworks concerning immigration and labor, even though these subjects are central to today's debates about globalisation and twenty-first century capitalism. Nil Yalter's works which have engaged with these topics over two decades have therefore not yet been historicized and this was a task I began to undertake with the artist's support.² The late registration of her concerns as an artist is somewhat typical of French art history, which lags behind other historical and sociological disciplines, but also by comparison to issues that have animated the international contemporary art world in the last decade.

Women's work, men's work

Nil Yalter's numerous projects since the 1970s have presented the lives and experiences of working women often linking these activities with their work in the domestic sphere. Each time, Nil Yalter includes gender perspectives by showing how men and women work separately in proscribed gender roles within the communities that they represent. Situated between documentary and aesthetics, this work reflects a whole section of migrants', workers' and women's memory of the 1970s and 1980s – mostly in France, a memory that still remains largely unknown and about which I will mention some examples. During the first half of 1970s, Nil Yalter directed several projects that address specific experiences related to women or to their dual culture as both women and immigrants (*La femme sans tête ou la danse du ventre*; Paris, ville lumière, with Judy Blum; *La Roquette, prison de femmes*, with Nicole Croiset and Judy Blum), but also the separation of tasks between men and women (*Topak Ev*; *Une expérience d'art socio-écologique*, Neuenkirchen). It is these last two projects I will analyze in greater detail here.

Analysing separately how human activities remain gendered is an ever present feature in Nil Yalter's work after her first installation, *Topak Ev (Tent)*, in 1973 at the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, which now belongs to the Santralistanbul Museum's collection (Istanbul). The collages that accompany

the tent consist of drawings, photocopies of photographs and writings. The tent was made on a metal structure covered with felt made of sheep wool on which painted sheep skins were hung and additional texts written. Following the discovery of the living conditions of Turkish nomads, Nil Yalter manufactured a nomad's tent that represents their lives and their beliefs – threatened by the land appropriation of Turkish landowners who drove them out of their traditional homeland and forced them to wander. Built by women, it is a double symbol, of women's lives confined in this space while men are engaged activities outdoor, but it simultaneously represents how nomads are freer than sedentary populations because of these tribal living conditions in Turkey. Topak Ev also introduced how the artistic process of Nil Yalter between art and documentary forms began to take shape alongside her ongoing concern for people who are economically, socially or politically discriminated against.

In 1975, in a project in Germany entitled *Une expérience d'art socio-écologique*, Neuenkirchen (A socio-ecologist experience, Neuenkirchen), Yalter chose to look at the female- defined work of a cleaning woman in contrast to the work of another woman employee who milked the cows in Neuenkirchen. This was followed by an examination of men's preparation for a shooting festival at heart of a forthcoming celebration in this small town. Yalter said of this piece that she 'wanted to work with [her subject] on her activity: cleaning, by definition, is a "feminine" work. Then I wanted to see the preparations for the village celebration: a festival of shooting, whose origin dates back to 1844'.³ The different occupations in the final video and installation highlight contrasting gender roles and the violence taught exclusively to men, because the women were excluded from the shooting gallery. The project was carried out and exhibited in Neuenkirchen in Germany and then shown at the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris. The work came about because thirty artists had been invited by gallery owner Ruth Falazik and Franco-German Youth Office (OFAJ) to prepare a proposal which resulted in an exchange with Neuenkirchen's population. All the artists employed photography, video and film, like the feminist artist Lea Lublin, who also interviewed local people and then played back their responses to them allowing them to distance themselves from their experiences. The installation proposed by Nil Yalter had two parts: three panels combining texts, drawings and photographs depicting the daily work of Mrs Schmidt, an employee who milked cows and of Mrs Meisel, a cleaning woman, and of a man practicing shooting; a video also shows the activities of the last two. The photographs, realistic and minimal, show body parts accomplishing actions, while the drawings take

up again certain details of clothing and tools, emphasizing essential means by this economy, in the analysis of gender and class perspectives that are recurring concerns for the artist. Texts describe the different peoples' stories. Mrs Meisel and Mrs Schmidt both came from cities in Pomerania: Mrs Meisel had to flee in 1945 upon the arrival of the Russian army in Gollnow, hometown, which then became a Polish city. The text describes different jobs undertaken by Mrs Meisel before becoming a housecleaner, her remuneration, the number of worked hours, her children and her aspirations. Mrs Schmidt was a maid before becoming an employee milking cows. Yalter's drawings represent details of her clothing, of her tools to milk cows and of her environment. The panel devoted to the shooting features photographs of the party drumbeats, gunmen in the process of targeting and metal containers punctured by bullets, while the text indicates their names, their professions and the results of their shooting. In its contrasts, the work acts as a socio-aesthetic witness of some women's and men's activities in Neuenkirchen and of episodes and activities within German history.

The reception of this work was indeed controversial, because its aesthetics were overlooked by the politics with which the work engaged, often dismissing it as sociocriticism, sociological or ethno-critical art. Nil Yalter, however, deliberately uses ethnological methods for understanding human communities and their relation to the land, to their home, to the universe, to objects and rites in order to understand individuals' practices, beliefs and symbolic relations to the world. From Topak Ev came the idea of meeting people living in slums, the source of another series of studies trying to understand the situation of these workers that Europe needs but despises. Ethnological criticism has joined forces with many consciousness-raising movements and political struggles and is part of a whole school of political thought in relation to aesthetics, including theorists like Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno from the Frankfurt School. It goes without saying that this type of work has fierce opponents, who believe it does not fall within the artistic field, and this has resulted in a difficult reception for the work and the reputation of the artists involved. Nil Yalter is interested in how people of a given population live in their situation and with their universe (or worldview) as well as how they can change them by their own consciousness-raising methods within their political struggles for recognition and representation. For Theodor Adorno, great processes of artistic creation have always been historically linked to those of social production, and he wrote in *Théorie esthétique* about 'the double character of art as autonomy and social fact'.⁴ The links between substance

and form are addressed in many discussions and symposia in the 1970s, and it is summed up by a quotation from Herbert Marcuse which demonstrates Yalter's position: 'A work of art is authentic or true not by virtue of its content (i.e. the "correct" representation of social conditions), nor by its "pure" form, but by the content having become form'.⁵

Immigrant communities

In the second half of the 1970s, Nil Yalter pursuing ideas developed since 1974, directed several projects on specific immigrant communities: *La communauté des travailleurs turcs à Paris* (1976) and *L'Immigration et la ville nouvelle* (1979). These projects concentrate on the work, living conditions and political exile of largely Turkish and Portuguese immigrant communities in France, although Algerian and Chilean populations also feature. In the first project, two videotapes contain first the testimonies of men, which are contrasted with the experiences of women and children in such a way that Yalter succeeds in emphasizing again how two spheres of life coexist, divided by gender. Similarly, in the second project, women, men and children speak about their lives and their problems, their aspirations. *La communauté des travailleurs turcs à Paris* (Turkish workers' community in Paris), realized with Nicole Croiset and two sociologists, was shown at the Paris Biennale in 1977. These testimonies on video of people in Corbeil-Essonnes and Goussainville – Paris suburbs – and in Paris reflect on the 'professional relationship between immigrants and host countries' and on issues relating to 'social inclusion, the survival of customs and traditions, the perception and assimilation of values scales by new immigrants, the contributions and mutual influence of different lifestyles'.⁶ Accompanied by photographs and drawings, the videos show families in their living places although in the drawings their faces disappear in a way which highlights their feelings of exile and loss of identity. Men and women describe their problems: accidents, exiguous flats (one family lives in a caravan), homesickness, the "in-between" between an impossible return and a partial integration. Women express myths forged about France and the second video shows their domestic work, in the kitchen and with children, in a way which highlights their ignorance of their husbands' life outside the home. These documents on immigrant women's daily life are rare. The few existing films and videos which do exist are made by feminists. Women nevertheless represented 40 % of the foreign population in 1975, arriving in France either as workers or to join their men abroad. Struggles of migrant workwomen or domestic workers have existed, but they left few traces and few personalities

are visible – the book of Maria Arondo, *Moi, la bonne* (Me, the maid) in 1975,⁷ could, for example, be linked with Nil Yalter's interest in Mrs Meisel.

Similarly, the video *L'Immigration et la ville nouvelle* (Immigration and new town), exhibited at the Cultural Center of Ris-Orangis, gives voice to immigrants, mainly Portuguese, who talk about their lives and their aspirations in their homes in vast blocks of low-rise buildings Habitation à Loyer Modéré, (H.L.M.) which is the city council's housing with reasonable rent in the Parisian suburbs of Ris-Orangis and La Grande Borne in Grigny. These documents, with the distance of time, say magnificently what life was like for immigrants in France in the 1970s, and the conditions that shaped the situation of what we now call "bedroom suburbs". Indeed, the cutting up of the urban space into areas produced separate spaces for the identity of some foreigners even though the evocation of working foreigners emphasizes their role in the economy of host countries and demonstrates a form of integration in the labour market. In France, migration history is still not seen as belonging to French History, so we must attend to these migrant memories as a counter to their absence from the dominant French story. Algerians also provided the music for this video, in a manner which demonstrates their presence but refuses to offer their testimony – the Algerian war was perhaps too close (1954- 1962). The apartments' decor, simple words and behaviour says a lot about these immigrants' situation, and acts as a further visual expression of their suffering and struggle to forget their home country while integrating values of the host country. For example, a man unionized in CGT (General Confederation of Workers) expresses his integration difficulties, his rejection of Portuguese customs and the acceptance and appreciation of his dual-culture. He explains that immigrants are scapegoats for the economic crisis and wrongly made responsible for unemployment. His wife expresses her sadness and anger in view of racism and says she feels unwanted. A young girl, in turn, recalls her desire to live in France, as a symbol of this second generation that will raise a protest movement in the 1980s. Nil Yalter not only gives voice to people who are rarely questioned or heard, but she makes their lives significant by her visualization of details in daily life, using simple artistic mediums that echo their poverty while magnifying their voice as individuals.

Characteristics of the particular French situation regarding immigration in the 1970s-1980s need to be clarified to relocate this work in context. France has welcomed immigrants since the Middle Ages, but the appeal to invited foreign labour intensified in the mid-nineteenth century, when most other European countries were still mass emigration countries. Immigration, far from

being a marginal phenomenon, is rooted in the heart of the French social and economic system. After the Second World War, France developed a worker and resettlement policy for migrants and imposed a quota system. The repatriation of French Algerians also caused the number of immigrants to escalate in the 1950s-1960s. Between 1955 and 1965, 2 500 000 foreigners – all permanent employees – arrived in France. This population of workers were mostly Spaniards, Portuguese and North Africans. Following the oil crises, France formally blocked all immigration in 1974 but in 1981, the Left permitted further migration within existing families. Today, it is estimated that one quarter or one third of the population living in France come from former immigrants of their grandparents' generation. The pattern of immigration in France has also changed and a largely European immigration has given way to a predominantly North African immigration. Thus, the number of immigrants from Portugal, Italy and Spain, which accounted for half of immigrants in the early 1980s has tailed away. By contrast, since 1980, those coming from North Africa and Turkey have increased by 68% among Moroccans, 13 % among Algerians and 86% among Turks. The people chosen by Nil Yalter are therefore representative of European immigration in the 1970s and 1980s and not the predominant North African migrants of today. However, her interest in Turkish migrants is ahead of their real importance in France, highlighting the strong involvement of her own origin in her choices.

Domestic work, working class, illegal employment

In 1979 and 1980, some of Yalter's projects started to question Oriental customs towards women and these works mix video and performance: *Rahime, femme kurde de Turquie*, *Les Rituels* (two projects done with Nicole Croiset) and *Le Harem*, and from 1980 Nil Yalter undertakes projects directly in communities, like *Femmes au foyer, femmes au travail* in 1981 with Nicole Croiset, which consists of three parts. In 1983, she also exhibits in the contemporary section of the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris *C'est un dur métier que l'exil I*, that evokes the miserable working conditions of Turkish immigrants settled in ready-to-wear factories in the Parisian street, Rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis. *Femmes au foyer, femmes au travail* (Women at household, women at work) includes a poster series, a video, a performance and a series of portraits of women done in La Rochelle as part of a broader collective work entitled *Femmes au travail, femmes à la maison* (Women at work, women at home) initiated by the District House of Mireuil. Nil Yalter and Nicole Croiset joined the project, supported

by the Culture Centre and the Festival of Contemporary Art in La Rochelle, to record testimonies of ten working class women, two of whom were immigrants, reflecting their daily occupations: work, leisure and family. The collection of articles and stories illustrating the daily problems of women living in H.L.M. was developed into large posters made up of photographs and texts that replaced the commercial billboards along the route taken by the bus which took the same women interviewed daily to work. In the buses, small advertising panels were used to repeat key phrases or words from their stories of their lives. The artists thus formatted these women's experiences, their fears and their joys, in an active collaboration. This city installation gave visibility to these women as well as a very rewarding sight of themselves. Nil Yalter and Nicole Croiset also produced a performance that reflected the activities and journey to work of these women workers. Both artists perform this work in front of two white stretched sheets, where slides and video of women's activities were projected, transforming everyday objects into powerful poetic evocations. The installation combined filmed fragments of reality with ritual actions performed by the artists. There was a reconstruction of the factory's reality, of printing, of work's world, which was superimposed on scenes from family life. These symbolic gestures reveal not only class and gender differentiation, but also their participation in maintaining a certain social order, including unpaid household work. Finally, with the recordings about Turkish immigrant lives in France, they realized a video made of interviews with Turkish immigrants, both men and women, called *Toprak* (land), on Turkish community in Villeneuve-les-Salines, the second H.L.M. city in La Rochelle, which was shown on the spot in a bar where Turks were accustomed to meet. After making this work, Nil Yalter collaborated with several works councils, usually alongside a Communist delegate, realizing another form of collective testimony with women about their lives and translating this into political protest for changes in the work place. For the artist, this political, educational and sociological work corresponds to her desire to 'Dial images and sounds like so many bits of reality shaped and anchored in interrogated workers' word and speech – To develop an aesthetic and artistic language as contribution to a work's culture'. This socio-political approach was also developed by other women artists at the same time, such as the collective work of Mary Kelly, Margaret Harrison and Kay Hunt, *Women and Work: A document on the division of labor in industry*. This installation, completed in 1975 and now in the Tate Britain in London, consists of black and white photograph, charts, photocopied documents, film loops and audio recordings. It documents the work of workers in a metal box factory at the time of the introduction of equal pay law. In the U.S., Suzanne Lacy's work

results also from the same approach.

In 1983, Nil Yalter created a further installation on exile, *C'est un dur métier que l'exil* (Exile is a hard job I) that was shown and remade again in 2006 and 2009. The work brings together experiences from different backgrounds in one space – emphasizing the proximity of migrant experiences. The 1983 project title is borrowed from Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet (1902-1963), whose work provided a link between the artist and workers during meetings to develop the project. The Turkish workers are mostly illegal migrants working in ready-to-wear workshops in Rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis, Paris, whose deprivation and poverty serving the fashion industry are far from the subject of any fascination or political concern by the West. The work of the visual artist interleaved two worlds together, confronting the reality of these immigrant workers' lives, their poverty, their loneliness and setting this against images from Turkish culture and their aspirations to work in Europe. The installation includes photographs, text and a video that represent living conditions of Turkish families who work in the same workshop and contains many expressions of their difficulties in adjusting to life in France as well as demonstrating their confinement, their lack of communication and their economic exploitation. Workers are often locked in these workshops which are not only enclosed spaces but also the site where they are exploited and exhausted through their labour. In the video, various symbols are used from Turkish culture to restore meaning to their stories and provide a means to generate distance, even to humanize their experiences. The red apple symbolizes, for example, a popular poetry that reminds you not to forget the bride back home. Nil Yalter juxtaposes myth with reality and imagination, enriching the cultural representations within a situation in which workers are removed from their family, their language or their country of birth. The worker's testimonies refer to the regularization of paperless workers in 1981, to the family gathering that followed, to the risk of cancer from the dust generated by the fabrics they work with, their fear of the police, problems with language and housing, the pain of exile and their nostalgia for their country of origin. One woman evokes the double burden of work that women have in the workshop and at home. Politicized workers analyze their situation lucidly, noting that French government took advantage of their youth. Another explains that 'the bourgeoisie uses unemployment to reinforce racism against foreigners. While the real reason of unemployment in France is the economic crisis'. Nancy Green, in her book on the ready-to-wear industry and its use of immigrant labour⁸ explains very well the important place occupied by workers from the clothing industry in all engineering industries,

stressing that the clothing industry may be a mass industry without any of the conventional methods of mass production. Nil Yalter's installation provides access to these populations that are particularly representative of industrial change and her work examines the consequences of labour and migration laws on men and women's lives. Given the isolation of the artist in her studio, Nil Yalter tried, like many artists from 1960-1970s, to establish a dialogue with different audiences and argued strongly that artists within the establishment must participate in a fight against all forms of oppression.

Since the 1980s, Nil Yalter has continued to realize, alone or collectively, many other projects that include these issues and, like many artists from the 1970s, she has also recycled older works into new projects. She is also interested in digital media, creating in 2004 *Diyarbakar, Mardin*, an interactive DVD that gives voice to literacy networks in Turkey. In this work, women and children, but also some men, explain the importance attached to learning to write and read, referring to the social violence that they suffer because of the "code of honor". The artistic treatment magnifies these stories without depriving them of their harshness and contributes to knowledge by crossing feminist, Marxist and post-colonialist thought. Located at the crossroads of several crucial issues for understanding our era – the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions of women, migrants and workers – the artistic work of Nil Yalter is interesting, beyond art history's current preoccupations, for its memory of underrepresented populations in their own universe and through their own words. Testimonies of these women and men are inserted into an aesthetic vision that elevates them without removing the viewer's perception of the harshness of their conditions or an understanding of how the artist's political beliefs interlock with her aesthetics. Using elements of everyday work and different forms to distance, analyse and reconstruct people's lives, this socio-critical art denounces the current state of affairs and at the same time gives voice and value to women, migrants and workers' memories.

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