

KRINZINGER SCHOTTENFELD · SCHOTTENFELDGASSE 45 · 1070 WIEN
TEL +43 1 512 81 42 schottenfeld@galerie-krinzinger.at
galerie-krinzinger.at

La Langue des Chimères **The Language of Chimeras**

Opening days: 13th and 14th of September 2024 12 -7 pm
Duration: September 17th – October 19th, 2024

Curator: Mohamed Bourouissa

Artists: Mohamed Bourouissa, Leonora Carrington, Neïla Czermak Icti, Wifredo Lam.

In collaboration with Sébastien Delot.

Studio team: Sophie-Charlotte Holmlund and Margot Nguyen.

With special thanks to Anne Barrault, Kristina Bosak & Krinzinger Gallery, Valeria Diaz Granada, Dorota Dolega-Ritter, Eskil Lam and to the artists, their galleries, and their teams.

Press Release

For the exhibition at Galerie *Krinzinger* in Vienna, curator Mohamed Bourouissa proposes an unexpected approach to sharing stories. Is it possible to capture infinity in an outline? Does this exhibition, entitled *The Language of Chimeras*, allow him to articulate a vision based on new values or new chimeras?

The juxtaposition of the artists Wifredo Lam, Mohamed Bourouissa, Leonora Carrington and Neïla Czermak Icti allows us to grasp the notion of global instability. How can we fail to see that these new connections produce a reversal of meaning?

Mohamed Bourouissa declares that his decision to handwrite Aimé Césaire's poem on the gallery walls in order to accompany Lam's drawings reveals the importance of the concept of language. It is a way of entering into communion and complicity with the artist and the poet.

For a poet represents, above all, human nature in its purest form. Deeply rooted in language, poets transcend human nature. Mohamed Bourouissa has always been part of the here and now. He is a person of the eternal present. He is both a stranger and a native of the same land and the same language as the artists mentioned above. For him, art is, in a certain form, a mother tongue.

A few extracts from quotes provide help in understanding the many paths and mazes he proposes in this journey:

KRINZINGER SCHOTTENFELD · SCHOTTENFELDGASSE 45 · 1070 WIEN
TEL +43 1 512 81 42 schottenfeld@galerie-krinzinger.at
galerie-krinzinger.at

"Language is something we share, something we sometimes think escapes us or something that we only understand in fragments, but it is also something that belongs to us and is fundamentally manifold. Language is something that is created, something that lives and that produces spaces in between, like other poetic articulations. Césaire's poem unites all of these aspects within itself and humbly evokes Lam's universe. It is tinged with beauty, but also with a certain latent violence. Césaire's perception of his encounter with Lam and its implications tells us about a fantastic world, a world made of ghosts, of chimeras, but also a world made of tenderness. A language of many worlds". Bourouissa thus evokes these chimeric worlds inherent in Lam's work, which can also be found in the fantastic drawings and paintings of Neïla Czermak Icti and Leonora Carrington.

In his video *Island*, the starting point of the project, Bourouissa recalls his collaboration with Estrella Diaz in regard to the film *Soy Cuba* (1964), asking her to gather on-site observations from her students as well as the memories of one of the film's actresses and its screenwriter. The objective of this project was to propose a counter-history of *Soy Cuba* and its making. Through an animated cartoon, the video shows how in *Soy Cuba* an untrue image of the Cuban Revolution was created, an image which did not correspond to what Cubans experienced and how they felt living in their city. Are these chimeras a way of speaking about violence, or of escaping it for a moment in order to try to conjure it?

The notion of the chimera represents, for these artists, the interstices of history. The fantastic universes created by them enable a world where counter-histories as well as the unspoken exist and are acknowledged. Mohamed Bourouissa had entered the language of art as an explorer: each word was on the point of being born, expressions were creations, adverbs were immense ... The sentences became cavalcades, opening spaces before them through their energies, and yet, the old ghosts had not disappeared. This negative of reality, this counter-representation of reality, is expressed via intersections between film, drawing, poetry, and painting as well as by plural inspirations.

At the exhibition, this is reflected for instance through Neïla Czermak Icti's work, whose characters draw inspiration from and are nourished by gore, grunge, science-fiction, or manga cultures, while being connected to her very concrete family, her intimate and daily universe. Mohamed Bourouissa shares "that he was influenced by Neïla Czermak Icti's research on the forgotten Nigerian actor Bolaji Badejo, who played the character Alien (in the film *Aliens* by James Cameron, in 1986), and her broader interest in the figure of the Alien, in its relation to otherness and the "Other". This research resonates with the fantastic and mystical aspect of Carrington's work, and her fusion of human and animal figures. Carrington too generates a vision of the chimera as a composite figure speaking about the soul, as for instance her bird-woman, who is the portrait of a deceased, shows. Her art is creating links between things, temporalities, and realities. This exhibition is also a reflection on the exile trajectories of Wifredo Lam and Leonora Carrington in the 20th century and their artistic migrations: Carrington was a European who settled

KRINZINGER SCHOTTENFELD · SCHOTTENFELDGASSE 45 · 1070 WIEN
TEL +43 1 512 81 42 schottenfeld@galerie-krinzinger.at
galerie-krinzinger.at

in Mexico and Lam was a Cuban who settled in Paris. The exhibition wants to point out how these displacements nourished their work, allowing them to develop their universes."

"Connecting these artists is the aspect of working from or about a territory that is not one's own. In a certain way, it had been this condition that I approached by taking an interest in Cuba and its history when I created the film *Island*", states Bourouissa.

Neïla Czermak Icti speaks from a place which seems very familiar, intimate, and sometimes autobiographical to me. However, it is a place where the fantastic emerges, as a way of transmitting and transforming the feeling of closeness. These unsettling experiences – when the hair of characters attending a family meal stands on end, when a hawk with a human head emerges on top of people embracing on a sofa – are temporal and spatial adventures. She manages to capture us in her net.

Finally, we explore the question of rituals that occur throughout our lives. The Annunciation becomes a premonitory moment of something that is about to happen (Lam/Césaire), turns into childhood memories, into birth and death (Czemak Icti), into certain incarnations and symbols of maternity and femininity (Carrington), or into the collective memory of a film (*Island*) – all of this forms a certain constellation of moments that traverse our lives – a way of engaging us on a path that lies always ahead of us.

Mohamed Bourouissa, Sébastien Delot, and Margot Nguyen

Mohamed Bourouissa

Born 1978, lives and works in France

Mohamed Bourouissa was born in 1978 in Blida, Algeria, and currently lives and works in Gennevilliers, France. Each of Mohamed Bourouissa's projects, preceded by a lengthy immersion phase, constructs a new situation of enunciation. Contrary to falsely simplistic media constructions, the artist reintroduces complexity into the representation of the margins of hyper-visibility.

His work has been exhibited in numerous solo exhibitions in France and abroad, at Palais de Tokyo in 2024, the Lam - Lille Métropole Musée d'art moderne, d'art contemporain et d'art brut à Villeneuve d'Ascq, the Musée d'Art moderne de Paris, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, basis in Frankfurt, the BAL in Paris, the Haus der Kunst in Munich, and the FRAC Franche-Comté in Besançon. He has participated in the Biennials of Sharjah, Havana, Lyon, Venice, Algiers, Liverpool, and Berlin, as well as the Milan Triennial. In 2018, he was nominated for the Marcel Duchamp Prize. In 2017, he was shortlisted for the Prix Pictet photography prize. In 2020, he won the Deutsche Boerse Photography Foundation Prize following the exhibition "Libre échange" presented at Monoprix

KRINZINGER SCHOTTENFELD · SCHOTTENFELDGASSE 45 · 1070 WIEN
TEL +43 1 512 81 42 schottenfeld@galerie-krinzinger.at
galerie-krinzinger.at

d'Arles as part of the Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie. In 2024, he was a finalist for the Mario Merz Prize. His works are held in prominent collections including those of MoMA - The Museum of Modern Art, New York, LACMA in Los Angeles, the Centre Pompidou and the Maison européenne de la photographie in Paris, and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. In 2022, he won the Paris Photo - Aperture Foundation Photobook Prize with Loose Joints editions for the book "Périphérique."

Leonora Carrington

1917, United Kingdom - 2011, Mexico

Born in England in 1917, Leonora Carrington arrived in Mexico in 1942 escaping World War II. Today, she is recognized as one of the most important and influential women artists of the 20th century. For over seven decades, Carrington's creative process was fueled by a magical and extraordinary world, often paired with a rebellious spirit that would define her life and practice. Leonora Carrington stands until today as a captivating and enigmatic figure of the surrealist art movement. Her fantastical ideas are carried across her preferred mediums of painting, sculpture, and writing and stand as a testament to her distinctive vision for an unapologetic and free-thinking exploration of the subconscious. Articulated by recurrent motifs (including hybrid animals, landscapes and fictive characters), feminism, ecology and the mystical of Carrington's oeuvre—employing a variety of genres, media and materials—plays upon the powers of challenging conventions, memory, fantasy, and freedom.

Carrington's artistic compositions were deeply intertwined with her tumultuous life experiences. Fleeing the family expectations imposed on her as a young society woman of early 20th-century England, Carrington forged her independent path within the surrealist movement in France, an influence she carried with her to Mexico. Much like her peers, she delved into the subconscious recesses of her mind, creating dreamlike narratives that echo her struggles and triumphs. Her art became a vessel for introspection and independence, a medium through which she navigated the complexities of identity, mythology and the arcane.

Her work is found in renowned museum collections in the Americas, such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York the Peggy Guggenheim collection in Venice, Tate Modern & Tate Britain in London, Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City, Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden in Washington DC, among other prestigious institutions.

Throughout her career, Leonora Carrington has featured in influential international exhibitions, notably at the MOMA and Guggenheim in NY, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Cultural Art in the US, Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, the Fondation Beyeler in Basel, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca US, Tate Liverpool, the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City and more.

KRINZINGER SCHOTTENFELD · SCHOTTENFELDGASSE 45 · 1070 WIEN
TEL +43 1 512 81 42 schottenfeld@galerie-krinzinger.at
galerie-krinzinger.at

Neïla Czermak Ihti

Born in 1996, lives and works in France

The illustrator, painter, and storyteller Neïla Czermak Ihti, known on Instagram as @alienhabibti, is a graduate of the Fine Arts School in Marseille. The characters in her work may well have alien horns or mermaid-like scales, but their family resemblance is striking. The artist's features are copied from one face to another, while mothers, aunts, and grandmothers are transformed into avatars. Seamlessly and in the most natural way possible, they all fuse into a syncretic style borrowed from manga, anime, and video games.

This fierce and fantastic procession of characters is conjured up by Czermak Ihti with the tip of a biro – her preferred medium – and sometimes enhanced with acrylic paint. In her works, the monstrous becomes something else: a story of transmission and transition, as well as a sign of recognition. The stroke of her pen is as sharp as a Sphinx's claw, a hybrid being as impossible to categorize as she herself, or the smiling or weeping kaomoji [Japanese emoji], a creature with a defined chest and a mocking sneer on its lips, as in her recent work *Chienne de vie* (2022).

Wifredo Lam

1902, Cuba - 1982, France

"My painting is an act of decolonization not in a physical sense, but in a mental one."

Wifredo Lam

A pivotal figure of Latin American modern art, Wifredo Lam was born in 1902 in Cuba, the son of a Chinese father and an Afro-Cuban mother of Spanish descent. After graduating from Havana's Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro, he won a scholarship in 1923 to study at the Museo del Prado in Madrid, where he stayed until 1938, when he moved to Paris. There he was enthusiastically embraced by the city's avant-garde, whose members at the time were fascinated with the unconscious, the fantastic, and the non-European cultures of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. As a Caribbean of African descent, Lam held a particular appeal for these artists and poets (especially Pablo Picasso and André Breton), who perceived his race as playing a distinctive role in his work. In 1940, after the Nazis had occupied Paris, Lam escaped via cargo ship for an arduous journey back to Cuba. The voyage included a layover in the French Caribbean island of Martinique, where he met the poet Aimé Césaire, a founder of the Négritude movement, whose ideas would have an enduring influence on the artist. Back in Cuba after this long absence, Lam was confronted with the harsh reality of a country struggling to emerge from over 400 years of colonial subjugation. Disturbed by the island's condition, Lam found motivation in his empathy with the dispossessed: "I wanted with all my heart to paint the drama of my country, but by thoroughly exploring the negro spirit, the beauty of the plastic art of the blacks." *La jungla* (The Jungle), made two years after his return to Cuba, is a monumental drawing of life-size figures in a sugarcane field, a location invested with the island's history of slavery. Embracing the influence

KRINZINGER SCHOTTENFELD · SCHOTTENFELDGASSE 45 · 1070 WIEN
TEL +43 1 512 81 42 schottenfeld@galerie-krinzinger.at
galerie-krinzinger.at

of Cubism, Lam depicts these characters multi-perspectively and gives them stylized masks, referring not only to the masks in, say, Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) but also to the idols of Afro-Cuban mysticism. Lam used water-based gouache to compose the scene in translucent layers. The figures stand camouflaged amid the dense bamboo and sugarcane; their totemic forms, simultaneously voluptuous and angular, gesture provocatively in a mysterious scene evoking “*lo real maravilloso*” (the marvelous real), a term coined by the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier to describe the genuinely surreal nature of everyday life in the Caribbean. In Lam's jungle, the exuberance of nature, and the imperturbable expressions of the masks, are interrupted by the alarming presence of sharp blades and beaks in the sugarcane. These menacing presences insinuate that other dangers may lie hidden beneath the jungle's skin. A landmark in Lam's oeuvre, *La jungla* was included in a solo exhibition at New York's Pierre Matisse Gallery in 1944. There it caught the eye of James Johnson Sweeney, MoMA's director of painting and sculpture, who successfully proposed the work for purchase to the Inter-American Fund, recently endowed by Nelson Rockefeller to strengthen the Museum's Latin American holdings. Although Lam was absent from MoMA's 1944 survey *Modern Cuban Painters* (following a dispute with the Cuban critic José Gómez Sicre, one of the show's organizers), *La jungla* went on view in the Museum's collection galleries immediately after its acquisition, in June 1945, and has been often on display since. Lam left Europe having experienced firsthand the vitality of Cubism, the emergence of Surrealism, and modern art's fascination with African art. At home in Cuba, he developed a style that allowed him to express the hybrid quality of Cuban identity, fully asserting the African elements of its history in the language of modernist painting. In works such as *La jungla*, Lam reintegrated African art forms into an autochthonous context, challenging the Western construction of “the primitive” while still acknowledging the reality of Cuba's colonial legacy.

**curated
by**

17.9. – 19.10. Wien
2024 Vienna



**ALTSTADT
VIENNA**

The Art of Hospitality