

Monira Al Qadiri, SS Murex (series) (2023), Lightbox installation,
25 x 25 x 7cm, Photo: © Markus Treter



Monira Al Qadiri

Hero

11.7.25 – 17.8.26

Opening
Thur 10.7.25, 7 pm

The Berlinische Galerie presents “Hero”, a major solo exhibition by Monira Al Qadiri. The show focuses on her long-standing exploration of the sociocultural, environmental, and political dimensions of the global oil industry. Through a complex ensemble of sculpture, video, and painting, the artist examines how human activity has turned crude oil into an engine of prosperity, but also of exploitation, geopolitical interests, and structural dependencies—a raw material that is inextricably linked to demands for power, inequality, and colonial dynamics. At the centre of the exhibition is the oil tanker, which serves as an emblematic figure of our present. This floating behemoth represents a dying industry with a toxic legacy that continues to affect the oceans, the air, the earth, and ultimately our own bodies. The artist considers this monstrous vessel from an equally poetic and critical perspective—and reimagines it as the protagonist of a narrative about excess, power, and decay.

Al Qadiri’s installation comprises several, predominantly new groups of works. A recurring visual element is the colour red. It dominates the space and refers to the highly toxic biocide tributyltin (TBT), an anti-fouling agent added to paint in shipbuilding that has caused massive damage to marine ecosystems. In the artist’s work, this colour becomes a symbol of the contradictory nature of petrochemical products—oscillating between efficiency and destruction, comfort and contamination.

The “SS Murex series” (2023) marks the start of the exhibition: porthole-shaped light boxes display archive images of historic oil tankers, which are all named Murex—after a type of snail that was once a popular decorative object in the Victorian era. This name was given to one of the first modern tankers back in 1892; it was built by an oil company that originated from a family business in the seashell trade. In the decades that followed, hundreds of oil tankers were named after seashells and snail species.

The centrepiece of the main room is the monumental mural “Hero”, which portrays the side view of a gigantic oil tanker in dramatic shades of black and red. It radiates industrial power—simultaneously captivating and threatening—and provides a commentary on the strategic significance of crude oil in the geopolitical power structure. At the end of this exhibition space, the bow of a tanker emerges as a sculptural element: “Bulbous Bow” (2025), a large-format fibreglass sculpture, echoes the characteristic shape of the so-called bulbous bow—a feat

of technical engineering that reduces a ship's water resistance and improves its seaworthiness.

For the work "Seasons in Hell" (2025), eleven adapted tanker models are distributed around the room in a wave formation and function as narrators of geological and human history. The exhibition concludes with the new video work "Oh Body of Mine" (2025, 10 min.), in which Al Qadiri takes a closer look at a ship-breaking yard for decommissioned supertankers in Bangladesh. Dismantling these ships is an industry that is primarily located in countries of the so-called Global South. The majority of European ships are dismantled in the three largest ship-breaking yards, which are found in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. Due to the numerous toxic substances involved, this is a complex and dangerous process that also results in the social and environmental costs being exported, too. Accompanied by an adaptation of Arthur Rimbaud's poem "The Drunken Boat" (1871), Al Qadiri's images depict apocalyptic-looking scenes and serve as a sombre conclusion to this multifaceted installation.

About the artist

Monira Al Qadiri (b. 1983, Dakar, Senegal) is a Kuwaiti artist educated in Japan. Spanning sculpture, installation, film and performance, Al Qadiri's multifaceted practice is mainly based on research into the cultural histories of the Gulf region. Her interpretation of the Gulf's "petro-culture" is manifested through speculative scenarios that take inspiration from science fiction, autobiography, traditional practices and pop culture, resulting in uncanny and covertly subversive works. She currently lives and works in Berlin.

Her solo exhibitions include "Deep Fate" (Kiasma Museum, Helsinki, 2025); "The Archaeology of Beasts" (Bozar, Brussels, 2024); "Benzene Float" (Halle Verriere, Meisenthal 2024); "Haunted Water" (UCCA Dune, China, 2023), "Mutant Passages" (Kunsthauus Bregenz, Austria, 2023); "Holy Quarter" (Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2022); "Refined Vision" (Blaffer Art Museum, Houston, 2022); "Holy Quarter" (Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2020); "Empire Dye" (Kunstverein Göttingen, 2019); "The Craft" (Gasworks, London, 2017); "Attempts to Read the World Differently" (Stroom Den Haag, the Hague, 2017); "Muhawwil" (Sultan Gallery, Kuwait, 2014).

Select group exhibitions include Sharjah Biennial 16 (Sharjah, 2025); Desert X Al Ula (Al Ula, 2024); 24th Biennial of Sydney (Sydney, 2023-24); 8th Boras Biennial (Sweden, 2024); Sharjah Biennial 15 (Sharjah, 2023); 15th Triennial of Small

Sculpture, Fellbach (2022); Asia Art Biennial, Taiwan (2021); Dubai Expo 2020 (2021); "Our World is Burning" (Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2020); "Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars" (MoMA PS1, New York, 2019-20); Asia Pacific Triennial (Brisbane, 2018); Lulea Biennial (Sweden, 2018); Athens Biennial (Athens, 2018). In 2022, Al Qadiri was featured in the Venice Biennale's central exhibition "The Milk of Dreams."

Accompanying events and outreach in English

Wed 16.7.25, 7 pm

Open Air Video Art and Artist Talk
with Monira Al Qadiri (in English)

Free admission, no registration needed.

Guided tours in English take place every Saturday at 4:15 pm. No extra charge to ticket-holders. No advance booking required.

Thu 4.12.25, 7 pm

Lecture Performance with Monira Al Qadiri
(in English)

Free admission, with online registration.

Press images

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Admission 10€, concessions 6€
Every 1st Wednesday of the month
reduced admission for all
Wed – Mon 10 am – 6 pm
Tue closed

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