

Exhibition

“Qalqalah قلقلة: More Than One Language” – Kunsthalle Mulhouse

Virginie Bobin, Victorine Grataloup

After an initial presentation at the Centre Régional d'Art Contemporain Occitanie in Sète in 2020, “Qalqalah قلقلة : plus d'une langue” is now presented at the Kunsthalle in resonance with the Alsatian context. Mulhouse is historically working-class and a multilingual European border city: in addition to the traditional Germanic and Frankish dialects, German, English, Arabic and Turkish can be heard there. The exhibition will be accompanied by a workshop and a public event with Achim Lengerer/Scriptings on the political and linguistic issues of language learning in the context of migration, as a continuation of his work begun in Berlin in collaboration with Christine Lemke. An original translation of the curatorial statement into Arabic will also be made available.



“Qalqalah قلقلة: More Than One Language”, 2021
Graphic intervention : Montasser Drissi. © La Kunsthalle Mulhouse.
Photography: Sébastien Bozon.

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More images are available on the website.

The name Qalqalah قلقلة comes from two short stories by Egyptian curator and researcher Sarah Rifky. The eponymous heroine of these works of fiction, Qalqalah, is an artist and linguist who inhabits a near future reconstructed by the financial crisis and the popular revolts of the 2010s. Her poetic meditations on languages, translation, and their critical and imagining power accompanied our reflections, and have stayed with us ever since. Qalqalah قلقلة became an online research platform involving three languages (Arabic, French and English) and two alphabets, and now it is taking the form of an exhibition.

The title “Qalqalah قَلْقَلَة : plus d’une langue” [Qalqalah قَلْقَلَة: More Than One Language], orchestrates a meeting between our heroine and a quote by Jacques Derrida. In *Monolingualism of the Other*, the philosopher, born in 1930 in Algeria, writes of his ambiguous relationship with the French language, ensnared in military and colonial history. The book begins with a paradoxical statement: “I have only one language; it is not mine”, contradicting any proprietary, fixed or unequivocal definition of language —whether it be French (as the researcher Myriam Suchet nicely puts it, the “s” in “français” should be understood as a mark of plurality), Arabic (taught as a “foreign language” in colonial Algeria, and today the second most widely spoken language in France, in its various dialects) or English (a globalised language that is dominant in contemporary art).

These three languages will come together in the exhibition, each bringing its own political, historical and poetic issues that intersect and respond to one another. Letters and voices will run through the exhibition, reminding us that languages are inseparable from speaking and listening bodies — all speakers express themselves “also through their eyes and facial expressions (yes, language has a face)”, to borrow the words of Moroccan writer and researcher Abdelfattah Kilito. The works echo multiple, hybrid languages, acquired in the course of family migrations, personal exile or uprooted encounters. Native, secondary, adoptive, migrant, lost, imposed, common, minor, invented, pirated, contaminated languages... How do we speak (to each other) in more than one language, using more than one alphabet? How we listen from within the place and language in which we find ourselves? Between the lines, the exhibition examines the perspective from which we view works, according to the situated imaginaries that shape us.

Montasser Drissi’s graphic intervention is a site-specific work designed for the architecture of the Kunsthalle. Throughout the exhibition, it links the Latin and Arabic alphabets to the English, Arabic and French languages, showing not only words and letters but also textual references presented on the walls in their original language.

Most of the invited artists place the works’ publication, circulation and reception modalities at the heart of their practice. Operations of translation, transliteration, rewriting, archiving, publication, republication, montage, even casting and karaoke appear throughout the works as attempts to offer the eyes and ears stories that are sometimes evasive. Beyond a linguistic approach, it is about establishing a space in which plural stories and heterogeneous accounts can be presented, based on one possible meaning — in more than one language — of the Arabic word قَلْقَلَة: “a movement of language, a phonetic vibration, a bounce or echo”.

The media can only be viewed online

Guided tour of the exhibition “Qalqalah قَلْقَلَة: more than one language”
© [La Kunsthalle Mulhouse](#), 2020. Directed by Marie Bannwarth.

Victorine Grataloup

Victorine Grataloup studied art history and theory at EHESS (School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences) and at the University Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne where she is now a lecturer, and worked at the Palais de Tokyo, KADIST, Bétonsalon - Center for art and research and Cneai before becoming an independent curator.

She has been collaborating with Virginie Bobin since 2018 through Qalqalah قَلْقَلَة, platform for artistic exchange, research and translations they co-founded together; and with the curatorial collective Le Syndicat Magnifique which she co-founded in 2012.

In 2020, she is the recipient of the Cnap (The National Centre for Visual Arts) curatorial research grant with a project on acquisitions of works by artists from the Islamic world. She simultaneously works with École des Actes (School of Acts), an experimental micro-institution working in between languages in Aubervilliers, France.

Virginie Bobin

Virginie Bobin works at the crossroads between research, curatorial and editorial practices, pedagogy and translation. In 2018, she started a practice-based research project on the political and affective stakes of translation, within the framework of the PhD-in-practice program in Artistic Research at the Akademie der bildenden Künste (Vienna). In parallel, she co-founded with Victorine Grataloup the non-profit organization Qalqalah قَلْقَلَة, a platform for artistic exchanges, research and translations.

Until 2018, she was Head of Programs at Villa Vassilieff, a center for art, research and residencies, which she co-founded in 2016. Previously, she worked for Bétonsalon – Center for Art and Research, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (Rotterdam), Manifesta Journal, Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers and Performa, the New York Biennial for Performing Arts. Her independent curatorial projects have been hosted internationally, in such institutions as MoMA PS1, e-flux space and Tabakalera, and her texts have been published in international exhibition catalogues and magazines (including Metropolis M, Manifesta Journal, Frieze /de, Flash Art, Switch on Paper). Editorial projects include *Composing Differences* (Les Presses du Réel, 2015) and *Qalqalah* (an online platform jointly edited by Bétonsalon – Center for Art and Research, Villa Vassilieff and Kadist Paris, 2015–2018).

<https://qalqalah.org/en/activities/exhibition-qalqalah-ar-more-than-one-language-kunsthalle-mulhouse>