

LYDIA

COURTNEY

AT

CHRISTINA

26 JANUARY – 25 MARCH 2018

## LYDIA OURAHMANE

### 'THE YOU IN US'

*The you in us* is a new commission and the first solo exhibition in an institution by London and Oran-based artist Lydia Ourahmane. Comprising installation, sculpture and sound, Ourahmane's exhibition continues her ongoing engagement with the emotional, psychological and political charge of material and place. Informed by personal encounters, Ourahmane's work raises questions surrounding systems of exchange and dissemination.

Recurring throughout Ourahmane's work is the impulse to address acts of displacement, in which allegories of absence and removal evoke wider issues of place and migration. Influenced by time spent living and working from her family home in Oran, Algeria, Ourahmane's exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery investigates transformation through sonic and sculptural registers.

Works within the exhibition resonate through acts of cause and effect between materials, the audience and Ourahmane herself. Central to the show is a new sound work, *Paradis* (2018), which is embedded within, and amplified from a temporary wooden floor installed throughout the gallery. This work combines audio from field recordings made by Ourahmane whilst in Oran with sound scores composed and performed by the artist and her collaborators.

*In the Absence of our Mothers* (2015-18) consists of a single gold tooth, which resides in the gallery space, and a duplicate gold tooth that is implanted within Ourahmane's mouth. This work is shown alongside documents referencing Ourahmane's grandfather's resistance to military service under the French occupation of Algeria by extracting his own teeth. The archive also refers to the documents' current use by his descendants to claim French citizenship by right of blood. Heavy silver doors, treated black with sulphur, mark the entrance to the gallery. Over the duration of the exhibition, as visitors and gallery staff interact with the doors by entering and exiting the space, the blackened surface slowly reverts back to silver.

Explored through a non-linguistic approach to narrative – such as the use of deep listening and visceral engagement – Ourahmane implements both her own body and the body of the viewer to ask questions including, how is localised trauma felt on a collective level and how do forms of resilience and respite manifest? Explored in relation to Ourahmane's subjectivity and political agency, this major body of work pursues lived experience as matter and as form.

Acting as a companion to the sound installation Ourahmane has produced *Paradis, 11.10.2017, 23:45* (2018), a moving image commission for Chisenhale Gallery's website. Ourahmane recorded the silent video on her phone in Paradis Plage, Oran, in October 2017. To watch the video please ask a member of staff at front of house, or visit the Chisenhale Gallery's website. Ourahmane has also produced a new edition comprising 13 hand printed photographs. Displayed in the gallery's foyer, each photograph depicts the spaces Ourahmane was working within while developing this new commission.

Ourahmane's exhibition commences Chisenhale Gallery's programme for 2018, which includes major new commissions by artists Paul Maheke, Banu Cennetoğlu and Lawrence Abu Hamdan. Through her work, Ourahmane raises complex questions concerning the effects of geographic borders on bodies and how systems of governance influence everyday experience, themes which recur throughout Chisenhale Gallery's programme for 2018.

**Lydia Ourahmane** (b. 1992, Saïda, Algeria) lives and works between London and Oran. Exhibitions include 2018 New Museum Triennial: *Songs for Sabotage*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (forthcoming 2018); *a good neighbour*, 15th Istanbul Biennial (2017); *Social Calligraphies*, Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw (2016); and Bloomberg New Contemporaries, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2014).

## TALKS & EVENTS

As part of the commissioning process, a programme of events has been devised in collaboration with Lydia Ourahmane, including talks at the gallery and offsite events at local schools.

### **Friday 26 January, 4pm**

Youssef Ourahmane responds to Lydia Ourahmane's exhibition, expanding on the narrative behind Ourahmane's new work, *In the Absence of our Mothers* (2015–18), part of her Chisenhale Gallery commission.

### **Wednesday 31 January, 7pm**

Lydia Ourahmane is joined in conversation by Venetia Porter, Assistant Keeper (Curator), Islamic and contemporary Middle East at the British Museum, to discuss Ourahmane's previous work in relation to her new commission.

### **Friday 9 February, 9–10.30am**

An early morning viewing of Lydia Ourahmane's exhibition, with an introduction to the work by Eliel Jones, Curatorial Assistant: Commissions at Chisenhale Gallery. Coffee and cakes are generously provided by the East End Women's Institute.

### **Saturday 24 February, 2pm**

Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith leads a gallery tour of Lydia Ourahmane's new exhibition. Mac Giolla Léith is Associate Professor in the School of Irish, Celtic Studies and Folklore at University College Dublin and writes extensively on contemporary art.

### **Thursday 1 March, 7pm**

In conjunction with late night gallery openings across East London, and programmed in association with First Thursdays, Ellen Greig, Curator: Commissions at Chisenhale Gallery, gives an introduction to Ourahmane's new exhibition. The talk will be followed by a listening event with artist Hiba Ismail, who will translate the lyrics of songs from a selection of 7-inch vinyl by musician Mohamed Belkhayati.

### **Saturday 3 March, 2pm**

The Soundhoppers, a sound playgroup for children run by Wajid Yaseen and Mara Bueno, present a workshop for families exploring deep listening and the different properties of sound through play, using a range of soundboxes and games. This workshop is suitable for children aged 5–11 years.

**Friday 16 March, 7pm**

Lydia Ourahmane hosts an evening of live sound performance at her home in Brixton. Doors open at 7pm, performances begin at 8pm. Places are limited. Please visit our Eventbrite page to reserve a ticket and receive full details including event location.

*All events are free to attend, unless otherwise stated, but booking is strongly advised. Please visit [chisenhale.eventbrite.co.uk](https://chisenhale.eventbrite.co.uk) or ask at the front desk to make a reservation.*

*BSL interpretation for events at Chisenhale Gallery is available on request. Please contact [emma.moore@chisenhale.org.uk](mailto:emma.moore@chisenhale.org.uk) for further information. Please be advised that two weeks' notice is required in order to confirm an interpreter.*

## LIST OF WORKS

### Gallery, clockwise from entrance:

*Doors* (2018)

Wood, copper, brass, silver, sulphur oxide, steel frame, hinges.

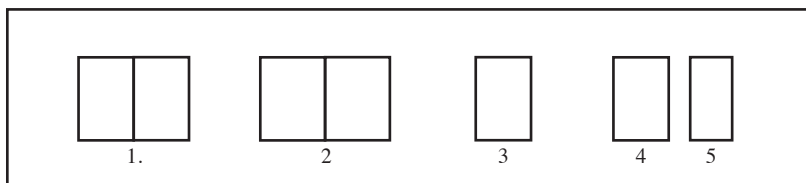
*Paradis* (2018)

11cm raised floor with treated floorboards, twelve transducer speakers, ten amps, two super-bass amps, 250m of speaker cable.

Duration: 1'03" (looped).

*Droit de Sang (Blood Right)* (2018)

Tayeb Ourahmane's documents in a wall-mounted display cabinet.



1. Military conscription card (1933)

2. Military records (1933)

3. French passport (1954)

4 and 5. Proofs of participation in the Algerian War for  
Independence on the Moroccan frontier (1969)

*In The Absence of Our Mothers* (2015-2018)

X-ray scan, text, two 4.45g 18 karat gold teeth, one of which is installed on the wall at Chisenhale Gallery and the other one is installed in Lydia Ourahmane's mouth.

## ONLINE COMMISSION

Lydia Ourahmane

*Paradis, 11.10.2017, 23:45* (2018)

Silent video (7 minutes and 58 seconds)

As part of Lydia Ourahmane's Chisenhale Gallery exhibition, Ourahmane has produced a moving image commission for Chisenhale Gallery's website.

*Paradis, 11.10.2017, 23:45* (2018), is a silent video by Ourahmane recorded on her phone in Paradis Plage, Oran, in October 2017. This online commission is a companion piece to Ourahmane's new sound work, *Paradis* (2018), which is embedded within, and amplified from a temporary wooden floor installed across Chisenhale Gallery's exhibition space.

To watch the work please ask a member of staff at front of house, or visit Chisenhale Gallery's website, [www.chisenhale.org.uk](http://www.chisenhale.org.uk)

## LIMITED EDITION

Lydia Ourahmane

*notes on the wait*, 2018

13 hand-printed photographs on Fuji Crystal Archive DP II in a bespoke archive box

19.5 x 27.5

Edition of 6

Special launch price: £2,400

Chisenhale Friends' price: £2,160

To accompany the exhibition, Ourahmane has produced *notes on the wait* (2018), an edition comprising 13 hand printed photographs, presented in a bespoke archival box designed by the artist. Selected from the artist's personal archive, the photographs were taken on 35mm film during her recent trips to Algeria, as research for her Chisenhale Gallery commission.

Comprising a series of urban and rural landscapes, the photographs take the viewer on a journey through Oran and its surrounding areas. *notes on the wait* (2018) explores displacement and ownership in relation to Ourahmane's ongoing practice and personal history.

The photographs are displayed in the foyer of the gallery in their portfolio box, alongside two framed photographs that are hung on the wall. You are invited to look through the images in the box. Please use the gloves provided.

To discuss availability, delivery options and purchasing, please email Fran Futers, [fran.futers@chisenhale.org.uk](mailto:fran.futers@chisenhale.org.uk)

All funds raised make a direct contribution to the artistic programme, supporting the next generation of pioneering artists.



## INTERVIEW WITH LYDIA OURAHMANE

*Ellen Greig: Your exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery, The you in us, consists of three interrelated works. Perhaps we should start with the work, In the Absence of our Mothers, which comprises two gold teeth, a scan of your mouth and some documents. Would you like to talk about this piece?*

**Lydia Ourahmane:** In 2015, while I was researching immigration from Algeria to Europe I met a 23-year-old man in Medina Djedida (a market in Oran), who was standing on one of the streets selling a woman's gold chain for €300. He said it was his mothers and she wanted him to sell it for her. This struck me, because a few days earlier, I had heard from someone else that €300 was the average price that people were paying at that time for a seat on a boat to cross to Spain. I ended up buying the chain for €300.

Over the summer, when I was in Algeria visiting an uncle, he told me stories of my grandfather, who was a sniper in the French-Algerian military. After years of compulsory military service in the French army my grandfather was ordered to fight in World War II against Germany. As the French had already lost 1.4 million soldiers in World War I they began pulling out from the empire. At this point he was married to my grandmother, they had 3 children (they would have a further 9). He knew that if he went to Germany he would never return. His friend advised him that if he pulled all of his teeth out he would be dismissed from the army. So, in January 1945 he pulled all of his teeth out and was subsequently discharged in February of that year.

From 1954 he become very involved in the fight against France for an independent Algeria. I noticed that his French passport was issued to him in that same year – which would make sense as one of his main roles during that time was smuggling arms from Morocco into Algeria, and it may have been useful to lighten security checks at the borders during the war. He fought on both the Moroccan and Algerian frontiers and was part of The Oujda group, who would later become affiliated with The Algerian National Liberation Front, and subsequently, the ruling government of independent Algeria.

When I heard this story of my grandfather it prompted me to consider this narrative in relation to the chain. Both acts – one being my grandfather extracting his teeth and this young man possibly stealing from his mother and departing against her knowledge and will – are forms of achieving escape as the last resort. In both cases their gestures are permanent and final; these two narratives are borne from the same 'flesh'.

Earlier this year, I melted the gold chain down into two 4.45g gold teeth, one of which was implanted into my mouth. Through the insertion of this gold tooth into my mouth, the anatomy of the bone has been permanently changed. For me, this definitive act resonates with my grandfather's story and the narrative around the gold chain. This work exists in different locations. One gold tooth exists in my mouth and the other being somewhere else. It also exists in the realm of a narrative, an oral history and an exchange.

*EG: Alongside In the Absence of our Mothers you have presented documents relating to your grandfather's identity and official military papers. Why have you decided to show these documents?*

*Droit Du Sang (blood right) (2018)* is a series of documents that deal with the legacy of my grandfather. They include an archive of his military documents and identity papers that have surfaced over the past year. These documents are currently being used by my family to claim French citizenship by right of blood.

An aunt of mine recently successfully claimed French citizenship based on my grandfather having a French passport, and his children being born before independence, therefore, they are French by birth. This revealed that my family on the Ourahmane side are eligible for citizenship. This realisation made me think about the possibility of this becoming a strange paradigm shift...

*EG: While you were working on this commission you were living in your family home in Oran. Can you talk about this time and how it shaped your thinking around this new body of work?*

**LO:** When I was invited to do this show, I was spending time in Algeria. During that time my dogs were stolen from the roof of my house while I was inside. I fell asleep on the sofa and woke up to the sound of one of the dogs running away from the stairs and very quiet footsteps above my head on the roof. A few minutes later, the engine of a car started outside the house and drove off playing really loud music. I'm referring to this incident, as I experienced it sonically, which became an integral part of my thinking around this commission.

In the morning when I woke up, the dogs were gone. I tried to report it to the police, but in order to file the report I had to give names of people that I thought could have been involved. This led me on an investigation to try to find the person, or people, who stole the dogs.

**EG:** *You have made a sound work embedded in a temporary wooden floor throughout the gallery space. The surface acts as a speaker, vibrating and projecting the sound throughout the gallery. Can you talk about this work?*

**LO:** The sound installation is called, *Paradis*, which refers to a coastal area of Oran called, Paradis Plage. I initially started making recordings in and around this area when I was trying to look for the people who had stolen the dogs.

When I was thinking about the atmosphere and shape of the sound piece, I showed Dante Traynor, my sound collaborator and friend, this picture that I took outside my house in Oran of four guys waiting on the corner. When I was talking to one of these guys a few days after I took the picture, I asked him, “What do you guys do on the corner all the time?” He responded, “Oh, you know, we just watch people come and go in cars, and talk about people, pass time.”

Taking this premise of waiting, I wanted the rhythm of the sound piece to feel as if you were watching a car come from one corner of your eye and watching it leave from the other corner of your eye. We’ve edited *Paradis* around a series of sound waves that literally move audio across a wooden surface that occupies the entire gallery space. This wooden structure sits approximately 10cm above the gallery’s floor. In this cavity we have installed 12 transducer ‘bodyshaker’ speakers. The speakers vibrate onto the wooden surface, creating amplification through contact. The idea is that the audio resonates through the floor into the body of the viewer.

**EG:** *Why does this act of waiting interest you?*

**LO:** In Arabic there is a word ‘sobri’ which translates as the act of waiting in a positive sense. That something better will come.

Recently, I’ve felt more tension when going home to Oran. There has been a shift in my experience of the place I think of as home. And this work simply records events or swells of time within which that shift happened.

I made contact with a guy I had met when I had taken the police into his house, because he had apparently been involved in stealing the dogs. I asked him if he would be interested in making a film together. From the get go, we were both extremely suspicious of each other. He thought that I was trying to get him in trouble, but I was interested in him as a way of getting the dogs back and I also wanted to know what he was

about. As soon as we started hanging out, we would just drive around, or go to places and he'd show us things – where he would hang out. I met a lot of his circle...

Every young person you speak to, within the first conversation you have – specifically in that area, will tell you how far along they are in the process of leaving, what they have in place and how much money they have got together. It is a very active reality, and not limited to the conceived young male stereotype – there are many women and children also. Its not something that even needs to be sought out, it is very apparent. The migration from that area is driven by an economic situation; last year 100,000 Algerians claimed asylum in Europe. People have specifically asked me if I could do anything to help, because I have a British passport.

*EG: Much of your work is borne out of exchanges with people. The sound work samples some of these exchanges. Can you talk about the sounds we are listening to?*

The audio is comprised from recorded compositions performed by myself and by friends of mine. These sounds have been slowed down and mixed alongside edited recordings made in Algeria, over the last year. The samples are ripped from videos I was recording with numerous people I met while I was there. A lot of it is conversational; some of it is sound from street corners, or from recording landscapes.

Some of the samples that you can hear in the work are taken from sound recordings of an Algerian style of music called Gnawa, which is a form of Sufi worship. I was specifically interested in the instrument that the Sufi's use, which is called a Guembri. This instrument is made out of the neck of a camel, one piece of wood and then the strings are made out of the intestine of a goat. They talk about how the instrument is therefore made out of three souls, and the souls that are present in these materials bring you into a state of 'trance' on hearing this instrument being played. I was really taken by the idea that an object could hold such significant charge – that an object could resonate with spiritual, or emotional significance, and embody these past lives. I am interested in how this object has charge beyond the space that it physically occupies. For me, this idea speaks directly to the other works within the exhibition also, such as the tooth work and the doors as well.

*EG: The sound work literally vibrates through your body when you are in the gallery space. Why is the physical engagement with this work so important to you?*

**LO:** I hope that visitors will sit, or even lie down on the wooden surface and physically, as well as sonically, experience the sound work. One of the reasons I have worked with these transducer speakers was because they are used in sound therapy, where consistent vibrations are played directly onto the body, creating a ‘trance-like’ state of calm. I wanted to work with this idea and create a physical engagement with the sound piece.

I am interested in an experience that has the potential to exist beyond language. I was talking to a friend the other day about echolocation, which is the ability for humans to detect objects in their environment by sensing echoes from those objects – a spatial understanding which isn’t conceived by vision. I see place or objects or spaces as ‘living’, in a way that they absorb and release what they have borne witness to. In Algeria superstition and the existence of the spiritual realm within the physical realm is widely practiced and accepted. There were certain things that I couldn’t describe in any other way.

*EG: So, sound allows you to reconcile—as well as map—between a physical, mental and emotional space?*

**LO:** Yes, but also within a context that I am not so involved in, and am still always outside of and will always be outside of because of my position of being able to leave when I want.

What is always brought up in my work is that there is this pre-established right for many Algerians to Europe, because of the recent history of colonisation. There are very tangible effects of wider social and political fractures that have surfaced as a consequence of Algeria’s recent history.

French occupation of Algeria, where the French imposed their culture, language, architecture etc. onto the country, has developed a physical and ideological right to space. I have been thinking a lot about these studies about trauma being passed down through peoples DNA, and how this concept relates to post-colonial control – how this right is embedded in ones body in the same way.

For example, the Arabic that I speak, having grown up in Algeria, has so many French words in it, to the point where I don’t even know the classical Arabic word for those French words. That is how involved it is in the everyday. It has linguistically removed parts of the culture, which will take a while to return.

Growing up between different cultures and places, stories and memories of these other spaces always inhabited the same realms of

reality for me – whether they were mine or someone else’s in present or past, so I guess what has always been really important for me is the process by which I can extrapolate my own interpretations from histories that I have always existed in relation to.

*EG: You’ve made a set of silver-oxidised doors that mark the entrance and exit of the gallery space. When people pass through the doors they mark the façade of the doors with the imprint of their hand. The idea is that eventually the oxidation will erode and the silver will re-appear. Again, the idea of mapping a space and physical engagement is important here?*

**LO:** The material significance of what my work does is very important. The doors are made out of silver plated brass, which has been put through a chemical process using sulphur, which transforms silver to black.

The doors are very heavy, with the intention that to enter and exit the gallery you would have to use your body weight to do so, and in this act you are conscious of your presence. Through this bodily and tactile interaction with the doors, areas of the blackened surface will eventually become silver again. The doors act as a record, for a period, or swell of time – everyone who comes to the show will leave a physical imprint of their presence here. And they all would have facilitated the reversal of the tarnish on the silver. I see this as a cathartic act.

*Interviewed by Ellen Greig, Curator: Commissions, Chisenhale Gallery, on Friday 19 January 2018. Chisenhale Gallery, London. Chisenhale Interviews, series editor, Polly Staple, Director, Chisenhale Gallery.*

## READING LIST

A reading list of texts, books and audio/video material has been compiled in collaboration with Lydia Ourahmane to accompany her exhibition, *The you in us*, at Chisenhale Gallery. This resource expands on ideas raised through Ourahmane's new commission. Included are texts by writers investigating ideas of otherness, migration and trauma in the context of sociology, political theory, literature and studies in health and psychology. Also included are essays on the qualities and effects of sound as material; press articles and reviews on Ourahmane's previous works; and links to audio/video material that provide reference and further context to the work, including *Paradis, 11.10.2017, 23:45* (2018), Ourahmane's moving image commission for Chisenhale Gallery's website.

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## THANKS

With thanks to: Hiba Ismail, Toufik Hales, Hadjer, Amina, Nadia Horch, Amine Horch, Aida Horch, Julia Horch, Bella, 'Formaga', Ameziane & Malikha, Ahmed Haddad, Areski, Wahid, Taro, Dante Rendle Traynor, Adam J Harmer, Alex White, Amine Maghboun, Studio 31 (Oran), Mohammed, Cheb Nani, Tipo, 'Dega', 'Chapeau Mini', Nasrou, Polly Staple, Ellen Greig, Eliel Jones, Mark Couzens, Clive Couzens, Shaun Couzens, Jammie Nicholas, Lucy Woodhouse, Emma Moore, Fran Futers, Ioanna Nitsou, Alexandra White, Sam Tierney, Calvin Laing, Ben Blackmore, Rachida Ourahmane, Abdelkreem Ourahmane, Cédric Fauq, Dr Coleman O'Gadhra, Alaa Abou Hasan, Ceramic Studios, Saul Adamczewski, Ben Romans Hopcraft, Gavin Weber, Weber Industries, Jon Moody, Matt Copson, Dominik Dvorak, Ben Vince, Sarah Ourahmane, Mum & Dad.

## CHISENHALE GALLERY

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Wednesday to Sunday 12-6pm  
Thursday 1 March until 9pm



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
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Lydia Ourahmane's exhibition is supported by:



أفاق AFAC

The Arab Fund for Arts and Culture  
المندوب العربي للثقافة والفنون - أفاق

مفردات  
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FOUNDATION

Lydia Ourahmane's exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery is supported by the Arab Foundation for Arts and Culture (AFAC); Mophradat Aisbl Grants for Artists; Joe and Marie Donnelly; and Nicoletta Fiorucci, founder of the Fiorucci Art Trust.

With additional support from the Lydia Ourahmane Supporters Circle. With special thanks to Weber Industries.

Chisenhale Gallery's Commissions Programme 2017-19 is supported by the LUMA Foundation.

Chisenhale Gallery's Curatorial Trainee Programme 2016-18 is supported by Sirine and Ahmad Abu Ghazaleh.