



Winter 2019 exhibitions
at Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art

You are welcome to join us on the afternoon of Sunday, January 27th to the opening reception of the winter exhibitions program at Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, which features:

An exhibition with an audio script by Sarah Demeuse and Wendy Tronrud, as well as a music soundtrack by Mario García Torres in collaboration with Sol Oosel

Students who abandon their studies are labeled as “dropouts.” Since the 1960s, however, dropouts and reasons for dropping out have also become associated with counterculture, as well as with deep-seated mechanisms of social exclusion. This exhibition centers on the phenomenon of dropping out and its relationship to institutions of learning, commitments to community, and the realms of art and aesthetics. It especially signals how it is more often women who work and tarry in these interstices. Conceptualized as a recording, the exhibition spatializes experiences of withdrawal in an aural, light, and color environment inspired by desert atmospheres. In dialogue with the exhibition are a number of scheduled live-performances commissioned to the choreographer Grace Ellen Barkey, the visual artist Andrea Éva Györi, and the dancer Johanna Tengan.

Firelei Báez, new work

This exhibition presents artworks, including a number of works on canvas and a large-scale immersive installation, resulting from the artist’s ongoing research on the Haitian Revolution in 1791-1804. A colonial uprising led by mulattos and Black slaves, it is an early precursor to abolition movements internationally. The artist is interested in exploring this history, as she is in drawing from imagery and ideas from mythology and anthropology, as well as in science fiction and theories of female subjectivity. Her artistic research especially draws her to study Black ancestry and the various expressions of syncretism. To do so, she delves in archives, folklore tales, and tropical and urban culture. Báez’s personal experience as an immigrant—she was born in the Dominican Republic, and currently lives in the United States—also inspires a central theme in her work: diaspora.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan, a solo exhibition

The exhibition’s central work is *Earwitness Theatre*, commissioned by Witte de With in partnership with Chisenhale Gallery, London; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis; and Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. The work comes after Abu Hamdan’s “earwitness” interviews into the Syrian regime prison of Saydnaya. His work on Saydnaya began in 2016, upon the invitation of Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture in London. On a practical level, the process involves listening and capturing sounds, which could, and eventually would, help to map out a prison, and to identify the number of detainees and inhuman confinement therein. On an aesthetic level, earwitnessing is how Abu Hamdan can sense and make evident testimonies often considered irrelevant by media outlets and inadmissible within the court of law, such as the experience of darkness, silence, and hunger.

On Contemporary Arab Representations

Within the vitrines of the continuously evolving exhibition *Untitled*, sited at the institution’s ground-floor gallery, is an archival display focusing on *Contemporary Arab Representations*. This long-term project was developed in 2002-2003 by Catherine David, Witte de With’s director at the time. *Contemporary Arab Representations* included various “representations by authors,” and was organized in three chapters: Beirut, Cairo, and Iraq. The project was ahead of its time on various counts. It offered and debated locally-specific cultural perspectives, over falsely-unifying overviews of a region. David’s use of “Arab” over “Middle Eastern” is a case in point. At the time, the press reviewed this long-term project widely, noting that the featured authors—how David referred to visual artists and cultural makers at large—were largely unknown to general audiences within *and* outside of their context.

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These exhibitions are organized by Witte de With’s director, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, and its team: Samuel Saelemakers, curator; Rosa de Graaf, associate curator; Wendy van Slagmaat-Bos, production officer. A series of public programs are organized in conjunction to the exhibitions. Please visit our [calendar](#) for more information.

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A press pack with images for all exhibitions and biographies for all participating artists can be downloaded [here](#). For press requests or for further information, please contact Jeroen Lavèn via press@wdw.nl or call +31 10 411 01 44.

