

Video Walkthrough | Lydia Ourahmane: *Tassili*

Lydia Ourahmane gives a virtual tour of her solo exhibition, *Tassili*. Speaking to the process of making her commissioned film, the artist reflects on 13 days and nights spent in the desert with her collaborators, and considers the urgency of documenting the ancient riverbed.

Watch the walkthrough on Mercer Union's website:

<https://www.mercerunion.org/exhibitions/ourahmane-tassili>

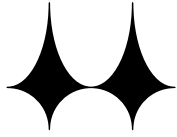
Lydia Ourahmane: There were so many moments that I really recognized, like, how absurd this was. And I then understood why no one had shot a film in this place before.

Tassili is a 47 minute moving image work. It was shot in Tassili N'Ajjer, which is a region between Algeria and Libya. Tassili N'Ajjer translates as "Bed of Rivers", so it's an ancient landscape that used to be the riverbed. It's now a hostile and arid environment that has a single source of water left. The rock formations were really made through the movement of water, which I think you can kind of sense as you're traversing the landscape.

You know, while it is a kind of a tourist destination let's say, the tourism is obviously very restricted because of the nature of that space, like having to physically walk there and take all of the food and the water that you need to survive. And it being quite a physically demanding kind of expedition, not that many people can make the journey. I think that then still like shrouds this place in mystery, but also Algerian nationals could go on these tourist trips there, but not foreigners. So this was also one kind of major aspect of making this work, was to take a group of collaborators who each held different passports and came from different parts of the world, and to get permission from, like the Ministry of Culture, the national park, and the military to allow the passage through this landscape.

Our group consisted of nine guides, the seven of us, me and my collaborators, and 20 donkeys. So most of our guides who were over the age of 30 were born on the plateau. The Tuareg Tribes historically were living in that region. They're a nomadic tribe, so they moved freely between Algeria and Niger and Mali. They were forcibly exiled from their home, and the only way that they continue to revisit this space is by taking people there. The desert is an extreme situation and it really demands a lot from each person that kind of encounters it. It forces you to face yourself. It was interesting to see how different people responded to that environment.

But there is this kind of like urgency of capturing everything, you know. All of us had various forms of equipment that we were like desperately trying to get as much information as possible. Yuma had this app on my phone which can basically take like depth accurate imaging. It basically utilizes the laser that's in the back of the iPhone. You can scan entire



sections of, like, rock faces. And so some of that comes into the film. There's animated sections that kind of interspersed in between. At points the viewer isn't really sure if what they're watching is like a render, an animation, or actual footage.

I was very aware of the potential of these paintings not existing in however many years, you know, we don't know. It's miraculous that they still have survived for 12,000 years, but they are kind of deteriorating. And so documenting them was also a very important aspect of making this film in the knowledge that we're not sure how long they might last. There is a lot of pressure and questions around representation. What does it mean to document this space and to a certain extent, to make it like publicly accessible? If this place has retained its mystery for so long, like, what does it mean to disrupt that? You know, it's overwhelming how magical it is. I mean, that's a really kind of dull word to use in relation to what it's actually like, but I felt like everyone needs to see this, you know?