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a centre for contemporary art

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## **Mercer Union presents Lydia Ourahmane's first institutional solo show in Canada with major new film commission *Tassili***

Set at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Tassili n'Ajjer in Algeria, the work offers a transcendental experience of space

JAN. 5, 2023 (TORONTO, O.N.) — **Mercer Union** presents *Tassili*, the first institutional solo show in Canada by Algerian-born artist **Lydia Ourahmane**, from **Jan. 28–April 15, 2023**. The exhibition is titled after the moving image work commissioned and produced by the gallery in partnership with SculptureCenter, New York; rhizome, Algiers; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunis; and Nottingham Contemporary. This is the fourth work in Mercer Union's *Artist First* commissioning platform, following Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *45th Parallel* earlier this year.

*Tassili* was filmed in the desert landscape of southeastern Algeria, which Ourahmane and a group of collaborators travelled to on foot. Tassili n'Ajjer is home to one of the most important groupings of prehistoric cave art in the world, with more than 15,000 drawings and engravings illustrating changes to the Sahara from 6,000 B.C. to the first centuries of the present era.

Ourahmane first visited the area in 2019 and was struck by the site's ability to transcend time — a trans-dimensionality that also unfolds aesthetically in the film. The artist notes the desert as a place where she could face her fears and push her body's limits — wanting to explore this further, she later returned with a group of friends. They walked into the open desert, fully at the mercy of the elements with only their guides to navigate them through the landscape. The 46-minute 4K film captures not only the landscape, but also the array of cave paintings the artist encountered: ancient demons, extraterrestrials, lost rivers and forests. First-person passages are intercut with point-of-view shots, night vision recordings, and sequences transferred from 16mm film. The work is scored in four parts by four composers, none of whom were present in Tassili n'Ajjer, adding another layer of intervention to the work. Because traveling through the desert is a careful balance of resource management and walking routes choreographed by locals, the artist was able to film only where she could walk, with no opportunity to backtrack or act beyond each present moment and location.

"*Tassili* serves as a sort of reminder and an echo of an experience that was deeply impactful for Lydia Ourahmane and her travel companions," says Julia Paoli, Director & Curator of Mercer Union. "The film offers another way of seeing how we move through landscape, how we encounter our environment, and how we understand mediated experiences. For Mercer

Union, the film asks important questions about embodied ways of knowing, and the underlying memories, records, and infrastructures that unite to create them.”

The exhibition opening will be preceded by an artist talk on Jan. 24 at 6:30pm off-site in partnership with the University of Toronto, John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Masters in Visual Studies Proseminar, and Images Festival.

**Lydia Ourahmane** is based in Algiers and Barcelona. Recent and forthcoming solo exhibitions include MACBA, Barcelona (2023); SMAK, Ghent (2022); SculptureCenter, New York (2022); Portikus, Frankfurt (2022); KW Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin (2022); De Appel, Amsterdam (2021); Triangle-Astérides, Marseille (2021); Kunsthalle Basel (2021); CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2020); and Chisenhale Gallery, London (2018). Her work was included in the 34th Bienal de São Paulo (2021) and the New Museum Triennial, New York (2018).

*Tassili* made its world premiere at the SculptureCenter this spring and is currently on view at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris before arriving in Toronto. For more information, visit [www.mercerunion.org/exhibitions/lydia-ourahmane-tassili](http://www.mercerunion.org/exhibitions/lydia-ourahmane-tassili)

Lydia Ourahmane, *Tassili*, 2022, is commissioned and produced by Mercer Union, Toronto; SculptureCenter, New York; rhizome, Algiers; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunis; and Nottingham Contemporary.

Lydia Ourahmane, *Tassili*, 2022, is made possible by Valeria Napoleone XX SculptureCenter (VNXXSC). Commissioning support is provided by VIA Art Fund. Additional support is provided by the Kamel Lazaar Foundation and the Harpo Foundation. Research support was provided by Mophradat.

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# artistfirst

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### **About Mercer Union**

Mercer Union is a non-profit, artist-run centre dedicated to commissioning and producing new works of contemporary art, and providing an engaging program that encourages critical inquiry and conversation. We champion ambitious exhibitions that empower diverse Canadian and international artists in formative and established stages of their practice.

### **Press kit and photos**

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