

KADER
ATTIA

**A THREAD
OF LIGHT**

September 4, 2020—January 17, 2021

A Thread of Light

Working with installation, sculpture, photography, and video, Kader Attia examines the symbiotic relationship between colonizer and colonized, oppressor and the oppressed. Attia's research-based practice focuses on understanding the individual, national, and societal wounds shaped by Western imperialism and its after-effects. *A Thread of Light* (2019) is a nine-minute video wherein Attia explores personal family histories of trauma through the childhood recollections of his mother. Refusing to depict these untold sufferings with images or articulate them verbally, her memories are instead mediated through the artist, who incises them, word by word, into black scratchboard.

Many of Attia's videos rely on an interview structure to amplify the personal accounts of persecuted populations and individuals. In the film, *Héroes Heridos* (2018), for example, Attia used first-person narratives of immigrants and activists to document the plight of asylum seekers, shedding light on issues related to citizenship, migration, and political nativism. However, while Attia has interviewed and filmed his mother for more than 20 years, *A Thread of Light* withholds that archival material. Rendering her story with text alone, Attia rejects showing her likeness, questioning the conventions of representation itself. The film's abrasive soundtrack, which alternates between silence and intense scraping, references the repeated acts of transgression performed by his young mother, as she scratched away the black paint her caregiver had applied to all windows in the house where she was raised. Although a minor offense, her gesture serves as a symbol of resilience and resistance, and a critique of gender-based violence and the silencing of victims of abuse. Attia's video is a censure against structures of oppression and a testament to the limits of image-based modes of visibility.

*Organized by Amara Antilla, Senior Curator,
Contemporary Arts Center.*

Kader Attia was born in 1970 in Seine Saint-Denis, Dugny, France. He studied at the École Supérieure des Arts Appliqués Duperré, Paris (1993); the Escola Massana, Centro de Arte y Diseño, Barcelona (1994); and the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (1998). His work has been exhibited internationally at institutions and recurring festivals including the Venice Biennial (2003, 2011, 2017); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2007); Henry Art Gallery, Seattle (2008); Havana Biennial (2009); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2012); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2013); Marrakesh Biennial (2014, 2016); Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2017); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018); Hayward Gallery, London (2019); and Kunsthaus Zürich (2020). Attia currently lives between Berlin and Algiers.

Ask Yourself

- 1 In our digital age, people rarely handwrite. What is the significance of Attia writing his mother's story instead of filming, typing, or speaking it?
- 2 How does the scratching sound amplify the emotion the viewer experiences? The silence?
- 3 How does the pacing of *A Thread of Light* build anticipation and/or anxiety for the viewer?
- 4 Consider the importance of oral histories. Programs like StoryCorps solicit personal histories to archive. What is the value of these personal stories? What can we learn from them? Have you interviewed an older generation in your family?



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Indeed, her uncle had painted all the windows
that would open on the schoolyard with bl