

ATLAS STUDIOS

Latefa Wiersch

Via Ludovisi 48 Rome

13.03.–05.07.2026

Opening hours

Wednesday / Friday 14:30–18:30

Thursday 14:30–20:00

Saturday / Sunday 11:00–18:30

Istituto Svizzero presents *Atlas Studios*, the first monographic exhibition in Italy by artist Latefa Wiersch (b. 1982, Dortmund, based in Zürich). Specifically designed for the spaces of Villa Maraini in Rome, the exhibition evokes the studios of the same name located at the edge of the Moroccan desert and often used by international film productions to recreate imperial antiquity sets.

Wiersch's practice engages with popular culture, cinema, television and historical imagery, filtered through her perspective as a Germany-born artist of Amazigh and Arab descent. Moving between autobiography and fiction, her work raises questions of national and cultural belonging within a context where migration is a structural condition, staging history as an unstable field of projection, rehearsal and role-play. Her main body of work consists of sewn puppet figures that she iteratively re-engages and re-fashions in a plethora of figures drawn from pop culture, history or her own life.

Atlas Studios builds on Wiersch's research on Hannibal, the Carthaginian general who notoriously attempted and failed to conquer Rome, and on the ways in which cinema has portrayed him and the history of the Roman Empire. Hannibal also refers to the 1970s housing estate in Dortmund-Dorstfeld where the artist grew up. The convergence of these stories forms the point of departure for ideally retracing Hannibal's route across the Alps and through the enduring mythologies of ancient imperialism—allowing him, in a sense, to finally reach his destination.

The exhibition turns Villa Maraini into film backstage inspired by the Atlas Studios in Ouarzazate, Morocco, where from the 1980s onwards countless international film productions have staged their visions of antiquity, empires, and exoticism. It unfolds as a sequence of environments that evoke the apparatus of filmmaking—sets, costumes, lighting, and rehearsal spaces—while exposing the mechanisms through which history is constructed, staged and perpetuated over time.

Central to the exhibition are Wiersch's protagonists, doll-like figures who embody hybrid, unstable identities. Neither fully animate nor inanimate, these characters bear the marks of migration, trauma and conflict. Placed within constructed sets, they oscillate between historical figures, hired actors, and exhibition visitors: as you walk through the villa's rooms you may come across Kahina, the legendary Amazigh queen, or a worker repainting the villa's frescoes, or Gertrude Bell with her camel loosely resembling Nicole Kidman in *Queen of the Desert*. Confronting the viewer's gaze, the characters reflect back inherited narratives of power and otherness, revealing how identities are continuously produced through repetition, performance, and institutional frameworks.

Curated by Lucrezia Calabrò Visconti
(Head Curator Istituto Svizzero)

Biography

Latefa Wiersch (1982, Dortmund; lives and works in Zürich) studied art at the Berlin University of the Arts and the Bern University of the Arts. Wiersch's installations and performances deal with questions of identity and the body in the post-colonial present. In order to investigate what it means to be human in our society, the artist often constructs clichéd images. The doll in particular is staged as an inanimate-animate counterpart. Another focus is satirically dedicated to themes of collective art production, institutional critique and the blending of the private and public as it appears in social networks.

Wiersch was a recipient of the Swiss Art Award 2023 and the Swiss Performance Art Award 2022 (in collaboration with Rhoda Davids Abel and Dandara Modesto). She was Artist in Residence 2024 at the Swiss Institute, New York. International exhibitions include Villa Bernasconi, Geneva (2026), Le Commun Genève (2026), Dortmunder Kunstverein (2025), Bozar Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels (2024), Kunsthau Zürich (2024), la Ménagerie de Verre, Paris (2024), Helmhaus, Zürich (2024/25), Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève (2022), Systema, Marseille 2023, Kunsthau Langenthal (2022/2018), Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zürich (2023/2021/2019), Stadtgalerie Bern (2021). Performances, among others, at Kunsthau Zürich (2024), Galerie Barbara Seiler, Zürich (2024), Kunstmuseum Luzern (2023), Dampfzentrale Bern (2022/2020), Rote Fabrik, Zürich (2022).