



View of “Lydia Ourahmane: صرخة شمسية Solar Cry,” 2020.

SAN FRANCISCO

Lydia Ourahmane

THE WATTIS INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS

360 Kansas Street

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Electric blue washes over the galleries of the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts. Add to this hallucinogenic landscape the haunting voice of mezzo-soprano Nikola Printz, who was directed by artist Lydia Ourahmane to continuously sing an A-flat note, then a B-flat note, each for one hour, which was recorded on-site and now plays on loop from opposite ends of the main room. The exercise is inherently untenable—the human voice inevitably breaks under such a burden. Although it likely scarred Printz, they ceaselessly followed instructions, perhaps pushed by their faith in the artwork.

Ourahmane’s underlying goal with this and other works in the exhibition is to explore belief systems, or what drives us to act and how we carry belief in our bodies. The blue saturation visually extends this intangible concept; like a belief system, it tinges one’s view of the environs and of one’s own body.

Within an inner gallery, a large-scale projection shows the artist, in close-up, getting a tattoo of a warrior girl, an image which Ourahmane encountered outside a cave while traveling in Tassili n'Ajjer, a desert plateau in southeast Algeria. The journey entailed walking for eight days through the inhospitable landscape, in exchange for encounters with the prehistoric site's fifteen thousand drawings and engravings, some made up to twelve thousand years ago. Similar to *In the Absence of our Mothers*, 2015–18, for which Ourahmane implanted a gold tooth in her mouth to honor an act of defiance carried out by her grandfather, *warrior girl c. 12,000 b.c.*, 2020, involves the artist permanently attaching herself to an image that, through centuries, has miraculously survived. The primordial drives that Ourahmane illuminates include not only belief but also memorialization.

— Jovanna Venegas