

ONEROOPH

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Nadia Kaabi-Linke: Walk the Line



By Lea Dlugosch

Borderlines

The idea of a wall is brutal and absurd. A manmade obstacle designed to keep people apart. What might have appeared reasonable in medieval castles, has become a haptic symbol of helplessness and fear. Especially where most of human communication takes place in digital space, these physical borders, no matter if made out of brick, barb wire or steel grid usually express the last stage of an argument, a defiant way of saying: 'I cannot deal with this'. Disturbingly enough,

walls hold a strange beauty too. Not only because of the promise behind them but also in their collection of human traces over a longer period of time.

Nadia Kaabi-Linke's wall is exceptionally beautiful and exceptionally long. The first feature becomes visible at first glance: A giant bright colored bundle nestles up between two ferro concrete columns in the exhibition hall of the Dallas Contemporary. The second one is less obvious: 1255 miles of thread – the exact length of the Texas Mexican border – transferred from the original coil, used by the local textile industry. The wall itself works as a proof of the preceding performance piece titled "Walk the Line". Kaabi-Linke describes it as a "symbolic border march". The performers are solemnly people related to this border by immigration direct or indirect through parents or friends: "This particular border is linked to illegal immigration and exploitation through the local textile industry in Texas. The system works both ways though, the industry needs workers and the immigrants need work".

Migration and its effect on people have always played an essential part in Nadia Kaabi-Linke's oeuvre, starting at her own personal history: Born in Tunis, raised in Dubai and France by a Tunisian father and a Ukrainian mother, the 38 year old now lives in Berlin Kreuzberg with her husband and her son. "I have known this feeling of being torn between the two identities of my parents for all of my life. Migration has always naturally influenced my work the same way it has always existed and shaped history. I look back to understand the future."

"Walk the Line" does exactly that: With the performance and exhibition title obviously referring to Johnny Cash's classic, Kaabi-Linke adds another layer of "reading". But while the song itself and Cash's music in general have not lost their power up to this day, Nadia Kaabi-Linke is more interested in his transgressive social endeavors: "He was as big as Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley at his time. They sang for the GIs in order to motivate them for war. Cash, however decided to sing for the prisoners of St. Quentin instead. This caught my attention. He was breaking social barriers through his music."

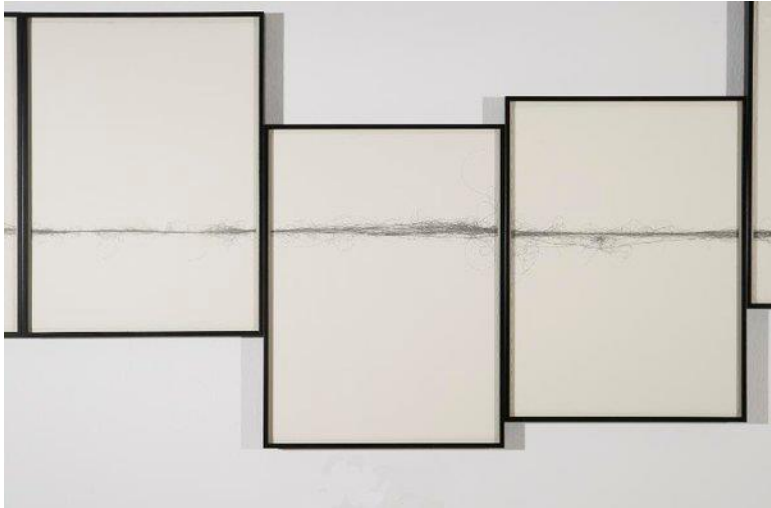
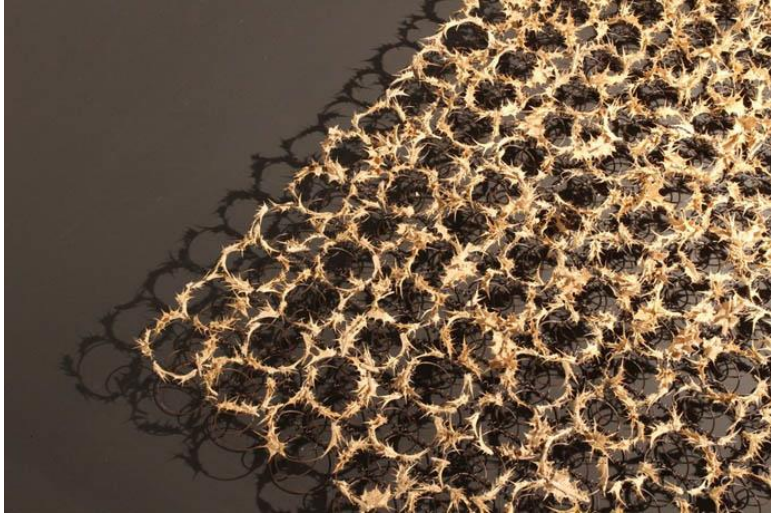
While social and political issues play a major part in Kaabi-Linke's work, she is not interested in using it as a tool for political messages: "I have no interest in this thing I call 'artivism', the kind of political activism that uses art as a transmitter. Activism is a serious thing, as is art. I am an artist and I have no interest in mixing the two. Both domains lose in the combination", the Berlin based artist explains. Renouncing from plump political statements in her work does not lessen their impact. Kaabi-Linke, offers a less slaying, more intelligent view.

Her works leave a silent yet profound impression just like the performers, walking in circles around their own colorful sculpture steadily without commenting on it. Nadia Kaabi-Linke's work never stops unfolding – or more precise, it never stops folding: Just like the innumerable layers of thread building up to a woolen wall in “Walk the Line” or the never ending maze of steel bars in “Flying carpets”, currently on view at the Guggenheim New York, there is always an additional level of content, a different way of looking at it from a second or third perspective. “The longer I work as an artist, the less I control the outcome. I have learned to let things happen in order to achieve the best results. I listen more and new dimensions build up in the process.”

No matter how many dark and startling notions Kaabi-Linke's pieces contain in the end, they are always of a high aesthetic quality. Human hair and fingernails come together in pretty arrangements “Stretch Perm”, aluminum cages create architectural shadow landscapes “Flying Carpets”, and giant borders appear like impressive color formations. On the outside, all of her works hold a strange beauty, coming closer, they reveal their brutality. Nadia Kaabi-Linke knows about walls.

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<http://onerooph.com/nadia-kaabi%C2%ADlinke-walk-the-line/>