



OR-BIT, 2016-18. Installation view: Haunted Water, UCCA Dune, Beidaihe, China, July 9-October 10, 2023. Photo: Raisa Hagiu. Courtesy of the artist and UCCA Center for Contemporary Art.

MONIRA AL QADIRI *COSMIC MACHINE*

September 4 - October 18, 2025

Perrotin is pleased to present *Cosmic Machine*, the gallery's debut exhibition with Monira Al Qadiri and the artist's first show in New York. Known for her multidisciplinary practice, Al Qadiri explores the intersections of global history, ecology, and the evolving relationship between natural and manufactured environments. *Cosmic Machine* will present a new body of sculptures that explore the impacts of natural resource extraction, which both fuels political narratives and links us to the natural history of the planet. Concurrently, the artist's monumental installation *First Sun* will be presented by the Public Art Fund in Central Park.

Born in Senegal and raised in Kuwait, Al Qadiri witnessed the pervasive power and sudden fall of the oil industry during the Gulf War. For centuries, Kuwait thrived on the pearl trade before it was replaced by oil in the 20th century (Al Qadiri's own grandfather was a singer on a pearling boat). As a young child raised in the 1980s in the Middle East, oil refineries were viewed as mystical, high-tech cityscapes, a vision that came crashing down in 1990. At the age of seven, Al Qadiri remembers being trapped in her home looking up at a black sky during the Gulf War, an experience that became part of her identity, her family's life, and that of the entire region. It was only after leaving Kuwait, first to pursue her art studies in Tokyo and later Beirut, Amsterdam, and Berlin, that Al Qadiri realized the

influence oil has to simultaneously advance and destroy society, a contradiction which has become a focus of her practice over the last decade.

Al Qadiri's practice uses the industry of petrochemicals as a point of departure to explore the past while offering possibilities for the future. Presented in seductive metallic and iridescent colors, her works suggest otherworldly, almost alien-like machinery, although their subject matter contain loaded histories. Throughout the exhibition, Al Qadiri displays several series inspired by the forms of drill bits, devices used to burrow into the Earth in search of oil. Using a magnetic technique to levitate the sculptures, her *OR-BIT* series hovers between the shape of ancient pyramids and futuristic architecture. *Spectrum* depicts forms with an oil-like surface that resemble shrines or tentacles while the surface of her *Spectral* series recalls the white shine of pearls.

In order to consider the impact of petrochemicals, we must first understand the mechanisms of the oil industry that are often invisible to us. Her series titled *NAWA* is inspired visually by steel rope cables that carry oil from the depths of the earth to the surface, which, when cut in half, reveal mesmerizing patterns that resemble flowers and blossoms. In her metallic recreation of these ropes, the artist creates an object that mimics the eerie presence oil occupies in our lives and in political discourse.



Monira Al Qadiri. *NAWA (35)*, 2024. Curved aluminium, automotive paint. 80 x 80 x 0.4 cm. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

Hanging from the ceiling in *Cosmic Machine*, Al Qadiri's *Molecular (Propane)* depicts the geometry of the molecular chemical compound rendered in gigantic proportion and an alien-like, robotic aesthetic. Al Qadiri discerns that perhaps oil's most dangerous trait is its ability to permeate our daily lives unnoticed. Petrochemical derivatives have become an inescapable part of our society through synthetic textiles, construction materials, cosmetic products, and common plastics. As petrochemicals are woven into the fabric of society, it becomes more difficult to reconcile the substance's ability to both revolutionize and destroy our way of life.

Al Qadiri urges us to reflect on how the past and present inform different futures, and which scenario we ultimately want to build. The elusive terrain of Arabian desert is a recurring backdrop for the artist as a place to contemplate fundamental questions of existence. The artwork in the center of the exhibition, titled *The Guardian*, depicts the Calotropis Procera plant, found in the Empty Quarter desert, which secretes a toxic substance that is supposed to cause blindness. For Al Qadiri, the plant is a symbol of man's blinded relationship with reality and the poison of natural resource extraction.

As a largely untouched terrain, the desert stores both traces of early life forms and a connection to the future. The newest work in the show, titled *Reptilian*, depicts what most obviously looks like the back of a reptile. For Al Qadiri, the work recalls surfaces of both the Arabian desert and Mars. Scientists have found that parts of the desert in Oman have an eerie similarity to the northern surface of Mars, called Arabia Terra (so much so that it has been used for Mars simulation missions). As scientists and governments look at the habitability of other planets like Mars, Al Qadiri is aware of the possibility that the future of humans may not be on this planet.



Monira Al Qadiri. *The Guardian*, 2023. Aluminum with white coating, 157 1/2 x 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 inches. Photographer: Lorenzo Arrigoni. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

In her work, Al Qadiri posits that to achieve success in the future, we must act collectively. The final sculpture series in the show, *Man of War*, reimagines the marine creature of the same name—a striking organism made up of multiple beings acting as one. Composed of poisonous tentacles, this life form embodies a paradox of power and fragility. In a moment where utopia and dystopia can seem indistinguishable, Al Qadiri urges us to reflect on the importance of interconnectedness in the face of shared vulnerability.

About the artist

Monira Al Qadiri (b. 1983, Dakar, Senegal) is a Kuwaiti artist based in Berlin whose practice explores global histories, ecologies, and cultural narratives, especially those related to what she refers to as "petro-culture." Al Qadiri has been widely shown in prestigious museums worldwide including Berlinische Galerie, Germany (2025-2026); Kiasma Museum, Helsinki, Finland (2025); Gothenburg Museum of Art, Sweden (2025); Bozar, Brussels, Belgium (2024-25); SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, USA (2024); UCCA Dune, Beidaihe District, China (2023); Blaffer Art Museum, Houston, USA (2022); Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao (2022); Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2020). Her work was included in the acclaimed 59th Venice Biennale "The Milk of Dreams" and other biennials such as the Sharjah Biennial (2025, 2023); 24th Biennial of Sidney, Australia (2024); Noor Riyadh, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2023-24); 58th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, USA (2022-23); Asian Art Biennial, Taiwan (2021). Al Qadiri has commissioned public installations for Public Art Fund, New York and Lassonde Art Trail, Toronto (2025-26); Penistone Hill, Bradford, UK (2025); Desert X AIUla, Saudi Arabia, (2024); Noor Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2023); Art 22, Doha, Qatar (2022); Hayward Gallery, London, UK (2021), and Dubai Expo (2020-2021).