

documents a walk she took from one institution to the other (and back). The snapshots she captured of the journey are spontaneous, even arbitrary aspects of the work. Whereas in *Danse dans la neige* the artist displayed spontaneity through her own movements, here the relationship is reversed and the artist documents the unpredictable movements found in the cityscape being captured. The artist's trajectory is inscribed on a map exhibited together with the photographs, and reveals the highly choreographed nature of the performance. This act of tracing one's performance is not unlike the inscription of an expressionist's brushstrokes on a canvas.

Rather than presenting an overview for overview's sake, the exhibition could have been a reflection on why the artist chose to practise different mediums at different times. The curators' selection and foregrounding of dance in her work could have been further explored in the presentation in order to disrupt a biographical linear narrative that concludes with painting. Artists, and prolific ones especially, like Sullivan, always have more work to do and whether they are alive or not at the time of a retrospective exhibition, their work should always be considered open-ended.

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SADAÂNE AFIF: THIS IS ORNAMENTAL

Curated by Anne Faucheret, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 9 September 2018 – 18 November 2018

Reviewed by Emily Watlington, Assistant Editor, Art in America

'There are ladies who play billiards. And there are even some who play well', reads a newspaper featured in *Sadaâne Afif: This Is Ornamental*. Myself a billiards-playing lady, I was pleased to read this simple fact, which is presented as if breaking news; the statement is from 1932, but similar ones are presented as novel even today.¹ I love to play, but always dread approaching the table in a bar, usually crowded with only men who are often eager to assume that when I ask to play, I am actually asking for something else. I also admit to feeling mild resentment, though perhaps unfairly, towards my women friends who elect to watch instead of participate. They typically say it is because they are not good, but they are not good because they never play, and they never play because they have been discouraged and made to feel unwelcome. Once a man even told me he 'couldn't handle it' when I sat on the table's ledge for a behind-the-back shot.

The exclusion of women in pool is not the most pressing harm enacted by patriarchy, but it is symptomatic of how very hard it can be for women to break into male-dominated spheres, and how strong a hold men continue to have on even the most quotidian of realms. Very little has changed for women pool players in the past century, or so I inferred from Afif's exhibition, which told the tale of the first woman champion of French billiards named Yasmine d'Ouezzan, a French-Moroccan woman who lived from 1913 to 1997.² Apparently, in the early twentieth century, many society women played billiards inside their homes, but few played in public. In fact, only three women participated in the qualifying rounds of the 1933 French ladies' championship. Afif's exhibition comprised archival ephemera (mainly newspapers and photographs) concerning d'Ouezzan – who also served as a muse for contemporaneous artists and musicians such as Vincent Scotto. The show dared to highlight a life that history museums likely would not touch, critiquing the idea of whose story counts. What it presented could easily (though simplistically) be read as bereft of any proper art. Yet in enabling an artist to curate ephemera outside the confines of the history museum and its traditions, viewers were presented with a look not at history's grand narratives by way of political leaders, but shown how power plays out on the pool table, too.

The newspapers feature comments that women faced additional pressures to appear elegant while positioning their bodies to play. One even wondered, 'Is it due to shyness that ladies don't play billiards, while embracing tennis and swimming?' The writer concluded that, 'they have a natural aptitude for it. Their self-control, suppleness, delicacy and astuteness are of the highest value at the billiard table'. Reporters were more likely to comment on d'Ouezzan's exotic beauty than her skills; one describes her as having 'everything it takes to inspire dreams'.

1. I actually play pool, not billiards. See note 2 for the difference.

2. French billiards, or carom billiards, comprises only three balls and points are measured by consecutive shots that 'carom', rather than by balls sunk.



Yasmine d'Ouezzan at the billiards table (c.1931). Photo: Agence Mondial, courtesy of Gallica/Bibliothèque Nationale de France (gallica.bnf.fr) and the Kunsthalle Wien (above); Saâdane Afif: *This Is Ornamental* (2018), installation view of *Vie de Yasmine d'Ouezzan* (2018). Photo: Jorit Aust, courtesy of Studio Afif, Berlin and Kunsthalle Wien (below).

Present on the pages is also much bemusement that this descendent of the Prophet Muhammad would turn down marriage proposals and inheritances in order to play billiards. It is tempting, then, to read billiards as a metaphor for her agency and freedom, but this begs the question: can one read a metaphor into this factual history, which is also presented as an artwork?

There is one literary element, wherein metaphors are created from reality: a script for a play Afif commissioned by Tomas Clerc scrolls in red across an LED sign. The play is based on Afif's 2014 Marrakech Biennale performance *Souvenir: La Leçon de Géométrie*. The artist invited Professor Dahmad Boutfounast to give geometry lessons in a busy square known as Djemaa el Fna. D'Ouezzan quickly became the play's protagonist after Afif first encountered her in a c.1930 photograph housed in Marrakesh's Maison de La Photographie. The play tells the story of her quest for a heptahedron: a geometric form with seven faces. Ultimately, though, it foregrounds her encounters with the other seven characters in Djemaa el Fna: the Professor, the huckster, the moped-rider, the fortune-teller, the coalman, the acrobats and the tourist.³ This narrative structure, wherein d'Ouezzan is the protagonist and yet a vehicle through which to meet other characters, mimics the way in which the exhibition promises to be a solo show of Sadaâne Afif's, but in the end is about his myriad collaborators and muses instead.

After Professor Boutfounast's geometry lessons as part of the 2014 performance, Afif recalled that 'unusual things happened in Marrakech':

[S]ome characters typical of the Djemaa el Fna began to speak 'in geometry', an ornamental language. We could see but especially hear conversations of very high abstraction in the streets of the Casbah, or on the cafés' terraces bordering the square.

(cited in Kunsthalle Wien 2018)

Ornament has, since around the time of d'Ouezzan's championship, been a charged word in Vienna, where the exhibition is now shown. Austrian architect Adolf Loos once infamously equated it with crime. Part of what evidenced ornament's inferiority, for Loos, was its association with the Oriental, and with the feminine. Afif's presentation is not literally ornamental in the sense that Loos meant it when he referred to decorative qualities. In fact, Afif's presentation resembles a temporary exhibition for factual information like those found in a tourist centre, with temporary walls and fabricated vitrines. Afif privileges a story of a minor victory of the Oriental and the feminine, one not considered of primary importance to grander narratives of history but which speaks volumes to its time (and ours) all the same.

Crucially, d'Ouezzan's story is a true one. Afif, thankfully, gets past the now-worn trope of presenting archival materials to support semi-fictional narratives so as to expose the mutability of evidence, as in the work of Sophie Calle or Walid Raad. He also does not fetishize the archive, as in Jill Magid's work on the life of architect Luis Barragan. For a moment, I dared ask the question that never breeds fruitful answers: where's the art here? Is it Afif's intervention, or point of view? And happily, the

3. The script for *L'Heptaèdre (The Heptahedron)* lists One Acrobats as a figure '[w]ho are two but together as one character' (Afif 2018).

answer could be either 'nowhere' or 'everywhere'; there was no sense that fiction is art and fact is not. That Afif, within the space of the art museum, was allowed to admire the life and story of a figure who would not be considered in another venue, demonstrates the importance of artist curators, who, through experimentation, prompt consideration of traditions anew.

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DAVID HARTT: IN THE FOREST

Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens, Oakville, 23 September 2018 – 6 January 2019

Reviewed by Valérie Frappier, Independent Critic

The word 'habitat' is often associated with notions of the natural environment – the term meaning 'the natural home' of animals, plants and other types of organisms. Habitats also denote a sense of the local, usually being built within and in response to regional environments. Conceptions of habitats for humans diverge from these natural associations, as human homes are meant as shelters from nature. Built houses, in their contemporary sense, reduce vulnerability and exposure to the elements. So what happens when human habitats – especially the high-modernist architectural kind – come to be conceived as exportable blueprints to be transplanted anywhere, regardless of a region's local environment? Artist David Hartt gets to the core of this dilemma in the exhibition *in the forest* (2018). Focusing on architect Moshe Safdie's unfinished housing project, *Habitat* Puerto Rico, the show excavates the modern ideologies that first birthed the design in 1968, and contemplates today's built remains as they are overtaken by nature across the island of Puerto Rico. Hartt uses a photographic lens to blur distinctions between human-centred definitions of habitat and nature's own rendition – ultimately pointing to the dialectic between the natural and the built environment.



David Hartt, *in the forest* (2018), installation views. Photos: Jimmy Limit, courtesy of Oakville Galleries.