

Gabriela Acha, SARA SADIK,  
Kaleidoscope, FW21-22



Sara Sadik's fictional narratives portray the Maghrebi youth (whom she refers to as *beurness*) in Marseille, the city to which she belongs. Rooted in a local perspective, her scripts, films, and performances tackle wider issues, such as the politics of identities and behaviors that lack media representation. Through her computer-generated images and gamified references to pop culture items including Capri Sun, Dragon Ball, and Kalenji clothing, Sadik builds her imaginary scenarios, evading the colonialism(s) that have usurped physical and virtual territories. Through her tactical use of new technologies and social media, Sadik aims to create spaces for fairer representations.

GA Let's start talking about the influences of gaming and popular culture in your work.

SS There is something related to the archive that is really important for me. I use my work as an archive and for the transmission of elements from my own culture so they can exist long-term; a bit like an archaeologist of the present. Certain cultural references and "codes" are considered illegitimate and aren't accorded a "rightful" place. I create composite worlds by using them and bringing out the beauty I see in them. It is an homage. Some of these cultural references are used as tools for my work, such as sci-fi, video games, or rap lyrics. Some are used for documentation purposes, such as fashion elements, gestures, and props. They are all working elements, references, and they end up having some kind of powerful mythic dimension in my storytelling.

GA Could you expand on your hijacking of new technologies, e.g. CGI, as a way to open up possibilities you consider otherwise impossible?

SS I always start from very real, documentary material that I transform into fiction that takes place in other physical and temporal spaces. CGI, and its freedom of creation, allows me to widen the spatio-temporal framework, to visualize the "invisible" and make their stories exist "elsewhere"; in other spaces, other dimensions, other temporalities where they themselves do not exist, or not yet. It helps me escape from the barriers and borders of our reality, whether they are physical, scientific, societal, or political. The working process of my film *Khtobtogone* (2021) is a more representative example when I talk about the opening possibilities of using CGI. The online version and cinema mode of *GTA V* allow for wide freedom in terms of customization and hijacking. The narrative of the film takes place in Marseille, and is about a French-Maghrebi man. Through the use of open-sourced mods created by other users/players, as well as the creation of new mods (e.g. characters, outfits, accessories) especially for the film, I was able to give life to the main character, a life within a game that wasn't initially created for it.

GA The virtual space is dominated by corporations, but there are still some places for freedom and creation within it. Concerning the mis- and underrepresented Maghrebi youth, how do you think these tools have the power to platform their thoughts and feelings?

SS What I find really interesting in the virtual space, the digital, is that the representation cards are reshuffled. Social media allows for self-representation. It is a place where the "forgotten," and the "invisible" can exist, express themselves, show themselves, and be seen in the way they choose to without any "gaze" to filter them. Before social media, they existed, but we didn't see them; we didn't watch them. It's really related to my work and its process. It's all about working with the restrictions of our reality, and finding ways to be by using the freedom of the digital. The first

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CYBERFICTION

Interview by Gabriela Acha

example that comes to my mind is TikTok. I follow many teenagers and young men on it, and are many different types of videos that they make. Sometimes it's just dancing videos, moments of joy and happiness. Sometimes it's more about politics and actuality. And, sometimes, it's videos about something really intimate, their feelings, and taboo subjects such as love. They have this ability to be free in the way they open up, thanks to the support they get back on it. They have their fans, their followers, who relate to them, and it's a continuous process that allows other teenagers also to use this platform as a tool, and as a space to be themselves.

GA You work as well with cognitive schemas and contemporary perceptions of love, as well as stereotypical behavior, to observe how identity is constructed. For this, in *Carnalito Full Option* (2021) you focus on masculinities. What drives you to do so (instead of femininities or else)?

SS The main starting point of my focus on men was something really personal, related to my little brother, and my will to understand him more. There is so much that young men internalize, keep to themselves, don't tell anyone with regards to their emotions. There is a lack, and urgency for spaces for them to open up, be listened to, be advised, and, I wanted to use my work and its process as a new space for them to express themselves freely, and for people to listen to them. It's really important for me to create this safe space for them, where they feel confident enough to tell their stories, their emotions, everything that we don't allow them to talk about usually, and to write fiction based on themselves and their stories.

GA Museums are physical architectures for legitimation and visibility, directing focus to whatever is exhibited in them. How do these structures coexist with the fluidity of social media and cyberculture? What roles do these interactions play for you and in your work?

SS It is obviously very rewarding for me and my collaborators, to have my work shown in a cultural institution. It allows the work to reach into another domain, the world that is contemporary art. Yet, it isn't easy at all. As I said earlier, I want my work to be a safe space for young men and their fragility to exist, and once my work is shown in these spaces, there is something else added to it, something that kind of freezes it, and leaves it to everyone. It isn't in my hands anymore. I don't have any control of it anymore. Cultural institutions are still really problematic, and it's a continuous interior battle, questioning and finding solutions to allow for a wider diffusion into this world without jeopardizing the men I work with. For example, *Carnalito Full Option*, which was commissioned by the Manifesta Biennial, I refused to show it in one of the main locations, the Conservatoire. I wanted it to be screened for the people who weren't typical visitors, in cafés, shops, bars, hookah lounges, and snack bars. It was still part of a huge contemporary art event, but without the uniqueness of their milieu and stories being taken away from them.

Combining video, performance, and installation, the work of artist Sara Sadik (French, b. 1994) revolves around *beurcore* subculture, which emerged as a result of the Maghrebi diaspora. Her solo show, "Hle!Academy", is on view at CAC Brétigny through December 2021.



Image courtesy of the artist and Crèveœur, Paris.