



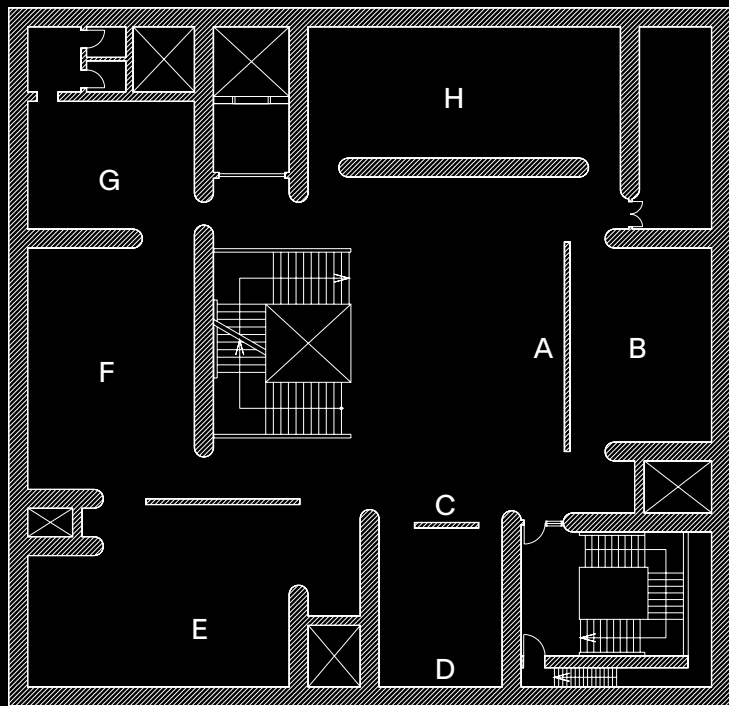
Yto Barrada

Bad
Color
Combos

(EN)

25.3. —> 30.7.23

Yto Barrada (*1971, lives in New York and Tangier) works with a variety of media: installation, film, photography, textiles and sculpture. Her works address social, cultural and political issues. *Bad Color Combos* groups works that address the relationship of mankind to nature, processes of learning and knowledge transmission, the questioning of cultural and artistic traditions, the confrontation of private and political history, and the meaning of colour and form. Central to Barrada's work is resistance—against overcome traditions, against power structures and role models. For her, learning and play are basic prerequisites for independent thinking and critical questioning of the present. Born in Paris and raised in Tangier, on the border between Africa and Europe, cultural dialogue is at the centre of many of Barrada's works. Often her hometown itself becomes the starting point for her artistic exploration. In 2006, Barrada founded the Cinémathèque de Tanger, a film and cultural centre. Her latest project is *The Mothership*, an artist residency and research centre in Tangier. The plant extracts from *The Mothership's* garden provided the colours for many of the artworks in this exhibition.



- A In the *After Stella*-series (2020–2022), Barrada addresses the history of artistic abstraction, which developed internationally and was shaped by various cultural influences. Barrada especially criticises the process of appropriating Moroccan culture as a source of inspiration for Western art and architectural history. She refers to the geometric colour field paintings of Frank Stella (*1936) created in the mid-1960s, whose titles are derived from the names of Moroccan cities. For Barrada, neither the industrial acrylic paints used nor the names of the works do justice to their cultural origins, which lie in Moroccan ornamentation and textile art. With her series *After Stella*, she makes these origins visible. The works are thus a contradiction to the Western-influenced art history. Another point of reference are the works of the painters Mohamed Chebâa (1935–2013), Farid Belkahia (1934–2014) and

Mohammed Melehi (1936–2020), who paved the way for artistic modernism in North Africa in the 1960s as founders of the Casablanca School. In their abstract works, they take up motifs and materials from popular, local art forms.

- B** As a collector of textiles, Barrada has been re-searching many facets of fabric history for many years: from materials and techniques to local traditions and international trade routes. Barrada also explores the art and science of dyeing, still considered by many to be “women’s work”, and its evolution from natural to highly toxic synthetic processes.

The velvet collages, made of different sized and dyed velvets, are inspired by historical colour sample books used in the textile dyeing industry. Different colour intensities and shades are created by using different dyes and mordants, such as plant, insect or mineral secretions. Barrada’s interest lies both in the historical dyeing processes and the extraction of natural dyes as well as in the effect of the colours produced themselves, which in combination with each other and through the changing of light constantly produce new optical variations.

- C** Barrada repeatedly picks up motifs in her works that have a connection with her hometown Tangier. The blue-violet, Moroccan *Iris tingitana* (Latin for “Tangier iris”, 2019) is considered the city’s landmark. Because of its bright flowers, it was used as a dye for textiles. For Barrada, the Tangier iris is a symbol of resistance and assertiveness, as it also grows in inhospitable places: in wasteland, on the city boundary and on construction sites. However, due to the changed climatic conditions and the altered urban structure caused by increasing tourism, the flower has been threatened with extinction for the past years. In the exhibition, the flower can be found in several places: as a small-sized collage made of cardboard and cast in bronze as part of an installation in room H.

- D** *Tree Identification for Beginners* (2017) is set at the intersection of political history and family history. In the summer of 1966, Barrada’s mother, Mounira Bouzid, was one of 54 African students who participated in the exchange programme “Operation Crossroads Africa”. The trip to the USA, sponsored by the State Department, was intended to promote cultural understanding. The film examines this staged encounter between North America and Africa and the burgeoning spirit of disobedience and resistance that was to shape an entire generation with the Black Power and Anti-Vietnam War movements. The report is accompanied by a stop-motion animation of colourful Montessori learning materials and Moroccan toys. For Barrada, learning and the acquisition of knowledge are the basic prerequisites for resistance against outdated thought patterns and a means of social change. The film is based on a live performance that premiered in New York in 2017.

- E** The installation’s title *Ways to baffle the Wind* (2023) is taken from an essay of the same name published in 1952 in the American lifestyle magazine *Sunset Patio Book*. The text presents various strategies to prevent an unwanted draught on patios and verandas. As a first step, it recommends testing wind strength and direction with an apparatus made of freely hanging cotton balls. By recreating this “wind machine” in the exhibition space, Yto Barrada playfully refers to man’s futile attempts to regulate natural forces. How much can we control the wind or specifically influence the climate?

The series of *Land and Water Forms* (2020) is based on educational material. Barrada uses four pairs of images to illustrate the reciprocal relationship between land and water forms: Isthmus and Canal, Cape and Bay, Peninsula and Gulf, Island and Lake, Archipelago and Lake District. Playfully, the artist creates an awareness of environmental features by the use of these objects. For Barrada, geographical borders are closely linked to social and political questions of cultural identity, migration and international exchange.

In *Continental Drift* (2021), Barrada combines private and political history to create a cinematic view of her hometown Tangier on the border between Africa and Europe. The film is a collage of Super 8 footage shot in various places. It also features Barrada's artist residence The Mothership and the Cinémathèque de Tangier, the city's art house and cultural centre she founded in 2006. The film also introduces some of Tangier's extraordinary personalities, such as street cleaners, farmers, guides in the historic city centre, and Jerry B., a British collector of magic lantern slides and fossils, whose voice is heard throughout the film.

The seemingly abstract compositions in the series *Plan for a Dye Garden* (2019) represent floor plans for a botanical garden Barrada created around her cultural centre The Mothership. The textiles, like almost all the textile works in the exhibition, were dyed with plant extracts from this garden.

F At first glance, the large grey textile works and photographs seem reminiscent of modern abstract painting, such as Frank Stella's *Black Paintings* (1958–1960). The photos, however, are made of educational material designed to practice sewing lines and patterns without thread. In this series, Barrada refers to the roots of artistic abstraction that lie in craft techniques and artisanal patterns.

The poster listing “bad colour combos” was designed in collaboration with Barrada's daughter Tamo. It refers to the endeavour to find rules for a world in which the individual has no power and, through these rules, to regain control of a world of one's own.

G The *Power of Two or Three Suns* (2020) also deals with man's confrontation with the forces of nature. The film was shot in an industrial laboratory where the durability of various materials for mass production is tested. Barrada places fabrics in a solar simulation chamber where they are irradiated

with xenon lamps that have the “power of two or three suns”. The film recalls the industrial aesthetics of 20th century modernism. Back then, new technology was welcomed as a sign of progress and was also thematised in artistic works. Today, this kind of representation stimulates reflection on issues such as climate change and the transience of resources.

H Do we have to carry on traditions without criticism? How can we learn differently and in a playful way? These questions are repeatedly at the centre of Yto Barrada's artistic work. Play often appears as a form of resistance and self-empowerment. Barrada often draws inspiration from historical education models. The pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel (1782–1852) pointed out the importance of free play and contact with nature and developed educational play materials from simple geometric shapes. The exhibition brings together several works that combine educational teaching materials with an artistic approach, such as *Tamo's Raft* (2020), *Pink Tower (Sensorial Education Toy)*, (2020) and the *Leaf Forms Puzzle* (2021). At the invitation of Yto Barrada, the exhibition also features works by artists Elodie Pong (*1966) and Bettina Grossman (1924–2021), with whom she shares a long-standing artistic interest.

Grossman's exploration of geometry and seriality takes place in various forms of expression, including sculpture, photography and film. After a devastating fire destroyed her studio in 1970, Grossman moved to the Hotel Chelsea in New York. Here she lived and worked in relative seclusion for many years, rigorously creating a new body of work. After meeting Grossman through filmmaker Corinne van der Borch, Barrada spent the last three years working on the artist's archive and the first book about her work.

Pong is an artist and filmmaker with a multidisciplinary practice. Her modular, multimedia installations are informed by personal histories, memories and science, and question systems of power. The ambiguity of the sculpture's

title *Die¹²* (2022) is also reflected in the materiality of the work. The cubes were made of cobblestones and evoke associations with riots and unrest.

The exhibition *Bad Color Combos* was developed in close collaboration with Yto Barrada and Mira van den Neste (exhibition design) and was created in cooperation with the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.



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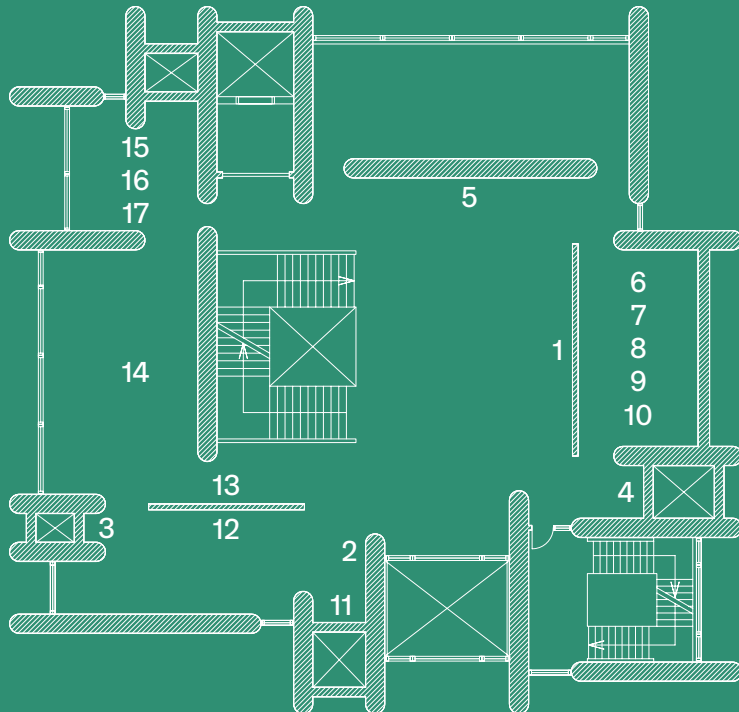
The examination of non-European art as a source of inspiration in the works of classical modernism, of nature and climate change, of colour and form studies as well as textile art practice becomes the starting point for the presentation of the collection. Again and again, the focus is on the transmission of knowledge, on processes of finding form and material, on artistic dialogues and power structures. These questions allow numerous references to be made between the works in the Kunsthalle's collection and offer connections to the themes that Yto Barrada (*1971) takes up in her exhibition on the 2nd floor of the building. With its open floor plan and numerous viewpoints, the Kunsthalle's architecture allows to trace these thematic links across the boundaries of individual rooms.

1 The exhibition opens with two large-format works by **Scean Scully** (*1945) and **Herbert Brandl** (*1959). Both works focus on making temporality visible and the influence of the natural environment on artistic creation.

In Brandl's *Untitled* (2007), nature becomes a co-creator of the abstract landscape: during the Venice Biennale, Brandl placed the painting in the courtyard of the Austrian Pavilion, where it was directly exposed to the weather.

2 In his *Idolino* (ca. 1892), **Ludwig von Hofmann** (1861–1945) depicts an apparently idyllic landscape in which man and his environment exist in harmony. The painting *Il Mattino* (The Morning, 2015) by **Salvo** (1947–2015) also shows a heavenly environment bathed in warm light, which is most notably devoid of people. The absence of man in Salvo's work and the idealised depiction of naturalness in Hofmann's refer to the tense relationship between man and nature, which has been shaped since the 19th century, not least by the advance of industrialisation.

4 At the beginning of the 20th century, Expressionist artists, including **Emil Nolde** (1867–1956) and **Karl Schmidt-Rottluff** (1884–1976), were inter-



ested in the vegetation of other cultures, which they regarded as “exotic”. *Tropenwald* (Tropical Forest, 1914) is one of 19 paintings created during Nolde’s two-month stay in New Guinea. To the artist, the landscape was a source of inspiration for an original art not influenced by Western civilisation—a questionable position from today’s perspective.

Like Frank Stella (*1936), who was inspired by Moroccan architecture and landscape (→ *Khurasan Gate I*, 1968), **Sean Scully** (*1945) drew inspiraion for his large-format mural *Hammering* (1990) from the abstract colour compositions of Moroccan wool and fabrics that he had seen on a trip to the country in 1959.

As the works of Frank Stella and Sean Scully show, the history of artistic abstraction in the global North is closely linked to the ornamentation of non-European cultures. The Bauhaus artist **Anni Albers** (1899–1994) was also inspired to create her abstract woven designs by the historical fabrics and patterns she had seen during a journey through Central and South America. She saw the independent patterns and structures as the basis for a redefinition and evaluation of the textile in art. *Connections*, published in 1984, represent a series of autobiographical prints in which Albers reflects on her life as a designer by means of various motifs from the respective phases of her personal development.

Benita Koch-Otte (1892–1976) had also attended the weaving class at the Bauhaus before taking over the management of the weaving mill at the Bodelschwingsche Stiftungen Bethel for 12 years until her death. The two designs *Aufgabe 57* (Task 57, undated) were purchased for the collection from the artist in 1970. With Anni Albers and Benita Koch-Otte, the presentation links directly to Bielefeld’s rich history as a city of linen weaving.

Sheila Hicks (*1934) had begun her studies at Yale University in 1954, where she met Anni and **Josef Albers** (1888–1976). The latter taught his theory of the interaction of colours there (→ *Homage to the Square*, 1967). After graduating in 1959, Hicks travelled through South America where, through

her acquaintance with the architect Luis Barragán (1902–1988), she turned her artistic interest increasingly towards weaving and later to large-scale, free-hanging textile works (→ *Untitled*, 1969).

In *Plaid 3* (1989), **Peter Zimmermann** (*1956) sets himself the creative challenge of reproducing the surface structure of a fabric so precisely that the painting can hardly be distinguished from the textile original.

Like Zimmermann, **Blinky Palermo** (1943–1977) blurs the genre boundaries between textile art and painting. In *Stoffbild Grün* (Textile image green, 1970), colour and choice of fabrics become the central design elements. Palermo uses simple, industrially produced fabrics that are joined together with a sewing machine.

Andy Warhol’s (1928–1987) *Yarn Paintings* (1983) mark the connection between textile craftsmanship, ornamentation and consumer culture. In 1983, Warhol received an advertising commission from the Florentine textile company Filpucci, which, however, was not realised. Inspired by the abstract patterns of the colourful threads, Warhol designed a series of photomechanically reproduced yarn patterns which, superimposed on top of each other, fill the entire surface as luminous, abstract ornaments. **Konrad Lueg** (1939–1996) addresses the loss of individuality that accompanies the serial character of consumer goods in his two paintings *Vier Blumenkästen* (Four Flower Boxes) and *Frau mit Tasche* (Woman with Bag, both 1965), in which the floral pattern, serially applied with a roll of wallpaper, creates an artificial ‘nature’.

The patterns of the *Wallpaper* (2023) were designed by **Yto Barrada** (*1971) specifically for the exhibition. They are based on ornaments used for endpapers of books. Barrada discovered these books in the library of the Mexican architect Luis Barragán (1902–1988). In Barrada’s work, the otherwise concealed decorations are transformed into a clearly visible part of the Kunsthalle’s architecture.

The minimalist sculpture *Tangier Island Wall* (2022), constructed from crab traps, forms a wall

against the outside space. The work refers to the fate of Tangier Island: the island off the coast of Virginia (USA) has lost more than half of its land mass in recent years due to the consequences of climate change. At the same time, the changing climatic conditions are causing a decline in crab fishing yields. However, this is the economic basis for the 378 inhabitants. Barrada's artificial dike of crab traps becomes a symbol of man's struggle against the forces of nature, but also a memorial to the consequences of human intervention in nature.

15 Natural forces, such as gravity and air movement, are also part of the *Mobile* (1956) by **Alexander Calder** (1898–1976). It is only through their influence that the coloured plates of the mobile begin to vibrate, to arrange themselves in ever new abstract constellations of colour and form.

16 The interplay of colour and movement is also explored by **Sonia Delaunay-Terk** (1885–1979)
17 and **Robert Delaunay** (1885–1941) in *Rythme-couleur* (Rhythm Colour, 1959–60) and *Rythme sans fin* (Endless Rhythm, 1934). The combination of different colours and shapes, which seem to continue endlessly across the picture surface, creates a dynamic of its own.

0 Alberto Giacometti / Martin Disler Little and Big Demons

Face to Face and Side by Side #7

In the series Face to Face and Side by Side, a work of art from the Kunsthalle Bielefeld's collection meets a selected work on loan from another institution: these encounters lead to new, often surprising perspectives. In the seventh edition of this exhibition series, the sculpture Petit Monstre II (Little Monster II, 1953) by Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966) from the ahlers collection, is juxtaposed with an untitled painting (1989) by Martin Disler (1949–1996) from the Kunsthalle.

Art as a trial of strength, a way of wrestling with the material and the motif, or even with oneself—all this characterizes both Giacometti's figure and Martin Disler's painting. For both, the theme is "the human being." Giacometti wants to capture the size of the human opposite him as he perceives it in space or within his field of vision. In attempting this, his sculptures become smaller and smaller. In Disler's exploration of the theme, on the other hand, his formats keep getting larger. While Giacometti concentrates on one figure, Disler's work contains many, which stagger about and jostle each other, as if in an apocalyptic scene or a portrait of hell. In the

work of both artists, the human emerges out of the visibly processed materials, then disappears again. Both artists transgress boundaries on their search for the final form, yet it seems to elude them again and again—monstrously in the sculptor's hands, grotesquely in the painter's.

What do two artworks sound like together? How can they be compared via audio? The sound designer Philipp Randt (*1979) (Kokelsounds Audioproduktion) has interpreted and compared both works of art through sound. Even in this medium, the search for form can be seen in the metaphorical trial of strength between the two artworks.

In cooperation with the Stiftung Ahlers Pro Arte.

STIFTUNG AHLERS
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Aurel Dahlgrün (*1989) crosses borders. He captures his expeditions and dives, during which he intensively deals with the elements air and water, with his camera. He then transfers the resulting images into his artistic works in the form of videos and photographs.

The artist collected the source material for the exhibited works in the “perpetual ice” of the Arctic. In the exhibition, Dahlgrün’s works take us along on his 2022 Greenland expedition, with the title “Summit” referring to the eponymous peak of the Greenland Ice Sheet and the research station there. Rigidity and motion, proximity and distance, brightness and darkness – such contrasts form the basic themes of the exhibition. The individual works seem like fragments from nature that, against the backdrop of the climate crisis, ask us: How long will the “perpetual ice” still exist?

Design: strobo BM

“Summit” is sponsored by the Kunststiftung NRW as an epilogue to the exhibition “Following Water” (2022).

