

Press release

Ali Kazma: Lisbon-Istanbul. Two Portraits on the Edge.

Solo exhibition by Ali Kazma

Curated by Maurizio Bortolotti

Opening 21 March 2025 | 10 PM

Galeria Francisco Fino

21.03.2025 – 03.05.2025

Ali Kazma's exhibition presents a view of Europe seen from its two geographical extremes through the lens of culture in a crucial historical moment for the continent.

This exhibition establishes a dialogue between Lisbon and Istanbul via two recent works by Kazma. Although located at opposite ends of Europe, the two cities share a similar condition. At the westernmost corner of Europe, Lisbon has historically been a gateway to the Americas. On the other hand, located at the easternmost part of the continent, Istanbul has been a hub for cultural and commercial exchanges with Asia.

In these two works, Ali Kazma explores the inner worlds of two major writers, Orhan Pamuk (Turkish), and now Lisbon-based Alberto Manguel (Argentinian). The videos look at the writers' domestic lives and daily environments and bear witness to the complexity of European culture, especially in borderlands like Turkey and Portugal, where the infiltration and influences of other cultures are more visible. Given the changing political atmosphere in many of its countries, Europe, which seems inclined to closing its doors mentally and physically to others, is reminded of its own ideal which embraces the world's complexity and richness. Adopting Pamuk's and Manguel's view of the world, the exhibition offers a model to rethink the European cultural approach.

The exhibition starts and ends with two videos about water: the waters of the Bosphorus, and those of the Tagus flowing into the Atlantic Ocean, which are integral to Istanbul and Lisbon's landscapes. The liquid element of sea or ocean water powers both cities and offers a tangible representation of their conditions as margins and gateways; it represents a dynamic space of traveling and exchange. Through this natural element, culture acts as a portal through which visions of distant parts of the world connect. With these two videos, Ali Kazma's narration finds a point of intersection between the two cities.

A constant state of uncertainty and expectancy defines this moment of significant global geopolitical change, governed by new economic strategies and technological innovations, and marked by a pandemic, wars, and massive population migrations. These two frontier cities, as it were, present a model for addressing the current situation and illustrate how complexity can enhance our experiences and assist us in navigating a deeply changing world.

Ali Kazma's representation of the two writers' lives embodies an idea of openness to the world as a paradigm at the roots of European culture. Both writers inhabit the continent's peripheries. Their longing for hybridization between different worlds generates expansive visions of peoples' ordinary lives. At the same time, they create points of connection with other continents.

The artist believes complexity is central to his ongoing exploration of today's world. In the videos presented at the exhibition, he seeks to bridge the intricate landscape of the writers' minds and their external environment. Throughout his career, he has developed a meta-narrative that connects human lives and environments with their representations. Kazma focuses on the watershed between reality and its image, the moment reality is poised to become representation, as seen in *The Taxidermist*. He creates a circular relationship between individual life and its depiction, where one gradually fades into the other. His narrative is not epic; it reflects our present existence, starting from exemplary lives or symbolic locations like the Svalbard Island Vault (in the video *Safe*), which houses all known plant seeds on Earth. Kazma's filming methodology transcends all fictional narratives. He crafts a fluid and robust narrative that links distant points, which are the object of his inquiry. His narration explores the geographic relationship between living environments and cultural models in various world regions, from Europe to South America and Asia. The interplay between ordinary life and its representation, seen through cultural habits, is one of the central themes in Ali Kazma's recent work.

Kazma's work is rooted in reality observation processes, which began many years ago in videos like *Clock Master* and *Brain Surgery*. He went on to develop this approach further, moving from the process of reality transformation to the exploration of cultural habits in specific life-environments, having investigated cultural models as points of connection between the symbolic and the real world across different locations worldwide.

Ali Kazma is part of a generation of video-makers who explored the narrow territory between cinema and contemporary art since the early 1990s. For artists like Doug Aitken, Matthew Barney, Pierre Huyghe, and Alfredo Jaar, it is not only about moving images; the installation in the exhibition space itself is part of their practice and enhances the meaning of the artworks.

Films are based on a plot; for this reason, they are often associated with literature. Artworks happen here and now in front of the spectator. This lineage of video-makers, including Ali Kazma, connects the essential features of the two genres, developing a new type of installation for videos, which contains a narration, even if often non-linear, and happens 'here and now' in the presence of the spectator who activates it. This means a video installation can only be

experienced in its presence. In a way, we could say these artists spatialized the time of the narration through the video installation.

For this exhibition at Francisco Fino Gallery, Ali Kazma created a unique environment for viewing his videos. The environment is the ideal connection and the physical space of two European cities. Two videos about the waters of Lisbon and Istanbul open and close the exhibitiv trajectory. The videos about Orhan Pamuk and Alberto Manguel are at the centre of the exhibition. On opposing walls, two colours symbolise the cities of Lisbon (yellow) and Istanbul (blue). An entire wall is dedicated to a series of stills from Ali Kazma's videos in a combo made of lightboxes featuring a non-linear narration.

The exhibition is a site-specific installation that spatially represents a cultural dialogue between the two cities. It presents a common social imaginary evoked by Lisbon and Istanbul through the eyes of the two writers, whose similarities and differences reveal a web of shared roots.

Maurizio Bortolotti

Ali Kazma

Born in 1971 in Istanbul, Turkey, **Ali Kazma** is a lens-based media artist living and working in Istanbul and Paris. He has a master of arts degree from the New School in New York City.

Questioning social organisation and the value of human activity, he highlights the relationship between the visible and the invisible aspects of reality by looking closely at the management of labour, time, bodies, gestures, space and processes. Kazma's attentive eye collects specific activities in a broad range of economic, industrial, scientific, medical, social and artistic spheres. He has an interest in spaces of social significance, places of production, in industries and handicraft, as well as in the details of machinery and ritualistic, repetitive daily tasks.

The artist, who represented Turkey at the 55th Venice Biennale - Pavilion of Turkey in 2013, had a comprehensive solo exhibition at Jeu de Paume, Paris in 2017. Ali Kazma's other solo exhibitions include Nouveau Musée National de Monaco (2023), Albergo Diurno Venezia (Milan, 2018), MUNTREF (Buenos Aires, 2018), Arter (Istanbul, 2015), Hirshhorn Museum (Washington, 2010), and the upcoming solo exhibition at Istanbul Modern in 2025.

Group exhibitions and biennials include 6th Kuandu Biennale (Taipei, 2018), 7th Moscow International Biennale of Contemporary Art (Moscow, 2017), MAXXI (Rome, 2016), Musée d'Art Contemporaine de Lyon (Lyon, 2013), 30th Sao Paulo Biennial (Sao Paulo, 2012), Istanbul Biennial (Istanbul, 2001, 2007, 2011) Muzeum Sztuki Lodz (Lodz, 2012), Istanbul Modern (Istanbul, 2011), Museum Kunstpalast (Düsseldorf, 2010) and New Museum (New York, 2010).

He has received the UNESCO Prize for Promotion of the Arts in 2001 and the Nam June Paik Award in 2010. The artist's works have been included in a number of institutional collections including CNAP (Paris), Istanbul Modern, MEP (Paris), Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, MONA (Tasmania), Sztuki Museum (Lodz), Tate Modern (London), Fondation Cartier (Paris), TBA21 (Vienna), and VKV Foundation Collection (Istanbul).

Maurizio Bortolotti

Maurizio Bortolotti is a curator, writer, and researcher born in 1961 and based in Milan. He is the curator of the 6°LAM 360 Biennial of Mongolia, on which he is currently working on (2019 -).

He has been “Director of Research and Public Program” to Himalayas Museum of Shanghai (2015-2016). In this position he has worked both to the organization of a new Biennial project called "Shanghai Project" and on the organization of the Museum. He has been the first Italian curator to work in a Chinese Museum.

From May 2019 to December 2020 was a member of the Board of Trustees of Gallerie Estensi in Modena.

He has been Curator of the International program of Zuecca Project Space in Venice (2011-2014). In this position he launched the institution with a program dedicated to Asia, included the turning point exhibition in his recent carrier of the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, "Disposition", in which the artist deal with his experience in Jail.

He has worked for the School of Visual Arts NABA (2004-2013), both teaching courses of "Museology" and “Sociology of New Media" in the department of Visual Arts and Media and as consultant for Art Projects. He has been lecturer about contemporary art at the Faculty of Sociology of the Urbino University (2003-2005).

He has worked as Independent curator in Italy and other countries like United Kingdom, Switzerland, Croatia, Turkey, Israel, South Korea, India, China, Mongolia; focusing on the interaction between art and social processes on the background of globalisation, investigating especially the interdisciplinary connection between art and architecture inside the urban space and its social relations. Since 2003, he is following the development of contemporary art in Asia.

He has worked as curator and consultant for different International biennials and he has been invited to the First World Biennial Forum (WBF) “Shifting Gravity” in South Korea in 2012. In 2009 he has been a member of the Scientific Committee of the Shanghai Biennial in preparation of the 2010 edition, happened during the Shanghai World Expo; in 2010 he has been commissioner for Europe of the First Art Fair organized by the Gwangju Biennial in South Korea, of which he has been consultant from 2008 to 2014. In 2012 he has been a consultant of the First Edition of the Kochi Biennial in India.

He has curated projects by Yona Friedman, Peter Eisenman, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Dan Graham, Tomas Saraceno, Olafur Eliasson, Ai Weiwei, among many others.

Further information

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Opening hours

Tue. – Fri. 12 PM – 7 PM

Sat. 2 PM – 7 PM