

Grada Kilomba. «Opera to a Black Venus. What would the bottom of the ocean tell us tomorrow, if emptied of water today? »



GRADA KILOMBA
Opera to a Black Venus, 2024
Proyección monocanal con un canal de sonido
Cortesía de la artista

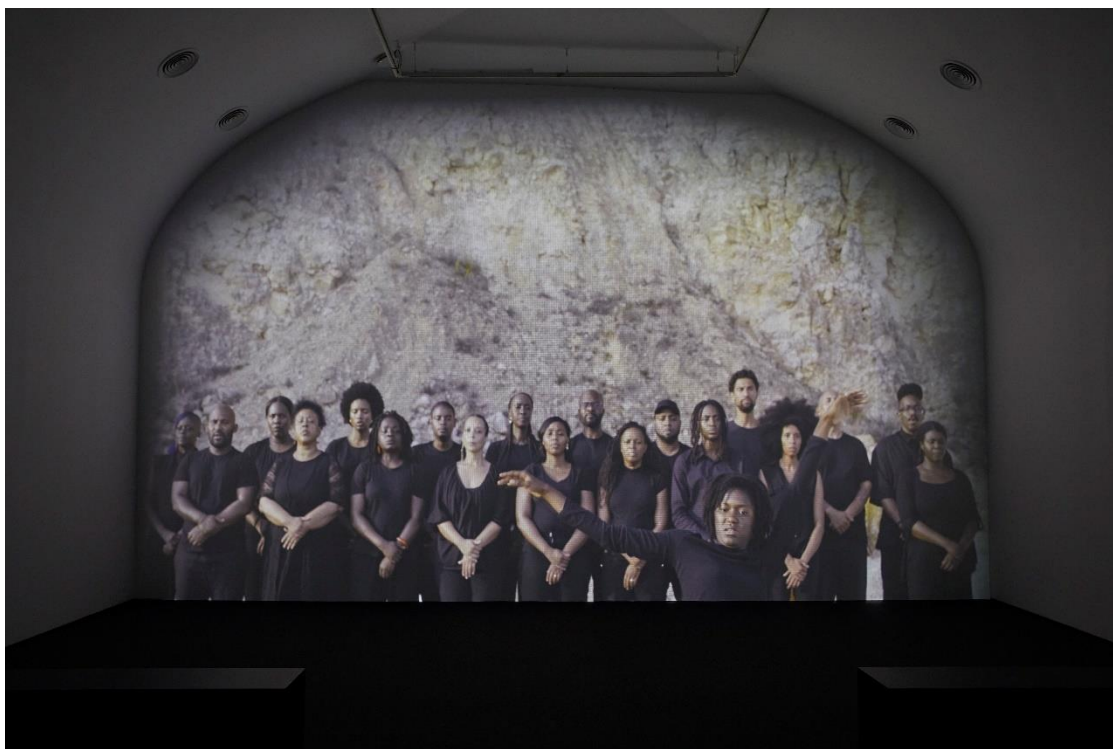
DATES: November 20, 2024 – March 31, 2025

PLACE: Sabatini building, 3rd floor

ORGANIZERS: Museo Reina Sofía

CURATOR: Manuel Borja-Villel

COORDINATOR: Soledad Liaño



Vista de la exposición *Grada Kilomba. «Opera to a Black Venus. ¿Qué nos diría mañana el fondo del océano si hoy se vaciara de agua?»* en el Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. Noviembre, 2024
Archivo fotográfico del Museo Reina Sofía
Obra: *Opera to a Black Venus*

The solo exhibition *Opera to a Black Venus*, devoted to the Berlin based Portuguese artist Grada Kilomba (Lisbon, 1968), assembles a selection of artworks, denoting the most complete presentation of her works to date in Spain. Kilomba is best known for her unique practice of storytelling, in which she gives body, voice, form and movement to her own writings, using: performance, staged reading, dance, video, sculpture, installation and sound landscapes. With a subversive and poetic imagery, her work draws on memory, trauma, gender and postcolonialism, interrogating concepts of violence and repetition. “What stories are told? Where are they told? How are they told? And told by whom?” are constant questions in Kilomba’s body of work.

Her work has been described as a new postcolonial minimalism, in which multiple and complex languages blur the boundaries between disciplines. With a robust substructure in psychoanalysis and philosophy, in addition to her extensive work as a researcher, she analyses the dominant systems of knowledge production, putting forward a process of unlearning current hegemonic narratives.

Opera to a Black Venus (2024) adopts the title of an ambitious new project, which the artist has developed over the last two years as a result of a collaboration between the Museo Reina Sofía and the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden in Germany. Kilomba imagines a futuristic scenario of an arid landscape, where the sea has disappeared,

revealing the traces of human existence. In the eyes of the artist, the ocean is the burial ground for millions of lives lost throughout centuries - from slave trade, to colonialism, to war, climate change and forced migration. “What would the bottom of the ocean tell us tomorrow, if emptied of water today?” asks Kilomba.

The work *Opera to a Black Venus* (2024 - ongoing), is a large scale video installation staging the first part of a contemporary Opera, dedicated to a *Black Venus*, who inhabits the grounds of the ocean and who becomes the oracle of narratives of remembrance and resilience. As it is common to the artist’s practice, she worked with communities



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Obra: 18 Verses

to percussionists and ballet dancers, all become the protagonists of this storytelling. A compelling choreography moves towards our eyes, as if underwater, to the sound of winds, voices and a four-handed piano improvisation by the artist and her young daughter - presented as a *requiem* or a lament to those who have succumbed to the tides of global waters.

Diving beneath the waves, Kilomba guides the audience through other large scale installations using poetry and materials such as fabric, burnt wood, stone, sand and glass, as scenarios to this contemporary opera: *18 Verses* (2022), the cartography of a shipwreck embraced by an ensemble of powerful voices and instrumental sounds;

Sounds of Water (2023), a poem in neon lights reveals a poignant call; *Labyrinth* (2024), a monumental spatial textile installation, alluding to the im-possible paths and routes of liberation; and *Compressed Time* (2024), where the striking contrast between solid stones and sleek black cube invites the viewers to contemplate the intersection of past injustices and future possibilities.



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Obra: Sounds of Water



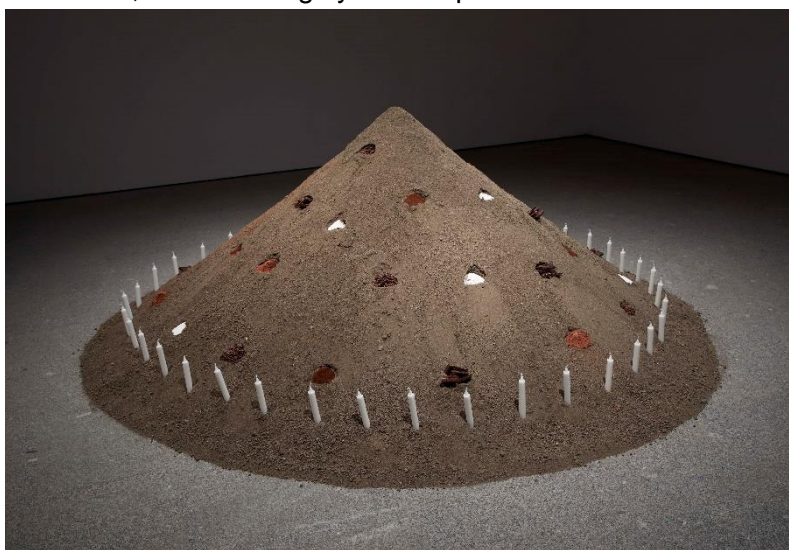
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Moreover, in this solo exhibition two other moments of the artist's career are presented: the acclaimed video installation *A Word of Illusions* (2017-2019), composed of the performance of three Greek mythologies translated into postcolonial times: *Illusions Vol. I, Narcissus and Echo* (2017), dedicated to the politics of misrepresentation and invisibility; *Illusions Vol. II, Oedipus* (2018), dedicated to the politics of violence and genocide; and *Illusions, Vol. III, Antigone* (2019), dedicated



GRADA KILOMBA
A World of Illusions trilogy. Illusions vol. III, Antigone, 2019
Videoinstalación con dos canales de vídeo, HD, color, sonido, 54'49"
Cortesía de la artista

to politics of remembrance and mourning. And an earlier moment, in which her own writings become performative: *The Desire Project* (2016), a three-channel video installation in which words become moving images and drumming a form of narrative; *Table of Goods* (2017), an installation composed of soil, sugar, coffee, cocoa and chocolate, mesmerising cyclical exploitation.



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Obra: *Table of Gods*

The exhibition, *Opera to a Black Venus. What would the bottom of the ocean tell us tomorrow, if emptied of water today?* has been organised in collaboration with the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden.

Curated by art historian and former director of Museo Reina Sofía, Manuel Borja-Villel, it could be visited on the 3rd floor of Sabatini

building from November 20 to March 31, 2025. On 19th November a [meeting](#) with Grada Kilomba, 'Who can we talk, what can we talk about and what happens when we talk?', will be held. Access will be free of charge until full capacity is reached, subject to prior registration.

Biography Grada Kilomba



La artista Grada Kilomba en una de las salas de la exposición.
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. Noviembre 2024
Archivo fotográfico del Museo Reina Sofía

Grada Kilomba is a Berlin-based Portuguese artist, whose work draws on memory, trauma and post-colonialism, interrogating concepts of power, violence and repetition, using: performance, staged reading, video, sculpture, installation and sound landscapes. Her work has been presented in major international events such as: Bienal de São Paulo (2016); 10. Berlin Biennale (2018); Documenta 14, Kassel (2017) and 32^a

Bienal de São Paulo (2016). Selected solo and group exhibitions include Inhotim, Belo Horizonte (2024); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2022); Museum of Contemporary Art Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2022); Sommerset House, London (2022); Norval Foundation, Cape Town (2022); Pinacoteca de São Paulo (2019); The Power Plant, Toronto (2018); among others. She was the co-curator of the 35th Biennial of São Paulo, Choreographies of the Impossible, 2023.

Kilomba's work can be found in many prominent public and private collections around the world, including Tate Modern Collection, London; Royal Dutch Collection, Amsterdam; Rennie Collection, Toronto; International African American Museum Collection, Charleston; Gulbenkian Modern Collection, Lisbon, Fitzwilliam Museum Collection, Cambridge, among others.

Kilomba holds a distinguished Doctorate in Philosophy from the Freie Universität Berlin, and in 2023 she was awarded the Doctorate Honoris Causa by University of ISPA, Lisbon. She has been a guest Professor at several international universities, such as Humboldt University, in Berlin and the University of Applied Arts, in Vienna. In 2024, Kilomba was the recipient of the renowned Angela Davis Guest Professorship, at the Goethe University, Frankfurt.

Madrid, November 19, 2024

Press Kit



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