



Hamburger Bahnhof – Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart

HAMBURGER BAHNHOF –
NATIONALGALERIE DER GEGENWART

Saādane Afif. Five Preludes

12. Dezember 2025 – 13. September 2026

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EXHIBITION TEXTS

Soixante mille millimètres d'infinis possibles

Soixante mille millimètres d'infinis possibles (Sixty thousand millimetres of infinite possibilities) transforms an ordinary folding ruler into an object that measures imagination rather than units of distance. The work is based on the editioned piece *Deux mille millimètres d'infinis possibles* (Two thousand millimetres of infinite possibilities) from 2014, in which a ten-segment ruler could be bent into endless configurations. It refers to a work by Marcel Duchamp (*3 Standard Stoppages*, 1913–14), for which the artist dropped three metre-long lengths of thread onto the ground in such a way that they formed different shapes. For this exhibition, Afif has installed thirty yellow folding rulers without measurements in various shapes on the walls. Together they have a length of 60,000 millimetres and can take on countless different forms.

Anthologie de l'humour noir

The sculpture *L'humour noir* (Black Humour) takes the distinctive architecture of Paris' Centre Pompidou as its starting point. In this work, Afif refers to a Ghanaian tradition of figurative coffins, which he discovered in the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* (Centre Pompidou, 1989). The artist went to Ghana to commission a coffin in the form of the museum from the artisan Kudjoe Affutu. The work raises fundamental questions about the relationship between art and institutions, including whether the inclusion of a work of art in a museum inevitably leads to its 'death' because it loses its original context and thus its critical potential. Five aluminium casts replicate original bollards from the square in front of the Centre Pompidou, which were often used as platforms for spontaneous speeches. The entire installation, consisting of the sculpture, the bollards and the 'lyrics', is titled *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (Anthology of Black Humour), which refers to a collection of texts published by André Breton in 1940.

The Old

The Old refers to three works from the series *The New* (1979–1987) by American artist Jeff Koons. In Koons' series, pristine, brand-new vacuum cleaners were presented in Plexiglas vitrines – untouched by time and preserved for eternity. In 2025, Afif tracked down the same vacuum cleaner models, now marked by many years of use, and placed them in replicas of Koons' original cases. By appropriating Koons' concept, Afif invites reflection on universal themes: the passage of time and the inevitability of decay. Art also ages and must be kept alive through new and changing perspectives. *The Old* is one of two new works created for this exhibition. New 'lyrics' – short, interpretative texts written by artist and writer friends – can be read on the surrounding walls

The Fountain Archives: Bookshelves and Regular Series

The multi-part work ensemble *The Fountain Archives* takes Marcel Duchamp's seminal work *Fountain* (1917) as its starting point. Between 2008

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and 2020, Afif collected 1001 books with pages depicting Duchamp's object, a urinal signed with the pseudonym 'R. Mutt'. He tore out each page showing Fountain, framed, signed and numbered the pages as independent works and sold them to purchase more books. The books were kept in his studio and formed a library in which the removed pages were made visible by bookmarks. Together, the framed pages – hung individually or in a grid – and the books on the shelves formed a growing archive. This room also includes *Musiques pour Tuyauterie* (Music for Plumbing), a reconstructed prehistoric flute made from bird bones and a musical score that refers to *The Fountain Archives*.

The Fountain Archives: Augmented Series and Index

As *The Fountain Archives* project became increasingly well-known, books, newspapers and catalogues started to reproduce Afif's framed images of Duchamp's *Fountain* – but now accompanied by texts about Afif's archive. Since 2014, Afif has therefore been working on new series: *The Fountain Archives: Augmented Series*. He collected publications that referred to his archive and once again removed the illustrated pages. He framed them and placed the books on the shelves of *The Fountain Archives*. The Augmented Series is a now completed archive within an archive – a collection of 147 images. This room also contains the artist's books *The Fountain Archives (Index)*, which bring together reproductions of all pages from the original project.

Live

Live transforms a ten-metre, freestanding wall into an ever-changing reflection of Berlin's streets. For the duration of the exhibition, current posters announcing upcoming cultural events will be pasted weekly onto the wall. A bill poster who regularly puts up posters in Berlin's public spaces will put up identical posters in the museum. The work references artistic practices such as those of the Nouveaux Réalistes (New Realists), who collected weather-beaten poster fragments in the streets of Paris in the 1950s and 1960s and exhibited them as works of art. This work blurs the boundary between museum and urban space: Afif appropriates the advertising posters and transforms them into a narrative about Berlin's vibrant cultural life set within the museum. The 'lyrics' written for the work *Live* form the starting point for performances that will take place beyond the Hamburger Bahnhof between May and July 2026.

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