



Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Preußischer Kulturbesitz

**Hamburger
Bahnhof**
Nationalgalerie
der Gegenwart

Berlin, 10 December 2025

PRESS RELEASE

Hamburger Bahnhof – Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart

Invalidenstraße 50, 10557 Berlin

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 10:00 – 18:00, Thursday 10:00 – 20:00,
Saturday + Sunday 11:00 – 18:00

Saâdane Afif. Five Preludes

12 December 2025 – 13 September 2026

An exhibition of the Nationalgalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Opening: Thursday, 11 December 2025, 19 Uhr

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Hamburger Bahnhof presents Saâdane Afif's first institutional solo exhibition in Berlin. The exhibition provides an insight into the work of the interdisciplinary artist, who has been living in the city since 2003, and includes the multi-part work 'The Fountain Archives'. This artistic archival project is dedicated to one of the most prominent chapters in 20th-century art history: Marcel Duchamp's legendary readymade 'Fountain' from 1917. Afif's installation was generously donated to the museum by Paul Maenz in 2023. Other works are also on display, including two new productions that explore the institution of the art museum and the principle of authorship with profound insight and subtle humour.

'**Saâdane Afif. Five Preludes**' at Hamburger Bahnhof brings together five key groups of work from the last 15 years: 'The Fountain Archives' (2008-2020), 'Anthologie de l'humour noir' (2010), 'Soixante mille millimètres d'infinis possibles' (2018) as well as 'The Old' and 'Live' (2025). Afif's works, which reference 20th-century art history, initiate a process of observation and interpretation that is continued by participants and viewers. He invites artists, musicians and writers to compose poetic commentaries for the works. These so-called 'lyrics' are displayed at eye level around the artworks in the exhibition space. They form the starting point for performances that take place at various locations in Berlin during the exhibition. Afif has designed posters announcing these performances for each of the five work groups on display. The artworks shown at Hamburger Bahnhof reflect on the avant-garde movements of the past century and their significance in today's art world, on the museum as a place of preservation and burial for art, and pose the question to visitors: where does life take place if not in the museum?

The exhibition begins with the long-term project '**The Fountain Archives**'. The project began in 2008 with a collection of magazines, catalogues and books featuring Marcel Duchamp's (1887–1968) famous readymade 'Fountain' (1917). By 2020, Afif had collected 1,001 books, torn out pages with illustrations of the urinal, framing, signing and numbering the sheets ('The Fountain Archives: Regular Series'). The publications are displayed on library shelves, with bookmarks marking the empty spaces ('The Fountain Archives: Bookshelves'). In addition, 147 sheets from publications in which Afif's 'Fountain Archives' project has been featured since 2014 are on display ('The Fountain Archives: Augmented Series'). The artistic archive project was completed in 2022 with an 'Index' in which all pages of the 'Regular Series' were reproduced.

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The exhibition also features the 2010 work group '**Anthologie de l'humour noir**', which was exhibited on the occasion of the awarding of the Prix Marcel Duchamp at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. 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. The title refers to a collection of texts published by André Breton in 1940, which contains contributions by Dadaist and Surrealist artists who are themselves represented in the Centre Pompidou's collection.

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Afif first presented the edition piece 'Deux mille millimètres d'infinis possibles' (2014), a two-metre-long folding rule without markings, in an installation version in 2018. The ten-part folding rule could be bent into an infinite number of configurations and referenced a work by Duchamp ('3 Stoppages étalon', 1913–14), in which Duchamp dropped three one-metre-long threads onto the floor, forming different shapes. For the exhibition at Hamburger Bahnhof, Afif has attached thirty yellow folding rulers without measurements in different shapes to walls of the same colour. Together, these rulers measure 60,000 millimetres in length and, together with the accompanying 'lyrics', form the installation '**Soixante mille millimètres d'infinis possibles**' (2018).

'**The Old**' was created especially for the exhibition, and refers to Jeff Koons' series of works entitled 'The New' (1979-1987). Koons (born 1955) presented immaculate, brand-new vacuum cleaners in Plexiglas display cases, untouched by time and preserved for eternity. Afif, conversely, tracked down the same vacuum cleaner models, marked by many years of use, and placed them in replicas of the display cases designed by Koons. The appropriation of Koons' concept opens up a reflection on universal themes: the passage of time and the inevitability of decay. Art also ages and must be kept alive through changing perspectives.

Visitors encounter the second new artwork created for the exhibition in the museum's Rieckhallen, where it is integrated into the permanent exhibition 'Museum in Motion'. '**Live**' is a continuously changing poster installation featuring advertisements for cultural events in Berlin, which Afif appropriates as readymades and transforms into a narrative about the city's vibrant cultural life. Week after week, a billposter affixes new posters to a specially erected wall; these posters are identical to those found on the streets of Berlin at the same time. The work recalls the actions of the 'Nouveaux Réalistes,' who collected torn posters from the streets of Paris in the 1950s and 1960s and exhibited them as works of art in galleries and museums.

From May to July 2026, a programme of performances will take place as part of the exhibition in the Roter Salon of the Volksbühne am Rosa Luxemburg-Platz, in KM28 and in the Kantine am Berghain. The programme '**Hamburger Bahnhof On Tour**', which marks the 30th anniversary of Hamburger Bahnhof, focuses on exchange and networking with cultural actors in Berlin.

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Accompanying the exhibition is an edition of the Hamburger Bahnhof catalogue series, published by Silvana Editoriale Milano, with a curatorial introduction by Gabriele Knapstein, a conversation between Clara Meister and Saâdane Afif, an essay by Christiane Meyer-Stoll and numerous exhibition views (12 euros).

The exhibition is curated by Gabriele Knapstein, Head of Collections and Deputy Director of Hamburger Bahnhof – Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart.

The exhibition is made possible by Hamburger Bahnhof International Companions e. V., Daniel Schmidt, Georg Reisch GmbH & Co. KG, and Dimitris Passas Collection.

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