

# MASS MoCA

## Yto Barrada: *Ways to Baffle the Wind* to Open at MASS MoCA on November 20

### A collaboration between MASS MoCA and Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art & Thought

**North Adams, MA, October 14, 2021**—MASS MoCA presents Yto Barrada: *Ways to Baffle the Wind*, on view beginning November 20. The exhibition of new and recent work—including sculpture, drawings, textiles, films, and works on paper—is assembled to model, parody, and learn from attempts to regulate and organize nature. *Ways to Baffle the Wind* is a collaboration between MASS MoCA and Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art & Thought, based in New Orleans. The exhibition is guest-curated by Andrea Andersson, Founding Director and Chief Curator of the Rivers Institute.

The title of the exhibition comes from a 1952 copy of the lifestyle publication *Sunset Patio Book*, which included an eponymous essay outlining various ways to evade the wind, including a makeshift machine made with cotton balls and string. *Ways to Baffle the Wind* puts objects to work in the service of studying the natural world and how our understanding of it has been shaped by cultural phenomena and historical narratives. Barrada's own version of the makeshift wind machine, *Portrait de ma mère comme un courant d'air* (2021), was commissioned by MASS MoCA for the exhibition. Through her multidisciplinary, investigative approach, the Moroccan-born Barrada unearths the subaltern histories that lie beneath both our physical and social landscapes. "I'm one of those people who can't decide until I know all the parameters," Barrada writes. "I am a slow learner: I hoard all this research and wait for some understanding to take shape."

A major component of Barrada's practice is mobilizing forms of collecting, making, and self-education to work within an interdisciplinary space marked by botany, geography, paleontology, and geopolitics. *Leaf Forms* (2019) and *Land and Water Forms* (2019)—exhibited together for the first time—are a series of works modeled after Montessori molded trays that display forms of nature in an elusive, ordered grammatical syntax. Based on Barrada's interest in pedagogical models and the assumptions built into educational materials, the works allow the viewer to unpack how these elements might fit together in new expanded narratives of the natural world.

Barrada's film installations highlight her research on educational systems and environmental forces. *Tree Identification for Beginners* (2017) collects imagery and documentation from her mother's first trip to the United States in 1966, as part of a government-sponsored tour that promoted American culture and values to a generation of young Africans. The film features stop-motion animation of Montessori educational toys and grammar symbols along with voiceovers of Barrada's mother, other tour participants, and American civil rights activists that reconstruct an era of dynamic social change, framing the educational tour as a subversive act of political resistance. *The Power of Two or Three Suns* (2020) tracks a fragmented journey through an industrial testing laboratory, where exposure to natural elements is simulated in order to weather-test materials for mass production. The film's focus on the machinery and testing procedures for textiles centers Barrada's interest in modern technologies, labor practices, and industrial demands.

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*Tangier Island Wall* (2019), a gambion wall of crab pots, reflects on the state of two different Tangiers: Barrada's hometown in Morocco and a small island in the Chesapeake Bay, off the coast of Virginia. One affected by forced isolation and the other by rising sea levels, the work reflects on the interconnected impacts of ecological disaster, geopolitics, and economic inequity. *Untitled (After Stella, Sunrise, III)* (2020) comes from a series of recent textile works created in response to artist Frank Stella's series of twelve Moroccan paintings made between 1964-1965. Barrada's work—made with hand-sewn textiles and natural pigment dyes—re-centers the Moroccan art and histories rendered invisible in Stella's work. Her use of natural dyes points to the long history of Morocco's textile industry and the networks of trade surrounding dyes and their complex movement between the East and the West.

### **About Yto Barrada**

Yto Barrada (b. 1971) is a Moroccan-French artist recognized for her multidisciplinary investigations into cultural phenomena and historical narratives. Engaging with archival practices and public interventions, Barrada's installations uncover lesser known histories, reveal the prevalence of fiction in institutional narratives, and celebrate everyday forms of reclaiming autonomy. She is the founder of Cinémathèque de Tanger, a cultural center that has become a landmark institution bringing the Moroccan community together to celebrate local and international cinema. Barrada's work has won numerous awards including the 2019 Roy R. Neuberger Prize, the Rotterdam Film Festival 2016 Tiger Award for short film, a nomination for the 2016 Prix Marcel Duchamp in Paris, the 2015 Abraaj Group Art Prize, The Robert Gardner Fellowship in Photography (Peabody Museum at Harvard University), and the 2011 Deutsche Guggenheim Artist of the Year award. Barrada has had numerous solo exhibitions, including those at the Neuberger Museum of Art, New York (2019); LMCC's Arts Center at Governor's Island, New York (2019); Casa Luis Barragan, Mexico City, Mexico, (2019); Barbican London (2018); American Academy in Rome, Italy (2018); Secession Vienna, Austria (2016); The Power Plant, Toronto (2016); Carre d'Art, Nimes, France (2015); The Serralves Foundation, Porto, Portugal (2015); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2013).

*Programming at MASS MoCA is made possible in part by the Barr Foundation, Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, Mass Cultural Council, and the Joe Thompson "Yes" Fund.*

### **About MASS MoCA**

MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest centers for making and enjoying today's most evocative art. With vast galleries and a stunning collection of indoor and outdoor performing arts venues, MASS MoCA is able to embrace all forms of art: music, sculpture, dance, film, painting, photography, theater, and new, boundary-crossing works of art that defy easy classification. Much of the work we show in our light-filled spaces, on our technically sophisticated stages, and within our lovely network of late 19th-century courtyards is made here during extended fabrication and rehearsal residencies that bring hundreds of the world's most brilliant and innovative artists to North Adams all year round. For more information about MASS MoCA, visit [www.massmoca.org](http://www.massmoca.org).

### **About Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art & Thought**

Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art & Thought is a non-profit institute for research, publishing, and exhibitions of contemporary art. Based in New Orleans, Rivers commits to research at the confluence of diverse bodies of knowledge and to art informed by diasporic experience and exchange. For more about Rivers, please visit: <https://riversinstitute.org/>

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