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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

By Siddhartha Mitter, July 6, 2022

Long Island City
Lydia Ourahmane

SculptureCenter



A view of “Tassili,” a 2022 video work by Lydia Ourahmane. The show draws on her recent journey in a remote plateau of the Algerian Sahara known for spectacular rock formations and prehistoric cave paintings. [Charles Benton](#)

Earlier this year the artist [Lydia Ourahmane](#), having cleared reams of Algerian bureaucracy, traveled with some collaborators, led by Tuareg guides with donkeys, to Tassili n’Ajjer, a hostile and baroquely beautiful plateau deep in the Sahara whose jagged sandstone formations harbor caverns rich in [prehistoric rock paintings](#). “Tassili,” Ourahmane’s 46-minute video shown on a huge screen at [SculptureCenter](#), is, on one level, an absorbing landscape study from the point of view of a trekker in this terrain, its beauty enhanced by a swelling score in four parts by different electronic-music composers. An accompanying sculpture by Ourahmane and Yuma Burgess, who was on the trip, employs black thermoplastic tiles

encoded with topographic information collected on site then modified in the studio using machine learning.

One lyrical and lush, the other abstract and coded, each work is a kind of response to land that resists interpretation. The Tassili was verdant 10,000 years ago; it drew colonial explorers in the 1950s who damaged rock art while trying to document it; today it lies on trafficking and migration routes. History draws the Algerian-born, British-educated Ourahmane to the Tassili, yet her project is open-ended and ultimately metaphysical — evidenced by a quote in the gallery text from the Tuareg novelist Ibrahim al-Koni, for whom the desert is “the only place where we can visit death ... Because it is the isthmus between total freedom and existence.” *SIDDHARTHA MITTER*