



YACINE  
FALL: **LOOKING  
FOR  
GOD**

GALLERY  
**102**

**Opening Reception:**

Monday August 12, 2019 // 7:00-9:00 pm

**Closing Reception:**

Friday September 6, 2019 // 7:00-9:00 pm

**Exhibition Dates:**

August 12 - September 6, 2019

Artist

## **Yacine Fall**

Yacine Tilala Fall is an interdisciplinary conceptual artist. She received a BFA from the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design. Using performance, sculpture, painting and natural materials, her work investigates identity, politics, and history through the lens of the body. Her work and practice speaks to the human body and its entangled relationship with the natural environment. A Senegalese heritage and an American upbringing informs her repetitive and labor intensive art practice.

# LOOKING FOR GOD

NICOLE IVY, Ph.D.



*"Truth is wherever you want it.  
We found it all within the body."*

--Yunus Emre, translated by Kabir Helminski and Refik Algan

Gallery 102 is proud to present *Yacine Fall: Looking for God*, on view from August 12 to September 6, 2019. This new work, featuring an installation as well as durational performance, foregrounds the fragile persistence of laboring human bodies. However, the body's physicality is not the only centerpiece of this work. Although the human form in all its bare striving is fully on view, so too are the ineffable encounters that occur between human beings – and between the human and the divine.

Yacine Fall is a Senegalese-Mauritanian American artist whose work traverses a range of methods and media, including textiles, ceramics, painting, and performance. Her creative practice emphasizes the entanglements that abide across multiple modes of artistic production. It weaves together art forms often interpreted as disparate, highlighting the continuous and steady labor required to produce those forms. The effect of this integration is a kind of grounding, an intentional figuration of the human body in renewed proximity to natural materials. Her work, *Un Lien (A Link)*, performed at the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design's NEXT exhibition in spring of 2019, exemplifies this approach. A combination of painting, fiber art, and performance, the work joined burlap ropes, clay, and intertwined human collaborators in a pulsating composition. Fall's newest offering continues this exploration of the links between earth and flesh as she digs trenches into dirt and sand using her own submerged head as trowel.

Fall's practice asks critical questions about the relationship between bodies, labor, spirit, and land: What does it mean to work (with) the earth? What can it mean for humans to struggle to breathe in unison? What, if any, stewardship is required when audiences bear witness to artists' exhaustion and what kinds of complicity might that witness entail? Her performance initiates an affective synchronicity between viewer and artist that compels us toward empathy. There is a rhythm in her work; there is a weight to it. The viewer herself becomes physically responsible for the viewing. Viewers sense the push and pull of her body. We breathe along with her halting gasps as she searches the limits of her endurance. We are implicated in her survival. In this way, we become liable for the worlds we make together under the conditions of her constructed environments. Just as Ashon T. Crawley has observed of Eric Garner's indelible plea of "I Can't Breathe," Fall's work "charges us to do something, to perform, to produce otherwise than what we have."<sup>1</sup>

Fall names this relationship as a *body-to-body connection*, a fitting description for the ways people press against—and leave marks on—each other. We can also think of the body-to-body press as a means of describing the celestial and social interactions invoked in her work. Fall's own body connects her to Senegal, not simply by genealogy but also by its repertoire of sound and movement. She crafts choreography for her performances using video footage of Qur'anic study sourced by extended family abroad. In *Looking for God*, blood and oxygen interact as the artist-performers strive to breathe while carving a path through dirt. Respiring, perspiring, they move in and out of sync: messy, obstructed, together.

There is in Fall's work an animating tension at play among body and spirit and material. Fall uses the body as a vector to upset the hierarchical division of mind and body elaborated

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1. Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017) 1.





by philosopher Rene Descartes' and normalized in Western Enlightenment-era science. She resists that split by raising the possibility of the transfer of pain's impression from performer to viewer.

She also queries whether we might find, in the practice of body-to-body connection, a building block for a faith practice. Process is significant to Fall's art making, and *Looking for God* relies on the labor of individual bodies as well as the witnessing work of the audience, the collective "body" of viewership. In the arc of the performance, Fall's head becomes submerged beneath the dirt, an act which limits her sight and restricts her breathing. This submergence performs a reunification of the flesh and the earth that calls to mind the funerary moment as well as the Qur'anic description of the creation of humankind "from dust, then from a sperm-drop, then from a clinging clot, then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Yacine Fall reminds us that putting the body to work is a spiritual act. The mechanics of the body's functioning give us a grammar and model for understanding the divine: not as hierarchy, but as process. Not as high above, but as within, as around us. In Fall's work, God is not simply transcendent, but that which must be entered into. She invites her audience to look at the bodies struggling in and through the dirt and to therefore see the manifestation of the holy in the terrestrial.

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2. *Holy Qur'an*, Surah Al-Haj 22:5.

*Nicole Ivy, PhD, is a historical thinker and professional futurist who is passionate about the arts and social change. As an Assistant Professor of American Studies at George Washington University focusing on early America and visual culture, she works to engage how our understandings of the past can incite our visions for equitable futures.*











# GALLERY 102

## Special Thanks

Special thanks to artist Yacine Fall, Professor Nicole Ivy, Joe Bradley, Rhe'a Roland, Nat Lewis, the Student Exhibitions Committee, Gallery 102 Interns, Corcoran School of the Arts & Design, and The George Washington University.

Gallery 102 is committed to the exhibiting of contemporary art, including work from GW & Corcoran students, DC-area artists, & nationally recognized artists of all media. The gallery provides practical curatorial experience to the student body. Students have the opportunity to exhibit work, curate shows, and install exhibitions. The Gallery 102 Committee consists of GW & Corcoran students—undergraduate and graduate, majors and non-majors, artists and art historians—who both develop innovative, original, and thought-provoking exhibitions and invite a select group of guest curators to present exhibitions each semester.

Yacine Fall, **Artist**

Jessica Layton, **Assistant Curator**

Ari Golub, **Assistant Curator**

Caitlin Chan, **Director of Communications**

Joe Bradley, Rhe'a Roland, Nat Lewis, **Fabricators**

Andy Johnson, **Gallery Director**

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### **All images courtesy of the artist**

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**Videographer:** Camile Dunwoody

**Film Editing:** Erin Graham

