

WALLS *of* ALGIERS

NARRATIVES OF THE CITY

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Unknown. Casbah, a street, from album D'Alger a Tunis, ca. 1880-1900. Albumen print. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California (94.R.51).

GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE PRESENTS "WALLS OF ALGIERS: NARRATIVES OF THE CITY"

**Exhibition highlights GRI's extensive holdings on Algiers,
the largest in North America**

LOS ANGELES—The Getty Research Institute (GRI) presents *"Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City,"* featuring selections from the GRI's unique and extensive archive of historical materials on the Middle East and North Africa.

"Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City," on view at the Getty Center May 19-October 18, 2009, examines the city's complex history through diverse 19th- and 20th-century photographs, postcards, illustrated books, and drawings. Among North American institutions, the Research Library owns the most significant body of 19th-century photographs of Algeria (over 1,300 prints).

Legendary for its white walls cascading to the Mediterranean, the city of Algiers displays a history of turbulent colonial occupation. From the French conquest in 1830 to its independence in 1962, Algiers served as an experimental site where intricate colonial strategies were rehearsed and tested. These policies changed the city, creating an urban duality that separated the "Arab" quarters (the Casbah) from the new French settlements.

Transformations to the urban fabric and architecture of Algiers reflected political shifts. An early French intervention, for instance, included demolishing a section of Mosque al-Kebir dating from the late eleventh century. To create a new facade, army engineers used an interior arcade from the eighteenth-century Mosque al-Sayyida, which had been torn down in the early 1830s to enlarge the city's main square. The resulting colonnade had a Parisian "rue de Rivoli" effect --

with an Islamic flavor. The French also appropriated the homes of the Ottoman elite, who were forced to leave the city, and turned their mansions into military compounds, religious headquarters, museums, and libraries.

Along with compelling visual images, the exhibition features historical voices drawn from government and military reports, scholarly essays, travel accounts, novels, and poems. These records are annotated by a range of critics, including architect Le Corbusier, philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, filmmaker Gillo Pontecorvo, psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon, and novelist Assia Djébar. "The diverse voices broaden and complicate the story of Algiers, frequently from contradictory points of view," says the GRI's Frances Terpak, who curated the exhibition along with Zeynep Çelik, New Jersey Institute of Technology.

The exhibition is composed of two thematic sections: **Places** examines the structure of the pre-colonial and colonial settlements, the interventions to the pre-colonial fabric, and the relationship between geographic conditions and settlement patterns. **Peoples** presents the ethnic and religious communities of the city and the interactions between them.

A third section features a series of constructed images by American artist Dennis Adams that insert the figure of Patricia Franchini (Jean Seberg) from Jean Luc Godard's classic film *Breathless* (1960) into stills from Gillo Pontecorvo's epic *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). Patricia, the young American selling the *New York Herald Tribune*, is "recast as an allegorical figure wandering the war-torn streets of Algiers, where she traces the fault line between the roles of messenger bearing the news and frontline witness to its making," according to Adams.

"Adams' work helps make the connection between historical Algiers and what's going on today in the Middle East," says Thomas Gaehtgens, director of the Getty Research Institute. "The current conflicts grew out of the actions of the past, and you can trace their development in the words and images of colonial Algiers."

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication: *The Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City through Text and Image*, edited by Zeynep Çelik, Julia Clancy-Smith, and Frances Terpak. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute/Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2009).

A symposium, *Walls of Algiers: Reconsidering the Colonial Archive*, on May 28, 2009, situates the exhibition in a theoretical and historical context. In addition to the curators, the speakers are Dennis Adams, Nadjib Berber, Julia Clancy-Smith, Jean-Louis Cohen, Nabila Oulebsir, and Mary Roberts.

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