

Chloe Stead, Sara Sadik's *Angry Young Men*, Frieze, July 11th, 2022

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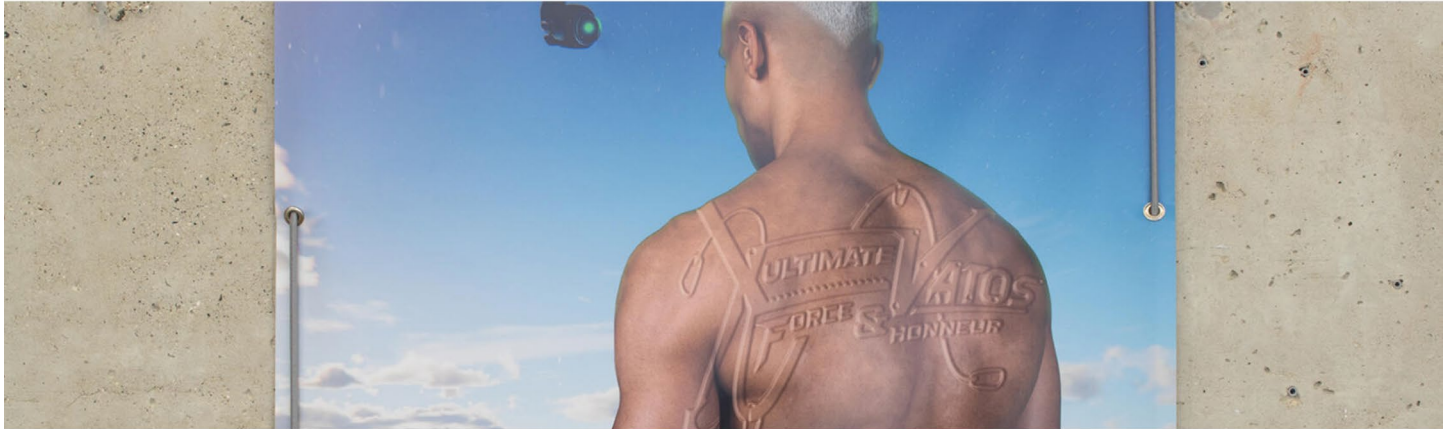


Sara Sadik's *Angry Young Men*

At Crèvecœur, Paris, the artist's new video work continues her interest in the results of rejection and subjugation on marginalized French youth



BY CHLOE STEAD IN EU REVIEWS, EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 11 JUL 22



Sara Sadik's *Khtobtogone* (2021) opens with a shot of a young, muscular man watching the sun set over the Mediterranean Sea. 'They say love comes at you when you least expect it,' he muses in an earnest voice-over. 'I swear, I'd almost given up.' These types of sentimental internal monologues are a staple of Sadik's films, yet her detail-rich stories of love and loss evade downright schmaltziness thanks to the working-class French youths telling them. After all, how can perspectives we rarely hear sound banal? In this case, Zine, a delivery driver of North-African descent, offers observations from his life as he works out, chills on the beach with friends and rides around the winding Marseille coastline.



Sara Sadik, 'Ultimate Vatos', 2022, exhibition view, Crèvecœur, Paris.
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Crèvecœur, Paris; Photo: Martin Argyroglo

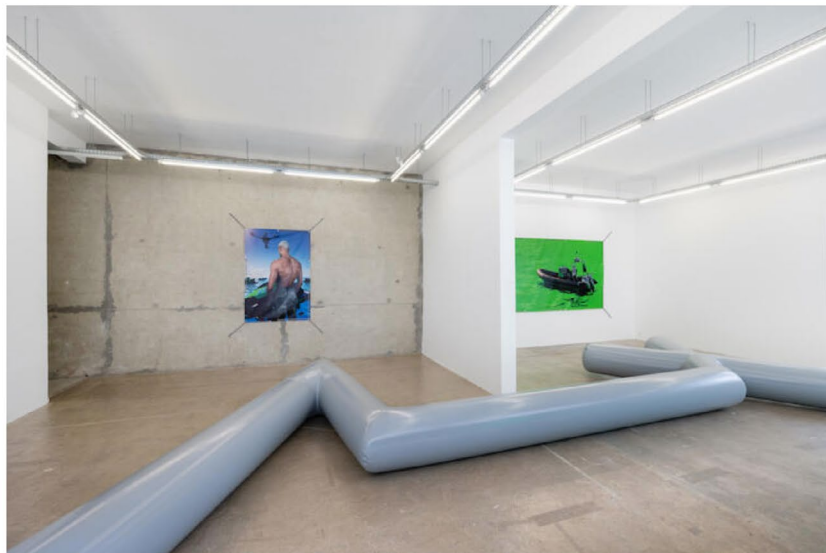
While Zine has rather humble aspirations, namely to love and be loved in return, the unnamed protagonist of Sadik's most recent film, *Ultimate Vatos: Force & Honneur* (2022), currently on show at Crèvecœur, has set his sights on something greater than mutual affection. His mission is nothing less than 'becoming a new person', which he aims to accomplish by gaining membership to the secretive organization that lends the work its name. The first of an intended series, part one revolves around our leading man's attempts to pass a capture-the-flag style endurance test in the rugged landscape of Calanques National Park. But this is no game: success, we are told, will 'prove the legitimacy' of his existence.

Crèvecœur



Sara Sadik, 'Ultimate Vatos', 2022, exhibition view, Crèvecœur, Paris.
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Crèvecœur, Paris; Photo: Martin Argyroglo

Unlike *Khtobtogone*, which Sadik ingeniously created using the computer game *Grand Theft Auto* (1997–ongoing), the central character of *Ultimate Vatos* is played by the Franco-Malian artist and actor Émile-Samory Fofana. The film's clever use of onboard cameras, however, particularly in the scenes where the protagonist is followed from behind, still makes it feel as if you're watching a character in a computer game, thus calling into question the boundary between the 'real' and the virtual. Equally effective are scenes of Fofana with friends taken from his social-media account, which add an intriguing slice of documentary to this otherwise fantastical and gamified world.



Sara Sadik, 'Ultimate Vatos', 2022, exhibition view, Crèvecœur, Paris.
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Crèvecœur, Paris; Photo: Martin Argyroglo

In the exhibition literature, Sadik mentions the concept of the 'body as weapon' as an influence on *Ultimate Vatos*. Accordingly, the dialogue is peppered with fighting talk, inspired by an unholy mix of French rap and army recruitment videos and aimed towards a shadowy, unnamed enemy. ('They humiliated our mothers and killed our brothers,' the protagonist laments. 'How long did they think we would stay like this?') Race is the unspoken factor here, with the implication being that this young man, having been shut out by 'a nation that never wanted him', is going to join a group of revolutionaries. Yet, despite vague allusions to a greater brotherhood, this story is one of isolation, and I'm left thinking more about angry young men on internet forums than the Black Panther Party.



Sara Sadik, 'Ultimate Vatos', 2022, exhibition view, Galerie Crèvecoeur, Paris. Courtesy: the artist and Crèvecoeur, Paris; Photo: Martin Argyroglo

Watching a video interview with Sadik on the occasion of her concurrent show at Westfälischer Kunstverein, I realize that, in the end, *Ultimate Vatos* is about trauma – specifically the trauma of rejection and subjugation and how this plays out in the lives of men. It can be turned into creativity, as in rap music, a frequent touchstone for the artist, or dulled by the cathartic experience of playing violent videogames. It can also be tapped into by institutions like the French Foreign Legion, whose advertising, as Sadik points out in the aforementioned interview, revolves around the idea of giving recruits 'a second chance' at life. But what kind of life will membership to the Ultimate Vatos Organization offer our protagonist? We'll have to come back for part two to find out.

Sara Sadik's 'Ultimate Vatos' is on view at Galerie Crèvecoeur, Paris, until 23 July 2022.

Main image: Sara Sadik, Ultimate Vatos: Force & Honneur, 2022, film still. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Crèvecoeur, Paris