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Kader Attia

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In art there are only so many colours, forms and concepts, just as in music there are only so many notes. French-Algerian artist Kader Attia's work deals with this idea that there is a limit to what we can create. In his eyes, man does not invent, man repairs. In the Whitechapel's Gallery 2, appropriately a former library, Attia has built a floor-to-ceiling bookcase and filled it with tomes on art, science and history in a variety of languages. The shelves create a square in the space, in the middle of which sits a cabinet of curiosities – microscopes, old science textbooks – and a ladder you can climb to peek on to the roof. Here, a mirror and a strip light create an endless reflection of the installation.

The work becomes tricky, muddled even, when you realise it's unclear whether the artist's concept of 'repair' is positive or not. Is Attia implying that the pursuit of art and science leads to some kind of biblical redemption or peek into the sublime – that by climbing a metaphorical Jacob's Ladder you get glimpse into the infinity of heaven. Or is he hinting that creativity is futile when you're surrounded by all these books on what has already come to pass?