5. | Hotel Rooms Bibles





Since 1999, various locations.
Exhibition View from different hotel rooms.
Courtesy of the artist.

Bibles de chambre d'hôtel est une performance et un work in progress initié en 1999, réalisé au moyen de bibles que Mounir Fatmi trouve dans les chambres d'hôtel, au cours de ses voyages à travers le monde. Les ouvrages religieux restent sur place ou sont parfois déplacés dans d'autres chambres d'hôtel, et sont augmentés de dessins, de messages, de lettres ou de photographies que l'artiste glisse entre leurs pages, à l'attention des prochaines personnes qui les consulteront. La bible de chambre d'hôtel est à l'origine une coutume instaurée par une association chrétienne protestante pour encourager la lecture des écritures saintes. Cette pratique démarre aux Etats Unis au début du 20e siècle et s'est répandue dans de nombreux pays à travers le monde. Elle n'a cependant pas court en France où l'association, assimilée à une secte, se heurte au refus constant des chaînes hôtelières.

La performance interroge les liens entre le profane et le sacré, entre l'hôtel comme lieu de résidence et de passage et les écritures saintes, et s'inscrit dans un travail mené sur les croyances et le mysticisme.

Elle observe l'immixtion du religieux dans la société civile en mentionnant une pratique devenue courante, voire banale et à peine relevée par les occupants des chambres d'hôtel. Elle souligne plus précisément l'intrusion du religieux dans l'espace personnel des individus en relevant la présence du livre saint dans la chambre, territoire de l'intimité du voyageur par excellence, où celui-ci se retrouve parfois seul et face à lui-même. Reprenant ce principe d'intrusion, les additions diverses aux ouvrages religieux pratiquées par Mounir Fatmi réalisent à l'inverse l'immixtion de l'intime, de la subjectivité et de l'art dans le religieux. Elles ont pour effet d'humaniser en

Hotel Room Bibles is a performance and a work in progress initiated in 1999 and created using bibles that Mounir Fatmi finds in hotel rooms during his trips around the world. The religious books stay in place or are sometimes moved to other hotel rooms, and drawings, messages, letters or photographs have been added to them, the artist placing them between the pages for the next people who will open them. The hotel room bible is originally a tradition initiated by a protestant association to encourage the reading of the Holy Scriptures. This practice started in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century and spread to many countries around the world. But it didn't take hold in France where the association, considered as a cult, is faced with the constant opposition of hotel chains.

The performance questions the relation between profane and sacred, between the hotel as a place of residence and passage and the Holy Scriptures, and is part of a larger body of work on the subject of beliefs and mysticism.

It observes the interference of religion in civil society by highlighting a practice that has become common, even banal, and hardly noticed by hotel room occupants. More specifically, it underlines the intrusion of religion in the personal space of individuals by showing the presence of the holy book in the room, the ultimate place of privacy for travelers, where they sometimes are alone and faced with themselves. Using that same principle of intrusion, the various additions to the religious books made by Mounir Fatmi create a reverse interference: that of the intimate, the subjective and of art into religion. They have the effect of humanizing and personalizing the anonymous and impersonal object of ritual. Taking their inspiration from the

le personnalisant l'objet impersonnel et anonyme du rite. S'inspirant du but exprimé par les initiateurs de la coutume tout en le détournant, et assimilables à une forme de cross-booking (pratique contemporaine qui consiste à s'échanger des ouvrages de littérature entre inconnus en les abandonnant dans des lieux publics), elles se constituent comme des formes discrètes de désacralisation et de démystification de l'objet rituel et comme des signes d'encouragement artistique au sein d'un dispositif puissant de prosélytisme religieux. Elles réconfortent les âmes esseulées des voyageurs non pas au moyen de quelque rhétorique mystique, mais par le dialogue entre deux subjectivités, et l'établissement d'un lien entre êtres humains.

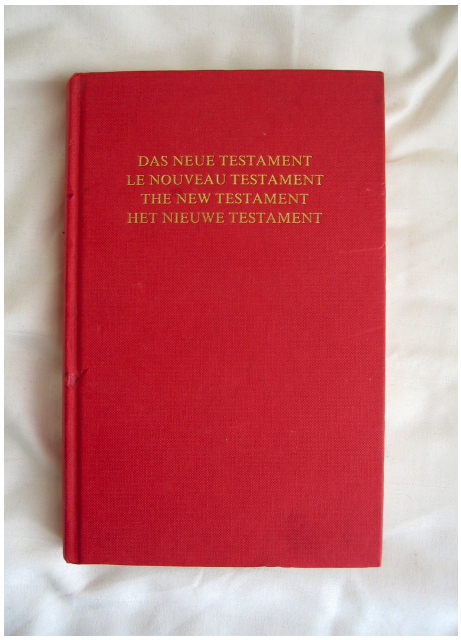
Studio Fatmi, septembre 2016.

objective of the people who started this tradition and diverting it, they can be assimilated to cross-booking (a contemporary practice consisting in strangers exchanging books by leaving them in public spaces) and consist in discreet types of desecration and demystification of the ritual object and in signs of artistic encouragement within a powerful system of religious proselytism. They comfort the lonely souls of travelers, not with mystical rhetoric but with a dialogue between two subjectivities and by establishing a connection between human beings.

Studio Fatmi, September 2016.

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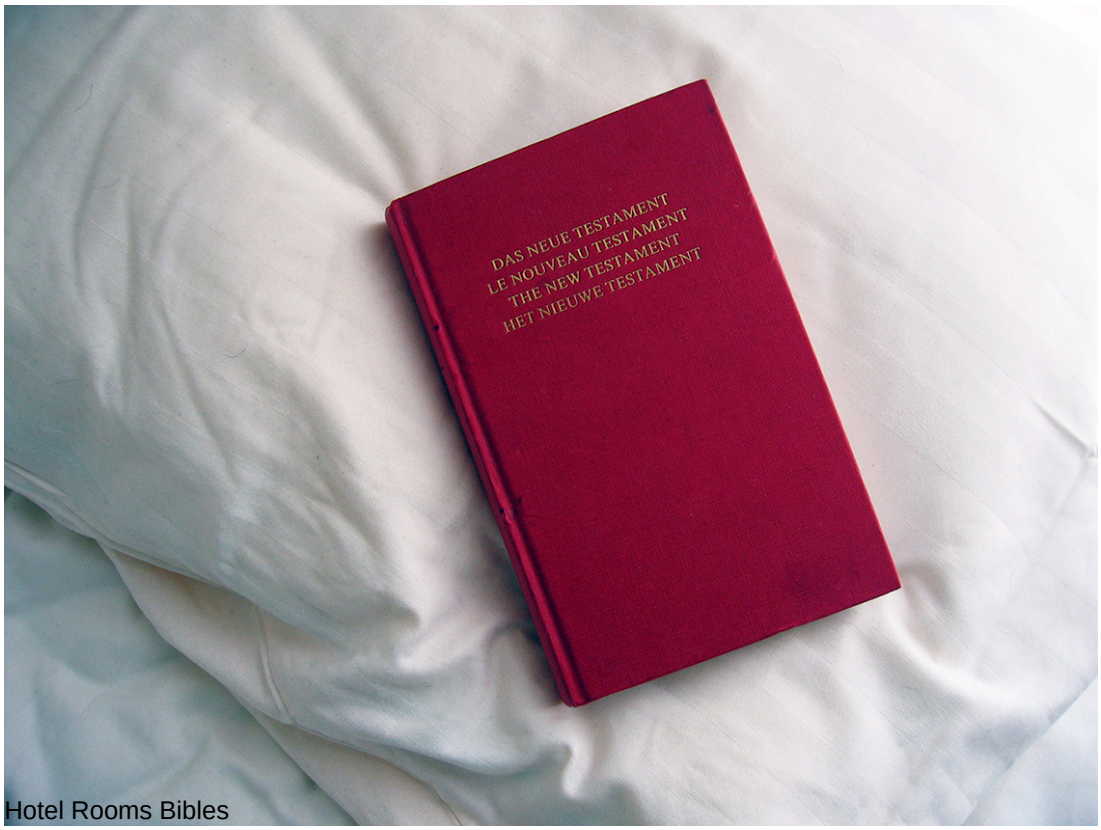
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Taking their inspiration from the objective of the people who started this tradition and diverting it, they can be assimilated to cross-booking (a contemporary practice consisting in strangers exchanging books by leaving them in public spaces) and consist in discreet types of desecration and demystification of the ritual object and in signs of artistic encouragement within a powerful system of religious proselytism.