

19. | God is Great 01



2012, Coran, microscope and miniature accessories.
Exhibition view from Minimalism is capitalist, Conrads Gallery, 2009, Düsseldorf.
Courtesy of the artist and Ceysson & Bénétière, Paris.

Dieu est grand est le titre donné par Mounir fatmi à deux de ses sculptures. La première se compose d'une pile de feuilles au format A4, portant chacune l'inscription "Dieu est grand", et reposant sur un piédestal s'élevant à hauteur d'homme. Une loupe est laissée à disposition du public afin de faciliter la lecture de l'inscription. La seconde met en scène un exemplaire miniature du Coran et un kit d'observation microscopique. Le livre repose sur la platine du microscope, ce qui permet son examen. "Dieu est grand", phrase prononcée aussi bien par les musulmans que par les chrétiens, est une formule de magnification dans l'islam associée couramment au "takbir", dont la traduction exacte est "Dieu est le plus grand". L'expression est passée dans le langage courant où elle sert à exprimer la joie ou au contraire l'inquiétude, ou encore la grandeur de dieu et sa supériorité par rapport aux humains. Elle constitue parfois un cri de guerre ou de victoire associé au terrorisme et son sens demande alors à être rétabli. On la retrouve enfin sur les drapeaux de certains pays musulmans.

L'oeuvre interroge une expression religieuse passée dans le langage courant. Elle mène ainsi une recherche en quelque sorte philosophique et philologique sur l'essence de Dieu, à partir de sa désignation par les textes sacrés et les croyants. Elle questionne l'essence divine et soulève une question théologique ancestrale : comment définir Dieu ? Elle constitue une réflexion sur les origines et les significations d'une locution et vaut comme questionnement sur la signification de manière général et interrogation au sujet des rapports entre l'individu, la religion et les croyances.

Les sculptures invitent à un examen scientifique, à une observation dans le détail et à une recherche de la précision,

God is Great is the title given by Mounir Fatmi to two of his sculptures. The first is made of a pile of A4 sheets of paper, each carrying the inscription "God is Great" ("Dieu est grand") and placed on a pedestal of the same height as a person. A magnifying glass is available for the public to facilitate reading the inscription. The second sculpture features a miniature copy of the Koran and a microscopic observation kit. The book is placed on the stage of the microscope, ready to be examined. "God is great", a phrase used by both Muslims and Christians, is a magnification formula in Islam frequently associated with the "takbir", whose precise translation is "God is the greatest". The expression is used informally to express joy or concern, as well as the greatness of god and his superiority to humans. It's sometimes used as a battle or victory cry associated with terrorism, which implies its proper meaning is reinstated. It is also found on the flag of certain Muslim countries.

The artwork questions a religious expression that has become informal. In this way, it conducts a form of philosophical and philological research on the essence of God, originating in his designation by sacred texts and believers. It questions the essence of divinity and poses an age-old theological question: how to define God? It is a reflection on the origins and significations of a phrase and serves as an examination of significations in general and an interrogation about the relation between individuals, religion and beliefs.

The sculptures are an invitation to a scientific examination, a detailed observation and a search for accuracy, in this case linguistic accuracy. They allow the viewer to observe the way the significations of expression are elaborated. The formula is

linguistique en l'occurrence. Elles permettent d'observer la manière dont s'élaborent les significations de l'expression. La formule est reproduite sur les feuilles A4 : répétitions que le langage courant donne également à observer, et que l'oeuvre se propose d'examiner à la loupe. On pourrait alors parler d'élaboration par récurrence : la répétition de l'expression dans le langage courant finissant par constituer un de ses traits caractéristiques. Un microscope est laissé à la disposition du public qui peut éventuellement tenter d'aller en retrouver les sources dans le livre sacré. Et si celle-ci n'existe pas telle quelle et dérive d'une forme différente, on la retrouve cependant citée partout avec un caractère d'évidence. On pourrait alors parler d'élaboration de la signification par imprécision linguistique, cette dernière assurant le succès de la locution.

Les sculptures proposent donc une observation du détail infime à partir des déclarations de grandeur quelque peu aveuglantes, dont les significations ne sont pas claires ou en tous cas se révèlent manquer de précision. L'oeuvre procède à l'examen scientifique d'une proposition métaphysique et fait ainsi se rencontrer la science et la croyance, le clin d'oeil humoristique et la pensée dogmatique. Elle pointe l'objectif de son instrument sur un concept théologique en tentant de l'isoler afin d'en déterminer la nature et finit par révéler l'incertitude autour du concept en apparence évident de "grandeur" divine. Les sculptures de Mounir Fatmi rappellent que ce n'est pas parce qu'on répète quelque chose qu'on en a forcément compris la signification.

Studio Fatmi, Juillet 2017.

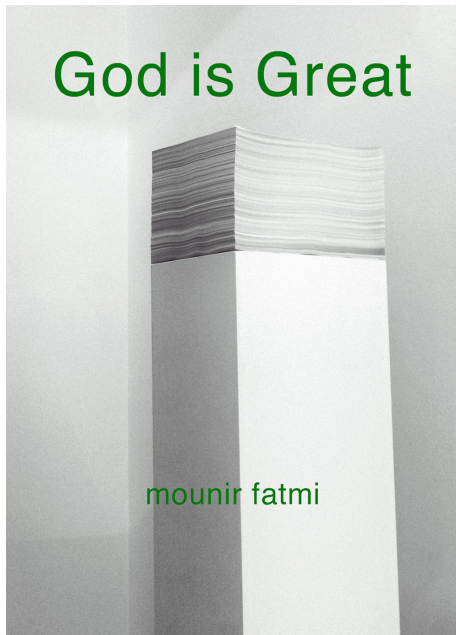
printed on A4 sheets of paper, a repetition that can also be observed in informal language and that the artwork seeks to examine closely. One could speak of a form of elaboration through recurrence: the repetition of the expression in everyday parlance ends up constituting one of its main characteristics. A microscope is left at the disposal of the public who might try and find its sources in the sacred book. And if the identical expression isn't there but was actually derived from a different form, it can still be found everywhere, used by all with total evidence. One could therefore speak of the elaboration of a signification through linguistic imprecision, that very imprecision ensuring the locution's success.

In this way, the sculptures offer an observation of a minute detail stemming from rather blinding declarations of grandeur, whose signification isn't clear or at least is found to be lacking precision. The work carries out the scientific examination of a metaphysical proposition and thus brings together science and faith, humorous nod and dogmatic thought. It points the lens of its instrument on a theological concept, tries to isolate it in order to determine its nature and ends up revealing uncertainty around a concept of divine "greatness" that seemed so obvious. Mounir Fatmi's sculptures remind us that it isn't because we repeat something that we necessarily have understood its signification.

Studio Fatmi, July 2017.

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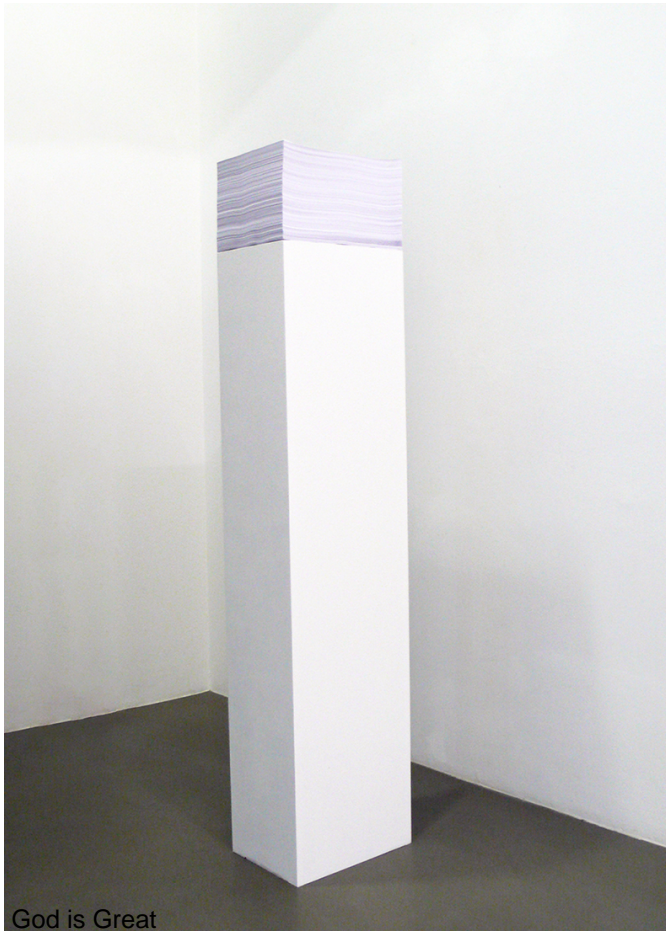


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