17. | The Tray



2008. Inkjet print, 90 x 160 cm.
Exhibition view from Fuck Architects : Chapter I, Lombard-Freid Projects, 2007, New York.
Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard, New York.
Ed. of 5 + 2 A.P.

C'est le genre de plateau argenté que l'on trouve partout en Orient. C'est le genre de plateau typique que l'occidental ramène de ses voyages outre-méditerranée, pour servir le thé, typique lui aussi.
C'est le genre de plateau qui se vendait au bazar du coin, à Bagdad, jusqu'en 2003. Un plateau banal, un objet usuel et anecdotique somme toute, sur lequel le regard s'arrête à peine. Sauf qu'aujourd'hui, ce plateau ne se vend plus nulle part. Il est devenu une sorte de rareté à la valeur ambiguë. Car il est un vestige de la propagande de Saddam Hussein, qui participait d'un culte de la personnalité coutumier dans une dictature, un outil ordinaire de la terreur, faisant entrer la tyrannie jusque dans l'intimité des foyers à peine masquée derrière l'image souriante et inoffensive, propice à la transvaluation, du Saddam Hussein brave et valeureux de la légende qu'il s'était construite.

Ce qui est intéressant dans cette photographie, c'est la manière dont, à partir d'une image simple d'un objet ordinaire, ce plateau, se déploient des faisceaux de savoirs et d'images qui ne s'y trouvent pas. Ce portrait de Saddam Hussein sur ce plateau servi à l'heure du café, fait ressurgir des épaisseurs d'histoire et de réalités. Sur près de 25 ans d'histoire, ce que nous savons et que nous n'avons pas vu, mais aussi, et surtout, ces images que les médias ont imprimés dans nos mémoires. Partant du visage de Saddam Hussein gravé sur ce plateau au temps de sa gloire, nous reviennent à l'esprit : les emprisonnements arbitraires et les exécutions sommaires, les expéditions punitives et les rébellions matées dans le sang, le génocide kurde, les guerres d'Iran, du Golfe et d'Irak, mais aussi l'Irak sous embargo* mortel (200000 morts par ans pendant douze ans

It is the type of silver tray found everywhere in the East. The typical sort of tray that typical westerners bring back from their travels to serve tea. It's the sort of tray that was on sale in every corner bazaar in Baghdad until 2003.
An ordinary tray, an anecdotal everyday object, which hardly even catches the eye. Except that today, this tray is no longer on sale anywhere. It has become a rarity with ambiguous value, because it is a relic of Saddam Hussein's propaganda. Hussein was central to a cult of personality that is customary in a dictatorship. It is a common tool of terror, which brings tyranny into the intimacy of the home, barely masked by the smiling inoffensive image - conducive to transvaluation - of the brave and gallant Saddam Hussein from the legend that he made for himself.

What is interesting about this photograph is the ability of the tray, an everyday object, to conjure up an array of knowledge and images in our imagination. This portrait of Saddam Hussein on a tray, served at coffee time, reveals depths of history and reality: the things we know or have been witness to over almost 25 years of history, but also and more importantly, the images the media has imprinted on our memories. Looking at Saddam Hussein's face engraved on this tray from his glory years, other images come to mind: arbitrary imprisonment and cursory executions, punitive expeditions, blood-stained rebellions, the Kurdish genocide, the wars in Iran, the Golf and Iraq. But also Iraq under fatal embargo* (200 000 deaths a year for twelve years according to UNICEF's statistics), the unkempt despot on the day of his arrest (which mounir fatmi has evoked on several occasions**), the trial which some saw as unfair and the execution that can be watched online like the paragon of a

selon les chiffres de l'Unicef) , la tête hirsute du despote au jour de son arrestation, que mounir fatmi aura évoqué à plusieurs reprises** , le procès que certains auront jugé inéquitable et l'exécution, qu'on pourra voir sur Internet comme un parangon de spectacle...autant d'indignités au risque de convertir le criminel contre l'humanité en victime , voire en martyr...

La question du pouvoir de suggestion de l'image est une réflexion-clé dans le travail de mounir fatmi. Il y a les images véhiculées par les médias, celles que l'on manipule et celles que l'on occulte, celles auxquelles on extorque une vérité et celles que l'on détourne. Ici, rien de tout cela. L'image est, à sa manière, minimaliste.
Ce plateau est un catalyseur d'images, déclenchant une quantité d'images invisibles et d'informations mémorielles. Curieusement cette paisible image de plateau supportant une tassé de café est potentiellement violente, non par ce qu'elle montre mais par ce qu'elle suggère, et renvoie à l'idée d'épaisseurs invisibles de notre réalité.
Puissance combinatoire d'images nouvelles, l'imagination suscite la projection de peurs et d'angoisses, d'images de violence, fantasmées ou non. Ces contenus insaisissables sont ressaisis par l'imagination, qui produisant entre les images des articulations inédites, opère alors des distinctions critiques à l'égard de la réalité.

Pour mounir fatmi, ce travail de distinction critique constitue très certainement une dimension fondamentale de la création artistique.

Delphine Yafil
Janvier 2009

**Voir aussi la vidéo Embargo et le texte de Nicole Brenez (1997)*
***Bas-relief Guilty-2007, un Week-end painting*

spectacle... so many indignities that we risk turning a criminal against humanity into a victim, or even a martyr...

Images' power of suggestion is a key thought-process in mounir fatmi's work. Images are conveyed by the media, manipulated or concealed, some are misappropriated while we use others to extract truth. None of that takes place here. The image is, in a way, minimalist.
This tray is an image catalyst, unleashing a great amount of invisible images and remembered information.
Curiously this tranquil image of a tray holding a cup of coffee is potentially violent – not in what it shows but in what it suggests – and refers to this idea of invisible depths in our reality. This is the connective power of new images: the imagination projects fears, anxieties and images of violence, fantasised or otherwise. The imperceptible content is filled in by the imagination, which in producing new articulations operates critical distinctions towards reality.

For mounir fatmi, this process of critical distinction constitutes a fundamental dimension of artistic
creation.

*See the video Embargo and the text by Nicole Brenez (1997)
**Bas-relief Guilty – 2007, a weekend painting.

Translation: Caroline Rossiter.

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exhibitions:

2012

Home Where - Lombard-Freid Projects - Expo collective

2008

Fuck architects : Chapter II - Le Creux de l'Enfer - Solo show



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