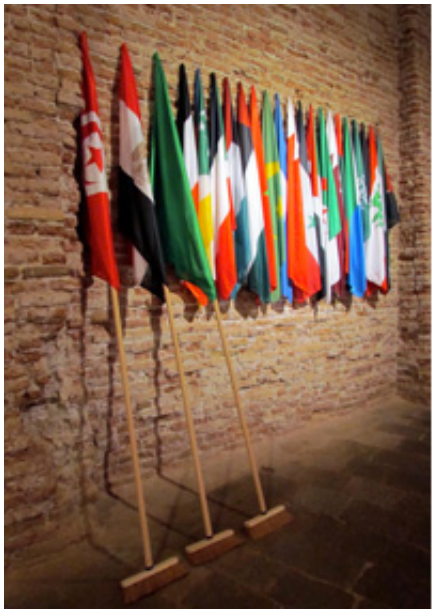
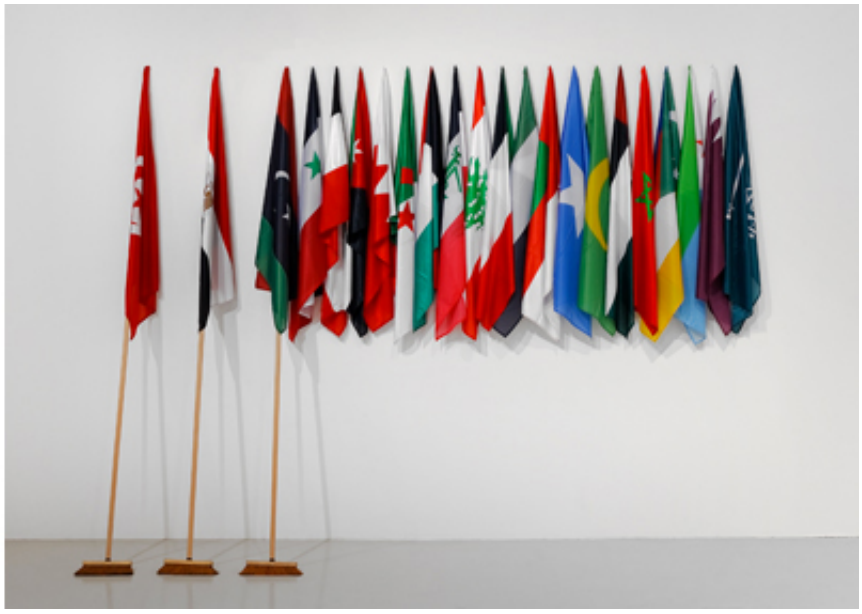
38. | The Lost Springs 03





2011, 3 brooms of 3 meters, 22 flags of the Arab League 300 x 405 x 40 cm.
Exhibition view of The Future of A Promise, 54th Venice Biennial, 2011, Venice.
Courtesy of the artist and Art Front Gallery, Tokyo.
Ed. of 1 + 1 A.P.

This work was part of 1st Trio Biennial - Who said tomorrow doesn't exist?, Rio de Janeiro, 2015.

This work was part of 54th Venice Biennal - The future of a promise, Venice, 2011.

« Les printemps perdus », l'installation minimale de mounir fatmi, portée par une scénographie sobre, légère, poétique, met en scène les 22 drapeaux en berne des pays de la Ligue des États arabes. Sous les pavillons tunisiens et égyptiens se dressent deux balais-brosses de 3 mètres de haut en référence aux soulèvements populaires qui ont mené à la chute respective de Zine El Abidine Ben Ali en Tunisie et de Hosni Moubarak en Égypte. L'actualité brûlante au Maghreb, au Machrek et dans la péninsule Arabique en proie à la contestation violente de pouvoirs néo-patriarcaux, inspire cette œuvre évocatrice, subtile et percutante.

La symbolique du drapeau est forte d'identité et d'attribution du point de vue de l'anthropologie de l'État. Totem moderne, il peut virer au fétiche en raison d'un surinvestissement affectif ou d'une dramatisation des passions politiques. Il participe d'une liturgie profane qui institue un espace sanctuarisé du sacré-politique. mounir fatmi semble l'avoir saisi avec cette remarquable intuition d'un dispositif iconique à mi-chemin entre l'autel et la dramaturgie protocolaire universalisante. Ce faisant, il touche au cœur même de la représentation démocratique c'est-à-dire à la capacité de catalyser métaphoriquement le lien civil, d'opérer un transfert de transcendance en même temps qu'un partage solidaire de

The Lost Springs, mounir Fatmi' s minimal, elegant and poetic installation comprises of the twenty two flags of the states that make up The Arab League, seen at half-mast. Leaning up against the wall, tucked underneath the Tunisian and Egyptian flags, like ersatz flag-poles, are two brooms that refer to the uprisings that led to the falls of, respectively, President Ben Ali in Tunisia and President Mubarak in Egypt. This subtle yet powerful work is inspired by the incendiary protests that have sprung up against neo patriarchal power across North Africa and the Arab world.

In the taxonomy of the state the flag is a symbol loaded with identity and attribution. A modern totem , it is the fetishized focus and site for the sublimation of the passions stirred by politics. It forms part of a new, secular and profane liturgy that creates a pseudo-religious space in which the political is sanctified. mounir fatmi captures the nature of the flag as a device that lies halfway between the altar and the formal language of universalising values. He gets to the core of the dynamics of representation in the democratic sphere, which is to say its ability to catalyse and animate civic bonds and to perform an act of transcendental transference of culture, values and sovereignty. These national emblems always carry with them an emotional charge, ritual and protective.

culture, de valeurs, de souveraineté. Les emblèmes nationaux renferment toujours une charge signifiante émotionnelle, rituelle, protectrice, voire performative à vocation fédérative. Ils rassemblent le peuple-enfant qui se drape sous leur égide telle une grande fratrie.

L'oblitération collective du père-chef recèle une dimension analytique, œdipienne, au sens de la fable freudienne de la horde primitive (Totem et tabou). Le ménage nécessaire suggéré par mounir Fatmi ne porte pas sur la communauté des frères, mais sur les potentats qui se rêvent en ses démiurges castrateurs au risque de verser dans la tyrannie. L'absence de balai interroge sur l'inertie de citoyens qui hésitent à se faire agents de salubrité dans leur propre foyer national. Elle ordonne, à la manière d'un planning, l'échéancier des tâches de ce vaste projet d'émancipation, de rénovation et de dégel sous les 20 bannières restantes. Les brosses indiquent ironiquement une dynamique et un effet d'entraînement euphorisant. À qui le tour ? Que reste-t-il à épousseter ? Où se cachent les ordures ?
Il y a dans cette héraldique contemporaine un caractère domestique qui souligne l'investissement civique de la sphère publique, l'espace national étant réapproprié par les peuples invités à l'agir-créatif en se saisissant de tous les manches à balai de leur Histoire pour ? comme dit l'adage ? balayer chacun devant sa porte.

mounir fatmi porte ici le témoignage par l'esthétique du coup-de-balai, d'un printemps intemporel. Le plasticien se fait porte-étendard de ce revivalisme révolutionnaire panarabe à l'utopie enchanteresse, rompant avec la monotonie ambiante de lendemains qui toujours déchantent. L'artiste mobilise les ressorts de la connivence, procède par allusion suffisante, mêle indistinctement roman familial et romantisme populaire de bon aloi, avec une irrévérence et une impertinence critique coutumières. Il dématérialise son objet en lui assignant une fonction symbolique cardinale, comme s'il s'agissait d'asséner à l'envie que tous les symboles donnent à penser.

Franck Hermann Ekra

Pièce censurée à Art Dubai, mars 2011.

With such emblems and signs, the infantalized people wrap themselves together under the illusion of comprising a great brotherhood.

The collective obliteration of the father-chief carries within it a psychoanalytic dimension, an Oedipal act in the Freudian nomenclature. The housework that mounir fatmi suggests needs doing is not within the household that comprises the community in general, but instead of the sweeping away of the dictators who imagine themselves to be violent demiurges who castrate the people. The absence of the brooms underneath the rest of the flags questions the failures of the people to put their own houses in order. The form of the work proposes a schedule of cleaning, of the eradication of stains, a vast project of emancipation, renovation and restoration under the other twenty flags. The brooms here become
signifiers for the cathartic act of cleaning and cleansing. Who' s next? Where else needs to be swept clean? Where is the rubbish hidden?
There is in this contemporary heraldic symbolism a domestic element that underlines the civic foundation of the public sphere and of the national space being retaken by people invited to act creatively using the broom and the instrument of History, and so embodying that piece of popular wisdom – That one must always keep one' s side of the street clean.

Through the aesthetics of the act of cleansing, mounir fatmi tells the story of a timeless spring. A standard bearer of the pan-Arabic revolutionary revivalis, he breaks away from the prevailing monotony of always disenchanted tomorrows and irreverently deploys enough allusion, deployed with a language of high popular romance but informed by Fatmi' s typical critical perspective.
Giving his work an essential and symbolic function, he dematerialises it, as if to repeat over and over again that symbols are food for thought.

Franck Hermann Ekra

" In The Lost Spring mounir fatmi gathers the 22 flags of the Arab league together, draping them in a neat, orderly row along a wall. The flags of Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt are affixed to pushbrooms, an aesthetic pun that turns the Arab Spring of 2011 into a kind of

“spring cleaning,”
as these three countries all removed their leaders from power as a result of democratic uprisings. "

Risa Puleo, Hyperallergic Magazine, 2017

exhibitions:

2022

African Voices - Officine dell'Immagine - Expo collective

2018

Motherland in art - MOCAK - Expo collective

2017

Diaspora now - Gifu Museum - Expo collective

State of the world - H&R Block Art Space - Expo collective

2015

Who said tomorrow doesn't exist? - 1st Trio Biennial - Expo collective

Le monde selon.. - FRAC - Expo collective

2014

Festival A-part - Expo collective

2012

Le monde comme il bouge - La Brasserie - Expo collective

2011

The Future of A Promise - 54th Venice Biennial - Biennale

Art Dubai - Solo show - Art fair

press articles:

Elena Stanciu, A struggle with meaning - The art of mounir fatmi, PETRIe, April 4th, 2016



It was shock, angst, and inescapable panic that introduced me to the work of Mounir Fatmi, a 'French artist in USA, an African artist in Europe'. His kinetic installation Modern Times – tA History of the Machine, on show in Denmark's Brandts 131 gallery, sends the viewer into somatic overdrive, yet remains acutely conceptual, as it employs referential elements pertaining to both Western and Eastern (Islamic) aesthetics. Visual repetition, perpetual circular motion, illegible Arabic calligraphy, and aggressive sound create a sense of danger, announcing an imminent clash of worlds embracing the mechanics of modernity, but struggling to grasp the essence of it.



A portrait of Mounir Fatmi

At times, Fatmi's works tap into strands of speculative philosophy, often breaking down bonds of meaning: objects are dislocated, taken beyond their instrumentality, reconceptualized, separated from the burden of a necessary relation to their qualities, in a potential attempt to explore what Graham Harman would call the 'object oriented ontology'.

In Between the Lines, a steel circular saw blade becomes the inscription surface for Quoran verses, which undergo a process of being emptied of semiotic content and rendered decorative elements. The defining qualities of both the object and of language are suspended, and the image becomes the new bearer of knowledge.



Between the lines, 2010, saw blade in steel, 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg-Cape Town. Photo credit: Mia Dudek

In his creative process, Mounir Fatmi uses a variety of media and materials, and appropriates objects at hand, in attempts to question their materiality and attributed function. His artworks challenge the thingness of things, as they take the form of known objects, but occupy meanings beyond their shape and instrumentality; in Brainteaser for Moderate Muslims, the commonplace colourful cube is transformed, redirected towards new possibilities of its materi
alism. The title suggests a playful reference to The Kaaba, a pre-Islamic monument rededicated by the prophet Muhammad, while the work as a whole invites critical thinking, with tones of political reflection.



Brainteaser for Moderate Muslim, 2004, acrylic on rubiks cubes, 54 x 11 x 13,5 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg-Cape Town. Photo credit : Rebecca Fanuele

Fatmi's oeuvre contains political statements, at various levels of articulation, which have the value to inform criticism and confront hierarchical or binary structures. Religious or ethnic identity is explored in the series titled Face. Here, markers of gender and lineage survive fragmentation and erasure, speaking to the dangers of prejudice and reductionism.

In a moment of reflection, Mounir notes: 'there are some things that cannot be named, nor described, and these are the things I am trying to show in my work.' This makes me doubt my own attempt to contain his work, to apply my limited language to his unlimited creative universe. Am I closer to the truth of a thing when I name it, when I describe it, or when its presence makes me feel shock, angst, and inescapable panic?



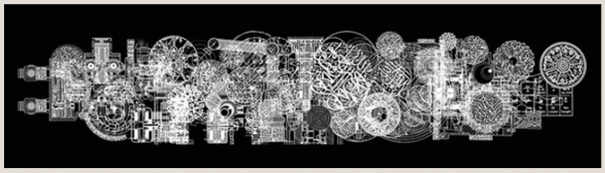
No Witness, (Portrait format) series started in 1996, 1995 paintings erased in 1996, 25,5 x 38 cm



Face,1999, serie of 13 drawings, ink and acrylic on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm. Courtesy of the artist. Private collection. Photo credit : mounir fatmi

Elena Stanciu: found your work in Merchants of Dreams : An exhibition of Contemporary Moroccan Art – Modern Times – a History of the Machine 1– to be very powerful and a compelling commentary to contemporary social and political realities. Tell me a little about what inspired you.

Mounir Fatmi: Modern Times – A History of the machine is about the speed of modernization in the Arab World. With the speed of industrialisation, cities in the Middle East appear out of the desert, with buildings thrown up so fast that there is no time to reflect on the changes. "Modern Times" explores architecture in the Middle East, raising the question of the human impact of this unrelenting



Modern Times History of the machine, 2010, France, video installation,15 min, HD, B&W, stereo. Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg-Cape Town Photo credit : Mounir Fatmi

ES: How did you come to choose this piece to be shown in Denmark? How do you think the Danish public will react to your work, and to Moroccan and African art throughout this biennale?

MF: Christian Skovbjerg invited me to exhibit in the Images 2016 biennale in Denmark. We met in Paris about one year ago to discuss the exhibition, as he wanted to focus on Moroccan artists. It is great to have the opportunity to show my work there. Scandinavian cultures are very far from me and luckily art is the perfect opportunity to build cultural bridges.



Deconstruction Structure N°1, 2013-2014, Typewriter, hammers, A4 paper on office desk, video on flatscreen, Bilboquet game, typed sheets. Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg-Cape Town. Exhibition view from Merchant of Dreams. Photo credit : Viborg Kunsthal

ES: You are very particular about consumption and the subject of consumption. Could you elaborate on these concepts, and on how they influence your work?

MF: I am concerned with the end of the object, the notion that one object becomes something else, like VHS becoming a town like in my installation Skyline, antenna cables become networks and depict a geometric pattern like in Kissing Circles.

I have started to explore the notion of politics, that it becomes the object of consumption like in the project Mutation, where the ideology of the Black Panthers Party became the brand of a hot sauce to raise money for children, or Picasso who is now a car produced by Renault, or even the PC, which was the Communist Party in French is now the Personal Computer. All those displacements are very interesting to me, as I observe how the world changes in terms of using images and creating meaning.



left:

The Last Springs, October 2011, 3 brooms of 3 meters, 22 flags or arabian countries, 300 x 405 x 40 cm.

Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg-Cape Town.

Exhibition view from Le Monde Selon…, FRAC Franche Comté-Besançon, 2015. Photo credit : Blaise Adilon

ES: At the moment, Europe is struggling to make sense of various kinds of Otherness, which leads to particular crises – of identity, of meaning, of communication. Can art contribute to solving these issues?

MF: Otherness is a complex issue that I address in many of my works, for example in Who is Joseph Anton?, The Blinding Light, or Darkening Process.

I live in Paris and when I am in the USA, I am a French Artist, but when I am in France, I am a Middle Eastern or African artist. I am always from somewhere else, wherever I am! I see here an urgency to understand the other, to accept and to learn with the other, and art can be a way to facilitate this.



The Impossible Union, 2011, arabic calligraphies of steel, hebrew typewriter. Courtesy of the artist and Collection of the Kunstpalast Museum, Duesseldorf. Photo credit : Mounir Fatmi

ES: I see a recurrent motif in your works – Arabic calligraphy, visually manipulated and aesthetically repurposed, to the point that words and language abandon their function. Tell me a little about this.

MF: Indeed, the text in my work loses its function and becomes an image. Language loses its meaning and for me there is a kind of inability to mean something. Claude Levi-Strauss asks in his book, The Jealous Potter: "what does the verb to mean mean?"

We can discuss many things but there are some things that cannot be named, nor described and that is what I am trying to show in my work.

Words: Elena Stanciu

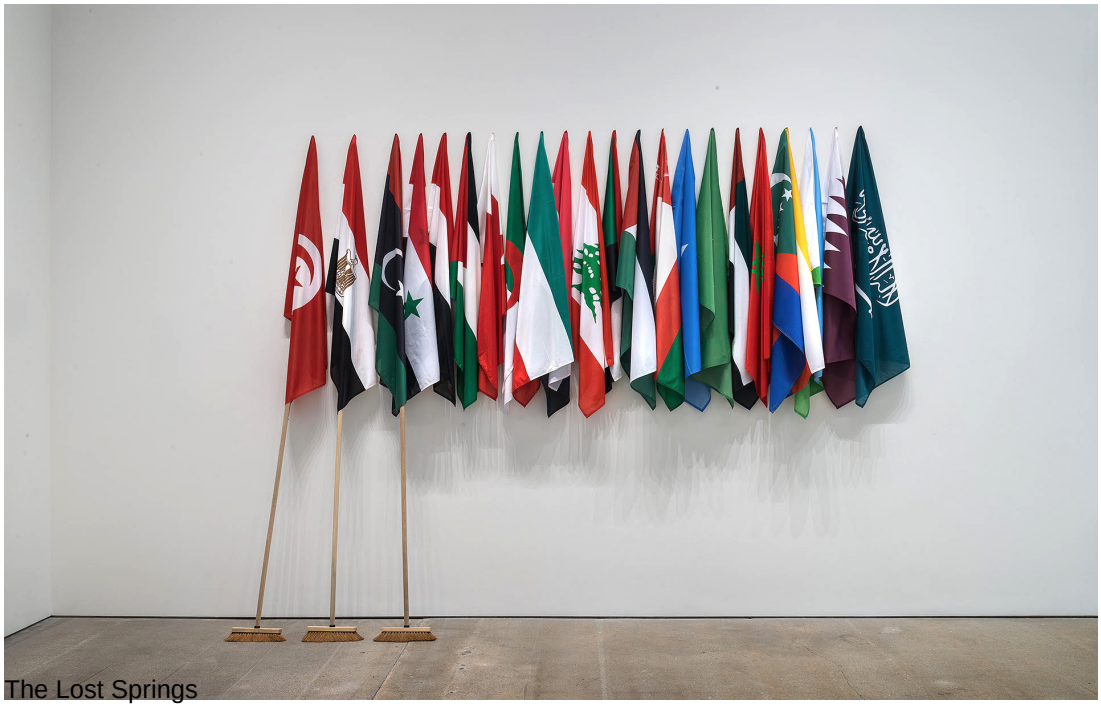
Artist: Mounir Fatmi



The Lost Springs

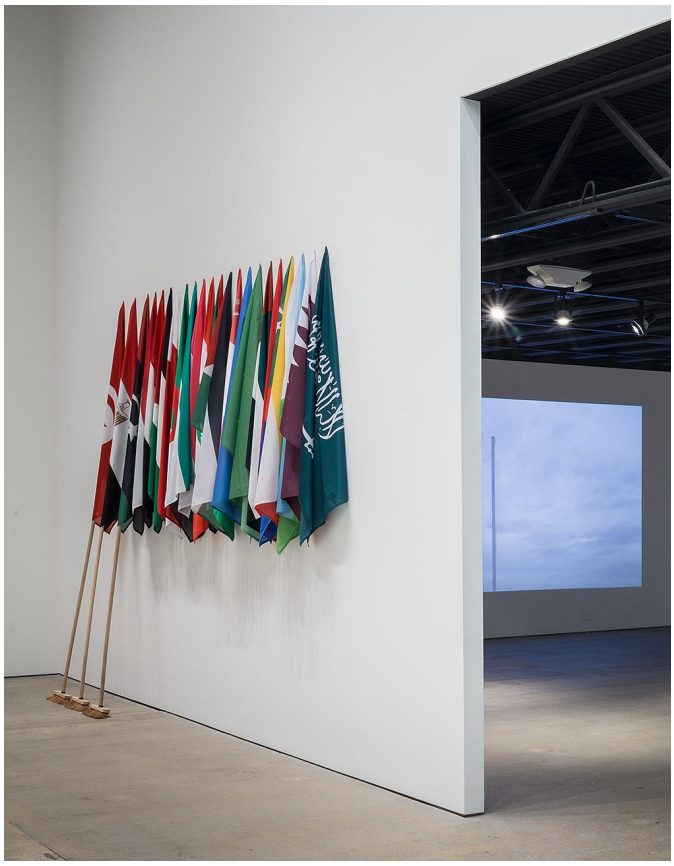
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Franck Hermann Ekra, 2011



The Lost Springs

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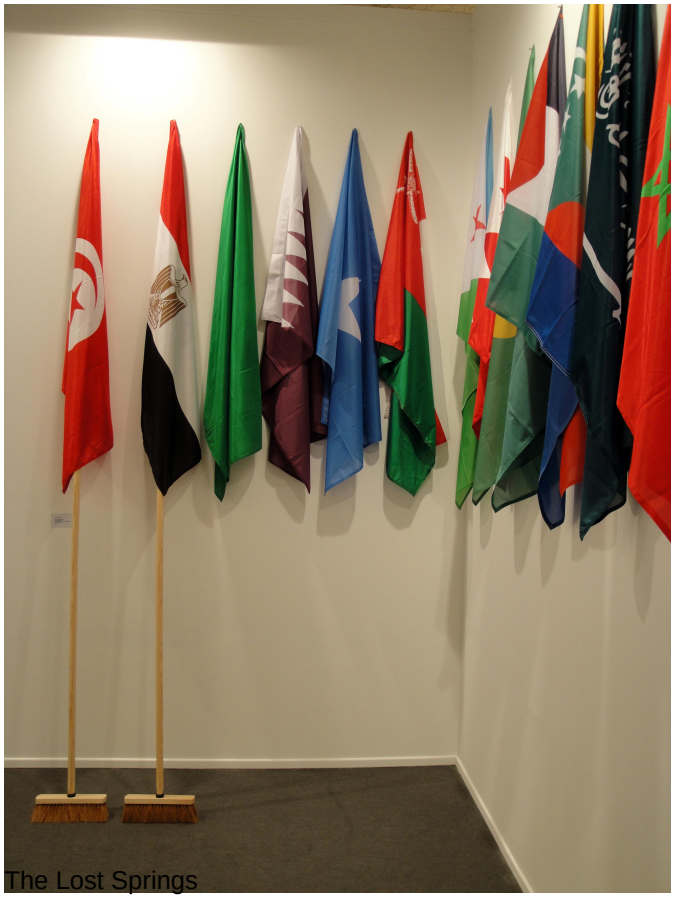


The Lost Steps

The form of the work proposes a schedule of cleaning, of the eradication of stains, a vast project of emancipation, renovation and restoration under the other twenty flags. The brooms here become signifiers for the cathartic act of cleaning and cleansing. Who' s next? Where else needs to be swept clean? Where is the rubbish hidden?

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