34. | Muhammad Ali, The Labyrinth





2010, France, 10 min 39, SD, 16/9, color, stereo.
Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard Gallery, New York.
Ed. of 5 + 2 A.P.

« Mohammed Ali, le labyrinthe » est une vidéo faisant se succéder des images du boxeur à différents âges de sa vie : de sa jeunesse et ses débuts en tant que boxeur, à l'âge adulte, une fois retiré du circuit sportif et professionnel. Elle donne à voir Mohammed Ali à l'entraînement, ou combattant sur le ring, esquivant une pluie de coups de poings ou les rendant un à un. Elle mêle des images de ses victoires et des adversaires mis au sol, et de ses défaites, lorsqu'il s'est retrouvé à son tour à terre. Une bande sonore fait entendre la voix de Mohammed Ali, enregistrée lors de ses nombreuses déclarations à la presse et en public qui, pour la plupart, avaient lieu avant les matchs. Les images sont accompagnées de retranscriptions graphiques de ses déclarations célèbres, passées à la postérité pour certaines d'entre elles. Les scènes filmées sont perçues à travers le prisme de couleur verte d'un labyrinthe graphique conçu par l'artiste, et dont la structure se compose de la répétition d'un même élément géométrique complexe formé par deux mots en calligraphie arabe coufique, le nom du prophète Mohammed et le prénom de celui qui demeura à ses côtés pendant tout son ministère, à savoir Ali. L'œuvre questionne à travers la figure de Mohammed Ali les statuts du héros et du anti héros dans la culture populaire des années 1960 à nos jours. Elle explore la relation entre le parcours personnel d'un grand sportif noir américain et l'histoire de la ségrégation aux Etats-Unis, ainsi que les origines et les conséquences de sa conversion à l'Islam.

La naissance de la conscience politique et l'accès à la pleine connaissance de soi sont décrits comme des parcours labyrinthiques avec ce qu'ils comportent d'obstacles, de tournants, d'impasses et de voies nouvelles et inexplorées. Le boxeur exprime ses regrets concernant ses rapports avec

Muhammad Ali, the Labyrinth is a video showing images of the famous boxer at various ages, from his youth and his early boxing days to adulthood, after he had retired from his career as an athlete. It shows Muhammad Ali training and fighting in the ring, dodging punches or returning them, one after the other. It mixes images from his victories, his opponents knocked out on the floor, and of his defeats, when he was the one lying on the floor. The soundtrack plays Muhammad Ali's voice, recorded during his many declarations to the press and to the public, most of the time right before a match. The images are accompanied with graphic transcriptions of his most famous declarations, some of which went down in history. The filmed scenes are shown through the green prism of a graphic labyrinth created by the artist, whose structure is made up of the repetition of one single complex geometric element formed by two words written in Kufic Arab calligraphy: the name of the prophet Muhammad and the first name of the man who stood by his side during his entire ministry, Ali. The artwork questions, through the figure of Muhammad Ali, the status of the hero and the anti-hero in popular culture from the 1960s to the present day. It explores the relation between the personal trajectory of a great black American athlete and the history of segregation in the USA, as well as the origins and consequences of his conversion to Islam.

The birth of political consciousness and the access to full knowledge of self are described as labyrinthine journeys with numerous obstacles, curves, dead ends and new and unexplored paths. The boxer expresses his regrets regarding his relation to the struggle led by Malcolm X, whose righteousness only dawned on him late, after the activist's sudden death. Describing himself as a patriot, he

le combat mené par Malcolm X, dont la pertinence ne lui apparaît que tardivement et après la disparition brutale du leader. Se déclarant patriote, il refuse pourtant de s'engager aux côtés des militaires américains dans la guerre du Vietnam, ce qui fait de lui un objecteur de conscience dont les convictions se heurtent à l'opinion publique et risquent de mettre un terme à sa carrière. Sa conversion à l'Islam se défie des stéréotypes sociaux propres à son époque et à son milieu, et devient un acte d'opposition et un symbole de la lutte contre la ségrégation. Pour Mohammed Ali, la critique sociologique et la résistance intellectuelle sont de véritables sports de combat.

L'art de la boxe est assimilable à celui de l'éloquence et à la rhétorique. Le boxeur est aussi connu pour ses exploits sportifs que pour ses talents d'orateur et ses grandes envolées lyriques. Mohammed Ali est une voix, une parole, un verbe haut et engagé qui mène un combat sur le ring et qui le poursuit dans l'espace publique. La lutte nécessite à chaque fois son entière implication physique, morale et intellectuelle - engagement qui laisse des traces, et dont les conséquences sur sa carrière de sportif et sur sa santé sont observables. La vidéo met en scène une vie de combats, menés sur tous les fronts, le parcours épique d'un individu, à la fois figure médiatique, héros adulé et parfois détesté de son époque, jusqu'à cette dernière image hautement émouvante du boxeur, à la fois victorieuse et vacillante, où on le voit allumer d'une main tremblante la flamme des jeux olympiques.

Studio Fatmi, Octobre 2017.

vidéo distribuée par Heure exquise ! www.exquise.org

nevertheless refuses to enlist with the US army during the Vietnam War, which makes him a conscientious objector whose convictions are in contradiction with the public opinion of the time and therefore risk putting an end to his career. His conversion to Islam stands in opposition to the social stereotypes of those days and to his background, and thus becomes an act of resistance and a symbol of the fight against segregation. For Muhammad Ali, social critique and intellectual resistance truly are combat sports.

The art of boxing is comparable to that of eloquence and rhetoric. The boxer was just as famous for his achievements in sports as he was for his talents as a speaker and his passionate lyricism. Muhammad Ali is a tone, a speech, a loud and militant voice engaged in a fight in the ring, which he pursues in the public space. The struggle requires his full physical, moral and intellectual implication every time – a commitment that takes a toll and whose consequences on his career and his health can be observed. The video shows a life of fighting on every front, the epic journey of an individual who was both a celebrity, a celebrated hero and at times a hated figure of his time, up until this last, quite moving image of the boxer, victorious and faltering at the same time, where he can be seen lighting the Olympic flame with a trembling hand.

Studio Fatmi, October 2017.

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“Muhammed Ali, The Labyrinth interleaves images of African-American boxer at different stages of his life with the flickering image of a labyrinth, unceasingly accompanied by a voice-over that narrates some of the episodes of Muhammad Ali’s life as a news broadcast. mounir fatmi

uses the boxer’s story in order to communicate his perceptions and interpretations on Islam 's relationship with the United States.”

ADN Galeria, November 2014

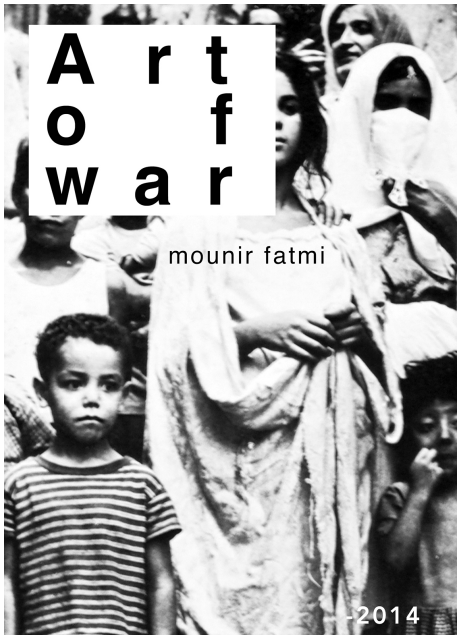
exhibitions:

2018

This is My Body - Art Bärtschi & Cie - Solo show

2014

Art of War - ADN Platform - Solo show



Art of war, SF Publishing, 2021

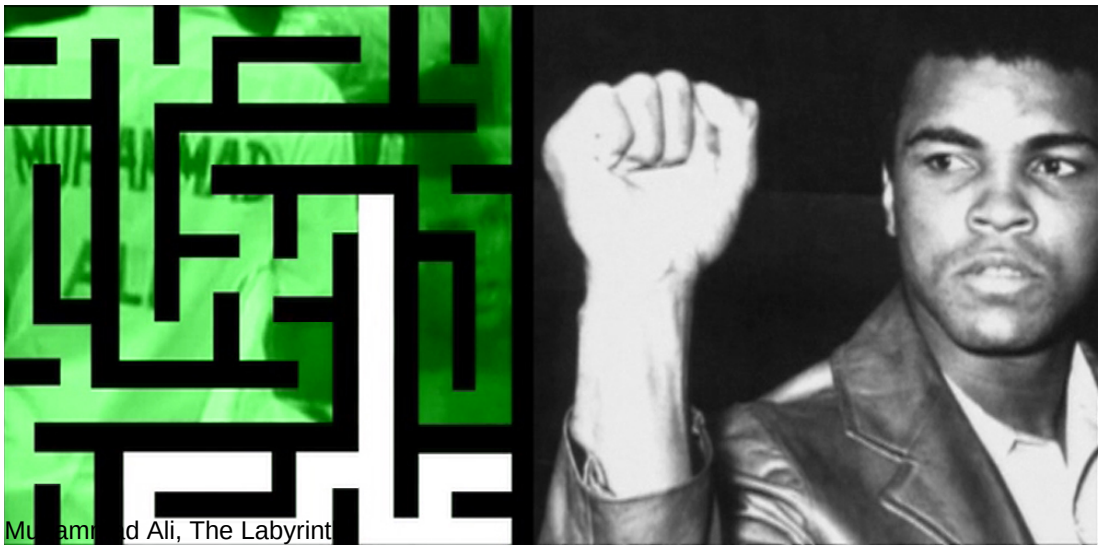
Through appropriation, duplication and repetition, Fatmi’s work today reveals the precarity of the original, as well as the copy, a flimsy mode of ownership and dissemination.

Lillian Davies, 2010



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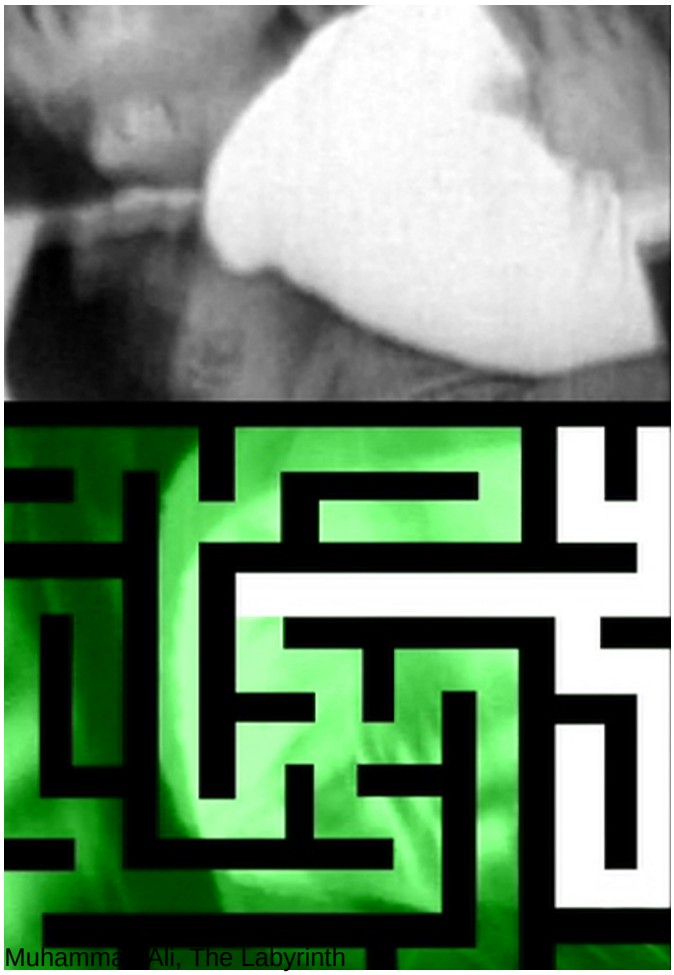


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