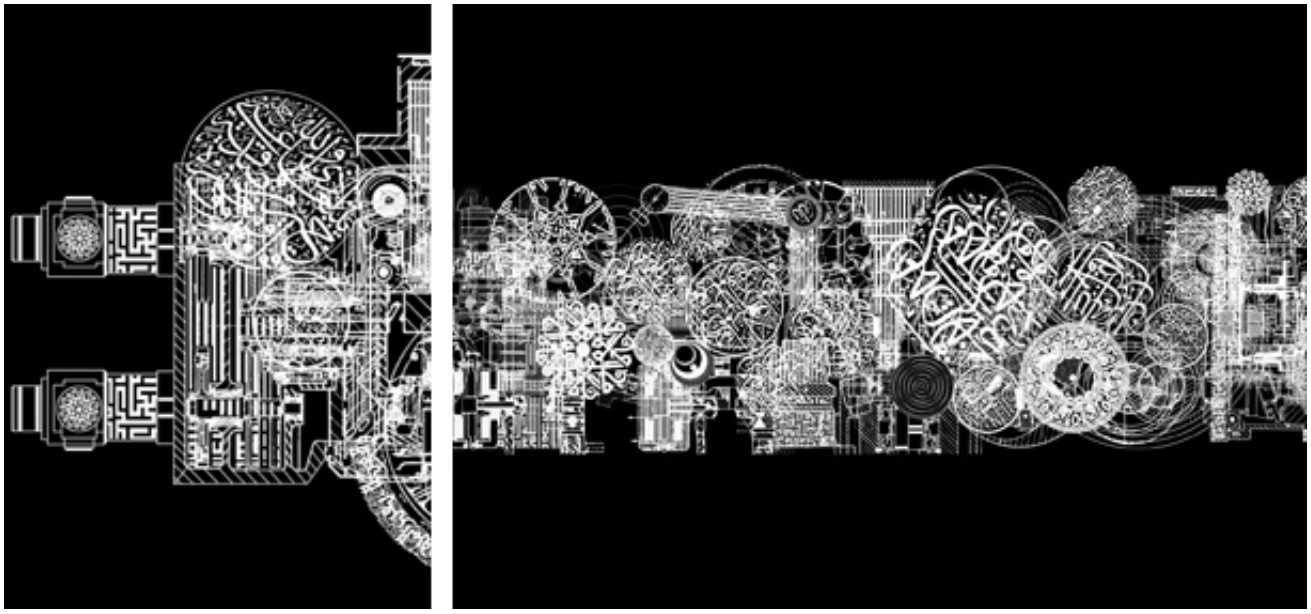
40. | Modern Times, a History of the Machine



2009-2010, France,video installation,15 min, HD, B&W, stereo.
Courtesy of the artist and Ceysson & Bénétière, Paris.
Ed. of 5 + 2 A.P.

Collection of Mathaf, Modern Arab Art Museum, Doha

This work was part of 6th Manif d'art Biennial -Machines - Les Formes du mouvement, Québec, 2012.

This work was part of 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale - A Rock and a Hard Place, Thessaloniki, 2011.

« Les Temps modernes » est une vidéo qui donne à voir une vaste et complexe composition géométrique blanche sur fond noir et met en mouvement de nombreux motifs aux formes variées, parmi un entrecroisement de lignes. Une bande sonore constituée de bruits de moteurs en marche rythme l'évolution de cette composition graphique sans cesse changeante. La vidéo a été projetée dans plusieurs expositions artistiques et aussi sur les façades d'édifices architecturaux.

La vidéo interroge les principes de fonctionnement de l'œuvre dans la production des significations et des usages des sociétés contemporaines. Elle questionne notre rapport au monde à partir de la notion de machine et de l'expérimentation des interactions entre la calligraphie arabe, l'art contemporain et la linguistique. « Les Temps modernes » aborde la machine telle qu'elle s'est constituée à partir de la révolution industrielle et de l'apparition d'outils de plus en plus complexes et automatisés. Elle interroge non seulement le renversement des relations entre l'homme et la machine à l'ère industrielle, qui a fait passer cette dernière d'une

« Modern Times » is a video showing a large and complex white geometric composition against a black background, with numerous motifs of various shapes moving among intertwined lines. A soundtrack with the sound of running motors brings rhythm to the evolution of this endlessly changing graphic composition. The video was projected for several artistic exhibits, as well as on the walls of buildings.

The video questions the functioning principles that produce significations and uses in our contemporary societies. It questions our relation to the world based on the notion of the machine and the experimentation of interactions between Arab calligraphy, contemporary art and linguistics. « Modern Times » tackles the notion of the machine as it’s been shaped since the Industrial Revolution and the apparition of increasingly complex and automated tools. It not only questions the reversal of relations between man and machine during the industrial era that allowed the machine to evolve from a utilitarian function to a form of domination and control over individuals, it also questions the concept of machine and it various aspects: tool, heterogeneous assemblage

fonction utilitaire à une forme de domination et de contrôle s'exerçant sur les individus, mais également le concept de machine sous différents aspects : à la fois outil, assemblage hétérogène produisant un effet au sens le plus large, modélisation des capacités fantasmatiques de l'être humain, ou encore désignation poétique et métaphorique du monde lui-même. Elle participe enfin à la fondation d'une figure esthétique centrale dans l'univers artistique de mounir fatmi, celle de la machine.

« Les Temps modernes » livre aux spectateurs les plans d'un appareil complexe. Son aspect pourrait relever du dessin industriel qui exposerait une structure composée de cercles et de lignes représentant rouages et arbres mécaniques. L'œuvre multiplie les éléments en jeux et associe des rotoreliefs, dispositifs de production d'illusion d'optique inspirés de Duchamp, des motifs calligraphiques en rotation dans les sens horaire et antihoraire, des symboles linguistiques accompagnés de leur transcription phonétique et des formes labyrinthiques défilant dans des différentes directions. La vidéo représente un fonctionnement et ses mouvements : elle observe des rythmes, des cycles. Elle traduit ou mime des effets d'entraînement, de transmission des forces ou de transformation de signaux entrant et sortant. Multipliant les formes et les sources d'inspiration, l'œuvre exerce sur le spectateur une séduction esthétique tout en provoquant chez lui un vertige visuel.

Dans cette vidéo, mounir fatmi s'inspire des jeux linguistiques de Wittgenstein autour de la naissance des significations et teste les limites perceptives du spectateur et ses capacités à relier entre eux les signes et à opérer des connexions. Elle se constitue comme une figure esthétique dont la fonction est d'expérimenter les rapports des individus au monde. Associée aux « Temps modernes » de Chaplin, elle tient compte de l'histoire des révolutions industrielles et des rapports entre l'homme et la machine qui a conditionné un très grand nombre d'existences et engendré une forme de fonctionnement complexe dépassant les individus qui s'y voient subordonnés. « Les Temps modernes » renvoie enfin aux entreprises picturales des époux Delaunay. L'œuvre se constitue de ce point de vue comme l'élaboration d'un langage lumineux et poétique, en réponse à un désir d'art total capable de rendre compte de la complexité du monde en mouvement.

Studio Fatmi, Décembre 2017.

vidéo distribuée par Heure exquise ! www.exquise.org

producing an effect in the widest sense, modeling of the fantasmatic capacities of humans, poetic and metaphoric designation of the world itself. Lastly, it participates in the foundation of an esthetic figure that is central to mounir fatmi's artistic universe, that of the machine.

« Modern Times » gives viewers the plans to a complex machine. Its aspect seems to place it in the category of industrial design, exposing a structure made of circles and lines representing cogs and mechanical trees. The piece multiplies the types of elements involved and associates rotoreliefs, devices producing optical illusion inspired by Marcel Duchamp, calligraphic motifs rotating clockwise and anti-clockwise, linguistic symbols with their phonetic transcriptions and labyrinthine shapes passing by in different directions. The video depicts a functioning and its movements; it observes rhythms and cycles. It transcribes or mimes effects of traction, the transmission of forces and the transformation of input and output signals. Multiplying forms and sources of inspiration, the work exerts an esthetic seduction on the viewer, while provoking at the same time a visual vertigo.

In this video, mounir fatmi takes his inspiration from Wittgenstein's linguistic games on the birth of signification and tests the limits of the viewers' perception and their capacity to associate signs and create connections. It constitutes an esthetic figure whose purpose is to experiment the relations of individuals to the world. In conjunction with Charlie Chaplin's « Modern Times », it relates the history of industrial revolutions and of the relation between man and machine that conditioned so many lives and generated a form of complex functioning that goes beyond the individuals who are subordinated to it. Finally, « Modern Times » also references the pictorial endeavors of the Delaunay spouses. From this perspective, the piece constitutes the elaboration of a luminous and poetic language answering a yearning for a total work of art that would be capable of transcribing the complexity of the world in motion.

Studio Fatmi, December 2017.

Video distributed by Heure exquise ! www.exquise.org

" Three-dimensional versions of the gears in the animation, they're beautiful and sinister and suggest an ideological violence. You certainly don't want these

circles to kiss. "

Sharon Mizota, The Los Angeles Times, 2012

exhibitions:

2025
Art Front: mounir fatmi - Art Front Gallery, Tokyo - Solo show

2024

De L'Incarnation... - Université Mohammed VI, Benguérir - Group show

Alhamdu Muslim Futurism - Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center - Group show

Alhamdu Muslim Futurism - PS1 Close House - Group show

2023
Modern Times in Paris : Machine, Art deco and Surrealism - Pola Museum, Japan - Group show

2022

ALHAMDU Muslim Futurism - Rubenstein Arts Center, Duke University, Durham - Group show

2019

A matter of perception - Skanstull Metro Station, Stockholm - Expo collective

2018

180° Behind Me - Göteborgs Konsthall, Göteborg – Solo show

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

2017

Lettres ouvertes, de la calligraphie au street-art - Institut des Cultures d'Islam - Expo collective

2016

On the Origins of Art - MONA - Expo collective

2015

Modern Times - Miami Beach Urban Studios Gallery - Solo show

Jameel Prize 3 - Sharjah Museum - Expo collective

Jameel Prize 3 - The National Library - Expo collective

Créer c'est résister - Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon - Expo collective

La Fabrique de l'homme moderne, en résonance avec la Biennale de Lyon - La FabriC, espace d'art contemporain, Fondation Salomon - Expo collective

Art Paris - Grand Palais - Art fair

2014

Le Maroc Contemporain - Institut du Monde Arabe - Expo collective

Giving Contours to Shadows - N.B.K - Expo collective

Jameel Prize 3 - Hermitage-Kazan Museum - Expo collective

Jameel Prize 3 - New Manege - Expo collective

2013

Jameel Prize 3 - Victoria & Albert Museum - Expo collective

50 ans d'arts videos internationaux - La Friche Belle de Mai - Expo collective

2012

6th Manif d'art Biennial - Machines, Les Formes du mouvement - Québec - Biennale

Oriental Accident - Lombard-Freid Projects - Solo show

Kissing Circles - Shoshana Wayne Gallery - Solo show

Suspect Language - Goodman Gallery - Solo show

25 ans de créativité arabe - Institut du Monde Arabe - Expo collective

Intranquillités - B.P.S.22 - Expo collective

L'histoire est à moi ! - Le Printemps de Septembre - Expo collective

2011

3rd Thessaloniki Biennale - A Rock and a Hard Place - Thessaloniki - Biennale

Megalopolis - AKBank Sanat - Solo show

Between the lines - Galerie Hussenot - Solo show

Told, Untold, Retold - Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art - Expo collective

West end ? - Museum on the Seam - Expo collective

press articles:

Polla, Barbara, Don't delude yourself: we are all in danger, Drome magazine, October 10th, 2012

Mizota, Sharon, Mounir Fatmi smartly connects , The Los Angeles Times, April 20th, 2012

DROME
magazine

Barbara Polla
10.10.2012
http://www.dromemagazine.com/do-not-delude-yourself-we-are-all-in-danger/

DON'T DELUDE YOURSELF ::
WE ARE ALL IN DANGER



Thus spoke Pier Paolo Pasolini the day before he was assassinated.

History is mine! is the title for this year's Printemps de Septembre à Toulouse, a beautiful exhibition that speaks to us about History and delivers a powerful dose of optimism.

Mounir fatmi is one of the artists included in the show and his video, Modern Times, a History of the Machine, is one of the few outdoor public art projects. The piece is projected at night onto the exterior wall of the Hôtel-Dieu. Inspired in part by both the Charlie Chaplin film of the same name and verses from the Koran, you could say it represents a Modern Times for the contemporary Islamic world. Modern Times, a History of the Machine was exhibited recently in Paris at Galerie Hussenot and is also owned by the Modern Art Museum in Doha, Qatar, where it was presented at opening in 2011 and then acquired by the museum.

Just across from this installation was another work by fatmi entitled Technologia which was projected on the Pont Neuf bridge. Technologia also presents verses from the Koran in calligraphy, but unlike Modern Times, which screens onto the side of a building, it was projected onto the floor of the bridge. It was magic when the light hit the ground. I had the privilege of walking alone at night on the bridge, after the opening, in the rain and the wind, walking in the darkness and shadow up to the light of the artwork, wonderstruck, my body taken in by the luminous movements of the Arabic calligraphy.

But certain Muslims in Toulouse did not see the work that way. A young woman – it could easily have been me just a few nights before – who walked on the bridge and through the projection, was hit in the face by another woman, a Muslim outraged to see her trampling the verses of the Koran. Apparently one does not walk on the Koran.

Action, reaction.

The work was removed by the City of Toulouse, despite the fact that nobody had asked them to. Out of fear? Fear is always a bad advisor. In order to keep public order? Not even in our dreams will the censorship of artworks promote public order. And even if this removal of his artwork was agreed on by the artist (he had stated earlier that "fighting for ideas is acceptable but I am not in favor of fighting on the streets"), don't delude yourself, this was artistic censorship.

At the same time, this weekend, we in Geneva are voting on a new Constitution and I am reading the wonders it contains:

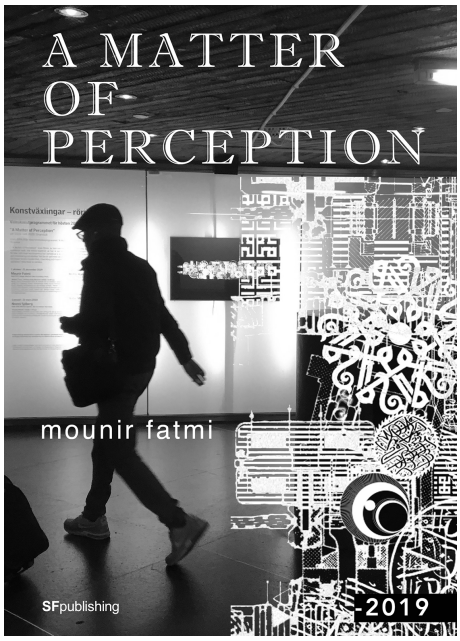
Among the general clauses: the State is secular. It maintains religious neutrality. Among the basic rights: The freedom of art and to make art is guaranteed.

Censorship is forbidden.

Mounir fatmi, maybe you should ask the City of Geneva, which is as left-leaning as the City of Toulouse, for artistic asylum. Or maybe you should ask Charleroi, where Pierre-Olivier Rollin, who has fought so hard to maintain his artistic independence, is right now inviting you to present "Intranquillités" (a premonitory title) at BPS22. "Curiosity as a tool of emancipation, free speech and the search for origins are what drives this exhibition… Mounir Fatmi, Mohamed El Baz, Charif Benhelima all work at questioning blind acceptance, unfounded validations and immediate obsolescence…"

"We are all in danger" said Pasolini. The next day, he was found dead on a beach at Ostia. Thirty years later, Christian Brouillard remembers and entitles a paper of his: Pier Paolo Pasolini ou La mort d'un hérétique. The death of heretics always starts with cultural closure – what Pasolini called "cultural genocide." According to him, "Refusal has always been an essential gesture… the handful of humans who made History are those who said 'no'". On mounir fatmi's website it now says: "History is NOT mine!". It also says that "brainwashing is the only free operation." We are all in danger, when someone decides to remove artworks, to slap a passer-by, to burn books, to kill Pasolini.

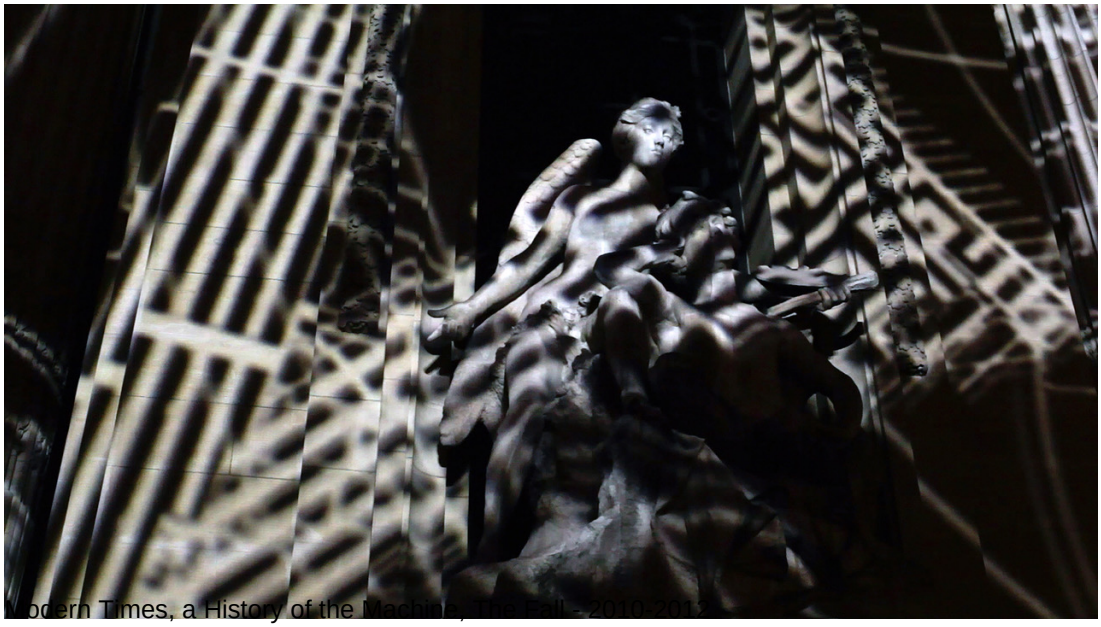
It will always be vital to say no to those who want to close things down, whoever they are. Open, open your eyes, and let the artists create and enrich the world and encourage thinking, complexity, singularity, cultural questioning and all forms of disquiet. Don't delude yourself: the life of those who create comes at this cost. At the cost of disquiet, and sometimes even death. As Pasolini knew.



A matter of perception, SFpublishing 2024

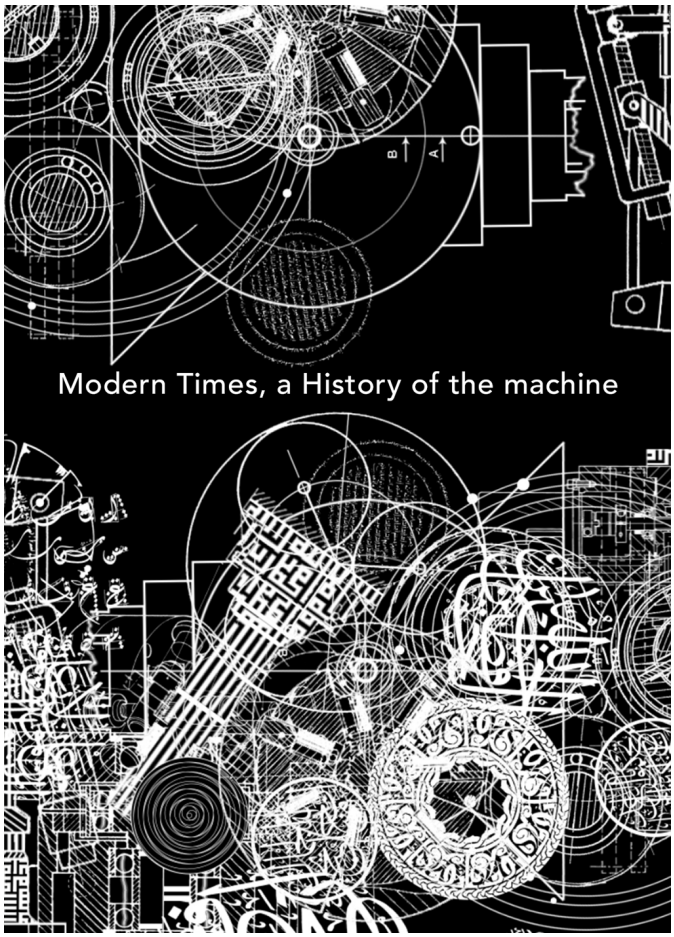
A series of circular bandsaws bearing Arabic calligraphy are suspended, reminiscent of a system of cogs or gear mechanism. The images projected onto the wall around the sculpture show architectural construction in the Middle East, creating an intense cinematic environment.

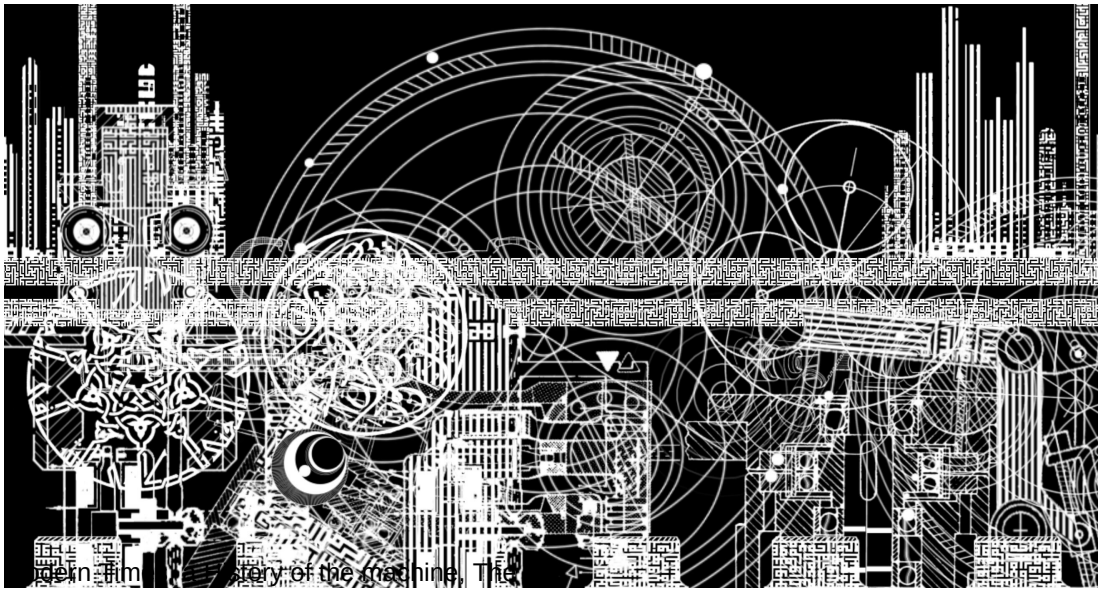
Nilo Amlashi, October 2019



Modern Times, a History of the Machine, The Fall - 2010-2012

First presented on the façade of the Grand Palais during Art Paris in 2015, the installation gives this question a concrete form. The projected gears overlap the lines of the building and change the way we read them. The façade seems caught up in the movement of the shapes passing across it. The viewer still senses the mass of the building even as its divisions are redrawn by light.

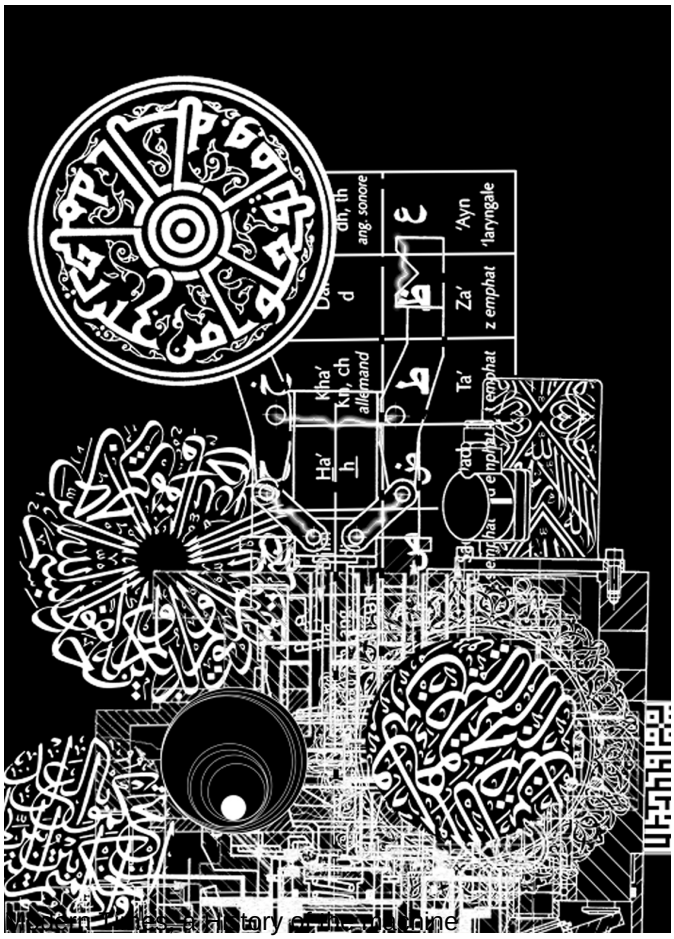




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