42. | Walking on the Light



Started in 2012, print on baryte, 26 x 40 cm.
Exhibition view from Walking on the light, CCC Tours, 2014, Tours.
Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard Gallery, New York.
Ed. of 5 + 2 A.P.

"Marcher sur la lumière" est une série de photographies réalisée à partir de l'installation lumineuse et cinétique "Technologia" (2012), dispositif projetant vingt cinq images circulaires sur un pont de Toulouse, parmi lesquelles les spectateurs peuvent déambuler librement et se laisser aller à la contemplation des lumières projetées au sol. L'oeuvre s'inspire des rotoreliefs de Duchamps, associés à la calligraphie arabe et aux paroles du prophète Mahomet.

Mettant en scène les spectateurs qui évoluent parmi les projections au sol, les photographies constituent les quelques rares images que l'artiste a eu le temps de faire, avant qu'une suite d'événements inattendus entraînent la suspension de son exposition publique et finalement sa censure. Au départ, il y a le geste d'une spectatrice marchant volontairement ou non sur une des projections lumineuses - geste aussitôt interprété comme un blasphème par d'autres spectateurs présents ce jour-là, et entraînant des manifestations religieuses dans la ville.

"Marcher sur la lumière" questionne le rapport problématique du public à l'œuvre et explore ce moment particulier qui précède un basculement entraînant l'incompréhension d'une partie du public et sa réaction de rejet, ainsi que le dévoiement des intentions de l'artiste. L'œuvre réalise une mise en scène de ce moment qui précède le basculement. Elle examine donc en quelque sorte les conditions d'une réaction chimique : elle en recense les éléments et les éventuels catalyseurs, et décrit leur configuration juste avant la réaction. La proposition fait allusion à la fois à l'événement ayant entraîné les manifestations puis la censure, et à la mention humoristique laissée par Mounir Fatmi sur un écriteau accompagnant l'installation : "Ne marchez pas sur l'œuvre". "Marcher sur la lumière" est une proposition

"Walking on the Light" is a series of photographs created from the luminous and kinetic installation "Technologia" (2012), where 25 circular images were projected on a bridge in Toulouse. The spectators could walk freely between them and were encouraged to engage in the contemplation of the lights projected onto the ground. The work was inspired by Marcel Duchamp's rotoreliefs and associated them with Arab calligraphy and the words of the prophet Muhammad.

The photographs show the spectators walking among the projections on the ground. They are the only ones the artist had the time to take before a series of unexpected events led to the suspension of the public exhibit and it was eventually censored. Everything started when a female spectator stepped, voluntarily or not, on one of the projections – a gesture that was immediately interpreted as blasphemy by other spectators present that day and led to religious protests in the city.

"Walking on the Light" questions the problematic relation of the audience with the work and explores this particular moment that preceded a tipping point leading to a failure to understand the work by a fraction of the public and its reaction of rejection, as well as the diversion of the artist's intentions. In a way, it examines the conditions of a chemical reaction: it lists the elements and the potential catalyzers and describes their configuration just before the reaction happens. The proposition alludes to the event that triggered the protests and the censorship, as well as to the humorous comment left by mounir fatmi on a sign in the installation: "Please do not walk on the work". "Walking on the Light" is a polysemous proposition which can be perceived in a poetic, childish or mystical way. It reflects an almost evident physical impossibility. It echoes a form of sensory and poetic

polysémique qui peut être perçue de manière poétique, enfantine ou mystique. Elle renvoie à une impossibilité physique évidente. Elle fait écho à une forme d'expérience sensorielle et poétique qui s'exprimerait par métaphore. La lumière peut faire écho à la mystique religieuse où elle symboliserait Dieu lui-même. Elle peut également renvoyer aux connaissances et aux savoirs d'ordre profane. Rappelons enfin que les éclairages constituent un élément essentiel dans les domaines de la mise en scène et du spectacle...

La première photographie de la série montre deux personnages masculins immobiles, se tenant à la périphérie d'un cercle lumineux. L'un d'eux, situé sur la circonférence est éclairé par la lumière d'un projecteur, tandis que l'autre, un peu plus en retrait, demeure dans la pénombre. Cette photographie a ceci de particulier qu'elle fait apparaître très distinctement deux motifs graphiques aux influences internationales - versets religieux et logo de marque d'équipementier sportif. Par un effet du hasard, religion et société de consommation figurent dans la même mise en scène et le pouvoir de leur iconographie sur les individus et les consciences peut éventuellement être évoqué, analysé et comparé...

"Marcher sur la lumière" opère finalement un arrêt sur image aux effets de suspens et de dramatisation. L'instantané précède t-il une scène de révélation mystique ? Les spectateurs vont t'ils s'avancer encore sous la lumière, ou vont-ils rester sagement à la limite des cercles sans oser avancer plus loin. Le suspens évoqué est également d'un autre ordre : les photographies suspendent le jeu des significations et la chaîne des causes et conséquences. Elles reviennent sur un instant critique et pourraient être perçues comme une forme de provocation, mais elles réaffirment en réalité l'ouverture du sens propre aux œuvres d'art, qui autorise tous les jeux d'interprétation et tous les questionnements.

Studio Fatmi, Avril 2017.

experience that expresses itself in metaphors. The light can be evocative of religious mysticism, where it would be the symbol of God himself. It can also reference knowledge of a secular nature. And of course, lights are an essential element in the field of staging and show production…

The first photograph of the series shows two motionless male individuals near a luminous circle. One of them, standing on the edge, is illuminated by a projector, whereas the other, standing back, remains in the dark. This photograph is particular in the sense that it very distinctly shows two graphic motifs with international references – religious verses and the logo of a sportswear brand. Out of pure coincidence, religion and consumerism appear in the same scene and the power of their iconography over individuals and consciences can be evoked, analyzed and compared…

Finally, “Walking on the Light” offers a still image giving off an effect of suspense and dramatization. Does this image precede a scene of mystical revelation? Will the spectators walk further into the light or will they safely stay on the edge of the circles, not daring to go any further? The suspense is also of another kind: the photographs suspend the interactions between significations and the chain of cause and consequence. They bring up a critical moment and could be perceived as a form of provocation, but in reality they reaffirm the openness of the signification of works of art, which authorizes any interpretation and all forms of questioning.

Studio Fatmi, April 2017.

" For Fatmi the work was about light and beauty, modernism and abstraction, and of course, no one could walk on those lines from the Koran as they were fleeting light,
the shadow of the figure crossing

onto the projection would in any case have blocked out the imagery under their feet. "

Jane Lombard, September 2017

exhibitions:

2017

Survival Signs - Jane Lombard Gallery - Solo show

2016

1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London - Officine dell'Immagine - Art fair

2015

Permanent Exiles - MAMCO - Solo show

2014

Walking on the light - CCC - Solo show

press articles:

Mounir Fatmi 7 Sep - 21 Oct 2017 at the Jane Lombard Gallery in New York, United States, Wall Street International Art, September 12th, 2017

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Mounir Fatmi

7 Sep — 21 Oct 2017 at the Jane Lombard Gallery in New York, United States

12 SEPTEMBER 2017



Mounir Fatmi. Courtesy of Jane Lombard Gallery

Jane Lombard Gallery is pleased to present "Survival Signs," Mounir Fatmi's third solo exhibition with the gallery. His work directly addresses the current events in our world and speaks to those whose lives are affected by restrictive political climates. "Survival signs" can also be seen as cultural signs, images, objects, experiences, and their connections and relationships to our everyday life. Is our society fluid, open and accepting, or the opposite? Several of the works in the exhibition teeter along a fine line of interpretation; are they revealing moments of construction or destruction, lightness or darkness? The artist presents his works as signs of survival; elements that allow him to resist and understand the world and its changes. The focal point of the exhibition, "Inside the Fire Circle," 2017, is a large, interactive floor installation consisting of jumper cables, obsolete typewriters, and blank sheets of paper on which visitors are encouraged to write, symbolizing a "jumpstart" to their own story or history. For Fatmi, "the installation is like a palimpsest of the modern age; the rhythmic flow between the paper and the cables seem as if they are sending signals back and forth, but at each stop the information is erased and the process begins again. This is a reflection of the tendency of history to repeat itself. The recent rise in nationalism across Europe, from Brexit in the UK, the rise of the National Front in France, Holland, Hungary, to the United States, and the state of affairs in Russia, Turkey and elsewhere, all reaffirm this fear." The artist wants the cables to symbolically jumpstart people out of their apathy so they can learn from the past and become actively involved in writing a new and different story on the blank pages.

Fatmi's wall sculpture, "Défense," 2016, is both an architectural object and readymade. In many parts of the world, these spiraled, pointed bars of metal function as security bars, installed to protect from intruders. It is aggressive and dangerous, but when placed within the context of an exhibition it takes on an added visual appeal, as a minimal sculpture that casts radiant shadows across the wall. The viewer must work around it in order to engage with the rest of the exhibition. Even in the distant past, these bars have been aesthetic and utilitarian, aggressive and attractive.

Another central work on view is a large photograph from "The Blinding Light," 2013 - ongoing, a series of work inspired by a 15th century painting by Fra Angelico entitled "The Healing of Deacon Justinian." The original painting depicts two saints, Cosmas and his brother Damian, grafting a black leg onto the deacon Justinian. Born in Syria, Cosmas and Damian were Arab by birth and later converted to Christianity. Fatmi's photograph superimposes an image of the painting with an image from a contemporary surgical room. The transparency of images essentially fuses science and religion, present and past. Fatmi first saw this painting when he moved to Rome at age 17 to attend art school. He saw in himself a connection to being like that black leg, existing in a world that was not his own, in his case as a cultural transplant.

Calligraphy of Fire, 2015, is a set of three black and white photographs. The images are enigmatic, as if offering a glimpse into a private ritual or an uncertain moment. For Fatmi, books and knowledge represent a means of survival, of opportunity, a path to independence, and a greater understanding of life. Calligraphy of Fire presents a set of situations, each of which links the idea of knowledge with light, and its absence, as darkness, a void. If the burning candle is symbolic of life, illumination, and knowledge, as it is throughout much of art history, in the left hand image the snuffed candle could suggest an impending opaqueness, the possible smudges as a form of censorship. On the right, the burning candle offers the possibility of light, yet if left unattended, the results will be destruction. In the center, the portrait of the artist suggests a movement from darkness into light, perhaps a path to self-awareness, growth, and even survival.

A small photo titled, "Walking on the Light," 2012 - ongoing, shows a man at night, standing on the edge of circular light projection made by the artist titled, "Technologia," which was a part of a 2012 exhibition in France. Fatmi took the photograph the night of the opening and it is only one of a few that exist as a few days later his installation was censored and removed from the exhibition. The light projection included verses from the Koran written out in beautiful calligraphy and combined into a swirling Marcel Duchamp inspired rotorelief. The controversy stemmed from the belief that the viewers would walk onto verses of the Koran, a sacred text, and as such considered destructive. But for Fatmi the work was about light and beauty, modernism and abstraction, and of course, no one could walk on those lines from the Koran as they were fleeting light, the shadow of the figure crossing onto the projection would in any case have blocked out the imagery under their feet.

At first glance, "Roots," 2015-16, a triptych made from white antenna cable seems to be simply an elegant work, but in fact the artist seeks to confront a more philosophical question: Just how deep can roots go? At a time when issues of identity and borders are increasingly in the news and being taken up by the extremes, the sculpture "Roots," defends the idea of harmony and stability through its interlacing composition, a metaphor for the possibility of eventual union. The antenna cable serves as both core material and valuable archive in the sense that it is quickly becoming an obsolete material. As such, the work itself and this archive find themselves in a similar position and create a sort of dialogue. The archive creates the work and the work stores the archive.

The video, "History is not mine," 2013, is a piece made partially in response to censorship. The black and white video depicts a man whose face remains concealed as he strikes a typewriter with two hammers. The only color comes from the typewriter's ribbon, a brilliant red, the color of blood; a collision of the beauty of the written sentence and the violence and difficulty of its creation. The video plunges us into the role of witness and accomplice, as if we are almost a part of this story's writing process. The simple and mundane gesture of striking the keys becomes crushing with the use of hammers. The weight that falls on the keys causes a deep, violent intonation. These effects, accentuated by the characteristic sound of a typewriter, also evoke the ticking of a clock or shots fired from a sub-machine gun. The artist urges the viewer to become aware of his or her stance vis-à-vis history. As evidenced by the title of the work, a feeling of hopelessness clearly emerges. The repetitive, angled shots overlooking the scene highlight a feeling of domination. By never showing the man's face as he strikes the machine, Mounir Fatmi encourages the viewer to identify with his or her own experience. Everyone is a part of this story being written, the violence of the hammers, and the impossibility of writing something coherent with this method.

"Alif," 2015 - ongoing, is a series of photographs showing a man's forearm, grasping a slightly curved and elongated shape like a dagger, and is a work in progress that is to be developed into a set of photographs, videos, and installations. This shape known as the "Alif," is the first letter of the Arabic alphabet. Alif is one of the six so-called "unrelated letters" or "isolated letters," meaning that it is never attached to the letter that follows.

Mounir Fatmi was born in 1970 in Tangier, Morocco and lives and works between Paris and Tangier. Since leaving Morocco in 1999, he is particularly interested in issues of exile, and the role of the artist in a society in crisis. Fatmi views himself as an immigrant worker: "My job is to question what it means to be an artist. Even when I feel outside of my own cultural context." He has participated in the 52nd and the 57th Venice Biennale, the 7th Dakar Biennial, the 2nd Seville Biennial, the 5th Gwangju Biennial, the 10th Lyon Biennial, and the 5th Auckland Triennial. Recent solo exhibitions include "Spot On: Mounir Fatmi," Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf, Germany; "Permanent Exiles," MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland; "Darkening Process," The MMPV Museum, Marrakech, Morocco.



Mounir Fatmi. Courtesy of Jane Lombard Gallery



Permanent Exiles, SFpublishing 2025

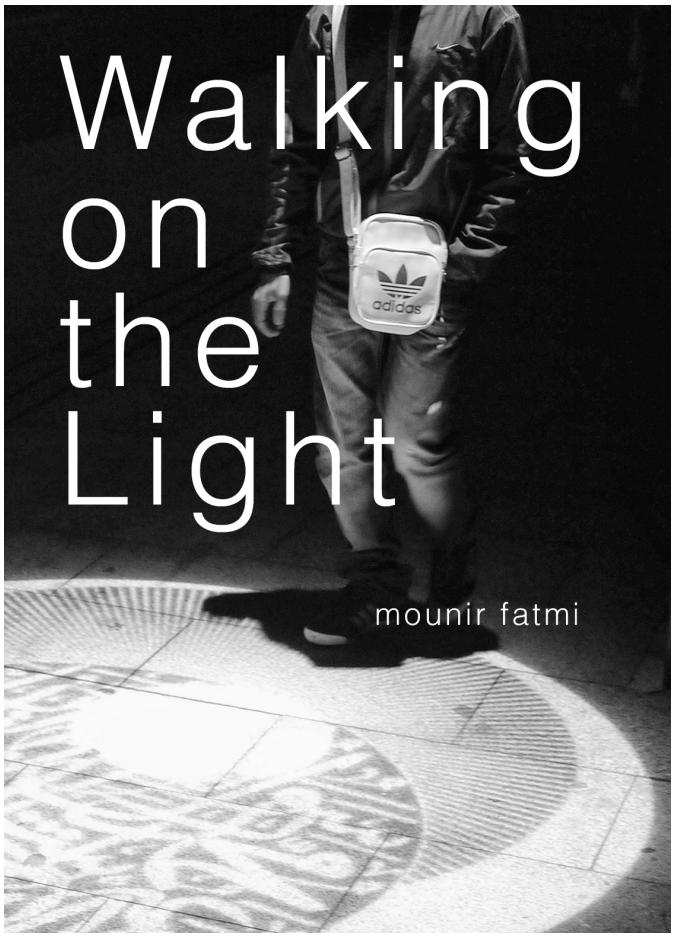
Permanent Exiles tackles the themes that recur throughout his work: identity, history, the body, language. All these things speak of exile, separation, and the impossibility of language, and express the difficulty of encounter.

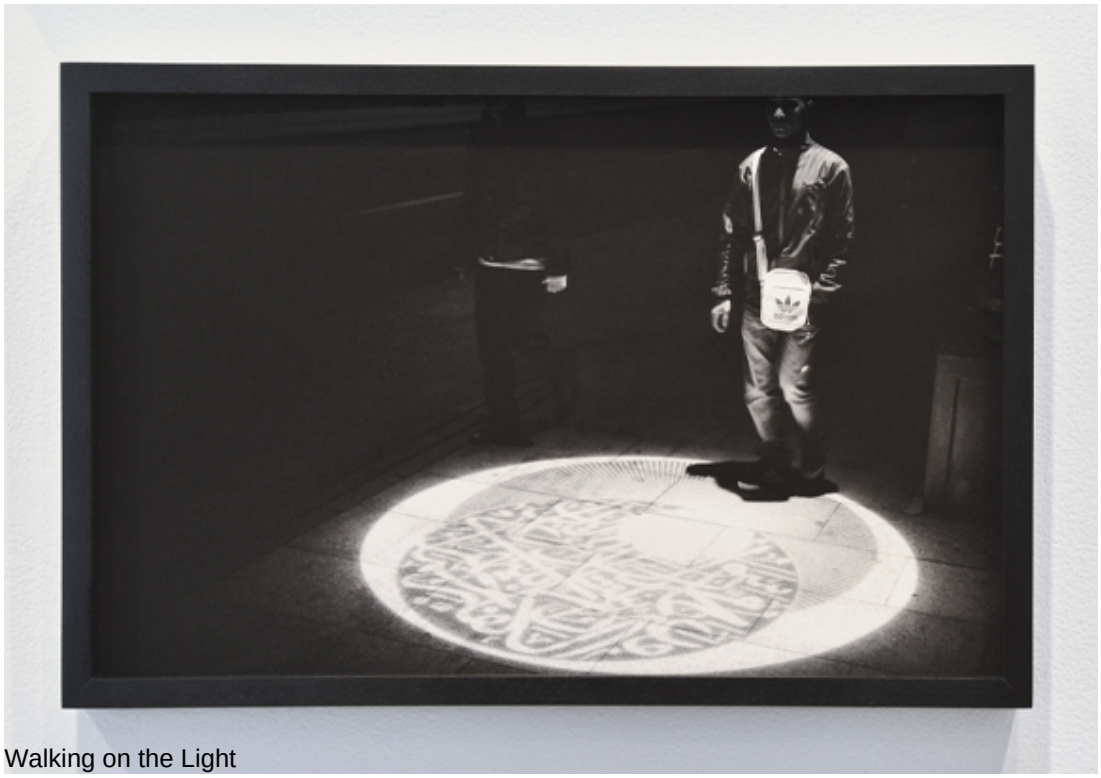
Françoise Ninghetto, February 2015



Walking on the Light

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Walking on the Light is a polysemous proposition which can be perceived in a poetic, childish or mystical way. It reflects an almost evident physical impossibility. It echoes a form of sensory and poetic experience that expresses itself in metaphors. The light can be evocative of religious mysticism, where it would be the symbol of God himself.