47. | Calligraphy of Fire



2015, triptych, pigment print on Fine art, 35 x 52 cm, each and 70 x 105 cm each.
Exhibition view from Survival Signs, Jane Lombard Gallery, 2017, New York.
Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard Gallery, New York.
Ed. of 5 + 2 A.P.

This work was part of 14th Biennale Africaine de la Photographie, Kuma, Bamako, 2024.

Calligraphie de feu est un ensemble de trois photographies en noir et blanc faisant partie d'un corpus plus large de l'artiste explorant la langue, l'écriture, la connaissance et la destruction. Les images de ce triptyque sont énigmatiques, comme si elles donnaient un aperçu d'un rituel privé ou d'un moment incertain.
Sur la gauche, la photo d'un livre ouvert posé sur une table ; les bras d'un homme sont placés autour comme s'il lisait. Dans une main, il tient une chandelle comme un crayon, sa mèche éteinte. Impossible de savoir s'il utilisait la lumière pour lire et qu'elle s'est éteinte, ou s'il a l'intention d'utiliser l'extrémité de la chandelle pour faire des traces sur le livre, rendant ainsi les mots illisibles et noircissant les pages.

L'image centrale est un portrait de l'artiste émergeant d'un fond noir. Il regarde le spectateur droit dans les yeux, sa tête penchée sur le côté, et une bougie allumée sort verticalement de son oreille. Il semble sortir de l'obscurité pour venir dans notre champ de vision, la bougie étant une métaphore de l'artiste en tant que chercheur de lumière et de connaissance. C'est une scène intime, comme si elle représentait un moment de rituel ou de transformation. Dans la photographie de droite, une bougie allumée est posée dans le pli central d'un livre ouvert, posé sur une table vide. Peut-être que la bougie a été négligemment laissée là par le lecteur, mais la disposition est plus précaire que cela, la flamme est trop proche, le risque d'incendie semble

Calligraphy of Fire is a set of three black and white photographs that form part of a larger body of work by the artist which explores language, writing, knowledge and destruction. The images in this triptych are enigmatic as if offering a glimpse into a private ritual or an uncertain moment.
On the left is a photograph of an open book resting on a table, a man's arms placed around it as if reading. In one hand he holds a long candle like a pencil, the end of which has been snuffed out. We cannot be sure if the light was being used to read and it has gone out, or if he intends to use the tip of the candle to mark up the book, thereby smudging the words and blackening the pages.

The middle image is a portrait of the artist emerging out of a black background. He looks straight at the viewer, his head tilted to the side, and there is a burning candle placed upright in his ear. He seems to be moving out of the darkness and into focus, the burning light as a metaphor for the artist as seeker of light, of knowledge. It is an intimate scene as if capturing a moment of ritual or transformation. In the photograph on the right, a burning candle is placed along the crease of an open book which sits on an otherwise empty table. Perhaps the candle was left there carelessly by the reader, but the set up is more precarious, the flame too close, the risk of burning seems imminent.

For fatmi, books and knowledge represent a means of

imminent.

Pour Fatmi, les livres et la connaissance représentent un moyen de survie, une opportunité, un chemin vers l'indépendance et vers une plus grande compréhension de la vie. Calligraphie de feu présente un ensemble de situations, chacune reliant l'idée de la connaissance avec la lumière, et son absence avec l'obscurité, le vide. Si la bougie allumée symbolise la vie, l'illumination et la connaissance, comme le veut la tradition à travers l'histoire de l'art, dans l'image de gauche la bougie éteinte pourrait évoquer une obscurité imminente, les traces noires représentant une forme de censure. À droite, la bougie allumée offre la possibilité de la lumière, mais si elle est laissée sans surveillance, il en résultera la destruction. Au centre, le portrait de l'artiste suggère un mouvement de l'obscurité vers la lumière, peut-être le chemin vers la conscience de soi, la croissance et même la survie. Les images font aussi subtilement référence au contexte politique global : l'attitude de plus en plus isolationniste de certains politiciens qui choisissent de promouvoir la peur, les frontières fermées et un retour aux « traditions » en réaction contre la mondialisation qui est intrinsèquement sans frontières, numérique et bâtie sur l'information.

Il en va de même pour les mouvements radicaux comme Daesh qui promeuvent un système qui a existé il y a des milliers d'années. Comment cela pourrait-il être possible ? Et pourtant cela se passe. Il y a une peur évidente dans ce retour en arrière radical s'opposant au progrès, et pour Fatmi cela suppose un retour à l'obscurité et une incertitude qui va de pair avec une destruction de la connaissance. Comme certaines réalités de notre monde, les images de Calligraphie de feu demeurent précaires, en équilibre entre deux tendances opposées, laissant au spectateur le soin de décider comment intégrer l'information qu'on lui soumet.

Blaire Dessent, mai 2016.

Traduit de l'anglais par Patrick Haour.

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 a 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 darkness, 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. The images subtly poke at the larger political landscape as well. The increasingly isolationist attitude of some politicians who choose to promote fear, closed borders and a return to "the old ways," as a revolt against globalization, which is technically borderless, digital and built on information.

It's the same with radical movements like Isis who champion a system that existed a thousand years ago. How can that even be possible? Yet it's happening. There is evident fear in this radical shift in looking backward as opposed to forward, and for fatmi that suggests a return to darkness, and an uncertainty that is paired with an erasure of knowledge. Like current realities, the images in Calligraphy of Fire remain precarious, teetering on the edge of both directions, leaving it to the viewer to decide how they process the information at hand.

Blaire Dessent, May 2016.

" Calligraphy of Fire presents a set of situations, each of which links the idea of knowledge with light, and its absence, as a 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 darkness, the possible smudges as a form of censorship. "

Blaire Dessent, May 2016

exhibitions:

2024

14eme Biennale Africaine de la Photographie, Bamako - Biennale

2020

ARCO madrid - ADN Gallery - Art fair

2019

The White Matter - Ceysson & Bénétière - Solo show

2017

Survival Signs - Jane Lombard Gallery - Solo show

Inside the Fire Circle - Lawrie Shabibi - Solo show

2016

Darkening Process - MMP+ - Solo show

L'art de la tolerance - Galerie Bab Rouah - Expo collective

Art Cologne - Conrads - Art fair

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

W ART

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



The Pretext, SF Publishing, Paris, 2017

I'm going to try to be very careful in my thoughts and judgments. Information moves very fast.

mounir fatmi, 2017

The New York Times

What's on This Week Around the World

By **Christopher D. Shea** March 11, 2016 10:31 am

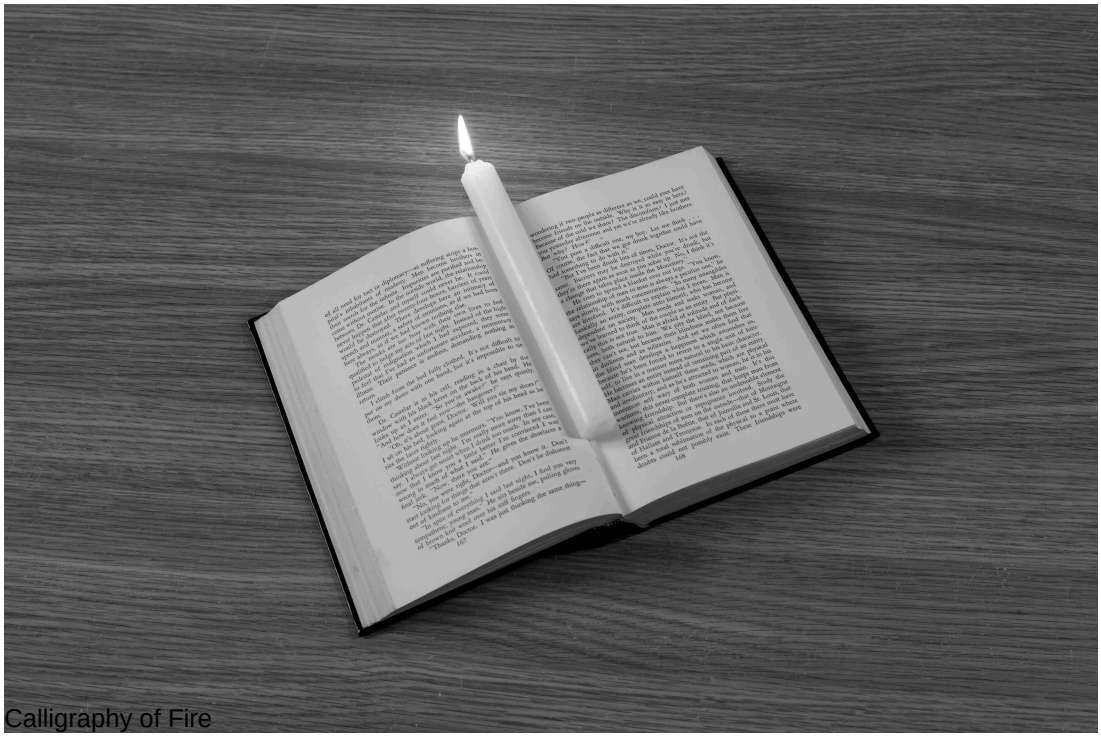


Marrakesh, Morocco
Mounir Fatmi. "Darkening Process"
MMP+
Through May 30

The Moroccan artist **Mounir Fatmi**'s artworks include simple black and white photographs, like the self-portrait below, along with formal experiments with the medium itself — like "The Blinding Light," an artwork that combines images from the Fra Angelico painting "The Healing of Deacon Justinian" with photographs of a modern-day surgery room. This solo exhibition includes photographs, videos and a sound installation by the artist.

© 2016 The New York Times Company





Calligraphy of Fire

Calligraphy of Fire is a set of three black and white photographs that form part of a larger body of work by the artist which explores language, writing, knowledge and destruction. The images in this triptych are enigmatic as if offering a glimpse into a private ritual or an uncertain moment.

Calligraphy of Fire

Calligraphy of Fire presents a set of situations, each of which links the idea of knowledge with light, and its absence, as a 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 darkness, the possible smudges as a form of censorship.



Like current realities, the images in Calligraphy of Fire remain precarious, teetering on the edge of both directions, leaving it to the viewer to decide how they process the information at hand.