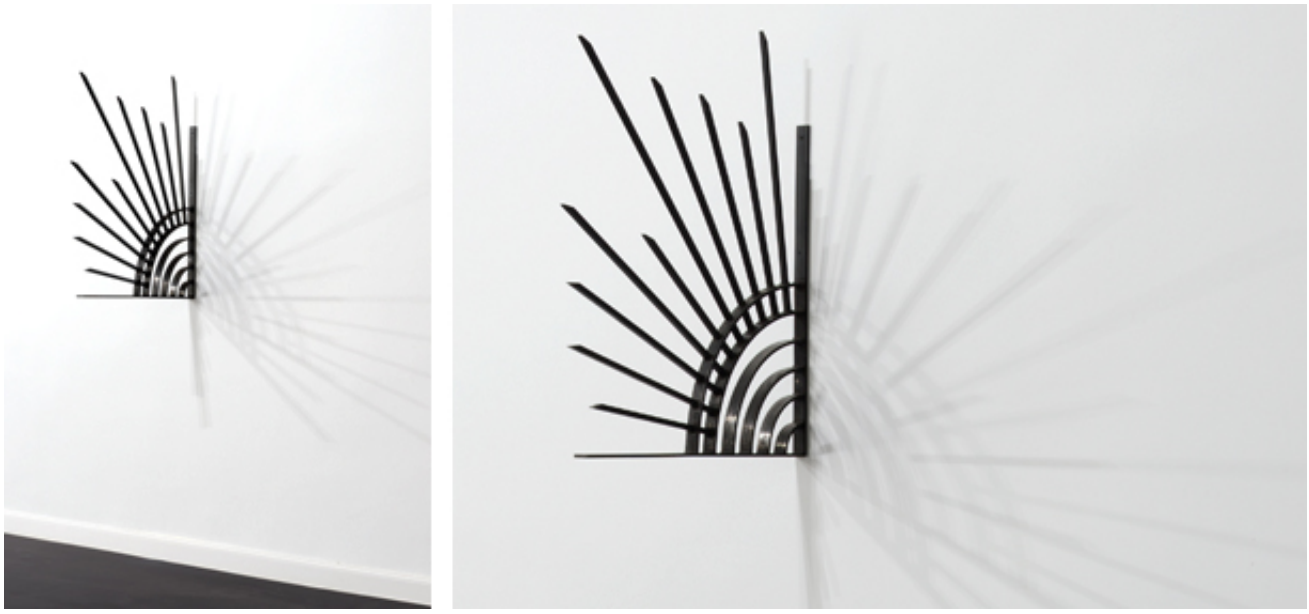
43. | Defense 01



2016, steel, 80 x 80 cm
Exhibition view from Survival Signs, Jane Lombard, 2017, New York.
Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard, New York.

Défense est une œuvre sculpturale de mounir fatmi composée d'une barrière métallique en quart-de-soleil surhaussé de pics pointus. Fixée à un mur, cette sculpture à l'esthétique minimaliste reprend un élément d'architecture classique originellement en bronze coulé appelée « barre de défense ». Cet élément présent depuis l'Antiquité sur les grilles de clôture est à la fois esthétique et utilitaire, agressif et attirant.

mounir fatmi puise ici dans le vocabulaire architectural moderne offrant à cet élément une nouvelle vocation, celui d'une œuvre d'art. Ce nouveau ready-made issue de l'environnement urbain, questionne la place sacralisée de l'œuvre dans un contexte muséal. De la même manière dont cet élément est couramment employé pour séparer les balcons afin de créer une frontière dissuasive de toute intrusion, il s'agit ici d'une réflexion sur une nouvelle forme de mise à distance de l'œuvre.

Par sa structure, ses pics, Défense, crée une barrière physique qui oblige le spectateur à prendre de la distance. Cette barrière ici physique est pour mounir fatmi une manière de continuer à interroger la question de l'implication du public dans la muséographie. Confondant ainsi le dispositif de protection et l'œuvre elle-même, cette sculpture a la volonté de pousser à l'extrême le dispositif d'exposition pour en sortir. Le public, tenu à distance, est forcé de contourner l'œuvre afin d'en prendre spatialement toute sa mesure. Dans cette mise en situation, la participation active du visiteur donne à l'œuvre son entière signification.

Studio Fatmi, Novembre 2016.

Defense is one of mounir fatmi's sculptural works composed of a metallic solar quadrant with pointed peaks. Fixed to a wall, this sculpture, with its minimalist aesthetics, takes on an element of classic architecture: cast bronze known as "security bars." Even in the distant past, these bars have been both aesthetic and utilitarian, aggressive and attractive.

mounir fatmi draws from modern architectural vocabulary and offers it a new vocation: being a work of art. This new "ready-made" comes from an urban environment, and questions the sacred place of the work in a museum context. In the same way that this element is commonly used to separate balconies and to create a dissuasive frontier for any intruder, it is also a reflection of a new form of distance from the piece.

With its structure and with its peaks, Defense creates a physical barrier that obliges the viewer to remain at a distance. For mounir fatmi, the physical barrier is a way of perpetually questioning the role of the public in museography. In combining a device used for protection with the piece itself, this sculpture aims to push the exhibition system to the extreme in order to go beyond it. The public, held at a distance, is forced to circumvent the work in order to take in the full extent. In this scenario, the active participation of the visitor gives the work its full significance.

Studio Fatmi, Novembre 2016.

“The work entitled Defense emulates the metal structures we build around the periphery in order to protect ourselves from the intrusion of thieves, while offering an image of a black sun; a symbolic
expression of a star that cools the heart instead of bringing it warmth.”

Anti-utopias, January, 2017

exhibitions:

2019

Borders - James Cohan Gallery - Expo collective

2017

Survival Signs - Jane Lombard Gallery - Solo show

2016

Depth of Field - Labanque – 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

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.

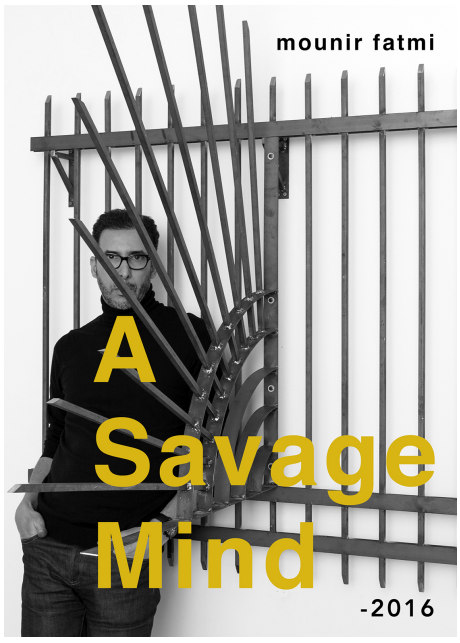
The video, "History is not mine," 2013, is a piece made partially in response to censorship. The black and white video depicts a man whose face remains concealed as he strikes a typewriter with two hammers. The only color comes from the typewriter's ribbon, a brilliant red, the color of blood; a collision 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



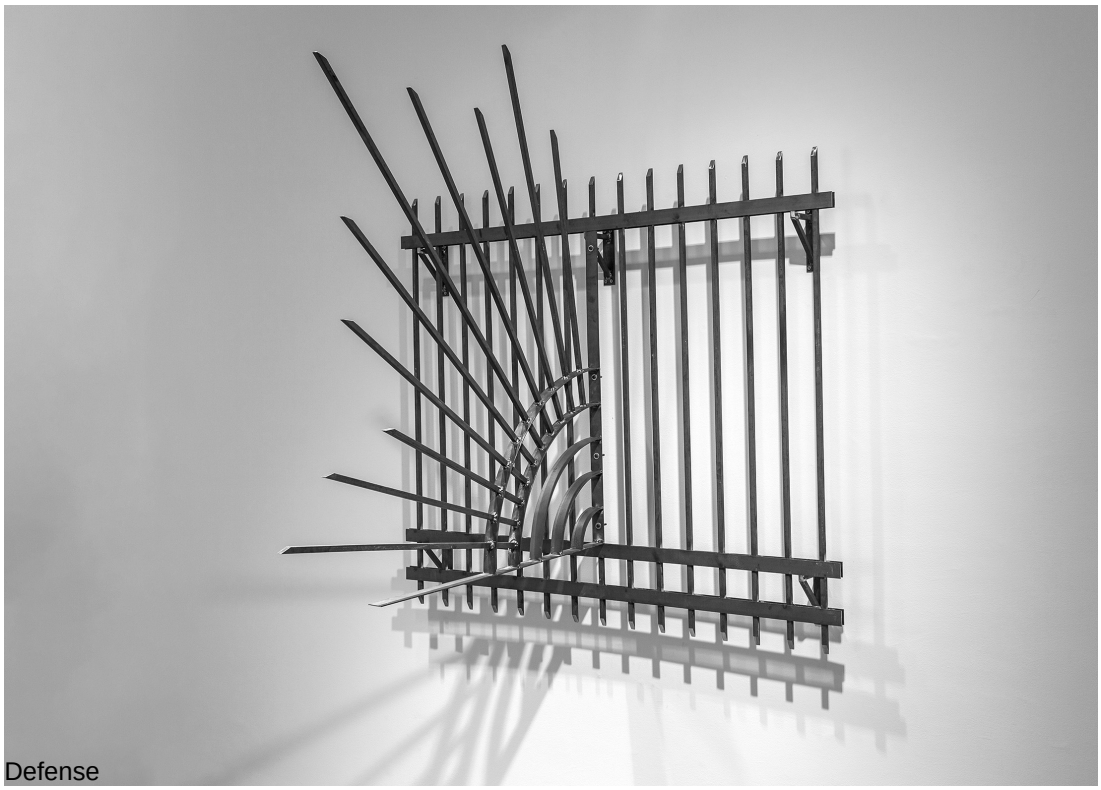
A Savage Mind, SF Publishing, 2020

How does the meeting between the one who 'can do' and one who 'knows how to speak of what is done' play out?

Keitelman Gallery, December 2016







Defense

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