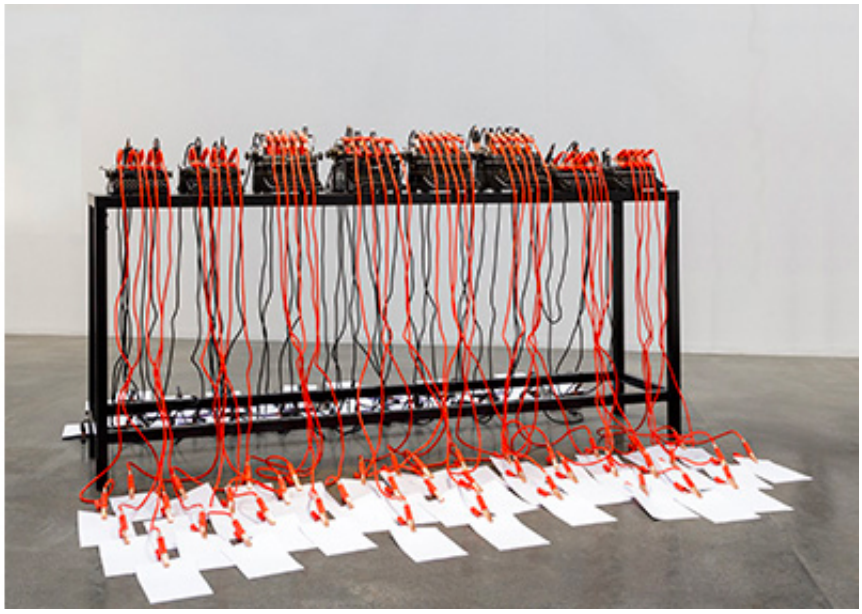
61. | Inside the Fire Circle 01





2017, Typewriters, starter cables, papers, table (140 (H) x 300 (L) x 60 (W) cm.
Exhibition view of Inside the Fire Circle, Lawrie Shabibi, 2017, Dubai.
Courtesy of the artist and Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai.
Ed. of 5 + 1 A.P.

« À l'intérieur du cercle de feu » est une installation sculpturale composée de plusieurs machines à écrire obsolètes juchées sur un haut socle métallique. Les extrémités de câbles de démarrage rouges et noirs sont fixées à l'intérieur de chaque machine à écrire, du type de ceux que l'on utilise pour recharger la batterie d'une voiture, tandis que le reste des câbles se répand sur la table et au sol. Les câbles sont triés par couleur : sur un côté de la table, les câbles rouges, de l'autre, les noirs. Au bout de chacun des câbles, des feuilles de papier blanc, placées au sol en trois rangées bien ordonnées.

Au premier regard, « À l'intérieur du cercle de feu » ressemble à une espèce de machine médicale fantaisiste, ou alors à un vieux standard téléphonique ; les câbles connectés essaient de faire démarrer les machines pour qu'elles se mettent à taper une histoire ou transmettre des informations. L'installation est comme un palimpseste de notre époque contemporaine : le flux rythmique entre le papier et les câbles donne l'impression d'un échange de signaux, mais à chaque interruption, les informations sont effacées et le processus recommence. C'est une réflexion sur la tendance de l'histoire à se répéter. Les gens semblent oublier trop vite le passé et les mêmes erreurs sont répétées à nouveau. La montée récente du nationalisme en Europe, du Brexit au Royaume-Uni à la montée du Front National en France, en passant par les Pays-Bas, la Hongrie, et au niveau mondial, les Etats-Unis, la situation politique en Russie, en Turquie et ailleurs, tous réaffirment cette peur. Mais l'artiste veut que les câbles fassent symboliquement redémarrer les gens pour qu'ils sortent de leur état d'apathie, qu'ils tirent les leçons du passé et soient

Inside the Fire Circle is a sculptural installation composed of several obsolete typewriters placed on top of a tall, metal plinth. Attached to the inside of each typewriter is one end of a pair of black and red jumper cables, those used to charge the battery of a car, while the rest of the cabling spills outwards, over the table and onto the floor. The cables have been split by color; On one side of the table are the red cables, and the other, the black. Clipped to the ends of each is a plain sheet of white paper, each piece resting on the floor to form three orderly rows.

At first glance Inside the Fire Circle has a slight resemblance to some crazy piece of medical equipment or perhaps a vintage telephone board; the connected cables trying to jump start the machine to begin typing to tell a story or relay information. 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. People too quickly seem to forget the past and we end up making the same mistakes as before. The recent rise in nationalism across Europe, from Brexit in the UK, the rise of the National Front in France, Holland, Hungary, and globally to the United States, and the state of affairs in Russia, Turkey and elsewhere, all reaffirm this fear. But the artist wants the cables to symbolically jump start people out of their apathy so they can learn from the past and be actively involved in writing a new and different story on the blank pages.

Fatmi is interested in the idea of movement, erasure,

activement impliqués dans l'écriture d'une histoire nouvelle sur des feuilles vierges.

Fatmi s'intéresse à l'idée du mouvement, de l'effacement, de la répétition et à la tendance de l'histoire à se répéter. Son utilisation fréquente de technologies et objets obsolètes, comme les machines à écrire, les presses d'imprimerie, les cassettes VHS ou les câbles coaxiaux, s'explique en partie par son intérêt pour faire revivre ces outils de transmission de l'information, de technologie et du futur autrefois glorifiés, avant d'être abandonnés au profit de quelque chose de mieux. Mais il s'agit ici aussi de la double fonction que génère ce matériau, agissant à la fois en tant qu'œuvre d'art et archive. Il s'instaure une sorte de dialogue entre les deux parties, comme au sein de l'installation, dans laquelle l'œuvre d'art est l'information et l'information devient œuvre d'art. De cette façon, « À l'intérieur du cercle de feu » peut être vu à la fois comme un transmetteur et un récepteur d'informations et d'histoire. Les machines à écrire prêtes à être utilisées, les câbles prêts à être chargés. Il n'est jamais trop tard pour agir et tourner la page, c'est le cas de le dire, pour inventer une meilleure issue.

L'installation a été créée pour l'exposition du même nom, « À l'intérieur du cercle de feu », présentée à la galerie Lawrie Shabibi Gallery à Dubai en mars 2017.

Blaire Dessent, avril 2017.

repetition, and the tendency of history to repeat itself. His ongoing use of obsolete machinery and parts, such as typewriters, printing presses, VHS cassettes and cable antenna, is partly about an interest in reviving these these once glorified transmitters of information, of technology and the future, following their abandonment for something better. But it is also about the double function that this material generates, as being both artwork and archive; There is a sort of dialogue between the two parts, as with the installation, in which the artwork is information and the information becomes an artwork. In this way, Inside the Fire Circle can be seen as being both a transmitter and receptor of information, of history. The typewriters ready to be used, the cables there for the charge. It's never to late to take action and turn the page, as it were, to forge a better path.

The installation was made for an exhibition of the same name, Inside the Fire Circle, presented at Lawrie Shabibi Gallery in Dubai in March 2017.

Blaire Dessent, April 2017.

"Typewriters also featured in the show's title work: a large new installation positioned in the center of the gallery. In this piece, waterfalls of jumper cables spill from typewriters arranged on a high table.
The end of each cable is clipped to a blank sheet of paper on the floor. The configuration, with black cables running down one side of the table
and red ones down the other,

suggests some sort of analogue setup for automated writing, mindless and mechanized.”

Rahel Aima, Art in America, May 2017

exhibitions:

2024

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2022

While the Storm Arrives - Es Baluard Museum, Palma - Solo show

2021

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2018

L'heure Rouge, 13eme Biennale de Dakar, Dakar

2017

Survival Signs - Jane Lombard Gallery, New York - Solo show

Inside the Fire Circle - Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai - Solo show

press articles:

Anna Seaman, Lessons of history come full circle in Mounir Fatmi's exhibition, The National, April 30th, 2017



Mounir Fatmi's Inside the Fire Circle uses art to reinforce lessons of history. Jump leads spill from typewriters and photos reveal John Howard Griffin's 'colour change'. Courtesy Lawrie Shabibi and the artist

Lessons of history come full circle in Mounir Fatmi's exhibition

Anna Seaman

April 30, 2017 Updated: April 30, 2017 07:11 PM

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The central installation of Mounir Fatmi's new exhibition gives the show its name. Inside the Fire Circle features a row of old-fashioned typewriters on an iron frame. From these obsolete objects, black and red jump leads spill out, the ends clipped to a page of plain, white paper.

Initially this might seem to question the transfer of information and provide a visual representation of the development of digital and future technologies – but it is also about the past.

"With this installation, I want people to remember history," says Fatmi, a French-Moroccan artist, of his first solo show in Dubai. "Unfortunately people have a short-term memory these days."

Fatmi describes the work as an aesthetic trap that draws viewers in but throws them into a circular motion of repetition.

"All these materials are going to disappear, so they are historical, but there is the notion of archive, which is constantly present," he says. "We see history repeating itself over and over again, like a palimpsest."

Palimpsest is a word for a manuscript or other writing surface that has been reused or altered but which still has visible traces of its original form.

This installation then, reflects the artist's preoccupation with the circle, a recurring symbol throughout his practice.

On the wall are several pieces made with coaxial antennae cables – another largely obsolete object – arranged and fixed in partly-circular and geometric patterns, encased in glass boxes.

Again, they draw the viewer in to the idea of repetition and infinity but also pick up the theme of physical material that is now part of history, soon to be discarded from use and, perhaps, even from memory.

By using such objects, Fatmi raises the question of whether when something is forgotten, does it mean it never existed? Why do we often fail to learn the lessons of history? If an incident falls out of the reaches of archive or memory, it can happen again, and we risk making the same mistakes.

This idea is highlighted in the story of John Howard Griffin, the subject of several pieces of work in the exhibition. Griffin was an American journalist and author from Texas. He was white but in the racially-segregated United States of 1959, he took medication and subjected his skin to ultraviolet rays to make himself appear black. He then went on a tour of the country's Deep South.

"I discovered the history of this amazing person who completed this experiment and I realised that many people hadn't heard of him so I decided to use his story to show others," says Fatmi.

A series of 10 photographs, titled *As A Black Man*, shows the gradation of Griffin's skin from white to grey to black. Another set, this time in black and white, show his legs crossing a white line in the street – which has several metaphorical and symbolic connotations.

"This story is especially relevant because of what is happening in the United States now," says Fatmi. "People forget the original American dream was in fact, the immigrant's dream. You can't imagine America as it is today without immigrants.

"So, I want to show people that back then, there was a white, educated person who was willing to literally burn his skin because he wanted to understand 'the other'. If people were to think like him now, it would help a lot."

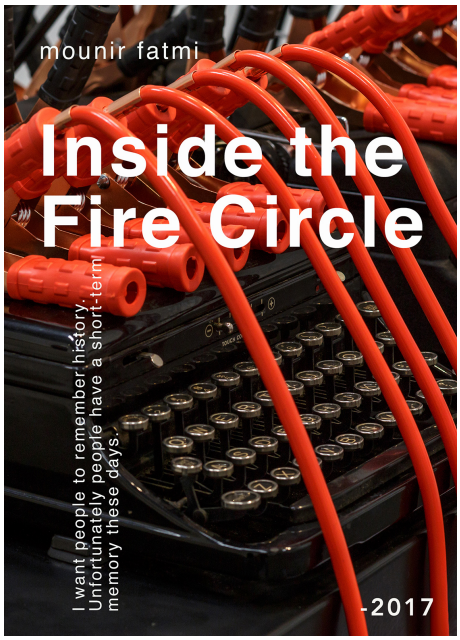
Fatmi's interest in forgotten stories, and in inspiring his audience to think for themselves, comes from a childhood spent in an impoverished Moroccan village where access to information was scarce.

He remembers there was only one dictionary in the village and he had to search it out. When he began creating art in an age of information saturation, Fatmi never forgot the importance of memory, and he hopes to harness the power of art to make a difference.

"Art changed my life," he says. "I try to understand life, history and everything with art – it is the key. And yes, it is a romantic idea but I do have a hope to be able to change something with my art."

• *Inside the Fire Circle is at Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Alserkal Avneue, Dubai, until May 15. www.lawrieshabibi.com*

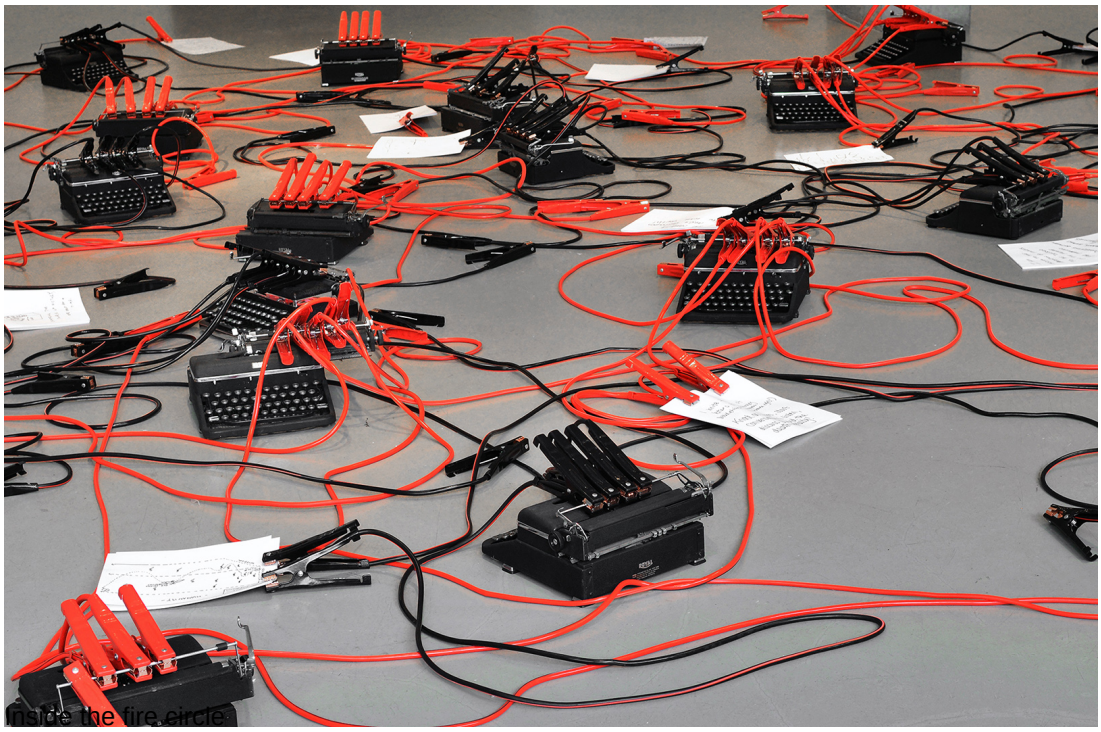
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Inside the fire circle

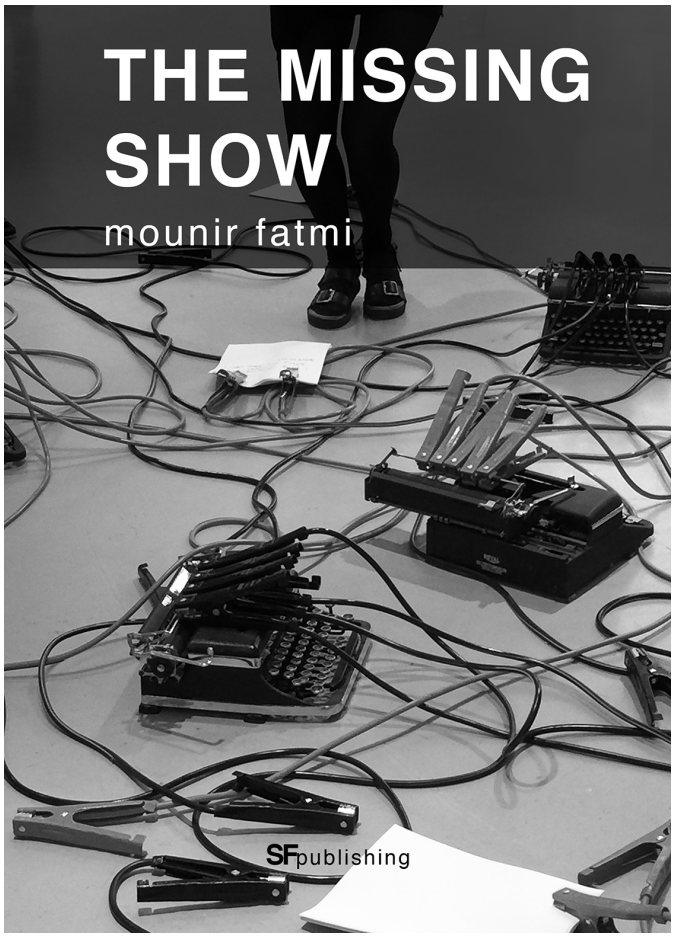
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Anna Seaman, The National, April 2017



Inside the fire circle

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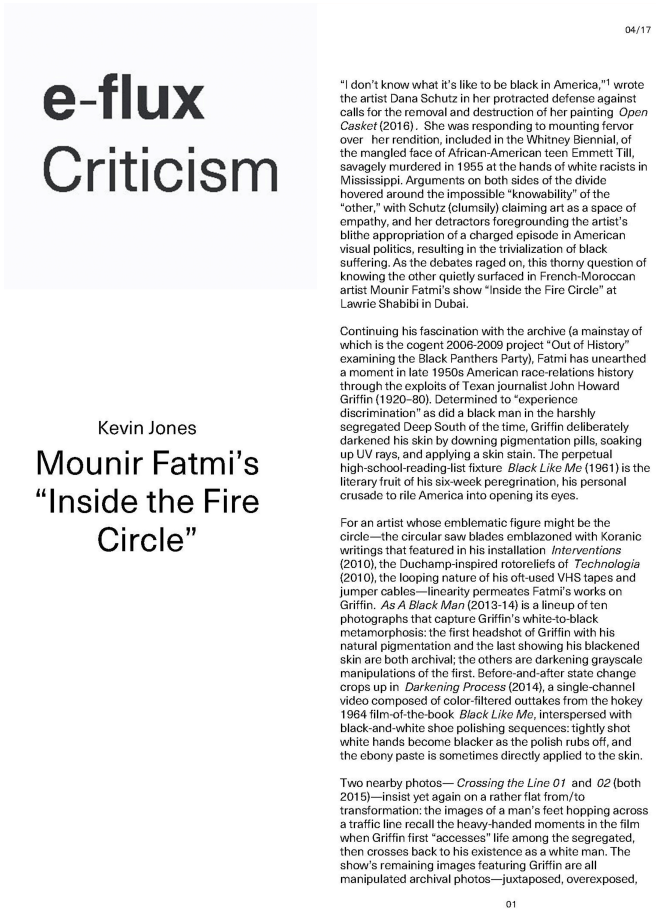
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e-flux
Criticism

Kevin Jones

Mounir Fatmi's "Inside the Fire Circle"

04/17

"I don't know what it's like to be black in America,"[1] wrote the artist Dana Schutz in her protracted defense against calls for the removal and destruction of her painting *Open Casket* (2016). She was responding to mounting fervor over her rendition, included in the Whitney Biennial, of the mangled face of African-American teen Emmett Till, savagely murdered in 1955 at the hands of white racists in Mississippi. Arguments on both sides of the divide hovered around the impossible "knowability" of the "other," with Schutz (clumsily) claiming art as a space of empathy, and her detractors foregrounding the artist's blithe appropriation of a charged episode in American visual politics, resulting in the trivialization of black suffering. As the debates raged on, this thorny question of knowing the other quietly surfaced in French-Moroccan artist Mounir Fatmi's show "Inside the Fire Circle" at Lawrie Shabibi in Dubai.

Continuing his fascination with the archive (a mainstay of which is the cogent 2006-2009 project "Out of History" examining the Black Panthers Party), Fatmi has unearthed a moment in late 1950s American race-relations history through the exploits of Texan journalist John Howard Griffin (1920–80). Determined to "experience discrimination" as did a black man in the harshly segregated Deep South of the time, Griffin deliberately darkened his skin by downing pigmentation pills, soaking up UV rays, and applying a skin stain. The perpetual high-school-reading-list fixture *Black Like Me* (1961) is the literary fruit of his six-week peregrination, his personal crusade to rile America into opening its eyes.

For an artist whose emblematic figure might be the circle—the circular saw blades emblazoned with Koranic writings that featured in his installation *Interventions* (2010), the Duchamp-inspired rotoreliefs of *Technologia* (2010), the looping nature of his oft-used VHS tapes and jumper cables—linearity permeates Fatmi's works on Griffin. *As A Black Man* (2013-14) is a lineup of ten photographs that capture Griffin's white-to-black metamorphosis: the first headshot of Griffin with his natural pigmentation and the last showing his blackened skin are both archival; the others are darkening grayscale manipulations of the first. Before-and-after state change crops up in *Darkening Process* (2014), a single-channel video composed of color-filtered outtakes from the hokey 1964 film-of-the-book *Black Like Me*, interspersed with black-and-white shoe polishing sequences: tightly shot white hands become blacker as the polish rubs off, and the ebony paste is sometimes directly applied to the skin.

Two nearby photos— *Crossing the Line 01* and *02* (both 2015)—insist yet again on a rather flat from/to transformation: the images of a man's feet hopping across a traffic line recall the heavy-handed moments in the film when Griffin first "accesses" life among the segregated, then crosses back to his existence as a white man. The show's remaining images featuring Griffin are all manipulated archival photos—juxtaposed, overexposed,

01

Inside the fire circle

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