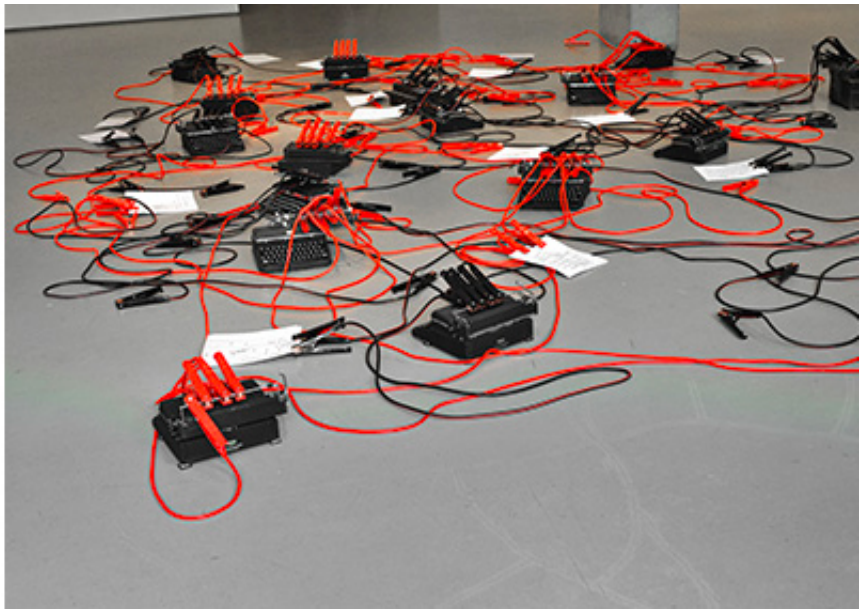
61. | Inside the fire circle 02





2017, 30 Typewriters, starter cables, papers, variable size
Exhibition view of Survival Signs, Jane Lombard, 2017, New York.
Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard, 2017, New York.
Ed. of 5 + 1 A.P.

This work was part of 13ème Biennale de Dakar - L'heure Rouge, Dakar, 2018.

This work was part of 1 Bienal Internacional de la Poesia Experimental - Posverso, Buenos Aires, 2024.

« 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

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

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 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.

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, 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.

"Inside the Fire Circle, a large, interactive floor installation consisting of jumper cables, obsolete typewriters, and blank sheets of paper, serves as a focal point of the exhibition and allows visitors to "jumpstart" their story or history.
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.”

Galleries Now, September 2017

exhibitions:

2024

1 Bienal Internacional de la Poesia Experimental de Argentina - POSVERSO - Group Show

2022

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

2021

Heavier than words - Conrads Gallery, Berlin - Solo show

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:

Alan Gilbert, mounir fatmi: Survival Signs, The Brooklyn Rail, October 5th, 2017

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

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

MOUNIR FATMI: Survival Signs

by Alan Gilbert - OCTOBER 5TH, 2017

JANE LOMBARD GALLERY | SEPTEMBER 7 – OCTOBER 21, 2017



Inside the Fire Circle, 2017. Typewriters, starter cables and paper, 55.12 × 118.11 × 23.62 inches. Edition 1 of 5. Courtesy of Jane Lombard Gallery.

In his current exhibition filled with formally precise artworks using a clear set of visual tropes—typewriters, sharp objects, and books—one work by Mounir Fatmi feels incongruous: a small, slightly blurry black-and-white photograph of a man sporting an Adidas satchel standing next to a glowing circle on the ground. Walking on the Light (2012–ongoing) is an image of Fatmi's controversial projection of light and rotating text from the Koran that was included at the Le Printemps de septembre contemporary art festival in Toulouse, France, in 2012. After it was installed with the image on the ground, people began walking on the projection, which created a controversy within the local Muslim community unhappy with the idea of sacred verses being trod upon. Fatmi eventually agreed to remove the work, although it has since been shown elsewhere.

Fatmi's art frequently concerns itself with networks and cross-cultural interactions, while highlighting the potential for violence embedded within them, as well as their fragility. Sometimes these interactions occur within cultures as well, as when Fatmi talks about his complicated relationship with Morocco, where he was born. Fatmi's Survival Signs exhibition at Jane Lombard Gallery continues this examination. Six black-and-white photographs feature a slender piece of metal that curves to a point. In most of the photos, a man's hand grasps the object in a way that might make it a weapon, a tool, or a stylus. In fact, each photograph bears the title Alif (2015–ongoing), the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, which is always written unattached to any subsequent letters. In Fatmi's series of photographs, the letter serves a variety of purposes, as religion and language itself always do. By isolating the letter, Fatmi shows how it can be used to disrupt communication as much as facilitate it.

A more substantial breakdown in transmission is signaled in the five-minute video History is Not Mine (2013), in which a man taps at typewriter keys with two small hammers before returning the machine's carriage to type again over the same line. The result is an illegibility of expression to itself and to others. Otherwise shot in black and white, the red strip in the typewriter ribbon signals an emergency, while the black half has small holes in it from the force of the striking. The indecipherability of the anonymous typist's message leaves his anger, or maybe it's his desperate hope, undeciphered. Fatmi's more recent work embeds this desire for connection and exchange, while also manifesting the challenges to it. Roots 03 (2015–16) is three framed pieces consisting of elaborate, twisting rows of narrow, white cables—the interactions are supple, flexible, complex. Next to it is a contrastingly radiant yet spiky iron sculpture—Défense 01 (2016)—that makes the concrete bench on which it is situated a less inviting place to linger.

Despite being mostly filled with severings and ruptures, whether linguistic or physical, at the heart of Survival Signs is an installation of more than a dozen black typewriters and white sheets of paper joined with jumper cables. Visitors to the installation are encouraged to write messages indicating what they are doing to help make the world a better place. Some of the notes are platitudes, some are silly, some more somber, while others place their faith in art. The metaphoric charge of Inside the Fire Circle (2107) is obvious, and its messages are meant to travel far, despite the analogue materials. Or maybe at the exhibition's conclusion, the notes will simply be destroyed. Or maybe they'll be sent to Fatmi, who in an open letter accompanying the exhibition's press release (and also excerpted as a wall text at the gallery's entrance) says he is not traveling to the United States for his own show after a previous traumatic experience with a U.S. customs agent in which he was interrogated for hours and forced to swear on a Bible. Whatever their fate, these messages are "survival signs" in a world cracked apart.

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.

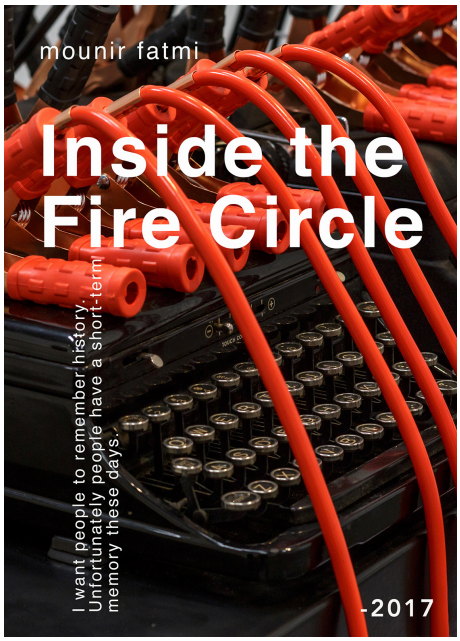
The video, "History is not mine," 2013, is a piece made partially in response to censorship. The black and white video depicts a man whose face remains concealed as he strikes a typewriter with two hammers. The only color comes from the typewriter's ribbon, a brilliant red, the color of blood; a collision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



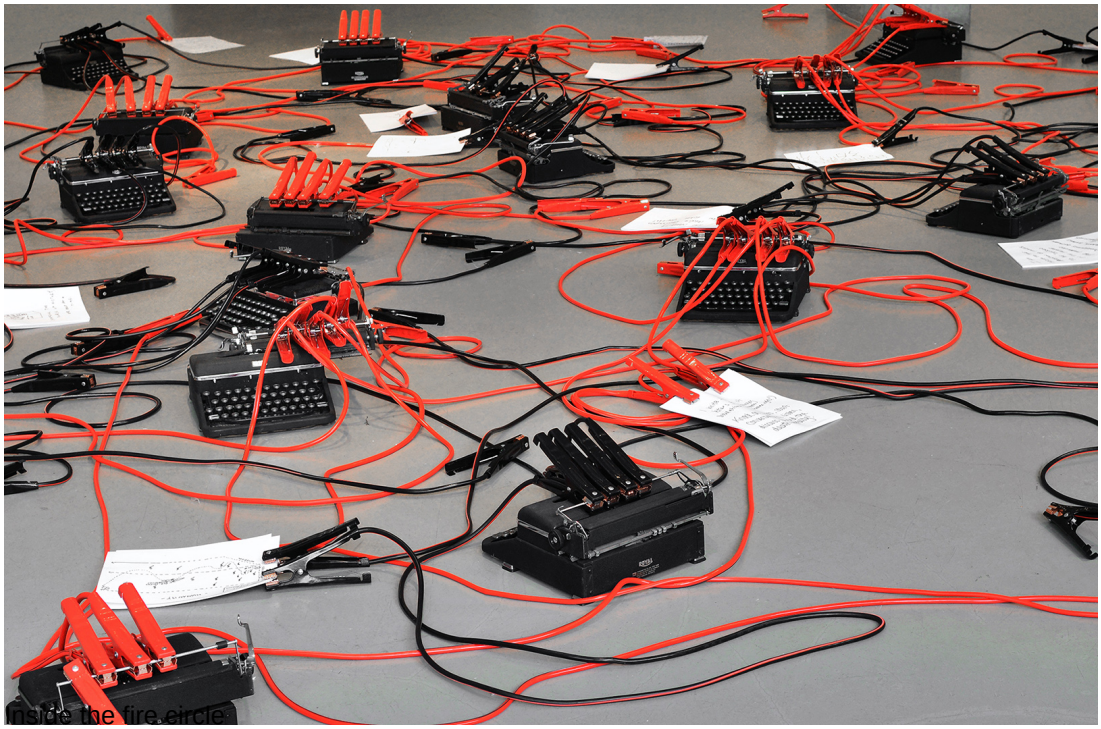
Mounir Fatmi. Courtesy of Jane Lombard Gallery



Inside the fire circle

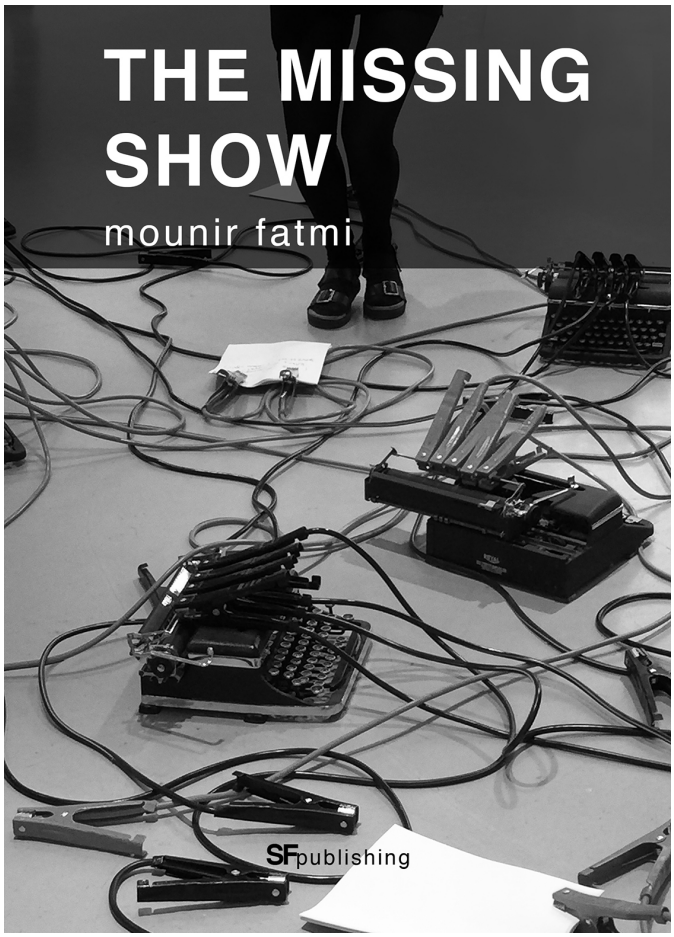
By using such objects, Fatmi raises the question of whether when something is forgotten, does it mean it never existed? Why do we often fail to learn the lessons of history? If an incident falls out of the reaches of archive or memory, it can happen again, and we risk making the same mistakes.

Anna Seaman, The National, April 2017



Inside the fire circle

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.





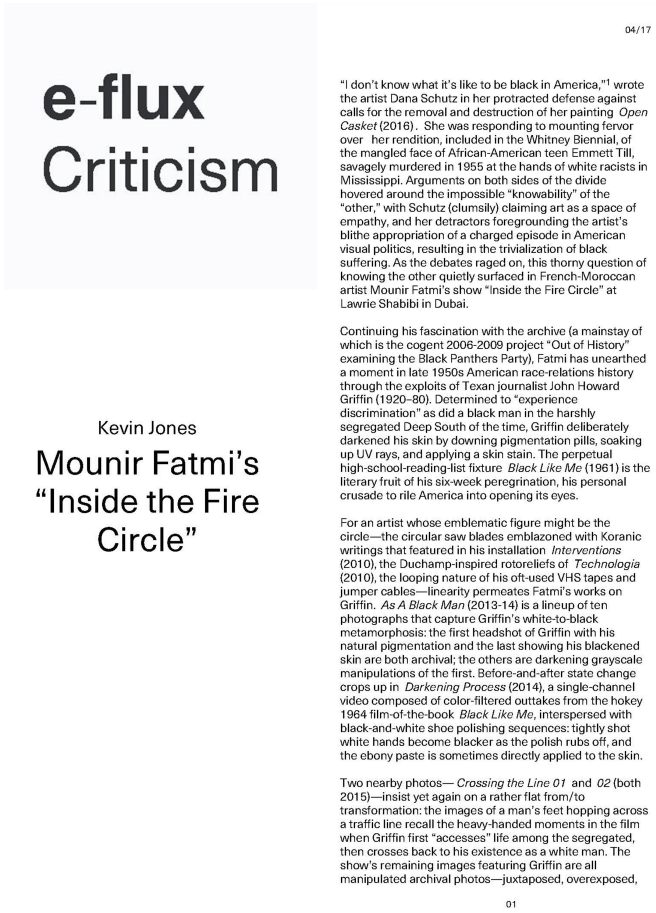
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e-flux
Criticism

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

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.