

19. Suspect Language



Suspect Language, mounir fatmi, SF Publishing, 2020

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Suspect Language is an exhibition that gathers a body of recent works by mounir fatmi.

From the entrance, the audience is confronted to the movie projection Sleep Al Naim.

In this video, a virtual image modeled in 3D of the famous English writer of Indian origin, Salman Rushdie is asleep.

Because of his most well known novel the Satanic Verses, censored in all the Arab countries, Salman Rushdie was victim of a fatwa enounced by the Iranian President Khomeini.

Inspired by Andy Warhol's experimental movie Sleep, the artist chooses the English writer as his main character, to make him sleep, to put him in this state between life and death. This is this in-between state that the artist expresses in this exhibition titled Suspect Language. He takes the censorship as point of departure of a creation, raising a doubt on the Quran's suraths in the piece In the absence of evidence to the contrary and writing his manifesto on jumping poles like in Obstacles, Coma, Warning.

Mounir Fatmi questions the text and its visual own poetry highlighting a paradox between its beauty and its violence, its meaning and its shape. Using the coaxial antenna cable in the pieces Kissing Circles, he interprets the solution to the

Descartes Theorem, being inspired by the poem of Frederick Soddy. How we can come from a mathematics problem to a language, like a poem.

There is another tribute in this exhibition, to the artist Brion Gysin, who lived in Morocco and a key person of the beat generation, and has been widely inspired by the Arabic calligraphy in his whole work. The piece Calligraphy of Fire, shows once again the beauty of calligraphy associating the shape to the shape of fire. It relates to a text that burns, that could be censored, it also could refer to a symbolic sense of purification.

The serie of photographs The Game, is an excerpt from the movie L'Enfant Sauvage by Truffaut. It shows the learning to a wild child the language by the game and the food. Not only it is this a reference to early anthropological ideas about otherness and the way the "savage" mind understands words and graphic representations, it is also a metaphor for France's interest in the "other" during the Imperial era. The doctor's incessant note-taking represents attempts to control and the implicit violence suggests the violence of imposed authorities. Again language plays a crucial role in trying to unify doctor and subject, or colonisers and colonised.

To finish the exhibition, the viewer faces the video Modern Times, here circular calligraphies are suspended, reminiscent of a system of cogs or a gear mechanism. The title of the piece Modern Times is inspired by Charlie Chaplin's celebrated 1936 film, in which Chaplin plays a lowly worker on a factory production line. The modernity of the factory's machines are visually characterised by a series of whirring cogs. The curves and arabesques of the calligraphy eclipse the meaning of the words, as if the message were disappearing into the engine of the machine. The words are reanimated in a purely visual way as circular abstract forms, reflecting the circular motion of the animation.

Goodman Gallery, September 2012

"By introducing thought-provoking statements to these images, mounir fatmi brings the original story to bear on contemporary society, bringing into focus the thin line between brutality and civilisation."

Caroline Rossiter