

## 3. | Obliteration memorizing



Paintings and photos started in 1996, acrylic on paper, photographs and videos. Exhibition view from Paris-Casa, suites marocaines, Couvent des Cordeliers, 1999, Paris. Courtesy of the artist.

Le projet pictural « Effacement mémorisation » convie les spectateurs à observer, à se saisir des instruments du peintre et à poser devant l'objectif d'un appareil photographique. L'artiste a rassemblé plusieurs peintures appartenant à sa production antérieure, œuvres proches de l'abstraction et de la figuration libre, qui ont bénéficié de la reconnaissance du milieu de la critique d'art. Des spectateurs anonymes sont placés face aux œuvres, convoqués d'abord en tant que témoins de leurs existences, puis comme acteurs aidant l'artiste à recouvrir les toiles vues de plusieurs couches de peinture blanche, et finalement comme modèles photographiques dont les portraits sont associés aux peintures recouvertes et signées « Peint, vu, effacé ».

« Effacement mémorisation » se propose comme une performance associant l'artiste et son public. Elle expérimente le rapport du spectateur à l'œuvre d'art en sollicitant sa participation à la création en cours. La performance procède ainsi par l'inversion des rapports attendus et insiste sur le rôle du spectateur dans l'élaboration de l'œuvre et de ses significations. La représentation photographique de l'observateur définit le type de relation entre le public et l'univers artistique de Mounir Fatmi, à savoir un lien interpersonnel et intime. Elle attribue au spectateur le rôle du témoin : non pas sujet passif recevant religieusement un sens pré établi, mais acteur à part entière, producteur des significations et agent de leur mise en circulation. Le projet « Effacement mémorisation », à rapprocher des peintures intitulées « Sans témoin » et « Coma », réalisées entre 1995 et 2003, s'origine de l'expérience de la reconnaissance critique et de la notoriété et du constat d'un manque d'intérêt généralisé pour les œuvres et les artistes. Ce dévoiement de l'attention est dénoncé dès 1993 par l'artiste avec la

The pictorial project “Obliteration Memorizing” invites the viewer to observe, to grab the painter’s instruments and pose in front of a camera. The artist gathered several paintings from his previous production, pieces that are close to abstraction and free figurativeness and that received the acknowledgment of the milieu of art critics. Anonymous viewers are placed in front of the paintings and initially asked to be the witnesses of their existence; then they are asked to help the artist cover them up with several layers of white paint, and finally to pose as photographic models whose portraits are associated with the covered-up paintings, along with the signature “painted, seen, erased”.

“Obliteration Memorizing” consists in a performance associating the artist and his public. It experiments the relation between the viewers and the work of art by requiring their participation in the ongoing creative process. Thus, the performance inverts the expected roles and highlights the function of the viewer in the elaboration of the work of art and of its significations. The photographic representation of the viewer defines the type of relation between the public and Mounir Fatmi’s artistic universe, namely a personal and intimate connection. It gives the viewer a role as a witness: not a passive subject ceremoniously accepting a pre-established meaning, but an actor in its own right, producing significations and orchestrating their circulation. The “Obliteration Memorizing” project, which is connected to the paintings “No Witness” and “Coma” created between 1995 and 2003, is rooted in the experience of acknowledgment by the critics, notoriety and the observation of a general lack of interest for works of art and artists. This diversion of interest was denounced by the artist as early as 1993 with the seemingly provocative and ironic announcement of his

proclamation apparemment provocante et teintée d'ironie de sa mort symbolique, suivie, à partir de 1996, des premiers projets de peintures effacées.

Cette performance s'intéresse particulièrement au reliquat, à ce qui reste de l'œuvre une fois qu'elle a été vue par le public. L'opération d'effacement a pour effet d'annuler le statut initial de l'objet en lui conférant un nouvel état : celui d'une œuvre d'art conceptuelle qui replace la question des relations au centre des préoccupations. Le procédé s'inscrit dans une attitude de remise en question permanente et une recherche constante d'horizons artistiques nouveaux, avec l'exposition d'éventuelles contradictions internes, sur les plans artistique, intellectuel ou humain. Le reliquat se présente ainsi comme un objet protéiforme, en devenir, destiné à subir d'autres transformations, d'autres métamorphoses, à être sans cesse remis en circulation. Il appartient à une œuvre jamais achevée et destinée à se renouveler par son appropriation par les spectateurs. Il permet également d'appréhender les limites du dispositif de monstration et d'exposition des œuvres d'art en général : figements des significations, ou encore instauration d'un rapport frontal et peu productif entre spectateur passif et artiste actif.

La série de peinture « Effacement mémorisation » tente de déjouer les pièges de l'exposition et de dépasser ses défauts et insuffisances. La performance fait appel au témoin oculaire, à la mémoire individuelle, mobile et susceptible de se transmettre. Elle ressuscite dans l'esprit du spectateur, assure sa vitalité et sa circulation dans les réseaux de communication, à travers les espaces et les époques. Elle donne à observer l'élaboration de divers statuts : témoin, acteur ou encore sujet représenté, dont la succession est susceptible d'évoquer la théorie de la « négation de la négation » formulée par Hegel et illustrée par l'exemple du grain de blé et de ses cycles physiques et vitaux, devenant épi après avoir été bourgeon. Chaque nouveau cycle s'affirme comme la négation du précédent afin que sa fonction s'accomplisse jusqu'au cycle qui lui succède, et qui comporte dès le départ les préludes de son annihilation, et ainsi de suite...

Studio Fatmi, Juillet 2018.

symbolic death, followed, from 1996 on, by his first erased painting projects.

This performance focuses particularly on the remainder, on what remains of the work of art once it has been seen by the public. The erasing operation has the effect of canceling the object's initial status by giving it a new state of being: that of a conceptual work of art that places the question of relations back in the center of preoccupations. This process is part of an attitude of constant questioning and searching for new artistic horizons, with the possible exposition of internal contradictions on the artistic, intellectual and human levels. Thus, the remainder is a protean object in mutation, destined to go through other transformations and metamorphoses and to be constantly put back into circulation. It belongs to a work that is never completed and destined to be renewed through its appropriation by the viewer. It also enables one to apprehend the limitations of the fact of exhibiting works of art in general: significations get rigidified and a frontal and an unproductive relationship is created between passive viewer and active artist.

The series of paintings "Obliteration Memorizing" attempts to avoid the pitfalls of the exhibit and to go beyond its flaws and shortfalls. The performance calls upon eyewitnesses and the individual memory, which is mobile and can be transmitted. It is resurrected in the mind of the viewer, ensures its own vitality and its circulation via communication networks and through space and time. It enables the observation of the elaboration of different statuses: witness, actor and represented subject, in a succession that is reminiscent of the theory of the "negation of negation" as formulated by Hegel and illustrated by the example of the grain of wheat, with its physical and vital cycles, becoming an ear after having been a bud. Each new cycle asserts itself as the negation of the previous one so that its function can be accomplished until the next cycle, containing from its inception the prelude of its own annihilation, and so forth...

Studio Fatmi, July 2018.

" The crossing-out of certain words here echoes earlier works in which fatmi proceeds to make memorisation erasures that put the emphasis on the opposing and even irreconcilable nature of word and image.

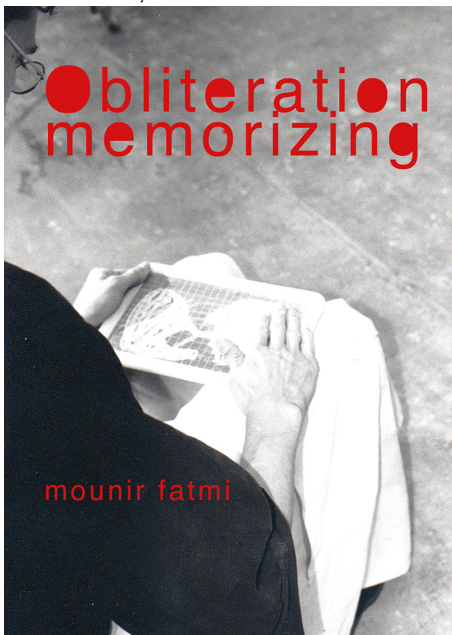
Erasure, silence and destruction  
are the result of the many ways  
in which these two major  
components are brought into  
tension in his work. "

Régis Durand, 2014

**exhibitions:**

1999

Paris-Casa, suites marocaines - Couvent des Cordeliers - Expo collective



**Obliteration memorizing**

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