7. | Wall Painting - Guilty





2007, black acrylic painting, in situ.
Exhibition view from Art, ecology and the politics of change, 8ème biennale de Sharjah, 2007, Dubaï.
Courtesy of the artist and Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai.

This work was part of 8th Sharjah Biennial, 2007, UAE.

Peinture murale en noir et blanc, « Guilty » fait apparaître dans une graphie fine et élégante le mot « coupable », écrit en très grandes lettres et nettement visible. Sous ce mot est placée une citation, en caractères beaucoup plus petits et irréguliers : « Si tu es un ennemi, ils te tueront pour de l'argent. Si tu es un ami, ils te tueront gratuitement ».

L'œuvre traite des origines sociales de la violence et interroge notre rapport aux images et au langage à partir de l'exploration de la notion de culpabilité, dont le rôle est central pour l'organisation de nos sociétés. « Guilty » fait notamment écho aux bas-reliefs de capelle d'antenne « Coupable » et « Présumé innocent » (2007-2010), qui mettent en scène les figures de Sadam Hussein et Jésus afin d'explorer le rôle des médias et le pouvoir des images. La citation utilisée est quant à elle une phrase souvent entendue par l'artiste dans le quartier populaire de son enfance. On la retrouve employée avec l'installation « Ami et ennemi » (2003), qui tente d'évoquer une histoire individuelle et universelle de la violence, à la fois verbale et physique.

La peinture murale procède à une mise en évidence des mécanismes élémentaires de notre rapport au monde au moyen d'un système d'oppositions : noir et blanc, ami et ennemi, coupable et innocent, ou encore payant et gratuit. Son esthétique post-minimaliste se met au service d'une forme de litote, façon d'en dire le moins pour en tirer un

A black & white mural painting, “Guilty” shows that word elegantly written in very large and clearly visible letters. Under it, a quote in much smaller and irregular characters: “If you’re an enemy, they will kill you for money. If you’re a friend, they will kill you for free.”

The work is about the social origins of violence and questions our relation to images and language based on the exploration of the notion of guilt, which holds a pivotal role in the organization of our societies. Among other things, “Guilty” echoes the bas-reliefs “Guilty” and “Presumed Innocent” (2007-2010), which exhibit the figures of Saddam Hussein and Jesus in order to explore the role of the media and the power of images. As for the quote, it is a sentence the artist would often hear in his childhood neighborhood. It was used in the installation “Friend and Enemy” (2003), which attempts to evoke an individual and universal history of violence, both verbal and physical.

The mural highlights the elementary mechanisms of our relation to the world using a system based on oppositions: black and white, friend an enemy, guilty and innocent, as well as free and paid for. Its post-minimalistic esthetic serves a form of litotes, a way of saying as little as possible in order to generate maximum expressiveness. The word represented, “Guilty”, is shown in stylized writing that exercises a graphic seduction on the viewer and contrasts with the violence and

maximum d'expressivité. Le mot représenté, « Guilty », se donne à voir dans une graphie stylisée qui exerce une séduction graphique sur son spectateur et qui contraste avec une forme de violence et d'agressivité que recèle le message qui se trouve en-dessous. La citation semble proposer différents choix entre des relations humaines mais les comportements qui en découlent n'offrent pas d'alternative et aboutissent à l'irruption de la violence. Phrase absurde et agressive, elle se présente comme une impasse logique aux conséquences systématiquement tragiques. Un tel contraste entre une séduction exercée par la beauté formelle d'un système de significations et le danger que celui-ci recèle de manière sous-jacente, relève dans l'œuvre de mounir fatmi du « piège esthétique ». Discours religieux ou publicitaire sont ainsi envisagés sous cet angle à travers nombre de ses œuvres. La stratégie du « piège esthétique » vient délivrer une leçon sur la juste distance à tenir face aux images, aux mots, au langage ou aux discours sous toutes les formes.

L'œuvre relie le traitement contemporain de la culpabilité au phénomène de médiatisation. De nos jours, la constitution de la culpabilité d'un individu ou d'un groupe relève parfois de l'opération de communication et les exemples abondent. « Guilty » pourrait faire écho à l'affaire Dreyfus et au « J'accuse » de Zola, ou au procès de la sorcière mis en scène dans le film Sacré Graal des Monty Python, où le public exerce sa raison et établit des catégories (bien et mal, innocent ou coupable) de manière aberrante, attendant avant tout que lui soit donnée l'occasion de déchaîner sa violence.

La peinture murale « Guilty » met en évidence l'obsession des sociétés contemporaines pour l'image, entendue à la fois comme icône graphique et comme élément du discours. Cette dernière se présente comme un nuage rhétorique étincelant qui en fait oublier son propos essentiel. « Culpabilité » : un même mot sert finalement à désigner une notion judiciaire s'appuyant sur l'exercice de la raison et une émotion. Phénomène ambivalent, voire ambigu, la culpabilité est le révélateur d'une société et de son fonctionnement, mêlant étroitement rationnel et irrationnel.

Studio Fatmi, Aout 2018.

aggressiveness conveyed in the message below. The quote seems to offer various choices when it comes to human relations but the behaviors that result from them don't offer any alternative and end up with the irruption of violence. An absurd and aggressive sentence, it appears to be a logical cul-de-sac with systematically tragic consequences. Such a contrast between the seduction emanating from the formal beauty of a system of significations and the underlying danger it contains constitutes in Mounir fatmi's work an "esthetic trap". Religious and advertising discourses are considered in this way in many of his works. The strategy of the "esthetic trap" delivers a lesson on the right distance to maintain from images, words, language or discourses of any type.

The work links the contemporary treatment of guilt with the phenomenon of media exposure. Today, revealing the culpability of an individual or a group of people is sometimes akin to a communication stunt, and there are numerous examples of this. "Guilty" could resonate with the Dreyfus Affair and Emile Zola's famous "J'accuse" manifesto, or with the witch trial in the movie "Monty Python and the Holy Grail", where the audience uses reasoning and establishes categories (right and wrong, innocent and guilty) in an absurd way, as it simply waits for an occasion to unleash its violence.

The "Guilty" mural highlights the obsession of contemporary societies for images, both as graphic icons and as elements of a discourse. Images are seen as a sparkling rhetorical cloud that lead one to forget its fundamental objective. "Guilt": one word that ultimately designates both a judiciary notion based on the exercise of reason, and an emotion. An ambivalent, if not ambiguous phenomenon, guilt is the indicator of a society and its functioning that closely combines the rational and irrational.

Studio Fatmi, August 2018.

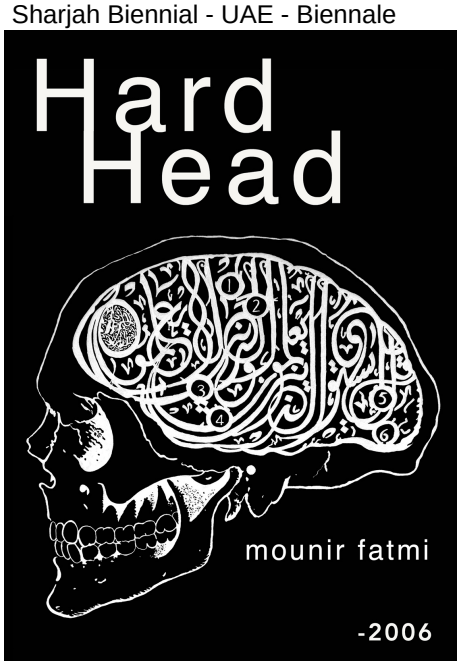
" The word represented, "Guilty", is shown in stylized writing that exercises a graphic seduction on the viewer and contrasts with the violence and aggressiveness conveyed in the message below. "

Studio Fatmi, August 2018

exhibitions:

2007

Sharjah Biennial - UAE - Biennale



Hard Head, SF Publishing, 2021

With this minimalist, radical mural painting, mounir fatmi skins certain representations that form our occidental or oriental/profane or religious identities.

Evelyne Toussaint's, September 2006

Sleep, Perchance to Dream

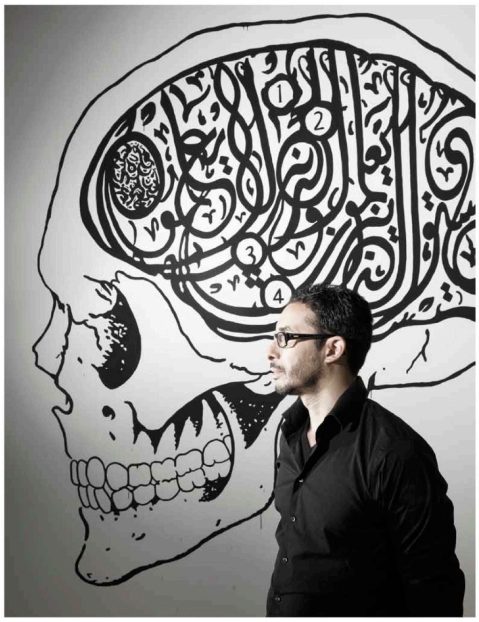
Mounir Fatmi dares to go against the tide

The works of Mounir Fatmi are pregnant with meaning. This is an artist who incorporates the complexities of the world – particularly its cultural and political characteristics – into his life and into each of the pieces he produces. Believing aesthetics to essentially be a trap, he is eager to imbue his artworks with guts, ingredients evoking the real, less-than-beautiful issues of our time. Fatmi's cultural background and international lifestyle bestow on him an openness and a balanced vision that enable him to observe controversies and injustices with clarity and fairness of mind. And it is this that he chooses to make manifest.

ANNA SANSOM

Mounir Fatmi is sitting in a noisy place called Café de Libre Échange in northern Paris. The café's name recalls his performance project, Libre-échange (Free trade), made in 1999, the year he moved to Paris from his native Tangier in Morocco, to participate in an artist's residency. Fatmi offered a white badge to passers-by, onto which he had written his name, thereby circulating his work in the public domain through a simple, innocent gesture. Text, language, and the exchange of ideas still lie at the heart of Mounir Fatmi's work, though now on a more sophisticated and controversial level. Last October, two of his pieces were censored – one from the Printemps de Septembre festival in Toulouse in the south of France, another from the Institut du Monde Arabe (Arab World Institute) in Paris.

Dressed in a dark suit, Fatmi is just back from the opening of History Is Not Mine, his exhibition at Paradise Row in London, where Sleep Al Naim, the video of Salman Rushdie slumbering, is being premiered. This is the same piece that was pulled out of an exhibition on 25 years of Arab creativity at the Institut du Monde Arabe just days before the show's inauguration. According to www.france24.com, the French institution claimed that the piece lacked pertinence. Fatmi says it was deemed too sensitive on religious grounds. The six-hour black-and-white video installation appropriates the form of Andy Warhol's film Sleep. Given that a fatwa was issued by Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran in 1989, in outrage over Rushdie's novel, The Satanic Verses, the film of Rushdie sleeping has political poignancy. "The idea was to put the public in a position of culpability", says the artist, who divides his time between Paris, Tangier, and Los Angeles. "After one minute of watching somebody sleeping, you start to feel voyeuristic and guilty. Salman Rushdie, and his right to freedom of expression, was not supported enough in the West and in the Arab countries." Fatmi made the video using 3D digital animation, after his request to meet Rushdie in person was declined by the author's



HARD HEAD, 2007
Wall painting
Courtesy of the artist and Paradise Row, London
Photo: Fouad Maazouz



Hard Head

Painted on the wall, a black calligramme. The interlaced curves and countercurves encircle the numbers from 1 to 6 forming the brain inside a skull. The profile is drawn with black paint on a white background.



Wall Painting - Hard Head

Just like in ancient phrenology, the Arabic ciphers in Hard Head, locked up in this strange brain/ writing, might depict zones of desire, fear, hope, hate or melancholy, the ones that control memory and creativity, or that activate faith or atheism, compassion or misanthrophy, the lust for life or the longing to die.

Wall Painting

There is no reason to believe that the artistic evolution is identical to the scientific one, because it would be easy to show that the parallel is little relevant. But what could really be a feature of artistic post-modernity is a certain capacity to observe truths as representations or as language games that steer a social, political and religious organisation.



Wall Painting - Technologia

The optical illusion is obtained here through the loss or the multiplication of the center of the composition. Its impressive effect suggests the idea of a frenetic production of images that violently impress themselves on the viewer’s retina. The work also exercises a visual seduction and its esthetic and geometry constantly appeal to the eye.