7. | Wall Painting - Dead or Alive





2007-2008, black acrylic painting, in situ.
Exhibition view from 1ere Biennale de Bruxelles, 2008, Brussels.
Courtesy of the artist.

This work was part of Biennale de Bruxelles - Fuck architects: chapter III, Brussels, 2008.

« Mort ou vif » est une peinture murale qui donne à contempler l'image agrandie d'un crâne à la pilosité remarquable. Cette surprenante vanité barbue est accompagnée d'une citation extraite du manifeste artistique de mounir fatmi "Si seulement les mots étaient libres sans aucune histoire". L'œuvre fait notamment écho à Tête dure, wall painting représentant un crâne orné de calligraphie arabe et religieuse, réalisé en 2005.

L'œuvre livre une réflexion sur le rapport de l'individu au discours religieux et à la langue en général. La citation tirée du manifeste renvoie aux conceptions linguistiques de l'artiste et à ses recherches sur le language. Les œuvres de mounir fatmi constatent que les mots et les signes sont chargés d'idéologie, et elles formulent le désir d'une langue rendue à sa liberté, à ses pouvoirs critiques et à son autonomie. Ce travail sur la langue et sa signification est mené à travers différents médias, photographies, vidéos, sculptures et installations, telles que « Sans histoire », « Les Chutes » ou « The Beautiful language » qui expriment une tension entre une langue chargée d'histoire et les tentatives pour élaborer un langage plastique capable à la fois d'en rendre compte et de s'en défaire. Elles élaborent des stratégies artistiques qui s'inspirent de notions linguistiques, de concepts philosophiques et d'œuvres d'art, tels que les travaux de Wittgenstein, ou le film « L'Enfant sauvage » de Truffaut.

« Dead or Alive » is a wall painting showing the blown-up image of a remarkably hairy skull. This surprising bearded vanity comes with a quote taken from mounir fatmi's artistic manifesto: « If only words were free, without any history ». Among other things, the piece echoes « Hard Head, wall painting », which presents a skull adorned with Arab religious calligraphy, created in 2005.

This work offers a reflection on the relation of individuals to religious discourse and to language in general. The quote from the manifesto refers to the artist's conceptions and his research on language. mounir fatmi's works of art highlight the fact that words and signs are loaded with ideology and formulate the wish for a language that would be free, with fully restored critical power and autonomy. This work on language and its meaning is carried out through various media: photographs, videos, sculptures and installations, such as « Without History », « The Falls » or « The Beautiful Language » that express the tension between a language charged with history and the attempts to elaborate a plastic language that would be capable of both translating this situation and breaking free from it. They elaborate artistic strategies inspired by linguistic notions, philosophical concepts and works of art, such as Wittgenstein's research and François Truffaut's film « The Wild Child ».

« Dead or Alive » is a polysemous piece of art. In the

« Mort ou vif » est une œuvre polysémique. Dans les imaginaires collectifs, cette expression appartient au vocabulaire du western et désigne un hors la loi. Le portrait monumental de ce personnage barbu est également susceptible de s'associer dans l'esprit de quelques spectateurs à l'image de Karl Marx, véritable icône moderne, dont le nombre de sympathisants est cependant en baisse, et la peinture pourrait alors évoquer la mort d'une idéologie. A moins que l'image ne soit plus facilement associée à celle de l'intégriste religieux, désigné alors comme le hors la loi des temps modernes ou comme l'acteur des nouvelles productions cinématographiques et médiatiques ? L'expression montre en tous cas une alternative, un choix à faire - voire un doute : s'agit-il d'une incertitude quant aux fonctions vitales du sujet exposé ? Son crâne osseux prouve qu'il est passé à trépas, mais ses dents d'un blanc éclatant et sa longue barbe semblent signaler un reste de vie. Cette contradiction interne à l'œuvre s'observe également dans les rapports entre la citation et l'image. La citation exprime le désir de signes débarrassés d'une charge sémantique encombrante - idéologique, sociale, historique, alors que l'image affiche des signes très connotés dans l'imaginaire du spectateur. Un crâne avec tout ce qu'il peut évoquer de lugubre et la barbe, associée à celle prescrite par la tradition religieuse.

La peinture murale « Mort ou vif » est une vanité dans un sens classique, c'est-à-dire une célébration de la vie à partir du rappel de notre mortalité. Elle constitue une exhortation à vivre pleinement avant l'échéance finale, accompagnée du constat de la vacuité de nos passions et de nos occupations humaines. L'œuvre invite à faire le choix d'un rapport libre et poétique au monde afin d'assurer nos forces vitales.

Studio Fatmi, Février 2018.

collective imagination, the expression belongs to the vocabulary of the Far West and designates an outlaw. The monumental portrait of this bearded character is also likely to be associated in certain viewer's mind to the image of Karl Marx, a veritable modern icon, though the number of his supporters tends to diminish, in which case the painting could be evocative of the death of an ideology. Unless the image is more easily associated to that of the religious fundamentalist, designated as the outlaw of our times or as the main character in today's motion picture and media productions? Whatever the case, the expression refers to an alternative, a choice to be made – or perhaps a doubt: does it express an uncertainty as to the vital functions of the exhibited subject? His bony skull proves he no longer lives, but his bright white teeth and his long beard seem to signal some form of remaining liveliness. This interior contradiction can also be seen in the connection between the quote and the image. The quote expresses a desire for signs free of any cumbersome semantic charge – whether ideological, social, historical – whereas the image precisely features signs that are strongly connoted in the viewer's imagination: a skull, with all the gloominess it conjures, and the beard, associated with the prescriptions of religious tradition.?

The wall painting « Dead or Alive » is a vanity in the classic sense: a celebration of life serving as a reminder of our mortality. It constitutes an exhortation to live fully before our final hour, together with a comment on the vacuity of our human passions and preoccupations. The piece is an invitation to choose a free and poetic relation to the word in order to secure our vital forces.

Studio Fatmi, January 2018.

" The wall painting « Dead or Alive » is a vanity in the classic sense: a celebration of life serving as a reminder of our mortality. "

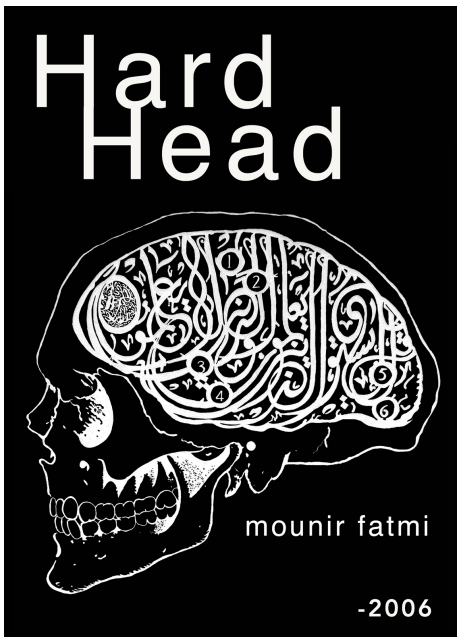
Studio Fatmi, January 2018

exhibitions:

2008

Connexion 02 - Galerie Delacroix - Solo show

Fuck architects: Chapter III - Biennale de Bruxelles - 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

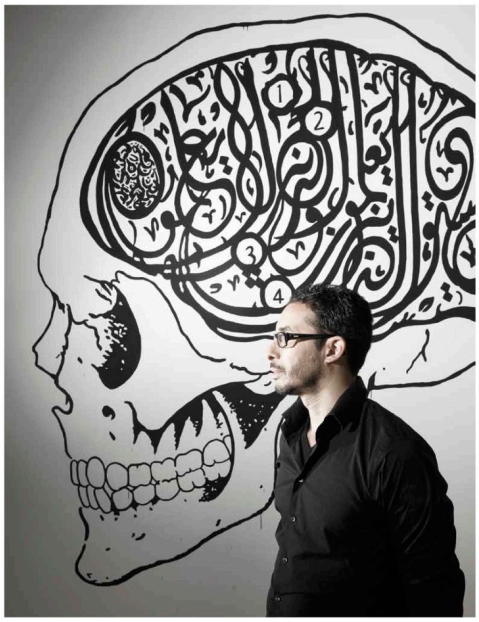
Mounir Fatmi dares to go against the tide

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



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.