7. | Wall Painting - The Fall of Saint Cosmo and Saint Damian





2011, black acrylic painting, in situ.
Exhibition view from The Angel's Black Leg,Conrads, 2011, Düsseldorf.
Courtesy of the artist.

« La Chute de Saint Cosme et Saint Damien » est une peinture murale qui fait apparaître les silhouettes noires sur le mur blanc de deux jeunes hommes vêtus de tuniques, dont l'habit simple semble se défaire en partie, glissant le long des épaules jusqu'aux poignets. Leurs mains sont jointes derrière le dos comme retenues par un lien et leurs jambes et leurs pieds nus sont repliés en arrière du corps. Leur visage au menton relevé est entouré d'une auréole. Il n'y a aucun décor autour d'eux, et leurs corps, disposés selon différents angles par rapport au sol, semblent être suspendus en l'air. En fait le personnage de gauche a l'air de chuter, tandis que l'autre semble prendre son envol, tel un super héros des temps modernes, la cape flottant au vent.

L'image utilisée est extraite d'une édition illustrée de la « Légende dorée de Voragine », qui relate une scène du martyr subi par Saint Come et Saint Damien : leur précipitation depuis le haut d'un rocher dans la mer et leur chute, juste avant qu'un ange ne les rattrape en plein vol pour les ramener à terre. Les personnages de Saint Come et Saint Damien sont les protagonistes de plusieurs œuvres de mounir fatmi, dont des projets de dessins et de vidéos intitulés « La Jambe noire de l'ange", qui abordent certains thèmes de prédilection de mounir fatmi et illustrent ses stratégies artistiques, à savoir les rencontres, et les interactions culturelles.

Saint Come et Saint Damien saints thaumaturges dans la tradition religieuse, sont des frères possiblement jumeaux, nés en Arabie, qui exerçaient la médecine gratuitement en Cilicie (Asie mineure). Ils étaient qualifiés d'anargyres car ils refusaient toute rétribution en échange de leurs soins. La plus célèbre de leur guérison miraculeuse est véhiculée par

« The Fall of Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian » is a wall painting showing the black silhouettes on a white wall of two young men wearing tunics, their simple clothes seeming to come off, sliding down their shoulders to their wrists. Their hands are held together behind their backs, as if they were bound with a string, and their legs and bare feet are folded behind them. Their faces, chins up, are circled with a halo. There is no landscape around them, and their bodies, arranged with varying angles, seem to be suspended in midair. In fact, the character on the left seems to be falling, whereas the other one seems to be flying away, like a modern day superhero, cape floating in the wind.

The image used is taken from a limited edition of Voragine's « Golden Legend » recounting a scene of the martyr suffered by Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian: they were thrown from the top of a rock into the sea, but an angel caught them in their fall and brought them back to land. The characters of Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian are the protagonists in several of mounir fatmi's works, among which drawings and video projects entitled « The Angel's Black Leg » that address some of mounir fatmi's preferred themes and illustrate his artistic strategies: encounters and cultural interactions.

Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian, healing saints in religious tradition, are brothers, possibly twins, who were born in Arabia and practiced medicine for free in Cilicia, in Asia Minor. They were called « anargyroi » because they refused to be paid for their treatments. The most famous of their miraculous healings is recounted in Voragine's « Golden Legend »: the episode of the transplant of a leg taken from a dead Ethiopian man onto a deacon of the Saint Cosmas and

« La Légende dorée » de Voragine, avec l'épisode d'une greffe de jambe empruntée à un éthiopien défunt au profit d'un sacristain de l'église Saint Come et Saint Damien à Rome. Le patient guérit d'une gangrène gazeuse et se retrouva donc avec une jambe noire et une jambe blanche. La scène a été souvent reprise par la suite par l'iconographie religieuse et se retrouve notamment dans les peintures de Fra Angelico au 15e siècle, recomposées par mounir fatmi dans les œuvres « La Jambe noire de l'ange » et la série de photographie « La Lumière Aveuglante ».

Scène de bloc opératoire, « La Jambe noire de l'ange » fait un arrêt sur image sur un instant dramatique et sublime, celui de la greffe, de l'hybridation culturelle. Avec « La Chute de Saint Cosme et Saint Damien », il est question également d'un instant sublime, mêlé de suspens et d'incertitude, précédant la chute des corps ou leur envol. Dans le domaine religieux, le terme chute serait en fait plus conventionnellement associé à celui d'ange - en référence aux anges déchus. Il suggère d'envisager l'hybridation culturelle comme à une forme de révolte contre l'autorité. Il invite à lire l'œuvre comme une représentation décalée, dramatisée et teintée d'ironie douce. « La Chute » détourne une imagerie classique, évoque l'inscription de l'artiste dans la société et son rapport particulier au monde, et s'amuse ou s'étonne de leur possible comparaison avec des saints ambivalents, martyrs et rebelles.

Studio Fatmi, Décembre 2016.

Saint Damian in Rome. The patient was cured from gas gangrene and finds himself with one black leg and one white one. The scene was subsequently often used in religious iconography and can be found in Fra Angelico's paintings in the 15th century, recomposed by mounir fatmi in his works « The Angel's Black Leg » and the series of photographs « The Blinding Light ».

A scene set in an operating room, « The Angel's Black Leg » is a snapshot of a dramatic and sublime instant, that of the transplant, of cultural hybridization. « The Fall of Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian » is also about a sublime instant, rife with suspense and uncertainty, right before the fall or the flight. In the religious domain, the term « fall » is actually more conventionally associated with the angel – in reference to fallen angels. It suggests to see cultural hybridization as a form of rebellion against authority. In invites us to read the work as a twisted and dramatized representation, tinged with soft irony. « The Fall » twists a classic image, evokes the place of the artist in society and his particular relation to the world, and finds amusing or surprising their potential comparison with ambivalent, martyred and rebellious saints.

Studio Fatmi, December 2016.

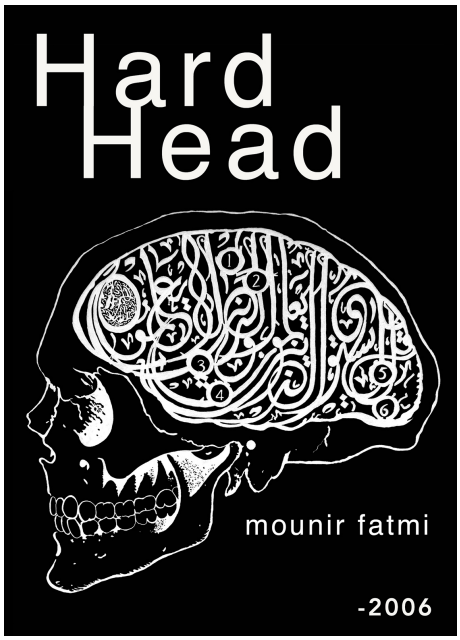
" « The Fall of Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian » is also about a sublime instant, rife with suspense and uncertainty, right before the fall or the flight. "

Studio Fatmi, December 2016

exhibitions:

2011

The Angel's Black Leg - Galerie Conrads - Solo show



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

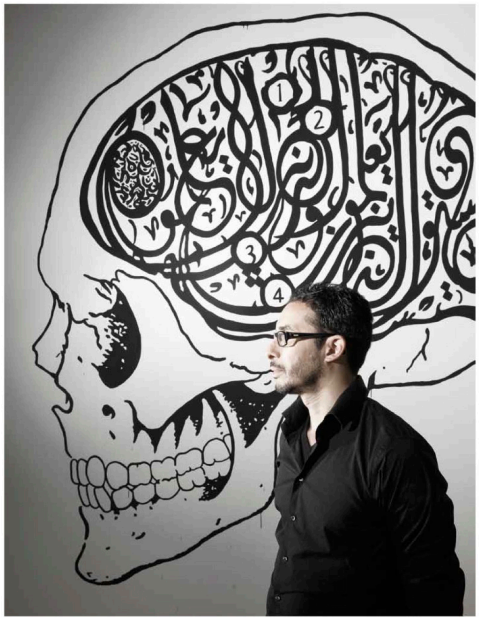
Mounir Fatmi dares to go against the tide

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 Maarouf



ard 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.