

## 7. | Wall Painting - The Evolution



2007, black and red acrylic painting, in situ.  
Exhibition view from Bad connexion, Saw Gallery, 2005, Ottawa.  
Courtesy of the artist.

Peinture murale en noir et blanc, « L'Évolution » livre à l'observation du public les silhouettes familières de différentes espèces animales - chien, cheval, singe, oiseau parmi lesquelles on trouve également une forme humaine. Une tache rouge se distingue nettement au niveau des boîtes crâniennes des être vivants représentés, identifiant leurs cerveaux.

L'œuvre interroge le concept d'évolution, qui propose une explication de la diversité des formes à partir de l'observation des caractéristiques anatomiques des espèces vivantes sur Terre et formule l'idée d'une transformation dans le temps. La peinture « L'Évolution » revient sur la naissance de cette théorie scientifique des structures du vivant formulée par les zoologistes du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle et développée par Charles Darwin au siècle suivant, et questionne sa place dans notre conception du monde. Quelles sont les formes du vivant sur Terre ? Qu'est ce qui les unit et qu'est ce qui les sépare ? Comment le spectateur contemporain perçoit-il les différences entre les espèces ? Entre l'homme et les autres animaux ? Quelles sont les conséquences de la théorie sur notre rapport au monde et à l'autre ?

Questionnement sur les origines du vivant, « L'Évolution » appelle le spectateur à se mettre dans la peau du zoologiste et à observer avec attention. Il est alors permis de relier les formes semblables entre elles, de relever les différences et les similitudes anatomiques. A moins que le jeu ne consiste à chercher l'intrus, et à noter la présence peut-être incongrue d'un bipède parmi les quadrupèdes. L'œuvre invite également à faire la différence entre une théorie scientifique et une hypothèse - comme l'hypothèse d'un dieu créateur par exemple. Elle propose un dispositif soumis à des

A black & white mural painting, "The Evolution" presents the viewer with the familiar silhouettes of various animal species – dog, horse, monkey, bird – among which a human form can also be seen. A red spot is clearly visible on the skulls of the creatures represented, identifying their brains.

The work questions the concept of evolution, which offers an explanation for the diversity of shapes based on the observation of the anatomical characteristics of the species living on Earth and formulates the idea of a transformation through time. The painting "The Evolution" goes back to the birth of this scientific theory about the structures of living creatures formulated by 18th century zoologists and developed by Charles Darwin in the following century, and questions its place in our conception of the world. What are the various forms of living things on Earth? What unifies and distinguishes them? How does the contemporary viewer perceive the differences between species? Between humans and other animals? What are the consequences of that theory on our relation to the world and to others?

A questioning on the origins of life, "The Evolution" encourages the viewers to put themselves in the shoes of the zoologist and to observe carefully. One can then connect similar shapes, notice anatomical differences and similarities. Unless the game consists in finding the odd one out and noticing the perhaps incongruous presence of a biped among the quadrupeds. The work also invites us to distinguish scientific theory from hypothesis – such as the hypothesis of an all-creating god for example. It presents a construction that is subject to experimentations, reminding us that a theory must be supported by facts.

expérimentations qui rappelle qu'une théorie est étayée par des faits.

La méthode et les principes qui ont permis d'élaborer le concept révolutionnaire d'évolution des espèces vivantes sont ici réaffirmés par mounir fatmi. L'œuvre montre la nécessité de l'observation, de l'expérimentation et de la réflexion dans notre rapport au monde. Elle exprime le besoin d'un retour à Darwin face aux « créationnistes » contemporains qui confondent théorie scientifique et hypothèse. L'idée religieuse d'un dieu créateur, de la supériorité de l'homme sur les animaux, réduits à leur fonction utilitaire ou alimentaire, est parfois relayée par les institutions scolaires ou par les plus hautes sphères du pouvoir : certains secrétaires d'état du gouvernement des Etats-Unis revendiquent encore publiquement en 2018 leurs positions créationnistes.

La peinture murale « L'Evolution » invite à une remise en question des dogmes religieux et d'une vision anthropocentrée et finaliste. Elle appelle à poursuivre la réflexion initiée par les scientifiques, et à dépasser éventuellement les théories darwinistes. L'œuvre remet également en question l'idée de progrès, teintée d'idéologie et incertaine, et celle de supériorité d'une espèce sur l'autre. Les caractéristiques anatomiques sont simplement différentes et parfois difficilement comparables. Le concept d'évolution conteste l'idée d'une séparation, d'une rupture définitive entre l'espèce humaine et le reste du vivant et affirme qu'entre l'homme et l'animal, la différence n'est que graduelle et parfois minimale.

Les espèces vivantes possèdent en effet un organe en commun : le cerveau, dont la présence est soulignée à l'aide la couleur rouge. En ce qui concerne cet organe qui dans l'opinion commune est censé assurer la supériorité incontestable de l'humain sur toutes les autres espèces, on n'observe pas de différence flagrante. Toujours cette même forme du cerveau plus ou moins grande, occupant l'espace du crâne dans les corps représentés qui signale des capacités cognitives communes et une condition partagée. La peinture murale « L'Evolution » invite à un retour nécessaires aux théories de l'évolution et à leur dépassement. Elle rappelle la nécessité de l'observation et invite à réévaluer notre rapport à l'autre.

Studio Fatmi, Aout 2018.

The method and the principles that enabled the elaboration of the revolutionary concept of the evolution of species find themselves here re-affirmed by Mounir Fatmi. The work shows the necessity for observation, experimentation and reflection in our relation to the world. It expresses the need to go back to Darwin to counterbalance the influence of contemporary "creationists" who confuse scientific theory and hypothesis. The religious idea of a creator god, of the superiority of Man over animal, reduced to its utilitarian and alimentary functions, is sometimes passed on by educational institutions and in the higher spheres of political power: certain Secretaries of State in the American government still publicly claim their creationist opinions in 2018.

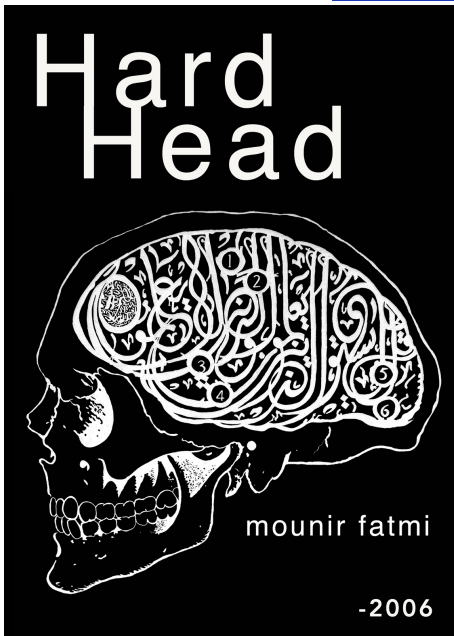
The mural "The Evolution" encourages the questioning of religious dogma and of an anthropocentric and definitive worldview. It urges us to pursue the reflection initiated by scientists and to perhaps go beyond Darwinian theories. The work also questions the idea of progress, uncertain and tinged with ideology, and the idea of the superiority of a species over another. Anatomical characteristics are simply different and sometimes difficult to compare. The concept of evolution contests the idea of a separation or of a definitive break between the human race and the rest of creation, and affirms that between Man and animal, the differences are only gradual and sometimes minimal.

Indeed, all animal species share a common organ: the brain, whose presence is highlighted here with the color red. Regarding that organ, which is commonly thought to ensure the unquestionable superiority of humans over all other species, there is no flagrant difference. Always the same shape, more or less large, occupying the space within the skull in the bodies represented, underlining common cognitive capacities and a shared condition. The mural painting "The Evolution" is a necessary invitation to go back to the theory of evolution, and to go beyond it. It reminds us of the necessity to observe and invites us to re-evaluate our relation to others.

Studio Fatmi, August 2018.

" A questioning on the origins of life, "The Evolution" encourages the viewers to put themselves in the shoes of the zoologist and to observe carefully. "

Studio Fatmi, August 2018



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 SANDOZ

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 Triumphe 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 pre-

miered. 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](http://www.france24.com), the French minister 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 authors.



HARD HEAD, 2007  
ink on paper  
Courtesy of the artist and Paradise Row, London  
Photo: Fouad Mezziane



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.