

HODA TAWAKOL***WHEN THE DATES TURN RED***

12th November 2018 – 3rd January 2019

Opening: Monday, 12 November from 6.00 to 9.00 pm



Jungle #1, 2018, Fabric, wadding, thread, metal and wood, 220 x 350 x 25 cm

For her first exhibition at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde entitled *When the Dates Turn Red*, Franco-Egyptian artist Hoda Tawakol researched traditional ritual practices and imagery associated with those pivotal, transitional and transformative moments in a woman's 'cycle of life'. Born in London, Tawakol's French, German and Egyptian upbringing is integral to her work and practice.

Tawakol's broad practice encompasses hand-dyed and sewn textile pieces, mixed media sculptures, fabric collages, and installations interweaving textures, grids and lattices in addition to works on paper. Her approach to contemporary textile art is deeply rooted in the feminist movement of the 1970s that revived the medium as a critical and discursive practice embedded in the history of women's knowledge and labour. Her work attempts to deconstruct symbols and archetypes that beset female agency.

The exhibition is titled after Tawakol's group of large-scale black and red fabric, representations of palm trees that appliquéd on hand-dyed textiles belonging to her ongoing series *Palm Trees* (2015-). The starting point for the artist's obsession with this species of tree lies in photographs and memories, both personal and inherited from her childhood spent between France, Germany and Egypt. She explains, 'Palm trees mean nostalgia to me. The Egypt of the 1940s and 1950s, the glamorous era, the golden age that I didn't experience. The Montaza Palace of King Farouk and the Corniche of Alexandria, a beauty of the old times, as well as the shores of the river Nile in Luxor that I visited when I was a child... At the same age, my playground in Europe was another kind of 'palm grove' I found in the Palmengarten, a botanical garden in Frankfurt in Germany.'

However, three wall-mounted textile works *When the Dates Turn Red* #6, #7 (2017-2018) and #9 (2017) blur the genres and disturb the binary constructions of masculinity and femininity of the plant when Tawakol presents the 'fruit' outside the framed palm. The date, or cluster-like shapes, made of stuffed, seamed nylon lying independently on the gallery floor are tied up to the tree with a thin string only to enhance the gender ambiguity of the tree's form.

This reminds us that, although the date palm is an anemophilous plant, that is a naturally wind-pollinated tree species, since its domestication and intensive cultivation, its pollination process has been mechanised. Such conflicting notions of control and autonomy are recurrent in Tawakol's work. The date reappears and has grown into single sculptures hanging from the ceiling and ironically titled *Lure* #10 (2015), #12 and #14 (2018). The flesh-coloured forms made of stuffed, sewn pieces of nylon and fabric that resemble organisms in transformation are reified at times as possible human body parts, male genitalia, female breasts, a uterus, at others, as anthropomorphic androgynous tentacular creatures.

Nearby, the collection of small sculptures titled *Dolls* (2011-2018) acts as a close-up or bird's-eye view of disassembled and disarticulated body parts. The two series *Lures* and *Dolls* recall the unsettling and erotically charged work of twenty century European sculptors Hans Bellmer and Louise Bourgeois with which they share the motifs of dismembered body and the childhood toy. Tawakol's work sits in between 'the scopophilic precision of Bellmer [and] the amorphous, maternal sensuality of Bourgeois.' (Jeremy Bell).

An object of temptation or attraction, a lure is also the name of a winged leather instrument swung on a cord and used in training birds in falconry. Another piece of falconry equipment, the hood, used in the manning process, that trains raptors not to fear humans, has inspired the works *Falconry Hood #31*, #32, #34 and #35 (2014). In similar fashion to the falconry hoods originally designed to keep the bird calm by depriving it of the sense of sight, the colourful clown-like fabric hoods crafted by Tawakol stand at the entrance of the gallery like serene lookouts that were blinded to something they would rather not see.

Through the variety and compositional complexity of her aesthetic interventions such as in the large-scale textile collage *Jungle #1* (2018), Tawakol in her work, touches on the boundary between the extreme figuration of personal identities and their dissolution, even to the point of disintegration. She created this large-scale textile collage by stitching together the various elements of the palm tree in rich verdant hues. The interwoven textures of the trunks, leaves, dates, and clusters of the tree do not allow our gaze to penetrate the space beyond.

Much as does the first part of an adage, the title of Tawakol's exhibition *When the Dates Turn Red* appears to predict a general truth or precede the conclusion of a popular saying that has gained credibility through long use and broad dissemination. This vivid phrase could announce a moral rule or augur an imminent event. Viewers should not expect, however, a conclusion that reproduces the Orient described by Orientalist writers 'as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem, and the despotic—but curiously attractive—ruler.' (Edward Said).

Yasmina Reggad



Falconry Hood #31, 2015
Fabric, styrofoam and thread, 34 x 27 x 28 cm

Artist's Biography

Born in London and raised primarily in Paris, Hoda Tawakol is a Franco-Egyptian artist who currently lives and works in Hamburg, Germany. She graduated in 2011 from the class of Andreas Slominski and Professor Micheal Diers at the University of Fine Arts (HfbK) in Hamburg.

Hoda Tawakol's work has been exhibited in numerous institutions and galleries in Germany, including Lothringer 13 in Munich, Weserburg Museum of Modern Art in Bremen, RELiGIO Westfälisches Museum für religiöse Kultur in Telgte, Kunstverein and Kunsthaus in Hamburg, Wiensowski & Harbord and Ph-Projects gallery in Berlin; and internationally at Sfeir-Semler gallery in Lebanon, Beton Art Space in Denmark and at 10th Velada Santa Lucía in Venezuela. Her work appears in the following collections: The Progressive Art Collection (USA), Sammlung Haus N of Gunda & Peter Niemann (Germany), SØR Rusche (Germany), and Sohst-Brennenstuhl (Germany).

About Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde

After establishing B21 Gallery in 2006, one of the first contemporary art spaces in the United Arab Emirates, Isabelle van den Eynde launched her eponymous space in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue in 2010, representing a pluralistic roster of artists from the Middle East and North Africa.

Through exhibitions, book publishing and international fair participation, the gallery prides itself on closely collaborating with its artists to create insightful, and often provocative presentations that challenge the conventions and ideologies related to the notion of art display and exhibition making.

Exhibition Dates: 12 November 2018 - 3 January 2019

Opening: Monday, 12 November from 6.00 to 9.00 pm

Regular Hours: Sun to Thu: 10.00 am to 7.00 pm, Sat: 10.00 to 6.00 pm

Location: Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Unit 17, Alserkal Avenue, Street 8, Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE

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