

## 10. | Martyrs 01



2014- 2015, Diptych, acrylic on wood, 220 x 122 cm each  
Exhibition view from Permanent Exiles, MAMCO, Geneva, 2015.  
Courtesy of the artist and Ceysson & Bénétière, Paris.

Martyrs est une série d'œuvres composée de panneaux de bois sur lesquels sont peintes sur fond noir une multitude de lignes comme les traces de cicatrices sur un corps. Le titre de l'œuvre, Martyrs, joue sur une double définition du terme. Si son acceptation la plus répandue renvoie aux personnages bibliques qui sont allés jusqu'à se laisser tuer en témoignage de leur foi, un martyr est aussi dans le vocabulaire de l'ébénisterie une cale protégeant des coups de marteaux et de scies.

Un martyr, du grec ancien (martus, « témoin ») est une personne qui va jusqu'à se laisser tuer en témoignage de sa foi, plutôt que d'abjurer. Parfois le mot martyr est utilisé dans le sens plus large de « victime ». Pour l'Islam, on considère le martyr comme un « chahid ». Le sens de ce mot arabe est proche du mot grec « martunos, qui veut dire témoin. Il s'agit évidemment de témoigner de sa foi. Si pour le christianisme, le martyre est également un témoignage de foi qui se fait dans l'amour y compris pour les juges et les bourreaux, le chahid de l'islam peut être un soldat qui meurt en combattant. Cependant, il ne faut donc pas confondre combattant, c'est-à-dire soldat défendant une terre ou une idée, et kamikaze terroriste, c'est-à-dire « semeur de terreur » via des assassinats à grande échelle et voulant imposer ses idées par la force. Toutefois, certaines fatwas affirment le contraire.

Avant de passer à l'étape de peinture, l'artiste découpe d'abord ces lignes droites à l'aide d'une scie électrique. Ces lignes droites protégées par des rubans adhésifs sont révélées une fois que la peinture noire est appliquée sur les panneaux en bois. Ces œuvres offrent en conséquence plusieurs niveaux de lecture engendrés par les deux définitions que leur titre offre. Cette abstraction géométrique, rappelant le suprématisme russe, peut faire écho aux diverses coupures qui ont marqué le corps des martyrs

Martyrs is a series of works composed of wood panels on which a multitude of lines, like scars on a body, are painted on a black background. The title of the work, Martyrs, rests upon the word's double definition. Its most frequent sense refers to the biblical characters who let themselves be killed as a sign of their faith, but in French a "martyr" is also a term of cabinetmaking designating a block that provides protection against the strikes of a hammer or saw.

A martyr, from the ancient Greek "martus" (witness) is a person who lets him or herself be killed as a sign of faith rather than renounce. Sometimes the word is used in the wider sense of "victim". In Islam, a martyr is considered a "shahid". The meaning of this Arabic word is similar to the Greek "marturos", witness. It's of course about providing testimony of one's faith. In Christianity, a martyr is also a demonstration of faith that is conducted with love, including for the victim's judges and executioners, but the shahid of Islam can be a soldier who dies fighting. However, a fighter, i.e. a soldier defending a territory or an idea, shouldn't be confused with a suicide bomb terrorist, who is a "sower of terror" resorting to large-scale assassinations and wanting to impose his ideas through brute force. Although certain fatwas claim the contrary.

Before the painting begins, the artist cuts these straight lines using an electric saw. The lines protected by adhesive tape are revealed once the black paint is applied on the wood panels. These works therefore offer several degrees of interpretation generated by the two definitions the title conveys. The geometric abstraction, reminiscent of Russian Suprematism, can be linked to the cuts that marked the bodies of Christian martyrs. However, the meaning of the word martyr evolved through the centuries. Today, its most frequent use designating a kamikaze, "he who kills himself in

chrétiens. Cependant, le mot martyr a dans le temps historique changé d'acceptations. De nos jours, son utilisation assimilée à celle du kamikaze, désignant « celui qui se tue dans le but de tuer » constitue un contre sens à sa signification originelle.

Sans pouvoir se fixer, l'œil du spectateur navigue d'un panneau à l'autre. Cet effet est accentué par l'aspect conflictuel de ces lignes géométriques. Le spectateur est donc confronté à une surface en tension composée de vides et de pleins sur un fond monochrome noir gravant ainsi l'image de l'œuvre sur la rétine, même en fermant les yeux.

Mounir fatmi, Novembre 2015.

order to kill", is the reverse of its original meaning.

Unable to settle, the viewer's eye moves from one panel to another. The effect is accentuated by the conflicted aspect of the geometric lines. The viewer is confronted with a surface full of tension composed of empty and full spaces against a black monochrome background, engraving the image of the work on the retina, even with closed eyes.

Mounir fatmi, November 2015.

Traduit du français par Patrick Haour.

" The emblematic title plays on the semantic variants of this word, whose meaning has transformed through the course of history. From the ancient Greek word martus, which meant witness, to the definition of a man who sacrifices himself in the name of faith, up to the present definition in which a martyr is improperly compared to the concept of kamikaze. "

Wall Street International Art, 2017

**exhibitions:**

2017

Transition State - Officine dell'Immagine - Solo show

2015

Permanent Exiles - MAMCO - Solo show

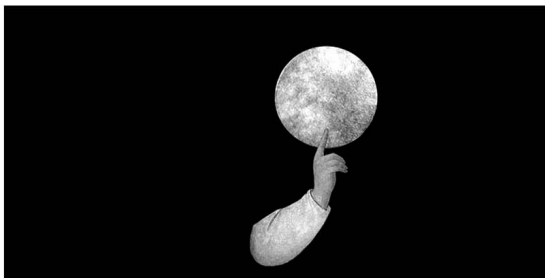
## press articles:

Mounir Fatmi 26 Oct 2017 - 7 Jan 2018 at the Officine dell'Immagine in Milan, Italy, Wall Street International Art, September 22nd, 2017



### Mounir Fatmi

26 Oct 2017 — 7 Jan 2018 at the Officine dell'Immagine in Milan, Italy  
22 SEPTEMBER 2017



mounir fatmi The Silence of Saint Peter Martyr, 2011 video HD in bianco e nero con audio, 5'04" edizione di 5  
Courtesy l'artista e Officine dell'Immagine, Milano

From October 26th 2017 to January 7th 2018, Officine dell'Immagine gallery in Milan will inaugurate its new location in Via Carlo Vittadini 11, hosting the largest solo exhibition ever held in Italy dedicated to mounir fatmi (Tanger, Morocco, 1970). Curated by Silvia Cirelli, the exhibition represents an unprecedented opportunity to explore the artistic career of this celebrated key figure.

Internationally very well known, mounir fatmi is among the protagonists of the current Venice Biennale, where he is participating with two extremely fascinating projects, in the Tunisian Pavilion within "The Absence of Paths" exhibition, and in the NSK State Pavilion. Invited to exhibit at prestigious museums such as the Georges Pompidou Centre, the Brooklyn Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo and the MAXXI in Rome, his works are part of large public collections including those at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Louis Vuitton Foundation pour la Création in Paris and the Mathaf, the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha.

Focusing on topical issues such as identity, multiculturalism and the ambiguity of power and violence, mounir fatmi over the years has managed to constantly reinvent himself, exploring a wide variety of stylistic languages ranging from video to installation, photography and performance. He follows a narrative pathway that in addition to confirming his remarkable lexical ability, combines personal ingredients and actual testimonies, tracing important passages of contemporary history.

The Milanese exhibition entitled Transition State will trace the distinctive features of his vast poetic synthesis, emphasizing the concept of cultural "hybridization": a combination of prejudices and stereotypes which are first revealed and then discredited, reinforcing an overall vision based on dialogue between religion, science, the ambivalence of language and how these transform over the course of history. Martyrs is a clear example of the power of language over the truth: it is a diptych made of black wooden panels whose surface is sliced by a multitude of lines that seem to move like wounds on a body's skin. The emblematic title plays on the semantic variants of this word, whose meaning has transformed through the course of history. From the ancient Greek word *martus*, which meant "witness", to the definition of a man who sacrifices himself in the name of faith, up to the present definition in which a martyr is improperly compared to the concept of kamikaze.

The theme of martyrdom also returns in the video *The Silence of Saint Peter Martyr* (2011), with the protagonist St. Peter the Martyr, also known as Pietro da Verona, who was a 13th-century priest of the Dominican Order that was atrociously executed because of his strong opposition to heretics. The calm of the scene, where the subject slowly moves his finger and mimics the peaceful gesture of silence, is violently opposed to the audio of the video itself with a disturbing and aggressive background.

The inspiration he draws from religious material is reconfirmed in the photographic series *Blinding Light* (2013), a project with both conceptual and visual manipulation of the so-called "Healing of the Justinian Deacon", a miracle that was also immortalized in a famous painting by Fra Angelico. The story tells of two saints who were famous for their medical skills, Cosmas and Damian, who entered Justinian's room one night and exchanged his sick leg with a healthy leg from a recently deceased Ethiopian man. Upon reawakening, Justinian was surprised to find that his leg had healed, but was of a different colour. Playing with superimposition between the ancient painting and modern surgery scenes, mounir fatmi amazes with his versatile lexical ability, which allows him to tackle major issues with surprising cultural sensitivity, including ethnic identity, hybridization and the notion of diversity.

The sensory vision of viewers is then exhorted in the video *Technologia* from 2010, where the convulsive succession of geometric structures and Arab calligraphic motifs of religious nature give rise to a highly hypnotic process. The spectator struggles to watch while his hearing is also put to the test with harsh noises. The juxtaposition between the object, its use and its cultural significance is central to the installation *Civilization* (2013): a simple work of art with a pair of black men's shoes placed over a book bearing the inscription "civilization". With these two objects, which are often used to indicate a person's level of civilization, the Moroccan artist questions the seduction of material objects and its deceptive power in contemporary culture.

During the opening ceremony of Thursday, October 26th at 7 pm, a performance at the presence of the artist will be held. It will be built around his installation *Constructing Illusions*, a participatory work that plays on the equilibrium between imagination and reality: concepts that often mingle with each other until they manage to completely exchange meanings.



1. mounir fatmi *The Silence of Saint Peter Martyr*, 2011 video HD in bianco e nero con audio, 5'04" edizione di 5  
Courtesy l'artista e Officine dell'Immagine, Milano
2. mounir fatmi *Blinding Light* #5, 2013 stampa inkjet su carta fine art 180x268 cm edizione di 5  
Courtesy l'artista e Officine dell'Immagine, Milano
3. mounir fatmi *The Silence of Saint Peter Martyr*, 2011 video HD in bianco e nero con audio, 5'04" edizione di 5  
Courtesy l'artista e Officine dell'Immagine, Milano

#### Officine dell'Immagine

The gallery works with artists from Europe and Asia with a perceivable connection to the Middle East and Africa. Through a rich exhibition schedule, with fine publications and fair participations, the gallery prides itself on making collaboration a principal of its operations, working closely with artists to create insightful, often provocative, total presentations that challenge the conventions of a contemporary art gallery.