

Reflection
Raja Aissa

Exhibition Dates | 13.04 to 30.05.14

From April 13 to May 30, 2014, Selma Feriani Gallery hosts a solo exhibition of artist Raja Aissa.

Raja Aissa graduated from the Tunisian Institute of Arts, Architecture and Urbanism and from the Pratt Institute in New York. She lives and works in Paris and Tunis. Her works figure up among the collections of Fondation Cartier in France and the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Tunis. They explore the concept of identity and the psychological mechanisms developed in response to globalization and the rise of fundamentalism. Through mixed techniques characterized by an interplay between reflection and superposition, the artist proposes a conceptually rich and visually diverse experience, often tinted with humour and taunting.

This exhibition brings together recent works by the artist that question through the mirror, self-representation and its relationship with the "visible" and the "invisible" in the identity process.

The *Volatile* series shows urban landscapes and female bodies marked by tiny laser perforations. The tightly knit holes, form an interlacing of Islamic-inspired motifs in the middle of each image, and gradually disintegrate.

This perforation refers to the violence covering any quest for identity as it involves a number of additions and subtractions when it enters in contact with alterity. In one way or another, the points of crystallization in self-seeking are doomed to be undone by the force of exchange, often painful yet inexorable.

Volatile – i.e. something that is about to explode, burst – functions as an allegory of the encounter between tradition, symbolized here by the Islamic ornament and contemporary technology, represented by the laser cutting, which floods and reshapes human relationships. The artist extends this idea in another series called *Scheherazade*. Like the narrator of *The Thousand and One Nights*, which owes its salvation to the talent of he storyteller, the individual is also forced to build his personal history, identity, to better assert and defend him/herself within society.

The series consists of eight portraits depicting a young woman buried under layers of semi-transparent polyester fibres protected by glass. The viewer only distinguishes her eyes and tiny parts of her face through a patterns cut out of the fabric hiding the model. On the same screen barring total vision, the viewer sees his own image reflected and juxtaposed with that of the young woman trapped in her gaze. This

operation is reminiscent of projective identification in psychoanalysis, defined as a defense mechanism that consists in projecting our characteristics onto the outside world to better recognize the self in it and control it.

Finally, in the *Bespoke* series i.e. "tailored" the artist is interested in how individuals transform ideas and concepts into immutable truths that serve to support their personal perceptions. This is plastically translated in sentences using reflective devices, thus invoking the difficulty that may arise in apprehending ideas taken up between the "I" and the "I am." In this respect, the artist says his "works act as a mirror that invites us to overcome the fear of learning more about our true nature." Raja Aissa also refers to Nietzsche's "Become Who you are", whose message becomes for the artist a neon installation that resonates from its central location in the gallery with all her works.