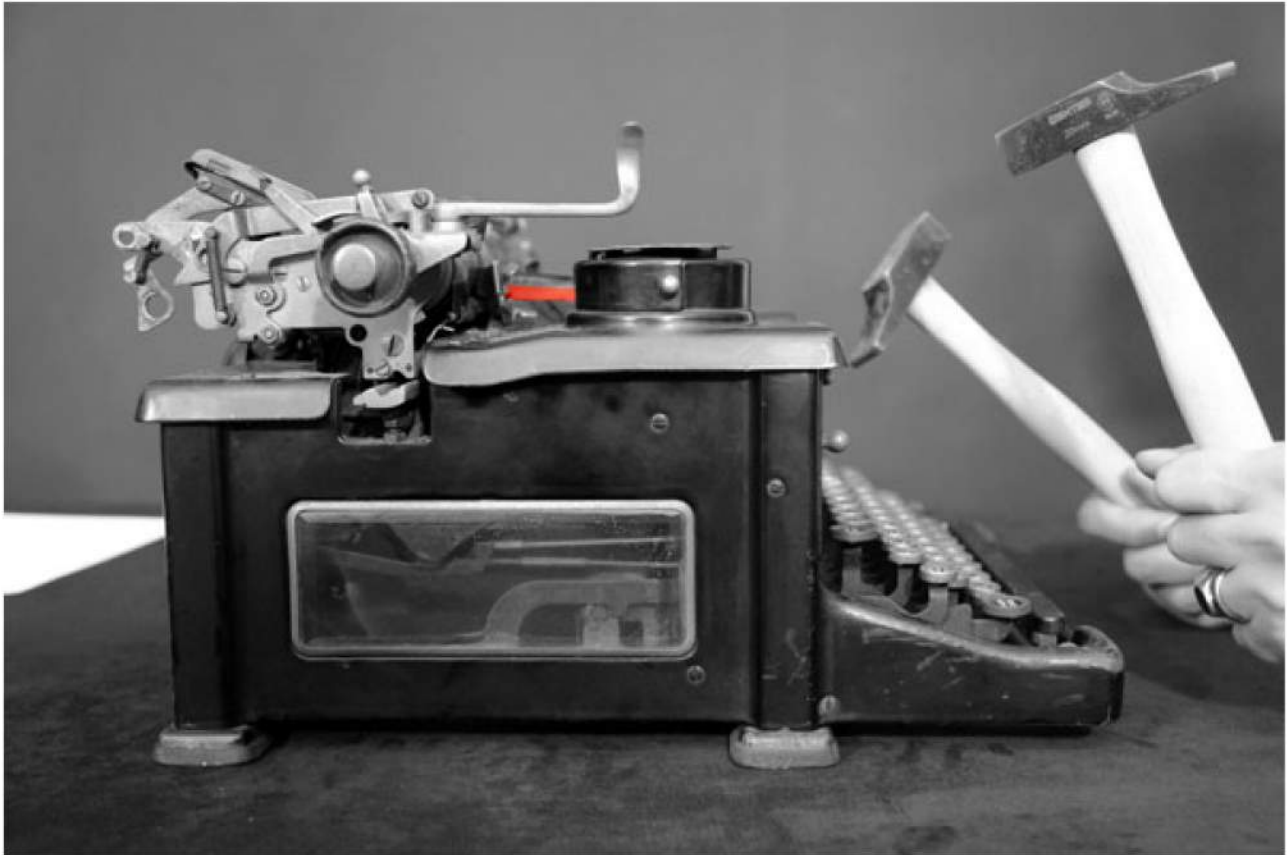


Aesthetica

Mounir Fatmi: History is Not Mine at Paradise Row Gallery, London



Multi-Media artist Mounir Fatmi's first UK solo show, *History is Not Mine*, opened at the **Paradise Row Gallery** on 19 April. Fatmi has become a leading voice of a new generation of young Arab artists, whose work fuses Arabic traditions with stylised Western conceptual art to generate critical dialogue inside and outside the Arts world.

While the almost full totality of the world is simply observing the destabilisation forces that are currently sweeping through the Arabic world, Mounir Fatmi reacts to this upheaval through his work, addressing prominent forces such as power, politics and religion. He does not simply produce conceptual Art, but Art that puzzles the viewer's mind, leading him to question contemporary ideologies.

As I entered the *History is Not Mine* exhibition, I navigated towards a sculptural steel object, *Between the lines*, representing a circular saw blade. At first glance, this is a graphic and modern piece; yet, elegant, traditional Arabic calligraphy is laser cut into it creating an unexpected contrast. The juxtaposition of the engraved words surrounded by the sharp edges of the saw allows the text to be confined within the object, delivering the social-political message that communication in the Arab world is often controlled by the few "behind sharp blades", as if they were sacred and untouchable.

One of the most striking pieces of work is *Circles*. Inside a plexi case white coaxial antenna cables are placed in a circular way. In Mounir's own words "his influence comes from geometry to the spiritual and function as an illusion of displacement in space and time". Looking closer, a strong resemblance can be found with the familiar image of people praying at Hajj. It becomes clear how *Circles* innovatively addresses one of the biggest topics in man's history, that of masses controlled by spiritual power.

I soon realise that Fatmi's skills are endless, as I surprisingly come across *Dripping on Persian Carpet*, Mounir's abstract expressionist carpet painting, hanging dry, but looking as though still "bleeding" in some areas. However, it is Mounir's video, *Sleep - Al Naim*, which captivates my attention. *Sleep - Al Naim* revisits Warhol's video *Sleep* with a 3D rendering of Salman Rushdie. This personalised depiction of Rushdie, an Arab Western man whose life has been threatened following the 1989 Fatwa, evokes a subtle political message of resistance against oppression, as he is caught between life and death. This beautifully shot video creates an unsettling account of men's unknowing destiny.

Weaving in and out of Arabic traditions and new conceptual art, Fatmi pushes the viewer to look beyond the surface and question world events. Through his widely interpretative and provocative work, he leads audiences onto a journey gravitating around ambiguity, apprehension and personal judgement.

Shortlisted for the Jameel Prize 2013, Mounir Fatmi will continue to exhibit in London later on in the year at one of London's most beloved museums, the **V&A**.

Frances Cooper

History is Not Mine: 19 April until 1 June, Paradise Row Gallery, 74A Newman Street, London, W1T 3DB.
www.paradiserow.com

Credits

Mounir Fatmi, *History is Not Mine*, Video, 2013, courtesy of the artist and Paradise Row.

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