



ZOULIKHA BOUABDELLAH
 An interview with Zoulikha Bouabdellah 2008
 One of the winners of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize

Reem Fekri: You once quoted Kant as saying ‘the intuition without concept is blind, the concept without intuition is empty’. How does this relate to your artistic practice?

Zoulikha Bouabdellah: If one were to analyze this quote by Kant, the word concept is the most vital. Whatever the idea, what matter is how it is expressed is integral to artistic practice. In the case of a visual artist, their talent is expressed through their ideas.

My ambition as a visual artist is to show my ideas in the most interesting ways possible. The transition from Kant on intuition and the concept seems to dish a reflection that becomes solidified in my head. The report first contested between the two concepts are finally intrinsic. To answer your question, I would say that in my artistic process, the concept is

accounted for whilst my practice is dedicated to the service of the idea.

RF: Your biographical history is significant and pertinent to your practice as particular identity tags are imposed on you. Do you deal with preconceived notions about Arab culture?

ZB: Yes, I am confronted with stereotypes that are vehicles within Arab culture, and how not to be in front of the expressions made when one aspires to become an artist who goes against banalities. In France, being Algerian, I am visibly part of a minority. I’m brown with non-Caucasian features, but I consider myself Franco-Algerian to the extent of the Oriental West. I therefore do not recognize myself in speeches filled with stereotypes - in particular, those dealing with the Arab and Muslim world. It often tends to simplify a world with the same synthesis is its own complexity.

RF: What other issues do you explore aside from cultural dislocation, gender and religion?

ZB: Let’s say the three main topics you have mentioned are the main axis of my thinking. If I had to add another thesis in my explorations, I would add the media. I think the world today seeks an ethnicity that conforms to the new and local world, via a universal perception of the parameters that are religious, sexual and cultural. In short, it is this relationship with current affairs that interests me.

RF: Who are your largest influences?

ZB: I do not have a single reference. I have several and each of my references take me back for some reason. I am influenced by cinema, literature, philosophy, music and fashion. I like buildings in Kubrick asymmetric, in David Lynch’s imbalance, with Youssef Chahine ... I like emotion in Yasmina Khadra’s reinvention of the classic, Amin Maalouf in his concern for the world, with its Samuel Beckett Derrida and disarray among its way to deconstruct to rebuild ... I also like at Umm Kelthoum power among the Callas his grace and Nazakat Ali Khan at his practice of magic.

RF: How does changing social and political climates affect your artistic practice?

ZB: The election of a Black president to lead a country fifty

years ago was virtually unheard of - a person of color could not even address another White and this certainly influenced my work. This fills me with hope and encourages me to continue my artistic process, whereby my aim is to cover my tracks. I see progress. In contrast to the wall that rises after the destruction of the Berlin wall fills me with skepticism and introduces, without a doubt, a few points of cynicism within my artistic practice.

RF: Who are your mentors?

ZB: I don't know.

RF: Do you consider yourself Algerian or Parisian?

ZB: Without hesitation, and happiness, I am both.

RF: What kind of response do you hope your project will achieve at Art Dubai?

ZB: I want my piece for Art Dubai to fit perfectly into the framework of the event within the context of a city that wishes to open up the world and give an image of Arab culture and modern radiance. My job is to create a reflection of what I am, an individual who smooths their own contradictions.