

ART FROM THE MUSLIM WORLD

TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN



In his Berlin “Side by Side Gallery” Akim Monet introduced earlier this year a project by Abdunnasser Gharem, one of the most famous artists in Saudi Arabia: the “Amen Art Foundation,” through which Abdunnasser Gharem supports a new generation of Saudi artists. In September Akim Monet will open the exhibition “Dance of the Seven Veils” with works from the Muslim world. What ties these works together is the headscarf.

Interview by Sabine Weier:

SW: Mr. Monet, the Contemporary art scene in Saudi Arabia developed only recently. Why so late?

AM: Saudi Arabia is a very closed society. It was only the Internet and channels like YouTube that gave Saudis contact with the rest of the world and allowed access to information. Before then, it was impossible to get books or dvd’s. Abdunnasser Gharem and other artists used to sit for the whole day in front of the computer. Before long they wanted to get their own voices heard and they discovered art to be a powerful medium.

SW: How political are these new works? Are they perhaps even revolutionary?

AM: In the Western world and now also within the Arab Spring, the idea of revolution is tied with the notion of destruction. The art of the 20th Century is symbolized by Deconstruction. Dadaism was about destruction in order to build something new. The art of the young Saudi generation is political as well, but the tone is very different. What these artists propagate is a subtle transformation. As Abdunnasser Gharem would say, these artists of the new generation want to negotiate the relationship between history and the contemporary world, without leaving tradition totally behind.

SW: Do women of this generation play a role?

AM: A big one, not only in Saudi Arabia, but also in other Muslim countries. In the exhibition “Dance of the Seven Veils,” I will also show works by three artists from Iran. For example, Tamineh Monzavi, who was born in 1988 in Tehran, explores the life of young people in Iran through critical documentary photography. Shadi Ghadirian portrays Iranian women in domestic environments and thus investigates the development of society. A journalist introduced me to her work. I then contacted her through Facebook. When I announced the exhibition on Facebook, another young artist contacted me; she is now also in the exhibition. The Internet makes many things possible.

The “Dance of the Seven Veils,” with Amira Behbehani, Shadi Ghadirian, Majida Khattari, Tamineh Monzavi, Shirin Neshat, Halim Al Karim, Dhafer Al Shehri, Abdunnasser Gharem and others, opens on September 20, 2013, at Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet, Potsdamer Strasse 81b, 10785 Berlin. www.sidebysidegallery.com.