

Fatima Moallim curated by Fabian Flückiger

Opening: 24.11.23 from 18:00

24.11.23 – 27.01.24

“Where the water recedes, crocodiles proliferate”.¹

This Somali proverb can be symbolically applied to Fatima Moallim’s work. It has a special resonance as it comes from her homeland. A place that she has only visited once. In a figurative sense, the water level in her work is low, one where many crocs are frolicking. Fears, threats and the existence of an autofictional identity, usually lying beneath the surface, become visible. This psychological tension is witnessed through unsettling sounds, that is generated from feelings, memories, dreams, but also from history and fiction. This sonic impact and force becomes palpable in the form of line and mark-making.

Her large-format drawings, her preferred medium, act like visual reports from the inside of a psyche that is strongly affected by sound. The journey from her apartment to the studio or from the studio to the hospital reveals a broad acoustic spectrum. From Stockholm to Malmö, New York or Kavala, a peripatetic experience with ever more intense social expectations imposes itself. The noise of the hectic hustle and bustle of society, the many (political) forces and directions that seem to emerge on sidewalks and in traffic are transformed into philosophical and existential questions before they condense into a visual form and continue to be carried by rhythm, speed and emotion.

Simone Weil’s thoughts about attention plays a special role in Moallim’s work. Moallim is self-taught. She does not follow a practice developed at an art academy. Her practice is oriented towards an attention that leads her to self-forgetfulness in order to get as close as possible to a subject. “Total attention,” says Weil, “is like unconsciousness.” It is therefore not surprising that the artist needs a long time for the motifs to mature in her “inner self,” but the translation onto paper then only takes a short moment, during which the drawing, receives no further additions. There is a Zen-like relationship between the long, inner process of maturing a drawing and the short, focused transfer that many of us lose sight of with our shrinking attention span.

The small oil-stick drawing *BESVÄRLIGA LJUD* hangs in vicinity to the exhibition’s entrance. The Swedish title in English translates to something along the lines of *DISTURBING SOUNDS*. In this drawing, the perceived noise or chaos overpowers any recognizable motif. It is a small outcry of powerlessness or perhaps even resignation to being able to see and understand correlations clearly. However, the work is small in comparison to the drawings, which are normally up to several meters high and wide. It seems like a lurking threat of chaos in which a resolution no longer seems possible: a cacophony of lines.

In *MALCOLM'S BROTHER* it is ambiguous as to whether it is about a short (invented) story on one of the travels from A to B, or a reference to the famous Malcolm X. The drawing, made shortly after her residency at ISCP in New York, shows a large reclining figure connected by a line to a small standing figure in a box. Could she be referring to the fact that civil rights activist Malcolm X was assassinated by a 'brother' of the Nation of Islam? Diagonally behind this, in the center of the image, is a black geometric shape that is not completely filled in, followed by a formation of two rectangles. The geometric shapes are connected by a line reminiscent of memorials, the one in the foreground from a frontal perspective, the one in the background from a bird's eye view. Places biographically linked to the artist have experienced deep distress: civil war and terrorization by radical Islamist militias Al-Shabaab in Somalia, religious violence and intensification of gang warfare and crime in Sweden, and widespread arming of the population, attacks on the rule of law and racially motivated violence in the US. The shapes seem like a loose sequence of atrocities and their memorials in these places, whose continuation is uncertain but not hopeless with the standing figure in the "present."

Another historic allusion can be found in the play on words in the title of the drawing *ADAM MADAM*. According to the biblical story, Adam is the progenitor of all humans and Eve, a "madam," the progenitor mother. The phrase can also be read phonetically as "mad [I] am" and Adam as "a[h] dam[n]" or extended to the palindrome "Madam I'm Adam". In her delight in playing with language and sound, Moallim not only takes up and perpetuates a gender relationship that has been handed down over thousands of years. Created during this summer's Koran burnings in Sweden, the drawing points to an ideological attempt to conjure an image of polarized worlds.

This new series of seven drawings created for the exhibition evokes the everyday life of an autofictional multicultural identity and the associated tensions between cultural mentality, religion, and violence. The noise and sense of social activity are interrelated with imageries that reflect the psychological well-being of a community. The works become physical insofar as they examine the noise of everyday life and its psychosomatic effects on people.

1 Nurrudin Farah uses this proverb in his novel *Crossbones*, a report on the state of Somalia. The fictional Somali journalist Malik, who lives in New York City, travels to his homeland to understand and report on the complex state of the civil war-torn country.