

ZOULIKHA BOUABDELLAH
SET ME FREE FROM MY CHAINS



SET ME FREE FROM MY CHAINS

Text by Isabelle van den Eynde

Couples of giant colorful Arabic letters cut out of aluminum sheets or formed of flashing neon hang randomly on the wall in a playful and lighthearted manner. They are deceptively simple. The elements are familiar - strings of neon twisted to form colorful letters. Yet their unconventional positioning and movement mount a remarkably visceral spectacle, with the suggestive title *Hobb* (Arabic for Love) functioning as an integral part of the beguiling ensemble.

Hobb elegantly exemplifies Algerian Zoulikha Bouabdellah's consistently challenging practice since she graduated from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Art de Cergy-Paris in 2002, favoring video in her debut. She was the recipient of the Contemporary Art Prize Le Meurice in 2008 with her sculpture *The Kiss*, and shortly after was one of the three winners of the 2009 Abraaj Prize with her installation *Walk on the Sky, Pisces*.

A product of a rigorous process of conceptual and formal reasoning, *Hobb* defies the border between representation and abstraction. It constitutes not simply the materials and the flashy colors installed in the space but also, perhaps more importantly, the set of conditions or limitations that have been their source of inspiration.

The work is inspired by the extensive heritage of Arabic love poetry, a treasury of sexual innuendo with a conspicuous absence of the human body. Zoulikha finds its literary opposite in Indian culture, where sexuality is largely uninhibited, with works like the *Kama Sutra* always having been illustrated. Thus tackling the subject of representing love and its physical expression, she uses calligraphy to achieve a scantily veiled abstraction of the human form.

Zoulikha's work is about expressive subversion. Not limited to the exact meaning of a shape or a word, it allows poetry, imagination, and reflection to add sense to a situation.

As a child growing up in Algeria and raised by the women of her family, subversion was a tool of daily life, a mode of survival she calls 'woman's best ally'. In a society dominated by men, the wisdom of women derived largely from knowing how and when to subvert.

A significant aspect of Zoulikha's work is her commitment to feminism. In its broadest sense, she constantly reminds herself that in most parts of the world women are not yet granted the same rights as men. She's a

global activist from a Muslim background, and is naturally inclined to draw references to her own culture by way of symbolic and aesthetic research.

"I can't be accused of representing human shapes. At the same time, I'm totally representing them, it's subversion. The way to divert is to be smart and be wise, the means to escape for a woman is subversion. I think it's a good way to get things moving on.

"It's the continuation of what Shehrazad did, because she used wisdom. It's not my thesis, it's what the history of art proves. In the early '70s, women started to work with the woman's body - it was a lesson I understood as a student. I wanted to suggest the movement of love, it's to go a little bit further in this space of taboo."

Set me Free from my Chains, the body of work which lends its name to the exhibition, consists of sculptural sentences that read "Set me Free from my Chains". Carved in plexi, they hang solemnly from paper nails like giant to-do notes nailed to a board. (Zoulikha's mother use to remind her daughters about their chores, nailing little notes to broom the court, make your bed, etc onto the curtains of their bedrooms). The 'chore' in this case is Umm Kulthum's famous phrase 'Set me Free from my Chains'. Extracted from a song about a past love story, the words are emblematic of the typical themes of love, longing and loss that are explored extensively in Arab poetry. Called the fourth pyramid, Umm Kulthum's fame and influence extended well beyond the artistic scene. In patriotic fashion, Zoulikha interprets Umm Kulthum's song as not only a lyrical evocation of the act of love but as a clear stance for the rights of women in the Arab world.

"They (men or Arab society) would not be frightened, because Umm Kulthoum represents the highest point of Arab culture. But the whole Arab world is about contradiction, we have women ministers, lawyers, judges but still in the mind of the Arab people - a majority of course - the women still need to be protected like a justification for being. It justifies her existence, otherwise you are nothing."

A third body of work comprises monochrome drawings on paper, in which the artist reproduces sequences from a scene of the Egyptian movie 'Afrita Hanem' (Genie Lady, 1949), where the famous Farid Al-Attrach wakes up to discover Samia Gamal performing a highly seductive oriental dance. The actor's discomfort and shyness escalate in front of this female companion before he falls asleep. Was it fantasy or reality? Zoulikha's drawings are accompanied by the words 'if only, if only, if only...'. She painted in red lacquer the lines of the silhouettes to emphasize their curvature and sensuality.

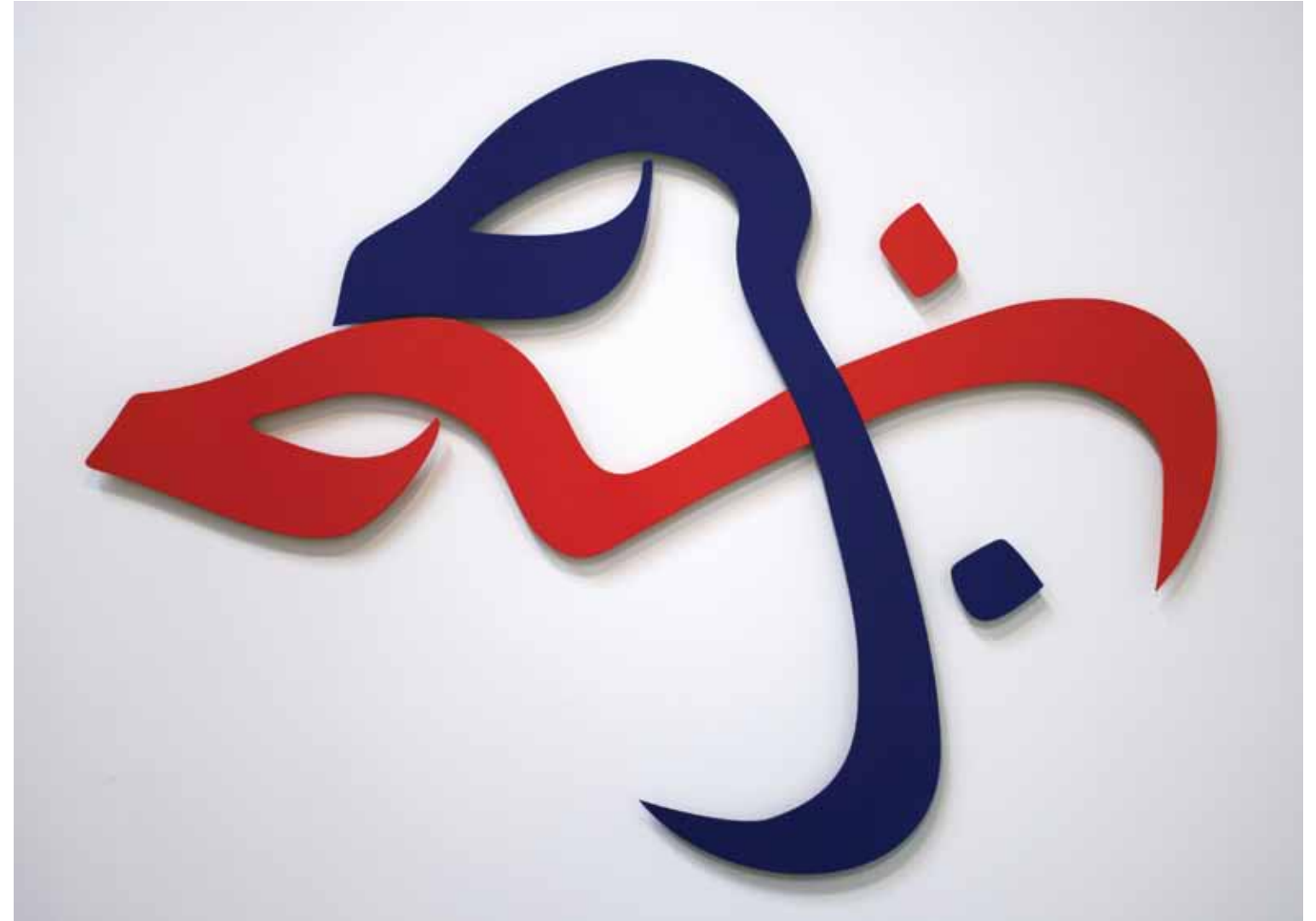
To complement these drawings, the *Big Odalisque* of Ingres is reinterpreted with Zoulikha's minimal monochrome technique and fragmented in nine different panels. The famous concubine with her languid pose and elongated back looks back over her shoulder, as if from a distant, antiquated past. Assumed to be an oriental woman, her stare and distorted proportions embody a woman's complex thoughts and feelings. Entitled *The Ruins*, this work marks an implicit conclusion to the exhibition, echoing the artist's battle for women cause and her penchant for romance.



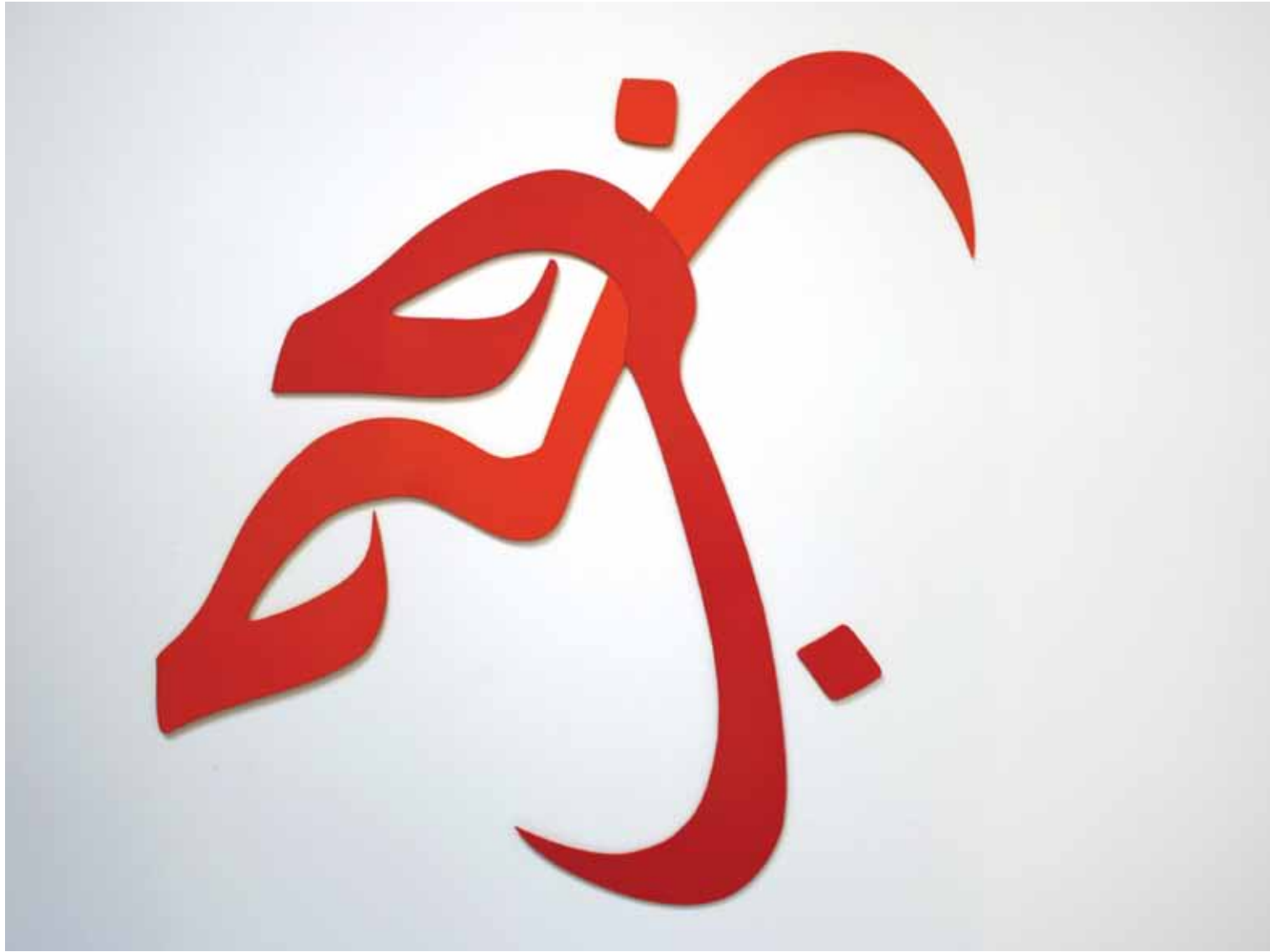
Grande Odalisque
Lacquer on paper
9 panels of various sizes
Approximate overall size 185 x 320 cm
Edition of 3 unique drawings
2010



Hobb (07)
Aluminum and powder coating paint
98 x 160 x 5 cm
2009–2010



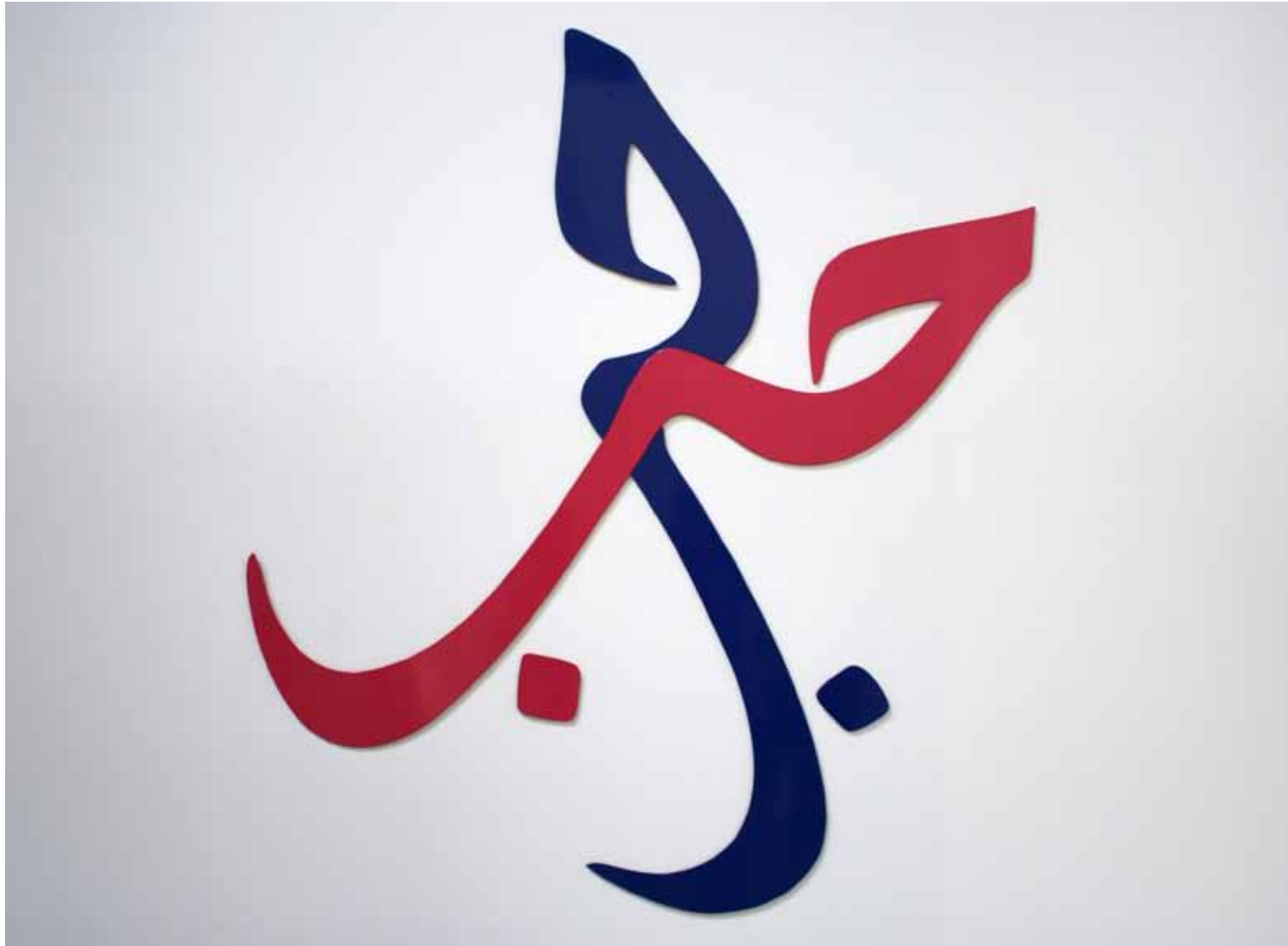
Hobb (15)
Aluminum and powder coating paint
110 x 160 x 5 cm
2009–2010



Hobb (14)
Aluminum and powder coating paint
139 x 160 x 5 cm
2009–2010



Hobb (18)
Aluminum and powder coating paint
136 x 160 x 5 cm
2009–2010



Hobb (10)
Aluminum and powder coating paint
161 x 156 x 5 cm
2009–2010



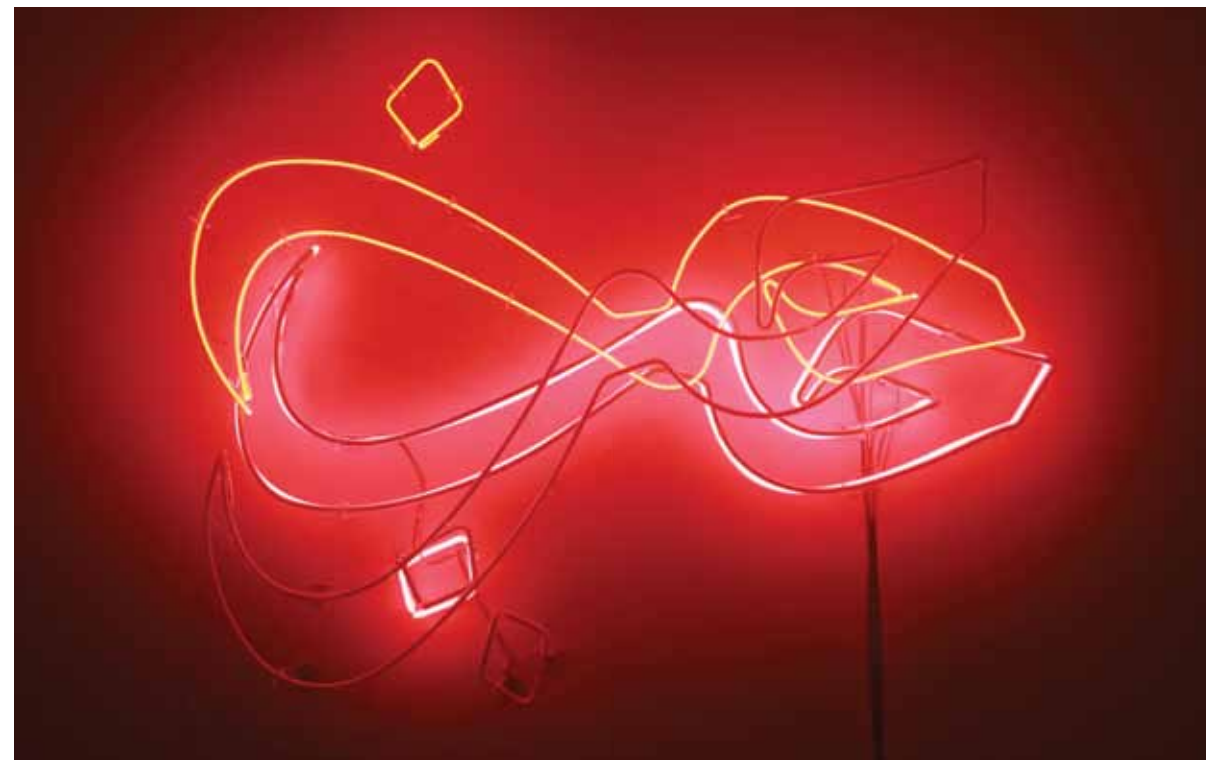
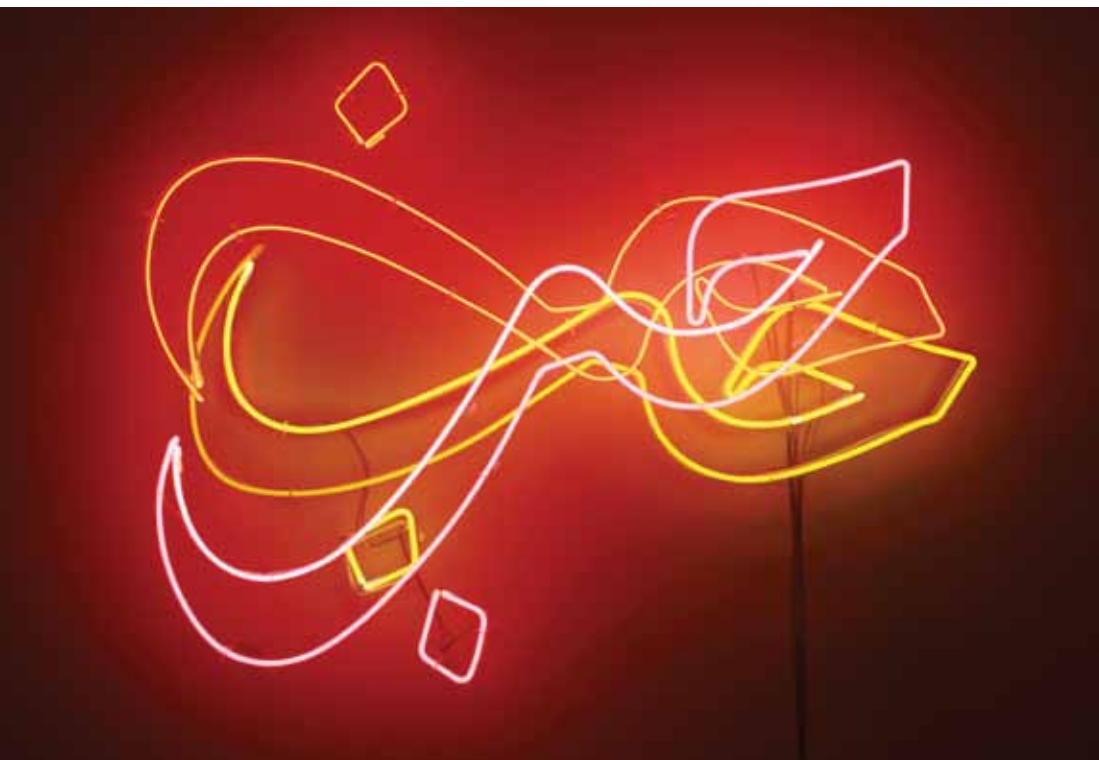
Hobb (13)
Aluminum and powder coating paint
80 x 167 x 5 cm
2009–2010



Hobb (19)
Aluminum and powder coating paint
154 x 170 x 5 cm
2009–2010



Hobb (03)
Aluminum and powder coating paint
143 x 160 x 5 cm
2009–2010



Two Lovers
Neon Lights
90 x 120 cm
Edition of 3
2010



Genie Lady (01)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010



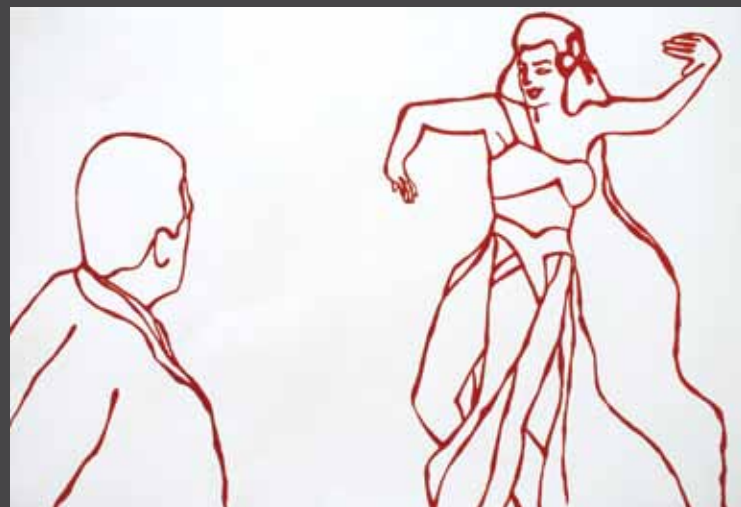
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Genie Lady (02)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

Genie Lady (03)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

Genie Lady (04)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

If Only, If Only
Lacquer on paper
20 cm x various length sizes
2010



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Genie Lady (05)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

Genie Lady (06)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

If Only, If Only
Lacquer on paper
20 cm x various length sizes
2010



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Genie Lady (07)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

If Only, If Only
Lacquer on paper
20 cm x various length sizes
2010



Genie Lady (08)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010



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Genie Lady (09)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

Genie Lady (10)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

Genie Lady (11)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

Genie Lady (12)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

Genie Lady (13)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

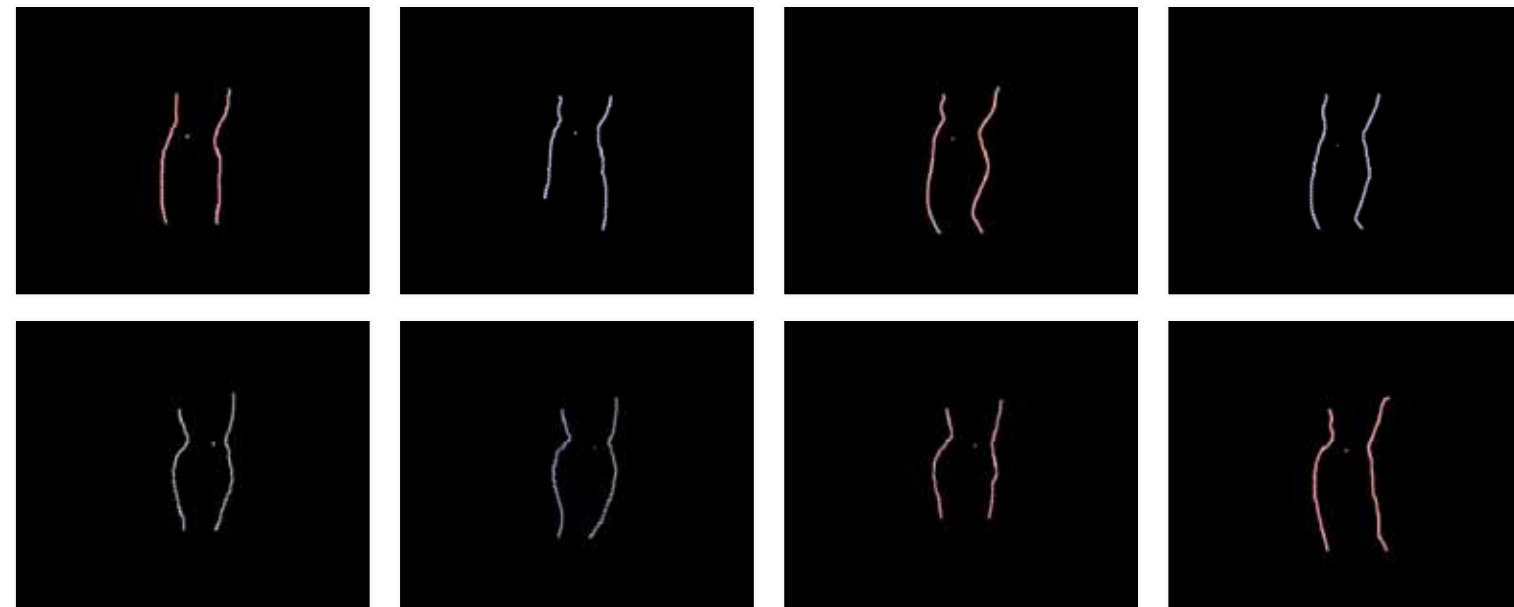
Genie Lady (14)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010

If Only, If Only
Lacquer on paper
20 cm x various length sizes
2010

If Only, If Only
Lacquer on paper
20 cm x various length sizes
2010



Genie Lady (15)
Lacquer on paper
40 x 80 cm
2010



Noun
Animation
3 Minutes and 17 Seconds
Edition of 3
2010

Music by PM Williamson
Text and voice by Elise Pichelin

(Stills from Noun)

ZOULIKHA BOUABDELLAH

Born in 1977, Moscow | Lives and works in Paris, France

BIOGRAPHY

Zoulikha Bouabdellah is the daughter of Hassen Bouabdellah, a film director and Algerian writer, and Malika Dorbani, ex-head of the Algiers Fine Art Museum. Following her birth in Moscow in 1977, Zoulikha Bouabdellah grew up in the Algerian capital until the age of 16. In 1993, while the civil war was underway, her family chose to leave Algeria and settle in France where she still resides. Zoulikha graduated from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Cergy-Pontoise in 2002 in Paris. Favoring video in her debut, she now works in a multitude of media challenging cultural dualities and imbalances, as well as cultural fusion and the ability to transcend borders. Zoulikha Bouabdellah has won several prizes: recipient of The Prix Meurice for Contemporary Art, Paris, France in 2008 with her sculpture *The Kiss*, one of the three winners of the inaugural Abraaj Capital Prize, Dubai, UAE in 2009 with her installation, *Walking on the Sky, Pisces*, Algerian Prize for young Algerian creation and Villa Médicis Hors les Murs (AFAA - Cape Town, South Africa). She has been shown all over the world in fairs, institutions and biennales such as the Venice Biennial, Art Dubai, FIAC, Art Brussels, Aichi Triennial, Bamako Biennial, Mead Art Museum, Centre Pompidou, MoCADA, Brooklyn Museum, etc. She has also done several residencies, most recently at the Art School Palestine in Ramallah, but also at Amherst College in the Massachussetts and in Cape Town, South Africa. In 2010, a bilingual monograph SOFT TRANSGRESSION was published by Gold Digger, Editions La B.A.N.K.

EDUCATION

M.A. Visual Expression, Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Cergy, France, 2002
B.A. Visual Arts, Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Cergy, France, 2000

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2010 La nature ne fait rien sans objet, La B.A.N.K, Paris, France
Aichi Triennial, Japan

2009 Les Mécaniques Amoureuses, Maison Guerlain, Paris, France
Abraaj Capital Art Prize, Museum of Arts & Design, NYC, USA
Coexistencias, 2nd Architecture, Art and Landscape Biennial of the Canaries, Spain
The other shadow of the city, The Palestinian Art Court-al Hoash, Jerusalem, Palestine
Perspectives: women, art and Islam, co-Presented by MoCADA and the Museum for African Art, NYC, USA
The seen and the hidden: (dis)covering the veil, Austrian Cultural Forum, NYC, USA
Wondering Where the ducks Went... Galleria Tiziana Di Caro, Salerno, Italy
Rencontres Internationales de la photo, Fes, Morocco
ArtEast, Video screening, Dansons, Dubai, UAE
ImagesPassages, Dansons, Annecy, France

2008 Turin Triennial, Italy
Point Ephémère, Paris, France
The third space: Cultural Identity Today, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA
Home ?, Galerie des tourelles, Nanterre, France
L'art au féminin, Modern and Contemporary Art Museum, Algiers, Algeria
Black-Paris, Black-Bruxelles, Ixelles, Belgium

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2010 Set me Free from my Chains, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai, UAE
CMOOA, Rabat, Morocco

2009 Hobb, La B.A.N.K, Paris, France

2008 Silence, Galerie 52'13", Berlin, Germany

2007 Bleu, Blanc, Rouge and other colors, La B.A.N.K, Paris, France

2006 Mutation, La Lettre volée, Brussels, Belgium

2005 Zoulikha Bouabdellah, IZIKO, South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

2007 Global Feminisms, Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Boston, USA
7th Bamako Biennial, Mali
Airs de Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
52nd Venice Biennial, African pavilion, Venice, Italy
Dreamdance, Visual Arts Space, Vénissieux, France
Global Feminisms, Brooklyn Museum, NYC, USA
Sexy Souks, Point Ephémère, Paris, France
Paris du monde entier, Artistes étrangers à Paris 1900-2005 The National Art Center, Tokyo, Japan

2006 Paris Black, Iwalewa-Haus, Bayreuth, Germany
SD OBSERVATORIO, IVAM, Valencia, Spain
Africa Remix, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
Why Pictures Now?, Museum Modemer Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, Austria
I love art vidéo, 7th edition, Modern and Contemporary Art Museum, Strasbourg, France
MAM SCREEN, Dansons screening in Tokyo subway, Tokyo, Japan
L'image révélée, Palais Kheireddine Musée de la ville de Tunis, Tunisia

2005 Occident vist des d'orient, Centre de Cultura Contemporania, Barcelona, Spain
Africa Remix, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris & Hayward Gallery, London

2004 Beauté. Afrique @ Nantes, Le Lieu unique, Nantes, France
Africa Remix, Museum Kunst Palast, Dusseldorf, Germany
The Sneeze 80 x 80, Gazonrouge, Athens, Greece
Vith African Contemporary Art Biennial DaK'art, Dakar, Senegal
Illusiones, Espacio C., Cantabria, Spain
Les Afriques, Tri Postal, Lille, France



GALLERY ISABELLE VAN DEN EYNDE

Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde (prev. B21) has discovered and nurtured the talent of some of the most promising figures in the Middle East's contemporary art scene. A generation of artists – including the likes of Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh, Reza Aramesh, Khosrow Hassanzadeh, Bitā Fayyazi, Jeffar Khaldi, Ahmad Amin Nazar, Leila Pazooki, Nargess Hashemi, Shadi Ghadirian, Lara Baladi, Fereydoun Ave and Farideh Lashai – has emerged from the gallery's focused tutelage, attracting the attention of adventurous collectors and curators, as well as prestigious institutions from the region and beyond.

Having recently moved to a larger space in an industrial quarter near the centre of Dubai, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde showcases an intense and innovative program of exhibitions that break conventional understandings of art coming out of the Middle East. The gallery publishes accompanying catalogue material for each exhibition.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

On Sheikh Zayed Road, take exit 43 in the direction of Al Manara East, descend into Al Quoz Industrial Area and turn right at the traffic lights. Continue straight through the first set of traffic lights and Al Serkal Avenue, a grey compound of warehouses, is visible on your right. Enter via the gate on the right hand side, then take the first right inside the compound and Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde is on your left, lot 17.

OPENING HOURS

Sat-Thu 10am-7pm; Fri closed

ADDRESS

P.O. Box 18217, Al Quoz 1, Dubai

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Special thanks to La B.A.N.K, Paris
(www.bankgalerie.com)



VIDEO FESTIVALS

- 2010 E-flux video rental, Fondazione Giuliani per l'arte contemporanea, Rome, Italy
- 2008 Paradise Now! Essential French Avant-Garde Cinema, 1890-2008, Tate Modern, London, UK
- 2007 New Media Screenings, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansasâ City, USA Carte blanche à Elvan Zabunyan, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
Video story, Centre Pompidou's 30th anniversary, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
- 2006 Live Screen, Saddler's Well, London, UK MAM SCREEN, Dansons, screening in Tokyo subway, Tokyo, Japan
I love art vidéo, 7th edition, Modern and Contemporary Art Museum, Strasbourg, France
- 2005 Playing in the Light: Black Dance Film Tour, Tate Modern, London
23rd festival Tous courts, Aix-en-Provence, France
- 2004 Festival Vidéoformes, Clermont-Ferrand, France Nuit de la vidéo française, Warsaw-Cracow-Gdansk, Poland
- 2003 Expérimentations dans les avant-gardes arabes, Cinémathèque française, Paris Festival Tous Courts, Aix-en-Provence, France
Image contre nature, Marseille, France Festival Cinéma Méditerranéen, Montpellier, France
- 2002 Festival Vidéoformes, Clermont-Ferrand, France I've festival des Cinémas différents de Paris, France
- 2001 Ile festival des Cinémas Différents de Paris, France

COLLECTIONS

- Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
- Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Wien,
- Autriche Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, MA, USA
- Sindika Dokolo Foundation, Luanda, Angola

MONOGRAPH

Zoulikha Bouabdellah, Soft Transgression, Published by Gold Digger, Editions La B.A.N.K

2003 Rites sacrés, rites profanes, Vth Rencontres de laphotographie africaine, Bamako, Mali Laplateforme-dispositif mobile d'échange et de recherche euro-méditerranéen en création contemporaine, Algiers, Algeria Zineb Sedira, Zoulikha Bouabdellah, Espace croisé, Roubaix, France Une nuit d'Art... ventures, 93 artistes. Orlan invite Les Ex de Paris-Cergy, Paris Focus pratique de la vidéo en école d'art, La Vitrine, École supérieure nationale d'art de Paris-Cergy, France L'Europe fantôme. Visions africaines de l'Europe et des Européens, Brussels, Belgium Obszervatorio#7. Introspective Zoulikha Bouabdellah et Olodélé Bamgboye, European Satellite Camouflage, Brussels, Belgium

2002 Vth African Contemporary Art Biennial Dak'art, Dakar, Senegal Obszervatorio#3, recontextualization of Vth African Contemporary Art Biennial Dak'art 2002, European Satellite Camouflage, Brussels, Belgium Laplateforme - dispositif mobile d'échange et de recherche euro-méditerranéen en création contemporaine, Mains d'œuvres, Paris, France L'ami de mon amie. Cergy Connexion, Cergy-Pontoise, France

AWARDS

- 2009 Abraaj Capital Art Prize, Dubai, UAE
- 2008 The Meurice Prize for Contemporary Art, Paris, France
Algerian Prize for young Algerian creation, Algiers, Algeria
- 2005 Winner of Villa Médicis Hors les Murs (AFAA), Cape Town, South Africa

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Set me Free from my Chains, Project Study
Clear plexiglas
Height: 220 cm, 190 cm and 160 cm respectively
Edition of 3 each size