

TEMPO RUBATO

Nadira Husain

The Shattered Horizon

May 30 - July 6 2013

Tempo Rubato is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition of Nadira Husain (b. 1980) in Israel. In addition, it is the first time that the French-born, Berlin-based artist is exhibiting paintings exclusively.

While this shift signifies a departure from a practice that has so far relied on various media (Husain previously worked with ceramic, textile, paint, wood etc.), this new body of work retains most of the strategies she has been using to date.

What strikes at first sight when observing these works is the flatness of the paintings, primarily the result of two factors: both the medium used, and the technique applied. Husain paints with tempera, a material with a flat matte finish that is applied directly onto the bare canvas. This allows her to deal directly with the materiality of the medium and use the canvas not just as a surface, but rather as an integral part of the work. Usually using tie-dye as a starting point, the fabric absorbs the paint in a fashion unseen when it is previously coated. Over a lengthy process, Husain then applies numerous layers of interlinking motifs, one upon the previous one.

If crafts are consistently at the core of Husain's practice, it is certainly as a testimony of her interest in their cultural and temporal specificity. That is to say, they are used as catalysts of a certain culture at a given point in time rather than in reactionary, fetishistic or nostalgic fashion.

These compositions for instance are specifically reminiscent of Islamic Art from the Mughal period. This style – active from the 16th century to the mid 18th century – was devoid of restriction in terms of human depiction as in early Islamic Art, but still retained some of its original elements: a general lack of hierarchy or focus point, a superposition of graphic motifs in duplicated or looped forms and the presence of vegetal elements to name a few. This aesthetic accounts for Husain's early visual culture, growing up in the Western environment of a Parisian childhood.

Present at varying degrees of visibility in Husain's paintings, these characteristic traits are however occasionally applied to content directly drawn from Western pop culture as exemplified in comics for instance. Inserting elements identifiable as cartoon characters or popular childhood icons such as the Smurfs or simply borrowing from the aesthetics of comics in an abstracted way, she introduces a comical tension and disturbs the balance existing in the codes of the format she chose.

For it is a syncretic concern that lies at the center of Husain's practice. Incorporating elements from the various cultures Husain has inherited or been exposed to along her personal biography, she creates paintings in which tensions arise and disturbances appear. Imagining works that tend towards order and stability, she acknowledges the multiplicity of her cultural background by means of delivering an honest testimony to her experience.

If not entirely autobiographical in nature, these paintings draw from a certain tradition of Expressionism. Describing her works in sensual terms – often using a vocabulary related to sound – Husain acknowledges “noise” and “sizzling”. Depicting sensations felt at home in Europe or in this

TEMPO RUBATO

specific instance, while on a trip to the Middle East, she describes the occurrence of experiences failing to resist the natural happenstance of chaos or lack of harmonic continuity; much like the idea of the horizon as safe and stable line that has been shattered, these works sporadically hold atonal, busy and elliptical characteristics.

In a formal depiction as fragmented as the reality she is experiencing, Husain presents a vision of the quality of relationships between forms. Paying close attention to situations of dissonance in unstable regions, both on a micro level (psychological) and macro level (political), she instills a sense of absurdity by means of preventing a strictly tragic reading of the work.

For instance, Husain does so when painting a linear series of dancing frogs directly onto the walls. Much like stamps apposed to Japanese woodblock prints from the 19th century, the outlined amphibians are a testament to the artist's tragi-comical outlook on contemporary existence.

Nadira Husain has previously had solo shows at Tobias Nehring Gallery (Leipzig), PSM Gallery (Berlin), and at Art Brussels. Upcoming solo presentations include a solo show at Art Basel Miami in conjunction with PSM Gallery, Berlin.