

ARTFORUM

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ART SCHOOL: A ROUNDTABLE
FONDAZIONE PRADA
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\$10.00



goose popping up from the bottom of the frame. In one sepia photograph, a man stands on a staircase that emerges from what seems to be a stage; accompanying notation identifies him as Count Condu. This is the last surviving photograph of him, apparently.

The exhibition sound track—a heady composition recalling Arthur Russell’s melancholic electronic instrumentals and Ariel Pink’s melodic sonic warps—was composed by Sampethai in collaboration with musicians Irene Lyssari and Niko Vezani (aka Benjha) as a take-off on the music from the television series *Twin Peaks* (1990–91). As the viewer wove her way through this strange story composed of paintings, drawings, and notes, it became clear that the lyrics to the music—heard through headphones connected to the little MP3 player provided on entering the show—appear in many of the texts. The music completed what became a total sensory and spatial experience, adding yet another layer to the exhibition’s take on myth’s capacity for endless variation.

—Stephanie Bailey

BEIRUT

Nathalie Khayat

AGIAL ART GALLERY

Nathalie Khayat’s exhibition “The Eye Above the Well” featured twenty-seven porcelain and stoneware vessels that were all roughly the size of a person’s torso. Eleven of them were displayed together on a low platform. The rest were placed on waist-high pedestals throughout the space. The effect was sculptural, or rather statuesque—as if one were regarding figurative presences rather than vases. What’s more, every single one of these bodies was damaged in some way: cracked, folded, knotted, torn, punctured, seemingly sutured, or halfway collapsed.

Khayat, who makes both functional design objects and works of fine art, has over the past fifteen years created a compelling visual language from the accidents and errors of her craft. Since 1999, she has been teaching intensely popular pottery classes out of her studio in Beirut, on the second floor of a building next to Sassine Square. Every summer, she brings her students to a studio in the mountains above the northern coastal city Batroun, where they experiment with smoke, sawdust, and a fire pit in the open air. Khayat is drawn to unexpected outcomes and to the processes that cannot be controlled when clay pots are shaped, thrown, dried, glazed, and fired in an experimental fashion. Tensions between fragility and brutality, between interior and exterior, and between black soot and white clay have come to define her work, and also to lend it a profusion of unexpected, often overwhelming meanings.

Khayat named her show for the prolific Dutch filmmaker Johan van der Keuken’s evocative documentary about daily life in the Indian state

of Kerala. She chose the title not for any similarities in the narrative or subject but rather for the symbolism of the well, a vessel of another kind, which allows her to play with notions of light and dark, inside and outside. “The Eye Above the Well” juxtaposed delicate, elongated white porcelain pieces left “naked,” or unglazed, with squatter, more rugged stoneware pots that were either blackened by smoke or glazed in gorgeously graphic white-on-black patterns, which Khayat describes as various expressions of a physical, emotional embrace. That, too, speaks to her process, but also to the ways in which real life and the outside world creep into Khayat’s forms, and how the context beyond her studio inevitably changes the shape and substance of her work through its proximity to political violence. Three years ago, a car-bomb blast ripped through her building, destroying her studio and shooting a window’s worth of shattered glass into the backs of Khayat and her son, who were reading together, leaning over a book on their laps, at the time. The target was Lebanon’s intelligence chief, Wissam al-Hassan, who was killed on the street below.

All of the pieces in this exhibition were produced in a single season, in the spring of 2015. Khayat says the work was compulsive but therapeutic, and that the relationship between her body and her pots was crucial as she spent months wrapping her arms around them, lifting them up, and carrying them from place to place. One of the porcelain vessels appears slashed from top to bottom. Another looks scarred on its shoulder. The glazing on one of the stoneware pots calls attention to a network of cracks and scratches, at once suggesting audacious beauty and a dangerously exposed vulnerability.

Two of the works emerged from her kiln totally buckled. Khayat, who for a decade has been influenced by Japanese pottery traditions, couldn’t bring herself to throw them away. They sat in her studio until she needed the space. Eventually, she hired a conservator to repair them and then a local artisan to fill in the cracks with gold, employing the Japanese practice of *kintsugi*. Those two pieces ended up in the street-facing windows of the gallery, a lesson in mending for the surrounding city and perhaps for the world, or at least for posterity, beyond.

—Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

SHANGHAI

Miao Ying

CHRONUS ART CENTER

For Miao Ying’s “Holding a Kitchen Knife to Cut the Internet Cable,” a monthlong online exhibition organized by the Chronus Art Center and the Chinese pavilion at the Fifty-Sixth Venice Biennale, the artist revisited a collection of ten GIFs and browser works she produced in 2014 and 2015 that engage the aesthetics of censorship. Arranged here in a set sequence, the flashy, congested pieces could be scrolled through by a visitor such that an ambiguous narrative unfolded. The composition of each page typically consisted of a background image, a browser window, and found slangy musings about love, appearing in the visual style of animated texts produced by Taobao, a major Chinese online-shopping site. These texts streamed across the page or turned slowly as though on a rotisserie. In the exhibition’s first works, domain names blocked in China—including Google, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram—have been entered into the browser search fields or navigation bars of otherwise blank windows that reveal the results of these searches; phrases such as “This webpage is not available” directly convey the reality of the Web behind the “firewall.” More suggestively, the vulgar animated text serves as wry commentary on the relationship between Chinese Internet users and the forbidden web pages. In one piece, for example, floating above a window reporting denied access to



Nathalie Khayat, *Untitled*, 2015, unglazed porcelain, 22 1/4 x 13 3/4 x 13 3/4".