

## *Savage Innocence*

What impressed him most when he discovered her work was the fact that he could not place the geographical origin of her iconographic sources. The white walls of the exhibition space were covered by tapestries of different sizes together with embroideries framed in brass; small, sculpted objects, paintings of modest sizes; and a large drawing on paper. He instinctively associated the motifs on the tapestries with Iran: the artist's surname inclined him to presume this assumption. Even though, the compositions of the embroideries reminded him of the swamps of the Everglades, the naïve figures in the paintings and drawings to that of Western medieval miniatures, and the sculptures, to fragments of antique South Indian archaeological discoveries. He rather liked this immense mental confusion. He considered the many influences to be a reflection of an ultra-cosmopolitan and universal society...

The powerful dominance of female figures over that of their male counterparts made him wonder whether this was not a veiled expression of a feminist sense. But the titles of the works soon made him reject this first impression, as they conveyed an explicit ambiguity. It made it rather difficult to determine whether the artist would not support the perpetrator rather than the willing victim in the erotic game. This led him to enjoy the wet environment in the figurative scenes and the playfulness of the abundant vegetation all the more. He subconsciously perceived the whole setting as a contemporary, subversive rendition of the best scenes in Western art history: the aroused old men ogling Suzanne appearing to be devoured by giant octopi. The savagery of humanity juxtaposed with the innocence of animality.

The subsequent visit to the artist's studio reserved other surprises. There was no clear distinction between her living space and working area. Like in a bandit's cave where the rays of sunshine glitter on the stored treasures, he discovered plastic dinosaurs, phalluses made of baked earth, art books whose covers had faded in the light, and half finished paintings and sculptures. A fascinating jumble of emotions came over him: as conflicted as those in her paintings. The pages on the wall contained poems in different languages. Their sweet words aroused a sense of lethargy and contemplation. In his daydreams, he could not help but think of the languorous odalisques seeking shelter from the heat and of the glances through mashrabiyas. In the reinterpretation of classical eastern patterns, he saw the eternal future of orientalism.

Simon Delobel

Sanam Khatibi

*Ask me nicely*

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Open on Thursdays and Fridays from 2-5.30 pm, on Saturdays from 2-6 pm, and by appointment.