

Aboudia: Diana Fardon Where Are You?

May 31st - June 22nd, 2017

In "Diana Fardon Where Are You?" Aboudia deploys his familiar style absorbed from the torn wall-posters and decaying fences of urban Africa to show us our own world through the eyes of a new arrival. Aboudia, who draws his inspiration from the streets of his hometown of Abidjan, is now pursuing a studio residency in New York. His 4th one-man show at Ethan Cohen Gallery offers the first fruits of his ongoing residency. The show happens in the context of the recent sale of Jean-Michel Basquiat's painting of a skull for \$110 million at Sotheby's. The record-breaking price at auction demonstrates beyond doubt that African inspired contemporary art has arrived as a full-fledged global genre of lasting interest. It's esthetic stamp is unmistakable however varied or individualistic the artist, however far-flung in the diaspora. Perhaps the leading light in the new wave of such young artists is Aboudia whose prices at auction keep climbing, who was featured in two Saatchi shows and whose work sells strongly around the world.

Replete with visual references to African motifs, tribal masks, symbols and colors, Aboudia's work is already acclaimed as a role model of the genre. Entitled "Diana Fardon Where Are You", the current show explores themes of aspiration and longing, exile and alienation, the search for lost love, and the spiritual state of anonymous limbo - in distinctly African tones. Aboudia has added bas-relief three dimensionality and spray-paint immediacy intermixed with pasted magazine pages of fashion models to his palette to convey the urgency of his feelings. The result is a startlingly powerful window into an immigrant's universal state, the inner turmoil of the eternal voyage from the familiar to the hoped-for. As such, Diana Fardon, a beauty once glimpsed and since lost, embodies the obscure object of desire that abides in faraway lands of glamor and luxury, a world of fashion models, a state of desire and yearning. Aboudia has arrived at that world and seen its immaterial illusion. What happens now? Where is this promised apotheosis? He sees himself searching, looking, his still African self, with the spirits that live in him, with the eyes of his family haunting him, the

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echoes of the street-children he left behind. His true identity that he can't banish is revealed in the vibrant expressionistic chaos narrated across each canvas.



Discussion Deux Nouchis, 60 x 48 in, 2017

In the first tableau entitled *Discussion Deux Nouchis* Aboudia envisions two inner spirits conversing on the phantasmal reality he finds assaulting his senses as he tries to make sense of new surroundings. The spirits, local to his origins, appear lecherous, cadaverous, ugly – this is what an outsider looks like to others. This is what an outsider feels like as a voyeur onto the polished world of exquisite people and objects. The world they and Aboudia see, the texture of their seeing, is directly presented in *Fashion Mode*. That world offers the lure of ordered elegance but never delivers, never touches the emotional yearning of deeper consciousness, which in turn overwhelms it. In *Rêve Urbane (Urban Dream)* four vividly skeletal figures of women dominate a canvas with fleeting magazine pages of black fashion models. Aboudia's experience as witness of women's extreme poverty in Africa haunts his witness of comparable women dressed up and sheathed in the armor of Western consumerism.

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