

Sara Ouhaddou
IMPRESSION // IMPRESSION

Vernissage: 29 September | h19
Talk by Juan Asis Palao Gomez and the artist | h18:30
Exhibition: 30 sep – 5 dec, 2017

VOICE gallery is pleased to invite you to the opening of the exhibition IMPRESSION // IMPRESSION by the artist Sara Ouhaddou. The event will take place on Friday, September 29th in the presence of the artist.

The impression of an impression, as a print of a print, the impression of a perception, the impression of a landmark, a temporality. As many interpretations of the objects Sara Ouhaddou puts together as pieces of History, as pieces of her own story.

This project was born in 2013 as the artist was staying in an artistic residency Dar al-Ma'mûn. The project echoes a natural approach of deconstruction. After design studies, Sara is standing at the very thin border between design and contemporary art. She is looking for a way to preserve the essence of construction as well as Islamic symbols which both represent the ultimate mathematical system to her. She wants to create a system of objects but has not found her way to it yet. This is when she starts depriving the objects of their usual function. She does the same with the craftsmen she's working with. By deconstructing everything she knows, she's not trying on destroy but rather to find her own answers. She is interested in the human aspect of work, and this is what she does with here two craftsmen from Marrakech, Saïd and Fouzia. This is the essence of what is "homemade" to be imperfect, but when you combine the "maker" and the "homemade object", perfection is then created, embodied in pieces of art. They are the results of a mental thought process rather than an architectural one, and this is what makes them timeless.

Based on these shapes and symbols, as well as on her personal background tainted by the oral Berber heritage, Sara Ouhaddou takes the analysis a step further and questions language and writing in order to build her own signs system. To that extent, she leads the viewer into considering the shapes as real enigmas. She put things together to create sense and enables the viewer to read her without actually reading words. She tries the experience herself, trying to express what she's been seeing and living with this new form of language.

The artist makes objects in collaboration with craftsmen and craftswomen selected for their skills but also taking into consideration their economic and social situation. She uses different materials such as rubber, textile, embroidery, and clay, to highlight traditional methods through aesthetic and technical innovations.

Here, she works essentially on ceramic, the clays from Ourika she's been able to experiment. Once again, she tries to push back the limits of this very fragile material. She actually creates a "mise en abyme" of the clay: the clay as a material but also as the soil, as the geographical territory, as a heritage in a sense, a collective memory and imaginary. The clay itself is a combination of contexts. All of these impressions, perceptions and various words are however gathered under one single notion: the recurring question of symbol as language. The way the pieces of art are organized in the exhibition tells a story, a story that could fit in only one of these many tiles. Once again the limits of standard are pushed back and the pieces of tiles are testimonies of failures, mistakes, that are, in the end, also part of the path to art. To show the material limits, technical limits, and encourage the reflexion on perfection and imperfection.

This exhibition shows this path, from the early intuitive beginnings to final understanding of a new way of symbolising language: a new alphabet. It is at the same time the end of a cycle having reached its own limits, and the beginning of a new one opened to experimentation.

CG: Sara, the pieces of art exhibited are almost all with natural tones: range of white, grey, as well as the red from Ourika nuances. Have you ever wished to create colourful pieces, made of different enamels? Would a switch in the colours or materials you use induce a new transformation of your own symbols?

SO: Freeing myself of colours is part of the deconstruction process. Colours may be reintroduced to the process, but later. Moreover, to me, it is of prime importance that the pieces of art are natural and nude, to show the clay as it really is, without any embellishments. This is a way of forgetting the "useful" aspect of the object, although it only aims at being decorative.

Recently I realized my craftsman was specialized in enamel but working only with part chemical enamels that we can find in Morocco. I wanted to find pure and natural enamels, symbolising a certain type of Morocco, from a specific place, with their own identify.

I thought about the green from Tamgrout in Zagora region. It met my will to create bridges between the two regions. On my way to Tamgrout I realized that other colours were to be found in addition to the green: yellow, black, red. I was looking after the obvious and ran into something more symbolic. This switch to enamel, and especially to new colours, is pure coincidence, the start of a new research. But so far, we are just getting started with some technical tests.

CG: You recently won "1 per cent Art of New-York City", for which you will create the pavement of the park Little Syria. Could you explain how this new project is a new phase? Is it a break from what you've been doing before?

SO: No it is not; in fact it is more the continuity around the notion of alphabet. Impression // Impression is like the substantial preparatory work for this new project. I speak darija but I can't read classical Arabic. Writing this language is for me as a succession of symbols that I can recognize through their structure. Regarding Little Syria, I put myself in the feet of a stranger, moreover Muslim, in New York. And how an American could perceive and understand this language without being able to read it. So I decided to create a new Arabic alphabet, which is once again a combination of symbols, something as a crossroad between the classical Arabic alphabet and the shapes coming from the Islamic geometry that I have been cataloguing for many years now. It is like a new abstract font. We could find a break in the fact that each time I create a new system, I am using a different material which is itself linked to a context and geography.

CG: This idea of chance, of coincidence, that you actually only consider as a mathematic element can be found in your perception of the achievement of your pieces. They are sometimes broken pieces, or pieces that will break with time. Do you consider this temporality as a new limit to pass through? Or on the contrary as a coincidence?

SO: It was complicated for me to accept this idea: that the pieces could be broken, break themselves; that we produce 50 tiles to end up with only one at the end. Then I started to think about this idea of temporality, including my craftsmen, who are always trying to create long-lasting objects. Now, I try to understand that in any case, ceramic is such a fragile material that it is ephemeral. A broken piece has the same value as the very end of a life: it is normal and bound to happen. I believe this temporality is a limit with which I would like to play, even use this limit to create. But I still need time to be peaceful enough and to accept to build something perfect and watch it self-destruct.

Text and conversation with the artist by Cassandre Gil