

GHEBALY

FARAH ATASSI



Farah Atassi

GHEBALY GALLERY

2245 E Washington Blvd.

July 7, 2017–August 12, 2017

Digesting a history of modernist art and design—high points include Fernand Léger's early twentieth-century paintings and Oskar Schlemmer's truly bonkers *Triadic Ballet*, 1922—Farah Atassi attempts to continue that era's experimental ethos with the trappings of her contemporary world. In *Blue Guitar* (all works 2017), bendy yoga practitioners curlicue around the musical instrument, its sound hole replaced by the narrow slots of an electrical outlet. Nearby, a clock (*Still Life with Clock 2*) marks the time—a constant companion in this exhibition of eight paintings.

These works are in accord; each canvas features a brightly patterned ground whose converging edges intimate angular rooms in which people and objects are posed. The calm of *Woman in Rocking Chair*, where the subject's legs are casually crossed at the ankle, is countered by *The Swimmer*, in which a striped bathing suit is punctuated, literally, by a large exclamation point. The grid is consistently conjured and effaced, amended and enclosing. Pat art-historical genres—the still life and the portrait—are given exuberant opportunities to stretch and extend their effects. Yet in almost every one of the works on view here, the paint is inconsistently applied and discolorations are frequent—appearing like touch-ups gone terribly awry. These are too regular to be merely mistakes, and so viewers who find themselves seduced by the snap of Atassi's paintings must also account for the artist's hand.



Farah Atassi, *The Swimmer*, 2017, oil and enamel on canvas, 79 x 63".

— Andy Campbell

Review Farah Atassi paintings: Part Picasso and pure catnip for fans of midcentury design

By Sharon Mizota

AUGUST 8, 2017, 12:20 PM

The paintings of French Syrian artist Farah Atassi at Ghebaly Gallery hark to Picasso and Cubism, reducing everyday objects — vases, telephones, guitars — to flat, elemental shapes that dissolve into riotous paroxysms of pattern.

The works also clearly draw from mid-20th century design, which is perhaps why they look new. The current vogue for the clean lines and clear colors of everything midcentury turns these paintings into hipster catnip.

That said, they are grittier than one might expect. Underneath the flat shapes and hard edges, one can easily discern ridges and whorls from previous iterations. The final paintings may look like cheery, breezy designs, but they feel hard-won. The underlying texture allows you to see Atassi thinking things through, trying things out. They convey a gravity and a personality that a flatter, cleaner image could not.

A penchant for visual ambiguity also saves the works from being simply pleasing or pretty. The still lifes are especially compelling in this regard. They typically depict an arrangement of objects on a table or shelf, but this surface is only barely distinguishable from the surrounding walls. Both are covered in high-contrast, brightly colored patterns.

The objects also reinforce this visual confusion. For every recognizable vase of flowers, there is a shape that might be a wall hanging or a decorative screen or perhaps just another shape. It could be something abstracted beyond identification, or not.

The images vibrate, not only with color and shape, but with the irresolvable nature of their impossible spaces. This tension is nothing new in painting, but it's a pleasure to see it explored with such verve and assurance.

The background materials for the show mention Fernand Leger as another touchstone for Atassi, who is based in Paris. But I also see a little of the American modernist Stuart Davis, and jazz. Both are grounded in reality but are capable of taking us somewhere else entirely.

Ghebaly Gallery, 2245 E. Washington Blvd., L.A. Ends Saturday. (323) 282-5187, www.ghebaly.com



REVIEW - 03 AUG 2016

Farah Atassi

Xippas, Paris, France

BY DEVIKA SINGH

Farah Atassi's new paintings are filled with diagrammatic shapes that hover somewhere between abstraction and figuration. With her

cheerful palette, the artist – who was nominated for the Prix Marcel Duchamp in 2013 – has moved away from the cool architectural compositions that characterized her earlier work towards exploring the figure in space. Triangles, squares and single lines in thick oil and glycerol paints seem to bounce across the patterned surfaces of these large canvases. Atassi is fascinated by the nude and the still life – the grand themes of modern painting – as well as the carnival. Although the paintings are full of references (Atassi has said that she owes a debt to cubism), her use of quotation often has a teasing element to it: for example, the influence of Pablo Picasso’s female nudes loom large but in *Nude in the Studio* (all works 2016) the one-eyed model seems to be winking at the viewer. The nimble female body at the centre of the painting is created from an assemblage of triangles set against graphic, colourful zigzagging lines. Only a long, undulating stroke signals the woman’s curly locks. *The Painter* is an equally playful work. Its focus is a seemingly anodyne artist holding a brush and a palette. Mocking the stereotypical egotism of the male artist, the canvas is empty and the painter’s face reduced to a caricature.



Farah Atassi,
Nude in the studio, 2016, oil
and enamel on
canvas, 2 x 1.6
m. Courtesy:
galerie Xippas;
photograph:
Frédéric
Lanternier

The backgrounds of all nine works in this exhibition comprise scotch-tape grids. Nearly invisible in reproduction, this armature gives a rugged texture to the works when seen up close. Using streaks of colour to build her pictorial structure, the artist paints lines on the upper edges of her canvases that are smudged and imperfect. The final all-over pattern often references Native American geometric folk designs; this both creates a wallpaper effect while locking the figure inside the composition.



Farah Atassi, 2016, exhibition view, Xippas, Paris. Courtesy: galerie Xippas; photograph: Frédéric Lanternier

In the second, untitled series of the exhibition, the murky chromatic gradations of the paintings *Psychedelic Setting* and *Psychedelic Setting II* recall 1970s design. In these works, the figure-ground distinction collapses, though the background is never entirely flat: Atassi overlaps forms to convey a sense of depth. The series references the theories of the French painter Henry Valensi who, in the 1930s, encouraged artists to base their compositions on musical arrangements. In *Metronomes*, jaunty, puppet-like musical devices are displayed in a similar set: the mechanical ballets of Oskar Schlemmer come to mind.



Farah Atassi,
*Psychedelic
Setting II*, 2016,
oil and enamel
on canvas, 1.6 x
1.3 m. Courtesy:
galerie
Xippas; photograph:
Frédéric
Lanternier

For two key paintings, *Still Life in Red* and *Full Color Still Life*, Atassi borrowed from both hard-edge painting and Henri Matisse's cutouts to create boisterous table arrangements of vases and flowers. Broken-up planes pop out of these high-spirited compositions that seem reassuringly familiar. Figure and object are treated with the same ebullience here and the result is exuberant: a hugely enjoyable take on the history of modern painting.

DEVIKA SINGH

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September 2016

FRIEZE.COM

REVIEW - 14 NOV 2014

Farah Atassi

xippas art contemporain



Farah Atassi,
*Sculptures for
Painting, 2014*

19 September – 1 November 2014

Farah Atassi's nomination for the Prix Marcel Duchamp in 2013 focused significant attention on the Belgian painter, pressure to which the artist has responded admirably. Since her graduation in 2005 from the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Atassi had been creating bare interior landscapes, generic spaces such as kitchens and bathrooms. These paintings were delineated by grids that often both emphasized the perspective of the spaces and described utilitarian tiling; in such cold, clinical locations residues of distress might be sluiced away, manifested by additional washed areas of colour. Recently, however, Atassi's work has evolved, and five of her works from 2014 were exhibited in Geneva.



Farah Atassi,
Folkloric Setting,
2014

She has remained true to the same method for these new paintings, a laborious process of gridding and masking her canvases with tape before applying colour in oil and glycerol, then adjusting the tape lines and repeating the process numerous times, so that some areas receive many more layers of colour than others. If this added interesting texture to the earlier psychologically-charged interiors – a pretty well-worn subject for contemporary painters – the method really finds its mark in the most recent pieces, which abandon clear figuration to generate spaces which are much more elusive. At first view they are pattern compositions; the portrait format *Sculptures for Painting*, for example, has a dark reddish-brown ground in which repeating white shapes make borders on the left hand and upper edges that seem to be converging off-centre of the canvas. Moving downwards and right, sharp folds in the pattern shatter the regularity, or maybe displaced shards of the same image have come to rest on the surface. Added to this, two-thirds of the way down the image, the brown and white flatness takes a three-dimensional turn when added lines of perspective extend it towards the viewer. Two angular sculptural totems stand on this rudimentary stage, bodies outlined in much the same way as the patterns of the background, but their discrete palette of brighter colours and linked forms imbues them with greater volume.



Farah Atassi, *The Cloud*, 2014

Given Atassi's facility to manipulate pattern and space, the viewer is inclined to form an easy connection to her Syrian roots, but titles like *Folkloric Setting* or *Ornamental Setting* both describe what they present and mock that attribution. And *Cut-Outs*, a bright red and white landscape work just under two metres wide, works with sawtooth-edged shapes akin to a woven Native American eye-dazzler. This pattern again just about suggests a backdrop for a collection of standing objects, though here the objects are less distinct in relation to their context. What can be made out of their semi-organic angularity could be inspired by Barbara Hepworth sculptures, or maybe Atassi was taken by Zaha Hadid's uncomfortable, digitally designed furnishings. The final work is *The Cloud*, another stage for two totemic shapes in front of a swarming cloud of dark cobalt, black, gold, mustard and flesh-coloured

rectangles. It creates the most fathomable space and thus the clearest link to Atassi's previous works, but also initiates the impression that these are all vector-based designs – which is not the case. In elaborating her practice, Atassi has orchestrated an impressive conjunction of decorative pattern, a likeness to digitally generated forms and architectural space. It is remarkable when seen in reproduction, and astonishing when viewed first-hand.



Farah Atassi,
Cut-Outs, 2014

First published in Issue 17
Dec 2014 – Feb 2015

PARIS

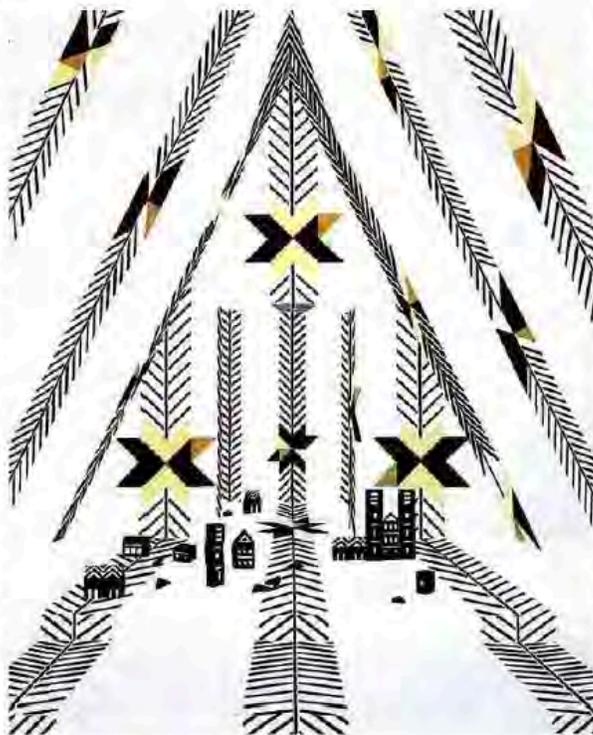
Farah Atassi

Galerie Xippas / 6 septembre - 26 octobre 2013

Farah Atassi, qui est actuellement en lice pour le prix Marcel Duchamp, présente une nouvelle série de peintures à la galerie Xippas, fruit d'une résidence qu'elle vient d'achever à New York. Ces œuvres mêlent, selon ses propres termes, les notions de *all-over* et de *display*.

Elle peint des intérieurs dont les formes se sont récemment complexifiées. Depuis ses premières recherches, des motifs dessinés au scotch déterminent ses compositions. Mais, pour la première fois, elle a utilisé un motif aléatoire dans *Modern Toys II* qui est à l'entrée de l'exposition. La composition se plie alors à la magie du hasard, qui est soulignée par un mur oblique, le premier que l'on connaisse dans ses tableaux. L'œil s'enfonce dans un espace qui se déplace au fur et à mesure qu'il l'apprivoise. Le fond est bleu et blanc, et rappelle les plages de Simon Hantai—la matière aussi d'ailleurs, car quelques éraflures de scotch décollé dépassent à la surface de la toile. On voit des socles qui creusent encore l'espace, sur lesquels on reconnaît de petites constructions aux couleurs vives, inspirées de jouets en bois dessinés par des pédagogues allemands au début du 20^e siècle, et dont les formes ressemblent à celles du Bauhaus, ce sont comme des réminiscences de toiles antérieures dans un environnement métamorphosé. L'usage de ces socles dans les compositions a été mis au point dans la toile *Factories*, visible à quelques rues de là dans une exposition à la galerie JGM qui offre une lecture originale d'un certain modernisme à la lumière de l'artisanat et de l'ornement (cette toile de Farah Atassi y dialogue avec une œuvre de Simon Starling) (1).

La pièce maîtresse de l'exposition est *Tabou*. Elle est inspirée par le folklore allemand du film de Fritz Lang, les *Niebelungen*, et révèle un espace dont le plafond en pointe est déterminé par un motif à chevrons ponctués d'étoiles noires et ocres. Comme par un mélange de folklores, une étrange parenté apparaît entre ces motifs et des motifs orientaux. Au sol, sont disposées des maquettes de Ladislav Sutnar que l'on retrouve dans d'autres tableaux (*Workshops*, *Building the City*). Modernisme et primitivisme se mêlent en harmonie. Il faut se placer un peu sur le côté pour percevoir le véritable point de fuite et les faux effets de miroir, et remarquer que la symétrie n'est qu'apparente, ce qui introduit dans cet édifice fragilité et légèreté. *Tabou II*



« Tabou » 2013 Huile sur toile
210 x 170 cm Oil on canvas

s'inspire, lui, d'un motif découvert dans une exposition sur l'abstraction européenne au MoMA. La composition de l'espace, en pointe également, est encore plus synthétique que dans *Tabou*. Une simple marche permet d'accéder à une sorte d'arrière-espace. Et les jouets sont posés à même le sol, comme s'ils annulaient la profondeur du tableau, mais juste un instant, le temps d'un regard ou d'un changement de focale. Un effet semblable se produit dans *Playroom III* dont les murs asymétriques sont couverts d'un motif jaune et blanc inspire quant à lui par une visite au American Museum of Natural History. Dans les deux toiles *Building the City I* et *II* qui concluent le parcours, le *all-over* des motifs géométriques est brisé par un système nouveau : les carreaux qui composent un pan de mur sont comme libérés de leur carcan, et s'épanouissent librement. Au-dessus des maquettes représentant des usines ou des gratte-ciel, le mur devient tableau.

Anaël Pigeat

(1) *After*, galerie JGM, 7 septembre-12 octobre 2010, commissariat Marjolaine Lévy

Farah Atassi, who is in the running for this year's Prix Marcel Duchamp, is showing a new series of paintings made during her very recent residency in New York—works that, as she puts it, combine the notions of *all-over* and *display*. The forms in the interiors she paints have gained considerably in complexity. Ever since her debuts, the artist used adhesive tapes to form the motifs that determined her compositions. At the entrance to this show we see the first piece by her featuring a random motif, *Modern Toys II*. The magic of chance is underscored by the sloping wall in this picture, another first for her. The eye enters a space that unfolds as it is mastered. The ground is blue and white, recalling the *plages* of Simon Hantai—as does the material aspect, with the marks left from stripping away the tape still visible on the canvas. There are pedestals which take us deeper into the space, and on them we recognize small, brightly colored constructions inspired by the wooden toys designed by German educationalists in the early twen-

tieth century, their forms resembling those of the Bauhaus. These are like reminiscences of earlier canvases in an environment that has been metamorphosed. The use of these bases in the compositions was perfected in *Factories*, a canvas that is on show a few blocks away at the JGM gallery, which is presenting an original vision of a certain form of modernism in the light of arts and crafts and ornament (in this show, a canvas by Farah Atassi dialogues with a work by Simon Starling). (1) The standout piece here is *Tabou*. Inspired by the mythology evoked by Fritz Lang in his film *Niebelungen*, it presents a space with a pointed roof determined by a chevron motif punctuated with black and ochre stars. As if in a mixing of folk traditions, we observe a strange kinship between these motifs and oriental ones. On the floor there are models by Ladislav Sutnar which also appear in other pictures (*Workshops*, *Building the City*). Modernism and primitivism mix harmoniously. You need to stand slightly to one side to catch the real vanishing point and the false mirror effects, and to see that the symmetry is merely apparent, a fact which brings fragility and lightness to the construction.

Tabou II was inspired by a motif found in an exhibition on European abstraction at MoMA. The spatial composition, which again is pointed, is even more synthetic than in *Tabou*. A simple step provides access to a kind of back-space. The toys are placed on the ground, as if to cancel the depth of the picture, but only for a moment, in the space of a gaze or change of focus. A similar effect occurs in *Playroom III*, the asymmetrical walls of which are covered with a yellow and white motif, inspired by a trip to the American Museum of Natural History. In the two final canvases of the sequence, *Building the City I* and *II*, the *all-over* effect of geometrical motifs is shattered by a new system: the tiles that compose a section of wall are as if freed of their constraints and can spread freely. Above the models representing factories or skyscrapers, the wall becomes a painting.

Translation, C. Penwarden

(1) *After*, Galerie JGM, September 7–October 12, 2010, curated by Marjolaine Lévy.

FARAH ATASSI, GÉOMAÎTRE

Par Elisabeth Franck-Dumas (<http://www.liberation.fr/auteur/12314-elisabeth-franck-dumas>)

— 20 septembre 2013 à 20:16

Galerie. La peintre belge d'origine syrienne délaisse les paysages et la narration pour jouer avec les figures, les surfaces et la profondeur.



Qu'on nous excuse la comparaison, vu le carambolage de références *highbrow* (Tarkovski, Mondrian, Malevitch) que suscite généralement le travail de Farah Atassi. Mais à nous plonger dans sa dernière série de peintures, exposées à la galerie Xippas à Paris, ce sont des flashes de films de science-fiction qui surviennent - les étirements lumineux et pixellisés des vieux *Star Wars* qui figuraient la vitesse, les errements claustrophobes de *Cube*, ce nanar aux personnages prisonniers d'une infinie et répétitive perspective cubique.

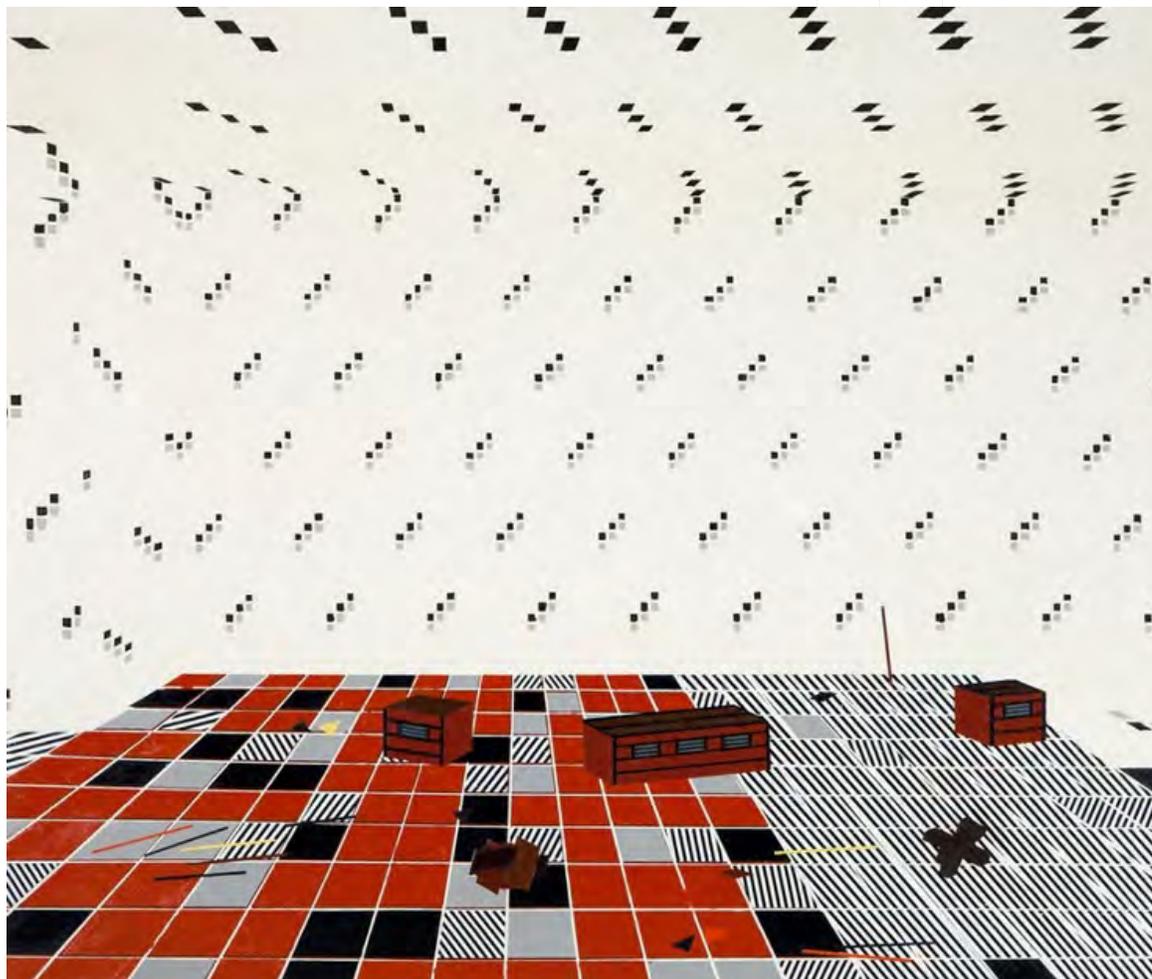
Non que la contemplation des œuvres de Farah Atassi soit désagréable, bien au contraire. Mais le visiteur pourra y retrouver ces sensations de décrochement, ces espaces à double fond, ces brusques chutes au cœur de la perspective. Sur fond blanc, certaines toiles sont tapissées de motifs de folk-art aux teintes primaires, d'autres de carrés de couleurs allant du minuscule à l'infiniment petit, et toutes jouent avec les effets de profondeur. Se rapprochant, on découvre des pans de murs, des marches, des plafonds creusés dans le vide, ou plutôt dans le plat, menant à un infini de chemins visuels. Posés au cœur de ces espaces, une poignée de jouets - usines miniatures, micro-immeubles.

Farah Atassi continue ses petits clins d'œil au modernisme (ou à Jean-Pierre Raynaud), mais là n'est pas l'intérêt. Contrairement aux derniers tableaux vus il y a deux ans dans cette même galerie, et présentés aussi à l'exposition «Dynasty» du Palais de Tokyo, ainsi qu'à la Foire de Montrouge 2010 (deux manifestations qui ont révélé Farah Atassi), les scènes produites s'éloignent de la narration. Aux étranges intérieurs désertés, tirés de photos de maisons communautaires russes, ont succédé des mondes picturaux construits de toutes pièces. Les toiles semblent tout à leur plaisir d'être des peintures, de susciter le vertige. *Modern Toys*, *Playroom* et *Workshop* démontrent une superbe maîtrise de la géométrie, des effets, du jeu entre surface et profondeur, entre ligne et point.

Née en 1981 à Bruxelles de parents syriens, Farah Atassi vit et travaille à Paris. Elle vient de terminer une résidence à l'ISCP (International Studio & Curatorial Program) de New York, où elle a peint la série présentée à la galerie Xippas. Elle est nommée pour le prix Marcel-Duchamp 2013.

Elisabeth Franck-Dumas (<http://www.liberation.fr/auteur/12314-elisabeth-franck-dumas>)

Farah Atassi Galerie Xippas, 108 rue Vieille du Temple, 75003. Jusqu'au 26 octobre. Rens. : 01 40 27 05.55 http://xippas.com/fr/galerie_xippas/exposition/202



Farah Atassi, Rec Room, 2012
Huile sur toile — 170 × 200 cm
*Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Xippas, Paris-Genève-Athènes-
Montevideo*

FARAH ATASSI — GALERIE XIPPAS

Point de vue September 11, 2013 — By Guillaume Benoit

Nominée pour le prix Duchamp 2013, Farah Atassi présente à la galerie Xippas une nouvelle série d'œuvres réalisées lors d'une résidence à New York. Plus qu'une simple évolution, les dernières peintures de Farah Atassi peuvent apparaître, au premier abord, en rupture avec son travail, pourtant, l'essence de son œuvre est là, intacte et enrichie.

Farah Atassi @ Xippas
Gallery from
September 7 to October
26, 2013

Farah Atassi semble porter, depuis quelques années le regain d'intérêt de la scène française pour une peinture sensible et dépouillée, où la figuration des lignes géométriques de l'espace laissent émerger une poésie du réel à l'efficacité indéniable. Si, malgré les apparences, l'essence de ses œuvres se retrouve bien dans cette nouvelle série avec ces obliques qui imposent leurs jeux de perspective, l'artiste a su renouveler en profondeur son œuvre et s'engage sur de nouveaux sentiers aussi excitants qu'audacieux.



Farah Atassi, *Playroom III* 2013, *o*
Huile et glycéro sur toile – 200 x 160 cm
Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Xippas, Paris-Genève-Athènes-Montevideo

Et la scénographie de cette nouvelle exposition personnelle à la galerie Xippas ne manque pas de souligner cette évolution. Indéniablement, ceux qui connaissent le travail de Farah Atassi à travers ses représentations d'intérieurs délaissés, perclus des stigmates d'une vie comme en suspens, ne pourront s'empêcher d'éprouver une « rupture » face aux premiers tableaux de cette nouvelle série. Un choc chromatique d'abord ; loin des couleurs pleines et profondes, des grilles emprisonnant la toile, la tonalité se fait lumineuse, presque aveuglante de clarté avec une prédominance de blanc, de rouges, jaunes et bleus. Choc formel ensuite ; jouant avec les codes du minimalisme, à l'image de *Playroom 3*, Farah Atassi semble apposer sur l'ensemble de la toile une structure aux motifs géométriques bicolores. Et pourtant, une fois encore, ce n'est que pour mieux révéler ces perspectives qui lui sont si chères, cette invention de l'espace par la manipulation optique. Comme camouflées par une bichromie

obsédante, les lignes de fuite s'imposent par leur absence, tandis que leur loi continue de régner.



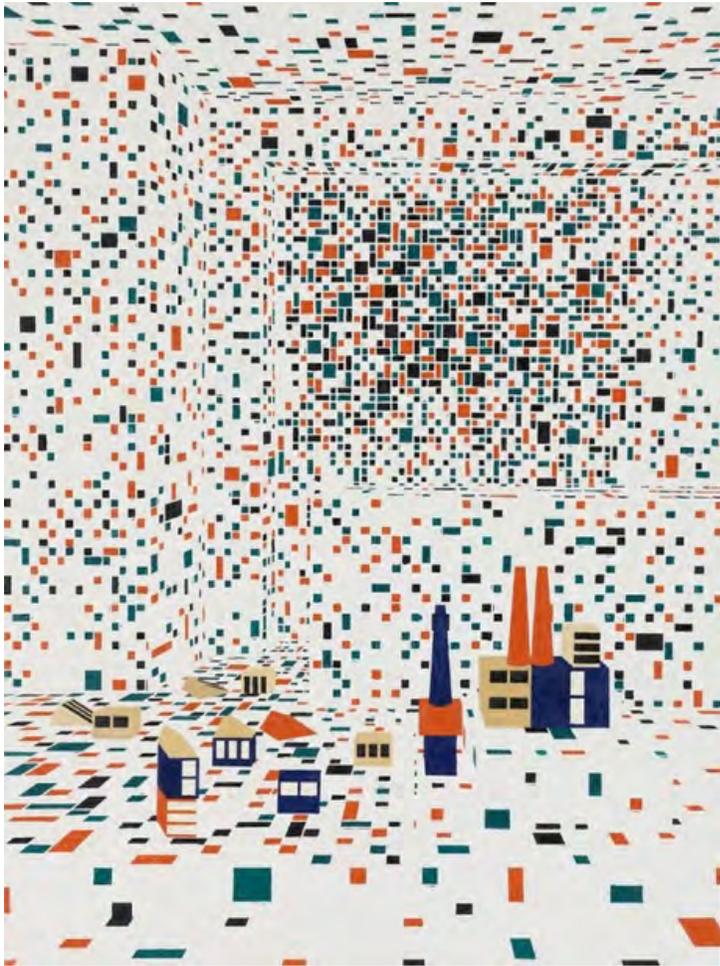
Farah Atassi, *Tabou II*, 2013
Huile et glycéro sur toile – 198,5 × 160 cm
Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Xippas, Paris-Genève-Athènes-Montevideo

C'est ainsi qu'émerge un aspect véritablement essentiel de cette évolution ; la dimension ludique. Elaborant un jeu subtil d'absence-présence et d'aller-retour entre les époques et les formes, Farah Atassi tente d'explorer au plus profond ce que peut percevoir l'œil, ce que peut cacher l'émotion esthétique. Rien d'étonnant donc à ce que l'on retrouve, disséminés dans ces espaces et comme laissés là par hasard, des jouets et maquettes inspirés des outils pédagogiques allemands du début du XXe siècle. Perturbant les motifs qui se font murs et cloisons, les maquettes dessinent un monde irréel, une utopie insolente et réjouissante qui unit les contraires, insérant au cœur du modernisme des stigmates de créations folkloriques. Les motifs minimaux s'unissent pour donner naissance à des visions traditionnelles, voire totémiques avec par exemple *Tabou II*. Farah Atassi fait ainsi du vide la condition d'émergence d'un monde et, si elle en finit avec les représentations d'habitations, c'est que sa peinture, elle-même, s'approprie et habite la toile. Sa grille initiale devient ainsi un véritable jeu de « re-création » des formes, bouleversées par les rapports de couleurs, les agencements aléatoires opérant, d'un secteur à l'autre de la toile, un voyage buissonnier entre les codes esthétiques et les époques. Cette belle liberté conquise, c'est à un spectacle émouvant de couleurs, de motifs et de combinaisons que l'on assiste, enchantés par cette remise en cause par l'artiste de sa propre pratique et ce sursaut d'audace et d'irrévérence.



Farah Atassi, Modern Toys II, 2013
Huile et glycéro sur toile — 200 × 160 cm
Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Xippas, Paris-Genève-Athènes-Montevideo

Mais, derrière la joie de l'expérimentation et de la découverte, ces objets inanimés, uniques habitants d'intérieurs qui sont à présent autant de mondes possibles, conservent, en la complexifiant, la mélancolie sourde de l'univers de l'artiste et ajoutent une confrontation essentielle à l'apprentissage du monde, celles des esthétiques « dysfonctionnantes » et pourtant superbes dans leur association. Un apprentissage, en quelque sorte à percevoir réellement la différence dans ce qu'elle a de plus essentiel. En ce sens, la peinture de Farah Atassi, poussant encore ses limites, s'installe plus que jamais dans une figuration sensible et ajoute à sa palette une liberté qui ne la rend que plus profonde.



Farah Atassi, Building the City II, 2013
Huile et glycéro sur toile — 195,5 × 145 cm
Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Xippas, Paris-Genève-Athènes-Montevideo

Farah Atassi

FOR ZOO MAGAZINE # 39, MAY 2013

The painter Farah Atassi is currently working at her residence and studio in New York. Born in Belgium from Syrian parents and raised in France, Atassi combines various cultural legacies and formal approaches in the medium that she loves most: painting.

Marta Gnyp: *Why are you so fascinated by modernist ideas about painting?*

Farah Atassi: It is probably my nature: I like efficient and direct painting. I like the idea of painting in a very simple way and using simple forms. The modern functionality model is very close to my way of working – the way the images appear clean while nothing is hidden. I like simple, geometric forms; I like straight lines. My master is Fernand Léger.

MG: *Your geometric forms and straight lines don't result in abstraction though.*

FA: I'm more sensitive to figuration. Which means that I don't want to paint abstract but I don't want to be too narrative either.

MG: *How do you construct a painting?*

FA: For me it is very important that the construction of the painting represents a space, although the point of departure is a grid and the flatness. I want to elicit a consciousness about space. In a way, it is a contradiction, since I'm using various effects to create depth and on the other hand, I want the viewer to be aware of the flat surface.



WORKSHOP III, 2012

MG: In your new series you refer to the modernist medium specificity that was heralded by the art critic Clement Greenberg in the 50s and 60s. He proposed that each medium should limit itself to the qualities specific only to this medium, like flatness in the case of painting. Do you try to investigate the limits of this thinking again?

FA: Yes, I confront these ideas with the depth of perspective, expressionist forms and ornaments. At first look, there is this immediate, clear image in each of my work but then everything gets subtler when you discover the surface of the painting, and through it, you discover the process of making.

MG: What do you want to achieve?

FA: The core of my painting is to put contradictions together, to experience the fictive space in the work while being aware of the surface at the same time.

MG: You are a painter; you don't use any other media. In this sense, you are a very traditional artist.

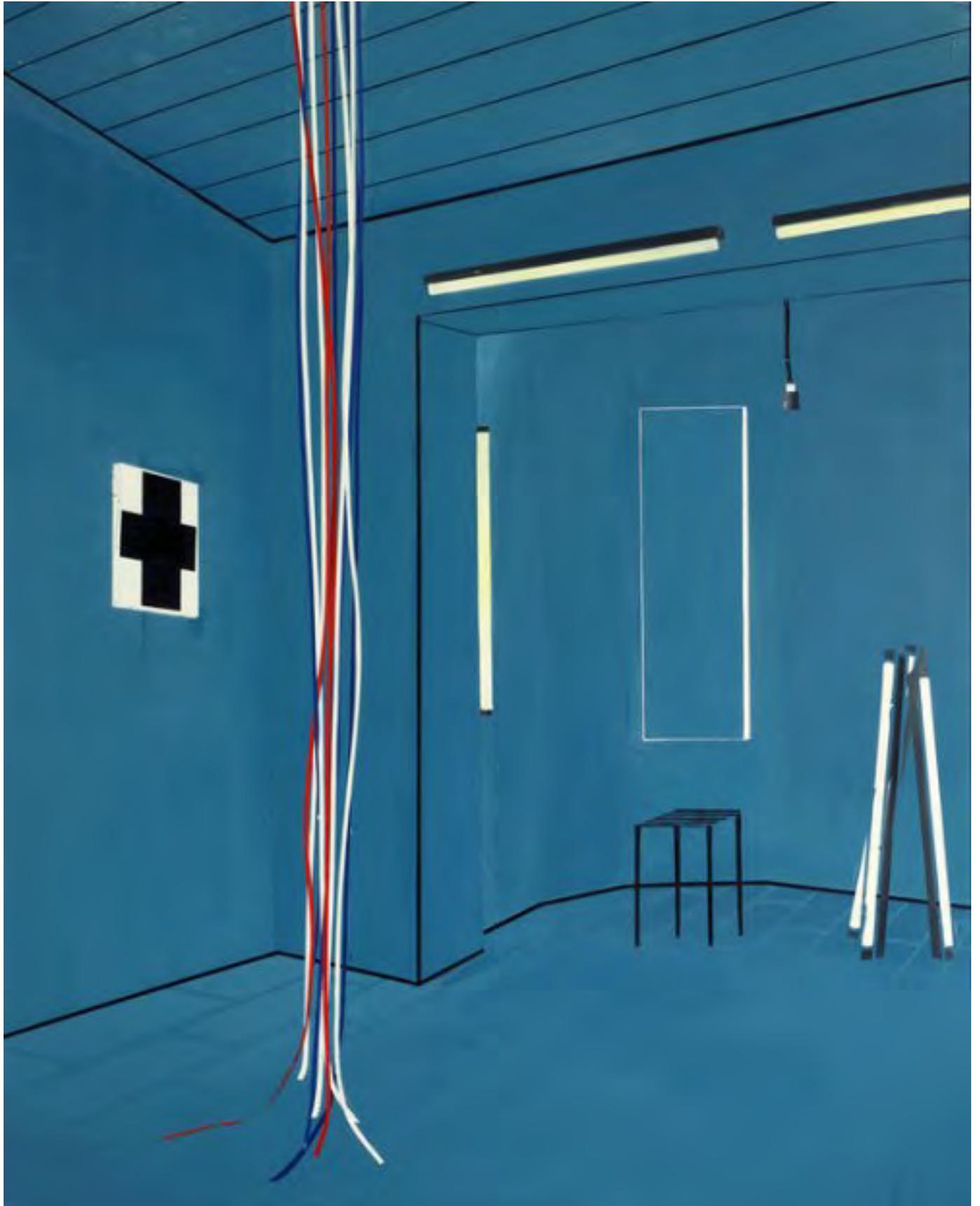
FA: Painting is all I like. I'm passionate about painting.

MG: Are you interested specifically in the modernist period or do you have other interesting cases from art history? Did you ever imagine relating your work to painting from other periods?

FA: Absolutely. Giotto's oeuvre has a lot of aspects that I explore in my work as well. Beautiful. So many contradictions! Since perspective didn't exist in his time, he had to use volumes to produce the effect of depth. In this sense, I feel very close to Giotto. Also, in his use of clear and simple shapes.

MG: In your works, the perspective is very important.

FA: I never really learned about the perspective. Once I started to apply it, it turned out to be very easy to do. You need to decide where you want to have the vanishing point – low, high or outside the canvas. I have been using them since 2008. Now I know exactly the effects of using different variations of it.



BATHROOM II, 2010

MG: In the past you painted interiors that seemed to be more realistic.

FA: That's correct. The spaces now are less narrative. In this period, I work on the paradox of modernity.

MG: What are the other themes that are important to you at this moment?

FA: I think I have always been interested in folklore, especially Russian and German. One of my favorite films is Die Nibelungen by Fritz Lang, which has many elements stemming from German folkloric expressionism.

MG: Have you always been working in series?

FA: Yes.

MG: Do you always work with the same format?

FA: Always approximately 200 × 160 cm. I like this format because it is a human size so you can relate to the painting.

MG: How long does it take you to prepare a painting?

FA: It depends.



WAITING ROOM, 2010

MG: The last half-year, you have been resident in New York. How does this city influence you?

FA: I will probably know better in a few months. I'm thinking a lot about American modernism and European avant-garde, but I'm mostly working in my studio.

MG: How come you became an artist?

FA: I knew very early that I wanted to become one. I was always drawing and painting a lot. Actually, I decided on it when I was very young.

MG: Did you go to an art school in Brussels?

FA: No, I was born in Brussels but together with my parents, we left Belgium very quickly and moved to France. I went to Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and then I participated in an exchange program with the Art and Museum School in Boston, so my first American experience was already 10 years ago. I graduated in 2005 and it took me three years to be prepared to show my work. I started only in 2008.

MG: It must be a difficult period for most young artists who graduate, when there is nothing, no gallery, no collectors, no protection from a school: you simply have to start working.

FA: It is a very difficult period. Because as you said, nothing is happening but also I didn't feel well prepared. I as an artist wasn't ready and my work wasn't ready to be shown in a gallery.

MG: How did you survive?

FA: Sometimes I sold a painting from the studio and sometimes I worked in a shop. My Paris studio was very cheap to rent so it was possible for me to concentrate on working. In 2008, I started to show my work to a bigger public, initially from my studio. These three years were very important to make myself ready.



MG: In 2010 you started to work with a gallery. You were invited to other group shows and your visibility became very strong. Your works landed quickly in collections of important museums and you are considered one of the most promising young talents in France. There is an increasing interest in your work. How does it feel?

FA: Maybe it is strange to say but it feels natural for me. If it didn't work it would be catastrophic for me because I'm a painter and I don't want to do anything else. My life is to be a painter. I highly appreciate my luck and think it is extraordinary what is happening to me but it had to be like this.

MG: You were born from Syrian parents. Do you think these Oriental roots helped your career because people who are interested in your art consider you more exotic, with all due respect?

FA: I don't feel like a French painter. I don't belong to the French school. I'm not French, I'm not Belgian and I'm not Syrian, and I'm very happy about it. Some people need to belong to create their identity. I don't care, and I don't belong. I'm very happy to have this freedom. I don't belong to any country and I don't think my painting belongs to any school.

MG: Why did your parents go to Belgium?

FA: To study and then they stayed.

MG: So in brief, there is a Syrian connection in you but not an obvious one. What about your preference for ornament?

FA: Syria is not really present in my life. I have never worked there, I don't speak the language, but subconsciously, my emotional part is Arabic.

MG: Is this what makes painting interesting to you, to discover all the time limits and possibilities?

FA: It is very interesting to work on a subject and then discover its limits. Then I have to accept it. In all paintings there is a decorative part. I have to take this aspect into account; I myself have to find dialectics between my decorative part and the rigorous interventions with models.

MG: How do you experience your age in relation to your work as painter?

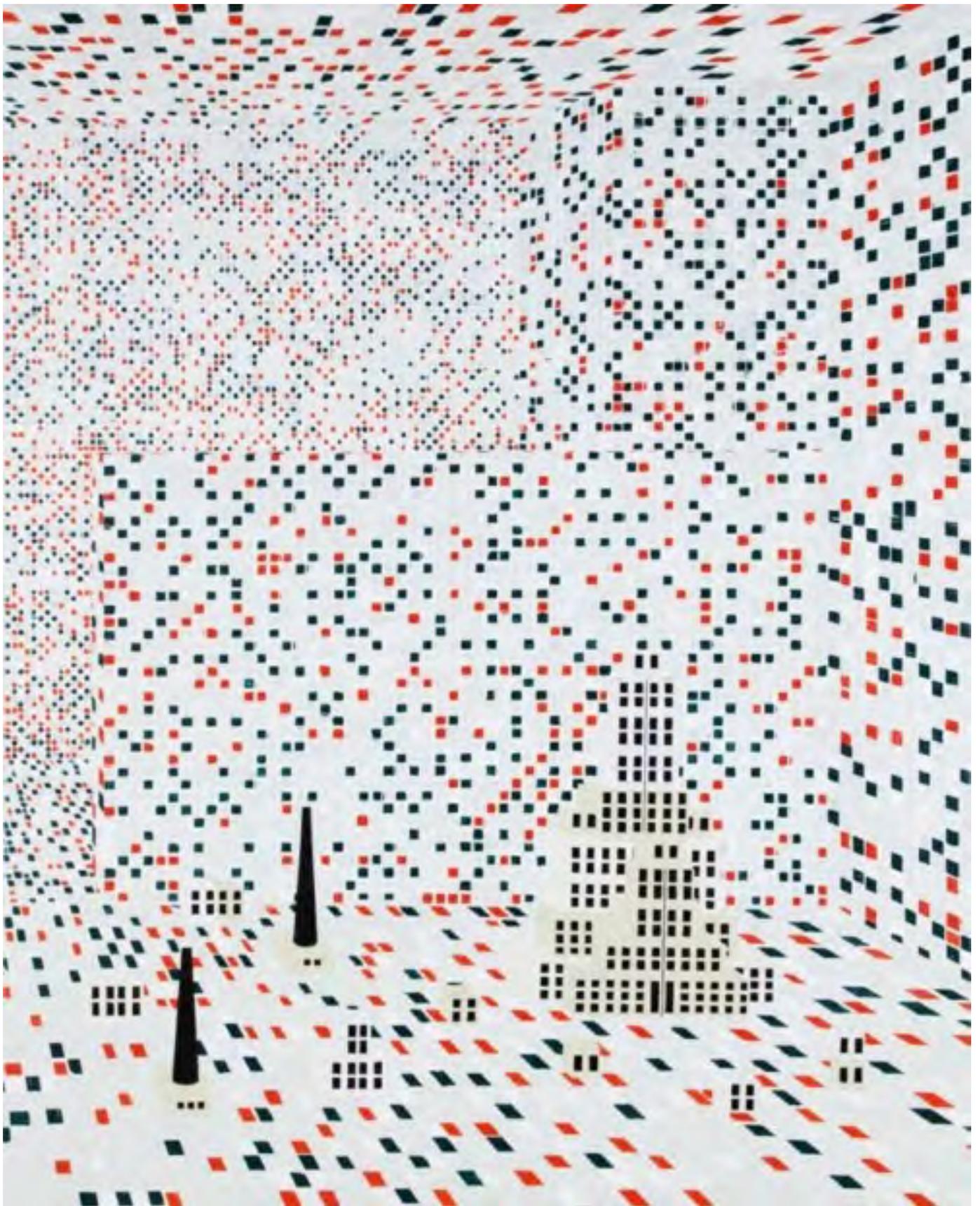
FA: It depends how you see it. 32 is not very young. When I was in Paris, I didn't think about my age. Since I've been in America, I have faced the idea of age. 32 here is no longer young. All is relative.

MG: What is your ambition? Every now and then the medium of painting is declared dead.

FA: I want to show that young artists can find new approaches and be passionate about painting. I know that I will do painting my whole life, because I believe in it. I want to show that it is possible to make great paintings in our time.

MG: Does being a woman artist make any difference?

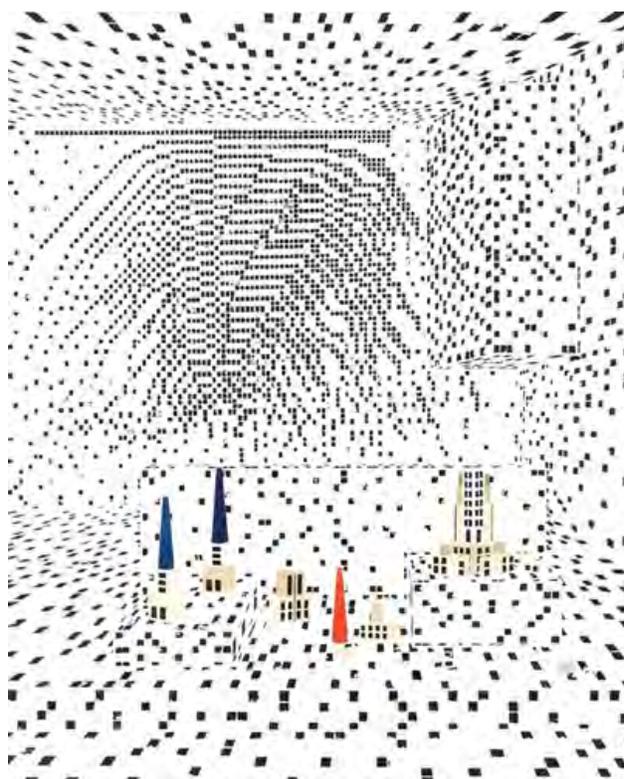
FA: It does because all of us have to cope with very concrete questions about life. The man has, for example, more time to think about a family and social pressure. At 32, as a woman artist, you have to manage a lot more things at the same time. As a woman, I try to find a solution to be present and generous to others and at the same time, concentrate on work.



Paris Reviews

Farah Atassi

GALERIE XIPPAS | PARIS



Farah Atassi, *Building the City*, 2013, oil and glycerol on canvas, 78 3/4 x 63".

Those familiar with Farah Atassi's work will recognize in her latest group of paintings the strong orthogonal lines that lend themselves well to her signature tiled and bricked interiors. Adhering to an underlying grid, Atassi meticulously uses tape and layers of oil paint to construct eerily unpopulated human-scale spaces. But whereas earlier paintings featured scant domestic objects—for instance, a cluster of chairs or a dangling light fixture—evoking a kitchen or a bathroom setting, recent works show the artist moving toward greater abstraction. Now exploring the grid as a modernist concept—though without entirely abandoning recognizable objects—Atassi banishes a realistic sense of time and place from her compositions and turns her attention to geometric shapes and patterns. Refreshing the rote problematic of the flat canvas, Atassi's painted graphic environments, which are clearly influenced by computer-generated schematics, confront the planarity of screen-based virtual realities.

In six new paintings, abstract patterns challenge the credibility of representational perspectival space and vice versa. *Modern Toys II* (all works 2013) and *Playroom III* feature tangram-like designs in, respectively, steely blue and mustard yellow hues, covering the entire canvas. The all-over patterns, also reminiscent of American Indian tribal designs, reinforce the flatness of the painted surface by reducing it to a series of triangles, squares, and trapezoids. Complicating this perceived flatness, however, these shapes vary in size and appear foreshortened in certain areas—giving the impression of wallpaper covering the walls, floor, steps, columns, and peaked ceiling of a believable three-dimensional interior.

Groupings of smaller, multicolored geometric forms sprinkled across Atassi's compositions further escalate the push and pull between surface and illusionistic space. Painted on top of the all-over pattern

—bringing attention to the picture plane as well as to the layered texture of canvas's surface—these forms also convincingly reside within the space described by the painting, as objects resting on the floor, steps, and platforms. The foregrounded rectangles and triangles in *Playroom III* read as scattered children's building blocks thanks to their wood-brown color with green detailing indicating windows, doors, and roof tiles. Meanwhile, in *Modern Toys II*, similar assorted shapes rendered in solid red, yellow, blue, and dark brown are less obviously rooted in the real world and look more like the rearranged components of a Malevich Suprematist composition.

Both *Building the City* and *Building the City II* pay homage to another master of geometric abstraction, notably one who is practically synonymous with the modernist grid: A direct allusion to Mondrian is found in the central composition of *Building the City II*, which appears to be a flat back wall decorated with crisp, evenly spaced rectangles. As Atassi's one-point perspective opens outward from this "wall" toward the viewer, the dense arrangement of orange, green, and black rectangles disperses into a random tessellation that can also be interpreted as mosaic tiles covering the ceiling, walls, and floor of a mysterious room. An ambiguous collection of Atassi's recurrent blocks/abstract shapes occupies the lower half of the canvas, ostensibly resting on a series of stepped platforms. Here, more than in any of the other paintings on view, the dual function of these forms—as real-world building materials and abstract compositional components—underscores the artist's conceptualization of space as both a physical and mental activity.

—*Mara Hoberman*