

## and Abla

Mohamed Abla | 10 October - 24 November 2017

Tabari Artspace Gallery presented the solo exhibition of one of Egypt's most influential and established contemporary artists, Mohamed Abla.

*The Silk Road* included a selection of abstract artworks which synthesised calligraphy, collage and traditional Middle Eastern techniques and explored folktales from North Africa, the Levant, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

A common theme in Abla's work is the exploration of new methods of mark making. For *The Silk Road* series, the artist employed the Turkish *Ebru* technique (paper marbling), which is the act of floating paper in a tray filled with water and oil paint. The paint is then carefully transferred to the surface of the paper to create colourful marble-like patterns. Abla cut shapes from the variously dyed papers, arranging them into compositions resembling animals, heroes, princesses and other folktale figures and imagined scenes derived from the ancient Silk Road network, which was operational from around 120 BCE to 1450s CE.

Narratives play an important role in Abla's work, and the inspiration for this series stems from the artist's research into the history of the Silk Road, as well as recent travels to India, Syria and Iraq. In his works, the artist selects specific folktales which he sees as symbolic of the unsettling political and economic issues in Egypt following the Revolution in 2011. Abla reimagines the activity of the Silk Road through his artwork and draws parallels between past and present politics of the East and West. In another work, *The Copper City*, Abla chose a Pakistani fairy tale as a point of departure. In the story, all of the inhabitants of a city have been turned into copper except for the princess who is locked in a tower. In a conclusion similar to that of the German fairy tale Rapunzel, a hero rides through the frozen city and saves her. This fable symbolises political and social unrest in many of the countries within the Silk Road network, which paralyse government efforts to address wider problems within their countries.

Born in Mansoura, Egypt, Mohamed Abla lives and works between Cairo and Fayoum, Egypt and Walsrode, Germany.



The Princess, 2016  
Mixed media on canvas  
70 x 100 cm

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His first solo exhibition ran at the Hohmann Gallery, Hamburg, Germany (1979), followed by shows at Gallery Ewat, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands (1989); Art Hall, Örebro, Sweden (1991); and the Egyptian Academy of Rome, Italy (1991), amongst others. Later, he moved back to Egypt where he held several solo exhibitions around the country. In 1994 he won the First Prize at the Kuwait Biennial, followed by the Grand Prix at the Alexandria Biennale, Egypt, in 1997. He has also participated in several international art events such as the Havana Biennial, Cuba and his work has been part of several group exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum in Bonn, Germany.

Abla has also founded several artistic institutions which connect artists locally, regionally and internationally through artistic creation. In 2007, Abla founded the Fayoum Art Center, Egypt, where artists meet, work and collaborate. In 2009, he established the first caricature museum in the Middle East, also in Fayoum.

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