

Thomas Erben Gallery

Press Release



Red Man, 2007. Wood, textile, plaster, 34 x 33 x 43 in.

Roza El-Hassan

October 30 – December 13, 2014

Opening reception: Thursday, October 30, 6-8:30 pm

Thomas Erben is pleased to present the gallery's first exhibition with **Roza El-Hassan** (b. 1966, Budapest), an artist of dual Hungarian/Syrian nationality. Installing wooden figures and mixed media sculptures with works on paper and wall-drawings, El-Hassan merges many contradictory qualities into a multi-faceted and nuanced reflection on the human condition.

Roza El-Hassan's social intervention and social design projects – involving materials like wicker and adobe - as well as objects and drawings, have been exhibited widely and internationally. Institutional solo exhibitions include Kunstmuseum Basel (2012); Mücsarnok/Kunsthalle, Budapest (2006); The Drawing Center, New York (2003); Secession, Vienna (2000); Ludwig Museum Budapest and De Vleeshal, Netherlands (both 1999); and Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum, Graz (1995). She represented Hungary at the 1997 Venice Biennale.

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El-Hassan's sculptures are at once solid and ethereal. Assembled from pieces of roughly hewn wood – small splinters joined to heavy blocks – these figures are carved by a hand alternating between the violent and the gentle. Blank or rudimentary faces combine with sketch-like body parts or carefully contoured planks into intuitive impressions: internal states projected in wood. Outer roughness is contrasted with a calm radiating from within, further enhanced by the partial coloring of some sculptures in light washes, with details added in pencil. These solemn works are balanced with more energetic pieces, like the haphazardly clad *Red Man* (2007), whose laughing face is painted a bright scarlet, matching the blanket on which he is sitting.

Similar qualities are present in El-Hassan's works on paper, and throughout the artist's career her drawings have been the constant holding all other activities together. Some of these works come about as sketches for sculpture, performance and architecture; time is a central aspect, and many are produced in a diary-like fashion. Abstract tangles mix with vague figures, collaged pieces of torn paper and fabric, translucent fields, vibrantly colored shapes, smudged pencil. As grave as the subject matters may be, the lightness and openness of the work suggests a process of searching rather than stating, a subtle sensitivity in fraught political climates.

The tentative, probing nature of El-Hassan's drawings is reflected through her entire practice, and what may at first glance seem makeshift is always underpinned with careful formal and material consideration. By letting her work sprawl in multiple directions, the artist creates a whole that encompasses all human hopes and fears, embodying currents of unrest and trauma as well as dignity, protest, and artistic integrity.

The artist lives and works in Budapest and Berlin, where she is currently a resident at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien. El-Hassan is the publisher of the website syrianvoicesmediationandart.wordpress.com.

The exhibition will be on view October 30 – December 13. Thomas Erben Gallery is located at 526 West 26th Street, 4th floor. Gallery hours are Tuesday – Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm. For more information, please contact us at 212-645-8701 or info@thomaserben.com.

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