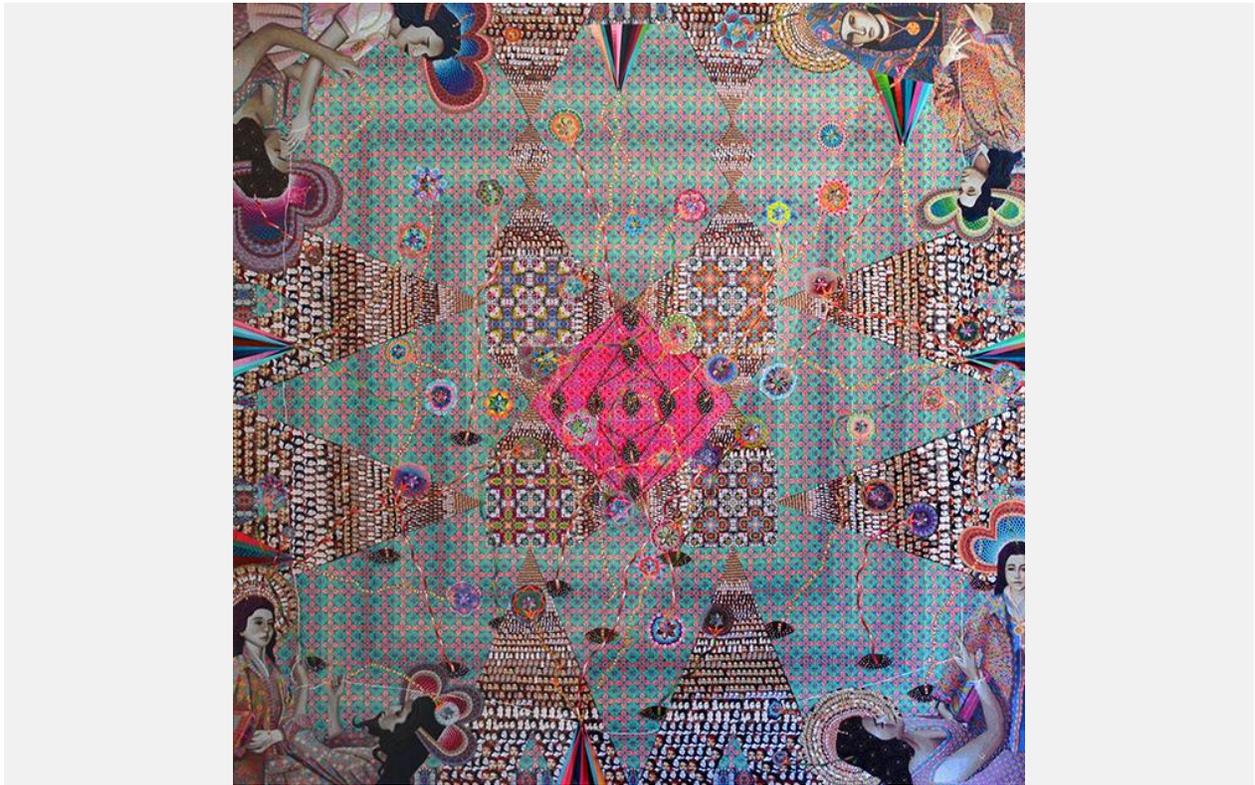


“In the Heart of the Cosmos”: Asad Faulwell at Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai – in pictures

Iranian-American artist Asad Faulwell develops new work for his ongoing series *Les Femmes d’Alger*.

Art Radar takes a look at some of the key influences that inspired the series.



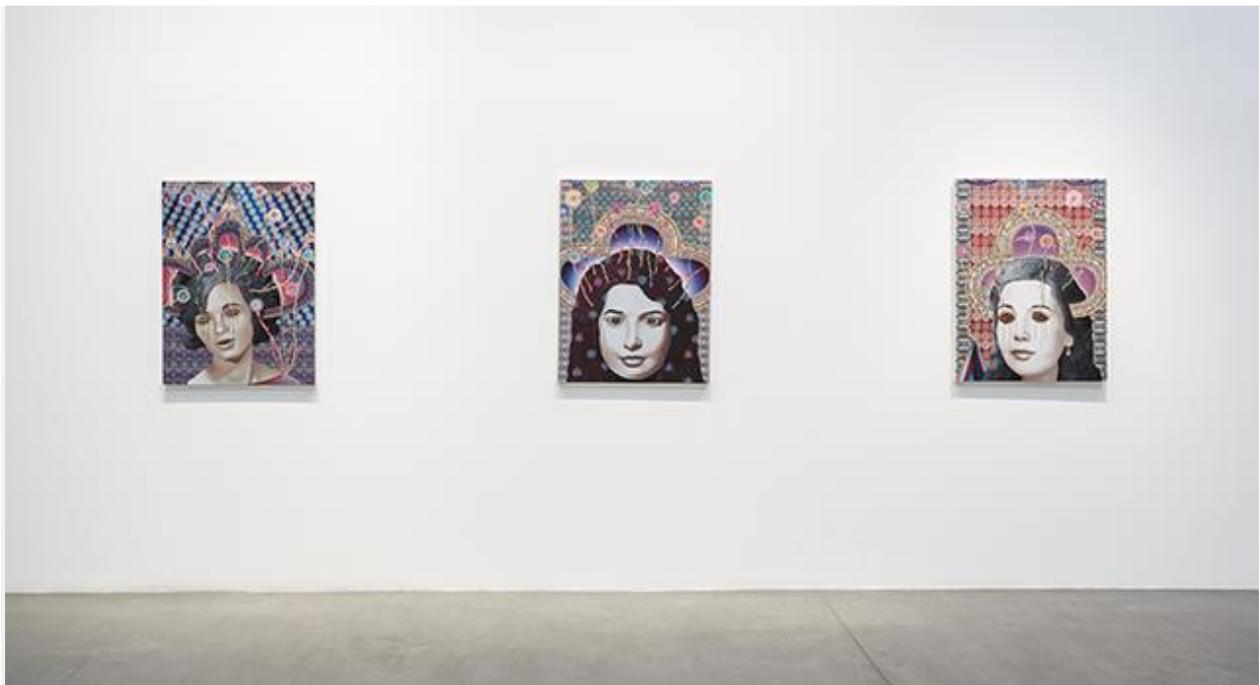
Asad Faulwell, ‘Les Femmes D’Alger #68’, 2016, acrylic. Image courtesy Lawrie Shabibi gallery and the artist.

From 9 January to 4 February 2017 Dubai-based gallery **Lawrie Shabibi** presents “**In the Heart of the Cosmos**” by Iranian-American artist Asad Faulwell (b. 1982). The exhibition features new works from the series *Les Femmes d’Alger*, which explores the forgotten history of Algerian women freedom fighters from the 1954 – 1966 Algerian war for independence from French occupation.



Asad Faulwell, 'In the Heart of the Cosmos', installation view of 'Les Femmes D'Alger #68', 9 January – 4 February 2017 at Lawrie Shabibi. Image courtesy Lawrie Shabibi gallery and the artist.

The series draws on several influences. The title "Les Femmes d'Alger" alludes to the work of both Delacroix's 1834 painting of the same name and Picasso's 1954 version. Where these earlier versions depict Algerian women in sexualised positions, objectifying their experiences, Faulwell brings the stories and experiences of the female fighters to the centre of the work. He highlights the suffering they endured as soldiers in the civil war as well as questioning the very role of violence. He revisits the history of Orientalist depictions of women from another perspective.



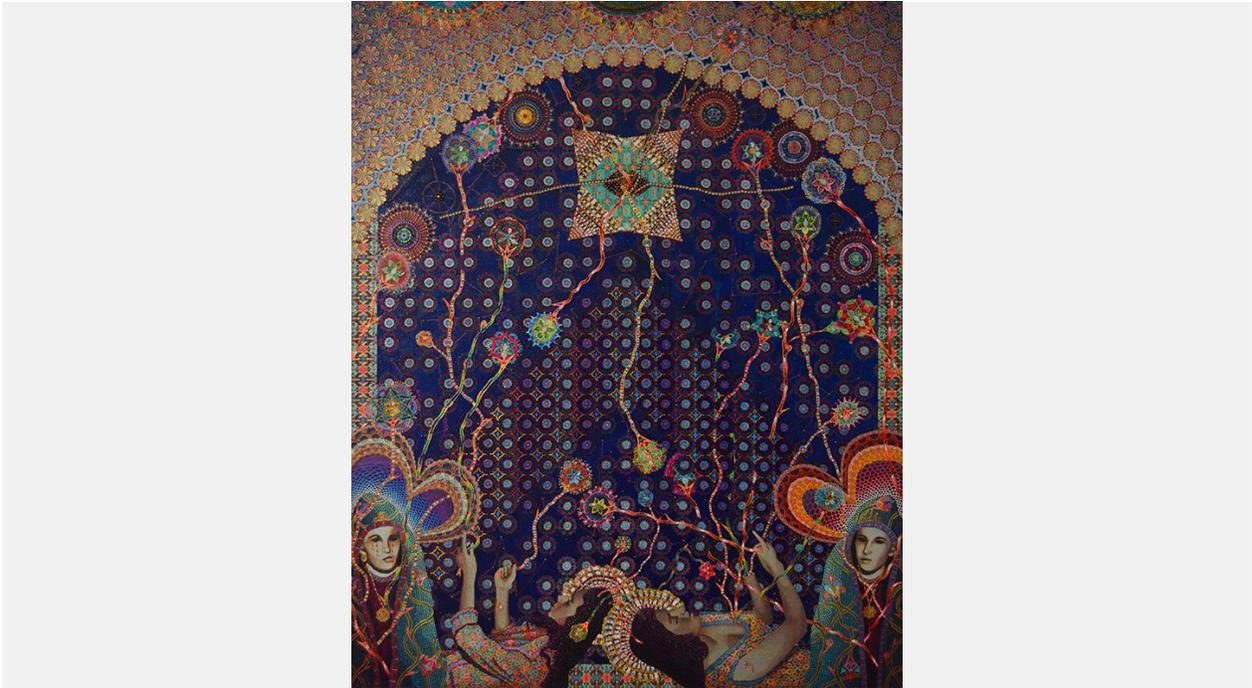
Asad Faulwell, "In the Heart of the Cosmos", installation view of 'Les Femmes D'Alger #68', 9 January – 4 February 2017 at Lawrie Shabibi. Image courtesy Lawrie Shabibi gallery and the artist.

This is a clear reversal from some key thinkers who had depicted the conflict from a Westernised or male perspective. In an **interview** with *Reorient: Middle Eastern Arts and Culture Magazine*, Faulwell gives the example of Albert Camus' *The Stranger*, in which he argues that the reader does not hear directly from Algerian speakers, that they are just props for the French characters. Faulwell observes that like Camus he is telling a story from mostly one perspective, but that it is the perspective of Algerian women fighters.



Asad Faulwell, "In the Heart of the Cosmos", installation view of 'Les Femmes D'Alger #71'. Image courtesy Lawrie Shabibi gallery and the artist.

Faulwell's series is strongly inspired by Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers*, which is based on events during the Algerian War (1954–62) and portrays guerrilla fighters as well as French paratroopers. Faulwell saw the film in 2007, which led him to research the lives of the women over two years before making the first works.



Asad Faulwell, 'Les Femmes D'Alger #72', 2016, acrylic. Image courtesy Lawrie Shabibi gallery and the artist.

Faulwell explains to *Reorient* that *The series is intended to shed light on these women in order to both examine their lives, and to address larger issues such as the lingering effects of colonial rule, gender inequality, and the morality (or immorality) of violent resistance.*



Asad Faulwell, "In the Heart of the Cosmos", installation view from left to right 'Les Femmes D'Alger #72' and 'Les Femmes D'Alger #68', 2016. Image courtesy Lawrie Shabibi and the artist.

The works show a complex picture of the period, the women involved and the role of violence. As the **press release describes**, *[Faulwell] illustrates the women as both saints and villains, aggressors and victims, captured and brutally tormented by their French adversaries and alienated by their Algerian male counterparts who recruited the women with no intention of recognising their contribution or empowering them after the war ended.*



Asad Faulwell, 'Les Femmes D'Alger #68', 2016, acrylic. Image courtesy Lawrie Shabibi gallery and the artist.

The works in "In the Heart of the Cosmos" places the women in almost shrine-like contexts with halos, crowns or shrouds and surrounded by bright colours and flowers. The geometric patterns are reminiscent of Matisse's decorative patterning and allude to Faulwell's own Iranian/Islamic tradition of geometric design and ornamentation.

In the newer paintings Faulwell has developed complex collage compositions onto which he has incorporated black and white photographs from news clippings. The clippings have mainly been taken from women on trial in French courts.



Asad Faulwell, 'Les Femmes D'Alger #72', 2016, acrylic. Image courtesy Lawrie Shabibi gallery and the artist.

In the interview with *Reorient* Faulwell explains:

While I do see my work as a celebration of resistance, I do not see it as a justification or celebration of violent resistance. I [rather] make an attempt to show the torment and psychological anguish that these women must have lived with. If anything, I think my work points to the moral ambiguity of using violence to overthrow an oppressive entity.

While Faulwell is bringing to light these untold stories of women revolutionaries, he is not evaluating their actions, leaving the viewer to ponder the complexities behind the colourful works.

Claire Wilson

<http://artradarjournal.com/2017/01/22/in-the-heart-of-the-cosmos-asad-faulwell-at-lawrie-shabibi-dubai-in-pictures/>