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Asad Faulwell Deconstructs Gender and Colonialism at Lawrie Shabibi

written by [Dorian Batycka](#)



When the War of Algerian Independence broke out in 1954, Muslim women eager to participate in the decolonization of their country joined the side of the National Liberation Front (FLN). Though often neglected, these women participated as active combatants in favour of Algerian independence and self-determination.

In Asad Faulwell's [newest solo exhibition](#) at Dubai's Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, *In the Heart of the Cosmos*, the artist examines the often overlooked contribution of these women. Drawing on archival research, Faulwell portrays the women who served in the FLN with sweeping large scale works that depict them in still uncertain terms, probing into lingering questions around colonialism and gender.



According to Faulwell, the women who fought during the war often did so on account of a “double oppression,” one on account of their French colonizers, the other on account of their gender.

Faulwell’s works evolved from a fairly innocuous encounter while still a student at the University of California, Santa Barbara, at a screening of Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers*, the masterful classic realist film shot on location in Algeria, cast with fighters active during the conflict, which Faulwell used as inspiration to begin work on a series of earlier works called *Les Femme D’Alger*.



The exhibition currently on view at Lawrie Shabibi builds on this earlier series, combining photographs Faulwell found during his most recent research, with each canvas composed

of central female figures meticulously brought back to life using a gold stippling effect, inlaid with pins, situated against incredibly ornate backgrounds, colorfully framing each figure, influenced by Iranian/Islamic traditions of geometric design.



The resulting works are beautifully crafted, conceptually thoughtful, socially aware, and politically relevant. Though the Algerian War of Independence officially ended in 1962, the capitulation of French imperialism has not entirely waned in the country, nor on the continent more broadly.

Arguably, the dynamics of 20th century empire building—solidified after the Berlin Conference in 1884-85, which regulated Africa to European colonial powers—have not gone away, they have merely evolved, hidden today in trade blocs and bilateral state relations that dovetail into official proclamations of economic ‘co-development’ and ‘infrastructure investment,’ all the while draining raw materials, resources, and the natural wealth of former colonies, such as Algeria, back to former colonial powers.



Seen together with the qualitative double binding of oppression faced by women in former colonies such as Algeria, Faulwell's work serves as a timely reminder of how unchecked empire, imperialism, and exploitation often overlap, coexist, and transform, leading the viewer to question the role of European colonization and its continued influence and lasting impact today.

by Dorian Batycka

Dorian Batycka is an independent curator, art critic, and DJ currently based Berlin. Previously, he was curator of contemporary art at Bait Muzna for Art Film (Muscat, Oman), assistant curator for the first ever Maldives National Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale, and has contributed to numerous publications including Hyperallergic, Art and Education, Frieze Blog and Nero. He can be found on Twitter and Instagram, @temp_projects

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