

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



Djamel Tatah, *Untitled*, 2017, oil and wax on canvas, 4 panels, 220 x 140 cm. (86 5/8 x 55 1/8 in.) each.

DJAMEL TATAH

24 APRIL – 1 JUNE 2018

What matters are not the picturesque qualities, episodes, shades of colour, or emotional effects. What counts is not poetry. What counts is the truth. And I call truth anything that continues. There is a subtle lesson in thinking that, in this respect, only painters can satisfy our hunger. This is because they have the privilege of making themselves novelists of the body. Because they work in that magnificent and trivial matter called the present. And the present always shows itself in a gesture. They do not paint a smile, a fleeting moment of modesty, of regret or of expectation, but a face with the shape of its bones and the warmth of its blood. What they have expelled from these faces moulded for eternity is the curse of the mind: at the price of hope.

– Albert Camus, extract from *The Desert*

French-Algerian painter Djamel Tatah makes a significant return to Ben Brown Fine Arts in London on 24 April with his second solo show, unveiling nine mesmerizing oil and wax paintings, produced over the last two years. This exhibition runs concurrently with the artist's major exhibition at the Lambert Collection in Avignon, which explores the sensitive dialogue between Tatah's works and those of the minimalist and classical artists of the Lambert Collection.

In these refined paintings, composed mainly of human figures and coloured spaces, Tatah represents the state of the world at present. In these works, the artist explores the desertion of the exiles, the destruction of Palmyra, and echoes of the historical moment in which we live, though their aesthetics transcend time and geography.

The subject omnipresent in Tatah's works is the silent figure – the mirror of all humankind, pain, solitude, melancholy, war and peace – they are both personal and collective. Sourcing ideas from a large portfolio of

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images, from historically significant works of art to press cuttings, films and personal pictures, Tatah composes his scenes, placing family and friends in carefully choreographed poses which he then photographs. The digital image is projected as life size figures onto the canvas, in preparation for a long and meticulous painting process.

The artist notes, 'I try to make my painting experience a shared experience, one vision that meets another. Maybe this is the beauty of art: to succeed in doing something which is accessible to someone else.' Featured in isolation, in pairs or in repetition across large canvases or polyptychs, the silhouettes are consistently depicted in a 1:1 scale. These figures share the gallery space with the viewer in a poetic and unusual way; the paintings are hung close to the floor which implies a corporeal relation, complimented by the sculptural quality of the artist's figures with their bold outlining and blocks of colour. They seldom face the viewer directly, instead they are found gazing upwards, downwards or far into the distance beyond the constraints of the canvas. The works have no title, bringing to the fore issues of identity. Free from any interpretation of the scene unfolding in front of him, the visitor is invited to turn to his own thoughts and actions.

Tatah's own pictorial invention is grounded in an ongoing exploration of culture and art from all epochs as varied as Byzantine mosaics and Piero della Francesca to Henri Matisse, Barnett Newman and Francis Bacon. Some of the artist's most influential discoveries include the Persian and Indian illuminated manuscripts at the British Library in London. The impact of these findings are manifest in the iconographical compositions as well as the use of triptych configurations and grand canvases seen in this exhibition.

ABOUT DJAMEL TATAH

Djamel Tatah was born in Saint-Chamond, France in 1959. He studied at the École des Beaux-Arts de Saint Étienne from 1981 to 1986 and moved to Marseille in 1989. In 1999, Tatah held his first solo exhibition at the Galerie Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert in Paris. Widely exhibited in France and abroad, his works have been included in solo and group exhibitions at: Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou (2005); Museum of Fine Arts, Nantes (2008); MAMAC, Nice (2009); Villa Medici, Rome (2010); Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Algiers (2013); Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul de Vence (2013); Museum of Modern Art, Saint-Étienne (2014), and features in the public collections of the Assemblée Nationale, Paris, and Centre Pompidou, Paris. Tatah currently lives and works in Provence and teaches at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

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