

میهوینا
دره

MAÏMOUNA
(MAÏMOUNA PATRIZIA GUERRESI)

Artist's statement

I have a personal interest in Sufism and I explore the integrative powers of the body and the spirit, particularly through female consciousness and its proximity to natural, creative forces. In recent years I have focused on the idea of a 'mystic body', where only the face, hands, or feet are visible. I often use familiar objects and clothing, which lose their ordinary significance and gain a sacred quality. As with many ancient icons, my figures in hieratic poses recall images of the Virgin, but also celebrate contemporary cultures and religions that have kept their traditions alive. This gives rise to a new and hybrid iconography of the great, pure, and mystical tribal mothers. I have a multiracial family and my two biological daughters, Adji (African) and Marlene (European), often model for me.

My work is part of a new, 'transcultural expression', where the elements of formal beauty combine with ancient African symbolic forms. I present a hybrid reality, consisting of eastern and western cultural references, in which ordinary poetics reach beyond what is represented to unite with a universal condition of beauty, mysticism and sensitivity. This kind of intuition is common to all peoples of the world. My photographs often depict mystical figures from Islamic Africa, which I find inspiring for their great charisma. These figures have a common feature: they are large and look as if they have been emptied. In fact, their shape is determined by the cloak being worn, which I see as an independent sculptural form. For a recent exhibition at the Filatoio Museum in Caraglio, Italy, entitled 'The Giants' Rooms', I created a sacred place for these figures to inhabit. The installation consisted of two small and elongated tubular houses made of steel. They were intended as mystical architectures, projected beyond real space, designed to create that metaphysical and dreamlike state of reflection and ecstatic silence. The archetypal house form alludes to the association between contemporary apartment blocks and Sardinian collective burial sites found in prehistoric times, known as the 'giants' tombs'. My dark faced figures are like my own great spirit guides, my ancestral icons, where aesthetics and ethics meld into a sensation of mystical renewal. For me Africa becomes the protagonist in the spiritual rebirth of mankind.

These figures have biblical names, such as Moussa, Ibrahim, Fatimah, Genitilla-Al Wilada; a female figure wearing a sculptural garment with a large black central cavity from which many bubbles escape, like brand new, weightless worlds. Another is 'Solomon's Throne', where shadowy steps lead out from a dark belly, symbolising this hybrid and aesthetic metamorphosis of the spirit.

About the artist

Perspective on the relationship between women and society, with particular reference to those countries in which the role of women is most marginalized. For over twenty years Guerresi's work has been about empowering women and bringing together individuals and cultures in an appreciation for a context of shared humanity, beyond borders – psychological, cultural, and political. She uses recurrent metaphors such as milk, light, the hijab, trees, and contrasting white on black to create awareness of the vital unifying qualities of the feminine archetype and its special healing potential. Guerresi's art is uniquely authentic. Her work is inspired by personal experience and cultural contexts that reference universal myths, the sacred realm, and the female condition, all of which are seen as vital expressions of the human form: an essentially spiritual and mystic body. Through photographs and videos of silent, austere, veiled women in domestic scenes and individual poses, her work functions as both metaphor and provocation. Guerresi's images are delicate narratives with fluid sequencing, as well as rational analyses: women dressed in white, enveloped in chadors, fixed within their own tradition and isolated from and by it in the contemporary world. Her Fatimah image suggests the woman as Mother-Earth supporting us in the original energy cycle of Space-Universe-Infinity.

Rosa Maria Falvo Italiaustralia – Independent curator

Biography

Originating from conceptual experimentations with photography and sculpture inspired by Body Art in the 70s and 80s, since 1994 Guerresi's work has focussed on themes of female spirituality, religious symbolism, and the veil. Early in her career she was invited to

participate in two **Venice Biennales (1982 and 1986)** and *Dokumenta* in Kassel (1987). Following these formative experiences, she held several important exhibitions in Italy, such as at the Giarina Gallery in Verona (1995), where she created a series of sculptures of egg and nut-shaped heads with various religious symbols and **Eggmen**, self-contained human figures in the act of praying. In 1996 **Allah's Tears**, drops of white resin hanging from the ceiling, received much acclaim at the Bianca Pilat Gallery in Milan. In 1999 in solo shows at the Rocca di Umbertide Contemporary Artspace in Umbria and the Mudima Foundation in Milan, she presented her first set of white resin sculptures, **Bui Bui**, veiled women sitting in a circle, accompanied by her remarkable video **The Virgin of the Rocks**. This work is strikingly relevant today as it shows a woman continuously removing her veil and yet never managing to rid herself of it. Various shows associated with this theme followed in Italy and Spain at the Valore Gallery in Vicenza, the Varart Gallery in Florence, and the Levy Gallery in Madrid. In 2004 **The Carpets** installation, terracotta pieces representing Islamic prayer rugs was very well received at the Contemporary III Museum in Atlanta, USA.

Recent exhibitions

2011

Il Poema del Mantello - curated by di Elisabetta Sassoli e Paola Colombari, Palazzo Bevilacqua, Bologna **Arte fiera Bologna 2011**, Galleria Photo&Contemporary **The Giants monography** - curated by Jean Dadolin, Istitute de Culture de France and culture de France Paris, Fez, Marocco **See You See me** - curated by Awam Ampka, Fondazione Studio Marangoni, Firenze **Pudeurs et colères de femmes** - curated by Diane Hennemberg, Fondation Boghossian, Villa Empain, Bruxelles **ARS 11** - curated by Jari-Pekka Vanhala, Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art Helsinki, Finland

2010

Frontier - curated by Michket Krifa and Laura Serani, La Centrale Electricque, European Center for Contemporary Art, Brussels. **MIART International Art Fair** - Galleria Paola Colombari, Milan, Italy - **Art Brussels 28th International Fair** - Photo & Contemporary Gallery, Brussels. **Figure della protezione** - curated by Bianca Tosatti, Palazzo Dei Pio, Capri, Italy. **Fotografia Europea and Rencontre de Bamako** - curated by, Michket Krifa & Laura Serani, Reggio Emilia, Italy. **Barakat: the Gift** - curated by Gaia Serena Simionati, Stux Gallery, New York, USA **XIV Biennale d'Arte Sacra Contemporanea Le Beatitudini** - curated by di Giorgio Cortenova, Museo Staurós d'Arte, Teramo Italy **Pavilion Art & Design Fair London 2010** (11/17 october) - Galleria Paola Colombari, **La Scultura Italiana del XXI secolo** - curated by Marco Meneguzzo, Fondazione Arnaldo, Pomodoro, Milano, Italia **Italian video-art festival** - curated by Nicola Davide Angerame King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Ladkrabang (KMITL), Bangkok **L'Orient et L'Occident desorientés?**, Rencontres international, organizzati dalla Fondation Boghossian, Flagey e Villa Empain - curated by Diane Henneberg, Bruxelles, Belgium

Art critics that have written about her work

Martina Corgnati (Milan, Italy), Rosa Maria Falvo (Melbourne, Australia), Enrico Mascelloni (Rome, Italy), Sarenco (Brescia, Italy), Julien Blen (Marseille, France), Tommaso Trini (Milan, Italy), Gabriel Mandel Khan (Milan, Italy), Achille Bonito Oliva (Rome, Italy), Giorgio Bonomi (Perugia, Italy), Giuliana Scimè (Milan, Italy), Omar Calabrese (Siena, Italy), Francesca Alfano Miglietti (Milano, Italy), Maria Grazia Torri (Milan, Italy), Maurizio Calvesi (Rome, Italy), Maria Teresa Ferrari (Verona, Italy), Alienor Saint – Macary (Marseille, France), Francesca Pini (Milan, Italy), Camilla Bertoni (Verona, Italy), Luciano Caramel (Milan, Italy), Andrea Busto (Torino, Italy), Giorgio Cortenova (Desenzano, Italy), Gaia Serena Simionati (Milan, Italy), Caterin Fox (Atlanta, GA, USA), Liza Kurzner (Atlanta, GA, USA), Amadou Lamin Salle (Dakar, Senegal), Laura Serani (Paris, France), Michket Krifa (Paris, France), Awan Amkpa (New York), Jean Dadolin (Fez), Jari-Pekka Vanhala (Helsinki), Diane Hennemberg (Bruxelles).