

We are standing in front of *The Infinite Vessel*, a monumental embroidery by Dalila Dalléas Bouzar made in collaboration with Algerian embroiderers from Tlemcen. These embroiderers usually manufacture ornate, traditional Algerian wedding garments, whose delicate technique is also used for *The Infinite Vessel*. The figures are inspired by *Tassili N'ajjer*, a UNESCO World Heritage site in the Sahara desert of southern Algeria. Dating back to the Neolithic period, this rocky plateau boasts thousands of rock paintings and engravings that offer a glimpse into humankind's ancient past.

Encountering some of the oldest images in human history is a mysterious experience, translating them into drawings is a challenge, even for an artist. Bouzar honours the alterity of these forms while preserving their inherent magic. The black velvet fabric creates a new sacred space. But it requires a process of initiation: As Giorgio Agamben wrote about ancient mysteries in "The Unspeakable Girl: The Myth and Mystery of Kore", people need to be initiated into life.

In the first version of this work at the Palais de Tokyo, *The Infinite Vessel* was set up as a tent that could only be entered without shoes. Bouzar's artistic medium extends beyond painting, and she uses her body as a canvas in her performances, a striking example being the premiere of *The Infinite Vessel*, where Bouzar wore *The Arch* – a huge red robe decorated with animal motifs made of gold and cotton threads. This garment is intended not only as a costume, but also as a means of establishing contact with the surrounding space.

This kind of performative art serves as a powerful contrast to colonial plunder. Museums themselves can be seen as the culmination of cultural appropriation, as Europe asserts itself as the exclusive heir of Greek culture. Moreover, the fact that colonialism often involves the forcible removal of objects from their sites of origin and their placement in museums raises questions of ownership and the erasure of indigenous cultures.

Bouzar's approach to the figures is not simply to preserve cultural heritage, but to see them through the lens of a utopian vision that transcends the narratives of domination that have marked their recent history. Born in Oran to Algerian parents, Bouzar comes from a country that has struggled with a complex socio-political landscape. From the brutal war of independence between 1954 and 1962, which led to liberation from French rule, to contemporary periods of political unrest and social discontent, Algeria's journey reflects the resilience and challenges of its people. The strong sexual mores of Islamic countries emerged as a reaction to colonial occupation. As Western colonialism extended its influence globally, it propagated misogynistic and homophobic ideologies deeply rooted in Christianity. This imposition introduced concepts of chastity, holy matrimony, sodomy, sin and guilt into diverse cultures.

Paradoxically, while imposing these values, the Western world also appropriated traditions from other cultures, transforming them into commodified lifestyle choices. A notable example of this process is the *Kama Sutra*, an impressive text on eroticism, that was often reduced to a mere caricature of sexual positions. Similarly, feminism's celebration of goddess cults in the 1970s ended in cultural appropriation and commercialization.

Bouzar's representations of the human form defiantly reject traditional boundaries of belonging. They celebrate their bodies with boldness, radiating power and vitality through their genitals. In this defiance, they embody inherent sources of resistance and offer a compelling counter-narrative to colonial and patriarchal oppression.

Dalila Dalléas Bouzar lives and works in Bordeaux and is currently represented by Galerie Cécile Fakhoury. Starting with drawing and painting, her practice has expanded to include textile art and performance, in which she deconstructs the clichés of Arab women's representation while questioning the role of the artist in these representations.

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