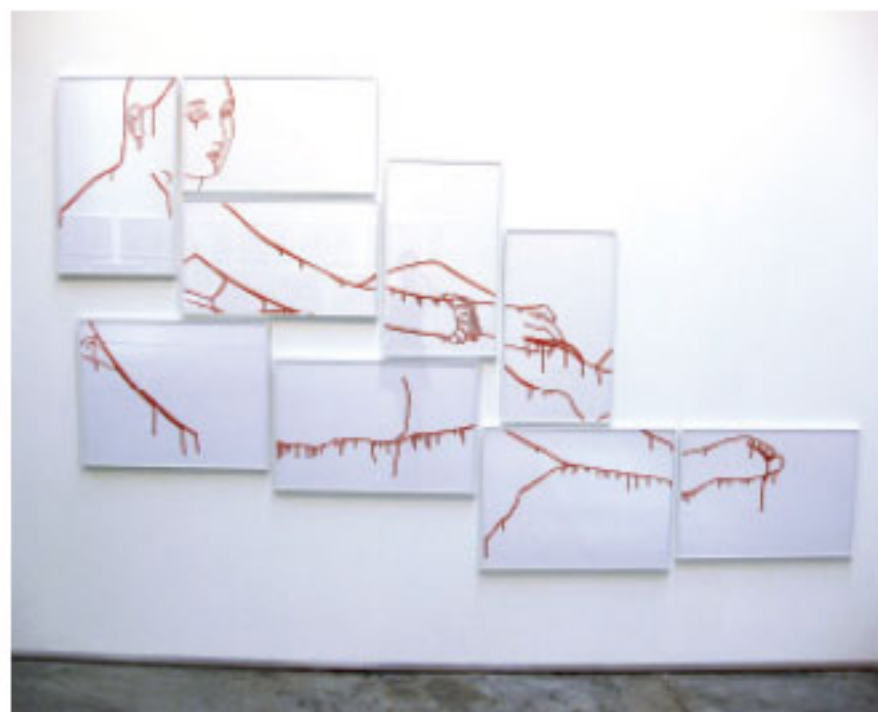


ZOULIKHA BOUABDELLAH

ISABELLE VAN DEN EYNDE - DUBAI



Zoulikha Bouabdellah, *Set Me Free from My Chains*, 2010. Installation view at Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai.

When she walked in to the Isabelle van den Eynde gallery in the heart of a Dubai industrial estate, Zoulikha Bouabdellah was happy with its symmetry and its virgin walls adorned with her latest work: *Set me Free from My Chains*.

The 33-year-old Algerian artist had caught the attention of the eponymous gallery owner as one of three winners of the inaugural

Abraaj Capital Prize in 2009 — linked to the Art Dubai fair — the first of its kind in the region.

Based in Paris, Bouabdellah was born in Moscow and lived in Algeria until the age of 16 and graduated in 2002 from Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'arts de Paris - Cergy. "Set Me Free from My Chains," her first solo exhibition in Dubai, is a celebration of the richness of free Arabic expression. "It's actually a lyric from an Umm Kalthoum song I chose because at that period Egypt was the capital of culture in the Arab World," says Bouabdellah. "I would like us to get back to this golden age of the Arab Renaissance."

Her work includes brightly colored Arabic letters in aluminum, forming scenes from the Kama Sutra entitled *Hubb* (Arabic for love), and on the same theme a neon work with yellow and white lettering called *Two Lovers*. Other works includes *Genie Lady*, with 15 red lacquer drawings depicting a scene from the film *Afrita Hanem* (1949) with Egyptian belly dancer Samia Gamal seducing a man.

While researching this exhibition, Bouabdellah visited prisoners in Lille who

would tell her that their art was a way of creating new spaces. "In this show I am saying that the more you put someone in a small space their imagination can become bigger so this is a danger for fascist and dictatorial governments," she adds.

Adrian Murphy



Above: ZOULIKHA BOUABDELLAH, *Two Lovers*, 2010. Neon, 90 x 120 cm. Courtesy Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai.