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Events: Don't Trust Me
A Solo Exhibition of New Work by Adel Abdessemed

Abdessemed's Visiting Artists and Scholars lecture

Location: Walter and McBean Galleries
San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI)
800 Chestnut Street
San Francisco, CA 94133

Exhibition opening reception:

Wednesday, 19 March 2008, 5:30–7:30 p.m.

VAS Lecture: Wednesday, 19 March 2008 at 7:30 p.m.

Cost: Free and open to the public

Exhibition Dates: 20 March–31 May, 2008

Images: High-resolution digital images available

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Don't Trust Me, a Solo Exhibition of New Work by Adel Abdessemed, Opens at SFAI on 19 March

San Francisco, CA (25 February 2008)—On Wednesday, 19 March 2008, the opening reception for Don't Trust Me, a solo exhibition of new work by Paris-based artist Adel Abdessemed will be held from 5:30–7:30 p.m. at the Walter and McBean Galleries on SFAI's 800 Chestnut Street campus. Immediately following the reception at 7:30 p.m., Abdessemed will deliver his Visiting Artists and Scholars lecture in the Lecture Hall (also on the 800 Chestnut Street campus). Free and open to the public (Tuesdays through Saturdays, from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.), the exhibition itself will be on view from 20 March to 31 May 2008 at the Walter and McBean Galleries.

A follow-up to his segment—the video projection *God Is Design*—in last year’s group exhibition *Wherever We Go* (also at SFAI’s Walter and McBean Galleries), *Don’t Trust Me* will mark Abdessemed’s West Coast solo debut. Including a site-specific performative event to be devised extempore, the exhibition features a slate of extremely short but provocative videos.

Looped cuts of only a few seconds, the videos offer up gestures and facts, but resist the imposition of narrative constructions or automatic interpretations (whether of the empirically unambiguous or the theoretically savvy kind). The tacit claims for “autonomy” made by such visual language—staccato forms, lights, movements, and immediate experiences—imbue the work with an instantaneous efficiency that circumvents categorization, making typical moral and cultural constraints seem beside the point. *Don’t Trust Me* portrays six animals—a sheep, a horse, an ox, a pig, a goat, and a doe—being struck and killed by a hammer. Each killing occurs so quickly that it’s difficult to determine definitively what has happened. Do these incidents represent slaughter or sacrifice? What are their social, cultural, moral, and political implications? Or are such questions now verging on irrelevance, as if something else altogether were taking place (or about to), something wholly other, unforeseen, unexpected?

At once intimate and spectacular, Abdessemed’s work aims to convert the banal into the dramatic. Transforming everyday materials and images into unexpected and sometimes shocking expressions, his inventive gestures, as if by alchemy, work to undo dominant modes of perception and entrenched sociocultural norms—they work, in short, to generate new relevance for radical ideas and actions. Actively defying social, cultural, moral, and religious taboos, Abdessemed contrives to subvert common sense and knowledge, received wisdom, and established biopolitical systems.

Within a wide range of media—drawing, video, photography, performance, and installation—Abdessemed’s artistic language is economical and straightforward; his range of references is open and generous, sensitive albeit controversial. For materials, he relies on bodily or embodied experiences (human and animal), ordinary household objects, industrial products, and even buildings. His work consists of the stark contrasts between beauty and violence, impulsiveness and rationality, romanticism and radicality, life and death.

Abdessemed’s belief in revolution, both social and individual, is manifest throughout his work—a belief whose motive can in part be taken from the trajectory of his own life. Born in 1971 in Algeria, he immigrated to France in the mid-90s during a period of intense internal conflict in his native country. In France, he quickly met with what he came to react against as the racism and ideological presumption that underlie—often in the form of “soft” fascism—late-capitalist manipulations of power and political corruption. Guided by the example of such oppositional figures as Frantz Fanon, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Antonio Gramsci, and Jacques Rancière, Abdessemed has strategically utilized the “system,” ironically and critically, to make his claims visible and audible, thereby provoking public discussion.

Abdessemed studied at the École des Beaux-Arts d’Alger as well as at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts de Lyon. He participated in the 2001 P.S.1 International Studio Program (MoMA) in New York, where he also exhibited. He has had solo exhibitions at Le Magasin—Centre National d’Art Contemporain in Grenoble, France (2008), P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center

(MoMA) (2007–2008), Le Plateau in Paris (2006), and FRAC Champagne-Ardenne in Reims, France (2004). In 2006, Abdessemed was among the participants in Notre Histoire, an exhibition of emerging French artists at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris.

SFAI's exhibitions and public programs—a component of which is the Visiting Artists and Scholars Lecture Series—are supported in part by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Peter Norton Family Foundation, and the Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. Additional funding for the Visiting Artists and Scholars Lecture Series has been provided by Bob and Betty Klausner. Additional support for Adel Abdessemed's exhibition, as well as for his Visiting Artists and Scholars lecture, has been provided by the Cultural Services of the French Consulate in San Francisco.

San Francisco Art Institute

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