

When I visited Nadira Husain's studio to see the new work for her upcoming show, she had just returned from the US. Eventually we started talking about her recent trip and the Hopi. She had brought back a book on figurines she'd seen there (Kachina Dolls) and was showing them to me. Something about these figurines and her enthusiasm for them, made me begin to think of them as keys to her visual world - if you needed keys that is. The figurines radiate a solemn earnestness that is owed to their tradition, heritage and meaning. The keys I speak of arise from a combination of this very earnestness and their exuberant, gleefully manic and incredibly detailed workmanship, as well as their utterly foreign style of human portrayal. This is how she introduced me to them: pointing out how liberating and funny the notion of such an utterly foreign creaturehood could be, and talking about their meaning which can never be graspable for us in its entirety.

She also told me about German cultural historian Aby Warburg's research on Hopi imagery in 1900, whose approach and work she has incorporated in the current show.

This just gives you a small glimpse of Nadira Husain's world of research: a realm full of story-telling creatures and talking signs. A sign that talks is a sort of hybrid, an intermediate being. It gesticulates, speaking without language. It is also intermediate beings, hybrids, and their identity value, that are especially attractive to Husain. She finds them in manga drawings, in the feminist visual narrative of Claire Bretécher, or in the image of an onion: the Tor browser logo (the browser used for anonymous communication in the internet). At times she alters these signs, sometimes changing their sex, switching features around or placing them in absurd situations. Or she invents them, like the *Femme Fondation* of the title: a creature that seems at first glance to be a woman, but then again might be something completely different. You can find this creature in her paintings, often positioned in the lower half, as *Femme Fondation* is supposed to carry the entire painting. In this exhibition she is already here on the wall, an already present visitor. She is already there.

Besides their incredible innovation and playfulness the individual elements in Nadira Husain's paintings entail a more weighty and earnest aspect - just like the Hopi figurines do. These intermediate beings, that Nadira Husain is so familiar with, would most probably be denied existence in an everyday, less imaginative reality or they, as things in-between two realities are not granted any space in the realm of pictorial representation.

This hints to her biography, something her paintings always refer to but it is also always a conceptual approach, a result of her research on different traditions of imagery. The knowledge that pictorial traditions form the respective visual representation of the world and therefore form the framework of imagination, leads Nadira Husain to search for different imagery. This quest is also one of memory, as she has seen these other images before. Therefore the superpositioned layers she makes are in a way works of remembering, associative concentrations that create pictorial space, which is then ultimately conceived as an image. Perhaps this is the reason why a single layer is nearly concealed by others and becomes part of one large single design. Not everything in these paintings is readily legible. Their creation also spans long periods of time, covering many steps: beginning with the weaving and printing of the image carriers, which are traditionally handcrafted in India (using Ikat or Kalamkari technique), followed by screen-printing and then lastly by the actual drawing and painting.