



Güler Ates

Stilled

4 February – 7 March 2015

For her second solo exhibition with Art First Projects, Güler Ates presents a sumptuous group of photographs from her residency in Rajasthan at the end of 2012. This took place at the City Palace Museum in Udaipur, a building founded in 1559 by Maharana Udai Singh II. Using as her model a Classical Indian dancer, Ates was given free reign of the palatial rooms, adorned with wall paintings, mirrors and coloured glass, giving onto interior courtyards and sanctuaries where the women of the family once lived.

Ates' subject matter explores themes of female identity, diaspora and cross-cultural displacement, where contemporary readings of the veil in particular play a central role. Previously in *Threshold*, (Art First 2012) Ates placed her fully veiled female figures in the context of a 16th Century English royal hunting lodge, and at Leighton House, home of the Victorian artist, Frederic, Lord Leighton. Using natural light only, her evocative tableaux examined the tensions and sympathies within our current ideas of the exotic.

The new work however, has its own exotic setting in India. The figure remains ambiguous – the only feature we ever glimpse is a hand. By setting her alone in uninhabited traditional spaces, Ates trumps the Orientalist trope of the harem scene, focusing instead on the privacy of an individual, at ease, away from the public eye and alone within the rooms, able to move freely between one space and another.

The textiles offer clues. Chosen by Ates from Udaipur's local markets and a textile factory, the typical saturated vermilions, azure blues, explosive pinks of reams of silk play a decorative yet resonant role of their own within each of the stately rooms, where patterned walls and rich floor coverings reveal some of the ravages of time.

The model is often shown from the back as a silhouette, upon which the cloth folds and falls in beautiful arrangements cascading onto the floor. She occupies the space, enlivening it through her presence. The dazzling, jewelled brilliance of the newly manufactured silks amplifies the sense that she is a contemporary figure, independent and confident, animating her poses now and then with Indian dance gestures. Yet the overall impression is also one of fusion, of timelessness, something like the atmosphere of calm portrayed by 18th and 19th miniatures from the Mughal Courts, and from the painting schools of Rajasthan – Malwa, Kota or Jaipur for example, where folk and classic motifs became increasingly intermingled.

Stilled is a refreshing, intelligent, gently feminist portrayal of an India imagined and experienced by a Turkish artist with sympathy and understanding of the constancies, as well as the rapidly changing, provocative and challenging realities of modern, western dominated cultures and the impact they have within more ancient, traditional worlds.

Born in 1977 in Eastern Turkey, Ates moved to London and graduated in 2008 from the Royal College of Art with an MA in Printmaking. Currently she is Digital Print Tutor at the Royal Academy Schools. A key aspect of her work springs from international residencies such as the month in Udaipur, generously supported by Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation, Udaipur and resulting in this exhibition. In April 2014 there followed a momentous residency in Rio de Janeiro, in the wake of the Olympics, and later that year in Turkey (Art Suites International Workshops). By dramatic contrast, her current residency is at Eton College, at the Headmaster's Lodge. Ates has exhibited in the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition, in Amsterdam, Rio de Janeiro, Istanbul, Japan and the USA. Her work is collected internationally and has entered the print collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Royal Academy of Art and the MAR.