

## Zoulikha Bouabdellah: pointed depictions of women and religion



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Perhaps the most striking artwork in Zoulikha Bouabdellah's exhibition at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde is the new edition of her 2008 work *Silence*.

In it, she has placed several pairs of sparkly high heels within small rectangular markings on the floor. Simple in its composition, the piece is strong because it is memorable, and in this particular exhibition, presented in the back room, it feels like a joyful discovery that a visitor encounters midway through the show.

"This work is about symbolism," says Bouabdellah.

"By placing women's shoes in the rectangle, I am making a statement: women are in the sacred space and do not try to push us out.

"Here I am referencing the period of Arab Enlightenment that began in Egypt in the 1950s, where discourse about the situation of women was so positive. It is a pity things have changed so much."

The exhibition, titled *Double Truth*, features mostly new work in which Bouabdellah captures apparently contradictory images, attitudes or notions within a single form.

*Silence* is a good example, as is the striking installation in the centre of the gallery, which on first glance seems to be a series of hanging razor blades.

When you look closer, these oversized blades actually depict both the minarets of mosques and the spires of churches, which are architecturally very similar.

Bouabdellah, an Algerian who is now based permanently in Morocco and travels frequently to Europe, recounts the story behind this piece: "When I was in Syria, I went to church to listen to the Catholic prayer in Arabic and I was fascinated. When I looked at the minaret and the church tower I realised they both have the same symbol – they reach up to the sky, to God."

Such contradictions abound throughout the show, for which she has created several geometric patterns on the walls as well as on a hanging black curtain, titled *Mirage Garden*. These are aesthetically beautiful but upon inspection, the units used in the patterns are sinister: bullets, guns and fighter jets – repurposed and recontextualised.

While bemoaning the loss of humanity and the rational of war, she also carries with her a nostalgia for the history of Arab civilisation.

"I feel very concerned about the situation in the region and how the question of religion has overshadowed so much of the beauty of our civilisation. Now, people forget our culture and our deep history. But we just have to look back and we have all the answers that we need."

The show also subtly conveys the underlying theme: hope, seen in the slightest of details, such as the glitter adorning the walls.

"The units of the wallpaper are weapons but the ink is handmade and yes, I do sprinkle glitter on the top because despite everything, there is still beauty in this world."

• **Double Truth by Zoulikha Bouabdellah runs until July 17 at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai.**  
**For more info visit [www.ivde.net](http://www.ivde.net)**

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