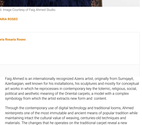
The carpet as a cultural metaphor: interview with Faig Ahmed



"Vitaral", 2014, Faig Ahmed. Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio

POSTED BY MARIA ROSARIA ROSSO
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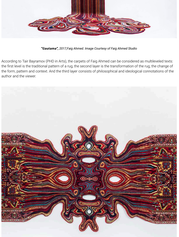
Faig Ahmed

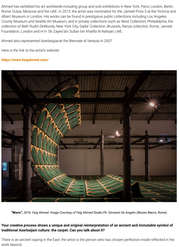
Faig Ahmed is an internationally recognized Azeri artist, originally from Sumqayit, Azerbaijan, currently living and working between Baku and Berlin. His contemporary art works in which he reciprocates in contemporary way the kaleric, religious, social, political and aesthetic meaning of the Oriental carpets, a model with a complex symbology from which the artist extracts new form and content.

Through the contemporary use of digital technology and traditional looms, Ahmed reinterprets one of the most immutable and ancient means of popular tradition while maintaining intact the cultural value of weaving, centuries-old techniques and knowledge. Ahmed's work, in fact, is based on the deformation of the original appearance and meaning for the universal symbol Faig's carpets are no longer decorative objects of high craftsmanship, but, transfigured, rise from their place on the floor and become art objects, instruments that tell stories reinvigorated and rewritten by the artist.



"Gardenia", 2017,Faig Ahmed. Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio

According to Yair Bayramov (PhD in Arts), the carpets of Faig Ahmed can be considered as multiwarped texts: the first level is the traditional pattern of a rug, the second level is the transformation of the rug, the change of the form, pattern and context. And the third layer consists of philosophical and sociological considerations of the author and the viewer.



"Dragofly", 2015, Handmade wooden carpet, natural colors, 130 × 300 cm, Image courtesy to the Artist

Ahmed has exhibited his art worldwide including group and solo exhibitions in New York, Paris, London, Berlin, Rome, Dubai, Moscow and the UAE. In 2013, the artist was nominated for the prestigious Carl Zeiss Prize and Albert Museum in London. His works can be found in prestigious public collections including Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Museum Kunstpalast Dusseldorf, Museum Ludwig, Cologne the collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody, New York City, Gallery Collection, Brussels, Banco collection, Rome, Jameel Foundation, London and H.H. Sh Zayed bin Sultan bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, UAE.

Ahmed also represented Azerbaijan at the Biennale di Venezia in 2017.

Here is the link to the artist's website:

https://www.faigahmed.com/

"Wave", 2014, Faig Ahmed. Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio, Pic. Giovanni Dw Angelo (Museo Maxxi, Rome)

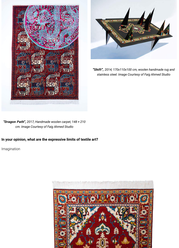
Your creative process shows a unique and original reinterpretation of an ancient and immutable symbol of traditional Azerbaijani culture: the carpet. Can you talk about it?

There is an ancient saying in the East: the artist is the person who has chosen perfection inside reflected in the work beyond.

I grew up at the crossroads of different cultures with ethnic conflicts. Azerbaijani culture is quite diverse and multicultural. Although the Soviet Union dominated our culture for many years, the Azerbaijani culture is more ancient part of the culture, has not changed for thousands of years and has accepted the whole culture individually. This combination creates a culture where tradition is the center and art is a peripheral. One of such traditions is carpet weaving. Carpets are made of two layers: the first layer is the pattern, the second layer is the way image on its surface. The carpet is also the oldest object that is still used in modern houses while its production process is still the same. Meanwhile all other things and their production is changing at a tremendous speed every day. I found the carpet as an ideal metaphor for culture. I also consider artists myself as a metaphor included in the process and behavior. For example, carpet style is the least boundary of ethnic groups, and it is also a kind of "flag" of the ethnic group. Nowadays, the contemporary interpretation of the carpet by ethnicity and even geographical affiliation. Through the eyes of the scientist these boundaries are blurred and changeable, while each nation will precisely point out its own pattern thereby indicating its borders.

Another example is the symbolic attitude to the carpet. For example, in Azerbaijan there is a funeral tradition when body is wrapped in a carpet and then buried. In some regions special carpets are still woven without any patterns in the center for the ceremony.

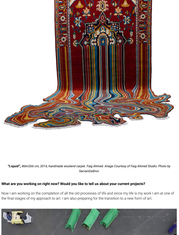
"You Have Wings" 244×134 cm, 2015, handmade woolen carpet. Faig Ahmed. Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio



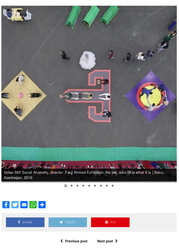
"Cobweaver",2014,2016, 2016, Handmade wool carpet.Faig Ahmed. Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio

Your works do not represent an example of decoration art but are the expression of a process of artistic/philosophical research. What is the purpose of this research and how does art help you to explore reality? Why did you feel the need to transform and give new identity to such a powerful symbol of universal culture?

I am freeing myself from collective unconscious processes and trans through the practice of art, and the viewer experiences the same concentrated experience of liberation. The modern artist is the Shaman who heals himself and people around, releasing them from diseases. In today's increasingly complex world, information and its content have the same power of disease as in the ancient world. The value of the Carpet for art is the fact that this object included layers of millennial stories that could be instantly translated into modern language and vice versa. Art is a kind of "Rosetta stone" which allows people to read the ancient and modern stories and cultural boundaries. As an artist, I was looking for a modern language of art to talk about the future, but I found an ancient one and started talking about the present. And in the present there is no value more important than the truth.



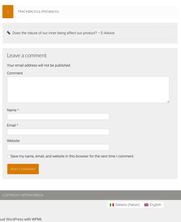
"Fallah", 2018 ,Faig Ahmed. Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio.



"Cobweaver",2014,2016, 2016, Handmade wool carpet.Faig Ahmed. Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio

Your work seems to be challenging the traditional technical and conceptual principles on which the ancient craft of weaving is based. How difficult is communicate and make your artistic intentions understood by the weavers you work with?

The process and technology of carpet weaving has not changed over the millennia. It is always difficult to work with people of tradition. If there is no discipline, but you can't stop a motivated artist.



"ONE",2004-2010,2016, Handmade wool carpet .Faig Ahmed. Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio"

"Pixel", 2010 ,Faig Ahmed. Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio

Can you tell us about a work of yours to which you are particularly attached or which has been a turning point for your artistic career?

My work belongs to people. My body is earth.

"Dragon Pyre", 2017, Handmade wooden carpet, 180 × 210 cm. Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio

"Shell", 2010 ,1700×1500×50 cm. wooden handmade rug and stainless steel .Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio

In your opinion, what are the expressive limits of textile art?

Imagination

"L-Spiral", 4m×24m cm, 2014, handmade wooden carpet .Faig Ahmed. Image Courtesy of Faig Ahmed Studio. Photo by Generatelabor

What are you working on right now? Would you like to tell us about your current projects?

Now I am working on the completion of all the old processes of life and since my life is my work I am at one of the final stages of my approach to art. I am also preparing for the transition to a new form of art.

Gizem Ekici Social Academy, director. Faig Ahmed Collection. Ha-ziq, ada-ziq (It is what it is.) Baku, Azerbaijan, 2016

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