

de Leningrad supportés par le monstre daltonien Matisse.

The selection of Matisse's work featured in Erró's painting is sufficiently wide-ranging to be representative of his production as a whole, from the Fauvist years to his final paper cut-outs in the 1950s. And yet, this non-chronological presentation, toing and froing between early works and those from the end of his career, does not create confusion: on the contrary, it reveals Matisse's rich talent and consistency in developing his art, consolidating his beliefs, and successfully resisting his tireless adversaries. Erró implicitly states that victory cannot be won without a fight. In 1899, the famous art critic and staunch supporter of Matisse, Félix Fénéon, in his typically terse style, remarked that "anything new, to be accepted, needs a lot of fools to die".<sup>1</sup> Thanks to his courage and the passing of time, Matisse triumphed over his enemies in the end, just as the Soviet soldiers eventually defeated theirs. But what about the "colour-blind monster"? The reference to colour-blindness reflects the arbitrary handling of colour which caused so much anger and indignation among the most conservative thinkers when the Fauvists first crashed onto the art scene. But Erró takes this a step further, with a *mise en abyme* of the idea of monstrosity. In the eyes of their critics, paintings by Fauvist artists seemed monstrous; at the stroke of a brush, Erró has made them truly monstrous. The richly coloured face of Madame Matisse in *La Raie verte* (The Green Line, 1905) is replaced by a grinning creature, with abnormally large eyes, nose, and mouth while the figure in *La Chevelure* (Blue Hair, 1952) has gained an enormous head, bent over at a right-angle... There is even a clever nod to Matisse and his scissors, in the fact that Erró cuts out the artist's paper cut-outs: the figure of *Zulma* (1950) finds herself reduced to a mere fetish in the clutches of an alarming mummy, while a few of the creature's bandages can be seen in the void left by her silhouette, cut from the adjacent vignette. Every element of the tableau could be similarly analysed, as the works of Matisse (our "monstre sacré") are attacked by "real" monsters such as Frankenstein, King Kong, Godzilla, and Dracula.

Two other works, painted between 1966 and 1967, have an identical compositional scheme to *Les Vainqueurs de Leningrad supportés par le monstre daltonien Matisse*. In *Les Grands Fauves (Hommage à Louis Vauxcelles)* (The Wild Beasts (Homage to Louis Vauxcelles)) and *The Background of Pollock*, Erró splits the space into two levels with works by Matisse in the upper section of the painting, while a whole range of characters occupy the lower section. The notions referred to in each work are intimately linked to art history: the uproar provoked by the Fauvists in 1905, for the former, and the thorny issue of the influence of European art on its American counterpart, in the

latter. Through these works, Erró not only demonstrates his knowledge of these subjects, he also uses his own language to translate this history of art, which others have spent pages and pages attempting to explain. In *Les Grands Fauves* the artist offers a mischievous take on the famous remark made by art critic Louis Vauxcelles—"Donatello chez les fauves" (Donatello among the wild beasts)—when evoking the strange contrast created by presenting Albert Marque's highly classical sculpture amidst the deluge of colours in paintings by Henri Matisse, André Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, et al. in Room 7 of the Salon d'Automne. A section of Maurice de Vlaminck's 1906 painting *Les Arbres rouges* (Landscape with Red Trees) can be seen at the back of a leopard's wide-open mouth. Opposite, the same painting has been given a gigantic pair of jaws with sharp fangs, literally "roaring" out of the canvas. Elsewhere, an impassive lion seems to have ripped another painting to shreds. A host of wild animals have invaded the rest of the composition, transformed into a jungle, both inextricable and technicoloured, where the paintings of Derain, Vlaminck, Matisse, and even Van Gogh are interspersed with vegetation. Monkeys reign supreme, amusing themselves with these artworks which, in the early twentieth century, could easily have been compared to the antics of monkeys. A smiling baby, sitting in front of *La Raie verte*, has turned round, as though appealing to the viewer... after all, didn't the critic Marcel Nicolle describe Fauvist paintings as the "barbaric and naïve games of a child playing with the paint-box he was given for Christmas"?<sup>2</sup>

It is with this same level of aggressivity that several major icons of modern art, (not only Henri Matisse but also Edvard Munch, Vincent Van Gogh, Salvador Dali, André Derain, Max Beckmann, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Juan Gris, Alexej von Jawlensky, Piet Mondrian, and others) represented by some of their most emblematic works, are plaguing the mind of poor Jackson Pollock in the appropriately titled *The Background of Pollock*. Each of these figures have counted, to varying degrees, in developing the style of the artist who would make his mark pioneering Abstract Expressionism in the years following World War II. As portrayed by Erró, Pollock seems to be wondering how to contend with this vast and cumbersome "cultural baggage" in order to take the modern art world by storm, as suggested by the spirited horses and their enraged riders filling the lower section of the composition. Might Erró himself not have been exposed to the questioning that he attributes to Jackson Pollock? Indeed, Pollock's torment is comparable to the turmoil that other artists have felt, and will continue to feel, struck by vertigo when faced with the burden of art history. What to do about all of this? Although Matisse is not the only artist to haunt Pollock, he does appear twice in

Erró's painting, through his *Autoportrait au maillot rayé* (Self-portrait in a striped T-shirt) from 1906 and the *Portrait de Matisse* (Portrait of Henri Matisse) painted by André Derain in 1905. The artist's image is also present in other works by Erró; in his 1986 *Portrait of Matisse* and 1987 *Hommage à Matisse* (Homage to Matisse), the Icelandic painter, with his unexpected, larger than life, and sometimes provocative combinations of motifs, seems to want to confront the stern but fair countenance of the very serious Mr Matisse. For a while, Erró abandons his predilection for saturating the pictorial space in favour of enhanced readability. This temporary suspension of his figurative all-over style can also be seen in *Matisse Motor* (1969) and an untitled collage from 1970, in which Matisse's famous *Nu rose* (Pink Nude), painted in 1935, finds herself intertwined with a passenger jet. The resulting tableau might be seen as a mechanical and modernist reinterpretation of the mythical encounter between Leda and the swan. In both cases, Erró creates the models or "maquettes" for his collages using the same tools as Matisse in the 1940s and 50s, i.e., a pair of scissors.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the incongruous nature of his juxtapositions is more in line with the Dada spirit: thus, in *Matisse Motor*, the figures from *Luxe* have seen their environment suddenly taken over by an enormous motor and fighter jet. However, Erró's logic does not amount to nihilist desecralization. Like Matisse, he has succeeded in emancipating himself from his academic training without entirely rejecting it. Spending six years training as a painter in Reykjavik, Florence, and Oslo, in a way that was "classical, perhaps too classical",<sup>4</sup> Erró understands the importance of iconic artists from the past. Is it fear of being devoured by the "monster Matisse" that makes him celebrate the artist in a banner-like work to his glory, the succinctly titled *Matisse*? As was the case for *Les Vainqueurs de Leningrad*, the leading Fauvist's paintings have been placed in a grid in this oil on canvas from 1991, which could be interpreted in any number of ways. Is this a vast example of "squaring off", an academic practice if ever there was one, which would enable Erró to rigorously appropriate not just individual works by Matisse but his entire *œuvre*? The Icelandic artist uses the word "net" for this grid. Should Matisse's paintings, therefore, be viewed as prisoners, caught within this giant net? This coercive approach would seem to hold the carnivorous works of Matisse symbolically at bay while, at the same time, inspiring a feeling of movement, of flapping even, enabling Erró to place his favourite works by Matisse in the foreground,<sup>5</sup> including portraits and self-portraits, *La Raie verte* and *La Blouse romaine* (The Romanian Blouse). Other paintings, playing a more secondary role, in this all-encompassing work—*La Femme au chapeau* (Woman with the Hat 1905), *La Desserte rouge* (Harmony in Red 1908), *La Danse* (1910),

and interior scenes from the 1940s—are also used by Erró in a number of the other Matisse-inspired creations mentioned above. In 2007, the 1991 composition was reused in unambiguously decorative intent, when Erró wrapped it around a mysterious box. How should this be interpreted? The symbolic richness of the object allows us to view it, turn by turn, as a metaphor for a treasure chest, a memorial vessel, or, more prosaically, a suggestion box, serving as inspiration from time to time. This box is one of Erró's last works relating to Matisse. In the mid-1980s, the artist reached a milestone by associating his name with Picasso and Matisse in the titles of two paintings (*Erró-Picasso-Matisse (Nature morte aux oranges)* (Still life with Oranges)) in 1985 and *Erró-Picasso-Matisse* in 1986). Proud of his influences, he was attempting a type of major reconciliation between the two leading lights in modern painting. In his recent production, Picasso, the other "monstre sacré", seems to have gained the upper hand and is devouring his way through the works of Erró. Is it definitive though?

1 Félix Fénéon, "Exposition Pissarro" in *L'Art moderne*, n° 3, 20 January 1899.

2 Marcel Nicolle, *Journal de Rouen*, 20 November 1905.

3 In an interview carried out when the artist donated sixty-six collages to the Centre Pompidou Paris in 2010, Erró explained that although the cutting and pasting phase is only a preliminary step before producing the painted work, the collages are of particular importance to him. They are "the originals and the paintings are the copies". [www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/resource/cpBqyr/iXapqd](http://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/resource/cpBqyr/iXapqd)

4 *Ibid.*

5 On this subject, see the interview with the poet and art critic Alain Jouffroy, which coincided with the exhibition *Erró, images du siècle* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfs0ucrK3nQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfs0ucrK3nQ))

## Being on the wall— Beings of the wall Berlin—KRM

Patricia Tardy

The KRM collective, composed of artists Geza Jäger<sup>1</sup> and Chérif Zerdoumi<sup>2</sup>, a Franco-German couple, was formed in 2002 with the duo's creation of a monumental fresco called *Who eats who?* on a wall in Berlin. Having been completed in a single day "in a kind of trance", this adventure "where the notion of time and space no longer existed" was regularly photographed as a sign of its transitory existence "a violent experience, lacking respect, with the sole aim of surviving...

The artist God does not exist.”<sup>3</sup> The following year, they repeated the performance on the wall of the Mauerpark in Berlin with a plan and the desire to “do something powerful and unique that had never been seen before.” The singular style and words used in this palimpsest covering one hundred metres on top of a layer of pre-stuck posters that predate the fall of the wall, were controversial. This led to the press getting involved. The fresco was detached and recovered by the artists, thereby affirming its status as a work of art and their desire to make a statement through their actions. After an initial exhibition at the Kulturbrauerei in Berlin, *One art, two heads*, a solo show followed at the history museum of Leipzig, and since then, many others in Europe and elsewhere. Apart from this factual element validating the emergence and recognition of KRM by the sign and stencil of the “stray dog”, the duo’s experiment on a fragment of this paradoxical symbol of separation and the free movement of people and ideas, became a turning point in their approach and projects.

#### The Spirit of the Wall

In their workshop away from the city, a disused textile factory in the Tarn, they invented a *Spirit of the wall* concept. This is visually translated into a raw, iconoclastic, and disruptive declaration on large-sized panels of wood or metal or nomadic fragments of an imaginary wall that are constantly in movement, undergoing the process of production. A “neo-tribal” expression that resembles a performance which is inextricably linked to the act of deconstruction and construction.

Their work is the product of a blend of different impulses and influences. It proceeds from the lacerated poster that flows from a personal collection of 80,000 posters from the 1978-1990 period; from stencils, tags; from drawn, sprayed, or scratched graffiti; and from drawing, painting, poetry, and writing. They use models and a vocabulary that springs from mass culture, advertising, the media; and from those of the popular countercultures: *Punk* and *Bad Painting* movements, and *Street art*, as well as the tribal art of other cultures. They are not fooled either by their cultural and artistic heritage or by not being the first to bring the street into the creative act. They “borrow” the materials and the meaningful and significant language of the street that they condemn, misappropriate, and blend. This is not done to transpose the “what” of a substrate from one location to another, but to bear witness to the “how” and its context.

For KRM, art is not an end in itself, but the means of getting people to perceive the world around us. The spirit of the wall resides in the impulse which brings to life the creative act, and the context which underlies its manifestation, and not in an aesthetically pleasing style or in a particular object.

They fulfil a kind of *work in progress* which

defines the evolutionary nature of their concept as much as that of the performance. Each piece is a duet, without a pre-set plan, without a sketch, in this fleeting state prompted by the action of one which may or may not be called into question by the action of the other. This is not dissimilar to the exquisite corpse of the surrealists and the creative games of Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, albeit with their own particular interactive methods, in which the dialogue becomes the third essential element of the work in action and not an unconscious addition or an aesthetic and playful exchange.

The collective work involves sharing the same space, the same creative freedom, and the same anonymity. But if the meaningless KRM signature and the stencil of the stray dog are a sign of self-effacement, it is paradoxically that of the quest for a family, an origin, and an identity. It demonstrates their desire to be part of a community devoted to acting on impulse and free and anonymous speech. What’s more, sticking as close as they can to this freedom also involves transgressing certain aesthetic conventions, the paradoxes of which do not trouble them at all: the street factory-laboratory, the substrate, the desire to make art.

They design fragments around themes that are integral to our contemporary society, such as segregation, genocide, exploitation, confinement, and discontent. Both unique yet consubstantial with a whole that they reproduce with the sense of a space that surpasses each one of them, with temporalities and different actions that collide. It is through this instant reaction to the stimuli of our urban and consumerist society that they draw the portrait of a globalised world in which social or territorial conflicts and the desire to contain migratory flows with more walls, are exacerbated. Men move, the walls follow them.

#### Tarfaya

Since 2006, Tarfaya has become another, much less promising and decisive location for these urban contextual artists. During a trip to Morocco, fleeing the tourist sites, they decided to follow the National 1 road, which crosses the desert, and, as a result of their car breaking down, they discovered Tarfaya. In this former trading post far away from the industrialised world, surrounded by a preserved and unspoiled countryside with sandy streets, no bank, no electricity, or tourists, and silent walls bearing no messages or posters. Nothing can withstand the wind, sand, and UV light, anyway.

This meeting point between man, the sky, the ocean, and the desert was so shocking to them that they decided to settle there semi-permanently. Geza photographs the sites, the remains of the past and, very quickly, the families in their encampments to which she offered her prints during future visits. “For some, it is the first time that they see an image of themselves, for others it is their

only picture of a missing relative that they can keep, carry with them and pass on,”<sup>4</sup> she says. Over the years, she has accumulated a large quantity of documentary archives on the changes that have affected Cape Juby, a souvenir of the site and its inhabitants, which will soon be assembled in a museum. The duo creates a mural with the children to pay tribute to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and the paper *Little Prince*, born in Tarfaya following the engine failure of the aviator. Little by little, KRM has forged ties with the nomads of the desert.

#### Sahara: textile works

Here, the walls are not a source of division, except perhaps if they are made of sand. Rather, they bring together those who are following “intangible” paths—travellers, aviators, fishermen, and nomads.

And the latter, with their flowing and moving habitat, inspired in 2017 by Roger Castang, a gallery owner from Perpignan, would be at the origin of this unexpected and particular textile work.

Finally, KRM came across the genuine desert walls in the form of the *khaima*, a traditional tent and symbol of Sahrawi people, who still live in their tents in the desert, in the courtyards, or on the roofs of houses. They are not interested in new tents, but in the countless textile fragments from tents and women’s clothing that the sand has not finished digesting. They search for and collect everything that has not been recycled, to create a library of samples of used fabrics.

They decided to make a statement by transforming them into a single piece, which is both substrate and a medium at the same time, without renouncing their style and creative process that they adapt to an environment where there are no models and urban signs. They preserve the rectangle, that of the wall, of the *khaima*, which brings the family, the tribe, and, symbolically, the nomadic society together within a “terrestrial” limit. The composition begins without a template and, on the reverse side of the patchwork, and will ultimately be sewn together by hand.

Very quickly, the artefacts, used previously, proved to be as meaningless as they were difficult to use given the fragility and wear of the fabrics. Right off the bat, this work is unique because of its abstract character that is reminiscent of the large fields of colour of the Colour Field movement, associated with American abstract expressionism, and the *Pattern Painting* associated with patchworks. But if, like the latter examples that draw their inspiration from repeated decorative motifs and Matisse’s cut paper, the compositions accentuate the impression of two dimensions, expansion and visual balance, they also stand out by their sensitive character and sense of the past.

As a pluralist material with multiple utilitarian and decorative purposes in home-wares as well as in clothing, the fabric is never neutral and KRM’s textile creations

have an intimate side suited to family life while also being feminine. The pieces of fabric, which have become frayed, torn, and patched by successive uses, become part of the fabric of the memory of these lives of the present or of the past. While sewing, as well as the materials, are a feature of what is traditionally considered women’s work, it also acts as a reminder that the home surroundings are the preserve of women in Saharan society. In this place, fabrics are a medium steeped in history and questions of identity that express, through the KRM’s recompositions, the fragile resistance of a tribal society in the face of time, galloping modernisation, extinction, and oblivion. They deconstruct so that each element is made intelligible and reassemble using sewing thread that has been dispersed over time. The result is an entirely different construct “patching” together pieces of the past, which have been stretched thin. In doing so, we are forced to take a fresh look at this projected surface that is almost entirely free of Western influences, without figurative representation and without writing or signs.

Similarly, it can be viewed in two ways, an abstract way in which each person can recreate images, territories, or geographical maps, male shapes, and veiled women, or a more tangible, tactile way. A reality that we would like to touch with our fingers to feel the patina of time. The wear and the fragility of a fabric resembles the hide of an animal with its coarse scars, blisters, wrinkles, and lifelines, along with its running stitched seams that are more or less loose, like the wanderings of a nomad. In places, you could feel and even hear a slight rustling, made by the bags of flour used for thermal insulation. Each piece of fabric has scalloped trims that stiffens the assembly and prevents fraying. This border, which forms a picture frame, also manifests the artists’ desire to transform the everyday object into a work of art, ready to be put on display. Similarly, some walls are fitted with angular hooks in Tamarix wood, which plays an important role in popular Berber culture as a food and medicine for their herds.

The use of fabrics as the only medium requires different techniques. Cutting and sewing replace the act of painting, with the more time-consuming tasks of collecting, unstitching, cleaning, serialising, and reassembling according to the material, the form, pattern, colour, or even the state of wear and patching of the fabrics. The new experience of the disappearance of the figure to be replaced by a patchwork organisation of colours and forms, associated with a mode and a space that belongs to oriental imagery or to other non-Western cultures, is based on tribal domestic craftsmanship, or even shamanic craftsmanship like the *Molas* of the Native American Kunas or *tingit* blankets of Alaska. The repetition of the surfaces is done in a movement that seems to have neither beginning nor end. Given this organisation deprived of

a centre, the eye cannot look at it in the same way as the wall, the draughtboard, or an oriental rug. In this almost abstract space, only the signature and the stray dog remain intelligible.

Going further than the coincidence of the locations and textiles which, despite being separated by more than a century, links the styles and practices which as different as those of Matisse and KRM, we can wonder what these experiences have in common or not. An alternative: Beyond the coincidence of the locations and textiles which, despite being separated by more than a century, links the styles and practices as different as those between Matisse and KRM; one can ask what these experiences have or have not in common.

Munich and the 1906 exhibition of Islamic art was for Matisse—as it was for other modern artists—the revelation or confirmation of an intuitive and expressionist creativity and the source of some radical transformations in art. It was also an indication of the industrial and colonialist utopia and of a decline in humanist values, due partly to the individual's inability to grasp the changes brought about by technology and science.

For KRM, Berlin represents the affirmation of their approach based on the movement of the hand and contemporary tribal practices. Today, while our view of these practices, common to many artists, from Dubuffet to Baselitz, Penck or Basquiat, has changed; they remain symptomatic of the end of utopia, of a fear of the future and of violence against the establishment. Disconnected from primitive society, tribal art is often defined in terms of the appropriation or assimilation by Western artistic practices. KRM, on the contrary, brings new life to cultural fragments by an imaginative restructuring process that does not reject its origins.

The correspondence between the textiles and the Maghreb links Matisse and KRM, resulting in comparable solutions in visual art: flat effects without any sense of depth, disintegration, or absence of the figure in favour of coloured surfaces, removal of the central element in favour of details, leading to a gaze that is dispersed by the repetition of the pattern. However, while "the revelation came from the east" according to Matisse, it is through the use of fabric<sup>5</sup> that this is achieved. For KRM, it is linked to the chance discovery of the desert and its people.

"Paint like a weaver or dyer" and "draw with scissors" by pinning the patterns to the canvas in order to experiment with several combinations in the composition, contributing to a common process. However, for Matisse, the latter is linked to pictorial representation, "painting without any provision for the future, painting for the sake of painting," said Maurice Denis. For KRM, the textile medium and its processes are part of a completely different approach which, while inextricably linked with its

environment, remains attached to something human.

The textile artwork escapes any attempt at classification and the artists who choose it do so for many reasons. Matisse approaches a "wall-icity" in order to widen "the window to the world" offered by the painting and the limits of pictorial academicism. KRM's textile-only mural artwork remains a performance that makes no distinction between the action and the work.

"It's not the same temporality," says Chérif Zerdoumi, and the goals are different; finally, what links Matisse and KRM is perhaps this disruptive aspect that is inherent in their approaches, i.e., the capacity to take risks in the name of creative freedom. Berlin is perhaps the revelation that the wall is not composed of a single indivisible piece, with a single constituent part and material and that its message can only be understood bit by bit. Tarfaya is certainly the confirmation that the wall is a dotted line linking people, between the shared and individual history, between the singular and the collective, the anonymous and the identified, the visible and what is not or no longer visible.

1 A multidisciplinary visual artist, Geza Jäger is also a musician, singer, performer, photographer, and art history graduate.

2 Chérif Zerdoumi, a self-taught sculptor and painter, and a gallery owner of ancient and contemporary works.

3 Geza Jäger and Roger Castang, in « De Berlin à Tarfaya », Centre d'art contemporain Walter Benjamin, Castang-Art-Project, January-march 2020.

4 Geza Jäger, interview with KRM, 18 January 2020.

5 Matisse, whose background was among the weavers of Bohain-en-Vermandois, was trained in industrial textile design. His fondness for and interest in this craft can be found in his collection of textiles which serves as a backdrop for his painting, e.g. the *Haitis*, Moroccan textile *mashrabiya*, in the *"Odaliques"*. He also produced clothes for the major fashion designers or the collector S. Shchukin, ballet costumes for Serge de Diaghilev and later the *chasubles* of the celebrants of the Dominican chapel of Venice.

6 Maurice Denis, « La peinture », in *Matisse et la couleur des tissus*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004, p. 96.

## Matisse and the plastic approach of Rania Werda

Nadia Zouari

Born in 1984, on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, Rania Werda is a rich blend of both western and eastern civilisations with a bold and rebellious touch

of the social reality of her country of origin. Daughter of a history teacher and an art teacher, Rania was quickly introduced to the basics of artistic theory and practice. This led her to pursue university studies at the Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Tunis, where she is currently completing her thesis.

### Moving towards figuration

While still a student, Rania Werda experimented with several technical substrates. In her first series in acrylic, the drawing was simple and vigorous. The paint and the colours defined the contours. Her research bore witness to her love of people and contributed to her being drawn towards figuration. From this period on, Rania laid the foundations for a rigorous work method, based on the series. It is also in repetition that her technique asserted itself. This is where she has to define her own path. Her engravings reflect a meticulousness and rigour expressed in a visual vocabulary composed of ornaments, flowers, and calligraphic writings. Despite the material difficulties and the cost of the engravings, Rania never ceases to compose. Some works bear witness to her determination to create.

She adapted her method of painting to the constraints of digital printing, leather, or the colours involved. She now executes her works with a mastery of engraving and printing techniques as well as the quality of leather. As a result of her research in visual art on the different ornaments of sacred books, she constituted an extensive laboratory of forms.

### The starting point

The starting point of her work can be found in the interpretation of the Koranic verses which have always been controversial. It is unclear who said what or why something was said. Their interpretations, which are sometimes fallacious, sometimes audacious, or sometimes misleading, tend to confuse Rania.

Why this, why that? None, or practically none, of the different specialists of the Koran and of Islam give the same explanation of the texts. Which is the right one? Rania Werda compared this problem to that of the Rorschach tests, these psychological tests which each person interprets differently according to their psychological background and life experience. Each image can be explained in different ways. The ink stains evoke various associations that can be used to assess the psychological state of a person. But as everyone knows, these tests, which even if they can give some idea of a person's psyche, are far from being 100% reliable. Given that the Islamic religion prohibits the representation of the human figure, Muslim artists have become masters in the art of geometric and floral decorations with geometric patterns. The mosques and palaces are literally covered with mosaics, tiles, mouldings and carpets with symmetrical designs, just like sacred books. Rania Werda explains: "I stripped the pages of the Koranic books of their

scriptures to keep only the ornaments. Ornaments which are as rich in meaning and ambiguity as the texts. These ornamental elements, which line the pages of the Koran, proliferating and covering every available space, prompt us to go beyond their geometric and mathematical character to reflect on notions of infinity. In the repetition of these arabesques, there is a form of insistence, penance, chant, or call to prayer.

These stylised plant details, which flourish and branch off from an undulating line, from which the stems, leaves, or flowers emerge and which repeat themselves endlessly, drawing the eye in a circular motion that gives the impression of an endless cycle. Repeating, repeating, and repeating again... patterns, gestures, snapshots, series, etc. This is probably what also drove Matisse to develop his blue colour shades ad infinitum. I have been collecting fabrics with floral and plant motifs for years. These fabrics that I use, sometimes as clothing and sometimes as blankets, for female bodies that often stand in an arrogant and proud posture. The use of leather as a material came quite naturally to my approach since the covers of Koranic books were often made of leather... I was fascinated by these covers... a meticulous work of hot stamping and embossing drove me to work with a craftsman in leathergoods to find out about this technique that is expensive, unfortunately. However, as I love using new technological mediums, I turned to the hot press and laser cutting... After spending a lot of time working on my image with Photoshop, I transferred my image using the hot press; the heat changes the colour as well as the size of the hide. This change makes each skin unique. Consequently, each print becomes unique. Afterwards, I switched to laser cutting after enhancing my image in Illustrator, with the most difficult task being that of getting my cutting points to coincide on the image... the gaps between the lines of the image and those of the engraving create a shading effect that I find very interesting... letting us bathe in the lack of clarity".

And while the characters depicted by Rania hide their inner selves by not revealing their faces, she paints what they are hiding, just like Matisse when he made his paper cuttings. She gives substance to what troubles the individual, to the emotion that they feel, the anxieties that stir them, and the worries of their soul. The face hides the causes that upset us. The annoyance that we feel inside us is imperceptible and invisible to those close to us and who are watching us. Rania Werda explains: "My characters are not hidden behind the Islamic veil. For me, there is a connection with the Lovers of Magritte which has always strongly challenged and intrigued me, with its buried desires, fears, trauma, and the frustrations of the unconscious mind." She adds: "I live surrounded by strong women and real fighters who are heads of families and who often hold po-