

CHRISTINE KÖNIG GALERIE

ADEL ABDESSEMED | *Soldaten*

Opening: Thursday, January 15, 2015, 6 pm
through March 14, 2015



Last year the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research counted twenty armed conflicts worldwide, all of which were classified as wars. Add to this, one level below, 415 conflicts some of which were assessed as high-intensity. In general perception, a number of these armed clashes are so far away that they do not reach western consciousness, such as those in the Central African Republic, Myanmar or in remote regions of India. However, as the continuing fighting in Eastern Ukraine shows, war has by no means vanished from the so-called highly civilized nations of the EU. The catchword “end of history”, coined by Francis Fukuyama at the end of the Cold War, has long been proven to be an illusion. History is made, it progresses – now no longer under the straightforward conditions of an equilibrium of terror but in response to an unpredictable terrorist attack or spontaneous popular uprising in autocratic regimes.

The Algerian artist Adel Abdessemed who lives in exile once described his artistic agenda with the words “acting, resisting and creating with the intention of changing the world.” He takes into account the ubiquity of war in contemporary life and media worlds in his “Soldiers” series. His charcoal drawings of the bodies of fighters, rendered in thickly shaded lines, in full combat dress, holding a firearm in the ready, then waiting in a relaxed state for the next mission or leisurely marching ahead, are not so much individual

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typologies as archetypal manifestations, taken from film or photojournalistic imagery which the artist has both appropriated and abstracted in his artistic intervention.

In Abdessemed's "Soldiers", the *mal du siècle* of an age in which wars are privatized and the state's monopoly on power has eroded finds a visual emblem. "Soldiers, soldiers are nice boys", Marie sings in *Wozzeck* and one could perhaps point to an erotic quiver echoed in the subtext of the drawings - just think of the fetishist passion often triggered by men in uniform.



Abdessemed's drawings, each depicting just one soldier in combat dress, are situated in a zone between memory and hallucination. Taken out of the narrative context where they originally unfolded their visual impact they become artistic placeholders of a hypostasized notion of shock and awe. The traumatic after-effects are usually not drawn from personal experience but from a media impact that is especially powerful in war times. Adel Abdessemed's soldiers embody force, violence transcending any type of logic governing a state of emergency in the literal sense of the word: not as a means to an end but as cipher for an esthetic surplus of forces that are manifested in the artistic drawing under the sway of art as a fundamental ontological disposition: The horror, the horror!

(quot. Thomas Miessgang, 2015)