

# AGAINST ISOLATION

ZHIVAGO DUNCAN BROUGHT HIS PARTICULARLY TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE TO CHALLENGE IDEAS ABOUT CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FOR HIS EXHIBITION AS THE JUNGLE WEEPS AT JAMM ART GALLERY, DUBAI

**P**roduced during his travels with Bedouins through Jordan, Zhivago Duncan's latest collection of works looks to dispel myths of cultural difference and investigate ideas on physical and moral truth. Duncan, born in Indiana in 1980 to Syrian and Danish parents, grew up between Saudi Arabia, France, Malta, Bulgaria, the United States and England, and is currently based in Berlin. This international upbringing is what informed the premise of the recent exhibition of his works entitled *As the Jungle Weeps*.

Upon entering JAMM Art Gallery in Dubai's Quoz district, one was first confronted by a friendly looking mechanical pony with a red mane and a royal seat. As Duncan describes, "It speaks Mandarin, when you put a coin in it, it sings in Arabic. I wanted to do a photo shoot with it out

Zhivago Duncan,  
*Patina of Time*



Zhivago Duncan,  
*Folklore 5*

Zhivago Duncan,  
*Muffler AK*



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in the desert”. And that is exactly what he did. Right behind it hangs *Patina of Time*, a surreal photograph that places the pony in the middle of the soft sand desert, its background is a landscape of mountains and sweeping blue sky.

This seemingly playful aesthetic continued in the series entitled *Folklore*. Spray paint cans were placed in front of white panels which Duncan and his fellow travellers shot at using AK-47's, which Duncan describes as, "The main tools of civil war". Reminiscent of William Burroughs' 'shotgun art' of the 1960s, the results were abstract splashes of colour. These technicolour bursts were in dialogue with *Titan*, a seven-video work that shows a JCB truck spilling sand at different speeds. A loop of an explosion from a 1960s Warner Brothers cartoon is projected on the veil of sand. "Both *Folklore* and *Titan* are made by machines that destroy and expand," Duncan points out. The mirroring by the projection of colourful animated

explosions with the static reality of the colourful sparks on the boards drew a relationship between American popular culture, destruction, production and the reality of the war not too far in neighbouring Syria.

Duncan's aim to illustrate misconstrued conceptions about the isolation of each culture is expressed through the dialogue he sets up between his relational works, which highlight the abstract yet palpable connections between iconography, language and the movement of objects through time and place. ●

