

Simeen Farhat

*Curiouser and curiouser*

16 March–16 April 2015

JAMM presents *Curiouser and curiouser*, a solo exhibition by American-Pakistani artist Simeen Farhat, showcasing a number of new sculptures and a large installation inspired by the story of Alice in Wonderland, written by Lewis Carroll. In doing so, the artist revisits her long-time interest in language and poetry as the vehicles of human experience. In Farhat's work, however, it is not the logic and formal structure of language that interests her but the symbolic forms which place human language at the crossroads between art, sign, symbol, sculpture, communication and representation. With a definite focus on the process of making art rather than on the production of cultural objects, this sculptural work is conceived in terms of perception and never as ornament or calligraphy. These material alliterations are constructed as living organisms, acquiring shapes almost intuitively.

In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), the philosopher of language Ludwig Wittgenstein postulated that while on the one hand, "The limits of my language mean the limit of my world," it is also true that "The world and life are one." If the boundaries of the world, defined as the limit at which we are able to experience it consciously, are set by language, then the speaking and thinking subject is himself or herself marked as a limit. Preoccupied with the borderline of thought and the expression of what is thinkable, Wittgenstein then concluded that it is only in language that this limit can be found and set, and what lays on the other side or beyond is simply nonsense. How to articulate the different varieties of experience that coalesce into the world if the word is chained to the logic of propositions alone? For Simeen Farhat, language also encompasses intentionality, potency and will.

Primarily interested in poetry, the sculptures cast in resin are not meant to be read as poems in the manner of concrete poetry and text art. What the artist is seeking to extract out of this world of Urdu, Farsi and English poetry is not the concrete logic of the linguistic message but the possibility to view an entire thought process and to translate poetry into chemistry: What is the source of its energy? What would poetry do if it were in motion? How does the affect of poetry affect the shapes and trajectory of organisms? The impossibility to read the poem raises a question about the indecipherable and, from a cognitive point of view, of whether poetry and literature in general are far beyond what the humanist European tradition postulates. Poetry is also the quotidian, the visual cultures of the world and the encounter between pure thought and reality.

While unquestionably a clever commentary on Islamic civilisation and its reception in the world of identity politics, Simeen Farhat's sculptures operate independently: she departs from the artisanal take of the phoneme towards a more geometrical art, so that from a distance, the viewer may experience the works as abstract paintings. A closer view reveals the alphabetic shapes but yet does not disclose the message: it only reveals rhythm and possibility of meaning. The artist writes, "Language is the greatest invention in our evolutionary process, our civilisation, our history and, most importantly, in understanding who we as human beings are." In a world of multiculturalism and globalisation, when women and those trapped behind endless borders are trying to say something and are not being heard, we are able to visualise here their speech in abstract magnificence.

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The installation *Weeping Metaphors* incorporates poetry inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, in which language is not only indecipherable content but is also used as a metaphor. Early in the story, after falling down the rabbit-hole, Alice eats something that makes her grow very tall, so tall that she begins to cry large blue tears as she cannot fit into the small door. Ultimately, she has to swim in an ocean of her own tears in order not to drown. According to the artist: "Alice would find herself in strange situations where things did not make any sense; she almost lost control of herself—of her identity. But then she became curious and open to those experiences by making herself vulnerable. Her experiences in the wonderland were both confusing and enjoyable at the same time. Logic and nonsense contradict each other." The gigantic tears and their shadows immerse us in the invisible real, riddled with paradox.

Simeen Farhat's installation reshapes her investigations on the nature of linguistic experience by turning to the playful and absurd: is language still coherent when we represent and articulate illogical ideas? For Wittgenstein, only logic is able to establish the ultimate horizon of life and world, hence things that exist in the world can only be coherently talked about. Farhat's idea of dynamism and energy goes further, in order to assert that experience itself is construed out of the contingent, the illogical and the temporary. In these sculptures, with their self-contained chaos, a continuity exists between life, word and world; one which is not sewn together by the ground rules of syntax but places all of them not only as markers but as the limit itself. In the speaking subject, in so far as he or she seeks an encounter with another, there are no ground rules, only pure unrestrained existence. In the words of Alice, it is "Curiouser and curiouser."

Arie Amaya-Akkermans

*Curiouser and curiouser* by Simeen Farhat will run from 17 March to 16 April 2015 with a private view on Monday 16 March from 6-9pm.

Simeen Farhat (b. 1968, Karachi, Pakistan) lives and works in Dallas, Texas. She earned a BFA from Arizona State University and an MFA from Texas Christian University. She has held a number of solo exhibitions since 2000 in the US, the UK, Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. The artist has taken part in several group exhibitions since 1998 throughout Europe, South Asia and the United States, and has taught design and visual arts at the University of Texas at Arlington.

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