

# ARTFORUM

## Asad Faulwell

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Asad Faulwell's current exhibition, "Bed of Broken Mirrors," expands his ongoing, ornamentation-fueled series "*Les Femmes d'Alger*" (Women of Algiers), 2010–, which spotlights Algerian freedom fighters who struggled to wrest their nation from the French colonizers in the 1960s. While the show focuses on portraiture—including canvases replete with metastasizing miniphotos—it also features an imposing diptych (*Les Femmes d'Alger* #36, 2013), which heralds a new narrative slant in the artist's output.



Asad Faulwell, *Les Femmes d'Alger* #36 (Women of Algiers #36), 2013, acrylic, oil, pins, and paper on canvas, 5 x 12'.

Although the series' title nods to Delacroix's famous harem glimpses, Faulwell upends the Orientalist lens: Far from anonymous, secluded sex objects, the women here are identifiable, willful agents, whose freedom of movement enabled them to wreak such violent havoc. Freeze-framed in poses varying from pensive to imperious, every figure is wan and hollow. They are painted as eyeless, ash-colored vessels offset by the conquering motifs that carpet the background. The pallid women, coiffed with exuberant, multitiered halos, are eerily monumentalized, enshrined in spaces that practically throb with chaotic layers of Islamic and Persian patterning gone amok. A subtle irony simmers in this work, bolstered by the manipulated Internet-sourced courtroom photos of the revolutionaries and their amplified sanctification. Faulwell's intent seems to hover on the boundary between commemoration and a derailing of precisely how that commemoration is visualized.

The diptych *Les Femmes d'Alger* #36 plumbs this strategy, introducing elements that further confound. Monumental mingles with mundane: A colossal face peers out amid a string of dapper women immobilized in their pursuits. Elsewhere, a tortured combatant, nude and crucifix-like, dangles from a golden chain, teetering between memorial emblem and empty religious object. While Faulwell may well have become the unlikely standard-bearer of these unsung women, his work nonetheless inhabits an intriguing gray space in which commemoration defies being taken at face value.

— Kevin Jones