

## HOUDA TERJUMAN | TERRE ET RACINES

Maria Giovanna Mancini

Voice Gallery is pleased to invite you on December 6, 2013, to the opening of *Terre et raciness (Hearth and roots)*, the first solo exhibition of the artist Houda Terjuman at our Marrakech gallery.

In an attempt to trace the cultural and family origins of the artist, who lives and works in Morocco, one ends up making a long trip to the Middle East and Europe, in the years of wars, in the stories of love and abandonment.

The condition of the contemporary world is that of cultural miscegenation; multiculturalism takes on, in the theoretical perspective of the scholars of Cultural Studies, an entirely positive character, a new force that helps to reorganize the social spaces in new forms of society, to structure new practices, to problematize new theories of self-representation and of the border. As a way to overcome disciplinary boundaries, and of the diktats that each culture requires the individual, such condition, of escape from the space given, assumes an uprooting and displacement into another place that has reverberations on the individual.

Whether fleeing from war or going away to look for work, to build a life that may satisfy wants and needs, the departure means the loss of contact with one's homeland. In the condition of exile, man becomes an uprooted tree like in story told by Houda Terjuman, and the exhibition *Terre et racines* turns into the story of a distressful and painful process of stability retrieval in the floating and liquid space of the contemporary.

Sculpture, as Heidegger reminds us, is a function which creates space that becomes a place for dwelling and negotiation of identity processes in the confrontation with otherness. The artist could not but choose the three-dimensional medium of sculpture to decline through the three phases – that of uprooting and exile, and therefore of suffering, that of negotiation in the contact with each other, and thus of dwelling, that of resilience and peace and thus of resting – the stages of a process that involves individuals, communities and the world.

The tree and the biological systems are a metaphor for the cultural condition that, once eradicated, becomes multi-rooted transforming its practices, resisting and reacting to external pressures in order to become on the surface a root that extends in several directions, rather than having the pretense of fastening to the depths of the soil.

Hyper-connected, heterogeneous and multifaceted field of consistency is the rhizomatic proceeding of the movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization – to use the words with which Deleuze and Guattari discuss methods and worlds – to the point where the individual/tree that gives up binary logic of stability/grounding, and the cultural exclusiveness of this perspective, finds nourishment and hence rest.

## Conversation between Maria Giovanna Mancini and Houda Terjuman

**MGM:** Built into a synoptic path, a syntax divided into three different emotional fires, the exhibition at the Voice Gallery is, for various reasons, a crucial step in your career and production. First of all, you have abandoned painting to create small and medium size sculptures. Sculptures claiming the feature, as discussed by Heidegger, to set up and *establish* space. This space, however, is not to be intended solely as a physical locus, measurable with the tools that science has perfected, but as a space of dwelling.

What prompted you to make sculptures? Now that you've experienced the possibility of creating objects that take up three-dimensional space, has there been an irreparable rift with painting?

**HT:** *The sculptures are small stories that you can look at, touch, feel. Everyone can recognize a personal journey in them. The different stages of life inspire me pictures and memories. Clichés of a collective memory that I try to give back in my work. Painting limited my attempt to express these feelings.*

*I do not think I could go back to painting. Sculpture allows me to convey emotions such as the hardness of rocks, the movement of roots, the peace of a secret garden.*

**MGM :** We said that the exhibition is divided into sequential phases: a first block of work is collected under the idea of suffering. The suffering of exile, the painful uprooting from one's land, the plight of those who always take their own things with them, ending up painfully being, wherever they go, strangers and foreigners: by choice or to escape from a war, the condition of those who leave their land is always of abandonment, always of exile. The idea of uprooting is one of the cultural, socio-political and, above all, emotional processes that typify the contemporary world.

Do you believe that art is a tool that can alleviate this suffering, which, in one way or another, dwells in each of us, or is it rather the place where to get in touch with this mood/pain and mold it, thanks to the ability of art to give shape to a global condition, transcending autobiographical elements?

**HT:** *I think that seeing scenes that evoke an experience allows us to become aware of them, and then move forward. The loneliness, the fear, the pain, but also resilience as the capacity of recovery, forgiveness, serenity, are also layers of life that can be shaped through sculpture.*

**MGM:** After the first, painful stage of separation there follows an unconscious state of hope, freedom, and no longer of loneliness, of endless possibilities beyond any connection with history, with cultural traditions and individual stories. To dwell is the term that can tell of this stage, because it represents the process of negotiating an identity dimension in the relationship with otherness, renewing the temporality and spatiality of action. And once again, the field of art seems to me the most suitable place to practice this coming closer to the other.

The concept of resilience indicates the ability of an ecological system to regain a steady state after being exposed to shocks and pressures. Is it appropriate to consider this body of work as the articulation of a process of resilience, as an "ecological system"?

**HT:** *These steps below show the different stages of life. The suffering is not eternal, and man has a limitless ability to regenerate himself, like nature. The vegetation, in the sculptures, is a metaphor for the strength and balance that are in us.*

**MGM:** Finally, the rest, the last stage of the journey in the exhibition, collects memories, the olfactory and tactile recollections of your childhood, which become a metaphor for a collective condition.

Why did you choose to present your new work in a sequence? Do you think that the exhibition moment is a further step, able to give another meaning to your work? Or is it, rather, a communal moment where you invite people, individually or collectively, to reflect on the process, the journey, on separation and the fact that everything will eventually go spontaneously back into place?

**HT:** *This exhibition is the story of the people I have met, but also the universal story of man. A long journey: from the reassuring arms felt during childhood, the long-sought peace after the long journey of life.*

*The third stage is the resilience, the rest, the return to this initial state.*

*The sculptures follow this path of life, the journey, the search for a home and rest. This path may thus make visitors wonder about their lives.*