

SERGE ZIEGLER GALERIE

c/o Galerie Renée Ziegler

Larry Deyab

BLACK FLOWERS

AUGUST 25 - OCTOBER 15, 2005

"But success shall crown my endeavours. Wherefore not? Thus far I have gone, tracking a secure way over the pathless seas: the very stars themselves being witnesses and testimonies of my triumph. Why not still proceed over the untamed yet obedient element? What can stop the determined heart and resolved will of man?" - Frankenstein by Mary Shelley

"Black Flowers" are paintings made by Larry Deyab in the last three years. They present a view of the world influenced by historical events that took place as recently as last year (the Falluja paintings) and as long ago as 1818 when Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* (the paintings *Flowers* and *Black Flowers*), as well as the early expressionist German cinema of 1922 (*Nosferatu*). It is a view of the world from an artist born in Massachusetts, living in New York since 1981 and witness to such events as the destruction of the World Trade Center, the continuing war in Iraq and the effect of the so-called "War on Terror" on contemporary life. Plus other things in between - including the major influence of Hollywood film culture on the world. These are the "Black Flowers."

Witnessing the way his country influenced the world in the events leading up to the Iraq war, it brought to the artist's mind the image of the Frankenstein Monster that does not understand what he does and what events he sets in motion. In *Flowers* (2004) the Monster kneels by the little girl throwing white daisies into the lake. He is amused seeing them float. When he runs out of flowers to throw in the water, he turns to the little girl to see if she will float - but

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she doesn't. The horizontal dimensions of the canvas (40 x 100 inches / 102 x 254 cm) allude to Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* and the spray-painted enamel Deyab uses in most of the paintings here relate to the immediacy of film, photography and the celluloid, non-painterly image. The related paintings *Black Flowers* (2005) and *Black Flowers I* show a scene of such simplicity that it is hard to imagine what it represents - the aftermath of the Monster's unknowing act, with only the white daisies floating on the surface of the dark lake. A water lily lies innocently in the corner, a reminder that images are deceiving. These are not Monet's *Water Lilies*.

The *Revolutionary Portrait: Terry Malloy* and the other paintings of fictional character Terry Malloy are based on the film *On The Waterfront*, made exactly 50 years ago in New York when his country was trapped in another one of its periodic bouts of political repression and censorship. A moment when the fear of Communism and the Soviet Union was exploited by his country's politicians the same way the fear of al-Qaida and Islamic Fundamentalism now provides excuses for the political suppression of free speech and an invitation to fear the foreigner or any unknown people or place. Terry Malloy is the man who literally stands up and fights the people and events that had exploited him for personal gain and unknowingly led him to participate in the murder of Joey Doyle - an innocent man who had exposed all the corruption around him. As in *Flowers*, here is another act set in motion without knowledge of the consequences. The *Revolutionary Portrait: Terry Malloy* is an image of defiance - defiance presented in a long, horizontal format mimicking Cinema-scope and reflecting the impact of film on our modern consciousness.

Film is also behind *Clockwork* (2004) a portrayal of brutality painted in beautiful pinks, grays and blacks. The beautiful, soft colors mock the horror of the scene. In *Clockwork* no one is safe. We realize that anyone can do anything they want to us - and who will really care? Who will stop them when even governments lie and murder? The paint application mocks the touch and colors of Minimalism and sixties abstraction. Even the painterly drips of gray falling to the left.

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Clockwork's colorful brutality is opposed by the black, white and gray of *Falluja (Highway)* 2004, based on one of the most horrible events to come out of the the war in Iraq. Like *Falluja (Scaffold)* 2004, also in the exhibition, these images make us question the sanctity of the human body and life. Are we more or less civilized today?

Liberia III (2003) is a portrait in black spray enamel and enamel house paint of a Liberian teenager wearing a do-rag on his head, a cigarette perched in his mouth and a Kalashnikov slung over his shoulder. The mist and smoke of war swirl all around him. He is a member of the youth gangs that roam freely in his country - the aftermath of their brutal civil war. It is an image of both corrupted innocence and sudden and extreme violence.

The *Revolutionary Portrait: New York* (2004) is New York City in the dark seen only by the light of a full moon. A dark and forbidding landscape lit only by nature. It recalls the blackout which struck New York in the dead heat of summer and paralyzed the entire city. It made New Yorkers and people throughout the Western World realize how vulnerable they were being so dependent on technology - specifically electricity in an electronic age. The artist remembers looking out at the black skyline of New York that night in mid-August 2003. It was dark for the first time since moving to the city and the only lights were coming - ironically - from candles in a few people's windows. A nineteenth century view of a revolutionary city.

New York - a city easily frightened now since the events of September 11, 2001, which Deyab witnessed that day from the roof of his building in Brooklyn. It is depicted in the painting *September* (2002) in simple black and white spray paint - the paint itself reminiscent of smoke. The view is from the sky far above the city as the dark silhouette of the second airplane is about to strike the second tower. The first tower is already engulfed in black smoke that trails away across the sky leaving a tragic wake. The influence of Alfred Hitchcock films is perhaps evident in this dispassionate view of a tragedy viewed without comment from above. The naming of some of these portraits of people and New York City as "revolutionary" reflect the experience of four trips to Cuba beginning in 1998 by the artist. While traveling around

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Cuba, Deyab saw the billboards along the highways depicting the various heroes of the Cuban Revolution. These images were presented in such a bold and unapologetic way that they influenced the artist's conception of the modern "revolutionary" portrait. Deyab felt that anything could be a portrait - people, places, even words - as long as the motivation was sincere and the image true.

All these paintings are sincere and true in an important way: They are the thoughts and images passing through mind of a person who is a painter living in our time and reacting to events happening in them. They are uncensored and unapologetic in their point of view.