

EBECHO MUSLIMOVA



Ebecho Muslimova, known for her raucous and sexually uninhibited character "Fatebe" creates paintings and works on paper that beguile the eye as much as they humor the mind. Fatebe's physical contortions and unpredictable quandaries play themselves out like performances on the canvas: each work depicts a single event that uncannily combines self-consciousness, comedy and vulnerability. Muslimova's technical prowess as a painter helps to underscore the sheer delight of Fatebe's misadventures. "As her life continues, Fatebe is faced with newly articulated objects, stretched over landscapes that are populated with new temptations and ghosts. With adoring precision, Muslimova codifies the echoes of domesticity, luxury, nature, education, psychology, fetish, and art itself—images that have the capacity to haunt her. Nothing can deter Fatebe, though. From her gleeful smile, we can assume that her convictions only gain momentum with every new opportunity to test them." (Quote from Natasha Stagg, Cura Magazine).

Muslimova received her BFA at Cooper Union in New York, NY in 2010. Muslimova has presented solo exhibitions at Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, BR; Bernheim Gallery, Zürich, CH; Magenta Plains, New York, NY; The Drawing Center, New York, NY; David Zwirner Gallery, London, UK; White Flag Projects, St. Louis, MO and Room East, New York, NY. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Kunstmuseum Basel, CH; ICA Miami, FL; Renaissance Society, Chicago, IL; Zuzeum, Riga, LV; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.; Swiss Institute, New York, NY; Kunsthalle St. Gallen, CH. Her large-scale murals have been commissioned for biennials such as The Dreamers, 58th Edition of October Salon, Belgrade, RS and The 32nd Biennale of Graphic Arts: Birth As Criterion, Ljubljana, SI. In 2022 Muslimova was the recipient of the Borlem Prize, honoring artists whose oeuvre brings awareness to mental health issues & struggles. Her work has been featured in publications such as Forbes, The New York Times, Artforum, Art in America, Mousse, Artnet, Hyperallergic, and Cura Magazine, among others. Muslimova is included in Jeffrey Deitch's book, Unrealism, featuring 27 artists and major essays by Johanna Fateman, Alison Gingeras, and Aria Dean.

Muslimova's work is in public collections including The Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.; ICA Miami, Miami, FL; MAMCO Geneva, Geneva, CH; RISD Museum, Providence, RI; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY and Zuzeum, Riga, LV.

Born 1984, Makhachkala, Dagestan, RU
Lives and works in Mexico City, MX

New City Brasil
July 12, 2024

NEW CITY BRASIL

The Reverse of the Reverse is the Same Rediscovered: A Review of Ebecho Muslimova's Provocations at Mendes Wood DM São Paulo

The first exhibition of Francis Picabia in New York, at the beginning of 1913, was received with great strangeness by critics. One of the newspapers at the time said that the painting "Dance at the Spring" looked like "a cat having convulsions in a tomato patch."

Despite everything, Picabia loved the feeling of freedom that the city and country transmitted to him, which led him to experiment in the following decades with a series of paths that distanced him from the very restricted programs of Cubism from which he had departed.

Previously, the artist reabsorbed Cubism into new derivative forms more akin to the irony of Dada and the exploration of Surrealist automatism, sometimes also painting realistic pictures that resembled advertisements, always giving the impression of being a legion of different artists doing things almost simultaneously, and not just one painter with a recognizable style. "What I like is to invent, to imagine, to make myself at every moment a new man, and then, to forget him, forget everything," he wrote in 1923.

The newly opened exhibition at Mendes Wood DM in São Paulo by artist Ebecho Muslimova (born 1984, Makhachkala, Dagestan, Russia) brings a similar experience in terms of the multifaceted aspect of a work whose centrality is precisely in the reaffirmation of the artist's ego. The show, titled "Rumors and Whispers," unfolds in two parts: the first (Rumors) at the gallery in São Paulo and the second (Whispers) at the Bernheim Gallery in Zurich, seeking correspondence between the works exhibited here and there, like a mischievous, ironic conversation that once again serves to bring to the scene the character created by the artist, a kind of nihilistic alter ego of herself called Fatebe.

Almost always naked, in libidinous poses and gestures that fluidly contort her body in space, which would make the most trained practitioner of yoga or Pilates envious, Fatebe is inside the paintings and outside of them at the same time, sequencing representation beyond the frame.

In the São Paulo show, the figure with large eyes and exposed erogenous zones performs a kind of dance along the gallery walls, following the disguised simplicity of the local architecture (a former industrial warehouse adapted for gallery functions) and exploding the concept of the white cube. The linear drawing outlining the figure recalls the style and humor of cartoons (like a Robert Crumb, for example), suggesting a relationship between high culture and low culture, but also with the refined environment of New York magazines, like The New Yorker and its famous cartoons. Fatebe places herself in impossible, overwhelming and violent situations that suggest the exploration of the artist's unconscious as in the work of the Surrealists.



Ebecho Muslimova, "Fatebe Nervous Glory," 2024, acrylic, high definition UV ink and oil paint on canvas, 72" x 72"/Photo: Mendes Wood DM São Paulo

In a work like “Fatebe Clown Boudoir” (2024), the anus of the figure resting on a table is stretched and opened for the viewing of an amphora by a figure of a dwarf endowed with various phalluses on a stool. Another amphora, similar to the first (which Muslimova saw at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York), inside the female body, on the sideboard behind this figure, seems more accessible but does not arouse the interest of the figure with its erect phalluses nor of the observers of the painting, transformed into voyeurs. No matter how bizarre the scenes involving Fatebe are, it is the possibility of being scandalized toward which we are directed as spectators.

For Freud, in the “anal phase,” which runs from eighteen months to four years of age, the child, becoming aware of its own individuality, simultaneously develops the perception of possession, selfishness and aggression in the sense of the desire to dominate the other, once it recognizes for the first time that there is another.

Since Fatebe has a body that is pure representation, hovering over the paintings in which her vagina and anus are used in every possible way, the elasticity of her libertarian attitude corresponds allegorically to the very will to paint without much commitment or predefined constraints by the market, the great violator of bodies under capitalism in its final phase.

Such freedom also recalls and resembles the libertarian ideals of European artists of the 1980s generation, with the return of painting, neo-expressionism, new figuration, trans-avant-garde, etc., in which there was a mix of diverse elements captured from art history and mass media without the commitment to their identification or genealogy. What mattered was the immediate and almost alchemical possession of painting and the act of painting itself, amplifying the ego (and the exhibition spaces) of the artists and their critical stance toward power and authority. I think, for example, of Sigmar Polke (1941-2010). There was, of course, no concern with the quality of the painting in this generation. This was not in dispute, at least for the majority. And such concern is not equally placed for Muslimova’s work.

In the exhibition by the artist in the basement galleries of the Drawing Center in New York, "Scenes in the Sublevel," in 2021, ten large-scale works were designed for the walls, reflecting on imprisonment and escape. It is difficult not to think of the graffiti that swarms the New York City subway trains and, at the same time, this city's tradition of making conceptual currents converge with popular culture, posters and advertisements, with the idea of maximum exposure to everything that is or can be sold. According to Samantha Ozer, who signs the curatorial text, "in the context of the city, Fatebe emerges as an emblematic image for the psyche of a generation that grew up around 9/11 and during the rise of surveillance, digitization of the self, proliferation of online avatars and endless opportunities for connectivity through technology. Faced with anxiety around urban life, Fatebe's world is a ketamine dream, a technicolor landscape where one can escape the chaos of the crowd and dissociate into the landscape—melting into the pool of one's own subconscious."



Ebecho Muslimova, "Fatebe Farm To Table," 2024, acrylic, high definition UV ink and oil paint on canvas, 72" x 72"/Photo: Mendes Wood DM São Paulo

In a recent interview with Emma Robertson, Muslimova reflects on her position of permanent restlessness and discomfort or dissatisfaction: “Making art is not a pleasant feeling. At least for me. I am sure this is true for many other creative works. But I control it, and I put her in these situations, I create the problems that she needs to be her own solution. And yet she keeps the way out for me to find the solution. So until she decides to appear in a way that makes sense to me, I am stuck with this problem. And this is our relationship!”

The relationship with her work as a spectator is also not easy, but it enables a type of aesthetic behavior that has become accustomed to facing the presentation of new things, young artists’ art, for example, without the novelty or strangeness typical of the avant-garde of the early last century. In a time when the most diverse issues of customs are not issues, but agents, the apprehension is made based on laughter, but a stifled laughter, which does not accompany the correlative feeling in a way that impacts our body and spirit.

In the aforementioned interview, Muslimova mentions the origin of Fatebe and talks about the sense of her presence or the fatality when she is absent in her way of thinking about the world: “I started drawing after a really frustrating period in school—and, in retrospect, I realized I was desperate to communicate something. And humor seemed like the quickest way to communicate something very quickly and efficiently. The idea doesn’t work unless I laugh at it, unless I can laugh at it.”

“Ebecho Muslimova: Rumors and Whispers” is on view at Mendes Wood DM, Rua Barra Funda 216, São Paulo, through August 10.

Frieze
June 19, 2024

FRIEZE

Ebecho Muslimova Plays a Game of Rumours

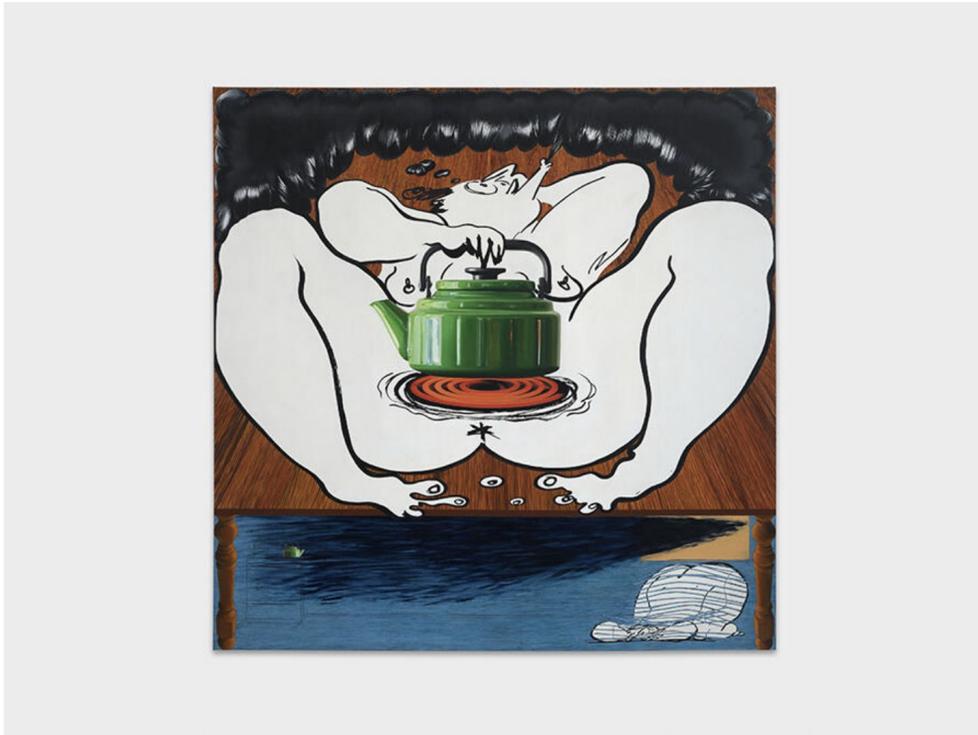
At Bernheim, Zurich, the artist's alter-ego, Fatebe, confidently splits herself between time zones, cities and hemispheres

Since her first appearance in 2011, Fatebe – the protagonist of the copious works of Ebecho Muslimova, an artist born in the Republic of Dagestan, educated in the US and now based in Mexico – has grown from a delicate, black and white ink figure displayed in A4 format to a character who fills two-metre-square, mixed-media canvases and stretches across whole walls of museums and galleries in larger-than-life murals.



Ebecho Muslimova, 'Whispers', 2024, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and Bernheim London and Zurich; photograph: Annik Wetter

Cheerful, abject and crass, Fatebe is a counter-patriarchal version of Betty Boop, the oversexualized 'baby vamp' brought to life as an animated cartoon during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Sharing the bold, celebratory shapes of Niki de Saint Phalle's feminine figures, Fatebe engages in acts and scenes of sexual transgression that, if they have any precedent, are more likely to be found in the dark recesses of the internet than within the art-historical canon. Invariably nude, Fatebe (a portmanteau of 'fat' and 'Ebe', Muslimova's nickname) is a protean character who is both a subject and an object, capable of impossible feats as well as withstanding the most perverse forms of torture. Seemingly never uncomfortable, she constantly has a grin pinned to her face.



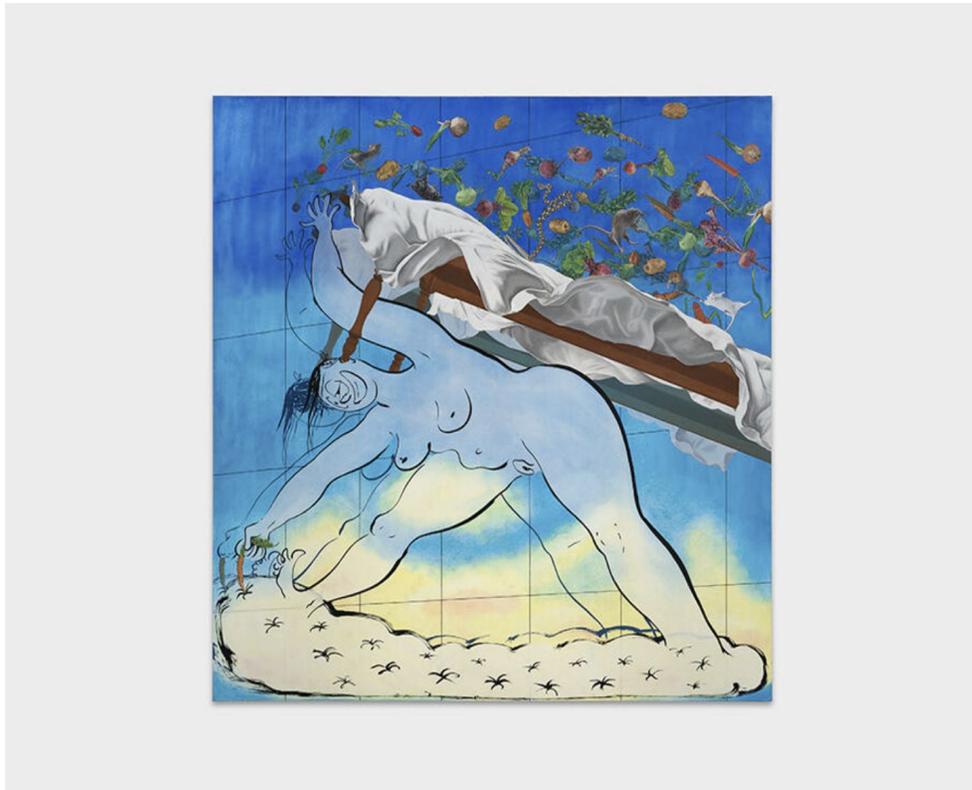
Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Kettle Vision*, 2024, acrylic, high definition UV ink and oil paint on canvas 1.83 x 1.83 m. Courtesy: the artist and Bernheim London and Zurich; photograph: Annik Wetter

In Muslimova's most recent set of works – currently on view in 'Whispers' at Bernheim in Zurich – Fatebe seems to, at times, dissolve into the setting, be that landscape or architecture, in scenes that frequently address consumption: both of food and of commodities. In *Fatebe Kettle Vision* (all works 2024), she appears outlined by the typical thick contour, her vulva replaced with a hotplate burner, her hand wielding an alluring, hyper-realistic, Japanese enamel kettle. With a plume of black smoke billowing from her mouth, she's cast here as a stove. In *Fatebe Farm Mother*, on the other hand, she is hardly noticeable, a pale figure in the background of a fenced field with a swarm of animal skeletons hovering above like bees.



Ebecho Muslimova, 'Whispers', 2024, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and Bernheim London and Zurich; photograph: Annik Wetter

But the artist's protagonist is not fading away. To the contrary, 'Whispers' is a disjointed conversation. Riffing off the children's game in which a message is passed in hushed tones between participants, often becoming distorted along the way, the artist prepared two sets of work: the other is on view in a concurrent exhibition at Mendes Wood DM in São Paulo and titled 'Rumors' (which is how the game is known in Brazil). In some cases, the works were conceived as elements in a single composition – as in *Fatebe Harvest Day*, on show in Zurich, and *Fatebe Farm to Table*, in São Paulo. The protagonist in the former painting is busy picking carrots from a field that is perhaps also part of her body. She carries a table on her back, her jerky movements sending scores of vegetables and rats into the air. In this painting's sister image, Fatebe – wearing red, high-heeled shoes that suggest an urban, consumerist incarnation – is impaled by the same table. In other works, the connection is less obvious but, in any case, the counterpart works remain out of sight to gallery visitors in both cities.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Harvest Day*, 2024, acrylic, high definition UV ink and oil paint on canvas 1.83 x 1.83 m. Courtesy: the artist and Bernheim London and Zurich; photograph: Annik Wetter

In a 2022 interview with *The Talks*, Muslimova explained that she started drawing during a particularly 'frustrating' period in school, using humour because it 'seemed like the fastest way to communicate something very quickly and efficiently.' 'Whispers', shows just how far Muslimova – and, by extension, Fatebe – has come since then. First leaving the comforts of the A4 page, she has now transcended the confines of the exhibition space, confidently splitting herself between time zones, cities and hemispheres, the grin still on her face.

Ebecho Muslimova's 'Whispers' is on view at Bernheim, Zurich, until 26 July; 'Rumors' is on view at Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, until 10 August

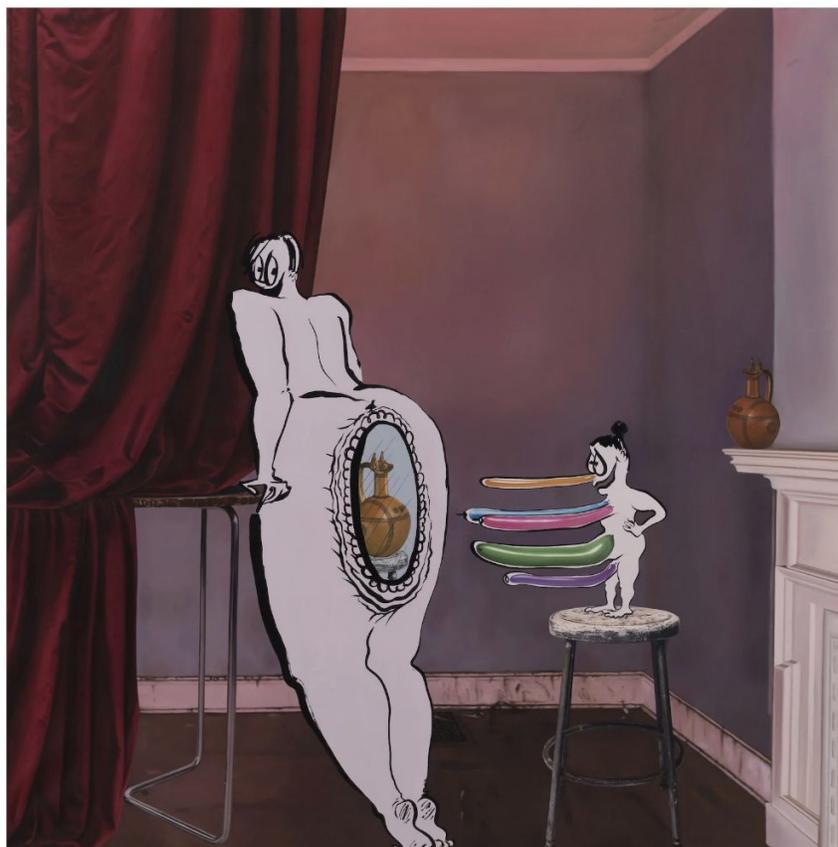
artnet
June 10, 2024

artnet

'It's Her World:' Ebecho Muslimova on Painting Her Uninhibited Alter Ego

When viewing Ebecho Muslimova's paintings, it might come as a surprise to hear that she is a bit of a control freak. The artist is known for her uninhibited and decidedly naked alter ego Fatebe, who is articulated in fluid, cartoonish lines.

In every surreal scene this figure inhabits, she explodes any sense of order and replaces it with delightful chaos. Look closer, however, and it is clear that Muslimova has articulated and balanced every element with razor-like precision.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Clown Boudoir* (2024). Courtesy of Bernheim and Mendes Wood © the artist.

While this persona began as an exercise in escapism while studying at New York's Cooper Union, it has become central to Muslimova's practice. "She is my shield," the artist explained, "I was very intimidated by artmaking, particularly painting, but now everything I paint is for her. It's her world."

When we speak over the phone, the artist is in the middle of installing her new show at Mendes Wood in São Paulo. She has taken the time to clamber off the scaffold, where, with the help of a dedicated team, she is painting murals that appear to extend from her canvases. Thanks to meticulous planning, everything is on schedule. "I am so anal, I definitely have a control problem. I always know exactly where everything is going to be," she said. "My true nightmare is having to stand in front of a blank wall!"



Installation view of "Rumors" Courtesy of Bernheim and Mendes Wood.

For this project, Muslimova has taken her fastidious organization to a new level. The Mendes Wood show opens in parallel with another at Bernheim in Zürich; the two are titled "Rumors" and "Whispers" respectively. Each painting has a partner piece in the other gallery, operating as pairs of "sisters," as the artist likes to call them.

The inspiration came from the game of telephone, in which people whisper a phrase from one person to another in succession, resulting in strange and often amusing misunderstandings. In her version, the paintings work in dialogue with each other, but are not necessarily speaking the exact same language.

“I had this romantic idea of a long-distance relationship,” Muslimova explained, “and the game of telephone has different names wherever you go. In Brazil it’s called ‘rumours’ and others refer to it as ‘Chinese whispers’ or ‘Russian scandals’. In fact, it came about during a time of global Cold War anxieties.”

Muslimova upends this context of misinformation and error—something that feels ever more pertinent in the current climate—by embracing the playful and childish elements of the game. “Regurgitating real-world anxieties into forms of play is really cathartic for me,” she added.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Harvest Day* (2024). Courtesy of Bernheim and Mendes Wood © the artist.

The artist painted her canvases between her studios in New York and Mexico City, bringing the pairs to life before eventually having to split them up. “It’s a real pain in the ass,” she laughed. “They have to work separately and as a whole, even though they came from the same witch’s caldron.”



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Farm to Table* (2024). Courtesy of Bernheim and Mendes Wood © the artist.

In some cases, this involves a scenic split in which both paintings operate as a half of a very evident whole. In *Fatebe Harvest and Fatebe Farm to Table* (both 2024), one figure upends an enormous dining table, which impales another figure on the succeeding canvas. Both works feature an eclectic mix of root vegetables, reptiles and rodents, which Muslimova ascribes to a sense of natural, cyclical decay.

In other instances, the compositional link is less immediate. In *Worm to Worm* (2024), for example, a contorted green nude appears shocked at a red canvas depicting an anus. The same palette is carried over in *Fatebe Rattan Lunch Worm Room* (2024), where three individuals crowd around a table. That is not the only connection, though. The art world context is lurking in the shadows.



Enecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Worm to Worm* (2024). Courtesy of Bernheim and Mendes Wood © the artist.

Worm to Worm features a marquee and the New York skyline in reference to the Hamptons Fine Art Fair, while its partner painting includes three characters which have appeared in other works, situated in a room that directly references [Kunsthall Stavanger](#) in Norway, where Muslimova will be showing next year.

Through this constant self-referencing, the artist builds a picture of missed connections and the memory schisms that can occur when one is constantly traveling, yet often connecting with the same subjects and people.

These slippages encapsulate the very contemporary feeling of FOMO (fear of missing out), something the artist was keen to explore. In orphaning the pairs, she has produced a sense of longing, not only within the context of the works themselves, but the people coming to see them. With such a vast transatlantic distance between them, only a select few viewers—if any—will see both shows.

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This sense of dislocation and distance is something that the artist has experienced in her own life. She recalls emigrating to the U.S. from Russia as a child, following an unexpected separation from her mother of several years. The many fantastical worlds of Disney were at odds with the single, strangely overdubbed video Muslimova had previously had access to. “I think it was *Duck Tales*,” she recalled. “All the voices were done by one gruff old man, but I loved it because there was this sense that the cartoon came from the place where my mother was.”



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Fenced Pigs* (2024). Courtesy of Bernheim and Mendes Wood © the artist.

Once she came to America, she became enthralled by the studio's famed animations, and the aesthetic has continued to influence her. "I completely fell in love with Disney," she said. "The seductive line really meant something to me. In combining the same stylistic, fluid lines with meticulous, hyperreal elements, the artist effectively blurs the line between realms of the imaginary and realistic.

"You can see the Roger Rabbit effect on Fatebe," the artist explained. "She's placed in an expanding world, where there are very different ideas of what is real. But no matter what, she's always herself."

"Rumors" runs through August 8 at Mendes Wood, Rua Barra Funda 216 01152 – 000, São Paulo, Brazil; "Whispers" runs June 7 through July 26 at Bernheim, Rämistrasse 31, 8001 Zürich, Switzerland.

Artsy
June 6, 2024



Ebecho Muslimova, “Whispers”

Bernheim, Zürich

June 7–July 26



Ebecho Muslimova
FATEBE TOAD SELF, 2024

In the Zürich half of a two-part presentation (the other show, “Rumors” is at [Mendes Wood DM](#) in São Paulo), [Ebecho Muslimova](#)’s series of paintings portray Fatebe, the artist’s alter ego, in flat, cartoonish lines. This signature character frequently finds herself in contorted, surrealistic situations, visualizing desire as Goya-esque grotesquery amid skyscrapers and modern urban domesticity. In cheerful, irreverent paintings, Muslimova offers a vision of a liberated, playful female body.

W Magazine
June 21, 2024

W

The Most Anticipated Art Shows and Exhibitions of 2024

Ebecho Muslimova: *Rumors* at Mendes Wood and *Whispers* at Bernheim



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Farm to Table*, 2024.
Courtesy of Mendes Wood DM and the Artist

The visual artist Ebecho Muslimova transfers all of her deepest emotions into a lively, rollicking character who appears, in some form, in all of her works. Named Fatebe, the character is “a surrogate self, or a self-device,” as Muslimova, who was born in Russia and now lives between New York and Mexico City, described it [in a recent interview](#). “She allows me to flatten out certain emotional or mental experiences that are formless because they are in my own interior.” The artist is translating those feelings into a dual show being held on two different continents. First, there’s “Rumors” at Mendes Wood in São Paulo, which debuted on May 25th; next up is “Whispers” opening at Bernheim Gallery in Zurich on June 7th. Each of the eight pieces on view will have a corresponding “sister painting in the other city, like a game of telephone, or a long-distance romance,” a press release from Muslimova reads. Fatebe is up to her old hijinks again in the new exhibition: paintings depict the character nude, flashing her crotch beneath a tent, or using a shovel attached to her head to stack a pile of rocks. As seen above, she also has the power to transcend the metaphysical. “Rumors” will show at Mendes Wood through October 8; “Whispers” runs until July 26 at Bernheim.

Artforum
Summer 2024

ARTFORUM

“Capítulo V: Heat”

LagoAlgo

By Fabiola Iza ☞



Julian Charrière, *And Beneath It All Flows Liquid Fire*, 2019, 4K video, color, sound, 16 minutes 10 seconds. Installation view. From “Capítulo V: Heat.” Photo: Alum Gálvez.

How to do things with art? How might it be a vehicle for engaging socially and politically with the world? Amid an ecological catastrophe of a colossal magnitude, the question of art’s relevance to society has only become more urgent, and it was the driving force behind “Capítulo V: Heat.” Dwelling on human-produced disasters and addressing the immediacy of climate change, the exhibition relied on fire-related metaphors to bring together four vastly dissimilar projects. According to the curatorial premise, each echoed a type of combustion: slow, rapid, spontaneous, and explosive.

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Curated by Jérôme Sans, LagoAlgo's artistic director and Palais de Tokyo cofounder, and Cristobal Riestra, owner of the long-established OMR gallery (a parent company of LagoAlgo), "Capítulo V: Heat"—the title refers to the fact that this was the fifth exhibition at the venue, described as a meeting point between art and gastronomy—seemed disjointed. It was unclear how the works of Muslimova and Montiel contributed to the show's proclaimed purpose of delving critically into issues around the environment and its preservation. It was no surprise that Julian Charrière's works were infinitely better suited to expanding on the intentions articulated in the show's curatorial statement, given that the artist's practice directly addresses the reverberations of human activity on the planet. Two film works involving different sorts of conflagrations were installed within a black-box room: *And Beneath It All Flows Liquid Fire*, 2019, features a three-level stone fountain engulfed by blazing flames, while *Controlled Burn*, 2022, shows an aerial view of fireworks exploding inside an open-pit mine, edited in a reverse sequence. And yet even here, I found the spectacularity of both works—ambitious productions coupled with immersive large-scale displays—unlikely to help convince visitors to act "for a reconfiguration with our home planet," as suggested in the wall text. Slow violence—as scholar Rob Nixon calls it—silently increases throughout time, and the main challenge the ongoing ecological crisis has posed is its perceptual disguise.

The inclusion of ARTISTS AGAINST THE BOMB, the exhibition's fourth project, organized by artist Pedro Reyes's studio, offered an opportunity to steer the show in a more productive direction. Historical and new posters calling for nuclear disarmament hung from the venue's hyperbolic paraboloidal ceiling. Even if some were originally designed in full color, all were printed in black and white. However, with no access to the posters' files on offer, the only way to keep these messages circulating was to buy a T-shirt adorned with the posters' imagery. More than agitprop, the setting evoked designer boutiques or concept stores. Has political or committed art become a style option? Here, antinuclear propaganda was used as a readymade—and, in the process, neutralized. I fear that art framed under an ecological concern faces the same risk.

LagoAlgo aspires to be a cultural space “strongly committed to the most current social and environmental issues” and, attracting a large public, it would be an appropriate social forum. Nevertheless, while the projects in “Capítulo V: Heat” offered fuel for meaningful conversations, the show also left me wondering whether art is really the forum in which they can be most effectively pursued.

The Art Newspaper
September 1, 2023

THE ART NEWSPAPER

Lactating breasts and farting bottoms: unruly bodies run rampant in exhibitions across London

Our leaky, creaky, capricious corporeal vessels are the subject of shows at Somerset House, Goldsmith's CCA and the Design Museum

Summertime is always accompanied by some flesh-baring, but this year a throng of myriad bodies in multiple modes have been unleashed across London. The vagaries of climate change may be sending temperatures up and down, but the heat was—and still is—decidedly on in a number of shows where pretty much every bodily preference and practice is allowed to run riot, with no orifice left unexplored. We all inhabit these leaky, creaky, capricious vessels and, flying in the face of the timidities of our current cancel culture, it has been a joy to experience such a comprehensive celebration of their variety and vagaries.



Ebecho Musimova's *Fatrie Gift Basket* (2020)
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Maria Bernheim

Cahn is also a powerful presence in *Unruly Bodies* at Goldsmith's CCA, another taboo-busting show in which 13 women and non-binary artists encompass a wider investigation of what embodiment means today. As per the title, bodies are often presented as monstrous, abject and liminal, but this is seen as a positive. "The unruly body is a site of resistance in which monstrosity is reclaimed as a subjectivity that disrupts normativity and contests power," states its curator Natasha Hoare.

Farting and the pumping of breast milk make few appearances in fine art, but here each are exuberantly depicted in, respectively, Ebecho Muslimova's paintings and drawings of her bawdy, rumbunctious alter ego Fatebe, and Camille Henrot's paintings of the ambivalent push-pull emotions and physical transformations that come with motherhood. Cahn also presents tough yet tender images of indomitable, vulnerable mothers and children, many made in response to the migration crisis, while Paloma Proudfoot uses ceramics to achieve an astonishing array of different textures—spanning flesh, fur and fabric—in her series of grotesquely glam mannequins, a wall-mounted parade of leggy lovelies who sport stylish fetishwear and strike elegant poses while decapitating and eviscerating each other.

Artsy
July 2023

ARTSY

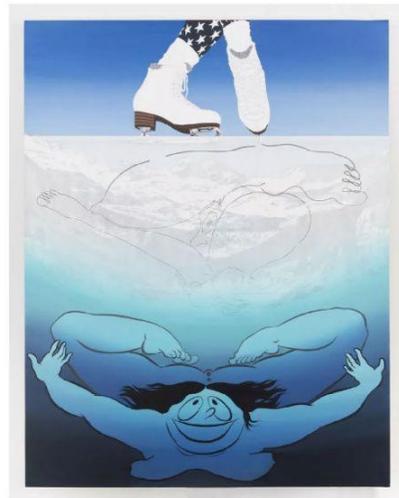
Contemporary Artists Are Liberating the Body from Restrictive Ideals

Human bodies are constantly subjected to restricting cultural ideals. Categories like gender, race, and sexual expression create narrow definitions, and pressure to follow them. It's this pressure for bodies to conform that supports discriminatory systems like ableism and objectification. In recent years, artists have rallied against this, creating liberated expressions of the physical form.

For artists, liberation is often shown through hybrid forms, with many artists presenting the body in a fluid or transformational state between the human, animal, and technological. Some reference mythology, representing figures such as the minotaur or centaur. Others depict disembodied limbs working symbiotically with machinery. Painters, meanwhile, frequently portray the body through abstraction, teetering between destruction and liberation; monstrosity and sublime beauty.

On view at Goldsmiths CCA through September 3rd, "Unruly Bodies" features 13 women and nonbinary artists dealing with these themes. The exhibition explores 21st-century embodiment, focusing on the abject and grotesque. A blood-red painting by [Camille Henrot](#), *What Did You Say?* (2019), shows a mother enveloping her baby, with its head half consumed by her snake-like mouth; while [Shadi Al-Atallah](#) paints themself in physical conflict. Their work *I'm Not Afraid of Ghosts* (2023) conveys oppositional emotional states through movement inspired by the queer ballroom scene and traditional folkloric dance from African diasporic communities in the Arabian Peninsula.

Elsewhere in the show, [Ebecho Muslimova](#) portrays Fatebe, her nude alter ego, in a series of exaggerated, cartoonish works. Fatebe's body is stretched and squeezed to extreme angles, but her face has a joyfully fiendish smile throughout.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Thin Ice Skating*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Maria Bernheim.

Artforum
September 10, 2023

ARTFORUM



Ebecho Muslimova.

September 10, 2022 at 2:58pm

EBECHO MUSLIMOVA WINS \$40,000 BORLEM PRIZE

Ebecho Muslimova has been named the 2022 recipient of the Borlem Prize, awarded annually since 2021 to an artist whose work draws attention to mental health issues. She will receive an unrestricted grant of \$20,000, with the same amount donated in her name to the charity of her choice, which the prize organizers stipulate must be in the service of suicide prevention or mental health advocacy. Muslimova selected the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline as the recipient of the donation. The prize was founded by collector, composer, and researcher Roberto Toscano in honor of his late brother, Fernando Toscano (1986–2018).

The New York–based Muslimova, who earned her BFA from Cooper Union, is well known for her work centering around the fictional character Fatebe, an alter-ego she created while in college to absorb her anxieties and to function as a surrogate, or avatar, for the artist in day-to-day life. Curvy, confident, exaggeratedly sexual, and always depicted in the nude, the cartoonish Fatebe

embodies both a zest for living and the rejection of societal standards attendant upon the female body and of the sexual mores imposed upon women.

“I am immensely honored to receive the Borlem Prize,” said Muslimova, citing the occasion as “a special opportunity to bring attention to the essential work of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. The cruel illusion of suffering alone must be dispelled,” she continued. “Suicide only magnifies pain and creates a ripple effect of suffering.”

The prize jury this year was chaired by Alex Gartenfeld, artistic director of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, and additionally composed of Elena Filipovic, director of the Kunsthalle Basel; independent curator and historian Mark Godfrey; Hou Hanru, artistic director of MAXXI in Rome; Gianni Jetzer, curator-at-large for the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC; Luigia Lonardelli, a curator at MAXXI; and Evrim Oralkan, cofounder and CEO of online digital museum Collecteurs.

Describing himself as “delighted” that Muslimova was named the winner of the prize, Gartenfeld noted that her “work in drawing and painting provocatively explores complex psychological states. With humor, intelligence and invention, Ebecho’s work empowers viewers to ask questions and think critically about the body, intimacy, and the fraught experience of being alive.”

Spike
Winter 2021-22

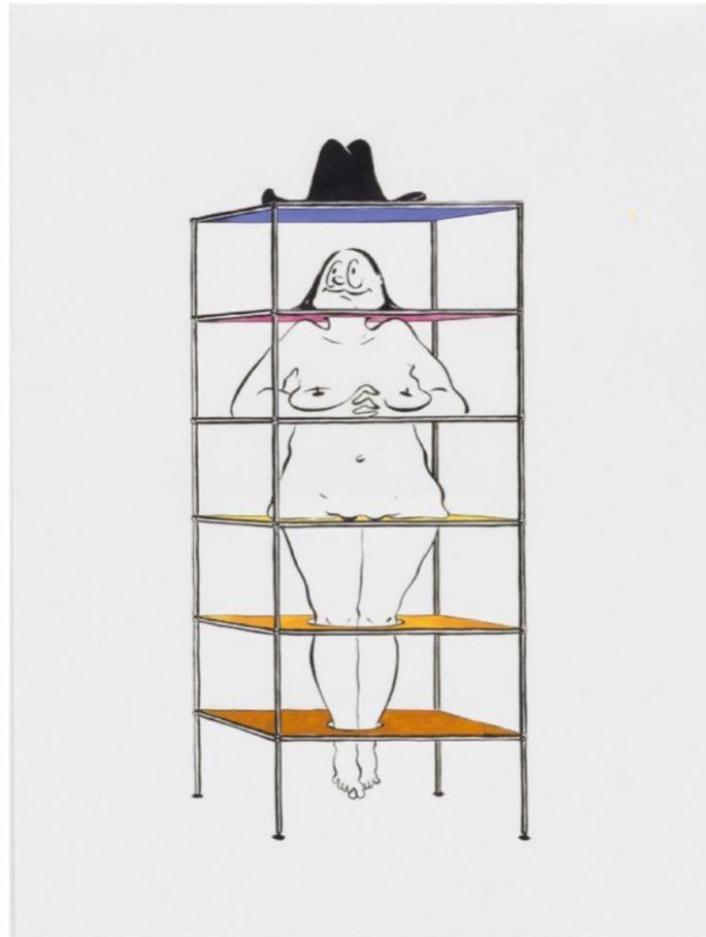
SPIKE

Tender, Freaky Vessel

Ebecho Muslimova
"Fatebe Digest"
David Zwirner
23 Nov – 23 Dec 2021

Swelling and star-arsed, the protagonist of Ebecho Muslimova's (*1984) artwork guts feminist theory with comedic charisma. Her orifices leak uncontrollably, failing to contain the anxieties that escape them. Birthed from Muslimova's creative frustration as an art student, the caricature of Fatebe inherits her name from a portmanteau of "fat" and "Ebe", the artist's nickname. An unexpected anti-hero, her gargantuan flesh and goggle-eyes wreak havoc on respectability. A bulls-eye between her legs, Fatebe is an absurd gloryhole in the punchline of a Kleinian joke. Yet it is hard to discern exactly what the gag is – which, of course, is precisely the point.

"Fatebe Digest" is a voyage of sexual and emotional absurdity. The Russian-born, New-York based artist begins her exhibition with a series of inked works on paper, wherein Fatebe finds herself in a series of farcical quandaries. Nipples ever-erect, she is a solitary figure in a comic abyss. As we follow Fatebe's x-rated escapades, we feel hot shame. The character cork-screws her body, slotting into domestic architecture like a tired key. In *Fatebe Coat Rack* (2021), her drooping flesh hangs from a coat-stand, synonymous with the hide of a cow. Conversely, in *Fatebe 60^o Anniversario* (2021), Fatebe is seated with an excremental companion in a beret, recalling Piero Manzoni's 1961 *Merda d'artista*, in which the Italian avant-gardist produced cans of his own faeces. The spectacular focal point of each drawing is the character's vaginal orifice, exaggerated to the point of ridicule so as to be penetrable by all. One might argue that Muslimova employs



Fatebe USM Sunset, 2021, sumi ink and watercolour on paper, 30.5 x 23 cm

abjection to dissect representations of female sexuality, in the vein of artists like Carolee Schneemann or Kiki Smith. Yet, it is hard to walk away from these erotic encounters with such political clarity. This is the paradox of the work: Fatebe invites us to consider our socially transgressive fantasies, while refusing to be easily digested as such. Instead, the character becomes a back-door to what queer theorist Jack Halberstam terms "low theory": eccentric forms of knowledge production, which risk being dismissed as ridiculous.

If Muslimova's ink drawings are an introduction to Fatebe's visual

world, her oil paintings are an expansion of the character's existential reckonings. In line with the artist's recent 2021 exhibition at the Drawing Center in New York, the paintings activate grotesque dramas pulled from sub-levels of the mind. In *Fatebe Octopus* (2021), the protagonist pantomimes as a sea creature, a hysterical smile plastered across her magenta face. In the painting opposite, *Fatebe BTS Mechane* (2021), she explodes into a crowd of delirious, multi-coloured skeletons, a skull gripped between her toes. The work adopts a trope known as the *danse macabre*, pointing to the

© Ebecho Muslimova. Courtesy: the artist; Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zurich; Magenta Plains, New York; David Zwirner

equalising force of death across humanity. Originating from medieval poetry, the visual allegory often depicted skeletons escorting humans to their graves in a playful waltz. Fatebe is well-versed in her own death-drive, both creating and escaping disastrous impasses with determined, brazen force. Her sexual exuberance is a vehicle to elicit emotional identification through humour, fear, and desire. Muslimova posits the buxom bimbo as a psycho-social subject worthy of our tenderness, a vessel for unabashed vulnerability.

The exhibition culminates in *Fatebe Theater Mural* (2021), the cen-

trepiece of the artist's melodrama. A hand painted installation foregrounds Fatebe's plump flesh, draped along the seats of a cinema, a urine-yellow light projected from her buttocks. It is no wonder Muslimova's satirical style has been likened to that of Iranian-American artist Tala Madani, who adopts projections and abject imagery to critique dominant power structures. Like Madani, Muslimova has the sharp wit of an editorial cartoonist-turned-psychoanalyst, excavating the depths of obscenity in search of meaning. The mural depicts Fatebe, puckering her lips to embrace the feet of an infant clutching

a skull. Pleasure, failure, and melancholy are all present in this fateful meeting. The artist draws on the Russian term жертва (zhertva) to describe Fatebe, which denotes victim, prey, and sacrifice all at once. Her extreme care for, and symbiosis with, the experiences of her caricature are evidence that empathy is essential to critical frameworks of thought. Muslimova's work is not to everyone's liking, and that is fine. It is a form of indigestion; an attestation that a vulgar joke can encompass more cultural weight than the theoretical musings it points to.

Tamara Hart

Fatebe Theater Mural, 2021, acrylic paint and charcoal on plaster wall, 280 x 590 cm
Installation view, David Zwirner, 2021

Courtesy: the artist and David Zwirner. Photo: Anna Arca



Frieze
April 21, 2021

FRIEZE

Ebecho Muslimova's Alter-Ego Devours the Patriarchy

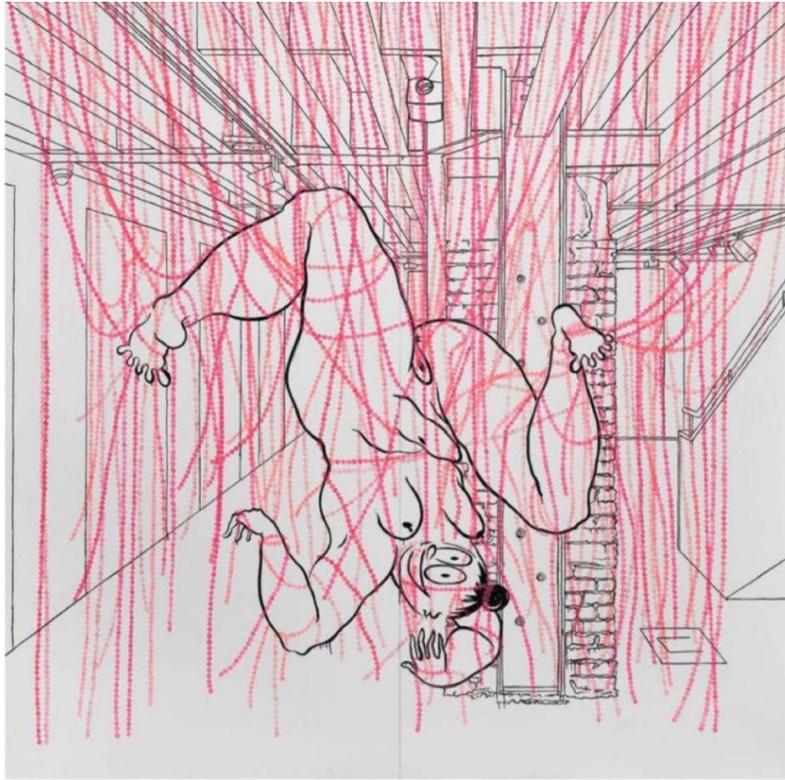
At The Drawing Center, New York, the artist presents a site-specific installation of large-scale drawings showcasing the bodily contortions of her crass cartoon counterpart, Fatebe



BY ANTHONY HAWLEY IN REVIEWS | 21 APR 21



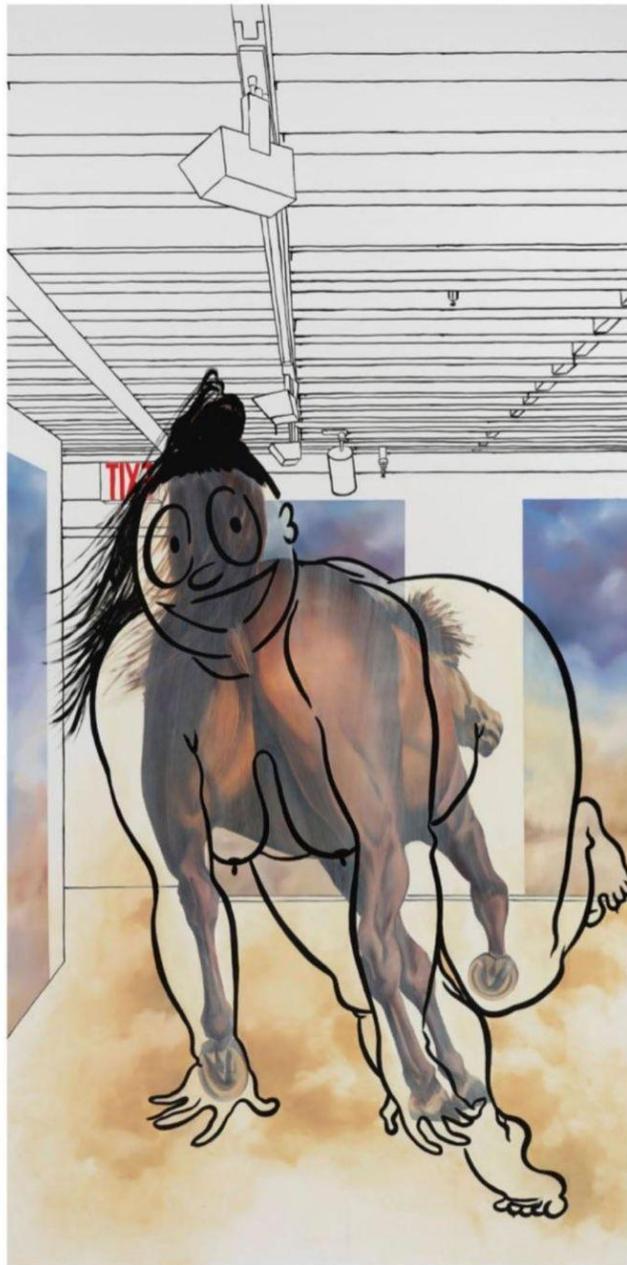
In *Fatebe Heirloom* (all works 2020), the artist Ebecho Muslimova's cartoon alter-ego – Fatebe – folds herself around a giant beanstalk. Her fingers and toes cling to the trunk as she squeezes her elastic frame into the form of a voluptuous heirloom tomato. But she's a bit overripe: her flesh oozes juice, dripping into a black hole beneath. In the adjacent diptych (*Fatebe Sister Booth A* and *Fatebe Sister Booth B*), Fatebe exudes and ingests two huge red vintage leather couches: her vagina and mouth stretched out, birthing and swallowing respectively. Is she in discomfort? It doesn't look like it. Fatebe grins mischievously as always, delighted with her uncanny ability to consume, contort, expel and become alternative forms.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Beaded Curtain*, 2020, enamel on Dibond aluminium, 2.5 × 2.5 artist, Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zurich, and Magenta Plains, New York; photograph: Shark

These recent works by the Russian-born artist are just some of the succulent spectacles in ‘Scenes in the Sublevel’ at The Drawing Center, New York – Muslimova’s first institutional solo show – a site-specific installation of ten, large-scale drawings. The exhibition’s biggest panel (*Fatebe Phantom Cage*) presents two Fatebes: one sits contentedly on a set of stairs, leisurely watching her second self, enlarged and engorged, having fit a bird cage inside her torso and releasing colourful fledglings from her smiling mouth. Organ-less, her body fits snugly over the wiry tiers of the aviary’s various levels. Fatebe is always a bit inside out.

In another panel (*Fatebe Wet Mold*), she is daisy yellow, mopping up her own urine, naked as she always is, but wearing little cloth booties. It seems her body is disintegrating into smaller Fatebes, marbled into the swirling floor of piss. Next to this is *Fatebe Downstairs*, where she's on her back, spread eagle, pulling back her butt cheeks to release colourful translucent balloons from her orifices. The room goes a little wobbly, funhouse-like – her inferred flatulence causing the space to shake.



Ebecho Mushimova, *Fatebe Reverse Gallop*, 2020, enamel and oil paint on Dibond aluminium, 2.5 x 1.2 m.
Courtesy: the artist, Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zurich, and Magenta Plains, New York; photograph: Shark Senesac

Muslimova's character is crass, to say the least, but her scatological body play and vulgar humour represent a much-needed deflation of the paternalism, individualism and self-assuredness of patriarchy. Fatabe willingly breaks herself down. Her contortions remind us that all bodies fail at some point, so perhaps there are new ways to see and be in our surroundings if we just let loose. Looking at these works, I wonder: why do we persist with all our tired, rigid orders? Who needs all these ancient men and their insistence upon governance, normalization? In this way, Fatabe poses the best threat: no more borders or binaries. No more stability, perfectionism or hierarchies. No more demure acquiescence. No more locker-room talk – she's swallowed the locker room itself. Who knows what she'll devour next? Maybe, like Christo and Jeanne-Claude did in 1995, she'll wrap the Reichstag. Maybe it will be a whole nation state.

Collapsible, convertible, unflappable and somatic, Fatabe is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's wet dream, a visual manifestation of their essay 'How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?' (1947). She opens her body, as they write, 'to passages and distributions of intensity and territories and deterritorializations'. She revamps species, dislodging human-object symbiosis, dumping self-respect and asking us to guffaw (and wet our pants!) along the way. In a sense, Fatabe might be perfectly cephalopodic – sinuous, invertebrate, tentacular, squirty – her billowing folds morphing almost seamlessly with her environs as she sprays smokescreens to keep enemies at bay. This is where she is so wonderfully tricky: her *joie de vivre* isn't (thankfully) politically correct, but politically abject.

Ebecho Muslimova's 'Scenes in the Sublevel' at The Drawing Center, New York, runs through 23 May 2021.

Main image: Ebecho Muslimova, 'Scenes in the Sublevel', 2021, exhibition view, The Drawing Center, New York.

Courtesy: the artist and The Drawing Center, New York; photograph: Daniel Terna

The New Yorker
April 21, 2021



ART

Ebecho Muslimova

The character Fatebe—a portmanteau of “fat” and Muslimova’s first name—is an alter ego for the ages, a lewd and goofy jester-protester whose hectoring pudendum is also a picket sign. Muslimova, who was born in Dagestan, Russia, and lives in New York, has portrayed her floppy, nude cartoon figure in countless comically surreal vignettes, presenting Fatebe as a lusty, hapless saboteur. In the artist’s new series, conceived specifically for the sublevel of the Drawing Center, Fatebe has become a structural intrusion. Large, mixed-media compositions overwhelm the low-ceilinged basement, evoking “Looney Tunes” absurdity, W.P.A. murals, and the sardonic punk figuration of Raymond Pettibon. In one panel, Fatebe gaily endeavors to vaginally subsume a tufted banquette; in another, the hindquarters of a running horse are overlaid with an image of our antiheroine on all fours. Fatebe is unquestionably the butt of every joke here, but Muslimova always ingeniously manages to give her the last laugh.

—*Johanna Fateman*

Feb. 5-May. 23

 The Drawing Center
35 Wooster St.
Downtown

212-219-2166



Flash Art
April 14, 2021

Flash Art

•FEATURE

Narcissus and Echo: The Singular Multiverse of Ebecho Muslimova by Mitchell Anderson

April 14, 2021



1 ② 3 4

Ebecho Muslimova, *First Suicide Attempt*, 2012. Screenprint. 30.5 x 22.9 cm. Courtesy of Privat Collection. © Ebecho Muslimova.

She reinvents herself as furniture, flora, or fauna; examines herself in any reflection she can find and dances the macabre; in a multitude of ways, Fatebe, the ample line-drawn alter ego of Ebecho Muslimova, redistributes the limits of the body, reality, and decency. Whether rendered in ink or inhabiting a lexicon of graphic painting, the cartoon character is a constant in a body of work that tackles not just immediate issues of bodily anxiety, possibility, and pleasure, but the meaning of imbuing two dimensions with imagined and replicated content and space. Over the past decade much press has been given to a gendered reading of the central element in Muslimova's work, but the varied executions, placement, and scale are also central to a total project that reflects on the ridiculousness of life and art and the ways in which one manages to physically and emotionally survive.

Muslimova's ink-drawn vignettes of Fatebe (pronounced Fat E-Bee), a portmanteau of the artist's nickname and the represented body, began in 2010. The initial impact of the character is her shamelessness, like Adam and Eve before the fall. Fatebe's abstracted double-circled vagina and starry asshole appear across her oeuvre, not as elements of shock but as elements seen when an active body is on view, sexually or not. If norms are being shattered, it's by the reentrance of the comic strip into high art, which, even after Roy Lichtenstein, Joe Brainard, Keith Haring, or Takashi Murakami, continues to hold a transgressive power over our expectations of what art, and especially art created by a woman, should be. Muslimova, Tala Madani, and Joyce Pensato come to mind as some of the few, and vastly differing, recent female artists harnessing these aesthetics. These small-scale drawings situate Fatebe in singular situations against a white expanse: burning a hole in her forehead with a magnifying glass in *FATEBE FIRST SUICIDE ATTEMPT* (2012) or her body oozing like mortar between a stack of bricks in *FATEBE BRICK HOLDER* (2015). If at times the situations seem humiliating, she never admits it. All shame resides within the viewer's expectations. Fatebe is especially interested in the limitlessness of her orifices, stretching and inserting in amazing ways. These drawings are too elegant for a public bathroom stall, but too scatological for the pages of the *New Yorker*. Class boundaries, exposed through sex, are crossed freely, settling uneasily.



① 2 3 4

Ebecho Muslimova, *THE BIG SLIP*, 2018. Enamel on aluminum dibond. 366 x 244 cm. Courtesy of Privat Collection.

Since 2017 Muslimova has depicted more complicated settings that cosplay as paintings. Ombré stenciling and photorealistic effects suggest paint-by-numbers. Muslimova never allows the wet movement of pigment to take control. Sometimes glossy enamel is laid on aluminum panels, as in the massive *THE BIG SLIP* (2018), whose patterned decoration is materially related, yet resists Christopher Wool's 1980s and '90s straightening of mid-century gay and feminine aesthetics.

The flatness of Fatebe is important. Muslimova's insistence on her cartoon qualities allows the impossible, stressing that this is not a caricature of fatness but another being living her own reality. Like Jessica Rabbit's "bad," Fatebe isn't fat, she's just drawn that way. A suite of paintings shown last year at Galerie Maria Bernheim in Zurich saw her interacting with skeletons executed like photorealistic stickers. Skeletal is in opposition to obese, and Muslimova renders it in her own opposition. Much more than memento mori, they are celebrations, their creepiness dismissed by a worry-free attitude. They highlight the conceptual and figurative depth being played with. In *FATEBE TRUMPET* (2020), she and a skeleton musically perform with alternate vanishing points, the sound of her instrument not registering on her partner's bones as her body wobbles along sound waves. In *FATEBE DARK BANNISTER* (2020) she stretches down the titular structure as a skeleton reaching the top presses its voluminous fingers into the flat flesh of her leg. The tension of illusion is felt in both, which is to say it forces the viewer to confront the meaning and, especially, the feeling of being both a thinker and a corporal thing in space.

This spatial play is more than a painterly bag of tricks. Muslimova confuses her character's relationship to our actual world. As an artwork she is always on performative display. At Magenta Plains in New York, *FATEBE 2017 SHOW* (2017) pictured Fatebe dipping her nipples in the gallery's septic-flooded basement. At Kunsthalle St. Gallen, a gigantic wall of the institution became both wall painting and spatial installation. *FATEBE BIG FOOT* (2018) graphically mirrored the exhibition and then set a gigantic Fatebe within that space, smiling as she mooned the IRL room. These gestures are more in line with Bruce Nauman's studio films of the late 1960s than with Brian Donnelly's ubiquitous "Companions" (1999–ongoing). Muslimova publicly considers the creative bargain of representation when one plays both actor and director in one's art. This is most overt when Fatebe is inserted into cinematic situations, from Tim Burton (*FATEBE SCISSORHANDS*, 2012) to Alfred Hitchcock and Stanley Kubrick (*FATEBE SELF POSSESSION*, 2017) to James Cameron (*FATEBE T2*, 2018). All are auteurs who famously controlled the actresses they worked with. Other times a connection between paintings hints at a multiplicity rather than an ongoing saga, as in *FATEBE DEEP FROG ORGANZA* and *FATEBE BENT GRILLE* (both 2019), the latter showing Fatebe approaching and observing herself in the composition of the former. Bound to live their lives as luxury objects away from each other, they hint at a complicated reality in Muslimova's multiverse of self-reflection (realization).

These complications are on full display now at Muslimova's exhibition "Scenes from the Sublevel" at the Drawing Center in New York, as each of the ten densely hung works form a surrounding mirror of the exhibition space. The title refers to both the show's physical basement location (the curators at the institution have unexpectedly and thoughtfully paired her with a survey of David Hammons's "body prints" upstairs) as well as something of the endless subconscious that Muslimova always mobilizes. Hung touching the floor, each, as with the wall painting in St. Gallen, graphically reflects the room before them. The three-panel *FATEBE PHANTOM CAGE* (2020) emulates the staircase as one descends, and is a survey of the possibilities of Muslimova's drawing and painting, as brushy balloons float behind a flock of birds that read as large decals erupting out of the mouth of her loose sumi-style Fatebe. On the walls are depictions of four other works in the exhibition, something seen throughout, so that the viewer becomes the true absence in this prismatic yet statically repeating house of mirrors. That these works will maintain the parallels of their initial display is a powerful conception. What does it mean for this institution's architecture to live on elsewhere, replicated like the artist's alter ego? All ten works are self-sufficient tableaus within a unified site-specific installation, an update of Titian's six-panel *poesie* (1551-75) depicting Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. From Fatebe tangled in Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Untitled (Blood)* (1992) in *FATEBE BEADED CURTAIN* (2020) or pissing against an Ettore Sottsass mirror in *FATEBE ULTRAFRAGOLA* (2020), references pop up everywhere, in action, in prop, and in infrastructure. Muslimova suggests that the phantoms of culture and norms affect our possibilities at every step of creation and life. They leave echoes. She places her practice, as an artist, into the world of the viewer rather than the antisocial safety of the studio. She invites a group questioning of the imagined and the illusioned. The true charm of Fatebe and Muslimova's constantly depicted hyper-narcissism is the way in which this transgressively free and boundless character, mishaps and perceived humiliations and all, isn't just a desired alter ego of the artist but, at some sublevel, a depiction of the ambitions and realities of each of us as we create and negotiate our way through the world.

Ebecho Muslimova's solo show "Scenes in the Sublevel" at The Drawing Center, New York will be on view until May 23rd.

The New York Times
March 17, 2021

The New York Times

3 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

Ebecho Muslimova

Through May 23. The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster Street, Manhattan. 212-219-2166;
drawingcenter.org.



Installation views of “Ebecho Muslimova: Scenes in the Sublevel,” at the Drawing Center. Daniel Terna

For almost 10 years, the young Brooklyn artist Ebecho Muslimova has been putting a naked, obese alter-ego called Fatebe — “fat Ebe” — through every feat of exhibitionist excess she can think of. In “Scenes in the Sublevel,” a series of 10 specially commissioned portraits on door-size panels of Dibond aluminum, she’s bigger than ever and more exuberant, appearing in elaborate fantasy vistas set in the Drawing Center’s own basement.

In a pair of adjoining panels, Fatebe appears on two red sofas, swallowing one and having sex with the other. Another scene has her dragging puddles of urine down endless corridors and a third superimposes her on the rear end of a beautifully painted horse. Her eyes, as always, are egg shaped and innocent, and her own pony tail echoes the horse's.

On her surface, Fatebe seems to suggest that women's bodies, female sexuality and appetite in general are, at best, ridiculous. The fact that her escapades are set in the very room where the works are hung — look for drawings of the basement's track lighting atop most of the panels — reminds you that the artist's role these days is to bring some color to the staid white walls of New York's art institutions, whether or not, like Muslimova, the artist in question happens to be an immigrant from the Russian republic of Dagestan. The drawings might even make you think that there's something unhinged and sinful about the simple pleasures of bright color and sinuous line.

But because it's all delivered with a pretty broad wink, you're free to take it or leave it. You can think seriously about portrayals of women in American visual culture, the treatment of female artists and your own implication, as a visitor, in the structural problems of the art world. Or you can just look at the pictures and have fun.

WILL HEINRICH

The Guide Art
March 21, 2021

THEGUIDE.ART



Ebecho Muslimova

By Walter Scott

Photography Emiliano Granado

Ebecho Muslimova and Walter Scott have never met but they share a habit. Both artists ground their drawing-centered practices in a Dr. Jekyll-like (or, perhaps more contemporarily, Anna Delvey-like) activity of embellishing and maintaining an alter ego. These alter egos, Fatebe and Wendy, respectively, act almost as scouting parties sent out ahead into the dangerous thick of their creators' most embarrassing fears and desires. Muslimova and her foil, Fatebe, landed their first institutional solo show this in an exhibition curated by Rosario Güiraldes at the Drawing Center in New York.

On the occasion of the show, the Brooklyn-based Muslimova agreed to delve into Fatebe's world with fellow alter-ego tripper Scott, who like Muslimova swerves the line between fine art and cartoon. Together the two artists find common ground in their love of *Roger Rabbit*, the clarity that comes with the sting of embarrassment, and the undeniable intelligence of being kind to yourself and others.

WALTER SCOTT: What's interesting to me about Fatebe is that she never seems to be at the mercy of anybody. The situations that she's in are of her own making. There never seems to be another figure. She is always performing these things for herself.

EBECHO MUSLIMOVA: She's performing for herself and also for me, but she's also always thinking of the perfect angle because he knows she's being seen.

SCOTT: So she is still performing but for a viewer.

MUSLIMOVA: Exactly.

SCOTT: I realized that the original desire to create Wendy, my alter-ego that performs all of these acts of embarrassment and mortification, was my own desire to somehow ratify or turn my own humiliation into something else. There is something weirdly empowering about being able to humiliate yourself publicly, but also have control over it.

MUSLIMOVA: Creating an alter ego character that then you can place in these compromised situations is the ultimate control issue. You have to literally invent another self to control.

SCOTT: Yes and that's what's fascinating. It's the flickering between what seems to be images of lack of control and what it actually is at the same time, this hyper controlled act. I think it has a lot to do with the conundrum of the artist that we're always toeing the line between hopeless abandon and tight self control. We go in between these spaces all the time. It is a productive tension that I see in your work.

MUSLIMOVA: [Fatebe] is a solution to a problem in many ways including the problem of the image. She solves whatever situation she's in. The beginning, middle, end and climax all in one.

SCOTT: I'm thinking about prickles and goo philosophy of which I know very little about. It's a quote by Alan Watts and it's about two kinds of being. Prickly people are precise, rigorous, and logical and goo people are vague and creative. I feel like literally and figuratively Fatebe is goo and that it's probably a good idea to have more goo in the system because her gooey body is able to, sometimes literally, envelope concepts and thereby solve them.

The situations you are putting her in seem to be also increasingly real from your early black and white drawings to these more 1-to-1 reality to fiction panels at the Drawing Center.

MUSLIMOVA: I think for me it felt like the *Roger Rabbit* effect was the best way to expand things around her without just cartooning everything.

I don't come up with the image before I start painting, so of course that translates into this kind of gerrymandered world. If reality is a little too real maybe her gooey body processes that information through collage.

SCOTT: I love that. I've been thinking a lot about *Roger Rabbit* lately. There is this scene that I posted on Instagram where the detective and Roger Rabbit are handcuffed together. And the detective is trying to saw the handcuffs off so that they could separate. And I thought it was a profound image. It resonated with me that there's this representational, cartoony world or cartoony self, and then your own self and they're kind of intertwined and stuck together. That's why these new things that you're making resonate with me specifically, because I also feel like it's almost like the compositions were there without her.

MUSLIMOVA: Sometimes that's true but sometimes the gesture of [Fatebe's] body comes first. She's like this lock that activates in any situation.

SCOTT: She's an adhering agent. She's malleable. She operates herself like furniture. She could operate as a platform, but she also can operate as an actor. She has this way of being an object herself.

MUSLIMOVA: At the Drawing Center, it shows. I made the architectural drawings of the room panel by panel and then that was my blank piece of paper.

SCOTT: There seems to be this burgeoning interest in architecture in your work that wasn't there before. Or were you always sort of interested in these super realist looking architectural spaces?

MUSLIMOVA: I have always been, but it floated in lately. Maybe it's like the goo and the prickles thing. The intimidation of architecture appeals to me. My parents are architects. I don't know. The concreteness of structures is something that [Fatebe] can stand up against.

SCOTT: Do you ever feel like the art world is intimidating and that there's a way that Fatebe can contort herself around the art world to reveal how intimidating it is?

MUSLIMOVA: It can be very intimidating. For a long time, I didn't show Fatebe at all. The first couple years, it was like I had this sick joke with myself where I would only do this for the rest of my life. I wanted to have this weird drawing practice that no one was going to think of as art. Art school fucked me up and Fatebe was a way to own something.

SCOTT: I relate. I drew Wendy on a placemat one day because I was tired of feeling like I needed to behave in a certain way as an artist. Wendy was like the least conceptual thing I could think about doing, but it was sort of the most honest in the end.

MUSLIMOVA: That's why I started [Fatebe]. I realized you know nothing and to front like you know anything is posturing. So why not just do the thing that you know you like and humiliate it and see where that goes. It turns out to be a lot of places.

SCOTT: It gets you all the way to the Drawing Center.

MUSLIMOVA: *[laughs]* Yes. Fatebe reveals things to me that I can only access through the process of unlocking her.

SCOTT: Creating Fatebe is a way to examine yourself. I've looked back at volumes of Wendy and realized she's a lot wiser than I gave her credit for at the time. She actually went through a lot of shit and figured it out because she actually is very emotionally intelligent so I guess I am too.

MUSLIMOVA: As you say, Fatebe is part of my emotional intelligence. I learn about how I feel through drawing her. But I don't know if all art does, maybe it does.

SCOTT: I like the slippery territory that your work exists in where if you look at it in a feminist lens it's interesting because it's not the type of work that proposes some sort of politically progressive solution, per se. It sort of just expresses the contours of a lived experience that it's kind of solution-less, but not in a negative way. This is true with Wendy too because I never set out to create like an empowered character who had her shit together.

MUSLIMOVA: Because that's reality. I don't know anyone who has their shit together.

SCOTT: I actually find that like a lot of art that proposes itself as a solution to a political issue doesn't seem very honest.

MUSLIMOVA: Plus, what kind of solutions can we have anyway? Things are so complicated.

SCOTT: Yes. It's empowering to just create work that expresses the details of living in a problem.

MUSLIMOVA: Before you had the nerve to think that you had a solution, why don't you just get good at describing the problem?

SCOTT: For myself, I have these fictional characters and they all have different subjectivities where they all face their own issues. I have an identity that feels not fractured, but multi-faceted. And so I get to create characters that express different parts of my identity and just send them into a little pit together to communicate.

MUSLIMOVA: Ever since I began drawing Fatebe, I've been trying to also kill her off. There's been dark moments where enough is enough. You have nothing left and then I find myself making a drawing about her death and that leads me back in.

SCOTT: I'm starting to feel like I've made like a Netflix series or something where it could go on forever.

MUSLIMOVA: It's because they live in their own world. The more you add to the character, the more dimensional they become. And then you're just kind of a custodian to these entities. You no longer have to just water it but arrange it and clear the path for it to grow wherever.

SCOTT: I feel a little stuck because I need to write the next Wendy and there's things that I want for her. And then it makes me wonder if maybe there's things I want for myself and there's actually things in my life that need to change.

MUSLIMOVA: The closest I feel to pure misery is when I have to come up with things. I can't. The only way to make a new work is to just do it. But perhaps because you have a storyline, there is a different need.

SCOTT: I think there is a narrative quality to Fatebe too, in a way.

MUSLIMOVA: Yeah, but she's a one-liner. She has to be the set-up and the punchline in the same form. She's a bit like a standup comedian.

SCOTT: I see that. I'm remembering that piece where she's eating the asparagus and peeing. You have it all in one shot. You see an expression of both cause and effect. You see what she's eating and then you see how it affects the toilet paper. Something about like the color gradient reminds me of the act of looking at art. I feel like she's literally taking on the act of perception. Here is her body, creating a gradient on this field. It's funny that I'm looking at this ombre pattern, which is very artful, but it comes from her urine. It's confrontational at the same time as being an aesthetic gesture. There's a belligerence there. Is Fatebe angry?

MUSLIMOVA: No, she's just an innocent. She gets angry when he stubs her toe but she doesn't have baggage. Her anger is like the anger of an animal.

I would say that I don't like to draw her angry. I also don't like to hurt her and that's how I know I love her because it's not intellectual. That's the only thing that she doesn't do is get really hurt.

SCOTT: Perhaps it's also because she's so malleable. She's generous in the way that she can envelop things and then remake, reconfirm, reconstitute them just with her own body. And it's always with a child hearted openness.

MUSLIMOVA: She withstands. She's not able to be humiliated.

SCOTT: She seems like she realizes that the problem is not the problem. The resistance to the problem is the problem. And that's pretty profound. She's the water that flows around the rocks.

MUSLIMOVA: Definitely. When I'm able to be the water, my reward is her. When you're making art, it's always a condensed version of that lesson.

Published: March 19, 2021

Ebecho Muslimova's "Scenes in the Sublevel" is on view at the [Drawing Center](#), 35 Wooster Street, through May 23, 2021.

Walter Scott is an interdisciplinary artist and writer, his most recent graphic novel, "Wendy, Master of Art," was published by Drawn and Quarterly in 2020.

Topical Cream
January 31, 2020

TOPICAL CREAM

EBECHO MUSLIMOVA: TRAPS!

By Meri Simonyan

Fatebe is Ebecho Muslimova's anxiety transcribed into the "structure of a joke." The cartoon's increasingly physical comedy tableaux are divided into three scenarios: the set-up, the punchline, and the expectation of surprise. Unlike other Fifth Wave icons, Fatebe's body is all she is, everything she has to say comes from a figurative gesture. Ebecho Muslimova's second show with Magenta Plains titled TRAPS! is a continuation of Fatebe's outrageous circumstances with a stoic twist.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Net*, 2019. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 66h x 60w in. Photo courtesy of the artist and Magenta Plains.

For *TRAPS!* large oil canvases have taken over the gallery space with striking colors that seem to be a new dimension of Fatebe's universe. Muslimova picked up oil as "an excuse to paint and experiment with new textures." The new textures and different spatial environments of the brightly colored oil paintings help Fatebe redefine herself as a flat line on a white surface. She is becoming more real as if she is "redefining her own flatness through color and dimension." The stillness of an oil painting versus a drawing has undoubtedly seeped into Fatebe's psyche, and she has become more stoic even when caught in a trap.



Ebecho Muslimova, *TRAPS!*, 2019. Installation view, New York, NY. Photo courtesy of the artist, Magenta Plains, New York, and Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zurich.

When asked who Fatebe is to her, Ebecho stated, "She is a surrogate body – a fantasy of me as a person...of my anxieties, depression, pain. I can't fall into a hole and stay there – that's not how we function in reality. We climb as fast as possible. We try to. But she gets to lay down and explore it all." According to the ethics of Fatebe, each failure is an opportunity to start over. As an alter ego of the artist, Fatebe is nothing if not a utopia.

CURA.
Winter 2019

CURA.



In a nightmare common to fits of insecurity, you walk the halls of your office or college campus, naked and unkempt. You recognize the reality of your hunching body and exposed privates, but only after they have been the focus of peer attention for an ambiguous amount of time. You've forgotten a step between one existence—the sleep state, in which the body is not under one's control—and another—the professional performance, in which a person's appearance proves just how much control she has over her body. Posture, makeup, hairstyle, and clothing give the impression of dedication to the cause of studied assimilation, and in this dream, you unwittingly rebel. The concern is not necessarily that it happened but that you did it unintentionally—you somehow let this happen, which means you have lost the essential part of your mind that compartmentalizes these two selves.

The artist Ebecho Muslimova invented Fatebe (pronounced “fat eebee”) when she had a day job at a corporate office.

Fatebe was all ego, a version of the artist's self *sans inhibitions*. In an immediate interpretation of the typical insecurity nightmare, she finds herself in public with no beautifying ephemera. But Fatebe feels no shame from this predicament. Instead, she finds pleasure experiencing her precariousness fully, splayed and physically vulnerable while expressing an almost arrogant joy from the amount of space she inhabits. An alter ego, Fatebe is allergic to elitism, and so the luxury of rejecting commercial work while one's potential simmers is something Fatebe, the cartoon character, would scoff at if she could pause long enough to care.

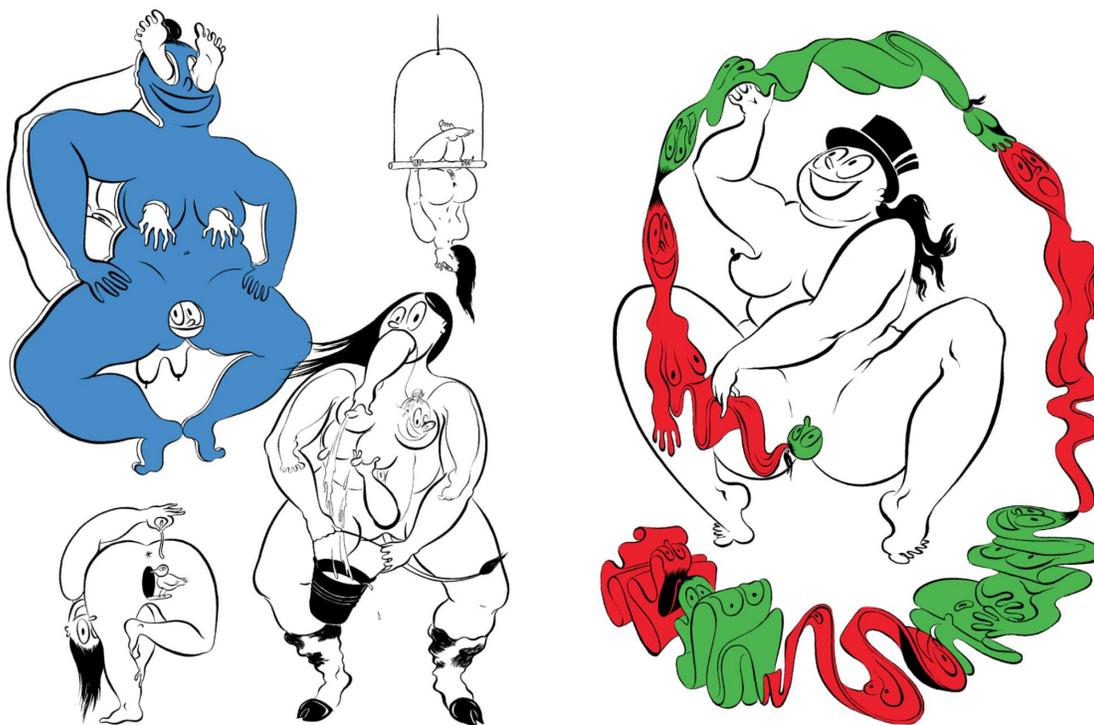
Her own haplessness, an accidental disregard for societal norms, and a balloon-like body excite Fatebe. In pen and ink drawings and large-scale paintings of mixed detail, every misstep she takes proves she can take more, that the outcomes can't hurt her pride if she has decided against any kind of preciousness. In lucid dreams, a fall can turn into flight. Similarly, accidental nudity can become intoxicating.

In much of the world, the amount of space a woman's body takes up has an almost directly inverted relationship to the amount of respect she is rewarded. In Fatebe's world, she appears to believe the opposite is true—and that exposure is everything. Sometimes, she is mural-sized, expanding across an entire building floor, her cartoon holes and nipples punctuating a clumsy pose. She dares you to call her unsexy, a joke, or unworthy of your attention. Even if you did, she wouldn't believe it.

In early drawings, Fatebe illustrated a preference for the comedic over the expected, and the act of intentionally avoiding the goal of integrity. She morphed from a paper cutout perched on pencils to lovingly framed portraits. And then, in the tradition of *ingénues*, Muslimova was discovered as a real artist, right when she least expected to be. The work is probably best viewed at solo shows, in spaces where it doesn't have to compete with art that demonstrates such dissimilar aims. The Fatebe series is brilliant in part because it presents itself as Fatebe herself does—as in, everywhere at once. Straddling all sides of an Approval Matrix, it is outside of one world, looking in, and inside a display case, but peering only at its own reflection.

A conceptual artist might have nightmares in which she accidentally sends her gallery a file of doodles instead of the work she's been perfecting for decades, ruining her career by exposing her somewhat less serious side. Fatebe embraces this fear, even if she is blissfully unaware of an oncoming post-privacy age. Seen in the gallery context, Fatebe is more than a prank or a pastime; she's subversive. Her brazen displays in cartoon settings are mimetic to the brazenness of drawing a caricature and calling it highbrow.

As her life continues, Fatebe is faced with newly articulated objects, stretched over landscapes that are populated with new temptations and ghosts. With adoring precision, Muslimova codifies the echoes of domesticity, luxury, nature, education, psychology, fetish, and art itself—images that have the capacity to haunt her. Nothing can deter Fatebe, though. From her gleeful smile we can assume that her convictions only gain momentum with every new opportunity to test them.



Art Spiel
December 4, 2019

ART SPIEL

TRAPS! Ebecho Muslimova at Magenta
Plains

Exhibition review by Torey Akers



Ebecho Muslimova, Fatebe Deep Frog Organza, 2019, oil and acrylic on canvas, 60" x 66", courtesy of Magenta Plains

Human civilization has always maintained an uneasy relationship with female monstrosity—just watch the cavalcade of sirens, witches, harpies and hags that stalk the perimeters of every major mythology on earth, luring hapless men to their deaths. This hyper-visible, oft-storied, but deeply erasive marginalization has long plagued the non-normative woman; however, there's a certain freedom in the fringes. Take Baubo, the Orphic goddess of chaos and mirth, whose paunchy, wizened appearance belied a frisky bawdiness that ancient Greeks adored. Ebecho Muslimova's 'Fatebe' character, whom she has been drawing since 2011 and features vivaciously in her latest solo exhibition, *TRAPS!*, at Magenta Plains, New York, builds on Baubo's cultural legacy with appropriately grotesque panache, taking a wide-eyed, manic approach to the tandem joys and pitfalls of embodiment.

The show occupies two floors and consists of large, patterned oil paintings flanked by smaller black-and-white ink pieces, which adopt a somewhat unassuming posture in white frames behind glass. The overarching theme of *TRAPS!* immediately pops upon entry into the gallery; in each image, Fatebe encounters environmental obstacles, like nets or natural disasters, that she navigates with flagrant, surrealist plasticity, often to the detrimental of her body, but never her spirit. Muslimova has approached this suite of work through a planar lens, tilting towards the virtual, and Fatebe's iconic stylization interacts with her surroundings as a digital layer rather than a stand-alone character.

In "Fatebe Lightning In the Mezzanine" (2019), the naked figure, crouched in a realistically-rendered chair, leans backwards out an open window, gulping down a hot bolt of lightning into her gaping maw while she leaks rainwater from her genitals. Her skin bears the same design of the wallpaper behind her, a tessellated tangle of tiny Fatebes, cluing the viewer into her semiotic invasion of the space.

When Muslimova introduces color, Fatebe transforms into an iconographic Roger Rabbit, unburdened by the mundane bureaucracy of logic, physics, or pain. Her greyscale infiltration feels filmic at first, invoking a range of references from *The Last Person In Pleasantville* to *Betty Boop*, but a comparative glance at Muslimova's drawings place Fatebe's ancestry staunchly in Al Hirschfeld's camp. The artist's hand, both careful and expressive, conjures an old-school slapstick ethos off-positioned in Bakhtinian balance with glamour, a rupturous, Carnivalian burst of irreverence that simultaneously defaces and upholds the status quo. It's little wonder that Fatebe's body rarely casts a shadow; she is one. Every inky stammer amplifies her charisma, her irrepressible, guiltless individuality.

Muslimova invented Fatebe as an inside joke, which tracks — her buoyant elasticity seems flush not with self-deprecation, but an earnest, frenetic wish fulfillment. Even when Fatebe loses, she's grinning, emboldened by the kind of agency only hypnagogic chaos affords. It's Fatebe's distance from painting's erotic nude tradition that provides so much space for mischief, transmogrifying her naked form into that of both a lovable trickster goddess and wide-eyed cipher for less ribald interpretations of femininity. Still, some of that madcap heart gets lost in translation with Muslimova's paintings, since their tight, untextured surfaces and self-consciously altermodern portrayals of only grant Fatebe the patina of fluidity, eschewing the kind of expository gesture that sets her drawings apart. This difference is best articulated in the lower level of the gallery, where an engulfing oil and acrylic depiction of Fatebe stuck in a net sits across from a sketch of Fatebe, for lack of better phrasing, queefing spaghetti and meatballs into a chair while seated at a dinner table. The curation is great, as "Fatebe Net"'s tangled position and unbothered pose give the impression that she fell through the top floor, but there's something a little staid and separate about Muslimova's handling; it's an exercise in patterning, an expert deployment of trend. There's simply no match for her tender, small scale virtuosity.



Ebecho Muslimova, Fatebe Surprise, 2019, Sumi ink on paper, 12" x 9", courtesy of Magenta Plains

The New York Times
November 2019

The New York Times

ART REVIEWS

New York Galleries: What to See Right Now

“Postwar Women” at the Art Students League; “Japan Is America”; Howardena Pindell’s “Autobiography” series; M: Ray’s paintings; and Ebecho Muslimova’s comic, fearless muse.



Ebecho Muslimova's "Fatebe Deep Frog Organza," from 2019. Ebecho Muslimova and Magenta Plains

Ebecho Muslimova

Through Dec. 18. Magenta Plains, 94 Allen Street, Manhattan; 917-388-2464, magentaplains.com.

Bawdy, crude, exuberant and empowering, the paintings in [Ebecho Muslimova's "Traps" at Magenta Plains](#) are designed to shock. They are also individual feats of virtuoso drawing and craft, and they demonstrate how painting can serve as catharsis, personal narrative and raucous joke, all wrapped into one.

The subject of the Russian-born, New York-based Ms. Muslimova confronts you fully exposed. Facing the gallery entrance is “Fatebe Bent Grill” (all works are from 2019), in which Ms. Muslimova’s alter-ego (that is, “Fatebe”) thrusts her buttocks at the viewer, so the first thing you see is an elegantly drawn pair of labia and an anus drawn with flick-like brush strokes. The rest of the painting, however — like several here — is a Gestalt fantasy of gates and [M.C. Escher](#) frogs that echo a painting across the room, “Fatebe Deep Frog Organza.” Another eye-catcher is “Fatebe Lightning in the Mezzanine” (2019), in which the artist’s doppelgänger lies naked in an armchair, with lightning striking outside, seemingly flowing through her body.

More than mere provocation, there is a luminous body-positive politics to these paintings. Fleshy, female and flagrantly nude, “Fatebe” is simultaneously comic, absurd and fearless. Painted with obvious love and rigor, she becomes a kind of Everywoman superhero.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER

Filthy Dreams
November 26, 2019

filthy dreams

In Fatebe, Ebecho Muslimova Has Created An Abjected Double, A Vessel Of Curiosity And A Kind Of Superhero

Fatebe (“FAT-E-be”) is in the midst of the Lacanian Mirror Phase. “She’s starting to interact with her own image and own sense of self versus the drawing of herself,” says her creator, the New York-based artist Ebecho Muslimova. “[The film] *Ex-Machina*, popped in my mind; she’s looking at herself in a mirror, self-realizing. I feel like I’m drawn more and more into the relationship between her and her own image.”

But the Mirror Phase is supposed to be traumatic, correct? The child looks in the mirror and thinks, “That..... is..... me?” Well if not traumatic exactly, then it’s certainly dramatic. On the inside, we are chaotic, polysexual, formless. On the outside, we are a stable entity, more or less. But Fatebe, as rendered by Muslimova, appears totally unfazed by the realization of her own image. A viewer can intuit a wish fulfillment of sorts. Fatebe is Muslimova’s curiosity without limits.

“Fatebe” is the absurdist, zaftig imagistic alter-ego of Muslimova, and is now the subject of a stunning series of oil paintings and drawings at Muslimova’s current solo show *TRAPS!* at [Magenta Plains](#). Muslimova has been obsessively drawing her since enduring a trying period towards the end of her education at Cooper Union (around 2011). Frustrated and struggling to meet the demands placed upon her by professors to make the kind of “difficult” conceptual artwork that is catnip to the up-their-own-asses art world elites—Muslimova literally tore up a number of works she made during the period—and enduring other assorted life anxieties, the early illustrations of Fatebe were born of Muslimova’s desire to make truly “earnest” work. “There has to be some kind of ‘trauma drama’ in order to make something earnest,” she explains in the back room of Magenta Plains. “It has to come from a place in which you weren’t feeling very earnest. You wouldn’t draw cartoon pussy if you weren’t in some way blocked.”

In short, Fatebe was born of her creator’s dejection. When she started drawing Fatebe—always naked and exposed, often humiliated—she had given up on the art world. She didn’t want to show her work to anyone. She imagined the lifelong obsessive drawing of this abjected alter-ego as a cosmic joke on her life. “[Fatebe] literally came out of a juvenile tantrum that I was having,” says Muslimova. “I decided that I was going to draw this one character my whole life, and people would see me hobbling down the street at 80 years old and would say, ‘That’s Ebe she’s drawn the same thing her whole life.’ And the joke became real. I can’t do anything else. It’s funny.”

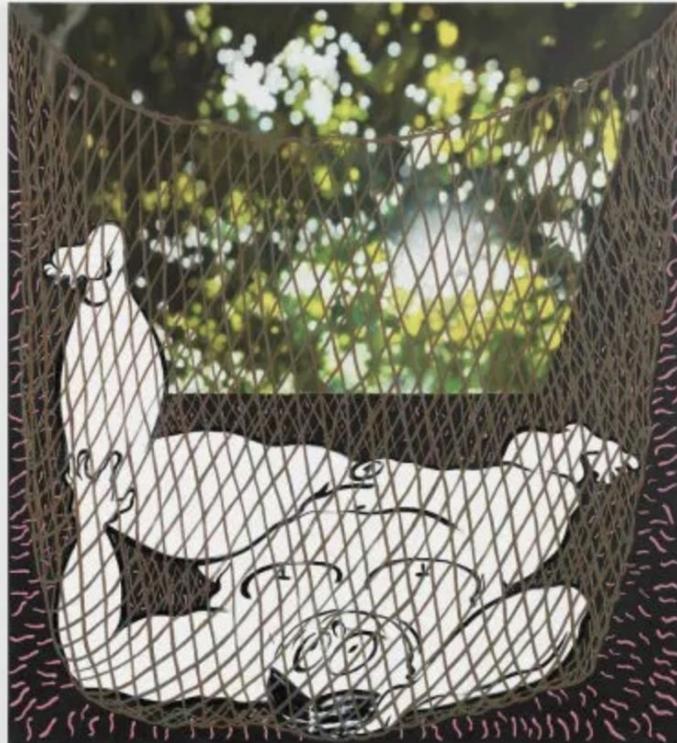
The twisted irony of the joke is that Muslimova has found real success with her countless illustrations and paintings of the character (it appears that the Magenta Plains exhibition currently up has sold out of all the pieces). In a contemporary art culture saturated with boring, serious artists making boring, serious works dealing with relational aesthetics or identity politics and so on, Muslimova's direct, frank, occasionally shocking, and most importantly, hilarious Fatebe works truly stand out in a crowded group show. It would appear that we all crave the kind of clarity of image and directness in communication that Fatebe evokes. In *Fatebe Bear Trap*, for instance, Fatebe is trapped in a bear trap. Make of that what you will.



From a psychoanalytic standpoint, what is most fascinating about Muslimova's work with Fatebe is that the artist has, what she describes as, a very real relationship with her creation. She talks about her like she's a real person who is enduring an in-real-time life on a chronological continuum. In a lecture at [Swiss Institute](#) in which Muslimova described her trajectory in creating Fatebe, she showed a number of slides of early drawings of Fatebe and said that each represent a new experience, a new memory, in the life of this character: "first date," "first fart," "first snake," and so on. All artists, of course, have deep relationships with the works that they create (or they should, assumedly), but I'd wager that very few have relationships as deep as the one between Muslimova and Fatebe.

Kant believed that to humiliate someone was to deny that person's very humanity. And yet, despite the closeness between Muslimova and Fatebe, Fatebe endures all manner of physical and psychological humiliations at the mercy of Muslimova's libidinal imagination. But there is a kind of wish fulfillment going on. Fatebe is, in a sense, a guinea pig for Muslimova's most based curiosities. Fatebe caught in a net, Fatebe shitting pasta, and Fatebe swallowing frogs en masse are just a few of the humiliating scenarios Muslimova has cooked up for her alter-ego in her most recent exhibition. Illustrations of the character allow the artist to expel some very bizarre notions from her consciousness. But simultaneously, Muslimova has empowered her character, forming a unique communicative flow between the artist and her creation, in which the artist can humiliate the character but the character can seemingly endure any humiliation without breaking a sweat.

"She's relishing in [humiliation], because she's my surrogate," says Muslimova. "There's real consequences to falling in holes for me or whoever, so she can explore these surreal degradations in a way that I wouldn't allow myself to. She's vulnerable, and kind of a puppet. But she's just grinning through these trials I'm putting her through, and she can stand up to her creator." Slavoj Zizek said that the true measure of love is the ability to insult one another, and if this is true, it's clear that Muslimova truly adores Fatebe.



Ebecho Muslimova, Fatebe Net, 2019, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 66h x 60w in.

Muslimova's Fatebe illustrations have garnered comparisons to other artists that use/have used illustration: Raymond Pettibon, Peter Saul, early 20th Century French satirist Honoré Daumier, and others. Beyond a shared medium, however, it's hard to see how. While those artists respond in real time to current events, Muslimova reaches into the recesses of her mind. There are evocations of the naughty black ink drawings of late 19th century British erotic illustrator Aubrey Beardsley in the sheer distaste and decadence of the images. Suspiciously, critics have failed to detect connections between Muslimova and the Swedish artist Marie-Louise Ekman. Though Ekman is a painter, the cartoonish figures that populate her paintings delight in corporeal and sexual debasements similar to the ones endured by Fatebe. On Ekman's work, [Johan Deurell writes](#): "Her work is consistent, emotional and humorous; and perhaps even a bit repetitive – if the subject matter of personal relations ever can be." Like Ekman's debased figures, Fatebe offers a broadly debauched understanding of what it means to inhabit a body.

But Muslimova has also achieved something that none of these artists have. "Fatebe is Muslimova's invention, which is every cartoonist's dream—to make a memorable character," writes [John Yau for Hyperallergic](#). In contrast to the aforementioned artists, Fatebe is the sole vessel for Muslimova to explore the recesses of her subconscious mind. It's hard not to infer psychoanalytic implications from Muslimova's decision to continuously render the same character, her self-described alter-ego, into all manner of surrealist emotional and corporeal disturbances. Fatebe could be viewed, from a certain perspective, as a manifestation of what theorist Julia Kristeva would have called "the double" in her text *Powers of Horror: Essay on Abjection*: a place where boundaries between subject and object begin to breakdown. Kristeva believes that we are continuously drawn to the abject, which could psychologically explain Muslimova's enduring fascination with drawing Fatebe—a character that was literally birthed from an abject period of her life.

But, as Kristeva says, "Abjection is above all ambiguity." Though a viewer can infer some psychoanalytic level in Muslimova's paintings and drawings of Fatebe, it is rather impossible to discern what, if anything, these works say about Muslimova's psychology or emotional state specifically. On the contrary, Fatebe has given Muslimova a creative technique of self-exploration while providing a buffer between her psychology and the audience. She can give her viewers a window into her mind without ever allowing them to see anything specific about her mind. Muslimova's psychology takes on a formlessness in these works: we understand that it's present, but can't see the thoughts, experiences, and traumas that shape and drive it. Muslimova says that the choice to render Fatebe in black line drawings is that the process and shading of painting can infer subtext, which she actively sought to avoid. "What Pettibon does is almost more revealing of who he is because to react to current events is to reveal his own inner feelings about those events," observes Muslimova. "Drawing is an evidence of thought because it's so immediate, but like the dark well of my own psyche, no one can see that [in these drawings]. [Fatebe] allows me a sense of privacy somehow."

TRAPS! is testament to the riveting formal evolution of Fatebe's illustrative existence. Though the show still features a number of black ink drawings, Muslimova has also rendered Fatebe on large-scale canvases in a number of oil paintings, each sumptuously detailed and emphasizing the character in exciting new ways. But it should also be noted, the paintings only offer vibrant backgrounds, Fatebe remains a monochromatic line illustration. Muslimova credits the choice to render Fatebe to larger canvases to the desire to expand the space around her. "The different textures and illusions of space in the painting reinforce her black and white flatness around her, so she, herself, as a drawing has more intention and dimension in her entity," she says. But on a more emotional level, she notes, "I also just wanted to try painting because it scares me."

In *Fatebe Landing Failure*, for instance, we see her caught in a leave-less tree, visually distorted to stress the delirious confusion of the situation, while her failed parachute is pictured off below the branches. The larger canvases provide the audience a clearer relationship between Fatebe and the audience. But the overall approach is the same. Fatebe is never the subject of a cartoon or animation, her image is always frozen in time, a picture. Roland Barthes, of course, wrote that photographs were little deaths, still lifes that freeze present moments into eternal pasts, prefiguring the stillness of the corpse. Fascinatingly then, Muslimova is making photographs of Fatebe from this imagined, nonexistent cartoon. This concept elevates the notion that we are being allowed to watch the life of this character through still images, and that every image that Muslimova creates alludes to the inevitability of the character's demise. This technique yields a heightened relationship between the viewer and Fatebe; we empathize with her, we root for her, she's the hero of this implied narrative. "I freeze her in the ideal angle that I want her to be seen in," says Muslimova. "It's important that she's frozen and that we are seeing her from the angle that we are seeing her."

What Muslimova implies here is that it's not just the situations in which Fatebe finds herself that communicate meaning to the viewer, but Fatebe's body gestures as well. And not just the placement of her limbs, and her poses and positionings, but the folds of her belly and the lines of her curves are all exploited as expressive tools. Much like Butoh dancing, the body is used as the primary performative tool in drawings of Fatebe, and Muslimova retains hyper-focus on how the body is depicted in each of the works. "The folds of her elbows, even those can be expressions," she explains. "Whenever things are happening with the body, it's a performance in a way, right?"

While some artists spend careers trying to find their aesthetics and voices, Muslimova has created one singular image that is able to inhabit so many of the avenues artists seek to explore. Fatebe is a rumination on the expressive potential of the human form, an abjected alter-ego that allows Muslimova self-exploration without the risk of over-exposing herself, a source of humour, transgression and absurdity, and—let's face it—kind of a superhero. It is simply impossible to get bored looking at drawings of her. We want her to persevere, we want her to win, and we want Muslimova to keep drawing her. This "psychotic version of herself" that was once a tool for Muslimova to "nourish her creative urges" without exposing herself to the exhausting scrutiny of the art market is now on its way to becoming something that Muslimova never intended to create: a contemporary visual icon. Muslimova's fascinating Fatebe drawings prove that artists should learn to stop worrying and love their mindless doodles.

Adam Lehrer is an artist, photographer and writer. Lehrer's work consists of manipulated photography, collages made of mostly Internet sourced appropriated images, and video loops. He has had solo shows at Spring Break Art Show, Governor's Island Art Fair, and has been featured in group shows. Lehrer is also a culture writer, and his art, film and music criticism has been featured in Autre Magazine, The Quietus, Forbes, VICE, Bedford & Bowery, Bullett Media, i-D, SSENSE, and more.

Elephant
November 25, 2019

ELEPHANT

5 QUESTIONS

The Artist Acting Out Her Anxieties Through an Alter Ego Who Refuses to Die

When Ebecho Muslimova first started drawing the character “Fatebe”, it was as a joke and a distraction from art school critique. Ten years on, Fatebe’s become the star of the show—and of the artist’s life. Words by Emily Gosling



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Bent Grille*, 2019

Since 2011, Ebecho Muslimova has led a double life: her own, and that of her sort-of-alter-ego, Fatebe (pronounced “Fat Eebee”), who has manifested through her artwork over the years—initially in the form of thousands of quick notebook drawings, and more recently in a series of paintings, some of which are currently on show at Magenta Plains in New York in a show entitled *Traps!* Fatebe is both glorious and grotesque; hilarious and unsettling as she settles into a series of strange, often logic-defying surreal scenarios.

Born in Russia and raised for the most part in New Jersey, Muslimova studied sculpture at art school, and didn't have a particularly easy time of it: she says that during her senior thesis project, she "kind of had a nervous breakdown" and ended up throwing out the sculptures she'd been working on for the whole of her final year. That was when Fatebe came into her own: the drawings Muslimova had been making as a sort of personal joke, and to show to friends, ended up as her final piece when tacked onto the wall together. She passed the course, but decided that she now "wanted nothing to do with the art world".

For a brief time after graduation, Fatebe went back to being, as Muslimova puts it, "this tragic joke I'm going to do for the rest of my fucking life and never show anyone." However, that "immature tantrum" passed, Fatebe persisted and has been not just the central concern of Muslimova's work, but of her life: artist and subject have a symbiotic relationship that feels incredibly real for a fiction rendered in ink and paint. I spoke to Muslimova about her less-than-great experiences at art school, presenting the female form, the inherent problems with the "fat" prefix and overcoming anxiety.



Ebecho Muslimova, Fatebe Deep Frog Organza, 2019

Tell me more about your experience at art school: you studied sculpture, so where did Fatebe come in?

I had always drawn since I was very young, then in art school, I didn't draw or paint and I now understand that I did sculpture because I wanted to, on an artistic level, occupy physical space. Fatebe started as a sort of base joke on the back of a notebook, to entertain myself and my friends and offer a sort of relief from art school critiques. I never expected to be so continuously involved with Fatebe: I tried to kill her off a few years ago, just thinking, "Oh God, how many more of these are you gonna do?" But killing her off can't just happen: she just refuses to quit. By now, it's a very important relationship in my life—it's the only thing that I've done for about ten years. It's funny, like the joke became real. I need to keep her, I want to—I'm like her custodian.

With your second solo show at Magenta Plains you've moved on to working in oil paint. Why did you decide to make that transition from drawing? How far did it feel like a "difficult second album" of sorts?

This is my second painting show, and I'm enjoying it more now. When I started drawing that character ten years ago I set up these tight parameters and rules for her: one frame, no narrative, black and white, no shading... I had a natural sense that I had to tighten the space in order for her personality to take up more space. Somehow formal possibilities of more freely drawing her would have distracted from her entity. Then I forgot that I'm the one who set up those rules to begin with.

For years I was like, "I wonder what it's like to use colour? I wish I could use colour!" I'd sort of made my own prison, then I started to learn painting. I've been painting for two years now and I'm really enjoying how to figure out painting with oils. I'm going to do some wall drawings in future; I'm working on another body of work right now for a show in Zurich in March with Maria Bernheim gallery so in my brain I'm on vacation but actually I'm already behind!

How do you overcome those anxieties about showing work, or making new work?

Through Fatebe; it's this relationship I have with her where anxieties about work are resolved. I feel like I'm always trying to clarify something through her, and when that doesn't work for some reason it feels like there's a big misunderstanding between what should be on the page and what isn't. That anxiety gets resolved by making a Fatebe that's satisfying to me.

Have you had any backlash about the name Fatebe as an “alter ego” name, seeing as you are a not-fat-girl living in Brooklyn? How far is she really an alter ego of you?

Maybe there were initially conversations about that, but then we're just talking about “who's fat and who's not” and it just becomes so stupid that it falls apart. She is her own thing. I'm actually surprised that it hasn't come up more, but I think that she's really a distinct personality: I'm not making fun of someone who has some curves. They're just her attributes—she looks like a lot of people look, and from the point of view of drawing a body, I feel like there's a reason fleshy women have always been painted. It's more fun to render—you can do more, it's more expressive. Fatebe doesn't speak, so her gestures and her body are her language. I think of her as being more like a self-portrait, but not me—like I'm rendering a different self, but she's a friend. She's like a surrogate sister who can do amazing feats that I physically or socially can't.

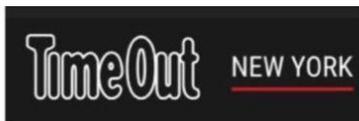
There's been a lot of discussion around the fact that in your drawings of a woman, there's never a man present, and the idea of challenging how women's bodies are portrayed in art in the absence of the male gaze. Is that a deliberate stance?

I'm drawing her body, because I'm familiar with a woman's body, because I have one. So it's not a purposeful thing: why would I do any other form? There are definitely parts of her that are like me: the creases of her knee, that's my crease, and that detail isn't important to anyone except me; and my eyes get really wide in certain situations, for instance. So there are physical similarities. Also, she's always seemingly on the verge of some anxiety attack, but she's enduring it. It's not like I'm always on the verge of that, but she's just like an expression of my mental state, so in that way she very much relates to me.



Ebecho Muslimova, Fatebe Net, 2019

Time Out
October 31, 2019



Ebecho Muslimova, “TRAPS!”

Art, Contemporary art  [Magenta Plains](#), Midtown West  Until Wednesday December 18 2019



Photograph: Courtesy Magenta Plains

Time Out says

Since 2011, the work of Ebecho Muslimova has centered on the artist's irrepressible alter ego, Fatebe, whose naked, corpulent figure acrobatically bounces across the artist's drawings and paintings. Rendered in sweeping cartoon outline, Fatebe is usually alone, confronting nonsensical situations with unconquerable good cheer as she overcomes outlandish depredations that often involve defecation, urination and other acts of abjection; indeed, her vagina and sphincter—which are sometimes elastically stretched with unlikely objects such as pianos or ceiling fans—are often prominently depicted. Born in the former Soviet Union, Muslimova adroitly mines a particularly dark vein of absurdism that feels uniquely Russian. That remains true of her current show, in which Fatebe contends with a plague of frogs among other disasters.

artnet
October 29, 2019

artnet news

Art World

Editors' Picks: 19 Things Not to Miss in New York's Art World This Week

Here's our weekly rundown of what to catch in the Big Apple.

Sarah Cascone, October 29, 2019

Wednesday, October 30–Wednesday, December 18



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Lightning in the Mezzanine* (2019). Courtesy of Magenta Plains.

7. **"Ebecho Muslimova: TRAPS!"** at Magenta Plains

For anyone who has not been blessed to stand in front of an Ebecho Muslimova work, make it a priority to see this show. In Muslimova's surreal, multi-color, multi-textural works, a character named Fatebe often performs amazing—and humorous—feats with her body. For the artist's second show at the gallery Magenta Plains, she is showing five new large-scale paintings across two floors, as well as works on paper.

Location: Magenta Plains, 94 Allen Street

Price: Free

Time: Opening reception, 6 p.m.–8 p.m.; Wednesday–Sunday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m.

—Cristina Cruz

artforum
January 2018

ARTFORUM

Ebecho Muslimova

MAGENTA PLAINS

94 Allen St

January 7–February 11

It's one thing for a woman to be nasty; it's quite another thing for her to be unapologetically fat. A little over a year ago, before the #MeToo movement showed the power of collective voices by calling out sexual abusers, Donald Trump deflected criticism, during the presidential debates, about his misogynist attitudes by throwing Rosie O'Donnell's body up as a rhetorical shield. Add Rosie to a list of full-figured feminists who are brash, excessive, and unafraid of men's opinions of their bodies. Also enter Fatebe, the flexible, bug-eyed, ultravoluptuous avatar of the Russian-born artist Ebecho Muslimova. This exhibition is Muslimova's first to include both drawings and paintings of a ribald character that, through an assortment of poses both banal and coquettish, frequently flashes her vagina or anus.

In the ink-and-gouache drawing *Fatebe 2017 Show* (all works 2017), Muslimova makes artistic doubt a poignant subject: Fatebe tumbles headfirst down a flight of stairs into a basement gallery—namely, the exact space where this show is installed. One breast flops around as another gets dipped into a fecal-looking liquid covering the floor. In *Fatebe Asparagus Pee*, Muslimova depicts Fatebe as a fertility goddess that is as modern as she is abject. She clutches stalks of the vegetable—once grouped into the same family as the lily, a classical fertility symbol—in her arms, while dozens more are shoved down her throat. She also straddles a pyramid of toilet paper.

Several other paintings return to the theme of self-examination. In the colorful *Fatebe Rack*, a take on Narcissus, she seems to be examining her vagina in the surface of a kiddie pool while trapped in a laundry rack. *Fatebe Self Possession* satirizes Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*: Fatebe films into her wide-open vagina, where three miniature Fatebes navigate a winding spiral staircase that exposes some carpeting (get the joke?) right out of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Self Possession*, 2017, acrylic and gouache on canvas, 42 x 60".

— Wendy Vogel

Forbes
January 7, 2018

Forbes

A Dick Joke Made By A Woman: On Fatebe, The Character Created By Artist Ebecho Muslimova



Courtesy of Ebecho Muslimova and Magenta Plains, New York

Ebecho Muslimova Fatebe Asparagus Pee, 2017 Acrylic on canvas

[+]

Fatebe, the character who stars in an exhibition of drawings and paintings by Ebecho Muslimova that opens tonight at Magenta Plains, is a slob. She is a

feminist icon. She is ridiculous. She is a dick joke writ with vaginas. She is joyful, she is gluttonous, and she is body proud.



Courtesy of Ebecho Muslimova and Magenta Plains, New York
Ebecho Muslimova Fatebe Rack, 2017 Acrylic on canvas 54h x 42w in

She emerged while Muslimova was an undergraduate at Cooper Union, as “an excuse to entertain my friends. This is what art students do. They get together, they get drunk, and they draw pictures of each other.”

Fatebe takes her name from Muslimova’s abbreviated first name. She is Fat-Ebe. She is uncouth. She is a comment on vanity. She is a low-brow concern. The fact that she is fat is none of your business. “I tell people, she’s already an entity, she just happens to be a bigger weight than other people,” Muslimova said. “It’s not a big deal. It’s just a part of her attribute. It’s ok to big. It’s not a giant statement.”

What started out as a joke became all that Muslimova could create. A sculptress by training, she stopped making objects, and started just drawing Fatebe. Fatebe with a vagina like a hot air balloon; Fatebe

making a circular hole in a wooden floor with her big dumb head.

“Whether I was thinking of it consciously or not, I wanted to own the dick joke,” Muslimova says. “All of these boys around me had the privilege of making boner jokes, and making boner funny art. I didn’t see that being done by women – the back of the bathroom doodle type of freedom.”

Consumed by Fatebe, Muslimova was unsure if she could ever have a career in the art world. She preemptively gave one up. When she graduated, she took a job making prints used on mass-market pajamas – a job she still does today. “I draw flowers by day, and vaginas at night,” she laughed.



Courtesy of Ebecho Muslimova and Magenta Plains, New York

Ebecho Muslimova

[+]

Little did she know, but her career was just starting. Her Fatebe images are skillful, and funny. They emerged at a time when women finally seemed to be breaking through the prison of a certain type of representation. “Vaginas are so serious,” Muslimova told me. “They’re either something so furious, this origin of the world thing, or they’re sexy. But what if it’s just like – the same way men twiddle the thing that protrudes out of them. What if you owned that? Fatebe is not ashamed.”

In the exhibition at Magenta Plains, Muslimova is showing Fatebe paintings for the first time — previously, the character only existed in drawings. The work draws a wealth of connections. They resemble racist cartoons from the 1930s, the drawings of Roger Hargreaves, Japanese woodblock prints, and even the paintings of Tahitian women by Paul Gauguin. They are vulgar, but they are also beautiful, and arresting.

“A big concern of mine is that they are read really fast. You might not get the statement I’m making, but you get a statement really fast.”



Courtesy of Ebecho Muslimova and Magenta Plains, New York

Ebecho Muslimova

Untitled (Jar), 2017 Acrylic and gouache on canvas 12h x 10w in

The titles, Muslimova, are deadpan; but they are also nonsensical, derived from word associations. *Untitled (Jar)*, 2017, which shows Fatebe impaled on a stack of coins, is a “painting I made about getting fucked by money,” Muslimova told me. *Fatebe Asparagus Pee*, 2017 shows Fatebe with her mouth and ears full of asparagus, straddling a pyramid of toilet paper. “I felt very humiliated making this whole show this whole time,” Muslimova told me of the work. “I wanted one painting where I was literally pissing myself. I wanted to do it in a way so that it works as a kind of scratch and sniff in understanding.”

Muslimova is only at the beginning of her career, but she has a natural instinct towards staying true to herself that most people only gain from decades of failing. Fatebe, she believes, is not the kind of character that makes an artist into an art star; but she doesn't care because Fatebe comes out of her cleanly, without struggle. Fatebe is a compulsion, and she is a beacon.

“Whatever I need to be say can be said through her,” Muslimova says. “If I can't figure out a way to say it through Fatebe, then the statement isn't thought out well enough.”



Courtesy of Ebecho Muslimova and Magenta Plains, New York
Ebecho Muslimova Fatebe 2017 Show, 2017 Ink and gouache on paper 10.50h x 17.75w in

It might not be your first choice to go see an exhibition that features a character with sagging breasts that she dips into the brown murk of a flooded basement; but go. I get why Muslimova is fascinated by her character. Once you get a glimpse, you can't tear your eyes away.

Ebecho Muslimova is open at Magenta Plains through February 11, 2018 concurrently with an exhibition of paintings by Zach Bruder.



Page 2 / 2

SHARE:



Elephant
January 12, 2018

ELEPHANT

New Year, New York Gallery Hop

New year, new you, New York. Get out into the chilly streets, there are a host of brand new shows in town. Words by Noah Dillon



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Rack*, 2017
Magenta Plains

On CNN, the Ball Drop at Times Square—New York City’s long-running New Year’s Eve ball—looked not too dissimilar to mind-altering performance art, inspiring a fleeting few memes online. Then the new year arrived in the midst of an Arctic blast that brought temperatures in New York down below 10F, the coldest of any such celebration in fifty-five years, and the first shows of the year opened on nights as cold as 3F. It’s certainly not the most tempting time of year to brave it out to see some art. Indeed, many top managers, advisers and other art-world luminaries are almost certainly sunning themselves in St. Barths or the like at this very moment. If you can’t afford such sunny luxuries, pull yourself together! There are some really great shows opening this month in the chilly city.

Cheim & Read's exhibition of work by Barry McGee opened last Thursday, in spite of blizzard conditions that deposited eight or more inches of snow throughout the day. However, a performance by Alicia Hall Moran and Jason Moran, at **Gavin Brown's Enterprise**, was pushed back until January 15. Alicia Hall Moran, a mezzo-soprano and artist of multiple mediums (including theatre, dance and visual arts), will also be performing at **MASS MoCA** on 27 January. That production employs experimental uses of the music from Carmen, telling the story of East Germany's Katarina Witt and American Debi Thomas, figure skaters who both competed and skated with selections from the opera during the 1988 Winter Olympics. The show will be on ice, in case you've been especially enjoying the cold.

If you're in this area, don't miss the exciting Ebecho Muslimova at **Magenta Plains**, with drawings of her exuberant everywoman, Fatebe, all smile, libido and cartoon supermorphia.



Ebecho Muslimova, Fatebe Asparagus Pee, 2017
Magenta Plains

Artspace
January 12, 2018

Artspace

ARTIST TO WATCH

9 Artists to Watch in January 2018

By Artspace Editors

JAN. 12, 2018

...

EBECHO MUSLIMOVA
Magenta Plains, New York
January 7 – February 11



Photo via Instagram

If there's one thing the editorial team at Artspace can agree on, it's that Ebecho Muslimova blows our minds. The Russian-born, New York-based artist is known for her alter ego "Fatebe," a character who is quite innovative in the ways in which she explores the orifices of her body. In one mostly black-and-white painting (picture the cartoon-like line drawings of [Raymond Pettibon](#), [Koak](#), or old Felix the Cat cartoons), a naked Fatebe looks through a movie camera through her own gaping vagina to peer down a spiral staircase where other Fatebe's stand peering back up at her. In every cartoon, Fatebe is autonomous, Fatebe is active, Fatebe is happy, and in the words of Piper Marshall writing for *Artforum*, "Fatebe is a sinister feminist." A recent graduate of Cooper Union, Muslimova has had solo exhibitions at Room East and White Flag Projects in New York.

artnet
January 16, 2018

artnet news

On View

This Artist's Surreal Paintings Imagine the Adventures of an Outrageous and Unstoppable Alter Ego—See Them Here

Show of the Day: "2017" at Magenta Plains, New York.

Sarah Cascone, January 16, 2018



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatshe Asparagus Pee* (2017). Courtesy of Magenta Plains.

EBECHO MUSLIMOVA

"2017"
Magenta Plains, New York

What the Gallery Says: "Ebecho Muslimova's strikingly graphic paintings and drawings spotlight an alter ego named 'Fatebe,' a grinning, portly figure minimally rendered in sweeping black lines. Wide-eyed and naked, Fatebe finds herself in various impossible situations—a contortionist of voluminous proportions. Whether squatting like a genie inside a jar of coins and gagged by a stack of quarters, or poised as Narcissus over a pool of still water while folded into the angles of a laundry drying rack, Fatebe can do and show things that her author can't."

Why It's Worth a Look: The 33-year-old Russia-born artist has impeccable line work, and is showing paintings, in addition to her usual drawings, for the first time. Each piece reads like an anxiety-ridden nightmare, Muslimova's Fatebe alter ego constantly finding herself in impossible, compromising, or otherwise absurd situations. The work recalls old time-y cartoons, and a Surrealist take on slapstick humor. Through it all, Fatebe remains smiling, and unapologetic emblem of voluptuous womanhood.

What It Looks Like:



Installation view of Ebecho Muslimova's current exhibition at Magenta Plains.
Courtesy of Magenta Plains.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Untitled (Jar)*, 2017. Courtesy of Magenta Plains.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Self Possession* (2017). Courtesy of Magenta Plains.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Rack* (2017). Courtesy of Magenta Plains.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Arms Display* (2017). Courtesy of Magenta Plains.

Hyperallergic
January 28, 2018

HYPERALLERGIC

An Artist's Irrepressible Alter Ego

In the world of Ebecho Muslimova's recurring character, Fatebe, there are no men: they are irrelevant.

When Ebecho Muslimova began drawing Fatebe, her alter ego, around 2011, she initially existed only as confidently drawn black ink lines on small sheets of white paper. In a drawing included in her first solo show at Room East (2015), Fatebe is hunkered down, a mad smile on her face, digging a hole and happily flinging mud balls over her shoulder. In another she is scrunched up and flat on her back, crumpled like a collapsed ceramic in exasperated surprise.

Fatebe is a female Buster Keaton enduring humiliation upon humiliation. She has straight black hair and is always seen in her birthday suit, her vagina often exposed. She is zaftig, muscular, and irrepressible — a contortionist performance artist whose only audience is the viewer. The situations she finds herself in are weird, funny and oddly sinister: they have to do with every part of the body and everything the body produces. Shit, piss, and flatulence are all part of the situations that Muslimova depicts with a fluid line.

Her latest exhibition, *Ebecho Muslimova: 2017*, at Magenta Plains (January 7 – February 11, 2018), includes something new: in addition to the ink drawings, there are four paintings, three of which are large. It is a bold move that may put off some of her fans, but shouldn't.

The small, largely black painting, "Untitled (Jar)" (2017), shows Fatebe stuck inside a white, outlined jar, her flattened white body resembling an overhead view of a frog. With her two big elliptical cartoon eyes upside-down and staring directly at the viewer, perplexed, she is squashed against the glass by the contents of the jar, a trove of gray and copper-colored coins, from quarters to pennies. A column of gray coins descends unimpeded from above the overflowing rim of the jar into Fatebe's open, upturned mouth and out of her stretched-open vagina.



Ebecho Muslimova, "Fatebe Wheelbarrow Unicycle" (2017), ink on paper, 9 x 12 inches

This is what Muslimova does best: she presents a situation where the viewer is hard put to figure out how Fatebe ended up in such circumstances. For all the shame and mortification her alter ego is subjected to, Muslimova never reveals the source (or points a finger), making what could easily be a didactic view into something bizarrely enigmatic.

This is one thing that sets Muslimova apart from other artists working graphically, often in black-and white. I am thinking of Raymond Pettibon and Steve Gianakos. The shame and embarrassment that Gianakos's figures suffer through don't invite the viewer's empathy. Pettibon and Gianakos make work that is confrontational and, frankly, male. In Fatebe's world, there are no men: they are irrelevant.

The other difference has to do with the source. Pettibon is often inspired by current events, while Gianakos has long mixed pornography with images of happy children taken from illustrated books. Fatebe is Muslimova's invention, which is every cartoonist's dream — to make a memorable character. She appears to be asocial, and the only being with whom she interacts is her reflection or manifestations of herself. Carroll Dunham could learn a thing or two about nuance from Muslimova.

In one of the large acrylic paintings, “Fatebe Asparagus Pee” (2017), Fatebe is squatting with legs apart upon a pyramidal stack of toilet paper. The roll at the top is a sickly yellow, which becomes lighter as it spreads downward through the tiered toilet paper, though the bottom row remains pure white, apparently spared by Fatebe’s pee. Meanwhile, she is clasping her hands together and holding a bunch of asparagus stalks in the crook of each elbow. Another two bunches are tucked between her forearms and her breasts. Finally, Fatebe flings back her head, her open mouth crammed with more than a dozen asparagus stalks, as if her mouth were a vase. Muslimova’s riff on the trope of woman as vessel is a perverse celebration of olfactory delight.

In “Fatebe Self Possession” (2017), Fatebe’s limbs are bent around the edges of the canvas like a rectangular donut, so that she is looking down into her wide-open vagina, which contains an overhead view of a stairwell receding down to a patterned carpet in red, orange, and black. Fatebe is filming the receding set of stairs with an old-fashioned movie camera. Three Fatebes peer up from different places on the staircase. The carpet at the bottom, framed by the staircase, is the only color in this otherwise black-and-white work. Fatebe’s self-obsession — of which there is a trace in all of the work — is given the full treatment in this painting. And yet, contrary to what you might expect, the narcissism comes across as peculiar, even benign: she is making a film of her other. While Fatebe might not embrace multitudes, she does contain mirror-likenesses that are up to something, who knows what?

In “Fatebe Rack” (2017), Muslimova uses color graphically, filling the ground with a solid green. Fatebe is folded over so that her hands are touching her feet, entwined in the bars of an unfoldable laundry rack, which, for some inexplicable reason, is rising out a child’s black rubber wading pool (or oversized washtub). She is staring into the water, which goes from pale pink to pale blue, reflecting the unseen sky above. This mirroring is echoed by Fatebe’s dark blue reflection in the water, which is staring up at the figure perched above, and gives the painting a spatial dimension that Muslimova has not previously brought into her work.



Ebecho Muslimova, "Untitled (Jar)" (2017), acrylic and gouache on canvas, 12 x 10 inches

As one might expect, Muslimova paints tightly and graphically, and her paintings share something with those of John Wesley. Fatebe seems to exist in what Jacques Lacan called the “mirror stage,” which is supposed to happen during early childhood, when the infant becomes fascinated with mirrors. While this theory has long since been discredited, what Muslimova does is create a character that is innocent, curious, and fascinated by her reflection. No matter what fate befalls her, she remains remarkably imperturbable. This is what I think Muslimova’s fans adore about Fatebe — no matter what happens to her, Fatebe accommodates herself to the situation and she never gets knocked down.

[Ebecho Muslimova: 2017](#) continues at *Magenta Plains (94 Allen Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan)* through February 11.

Artforum
May 2018

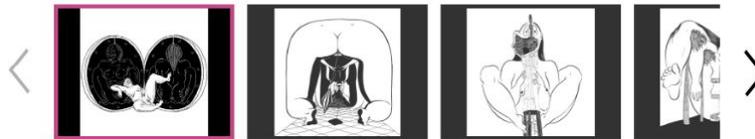
ARTFORUM

PROJECT: EBECHO MUSLIMOVA

By Chloe Wyma ☒



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Mold*, 2018, sumi ink on paper, 10 × 10".



IN THE FIRST IMAGE of this project, Fatebe emerges from the bivalve mold a disheveled, decidedly immodest Venus. She reclines in the nude, legs akimbo and pudenda proudly displayed, her rumpled flesh impervious to reification or containment. Born in 2011, Fatebe is the precocious child and loose-jointed alter ego of artist Ebecho Muslimova. Muslimova draws her perpetually naked, pleasantly zaftig second self into innumerable graphic scenarios, her elastic body functioning as a vehicle for dirty jokes and insuppressible energies. In a recent exhibition at Magenta Plains in New York, Fatebe swallowed a bushel of asparagus while urinating on a pyramid of toilet paper; she kebabed herself on a roll of quarters; she filmed the staircase scene from Hitchcock's *Vertigo* inside her extraordinary, capacious vagina; she tumbled—tits first—down a staircase into a pool of brown liquid.

Muslimova's quicksilver ink drawings variously recall the woozy "rubber hose" animation of Depression-era Fleischer Studios cartoons; the sophisticated obscenities of Aubrey Beardsley; the spry, witty caricatures of Al Hirschfeld; and even the jolly surrealism of Dr. Seuss. Yet Fatebe (a portmanteau of "fat" and "Ebe," the artist's nickname) is not a product of cultural nostalgia, but rather one of personal exasperation. Muslimova began drawing the character as a pleasurable escape from the critical discourses and professional anxieties of art school, where she studied sculpture. With her extravagant abjection and cheerful onanism, Fatebe proved to be a surprisingly expressive form and inexhaustible engine of breakdown and recuperation. Originating as an inside joke for the artist and her friends, Muslimova's Zeligesque avatar grew into an ambitious long-term practice.

Throughout Fatebe's seven-year life, she has evolved from a solitary actor set against an existential white ground to the protagonist of increasingly complex physical comedies. In this portfolio for *Artforum* (all works 2018), her body engorges to fill the square format of the printed page. In *Fatebe Pendulum*, her thighs and buttocks contort, Flubber-like, into a proscenium arch through which she and the viewer enjoy the theater of her body. She presents her ass to the page's surface, gazing out from between her legs at the titular pendulum swinging hypnotically from her vagina. The drawing's aggressive single-point perspective calls attention to one of the oldest tricks in the Western draftsman's playbook, inverting the masculinist optics famously crystallized in Albrecht Dürer's *Artist Drawing a Nude with Perspective Device*, 1525. Fatebe's invulnerability to scopic violence and irrepressible self-display are made more explicit in *Fatebe Complex Body Sphere*. Here, she assumes a recumbent pinup pose, blithely indifferent to the barbs of an enormous spiked polyhedron—recalling the ferocious geometries of Lorenzo Sirigatti's 1596 treatise *La pratica di prospettiva* (The Practice of Perspective)—nested in the curve of her back.

Critics have understood Fatebe as expressing a feminist, body-positive politics, yet her feminism isn't grounded in the production of affirmative representations, but rather in her capacity to embody profuse desublimating fantasies, to assimilate and master humiliation by transforming it into scenes of ambivalent, polymorphous perversity. In *Fatebe Crystals*, her vagina stretches into a rectangular box, discharging a steel shelving unit stocked with gemstones. She examines these treasures, illuminated by a work lamp mounted to her anus, through a jeweler's loupe. In *Fatebe T2* (titled after the 1991 *Terminator* sequel), she is penetrated by a tripod-like apparatus that drills upward through her body and out her contorted mouth, exposing the metal armature of Arnold Schwarzenegger's android-assassin fist. However, Fatebe's protean antics also invite comparison to Schwarzenegger's nemesis in that film, the liquid-metal T-1000: indestructible and able to assume the form of almost anything it touches.

The New York Times
July 23, 2015

The New York Times

Ebecho Muslimova Draws a Clumsy, Manic Alter Ego

Many people have distorted impressions of their own bodies and consequent feelings of inferiority. It's hard to maintain a positive self-image when unrealistic ideals are thrust before our eyes everywhere we look.

So when an artist like the gifted drawer Ebecho Muslimova creates funny, wordless cartoons of a lovably goofy, corpulent alter ego called Fatebe, we know what she's wrestling with. In [this show's](#) eight pieces, selected from more than 100 Fatebe drawings she has made, Ms. Muslimova envisions this avatar as a kind of indomitable, clumsily manic performance artist.

Sinuously outlined with fine brushes in black ink on snowy white pages, Fatebe appears naked, with unkempt hair and expressions of popeyed surprise, in all sorts of awkward and confounding situations. In "Fatebe Floor Piece," she has somehow managed to cut a splintery circle in a gallery's wooden floor, using her head like a jigsaw.

"Fatebe Dirt Hole" could be a homage to Mike Kelley: It shows Fatebe furiously digging mud, flinging clods into the air. The soil can be read as feces, which suggests a vision of the artist delving into her own primal unconscious. In an untitled piece, she re-enacts the myth of Narcissus: At the edge of a black river, she is bent over and using her hands to scoop out a masklike reflection of her own face.

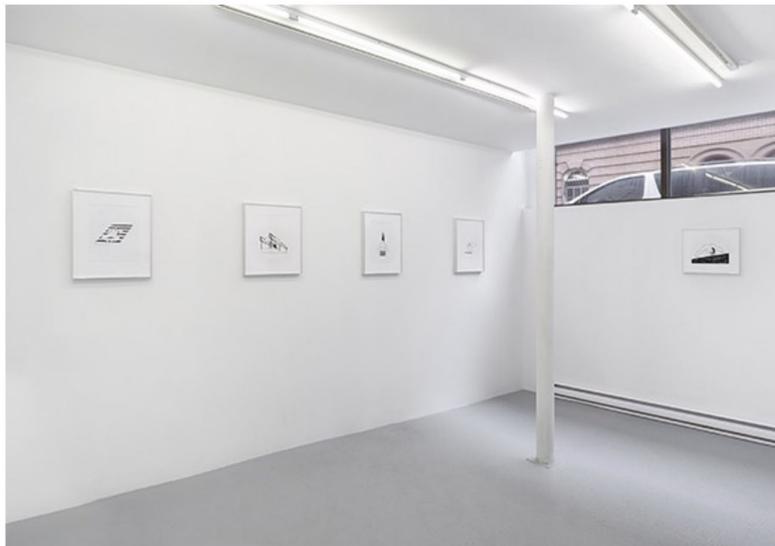
Ms. Muslimova was born in Russia in 1984, graduated from Cooper Union and lives in New York. This is her first solo exhibition. It's a modest but auspicious debut.

Mousse
July 21, 2015

MOUSSE

“The Crack-Up” and Ebecho Muslimova at Room East, New York

Ebecho Muslimova



My Darling,

Though you are far away from me, nothing will change.
I will love you truly and you will always be a
special part of Fatebe.

I long to feel the comfort and softness of your loving
arms. I want to hug you and kiss Fatebe and hold you
tight but I must wait...
Until we meet again, I long for Fatebe.

Yours,

at Room East, New York

until 8 August 2015

Artforum
July 2015

ARTFORUM

EBECHO MUSLIMOVA

by Piper Marshall

ROOM EAST

41 Orchard Street

June 28, 2015 – August 15, 2015

A particular smell clings to New York City's Chinatown in the summer. The aroma makes its way to Orchard Street. It inflects the eight drawings hanging at Room East. These direct cartoons depict FATEBE. FATEBE is artist Ebecho Muslimova's alter ego. We may not know Muslimova, but FATEBE is a black line on white ground. And Fatebe is doing things (think Garbage Pail Kids). FATEBE is playing with herself; she is playing with her fat body. She stares at her face in a stream of shit. She twists her form into a mess on the potter's wheel. She folds her flab over a wire. She flatulates out into the open. She digs up dirt with her hands. She drapes her flesh over handrails. She offers us a view of her symmetrical vagina.

But seriously, what compels us to gape at FATEBE? Why does our gaze linger so readily, so openly? These drawings thrust in front of us what we will push aside. FATEBE taps into the drive that lures us downtown. She makes us inhale the foul stench of the moistest nights. She throws at us that which we are required to withstand: our bodies, our selves. FATEBE is a sinister feminist. She wildly grins.



Ebecho Muslimova, *Fatebe Air Pump*, 2015,
ink on paper 12 x 9".