

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUXELLES

SARKIS

Au commencement la chaleur

February 11 - April 3 2021

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri
75004 Paris



Sarkis
1997 O.S.W.N. (Krutenuau), 1997
Collage with watercolor on paper, wooden frame, red neons in cristal
59 x 64 x 6 cm (23 7/32 x 25 3/16 x 2 3/16 in.)
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is delighted to present *Au commencement la chaleur*, Sarkis's sixth exhibition, after *Les vitraux mobiles de Sarkis* in 2019 and *Intérieurs* in 2018. Born in 1938, in Istanbul, the artist moved to Paris in 1964, where he spent the last 60 years developing a prodigious body of work that defies any attempt at classification. Starting with *Kriegsschatz* (War Treasure) and *Leidschatz* (Pain Treasure), concepts that would inform his prolific career from 1976 onwards, Sarkis became a pioneering figure in the way he reflected on the history and aesthetics of pillaged or subtracted objects. At a time when international institutions have started to address this hot topic — an area of particular concern for museums —, Sarkis scrupulously continues to carry out the critical analysis he had begun almost 45 years earlier.

Au commencement la chaleur comprises a group of *Scènes en cuivre* (Copper Scenes), *Plans Brûlés avec néons S.W.N.O.* (Burned Plans with Neons S.W.N.O.), and a work on paper from the series *Main/Feu* (Hand/Fire). Highly incandescent, this exhibition steeps the viewer in a decor set alight by the works' glowing emanations.

He began to work on the series of *Plans Brûlés avec néons S.W.N.O.* in 1997 and presented it for the first time that same year at Barbara Claasen-Schmal Gallery in Bremen. Each work comprises a wooden frame with the four cardinal points (Nord, Ost, West, Süd), in neon, shaped according to the artist's own handwriting: the positions of these points are intentionally inaccurate and throw off our sense of space. The plans are topographical surveys of places that were crucial to Sarkis, who draws the main elements of their inflamed furniture in red watercolor. Thus, *1997 S.O.W.N. (galerie B.)* reproduces the burning space of the Barbara Claasen-Schmal Gallery, while *1997. O.S.W.N. (Krutenuau)* evokes his own studio-bedroom at rue Krutenuau in Strasbourg. While at the head of the art department of the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs from 1980 to 1990, he never invited anyone to his monastic home-studio, but the room was the birthplace of an absolutely crucial production in his œuvre.

The flames, made with water and red pigment, reflect the intensity and inexorable power of the interaction between materials and space. Eminently alive, the objects, the wall, or the furniture simulate the artist's creative power. The pencil-drawn floorplans recall Sarkis's early training and the fondness for architecture that infuses all of his creation — his works and his exhibitions. All the techniques are visible and the materials were selected meticulously for their intrinsic properties — the neon is Sarkis's optic nerve and watercolor is chosen for the way it interacts with the liquidity of water.

The series of *Scènes en cuivre* also bears the weight of its material: copper is preferred for its electric and thermal conductivity on the one hand and its resistance to corrosion on the other. Sarkis realizes the T-shaped supports in this metal, which he considers “warm”, and drapes them with fabrics that are meaningful. The first two works in this series begun in 2012 present Dozo vests (Burkina Faso), from the confraternity of West African hunters; one of these is currently on show at the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac through June 27, 2021, in the exhibition *Ex Africa*, curated by Philippe Dagen.

A light silk tunic, meticulously sourced from a vintage store, partly covers a coat of mail that reproduces the T of its support structure; a multi-pocket, military vest for desert operations (other type of body armor) embraces a shimmery, floral dress made by a Korean designer. A lacerated camouflage jacket is adorned with a “bird” bag by the same stylist. The bag, with its golden seams, sequins and embroidered beads, jars against the backdrop of the hostile equipment. The pierced copper rod of *2015.03 Sculpture de cuivre avec veste militaire et sac Tsumori Chisato* (2015.03 Copper Sculpture with Military Jacket and Tsumori Chisato Bag) brings to mind a flute harnessing a harlequin. Associating tactical and warlike clothing with happy, seductive fabrics creates something of a paradox. While war is by no means poetic, the elements that determine it can be: it is this duality that interests Sarkis, who finds sublime in the camouflage motif, as evident in the title of the work *2018. Veste de camouflage en paysage de neige et châle en soie à fleurs* (2018. Camouflage Jacket as Snowy Landscape and Floral Silk Scarf).

At once “minimalistic and maximalistic,” they are Totems, which, because of their size, lend the clothing a certain dignity. According to the artist, “*the artwork becomes an artwork when it is shown, in all its glory: clothing is proud to be exhibited.*” Transcended by their supports, these fabrics reach a culminating sculptural state, with the elevation freeing their psychological and spiritual dimension.

2018.05.17 Main/Feu en 7 couleurs d'arc-en-ciel, sur 3 feuilles superposées (2018.05.17 Hand/Fire in 7 Rainbow Colors, on 3 Superimposed Sheets) is the next work to punctuate the exhibition. The motif is made with an impasto of rainbow-colored paints and represents a matrix that recalls, at once, a hand and combusting flames. Edged with the oil that has bled into the paper, leaving behind a halo that espouses the shape, the living matter continues to weep even when the artist's hand has distanced itself. The superimposition of sheets of paper can be seen in transparency under the pictorial layers, adding, via this stratification, a multiplied perception of inflamed desires.

By composing reverently, using active materials, Sarkis proposes a powerful hanging with *Au commencement la chaleur*. With an evident mastery that does not detract from his work's sheer vehemence, the *Plans Brûlés*, *Main/Feu* and *Scènes en cuivre* are hearths that ignite at the spectator's contact. The dazzling combustions provoked by these encounters will soon turn into a tenacious glow that attests to the crucialness of Sarkis's visionary work.

Born in 1938 in Istanbul, Turkey, Sarkis has been living and working in Paris since 1964. In 1969, he was invited by art critic Harald Szeemann to take part in the now famous exhibition *When attitudes become form* at the Kunsthalle of Bern. In 2015, he represented Turkey at the 56th Venice Biennale, and took part in the exhibition held at the pavilion of the Republic of Armenia, which won the Golden Lion.

www.sarkis.fr

As part of the *Ex Africa* exhibition at the Quai Branly Museum – Jacques Chirac curated by Philippe Dagen, five works by Sarkis are on display until June 27, 2021 : *La Chorégraphie avec des “Trésors de Guerre”*, 2011-2016, 2012. *Scène en cuivre*, 2012, *Ombre*, 2012, *2013.10 L'oiseau touché*, 2013 et *On the Breaking Bad's wallpaper between the Cry and the Masks*, 2014.

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