



GHADA AMER, Le Salon Courbé 2007, Exhibition view, Francesca Minini, Milan



GHADA AMER Not About Orange, 2007 Acrylic, embroidery and gel medium on canvas 36 x 42 inches, (91.4 x 106.7 cm) AMER 2007.0015
COURTESY GAGOSIAN GALLERY



**New York-based
Egyptian artist
Ghada Amer
uses a delicate
thread to weave
powerful images**

SKIN: What's it all about?

Ghada Amer: Love and loneliness.

SKIN: What's it not all about?

GA: It is not about pornography.

SKIN: How does your family feel about your work and your visual outspokenness?

GA: In the beginning they were not very happy about it. Then my father started to read about art and everything published about my work. Then he started to defend me in front of everybody in Egypt. My mom never liked it; she is very embarrassed by it. In the beginning she was very aggressive; we had many fights. She only likes my garden works and my written pieces! She wants me to stop "making those nudes". But, she helps me produce all my sculptures and installation work. I think she would like to love my work... she just cannot because of her background.

SKIN: Do you do what you do out of a need to free at least one voice – yours – from the restraints of the Arab world?

GA: To free myself mainly from the restraints I have been brought up with - it is my own prison that I am talking about.

SKIN: Any thoughts on the issue of freedom of speech in and outside the Arab world?

GA: Both in the West and in the Arab world there are issues of freedom of speech. It is difficult to talk about sexuality in the Arab world; my work looks, from an Arab's perspective, very daring – crossing boundaries. I just co-realised "Indigestible Dessert", a collaborative video with a long time artist friend, Reza Farkhondeh, about Bush and Blair. It is a performance we did in the United States where we made a effigies out of cake and white chocolate of Bush and Blair. I hit their faces with a hammer and invited people to eat their bodies, which were made out of strawberry and raspberry mousse. I cannot show this video in the US. I showed it in a class at Columbia University and some students were extremely offended. So here again we are crossing boundaries. We cannot talk about power in this way. So for me I do not feel – especially after September 11th – that the West is a haven of freedom of speech. It is, rather, a certain freedom of speech.

SKIN: Your work materialises into focus - did you mean for that to happen or was it a provocative coincidence when you began making images?

GA: It is out of anger.

SKIN: What's the subtext behind sewing your erotic work?

GA: I want to invent a new way of painting that would really belong to women – painting with thread. And as I also very much like contradiction, the subject had to be taken from men's world – an obvious one being pornography.

SKIN: What is your response to your critics – particularly those who see your work as a slap in the face to Islam.

GA: I hate that people contextualise my work in regards to Islam. It really upsets me.

SKIN: Are you working on any new pieces, exhibitions, etc these days?

GA: "Indigestible Dessert" opened in Milan on May 17th. I am also presenting a lounge called Salon Courbé, in which I created wallpaper with the definition of the word "terrorism" in English. I made a lounge and a silk and wool carpet with the definition of the word "terrorism" in Arabic, embroidered with the same Arabic definitions on the upholstery of the sofa and the chairs. It is about the importance of understanding the world from two different languages or points of view. And I am opening a show of erotic paintings at the Museo D'arte Contemporanea Roma (MACRO) in Rome on May 25th.

SKIN: What is sexy/erotic/sensual to you?

GA: That's difficult to put into words – look at my paintings.

SKIN: What's not sexy/erotic/sensual to you?

GA: Slavery.

SKIN: If you had the attention of the entire world for 60 seconds, what's the one thing you would most like to say?

GA: I would play John Lennon's "Imagine". I know it is more than 60 seconds.