



Abdallah Akar, *Poème suspendu*, 2010, 7 pieces, each 297 x 130 cm, mixed media on paper

Born in Tunisia in 1952, Abdallah Akar now lives and works in Paris. He studied under Master Iraqi calligrapher Ghani Alani and exhibited for the first time in 1986. He began teaching calligraphy at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris in 1993.

Akar's mesmerizing installation for Abu Dhabi Art finds its inspiration in the renowned collection of seven pre-Islamic poems known as the *Mu'Allaqât*, the "suspended poems". According to tradition, these poems were originally written on silk weavings that hung suspended and floating on the walls of the Kaaba. Written before the Koran, the poems are considered among the founding texts of Arabic language and culture. Akar breathes new life into these storied poems in his installation, suspending seven large cotton banners on which he's written in Kufic characters the first verses of the seven ancient poems. The banners are arranged so that each woven piece allows light to pass through, boldly outlining the calligraphic characters. The installation functions as a commemorative site for the *Mu'Allaqât*, and the public is invited to experience the text as a wave of words and colours. The blazing volatility of these textiles evokes the long fourteen centuries that the texts have traversed, like a caravan library, to reach us.

In this work, Akar takes us back to 6th-century Bedouin society, where verbal sparring matches were keenly fought, where the poetry was "powerful and invisible as the wind on dunes," and where beautiful words were worth all the wealth of the world. In Mecca, the greatest poems were hung floating on the breeze for everyone to see. All the great Arabic poets are represented in Akar's work: from Ibn Arabî to Nizar Kabbani, from Ibn Al-Roumi to Abou-el-Kacem Chabbi to the renowned Mahmoud Darwich -- Akar celebrates all of them in his art, on paper as well as on canvas.

Each background is a celebration of the geometry of language. Akar hangs transparent papers between the veils and the light sources in order to filter the glow streaming through the poems, which are written in Maghrebi writing. Together, the veils form a college of ancient poetic verse that the viewer can enter to experience "the tears of a loved being" or "the spark of love". Wandering among these illuminated fabrics becomes a dramatic game of changing combinations and an ethereal amalgamation of textures and words. The woven muslin fabric is appealing because of its texture and transparency, while the Kufic style of calligraphy is used because of its striking geometry. Like Akar, viewers are easily seduced by the complexity of paper and wood as well as the long cotton veils in the installation. The result is a living meditation on tradition and a visceral encounter with the sensations words evoke.