



SIMONE FATTAL

by Phillip Griffith

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The fourteen stoneware sculptural works in Simone Fattal's first New York City solo exhibition resonate with a curious force of intimate gravity. Taken individually, they convey monumentality; stepping back, each could be easily held—delicately—in your hands or arms. Standing atop narrow white pedestals, these nearly devotional figures are quasi-mythic forms, but like Sophocles's *Antigone*, they take root in the earthly, human realm.

The titles of the works evoke austerity, and some of these figures seemingly embody that austerity in long attenuated forms that appear aloof, such as in *Standing Figure II* and *III* (both 2009) conjuring forms with cloaked heads. The smooth allure of the *Standing Figures* gives way to the handled clay of others, like *Standing King* and *The Queen* (both 2009), who have been pinched and molded into turbulent forms. Offering an index of the artist's hand, the most turbulent of workings is *Tree* (2009)—gnarly, and painted in umber and bruise-blue tones, calling to mind a trunk hollowed out by fire.

The majority of these sculptures have been modeled in long vertical forms, seemingly out of a single column of clay. The form of *Horse* (2009), however, is additive, with four sturdy legs attached to a flat, horizontal body. The ragged mane that runs down the horse's long neck looks like a craggy mountain range. Similarly modeled, the clay of *Stool* (2009), washed in a luminous, semi-vitreous blue-green glaze, is pressed into thick sturdy legs supporting a broad semicircular top. The handling of the seat, dragged down slightly in front, intimates that a body may have just slid off the chair—either a tripod for a prophetess or a throne for a queen.



Installation view: Simone Fattal, kaufmann repetto New York, February 23 – April 8, 2017. Courtesy the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan/New York.

Fattal is the longtime publisher and partner of the poet and artist Etel Adnan, and the chthonic figures Fattal has produced in this exhibition could easily populate the abstract, historic, and mythic landscapes

of Adnan’s writing and art—as easily as Greek tragedy. When Adnan’s *Sitt Marie Rose* first appeared in 1978—a French-language novel about a woman’s murder by a childhood friend in the context of the Lebanese Civil War (which appeared in English translation from Fattal’s Post-Apollo Press in 1982)—the two had to leave Lebanon due to the controversy it sparked.

The demented perspective of war and political violence reveals and perverts much about human nature. “[Man] dooms animals and mountains technically by yoke,” declaims the Chorus in praise of humankind’s ingenuity in *Antigonick*, Anne Carson’s inventive translation of Sophocles’s *Antigone*. “And utterance and thought as clear as complicated air and moods that make a city moral these he taught himself.” In Sophocles, doom arrives not from divine wrath, but out of the same making that establishes the rest of humanity’s shared systems of thought and art.

And so, I can’t help but think that these sculptures are, too, about war. The explicit context of that form of violence is missing from the sculptures, but these figures seem to reveal a landscape of infrastructure and ecosystem abandoned or scarred by a drive to political violence. Lopsided walls with pipes cut off, a staggering old nag (perhaps a wounded warhorse), a burnt tree trunk, a vacant throne. The prophetess has gone silent; these figures remain as witness and consolation.



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