

NEWS AND FEATURES

G.R. Iranna in New York

G. R. Iranna is at Aicon New York till December 6th, with his solo show, *The Birth of Blindness*. There are the expected lushly textured tarpaulin paintings to be had, but the show's provocative turn is largely due to the two sculptural installation pieces on display at the gallery. Another unusual piece is the donkey in the room, *Wounded Tools I*, from 2007, included in the show after it won Iranna the Juror's Choice Award at the Singapore Art Museum this year.

One of the installations, *The Dead Smile, 2007*, quietly bludgeons one with the rank baggage of protest, subjugation and fear, as Iranna makes the viewing public complicit in the interrogation. As the critic Johnny M.L. states in the accompanying catalogue, "Shocked by the unexpected seizure, blindfolded by black hoods, each member in the group looks completely isolated. Squatting precariously on the floor, their soldier-like classically toned bodies are tensed up in the expectation of an impending torture. The conspicuous absence of the perpetrators of state violence underlines the hallucinatory presence of ideological powers and this scene could be from any torture camp like Guantanamo Bay or Abhu Ghraib." It is disquieting to note that although the grouping of 21 figures take up significant floor space in the show they are but a tiny fraction of the thousands of detainees held at ransom worldwide.

The other large scale installation, *The Birth of Blindness, 2007*, is far less political and more timeless in the accusations it levels against those in power. Another 10 naked figures, blindfolded but not hooded, kowtow on individual carts. Drawing from the work's title, the romantic story may be relayed that the viewer is a merciless overseer or slave driver for the Egyptian Pharaohs. And it is from this necessary vanity to produce mankind's lasting monuments to progress and the future that the contract is written in bondage between those who are slaves and those that represent the oppressive State.

Of the paintings, *There is No Border, 2007*, is particularly arresting because it is less literal than Iranna tends to be. An uncountable row of brown figures crouch on their knees; they are blinded, but not forcibly, for the blue cloths are not tied but instead hang loosely on their heads like veils. Their bodies are penned by rows of barbed wire in front and behind. Regardless, the implication arises that blinded as it seems by their own volition the barbed borders are therefore in their inner psyche and as such all that is required is the brave but simple act of removing their veils to see that there are no borders physical or metaphysical.

In terms of style and execution, it cannot be discounted that there is a pervasive and darkly sexual undercurrent to the exhibition. Iranna's clean and elegant figures are devoid of gross human emotion, robbed as they are of any visage. In fact, they are offered as deliciously taut sacrificial lambs ripe for plucking by those with sinister predilections. Aesthetically, Iranna daringly probes ugly and desperate philosophies that enable authorities to seize bodies, at random and with no justification, which becomes concomitant with the exercising of sexual power and prerogatives over the body.