

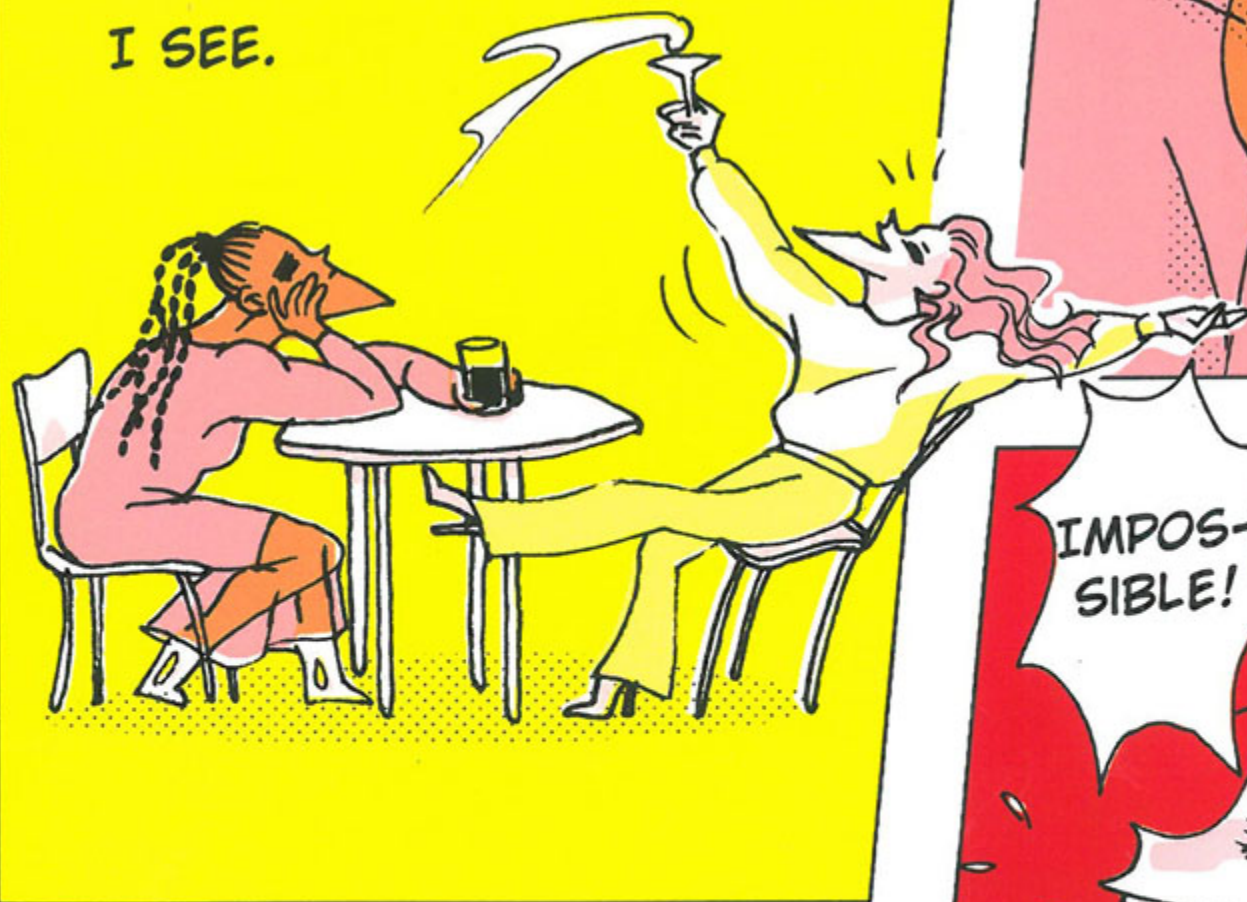
# ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2014 POINT 'IN MY LIFE... INTERNATIONAL

POINT 'IN MY LIFE...

I'M EXACTLY WHERE I PLANNED TO BE, IT'S AHMEE-ZING !!

I SEE.



WARHOL'S COMPUTER  
AFROFUTURISM  
ART AND ANIMATION

BUT HONEY, YOU KNOW ...

WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING, YOU HAVE THIS SAD LOOK ON YOUR FACE... ARE YOU SECRETLY HURTING?



IMPOSSIBLE!

I HAVE A JOB!

I ALSO HAVE MY STYLE, MY MAN, SORT OF...



HA HA

\$10.00



# Ghada Amer

CHEIM & READ

“Rainbow Girls,” this recent exhibition of Ghada Amer’s new work, tethered a porn-suffused AbEx “allover” to a sculpture of transparent form. Though the influential Egyptian-born artist’s signature nudes still remain as complex linear outline (recalling Tom Wesselmann-like wraiths), gone are the vulvae that added a certain piquancy to Amer’s earlier work. The sculpture *Blue Bra Girl*, 2012, for example, is a vast ovoid with a prominently displayed face, while in *The Heart*, 2012, the Rainbow Girls are perhaps a bit more difficult to discern, owing to the somewhat punched-in shape of the heart itself. Even more surprising than the artist’s use of the female figure as linear sculpture is her deployment of Arabic script. In *The Words I Love the Most*, 2012, the curved exterior of the spherical bronze reveals Arabic words relating to love—*passion, tenderness, etc.*

Amer’s recent sculpture also reminds one of the *mashrabiya*, the latticework wooden screens of traditional Arabic architecture, which permit one to look through without being seen; in her catalogue text, Anne Creissels uses this suggestive comparison to underscore the affiliation of Amer’s work with feminist linguistic theory. I would add the Koranic decorations on eleventh-century Kufic pottery as another



Ghada Amer,  
*Amina*, 2013, acrylic,  
watercolor crayons,  
embroidery, and gel  
medium on canvas,  
50 x 60".

likely source. (Admittedly, the wild discrepancy between Amer’s erotic representationalism and the spindly yet transcendent abstraction of Kufic calligraphy may subvert this possibility.)

These are but two of many “threads” in Amer’s oeuvre. *Threads* is a word of multiple meanings—it may be an idiom for “clothing,” the constituent element of the structure of cloth, or that which binds you to your ancestry—all famously explored by the artist. Undeniably, the most political strand has been the artist’s fusion of the gestural side of Abstract Expressionism with erotic imagery. Despite Amer’s fame, viewers are still surprised when chancing upon these erogenous images, which are, or were, often lost in disguising, dangling threads, a tangle that itself also served as a sign of a highly fetishized—both negatively and positively—taboo substance: pubic hair. That Amer is Cairene only intensifies the radical effect of her subject; quite like Shirin Neshat, she is a standard-bearer of a certain anti-patriarchal conviction.

In this show, the artist generally eschews full nudes for faces, and these visages—whether turned to the side (*Norah*, 2014) or in direct frontal view (*The Rainbow Girl*, 2014)—are, as in the earlier work, partly obscured, hidden by threads dangling from carefully snipped embroidery. Other pieces, meanwhile, are entirely abstract; in *The Big Black Bang—RFGA*, 2013, for instance, the bundles of threads occlude any imagery at all. Perhaps the artist’s shift from explicitly erotic imagery to portraiture results in part from porn’s current ubiquity, its easy Internet accessibility. It is now demystified, no longer shocking—or far less, anyway.

Yet another thread to follow is that of the artist’s schooling. Following the revolution of 1952, hitherto undreamed of prospects for education were opened to some gifted Egyptian children and, as a result, a goodly portion of Amer’s schooling took place in France, and French became her second language. Amer is a now-lauded graduate of the Villa Arson, the prestigious art school in Nice, whose student body was particularly responsive to the political developments deeply inflected, when not instigated, by the university rebellions of ’68: “*Sous les pavés, la plage!*” (“Beneath the cobblestones, the beach!”) What could be more Niçois than that rallying cry of the Sorbonne *soixante-huitards*? Thus, the myths of an arcadian golden age embodied by the Mediterranean imagery of Matisse and Maillol continue to reverberate in Amer’s “Rainbow Girls.”

—Robert Pincus-Witten