

ART & DESIGN | ART REVIEW

Rachid Koraichi, Making His Own Language

By HOLLAND COTTER MARCH 31, 2016

Rachid Koraichi, who has been widely exhibited internationally for decades, is only now having his first New York solo exhibition. Born in Algeria in 1947, he came from a family of Quranic scholars and copyists in a Sufi tradition. He trained as a calligrapher before studying painting and printmaking in Paris in the 1970s and has made the written word, as a conveyor of spiritual philosophy, poetry and politics, his primary medium. Just as language serves as a visual binder in many Islamic cultures, so it does in Mr. Koraichi's formally diverse but completely of-a-piece show, "Love Side by Side With the Soul," at Aicon Gallery.

In the main gallery, large openwork steel sculptures, based on calligraphic forms, are set against banners embroidered with texts by Sufi masters; tall, calligraphy-covered porcelain pots fill an adjoining space. The effect is vibrantly polyphonic: On the banners, big, dark characters float and pulsate over dense fields of smaller, lighter ones. The sinuous sculptures duplicate themselves as cast shadows; the pots, half-invisible in the side room, have the presence of a massed chorus.

Though rooted in an ancient religion and traditional crafts, Mr. Koraichi's graphically punchy art is fully in the global modernist and postmodernist flow. He quotes from Sufi mystics like Rumi and Al Arabi but incorporates the words of the Algerian novelist Mohammed Dib and the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. Arabic mingles with indigenous North African languages (much of the work is

made by North African dyers, weavers and potters), and invented characters — some resembling Chinese, others talismanic signs — are liberally stirred in. Harmony in multiplicity is the message: beautiful thought, heady sight.

Rachid Koraichi

‘Love Side by Side With the Soul’

Aicon Gallery

35 Great Jones Street, East Village

Through April 9

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