

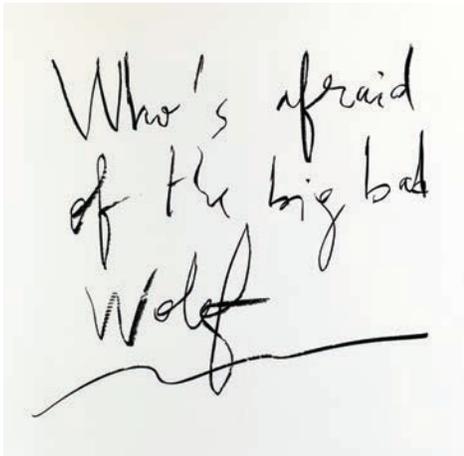
For immediate release

ADEL ABDESSEMED

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf

February 17 – March 17, 2012

Opening reception: Friday, February 17, 6 – 8 PM



David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of new works by Adel Abdessemed. Spanning both of the gallery's 525 and 533 West 19th Street spaces, *Who's afraid of the big bad wolf* is Abdessemed's second solo exhibition since he joined the gallery in 2008.

Across a wide range of media, Abdessemed transforms well-known materials and imagery into charged artistic declarations. The artist pulls freely from myriad sources—personal, historical, social, and political—to create a visual language that is simultaneously rich and economical, sensitive and controversial, radical and mundane.

The exhibition brings together recent works that revolve around the themes of war, violence, and spectatorship. The 525 gallery space will present works grouped by Abdessemed as primarily concerned with the dichotomy between meaning and matter: they include *Décor*, which presents four life-size sculptures of the crucified Jesus made entirely from razor wire. Modeled after German

Renaissance painter Matthias Grünewald's *Crucifixion* (a part of his *Isenheim Altarpiece* from 1506-1515), the contorted, twisted figures hang against an otherwise naked wall without the structure of the cross itself. Creating a formal juxtaposition between the hazardous qualities of the razor wire and its abstract appearance, *Décor* enhances the connotations of physical suffering implicit in the subject matter, while the repetitive appearance of the sculptures creates a distinctively decorative effect.

Occupying the floor in front of *Décor* is a group of over thirty larger-than-life-sized microphones made from hand-blown glass. Perhaps an allegory for the ideal of transparent communication and open dialogue, the title of the work, *L'avenir est aux fantômes* (The future belongs to ghosts), is a reference to the late French philosopher Jacques Derrida, whose characterization of a variety of phenomena as "ghosts" was highlighted in Ken McMullen's film *Ghost Dance*, 1983, featuring Derrida himself. Also on view nearby is *La Grande Parade*, a large installation of Abdessemed's drawings of porcupines, weasels, tortoises, and other reptiles. Executed in the artist's loose style, the animals have sticks of dynamite strapped to them as if presenting an allusion to modern-day kamikazes.

In the 533 gallery space, which brings together works Abdessemed has characterized as primarily concerned with substantive themes of hope, death, memory, and compulsion, viewers first encounter *Hope*, an installation of a boat found abandoned on a beach in the Florida Keys. Used illegally to transport immigrants in pursuit of a new life to the United States, often compromising their safety in the process, the boat is presented as it was discovered, but has been filled to the brim with black bags cast in polyurethane resin from actual, stuffed garbage sacks. While a crude and provocative analogy between the trash and the boat's former passengers appears explicit, *Hope* presents an art historical reference to Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich's apocalyptic painting from 1823-1824, *The Wreck of the Hope*, featuring a capsized vessel in a sea of icebergs.

Also in the 533 gallery space will be *Who's afraid of the big bad wolf*, a wall installation of taxidermy animals, including wolves, which takes its title from the famous soundtrack to Disney's 1933 cartoon *The Three Little Pigs* as well as from Barnett Newman's version of the phrase for his series of paintings from the late 1960s, *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue*. Following on from

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Décor, 2011-2012 (detail). Razor wire.

Four elements, each: 86 x 70 x 24 inches (218.4 x 177.8 x 61 cm).

response to a verbal insult by the latter. While it presents a realistic rendition of the event, Abdessemed's slightly larger-than-life, resin sculpture is not so much a commemoration of the incident itself as it is a testament to the emotions and underlying narratives which often accompany major sports events. By distilling the moment of Zidane's much scrutinized violent impulse, Abdessemed's work draws attention to the verbal insults and provocations that often flourish in the sport without any visible manifestation, and further emphasizes the obsessive interest in drama that lies beyond the game itself. As such, it reverberates with the underlying theme of the exhibition, which is concerned with familiar manifestations of aggression and violence. Drawing on a multitude of seemingly converse and often visually spectacular references and symbols, Abdessemed highlights the interconnectedness of innate aspects of human behavior, while at the same time challenging passive modes of spectatorship.

Born in Constantine, Algeria, **Adel Abdessemed** attended the École des Beaux-Arts d'Alger, Algiers, and the École nationale des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, France. He had his first American gallery exhibition, *RIO*, at David Zwirner in 2009.

A major survey of the artist's work is planned for October 2012 at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and will be accompanied by an exhibition catalogue. Abdessemed's work was recently the subject of solo exhibitions at Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art, London, and the Ontario College of Art & Design, Toronto (both 2010). Other notable solo exhibitions include the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2009); MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Le Magasin-Centre National d'Art Contemporain de Grenoble, France (both 2008); and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York (2007).

The artist has participated in a number of significant group exhibitions, including the 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale; *In Praise of Doubt*, Punta della Dogana, Venice (both 2011); Aichi Triennale 2010, Nagoya, Japan (2010); *Mapping the Studio: Artists from the François Pinault Collection*, Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana, Venice; 10th Lyon Biennale, France; 10th Istanbul Biennial; 10th Havana Biennial (all 2009); 7th Gwangju Biennial, Gwangju, South Korea (2008); and the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007).

His work is represented in prominent collections internationally, including the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; and the François Pinault Foundation, Venice. He lives and works in Paris.

A comprehensive monograph of Abdessemed's work is currently being prepared by David Zwirner in collaboration with Pier Luigi Tazzi and Steidl.

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Abdessemed's previous work with preserved animals, the installation juxtaposes the age-old practice of taxidermy, used for scientific as well as for decorative purposes, with a reference to meaningless slaughter and war—the animals in the installation have subsequently been burnt and are a monotonous black while the overall dimensions correspond to Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937, a now classic representation of the effects of war on civilians. Near the installation, *Mémoire* presents a video showing a baboon spelling out the words "Tutsi" and "Hutu" on a white wall, which refer to the names of the opposing ethnic groups involved in the 1994 Rwandan civil war and the ensuing devastating genocide.

Coup de tête depicts the moment French footballer Zinedine Zidane headbutted Italian Marco Materazzi in the 2006 World Cup final in Germany in a heated