

# NONFINITO

GALLERY

## reciprocity failure

Walid layadi Marfouk (Moroccan-French, born 1996, Paris)

Lives and works between New York and Marrakech, Morocco

Walid Layadi-Marfouk's photographs emanate a sense of mysticism. They bring the viewer into lush environments while simultaneously keeping them out. The large-format analog images depict intricate situations staged from memory, but reconstructed from the artists' Moroccan upbringing as they never existed in real life. Rather than the documentary reconstruction of a specific event, the works evoke a stage, set in an unlocated past, a reverie in which fragments of memories flit around. The context of the Western gallery space further activates the images' diligent ambivalence: not only do the works eschew a brand of representation that is universally intelligible, per Glissant's politics of opacity, but they are above all disinterested in the representational fact itself—in favor of an exploration of memory, culture, and heritage as relational constructs affecting the individual. In Western spaces where many representational efforts are asked to translate for themselves, Layadi-Marfouk contemplates what it means to remain untranslated and acutely personal.

The exhibition's eponymous concept of *reciprocity failure* is integral to these compositions. Via a set of silver gelatin prints depicting Moroccan architectural artifacts, the artist investigates the photographic, physical and optical phenomenon of reciprocity failure: an aberration that affects the rate at which film registers information when exposed to light. While that rate is normally positive and constant, it diminishes quasi-exponentially in the event of long exposure times—durations outside of the film manufacturer's specifications—forcing the photographer to compensate for the substrate's deficiency by subjecting it to arbitrary and extreme exposure times. The film's habitual proportionate response to light breaks down; its reality-recording mission fails. Layadi-Marfouk's silver gelatin prints are displayed alongside the color works in the gallery, drawing a parallel with another aberration, this time cultural in nature: the failure of white Western spaces to provide adequate platforms for non-white cultures to flourish on their own terms. This anomaly is a lack of reciprocity, which stands all the more blatant when considering the omni-presence/potencies of Western mainstream culture across Arab and Muslim territories—a presence still supported by vestigial colonial fluxes.

Through the precise darkroom process of solarization, by which certain tonal ranges in the final print are inverted while others are preserved, the artist looks to not compensate for reciprocity failure, but instead simply to disrupt it, to perturb it. The repetition of particular images at various scales and different degrees of solarization recreates the operations of memory and a semblance of familiarity, only to render it strange, unknowable. A new space emerges, displaced both from here and from there.

Throughout the exhibition's two floors, Layadi-Marfouk develops a three-pronged definition of reciprocity failure: failed reciprocities can be photographic—founded in optics and chemistry. They can also be cultural and thus external to the subject, often in the context of Western vs non-Western interfaces at an individual or cultural level alike.

The artist's light works—neon tubes mounted on prayer rugs—consider yet another type of reciprocity failure: one that is internal to the subject. It originates in discrepancies and incompatibilities between the subject's tradition and their current living and lived circumstances, between their inherited values and those later acquired, between their original and present identities. The neon lights spell out the names of the artist's failed lovers, physically highlighting clashing habituations of intimacy, queerness and religion. The calligraphed phonetic transcriptions of non-Muslim forenames into Arabic serve as an attempt to counteract long-established translative power dynamics, wherein Arabic text is translated for Western audiences, while many Arabic-speakers are expected to learn Western languages in order to consume

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Western text. Layadi-Marfouk's works present strategies to intervene into the psychosexual afterlife of colonialism, probing its linguistic and libidinal impulses. They invite us in, only to offer broken mirrors and outward stares.

Walid Layadi-Marfouk obtained his B.S.E. and certificate in the Program of Visual Arts from Princeton University; he is a recipient of the Louis Sudler Prize in the Arts (2017).

His work is held in several institutional collections, including the Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden, the French Institute of Marrakech, and the Princeton University permanent collection.

Previous exhibitions include RIAD - Lewis Center for the Arts (Princeton, 2017), RIAD - French Consulate (Marrakech, 2018), the 1-54 African Contemporary Art Fair (Marrakech, 2018), AFRICA IS NO ISLAND - Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (Marrakech, 2018), Second Generations – U.N. General Assembly (New York, 2018), and No Commission at the Dean Collection (Miami, 2018).

rec·i·proc·i·ty fail·ure  
noun

1 [*photography*] failure of an emulsion to follow the principle that the rate of darkening is constant for a given product of light intensity and exposure time, typically at very low light intensities and very long exposure times.

2 [*culture wars, colonialism*] failure of a dominant (colonial) culture to provide adequate platforms for a non-dominant (colonized) culture to flourish on its own terms, often due to vestigial colonial dynamics within institutions.

3 [*psychology, intersectionality*] failure of a multi-cultural subject to reconcile inherited traditions with present living circumstances; failure to maintain internal coherence in adhering to mutually exclusive sets of values.