

Asad Faulwell in Art Forum
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ARTFORUM

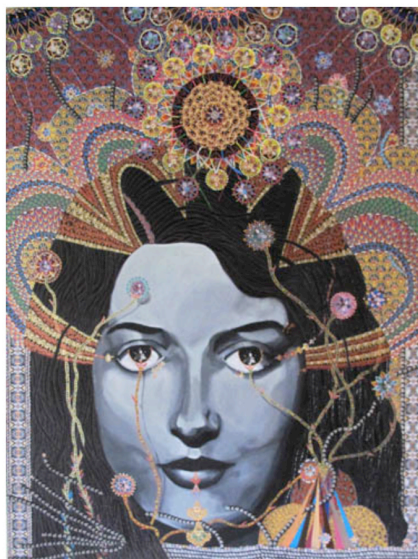
Asad Faulwell

KRAVETS / WEHBY

521 West 21st

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Algerian women have served as muses for artists as diverse as [Eugène Delacroix](#), [Pablo Picasso](#), and, more recently, [Lalla Essaydi](#). In his first New York solo exhibition, appropriately titled “*Les Femmes D’Alger*” (Women of Algeria), Los Angeles–based artist [Asad Faulwell](#) deifies the largely unsung female freedom fighters who struggled from 1954 to 1962 to end French occupation in the African nation. As Frantz Fanon writes so eloquently in his book *A Dying Colonialism* (1959), these women were often called upon to plant bombs in the French sections of cities because they could enter without detection if wearing European dress.



In his painting *Les Femmes D’Alger 3*, 2011, the starkly rendered black-and-white face of one of these activists, [Djamila Bouhired](#), stares out at the viewer and dominates the canvas, while thin bands of color and decorative motifs flow out from her eyes and connect to an intricately drawn background of florid shapes and patterns. The union of the somber portrait and these latter forms—reminiscent of the 1970s Pattern and Decoration movement, itself heavily influenced by traditional Moroccan textiles and Persian motifs—evokes both the exuberance of life and the specter of death associated with her heroic acts.

With *Les Femmes D’Alger*, 2010, Faulwell depicts a three-quarter-length portrait of [Zohra Drif](#), who was sentenced to twenty years in prison for her role in a bombing in 1957 but was eventually pardoned at the end of the war. Her strong, handsome face is rendered in a muted palette while colorful, decorative shapes and patterns cover her dress and eyes in a style evocative of [Gustav Klimt](#)’s, particularly his beautifully intriguing portraits of lone women. The balance between surface and psychological depth Faulwell achieves in the above pieces veers towards the purely decorative in *Danielle Minne*, 2010, and *Mujahidat #11*, 2011, paintings in which the portraits are completely hidden within floral and starburst shapes. These works might serve as metaphors for the manner in which these revolutionary women once seamlessly blended into the background.

— [Alpesh Kantilal Patel](#)