



20 Artists to Watch at The Armory Show

February 2017



Portrait of Achraf Touloub in Paris by Fred Lahache for Artsy.

Achraf Touloub

The year 2017 is shaping up to be a pivotal one for Touloub, whose practice investigates the role of traditions in shaping the global society that we live in today. This week, the Moroccan, Paris-based artist shows work at Berlin- and Cluj-based gallery Plan B's booth at The Armory Show; and in May, he'll unveil a new project as part of the 57th Venice Biennale, "Viva Arte Viva," curated by the Centre Pompidou's Christine Macel.

At the fair, Plan B is showing three of Touloub's sprawling, copper ink drawings. From afar, the dense compositions may recall objects that have historically communicated information through logic-based methods: text-laden scrolls, labyrinthine elevation maps, or data visualizations. As one approaches the intricate and visually stunning works, however, their undulating forms unravel into a purely graphic image that denies any communication of information in a traditional sense.

Touloub is interested in the ways in which our rapid technological progress has devalued the methods—whether written words, symbols, or images—by which we have communicated information in the modern era. And he wants to propose an alternative way in which images can insert themselves into this degradation of meaning.

In works like his "sight scenario – horizon" series on view at the fair, he proposes that we might stop communicating by directly representing various concepts and instead communicate on a sensory level. The works aren't meant to be read or explained, but rather experienced.

Through that contemplative process, Touloub's work considers the possibility that images and symbols provide alternative, nimble methods of expression—ones that, perhaps, aren't as easily manipulated or misunderstood as language. As an artistic statement—or a method of dissecting today's world—it's an admirable effort.