

FELIX & SPEAR

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Press Release
March 22, 2023

HOURIA NIATI

'No To Torture'

31 Mar – 7 May 2023

Meet the artist: Sat 1st April 12-3pm

London, March 22, 2023 – Felix & Spear Gallery is delighted to present the complete five panel exhibition '*No To Torture*' made by Houria Niati in 1982.

In 1986, Richard Cork commented in *The Listener*:

"...to outright anger in Houria Niati's sequence of canvases, which take as their starting point Delacroix's *Women of Algiers*. Born in Algeria, she suffered brutal first-hand experience of the war of independence. Quite understandably, it has coloured her attitude towards the languorous image of passive, cosseted womanhood painted by Delacroix. In place of his seductive romanticism, she paints female nudes whose faces have been erased by fierce, slashing actions of the brush. The mood here is closer to Picasso's harshly distorted *Demoiselles d'Avignon* than to Delacroix and Niati's women bear the unmistakable marks of oppression and torture. But they also possess a resilience which implies a defiant determination to overcome the horrors of the past."

About Houria Niati

b.1948 Khemis Miliana, Algeria

Lives and works in London, England

Houria Niati was born in French Algeria in 1948 where she lived through the war of independence (1954-1962). Niati was 6 years old when she heard the first explosions launching the war which lasted 7 years and costing the lives of over one million Algerians resisting the French occupation. At the age of 12, Niati and three classmates were arrested and briefly jailed for painting anti-colonial graffiti and demonstrating against the French authorities. Her experiences during this time greatly influenced the art produced later in life. Niati's passion for art started at a young age. Following in the footsteps of her father, a self-taught landscape painter inspired by the art of the impressionists, she initially trained in Community Arts in Algiers. In 1977, Niati moved to London enrolling on a fine art course at Croydon College of Art, followed by an MA in Fine Art at Middlesex University. Niati has been exhibiting her work internationally since 1983. Her practice consists of painting, drawing, installation, video, digital art, poetry and singing performance. Niati is perhaps best known for her powerful painting installation *No To*

Torture (After Delacroix's *Women of Algiers*, 1834) made in 1982 and consisting of 5 large panels – this work played a major role in launching Niati's career in 1980s London. Niati was included in the 1983 exhibition *Five Black Women* (Sonia Boyce, Lubaina Himid, Claudette Johnson, Houria Niati and Veronica Ryan) organised by Lubaina Himid and held at the Africa Centre, London. Several of Niati's installations including *To Bring Water From The Fountain Has Nothing Romantic About It* explore oriental images and colonial postcards. These works have further established her reputation as an international artist whose work is intimately self-referential, documenting her own multicultural history. Family photos and snippets of the past are hidden behind a veil of whimsical calligraphy written in English, French and Arabic text and selected from the artist's own poetry, questioning the process of integration and what it means to live with several cultures simultaneously.

'*No To Torture*' installation has been exhibited in: The Whitechapel Gallery, CCCB Barcelona, Orangerie du Senat, Paris, Bedford Gallery in Atlanta, Nexus Contemporary Arts Centre in Atlanta, Wolson Galleries, Miami, Chicago Cultural Centre, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC, The Cartwright Hall Museum, Bradford, The Africa Centre, London, The Fruit Market Gallery, Edinburgh.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Gallery address: **Felix & Spear, 71 St. Mary's Road, London W5 5RG**

Exhibition Opening Hours: Wed – Fri 11.00 – 18.00, Sat - Sun 12.00 – 15.00

If you would like more information about this topic, please contact 020 8566 1574 / press@felixandspear.com

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