

BERNHEIM

EBECHO MUSLIMOVA

Flip In

BERNHEIM, London

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Bernheim is delighted to announce a new solo exhibition, 'Flip In' by Ebecho Muslimova, her first with the gallery in London. Following 'Fatebe Shadows', her first museum exhibition in Scandinavia at Kunsthall Stavanger, the show brings together a new body of large-scale paintings in which the world is turned, quite literally, on its head as well as a new body of work on textile and a wallpaper installation.

For more than fifteen years Muslimova has lived alongside Fatebe, the bug-eyed, rubber-limbed and gloriously shameless alter ego she first drew as a student at Cooper Union. Fatebe has milked herself, swallowed her own reflection, tumbled headfirst down gallery stairwells and pulled endless copies of herself out of her own body. Here she multiplies again, and this time the rooms she occupies are as unstable as she is. Ceilings become floors, a drinking glass becomes a prison, a gallery becomes a stage, and the stage turns its back on its audience.

The paintings are set in two very real places. One is the gallery itself: the eighteenth-century Mayfair townhouse at 1 New Burlington St, with its carved cornices, sash windows, ceiling roses and fire-exit signs. The other is the flat and studio Muslimova has made her own in Mexico. The two are meticulously rendered, then overrun, flooded and upended, so that the London white cube and the Mexican bedroom start to read as mirror images of one another. The exhibition takes its cue from Muslimova's *Down Tales* and from the long, mischievous history of the upside-down book: the topsy-turvy picture books of the late nineteenth century, in which a drawing read one way becomes another when the page is turned, and the reversible heads of Giuseppe Arcimboldo, where a bowl of vegetables flips into a gardener's face. These are images that refuse to sit still, that demand the viewer physically reorient themselves. Muslimova paints with the same double grammar. Every room here can be read from more than one side, and none of them promises solid ground.

Behind this lies an older tradition still: the *mundus inversus*, the world turned upside down. In the popular prints of early modern Europe, fish fly, oxen drive the plough and wives command the household; in Pieter Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559), the globe hangs inverted, its cross pointing to the ground. Mikhail Bakhtin read such inversions as the logic of carnival, a sanctioned suspension of order in which the lower body triumphs over the head. Fatebe has always been a carnival figure. In these paintings, the architecture finally joins in. And then there is Alice. Lewis Carroll's heroine falls down the rabbit hole, shrinks, swells, and steps through a mirror into a room that is identical and entirely wrong. Muslimova's paintings work the same way. Fatebe is too large for the jar, too many for the corridor, too slippery for the frame. Like John Tenniel's illustrations, the pictures hold a crisp, almost documentary realism and an absurd logic in perfect balance, and it is that tension, rather than any single joke, that makes them so unsettling and so funny.

In one painting, the gallery's own entrance hall becomes the scene of a stampede. The plaster mouldings and the staircase are drawn with an engraver's patience, each bead and egg-and-dart catching the light. Up the stairs and through a doorway surges a crowd of pale-blue Fatebes, smiling and interchangeable, while a single white Fatebe in a crimson opera glove kneels at the front. The house becomes a body and the crowd its circulation, a Mannerist pile-up worthy of Giulio Romano's collapsing *Sala dei Giganti*, retold as a comedy of manners. Elsewhere, a white-walled room with tall arched French windows is invaded by Fatebes on all fours, each scraping at a small mound on the floorboards. Around them runs a chain of paper dolls, cut by one Fatebe from a strip in her hands as she leans against the wall. On the far wall hangs a framed picture, itself another painting in the exhibition: a theatre workshop of ladders, pulleys and painted backdrops, peopled by tiny lavender figures. The device is as old as Velázquez's *Las Meninas* and Jan van Eyck's convex mirror, the painting within the painting, *mise en abyme*. Muslimova then paints that picture again at full scale, framed by tiled walls, a showerhead and a hanging pulley, so that the gallery, the bathroom and the backstage collapse into one another.

In a third work, the interior of the artist's Mexican apartment is lit like a stage set, its curtains pulled open. Contorted Fatebes hold up glass tabletops on their backs, a sly nod to Allen Jones's furniture sculptures, here returned to the woman who carries the weight. Along the apron of the stage, a frieze of baboons, a sacred animal of ancient Egypt, sits beside amphorae and vessels, as though the museum vitrine had been rolled out for the final bow. A fourth picture floods a room up to the window sills, the water seen in cross section like an aquarium, while snakes and paper cut-out figures cluster around a drain. In a fifth, a giant drinking glass sits upside down on a bed, trapping a drowsy Fatebe like an insect under a tumbler, as mosquitoes drift and a desk fan turns. A sixth stretches across a split field of pink, green and teal, an airport departure lounge where planes cruise past the glass, police officers give chase and a row of Fatebes slump across waiting-room benches, half bored, half ecstatic. The rooms are built with the precision of *trompe-l'oeil*, in a palette of sepia, verdigris and grey that recalls old photographs. Fatebe arrives in flat, fluid line, a creature of the cartoon and the comic strip, from Philip Guston's late hooded figures to the underground comix of the 1970s. The friction between these registers, between the illusion of depth and the honesty of the drawn line, is where the work lives. As in Maria Lassnig's body-awareness paintings, the body is felt from the inside before it is seen from the outside, and the room becomes its second skin.

What emerges is not escapism but a precise portrait of disorientation, the feeling of living between continents, between studio and showroom, between the self one presents and the self one carries. Muslimova turns the house upside down so that we might see it, and ourselves, from the right angle at last. Fatebe, as ever, is unbothered. She has always known that the world is upside down. Now the walls agree with her.

Ebecho Muslimova was born in (1984) Makhachkala, Dagestan, Muslimova received her BFA from Cooper Union in New York, NY in 2010. The artist currently lives and works in New York and Mexico City. Her recent solo shows include "Fatebe Shadows", Kunsthall Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway, "Fatebe Sunset Storage", Artlead Billboard Series, Ghent, Belgium Ebecho Muslimova & Maria Lassnig, Magenta Plains, New York, USA (2025) "Rumors" at Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brazil and "Whispers", Bernheim, Zürich, Switzerland (2024); "FOG" at Magenta Plains, New York (2023), "Fatebe Digest" at David Zwirner, London (2021), "Scenes in the Sublevel", The Drawing Center, New York. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel, CH, Lago Algo, Mexico City, MX; Goldsmiths CCA, London, UK; The Renaissance Society, USA and are represented in the collection of various museums, including Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C, ICA Miami, Miami, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Dallas Museum of Art and MAMCO, Geneva, among others.

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