

ARTFORUM



Soufiane Ababri, *Bedwork XLII*, 2018,
color pencil on paper, 47 1/2 x 47 1/2".

ISTANBUL

Soufiane Ababri

THE PILL®

Ayansaray Mahallesi Mürselpaşa Caddesi
181 Balat

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In Turkey's oil wrestlers, Soufiane Ababri finds the focus for an exhibition tackling Western representations of the Orient. In the Moroccan-born artist's "Bedwork Series," all works 2018, oil-slathered Turkish men attempt to overthrow one another, less agents of domination than floral figures defying the homoeroticizing gaze. Pink-cheeked men with fluid gender identities, the *pehlivans* nourish and pour olive oil on each other as Ababri's affectionate, colored pencil depictions turn masculinity on its head; the softhearted male bodies derive their power from acts of kindness, not the roughness attributed

to them by Orientalist fantasists.

Drawn while the artist lay in bed, the second part of "Bedwork Series" concerns a cluster of men in Turkish settings: They drink espresso on stools, cook pasta in a kitchen, sit naked on a mattress, smoke hookah, and pore over a book. These twenty-four images offer glimpses into the erotics of the mundane, exploring the lolling shiftlessness of the subjects. *Fleur Miraculeuse* comprises four ceramic statues portraying lower bodies of wrestlers as they perform *peşrev*, the dance-like warm-up movements in wrestling matches. The sculptures, scattered throughout the rooms, double as vases filled with tulips. The title references Jean Genet's prison memoirs, and the floral arrangements, dug into buff bodies, echo that writer's surreal dramas.

In the video installation *Memories of a Solitary Cruise*, a bulky man prepares coffee in the gallery's kitchen before changing into a wrestling singlet. He meticulously mops the floors with blue paint, contributing to the exhibition's production. Smearing rather than cleaning the floor, the performer paints a wavy sea beneath him so that, in their appreciation of Ababri's subtle portraits and scenes, the visitors themselves become cruisers.