

‘Objects’ by Hassan Sharif

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Insights, booth 3D 30

“Art is not made for understanding, it is made for feeling and emotion. I want the audience to add [to the work], to interpret in their own way...when someone comes to me and says ‘I like your work’ it means he has understood it.” Hassan Sharif, 2013

Hassan Sharif came of age during a formative period in the history of the United Arab Emirates. As he matured as an artist in the 1980s and 1990s he developed an oeuvre comprising myriad individual works that range from meticulously rendered works on paper to assemblages of cheap and widely available materials. Having studied art in London in the early 1980s Sharif was particularly drawn to British Constructivism, and theorist Kenneth Martin’s analysis of the movement’s “systematized constructive process governed by chance and order” catalysed his arbitrary yet systematic process.¹

Hassan Sharif’s various bodies of work are spread across four distinct categories:

Experiments represent the artist’s observations of banal objects and social environments. Photo documentation that scrutinizes the number of cars on a road, or the measurements in a ruler are representative of these works from the 1980s.

Performances are also from the eighties, and comprise quotidian actions performed in a particular setting. They are solitary acts as often as they are staged for small audiences.

Semi-Systems are sketches, drawings, paintings and wood reliefs inspired by arbitrary rules that incorporate chance and error toward uncertain results.

Sharif creates **Objects** via improvisation and randomness that generate continually evolving and failing systems. He constructs these objects from mass-produced materials made up of rubber, plastic and cloth that he twists and ties together into assemblages and piles using rudimentary techniques.

Among the works that will be exhibited is *Cotton*, which combines video with an object explicitly sharing Sharif's process. In the eight-minute video the artist grasps clumps of raw cotton, dips each handful into a bowl of glue, and then methodically builds a pile on his lap. His attentiveness to the task at hand masks the utter fecklessness of the project, which simply introduces a binding agent to turn one pile into another slightly modified pile. At the conclusion of this video Sharif slowly looks up and casts a satisfied glance at the camera man. As systematic as the linear video appears to be, it emerged out of the improvisational spirit of his Objects as he merely culled materials from around his studio. This gesture typifies the affective give and take between the artist, his materials, and his conceptual tools

Spoons and Copper Wire is an ironic imitation of the consumer process. The artist takes on the role of a mass producer by purchasing a large quantity of spoons, yet completely eliminates their function as a tool for eating. Instead he wraps the handles around wire and leaves the shallow heads exposed to remind us of the suggestive path it takes into and out of the mouth.

In the series entitled *Cotton Rope* Sharif takes the book as his medium, creating his own version of the artist book. His influence here lies in Arte Povera, and the publication 'Books by Artists' edited by Tim Guest and Germano Celant. In this work he pierces into the soft paper of hard cover school books, and weaves knots of black and white cotton rope through these holes. These books are not to be read or written in, instead he reconstructs them as art objects with organic forms.

Cardboard and Glue (2005) is the third iteration of an ongoing narrative of works comprising the same materials. The first one was produced for the seventh edition of the Sharjah Biennial, and it was intended to move throughout the city. He changed their configuration and placed them on roadsides and alongside moored boats. This

mobile work did not make it to the opening; it disappeared, likely mistaken for garbage and tossed away. Hassan's response was to acknowledge that the event of loss was in fact an aspect of the work. He decided to continue the series and to remake the original lost object. Unlike the original, each new *Cardboard and Glue* will find a destination: the second is in the collection of the Pompidou and the third will be shown in Art Basel Hong Kong.

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¹ Kolczynska, Paulina, 'Hassan Sharif A Rare Bloom in the Desert', Catherine David, ed. *Hassan Sharif: Works 1973-2011*. 2011, p. 36