

HASSAN SHARIF

Images

MARCH 05 – April 15, 2015



Please print details of this performance in your newspaper: Every few weeks, Hassan Sharif takes a taxi to the city limits of Dubai. He is dropped off alone and walks out a little way into the desert. For about half an hour, he talks to the desert about politics or art history. Afterwards, he walks back to the road, hails a cab and goes home.

Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde is pleased to present *Images*, a provocation from an arch-provocateur after more than 40 years of art-making. At a time when Sharif is being increasingly referred to as the ‘father (or even ‘grandfather’) of Emirati art’, Sharif challenges this with very new works that reject commonplace understandings of his practice.

Images does not glisten with the bright plastic heaps that the artist has become known for. Instead, we see reams of paper, air-rusted iron shapes and pages torn from a dictionary that scuttle up the walls or hang from the ceiling. The viewer is invited to explore a cave-like wall of papier-mâché encrusted toys, a crystalline stalactite of inkjet printouts, and a piece of elasticated cotton on canvas that begs an inquisitive hand.

If Sharif’s assemblages from the ‘80s onwards were a response to globalised consumerism, handing the unwanted surplus of mass production back to society as art, in *Images* he turns on the sheer abundance of imagery — printed graphics, reproducible photographs, garish cartoon characters — that surrounds us.

Glossy magazines are churned out month-to-month, low-resolution photographs can be printed and reprinted, streams of leaflets and brochures circulate that are designed to seduce us into the marketplace. Such a seemingly endless repetition

of imagery fascinates Sharif. He addresses this deluge with his own acts of over-ornamentation and repetition, whereby images are stripped of their inscribed meaning and turned into raw material to be stitched together, reconfigured and reclaimed as colour, line and shape.

Alongside this body of new work is a selection of Sharif’s cartoons, first published in the UAE’s magazines and newspapers in the 1970s and exhibited for the first time here. These satirical ink cartoons are a record of the enormous societal changes taking place in the UAE in its first decade of independence, but remain relevant as they wryly reflect on everything from the excesses of new money to labour, influence and greed. Some are even oddly prophetic of what was to come — in a drawing from 1977, two Emirati men stand waist-deep in the Gulf as fish frolic around them. “My friend, I urge you, buy this piece of sea,” says one of the men, “they will build an island here in two years!”

At a time of pronounced international interest around Sharif and his role in provoking conceptual art in the Gulf, *Images* is a discourse on desire, ubiquity and how repetition can become a transgressive act in itself. It is a show that reflects the artist’s insatiable appetite for all that convention deems unappealing, and his insistence that art begins from guilty pleasures.

Caption: Hassan Sharif, *Images No. 2*, 2014, paper and glue. Variable dimensions.

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