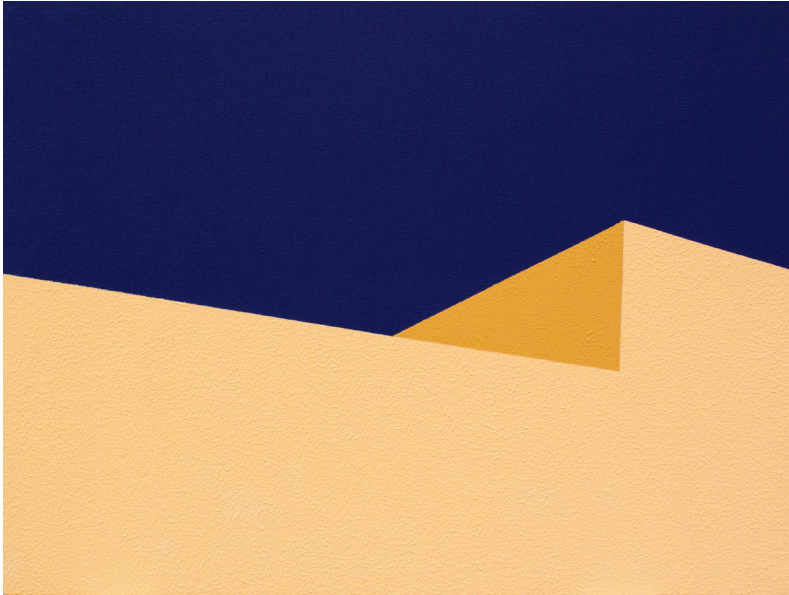


MOHAMMED KAZEM**A PRIME ACTIVITY**

17 September – 1 November



Neighbour No. B5, 2018, Acrylic on canvas board, 45.7 x 61 cm

Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde is pleased to announce Mohammed Kazem's third solo exhibition at the gallery, which focuses on his paintings – a relatively unknown aspect of his practice. Kazem has been painting since his late teens and early 20s, went on to win the first prize in painting at Muscat Youth Biennial in 1990 and loved the surface so much that he remained consciously aware to the inspiration coming from the medium itself.

He did not allow himself to be enslaved by a particular medium or a specific pigment, which is visible in his earlier series of intimate watercolours largely inspired by the atelier of the late fellow artist Hassan Sharif, in which Kazem would change the predominant colours on each work and create visible differences merely based on pigment experimentation. Hassan Sharif remarked that the young artist was remarkable for "dealing first and foremost with the paint and its colours, and not the scene and its objects." Materiality for Kazem is both an outcome and an inspiration: it is at once folded into the genesis of a work - the feel of objects in *Tongue* (1994), the bumpy paper of *Scratches* (1990 -), the squished wads of gum in *Kisses* (2017) —and the rough raised finish of outdoor wall coverings in his new series *Neighbours* (2018) - the texture marks that thread throughout many works.

In *Neighbours* (2018), Kazem renders flat paintings focusing onto the meeting lines of the bright coloured walls of his neighbourhood and the sky. Using the

same title as his 2006 collection of 14 photographs where clothes hang on a line set against a pristine blue sky, the photographs evoke the poetry of an ordinary and unremarkable scene that lies just outside the artist's window. At that time, Mohammed Kazem's neighbours are a household of migrant workers whose lives are marked by ephemeral traces; arguments in a foreign language, the smell of cooking and the rustle of cleaning. *Neighbours* captures a partial portrait of these unseen characters that exceeds their everyday conditions, pitching their aspirations into the endless imaginary of an infinite sky, or an abstract colour block painting. Kazem jokes about the process "I quickly photograph the kitschy aesthetics of the walls connecting each house in my neighbourhood and bring it back to the air-conditioned studio to work on it." He observed that for most traditional neighbourhoods in the UAE, refurbishing meant painting over an existing wall in vibrant colours. This led him to experiment with outdoor decorative painting techniques predominant in the region. "The process demands me to learn how to paint like a painter, not an artist." A wood relief imitating an exterior wall or a painting of a meticulously detailed air conditioner trace the ephemeral human connection.

In seemingly direct opposition to his minimal abstractions, is a new series entitled *Even the Shade Does not Belong to Them* (2018) executed with swashes of dark coloured acrylic and ink wash over the canvas in multiple layers allowing

Kazem to conceal the scene from the viewer to reveal only part of the composition through a veil of smoke. Kazem presents paintings in which elements of figurative art are abstracted and incorporated in his generally flat colour surfaces. They become quiet and contemplative, blurring the perception if we are looking at the work in terms of its materials and formal elements and not in subjective content. The new series intensely echoes *Window 2011-2012* (2011-12), a collection of 108 drawings on paper where Kazem captures spontaneous and unrepeatable moments of his extended environment. Just like in *Even the Shade Does not Belong to Them* (2018), *Window 2011-2012* (2011 – 2012) stems less from a desire to depict a scene than to seize an instant—a billboard message fleetingly glanced, a shadow on the sand, a passerby in a slogan-emblazoned uniform. The new works are hinged on their photographic predecessors: here, the drawings are actually traced using carbon paper from photos taken by Kazem. The in-frame subjects are oddly de-substantiated—only the shapes, colourless, dehumanized, interchangeable—remain. Yet when we piece together the fragments of both series into an individual narrative, we are left with the question of how much that hand has pre-determined our reading. Kazem purports to work outside of politics. But it is hard to walk away without feeling the sting of critique.

While painting remained a major aspect of Kazem's early practice, now more than 30 years later, he is still fascinated by collecting and documenting information about unimportant objects and traces of our present within a particular environment. In his monograph published in 2013, Hassan Sharif wrote, "The meaning or purpose of his [Kazem's] paintings lies in the life of the colours and the ways they can be put to use, not in the painted objects themselves."



Studio, 1993, Acrylic on paper, 40.5 x 30 cm

Artist's Biography

Mohammed Kazem (born 1969, Dubai) lives and works in Dubai. He has developed an artistic practice that encompasses video, photography and performance to find new ways of apprehending his environment and experiences. Throughout his practice, Kazem has tried to capture the un-capturable. From his own body and the objects of his quotidian to nature itself, Kazem senses what is unmeasurable, sometimes even un-seeable, and transfigures it into a visual work. Since the mid 1990s, he began scratching paper with the edge of a pair of scissors, where he lifts the surface of the paper creating monochrome braille-like networks of bumps, depressions and relief works on paper that represent sound and which he titles *Scratches on Paper*, *Sound of Angles*, *Sound of Light*, and *Sound of Objects*.

Kazem was a member of the Emirates Fine Arts Society early in his career and is acknowledged as one of the 'Five', an informal group of Emirati artists – including Hassan Sharif and Abdullah Al Saadi – at the vanguard of conceptual and interdisciplinary art practice. In 2012, he completed his Masters in Fine Art at the University of the Arts, Philadelphia. In recent years, he has participated in several group shows at the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (2017), Guggenheim New York (2016), the Yinchuan Biennale (2016), Sharjah Biennial (2015), Gwangju Museum of Art (2014), Fotofest Biennial in Houston (2014), Boghossian Foundation (2013), and Mori Art Museum (2012), amongst others. In 2013 he represented the UAE's National Pavilion at the Venice Biennale with an immersive video installation entitled *Walking on Water*, curated by Reem Fadda, and in 2015 he showcased works from the *Tongue* series at *1980 – Today: Exhibitions in the UAE*, curated by Hoor Al Qasimi. His works are held in the collections of the British Museum, London; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and New York; Mathaf, Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, Beijing; Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah; Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah and Vehbi Koç Foundation, Istanbul; among others.