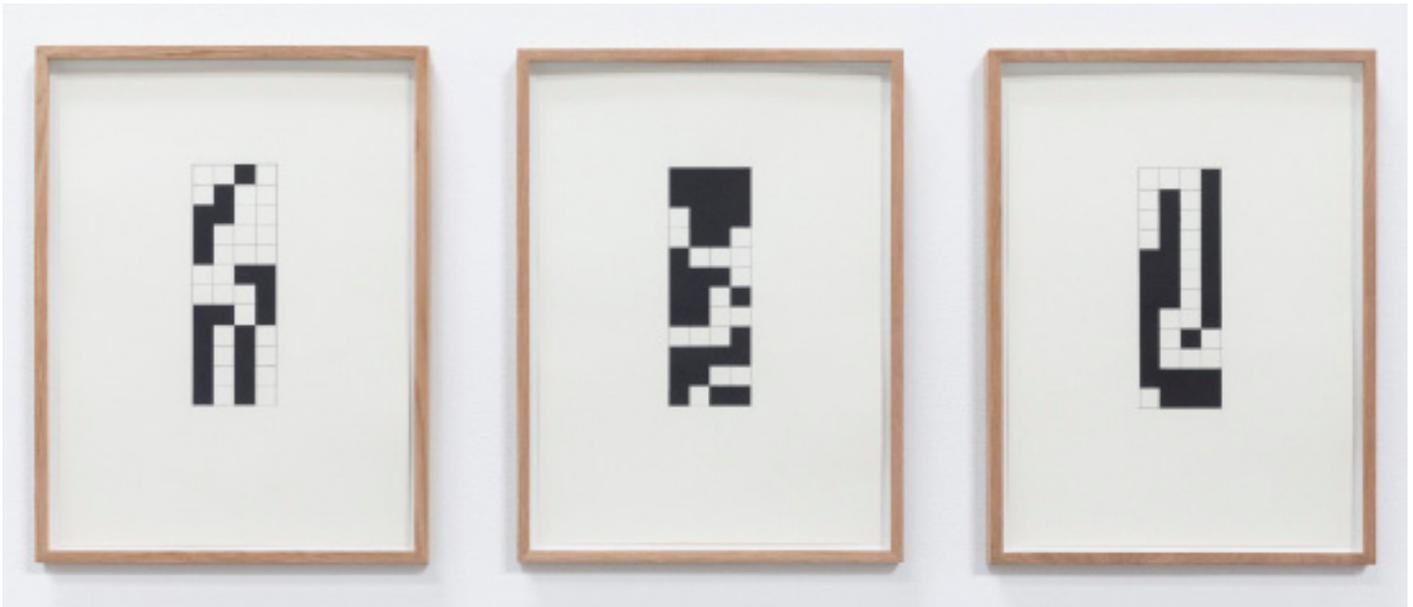


# 184 Nails

HASSAN SHARIF

Curated by Vikram Divecha

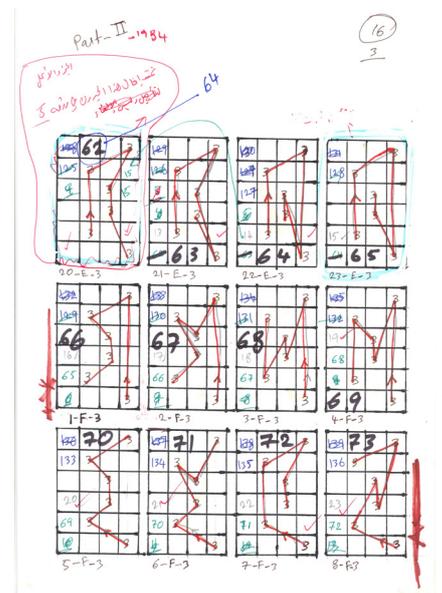
13 January - 26 February, 2022



Black and White Squares No 1,2,3 (2010), Set of 3 works

**184 Nails** is a non-static exhibition featuring works that will be replaced at the end of every week. Twenty-one works selected from Hassan Sharif's 'Semi-Systems' series will be rotated across the gallery walls at least twice during the seven-week exhibition run. Works not exhibited will be stored in a shelving unit in the gallery space until their return. 'Draft papers' from separate works will be exhibited in a continuous procession across the gallery walls. Respective 'artworks' will be exhibited alongside this chain of 'draft papers.' A random system determines the order of the works on the gallery walls.

Rope presented Sharif a constant invitation to tie a knot. Corrugated board, to repeatedly fold. Wire, to endlessly bend. Mathematics was another generative material for Hassan Sharif (1951-2016), which he exhausted to create his 'Semi-Systems' series. These seminal works were produced in two phases. Beginning in 1982 at The Byam Shaw School of Art, London where Sharif was a graduate student, and continuing in Dubai until 1985 after Sharif had returned home. He returned to 'Semi-Systems' in 2006 and continued expanding this series for a decade until his demise in 2016. The Semi-System works often comprise two elements, the 'draft papers', and the resultant 'artwork.' The draft papers are where the work initiates - Sharif would conduct mathematical exercises on inexpensive A4 paper to search for a formula, which would then turn into a tool to explore the possible permutations. Utilizing numbers or numerals to count, measure or move, Sharif studiously applied himself as a way to seemingly abdicate himself from thought itself. A momentum and rhythm arise through the nature and behavior of the systems he invents: they begin to guide Sharif's hand and mind to arrange, order, group, sort and organize. Graphic shapes enter a synchronized choreography—lines begin to turn at sharp angles, rhomboids begin to swivel, cubes begin to stack up, numbers begin to shower. For his work titled *One 2 Four* (1984, reconstituted in 2007), Sharif generated fifty-two draft papers. These papers, when laid out in succession, conjure a storyboard of automated



One 2 Four (1984), Lost and reconstituted in 2007  
Set of 7 works and 52 draft papers  
One draft paper (1984)

thought, indicating scenes from the subconscious. Or are these images of exuberance, of Sharif bending, folding, twisting, but in his mind?

Sharif was constantly on the run. Evading arrest from stasis. Rummaging in search for autonomy. An autonomy of thought. Not to forget an autonomy from function for his selected materials, as well. This stasis-versus-movement dynamic materializes in *184 Nails* as the exhibition performs as a contradictory system. In the small exhibition space at the back of the gallery, non-exhibited works (waiting for their turn) will be stacked in a shelving unit, as if sitting in an archival repository. A conflicting format will be on display in the main gallery hall, where the works are thrown into a swirling state of restlessness. This shape-shifting action points at a proposal: can something new arise from the churning of this momentum? While Sharif's legacy is cemented, the question at stake is how his archive can be made available to generate new ideas. Can we reconsider Sharif's work as raw material instead? *184 Nails* acts as a trigger for new possibilities interdisciplinary short circuits have been made with different departments at American University of Sharjah. Two professors in architecture have identified a recurring fundamental absence in the Semi-Systems works, which has led them to investigate systemic interdependence. Based on the variations in Sharif's graphic numerals, an ethnomusicologist is attempting to dismantle a maqam ensemble to generate a serialism score. A mathematician is exhausting a Semi-Systems formula to push the limits of permutations in a quest for mathematical beauty. These inquiries will surface in the gallery, not as attempts to decode or commemorate Sharif's work, but as their own experiments. As Nietzsche would have argued, history is not an archive to be preserved. But a storehouse/baqala/bodega with an endless supply of material that needs to be ransacked to generate new meaning.

## About Hassan Sharif

Hassan Sharif (1951-2016) made a vital contribution to conceptual art and experimental practice in the Middle East through forty years of performance, installation, drawing, painting, and assemblage. Prior to leaving the UAE to study in London in 1979, Sharif gained attention for his cartoons published in the U-AE press—ironic, outspoken critiques of the rapid industrialisation of the Emirates and political deadlock of 1970s Arab Nationalism. As an artist, he rejected calligraphic abstraction, which was becoming the dominant discourse in the Middle East at that time, and pursued instead a pointedly contemporary vocabulary, drawing on the non-elitism and intermedia of Fluxus and the potential in British Constructionism's systemic processes of making.

In addition to his own practice, he also encouraged and supported several generations of artists in the Emirates. Sharif was a founding member of the Emirates Fine Arts Society (founded in 1980) and the Art Atelier in the Youth Theatre and Arts in Dubai. In 2007, he was one of the four artists to establish The Flying House, a Dubai institution for promoting contemporary Emirati artists. His works are held in the collections of the Sharjah Art Foundation; MAMCO, Geneva; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate, London; Guggenheim New York and Abu Dhabi; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah; M+ Museum, Hong Kong and Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Yinchuan, among others. In 2017, a major retrospective of his works, entitled *Hassan Sharif: I Am the Single Work Artist*, curated by Hoor Al Qasimi was held at Sharjah Art Foundation. This retrospective has travelled to the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin and the Malmö Konsthall, Malmö in 2020, and the musée d'art moderne et contemporain (MAMC), Saint-Étienne in 2021.

## About Vikram Divecha

Beirut-born, Mumbai-bred, Vikram Divecha is an artist based in Dubai. He holds an MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University and was a participant of the Whitney Museum's Independent Study program. Divecha's practice shifts between public art, site-specific interventions, installation, film, painting, drawing, photography and text. His practice raises questions about time, value and authorship by engaging people across urban and social spheres, and working with available material and space. His ambitious new 34:00 mins film *Dohrana* (2021) commissioned by Warehouse 421 continues his collaboration with Sharjah Municipality gardeners, displacing the romance of Urdu poetry, choreographic postures, movements and music with the ever-green aesthetics of public roundabouts and traffic islands. Divecha teaches as an Adjunct Professor at AUS (American University of Sharjah) in the College of Architecture, Art and Design. *184 Nails* is his first curatorial project.

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Images courtesy of the Estate of Hassan Sharif and Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde

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