



Rest

Mohammed Kazem and Vikram Divecha

27 February – 15 April, 2024

Gallery Isabelle is pleased to announce the upcoming duo exhibition, *Rest*, featuring the distinctive works of Dubai-based artists Mohammed Kazem and Vikram Divecha. The exhibition will run from February 27 to April 15, 2024.

Rest delves into the intricate relationship between labour, rest, and the ever-evolving urban landscape of the UAE. Echoing T.J. Clark's 20th century exploration of art in *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (1984), the exhibition navigates the historical debate surrounding art's reflection of social and economic life and the 'struggle of representation.'

Considering the dynamics of human existence, alternating between cycles of depletion and restoration, the exhibition highlights the vital role of rest in the perpetual movement of cities. Driven by the forces of capitalism, desire, and aspiration, cities rely on the labour that fuels them. *Rest* challenges societal norms that discourage rest, aiming to disrupt the prevailing narrative and explore possibilities on the other side of exhaustion.

Through their distinct perspectives, Mohammed Kazem and Vikram Divecha challenge conventional narratives surrounding the representation of labour in the UAE. Both artists examine how workers, in direct opposition to the dominant culture's desires and plans, reclaim their bodies and time. The systems in place often overburden labourers to increase profit: *Rest* serves as an outlier investigation and counternarrative. "The 'Dream' aspect of rest work is deeply tied to the metaphysical and spiritual. It is a time to be free from the confines of linear and grounded reality," says Tricia Hersey in *Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto*.

This exhibition manifests a subculture that holds space for the blossoming of resistance, healing work, and the urge to deprogram.



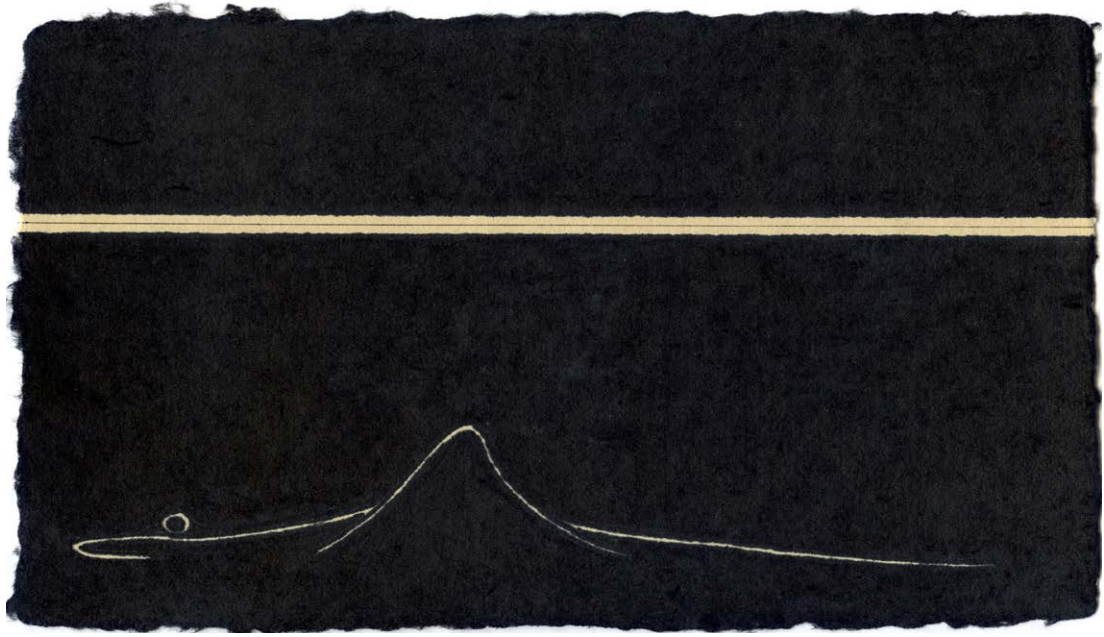
Mohammed Kazem, *Window* (2023)

Mohammed Kazem's Urban Narratives

Kazem's artistic journey unfolds through a series of paintings that capture the transient moments of labourers at rest. Skilfully using different lenses, he blurs the boundaries between focus and ambiguity, prompting viewers to question their perception of these non-productive yet profoundly significant periods. Kazem's commitment to revisiting urban transformation breathes life into scenes where labourers contemplate life during bus rides, napping under trees, or day-dreaming.

Kazem's recent works unmistakably resonate with his collection of 108 drawings on paper, *Window 2011-2012*, which traced scenes from photographs he has been taking around the UAE since 2003. These original photographs were accumulated by Kazem from trips around the seven Emirates, showing construction sites, busy highways, tired workers seated at the roadside, as well as the private and public social life of the country's globalised population. But Kazem's traced drawings lack colour, conveying a sense of anonymity and unnatural precision of line.

Similarly, in alignment with *Even the Shade Does not Belong to Them* (2018), in which Kazem painted the images of men in acrylic and washed them over in dark ink, his current paintings and drawings intentionally transcend the mere depiction of scenes, focusing on seizing instants. Kazem's new works purposefully straddle the line between abstraction and figuration. Figures are glimpsed, as if seen through a moving window or fading into the landscape, recreating the labourers' ever-present yet often unnoticed existence.



Vikram Divecha, *Resting Bodies (Island No.4)* (2024)

Vikram Divecha's Collaborative Explorations

Divecha's engagement with Sharjah's Municipal gardeners in projects like *Shaping Resistance* (2015), *Beej* (2017) and *Dohrana* (2021) marks a shift in agency, allowing these workers a moment of self-expression and visibility. For *Dohrana*, Divecha prolonged his collaboration by working on crafting Urdu poems, which led to the making of a short film.

The film scenes take place in the green landscaping sites interspersed in the UAE's highways and intersections. During weekends and break hours the migrant workforce flocks there to take a pause and unwind. Although not meant for public access, these 'sites' are claimed by the people of this city - giving them a new meaning beyond urban decoration 'sights.'

Divecha's *Resting Bodies* series, are studies based on sketches in those sites, observing how people rest, sleep, stretch their muscles, find comfort, and lounge. The resting silhouettes transform into 'models,' blurring the distinction between figures and a landscape of shapes. These shapes are sourced in Divecha's memory of driving around the city, accumulating a topography of traffic islands and maps of green spaces at road turns, filter lanes, and interchange exits.

The resting body is presented within a commotion of lines signifying not just the movement of city, traffic, and roads but the movement of capital and its constant demand to fuel the system with labour and energy. Dignity cloaks the pauses that these drawings articulate through by contrasting the incessant urban flux and the stillness of resting bodies.

Both Divecha and Kazem's final works transcend literal representation, morphing visible reality into non-figurative scenes or unfocused landscapes. They seek to visualise not just the visible world but the landscapes of the soul, merging what exists with the realms of the unexplored.

Artists' Biographies

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. The foundations of his work are informed by his training as a musician, and Kazem is deeply engaged with developing processes that can render transient phenomena, such as sound and light, in tangible terms. Often positioning himself within his work, Kazem responds to geographical location, materiality and the elements as a means to assert his subjectivity, particularly in relation to the rapid pace of modernisation in the Emirates since the country's founding.

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, Abdullah Al Saadi, Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim and Hussain Sharif – at the vanguard of conceptual and interdisciplinary art practice.

Vikram Divecha (born 1977, Beirut) is a Beirut-born, Mumbai-bred, artist and educator based in the UAE. He holds an MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University and was a participant of the Whitney Museum's Independent Study program. Divecha has exhibited at the 57th Venice Biennale (National Pavilion UAE), 13th Sharjah Biennial, and the Louvre Abu Dhabi. He currently teaches as an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Art and Art History at the New York University Abu Dhabi. Divecha's practice shifts between public art, site-specific interventions, installation, film, painting, drawing, photography and text.

Divecha challenges the nature and modes of artistic production - from shifting authorship to collaborators to opening up gaps within urban systems, the changes he initiates are capable of enduring well beyond the time/space framework of what is 'exhibited'. Through these projects, Divecha often returns to themes of transience, time, architecture, migration and labour.

For any additional information or press-related inquiries, feel free to reach out to Nada Forbes at nada@ivde.net. Images courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle, Dubai.

Kindly use the below link to find further images and information:
[Rest by Mohammed Kazem and Vikram Divecha](#)