

ISABELLE VAN DEN EYNDE GALLERY, DUBAI

OBJECTS AND SOUNDS

In Mohammed Kazem's current solo exhibition at Isabelle Van Den Eynde Gallery in Dubai, objects are enhanced through metaphorical and conceptual sounds. Rebecca Anne Proctor reports.



A series of scratches on white paper, sidewalk chewing gum stains and a video projecting a silent scene in the German town of Chemnitz quickly overtaken by the loud sounds of bells that distorts our perception of the quiet and still landscape before us. These images are among the works in Emirati artist Mohammed Kazem's recent solo exhibition 'Sound of Objects' at Isabelle Van Den Eynde Gallery in Dubai. At the heart of each of them is the idea of how simple external phenomena can be reinterpreted in new and imaginative ways. As renowned Emirati artist Hassan Sharif states in his 2013 essay, "Kazem makes subjectivity a subject in its own right: that is, he connects external phenomena to the imagination."

Kazem is one of the UAE's foremost contemporary artists. For over 30 years he has created ground breaking installation and performance artwork that prompts us to examine our sense of perception very much in the manner of the Conceptual Art movement. Kazem's mentor, and one who is referenced in the show, is Emirati artist Hassan Sharif. Similar to Kazem's, his work revolves around topics of urban transformation, the human body, environmental issues and social commentary. His work follows Sharif's in that it is focused around a series of experiments, the earliest being, and one which is one of the highlights of the exhibition, his series 'Scratches on Paper', which he began in 1990 and continues to develop. This show focuses on 24 works on paper created during Kazem's residency at the Watermill Center, New York, in 2014. Revealing a variety of endearing forms that the artist observed in the Watermill's vast collection, they reveal Indonesian masks, hand-carved bowls and African figurines, among other renderings. And they are made with the artist's technique of using a pair scissors scratched continuously over white paper. So monotonous are these scratches, one can almost hear the rhythm and continuous sound of Kazem as he was labouring away for hours on end to create the series of bumps, reliefs and depressions which appear onto the cottony paper. There's something painstakingly fragile about the resulting artworks; they are fruits of a determined manual labour and are also what the artist calls, in his own words, the 'sound' of the object. Indeed, the sound of the scissors scrapping away against the white paper resulted in what lies before the viewer. While there is now no sound attached to the artwork, sound was definitely a part of this process of artistic creation.

Without it the scratches would not have been there.

The show takes the visitor through pivotal recent works by the artist in a very fluid way; they seem, almost if by chance, to communicate with each other and lead one from one area to the next. From Kazem's most recent scratches which make up the major part of the works on show to the artist's 'Showering' installation of 1998 which was previously staged at the Sharjah Biennial and reconstituted in 2014, and features the aftermath of the artist's morning shower within a white basin with water, soap and a few black hairs alongside other earlier works such as 'Tongue' (1994) featuring a selection of photographs showing Kazem sticking his tongue into different textured objects found around his studio, the exhibition eloquently strikes a dialogue between the artist's past and present work. Other newer works of note include 'Elsewhere', a series of 2014 photographs showing lumps of blackened chewing gum which have been dropped and crushed on a city street. The artist likens them to kisses on the street by connecting these human traces by pink chalk lines to reimagine them as preserved 'kisses'. Nearby is a video showing a quiet scene of the German town of Chemnitz. We wait with earphones until loud bells break through the silence and change our perception of the otherwise silent scene.

"It was important for us to show how the playful, provocative and often bodily roots of Kazem's practice in the 1990s are still discernible in works created just this year," says the gallery's Artistic Director Christopher Lord. "With that in mind, this idea of desire and how Kazem is always wryly reaching towards an uncertain or inherently ungraspable thing in his work subtly unites these various periods – whether it's trying to 'scratch' this entirely subjective 'sound' of objects in the Watermill Center's collection, or recreating in photographs his childhood memory of being punished and having only his own feet for entertainment." The works are provocative reminders of the type of work that the artist was making during the nineties, its relevance today and importance for the development of an Emirati art history. At once provocative, physical and enlightening, in the midst of all of these artworks is the sound of Kazem scratching his scissors across the white paper. Continuous and determined, it offers the artist's presence and a glimpse into an artistic process that we otherwise cannot see. 'Sound of Objects' runs until 4 January 2015. ■ ivde.net

(Left) 'Kisses' (2014) (Courtesy of Isabelle Van Den Eynde Gallery)