



NOME

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REALMS OF THE HYPERREAL  
KHALED HAFEZ

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GLOGAUERSTR. 17

10999 BERLIN

N O M E G A L L E R Y . C O M

**TRIGGERING / NAILING / CUTTING:  
THE IDIOMATIC PRACTICE OF KHALED HAFEZ**

The image of three arrows pointing outwards from a central point, at 120-degree angles, is apt to visualize the dynamic work of Khaled Hafez. Each arrow of the artist's practice — painting, installation, and video — pulls in a different direction, and yet the equal force of each precise line of flight creates a central balance. Hafez draws from diverse reference points, which, though scattered, shine light upon each other: from the fifth-century painter Zeuxis to digital pixels, from Platonic solids to functional objects, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to the history of Egypt, the artist's country of origin — from its coup d'état in 1952, through the revolution of 2011–14, until today. In this exhibition, a new series of paintings with elements of collage, a sculptural installation, and a video work act as these three arrows, energized in different directions and yet working together as one.

\* \* \*

0° — 120°

Hafez's recent series of paintings, "Realms of Hyperreal", is based on the juxtaposition between the brushstroke and pixel. While the brushstroke is the most ancient action for the creation of paintings, the pixel is the youngest. Here the two encounter one another and become enmeshed, transforming the picture plane into a meeting of contradictions.

Echoing Martha Rosler's collages or those of John Heartfield, these works consist of a background of abstract pixilated landscapes, which in places merge with a more gestural rendering. On top of this bright mosaic base, the artist introduces images sourced mainly from magazine advertisements. The images are scanned, distorted, and manipulated in Photoshop, then enlarged from 100 to 900 percent and printed on archival acid-free paper. After they are delivered into reality by the machine, they are cut precisely with scissors and applied to the canvas with acrylic gel. The mainly monochrome palette of these cutouts refers to

photographic images, whether still or moving, from the histories of television and cinema.

In Hafez's words: "[Photography, cinema, and television] shaped the perception of the citizen from the beginning of the twentieth century till today [...] this allows me to mix fiction, cinema, and photographs with reality and real-life models — women from fashion magazines and male models from bodybuilding magazines. [...] Through this juxtaposition I attempt to break the barriers between fiction and reality, past and present; the ancient gods versus the models and celebrities of today; the sacred and the ephemeral, the consumable and the profane."

\* \* \*

120° — 240°

In the installation *Contaminated Belief* (2007), Hafez presents a specific but opaque space in which the notion of tool, prop, and sculpture coexist, reinforcing but also negating one another. Three glass vitrines sit atop pedestals draped with fabric in red, white, and black. Each vitrine contains an object cast in solid bronzed copper: a gun (red), a hammer (white), and a knife (black). These objects were previously props in the corresponding video *Revolution* (Liberty, Social Equity, Unity) (2006). The presentation of such objects of oppression addresses the 1952 coup d'état in Egypt, as well as their role in the histories of war and technology more widely. The three colors reflect the three stripes of the Egyptian flag, but also refer to other symbolisms, for instance the representation of prominent political positions of the twentieth century: the white of the Christian religious party, the red of communism, and the black of fascism. The use of copper brings a historical connection to the Middle East, while the museum-like display highlights how history is never objective but rather continuously edited by individuals and groups with specific agendas, subject to processes of revisionism and normalization.

Each object is iconic and rich with connotations. With regard to the gun, the word 'trigger' defines "a small device that releases a spring or catch and so sets off a mechanism, especially in order to fire a gun," whereas the verb 'to trigger' means "to cause

(an event or situation) to happen or exist, to provoke." Since its invention, the hammer has been used as a symbol for many actions: from the idiomatic "to nail something" — to secure something, to achieve something — to the Italian saying "tra l'incudine e il martello" ["between the hammer and the anvil"], which in English can be compared to the saying "between a rock and a hard place" — to be in a situation where one is faced with two equally difficult alternatives. This latter idea would be a good anticipation of the meaning behind Revolution (Liberty, Social Equity, Unity). Further, the hammer has become iconic of opposite actions: building or destroying, working or striking.

The knife meanwhile is perhaps the most versatile of this trio of objects. Consider its many types — dagger, sword, sickle, scimitar, blade — and its role in idioms such as "to put a knife to your throat" (Proverbs 23:2), or the Italian, "avere il coltello dalla parte del manico" [to carry the knife by its handle], which means "to have the upper hand." The knife defines who has power. Further, in relation to Hafez's practice and his affinity with the moving image, the 'cut' is central to filmmaking and the history of cinema.

\* \* \*

240° — 360° (0°)

Finally, the video Revolution (Liberty, Social Equity, Unity) is based on the time period 1952—2011, from the Egyptian coup d'état to the Arab Spring. The work is an ode to broken promises. Again it operates in threes: there are three scenes, three characters (played by one actor), three outfits, three actions, three transformations; there is a before, a during, and an after.

In the first scene, the character appears in military uniform, gun in hand, representing the army's leadership and their confidence in saving Egypt from the oppressions of colonialism. In the second scene, the character appears as a slick businessman, suit and tie, hammering nails into the table; he is nailing deals — a sign of capitalist prosperity and the apparent freedom of business. In the third scene the character appears in traditional Muslim clothes,

and is caught decapitating blonde Barbie dolls with a satour, the traditional Egyptian butcher's blade for cutting chunks of raw meat — an act that refers to the extreme Islamist direction the country took after the fall of Mubarak's regime.

The exhibition as a whole could thus be interpreted as a triptych of these three works, and two of this triptych's parts, Contaminated Belief and Revolution, are triptychs in themselves, with the second work derived from the third. A triple action is always at play.

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Through this multifaceted triptych structure, Khaled Hafez delivers images and objects at the core of the human experience. The paintings, sculpture, and video of this exhibition together open avenues of the viewer's thinking process. They trigger issues that are deeply connected to the symbolic and the notion of representation, whether this 'representation' is that of painting, photography, or indeed representative democracy. As paradoxical as it might seem, it is not through the inclusion of political subject matter, but rather through opacity of meaning — through the conception of structures that flicker from one possibility to its opposite — that Hafez's art acquires its true political status.

Nicola Trezzi

Nicola Trezzi (b. 1982, Italy) is an educator, exhibition maker, and writer based in Jaffa. From 2014 to 2017 he was the head of the MFA program at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design Jerusalem and prior to this position he was U.S. Editor at *Flash Art International*. In February 2018, Trezzi will assume the post of director and chief curator of the CCA Tel Aviv.

A R T W O R K S

*ONE GOD & ONE HATHUR, 2017*

Khaled Hafez  
Mixed media on canvas  
200 x 150 cm



*TWO GODS & ANGELS, 2017*

Khaled Hafez  
Mixed media on canvas  
200 x 120 cm



*SEKHMETS OF PARADISE, 2018*

Khaled Hafez  
Mixed media on canvas  
200 x 140 cm



*REALMS OF HYPERREAL 1, 2018*

Khaled Hafez  
Mixed media on canvas  
300 x 120 cm diptych



*REALMS OF HYPERREAL 2, 2018*

Khaled Hafez  
Mixed media on canvas  
300 x 120 cm diptych



*REALMS OF HYPERREAL 3, 2018*

Khaled Hafez  
Mixed media on canvas  
200x150cm



*CONTAMINATED BELIEF, 2007*

Khaled Hafez

Installation. Bronze elements of various dimensions



*MEMORY BOX, 2007*

Khaled Hafez  
Installation. Bronze elements of various dimensions





*REVOLUTION, 2006*

Khaled Hafez  
Single-Channel split screen video  
Hi-Def & mini-DV  
4 minutes





*ON NOISE, SOUND & SILENCE: THE VENICE COMPOSITE, 2013*

Khaled Hafez  
Single-Channel split screen video  
Hi-Def & mini-DV  
2 minutes 42 seconds







## KHALED HAFEZ

Khaled Hafez's work delves into the dialectics of collective memory and consumer culture. Through various media — painting, video, photography and installation — Hafez deconstructs the binary narratives propagated by mass media and disrupts representational dichotomies such as East/West, good/evil. Re-assembling appropriated pop, historical, and political imagery, the artist traces links between the icons and serial format of Pharaonic painting and modern comics. His practice produces an amalgam of visual alphabets that bridge Orient and Occident, and address how globalization and consumerism have altered Middle Eastern societies, to create aesthetic hybrids far beyond the stereotypes of the news.

The video installation *Mirror Sonata in Six Animated Movements* (2015) for the 56th Venice Biennale was the culmination of Hafez's excavation of Egyptian identity, combining hieroglyphic forms with superhero figures and emblems of warfare. His work has been exhibited at, among others: Venice Biennale (57th, 56th and 55th editions); 12th Cairo Biennale (2010); Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; British Museum, London; Hiroshima Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan; New Museum, NYC; Saatchi Gallery, London; MuHKA Museum of Art, Antwerp, Belgium; and Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany. Hafez has been Fulbright Fellow (2005) and Rockefeller Fellow (2009).









CREDITS

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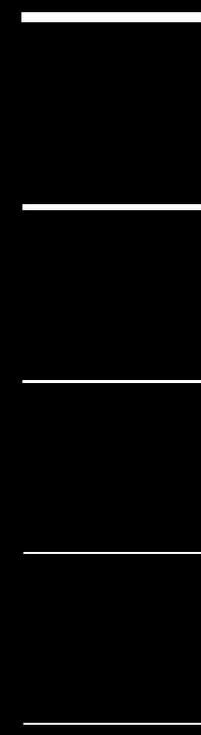
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