

Labyrinths - A solo show by Ali Fahmi

5 March - 30 April 2024

Gypsum is pleased to present *Labyrinths*, the gallery's first solo show of oil paintings on canvas by Egyptian painter Ali Fahmi.

In his practice, Fahmi is sensitive to his physical surroundings. His works - emanating from the environments in which he paints and the music he listens to - possess an affective, visceral quality. He takes on the role of artist and alchemist, shifting between organic, kinetic, and poetic sensibilities in his process of oil painting. His abstract forms, both delicate and zestful, transform into landscapes and physical bodies through the layers of his gestural strokes of paint.

Drawing on Willem De Kooning's synthesis of abstraction and figuration and Paul Cezanne's concrete expressions of sensation, Fahmi's bodies shape-shift through loose strokes and earthy tones and textures. He reimagines and reflects on preexisting narratives, transforming compositions into abstract forms. In *La Chasse aux Lions*, he translates a painting by Eugene Delacroix of the bodies of animals frantically spinning in a whirl, taking note of their charged gestures and movements.

Fahmi's canvasses involve a laborious, traditional method of oil painting which utilizes a combination of non-synthetic materials and pigments. He starts by pinning unstretched linen directly onto the wall on which he paints. To prime his canvases, he soaks and melts rabbit glue, made of skin and cartilage, which he layers onto his linen. His gesso is then produced through a mixing of rabbit skin glue, zinc powder, calcium carbonate, and a portion of linseed oil – an oil he transforms from the raw material by washing and letting it oxidize for an extended period of time. Fahmi even makes some of his own oil paints using his linseed oil and natural pigments, which he grinds with a glass pestle on a flat glass mortar.

Fahmi's practice and form deploy similar tensions to the alchemical production process; the recurring friction between speed and slowness, and physicality and poetry allows for his work to operate within liminal spaces, generating a body of work that is layered and tortuous.

Ali Fahmi (b. 1957, Cairo) is a self-taught Egyptian-Italian artist whose practice spans watercolor, etching, charcoal, graphite, and oil painting. He received his M.A. in High Energy Physics from Brown University in 1982, before moving to Paris in 1987 for a year. In Paris, he began experimenting with watercolor and oil painting, studying the works of Henri Matisse, Paul Cezanne, Delacroix, Rubens, Wassily Kandinsky, and Willem De Kooning, and remaining influenced by the music of composers Pierre Boulez, Arnold Schoenberg, Bob Dylan, and Metallica. Fahmi returned to Cairo in 1988, where he embarked on his artistic practice alongside running his organic banana farm, Balaika, which utilizes biodynamic farming methods. His last solo show, *Scattered*, took place in 2019, in downtown Cairo and was curated by Sama Waly. Fahmi is based between Cairo, Fayoum and London.