

To Mend Is to Shatter

A solo show by Yasmine El Meleegy

16 February - 31 March 2023

Gypsum is pleased to present "To Mend Is to Shatter", the gallery's first solo show by Yasmine El Meleegy presenting her newest body of mosaic-like works, which engage with the legacy of late Egyptian sculptor Fathy Mahmoud.

Like El Meleegy – whose practice has been concerned with the repair of personal domestic objects and restoration on a larger scale – Fathy Mahmoud situates his practice at the interstice between private, and public domains. He was commissioned to produce monumental public sculptures and murals in Cairo and Alexandria, while also establishing a porcelain factory whose dinnerware sets have become ubiquitous in Egyptian homes. These objects were the vehicle through which Mahmoud sought to make art accessible to the masses, an ideal he espoused in keeping with the zeitgeist of the post-monarchist Egyptian state.

Using shattered remains from Mahmoud's porcelain range, El Meleegy constructs artworks that reprise gestures and motifs from his works, piecing images and stories from her memory into Mahmoud's depictions of the social and political upheavals of the time. Foregoing the distinction between the dinnerware's functionality and its value as an art object, El Meleegy's reliefs blur the line between grand national narratives, and the minutiae of our lived experience.

El Meleegy's process is connected to violence and its traces. It manifests in the act of her shattering of Mahmoud's porcelain, only to piece the shards back together again. It finds its echoes in the narratives behind some of Mahmoud's most celebrated works, which commemorate the country's nationalist struggle for independence. El Meleegy subsumes this brutal historic moment within her work, presenting destruction as an act of repair.

El Meleegy's wider practice stems from a personal impulse to fix and mend, an act which both staves off, and confirms the certainty of loss. Approaching defunct, damaged household items with painstaking care, she seeks to restore an object's emotional and historic resonance by repairing its physicality. Through Mahmoud's oeuvre, the artist explores a moment of rupture that reconfigured systems of governance and class dynamics in Egypt.

The exhibition is accompanied by the artist's book "A Cup of Tea With Fathy Mahmoud," in which El Meleegy addresses 13 letters to the late sculptor, which act as record of her research into Mahmoud's life and practice.

This project was realized through a production grant by AFAC - Arab Fund for Arts and Culture.

Yasmine El Meleegy is a multidisciplinary artist and sculptor living and working in Cairo. She holds a BFA in Painting from Helwan University (2013), and a Diploma in Multimedia from Ecole Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Nimes (2014). El Meleegy was a resident at MASS Alexandria in 2016, and recently participated in the African Cultural Fund and 32bis's Summer Residency program in 2022. In Cairo, she has shown her work in a solo exhibition titled "Rites of Passage" at Townhouse Gallery in 2017, and carried out a performative intervention at Stephenson Pharmacy, "Scaffolding a Familiar Epoch" in 2021. She has also exhibited work with institutions including Medrar, 28 Curatorial Collective, DARB 1718, Art D'Egypte, SOMA Art Gallery, and Access Art Space. Her work has been featured in Marseille, New York, Thorsminde, Basel, Berlin, Yinchuan, Gwangju, Villorba, Venice, Milan, Jyväskylä, Cape Town, Sang, and Kolkata.