

## Software Upgrade

A group show with Zeina Aly, Castell Lanko, nasa4nasa, Omar El Sadek, Hend Samir, and Yazan El Zubi. Curated by Malak Helmy

25 September - 5 November 2023

Gypsum is pleased to present *Software Upgrade*, a group exhibition with works by Zeina Aly, Castell Lanko, nasa4nasa, Omar El Sadek, Hend Samir, Yazan El Zubi, and curated by Malak Helmy.

*Software Upgrade* proposes that the nature of the image shifted over the last decade in Egypt—more specifically, between 2014 and 2019. Conditions made it such that a reformatting of our collective relationship to images took place; that period saw a lapse in the semiotic order, and a move to thinking through other senses, often through the sonic. Within that our relationship to the image shifted. The artworks presented here each evidence a search for what an image is: how to perceive it, observe it, find it, and transcribe it onto and through various surfaces.

The exhibition takes its title from a text by Malak Helmy looking at the conditions in which that semiotic lapse and shift to the sonic occurred. In the text, which is included in the publication accompanying the show, the period is bracketed between two moments of global transmission: one being the last image of uprising—marking the end of one kind of visual and literary transmission of images from the local to the global—and the other being the Golden Pharaoh Mummy Parade, the return to a new order of image transmission. The time between is articulated as an unordered temporality. The text explores how the lapse affected a collective body's relationship to self and image. It suggests that cultural production moved from the visual and literary towards the sonic, and that through sound—perhaps a mode less tied to the production of meaning or legibility—one could listen for an image again.

In that moment of unordered temporality, when infrastructures were still not solidified in such a manner as to reorganize the collective body into one picture, other temporalities were able to take shape, make patterns, and create their own forms of unarticulated meaning, value, and possibility. Through acts of collective deep listening, an image could return whose status could be renewed. This image was less threatening, less heavy with meaning, less tied to any order of knowledge or history, including the Western art history long attached to image-making.

To write with those new images was to tell stories we did not quite yet know. As if with reorganized meanings, the images became a form of communication. Perhaps what they tell us now is the tale of another temporal-semiotic orders than the one's occupy now. Perhaps they point to something else that is yet to be articulated.

We see forms of writing throughout the works in this exhibition—be it through the body, the surface of a painting, the medium of paint itself, through photography, or through computer-generated images. We see acts of looking and transcribing a moment of seeing. At times the images appear as rebuses or mythic glyphs, at others they are simply textures or simulations of life around us being looked at a second time, to be deciphered anew.

The publication will be launched in October 2023 and is designed by Engy Aly. It will include a series of interviews with the artists, alongside the text "Software Upgrade" by Malak Helmy and images of the artwork.

\*Title adapted from composer Pauline Oliveros' *Software for People* (1984), in which she writes about deep listening and group composition.

**Zeina Aly** is a multidisciplinary artist based in Prague. She holds a BA in Visual Arts from the American University in Cairo (2012), and is currently an MA Fine Art candidate at Prague City University. Aly's work explores themes of collective memory, social alienation, and surveillance within the public and private sphere, featuring an interplay between the digital and material, a direct influence of her work as a musician. She has previously participated in selected institutions across Cairo and Alexandria, including MASS Alexandria, Dark 1719, Sharjah Art Gallery, and Beirut in Cairo, and has taken part in local and international residencies, including MASS Alexandria's residency program in 2013. Aly was awarded the Queer Artist Living Stipend from Mophradat in 2021.

**Castell Lanko** is a multidisciplinary, audio-visual artist whose work explores how virtual and artificial environments, computational infrastructure, and massively distributed networks can challenge the boundaries of our senses. Her work has been featured in group shows across Cairo, Guadeloupe, Wroclaw, Amman, Paris, Genova, Naples, Salerno, and Catania, and she has completed residencies at the Goethe-Institute and Cité Internationale des Arts. Lanko was awarded the Goethe-Institute "Quarantined" Project Fund (2020), Roznama 8's French Institute Prize (2021), and 1st Prize for the CLIMAX Project at Cri de Femmes Festival, Guadeloupe, France (2021). She currently lives and works in Cairo.

**nasa4nasa** is a Cairo-based dance collective, co-founded by dancers Noura Seif Hassanein and Salma AbdelSalam. Their work explores image-making and online presence as their ongoing dance practice, being housed primarily on Instagram. nasa4nasa's debut performance, SUASH, was featured in Next Festival and MDT in 2018, as well as in Maadi Sporting Club, Impulstanz [8:tension] Young Choreographer Series, and Festival de Marseille. They also previously performed in various local and international institutions and festivals, including Judson Church, New York, Gypsum Gallery, GypGwangju Biennale's Live Organs online commission, Rawabet Cairo, D-CAF Festival, Zurich Theater Spektakel, and Fondazione Fertinelli. nasa4nasa are former recipients of the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Mophradat's Consortium Fund, the GPS Global Practice Sharing | Movement Research Residency, and have been recently awarded the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture in 2023.

**Omar El Sadek** is an audiovisual artist specializing in electronic sound production, painting and animated visuals. He holds a BA in Fine Art and Experimental Media from Prague City University, and is currently an MA candidate at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. Sadek was selected on the roster of Shape+ Platform for 2022-2023 and is part of the Glory Affairs collective in Prague. His visual works have been previously exhibited at various audiovisual festivals, including Unsound Festival (2019), Lunchmeat Festival (2020), Rewire Festival (2022), and soon at Le Guess who Festival (2023). He has previously collaborated on audiovisual performances with artists Drew Mcdowall, ZULI, MSYLMA, Nadah El Shazly and Elvin Brand. Sadek released his debut musical album, Dowafar, in 2021 under his alias, "Qow", with Prague-based label, Genot Centre, and is currently working on an upcoming release, titled ELMosameh Sherine, with Cairo-based label, Irsh.

**Hend Samir** is an Egyptian painter based in Amsterdam. She holds a BA in Fine Art from Helwan University in Cairo, and has completed a residency at the Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam in 2022. Samir has widely exhibited her work in international shows in Europe, the United States and Egypt, and has recently shown a solo booth with Gypsum at Art Basel Statements in June 2023. Her work has been acquired by notable private and public collections, including the Rubell Museum in Miami and the Hammer Museum in LA. She is the winner of the 2021 Dutch Royal Award for Modern Painting.

**Yazan El Zubi** is a Moroccan-Jordanian artist, living and working between Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco. He holds a BA in Architectural Engineering and Environmental Design validated by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) program. Zubi uses different techniques of image making which channel the juxtaposition of archeological sites and objects with their counterpart of modern spaces and daily-life items. His exhibitions include group shows in Tangier, Cairo, Madrid, Amman, and Brussels, and he has previously participated in residencies at the Danish Institute in Cairo, Cairo (2021), ADEF Technological Camp, Alexandria (2019), Mophradat, Cairo (2016), MMAG Foundation, Amman (2019), Makan Makan Makan, Amman (2016), and Townhouse Gallery, Cairo (2014). Last year, Zubi taught a photography course at The American University in Cairo, and is currently an artist-in-residence at the MMAG Foundation, Amman.

**Malak Helmy** is an artist and writer based in Cairo. Spanning a variety of media, her practice traces changing relationships between place, nature, technology, and perception. She has shown her work in video, sculpture, text, and sound at Bozar, Brussels; Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham; Savvy Contemporary, Berlin; and in the Gwangju, EVA, and Mercosul biennials. She co-curated Meeting Points 8, "Both Sides of the Curtain" (2016-17), and co-edited the publication project "Emotional Architecture" (2012-15). Helmy's writing has appeared in the publication for the Cypriot Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale, *LEAP*, *Mada Masr*, *Bidoun*, and several anthologies published by Sternberg Press. She has received the Delfina Foundation Research Fellowship with Goldsmiths College as well as Mophradat's Temporary Spaces and Projects grant. Helmy was associate professor of practice in the Visual Arts department at the American University in Cairo in 2022-23.