

Software Upgrade - a group show curated by Malak Helmy
Artwork Descriptions

Zeina Aly, *Paint by Numbers: Domestic Simulacrum 1 and 2*, 2020

Acrylic on canvas, various dimensions.

In *Paint by Numbers*, a series of seven acrylic works on canvas, Zeina Aly breaks down the interior of her home into still lifes sectioned into numbers to be colored in. The paintings are a part of a larger project titled *Domestic Simulacrum* that speaks to concepts of value, circulation, and the location of art. The method of capture insists on a certain automation, the absolute mundane, and the most unmediated translation of the experience of the real. As if through this withdrawal of creativity we can finally see what lies before us. Below is the color key for the paint-by-numbers sets.

Colors 1–32

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. The color of laughter | 17. The color of depths of your normalcy |
| 2. The color of financial security | 18. The color of fear of the uncontrollable |
| 3. The color of emotional insecurities | 19. The color of your cat's tongue |
| 4. The color of your love handles | 20. The color of ideas that don't belong to you |
| 5. The color of caution | 21. The color of your settling |
| 6. The color of untold stories | 22. The color of your car |
| 7. The color of your carbon footprint | 23. The color of your inability to connect |
| 8. The color of status anxiety | 24. The color of your doormat |
| 9. The color of straightened hair | 25. The color of your grandmother's bathroom tiles |
| 10. The color of the hole in your shoe | 26. The color of your life's savings |
| 11. The color of emotional shortcomings | 27. The color of your summer holiday |
| 12. The color of dependence on material beauty | 28. The color of your blocked sinuses |
| 13. The color of your capitalistic tendencies | 29. The color of bad blood |
| 14. The color of the inability to be wrong | 30. The color of rotten fruit |
| 15. The color of your non-existent bank account | 31. The color of your overpriced education |
| 16. The color of your inability to relate to your peers | 32. The color of cognitive biases |

nasa4nasa, *SUASH (still from live performance)*, 2019

Vinyl, 180 x 300 cm

This image is a single frame taken from nasa4nasa's *SUASH*, a dance performance produced for and premiered at a squash court in Maadi Sports Club in 2019. In *SUASH*, nasa4nasa play with the lines and architecture of the court, the blood red color of costumes, and a strobe light and its effect on our perception. They explore movements embedded in our bodies through conversation that seems preverbal: conversation with each other as a duo, with the environment they're in, with soundtracks made for the work, and with the idea of the image. Their stage turns from a squash court into something that feels like a womb, or the intimacy of your vision when you close your eyes. And in it their dancing bodies turn into animal forms, your own limbs, a memory, a shadow, a pattern—as if transcribing a code through fast-moving frames and sequences for you to decipher or remember. When you look at nasa4nasa in the midst of performance, what you see before you and what you see in your mind blurs; watching dance transforms into questions of learning, feeling, reading, writing—processing fragments of your entire history.

Omar El Sadek, *Msylma AV and Li Kul Murad hijaa*, 2019

Oil pastel on paper, 21 x 29.7 cm, and HD film, 5.02 min

This body of work relates to Omar El Sadek's visuals for musical artist MSYLMA's live concert of his first album. On YouTube, the video included here, which accompanies one of the tracks, is described as "a manipulation of the Islamic epic *The Hamzanama Series* (1562) breaking a painting's main characteristic of silence using both sound and movement." As a counterpoint to the complex temporality of the track and to complement its lyrics, a fast sequence of details of the painted manuscripts repositions points of perception, conceptions of space, and modes of representation. Faces turn into pattern, gestures turn into signs, painting surfaces erode like pixels—blurring medium, time, languages, and traditions. The installation also includes the set of oil-pastel drawings on paper which served as visuals for a second track; they appear like flashing rebuses and preverbal signs emerging from the edge of language, hallucinated in the dark.

Yazan El Zubi, *Object of Civilization*, 2011–22

Inkjet prints, various dimensions

Object of Civilization is a catalogue of digital and film photographs taken by Yazan El Zubi between 2011 and 2022. It includes visual remnants of colonial-era sites and changing urban surfaces found when walking around the city, as well as textures from moments during travel or with friends. What unites these images is a series of questions that guides Yazan's practice: How and why are personal, inherited, or historical collections brought together? What motivates display in mini-museums, curiosity cabinets, or domestic arrangements? And what kind of histories and navigations can we see through them? The prints function as an alphabet, a collective vernacular of how we see our present. The flatness of an object against a background where our eyes struggles to read depth; the changing plasticity of our psyches; things floating through our everyday that have been abandoned by history but still shape us. As an antique cabinet of surfaces or an iconology of the hyperreal, *Object of Civilization* suggests that our present can be told through a quality of images.

Castell Lanko, *Cybernetic Emptiness*, 2021

HD film, 6.06 min

Cybernetic Emptiness is an audiovisual project engaging human identity, self-consciousness, virtual reality, communication, and control theory. The title points to what constitutes a human in the cyber void. The character in the video exists in many places and modes, between identity and our senses and the sonorous functionality of illusion. In this work, and in others she's made, Castell Lanko builds scenes and time-spaces that begin to appear from the edge of a darkness; you are not sure if you are looking into a data image bank, a consciousness, a past, or a future. It is a darkness from which semi-human forms begin to appear again along with the very formation of images. In this video, it is like the muscle of perception has strengthened and sees within an open field of time with an entirely new clarity, it turns to speak to us.

Hend Samir, *To be Razed*, 2023

Acrylic on canvas, 50 x 150 cm

Hend Samir begins by spreading wet paint on unstretched canvas, letting the medium perform its own mercurial qualities into different patterns and forms. From within it she finds spaces, characters, and storylines that she brings to the surface with small gestures and strokes. Hend's paintings don't always have a clear ground; figures can swirl in an almost anti-gravity like world. They have a kaleidoscopic quality that means our perception must shift planes and points of focus to comprehend where the picture is we're looking at. A static medium seems to defy its own laws, to invite you to move your head inside it and see different scenes buried in its layers.