

TAHA BELAL :: VACUUM FORMED

11 June– 10 July 2014

Gypsum Gallery is thrilled to present Vacuum Formed, the debut solo show for Cairo-based artist Taha Belal. The exhibition brings together a collection of old and new works that date back from 2008 to the present day. In Vacuum Formed, Belal carries on a formal investigation of language and images exchanged in our daily life. He uses mass-produced and disposable printed materials such as newspapers, magazines and wrapping paper to make neat, desirable artworks.

His earlier works rely heavily on Al-Ahram newspaper, the state-owned Egyptian daily that had nostalgic associations for the artist during his university years in the United States. In one series, Belal methodically transfers news images depicting the same subject from different perspectives next to each other. The repetition of the same event suggests that these images act as an abstraction - of a time and a place. Taken out of context and transferred onto another surface, they lose their topicality and their ostensible relationship to reality becomes altered.

Another set of works are sheets of newsprint from which every single word has been surgically cut out. Emptied of its content, the perforated sheet resembles a prized piece of lace rather than a discarded newspaper. Belal continues his foray with common materials in a sequence of works that test the limits of a basic desktop printer. He misuses ink cartridges to produce streaky variations of scanned book covers, pulling apart and putting together images to reveal the colors that were layered to form them.

In 2014, Belal developed an interest in kitschy wrapping paper, its inherent lack of value and its stylized modular patterns. Using sculptural techniques such as chiseling and scratching, he reproduces the abstracted shapes onto various materials such as large sheets of gypsum board, mirrors and coated paper. Belal's process subverts the glib authority and pervasiveness of this common printed matter, highlighting its constructedness. His artistic interventions are labour-intensive, delicate and spectral, yet his materials are rough and still bear errors: smudges, and the dirt and fingerprints on items that, like money, are passed through many hands.

Taha Belal has a BFA in Studio Art from Pennsylvania State University (2005) and an MFA from the California College of the Arts, San Francisco, USA. His work has been exhibited in IVAM, Valencia, Spain; MATHAF – Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha; MKG Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Germany; Museum for Photography, Braunschweig, Germany; SMAEK Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, Munich, Germany and Tartu Art Museum, Tartu, Estonia. He has also exhibited in a number of art galleries in San Francisco and the UK. In Egypt, he has shown his work at Townhouse Gallery in Cairo and Nile Sunset Annex (which Belal, Jenifer Evans and Hady Aboukamar founded). Nile Sunset Annex is a self-funded, independent art space that hosts local and international artist exhibitions and discussions, as well as publications. Taha Belal lives and works in Cairo.