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Egyptian artist Khaled Hafez's "A Temple for Extended Days" at new Ayyam Gallery Dubai

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Ayyam Gallery celebrated the opening of its new location in Dubai and the arrival of its newest artist, Khaled Hafez, with a solo exhibition of his painting and video work.

Multimedia artist Khaled Hafez's new exhibition "A Temple for Extended Days" is now on display until 14 January 2016 at Ayyam Gallery's new location in Dubai. The show shares the artist's interpretation of Egyptian iconography combined with and confronted by modern, recognisable mass media symbols, in search of a greater understanding of Egyptian identity.



Khaled Hafez
A Temple for Extended Days

16 November - 14 January

Khaled Hafez, "A Temple for Extended Days", installation view at Ayyam Gallery, Dubai, 2015. Left: Khaled Hafez, 'Tomb and Sonata II', 2010. Image courtesy Ayyam Gallery.

Khaled Hafez's (b. 1963, Cairo) solo exhibition at **Ayyam Gallery**, entitled "**A Temple for Extended Days**", explores a collision of worlds: the ancient and the modern. His monumental multi-panel paintings ask the viewer to consider the actual difference between reality and the artificiality that comprises our post-modern culture.

Hafez, who recently showed in **two official collateral exhibitions** at the **56th Venice Biennale**, reuses and recomposes media and advertising images that are ever present in the popular consciousness in an attempt at exploring dichotomies that exist in Egypt. Military and civilian figures meet in confrontation, while Egyptian goddesses – representative of female supremacy, towering over significantly smaller male figures – challenge sexism in modern Egyptian culture. Hafez is interested in movement in the literal and figurative sense, **explaining that**

In contemporary culture dominated by a century of Western film and animation, the similarity between these ancient and contemporary forms of the kinetic is intriguing to me, and a focal aspect of my research.



Khaled Hafez, 'Book of Flight', 2010. Image courtesy Ayyam Gallery.

Hafez's body of work is the result of his intellectual investigation into the original identity of things and people. He is fascinated by what French philosopher and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard called 'the third order of simulacra'. Simulacra are copies presenting things that no longer possess an original or never had an original in the first place.

Simulation is the re-performance of an operation of a system over time. Taken together, Baudrillard proffers that our modern society has replaced all reality and meaning with simulacra and that the human experience is not reality, but rather a simulation. Today's simulacra indicate that reality is irrelevant to the current understanding of our lives.



Khaled Hafez, 'Tomb Sonata in Three Military Movements', 2010, mixed media on canvas, 200 x 750 cm.

Image courtesy Ayyam Gallery.

Hafez's work seems to eschew simulation and hones in on the stories contained within the simulacra of our modern time. In this exhibition, the notion of the temple as the site where the profane becomes the sacred is pushed to the limit, further reinforcing a distance from the original. Anubis, the Egyptian god of the underworld, is recast as a body builder – a critique of our culture obsessed with body image. Women are recast as powerful Pharaonic figures reigning over animals and men, a reference to the ubiquity and power possessed by the West over other cultures.

Military snipers appear with their rifles ready to wage war within the temple site, where presumably there is no sign of conflict. Hafez's combination of these seemingly disparate characters into an assumed sacred space – but very much a contested site in which all of his figures are seeking power – suggests that another consequence of simulacra in the post-modern society is the destruction of that which is sacred.



Khaled Hafez, 'Tomb Sonata in Three Military Movements II', 2010. Image courtesy of Ayyam Gallery.

Hafez's work straddles a number of dichotomies, all in a continuous line towards exposing what is real and what is not. Along this trajectory, Hafez's aesthetic presentation of these dichotomies reveals them to be the very kind of constructed simulacra he seeks to deconstruct. As **Jessica Winegar** noted in her essay "**The Art of Dichotomy**",

The Anubis image alone navigates the binaries of life/death, good/evil, past/present, and animal/man. The god was supposed to protect souls from evil as they made their journey from life to death. Interestingly, Anubis later became the symbol of the primitivism of Egyptian thought to early Greeks and Romans; and then today the idea that a god could be an animal (especially a dog) is anathema to most Muslims and is sometimes used to draw distinctions between past and present, and between the ignorance of other religions vs. the enlightenment of Islam. In contrast, Pharaonic Egyptian symbols are today icons for Westerners (and many Egyptian artists) of Egypt's past greatness, whereas veiled women become icons for Egypt / Middle Eastern / Muslim backwardness. Thus, the same dichotomous system of images can have similar meanings to different groups of people throughout space and time.



Khaled Hafez, 'The A77a Project', 2009, video and installation. Image courtesy Ayyam Gallery.

Among the most poignant pieces in this show is his video and installation work entitled **The A77A Project: On Presidents and Superheroes** (2009). A continuation of his investigation into the origin of identity, Hafez acknowledges six elements – time, past and present, the superhero or the role model, the process of cultural recycling, contemporary visual imagery in their kinetic and static forms, and the sacred values versus the neo-consumer values of globalisation. These components serve as the foundation of his practice; they have come together to form a hybrid identity that has informed his oeuvre for the past three decades.



Khaled Hafez, 'The A77a Project', 2009, video and installation. Image courtesy Ayyam Gallery.

In this video, Hafez integrates the Egyptian god Anubis into modern day Cairo. Anubis interacts with city dwellers and serves as a documentation of the city of Cairo in the years right before Egypt's Arab Spring. Images of Cairo were gathered from numerous bloggers as well as Hafez, which he then stitched together to create the urban backdrop. This was a truly democratic process and thus a counter to censorship and the rigidity of intellectual property.



Khaled Hafez, 'Tomb Sonata in Three Military Movements' (detail), 2010, mixed media on canvas, 200 x 750 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Ayyam Gallery.

Khaled Hafez's work is the aesthetic output resulting from years of inquiry into the complex notion of Egyptian identity. As he explained **in a 2010 interview** with Heba ElKayal,

Whether in video or painting I tackle the same notions and elements that help me explore the concept. I explore through different aspects of this complex identity. I have a theory, I call the Big Mac Theory of Egyptian identity: Egypt is African, Middle Eastern, Arab-Islamic, Judo-Christian, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and before all: it is Ancient Egyptian as well. Each of those aspects is a strata, a horizontal "slice". It is a big mistake to consider only one layer to describe the Egyptian identity, and leave other layers. One layer is never sufficient.

Negarra A. Kudumu

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