



Ocula Magazine | Conversations | Artists

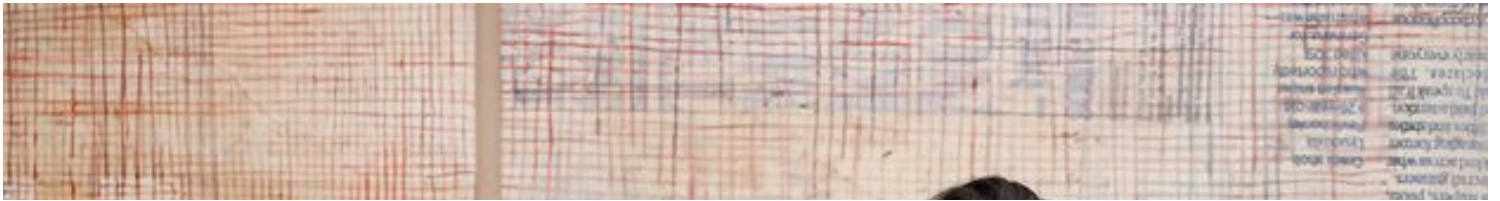
Mandy El-Sayegh [+ FOLLOW](#)

Mandy El-Sayegh: Productive Ambiguity

In Conversation with

[Claire Shea](#)

Hong Kong, 16 August 2019



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Mandy El-Sayegh. Photo: Abtin Eshraghi.

Moving across installation, painting, drawing, and writing, Malaysia-born and London-based artist Mandy El-Sayegh explores the political, social, and economic complexities of humanity, using a mosaic of information—from advertising slogans and pornographic imagery to newspaper articles—that she subjects to processes of layering, erasure, and obfuscation. This practice originates from an interest in part-to-whole relations between science

and philosophy, whereby fragmentation can lead to the creation of new meaning.

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concrete information and its contribution to new meaning was explored in *Cite Your Sources*, El-Sayegh's first solo exhibition in the U.K., at [Chisenhale Gallery](#) in London's East End (12 April–9 June 2019). The exhibition included the artist's ongoing 'Net Grid' series (2010–ongoing) —large-scale paintings of layered text and imagery that is interrupted by hand-painted grids as a literal reference to the net as catching information.

El-Sayegh's use of the wet-on-wet technique, of layering paint atop freshly painted surfaces, recalls the saturation of information—accentuated in this exhibition through the pasting of pages from the *Financial Times* across the floor and walls. Images and blocks of text once more approximated the grid, while overlaid calligraphy in Arabic from her father's practice, along with other abstracted information, pointed towards the mutability of language. The flesh-hued tone of the paper, meanwhile, recalls the body and its entanglement in the political landscape.



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Exhibition view: Mandy El-Sayegh, *Cite Your Sources*, Chisenhale Gallery, London (12 April–9 June 2019). Commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Andy Keate.

Against the backdrop of Hong Kong, El-Sayegh's most recent exhibition at Lehmann Maupin holds particular significance (*Dispersal*, 11 July–23 August 2019). The city's protests against a controversial legislative bill that would allow residents to be extradited to mainland China entered their tenth week on 12 August, with thousands of protestors occupying the airport over alleged police brutality on the Sunday. The selection of 'Net Grid' paintings on view in this exhibition are placed against a backdrop of pages from *South China Morning Post* pasted across the walls of one gallery.

El-Sayegh's choice of a local newspaper that is published in English addresses the frameworks of nationality, culture, and society that are prevalent in her practice. In an interview with *South China Morning Post* held after the opening of her show, El-Sayegh cites her heritage—being half Palestinian and half Malaysian Chinese—as resonating with Hong

Kong through her mother's connection with China, leading her to realise that she has 'the same tension, the same urge to split from a body'. 'In Hong Kong, it's two systems. In Palestine, it's the two-state solution. In Britain, it is leaving the body of Europe'.

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The following conversation is an edited, and structurally adjusted transcript of a public talk that took place between the artist and Para Site's deputy director Claire Shea ahead of the show's opening, traversing topics of the fragment, the body, and the mutability of language.



Exhibition view: Mandy El-Sayegh, *Dispersal*, Lehmann Maupin, Hong Kong (11 July–23 August 2019). Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul. Photo: Owen Wong.

CS:

Could you start by describing your show in Hong Kong at Lehmann Maupin, *Dispersal*?

MES:

Hong Kong spaces are smaller, so I was thinking about how to express this complexity in two gestures. In these two spaces that are really small, I was thinking about the spectrum of figuration to abstraction, so one space is very material, with latex on the floor. and the other space is more about painting and figuration.

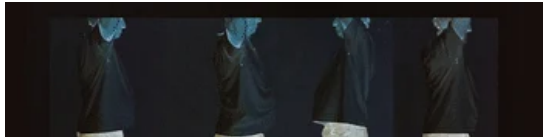
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