

## THE TRUTH ABOUT FICTION

31 January – 28 February 2018

**With Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, Bryony Dunne, Mahmoud Khaled, Basim Magdy, Mona Marzouk, Galila Nawar and Setareh Shahbazi.**

Gypsum is pleased to present *The Truth about Fiction*, a group exhibition of photographs, films and paintings that explores how the image acts as a receptacle for personal and political knowledge. The show delves into forms of informational exchange at official, informal and subliminal levels. The works draw on references from visual sources that are old and new: snapshots taken on trips, newspaper clippings of criminal cases, surveillance footage released online, museum displays and historic family crests. The artists handle their material using strategies like repetition, juxtaposition, layering, stripping, collage and montage. Produced over the span of the last ten years, these works provoke us to reconsider what we see in relation to feelings and beliefs. Building on tropes of truth, aesthetics and image production, these specific works highlight the pliability of images and their potential to amplify and diminish fact or fiction.

Harlem-based Palestinian duo, Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme's poignant single-channel-video *Only the Beloved Keeps our Secrets* (2016) is constructed around surveillance footage circulating online of the ambush and death of a teenage boy who crossed a 'separation fence' built by the Israeli military near Hebron while he and two friends were picking Akoob, an uncommon edible plant celebrated in Palestinian cuisine. The film brings together samples of research and original material that they have generated for over five years. Lyrical text, ambient sound and shaky images overlap with each other in a disjointed, commanding narrative. The film, in which celebration and destruction rub shoulders, taps into the power of technology and the Internet to offer a fertile environment for revising the past and writing the present.

Irish-born artist Bryony Dunne presents two works: a portrait and a series of photomontages that intersect in their reference to Cairo's Agricultural Museum. *Things Stay for a While* (2017) is a film portrait of Ahmed Ali Badawi, a writer, translator, researcher and self-described "eternal student" who lives in Cairo. The film shadows Ahmad inside his downtown apartment as he researches the evolution of bird wings and his treks through the streets of the city to the Agricultural Museum, which houses an array of taxidermied birds and other winged specimens.

*Theatre of Impositions*, features colourful cacti found at Cairo's annual Orman Botanical Garden exhibition superimposed on dioramas from the Agricultural Museum. Each frame holds layers of imposition: the museum display idealized pastoral scenes of Egypt during the colonial era, and the cacti heads that were injected with pigment and grafted to the rootstock of other cacti represent a futuristic fantasy of nature. The artist adds another imposition by painting subtle layers of pigment to highlight certain sections of the image and puncturing each print to mimic the needles of the cacti.

Trondheim-based Alexandrian artist Mahmoud Khaled's *Google Me / Duplicate Self-portrait* (2010) compares two screen shots of recordings of two public performances at precisely the same moment in the track. Khaled began this work in 2008 as a response to an invitation to deliver an artist talk in an international institution. Since then it has evolved into a body of work that explores the search for and enactment of an artistic self and its duplicates in the public domain. The piece takes as its point of departure Khaled's accidental discovery of Khaled Mahmoud, a popular London-based oriental dancer born in Cairo, who the artist found after trying to 'Google' his own name.

Alexandrian artist Mona Marzouk shows a single work from her series *Renovabitvr (Renewal)* (2016). *Renovabitvr (Renewal)* is inspired by the Medicis, a powerful family whose rule of Florence began in the fifteenth century and ended in the eighteenth. She is interested in their use of symbols to immortalize family identity. The Medicis present an example of how power is perpetuated through patronage of art and culture and the commitment to the advancement of knowledge and science. With a penetrating precision, Marzouk imaginatively reinterprets their iconography, drawing on colors, coats of arms, and mottos to create hard-edge, minimalist paintings.

Egyptian artist Galila Nawar's series of oil paintings entitled *Nesrine* are versions of unofficial mug shots. Taking after newspaper clippings, she replicates images of individuals that were taken upon arrest, photographed for news pieces without permission. The photographs of these individuals – yet unknown whether innocent or guilty – had been captured in moments of perplexity, somberness or distress to create narratives of crime that precede any semblance of due process. Nawar's serial paintings reproduce a type of moral ambiguity that is present with both, the accused and the act of visually freezing them in a state as such.

Basel-based Egyptian artist Basim Magdy's photo-based work *We're all Victims of our own Adopted Fantasies Here (Reprise)* (2017) borrows from the musical concept of the reprise, the repetition of a verse or part of a song to explore it differently from the original, altering its meaning while keeping its source. The title of the work is a sample from a phone conversation in his earlier work *The Everyday Ritual of Solitude Hatching Monkeys*. Originally shot on rolls of film that had been pickled in household chemicals by the artist, the resulting material presents a fictional image of reality, cast in dreamlike colors. This composite work imagines the female protagonist and the life she surrounds herself with.

*Something Always Falls* (2015) by Berlin-based Iranian artist Setareh Shahbazi is an introspective series of photomontages composed out of notes and observations in the form of found images and snapshots. Using digital manipulation, Shahbazi breaks down her images into visual elements, and seamlessly reorders what she extracts into new and mesmerizing visual compositions. In the absence of a linear narrative flow, the work weaves together shards of a story constructed around the logic of association.