

CODES OF COUPLING

Hassan Khan
Jonathas de Andrade
Mohamed Al-Bakeri
Mohammad Shawky Hassan
nasa4nasa

Curated by Mahmoud Khaled

“Codes of Coupling” is a group exhibition curated by gallery artist Mahmoud Khaled, taking the use of “coupling” bodies as a subject and an aesthetic tool to explore intimacy, gender power and societal codes through video, film, dance, audio and photographic installations.

The exhibition runs on a subjective desire to show and revisit works that communicate with Khaled’s own artistic consciousness. An experiment of relatability informs the choices – an ode to a repository of images, past works and ideas of others that converse with the curating artist’s own questions and concerns, as such. The exhibition toys with a longstanding strategy of euphemistic visualization – a system of symbolism, metaphors and cyphers that are meant to denote passion or indiscretions, like the image of a violently erupting fountain in a black and white film.

A methodical breakdown of the use of multiple bodies to explore the potentiality of sameness, and its aesthetic and emotional value, runs in parallel to works that depict “coupling” as a political act. “Sameness” can be used as a tool of assertion and examination of physical and geographical grids to test what two bodies can do if they are acting as one.

Khaled’s own art practice makes use of coded gestures and romantic allusions to speak of a deeply emotional and unsettling history of love, failure and authoritarianism. And questioning his tactics through other artists’ works, this exercise asks what artistic and sublime value is gained when a covert expression is necessary and what is lost in return?

In his film “it was related to me” (2011), Mohammad Shawky Hassan meditates on the complex relationship of two brothers, exploring the interplay of notions of brotherhood, patronage, masculinity, and sexuality. The film features iconic voiceovers sampled from popular television programs. They create a parallel stream of a moralistic consciousness and a sensibility that infuses and informs the majority of deep social interactions in an Egyptian context.

In “Between Men” (2019), Mohamed Al-Bakeri creates an abstracted representation of everyday social gestures between men in a city such as his hometown, Cairo. The coded body movements generate a visual language that is recognizable even when broken down to its smallest units. Performed in repetition, their impact, speed and duration reaffirm the existence of a system. Al-Bakeri’s research began with recording live footage and collecting sound samples on the street, public transportation and in coffee shops.

“Untitled Extracts” (2020) is a photographic installation by nasa4nasa where the duo uses different spaces as alternative stages to circulate dance. nasa4nasa use their bodies to create figurative compositions that highlight the theatricality of the space they occupy. And in other images, the focus is shifted towards the functionality of these space and their therapeutic purposes, where the bodies as performative tools become redundant. The duo’s photographs document the moments when the ephemerality of dance is frozen into a curated feed of images that highlight the visual aesthetic the collective has acquired. They use Instagram as an artistic platform and their practice is shaped by the limitations and rules it sets for them.

Also debuting the performance, "End of Times" (2020), nasa4nasa explore the limits of temporality when creating a state of togetherness, in which failure is inevitable, agency is questioned and neurons are mirrored. The two bodies attempt to choreograph the energy field produced through their synchronized movement and proximity and that makes possible the creation of a moving image out of their singularity. "End of Times" questions the insistence of finding connection and intimacy in relation to fleeting time. It is a yearning to slow down endings.

In revisiting his work "Jewel" (2010), Hassan Khan responds to the curator's request to unpack questions that ran through the video's 6-minute loop by producing commentary rather than a new artwork. "Jewel" brings together a deep-sea fish, original music and a dance performed by two men in a suspended space. While the choice of clothes and demeanor denotes different historical and social backgrounds, various sometimes conflicting registers are evoked over the duration of the piece; including intimacy, hostility and friendship amongst others. The work is an elusive "conversation" that is both organic and meticulously choreographed. In "No Comment" (2020), Khan creates a commentary on this performance as it might appear in mainstream media, by evoking (while avoiding imitation) the strategies and forms of delivery of a famous Egyptian TV presenter. This commentary is authored by Khan and performed by Andeel.

In Jonathas de Andrade's seminal work "2 em 1" (2 in 1, 2010), the artist uses the perfunctory logic of an instruction manual to point to a love that is forced to conceal itself within impersonal gestures and aesthetics. A process of building an intimate domestic unit through the apparently mechanical movements is an exercise in camouflage, persistence and the cumulative action of building a whole from two – a queer sensibility of survival.

Biographies

Encompassing installation, photography and video, **Jonathas de Andrade's** work often explores how collective codes of conduct and organization impinge on and shape other modes of being. His work has been shown in a number of international exhibitions, including Sharjah Biennial 13: Tamawuj (2017); Jonathas de Andrade: O Peixe, New Museum, New York (2017); 32nd Bienal de São Paulo (2016); Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2014); Histórias Mestiças, Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo (2014); 11th Dakar Biennale (2014); 12th Lyon Biennale (2013); The Ungovernables, New Museum Triennial, New York (2012); Sharjah Biennial 10 (2011); 12th Istanbul Biennial (2011); 29th Bienal de São Paulo (2010) and 7th Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2009). He was the recipient of the Special Prize, Future Generation Art Prize (2012) and a finalist for the Prêmio PIPA (2011). He has participated in residencies at Darat Al Funun, Amman; Gasworks, London and Townhouse Gallery, Cairo. Born in 1982 in Maceió, Brazil, de Andrade currently lives and works in Recife, Brazil.

Hassan Khan is an artist, musician and writer.

Mohamed Al-Bakeri holds a BA in Journalism, and recently completed the independent study program MASS Alexandria, founded by artist Wael Shawky. He is based in Cairo, Egypt.

nasa4nasa is a dance collective based in Cairo. It was co-founded by dancers Noura Seif Hassanein and Salma Abdel Salam in October 2016. Their debut performance SUASH premiered in November 2018 in support of Mophradat's Consortium Fund at both Next Festival in Belgium and A Fine Selection Confirmed at MDT, Stockholm. In April 2019, SUASH premiered in Cairo in the squash court it was realized for. In July 2019 SUASH was performed in Impulstanz in Vienna as part of the [8 tension] Young Choreographer Series. In September 2019 nasa4nasa performed their newest work Still Life at Fey Festival, Bourgne.

Mahmoud Khaled (b. 1982) studied Fine Arts at the Alexandria University in Egypt and Trondheim University in Norway. His work spans video, photography, sculpture, installation, sound and text. His solo shows include "A New Commission for an Old State" at Gypsum (2018) and Edith-Ruth-Haus, Oldenburg (2016); "Proposal for a Porn Company", Galpão VB | Associação Cultural Videobrasil, São Paulo (2016); "Painter on a Study Trip", Gypsum Gallery, Cairo (2016); "It's Never Too Late to Talk About Love", Nile Sunset Annex, Cairo (2014); "When Meanings Face Glossy Surfaces", Contemporary Image Collective, Cairo (2010) and "I Never Wanted to Be Alone in a Room", BALTIC Center for Contemporary Art, Gateshead (2010). His group exhibitions include "Maskulinitäten", Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn (2019); "A Group Exhibition", Witte de With, Rotterdam (2018); 15th Istanbul Biennale, (2017); 13th Sharjah Biennale, (2017); Terra Mediterranea – in Action, NiMAC Arts Center, Nicosia (2017); "Hips Don't Lie", Centre Pompidou, Malaga (2016); "Electronic Superhighway", Whitechapel Gallery, London (2016); "Complicity", Sultan Gallery, Kuwait (2016); Lofoten International Art Festival, Lofoten (2013) and the 9th Shanghai Biennale, Intercity Pavilions Project (2012). In 2012 Khaled was awarded the Videobrasil in Context Prize, in 2016 he was shortlisted for the 2016 Abraaj Art Prize. Khaled is a recipient of the DAAD fellowship for 2020.