

Mandy El-Sayegh
Protective Inscriptions
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Lehmann Maupin Seoul
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MANDY EL-SAYEGH, transliterated cut script, 2021 (detail), Oil and mixed media on silkscreened linen
57.48 x 61.42 inches, 146 x 156 cm. Photo by Damian Griffiths

Lehmann Maupin Seoul is pleased to present *Protective Inscriptions*, an exhibition of new work by London-based artist Mandy El-Sayegh, whose practice reflects the fractured nature of communication, knowledge, and identity. Adapting elements of psychoanalysis within a formal aesthetic, El-Sayegh investigates the body as a site of cultural rupture, linguistic entropy, and mutated meaning. "I'm interested in this idea of lost time and the impossibility of finding a moment of origin," states El-Sayegh, "My work builds fragmented histories into absurdist bodies and forms." The artist's first solo exhibition in Seoul, *Protective Inscriptions* will feature an immersive installation, combining painting and soundscape to activate a formless language of flesh and vibration.

For this exhibition, El-Sayegh has created a skin of unstretched canvases that wraps the walls of the gallery, overlaid with a new suite of Net-Grid paintings. A continuation of the artist's ongoing Net-Grid series (begun in 2013), this installation offers insight into the method of their making. Created through the assemblage of material and overlaid with hand-painted grids, these works represent the process of trapping, distilling, and retaining information, capturing both intended meaning and happenstance associations. Beneath each clean, schematic exterior lies a bruised surface that evokes wounded flesh. This dense material layering is echoed in the accompanying sound work, which reverberates throughout the space, breathing and vibrating in a low hum. Here, El-Sayegh's dense red grids, intense layers of color, and aural environment work in tandem to create a visceral experience that is both bodily and cerebral.

Drawing on the Buddhist idea of the nine stages of decomposition, El-Sayegh infuses each painting with interstices and flesh-like pigment that represent an ambiguous process, the direction of which (towards healing or towards decay) is deliberately obscured. Here, El-Sayegh's grid becomes a protective sheath, a girdle holding the damaged tissue of the body together. In one painting, ***transliterated cut script***, El-Sayegh draws on traditional Buddhist woodblock prints, which were

often printed on rice paper and worn on the body as a talisman for protection. This work is composed of layers of blue, red, and green pigment, combined with silk-screened images of a Buddhist print, the artist's father's calligraphy, Financial Times articles, muslin, and surgical gauze. A self-harm injury, referred to as dermatitis artefacta—a deliberate self-infliction of lesions—is carefully rendered, and is the only hand-painted element in **transliterated cut script** apart from the grid itself. The piece draws on a specific woodblock print that appears throughout, featuring the eight-armed Bodhisattva Mahapratishara in the center surrounded by the dharani (Buddhist mantra), 33 ritual objects of esoteric Buddhism, mudras, and Bodhisattvas on lotus pedestals.

The soundscape, *chalk*, is inspired by Buddha Machines—small portable chanting devices used to aid in prayer and meditation. A collaboration with composer Lily Oakes, *chalk* layers sounds from disparate sources. It pulses through the body, activating a vibration that engages the senses in the act of looking, observing, and experiencing. The work is composed of ambient and industrial sound, bells, electronic music, and chanting. The layering process in *chalk* echoes the material and historical layering of El-Sayegh's practice, in which she weaves together dislocated fragments from her own history, crafting them into an organic system, or body. The visual and auditory compositions in *Protective Inscriptions* deliberately confuse any defined order or interpretation. El-Sayegh leaves analysis open, remaining mindful of the potential for systems of categorization to tip over into prejudice or violence, or lead to the pathologization of difference. Indebted to the anti-taxonomical and the nonsensical, El-Sayegh's *Protective Inscriptions* creates a space where dominant modes of meaning-making can be broken down and reimagined.

About the Artist

Mandy El-Sayegh (born in 1985, Malaysia; lives in London) received her BFA in 2007 from the University of Westminster, London, followed by her MFA in painting in 2011 from the Royal College of Art, London. Solo exhibitions of El-Sayegh's work have been organized at the Sursock Museum, Beirut, Lebanon (2019); Bétonsalon, Paris, France (2019); Chisenhale Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2019); The Mistake Room, Guadalajara, Mexico (2018); and Carl Kostyál, London, United Kingdom (2017). She has been featured in various group exhibitions including ***Searching the Sky for Rain***, Sculpture Center, Long Island City, NY (2019); ***Ecologies of Darkness***, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, Germany (2019); ***Deterioro y Poder***, Instituto de Vision, Bogota, Colombia (2018); ***Lessons in Agronomy***, Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing, China (2017); ***Boundary Work***, Sharjah Biennial 13: Tamawuj, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2017); ***Room Services (with Oscar Murillo and Yutaka Sone)***, New York Art Book Fair at MoMA PS1, New York, NY (2016); ***For Pete's Sake***, Carl Kostyál, Stockholm, Sweden (2016); ***Elizabeth House***, Elizabeth House, London, United Kingdom (2011); ***Responsive Eye***, London Gallery West, London, United Kingdom (2011); and ***RCA Painting Degree Show***, Royal College of Art, London, United Kingdom (2011). El-Sayegh's work is in public and private collections, including Collection Nicoletta Fiorucci Russo, London; and Start Museum, Shanghai, China. In 2017 El-Sayegh was shortlisted for the Max Mara Art Prize for Women in collaboration with the Whitechapel Gallery, London and was invited to participate in the Chisenhale Gallery Commissions Programme 2017–19, supported by the LUMA Foundation.

About Lehmann Maupin

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996. The gallery represents a diverse range of contemporary artists and estates from around the world. Since inception, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies. This mission has resulted in historic first exhibitions in New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul. The gallery opened its

newest location in London in October 2020. For more information on the gallery and its artists, visit lehmannmaupin.com.

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