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**Reading is Making : Books and Boxes**

**A solo show by Hassan Sharif**

**September 2nd to October 7th, 2017**

“From the beginning, just by looking at works in my books, I was becoming aware of a different way of thinking and making art. I was always trying to find a way. I knew there was something new and different out there.”

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Hassan Sharif passed away on September 18th, 2016. His acute perception of the world along with his freedom of thought marked a generation of artists both from his native Middle East and on the international scene.

For the gallery's first exhibition of the artist's work after Sharif's passing, we will reexamine his ideas and work starting with the series *Books and Boxes* begun in 1982. The exhibition presents the work in its entirety and as it progresses, tracing a distinctive journey built around the series, including caricatures from the 1970s where fundamental themes that were first expressed appear later in different forms in other works including *Objects* and *Semi-Systems*.

With a certain skepticism, the satirical and provocative drawings from the 1970s address the everyday life of a society in flux and the new politics of Sharif's own country. His intellectual rigor led the artist to distance himself from the risks of pan-Arabism, and he quit drawing caricatures in 1979 to study art in the United Kingdom.

In London where he studied abstract geometry and applied calculus, Sharif developed what he would call his “Experimentations” using simple objects, and began experimenting with systemized structures and mathematical rules, while simultaneously introducing notions of error and chance. Dictionaries regularly appear as part of the repertoire both in form—alphabetization—and in substance to stay away from being dogmatic. As conceptual photography, the piece *Dictionary*, 1983, is the outcome of the artist's performative experiments. And in sculptural format *Dictionary*, 2012, defies any established classification or reference.

*Books and Boxes* is also the development of a narrative based on systems of symbols that turn into series of semi-systems (as if the entire body of work is founded on categorization, yet only exists thanks to muddling and noncompliance of the categories).

An object for Sharif becomes the foundation for creating a two-dimensional domain in grid format. At first there were a few pages stapled together featuring his experiments in systematic calculus (*Books and Boxes*, 1983). Elsewhere wood containers wrapped in strips of cut paper combine systemization and chance (*My Little Tiny Box*, 1983). Using plain materials found in everyday life - newspapers, cardboards - the sculptures are at times autobiographical and the product of simple and repetitive transformative actions.

Repetition is a kind of resistance to an economic and social reality, a witness to change in the artist's world. In opposition to the proliferation of things, Sharif proposes the duration of action.

Returning to the book format, the one containing knowledge -a book of untold stories or a visual and spatial next step in the ways of storytelling? Open or nearly shut, collected, transformed, or distorted, *Books and Boxes* at times says too much, is too lavish or too silent, yet highly restrained. *Books and Boxes* provokes desire, curiosity, sometimes even frustration. It's as though the plain practically archaic "boxes," direct descendants of Fluxus, possessed the intelligence to ask us to trust. Trust between audience and artwork is surely a reference to Duchamp, but it also conveys a different reality, one that is introspective and linked to a temporality that the work forces on us.

The exhibition highlights the dynamism of work through a profusion of vocabularies : conceptual in its performances and its recording of insignificant actions, minimalist in its repetition of subject and form, pop through the transformation of found objects, fluxus through its playful and detached temperament, modernist with its disobedience and disruptions, its self-awareness and disconnection.

But primarily, the exhibition wishes to pay tribute to a poetic formulation that is at once humanist, intimate and watchful.

Translation: Miles Hankin

**News:**

*Hassan Sharif : I Am The Single Work Artist*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, Nov 4, 2017 - Feb 3, 2018

*Viva Arte Viva*, 57th Venice Biennale, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, until Nov 26, 2017

*Life, A User's Manual*, Timisoara Art Encounters, Timisoara, Sept 30, - Nov 5, 2017