

VISUAL DETRITUS: THE PRACTICE OF MAHER DAWOUD

By: Khaled Hafez

Maher Dawoud, (born 1983) is a Cairo-based Egyptian artist. His practice spans the mediums of painting, installation and trans-medium interdisciplinary approaches. His work demonstrates a belief in the power of visual impressions to deliver a diversity of ideas.

Dawoud experiments with a wide range of materials and paint in quest for a surface expressive of wealthy visual texturing and layering. His interest in classical German stained glass is reflected in his practice and his academic interests. He utilizes glass and mosaic debris to create site-specific installations. His collaborative project *Can You See* (2015) represented Egypt at the 56th Venice Biennale's National Representation section, and showed his particular interest in large mosaic constructions, much reminiscent of the contemporary public art and of the globalization advertising culture. The work played with the notion of peace versus violence in conflict resolution.

Dawoud attempts always to juxtapose two opposing concepts: in his most recent project *White Headache*: he explores relationships of wealth versus power, and the relation between pain and emptiness. By using white spaces in their primary form, he renders great value to the notion of emptiness, without counting on external factors -be them colors or other material-- that are usually used to be build narrative. To Dawoud, pain is defined as a flow of empty white space, feeding into the idea of recreation. In his research for this project, the artist has created his preliminary sketches in the Sinai Desert, which he tries to bring to the project through contemplation on anxiety, and the relationship of the desert's vast expanse, and its possible reflection on the flow of pain.

Using mosaic tesserae to execute the project, a sense of playfulness swept in the in the process: an awakening of the child spirit and a gaming sense of joy.

Contrary to his early years in the practice with ceramic, glass and mosaic elements, during which he focused on sheer technique, Dawoud today randomly collects and constructs his narrative using additional primitive/basic and natural materials: shells from the beach, pieces of wood, stone, metal, ancient Egyptian symbols of baboons and scarabs as well as fractured plates and mugs. Like Mounir Cnaan' speedy exercises with cardboard, Dawoud places his elements without prior sketching or planning sometimes, moving fast in the building of his surfaces, in a quest for an authentic and honest subconscious expression of thoughts: those spontaneously coming to mind. Dawoud holds BFA, MFA and PhD in studio practice from Helwan University, Egypt.

OTHER

PhD dissertation: *The Employment of Mosaics in Installation Art: Analytical and Comparative Study.*

MFA dissertation: *Creative Values of the Linear Compositions in Classical German Stained Glass.*

ABOUT THE WRITER

Khaled Hafez is an Egyptian painter and video artist based in Cairo. Fluent in three languages (Arabic, English and French), he has been working on Egyptian issues echoing a more global context. Politically and socially engaged, his artworks are conceived as autopsies of a society torn between the local and the global. Looking back at his production at the turn of the millennium, one could say that Hafez is a visionary when he deconstructed all the contradictions of the Egyptian society and the inevitable clash that will occur sooner or later between three fundamental protagonists: the middle class, the fundamentalist and the military.



Astronomy news, 2015. Glass, smalti, ceramics, cement, detail



Experimental white Desert, 2015, Marbel, ceramics, smalti, glass, Detail.
 Experimental white Desert, 2015, Marbel, ceramics, smalti, glass, 40x40cm



Object, White pain, 2015, Gypsum, glass, Polyester, Detail



Object. White colors. 2015. Wood, Marble, ceramics, smalti, glass. Detail



Object. White Headache. 2015. Polyester. Detail