

Hazem El Mestikawy ***Alif Beh***

May 22, 5.30-7.30pm: Opening in the presence of the artist

May 23–July 22, 2017: Exhibition

Collection Focus 02

Project Space Art Jameel's second Collection Focus is dedicated to a major work by **Hazem El Mestikawy**. *Alif Beh* (2006-2009) is a sculptural installation that comprises 60 parts representing 30 Arabic letters based on the idea of negative and positive, suspended and placed on the floor. Typical of El Mestikawy's practice, the installation is made from cardboard, recycled paper, and glue, transforming these everyday materials into intricate, geometric sculptural shapes that are influenced by ancient Egyptian, Islamic and contemporary art and architecture.

Alif Beh is accompanied by a set of drawings, in part a study for the installation.

El Mestikawy cites both aesthetic and environmental reasons for his choice of material: "I love the construction, and I love the hollowness. I love that the work appears so solid and yet is very light and easy to pack and carry. I sometimes make huge exhibitions that come out of a very small box. I love the shock on curators' faces when I open my bag and start pulling the pieces out." (The artist quoted in *Egypt Today*.)

El Mestikawy's work is based on the principle of duality and oscillates between the positive and the negative, lightness and heaviness, and light and shadow. With flawless precision and a geometric complexity, El Mestikawy carefully overlaps and arranges different sections or modules and ultimately locks or glues them together – like a puzzle – to create a homogeneous unity. The artist draws on artistic and geometric form as well as aspects of his heritage, including the fundamental principle within Sufism of unity in multiplicity. Objects, letters and numbers repeat symmetrically to form patterns and provide the impression of infinity and ordered abstraction. The notion of meditative process, repetition and time, as also found in Islamic art and architecture and ancient Egyptian art, is a guiding principle.

Hazem El Mestikawy lives and works in Cairo and Alexandria. Born in Cairo in 1965, he holds a Bachelors in Art Education from the Sculpture department of Menya University. He has exhibited consistently since the 1990s: recent group shows include 'AGENDA', Alexandria Bibliotheca Gallery, Alexandria; 'Why Not?', Place of Arts, Cairo; 'Modulus', Oxyd Art Spaces, Winterthur, Switzerland; collection 'Shoes Or No Shoes', Museum Kruishoutem, Belgium; '3rd Kokaido Art Show', Iwate Prefecture Civic Centre, Morioka, Iwate, Japan; 'New Formalism', Bidoun at Art Dubai, UAE; 'Land of the Hyperreal' Contemporary Egyptian Art, Cuba; and collection of North Carolina Museum of Art, USA.

El Mestikawy's most recent solo shows took place at Art Talks Gallery, Cairo, and Galerie Atrium ed Arte, Vienna, Austria.

His works are held in the collection of the Museum of Egyptian Modern Art, Cairo, and the North Carolina Museum of Art, USA, among other institutions. *Patent Pattern* won the grand prize at the 13th Asia Art Biennale in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2008. In 2011, El Mestikawy was short-listed for the Jameel Prize.

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El Mestikawy also previously held the position of Director and Chief Curator of the MEMA Museum of Egyptian Modern Art; Head of the Jury for the 1st International Media Art Forum (2008); and member of the High Committee 11th Cairo International Biennial (2008).

Art Jameel is a not-for-profit organisation that supports artists and creative communities. Our programmes foster the role of the arts in building open, connected communities; at a time of flux and dramatic societal shifts, we see this role as more crucial than ever.

Art Jameel's current initiatives include running heritage arts schools and restoration programmes, plus a broad range of arts and educational initiatives for all ages. In 2018, we open the Jameel Arts Centre, a not-for-profit contemporary arts institution in Jadaf, Culture Village, Dubai.

Our model is collaborative: major institutional partners include the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Prince's School of Traditional Arts; locally, the foundation works with individuals and organisations to develop innovative programming that embraces both ancient and new technologies, and encourages entrepreneurship and the development of cultural networks.

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