

ART PROBE

ISSUE #32

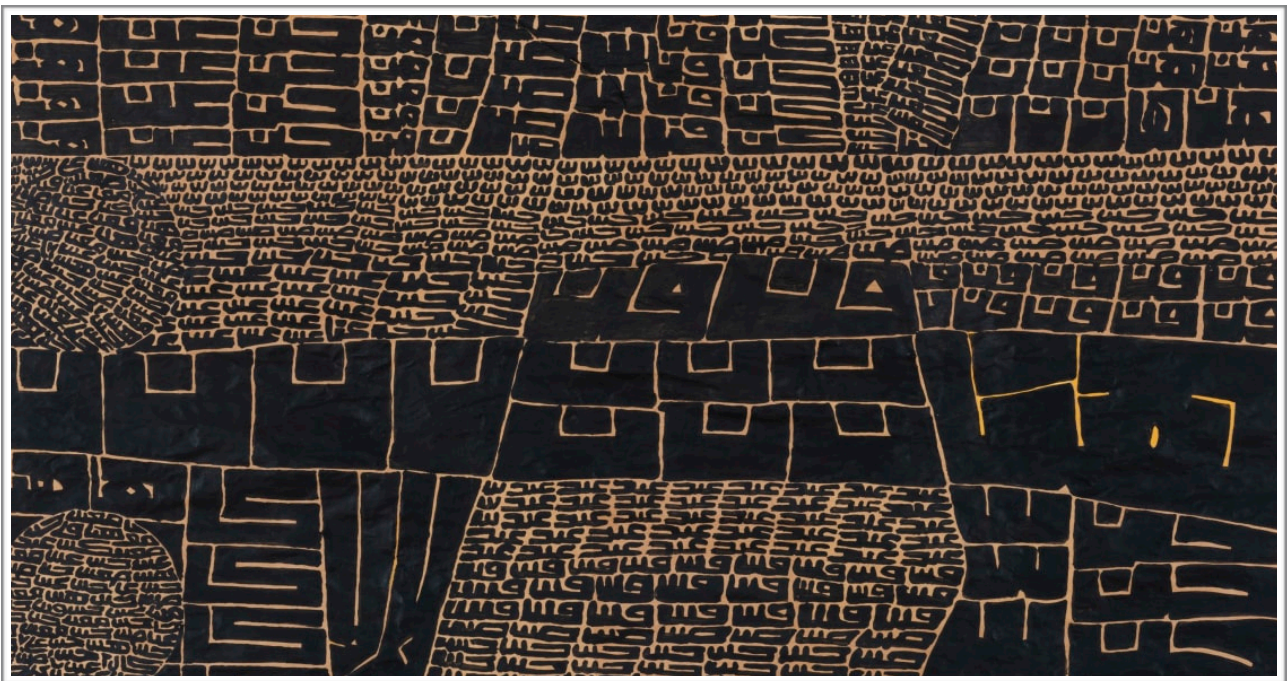
- Shristi Sainani

Exhibition : *Soul Taming*

Artist : *Fathi Hassan*

Venue : *Sulger-Buel Gallery (London, UK)*

Dates : *1 December 2020 - 31 July 2021*



Burhan (detail, 2020) Fathi Hassan

Source : Sulger-Buel Gallery

Born in Cairo, *Fathi Hasan (b.1957, Egypt)* is a visual artist and poet, who explores themes of vernacular language dissolved by historical colonisation. He invents Kufic-inspired scripts, plays with textures to venture in-between spaces of graphics and colour. *Hasan* (aka Akkij Fathi) works in the mediums of painting, sculpture and installation, occasionally involving written word; also performing spoken word. Curated by British-Libyan architect *Najlaa El-Ageli*, '*Soul Taming*' also exhibits a lyrical response to the contemporary *Covid-19* crisis, referring to post-Arab Spring period and the deconstruction of democracy.

'When I was searching for myself amongst the seasons of the clouds...Spring was conforming between golden ears of wheat... and he knew me....and he did not talk eagerly about me... Because he is confident in my knowledge without my signature... We spoke about when the moon will arrive... I used to tell him; You must go, you have an appointment... Just remember to send me peace with the winds...' (Fathi Hassan)

Favourites from the show 'Soul Taming' are:

1) The Four Seasons of the Basic Man, 2019



Source : Sulger-Buel Gallery

Graphically flamboyant, *The Four Seasons of the Basic Man* (2019) is a mixed media on paper measuring 195 x 145 cm. It is a complex montage, of cut-outs of inked palms, receipts — one of which reads : *Will you stay here this evening? Very Important. Rare.*, textiles, lace supporting vibrant, brawny text. The work seems like a mapping of the Arabic streets of *souq* (markets), women wearing henna, clad in delicate fabrics, shopping for necessities, commercial ads and tales of trade.

The Four Seasons of the Basic Man (2019) immediately transports one to the writings of Khalil Gibran :

*And before you leave the market place, see that no one has gone his way with empty hands
For the master spirit of the earth shall not sleep peacefully upon the wind till the needs of the least
of you are satisfied.*

2) Evolution Domain, 2020



Source : Sulger-Buel Gallery

The crocodile has a long standing history with Egypt. In ancient Egypt, *Sobek*, was God of crocodiles. Worshiping him meant protection and strength. To his worshipers, He created the Nile, and is seen as the God of fertility and rebirth, and the symbolic strength of the ruler of Egypt. In contemporary Arabic literature, we see the beast reincarnate in *Youssef Rakha's* book, *'The Crocodiles'*, which comments on what it means to be a poet in a place like Egypt. *Hasan*, through *'Evolution Domain (2020)'* explores the same subject, manifesting a 240 x 112 cm mixed media on paper. The reptile is seen, calmly treading on water unfurling a detailed scape of patterns and panache.

3) The Nubian, 2019



Source : Sulger-Buel Gallery

Today, the region of Nubia is split between Egypt and Sudan. Nubian heritage and its place in the Arab world is an important aspect of *Hasan's* work, the title of this piece stems from the same. The work fabricated as a mixed media on paper, evokes a Saharan earthiness. With the use of warm tones and intricacies of detail, it alludes to the geometries that are found in traditional textiles and *henna*, or suggestive of local microcosms — one can recognise arial view of dense, organic mud constructs of villages, checkered floor tiles, linear representatives of streets and roads. The focal point of the piece is a tan and stone strip, of the similar configuration as the Red Sea connecting Egypt and Sudan.

REFERENCES

Sulger-Buel Gallery:

Soul Taming. 2021. *Sulger-Buel Gallery*. <https://www.sulger-buel-gallery.com/exhibitions/21-soul-taming-fathi-hassan-curated-by-najlaa-el-ageli/>.