



Hassan Sharif

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April 7–May 14, 2016

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Weaving

Since 1982 when I felt there was a gap between my conventional painting and sculpture; I was intent on finding an alternative “work of art.” I also realized that my sarcastic outlook on life was the result of my engagement with political cartoons that were published in newspapers and magazines between 1970 and 1979. These illustrations offered a critique on the social and political condition [of the Emirates at the time]. During the same decade, I was also deeply influenced by contemporary art from Europe and the United States. My new intellectual and artistic theories derived from these influences and were aimed at criticizing a life that revolved around consumption in all forms and the negative impact this had on individuals and society’s psyche. I started to look at life with increasing skepticism, becoming more and more cynical by the day. It was this new world order, the slogan of which is “Adapt your aspirations to our ends—or else,” that particularly irritated me. The vulgar market mentality that flooded shops with consumer products had so infiltrated the minds of people to the point of controlling them as slaves of greedy corporate tycoons. The primary victims of this consumer system were people from places that the world’s major economic powers called ‘third world’ countries or the more politically correct ‘developing’ countries. In this context, I resorted to the idea of “redundant repetition” when producing my art. I would continuously engage with boring, recurring, and endless activities, a process that has become emblematic to my practice since 1982, and to this day is at its core.

Despite the fact that my works are based on a sequential and industrial mode of creativity, they ultimately demolish the repetitious autonomy of a mass-produced product. I inject my artworks with a realism that exposes this socio-political economic monster, allowing people a chance to recognize the danger of overindulgence in this form of negative consumption.

I have started producing works that, in contemporary visual arts terminology, are fittingly called mixed media art. I use whatever material is available to me, whether natural or synthetic, such as: cardboard boxes, cloth, paper, plastic, wood, and metal wires, most of which has already been used. I chose the term “weaving” because my process, which is at once repetitive and varied, requires neither strenuous physical activity nor unique skill. I stay away from complicated technology and I have no secrets, so this is actually something that anyone can do. All that is required is a pair of hands and minimal effort.

Simple as my artwork may seem, it presents a form of realism with the candid ability to mock societal problems, including: boring and oppressive preaching, social, political and economic property and the overbearing solemnity caused by superfluous socio-psychological disorders. It is not my goal to create a utopian society, for as they say “Utopia is where there is no space.” It is not my job to solve people’s problems; I might in fact be a source of problems. I am not a magician who pulls rabbits out of his hat. I am not out to shock the viewer.

The essence of localism is found on objects belonging to our heritage, a progressive position that has shifted, and inherently negates the dullness of overly used concepts like identity, language, customs, and traditions. The aim in challenging the preconceive understandings of these concepts is to give them complementary intellectual, visual, dynamic, and enjoyable qualities in order to encourage new sorts of questions. Why can’t we attempt to rediscover the spirit of ancient vocations, unlock their secrets and subtleties and regain the general spirit of a society long lost? My obsession with ancient handicraft is not based on a desire to promote tourism or attract the media. Rather, I want to nurture new ways out of the old and present these in a contemporary visual and artistic context. We can thus share ancient traditions with current and future generations on both visual and intellectual levels. It is a marriage of the old spirit with a new wave, a concept of succession in the field of multi-dimensional pluralistic visual arts that emphasizes a holistic balance between individual and collective existence, recording and reuniting us once and for all as one society.

Even if I’m working in the space between painting and sculpture, sometimes I draw and paint using different subjects and multiple styles. At times, in an attempt to define my works, I give them “erotic,” psychological, and personal dimensions in addition to the subjective ideas I mentioned above. I don’t think there are ‘negative and positive’ aspects of my interpretations—perhaps they don’t really concern me that much, and I convince myself that certain interpretations are simply “tempting.” At the same time, I also feel my interpretations are flawed and cannot be corrected or amended. My concept of art is not straightforward; it is a product of a mental weaving process.

Hassan Sharif, Dubai, UAE, July 2006
Translated from Arabic by Mohamed Al Waddah 2006



Combs, 2016

"I find combs fascinating because of the system they employ. The number of teeth, the distance between them, their length and thickness, all seem to be well calculated, and they have been so for thousand of years."

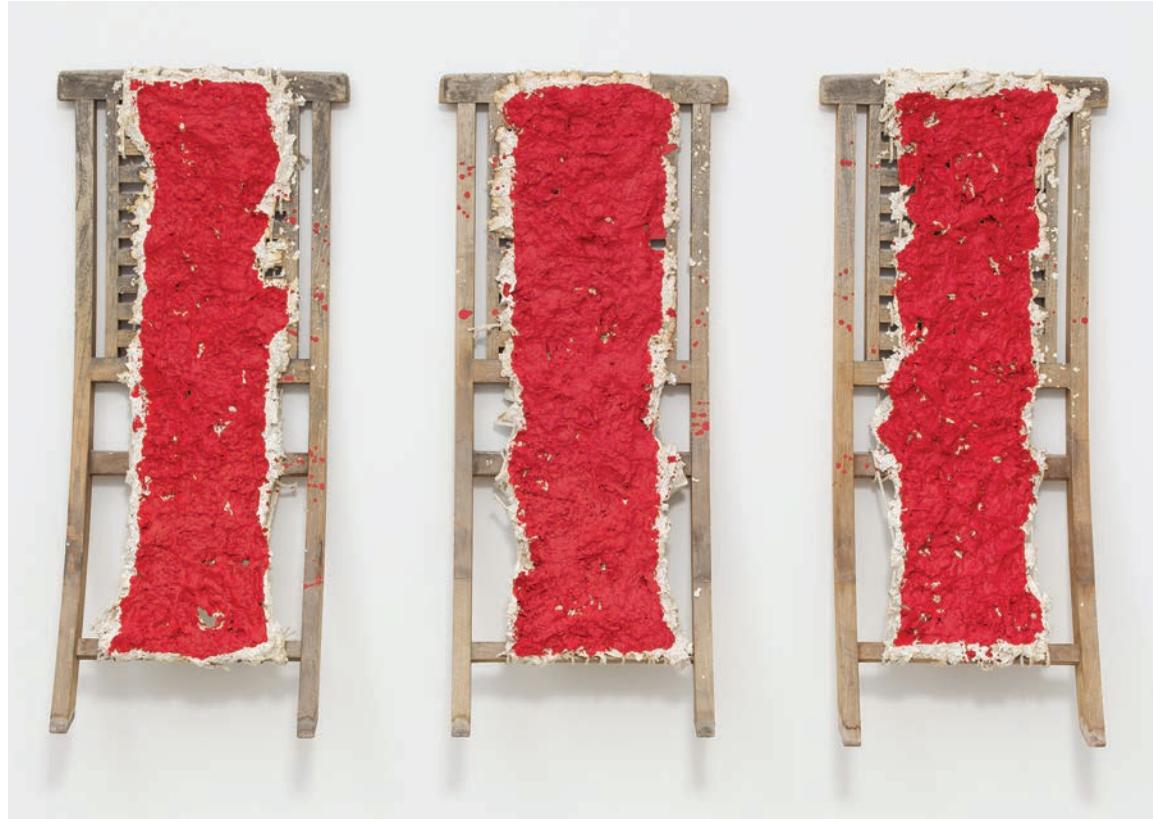
Combs, detail, 2016



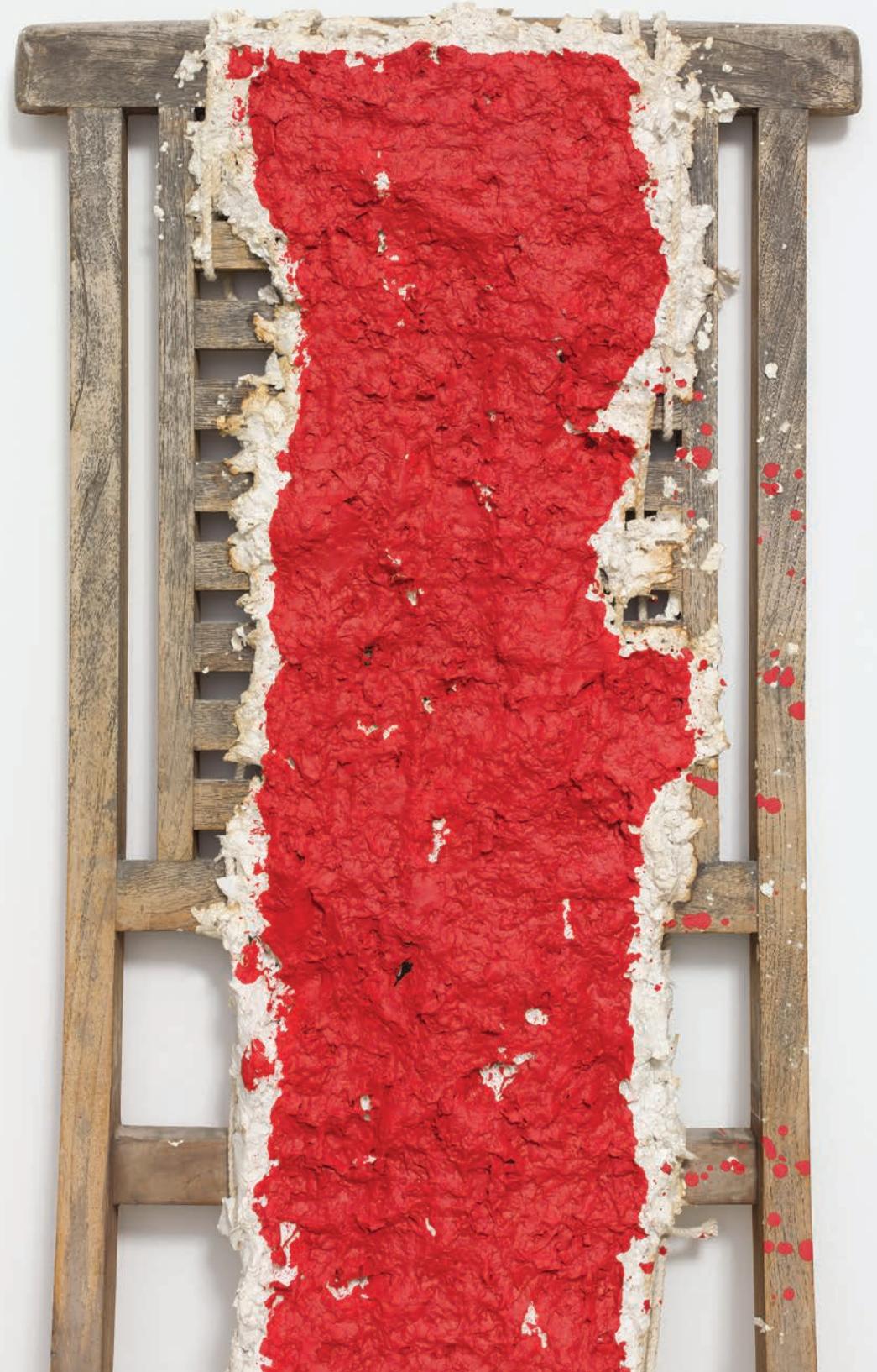


“People depend greatly on objects to keep up with their daily routines and activity, and so long they are alive, they keep using, exhausting, and relying on them as if they are, in one way or another, part of their own bodies.”

Artificial Leg, 2014



Above: *Cadmium Red*, 2014
Right: *Cadmium Red*, detail 2014

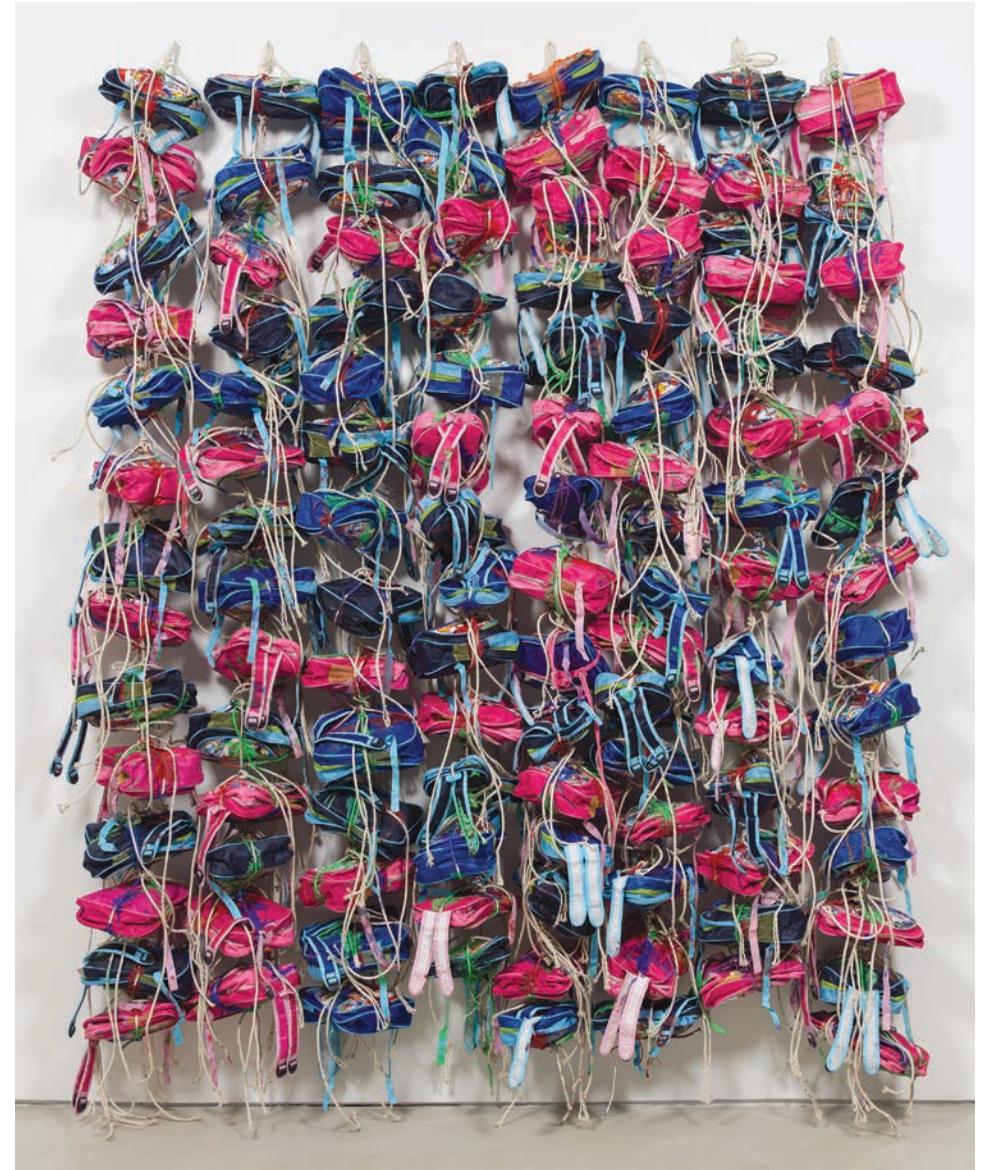




Hassan Sharif

Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2016

“The work is based on the idea that children carry the knowledge which they will use for their future.”



Back to School, 2015



Left: *Nail Clipper*, detail, 2014
Right: *Nail Clipper*, 2014





Ladies and Gentlemen, 2014



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2016



Masks, 2016



"[Masks] have an important and historical role. In the Middle East, women cover their faces with veils. In Africa they are used in dances to ward off evil spirits. Hiding one's identity has become increasingly important. Some people gain confidence after wearing a mask to run schemes like thieves, have fun like in Carnival of Venice, or do terrible acts like terrorism. So, this particular object has so many interpretations and rituals."

Masks, detail, 2016



Left: *Punching Bag*, detail, 2016
Right: *Punching Bag*, 2016





Gloves, 2015

"Gloves have so many different uses and reflect different cultures. Some women protect their hands from the sun, others hide them. Thieves don't want to get noticed, and museums use them to keep the works clean. But the construction gloves by far have the most important role, due to what it offers from great safety and some sort of pain relief to workers."



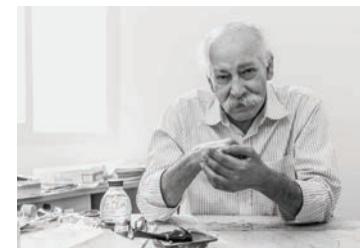
Gloves, detail, 2015



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2016

Hassan Sharif (b.1951, Dubai, United Arab Emirates) lives and works in Dubai. Recognized as a pioneer of conceptual art and experimental practice in the Middle East, Sharif's artworks surpass the limits of discipline or singular approach, encompassing performance, installation, drawing, painting, and assemblage. Since the late 1970s, he has maintained a practice as a cultural producer and facilitator, moving between roles as artist, educator, critic, activist, and mentor to contemporary artists in the United Arab Emirates. He incorporates cotton, textile, metal, chord, plastic, and everyday objects in order to create a variety of works that reflect contemporary concerns such as consumerism, manufacturing, and commercialization of handicrafts.

Hassan Sharif is a founding member of the Emirates Fine Art Society and of the Art Atelier in the Youth Theater and Arts, Dubai. In 2007, he was one of four artists to establish The Flying House, a Dubai institution for promoting contemporary Emirati artists. The first Emirati to have his work shown in the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, Qatar, Sharif was also among the selected artists to represent the U.A.E. during its first national pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2009. In 2011, Sharif was the subject of a retrospective exhibition, *Hassan Sharif: Experiments & Objects 1979–2011*, curated by Catherine David and Mohammed Kazem and presented by the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture & Heritage/ Platform for Visual Arts, U.A.E. His work has been shown in recent exhibitions at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar (2016); the Sharjah Biennial (2015); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2015); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2014); Fundação Casa França-Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil (2014); and the International Centre of Graphic Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia (2012); among others. Sharif's artwork is included in the collections of the Centre Pompidou, Paris; M+ Museum, Hong Kong; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar; the Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, U.A.E.; the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah; the Sittard Center, The Netherlands; and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., and Guggenheim, New York. Sharif's work is currently on view at the Sharjah Art Foundation as part of the exhibitions *Do It* curated by Hoor Al Qasimi and Hans Ulrich Obrist, and *1980—Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates* curated by Hoor Al Qasimi and first featured at The National Pavilion United Arab Emirates at the 56th Venice Biennale, Italy.



Hassan Sharif, Dubai, 2015



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2016

Checklist

Artificial Leg, 2014

Mixed media

59.8h x 15w x 12.2d in

Cadmium Red, 2014

Mixed media

38.58h x 64.96w x 1.57d in

Nail Clipper, 2014

Mixed media

53.15h x 12.99w x 3.54d in

Ladies and Gentlemen, 2014

Mixed media

108.27h x 181.1w x 17.72d in

Back to School, 2015

Mixed media

114.17h x 96.46w x 15.75d in

Gloves, 2015

Mixed media

104.33h x 96.46w x 14.96d in

Combs, 2016

Mixed media

108.27h x 78.74w x 27.56d in

Punching Bag, 2016

Mixed media

96.46h x 23.62w x 21.65d in

Masks, 2016

Mixed media

112.2h x 94.49w x 17.32d in

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Through exhibitions, research, and artist representation, the Alexander Gray Associates spotlights artistic movements and artists who emerged in the mid- to late-Twentieth Century. Influential in cultural, social, and political spheres, these artists are notable for creating work that crosses geographic borders, generational contexts and artistic disciplines. Alexander Gray Associates is a member of the Art Dealers Association of America.

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