



Exhibition view, Photo A. Greuzat

HASSAN SHARIF: EXPÉRIMENTATIONS *AT LA PATINOIRE ROYALE, BRUSSELS*

Iranian artist Hassan Sharif pioneered conceptual art in the Gulf region while he was living in Dubai after pursuing his education in Britain. Experimental and audacious in his approach to art-making and using materials, he emerged as an important figure in the Middle Eastern art scene. This exhibition, which opened seven months after he died from cancer last September, pays tribute to his legacy, humour and vision

By ANNA SANSOM

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Curated by Paris-based curator Hervé Mikaeloff and organised with the support of Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde in Dubai, which represents Sharif 's estate, the show extends over the two floors of La Patinoire Royale. It reveals Sharif 's adroitness for appropriating vernacular materials and recognising their potential in order to make something monumental.

The artist bundled together dozens of monochrome hand towels that he would arrange in rows and columns, creating frothy sculptures that bear an influence from abstract painting. Evidently, Sharif worked in an obsessive-compulsive manner, accumulating mountains of material that he would work through in order to create his artworks.



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In a video made for Sharif 's 2015 exhibition at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, the artist says, “Accumulation becomes important, stacking one thing on the other. It's like time – the idea that history stacks itself, one event on another. By taking elements from the world around me, I repurpose them, restack them and present a different way of reading the situation.”

Accumulation applies to much of Sharif 's output. 'Hats' (2016), one of the last works he made, is a huge, suspended mass of hundreds of hats joined together by black ropes. Arranged in a sphere, it is like a hymn to femininity and colour. Nearby, 'Knots' (2012-2016), made from tightly knotted white rope, cascades like a waterfall. A silver column, '555 Pillar' (2016) has been ingeniously conceived from mounting thousands of ready-made trays. Meanwhile, brightly coloured wall pieces, again showing a painterly sensibility, have been fashioned from countless zips and pouches.



Hassan Sharif, Pouches, 2016, pouches and cotton ropes, 320 x 420 x 45 cm

“I have this habit, it is inherent in me, to repeat things,” Sharif also says in the video. “Repetition relaxes me.” Sharif explained that he sought “indeterminacy” in his work and wanted “performances floating everywhere.” Indeed, the sculptures evoke a performative idea, as one imagines Sharif creating them in an active manner. Accumulatively, they manifest as conversation pieces.

Pulling at things, toying with them, and using his hands to negotiate them seemed to have a cathartic effect on Sharif. For instance, 'Dictionary' (2015) – a wall sculpture formed from a flow of pages ripped out of dictionaries – belies how Sharif was compelled to improve his English whilst studying at the Byam Shaw School of Art (since merged with Central St Martins) in London and adopted the habit of poring over dictionaries. Referring to his sculpture, 'Weaving' (2016), composed of stainless steel sheets woven together, he remarked, “Weaving is like pulling pages out of a dictionary.”



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Although best known for his conceptual, sculptural works, Sharif 's practice was multidisciplinary, also including paintings and humorous drawings in his earlier years. In one such drawing from 1977, a bald manager at a desk tells a young, busty woman, “Your qualifications are clear, no need to show me your degree.”

Like a mini retrospective, the exhibition provides a carefully considered overview of Sharif's work and his contribution to global art.



Hassan Sharif, Towel 3, 2013, towel and copper wire, 285 x 170 x 30 cm