

Hassan Hajjaj:
'Kesh Angels'

28 January – 8 March 2014

New York, New York (January 9, 2014) – Taymour Grahne Gallery is proud to present 'Kesh Angels, a solo exhibition of work by the Moroccan-born, UK-based artist, Hassan Hajjaj. Marking the artist's first exhibition in New York, 'Kesh Angels presents a unique take on the vibrant street culture of Morocco and pays tribute to the biker culture of the young women of Marrakesh in a series of photographs, limited edition objects, an installation, and a video.

Hajjaj's work plays with and upends stereotypes, the power of branding, and the familiarity of everyday objects, applying a 'street-wise' approach to his layering of influences, items, and cultural signifiers to imbue the work with an electrifying tension. His confident, upbeat portraits of young women wearing veils and *djellabah* while posing on motorcycles subvert preconceived notions of Arab women; his subjects are traditionally clad but defiantly modern, bearing bright smiles and the markers of youth, independence, celebration, and fun. As Kelly

Carmichael writes in her 2010 essay in *Contemporary Practices*, "Hajjaj's approach is to toy with the perceptions of Arabic culture and the relationship between East and West, recasting iconic images and allowing shafts of 21st century light to reenergize the encounter... [while] his practice on inclusion and contrast rarely offers just one aesthetic of theoretical opinion."¹

Borrowing from the tradition of African studio photography and the glossy aesthetic of the fashion shoot, Hajjaj's work combines the personal with the political, the individuality of his subjects framed by consumer goods and adorned with the trappings of culture and branding. The handcrafted inlaid wood frames are made up of quotidian branded objects like soda cans and Moroccan packaging, mixing old and new, both responding to and completing the works they surround.

The exhibition is also accompanied by a book on the last decade of Hajjaj's work, published jointly by Taymour Grahne Gallery and Rose Issa Projects, London. Concurrently, the artist's three-channel video installation *My Rock Stars, Volume I* (2012) is on view at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California, through 20 July, 2014. The work, which features performances by international musicians wearing clothes designed by Hajjaj, is a recent acquisition by the museum.

Hassan Hajjaj left Morocco for London at an early age. Heavily influenced by the hip-hop, reggae, and club scenes of London as well as by his North African heritage, Hajjaj is a self-taught and thoroughly versatile artist whose work includes portraiture, installation, performance, fashion, and interior design, including furniture made from recycled utilitarian objects from North Africa, such as upturned Coca-Cola crates as stools and aluminum cans turned into lamps. 'Kesh Angels features an installation of his



¹ Kelly Carmichael, "Hassan Hajjaj: Coca Cola Riad," *Contemporary Practices Vol VII*, 2010.

furniture in the lower gallery, completely transforming the space into one of the artist's signature lounges.

Hajjaj was the winner of the 2011 Sovereign Middle East and Africa Prize, and was shortlisted for Victoria & Albert Museum's Jameel Prize for Islamic Art in 2009. His solo exhibitions have been held at The Third Line, Dubai; Rose Issa Projects, London; Freies Museum, Berlin, as well as group exhibitions such as The Marrakesh Art Biennale; Edge of Arabia, London; Photoqua, Paris; and Re-orientations at Rose Issa Projects, among others. His work is in the collections of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; the Farjam Collection, Dubai; Institut des Cultures d'Islam, Paris; Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunisia; Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, VA, and more. The artist lives and works between London, UK and Marrakesh, Morocco.

About Taymour Grahne Gallery

Taymour Grahne Gallery seeks to foster a diverse, international program of groundbreaking contemporary art, with a special foundation in contemporary the art of the Middle East region. Working collaboratively with curators and critics, the gallery is committed to cultivating emerging talent and supporting established artists from around the world.

Taymour Grahne Gallery is situated in the heart of Tribeca in a landmarked 4,000 square foot space designed to accommodate a dynamic public events program organized in conjunction with the gallery's exhibitions and related publications. Widely recognized for creating the most comprehensive and widely read blog dedicated to contemporary art from the Middle East, gallery founder Taymour Grahne brings a special foundation and specialization in Middle Eastern and North African art. Exhibiting artists include: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Reza Derakshani, Daniele Genadry, Hassan Hajjaj, Lamia Joreige, Mohammed Kazem, Sanaz Mazinani, Ciarán Murphy, Nicky Nodjoumi, Walid Siti, and Camille Zakharia.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to 6pm.

(Image: Hassan Hajjaj, Nisrin, 2010, Metallic Lambda Print on 33mm White Dibond, 53.5h x 36.77w in / 136 x 93.4 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Taymour Grahne Gallery, New York.)

For more information, please contact:

Helena Anrather, Taymour Grahne Gallery, Helena@taymourgrahne.com

Katrina Weber Ashour, FITZ & CO, Katrina@fitzandco.com

Join the conversation on social media by linking to @TaymourGrahne and using the hashtag #HassanHajjaj