



Featured in

Issue 204

The Sun Never Sets: Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim's Landscapes of Light

At Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, the UAE-born artist pays homage to his local terrains



BY EVAN MOFFITT IN REVIEWS | 01 JUN 19



The sun never sets in Khorfakkan. Nestled in a cove where the rocky Hajar Mountains meet the sea, the town is one of the few in Sharjah to face East, towards the Gulf of Oman, turning its back on the Emirates' heavily urbanized West coast and the metropolitan bustle of Dubai. Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, a lifelong resident, has literally worked this landscape into his sculptures, coating their colourful surfaces with painted earth and sand. The artist derives those colours, in turn, from the sunsets the mountains block from his view. Unable to see the sun sink below the horizon, he has long imagined bright tones of fuchsia and marigold, applying paint to his sculptures in dappled brushstrokes that shimmer like light on ocean waves.

With its papier-mâché coating of hot pink, mauve and emerald, *Bouquet* (2018) is the colour of no worldly sunset. The work is one of several small sculptures in the artist's solo exhibition at Lawrie Shabibi that recall the backdrop of his home and studio; its underlying structure of cardboard tubes and boxes vaguely resembles one of the oil rigs situated off its coast. Here, its surface most intrigues: rough like fresh stucco yet inviting to touch. On the floor sit three sculptures made from plastic bottles (*Mineral Water*, 2013) – the kind that often wash up on Gulf shores – which Ibrahim has slathered in the same agglutinated pulp and painted brown, like a cluster of barnacles fished from acidifying seas.



Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, *Bouquet*, 2018, cardboard boxes, sliced cardboard, papier-mâché, 108 × 69 × 62 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Lawrie Shabibi

Flowered Branch and *Spike* (both 2018), meanwhile, recall the kamanjah: a stringed instrument, popular in the Middle East, first introduced to the Safavid court in the 17th century. For *Spike*, Ibrahim has merged the chamber with a chair seat, making its slender pink neck and yellow pegs seem more like a recumbent human body. These sculptures beg to be strung and plucked.

Ibrahim's work shares its playful tactility with the sculptures of Franz West, a fellow master of papier mâché. A series of wall-mounted pieces, however, more closely resembles the 'Achromes' (1957–58) of Piero Manzoni, with their inchoate mounds of cotton and synthetic hair contained in boxy frames. Ibrahim has coated both his frames and their contents with the same pulp as his other sculptures, painted black or bluish-white, and carved them with gridded relief patterns. One (*Small Pendulum*, 2016) cradles another box inside its frame, which in turn holds a stubby roll of pale paper, like a bloodless finger. The choppy oblong of the largest work in the series, *Fingerprint on Paper* (2015), has the graphic punch of Richard Artschwager's famous 'blp' works (1967–2012).



Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, 'The Space Between Eyelid and Eyeball', 2019, exhibition view, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai. Courtesy: the artist and Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai

Similar black typographic marks on paper line the walls, from floor to ceiling, of a small back gallery, flooding its pristine calm with an inky torrent. Ibrahim makes these 'drawings' discreetly while at work as a technician at a local hospital. Each mark, then, could be seen to measure time, while together they form a field of painterly static.

The most impressive work by Ibrahim on view at the gallery is not in this exhibition at all, however; it is included in 'Materialize', a deeply uneven pop-up group show across the street. Large papier-mâché baubles fan out in concentric rings like the petals of a psychedelic lotus. *Khorfakkan* (2007) directly references the artist's hometown with its title, but also the first works of land art he made in the desert there, in the 1990s, by gathering rocks in circular formations. The mandala-like installation is as mesmerizing as any by West. Seen from the gallery's mezzanine, its centre of gravity comes more fully into view, its many colours fanning out like the rays of the sun in its final descent.

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, 'The Space Between Eyelid and Eyeball' was on view at Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, from 5 March until 9 May 2019.

Main image: Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, 'The Space Between Eyelid and Eyeball', 2019, exhibition view, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai. Courtesy: the artist and Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai



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