

Karam Natour: Repeat After Me

Solo Show at Umm El Fahem Gallery

Curator : Irena Gordon

Karam Natour's work deals with identity, its characteristics, its fluidity, and the way it is imposed by society, culture, geography, nationality, and history. It also confronts the relation between language, image, and meaning creation process. The exhibition includes new video and drawing works, alongside excerpts of texts and images from Natour's upcoming artist book. The title of the exhibition expresses Natour's focus on self-image, and on the motif of repetition in the context of sociocultural conformism. At the same time, it underscores game-playing and humor as a comprehensive artistic stance and, and, in particular, as a way to understand Natour's oeuvre.

In one video work created for the exhibition, filmed in Shefa-'Amr, the city where the artist grew up in, Natour follows his daily route as a child from home to the Nuns' school where he studied. .

In another, longer, video work, he examines his identity through his relations with his extended family, and the way his figure penetrates and disrupts fixed systems. Concurrently, it also addresses the world of advertising, art history, and various socialization processes of the individual.

Natour's drawings also evolve from the video medium: the artist films himself, processes the frames digitally, and draws his pictorial figure out of them. This figure shares with him his body and appearance; it populates the drawings and strides in their midst, through quotidian life and art history. The image is naked or clad in featureless underwear. It is altogether a body that moves through different situations, alternately motivated and motivating, susceptible to examination, inspection, and review but concurrently liberated from all of these, elusive, fluid, passing among

situations, times, and definitions. The image appears in different personae and narratives, contrasting, crossing from culture to culture—Western to Eastern, Arab to Israeli, feminine to masculine—fracturing structural dichotomies and offering allegorical contexts that invite multiple meanings.

As Natour plays with his personae with theatricality and virtuosity, he reveals their vulnerability and his own. A central character that accompanies him is that of Jester, the Medieval and Renaissance court clown, the entertainer and story teller, who also incarnates a savage, demonic, side associated with the Greek god Pan. Natour takes his Jester on historical, humoristic, sexual, cultural, and social journeys. Another character is that of the wise teacher, Sanat Kumara, “Master of the Earth and Humanity” in Hinduism, who represents patience, wisdom, and love, as well as Venus, the Roman goddess of beauty. As he oscillates between these different personae, Natour strives to attain an anatomy of the random, of states of control and liberation, vis-a-vis the seemingly constant concepts of time and space.

In his indexal triptych **Sun, Saturn, Venus**, Natour unveils the universe upon which he draws: *The Book of Mirdad* by the Lebanese author and poet Mikha'il Na'ima, with its plunge into mysticism; the surrealist artist Remedios Varo, *One-Thousand-and-One Nights Tales*; the work of Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan; texts of the American artist John Baldessari (a father-figure for Natur); Christianity; and ancient Egypt. They all come together to create a stunning mirror, at once conscious and critical, material and spiritual, into which the artist peers in search of a metaphysical self that knows neither borders nor limitations.