

ARTICLES

PREVIEW

Bring the Boys Back Home

With an upcoming show at London's Selma Feriani Gallery from 15 October-27 November, Lebanese artist Pascal Hachem explores notions of causality in his hard-hitting and probing works.

"Consider us we're playing/We're catching these little species/We're catching the man power..." - Pascal Hachem, 2010

Pascal Hachem's practice is rooted in visual and historical research, leading to exhibitions that explore both physical and temporal relationships through sculpture, installation and performance. The notion of causality, of deliberate action, performing an act with a precise reaction, has been central to both his performed and constructed works. His early works demonstrate and contain physical tension, sensitive yet critically engaged responses to situations confronted while living and working in Lebanon. The piece *Split*, for instance, was an apparatus which slowly ripped apart a T-shirt, pulling it at the sleeves via a simple mechanism weighted down with sandbags, a familiar feature in zones of conflict. His aesthetic has some of the virtuosity of the genius inventor, but also reflects the ingenuity of machines or systems that are designed by necessity in places where alternatives are unavailable, where machine parts and old scraps of wood are reclaimed and recycled not by choice, but out of need.

Hachem's critically incisive observations of the systemic flaws inherent in current forms of political power inform his work, in practice executed through elegant, highly mechanized three dimensional pieces. He has a penchant for pulling out the knives, both literally and figuratively, and past works have directly addressed political and social violence. Precisely engineered, they restage and perform the active participation of the individual or group within a carefully calibrated set of circumstances. Human agency, the very action itself, the performance of a gesture - the foot on the pedal, the flick of the wrist - which can set off a chain reaction of controlled violence is central to his practice. Bloodlessly, his works evoke unimaginable horror.

Preferring to produce work that is both site and context specific, his work for a group show in London, *The Third Eye* at Selma Feriani, was a carefully considered response to the way in which he perceptively gauged the social realm is controlled, the potential for action and agency effectively denied. *DIY (Do It Yourself)* invited viewers to press a pedal which operated scissors installed at eye level, the violence one step removed from the action. He recently produced a show in Italy after spending three months in Rome; Hachem chose the historically significant Cestia Pyramid for a site-specific installation, *Slow Food*, basing his intervention on the role of the person it was ostensibly built for in about 12 BC, Caius Cestius, who among, other duties, was the official of public banquets. Using the damaged internal space of the burial chamber, Hachem's work consisted of an arrangement of hundreds of metal forks around an empty plate, a moving sculpture that evokes frenzied hunger and the elaborate rituals constructed around the assuagement of greed.

In his first solo exhibition in London at Selma Feriani, the artist plans to present what is arguably his most ambitious sculptural installation to date. Once again, Hachem creates an uncomfortable tension in the white cube space. This new body of work is overtly polemical, yet it simultaneously challenges the role of polemic and political authority itself. *Bring the Boys Back Home* is designed to provoke, to confront and to question. While the cultural references are specific to the artist's native Lebanon and respond to the frustration of living with relentless political violence, this work acknowledges that seemingly endemic theatres of war cannot be divorced from the shared pandemic of global conflict. The deliberate, canny choice of symbols that are as universal as they are particular allows the message to resonate. Hachem fuses together a simple everyday object, the matchbox, with an easily recognisable and inflammatory image. A matchbox can be incendiary, but once emptied, the artist hints, it can be used to secrete and imprison weaker creatures, to hide and carry the precious booty of the cruel and curious child. Carefully selected, this particular matchbox bears the familiar insignia of modern armies, the three stars of military rank. Contained within is a partially visible, familiar and arguably equally universal gesture of the polemical orator, the raised index finger; the final point, the order, the command, the call to arms, an invitation to unstoppable, unending cycles of violence and self-annihilation.

By Nada Raza



'Under the Bridge, Under the Table': 2009. Pigment print. 120 x 90 cm. Edition one of three. Courtesy the artist and Selma Feriani Gallery.



'Keep Sharpening your Knives and They Will Blunt': 2010. Installation, unique work. Steel structure, engines, desert sand, knives, electrical box and Perspex. 140 x 64 70 cm. Courtesy the artist and Nadour collection.