Raafat Ishak

Nomination for the presidency of the New Egypt

OPENING
Saturday 13th October, 2012

EXHIBITION DATES
13 October – 10 November, 2012

Sutton Gallery is pleased to present Nomination for the presidency of the New Egypt, an installation by Raafat Ishak which continues his engagement with moments of major social upheaval, responding to the revolutionary wave of the Arab Spring and the ensuing transition toward political democracy in Ishak’s native Egypt.

At this pivotal moment within the recent history of the Middle East, as groups and individuals seek to propose alternative models of governance, Ishak’s latest project involves the establishment of a manifesto for a new political party to contend the Egyptian elections. Written in cursive Arabic text, the ‘party’s’ manifesto sits below an imagined logo, a Scarab beetle, painted in Ishak’s customary style, where distinctive lines enclose curved, square or rectangular shapes that have been slowly built up in pastel shades on unprimed MDF.

Placing emphasis on the need for better food distribution and land cultivation, the proposed manifesto revisits a highly radical and contentious position within the framework of Egyptian nationhood: the re-flooding of the Nile River. Here Ishak calls for positive action and renewal, thereby reflecting his practice at large, which continually expresses the world as another place or suggests an imagined future.

The physical configuration of Nomination for the presidency of the New Egypt recalls a paper scroll resting on a black cube. Notably, the presence of the black cube has carried great significance throughout Ishak’s oeuvre, with incarnations of Malevich’s Black Square 1915 appearing in Ishak’s practice as early as 1987. His resonance with this symbol is not simply due to its significance in modern art and architecture; it is also equally a reflection on his heritage and the sacred site of Islamic pilgrimage, the black stone cube of the Kaaba in Mecca: ‘While this motif resonates with externally generated meanings – an amalgam of archeological layers and intersecting histories – it also suggests the limits of abstraction and the meanderings of the contemporary artist’. In this way, the black cube is positioned as both structurally and culturally representative of the circulatory nature of the personal and political.

Raafat Ishak received a Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting) from the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, in 1990. He is currently undertaking a PHD at Monash University, Melbourne.

Recent individual exhibitions include: Proposition for a banner march and a black cube hot air balloon (in collaboration with Tom Nicholson), Shepparton Art Museum, Victoria, 2012; and Raafat Ishak: Work in Progress, The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 2010. He has also presented significant bodies of work at Art Dubai, with Sutton Gallery, in 2011 and 2012.

Recent group exhibitions include: Shifting Geometries, Embassy of Australia, Washington DC, 2012; The Other’s Other, Artspace, Sydney, 2012; Alienation, Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 2012; The Future of a Promise, Venice Biennale, 2011; NEW010, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2010; Cubism and Australian Art, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 2009; and The 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

Ishak’s work is held in many significant public and private collections, including: Barjeel Art Foundation, United Arab Emirates; Michael Buxton Collection, Melbourne; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; and The Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne.