

PRESS RELEASE

HAMRA ABBAS | OPEN CUBE

ON VIEW | 18 NOV 2019 – 14 JAN 2020

ARTIST-LED TOUR | 18 NOV 2019 | 5 PM

RECEPTION | 18 NOV 2019 | 6 PM

Lawrie Shabibi presents *Open Cube* by Hamra Abbas, opening on Monday 18th November, 2019, Abbas's third solo at the gallery, which runs concurrent with her permanent sculpture *Trees: Gardens of Paradise* at Qasim Park commissioned for the 2019 Karachi Biennale.

The title of the exhibition refers to Sol LeWitt's *Incomplete Open Cubes* (1974) in which the artist identified 122 unique variations of an incomplete cube. These 'open cube' structures had between one and nine limbs removed, but always with the structure remaining three-dimensionally connected. It was Abbas's encounter with these works at MASS MoCA in 2016 that provided her with new insights into her own practice, specifically with regard to his treatment of the cube and his explorations of colour. In the current exhibition, Abbas draws upon this intimate encounter, incorporating her understanding and experience of LeWitt's systems into her own personal language.

Colour has been central to the perceptual identity of work created by Abbas in recent years. It was Abbas' interest in colour that led to her visit Sol LeWitt's landmark exhibition *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective* at MASS MoCCA. More recently she stumbled upon a publication entitled *Sol LeWitt Incomplete Open Cubes, The John Weber Gallery 1974*, which laid out the arithmetical process of 'unpacking' the cube to create new forms, providing her with a new contextual framework for her own works, recalling her series *Kaaba Picture as a Misprint* (2014) in which she 'unpacks' the colour black to reveal hidden multiplicity (i.e. cyan, magenta, yellow). In *Open Cube* Abbas presents a series of three diptychs that build upon the *Kaaba Picture as a Misprint* series but substitute the abstract Kaaba image with a triangle, square and hexagon. These shapes are filled in solid black against a white background, recalling LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #343* (1980) and Malevich's *Black Square*. The solid black shape is then rotated on its axis in order to reveal colour peaks of primary and secondary colours, drawing attention to its compositional presence or polysemy.

Extending from these new *Misprints* are three *Construction Drawings*, a series of marble inlay works that repeat the process of rotating triangle, square and hexagon but in this instance to create a complex circular web of straight lines. These works are meticulously hand-crafted from two contrasting colours of stone – white marble and black granite. Unlike the *Incomplete Open Cube* forms which are finite, these spinning lines are expansive and boundless. They have a mystical quality, recalling the geometric drawings of Emma Kunz or ancient mandalas.

In direct reference to LeWitt's *Incomplete Open Cube*, Abbas's series of nine marble 'drawings' entitled *Open Cube: After LeWitt* (2019) each of which appropriates one of the *Incomplete Open Cube*

drawings. In contrast to LeWitt's line drawings, the broken forms are filled in with jet black marble which adds more density to the shapes and reinstates her fascination with the colour black.

Finally, *Open Cube* (2019) a floor sculpture, is the largest work in the exhibition. Floor sculptures and installations in differing materials and formats have long been a feature of Abbas's practice, inviting a different sort of interaction with the viewer. Her first was *Please Do Not Step* (2004), exhibited at Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, with various iterations at other institutions including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London for the Jameel Art Prize 2009. Initially, these installations were always made out of paper, ephemeral and intended to be fleeting, much like her own sense of temporariness whilst living away from her hometown Lahore from 2002 to 2015, first in Berlin and then Boston. It was not until she established a permanent studio in Lahore in 2015 that the floor installations took on a more permanent, sculptural presence, moving from the most light-weight material to the heaviest. In *Open Cube* (2019), the image of two squares appear to float on top of each other creating an optical illusion. Unlike the other monochromatic marble pieces in the exhibition, the inlay used here is colourful (blue Afghani Lapis Lazuli, red Pakistani Indus Gold and the yellow Italian Giallo Siena). Although *Open Cube* (2019) draws its inspiration from the *Incomplete Open Cube* drawings, the squares do not connect, thus defying the guidelines of LeWitt's drawings.

HAMRA ABBAS

Hamra Abbas was born in Kuwait in 1976. She received her BFA and MA in Visual Arts from the National College of Arts, Lahore in 1999 and 2002 respectively before going on to the Universitaet der Kuenste in Berlin where she did the Meisterschueler in 2004.

Abbas' artistic practice draws from a myriad of sources and takes a diversity of forms. Her works originate from encounters and experiences - an image, icon or gesture - that are manipulated by the artist transforming its scale, function or medium. Her intention is to deconstruct the act of seeing by recreating images that form part of a collective memory. Unrestrained by subject matter or media, she takes an investigative approach to produce a diverse and holistic body of work addressing notions of cultural history, sexuality, violence, ornamentation, devotion and faith.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Gardens in Which Rivers Flow: Plastic Flowers and Everyday Miracles*, Art Dubai with Canvas Gallery, Dubai, UAE, 2019; *Colour*, Canvas gallery, Karachi, Pakistan, 2017; *Bodies*, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, UAE, 2016; *But Can You Show this in Pakistan?* PILOT, Istanbul, Turkey, 2015; and, *Kaaba Picture as a Misprint*, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, UAE, 2014.

Her work has been exhibited as part of major group shows including: *Gateway: Fragments, Yesterday and Today*, Abu Dhabi Art Fair, Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2019; Second Karachi Biennale, Bagh Ibn e Qasim, Karachi, Pakistan, 2019; *She Persists*, Palazzo Benzon, Venice, Italy, 2019; Art Dubai Contemporary, with Lawrie Shabibi, UAE, 2018; Lahore Biennale, Pakistan, 2018; *Global Control and Censorship*, Galeria Arsenal, Bialystok, Poland, 2017; Karachi Biennale, Karachi, Pakistan, 2017; *Sanctuary*, FOR- SITE Foundation, San Francisco, USA, 2017-2018; *Insights*, Art Basel Hong Kong, with Lawrie Shabibi, 2017; *The Making of an Institution*, NTU CCA, Singapore, 2017; *Text Edit*, Manhattan Bridge Anchorage, Brooklyn, New York, USA, 2016 ; *Accademia di Brera*, Milan, Italy, 2016; *And Nothing but the Truth: Parrhesia II*, KOEL Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan, 2015; and, Art Dubai Contemporary, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, UAE, 2015, amongst others.

She is the recipient of the Jury prize at Sharjah Biennial 9, the Abraaj Capital Art Prize in 2011 and was shortlisted for the Jameel Prize in 2009.

Her work is part of significant collections, including: the British Museum, London, UK; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas, USA; 21 C Museum, Louisville, Kentucky, USA; Pacific Asia Museum,

Pasadena, USA; USA Art In Embassies Collection, USA; Burger Collection, Hong Kong; Koç Foundation, Istanbul, Turkey; Borusan Foundation, Istanbul, Turkey; Kadist Collection, Paris, France; Vanhaerents Art Collection, Brussels, Belgium; Devi Art Foundation, Guragon, India; Kiran Nader Museum of Art, New Delhi, India; King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra), Saudi Arabia; and, Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Abbas currently lives and works between Lahore and Boston.

LAWRIE SHABIBI

Lawrie Shabibi is a contemporary art gallery housed in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. The gallery supports the long-term development of the careers of young international contemporary artists, with a focus on those from the Middle East and North Africa, and more recently diasporic artists within the UK. From its inception, the gallery has also organized art historical exhibitions, working with an older generation of artists from the Middle East and North Africa region. By holding a regular programme of exhibitions, screenings and talks, publishing catalogues and participating in international art fairs, Lawrie Shabibi has in the space of eight years been a forerunner in the development of the contemporary art scene in Dubai. As of 2020 Lawrie Shabibi will have a UK outpost at Cromwell Place in London.

FOR GALLERY INFORMATION

lawrieshabibi.com

FOR IMAGES AND PRESS INFORMATION

Diana Stellman

diana@lawrieshabibi.com

+971(0) 4346 9906