

## **Starting with empty spaces (empty spaces as a beginning)**

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Time is curved, not a straight line, yet a multi-versatile concept, a discontinuous idea. The traditional separation of progressions and regressions usually adopted for characterizing the process and sequence of history cannot be applied to visual arts. Art works are polysemous and polychronic at their best.

Therefore, assuming there is no past but only passing time, visual representation has the privilege to connect and synthesize a multitude of times. Just like poetry, although Leonardo da Vinci would resolutely disagree, professing the superiority of painting over poetry and asserting that only the first one is able to simultaneously capture different moments into one frame. I personally believe both disciplines enjoy this diachronic condition, no matter how arguing with the Masters always represents a fragile and unenviable condition. Luckily, "Masters" are not unique references.

"The concept of "Painting" for me is the process of hiding some areas of the primed surface of canvas from viewer's eye: by doing this I'm creating a wimple covering all over the painting's surface. It resembles "osmosis" or a "membrane", that soft thin skin in the body allowing the passage of liquid from one side to the other of a skin-like wall by penetrating it. I live in the space which is between wimple and the empty surface of my painting, it seems very narrow space but if you look at it from contemporary perspective in paintings you'll fall down into infinite dimension. In this endless dimension where I live I'm not in need of finding out what painting is, neither I have to find out how to make a painting, because I've done it and I'm still doing it up to now." (Hassan Sharif)

Publicly starting his career as a caricaturist, since the mid '70s Hassan Sharif has paralleled this production with an often silent or silenced artistic activity. His early drawings move back and forth through the fashions of modern art scene, thus allowing him to experience different styles of representation before and in the perspective of finding his own manner. A manner which looks quite mature when it first appears at the end of the same decade, peculiar as it is of this artist's personal way of figuring "reality".

The development of Hassan Sharif's pictorial expression, with and regardless of a significant interruption over more than a decade, shows a character of permanence that is sometimes so persistent to be possibly confused with a kind of reminiscence. His recent paintings are vigorous, lucid and highly ironical, a quintessential representation of the absence of coordinates within which we do tentatively move although pretending to possess a perspicacity, a clear-sightedness, a penetration mostly unattainable,

The early '80s are characterized by a considerable and remarkable phase of experimentation, which importance has not yet been properly brought out and emphasized with regard to both the local and the international art scene. Experiments (1979-1986) and performances (1982-1984), handmade books and boxes (1982-1985, 1996 and then again starting in 2006) are prominent and outstanding fields for self representation and for exploration of dialectical possibilities and alternatives to traditional ways of "making art".

1983 is also the year when Hassan Sharif's first "semi-systems" are documented and his famous objects appear little earlier, in 1982. Both are continuous productions and they accompany –although with different material reflection, the first one remaining for quite a long time a mental structure rather than a tangible product– Hassan Sharif's artistic inquiry into "reality", an investigation into time and space, granted that these are and still remain the categories within which we must accept to move and relate to others.

“Since 1980 and till today I have been producing works closely related to constructive and system art, yet I call them semi-system. These works are based on very simple numbers, arithmetic, alphabets, and directions. I manipulate them to create straight, curved and broken lines or geometric shapes, particularly squares, and I execute them with ink on paper or using different colours on canvas in medium sizes. These lines and squares are repeated and mass produced. Each work or project is comprised of many drawings, and at the same time each painting or drawing represents itself. This repetition in producing large quantities of similar 'things' is also similar to playing with words, letters, lines, numbers and colours, ‘a kind of repetitive arpeggio, intonation or melody.’” (Hassan Sharif)

Sometimes I think of blindness not as a metaphorical condition, rather as a physical one. In that hypothetical dimension, I would still be able to appreciate Hassan Sharif’s work through all other senses, the plastic and tactile nature of his objects only apparently preceding and guiding, prevailing over the other senses in the discovery of his creations. Most probably his voice and words would represent the clearest illustration of his work, in its ductility to performance and replacement.

Hassan Sharif’s art works do not cling to a specific fraction of time. Indeed, they reduce the hiatus between difference and repetition, the immobility of the past and the unpredictability of the future.

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