



Copper no. 35, 2016, detail, copper wire, 88.6h x 33.5w x 7d in (225h x 85w x 18d cm)

Hassan Sharif: Semi-Systems

January 4 – February 10, 2018

Alexander Gray Associates presents Hassan Sharif: *Semi Systems*, the Gallery's fourth exhibition of work by the artist (b.1951, Iran – d.2016, Dubai, United Arab Emirates). Focused on Sharif's use of the grid, geometry, and repetitive gesture, the exhibition includes work in a variety of media made as early as 1982 until his death in 2016.

During his studies in London in the early 1980s, Hassan Sharif became exposed to and engaged with conceptual artists, which prompted him to selectively embrace and reject strict tenants of abstraction and automatic form; chance and play. These motifs along with a fascination with mathematical calculations and permutations led him to begin methodical yet absurd performances which he called "Experiments." On his return to Dubai in 1982, these performances would develop further, taking place for an audience of the camera, in studio urban and desert settings. On view are six documentary images of *Drawing Squares on the Floor Using a Cube* (1982) in which the artist traced a pre-existing sculptural cube onto the ground in a grid pattern, ultimately creating a larger drawn square that echoes the shape of the traced object.

Concurrently, Sharif applied the same approach of repetition and variation to a series of geometric and linear drawings, the "Semi-Systems," which he would continue throughout his career. Conceived with arbitrary mathematical rules or instructions that were often outlined in accompanying workbooks, the artist would embrace rebellions within these frameworks, breaking rules, inverting formulas. While making this work in Dubai, Sharif was witnessing changes in religious practice, the transformative impact of the UAE's political independence, and rapid economic growth and speculation. As art historian Paulina Kolczynska writes, Sharif "wanted to remain at the fringes of the system in order to retain space for the creation of his own constructivist process... it was through his coined description of "semi-systems" that he made an important statement, signaling that he was taking some distance from the original systematic agenda."

Central to the exhibition is the monumental wall painting *Clockwise*. The painting structure is derived from a 2008 diptych of the same title, each panel of which includes a columnar grid formation, with one line emphasized in each cube. While these works rely on straightforward geometry, they are hand drawn and imperfect. Also on view are Sharif's preparatory drawings, or 'draft papers' which illustrate how his formulations were mutable and could yield an array of results. Similarly imperfect is the wall-based object *Springs* (2016), which is comprised of coiled metal draped from the wall, each tendril ending at a different length, some coils more taut than others. The springs themselves are a feat of mathematical engineering.

Sharif capitalizes on their existing structure and arranges them on the wall, much in the way he used the generic lines, squares, and dots in endless orientations. In total, the range of works on view reflect Sharif's humor and flexibility that was the source and result of his lifelong artistic practice. As the artist explained, "Sometimes I make some mistakes in my works, I keep them as they are without correction because I believe that 'Art' is a result of errors."

Hassan Sharif is the subject of a major retrospective, *Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist*, curated by Hoor Al Qasimi currently on view at the Sharjah Art Foundation, United Arab Emirates. Sharif was a founding member of the Emirates Fine Art Society and of the Art Atelier in the Youth Theater and Arts, Dubai. In 2007, he was one of four artists to establish The Flying House, a Dubai institution for promoting contemporary Emirati artists. The first Emirati to have his work shown in the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, Qatar, Sharif was also among the selected artists to represent the U.A.E. during its first national pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2009. In 2011, Sharif was the subject of a retrospective exhibition, *Hassan Sharif: Experiments & Objects 1979-2011*, curated by Catherine David and Mohammed Kazem and presented by the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture & Heritage/Platform for Visual Arts, U.A.E. His work has been shown in recent exhibitions including, *Viva Arte Viva*, 57th Venice Biennale, Italy (2017); *The Creative Act: Performance • Process • Presence*, The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. (2017); *But We Cannot See Them: Tracing a UAE Underground*, 1988–2008, New York University Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. (2017); Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar (2016); the Sharjah Biennial, U.A.E. (2015); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2015); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2014); Fundação Casa França-Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil (2014); and the International Centre of Graphic Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia (2012); among others. Sharif's artwork is included in the collections of the Centre Pompidou, Paris; M+ Museum, Hong Kong; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar; the Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, U.A.E.; the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah; the Sittard Center, The Netherlands; and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., and Guggenheim, New York. Sharif's work was on view at the Sharjah Art Foundation as part of the exhibitions *Do It* curated by Hoor Al Qasimi and Hans Ulrich Obrist, and *1980 — Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates* curated by Hoor Al Qasimi and first featured at The National Pavilion United Arab Emirates at the 56th Venice Biennale, Italy. The Estate of Hassan Sharif is also represented by Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai, and GB Agency, Paris.