



Left: Hassan Sharif, *Press Conference No. 4*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 78 5/8 x 57 1/8 in (200 x 145 cm). Right: Hassan Sharif, *Raising Hands No. 2*, 2009. Oil on canvas, 78 3/4 x 58 in (200 x 145.4 cm)

Hassan Sharif: *Political Paintings (2008–2009)*

New York: March 17–April 23, 2022

Alexander Gray Associates, New York presents Hassan Sharif: *Political Paintings (2008–2009)*. While Sharif (1951–2016) is best known for his sculptural compositions, he was a dedicated painter—insisting, “It is so easy now for me to give up painting and make objects, but time and time again I feel painting is important.” Highlighting the medium’s primacy in his practice, the Gallery’s presentation brings together political cartoons from the 1970s and paintings and works on paper from the late 2000s to center the artist’s unflinchingly wry observations on contemporary life and politics.

Trained as a painter, Sharif first received critical recognition for his figurative images. By the mid-1970s, he had applied his compositional skills to drafting caricatures for a variety of United Arab Emirates newspapers and magazines. Using his platform to critique everything from the United States’s foreign policy in the Middle East to the changing economic realities of life in Dubai after the establishment of the U.A.E. in 1971, Sharif’s images have an immediacy and irreverence that makes their outspoken commentary all the more compelling.

Later paintings by the artist amplify these cartoons’ political critique and gestural style. Canvases from the *Press Conference* series (2008–2009) feature an impassioned leader ranting into a microphone. As Sharif once observed about these politicians, “They are so confident that, in the end, they go mad. They think that when they talk there are bombs coming out of their mouths.”

Alluding to this madness, the works' loose brushstrokes animate each scene—dissolving every figure's face into a grotesque parody that captures their unhinged psychological state.

Other works by the artist from this period shift their focus away from political figureheads to picture the grim reality of those whose collective fates they control. Repeating the gesture of a raised hand over and over again, Sharif's 2009 *Raising Hand* paintings abstract the movement until its meanings collapse and run together—making each figures' arc-like motion simultaneously a wave goodbye, a sign of surrender, and a plea for help. Rendered in sickly hues of blue, green, and orange, Sharif's figures recall the emotive, distorted forms of German Expressionists, drawing parallels between their questioning of convention and Sharif's own.

This critical appraisal—an inherent social critique—was foundational to Sharif's approach to art-making. "Every act from man is a political act. An artist is a realist by nature," he once concluded. "I record reality through visual symbols which overflow with combinations of black humor."

Hassan Sharif was the subject of a 2017 retrospective *Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist* curated by Hoor Al Qasimi at the Sharjah Art Foundation, which traveled to the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany (2020); Malmö Konsthall, Sweden (2020); and the The Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporaine de Saint-Étienne Métropole (MAMC+), Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, France (2021). Sharif was a founding member of the Emirates Fine Art Society and of the Art Atelier in the Youth Theater and Arts, Dubai, U.A.E. 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 Mathaf: 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 53rd 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*, 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, United Kingdom (2015); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY (2014); Fundação Casa França-Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (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; Sharjah Art Foundation, U.A.E.; Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, U.A.E.; Sittard Center, The Netherlands; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.; and Guggenheim, New York, NY. Sharif's work was on view at the Sharjah Art Foundation in 2016 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, which was first featured at the Emirati Pavilion during the 56th Venice Biennale, Italy in 2015. The Estate of Hassan Sharif is also represented by Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai, and GB Agency, Paris.

Alexander Gray Associates is a contemporary art gallery in New York City and Germantown, NY. Through exhibitions, research, and artist representation, the Gallery spotlights artistic movements and artists active in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Influential in cultural, social, and political spheres, these artists are notable for creating work that crosses geographic borders, generational contexts, and artistic disciplines. Alexander Gray Associates is an organization committed to anti-racist and feminist principles.

New York: Tuesday–Saturday, 10:30 AM–6:00 PM.
Germantown: Saturday–Sunday, 12:00 PM–6:00 PM, and by appointment