



HASSAN SHARIF

SEEING WITH HASSAN SHARIF

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Untitled – A Lucky Number

(Poem no. 666 for Hassan Sharif)

I watch you explore varying states of synthesis –
In Sickness and in Health

I clutch my lymph nodes
They swell akin to your Slippers on Wire –

Round
Incongruously held
Bulbous
Mottled in Blemish – hot as the embers of
charred coal
Waiting to explode into the burnished sky!

Uneven edges,
Sewn and spun, together / and through the
Sharp edge of your nail
Spiking – these wanton lumps do not prickle
thorns

The verges of your un-cut finger – pricks, and
rakes across the back
Of the throat
The tar of cigarettes, scorching lungs
Powdery powder – remnants in air.

Breathing is sated, seated; sealed
An encounter approaches – a duel
Or is this an embrace?

A part of me / of you, cradled –
Fragile is the kin as the skin that cracks
At one's fingertips.

I am a plastic bag that waits forever – for
everyone and no one all the same.
Spinning, looping, flapping
In longing
In plain sight –
I am always a metaphor, billowing.
Tessellating
Elusive as I am familiar.

A chandelier of everything, of amassing
accumulations
Bound to Appear
A world of divine detritus
A circle of two beings, soldered into one.

Omar Kholeif

Waste Not Want Not: The Life of Everyday Material

What would it look like for a piece of writing to embody the spirit, the very essence of a form of artmaking, a process anchored around the act of perpetual assembly? Or the act of disassembly? To produce words that resemble Lego blocks coming undone? Prose that conjures fastened buttons and strung rope; materials stitched and threaded. Or rather, decomposing – hanging by a thread, perhaps? In-between these pages, jute, cardboard, and acrylic – smeared and stained on handmade paper – sit alongside aluminium coil, wound and looped up to infinity, ascending and descending from parallel edges.

Each artwork produced by the late Emirati artist, Hassan Sharif, is the subject of constant change. Reflecting at the time of writing on *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter's review of the expansive 2017 retrospective, *I Am the Single Work Artist*, curated by Hoor Al Qasimi at Sharjah Art Foundation, it is evident that any form of critical reflection of Sharif's art, in and of itself must serve as an act of embodying the artist's intuitive methodology. Cotter's review, published under the title "The Materials Man of the Emirates," is composed of painterly prose, words that reveal themselves in a form of accumulation. Each sentence that we read is constituted out of recurring metaphors and synonyms, which demonstrate Sharif's singular act of creating amalgams.

Cotter's writing distils the artist's practice appropriately. The pursuit of Sharif's artmaking was singular – to fashion a creolised form of art through expressive, economical, and opportunistic means. The results are contorted in form – constituent elements dipped and dyed, which materialise as tessellating hybrids that converse and convene across space and time. I invoke the word "creolised," specifically, to conjure Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant's concept of a "poetics of relation." Alternatively, in the realm of environmental anthropology, one can point to Sophia Roosth, who contends that synthetic biology requires one to "produce new living things" to comprehend how life, in essence, functions, evolves, twists, and revolves backwards on itself.

Born in Iran in 1951, in the coastal city of Bandar Lengeh on the Persian Gulf, Sharif's future home, for most of his life, would be Dubai – one of the seven Trucial States, which would form the nation of sheikdoms known today as the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It has been popularly noted that the artist came of age during the transition of the Trucial States into the United Arab Emirates – the infamous period of the oil boom and the attendant rise in consumer culture – one that is believed to have replaced the informal or perceivably sparing aspects of everyday, quotidian culture. A new public imaginary was to be propagated into a community where the language of art, let alone the contemporary, did not yet clearly exist. Sharif thus ventured to London as a young adult, where he studied at the Byam Shaw School of Art – returning to the UAE as an artist of performance feats, famously mythologised for enacting scenes such as an outdoor exhibition in the Emirate of Sharjah's Central Souk in 1984–1985. This period, in the early 1980s, served as a moment of document and documentary. Sharif's actions were performed and

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Broom
2016
Sharjah Art Foundation
Collection, Sharjah
(cat. 84, detail)

recorded with the restless thrill and anxiety that can be attributed to the likes of the Fluxus movement artists, such as Dara Birnbaum, Nam June Paik, or Bruce Nauman.

Sharif's work serves as a conjuring. It did not fill a vacuum but rather sought to create an alphabet for a language that did not yet exist in the UAE. Sharif operated, as Jean Fisher invoking Michel Serres noted, as a trickster – building mythology around himself as quickly as he debunked the concept of myth itself. During the 1980s, Sharif shared his learnings and musings, and his translations of contemporary art with other regional artists, becoming a protagonist amongst a small coterie of burgeoning artists. Often referred to as “pioneering” in this regard, however, such lofty verbiage would not necessarily sit comfortably with Sharif. It would, perhaps, be more appropriate to suggest that he was a spirit of the utmost generosity – sharing learnt approaches to artistic knowledge production and its dissemination. In this regard, Sharif summoned ghosts where there were no ghosts: over desert landscapes, from coast to coast, across gulfs.

The life of Sharif's everyday materials is a persistent and necessary point of departure and return for the study of his work. Much has been spoken of the artist's work belonging to the Duchampian tradition of the readymade – a reference point that the artist himself once cited as an early influence. Polemically, one can argue that Duchamp has been deployed in these instances as a Western anchor, an art historical beacon, to legitimise Sharif's claim to being a “Conceptual” artist at a time when there was no local vernacular for art, let alone modern or contemporary visual culture. Contra to Duchamp's approach to the readymade, Sharif's polyphonous art – as a political cartoonist, a commentator, a teacher, and as a draughtsman working on paper, wood, fabric and any every other form of material culture available to him – constitutes a precise and culturally situated act of worldbuilding. His handmade weft and cleft are gestural explorations into a world that did not exist in his locality, prior to his visual articulation of it. His use of crude materials, notably plastic, demonstrates the rise of a material culture that bridged Dubai and the UAE to the rest of the world through petrochemical development. His deconstruction and re-animation of polymer-based materials – such as plastic hair combs, which he would interleave with natural material such as copper, as in the hanging installation *Combs* (2016), or raw cotton and glue, as evidenced in his video work *Cotton* (2013) – are expressive of the blurred boundaries in the ecological debate, one where the synthetic and the natural intertwine.

The most expended of polymer-based products globally today are deployed in the packaging of everyday customer goods – a source that one can find in the late artist's working studio: from unused aluminium food trays stitched together on wire, or in rolled-up packaging dipped in glue, used to produce hanging wall reliefs that resemble a kind of bunting. In his first monograph published in English, surveying works from 1973 to 2011, an argument pivots around the artist's practice of “weaving” as an intrinsic

principle to his formal artmaking. Weaving, in the literal sense, is suggestive of a handmade process that enshrines certain antiquated imaginaries of non-Western cultures. A contemplative examination consistently reveals that the praxis of Sharif's art has outlasted the pursuits of his practice. That is to say that the living function of history – its authorship and narration in the world – has been infected by what Roland Barthes once argued as the socialised mythology projected or inflected upon the non-Western subject.

Contrarily, a close examination of Sharif's archives, studio, and substantial public holdings divulges a trajectory much more deeply tethered to the history of collage and assemblage, as opposed to the exactitude of weaving. Weaving as a practice, if we are to invoke figures from Ani Albers through to Otobong Nkanga, demands a specific and precise intensity. A period of preparation encompasses sizing, winding, and warping before the ultimate act of weaving – one that is seen as creating utility for the threaded material, i.e., composing a functional or utilitarian item out of yarn or loose threads. Weaving institutes, organises, and arranges a form of inscribed meaning in the world; a historical belief that is enshrined in the practice as it emerged in Egypt between 2600 and 3400 BC.

Conversely, Sharif was a disobedient operator who eschewed tradition, labelling, or boundary. Sharif's acts of perceived “weaving” were instead gestural allusions to the potential gleaned from a counterintuitive use of mass material culture. The embodied craft and workmanship of interlocking threads was not the focus of his intent or what we the spectator should see. His disembowelled and filled objects, rather, serve as metaphorical allusions of interlocking cultures. His tapestry emerges as a “body without organs” ascending into homeostatic states of constant occupation – an occupation of a public imaginary in flux. The most courageous of all of Sharif's weaving was the continuous act of stitching together the concept of polyphony as a central tenant into the very essence of his work. He developed a novel performative, event-based culture in the UAE, sketching and pronouncing provocations in lyric and prose. To invoke poet Adrienne Rich, Sharif was someone who was in search of “a common language” for art and artists alike – a located dialect that could proffer multiple seats of entry for the spectator, all the while eschewing the politeness of visual art as belonging to an elitist culture. Sharif once noted, “the essence of localism is to bestow upon objects of heritage an amended and progressive position that negates the dullness of regurgitated concepts like identity, language, customs, and traditions.” In turn, Sharif was able to create an art practice that was of a specific place and time, without serving to sanctioned views – the myopic view of the non-Western artist as the subaltern.

The Studio of Life

Hassan's Atelier, as it has come to be known, was packed up piece by piece after the artist's death and moved into the care of the Sharjah Art Foundation. There, it was re-erected in 2017 as a reproduction in full within the Foundation's

Al Mureijah Square art spaces. In 2022, a portion of the studio travelled to London for the exhibition, *A Century of the Artist's Studio*, curated by the then-director of Whitechapel Gallery, Iwona Blazwick. A hoarder's dream, Sharif's studio is anchored by a worktop that is carved and stencilled with written musings and drawings. His words are barely discernible from under the presence of cables and wire; tin and plastic; paint and glue; and all manner of found objects, which look as if they were upturned and fell without logic from the sky – scattered, overlaid; a palimpsest whose organising principle is arched around chaos.

Within the interstices, beneath the countertop, are square-shaped vestibules that exist within the body of a hefty wooden frame. Here, one can bear witness to a more fragile artist. A tenderness is evident in the way synthetic slippers and nails are neatly organised alongside tins of paint and industrial-sized containers of glue, as well as carefully folded cloth and tinfoil. On the wall above his workstation sit an array of incomplete works – a wrench soldered in plasticine, for instance. Sharif's obsession with plastic remains pivotal as evidenced by the numerous stuffed plastic bags that line his workspace. Collectively, they construct a kind of travelogue of different routes and sites that the artist would visit on a regular basis – journeying from pharmacies to grocery stores.

In the Giardini at the 2017 Venice Biennale, curator Christine Macel presented *Hassan Sharif Studio (Supermarket)* as part of the curated International Exhibition. A vitrine of choreographed mounds of plastic bound in red rope sat alongside tightly wrapped plastic bags. Dozens of power sockets accumulated leading to an embankment of electrical debris. Chopsticks, slippers, and cardboard boxes wrapped in and around themselves – nonhierarchically situated. These unfinished artworks from Sharif's studio are intended to evoke the chaotic visual spree of supermarkets – large, self-service supermarkets selling everyday and industrial products in bulk, often at discounted rates. Stores that are, of course, commonly found on the outskirts of cities in the UAE, mimetic of their Western counterparts which are often located in suburban locales. The presentation, mostly composed by Sharif in intuitive bouts of production, reflects the artist's ongoing obsession with and devotion to working in his studio, most often alone. Gathered, this constellation of materials serves as a living archive – a museum of everything and nothing, all at once – their binding quality being each object's mutable, elastic existence – one that commits them to the world for posterity's sake.

Plastic-plasticity-malleability: the contoured, shaped, and formed polymer found in most households is produced from fossil fuels. Popular reports note that there have now been more than 9.2 billion tons of this produced, much of which ends up in landfills that occupy economically disenfranchised nations and geographic expanses. Another industry in the form of recycling has emerged in response, but the toxicity of pollution, and the sully of waters that has endangered marine life and defiled the perceived purity of nature,

continues to be one of the most contentious of living debates. The year after Sharif's death, plastic seemed to take centre stage amongst numerous exhibits, including in a collaboration of mine with artist Laurie Simmons who, in 2017, produced *2017: The Mess*. This she dubbed, in Arthur Lubow's article, "Stepping Outside the Dollhouse," as a "memento mori of our times." The twenty-foot-long staged photograph, which consisted of thousands of cheaply acquired, multi-coloured plastic objects, was reportedly created to evoke the oft-quoted line in American filmmaker Mike Nichols's popular cinematic work *The Graduate* (1967), "There's a great future in plastics." But at what expense? And to what end?

Sharif is everywhere that I look these days. It is 2020, and I am peering out from an apartment block during the global lockdown induced by the Covid-19 pandemic. I am inhabiting a new building at the edge of the manmade Palm Island. The glass reliefs to the balcony do not open. The building is brand-new, straddling a series of waterfront developments that are still under construction. Groups of largely South Asian and East African men in blue uniforms line the streets during the day – the smell of their sweat in the scorching heat is almost evident to me behind the double-glazed screen. Scaffolding appears, as do cranes; large sheaths of metal and glass. The view before me becomes obscured by an escalating shroud of dust, which might as well resemble ash. This is industry. But everything is handmade, if one is to be *precise*. Carefully crafted from the hands of a human – a form of labour as choreography.

In my own invocation of Saidiya Hartman's concept of critical fabulation – a literary technique that utilises fiction as a device to fill in the historical ruptures of time – of erasure, I often find myself casting Sharif in a familiar movie scene. It is 1999, and Sharif is holding a white plastic bag with detailed logos, within them the address of a pharmacy, stencilled in large Arabic letters. He slowly, but assuredly, makes his way across erstwhile pavements, manoeuvring across highways, amidst powdered grime, with his cigarette constantly in his mouth. He enters a small local mall to gather cut-rate materials to begin his act of worldbuilding.

Time grinds to a halt. For nearly five minutes. We are in a motion picture. A scene of *something or the other*. Plastic bag floating in the air – animating my frame of vision in a free-wheeling dance. A soundtrack by composer Thomas Newman, simultaneously melancholic and blithe in tenor, fills the screen, and with it the porous atmosphere that surrounds Sharif's body. This is *American Beauty* (1999), Sam Mendes's Oscar-winning directorial debut. The iconic scene of Ricky Fitts, played by actor Wes Bentley, who can be found observing, filming, and obsessively documenting a flailing plastic bag as it whirrs and whirls in the open air. Here, it becomes a piercing metaphor that jumps off the screen.

This scene, like the film itself, operatively functions as a search for meaning, for an understanding of the rhythm – the modalities of life itself. That very metaphor, too, serves to symbolise Sharif's very act of becoming. A flaneur traversing streets with plastic bags, filled with plastic and coil, to return,

organise, and engage in a self-soothing act of filling and picking; of making and unmaking the hybrid forms in the studio of his life.

Sharif's assemblages have been described as quotidian with some emphasis, in the scant literature on his work, attributed to the artist's locality. Yet, examine his culled sculptures of spiked spoons and forks once erected onto tables and walls, and a definite kind of intensity begins to emerge – one that harkens to the anxious violence of Melvin Edwards's welded steel wall reliefs. The tendency to contaminate forms into aggregate sculptures can be witnessed in *Slippers and Wire* (2009), a mutable sculpture as installation, that consists of economically acquired slippers in pop blues, greens, and pinks that are welded, if not bludgeoned, together by industrially produced nails that are wedged through the bottoms of the feet. Stacked inharmoniously, edges rippling, the work can concurrently be seen in multiple fashions. For one, it may resemble the injurious architecture of a landfill – visually hollowed of poetry. Yet, stand from a distance, and the construction's abundant colours – tessellating and recurring – effloresce, rousing a Pop radiance of pure ecstasy.

Obfuscating Language: Bisecting and Bifurcating Forms

I am standing in an exhibition hall in Hamburg. It is called the Deichtorhallen – this vaulted space once served as a market and a vestibule of a sort for trains arriving from and departing to Berlin. On the other end of the journey, trains would reach the site of what today is another contemporary art museum: the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin. I breathe in the smell of jute – once famously referred to as the “golden fibre,” produced and exported from Bangladesh – as I peer over a small table with a number of Sharif's book works that were shipped here from Sharjah Art Foundation's warehouses in the UAE. The multiple points of movement and return feel apt, illustrative of the routes of circulation and reference of the artist's animated readymades. The sculptures before me are a royal blue. They are notebooks from 1983, reconstituted in 2006. Emblazoned across the glossy fronts of these vessels, as hefty as they are weightless, are the words “Best Quality” – embossed in a yellow that is almost iridescent. “Made in Indonesia,” they profess. The contradiction, inherently, is that these artworks were, like almost all of Sharif's constructions, realised in the UAE, where Sharif lived for most of his adult life, except for the years spent as a student in the UK.

Stand back from this table and one will bear witness to voluminous pages, pulled apart and refolded, tacked together, and seamed shut with jute rope. These volumes, situated alongside the rising abstract sculptural forms of renowned Lebanese artists, Etel Adnan, Saloua Raouda Choucair, and Huguette Caland, quickly assume themselves as bodies – stand-ins for a person who is no longer here. For this author, they are reminiscent of the late artist David Wojnarowicz's protest performance of sewn and stitched lips (*Silence = Death*, 1990) – a visceral gesture made as a protest towards a culture of silencing. Here, sewn lips and sewn books occupy similar ground. The protest herein is *evidently* one against the impossibility of colonial languages, learnt or unlearned,

mastered or not, to express Sharif's atlas of thought. Is the desire to sew shut these books a dismissal of elitist forms of language, a nod to the obfuscating nature of knowledge, or an invitation for each spectator to consider one's very concept of literacy?

After Sharif's return from Britain in the 1980s, his artworks became as reflective as they were refractive. Rather than exist within the binary of bisecting and bifurcation, the artist interpolated his multiple practices, creating a junction where works were split and stretched, reassembled, and bound dutifully. This approach remained evident in his later years in large-scale installation works such as *Zip Fastener no. 2* (2016) and *Shopping Bags* (2015); when installed in large white exhibition spaces, they begin to resemble American artist Sam Gilliam's intersecting draped paintings – curtains that reveal and disguise – making closer inspection imperative.

In 2015, near the end of his life, it had become unmistakable that for over four decades the trickster had come to retaliate. Commenting on his epic installation, *Dictionary* (2015), a cumulative sculpture begun in the early 1980s, Sharif noted:

“At art college, I was informed that if I did not learn English that I would not have access to knowledge ... I retaliated against that.”

Here, seven illustrated dictionaries in English and Arabic, with one in particular that he used during his years in London, are pulled and pooled into a looming anti-monument. Strung together via glue, cotton, and rope, these pages form an abstracted body, as much as they resemble a collapsing fountain of contradictory sets of knowledge. Each publisher, every editor, proffering a sanctioned view of linguistic communication, an imperfect tool for a global society that has not stopped accelerating. Here, the definition of defining language, the very concept of ascribed meaning, is made antiquated; watch it in free fall.

Sharif's vocabulary from his postcollege years often pronounced the visual concept of the double, such as in his oil painting, *Black and White* (1985), which presents inversions of a diamond-like shape and creates a dual image of negative and filled space. Whether Sharif's time spent studying in London led him to the concept of W.E.B. Dubois's belief in double consciousness is unclear. That said, Sharif's manifold approaches to self-definition, in the first half of the 1980s, are one of constant experimentation – working across performance, drawing, painting, sculpting; photography and auto-ethnographic acts of self-documentation; and diaristic reflection – and clearly evince his desire to avoid being prescribed into the categorical field of one formal artistic identity.

Perhaps intuitively, the dominance of “Systems Art” in Britain in the 1970s spilt over into Sharif's education, leading to what has been dubbed by the artist as “semi-systems” of decoding and exploring what exists between the line, the thread, and the square. What aesthetic and, by proxy, cultural meaning

is derived when transposing what is conceivably a mathematical rubric of squares and crosses from works on paper, such as *Body and Squares* (1983), into animated performances? Observe the roughly A4 size works-on-paper alongside photographs of Sharif's embodied performances – of his body lying flat on the ground, covering, marking the squares. The photo-documentation of the performance sought to explore how many squares the artist could fill by adopting various physical positions of his person – the possibilities of chance outweigh the burden of precise calculation, resulting in pictures that bare a gendered body subjugated to myriad forms of contortion.

Endurance, or rather, enduring the limitations of the prescribed visual codes of art, was a preoccupation of Sharif's. In *Swinging* (1983), the artist took to the desert, a naïve, almost infantile act, flapping back and forth in a child's swing. Obscured in the pictures of this *happening*, which is clearly inspired by the performative tendencies of Fluxus artists, is an attempt to document the frequencies of his voice while enacting this physical action – his voice traversing its highest point to its lowest. The perseverance of the artist's actions is as lasting as the legacy that he has fostered in the collective imagination in the UAE's art scene. Indeed, one of the most cited facts of Sharif's life was his commitment to furthering informal structures of artistic education through affiliations such as the Emirates Fine Art Society, whose headquarters today exist in a heritage house that I peer at from outside my office's curved windows.

The permanent influence of his multiple embodied actions has expanded beyond the confines of any single site of imagination. In 2018, I invited the acclaimed artist and filmmaker Akram Zaatari to imagine a new film commission for the 14th edition of the Sharjah Biennial. Aware of Zaatari's interest in archaeology, I asked him to visit the inland town of Al Madam, Sharjah. Home to a regular shopping festival, Al Madam's "old town" is also colloquially referred to by some as the "ghost town" – its barren houses sunken into thickets of sand reminiscent of the descending palazzos of Venice, plummeting into the water against the forceful acqua alta.

Inspired by Sharif's *Swinging*, and the artist's pursuit of exploring the limits of acoustic frequency, Zaatari convened three musicians to this site, using it as an "acoustic sounding space," and a refractive echo chamber. Observed studiously by a lingering camera, these durational scenes become discomfiting, that is, until the camera cuts away to the next setting. The feature-length film titled *The Landing* (2019), or in Arabic, *Al Houbut*, now sits swathed in a hard drive in the Sharjah Art Foundation Collection, alongside photographic documentation of Sharif's performances – both sonic bodies, laid flat, sleeping, resting, awaiting a moment for animation, perhaps a reorientation, or rather, the very service of reclamation of both the land and the body that they serve.

Objects, Rejecting Objecthood: Towards Total Impurity

Michael Fried's now antediluvian treatise on "Art and Objecthood" from 1967 lurks in my subconscious every time I watch Sharjah Art Foundation's team of art

handlers begin to unpack and prepare Sharif's work for exhibition. Fried – whose text I was required to study in my academic schooling – professed that the field of Minimalism, which encompassed the readymade, was "too literal, theatrical," somehow "too pure" an invention. The contradiction of applying this framework to Sharif's readymades, which have been interpreted within a field of Minimalism, is precisely that their literal act of theatrical making and staging – their sullied impurity – is what makes them distinct within the field of art and its history.

Sharif's practice, to raise the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, is as distinctly singular as it is plural in the way that it manifests – both in its making and its experience. His contoured artworks deploy quotidian objects, such as plastic buckets, shoelaces, and food packaging, to reject the notion that any aesthetic tendency or desire should be vanquished or suppressed. This is apparent in the artist's statement from the early 1980s that

"I am loyal to colour"

– a marker emblematised in his annotated gouache and pencil work on cardboard, *Color Wheel* (1980), as much as it is evident in his sculptural installation *Plastic Cups and Coir* (1999). Sharif's use of colour combinations, however, does not seek to create a form of Lyrical Abstraction or the politeness of authoritative fields of arrangement.

One could argue that his jarring colour palette is a testament to anthropologist Michael Taussig's surrealist argument that colour reveals "the bodily unconscious." The presentation of colour is now historically ascribed to colonial impulses, specifically the obfuscation of it from the context of high art. In the realm of Western art history, the early twentieth-century avant-garde's avoidance of colour denotes the Western world's chromophobia – an argument elucidated by the artist David Batchelor in his monograph of the same name. Thus, to think of Sharif's art is to practice an act of unlearning, presenting a re-examination of cultural hegemony, in favour of a porous reconstitution of art history. It was a pursuit that Sharif himself, as an artist, author, educator, and maker of worlds, relentlessly followed over the course of his life. His work, alive and awake, continues this mission.

The First Conclusion

Sitting down to author this piece, to weld together these rendered perspectives, was a most isolating task. Despite being considered the "pioneer" of art in the UAE, and a moderniser of art in the UAE, West Asia, and beyond, Sharif's practice remains under-studied. Looked at by a handful of individuals, it demands a deep valuation, before it can seek to be re-evaluated. Where are the words, you can ask? What institution should bear the task, or indeed, perform this context dutifully, enthusiastically, with the devotion it so rightly deserves? This contribution is but a mere drop in an ocean. I have sought to scratch the surface of Sharif's life and practice in

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an attempt to elucidate a proposition – that Sharif was a pioneer, not of the readymade, but of the hybrid, creolised, contemporary (not necessarily modern) object and its attendant discourses.

I take issue with the pronounced emphasis of focusing on the micro-specificity of a single technique or the indolent practice of ascribing Sharif's art to too grand a narrative. Sharif was preoccupied with straining repetitive acts and gestures, but his quest for innovation emerged in an expanded field of art and cultural production which demands further clarification, context, and explication. As I see it, Sharif's quest was not necessarily innovative when examined in isolation, but the attendant result of his efforts, when situated in context, was boundless and breathtaking. One of the most precise emblems of Sharif's practice, I believe, is his *Artificial Leg* from 2014. Here, one bears witness to a single medical-grade walking-crutch that is enmeshed in metallic, circular, looping, and winding wire that resembles barbed wire as much as it does a kitchen scrubber. It sits, often on a wall, descending, as much as it ascends, or even transcends. Speaking of the work's significance in 2015, the artist – at the time, enduring his own health-related turmoil – noted that such an apparatus, the crutch, is no longer a staff; once an insignia of power or nobility, now a crest of human beings and their overreliance on the medical industrial complex.

But whose complex shall we address first? Sharif often cited the “ghosts” – the spectres that lurked within the body of images, whose overwhelming abundance saturated the human subconscious, demanding to be seen. His metaphor in an age of increased visibility of various communities that have been historically marginalised is piercing in its relevance. Again, I should emphasise, that what has been articulated thus far on Sharif will not suffice. As Adrienne Rich professed, “no poetry,” indeed, no existing form of art or criticism will “serve” us. The limited language, the modest tools available to those who have worked for decades unseen, not merely to art's hegemony of elitism, but to our very selves, will not be able to sweeten the bitter, not alone. These words, much like Sharif's art, I hope, will act as an operative summoning – an invitation to imprint a form of imagination into ink and print. As curator Koyo Kouoh declared in a conversation on stage with me at the 1-54 Forum on Contemporary African Art in 2022, “human beings [we] shall always, return to scripture and objects.” They are the preserve of our material culture. We demand, want, indeed, deserve, to see with, not through Sharif, for his art of worldbuilding constituted more than the faint lines drawn in the sand, which exist today.