

Mohammed Kazem

Ways of Marking

Curated by Murtaza Vali

Aicon Gallery Exhibition January 18th – February 24th, 2018
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35 Great Jones St, New York NY 10012



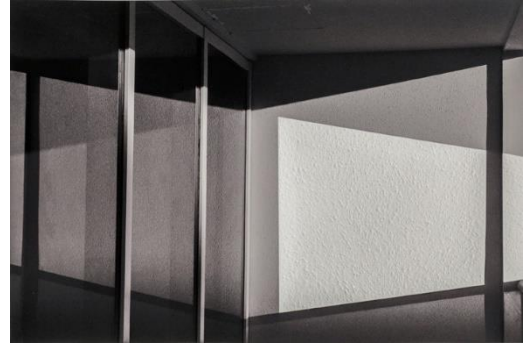
Mohammed Kazem, *Soundless II*, 2015
Acrylic, ink and pastel on paper, 71 x 51 in.

Aicon Gallery is pleased to present ‘**Ways of Marking**,’ Dubai-based **Mohammed Kazem**’s second solo exhibition in New York, and his first with the gallery. Kazem’s last solo show in New York focused largely on his conceptual and performative projects, the latter often executed for and documented in photographs. Tempering an objective and observational precision with a healthy dose of irony, in these works Kazem analyzed episodes and experiences from his daily life, interrogated his specific social and political context, and registered the effects of profound transformations in his surrounding built and natural environment. Instead, this exhibition focuses on a distinct, arguably more universal, strand of Kazem’s rich multifaceted practice, an ongoing meditation on the nature of mark making first begun during a fertile period of experimentation early in his career. In 1990, searching for a way to get beyond oil painting, Kazem translated his thick short brush strokes into an entirely novel and unique type of mark. He began to carefully and repeatedly scratch the surface of paper with the edge of a scissor to create various patterns and forms. Rising slightly off the paper, these marks consciously blur the traditional distinct between medium and support which, at least materially, are identical. And depending on the length, weight, and density of the scratches they can be difficult to see at first glance also blurring the line between figure and ground.

For Kazem these works possess a synesthetic quality. They function as highly subjective but still tangible records of otherwise intangible and immaterial experiences like sound, light, time and movement. Each scratch carries with it the sound of its execution. The resulting fields of ridges and bumps cast thousands of tiny shadows, animating the two-dimensional surface by creating areas that respond dynamically to ambient light. And as forms and surfaces are gradually built up through the accumulation of thousands of short

intuitive but precise marks, these works also record the passage of time. They are temporal records of their own making.

Over the years, Kazem has developed a masterful versatility in how he executes and deploys the scratch. They can appear intentional or random, straight or wavy, long or short. Outlining a form or delineating a pattern, sparse elongated scratches resemble the drawn line, while short overlapping and intersecting strokes fill in areas creating texture, like traditional drawing techniques of shading or cross-hatching. In some works, a layer of acrylic paint makes the scratches, and the patterns and forms they describe, become more visible. In the spare but monumental *Scratches on Paper* (2014), an over thirty-two foot long scroll of black paper covered with almost invisible scratches, the repeated gesture becomes an exercise in focus and endurance. And in the *Receiving Light* series (2016-2017), Kazem reanimates those areas of abstract photographs of his built and natural surroundings that receive direct sunlight by carefully filling them in with short scratches. The sense of dynamism and duration introduced through these textured fields of bumps and shadows reverses the photographic arrest of light, time and space into a fixed image by reanimating it.



Mohammed Kazem, *Receiving Light II*, 2016
Scratches on inkjet print on Hahnemuhle paper, 16 x 24 in.

Presented alongside a selection of Kazem's signature scratch works are some of his other experiments with mark, line, material and gesture. In the *Soundless* series (2015), conceived as silent counterpoint to the scratch works, Kazem creates dense fields made up of thousands of tiny pastel scribbles, which are overlaid with washes of acrylic paint and/or ink. While the top halves of these works bear more than a passing resemblance to Rothko's moody and atmospheric color fields the bottom halves dissolve into dribbles and spills, smears and stains, cataloguing the types of marks that different media allow for. And in *Kisses* (2017) short colored chalk lines drawn between nearby darkened splotches—the remnants of spit out chewing gum—encountered on the sidewalk metaphorically enact an intimate encounter between unknown bodies.

About the Artist

Mohammed Kazem was born in Dubai, UAE, in 1969. A trained musician as well as an artist, Kazem studied painting at the Emirates Fine Arts Society, in Sharjah, UAE, attended Al Rayat Music School, in Dubai, and recently received his MFA at the University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA. A pioneering conceptual artist, influenced by his close friend and mentor Hassan Sharif, his work touches on current global transformations in the social, political, and natural environments, and explores abstract ideas about the body, movement, space, and the natural elements.

About the Curator

Murtaza Vali is a critic and curator who lives and works between Brooklyn and Sharjah. A member of Art Jameel's Curatorial Council and the Curator of the 2013 Abraaj Group Art Prize, he has curated exhibitions for commercial galleries and non-profit institutions around the world. A recipient of a 2011 Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant for Short-Form Writing, he regularly contributes to international art periodicals and exhibition catalogues. An occasional educator, he is a Visiting Instructor at Pratt Institute and a Lead Tutor for Campus Art Dubai.

Please contact Aicon Gallery (jana@aicongallery.com) for more information.