

**P R O M
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G A L L
E R Y ■**

di Ida Pisani

Hiwa K

As You Dig Inwards

Curated by Aneta Szylak

Opening on March 29th at 7,00 p.m.

Press release

“As You Dig Inwards” is a new exhibition, taking upon the artist’s personal memory of events, places, and images. But yet, as usual, Hiwa K expresses his uneasy relationship with representation. The newest production, a set of lightboxes with blurry archival, 1960s images from the times of Abdel Karim Qasim, partly sheathed in plastic film on its surface, challenge our very quest for representation. Abdel Karim Qasim, was a nationalist, left-leaning president of Iraq, who rose to power thanks to a military coup. He became the country modernizer who, at the same time, tried to resist Western influence and develop his politics with regional allies such as Soviet Russia. He was assassinated after numerous attempts, which is what ultimately led Saddam Hussein to gain power. The propagandist apparatus of Qasim produced some visual vocabulary of his political project, such as representations of labour, equality of women, manifestations of political will and documentation of propagandist events. The excerpts can be seen in Hiwa K’s new work. They are paired with the scenes connected to assassination attempts, or proofs of Kuwait land appropriation, what Qasim claimed to be part of Iraq.

The images, though, no longer simply tell the story of his unfinished political project but become background of abstract or semi-abstract colour interventions by the artist. Giving colour and new life to black and white image becomes nearly an abstract painting over propagandist and documentary images. The remains of fading propaganda of the times past and the Iraqi’s unfulfilled expectation towards then new political project. Yet it remains to date that the present political and cultural context of Iraq, or in general postcolonial and post-totalitarian condition, is seeking credibility in archival resources and political sentiments residing in collective memory.

One of the central works for understanding Hiwa’s practice around image and reflection is the film “Pre-Image (Blind like a Mother Tongue)” (2017). The artist tells here the story of his dangerous pedestrian journey from the native Iraqi Kurdistan, through countries and seas, with illegal border crossings and his arrival to continental Europe. The peregrination with company of other refugees and their smugglers, was the route from the unbearable to the unknown. From the seen already to yet unseen. To realise this film, Hiwa took again a part of

his original path, equipped with self-made navigation tool comprising of number of mirrors and a stick. His coming, his arriving is made out of what he sees in the mirrors. In practice, the artist does not see the world, but its reflections, unavoidably fragmented and momentary. Reflected image is for him a tool to navigate in diverse cultural contexts without being immersed in them. For this reason, he is not belonging anywhere and does not identify himself with either where he came from or arrived at. It is rather a mere friction between what he came with the ever changing cultural surrounding.

The process of searching for the forgotten meaning in the memory and archive is still an internal process rather than the mode of holding up and displaying discoveries. The artist's undertaking is digging inwards as the title of the show says, rather than upwards where nothing is certain but nearly everything can be transferred beyond direct message.

The exhibition terminates with some earlier work by the artist and introduces the viewer to the key elements to Hiwa K's narrative on walking and arriving without settling down, being uprooted, with unresolved past and unplanned future thus becoming where his own body becomes a tool to express what can't be represented or described. Finally, "Pin Down" (2017) a rarely seen filmed performance with Hiwa K and Kurdish philosopher Bakir Ali, is bringing intellectual struggle to the level of body wrestling to accentuate the role of difficult to describe friction between being in common and conversation. It speaks to other works that question the image surface, its simplified meaning and a depth of our complicated relationship with that meaning.

The exhibition is curated by Aneta Szyłak, the artist's long-term intellectual ally and travel companion, today also the mind behind upcoming NOMUS New Art Museum in Gdansk, Poland.