

# RICHARD SALTOUN

## PRESS RELEASE

**Fathi Hassan: *I can see you smiling Fatma***

**9 April - 25 May 2024**

**Private View: 9 April | 6pm**



Richard Saltoun Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition with Edinburgh-based, Egyptian born artist, **Fathi HASSAN** (b. 1957, Egypt), marking the gallery's representation of the artist. Showcasing a new body of paintings and a site-specific mural, this will be Hassan's first exhibition at the gallery, and follows from his participation in the 2023 Sharjah Biennial.

Entitled *I can see you smiling Fatma*, the exhibition, dedicated to his mother, showcases recent work that fuses his distinctive calligraphic motifs with the rich visual iconography drawn from his Nubian heritage. The exhibition will be followed by a further solo exhibition at No.9 Cork Street, London, entitled *Fathi Hassan: Shifting Sands*. Presented by The Sunderland Collection, this will be on view between May 31 - June 15, 2024. The two exhibitions jointly highlight the artist's engagement with the experience of migration, dislocation, diasporic identity, and shifting notions of heritage.

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Born in Cairo in 1957 to Nubian and Egyptian parents, Hassan's family were forced to leave their homeland of Nubia when the Aswan High Dam was built in 1952, flooding a vast area now under Lake Nasser. In his early twenties, he received a grant to study at Naples Art School, taking him to Italy where he developed his practice and gained artistic prominence. International recognition for his work grew in the 1980s and Hassan became one of the first African and Arab artists to exhibit at the Venice Biennale in 1988 curated by Dan Cameron.



Since then, Hassan has exhibited internationally, particularly in the Middle East, Italy and more recently the UK, where he relocated in 2018. His personal history, marked by constant movement and displacement has been a key influence on his artistic practice and the exhibition concept.

The works in the exhibition continue Hassan's excavation of his Nubian heritage. Incorporating images, colours and materials evoking cultural relics, cartographic fragments, and the essence of the landscape, these evocative compositions are layered with enigmatic inscriptions of ancient languages erased by colonialism. Though rooted in Kufic calligraphy, these scripts remain purposefully indecipherable, challenging the socio-cultural constructs of language and suggesting alternative ways of interpreting the relationship between text and image, the signifier and the signified. In the same calligraphic style, the artist will create a large-scale, site-specific mural spanning an entire wall in the rear gallery,

echoing previous museum commissions.

His portraits of *Nubian Warriors* are depicted against ornamental backgrounds populated by patterns, animals and people in a highly narrative, almost hieroglyphic style. Many of Hassan's works bear imprints of his profound personal journey, paying homage to figures from revered philosophers to cherished family members, notably his mother, Fatma, to whom the exhibition is dedicated. Thus, Hassan's exhibition serves as a poignant meditation on displacement, diasporic identity, and the multifaceted layers of language, distilled through the prism of his personal autobiography.

These themes will be further expanded through the exhibition *Fathi Hassan: Shifting Sands* at No.9 Cork Street, unveiling a new body of work created in response to items from The Sunderland Collection – an extraordinary private collection of rare antique world and celestial maps. For this show, the artist uses maps as a lens, incorporating

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motifs and images that have recurred throughout his practice, and drawing in new influences such as thinkers and creatives who have had a global influence on science or culture across borders.

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### **About Fathi Hassan**

Fathi Hassan (b. 1957) was born in Cairo to Nubian and Egyptian parents. He is known for his calligraphic works spanning photography, paintings, installation and drawing that highlight the plight of lost languages and oral history as a result of colonial domination. He rose to international prominence in the 1980s, and was among the first African and Arab artists to be included in the Venice Biennale in 1988. Having worked between Italy and Great Britain for many years, he finally took up residence in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 2018.

Notable solo exhibitions include; *Whispers*, Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai (2019); *Migration of Signs*, Williams Museum, Massachusetts (2015); *The Depth of Hope*, V.C.U. Qatar, Doha (2014); *Faces and Voices*, John Rylands Library, Manchester UK (2012); *Fathi Hassan: Transformation*, Skoto Gallery, New York (2011); National Museum Villa Pisani, Stra, Venice (2008) and *Containers of Memory*, Annina Nosei Gallery, New York (1995).

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