Art in America

#currentmood

$12 JANUARY 2017 COVER BY AMY SILLMAN

individuals in close-up as they crowded against the wall. A selection of the resulting images, which were surprisingly theatrical, were presented in the gallery's back room.

The main gallery contained works (all 2016) that Owens asked David Choi, Andy Cross, David Hammons, Matthew Day Jackson, Rashid Johnson, and Eric Mack to make for him to modify or alter. Owens's contributions ranged from filling the small negative spaces of a geometric sculpture by Choi with Vaseline to creating a large-scale photograph in which two outlines of his body, drawn with a flashlight and captured through multiple exposures, flank a black-and-white photogram by Jackson of another bodily imprint.

Like the photographic documents that were conceived as "reaction" performances, thus turning the audience into participants (however unwittingly), the line where one artist's work ends and Owens's begins was deliberately blurred. In this sense, the artist's overriding agenda to revise the canon was well served. More than simply expanding the scope of who is included, the show offered a contrary model, one in which authorship becomes collective and fluid rather than being singular and discrete. It isn't a new model, but Owens's decision to embody it in a solo exhibition was laudable, and an act of subversive generosity.

—Jane Ursula Harris

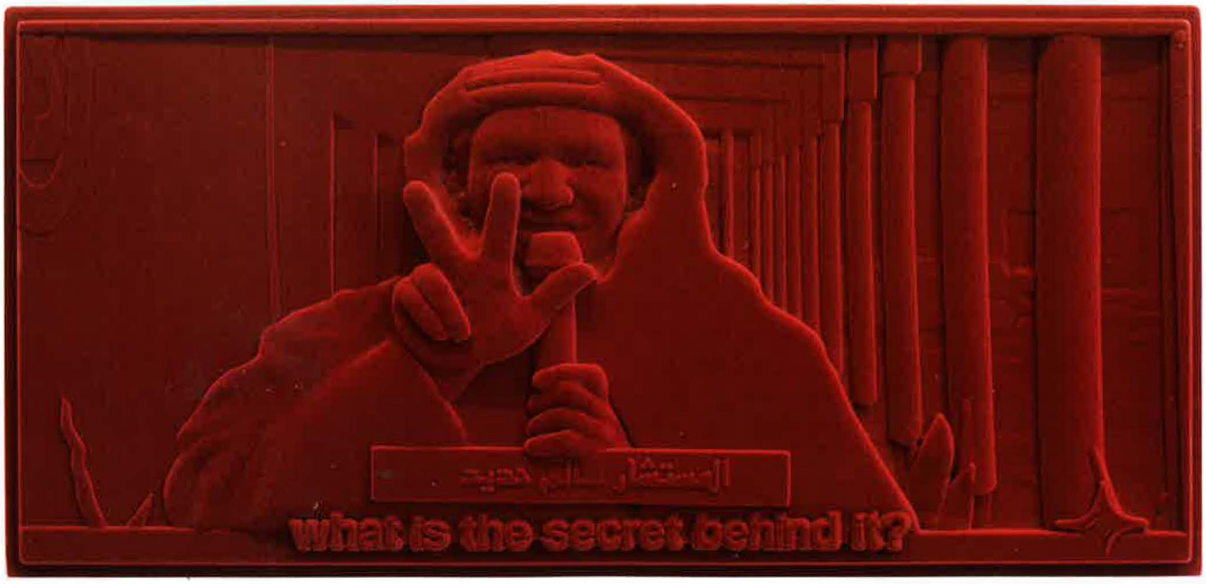
GCC

Mitchell-Innes & Nash

At the 2013 World Government Summit, the prime minister of the United Arab Emirates debuted a new hand gesture. He raised his hand as if in benediction, and extended his thumb, index, and middle fingers. It was nearly identical to the "Serb Salute," used by nationalists in the former Yugoslavia, or the *Schwurhand* from Christian iconography. For the sheikh the three-digit salute signifies "win, victory, and love," the new brand values of the UAE. It represents a promise of self-actualization in partnership with an increasingly corporatized municipal apparatus, a direction also suggested by the slogan for Dubai's Smart Government program: "Together for your happiness."

The sheikh's salute recurred throughout "Positive Pathways (+)," the first exhibition at Mitchell-Innes & Nash for GCC, a collective of eight artists who are citizens of countries in the Gulf region. (The group's name is identical to the acronym for the Gulf Cooperation Council, an intergovernmental bloc whose branding and visual vocabulary are mimicked by the artists.) The show charted the flourishing popularity in the Gulf of "positive lifestyle" practices—encompassing anything from yoga and healthy eating to New Age spiritualities—as well as their instrumentalization by governments as technologies of control. With sedentary populations disproportionally prone to obesity and diabetes, the gamification of weight loss has become a tool of governance in the region; the UAE, for instance, hosts an annual competition where participants win a gram of gold for every kilogram lost. The appified pursuit of wellness has become a primary aim, and it's easy to imagine a near-future in which one's technologically tracked daily steps are policed and cheered by local municipalities.

The exhibition hewed to its premise as tightly as it did to its maroon-and-white palette, which was borrowed from the flags of Bahrain and Qatar. Its anchor was *Positive Pathways (+) (Version II)*, 2016, a reprise of a sculptural installation that GCC debuted at this year's Berlin Biennale. In it, a woman is shown leaning over a young boy, performing the energy-summoning Quantum-Touch therapy, which is similar to Reiki. The figures, made of plaster, are encircled by a rubberized red running track—of the sort that authorities


المستشار سالم حديد
what is the secret behind it?

GCC: *Gestures I*, 2016, thermoformed styrene with flocking, 17¾ by 37¼ inches; at Mitchell-Innes & Nash.

across the Gulf have installed at public parks and corniches in an attempt to get residents moving. The hijab-clad woman could be from anywhere, but the boy's flowing *thobe* broadcasts his status as a Gulf national. Sand surrounds the track and piles up in a gallery corner, threatening to overwhelm the room and nodding to the way in which even the most high-tech, hermetically sealed interiors in the Gulf cannot keep the desert out.

"As Arabs, we have a great history. So why do we follow others?" a female voice-over purrs soothingly in a sound piece that accompanied the installation. She goes on to extol the virtues of Quantum-Touch and the three-finger salute. Left unsaid is the fact that holistic ideologies generally originate in the East but have to be rebaptized as New Age in the West before they can be considered palatable—more scientific, less pagan, or un-Islamic. Her ASMR-inducing voice is soft as shorn velvet, like the seductively plush flocked thermoformed reliefs that constituted the rest of the exhibition, depicting scenes culled from instructional YouTube videos about the healing movement in the Gulf: a reporter saluting the camera, an annotated diagram illustrating pressure points, hands healing a boy's neck or loosely cupped, supplicating in the Islamic manner. Discrepancies between Arabic and English subtitles that appear on the reliefs invoke the identity crisis of these governments as both societies of control and consumerist paradises open to international commerce. Like the sculpted woman and child, the figures in these works have unsettlingly vacuous eyes and provide no succor. They may not be happy, but, appearing in shallow relief with high-sheen surfaces, they are decidedly on-brand.

—Rahel Aima

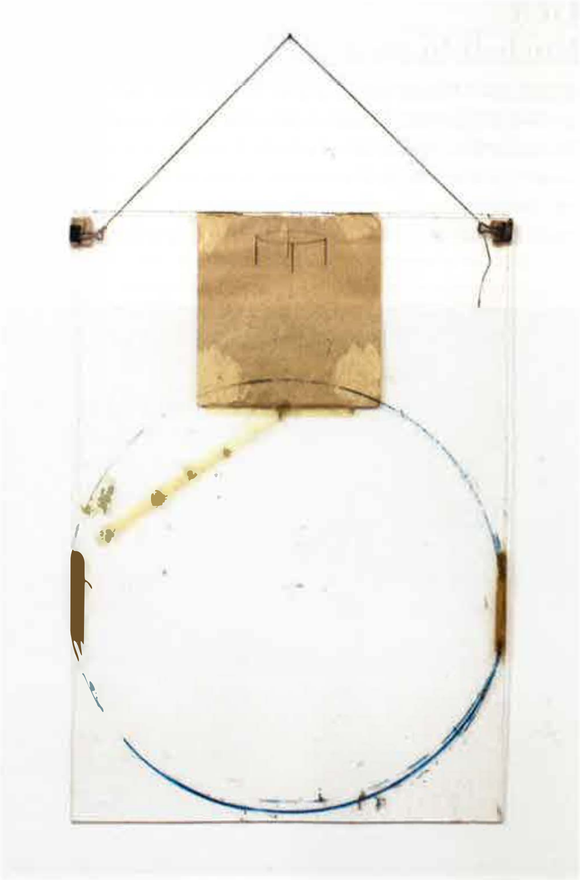
NAHUM TEVET

Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery

Although I have long been a fervent admirer of Nahum Tevet, until the recent exhibition "Nahum Tevet: Works on Glass 1972–1975" at Hunter College's Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, I knew of the work in question only through some tantalizing but indistinct period photographs. There is a certain irony in this because it is one of Tevet's guiding principles, especially in his large-scale labyrinthine installations of recent decades, to create art that is resistant to the camera. But it also seems fitting that this body of work—stripped-down, small-scale wall pieces made from humble materials including tape, twine, wire, and wood scraps as well as glass and plexiglass—was accessible only via some dodgy black-and-white photographs, since at the time Tevet was making it, his primary access to the Minimalist and Post-Minimalist art, mostly American, that influenced him was through similar black-and-white images in art magazines.

For an artist working in Israel in the early 1970s, foreign magazines were practically the only way to access contemporary international art. Rather than lamenting his isolation or contenting himself with derivative production, Tevet, who didn't travel abroad until 1975, embraced the differences between "center" and "periphery." As he recalls in an interview in the exhibition catalogue, "You could not live in a relatively poor socialist kibbutz and pretend to be Donald Judd or Richard Serra." Relying on cheap, readily available materials, Tevet began to assemble works in which conceptual self-referencing and inspired tinkering cohabit to an unusual degree. Like classic Conceptual art, each glass work is a record of its own making—one of the pleasures of the show was to watch a highly self-conscious artistic intelligence at work—but, somehow, they also seem to be achieved through improvisation and accident. This combination of the conceptual and the casual owes a debt to Tevet's mentor, Israeli painter Raffi Lavie (1937–2007); it also makes Tevet's work seem very contemporary, a precursor to much "provisional" art in its embrace of a self-questioning attitude and rejection of monumentality.

A typical glass work by Tevet involves a rectangle of roughly cut glass to which the artist has attached some metal binder clips. Lengths of twine usually run from one clip to another; sometimes the twine is used to suspend the work from a nail, and sometimes its role is purely formal. Frequently, small pieces of folded paper are wedged under the binder clips, while larger pieces of paper or card stock are



Nahum Tevet: *Untitled #30*, 1975, paper, binder clips, twine, transparent tape, masking tape, pencil, marker, and wax pencil on plexiglass, 35⅝ by 20 inches; at the Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery.