

Taha Belal

The Atmosphere from before the Step Down Returns to the Square

January 5 – February 18, 2012

Opening Reception: Thursday, January 5, 2012, 5:30pm to 7:30pm

For nearly a year, the world has watched the political situation in Egypt unfold. Characterized primarily by non-violent acts of civil resistance, this uprising has become inextricably associated with the power of social media and rapid information sharing in shaping the trajectory of collective action and experience. Taha Belal returned to his native country shortly before this upheaval commenced,

participating in the well-documented activities in Cairo's Tahrir Square. As an artist whose work investigates the media's role in defining perceptions of current events and history, his practice presents a particularly timely addition to this ongoing conversation about the evolving climate in Egypt. In his first solo exhibition with Haines Gallery, Belal exhibits carefully constructed works on paper produced over the last year in his Cairo studio.

Belal utilizes appropriated and re-contextualized imagery drawn from newspapers and magazines that speak to the media's overwhelming circulation of visual information. In these most recent works, he selects newspapers and magazines the day after significant events have transpired, providing him with potent visual source material. Using a variety of approaches – among them a razorblade – he meticulously cuts this found material, reorganizing the information according to various patterns on sheets of gridded paper. By reorienting the information under these new parameters, Belal suggests the potential for pattern as a means of bringing new order and structure, but also obscuring meaning and ease of comprehension. He renders the



Red and Blue on Newspaper, 2011, Colored paper, PVA glue on newspaper, Frame, each: 30 x 37 inches / Paper, each: 22 x 29.5 inches

original message illegible, encouraging viewers to consider the reductive and superficial qualities of mass media. This work confronts more than the media's constructed notions of truth or cultural misunderstanding and distrust; it also seeks to confront how our organization and perception of this perpetual information influences our interpretations of stories and meanings.

Belal's work has been quickly embraced for its pertinent and insightful commentary. To date, he has been included in exhibitions at Southern Exposure, San Francisco; Pro Arts Gallery, Oakland; The Popular Workshop, San Francisco; San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery; and Fine Arts Gallery, San Francisco State University. He received his BFA from Pennsylvania State in 2005 before moving to San Francisco where he completed his MFA at the California College of the Arts. Belal was awarded an MFA Fellow Residency at the Headlands Center for the Arts in 2008 and a Murphy & Cadogan Fellowship through the San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery in 2007. Most recently, he was nominated for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's SECA award in 2010.