

Anachrony

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media

Anachrony brings figures wrapped in fabric into the landscape of Fayoum. Photography and digital manipulation shape a sequence in which bodies, cloth and landscape interact.

Egyptian photo artist Nermine Hammam to show Anachrony in her first solo exhibition in Cairo in three years “This work is the landscape of my psychological state and of my soul at a particular moment in my time...an outward projection of my brain.” Sunday 11th March, 2012 Egyptian photo-artist, Nermine Hammam will show her series Anachrony (2009) at the Safarkhan Gallery on 27th March 2012, in her first solo exhibition in Egypt in three years. Photographed in the desert around Fayoum, Anachrony is a series of mixed media images that depict anonymous human forms cocooned inside long, undulating drapes of fabric in a surrealistinspired landscape of desert and mountains.

A highly personal work, Anachrony was created in reaction to three months spent by Hammam photographing patients in Egypt’s state-run Abbasiya mental asylum[1]. The work emerged as an effort to purge the “unexpectedly strong personal reaction elicited by my experience of the asylum. It is an anguished search for solace and a cry for help. With this work, I beg forgiveness for the unspeakable horrors that I witnessed but was unable to prevent.” Anachrony represents a ‘working through’ of powerlessness and of shame: like the stills of a film, the images together form a distinct narrative of time, a movement from the dark terrors of nightmare towards the quiet possibility of hope. “It is the landscape of my psychological state and of my soul at a particular moment in my time.”

Anachrony is a collaborative work, born out of a collective performance by artist Karima Mansour and Hammam’s teenage daughter, directed and photographed by Hammam herself. Draped in flowing fabric, the two dancers performed free and un- choreographed moves in the Fayoum landscape. Nature itself plays a key part in this performance: “ There was a sense of abandon and submission, as the wind caught the fabric and created the different shapes that you see in the images. After the powerlessness of the asylum, this felt like the ritual invocation of nature, a reaching out and asking for protection and forgiveness. Born out of helplessness, we let nature take its course.” The work ritualistically invokes the feminine side of nature, the softer, nurturing dimension from which healing derives: “Art comes from the unexpected outcomes of human interactions. For me, collaboration is the answer; it is all that stands between us and the void.”

The result is dream-like figures, or suspended states of being, caught inside the tightly wound skeins of cloth. At the beginning of the series the figures are barely recognizable but as the work progresses and the nightmare recedes, the figures take on increasingly human forms. “These figures sit in quiet desperation, and yet there is movement at the same time”, explains Hammam. They crouch and

strain, reaching out in the iconographic poses of prayer and supplication, pulling against the rocks that hold them back. The resulting forms suggest, at once, the protectiveness and claustrophobia of the cocoon or the womb: “The figures are trapped, at the point of asphyxiation. With almost no space between themselves and the fabric, there is an agonized movement inside a tightly confined space. It is a paradox: claustrophobia in a heavenly space.” Beyond this veil of fabric there is the truth, but for now the fabric is suffocating and blinding.

Hamam transports her figures into a natural landscape that is timeless and silent, with only vague intimations of mountains and horizon. Exploring the medium of photography, with its traditional associations of documentation, of fact and of place, Hamam depicts a quiet space “that is nowhere but also has the faint outlines of somewhere.” It is a world without reference points or images; the void that exists under the cacophony of noise, smells and impressions that make up our daily lives.

This place presents the possibility of solace and self-knowledge: “The continuous noise of the world keeps you from introspection. Only where there is real quietness can you truly begin to reach a sense of who you are...to find ourselves, we have to drop the many reference points with which we define our personal narrative.” Yet it is also a place of fear: “how do we live without these comforting coordinates of religion and family ties that help locate ourselves in time and space?” In the asylum, reality, like sanity, was revealed as a man-made construct; violent, constructed and inflicted on the powerless. But, Hamam notes: “without these artificial touch points of reality, we are left alone in the void with no points of reference but our own selves.” In the silent world of *Anachrony*, there is no struggle, no finality and no absolutes, only the timelessness of quietude and a sense of waiting: “There is an aimlessness, a pointlessness in this space; only if you reconcile yourself to that will you ultimately be free,” says Hamam.

Described by the artist as her private, internal heterotopia[2] this silent landscape of the mind stands in direct and necessary opposition to the external heterotopia of the mental asylum. As a heterotopia, it is not open to all and cannot be entered at will: “After the experience in the asylum my body and mind were exhausted. This complete exhaustion allowed a new state of consciousness. I wanted to cleanse myself from the sin of what I had witnessed.”

A palette of pink and grey hues infuse the work, bathing the barren landscape and evoking that strange mixture of horror and relief that a dreamer might experience when waking from a nightmare to the soft rays of dawn. Hamam adopts a process of layering and digitally manipulating each photograph, moving from the original towards a new and transformed image. This process mirrors the gradual retreat of her work from the horrors of the asylum into a place of healing; it echoes the film-like progression of the series as a whole, that moves frame by frame, from nightmare towards, if not salvation, then at least some hope of redemption and of truth. Notes: [1] Images of the asylum itself form a separate series, *Metanoia*, which was heavily censored by the State upon its exhibition at The Townhouse Gallery, in Cairo, in 2009 [2] Short definition of heterotopia *ANACHRONY: A PRIVATE LANDSCAPE AFTER THE ASYLUM*

About this portfolio

This reading portfolio reproduces the current website image sequence. Plate references identify images for correspondence; they are not edition numbers. Captions use the available studio records. Dimensions and editions that are not recorded are not inferred. Image counts refer to displayed images, which may include details or alternate views. Series: <https://www.nerminehammam.com/work-anachrony>



Anachrony - plate 01

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90.76 x 60.28 cm

Reference: anachrony-01 | Images © Nermine Hammam



Anachrony - plate 02

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media

Reference: anachrony-02 | Images © Nermine Hammam



Anachrony - plate 03

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90 x 35 cm

Reference: anachrony-03 | Images © Nermine Hammam



Anachrony - plate 04

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90 x 40 cm

Reference: anachrony-04 | Images © Nermine Hammam



Anachrony - plate 05

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90.76 x 33.44 cm

Reference: anachrony-05 | Images © Nermine Hammam



Anachrony - plate 06

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90 x 40 cm

Reference: anachrony-06 | Images © Nermine Hammam

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Anachrony - plate 07

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90.76 x 25.27 cm

Reference: anachrony-07 | Images © Nermine Hammam



Anachrony - plate 08

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90.76 x 59.82 cm

Reference: anachrony-08 | Images © Nermine Hammam



Anachrony - plate 09

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90 x 40 cm

Reference: anachrony-09 | Images © Nermine Hammam



Anachrony - plate 10

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90.76 x 60.28 cm

Reference: anachrony-10 | Images © Nermine Hammam



Anachrony - plate 11

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90 x 40 cm

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Anachrony - plate 12

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90.76 x 60.28 cm

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Anachrony - plate 13

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90.76 x 60.28 cm

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Anachrony - plate 14

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90 x 40 cm

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Anachrony - plate 15

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90.76 x 60.28 cm

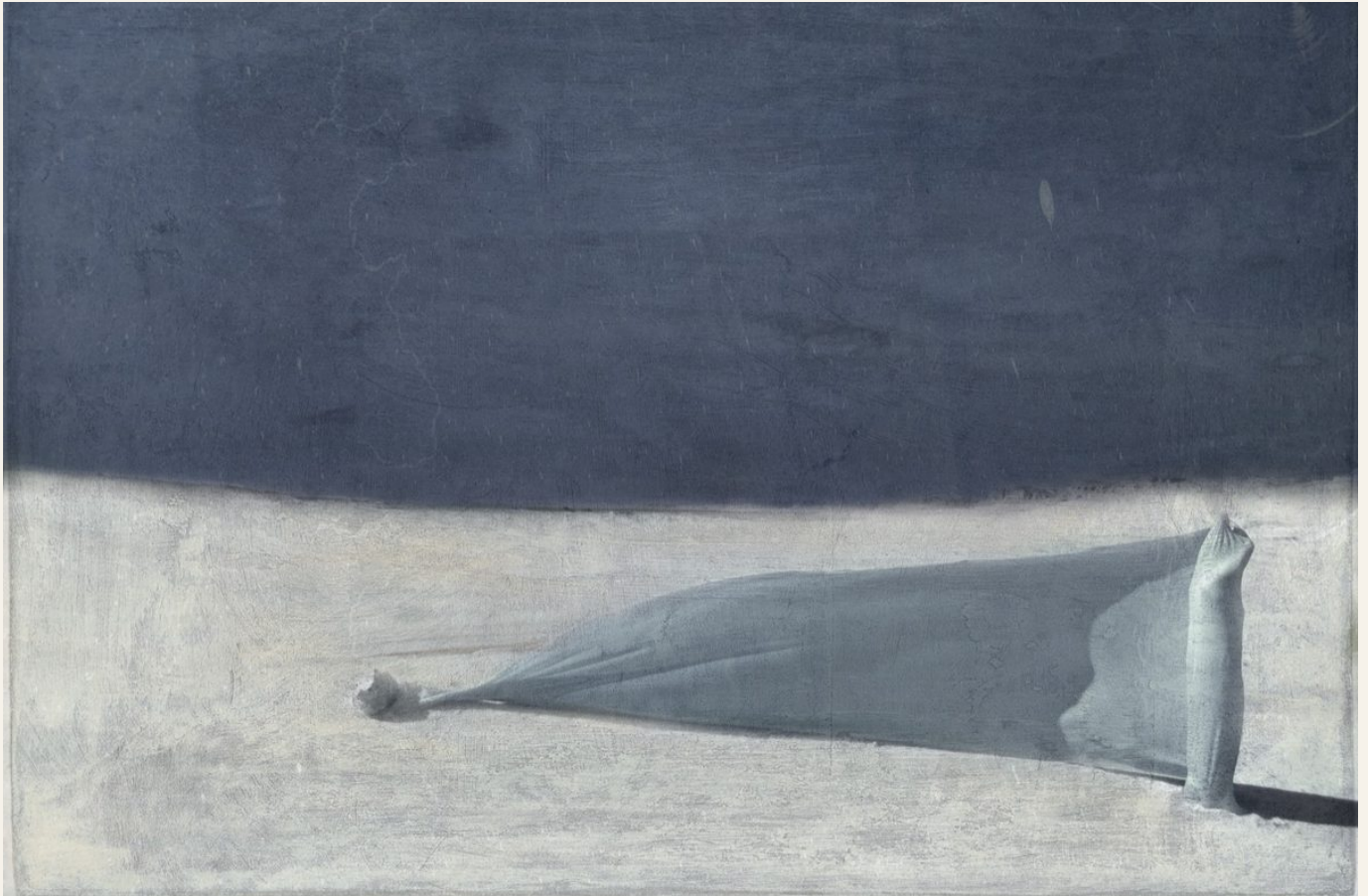
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Anachrony - plate 16

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90 x 40 cm

Reference: anachrony-16 | Images © Nermine Hammam



Anachrony - plate 17

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90.76 x 60.28 cm

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Anachrony - plate 18

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90 x 40 cm

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Anachrony - plate 19

2010 · Digital collage, mixed media · 90 x 40 cm

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