

## HAYV KAHRAMAN



**I Love My Pink Comb**, 2010, Oil on wooden panel, 107x172cm - Courtesy of the Artist and The Third Line Gallery - Dubai.

Born in a land that is ironically the cradle of civilization and presently the ultimate embodiment of human degradation, Iraq, artist Hayv Kahraman has of necessity inherited a host of issues that find expression in her work such as female oppression, honor killings and war. Filled with desire, the artist paints for redemption and salvation, hoping one day humanity will witness a profound change. Technically Kahraman works with oils on unprimed linen canvas that she meticulously prepares herself to ensure the quality and durability in each step from mounting to finish. Using distinct two-dimensional tones of vibrant color covered with detailed, Kahraman's highly figurative works reference a range of styles, from Japanese and Arabic imagery to Persian miniature, Greek iconography, Renaissance and Art Nouveau. The semi realistically rendered figures appear as melancholic transformed beings, resigned to the

dominant masculine authority. The female figures with their prominent, timeworn eyes and elongated necks represent an archetypal image of the swan. Graceful and elegant, they move through the landscapes of horror facing the calamities of male dominance. They dwell in an ambiguous existence between despair and respectable obedience where suffering is great, so is the need for transcendence. Kahraman's series *Marionettes* (2009) is the embodiment of the aforementioned themes. Here, Kahraman explores this subject of female oppression with particular reference to war in the Middle East and specifically in her home land of Iraq. At the same time, she turns her attention to female subjugation found in the everyday, in a series of work focused on women and domestic life. Enslavement is depicted through strings controlling the movement of the women; they drift through the landscapes seemingly oblivious to, or

accepting of, their fate. Kahraman paints in the hope of inspiring change. “When oppression continues for generations, it eventually becomes commonplace, and questioning of it all fades away,” she says. “My focus is not on women who choose the domestic path willingly, but those who are forced into it and then submit to this enslavement.” Through seductive fairy-tale imagery, Kahraman is able to address difficult aspects of Middle Eastern identity and ideologies. She explains that the child-like innocence in movement and form of the unsettling two-dimensional personas “represents the dichotomy of agony and gaiety, the duality of dream and nightmare; surreal documentations of truth are the essence of my creative representation”.

Kahraman’s series titled *Pins and Needles* (2010) pushes the themes of enslavement and oppression discussed in *Marionettes* further, to the realm of the self-inflicted. This series of work integrates the feminine and the flesh, serving as a gateway to gain the ultimate perfection in terms of beauty and form. The innocence of the games and toys from childhood bring these terms to a reality: the game of life. The binary opposites of body modification, whether voluntary or forced upon versus the amusement of games and toys, create an ignominious dynamic of unsettling events. Society has taken the alteration of personal appearance and body modification to a level where adding / removing / enhancing / decreasing an area, section or color resembles the simplicity and ease as a children drawing on their faces, or creating colored tattoos during recess. Kahraman uses these crayons to outline areas of flesh they would have surgically adjusted or in another where botox injections and needles are laid in a seemingly nonchalant manner resembling children in a playground. Societal gender distinctions can be inconspicuous in nature and start early in human developmental stages. Kahraman focuses on one of the divisions in the field of feminist anthropology: the examination of gender maturity by the separation of the biological from the cultural factors which control human behavior and identity. By adding an element of subtle cynicism to this each work incorporates the innocence of childhood games that anchor on the concerns of conditioned behavior and gender roles. Her inspiration stems from women who undergo mutilation to their body: those inflicted by force conforming to



**Levelled Leisure, 2010**, Oil on linen, 204x153cm - Courtesy of the Artist and The Third Line Gallery - Dubai.

current social customs, and those which are self-inflicted in terms of cosmetic surgery. Kahraman continues her exploration of the female body and psyche, investigating the disconnection which occurs and tries to trace the stages women have taken to reach the point that she illustrates in her work. Her paintings depict scenes of women partaking in voluntary acts of ‘beatification’, but under the guise that the maintaining of their bodies has been implanted by factors as the opposite sex, ritual traditions or conforms of society. This series includes two sliding puzzle pieces. Made of wood, each piece is an interactive, functional and mobile. The shuffling of the individual panels dismantles the collective image of poised women grooming one another, hands and feet and faces are plucking, tweezing and waxing arms, legs and faces. Creating an excessive cycle of endless outreach towards the unattainable ideal, Kahraman plays with the idea of creating the individual idea of beauty. Literally and visually.



**Hold Still**, 2010, Oil on linen, 107x172cm - Courtesy of the Artist and The Third Line Gallery - Dubai.

Kahraman resumed the conversation started by this series with a solo booth at the first edition of Turkey's newest art fair, ArtBeat Istanbul in September of this year where another puzzle piece titled "Corporeal Mapping" (2011) was displayed. Of her choice of works, the artist explains that "I developed the sliding puzzle with the intent to link this game with the plasticity of the malleable body. With the advent of today's medical or more specifically surgical advancements, our body has become more and more malleable and the idea of modification and alternation has gained a worldwide audience. We are now able to change and alter our flesh to conform to what we perceive as the ultimate ideal beauty." Puzzles are learning tools that challenge our ingenuity and require recognizing patterns and creating order within them. Sliding puzzles are panels to be configured to create a final coherent image. The separation of the individual panels creates a deconstruction in the final image that reflects the common dualistic psychology of today as in mind/body or feminine/masculine etc. The attempt of actively assembling these separated panels

into a coherent image transcends the Cartesian dualism of mind versus body and the obsession of control. This piece focuses on the corporeal aspect of gender and body modification where these women are excessively altering each other in a never-ending cycle of a deranged path to an unattainable utopia.

Overall, it is through an inherent childlike innocence in movement and form, in contrast with the harsh reality of war, these highly figurative yet two-dimensional personas represent the dichotomy of agony and gaiety, the duality of dreams and reality, peace and war. These surreal documentations of truth are the essence of Kahraman's creative representation. Sweeping the audience into the eyes of her characters while simultaneously inverting the scene into a celebration of the various cultures in our world, Kahraman endeavors to refocus the felt pain into an investment in the human capability to overcome and prevail.





**Appearance of Control**, 2010, Oil on wooden panels - sliding puzzle, 168x247x12 - Courtesy of the Artist and The Third Line Gallery - Dubai.

*About Hayv Kahraman: After studying graphic design at the Accademia di arte e design in Florence, Italy in 2005, Kahraman pursued studies in web design at Sweden's University of Umeå. Represented by The Third Line gallery, she has exhibited at select solo shows in the USA, the UAE and Qatar, and international group shows including the Sharjah Biennale 2009. Her works have been acquired by Saatchi Gallery, London, UK, The Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar. She was also shortlisted for the prestigious Jameel Prize at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 2011. Kahraman currently lives and works in California, USA.*

*We would like to thank The Third Line Gallery (Al Quaz, Dubai – UAE) for their kind support providing the Material needed for this article.*