

## Ahmed El Shaer



**Under Examination** - Video - 3 min - 2009

Ahmed El Shaer (b. 1980) holds a BA of Art and Education from Helwan University. His work spans photography, video and installation. His videos combine a diversity of time-based elements: film, machinima, stock footage, ambient and synthetic sounds as well as 3-D animation. El Shaer names the artist Shady el Noshoukati, who teaches at the school of Art Education and at the American University in Cairo, as a critical influence – particularly for his summer workshops in new media that he has been running at the Art Education institution for the last ten years. El Shaer has been deeply involved with those workshops, as well as with the art collective Medrar for Contemporary Art, which has a focus on new media.

El Shaer is probably the most internationally

exhibited new-media artist of his generation, showing at highly reputable events such as 50JPG: The Revenge of the Archive, The Presidents: Remix, Blancpain Art Contemporain Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland, 2010; IN/FLUX: Awkward Conversations; The 17th New York African Film Festival, New Museum, New York, USA, 2010; How much Contemporary, Art Project, Nicosia, 2010; Mid-East Cut: International festival for alternative film & video, Danish Film Institute, Denmark & Finland, 2009; Orebro International Video Art Festival, Orebro, Sweden, 2008; BIACS 3: International Biennale of Seville, Spain, 2008.

He was selected for the Salzburg International Summer Academy in Austria twice – once in the class of the game artist Feng Mengbo,



**Recycle** - *Instillation* - 2mx2m - wood - 2010

and on the basis of his work there, selected to return the following year for the class of the pioneering multimedia artist Valie Export. He says that there he realized that “virtual reality is a mirror that can best describe my ideas and concepts.” He discovered machinema, which uses computer games as hosts, and which has been important for his work since: the contact or confrontation between the physical and the digital is key. “Every one of us has the same fate: we do not choose our birthday, we do not choose our names, and sometimes we do not even choose our lovers”, he once reflected in one of his video projects: Barcode.

In *Meine Zurich*, a 2 minute video made on a 2009 Pro Helvetia residency, is a shot of a canal. While swans and ducks swim around on the canal, above them silhouettes of buildings are brought in with a mouse arrow and fill up the space briskly with a digitally created red crane. The finale is a few seconds footage of the real-life canal and the Swiss buildings above it, while people pass and birds sing. The audio is from *SimCity*, the city-building simulation game El Shaer says is incredibly popular in Switzerland.

Politics and the experience of being a contemporary Egyptian seem fundamental to El Shaer’s work. A recent piece called *Recycle* is an installation of a 2-metre square puzzle. The coloured squares each have one of 15 expressions written on them, which El Shaer collected from people concerning promises made by the government over the last 30 years. He realised that the promises consisted of the same few words rearranged, for example: unemployed, education, desert, plan, national economy. The viewers could move the heavy pieces around with difficulty, but it was impossible to make a coherent sentence.