



SEP 15–NOV 4, 2018

## SHADI HABIB ALLAH PUT TO RIGHTS

Shadi Habib Allah works across film, sculpture, and installation, often drawing on a process of deep research and on-the-ground engagement in specific locales. Richly varied in form and focus, his projects run the gamut from traveling along illicit trade routes with Bedouin smugglers to recreating the bathtub of French Revolutionary radical Jean-Paul Marat. In works such as these, he homes in on economies of people, objects, and images, tracing various ways of navigating through these networks or investigating their structures.

Uniting Habib Allah's practice is a distinctively ambiguous approach to his subject matter, tempering a deliberate and critical distance with a sympathetic, almost intimate tone. His projects are not documentary, per se—he takes an artist's license in combining scripted and observational moments, and in non-linear edits—but offer sensitive and robust portraits of people and places that are often invisible or hidden from the mainstream. Habib Allah locates active circuits of goods and services that exist independently of, and at times elude or exploit, state-sanctioned systems.

At the Renaissance Society, two new works draw on the artist's relationships in the Miami neighborhood of Liberty City, where corner stores once flourished as some of the only local options to buy groceries. Changes to zoning laws, however, brought in big-box chains, and in order to survive, many of these businesses shifted their primary exchanges to gambling and illegal food stamp transactions. A series of photographs, *Dropping the 10th Digit*, captures details of the hand-written receipts behind the counter, tracking individual customers' records of debts and food stamps traded for cash. *70 Days Behind Inventory* sees the artist taking up the vinyl flooring from one of these stores and relocating it into the gallery. Well-worn and stained, the tiles bear the markings of their previous life—imprints of the shelving units, a promotional decal—while demarcating a ghostly new space whose purpose is unclear. In both works, Habib Allah isolates specific nodes that nod to a complex shadow network of adaptation and endurance.

Presented alongside these, three previous video works trace systems of clandestine circulation and slippery subcultures. Set in Jerusalem, *30kg Shine* is part ghost story, part horror film, part character study. These parallel stories unfold under the cover of darkness, weaving together multiple threads as they explore conditions of ownership in the face of conflict. *S/N: 8FIGNA0021* features an interplay between a sculptural

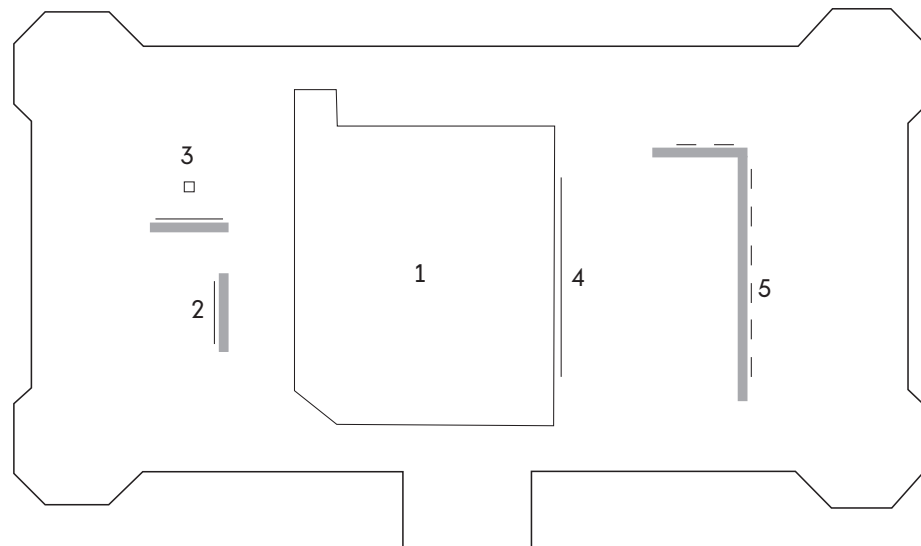
THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY

at the University of Chicago  
5811 South Ellis Avenue  
Cobb Hall, 4th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60637

773 702 8670  
[info@renaissancesociety.org](mailto:info@renaissancesociety.org)  
[renaissancesociety.org](http://renaissancesociety.org)

element—a camera commissioned by the artist to be purchased on the black market and given a new “legal” identity—and a video by which that camera records its own transformation. In documenting such a process, Habib Allah points to ways in which the circulation of illicit objects converges with more legitimate channels, and how this mirrors the practices of making and selling art. The artist’s 2010 work *The King and the Jester* was shot in a Liberty City auto body shop, offering glimpses of daily life that reveal an environment shaped by overlapping currents of machismo, camaraderie, hostility, and vulnerability. As with many of Habib Allah’s other works, the film blurs actual and fictionalized elements to examine issues of identity, value, power, and class as they play out both in this particular site and in broader society.

Overall, the work in *Put to Rights* implicitly poses the question, Why are things the way they are? Habib Allah’s practice pays attention to people who are not on top, economically or culturally, and to the strategies they develop for surviving in difficult situations. Without glamor or condemnation, he depicts realities that are deeply complex, recognizing the ways in which contradictory elements often coexist.



- 1 *70 Days Behind Inventory*, 2018  
Vinyl floor tiles, raised wooden platform
- 2 *30kg Shine*, 2015  
Single channel HD video with audio  
19 min, 40 sec
- 3 *S/N: 8FIGNA0021*, 2012  
Aluminium, 20 gauge metal, video camera, fiberglass, bond body filler, single channel HD video with audio  
16 min
- 4 *The King and the Jester*, 2010  
Single channel HD video with audio  
26 min
- 5 *Dropping the 10th Digit*, 2018  
series of eight Duratrans prints  
mounted in lightboxes

Curated by Solveig Øvstebø

All works presented courtesy of the artist; Rodeo, London; Green Art Gallery, Dubai; and Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

Renaissance Society exhibitions and programs are made possible in part by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; The Provost’s Discretionary Fund at the University of Chicago; and The Illinois Arts Council Agency.