

City on High

Exhibitions of Yvonne Jacquette, Jonathan Ryan Storm and Hassan Sharif

By PETER PLAGENS

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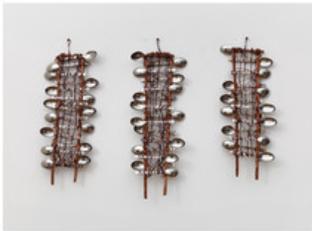
Hassan Sharif

Alexander Gray Associates

508 W. 26th St., (212) 399-2636

Through Feb. 8

The United Arab Emirates is a federation ruled by hereditary leaders who can crack down on artistic expression in a way we're not used to. On the other hand, U.A.E. cities Abu Dhabi and Dubai are filling up—to put it mildly—with contemporary art galleries and museums, apparently hoping to become mega-destinations of art tourism. Which brings to mind a big question in our newly global art world of contemporary galleries, museums, fairs and whateverennials: How are we in the West, where the idea of the avant-garde was invented, to judge polite-looking assemblage and conceptual art that comes from countries where it might be considered more edgy, even subversive, than it would be here?



Hassan Sharif's 'Spoons No. 3' (2012) at Alexander Gray Associates. Alexander Gray Associates, New York

After attending art school in London, Hassan Sharif (b. 1951 in Dubai) returned to his homeland to make art and, as it turned out, to write newspaper articles about contemporary art and co-found the Emirates Fine Art Society. His own work consists of a demurely graphic species of conceptual art (in this exhibition, iterations of a line based on a checkmark arranged in a grid) and assemblage sculpture (ranging from 27 aggregates of pieces of wood wrapped in heavy-gauge wire lying atop a low platform

to hanging rows of strips of rug fabric).

On a Western art-world scale, it's all very constrained and pretty, and doesn't really evince the meditation on calculative systems or rapid social change that Mr. Sharif wants us to see in his work. Then again, we probably need to consider where he's coming from.

—Mr. Plagens is an artist and writer in New York.