

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Carl Hammoud: Time and Again

February 21 – April 25, 2020

Opening reception: Friday, February 21, 6–8 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Time and Again*, an exhibition of new paintings by Carl Hammoud—the artist’s fourth presentation at the gallery.

Carl Hammoud’s newest oil paintings seem gripped in a balletic struggle between chaos and order. His brushstrokes are consistently tight and precise, whether his compositions are spare, dense, or fragmented. His muted colors and seemingly benign subjects—while familiar and accessible—belie the existential drama at his work’s core. This drama was articulated by former Czech president Václav Havel: “Just as the constant increase of entropy is the basic law of the universe, so it is the basic law of life to be ever more highly structured and to struggle against entropy.”

The seven paintings in this show deal with three motifs: a spotless kitchen, a tightly cropped tangle of flowers, and a disjointed image of a wall clock.

For *Echelon*, Hammoud built a 12-inch-high scale model of a kitchen almost entirely out of paper. He photographed it and made three nearly identical paintings of this pristine, imaginary space—the only difference being the color of light in each piece (as if we were looking at the same scene across three different seasons). Drawers and cabinets are perfectly aligned, the floor is reflective like polished concrete, the countertop is free of clutter (but also of appliances and tools), the tiled backsplash makes a neat grid. Everything is white and spotless. The surface of each version of *Echelon*, however, carries a unique pattern of scuffs reminiscent of scratches on an old photograph. Hammoud created this patina by going over the paintings with a hot iron, marring the surfaces of his meticulously executed works—with only the thinnest margin of control.

In *Metaphor*, we see three similar renditions (in small, medium, large, and a range of color temperatures) of a cluster of flowers with multitudes of whiskery stamens. (The compositional density of *Metaphor I, II, and III* harkens back to Hammoud’s many paintings of jumbled stacks of overturned chairs.) These flowers belong to a Fishtail Palm Tree, *Caryota mitis*, which is indigenous to Indo-China (but an invasive species in Florida). *Caryotas* are monocarpic, which means the whole tree dies after only a single cycle of flowering.

Time and Again is a black-and-white image of a wall clock that Hammoud fragmented into a 12-part grid. He combined images of four clocks from four classic films (one from each decade between 1940 and 1980) to create a watercolor that is as disorienting as it is recognizable. This patchwork clock is round, the hour markers are all where they should be,

and we see parts of several hands (hours? minutes? seconds?)—but it does not tell the time. Rather, time seems to move both forward and backward, in a physics-defying time-lapse that is simultaneously orderly and confusing.

Although Hammoud has wrestled with ideas about control and its futility for many years in his studio, these musings were brought into sharp, tangible relief with the birth of his first child, Astrid, in 2017. His desire to give her a good life is at odds with how little control he actually has over what her future holds.

Becoming a parent has changed Hammoud's relationship to time—it seems now to move both more slowly and more quickly. Routine organizes their days. As writer Paul Graham put it, "Small children are disastrously fond of repetition (anything worth doing once is worth doing fifty times)," and yet their routines are often delightful: "You don't have to be doing anything special," Graham continues, "You could just be going somewhere together, or putting [her] to bed, or pushing [her] on the swings at the park." Hammoud speaks specifically about the joy he feels in observing his daughter's budding curiosity about the multivalent potential of language—an interest he shares and one that shapes his work, including the paintings in this show.

However, Hammoud also speaks about how he sees his paintings as "semantic projection surfaces"—a line of thinking parallel to the argument Roland Barthes presented in his 1967 essay "The Death of the Author," that the means of engaging with an artwork originates in the viewer's experience of the world rather than the artist's. But just as an artist cannot control the interpretation of his work, neither can he erase himself from it. The premise of Karl Ove Knausgård's *Autumn*, a love letter to his unborn daughter, might be relevant to Hammoud's recent life and newest body of work, especially when assuming the conflation of daughters and viewers or readers:

I want to show you the world as it is now: the door, the floor, the water tap and the sink, the garden chair close to the wall beneath the kitchen window, the sun, the water, the trees. You will come to see it in your own way, you will experience things for yourself and live a life of your own, so of course it is primarily for my own sake that I am doing this: showing you the world, little one, makes my life worth living.

Swedish artist Carl Hammoud was born in 1976 and lives and works in Stockholm. He has exhibited extensively in Scandinavia, having mounted solo shows at the Eskilstuna Konstmuseum (Sweden), Gothenburg Museum of Art (Sweden), Kalmar Art Museum (Sweden), and Malmö Art Museum (Sweden). He has participated in group shows at institutions such as the Borås Museum of Modern Art (Sweden), Hangaram Art Museum (South Korea), Magasin III Museum & Foundation for Contemporary Art (Stockholm), Trafo Kunsthall (Oslo), and Turku Art Museum (Finland). His work is included in the collections of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (Buffalo), British Museum (London), Gothenburg Museum of Art, Magasin III Museum & Foundation for Contemporary Art, Malmö Art Museum, Moderna Museet (Stockholm), Sammlung Frieder Burda (Germany), and Scheringa Museum (Netherlands). In 2019 he was elected as a new member to the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts.