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Khaled Sabsabi's *MUSH* (2012) is a mashed accretion of multiple spaces and times, an encompassing of diverse cultural contexts and temporalities, metaphorically pulped and represented to us as a dynamic assemblage of repeating and contingent geometries of infinite possibility. If our initial encounter with the work draws us into a kaleidoscope of constructed forms and geometric compositions, *MUSH* subsequently also points to the alternative meaning that is made possible through the deconstruction of conventional image forms, with potential for other perspectives regarding our being in the world.

Drawing on the artist's personal archive of images, *MUSH* is an object installation video piece comprised of two parts: a large, cubic form suspended from the ceiling as if floating in mid-air and a projection of an eight-pointed star. Each projected surface of the four-walled cube offers a digital patchwork of intersecting images and ambient sounds which draws on video footage collected by the artist during his travels in Australia, North Africa and the Arab world since 2004. They record everyday life across these cultural landscapes, including street scenes, observations of people, religious ceremonies and architectural sites.

However, if the artist's initial interest was to engage and communicate the reality of life across these different cultural zones in coherent audio-visual representations, in *MUSH* there is a deliberate interest in blurring the reality of these documented experiences. For while *MUSH* may at first register distinct geometries and structures, there is also a sense of simultaneously imploding and exploding frames, where the morphing endlessness of constructed forms seems instead to point to ultimately *unstructured* forms of knowledge – an emptying out of experience that is returned as infinite possibility.

In so doing, the artist returns the medium of film to us not as mere documentary experience but instead, as an almost 'painterly' abstract canvas of ambiguous repeating geometries, colours and patterns, with a similarly abstract soundtrack vaguely reminiscent of the cries of Muslim prayer. Visually, each surface projection is an intersection of refracted digital image streams which ultimately seem to 'disappear' into a central vanishing point of infinity; however, they also appear to simultaneously burst and radiate outwards. From a distance, the aesthetic patterning is reminiscent of the beautiful repeating geometries of Islamic design and architecture. Up close the work creates a dizzying 'parallel perspective as if falling into the horizon of a tiny universe.' Unlike many of the artist's previous artworks of the last period with their clear depictions of community life and their attention to communal identities, *MUSH* is a blurring of humanity pointing towards the essence of life, the transitory yet repeating potential of existence. The deconstructed image-sound narratives become a means of restoring the idea of the universe's infinite potential. The additional projection on the other side of the cube invoking the image of an eight-pointed star is actually comprised of two offset, overlaying squares. The four points of each square overlap in dynamic clockwise and anticlockwise rotations to momentarily form an eight-pointed star before returning to a four-point square. In this overlapping of two squares, the eight-pointed star is reminiscent of the Islamic *Rub el Hizb* symbol, prevalent across much of the Muslim world and, besides its symbolic uses on flags and mosques, a traditional aid in reciting the Qur'an. Indeed, the branch of Islamic thought and practice known as Sufism is a key source of inspiration for the artist in conceptualising *MUSH*. Concerned with the 'inner, mystical dimension of Islam', Sufism has been described by some as a 'perennial philosophy of existence'. For Sabsabi, 'this eight-pointed star symbolises balance and counterbalance... taking its form from the superimposition of two four sided squares: four being the lowest spiritual number, eight being the highest for many cultures and religious faiths.'

From the eight-sided vertices of the cube, to the eight refracting image streams which comprise each surface projection of the cube, and finally, the eight-pointed star projection, *MUSH* is a visual manifestation of octal possibilities. The artist cites the cross-cultural and timeless significance of the number '8' as a point of inspiration, especially its association with

the concept of infinity and eternity. Indeed, in mathematics and physics, the concept of infinity is often represented in a formal sense as the number 8, while modern-day computing technology often relies on octal algorithmic bases. Ancient Indian and Greek cultures philosophised about the concept of infinity. The Buddhist symbol known as the Dharmacakra has eight spokes and the Buddha's 'Four Noble Truths' is the basis of the Noble Eightfold Path. There are eight immortals in Chinese tradition. Aboriginal cultures also reference infinity via the looped ∞ symbol and métis cultures find resonance in the looping and conjoining of circles in the infinity symbol. Within the Sufi cultures which Sabsabi draws more direct inspiration from in creating *MUSH*, infinity is the space of essential unity, a dissolving into divinity, free from the dimensions of time and space, but always true to a set of essential laws which draw from but ultimately transcend history and cultures. Thus, grasping Sufi spiritual essence finally depends on the subject's non-attachment to the world of reality.

The collapsing of space-time dimensions that is registered in *MUSH* is evocative of this Sufi spirituality of transcendence. If our present 'postmodern' times urge theoretical reflections of the collapse of the subject and uncertainty of the real, *MUSH* recalls a longer history of Sufi hermeneutics that finds inherent meaning in the deconstructed world of non-physical attachment.

Sabsabi and his family migrated from Lebanon to Sydney's western suburbs in the late 1970s, seeking to escape the civil war in Lebanon. His home in the outer suburbs of Sydney is a rich cultural intersection of indigenous, Pacific, Asian (especially Chinese and Vietnamese), Arab and other cultural communities making up the rich tapestry of Australian cultural experience in the twenty-first century. Before Sabsabi's turn to forms of contemporary 'fine art' practice, Sydney's suburban context was also developmental grounds for his earlier interest in hip-hop culture and his community-engaged practices of hip-hop expression. In both its visual and aural kaleidoscope, *MUSH* is also reminiscent of the kind of sampling, looping and mixing which hip-hop music is renowned for.

In more personal terms, *MUSH* is an accumulation of experience and the culmination of an intense period of artistic progression for the artist. In 2010, the artist presented his video installation entitled *99* – an installation of 99 televisions, each with an overlay of dual images using Super-8 film: media images of turbulence in the Middle East superimposed with the hypnotic image of a whirling dervish. Sabsabi's subsequent video-installation *Naqshbandi Greenacre Engagement* (2010) emerged from the artist's engagement with members of the Naqshbandi Sufi Order of Australia based in the Western Sydney suburb of Greenacre. This three-channel video installation reveals the artist's intimate insight into this community's prayer and communal gatherings at their local Scout Hall, deconstructing the traditional use of this regular space of community activity in Australia. The artist's two-part multi-media installation *corner* (2012) drew on religious scenes in the artist's home town of Tripoli in Lebanon and the northern village of Danke relating scenes of religious communion and sacrifice. These are just a few of the artist's works in recent times which we might comprehend as the aesthetic, philosophical and spiritual precursors to *MUSH*, tracing a passage of everything to arrive at nothing, plunging into the depths and diversity of human experience but ultimately with *MUSH*, reaching a universal human spirit inextricably linked across cultures and history, and which moves, advances and unfolds in the same direction. In presenting a pulp of image-sound life experience, *MUSH* demands an attuning of our senses as an affective encompassing of all things. Much like Sufi spiritual rumination, *MUSH* offers us opportunity for contemporary meditation of life's meaning in the 21st century, especially in contemplating our parallels and connectedness in the physical and emotional world, in discerning our complex social reality and embracing the uncertainties of existence, and in responding to the ephemeral and the ever-lasting.