

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Shahryar Nashat

It's Not Up to You

January 26 – March 29, 2024

Opening Reception: January 26, 6pm - 8pm

Grote Hertstraat 12 Rue de Grand Cerf

Brussels

Gladstone is pleased to present 'It's Not Up to You,' an exhibition of new works by contemporary artist Shahryar Nashat. Examining the complex relationship between the body and its representation in the production of art, Nashat embeds traces of the act of creation as an aesthetic byproduct within the work. Visceral, yet meditative, the works in this exhibition expand upon Nashat's continued exploration of themes of identity, mortality, and resilience.

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Where a boyfriend gives himself up to the other, and the lover takes him, selfishly, like a flower from a field, the hustler gives himself to himself as part of an insular economy, a useless transaction, which is, nonetheless, a gift – a work.

The hustler is the artist as a young man, gazing into the camera, a smug, somewhat lazy look in his eyes. He is about to dye his hair – it won't work. We are witnessing a moment of transition, the blurring of a line between a life and its outcome. The hustler is his own canvas, the painter as well as his pigments. To be an artist is to turn the collateral of survival into a living. The artist is a hustler and the hustler works alone. He stains and cleans up after himself as best he can. He wears a plastic glove and he looks at us, lazily, provocatively. His picture appears several times in the exhibition. Shahryar Nashat often works with this type of repetition, as if to see what matter accumulates, whose face emerges – this time his own.

We meet him again, the hustler-artist, in a series of images of fabric stained by bodily secretions and covered with a skin of acrylic gel. The hustler is his own canvas, but when he paints he finds his colours come out sheer: sweat, saliva, tears. Such fluids are aesthetic responses to being in the world that require some work in order to appear. This is what Nashat facilitates when he treats the picture in post-production, develops it, so that the stain becomes distinguishable from its host, and what had regrettably seeped into the fabric is made luminous and deliberate. You look at it quietly, that useless gift, a blurred line.

In the sculpture *Deeper and Deeper*, foam mattresses and glass tanks provide a set for the hustle of becoming. Inside them, water from the salt lakes in Camargue, France, offers a solution to the hustler's chromatic problem. Lots of things make up a hustler, all the things that make a mark: fine organic matter, living matter in its primary state, pure and simple. He lives in the water under the name *dunaliella salina*, a microscopic warrior. As temperatures rise, liquid condenses, the waterline descends, and the algae-hustler's battle is slowly won. Life is so rarely up to the hustler, but in moments such as these, reduction comes out as production, the remnant as content, and the hustler sees his hour of stardom – the hour at which even the basest element rises to the level of protagonist. The armour produced by the algae to protect itself from the salt makes a pink lace-like pattern. Witness an aesthetic response to being in the world, art as the product of survival, hustler art.

"Perfection is impersonal" wrote Simone Weil and the hustler is certainly that. For whose face do you really see encrusted onto the side of a glass tank, or in a bathroom mirror? The hustler is no one, but he does not feel sorry for himself, nor for anyone else. He pays the price of salt for his luminous appearance by cleaning up after himself. He washes the carpets as best he can, scrubs grout from between amber-coloured bathroom tiles, hears the dull gasp of the vacuum cleaner. When he closes the door behind him, only the most obstinate stains remain. His self-portrait.

— Kristian Vistrup Madsen

For further information, please contact press@gladstonegallery.com

New York gallery hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm

Brussels gallery hours: Tuesday-Friday, 10am-6pm and Saturday, 12pm-8pm

Seoul gallery hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm