

Hiwa K

Blind as the Mother Tongue

Drawing on vernacular forms and collaborative and performative actions, Iraqi-Kurdish artist Hiwa K (b. 1975, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq) makes work inspired by political events, chance encounters, oral histories, and his own experiences, including fleeing Iraq on foot in the late 1990s.

Hiwa K approaches his subjects with curiosity, pragmatism, and spontaneity, and his videos, performances, and sculptures speak to themes of political memory and belonging, as well as what the artist refers to as “placelessness” and “zones of possibility.” Hiwa K often distances himself from the standard position of the artist, instead appearing in his works as an interviewer, guide, bandleader, or political organizer. Many of his artistic projects take shape through self-education, informal collaborations, and exploratory trials.

“Blind as the Mother Tongue,” the artist’s first solo exhibition in the US, gathers a selection of works spanning the last decade that address experiences of estrangement and alternative modes of seeing, learning, and remembering. The exhibition includes the artist’s recent video *Pre-Image (Blind as the Mother Tongue)*

(2017), which debuted at documenta 14 in Athens, and presents a powerful allegory for exile and migration. It also features several video works that take up social, political, and economic histories specific to Sulaymaniyah, the artist’s hometown in Kurdish Iraq. In addition, Hiwa K has created a new body of work comprising drawings as well as a sculpture—a forged steel morion, or colonial-style helmet, inverted like a cooking pot. These new works give shape to his recent investigations of early colonial encounters between the Inca and Spanish empires and reflect on hybrid and hidden narratives, the circulation of culture and tradition, and the perception—and misperception—of others.

“Hiwa K: Blind as the Mother Tongue” is curated by Natalie Bell, Associate Curator.

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