

SEAN KELLY

Jaffe, Tali. "In His Own Words," *Cultured*, October 2015.

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IN HIS OWN WORDS



If you haven't had the opportunity to visit "Overture," Idris Khan's momentous exhibition at Sean Kelly gallery in New York, this weekend is your last chance to take in the artist's largest show to date in New York. Among the 25 works on view is a large-scale sculpture comprised of seven panes of glass—each hand stamped with text—that come together to form an abstract constellation. We caught up with Khan to talk about this pivotal piece, along with his exploration of minimalism through his "white paintings" and some of the encounters he had during his week-long installation.

This being your largest show, have you find yourself in a particularly charged state of late?

Four years ago when Sean first came to the studio to discuss working together, he mentioned that he would be moving from the 29th Street gallery to a much larger space. He wanted to create exhibitions that made big statements, and that were of museum quality. We discussed the possibility of combining all the mediums that I work with and to make an exhibition that showed a clear vision whatever the choice of discipline. It was exciting to make a large show- it opened up all sorts of possibilities to connect the work over the past three years.

You spent two weeks installing a very large wall drawing at the gallery. Can you tell us the impetus for this piece? Creating that site-specific work, were you approached by visitors to the gallery? What were some of your exchanges like?

It was a great two weeks. The team and I had an amazing time making the work. The wall faces the main entrance of the gallery so people who passed by stood and watched the piece being made and often couldn't believe the lengthy process of stamping minute words on such a large scale. The beauty for me is having no physical constraints to the size – they don't have to fit through doors or windows they can become as large as the wall allows. They are such an integral part of my work, as I love making something that becomes part of the architecture of the gallery. After the show ends it gets painted over but in a way it's nice that it will always be there until the wall gets destroyed.

Let's talk about glass. This is the first time you've worked in the medium, will you be continuing with it?

If I can find a supplier who understands that I can't have chips or scratches on the glass then yes I would love to continue working with glass!!! 'Overture' was so difficult to make. My studio is like a glass graveyard at the moment! I do love the effect of the words on the glass and I will be making more as I find the possibilities exciting.

In the glass piece, you've layered seven panes of glass stamped with text, rendering it illegible. What is your message in this work?

Separation and displacement. I think it seems a natural progression in my work to start to separate the image from the background. The words begin to feel lost and like they are floating in space. I wanted each word to be representative of displaced people, migrating away from the center point of

the composition. Thousands of words on the move, away from where they started. My work isn't supposed to send any specific political message, but rather it represents an abstract idea, the idea of trying to comprehend these enormous global issues. Illegibility is not my starting point it's more about accumulation.

Can you tell us about Kairos, the dance production for which you designed the stage? In 2013 I was approached by the world leading choreographer Wayne McGregor to design the sets for a new ballet he was making to the 'Four Seasons, Vivaldi Recomposed' by Max Richter. It made perfect sense to me, as part of my work is to layer and deconstruct music visually.

I decided to make two large drops made with transparent gauze. One had every note of the four seasons multiply exposed onto its surface and the other had every note removed from the pages and the only thing left was the lines of the sheet music. The transparency of the gauze allowed the dancers to be lit in a way that they became the notes of the sheet music. In the middle of the stage I created a large curved wall made with gesso so the dances could interact with the wall and it was perfect for casting shadows across the stage to give the impression of the changing seasons. The piece was commissioned by the Zürich Opera House and opened there in 2014. It was performed at the Edinburgh Festival this summer where it received a 5 star review from the Guardian Newspaper- not to brag! I truly want to make more sets in the future. It is amazing to be given the opportunity to make a complete artwork.

Idris Khan: Overture is on view through October 24 at Sean Kelly, New York.