



GALLERIA CONTINUA

SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING **LES MOULINS** HABANA

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MOATAZ NASR

Croissant

Opening on Sunday, April 30, 2017, as from noon
 Exhibition from April 30 to September 30, 2017

With the Egyptian artist Moataz Nasr chosen to represent his country for the 57th Venice Biennale, Galleria Continua / Les Moulins is pleased to present his large installation, *Croissant* [*Crescent*], outside in the Moulin de Boissy garden.

Beyond its initially playful appearance, the work contains the sentence, 'No politics in religion and no religion in politics', the famous slogan of Egyptian president Anwar el-Sadat, at a time when religious tension in Egypt was at a height and the Muslim Brotherhood, through the ulemas, was openly criticising the government and its policies.

The sentence, written into the grass of the Moulin garden in Kufic script, blends with the landscape and becomes a maze in the eyes of those without Arabic, recalling a classical motif from the art of gardening—and no one is ignorant of the importance of the garden in the Arab world. Kufic calligraphy, chosen here for its orthogonal forms, is also a way for Nasr to anchor his work in the roots of the Arabic language, as this is its oldest known calligraphic form. The current installation returns to a mode of operation developed for an earlier series

of works, themselves entitled *Maze*. In the prior series, another slogan emerges from the lines of Kufic: 'The people want the end of the regime'. This phrase became internationally renowned as the slogan chanted by the protesters in the different countries of the Arab Spring in 2011, from Tunisia to Libya, from Syria to Egypt. The *Maze* series, reflecting the hopes and wishes of these populations, contained a reflection on the future of such movements, while marking a point in the history of the people of the Arab world.

Today it is another slogan that forms the maze. Written in the shape of a crescent moon (symbol of the Arab world), the one-time Egyptian president's declaration resonates strongly with the present, in spite of having been pronounced in the 1980s, in a context where the question of political Islam was emerging in Egypt at a moment when the country found itself full of cultural tensions. The phrase reminds us how today the political stakes raised by the protestors at the time of the revolts became gradually masked by problematics linked to the increasingly extensive reach of religion in the field of politics, in particular through the supporters of radical Islam. In Egypt, the Muslim

Brotherhood emerged as the political formation in the strongest position at the moment of Mubarak's fall. Mohammed Morsi, an associate of the Brotherhood, would be elected president in 2012. Far from bringing stability to the country, his presidency was overturned by the army, who have been in power ever since.

In this way, Moataz Nasr has given continuity to his engagement, in which it becomes possible to see the idea of a path to trace, drawing at once from the legacy of recent political events, from Sadat to the Arab Spring, and from a reservoir of ancient know-how: calligraphy and the art of gardening. The work thus appears within a perspective broadly questioning the evolutions and aspirations of a group of populations, while remaining closely tied to burning questions of the present.

Moataz Nasr was born in 1961 in Alexandria, in Egypt. He lives and works in Cairo. It was here that in 2008, as an engaged artist, he created the multidisciplinary cultural centre Darb 1718, which supports young artists, organises workshops, meetings, and debates.

Moataz Nasr's recent exhibitions have included *Afriques Capitales*, La Villette, Paris, 2017; *ArtTalks*, Cairo, 2014; *The Journey of the Griffin*, Santa Croce sull'Arno (Italy), 2013; *The Sea is my Land*, MAXXI, Rome, 2013; *Collision*, Dubai, 2012; *In a Nutshell*, London, 2011; *Réactions en Chaîne*, Château de Blandy-les-Tours (France), 2011; *Traversées*, Grand-Palais, Paris, 2008.