

Egyptian Artist Khaled Hafez's Coded Works Reveal a Personal Narrative

ARTSY EDITORIAL
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Khaled Hafez
Chapter 9: Everything or Nothing
Deborah Colton Gallery

Hermes was a flexible Greek god, at once a trickster and an emissary between the gods and the mortals. He was a protector of wit, literature, athletics, invention, travelers, and herdsman. He was thought to be always on the move. The adaptable, mobile nature of Hermes inspired “Codes of Hermes,” Egyptian artist Khaled Hafez’s first solo show in the United States, at [Deborah Colton Gallery](#) in Houston.



Khaled Hafez
Chapter 4: Living by the Order
Deborah Colton Gallery



Khaled Hafez
Chapter 7: Adhuc Stat
Deborah Colton Gallery

In the series of works on view, Hafez uses Hermes—and his predecessor, Thoth, an ibis-headed Egyptian god with many of Hermes’s attributes—to encrypt his paintings with the archetypal imagery of the gods, writ with the painterly language of graffiti. Drips of paint and pasted found images recall, aesthetically, the works of [Sage Vaughn](#) or [Harif Guzman](#), artists known for their street-art-tinged oeuvres.



Khaled Hafez
Chapter 2: Living By The Rule
Deborah Colton Gallery



Khaled Hafez
Chapter 8: Living Forward by the Day
Deborah Colton Gallery

The paintings, using Hermes as a jumping-off point, are really chapters, 10 in all, of a personal journey. The diaristic paintings follow Hafez as he struggles with authority and the creation of his art. Images of fashion models clipped from magazines are given wings as they engage in battle, hinting at his struggles, and Egyptian symbols (an ankh, hieroglyphs) sneak their way onto the canvases, pointing to a conversation with his Egyptian identity.



Khaled Hafez
Chapter 10: Veritas Vos Liberabit
Deborah Colton Gallery

The works are narrative, and it becomes an interesting challenge to follow along and decode them as they play with issues of migration, identity, and wealth. Hafez has long used codes to engage the viewer in a sort of game. For instance, the artist uses tulips to indicate sexuality, peppering his paintings with collaged flowers, but doesn’t let on much more than that. He keeps elements private, but gives the viewer enough to make up narratives and guesses.

—Maxwell Williams

“Khaled Hafez: Codes of Hermes” is on view at Deborah Colton Gallery, Houston, Nov. 14, 2015–Jan. 31, 2016.

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