

**SUSPENSION  
OF DISBELIEF  
GHAZI BAKER**



# SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF

GHAZI BAKER

Exhibition curated by  
Mark Hachem

March 2019

**mark hachem**  
New York | Paris | Beirut

Cinema should make you forget you are sitting  
in a theater.

-Roman Polanski

Ghazi Baker's solo show "Suspension of Disbelief" is a surreal rendition that is derived from elements of cinema and popular culture, attempting an aesthetic discourse by depicting the relationship of that on screen and the image transmitted to the membranes audience through the psychological process of momentary suspension of disbelief. His practice can be easily compared to those contemporary graffiti artists or the greats of pop-centre such as Roy Lichtenstein or Andy Warhol (who critiqued the visual culture influenced by the reality of consumerism) but only superficially, as his endeavor is rather erecting the static that arrives from today's animation, action and fantasy genres of movies.

Pop-culture is not only examined and represented, rather its consumption is investigated as part of the human ethos rather than a shallow critique and rejection.

- Sumesh Sharma, 2019

## ON "SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF"

Ever since I was old enough to start watching movies, I've been amazed by what people can do in film, fly like Superman, travel to distant stars as in Star Wars or simply a star falling in love and making you, the viewer, believe it. Later, my fascination with movies turned into a philosophical pursuit, to try and understand what makes us, the viewers, accept the ridiculous premise of a film for the sake of our enjoyment of that story. The connection between the story being told on a screen and the viewer, the audience, is the interesting part, that is the subject of my series of paintings. These 20 some paintings are divided in two symbiotic elements, the transmitter and the receiver, the movie and the viewer, and in the case of my paintings, the painted audience of a movie becomes the transmitter to the viewer of the painting, attempting to introduce the viewer as a new entity willing to possibly suspend their disbelief while looking at the paintings.

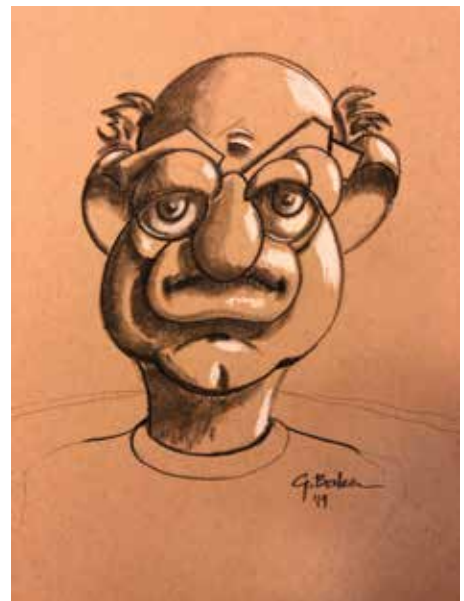
Of course this theory applies to a much wider human condition, from suspending disbelief when we listen to a politician's blatant lies, to more intimate situations when a friend tells us things will be alright even though we know they won't. We, as human beings, want to believe in the fantastic, the surreal, the better and brighter. In my show, I chose to focus on a selection of movies to study their interaction with audiences.

We watch movies the same way older generations would read books, by shutting down our belief system and letting our imagination take over, in other words, suspending our disbelief. The term suspension of disbelief or willing suspension of disbelief has been defined as a willingness to suspend one's critical faculties and believe something surreal; sacrifice of realism and logic for the sake of enjoyment.

According to the theory, suspension of disbelief is an essential ingredient for any kind of storytelling. With any film, the viewer has to ignore the reality that they are viewing a staged performance and temporarily accept it as their reality in order to be entertained. Black and white films provide an obvious early example that audiences are willing to suspend disbelief, no matter how implausible the images appear, for the sake of entertainment. With the exception of totally color blind people (achromats), no person viewing these films sees the real world without color, but some are still willing to suspend disbelief and accept the images in order to be entertained. Suspension of disbelief is also supposed to be essential for the enjoyment of many films and television shows involving complex stunts, special effects, and seemingly unrealistic plots and characterizations.

As an audience, the psychological effort required to enter this state of arrested disbelief seems innate and effortless, as an artist I wanted to experiment with the aesthetics of painting surreal and sometimes grotesque characters to see if the viewer would be willing to suspend disbelief and convince himself he/she is looking at actual audience members watching a specific movie and reacting to it.

Ghazi Baker  
Beirut 2019



Studies for people watching  
Charcoal on paper





After  
LOVE ACTUALLY  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
200 x 320 cm  
2019





## Love Actually, 2003

With no fewer than eight couples vying for our attention, *Love Actually* is like the Boston Marathon of romantic comedies, and everybody wins. Curtis is just like his screenplays: He just wants to be loved, and he'll go to absurdly appealing lengths to win our affection. With *Love Actually*, Curtis orchestrates a minor miracle of romantic choreography, guiding a brilliant cast of stars and newcomers as they careen toward love and holiday cheer in London, among them the Prime Minister who's smitten with his caterer; a widower whose young son nurses the ultimate schoolboy crush; a writer who falls for his Portuguese housekeeper; a devoted wife and mother coping with her potentially unfaithful husband; and a lovelorn American who's desperately attracted to a colleague. There's more--too much more--as Curtis wraps his Christmas gift with enough happy endings to sweeten a dozen other movies. That he pulls it off so entertainingly is undeniably impressive; that he does it so shamelessly suggests that his writing fares better with other, less ingratiating directors.

-Jeff Shannon

Daniel:

Tell her that you love her. You've got nothing to lose, and you'll always regret it if you don't.

Karl:

Life is full of interruptions and complications.

Sam:

Let us go get the shit kicked out of us by love.





Watching  
THE GODFATHER  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
100 x 150cm  
2018







Watching  
BACK TO THE FUTURE  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
120 x 150cm  
2018







Watching  
THE PARTY  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
100 x 150cm  
2018

## Apocalypse Now, 1979

During the Vietnam War, Captain Benjamin L. Willard, a special operative (i.e. assassin), is ordered by military intelligence to find a Special Forces commander who has flipped out and established his own maniacal army in Cambodia, Colonel Walter E. Kurtz, and “terminate with extreme prejudice.” Willard’s journey upriver through Vietnam is superficially an action adventure, but equally obviously an allegory of war’s insanity and a metaphor for the journey into one’s self. In the last 30 minutes, when Brando makes his appearance as the crazy Kurtz, the film becomes a bewildering philosophical search through improvisation and chaos — for answers and a resolution to the mysteries of madness and evil.

Chef:

Why do all you guys sit on your helmets?

Soldier:

So we don’t get our balls blown off.

Kurtz:

I watched a snail crawl along the edge of a straight razor. That’s my dream. That’s my nightmare. Crawling, slithering, along the edge of a straight... razor... and surviving.

Kilgore:

You smell that? Do you smell that?... Napalm, son. Nothing else in the world smells like that. I love the smell of napalm in the morning. You know, one time we had a hill bombed, for twelve hours. When it was all over I walked up. We didn’t find one of ‘em, not one stinkin’ dink body. The smell, you know that gasoline smell, the whole hill. Smelled like... victory. Someday this war’s gonna end...

After  
APOCALYPSE NOW  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
150 x 150 cm  
2019













Watching  
GONE WITH THE WIND  
Acrylic on canvas  
150 x 160 cm  
2018

Study for wall street







Watching  
WALL STREET  
Acrylic and Charcoal on canvas  
150 x 150 cm  
2018

Jaws, 1975

The story of a Long Island town whose summer tourist business is suddenly threatened by great-white-shark attacks on humans bypasses the potboiler trappings of Benchley's book and goes straight for the jugular with beautifully crafted, crowd-pleasing sequences of action and suspense supported by a trio of terrific performances by Roy Scheider, Richard Dreyfuss, and particularly Robert Shaw. The sequences on Shaw's boat--as the three of them realize that in fact the shark is hunting them--are what entertaining moviemaking is all about.

-Marshall Fine

Quint:

The thing about a shark, it's got lifeless eyes, black eyes, like a doll's eyes. When it comes at you it doesn't seem to be livin'... until he bites you, and those black eyes roll over white.

Hooper:

I'm not going to waste my time arguing with a man who's lining up to be a hot lunch.

After  
JAWS  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
186 x 138 cm  
2019









After  
BULLITT  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
100 x 100 cm  
2018



Watching  
INTERSTELLAR  
Acrylic and pastel on canvas  
100 x 100 cm  
2018



After  
GONE WITH THE WIND  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
100 x 100 cm  
2019









After  
BLUE VELVET  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
80 x 120 cm  
2018

Blue Velvet, 1986

David Lynch peeks behind the picket fences of small-town America to reveal a corrupt shadow world of malevolence, sadism, and madness. From the opening shots Lynch turns the Technicolor picture postcard images of middle class homes and tree-lined lanes into a dreamy vision on the edge of nightmare. After his father collapses in a preternaturally eerie sequence, college boy Kyle MacLachlan returns home and stumbles across a severed human ear in a vacant lot. With the help of sweetly innocent high school girl (Laura Dern), he turns junior detective and uncovers a frightening yet darkly compelling world of voyeurism and sex.

Detective Williams:  
That's a human ear all right.

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover, 1989

Few directors polarize audiences like Peter Greenaway, a filmmaker as influenced by Jacobean revenge tragedy and 17th century painting as by the French New Wave. *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* is both adored and detested for its combination of sumptuous beauty and revolting decadence. A vile, gluttonous thief spews hate and abuse at a restaurant run by a stoic French cook, but under the thief's nose his wife conducts an affair with a bookish lover. Clothing changes color as the characters move from room to room. Nudity, torture, rotting meat, and Tim Roth at his sleaziest all contribute the atmosphere of decay and excess. Not for everyone, but for some, essential.

-Bret Fetzer

Albert:

Looks like catfood for constipated French rabbits!

Georgina:

Bon appetit, Albert, that's French...

After  
THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE AND HER LOVER  
Acrylic, charcoal and oil on canvas  
120 x 100 cm  
2019













Watching  
ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND

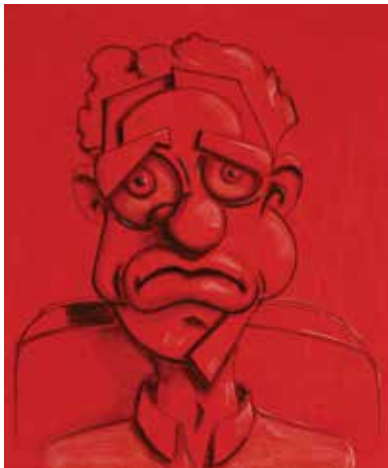
Acrylic and oil on canvas

100 x 120 cm

2018

## RGB

RGB (red, green and blue) refers to a system for representing the colors to be used on a computer display. Red, green, and blue can be combined in various proportions to obtain any color in the visible spectrum.



RGB  
RED

Acrylic and oil on canvas  
65 x 54 cm  
2018



RGB  
GREEN

Acrylic and oil on canvas  
65 x 54 cm  
2018



RGB  
BLUE

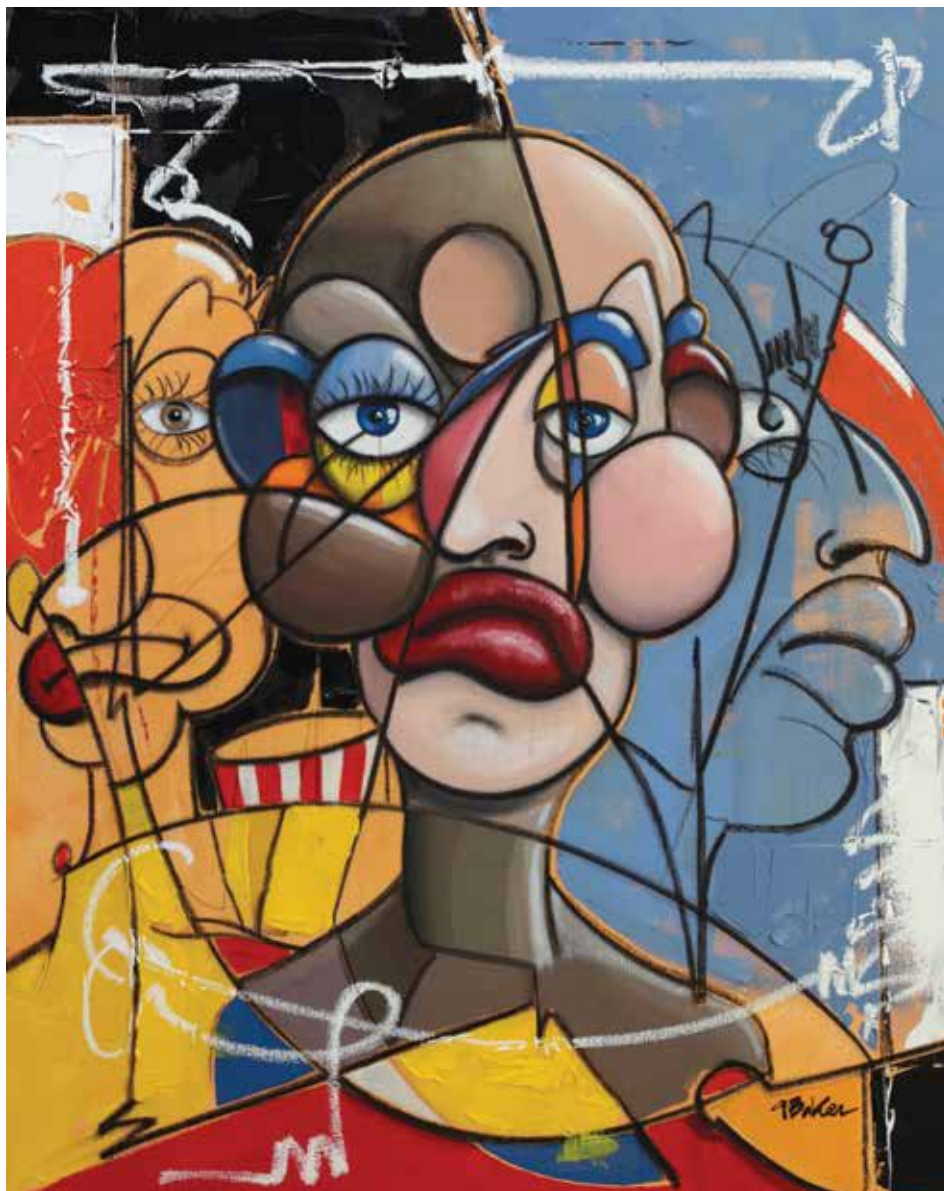
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
65 x 54 cm  
2018





Watching  
CITIZEN KANE

Acrylic and oil on canvas  
81 x 65 cm  
2018



Watching  
KAHAANI (Bollywood)  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
100 x 80 cm  
2019

Watching  
CAST AWAY  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
100 x 80 cm  
2018









Watching  
APOCALYPSE NOW  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
120 x 100 cm  
2018

## A Clockwork Orange, 1989

Stanley Kubrick's striking visual interpretation of Anthony Burgess's famous novel is a masterpiece. Malcolm McDowell delivers a clever, tongue-in-cheek performance as Alex, the leader of a quartet of droogs, a vicious group of young hoodlums who spend their nights stealing cars, fighting rival gangs, breaking into people's homes and raping women. While other directors would simply exploit the violent elements of such a film without subtext, Kubrick maintains Burgess's dark, satirical social commentary. We watch Alex transform from a free-roaming miscreant into a convict used in a government experiment that attempts to reform criminals through an unorthodox new medical treatment. The catch, of course, is that this therapy may be nothing better than a quick cure-all for a society plagued by rampant crime. *A Clockwork Orange* works on many levels--visual, social, political, and sexual--and is one of the few films that hold up under repeated viewings. Kubrick not only presents colorfully arresting images, he also stylizes the film by utilizing classical music (and Wendy Carlos's electronic classical work) to underscore the violent scenes, which even today are disturbing in their display of sheer nihilism. Ironically, many fans of the film have missed that point, sadly being entertained by its brutality rather than being repulsed by it.

-Bryan Reesman

Alex:

There was me, that is Alex, and my three droogs, that is Pete, Georgie, and Dim, and we sat in the Korova Milkbar trying to make up our rassoodocks what to do with the evening. The Korova milkbar sold milk-plus, milk plus vellocet or synthemesc or drenchrom, which is what we were drinking. This would sharpen you up and make you ready for a bit of the old ultra-violence.

After  
A CLOCKWORK ORANGE  
Acrylic, charcoal and oil on canvas  
150 x 100 cm  
2018









drink!

A. Baker



When Harry Met Sally, 1989

In 1977, college graduates Harry Burns and Sally Albright share a contentious car ride from Chicago to New York, during which they argue about whether men and women can ever truly be strictly platonic friends. Ten years later, Harry and Sally meet again at a bookstore, and in the company of their respective best friends, Jess and Marie, attempt to stay friends without sex becoming an issue between them.

Harry Burns:

I love that you get cold when it's 71 degrees out. I love that it takes you an hour and a half to order a sandwich. I love that you get a little crinkle above your nose when you're looking at me like I'm nuts. I love that after I spend the day with you, I can still smell your perfume on my clothes. And I love that you are the last person I want to talk to before I go to sleep at night. And it's not because I'm lonely, and it's not because it's New Year's Eve. I came here tonight because when you realize you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible.

Sally:

No, no, no, I drove him away. AND, I'm gonna be forty.

Harry:

When?

Sally:

Someday.

Harry:

In eight years.

Sally:

But it's there. It's just sitting there, like some big dead end. And it's not the same for men. Charlie Chaplin had kids when he was 73.

Harry:

Yeah, but he was too old to pick them up.

After

WHEN HARRY MET SALLY

Acrylic and oil on canvas

200 x 155 cm

2019





## GHAZI BAKER

Ghazi Baker (b.1967) is a self-taught artist, he is a practicing architect and manages his own firm. Born in Beirut in a multicultural family with Iranian and Armenian heritage, he is an avid photographer and a passionate bike rider. His trips, rides and photography have always been a source of inspiration and self-awareness.

Currently working and living in Beirut, Baker's style could be characterized as an exotic cocktail of lines, post-structuralist art, cerebral and deliberately anti-thematic. Always looking to highlight the process itself, his artistic influences include comic book art, music, movies, motorcycle culture, esoteric imagery, everyday life and the human condition. His work is inspired by thinkers as diverse as J. Derrida and M. Foucault as well as other artists such as Francis Bacon and Egon Schiel.

Baker's work is highly sought after by many major collectors in the Middle-East, Europe and elsewhere. His work is present in institutional and foundation collections in Beirut, Dubai, New York, Paris and other locations, and has been exhibited internationally in Art Basel (2017), art Miami (2016), scope New York (2016) and many others.

## EDUCATION

Bachelor of Architecture, BArch  
American University of Beirut, 1991

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS, ART FAIRS and COLLECTIVE SHOWS

Beirut - Lebanon | 12-11-2014 "Decade-nce" Ghazi Baker solo exhibition  
Beirut - Lebanon | 11-15-2016 "Sins, Virtues & Colors" Solo show, mark Hachem gallery.  
Istanbul - Turkey | 11-3-2016 Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair  
Beirut - Lebanon | 9-21-2016 Beirut Art Fair 2016  
Miami - USA | 11-29-2016 Miami Art fair 2016  
Palm Beach - USA | 1-12-2017 Palm Beach modern & contemporary 2017  
Paris - France | 1-20-2017 Artists Collective, Mark Hachem Gallery Paris.  
Wynwood -USA | 2-16-2017 Art Wynwood 2017  
New York - USA | 3-2-2017 Scope New York 2017  
Paris - France | 5-12-2017 Collective exhibition Mark Hachem Gallery Paris  
Basel - Switzerland | 6-13-2017 Scope Basel 2017  
Beirut - Lebanon | 9-21-2017 Beirut Art Fair 2017  
Paris - France | 11-23-2017 " CHROMESTHESIA" Solo show, Mark Hachem Gallery, Paris.  
Miami - USA | 12-5-2017 Scope Miami 2017  
New York - USA | 3-8-2018 Scope New York 2018  
Basel - Switzerland | 6-12-2018 Scope Basel  
Istanbul - Turkey | 9-20-2018 Contemporary Istanbul  
Beirut - Lebanon | 9-21-2018 Beirut Art Fair





Published in Beirut 2019

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Beirut 2019

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**THE  
END**