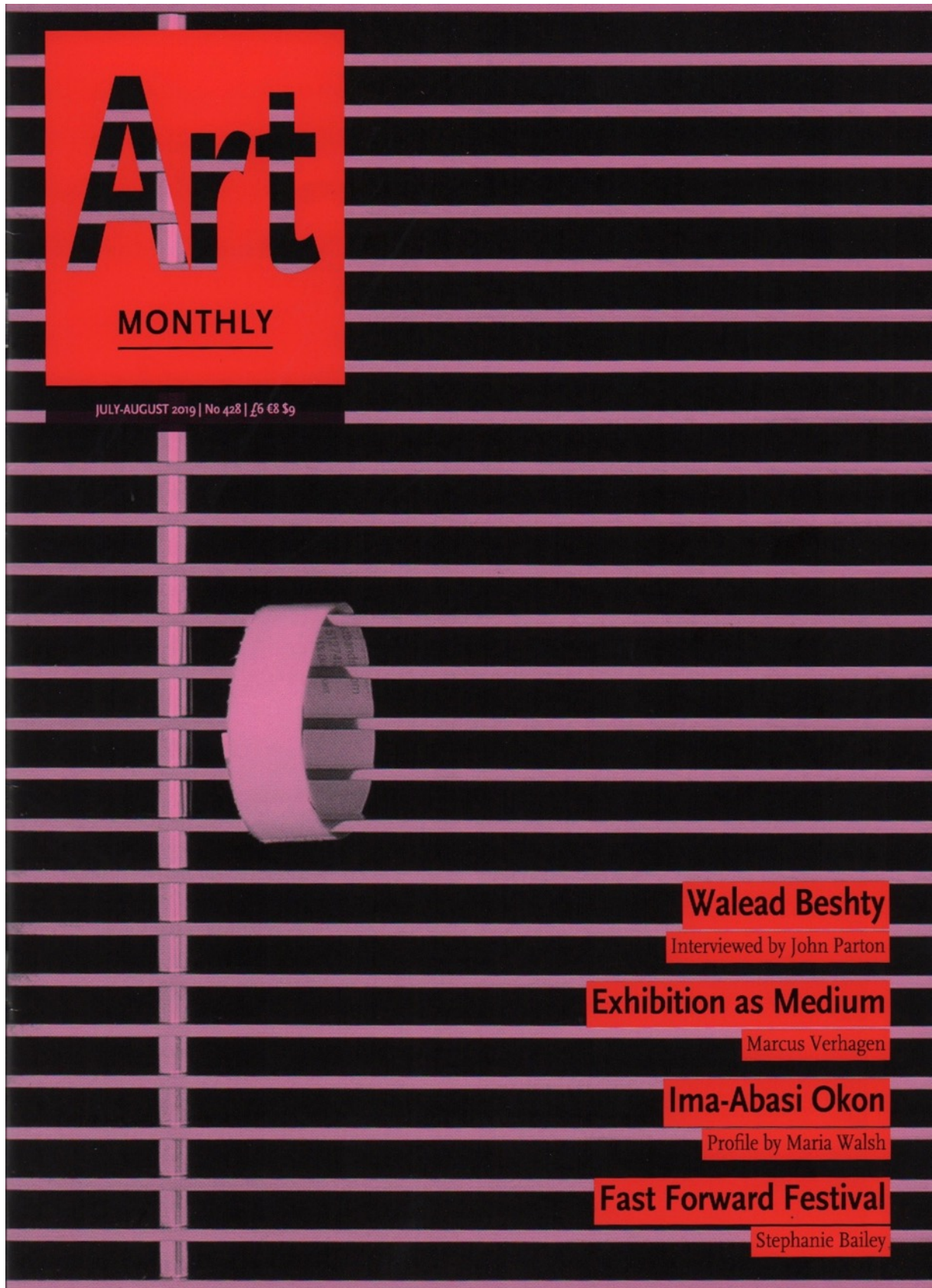


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'There Is No Alternative'
Installation view



and slang from African-American vernacular culture, layering a coded, contemporary vocabulary onto an obscure and outdated text. Like Giorgio Agamben's essay, also entitled 'Notes on Gesture', where the physical expression is deemed the 'communication of a communicability', the gesture indicates a seemingly limitless capacity, an infinite potential, to mean whatever it is you want it to mean. ■

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Navine G Khan-Dossos: There Is No Alternative

The Showroom London 5 June to 27 July

For more than a decade Navine G Khan-Dossos has been investigating the aniconic tradition associated with Islamic art, using its vocabulary of repeated geometries

to create paintings which resist imagery. Patterns are platforms for infinite repetition and interchangeability. These are formal qualities which Khan-Dossos's current installation at The Showroom uses elegantly to mine the symbolism of Prevent, a UK government counter-terrorism strategy which is itself predicated on an architecture of pattern, using past to predict future behaviours. The exhibition, titled, 'There Is No Alternative', comprises wall-painting, performance, workshops and installation. Patterns Khan-Dossos derives from logos and symbols associated with Prevent are painted (and overpainted, as the walls run out) throughout the exhibition's duration. In their normal use these logos appear on their own as branding, adorning stationery or websites. As patterns they lose their distinctiveness to become more like white noise. In the centre of the space is a conspicuously bland study area where a combination of policy documents, correspondence and books encourage a detailed look at the substance and aesthetics of Prevent. The government announced an independent review of Prevent in January, so the space is theatrical to the extent that it might be

the set for such an exercise: the office furniture and houseplants could easily describe a room in the civil service or the office of a lobbyist.

Prevent is a controversial element of the government's counter-terrorism strategy. Safeguarding, concerned as it is with potential rather than actual crime, is intellectually problematic in all the ways fans of *The Minority Report* (in both its Philip K Dick and Tom Cruise iterations) will recognise. These problems amplify in the culturally or racially loaded contexts safeguarding tends to occupy. In the light of hostile environment initiatives, or glib attitudes towards citizenship when its revocation presents ministerial PR opportunities, Prevent's limitations become more visible.

But the futurity Prevent concerns itself with is ideally suited to the kinds of pattern that preoccupy Khan-Dossos, since patterns loop, following the rules they prescribe. Everything fits, and each form is set by its neighbour. Such structures offer clear visual parallels for the wider questions within Prevent: issues of determinism and agency, and the balancing of freedoms against constraints. The paintings' patterns can be positioned in the tradition of the grid, too, recalling Rosalind Krauss's³ assertion of 'the protectiveness of the [grid's] mesh against all intrusions from outside'. Krauss's reading of the grid is full of resonances here: 'The absolute stasis of the grid, its lack of hierarchy, of centre, of inflection, emphasises not only its anti-referential character, but – more importantly – its hostility to narrative.' Prevent, conversely, is predicated on narrative and the idea of one thing leading to or causing another (hence, perhaps, the declaratively linear title 'There Is No Alternative'). Krauss was describing purist grids, which Khan-Dossos's grids are conspicuously not: they are concocted from the iconography of Prevent – symbols like shields, fingerprints and padlocks. But again the repetition of these shapes comes to reflect the ways symbols metamorphosise over time. It is difficult not to see the shield logos at The Showroom in a lineage of shields that links through to the crusades, giving a deeper visual history to policies which present themselves as urgently contemporary.

The history of Khan-Dossos's own practice has similar continuities with this new Showroom work. Her interest in the technologies and aesthetics of green screens or loading pages has echoes here in the temporality of Prevent, a strategy preoccupied with what is about to happen. There is clear logic for an artist like Khan-Dossos, whose work has long been situated in this generative moment, turning to Prevent as a subject. The topic is loaded with connotations about the image and its construction too: Prevent is an exercise in vigilant looking, or surveillance, so to bring that activity back into an art space is to restore it to its rightful habitat. Independent reviews speak a particular language, but Khan-Dossos

offers an alternative review which is more ambiguous and more structurally nuanced: her layered wall-paintings are screens and their subject is screening. The audience, in turn, can practise the same self-reflexivity – scrutinising a policy which places society under scrutiny. ■

Alexander Massouras is an artist and writer based in Cambridge.

Kembra Pfahler: Rebel Without a Cock

Emalin London 1 June to 20 July

Here is a monstrously large phallus with a big bulbous head, glittering in mirror-tiles and flanked by two similarly spangled balls. A collaboration between Kembra Pfahler, Urs Fischer and Spencer Sweeney, *Disco Cock* is ornate, imposing, beautifully produced and brutally silly. The monument – the 'cock' of the title, a proxy for a 'cause' – also brandishes a few multicoloured handprints and smears: remnants from its activation by Pfahler and others (with painted bodies) at the private view. *Disco Cock* is therefore a prop for performances, a trace of prior activities and a sculptural artefact in its own right.

Pfahler is best known as a performance artist, especially for her concept band The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black (TVHKB), active since the 1980s. Pfahler adopts a signature 'look' in oblique homage to Black: monochrome body paint (blue, red, yellow), knee-high black pleather boots with white laces, a giant, tousled, black fright wig, expressionistic eye make-up and black teeth. In her loud, visually explosive live TVHKB shows – typically supported by a proliferation of similarly attired performers, like strange visual echoes of her occulted self – Pfahler performs ambivalent homages to the depthless pomp of rock, lovingly reproducing its exultant spectacle (she's fun to watch) while poking fun at its vacuity and at other times filling it in. In one anthem, for example, apropos of nothing, Pfahler sings, 'Underwear drawer! Underwear drawer! I gotta clean out my underwear drawer!' In another, she appropriates Palm Apodaca's guttural, anti-capitalist, lesbian-separatist rant from the 1970 movie *Five Easy Pieces* (starring the original, luminous Karen Black), the pilfered monologue enabling a song about 'going to Alaska' to escape the moral and aesthetic decrepitude of the city: 'Man! He likes to create a stink! I mean, I've seen filth that you wouldn't believe. Ugh! What a stink! I don't even want to talk about it.'

'Rebel Without a Cock' is Pfahler's second solo exhibition at Emalin. Surrounding *Disco Cock* are props from performances (muted hints at a roller derby *Oliver Twist*, perhaps?) and a series of nine photographic collages