

Sleep is cyclic. A universal ritual. What wakes sleeps. What lives dies. In "The Longest Sleep", Rafik Greiss squares with the circle of life. He embraces rituals that disturb linear time. A discarded piano? Sculpture (*Thais (Bird of Paradise)*, 2024). A distorted postcard? *The Second Life of a cat* (2024). He asks, teasingly, what if the Omega were the Alpha? What if our life and all the shit in it were eternal? That's the dream here.

An obsession with the life cycle of objects animates Greiss' practice. Many of the works on display are the spoils of his trash-to-treasure eye combing the streets of Paris, Tbilisi, and Cairo. He finds power in thresholds and between-spaces: the worn doormat of a Sufi mosque (*Mawlid Doormat*, 2024), a photograph of cloth strung up in an empty lot (*Trade Winds, White Heat*, 2024). Behind a set of doors from the street in Georgia, Greiss tucks an intimate thumbnail photo, the dirty glass a protective gauze (*Lèvres Froides (Die Selection Cover)*, 2024). His manipulations to object and image give renewed life to forgotten reality. Shoot, lug, cut, scan, frame, tear, research, repeat. Two-dimensional images of three-dimensional objects are given texture through paper, framing, and grit. They become three-dimensional again. A cycle.

At the back of gallery, inset wooden panels sheath Greiss' refuge for refuse. An oeuvre in situ, "With tree pollen covering everything, and more skin showing everywhere you look, sometimes spring feels a bit like..." (2024) points to the relative nature of "dirty". Surprise: the definition is cultural, shaped by religion and economic condition. In the bottom corner of the panels, Greiss etches Adam, fallen. In this 14th century image, Adam wields a woody hard-on of arbor philosophica, the alchemical precursor to the philosopher's stone. Greiss wouldn't claim it, but he has a knack for turning base material off the street into gold. By reappropriating and re-valorizing waste from his home country, Greiss subverts our sense of the sacred, the clean and the unclean. He observes rituals in the environment (see *Pattern Recognition I and II*, 2024). And here, in the blank slate of the gallery, his objects are isolated from their source. Perspective is reframed.

In the basement, one triptych film anchors the dream. Greiss' first major film work, *The Longest Sleep* takes viewers on a fever-dream circuit of mawlids. Arabic for "anniversaries", these are birthdays celebrations for Sufi walīs, local saints who serve as mediator and intercessor to God. With his camera as the invite, Greiss documents hadra, rave-like prayer rituals performed at mawlids. Rapt, believers lurch right, then left. They cry out, inhale, pray, release. On and on. Dusk 'til dawn.

It's addicting, or at least that's what Greiss observed across the dozen mawlids he participated in this summer. Like Deadheads, or rave kids, he encountered again and again many of the same pious people who travel around Egypt seeking something higher. He insists the film is not about religion. Rather, "The Longest Sleep" concerns transcendentalism as a cyclical practice that distorts time. "I was deeply moved that people could reach these altered states without drugs," Greiss recalls. "Their eyes rolled back in their heads, and saliva flew from their mouths when they spun together. The intensity was contagious." According to Andrew Newberg, expert in the emerging field of neurotheology, all these acts set alight the same part of our pre-frontal cortex. There is a spatial side to belief, it's mapped in our brains. Picture the whirling of the pilgrim-addicts with synapses firing. There is the potential for breakdown — in motion and emotion.

To Greiss, the mosque-to-rave pipeline is leaky but transcendence-seeking is timeless. It's cyclic like the merry-go-round in his film. "I never grew up with religion, but I was always intrigued by the stubbornness of religious people," reflects Greiss. Stubborn, that is, in their pursuit of that higher plane where time spirals. While filming "The Longest Sleep", Greiss never joined in the hadra. "If I could have been invisible while filming, I would have," he admits. He and us: modern wallflowers to transcendence. But maybe we should get dirty with it? Lurch right, lurch left. Then cry out, inhale, pray, release, repeat. "It takes over the body" Greiss recalls. Until you fall into the longest sleep.

Andrew Pasquier

Greiss (b. 1997) is an Irish-born Egyptian artist currently based in Paris. His work has been exhibited internationally at venues such as Kunsthalle Zurich (Zurich, 2024), the Swiss Institute (New York, 2023), and Balice Hertling (Paris), among others. His first solo exhibition was held at Galerie Balice Hertling in 2021.