

Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative
But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise:
Hassan Khan on Logic, Value, and “Banque Bannister”

My name is Hassan, and I’m an artist, musician, and writer—yeah, I’d underline them all.

My medium is not the medium itself—it’s not sculpture or film or video. My medium is how I approach these mediums, which means that the work demands to become something. And that something can be in any form, depending on what that specific work needs, and wants, and demands. So I end up working in a lot of different mediums, not by choice, but really being compelled by what the works need.

The thing about *Banque Bannister* is it’s a functional everyday object—I mean, it’s a very banal thing, but there are many such things that I notice. And I feel like I can learn things from them—little details tell you something about how the world functions. It’s very clear why a bank would use something that has that kind of color, et cetera, to promote certain ideas, but that is actually not my priority, or my top interest—that is just the first layer. What I’m interested in is something underneath that. The institution that is housed in these bricks and cement and steel is also a whole system, addressing an audience, the public, the people walking down the street. And without us even thinking about it, we’re able to understand that message. So I’m not interested in that message, per se. I’m interested in that ability—how an object can have a presence; and how it can communicate; how it can become legible; and how is it possible for us to be able to read and decode and understand that presence? It’s not about lifting it out of one place and putting it somewhere else. So this thing exists in the world, but I’m reproducing it. My interest was in upending its own logic, and therefore, it is suspended, it’s irrational.

The Twist is a detail from a railing of a balcony. I didn’t reproduce it—I just reproduced its very logic. It’s really interesting for me, because that minor ornamentation is a very primary gesture, and civilizations were based on primary gestures, one of them being identification—identifying yourself, and identifying property. And to do that, you need things like names, and you need things like markers, you know? Values produced by ornament, in a sense. And so *The Twist* plays around with primary gesture.

The Knot is again related, because it’s a replica of a knot in a rope. But it’s made out of glass. So it is something that we know as a functional, tactile thing that is suddenly transformed, and sort of fossilized into a form that is fixed, that has the properties—almost opposite properties—to the original source.

I can connect all of this to *Brass Column*, which is probably my very first sculptural work. A column is an architectural form. But my interest in it was really, you know, again this issue of value and accumulation, and making a mark that produces this value, because of the kind of material, the fact that it’s seventy-something rings that are stacked on top of each other. It is the act of having a unit, and accumulating a certain amount of material value. It has a weight. But if it’s just a solid piece, you would miss the act of numbering, the act of measuring. You know, all these are primary gestures. I think that in a strange way, this older piece sort of foreshadows these later works.