

SHADI HABIB ALLAH

*BISCUITS AND GREEN SOX MAAIKE*

SEPTEMBER 18 – OCTOBER 16, 2016

For his second showing at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, Shadi Habib Allah has installed live kudzu vines under electric grow lamps, a surround-sound audio recording, and furniture-like sculptures made with plywood, Dibond and paint. When the fast-growing kudzu plant was first imported here from Asia in the late nineteenth century, it was hailed as a miracle plant in the 1930s and then later became regarded as an invasive species. Known as “the vine that ate the South,” kudzu has spread and taken over much of the farmland once dedicated to the cotton trade. On southern highways, views are engulfed on both sides by kudzu leaves, giving drivers the impression of a never-changing landscape, an endlessly looping tracking shot. The myth is that kudzu grows at a rate of a mile a minute, or 60mph, which is also the supposed maximum speed of the 50cc scooter, which we hear in surround sound. Evoking the feeling of a road trip or road movie in the gallery, the soundtrack moves between the speakers making a kind of sonic drawing in space. As with his video work *Dag’aa*, 2015, which follows the movements of Bedouin smugglers in the Sinai desert, Habib Allah is interested in experiences of navigation and disorientation in relation to both physical and virtual interfaces. In the soundtrack, a snippet of recorded dialogue in Chinese says something like “I go down these winding roads,” and the vines meanwhile will continue to spread throughout the show’s duration, extending a green leafy surface. Rolls of touch-sensitive Fuji paper will attempt to generate a drawing as they receive physical impressions of the growing kudzu. The painted plywood sculptures also function as seats.

Kudzu’s primary method of reproduction is asexual vegetative spread (cloning) which is aided by the ability to root wherever a stem is exposed to soil. For sexual reproduction, kudzu is entirely dependent on pollinators. In the 1950s, the Agricultural Conservation Program removed kudzu from the list of species acceptable for use as an agricultural forage crop or soil stabilization plant. Congress listed kudzu as a Federal Noxious Weed in 1998. In 2014, the State of New York designated kudzu as a prohibited plant under the state’s Environmental Conservation Law. The artist had to apply for city permits to grow these vines at RSFA, and must ensure their destruction at the end of the show.

Shadi Habib Allah (b. 1977, Jerusalem, Palestine) has exhibited at the New Museum Triennial (2015); Art Statements, Art Basel 43 (2012); *Palestine c/o Venice*, Venice Biennale (2009); the Riwaq Biennale, Ramallah (2009); and In Focus, Tate Modern, London (2007), amongst others. Recent exhibitions include *Shadi Habib Allah: 30KG Shine*, Rodeo, London (2015) *The Verdant*, Hacienda, Zurich (2015); Artists Space on Randall Island, Frieze Art Fair, New York (2014); *Empire State* curated by Norman Rosenthal & Alex Gartenfeld, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome (2013) & Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris (2013); *Frozen Lakes*, Artists Space, New York (2013); and *Nouvelles Vagues*, curated by Jason Waite and Antonia Alampi, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2013). He lives and works in New York.