



Mohamad Hafez was born in Damascus, Syria in 1984 and migrated with his family to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia a year after his birth. His early life was informed by his family's foreign status in Riyadh and regular visits to Damascus, until their eventual return in 1999. Hafez moved to the United States in 2003 to study architecture at Iowa State University. Since 2009, he has established himself as a licensed architect and full-time artist in New Haven, CT.

Movements to and away from Damascus at political turning points influence Hafez's imagination of Syria as a subject of both distance and intimacy in his artwork. Hafez describes security challenges in visiting Damascus from the United States during the early years of the War on Terror and with the onset of the current war in Syria. The launch of the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) after September 11, 2001 required foreign nationals from

Muslim-majority countries such as Syria to report regularly to immigration officials. As a perceived security risk, Hafez's "special registration" was mandated. For eight years, the scrutiny of NSEERS prevented him from jeopardizing his single-entry work visas in the United States by visiting Syria. In 2011, Hafez visited Damascus with his architectural firm for a scheduled few days—yet, forced to await US visa approval for reentry, he remained for six weeks. Visiting at the height of the "Arab Spring" protests and just before the "civil war" began, Hafez marks this return as pivotal to the current direction in his artwork. His earlier works explored cultural nostalgia as a fraught concept for a migrant artist in diaspora. His recent artwork is more attentive to how the violent practices of states transform the lived environments and mobility of people. Hafez's sculptures repurpose nostalgic national memory in conversation with global media representations of Syria as a war-zone and site of humanitarian disaster.

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