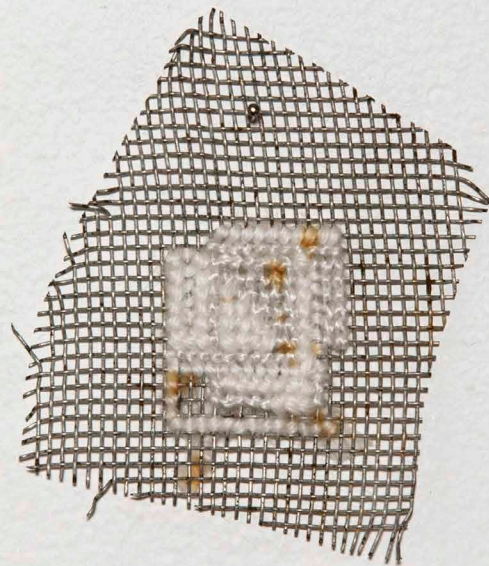


CAMPLE—LINE

MAJD ABDEL HAMID
MURMURATION
27.06 – 06.0.26



Son this is a waste of time, 2015-ongoing



Majd Abdel Hamid: *Murmuration*

—Francis McKee

Modern physics tells us that the universe is underpinned by a cosmic web of dark matter, an interconnected structure of invisible filaments holding everything in place. At the same time, biologists point to a system of nanoscopic structures that determine the repeated patterns of insect wings, human cells, and a myriad of organic materials that surround us. This sounds comforting: it all suggests order, destined outcomes, a grand plan of sorts. But the theoretical physicist John Wheeler unsettles this in his explanation of the universe where he finds that ‘empty space is not empty. It is the seat of the most violent physics.’¹

Majd Abdel Hamid’s work often seems to glance off all these ideas – the textiles he creates offer reassurance through their traditional materials, the handmade elements of cross-stitch embroidery, their intimate scale, and the symmetries of the patterns. There are systems and structures that underpin the objects he constructs and these too suggest order and security. But, working against all of this, there is an underlying wave of uncertainty that threatens the stability of his patterns.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this is Hamid’s fortune tellers which line the gallery. The fortune teller is a classic origami children’s game, usually made by folding a sheet of paper to create a small pincer-style object. There are four pockets for four fingers which open and close the device revealing messages written inside. In Hamid’s case, the fortune tellers are often made from patterned, and sometimes embroidered fabric and so every manipulation of the device opens on to an abstract pattern. The mathematics of folds in space come into play here: physicists are increasingly fascinated with the spatial complexities of origami and use origami paper creases to help them understand complex problems. The telling of fates in Hamid’s fortune tellers is interspliced with the navigation of space, time and dimensions of past, present and future. Concerned with memory and trauma, and their various traces in our lives, Hamid’s abstract patterns sometimes echo the blueprints of an ever-changing Beirut or map a prison in Syria and other topographical schemes.



Son this is a waste of time, 2026

The embroideries also draw on an earlier improvisational patterns of wedding dress embroidery in Palestine, where dress patterns reworked traditional motifs, reflecting the personal tastes of the wearer as well as echoing past memories – a fluid transmission of past into present. It's worth noting too the conscious homage to Félix González-Torres (1957-1996) in the line of fortune tellers. González-Torres's candy piles such as *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991) heaped sweets in a gallery corner in memory of his partner, Ross Laycock, who died of AIDS. The audience were invited to take and consume the candies just as Hamid's fortune tellers can be taken as free gifts by visitors to *Murmuration*. Both works commemorate traumatic events and both, through participation, invite us to engage in a process of grief through gentle acts of togetherness.

There is a clear sense in both the work of González-Torres and Hamid of that grief being camouflaged, of burying difficult issues within aesthetic pleasures that catches us off guard. Majd Abdel Hamid frequently codes his works in these ways, using his research into the history of textiles to find new ways to express his ideas. In his ongoing series of works, *Son this is a waste of time* (2015–), he embroiders with white thread on etamine or cotton paper, creating a field of white on white where the patterns and cross-stitches vanish into the background compelling us to search closely to find fragments of meaning amid the texture of the fabric. The method recalls the history of damask where this monochromatic technique was used to blend images into white silk backgrounds that only became visible if the fabric was turned towards the light in a certain way. It was a classic means of disguising wealth in public, revealing itself only to those who knew how to see the hidden pattern. Hamid's title for this work comes from a remark by a seamstress in Ramallah practised in the Palestinian embroidery tradition of *tatreez*, when he asked her to stitch a series of white-on-white pieces. The artist decided to embroider the works himself and, along the way, came to appreciate the meditative calm of the working process. There are some echoes of the American painter, Robert Ryman (1930-2019), whose white-on-white paintings resonate here too. Ryman, once an improvisational bop musician, reduced the sensory input of colour in his works, only to amplify the nuances of shades and textures that were then visible through attention. For Hamid, the work also underlines the hours spent embroidering, meditating, daydreaming, as he constructs each

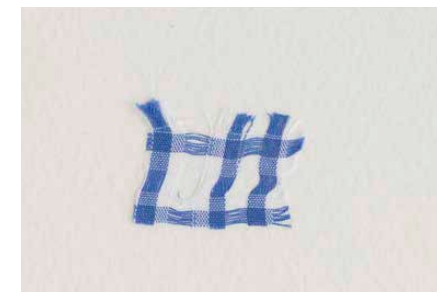
piece. The reduction of the image, the near vanishing and the small scale of the works, recalibrates our vision and the rhythm of our looking. We are drawn closer and begin to focus on the texture of the threads, the fabric, the hints of pattern.

Hamid's approach is made more explicit in other works – *Code* (2024), for example. These soft buttons of material are reminiscent of dominoes from a distance. Close up their arrangements recall the early days of computing, when binary was coded as holes across stacks of punch cards to create a program instruction. Those cards, in turn, were derived from the punched paper cards used to automate the Jacquard looms and program the complex patterns they produced in the early days of the Industrial Revolution. This is code in service of creativity, generating a weave and patterns on fabric or in the case of computing, generating programs.

Hamid's cards of code often resemble the rolls of pianolas too – the early automated player piano that could preserve and reproduce actual performances by Rachmaninoff, Debussy or Jelly Roll Morton and other celebrated composers. *Music Box* (2024) demonstrates this act of memory and recreation in its fragile way, a moving piece in its modest persistence. Nestled in a set of drawers in the far corner of the gallery, there is a sense of protection offered by the sturdy old-fashioned structure of the furniture. The drawers are a system of security and categorisation so traditional that its properties are almost invisible and certainly taken for granted. And yet, in Hamid's universe, they have multiple possibilities as they contain fragments and collections of patterns, holding memories, traces of grief and volatile, unstable futures.

In *Light* (2002), one of the greatest 21st-century science fiction novels, M. John Harrison's protagonist remembers a childhood epiphany on a stony beach:

Suddenly he understood this as a condition of things – if you could see the patterns the waves made, or remember the shapes of a million small white clouds, there it would be, a boiling, inexplicable, vertiginous similarity in all the processes of the world, roaring silently away from you in ever-shifting repetitions, always the same, never the same thing twice.





Fortune Tellers, 2026



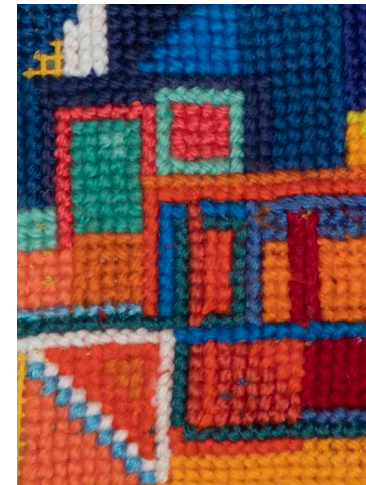
Still from Video, 2024

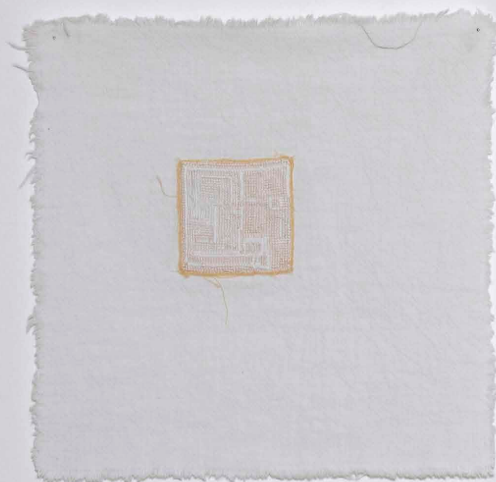
This comes close to Majd Abdel Hamid's perception of pattern from weaving, through mathematics to coding. The title he has chosen for the exhibition too, *Murmuration*, points to a complex natural phenomenon that signals a breathtaking unpredictable movement of starlings that is both beautiful and uncanny. In an attempt to describe these large scale events the nature writer Helen Macdonald looks to the Danish definition of a murmuration: 'the Danish term, sort sol, is better: black sun. It captures their almost celestial strangeness.'² She explains that the shape of a starling flock is generated by the birds copying the motion of others around it, reacting to their movements in less than a tenth of a second. These sudden turns and twists across the sky, then, appear to be the single motion of a large, ever-changing organism. For Hamid this organism may be the ever-shifting nature of grief, memory and the patterns we generate navigating the future.

Francis McKee is a writer and curator working in Glasgow. From 2006-23 he was Director at the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow. He is also a lecturer and research fellow at The Glasgow School of Art.

1. John Archibald Wheeler, *Geometrodynamics* (Academic Press, 1962)

2. Helen Macdonald, 'The Human Flock', in *Vesper Flights: New and Collected Essays* (Grove Press, 2020)







Son this is a waste of time (from July to March), 2024



List of works

1. **Son this is a waste of time**
2015-ongoing
White cotton thread on etamine and cotton paper, each 14.6 x 10.4 cm
2. **Code**, 2024
Assorted cotton thread on cotton paper, each 17.8 x 9 cm
- 3-6 **Son this is a waste of time**
2015-ongoing
white silk thread and metal
11.5 x 10.2 cm

2023-24
white cotton thread on cotton fabric
26.7 x 26.7 cm

2026
white cotton thread on etamine
7.2 x 8 cm

2025
white cotton thread on etamine
24 x 16.5 cm
7. **Son this is a waste of time VI**
2025, white cotton thread on linen
21 x 14.9 cm
8. **Fortune tellers**, 2026
Assorted fabrics, 1500 x 14 cm
9. **Ode to Sea (murmuration)**, 2026
Three colour polaroids, 8.5 x 7.2 cm
10. **Muscle memory**, 2026
Dyed cotton fabric on cotton paper
22.8 x 17.3 cm
11. **Son this is a waste of time**
2015-ongoing
White cotton thread on metal mesh
6.5 x 5.8 cm

Chest of drawers:
12. **Son this is a waste of time (from July to March)**, 2024
White cotton thread on etamine
23 x 32 cm
13. **Notebooks**, 2024
Fabric, thread and paper
14. **Video**, 2024
Digital video
Running time: 4 mins, no sound
15. **Music box**, 2024
Music box and paper
- 16-19 **Compositions**, 2024-5
Fabric on cotton paper
dimensions variable
- 20-23 **Compositions VIII, IX, V, I**
2024
Fabric on cotton paper
dimensions variable
- 24-26 **Son this is a waste of time**
2015-ongoing
White cotton thread on metal mesh, 5.7 x 5.4 cm / 5.5 x 5.1 cm / 6.7 x 4.2 cm
27. **Son this is a waste of time**
2015-ongoing
White cotton thread on cotton fabric, 8.2 x 6.1 cm
28. **Composition**, 2024-5
White cotton thread on cotton paper, 10.4 x 5.1 cm
- 29-31 **Compositions**, 2025-2026
Assorted cotton thread on linen
10.7 x 13.7 cm

Assorted cotton thread on etamine
8 x 5.3 cm

Assorted cotton thread on cotton paper, 14.6 x 10.5 cm
- 32-33 **Resonance**, 2026
Polaroid 8.5 x 7.2 cm

Assorted cotton thread on cotton fabric, 15 x 10.6 cm

Dimensions are given H x W x D

Majd Abdel Hamid (b.1988, Damascus, Syria) grew up in Ramallah in the West Bank and is currently based between Beirut and Paris. He graduated from Malmö Art Academy, Sweden (2010) and attended the International Academy of Art in Palestine (2007-2009).

Recent solo exhibitions include: GAK Bremen, Germany; Kunsthalle St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland; Cell Project Space, London, UK; *Grey Noise*, Dubai; Marfa, Beirut, Lebanon (all 2025) and *Signal*, Malmö, Sweden (2024). His work has also been featured in numerous group exhibitions, including: Biennale de Lyon, Lyon, France; Phenomenon, Anafi, Greece; Venice Biennial, Venice, Italy; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France; Prix Reiffers Art Initiatives, Paris, France; Art Explora, Photograph Pavillion (all 2024); Hirafen, Tunis, Tunisia (2023); Kyiv Biennial, Vienna, Austria (2023); Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE (2022) and SMAK, Ghent, Belgium (2022).





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