

From March 6 till March 20, 2010 Ayyam Gallery, Damascus will proudly present the solo exhibition of established Syrian painter Thayer Helal. Known for large mixed media canvases that transform the tangible (and intangible) into abstract compositions exploring color and texture, the artist will present a new body of work that delves further into the energy, movement and rhythm of people, places, space and time.

Born in Syria in 1967, Helal immigrated to the UAE in the 1990s, where he has resided ever since. With a long exhibition history and a senior faculty member of the University of Sharjah, Fine Arts College, he has established himself as a leading figure in the contemporary Arab and Gulf art scene. In addition to being highlighted in countless solo and group exhibitions in the Middle East, he has been featured in such international events as the Scope art fair (Basel) and the Alexandria and Sharjah Biennales.

Although Helal's most recent canvases continue the bold experiments in depth, surface and palette seen in his previous work, the execution through which they have been realized is noticeably freer and expressive. By creating images that are derived from both internal and external sources (i.e. individual and collective experiences), the artist seeks to fashion a way of seeing that relies on the sensations of rhythm and movement to communicate the sentiments and physicality of society and culture.

In effect, his approach to painting reflects the fundamental principles of abstraction, as seen in the work of revolutionary art movements such as Russian Constructivism and Abstract Expressionism. In an interview with Canvas magazine, Helal affirmed "My work also has an outer appearance that is manifested in terms of form and color. Its essence, its significance, is in the signs and symbols that lead you to a particular thought. With these shapes, I express different thoughts which each viewer sees from his or her own perspective."

Much of the inspiration for his latest series stems from the vigor of collective action or the gathering of crowds, as it appears in political protests and marches or religious ceremonies and festivals. Departures from his earlier works, which were divided into grids of square compartments that functioned as nuclei of brushwork and toyed with the outcomes of repeated forms, these new canvases are arranged with lines and markings that are liberated from spatial bounds. Planes overlap and intersect dramatically while paint drips freely and various mediums are combined to add a sense of depth and dimension. Reproducing the power of these assemblies, the artist uses a bright palette with uninhibited strokes, methodically working the canvas with materials until it appears as rugged terrain. For the artist, "These may be elements of plant, animal or human or imaginary or abstract, which vary from panel to panel and from time to time, both in form and meaning." Like the larger bodies that appear from these gatherings, be it in an organized fashion or amidst utter chaos, his compositions speak of the kinetic forces behind nature and life, emphasizing their physical and psychic impact on the senses and translating them with artistic prowess.