

Omran Younes's Solo Show
At Ayyam Gallery, Beirut
From 2/02/2010 – 25/02/2010

From February 2 to March 25, Ayyam Gallery Beirut will proudly present the solo exhibition of Omran Younes. Featuring a new body of the artist's work, the show will highlight the continual progression of one of Syria's most exciting painters.

As a member of a generation of artists that emerged from the influential school of Syrian modernism, Younes has sought to further contemporary aesthetics while building on the practices of his predecessors. This has often meant the capturing of the world around him with bold social commentary and an acute sense of observation through new varieties of painting. He frequently works within a specific theme, with each series dedicated to particular experiments in subject matter and technique.

His latest canvases, which will be debuted by Ayyam, are a departure from his previous, well-known collection of paintings that revolved around scenes of the theatre. Bringing the bravado of the stage to compositions that are invigorated by flat color fields, fluid lines and enigmatic characters, the "Theatre" series contains striking imagery—one that challenged our understanding of social norms, namely the duality (or masks) found in our daily interactions.

His current series stands as a new (and distinct) chapter of his oeuvre, as the paintings display a fresh palette, different subject matter and a more intimate investigation of human relationships. For the artist, "Each series has its own set of colors. And each subject obliges one to employ various hues... This collection of paintings is based on photo portraits that were taken before the use of color technology, it indicates a sense of loneliness and nostalgia—a longing for memories, to moments of the past."

Oversized portraits with exaggerated figures characterize Younes' resurrecting of this past. A minimal palette of white, black, grey, brown and pink tones gives a pensive mood to his subjects. Their large heads dominate canvases, and although there is a monumental feel to the works, the viewer is drawn into the composition through the subtle ways in which Younes applies layers of various mediums, creating dimension with washes of color and scumbled paint. This intensive method of depicting their forms provides a near sculpted look to his male and female subjects, emphasizing the impact of their memories on the artist, and giving way to the ways in which the mind reconfigures what is lost or distant.

One can also see traces of a wide range of influences, including Post-war European artist Francis Bacon, who straddled international movements in modern and contemporary art. According to the Younes, this is a result of his maturing creative process, "The 'Theatre Series' worked within the spirit of 1960s Syrian modernism. This new phase is more of a step towards current trends. The more I see and experience in painting, the more I feel I am stepping into contemporary art."

Born in Al-Hasakah in 1971, Younes has been active in the local art scene since the late 1990s. He graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus in 1998 and went on to obtain a Masters degree in Fine Arts in 2000. Having exhibited throughout the Middle East, his work has received critical acclaim at home and abroad. Most recently he has exhibited at Ayyam's Dubai and Damascus locations and in Doha at the Virginia Commonwealth University gallery among the ranks of such prominent Arab artists as Dia Azzawi, Mona Hatoum and Youssef Nabil. Today his work is collected as a staple of contemporary Syrian art, recognized for his commanding approach to depicting his subjects—one marked by labored explorations and careful execution—and a noticeable pursuit of elevating his art to its highest form.