

Ayyam Gallery Damascus is pleased to present the solo exhibition of contemporary Syrian painter Kais Salman, to be held January 30 - February 25. Since first exhibiting with the gallery in 2007, Salman has quickly become a fixture at Ayyam, participating in such standout events as “Ayyam’s Summer Festival,” “Shabab Uprising,” and “The Young Collectors Auction (I and II).” This forthcoming solo show will highlight how the young artist has fervently pushed the boundaries of contemporary Arab art with striking subject matter and bold approaches to painting.

Born in Tartous, Syria in 1976, Salman graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus in 2002. During his time there, he displayed a great capacity for drawing the human figure, an interest that remains paramount to him today. An exciting talent whose provocative works have captured the attention of the regional art scene, he has exhibited throughout the Middle East, and in Europe and the US. His paintings are housed in collections in Syria, the Gulf, North Africa and Europe.

Salman’s latest body of work, “The Fashion Series,” is a tour de force. Seemingly insatiable figures dominate large expressionist canvases. With heads that resemble those of Willem de Kooning’s women, Rubenesque bodies that teeter on the verge of the grotesque, and a degree of satire that resembles the staggering compositions of 1920s Germany, Salman’s subjects are meant to be visually shocking. That this combination has both formulistic and conceptual elements to it is the artist’s intention, “I want to concentrate more on the expressive quality of the figure. It makes my paintings simpler and more expressive and spontaneous.”

Noticing the growing materialism and vanity that seems to have absorbed much of global society, the artist offers profound observations on this mounting epidemic as he seeks to “highlight how this obsession with fashion and brands is moving people from the spiritual to materialism.” Opting to create his own type of “fashion model,” Salman’s work undermines existing notions of beauty and glamour, exposing the dangerous ways in which we have become consumed by the disposable, empty and intangible nature of objects and goods. “I am concerned with the materialism that is now very common in our lives,” affirms the artist. “It is making us increasingly uglier and a bit aggressive. Thus our inner self is reflected in an ugly way.”

At once poignant and disquieting, his canvases attack the senses with brazen figures, assured markings and a dramatic palette. With distorted frames and hallowed eyes Salman’s protagonists stare blankly at the viewer. Although they appear scantily clad—their bodies exposed as heaps of flesh that the artist has depicted using various mediums and coarse brushwork—they seem to disappear beneath layers of makeup. Some even wear masks, as though hiding their true identity. If his models seem timid yet audacious, it is because the artist seeks to emphasize the overwhelming contradictions of this consumerist culture. That one might be overcome by Salman’s women and his projection of twenty-first century ways of life is exactly the point. With a mature sense of color and design and an apt command of media, the artist’s gift for painting makes his brand of social commentary all the more impactful.

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