

‘Masked Bodies’ by Asaad Arabi
At Ayyam Gallery, Beirut
From 10/12/2009 – 22/01/2010

Ayyam Gallery Beirut is proud to present the latest body of works from Master painter Assad Arabi.

Assad Arabi is an invaluable retrospect on a very particular awakening in the history of Middle Eastern art. *Al-Nahda al-Arabiyya* was an eminent Arab renaissance, which flourished and accompanied the wave of the innovative sixties. It was set out to embrace and attain the lessons of the western world all whilst similarly respecting the cultural denotations and the local artistic heritage present in the region.

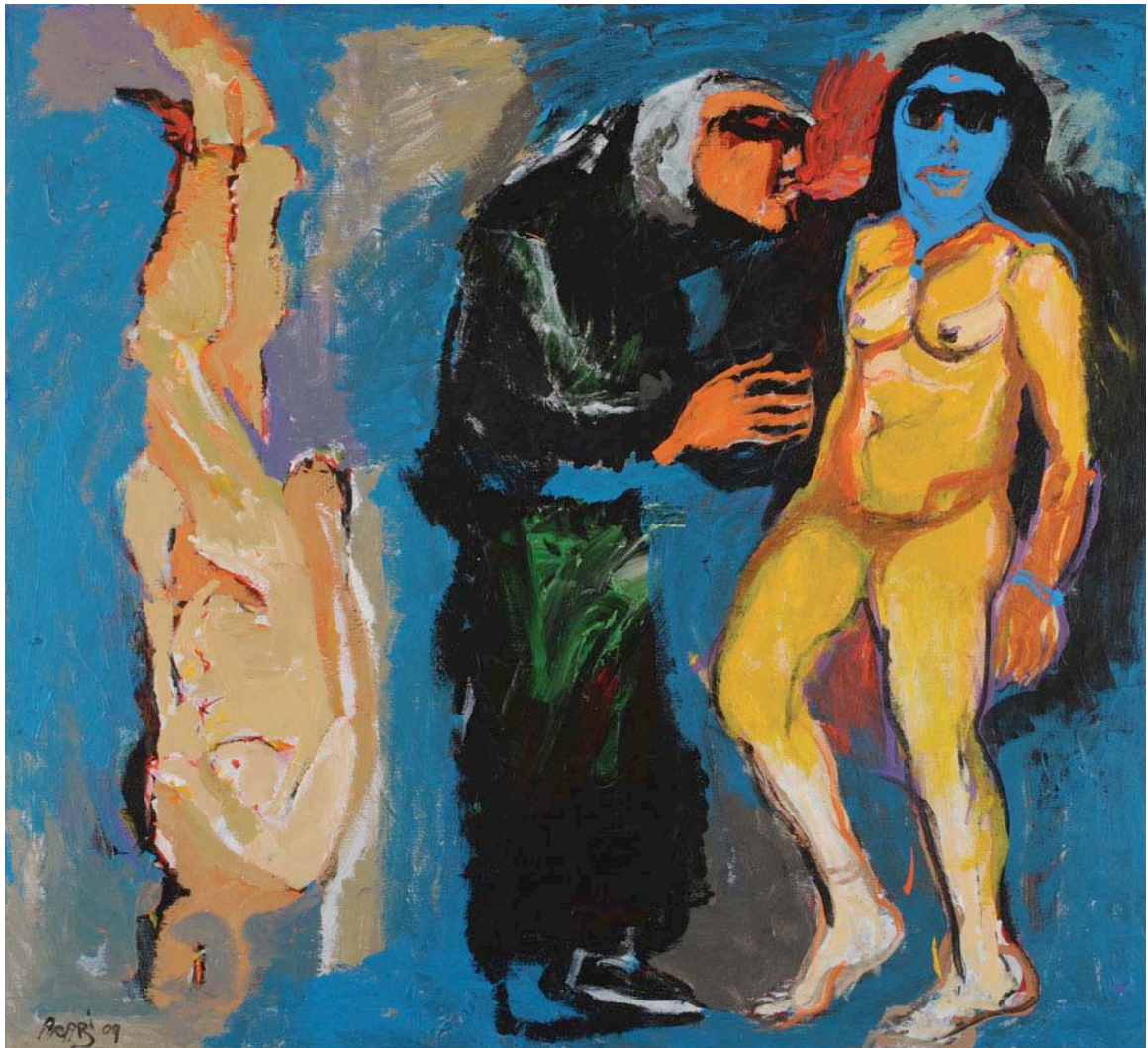
Assad Arabi is an artist who is gorged with the effects of this revolutionary generation and it is in this spirit that the artist decides to take on the nude. In a bold fashion, Arabi is resolved to counteract the increasing hostility towards figurative painting, a practice that predates pre-historic times, and revive the essential and revered artistic matter.

“The general dumbing down of art and culture in an intolerant, bigoted art scene obsessed with the mantra of literalness, depicting nudity has become an adventure, a sin even”

Arabi further strengthens the nude by placing her against images of total concealment.

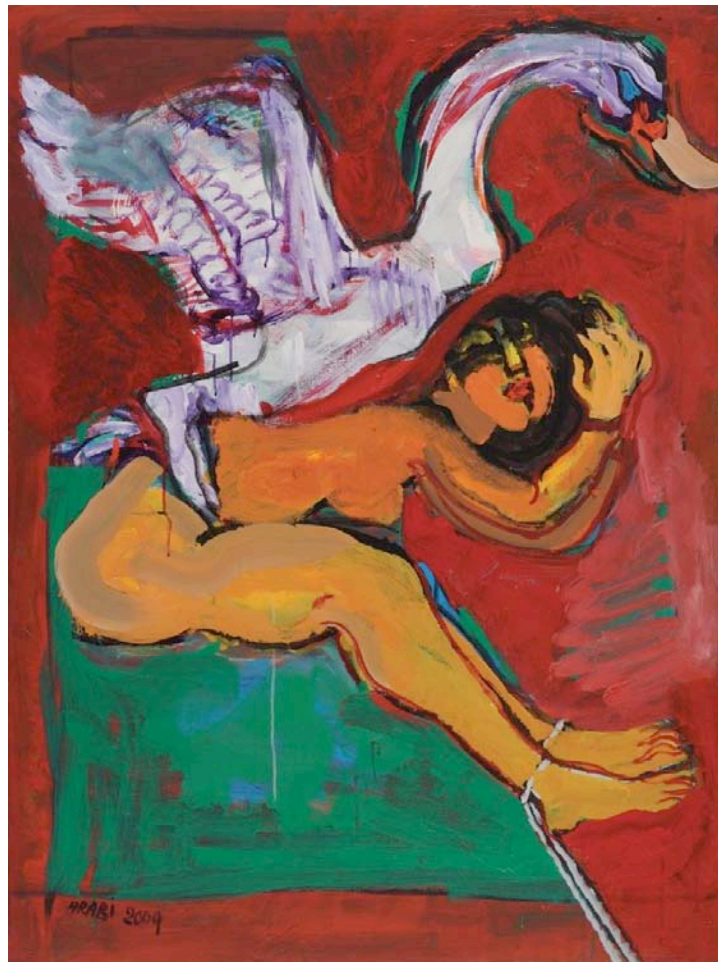
Ever since the painter embarked on his in the sixties, Arabi has been fascinated with contrast. It started with the duality between black and white that led to the sensation of hot versus cold through to today’s nude and veiled.

In 'The turned over naked', a painting Arabi has a particular affection towards, he expands on this theme in greater depth with his composition of veiled next to the nude, the woman standing upright and the other adversely turned over. The three symbols so far apart from each other stand as there own, and even if it seems the veil that one wears starts to engulf the other into the same guise, the nude will always assume its character.



'The turned over naked' - 150x150cm – Acrylic on Canvas - 2009

The painter has a finely tuned background in philosophy and takes a natural interest in mythology, which pushes a myriad of references to appear in his works. In 'Lydia and the Swan' Inspiration was derived from the gruesome Greek mythology tale of 'Leda and the Swan'. Leda was admired and exhaled by Zeus who transformed himself into a swan where he seduced and raped Leda on the same eve she slept with her husband, King Tyndareus. A tale full of underlying eroticism and violence, Leda would never recover from the psychic wound of this attack. Arabi's Lydia is painted bound at the hands and feet appearing ambushed with no escape. The swan appears clearly superior in its installation and the color red screams calamity for Lydia. The brush strokes are rapid giving an alarming movement to the painting.



'Lydia and the swan 1' - 130x97cm- Acrylic on canvas -2009

In *Monsters of isolation* the artist oscillates between strong symbols of woman, man and fecundity. The Rhino stands as a symbol of masculinity, used in strength as a trio, to counteract the immensely powerful symbolization of the women's posture.



'Monsters of isolation' – 48x63cm – Acrylic on Canvas - 2009

With Arabi's work there is always a sense that there is more beneath the surface – with the fervor of his symbols - yet there are still things being hidden, disguised or withheld. To say that his latest body of works is all about the nude is to not do it justice. This is visibly clear in 'the turned over naked', the underlying theme in his latest works are concerned with both sides of the debate - The expressionist and psychological ambiguity between complete nudity and total concealment.

It may seem that at first glance that Arabi has been unfaithful to the old scenes of old Damascus for which he is known for, that there has been a rupture in his artistic research. Yet Arabi's new works elaborate on an expanding and ongoing project, which at heart lies much more in his stylistic unity and the expressionist passion and approach he has to line and color.

With his latest works Arabi is certainly a muse that playfully with his bright palette tries to shock the onlooker with strong images of seductive color. Although much more than this, it is an invitation into an open-ended discourse with analogous elements that rarely land an answer but only raises further questions why.

Arabi's drawings are skilful yet imprecise. Despite there perplex significance; they come across as sensual and romantic, seducing the onlooker.