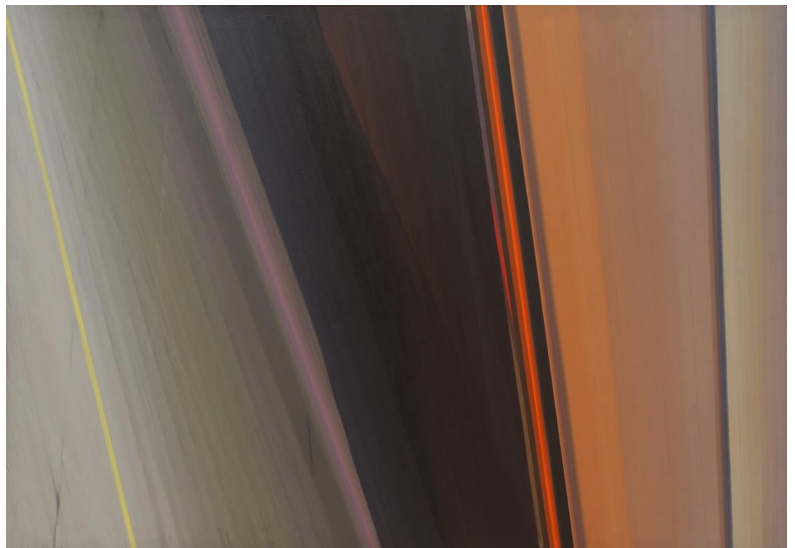


**Ayyam Gallery - Dubai is pleased to announce the opening of “Stories from the Levant,” an exhibition highlighting our commitment to contemporary Middle Eastern art with some of the finest examples of work in the region today. On view from January 22 - February 14, “Stories from the Levant” will feature painters Samia Halaby and Tammam Azzam and multidisciplinary artist Nadim Karam.**

In the front room, the paintings of Samia Halaby span several decades, shedding light on the extensive career of one of Palestine’s most accomplished painters.

Born in Jerusalem in 1936, Halaby attended the University of Cincinnati and Indiana University in the US and taught at leading American institutions for nearly 20 years, most notably the prestigious Yale School of Art. Establishing herself in the American art scene early on, Halaby’s work is housed in principle collections such as the Guggenheim Museum of Art, New York, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C. and The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois. Internationally her work can be found in The British Museum, London, Le Institute du Monde Arabe, Paris and the Jordan National Gallery of Arts, Amman. Seminal works by the artist include the large abstract painting Yesterday (1978), an important example of Halaby’s approach to abstraction during the 1960s and 70s executed in a cool palette of varying shades of black, orange, grey and purple with striking



vertical color planes plunging across the canvas. Stemming from the artist’s rich background in scientific design, the work’s methodical exploration of optics, in which directional illuminations converge with distant horizons, are visibly rooted in Halaby’s early observations of nature. This provides an important link between her first geometric abstractions to more recent work such as Through to Landing (2008), which uses distinct brushwork and the arrangement of endless colorist fields to suggest movement and light.

In the back room, the first solo presentation of Tammam Azzam's mixed media works will offer an exciting look at an evolving generation of Syrian artists challenging the boundaries of contemporary Middle Eastern painting. Featured as part of Ayyam's recently launched Shebab Project, Azzam is a rising star on the local scene and has become an instant favorite among regional collectors.



Born in Damascus in 1980, he is a graduate of the Faculty of Fine Arts and has participated in a number of noteworthy exhibitions and workshops, including Darat al Funun's Al Kharif Academy in Amman, Jordan where he worked under master Syrian expressionist painter Marwan. The artist's Laundry Series (2008) exemplifies a unique approach to painting that challenges conventional examples of the art form. Dominated by large mixed media canvases employing everyday objects such as clothes pins, Azzam creates texture and dimension in palatial enigmatic compositions that speak of negative and positive space. Initially in the series the viewer can identify Azzam's reference to the ordinary, as clothes pins appear to hold white sheets in one piece and are used as templates in another. While these objects are used to generate a distinct abstract expressionist feel, in which the emphasis is on the tactical application of medium, Azzam's compositions simultaneously recall the sharp lines, dramatic peaks and vivid sensations of surfaces found in nature. The artist's bold canvases are inspired by the rugged volcanic terrain of his native Suwieda in Syria.



On the mezzanine level of the gallery, the exhibiting of Nadim Karam's work will mark the expansion of our growing roster of influential Arab artists. Working in a variety of medium, this versatile Lebanese artist is known for his groundbreaking urban design and cutting-edge painting and sculpture. Born in Senegal in 1957, Karam graduated from the American University of Beirut, Lebanon and pursued graduate and postgraduate degrees at the University of Tokyo, Japan. His first show since signing with Ayyam will feature a series of paintings based on an architectural plan initially proposed at the International Design Forum in Dubai in 2007. Referred to by The New York Times as "mind-blowing," Karam's The Cloud concept outlines a massive public entertainment complex containing floating gardens, a lake, restaurants, a palace and a museum suspended in the air by rain-like stilts and covered with artificial condensation.



Commenting on the need for communal space amidst a landscape characterized by private spaces, he suggests the endless social possibilities created through advanced technology and avant-garde urban planning. Hovering 300 meters above Dubai, the project would appear like a large cloud floating across the city skyline. The complex is intended as a "dream in which everyone can participate, the antithesis of Dubai's exclusive towers."

The Cloud inspired an eponymous series that is at once surreal and whimsical. Karam's concept is immortalized in *The Conductor of the Cloud* (2008), a large painting showing an extraterrestrial-like figure immersed in an ethereal atmosphere rendered in blue and brown washes. Isolated in white, the figure, *The Cloud* and the Dubai skyline are drafted with fine lines and sparse detail, a technique focusing on form that maintains Karam's distinct style, which is rooted in everything from Ancient art to graffiti-inspired Pop art. The central figure sits on a chair as each of his multiple arms pull strings attached to various elements of the city—cars, planes, skyscrapers and animals. Floating above the figure, *The Cloud* is also pulled by strings. The figure's identity is mysterious. Could it be the artist himself? Or a mythical creature in a world where fantasy meets reality? Perhaps Karam's subject functions as an anthropomorphic representation of the utopian philosophy behind his project. Regardless of its meaning, the piece embodies Karam's visionary blueprint for Dubai's evolving cityscape.