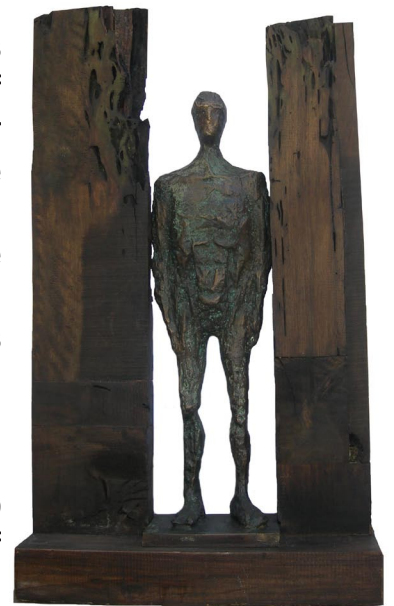


From December 11, 2008 until January 8, 2009, Ayyam Gallery-Dubai will proudly present three exhibitions featuring some of Syria's leading contemporary artists.

In the front room, "Buried in Tradition" will highlight recent works by pioneering sculptor Moustafa Ali and mixed media artist Moustafa Fathi. The paring of the two masters showcases a unique aspect of Syrian art that merges the region's rich artistic heritage with a modernist aesthetic, creating works that excavate the past and speak of regeneration.

Born in Latakia in 1959, **Moustafa Ali's** sculptures and his eponymous non-profit art space have become cornerstones of the Damascus art scene, influencing generations of artists. After studying sculpture at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus, he pursued his studies in Carrara, Italy, an experience that is often visible in the classical posturing of his figures and delicate rendering of the human form reminiscent of Italian statues. Using a variety of materials, including bronze and wood, Ali's works are ethereal in nature and monument in feel, despite ranging in scale. In *Between Two Walls* (2008), a bronze figure is shown standing flanked by wooden pillars, the subject's form executed with expressionist markings. The enclosure of man amidst two imposing forces perhaps serves as a comment on the state of humankind in the modern world or the evoking of a continual struggle that has lasted over centuries.



Similarly, **Moustafa Fathi's** mixed media canvases employ an ancient-seeming aesthetic, in works that bring to mind a multitude of past civilizations, with pictographs created with seals made by local artisans dominating abstract compositions. Born in Deraa in 1942, Fathi studied engraving at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus and later traveled to Paris, where he continued to develop his craft. Despite his international training, his work has remained rooted in Middle Eastern artistic traditions. *Untitled* (1992), for example, shows a number of hieroglyphic-like markings in a bold palette scattered in the center of a black

canvas. The result is a contemporary rediscovery of primordial techniques that makes for a striking, albeit mysterious, composition conjuring up notions of time and memory.



In the middle room, the exhibition “My World” features work by **Leila Nseir**, who was born in 1941 and is long considered a pioneer of modern Syrian art. Using a vivid assortment of pastels and stylized figures with imposing presences, Nseir creates meditative portraits. In her pastel on wood piece *Fertility* (1992), a group of Kouros-like subjects stand gazing directly at the viewer. Presumably a family, the mother holds a bouquet of flowers, while a small child holds a white dove. What could be simply understood as a portrait becomes mystifying, as symbols of peace are associated with white doves and white flowers were often used in early European painting to signify the Virgin Mary or holy mother. As the work’s title

adds a contemplative dimension to the representation of family, Nseir’s work possesses a profound philosophical subtlety.

In the back room, **Abdul-Karim Majdal Al-Beik’s** exhibition “Walls Speak” presents work that traverses artistic styles. From collage to abstraction, his approach to painting is varied as he delves into the depths of his childhood in northern Syria, summoning the scenes and colors of village life. Born in Al Hasakah in 1973, he is the second prize recipient of Ayyam’s 2007 competition for emerging Syrian artists. His painting “Childhood Wall” (2008) shows a Paul Klee-like scene in which children are dispersed in multiple planes throughout a village positioned in the center of the canvas. Painted in subdued colors of white, grey, and blue, the imagery appears immersed in a haze, giving the impression of a distant recollection that remains submerged in the caverns of the mind, a weighty exploration of bearing witness and the triggering of memory.



Also on display on the mezzanine level is Ayyam’s permanent collection, representing some of the Middle East’s foremost contemporary painters, sculptors and photographers.