

PRESS RELEASE

Ayyam Gallery

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Gallery Hours:

pm

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Mon-Fri: 10:00am-8:00

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Farzad Kohan, 'Make Me Crazier', 2014, Mixed media on wood panel, 122 x 122 cm.

**Mounzer Kamnakache, Thayer Helal,
and Farzad Kohan: *Light as Form***

23 July – 28 August 2015

Ayyam Gallery Beirut is pleased to present *Light as Form*, a collective exhibition that brings together the diverse works of Mounzer Kamnakache, Thayer Helal, and Farzad Kohan. Although employing divergent aesthetics and addressing a range of subject matter, the featured artists all incorporate the concept of light as a formal property that also functions as a signifier. Contrasts in light serve as a way to guide the viewer across the canvas, highlighting key areas of the composition, while simultaneously symbolising various phenomena, giving each work a sense of movement across space and time. By using this technique, Kamnakache, Helal, and Kohan depict evolving processes in which their subjects appear to grow or change within the boundaries of the picture plane.

In Kamnakache's untitled paintings, for example, sun-drenched scenes of his recurring scarlet heroine describe the cyclical nature of life. Alluding to the ancient Greek myth of Leda and the Swan—the story of Zeus' seduction of a queen and the subsequent birth of their children, one of which was Helen of Troy—Kamnakache depicts figures whose bodies appear enlivened by the elements, as the effect of wind upon supple flesh is detailed with white and pink gradations. Clouds are also treated with this use of colour and mimic the volume and mass of his humans and birds. The maternal figure sways and turns in each scene as her lover or children follow, and the sky moves with them.

Helal's abstract untitled canvases include variations in light rendered with dense applications of paint and additional media such as leaves. Inspired by the sowing of seeds, in which plants are equally spaced in rows, Helal carefully organises his compositions with an evocation of nature's underlying code before recreating the spontaneous development of its facets as different forces meet, whether the imprints of man or the determinants of a season. Helal applies loose brushwork as a final layer of his compositions: white and gray areas of paint that drip down the canvas, resulting in instinctive actions and unpredictable outcomes.

Kohan similarly uses abstract forms to depict perceptible realities by constructing surfaces that evoke the sensations of human experiences and the physical and psychic spaces in which they occur. Kohan's compositions are realised through a laboured process that involves several stages of painting and collage. Allusions to light form as he strips away layers of his painted panels and sections of hidden strata are revealed. In *Make Me Crazier* (2012) Persian text is barely visible against a deep blue background and an uncovered base that appears worn despite illuminating the composition.

The illusion of depth that is produced from the artist's reworking of the surface causes the text to 'float' in the painting. Presumably in reference to a personal exchange, the work's title suggests that, although summoned to provide clarity, in some instances words are futile.

About the Artists

Mounzer Kamnakache

Mounzer Kamnakache works in sculpture, pastels, and painting, creating ethereal works that are simultaneously mythological and existential. In Kamnakache's two dimensional works, a mythical universe surrounds a red haired, buttery-fleshed heroine whose robust forms recall the sensual outlines of fertility goddesses in ancient art: a stylisation that was often used to symbolise the origins of life in creation stories. Depicted in warm hues and set against the coolness of abundant landscapes or the weightlessness of cloud-filled skies, women embody what he describes as 'the pulse of life and its tenderness at the same time,' a dichotomy between body and spirit that although unified in man represents the age-old question of existence.

Born in 1935, Mounzer Kamnakache graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Damascus in 1968 before travelling to France to pursue graduate studies in Paris, where he lived and worked for nearly two decades. Upon returning to his native Syria in the 1990s, he began to teach at his alma mater while continuing to exhibit at home and abroad. Kamnakache's recent exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2009) and Beirut (2011).

Thaier Helal

Thaier Helal's large mixed-media works are considered at the forefront of contemporary abstraction in the Middle East. Drawing inspiration from the physical and sensory aspects of the world around him, Helal explores the dynamism of space as it is reshaped by the fluctuation of society and culture. The artist's canvases communicate movement and energy through explosions of colour, intricate divisions of the picture plane, and the methodical process of repeatedly layering the surface. Although utilising the leitmotifs of contemporary painting, his deliberate approach is reminiscent of the formalism of Islamic art, which relies on units as part of a larger whole to communicate a sense of wonder when alluding to the sublime.

Born in Syria in 1967, Thaier Helal graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus before relocating to Sharjah in the 1990s, where he currently lives and works. He is the recipient of numerous awards including the Grand Gold Award at the Contemporary Painting Biennial, Tehran (2005); and the Award for Painting at the Sharjah International Biennial (1997). Helal has also contributed to the development of regional art as a longtime faculty member of the University of Sharjah, Fine Arts College.

Recent exhibitions for the artist include Ayyam Gallery London (2015); Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2014, 2012); Samsung Blue Square and Busan Museum of Art, South Korea (2014); Art Abu Dhabi (2013-2009), Art Dubai (2013-2010); Ayyam Gallery Cairo (2011); Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2010); Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2010); and Alexandria Biennale (2009).

Farzad Kohan

Farzad Kohan's sculptures and paintings explore themes such as love, migration, and identity, and often incorporate appropriated media and found objects. Partially inspired by his personal history and surroundings, Kohan places an emphasis on form, allowing the successive stages of art making to become analogous to diasporic experience, as diverse, sometimes opposing, elements are sampled, brought together, and accumulated. These visible stages are integral parts of each finalised work. Kohan's formalistic process is revealed, for example, as he layers then strips his abstract works through painting, collage, décollage, and sanding, creating built-up yet weathered surfaces that are at once chaotic and methodical. Allusions to the passage of time, gradual transformations, and hidden narratives are found in the tactile details of his treated panels.

Born in Tehran, Iran in 1967, Farzad Kohan lives and works in Los Angeles, California, where he first trained as a sculptor in the late 1990s. Kohan has held solo exhibitions at Ayyam Gallery Dubai, DIFC (2013) and Seyhoun Gallery, Los Angeles (2006). Selected group exhibitions for the artist include Francis Boeske Projects, Amsterdam (2015); ABRA Gallery, Los Angeles (2011); Human Rights Awareness Tour, USA (2008); J Ferrari Gallery, Los Angeles (2008); Eagle Rock Center for the Arts (2008); and Phantom Galleries, Los Angeles (2007).

About Ayyam Gallery

Founded in 2006, Ayyam Gallery is a leading arts organisation managing the careers of diverse established and emerging artists from the Middle East. Blue-chip art spaces in Beirut, Dubai, and London, a series of collaborative projects in the United States, Europe, and Asia, and a multinational non-profit arts programme have furthered the gallery's mandate of expanding the parameters of international art by introducing the dynamic art of the region to a global audience. With its widely respected multilingual publishing division and a custodianship programme that manages the estates of pioneering artists, Ayyam Gallery has also spearheaded recent efforts to document the region's art history.

Exhibition Facts

Exhibition Dates: 23 July – 28 August 2015

Location: Beirut Tower, Ground Floor, Zeitoune Street, Across from Beirut Marina

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For press information and artwork images, please contact press@ayyamgallery.com or +961 1374450/51