

PRESS RELEASE

Ayyam Gallery
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Nihad Al Turk: *Drawings on Paper*

2 April – 28 May 2015

Opening reception: Thursday, 2 April at 7:00 - 9:00 pm

Ayyam Gallery Beirut is pleased to announce *Drawings on Paper*, the forthcoming solo show of Syrian painter Nihad Al Turk. Featuring a new body of work, the exhibition will highlight an essential component of Al Turk's artistic practice by examining his use of drawing as a formal device that gives volume and depth to expressionist figures and objects—subjects that appear to shift in place as masses trapped in disfigured shells.

Although widely known for allegorical paintings exploring a cast of monstrous, semi-autobiographical characters, Al Turk recently produced a series of large ink and acrylic drawings that chronicle the current conflict in Syria from its early days as a popular uprising to its current state as an all-consuming war. In place of detailing recent events from the vantage point of traditional documentary modes, however, the artist depicts the ways in which such violence is internalised by those who experience it firsthand. Rendering the daily impact of large-scale devastation as a process of malformation that transforms the body, Al Turk draws the physicality of his subjects with the solidity and organic contours of weathered boulders. The artist's protagonists seem to bear the scars of the conflict, their faces rendered as illegible maps of ruin. The series comprises portraits of known martyrs, anonymous witnesses, and key figures of the war, each with swollen faces, and many posed with the gesture of victory, a two-finger salute that indicates the steadfastness of his vanquished subjects.

While the densely layered crosshatching found in the artist's previous works is intensified in the series, the drawings signal a bold break from the formalism of his early paintings as he reconsiders space, figuration, and colour. Layers of crisscrossing lines detail the shapes of his figures, creating a sculptural sense of volume that offsets the flat surface of the paper and provides a degree of realism. In all of Al Turk's works—which are often self-portraits accentuated by recurring symbols alluding to his biography—figuration describes the psychological state of the subject. The artist's painted figures are semi-human, outwardly anonymous, and mostly missing limbs—the parts of the body that provide the ability to move and the sense of touch. His recent drawings portray protagonists whose features are realised. Unlike his past characters, they possess eyes and arms, and are isolated in the composition as though frozen in undefined settings, allowing the viewer to supplement the narratives that situate them.

Al Turk's new works follow a period of his art that restructured his compositions as he injected brilliant hues and minimised backgrounds with flat areas of colour. Inspired by his move from Damascus to Beirut after the outbreak of the war, the last series is ostensibly optimistic. In contrast, his most recent drawings provide a somber account of displacement through a medium that allows for the laden inferences of markings. As the artist's lines seem to cut into the surface of the paper, an evident tension is created.

About the Artist

Informed by readings in literature, philosophy, and theory, many of Nihad Al Turk's deeply psychological compositions can be read as allegorical self-portraits. Central to his work are thematic explorations of the endurance of man amidst the power struggles of good and evil—an existentialist question that has engrossed the artist for some time. Al Turk's regular cast of imperfect creatures, mythical demons, still lifes, and botanical elements serve as the symbolic outcasts, anti-heroes, and rebels of a harrowing narrative. Recently, he has set aside the dark palette of his earlier mixed-media paintings by injecting vivid hues in the form of solid colour fields that accentuate figures. This visible sense of optimism is juxtaposed with the quieting of his protagonists through a physicality that is robust and no longer disfigured as they finally escape the weight of their world.

Born in Aleppo, Syria in 1972, Nihad Al Turk lives and works in Beirut. A self-taught artist, he began drawing at a young age and pursued painting in his adolescence prior to launching his artistic career in Syria in the late 1990s. Selected solo and group exhibitions for the artist include Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz, Dubai (2014); Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2014); Ayyam Gallery London (2014); Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2014; 2011); Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2009); the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Damascus (2009); Park Avenue Armory, New York (2008); Mark Hachem Gallery, New York (2008); Diyarbakir, Turkey (2005); and the Latakia Biennale (2003), where he was awarded the Golden Prize.

About Ayyam Gallery

Founded in Damascus in 2006, Ayyam Gallery is internationally recognised as a leading arts organisation in the Middle East, representing a diverse roster of established and emerging artists from the Arab world and Iran. Spaces in Beirut, Dubai, and London, a widely respected publishing division, and an associated non-profit arts programme have furthered the gallery's mission of promoting the dynamic art of the region.

Exhibition Facts

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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