



Mohannad Orabi, *Untitled*, Mu'allaqat series, 2016, Mixed media on curtain, 247 x 235 cm

M O H A N N A D O R A B I
M U ' A L L A Q A T

26 May – 16 July 2016

Opening reception: Thursday, 26 May from 7.00 to 9.00 pm

Ayyam Gallery Beirut is pleased to present Mohannad Orabi's most recent body of work in a solo exhibition titled *Mu'allaqat*.

About the show

Alluding to the seven ancient pre-Islamic Arabic poems that were written in gold and suspended from the Ka'ba's black cloths, *Mu'allaqat* consists of hanging curtains on which Orabi's signature, larger-than-life characters demonstrate how a transformation in the artist's attitude towards life trickles down into his practice. Paired with playful, vibrantly coloured accessories that breathe joy into Orabi's otherwise stoic protagonists, the literal lightweight quality of his chosen medium reflects the artist's determination to embrace life's uncertainties as they come, allowing for spontaneous forms that result from the challenges of a new environment.

While each *Mu'allaqat* tells its own story, the commonalities of form and colour observed in the adjacent paintings unravel as a horizontal thread that unites the lives of Orabi's sketch-like characters: the red of a young woman's roses is found in a man's tarboosh, and flows further along the walls to dye the ball held by another of Orabi's heroes, while all of them rest atop identically patterned, intricately woven carpets. Elsewhere, a magical reality guided by body language takes over, as a girl whispers her secrets to the moon, and a boy is seen befriending a bird.

Orabi's curtains with their predetermined colours indicate another shift in his practice: while previous works began with a buildup of painted layers to represent the characters' life experiences, Orabi's heroes are now traced first and come to the forefront, while their surroundings remain just that — the background. This medium-taming process exemplifies Orabi's conviction that art can be made from very simple materials, making one's opportunities for self-expression and artistic growth endless.

About the Artist

Dominated by vivacious childlike figures in various scenarios, Mohannad Orabi's previous paintings reflect his interest in the spontaneity of process and the liberation of form that emerges when art is created intuitively without fixed directives. Many of these mixed-media canvases were painted as self-portraits, revealing the artist's fascination with the evolution of consciousness in childhood and the wonder and whimsy of the formative years that first shape our comprehension of the world.

With the start of the Syrian uprising and the conflict that followed, Orabi adopted an increasingly realist approach to portraiture, drawing inspiration from the various media that are currently forging a visual repository of the war. Martyr posters, Facebook profile pictures, and other types of filtered or composed imagery serve as source material for portraits of Syrians under siege, displaced, and in exile, recording a side of the conflict that lies beyond its ideological divisions and political talking points. While the artist retains an interest in the socialisation processes of childhood, his own experiences of now living outside the country have led him to consider the ways in which visual culture, social media, and digital communication have become substitutes for what was once tangible.

Born in Damascus in 1977, Mohannad Orabi currently lives and works in Dubai. Orabi graduated from the Faculty of Fine Art in Damascus in 2000 and won the first prize in The Syrian National Young Artists Exhibition in 2006. Solo and group exhibitions include Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice (2015); Ayyam Gallery London (2014); Ayyam Gallery Jeddah (2013); Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2015, 2014, 2012); Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz, Dubai (2014, 2009); Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2014); Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2008), Zara Gallery, Amman

(2007); and Ishtar Gallery, Damascus (2006, 2004). In 2014, Orabi was listed among *Foreign Policy's* '100 Leading Global Thinkers.'

About Ayyam Gallery

Founded in 2006, Ayyam Gallery is a leading arts organisation that manages the careers of diverse established and emerging artists. Blue-chip art spaces in Beirut and Dubai, 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. With its widely respected multilingual publishing division and a custodianship programme that manages the estates of pioneering artists, Ayyam Gallery has also contributed to recent efforts that document underrepresented facets of global art history.

Exhibition Facts

Exhibition Dates: 26 May - 16 July 2016

Opening Reception: Thursday, 26 May from 7.00 to 9.00 pm

Regular Hours: Mon-Fri: 10.00 am - 8.00 pm / Sat: 12.00 - 6.00 pm

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

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