



Rashed Al Shashai, *From the Skylight*, 2016, Archival print on cotton paper, 80 x 120 cm, Edition of 5

# RASHED AL SHASHAI SALVATION

14 March – 26 May 2016

Opening reception: Monday, 14 March, from 7:00 to 9:00 pm

Ayyam Gallery DIFC presents *Salvation*, the solo exhibition of conceptual artist Rashed Al Shashai.

## About the show

Featuring a new series of photographs and installation work, the exhibition explores the concept of spiritual salvation as it is exploited and manipulated by militant, extremist groups. Using the story of the Grand Mosque seizure in 1979 as a starting point, Al Shashai examines how such events affect vulnerable communities when violence and extremism are justified through a deeply flawed understanding of morality and redemption.

Al Shashai's recent work is inspired by the history of the seizure, a crisis that not only shook Saudi Arabia but also had a significant impact on his family. The artist's grandfather was in the Grand Mosque when Salafi 'rejectionist' militant Juhayman al Otaybi instructed a large group of armed men to takeover the holy site in a standoff with Saudi authorities. Al Shashai's grandfather escaped despite a complete lockdown of the mosque by climbing through a small window that was shaped like an Islamic star.

In an accompanying artist statement, Al Shashai describes the architectural detail as a symbol of self-assured salvation, a process that is tied to the 'ability to overcome any obstacle.' This sense of confidence is therefore 'apparent and easily perceived by others through one's character and actions,' and stands in great contrast to the 'forced' idea of salvation that is promoted by extremists in their efforts to gain political control.

In *Salvation*, photographs of Mandasah, an abandoned village near Mecca, document the ruin that was left behind when most of al Otaybi's male followers were killed after Saudi forces retook the mosque. Al Shashai charts the current state of decay of the former Salafi stronghold, its once thriving community having fallen prey to the ideology of the power-hungry fringe group. A sepia toned image, for example, shows the surrounding mountains of the valley eclipsing its dilapidated cement buildings. Another photograph provides a closer view of a deserted home through a chain-link fence—the artist's vantage point is positioned at the centre of a hole cut in the form of an Islamic star. In a far corner of the sun-drenched image, a herd of goats offers a glimpse of a new beginning for the devastated village.

## About the Artist

Saudi artist Rashed Al Shashai utilises found objects and appropriated imagery as conceptual means of identifying the signs of the everyday, creating what he describes as a 'semantic field' through which philosophical questions, primarily the purpose of human existence and the functions of society, can be explored. With playful forms, Al Shashai seeks to engage viewers with the signifiers of the mundane in order to facilitate a consideration of what might otherwise create tension, such as the omnipresence of media, a global descent into superficiality, and the growing epidemic of apathy that has come to define modern life.

Born in Al Baha, Saudi Arabia in 1977, Rashed Al Shashai holds a Master of Visual Arts degree and is a prominent figure of the contemporary Saudi art scene. As a conceptual artist and arts educator, Al Shashai has been influential to a new generation of Saudi talent while also nurturing local artistic practices as a founding member of the Saudi Arabia Fine Arts Society and the Art Education Society. In 2009, he established the Tasami Centre for Visual Arts, an independent space that supports cutting-edge art in the Kingdom, and was the organisation's director until 2014.

Al Shashai has widely exhibited in the Arab Gulf and abroad at such venues and events as Low Gallery, San Diego (2016); The Armory Show, New York (2015); Hewar Art Gallery, Riyadh (2015); Hafez Gallery, Jeddah (2015); the Annual Exhibition of Emirates Fines Arts Society, Sharjah Art Museum (2012); and the Ostraka International Forum, Sharm El Sheikh. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including First Prize from the Media Art Show, Riyadh (2011).

## 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: 14 March – 26 May 2016

Opening Reception: Monday, 14 March from 7:00 to 9:00 pm

Regular Hours: Sun-Thu: 10.00am-8.00pm

Location: Ayyam Gallery, Gate Village 3, DIFC, Dubai

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