



Donald, 2016, oil and acrylic on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

ABDALLA AL OMARI *THE VULNERABILITY SERIES*

22 May – 6 July 2017

Opening reception: Monday, 22 May from 7.00 to 9.00 pm

Ayyam Gallery Dubai (12 Alserkal Avenue) is pleased to present *The Vulnerability Series*, the solo exhibition of Brussels-based painter Abdalla Al Omari.

About the Show

The Vulnerability Series features a selection of recent portraits that reimagine controversial world leaders as disenfranchised or displaced civilians. These fictionalized portraits are rendered with an affecting form of realism that although usually reserved for sympathetic

characters also draws from political visual culture, particularly the use of propagandist images like political posters billboards. In place of showing veneration for his familiar protagonists, however, Omari eliminates all suggestions of strength, charisma, and righteousness. Setting aside the hallmarks of autocratic visuals, he depicts them in moments of despair. all suggestions of strength, charisma, and righteousness. Setting aside the hallmarks of autocratic visuals, he depicts them in moments of despair.

Initially, the artist was driven by his own experiences of displacement, and the anger that consumed him as the situation in his native Syria escalated. Intrigued by 'the romantic idea of vulnerability and the impact it can generate' while depicting his subjects, Omari eventually arrived at the 'paradoxical nature' of empathy. As he developed the series, his aim shifted from an expression of anger to a more vivid desire to disarm his figures, to picture them outside of their positions of power. 'I wanted to take away their power not to serve me and my pain but to give those leaders back their humanity and the audience an insight into what the power of vulnerability can achieve,' the artist writes in an accompanying statement.

In *The Mediterranean*, for example, Omari paints Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian president as a distraught refugee partially submerged in water, surrounded by a ravaging sea and an overcast sky. Bewildered, al-Assad stares into the distance, through the viewer, as though unable to fathom his circumstances. If the initial reaction to such imagery is one of sympathy, the identity of Omari's subject complicates this encounter, prompting a number of critical questions. For the artist, a moment of vulnerability reminds us of our universal predicament, despite where our sympathies might lie.

About the Artist

Launching his career in Damascus shortly after the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, Abdalla Al Omari's recent paintings describe the experiences of civilians, particularly children, who are caught in the crossfires of war. Now based in Belgium, where he began the Vulnerability series, he also works in video and performance art.

Omari graduated from the University of Damascus with a degree in English Literature while also attending the Adham Ismail Institute for Visual Arts. Later, he worked with pioneering Syrian artists Ghassan Sibai and Fouad Dahdouh. His paintings are housed in the collections of Barjeel Art Foundation, United Arab Emirates, Kamel Gallery, Syria, the Syrian Ministry of Culture, among others worldwide.

Recent exhibitions for the artists include Institut du Monde Arabe; Strombeck Cultural Center, Belgium (2017); NW Gallery, United Kingdom (2015); Kozah Gallery, Lebanon (2014); and Berlin Biennale (2012).

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: 22 May – 6 July 2017

Opening Reception: Monday, 22 May from 7.00 to 9.00 pm

Regular Hours: Sun – Thurs: 10.00 am to 6.00 pm, Saturdays 12.00 to 6.00 pm

Location: Ayyam Gallery Dubai (12, Alserkal Avenue), Al Quoz 1, Dubai

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