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ayyam gallery



Dis-connected II, As Cold as a White Stone series, 2016, photography on archival cotton paper, 160 x 110 cm, edition of 5

LARA ZANKOUL *AS COLD AS WHITE STONE*

12 January - 4 February 2017

Opening reception: Thursday, 12 January from 7.00 to 9.00 pm

Following a successful debut in Dubai, Ayyam Gallery Beirut is pleased to announce *As Cold as a White Stone*, the solo exhibition of Lebanese artist Lara Zankoul.

About the Show

Highlighting an eponymous body of work, *As Cold as a White Stone* explores what the artist describes as 'the coldness, resistance, and numbness of human relationships nowadays.'

During a recent artist residency in Italy, where she studied the local development of art, Zankoul discovered the marble quarries of Carrara through the surrealist images of Matteo Basile. In Basile's *Pietra Santa* series, this stark background creates an otherworldly environment in which dystopian nightmares unfold. Drawn to the ravaged setting of the quarries, Zankoul uses the white marble backdrop to construct sparse scenes in which withdrawn figures represent 'the nature of human interactions in a world dominated by individualism, virtual life, and ego/selfishness.' Her characters are anonymous, their faces mostly hidden from view as they languish in isolation or stand frozen in a state of confusion. Zankoul allows the setting to inform the mood of her characters. Sharp edges and lines that are man-made define the stone, a feature that articulates the alienation of a plugged-in society: a constructed (virtual) environment stripped of direct interaction and devoid of humanity.

Zankoul's adaptation of the Carrara quarries also evokes the legacy of white marble in Italian art, particularly Renaissance sculpture as seen in Michelangelo's *David*. With such works, idealised renderings of the human form based on recovered Roman examples served as the artistic embodiment of a dynamic era. Science, art, architecture, literature, and politics developed at a rapid pace, indicating a collective interest in cultivating culture. Although related to this historical narrative, Zankoul views the quarries as the quintessential representation of our descent into an emotionless state of being, as we have lost a sense of warmth and connectivity. Whereas Michelangelo focused on the human figure, constructing it according to a philosophical take on its proportions, Zankoul deconstructs the body as an abstracted void (demonstrated in the stark clothing of her characters), a dehumanised subject that is on the verge of disappearance, passive and numb in a world deprived of its natural form.

About the Artist

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The dreamlike compositions of conceptual photographer Lara Zankoul explore the human psyche within the context of social experience. Many of Zankoul's whimsical images demonstrate an attempt to invent new worlds, to push against the boundaries of reality in order to escape the monotony of ordinary life. At the same time, Zankoul offers subtle critiques of modern society, fixing her figures in settings that often reflect the taxing psychology of everyday interactions or scenarios as her subjects navigate its various dimensions. The characters portrayed in Zankoul's works are anonymous and timeless, universal subjects existing within metaphoric landscapes, where the senses are heightened and exaggerated facets reveal affecting details that otherwise remain obscured.

Born in Lebanon in 1987, Lara Zankoul lives and works in the country's capital, where she earned a graduate degree in Economics from the American University of Beirut. Since beginning her artistic practice in 2008, she has participated in exhibitions and workshops throughout the Middle East and Europe. In 2011, she was an award recipient at the first ever Shabab Ayyam Photography Competition. Zankoul held her first (2013) and second (2014) solo exhibitions at Ayyam Gallery Beirut. Recent group shows for the artist include *ArtxDesign*, Guy Hepner Gallery (2016); *The Road to Elysium*, HEIST Gallery, United Kingdom (2014); the third edition of the Festival Photomed, France (2013); and *Women's Art*, Art Lounge (2011), Lebanon.

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: 12 January - 4 February 2017

Opening Reception: Thursday, 12 January from 7.00 to 9.00 pm

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

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

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Hearts Can Fly, 2015, Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 150 cm

MOHAMMAD BOZORGI AGAINST THE DARKNESS

30 May – 25 August 2016

Opening reception: Monday, 30 May from 7.00 to 9.00 pm

Ayyam Gallery Dubai (DIFC) is pleased to announce *Against the Darkness*, the solo exhibition of leading Iranian calligrapher and painter Mohammad Bozorgi. Selected from the artist's recent series, *Coloured Tears*, *Grey World*, the featured works were produced in response to regional conflicts, and describe the impact that such widespread destruction has on the global community. Bozorgi's latest body of work also serves as an exploration of colour and the high level of abstraction that can be realised when calligraphic forms are freed in complex compositions.

About the Show

In an accompanying statement, Bozorgi describes the artist's role of depicting the world as he or she observes it. According to the painter, references to everyday life in art are a form of translation that materialises even in certain uses of colour. In *Coloured Tears*, *Grey World*, the concept of darkness, or the decline of living conditions into a constant state of despair, is countered with colour in protest of 'lost dreams' and 'lost lives.' At the same time, Bozorgi seeks to inspire a sense of hope in viewers by alluding to a world shaped by beauty, peace, and tranquility.

The large-scale painting *Martyred Child (Damascus)* (2015), for example, uses contrasting hues to pay tribute to the young victims of war, as a sienna background is overcome by the radiance of cream-coloured text. The circular design of the script suggests the movement of a procession as letters are stretched to fluid lines that seem to travel beyond the edge of the picture plane. Words are contained in a circle at the centre of the painting, creating an optical illusion that suggests infinite spatial depth. From afar, this focal point and the surrounding text resemble the magnificence of a brilliant sun that shines over a dimmed setting.

In the diptych *War and Freedom* (2015) symmetry is used to describe battling ideologies as repeated words meet but do not cross a central axis. Bozorgi's calligraphic forms take on anthropomorphic attributes, as text appears to move like a mass of people that swarms a target object or site. The identical nature of the composition's two sides creates a mirrored image, an environment where chaos has arisen and a clear understanding of its causes is indistinguishable.

About the Artist

In keeping with the aesthetic principles of Islamic art, Mohammad Bozorgi maps his compositions according to precise mathematical structures and symmetry, and never deviates from the meaning of words despite the innovation of his script.

Born in Tehran in 1978, Bozorgi was originally educated as a biomedical engineer before entering the visual arts with a decade of training at the Society of Iranian Calligraphers, where he mastered a number of calligraphic forms, and earned 'Momtaz' degrees. This robust background has inspired Bozorgi to use the directives of geometry to create abstract illusions of depth and space while developing stylised characters based on Arabic and Persian examples.

Recognised as a leading figure among a 'New Generation' of contemporary calligraphers, Bozorgi builds on the breakthroughs of modern predecessors, as he seeks to advance the art of calligraphy through experimental formalism. Within his meticulously designed compositions, text multiplies as it is infused with energy and appears to move across the canvas or paper in unison, originating from and returning to the center like the cyclical rhythms of nature.

Bozorgi has participated in recent solo and group exhibitions at Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz, Dubai (2015); Ayyam Gallery, Jeddah (2014); Homa Gallery, Tehran (2014); Galerie Nicolas Flamel, Paris (2013); Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Zurich (2012); Shirin Art Gallery, Tehran (2012); and Endjavi-Barbé Art Projects, Geneva (2012). His works are housed in private and public collections, including the Islamic Arts Museum, Malaysia.

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Opening Reception: Monday, 30 May from 7.00 to 9.00 pm

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

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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.'

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