



*Railway*, 2023, Paper Collage on Canvas, 90 x 130 cm

## TAMMAM AZZAM

### *Diary* - يوميات

8 January | 20 February 2024

Ayyam Gallery is pleased to present *Diary*, a solo exhibition featuring Tammam Azzam's recent body of work. Please join us for the vernissage on January 8th from 6 pm - 9 pm, in presence of the artist.

#### About the exhibition

In the exhibition *Diary*, Tammam Azzam, an artist known for his profound explorations of the destruction and reconstruction of an image or space, showcases works that play with perspective. Horizon lines expand outward and urban vistas are cut into parts, interrupted like the lines of a window frame. In one untitled 2021 painting, the sky is a turquoise sea-blue, which complicates the boundaries of the subject, an earthy terrain referencing the lava fields in the south of Syria, where Azzam is from. The sea-sky's color marks a tonality he has carried with him, visible in paintings of scenes from parts of Berlin, thus connecting different places in visual moments.

In four 2022 studies on paper, Azzam zooms in on a particular building in a Berlin neighborhood, mapping its rise with a rectangular grid of windows. At times the rectangles are left blank like empty plots and while in other cases they are filled in and fused. Through the use of color, the architecture — enveloped by a conventional sky or muddy green and red — becomes a subjective reality.

2018 marked a significant turning point for Azzam, where he delved into paper collages. The papers he uses, varying from 30 to 110 grams, are layered, glued and constituted in detail through a meticulous use of color. His resulting broken-up façades move beyond the collapsed cityscapes evident in other signature works such as the largely monochrome 2014 series *Storeys*. Where much of Azzam's previous work has been seen to index the war-torn country he left behind in 2016, his visual narratives construct an arc broader than displacement and memory. Pieced together in collages on canvas like intricate yet imperfect puzzles, the artist evokes a vision about to be formed. The painted paper collages are symbolic of the delicate balance between fragility and creation, between a weathered façade and fluid abstractions of nature. In *Neukladow* for example, a certain opacity in technique is tempered with washes and reflections of water.

In his depictions of empty roads that go beyond our field of vision, he creates a topography like veins of marble, disappearing in the distance. Each fragment in his work (of color, material, form) is a piece of time, a rhythm. And the entire picture is more than the sum of its parts. Take the 2023 collage of copper-toned tectonic plates which could equally be the earth's crust or an icy lake shimmering in the sun. Just above the painting's center the ground becomes a vertical, cracked wall. This kind of shift in vantage point impacts the work's sense of dimension and texture as well as the ways in which the eye travels and rests — how we understand the world and time.

As Azzam bears witness to his surroundings, adopting a point of view that is never top-down but consistently frontal, he emphasizes a minute scale within more-than-human worlds. Empty of living beings and yet eerily familiar, these are instances of stillness and presence — situated after an event has already happened, or before an imminent occurrence.

Text by Nadine Khalil

## About the artist

Born in Damascus, Syria in 1980, Tammam Azzam received his artistic training from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Damascus with a concentration in oil painting. Alongside a successful career as a painter in Syria, Azzam was a prolific graphic designer, an experience that would inform his digital media work after relocating to Dubai with the start of the country's conflict.

The initial phase of Azzam's work was distinguished by a 'hybrid form' of painting with applications of various media that allowed him to arrive at tactile interactions between surface and form that multiply as compositions evolve. These semi-abstract works use unconventional materials such as rope, clothespins, and other found objects in order to accentuate the depth, texture, and space of laboured picture planes, creating a visible tension. Although outwardly different in appearance, the series that resulted from these early experiments were inspired by the artist's changing perceptions of specific urban environments.

Following the start of the uprising in Syria, Azzam turned to digital media and graphic art to create visual composites of the conflict that resonated with international viewers. These widely distributed works are informed by his interest in the interventionist potential of digital photography and street art as powerful and direct forms of protest that are difficult to suppress. In early 2013, Azzam made worldwide headlines when his *Freedom Graffiti* print went viral on social media.

Recently, he has returned to painting with Storeys, a series of monumental works on canvas that communicate the magnitude of devastation experienced across his native country through expressionist compositions of destroyed cityscapes. Chronicling the current state of his homeland, Azzam delves into a cathartic exercise of reconstruction, storey by storey. Alongside these new paintings, he has produced a significant body of giclée prints and installations that depict the facets of cities through similar themes.

Azzam has contributed to large-scale international exhibitions such as the FUU-Street Art Festival, Sarajevo (2015); Vancouver Biennale, where he was in residence (2014); FotoFest Biennial, Houston (2014); Dak'Art: Biennial of Contemporary African Art, Dakar (2014); Alexandria Biennale (2014); and the 30th Biennial of Graphic Arts, Ljubljana (2013).

In recent years, Azzam has participated in solo and group exhibitions at such venues as Kornfeld Gallery, Berlin, Germany (2022), Museen in Sudtiroil in Tirol, Italy (2020); Haines Gallery, San Francisco, CA, USA (2019); Ayyam Gallery - 11 Alserkal Avenue, Dubai (2019, 2016); Kornfeld Galerie, Berlin, Germany (2018); Bienal del Sur, Caracas (2017); Künstlerforum Bonn, Bonn (2017); For-Site Foundation, San Francisco (2017, 2016); European Capital of Culture- Pafos, Pafos (2017); City Museum of Oldenburg, Oldenburg (2017); Künstlerverein Walkmühle, Wiesbaden (2016); Columbia University, New York (2016); Tainiothiki Twixtlab, Athens (2016); Banksy's Dismaland, Weston-super-Mare (2015); Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice (2015); Framer Framed in de Tolhuistuin, Amsterdam (2015); Forum Factory, Berlin (2014); Lena & Roselli Gallery, Budapest (2014); Liquid Art House, Boston (2014); Rush Arts, New York (2014); Busan Museum of Art, Seoul (2014); 1x1 Art Gallery, New Delhi (2014).

In 2016, Azzam received an artist fellowship at the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg Institute for Advanced Study in Delmonhost.

## About Ayyam Gallery

Founded in 2006, Ayyam Gallery is a leading arts organization that manages the careers of diverse established and emerging artists. Blue-chip art space in Dubai, a series of collaborative projects in the United States, Europe, Africa and Asia, and a multinational non-profit arts program have furthered the gallery's mandate of expanding the parameters of international art. With its widely respected multilingual publishing division and a custodianship program 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

Exhibitions Dates: 8 January | 20 February 2024

Regular Hours: Monday - Friday: 10 am - 7 pm

Saturday: 12 pm - 6 pm

Location: Ayyam Gallery, B11, Alserkal Avenue, Street 8, Al Quoz 1, Dubai

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