



PSF-P2, 2023, Charcoal, Ink & Oil on Canvas, 50.5 x 50.5 cm

FAISAL SAMRA

Immortal Moment II - Coping with the Shock

27 February | 15 April 2024

Ayyam Gallery is pleased to present *Immortal Moment II - Coping with the Shock*, a solo exhibition featuring Faisal Samra's recent body of work. Please join us for the vernissage on February 27th from 6 pm - 9 pm, in presence of the artist.

About the exhibition

This exhibition showcases the second body of work from the *Immortal Moment* project, in which Faisal Samra creates artworks through the accumulation of instances, pushing the viewer to question the opportunities of a single moment.

In the first chapter of this project, Faisal describes the technique as capturing a moment and immortalizing it in time through gestural performances, serving as an expression of emotions. However, now, he defines the outcome as a “shock”. This exhibition will reveal the process of *Coping with the Shock*.

While the concept of fight or flight is thoroughly examined in the fields of medicine and psychology, Faisal introduces a novel conceptualisation of it through his artistic practice. At a moment of shock, either the moment dominates and controls us, or we absorb and adapt to it, metamorphosing into a new form. To survive and overcome the shock is what we call coping.

In the spirit of fight, the artist intervenes post gesture to cope with what chance and the laws of physics produce. The study of the improvised creation allows the artist to seek meaning within the abstraction. Therefore creating post-shock creatures and figures. In a meditative process, the summation of dots and splashes of color amount to what the artist is looking for. Ultimately, this artistic endeavor becomes an endless cycle of documentation, acts, and gestures that trace time and immortalize it, one overcoming the other.

The cyclic timeline in capturing the essence of moments is evident in his concepts and the evolution of his artistic practice. In the *Distorted Reality* series (2005/2011), Faisal chose a moment from countless stills of filmed performances. In the subsequent project, *Thriving Emotions - Immortal Moment* the artist identifies the moment before anything else. The emphasis lay on the emotion conveyed through the spontaneous act of creating marks. *The Immortal Moment* project comes to a full circle in this exhibition: through gestural mark-making, Faisal restructures the singular moment of action to birth a new series of moments to establish control amidst the unpredictable.

The dialogue between the abstract and figurative, conceptually or formalistically, is essential to Faisal's work. Time, being one of the most abstract ideas becomes figurative when Faisal visually notes down specific points in time through the use of charcoal and paint. The result is formalistically abstract, but the final creation becomes figurative through several interventions, which represent a culmination of temporal instances.

About the artist

Long considered one of the Arab Gulf's foremost artists and a pioneer of conceptual art in the Middle East, Bahraini-born, Saudi national Faisal Samra incorporates digital photography, painting, sculpture, video, and performance in a creative repertoire that explores existentialist themes with the figure at its center. Since the mid-1970s, Samra has tested the conventional functions of media through meticulously structured works with experimentation and research as the guiding principles of his artistic practice. As his oeuvre has progressed and defied traditional modes of representation, he has rebelled against his own understanding of art, transitioning into new works that maintain three essential concepts: spontaneity, dynamism, and secrecy.

In 1974, Samra emigrated from Saudi Arabia to France to attend the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (ENSBA), Paris. While studying at the esteemed institution, he immersed himself in the work of modern and contemporary European artists. This initial period of Samra's development was distinguished by expressionist drawings and paintings that investigate the body in motion or at rest, establishing a conceptual basis for later videos, photographs, and installations, while also demonstrating his initial rejection of the prescribed forms of figuration.

Upon graduating from the ENSBA in 1980, Samra settled in Saudi Arabia and continued to exhibit abroad. In the late 1980s, he returned to France, where he spent four years as an art consultant at the Institute du Monde Arabe. After nearly a decade of contributing to collective exhibitions across Europe, he held his first solo show at Etienne Dinet Gallery in Paris (1989). This milestone was followed by *Le Pli* (1991), a critically acclaimed exhibition at the Institute du Monde Arabe that established Samra as a leading artist from the Arab world. This period of his career was distinguished

by early investigations of emotive and sensory approaches to art.

In the 1990s, Samra's *Heads and Other Body* series introduced hanging art objects that blur the lines between painting and sculpture by liberating the treated canvas from the stretcher or frame and incorporating materials such as wire mesh, which create an armature for three-dimensional forms. This enabled Samra to explore the dynamics of an artwork as it is experienced in a particular setting while presenting constructive materials as its form and content. These formal and conceptual breakthroughs led to influential installation, video, and multimedia works that continued his career-long investigation of life, the space between birth and death, and how time can be reflected through the visual devices of art.

The artist's selected solo exhibitions include the Ministry of Culture in Bahrain (2016); Bin Matter House, Bahrain (2015); Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz, Dubai (2014); Ayyam Gallery London (2014); Ayyam Gallery Jeddah (2013); HD Galerie, Casablanca (2012); Traffic Gallery, Dubai (2011); Albareh Gallery, Bahrain (2010); Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris (2009); XVA Gallery, Dubai (2007).

Recently, Samra has participated in collective exhibitions at the Bienalsur, Argentina (2019); OFF Biennale Cairo (2018, 2015); Musée Labinet, France (2017); Low Gallery, San Diego, USA (2016); Abu Dhabi Festival, UAE (2015); Busan Museum, South Korea; FotoFest, Houston (2014), Edge of Arabia, London (2012); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2012); Maraya Art Center, Sharjah (2010).

Samra's works are housed in the collections of The British Museum, London; BuchDruckKunst e.V Art Book Museum, Hamburg; the National Museum, Mexico City; the Modern Art Museum, Cairo; Almansouria Foundation, Jeddah; Jameel Art Foundation, Jeddah; Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, Amman; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; and Bahrain National Museum, Manama, among others. He has participated in biennials in Singapore and Cairo (2008) and is a jury member for the Alexandria Biennale, Egypt.

In 2012, Skira Editore published an eponymous monograph on the artist.

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: 27 February | 15 April 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

T: +971 4 323 62 42

Email: meera@ayyamgallery.com

Website: www.ayyamgallery.com