

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Asaad Arabi, *Om Kalthoum*

Location: Ayyam Gallery Jeddah

Preview: 24 April 2013, 7pm

Dates: 24 April – 30 May 2013



Ayyam Gallery Jeddah is pleased to announce *Om Kalthoum*, a solo exhibition of Syrian artist Asaad Arabi from 24 April – 30 May 2013.

Following on from his previous series of work *Nostalgia*, shown at Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai in 2011, for his exhibition at Ayyam Gallery Jeddah the artist revisits the subject of legendary Egyptian singer, Om Kalthoum. Arabi paints expressive portraits of her that both serve as a tribute to her talent and investigate the wider relationship between music and painting. Throughout his gestural work, he pays close attention to colour: bold strokes of vivid colour call to mind a conductor leading his orchestra through a powerful symphony, or a composer marking notes on a score.

Though Kalthoum remains the focus of the series, in *Seat of the Forgiven* (2012) the musicians accompanying her take centre stage. These figures and their assortment of instruments are rendered with loose, fluid brushstrokes, imbuing them with a restless energy. Arabi's fascination with the relationship of the visual to the acoustic is evident throughout his work; he creates paintings that are a testament to the pervasive bond between the act of painting and playing music, two art forms which have drawn on each other for inspiration and stimulation throughout history. Arabi has commented: "*Paul Klee and František Kupka claimed that the spiritual dimension of the canvas comes from its fusion with music or in other terms, that it emanates from the sense associated with seeing and hearing - that is, from the heart.*".

Rather than painting static and posed portraits of Kalthoum, he captures her mid-performance – head tilted back and arms held aloft, commanding the audience. In doing so, he invites the viewer to become part of the audience and experience a collective nostalgia for this much-loved singer. Arabi has spoken of his fascination with Kalthoum's ability to transcend the barriers of class and

religion in Middle Eastern society, likening her to a religious leader to whose music people turn for 'spiritual nourishment'.

Between 2010 and 2011, Arabi listened to Kalthoum every day while drawing and painting in an immersive ritual which then compelled him to study every aspect of her performance and the musicians who played with her. While *Nostalgia* paid homage to a legend and the intense emotional response she inspired, *Om Kalthoum* elevates Arabi's studies to a major survey of this iconic cultural figure.

Born in Damascus in 1941, Asaad Arabi lives and works in Paris. He holds a PhD in Aesthetics from the Sorbonne University and his work on aesthetic theory has been widely published in both French and Arabic. Selected solo exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2011); Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2010); Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2009); Cairo Biennial (2004); Sircov Gallery, Brest, France (2003); Kuwait Museum (2003). His works are housed in museum collections including Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; Barcelona Contemporary Museum of Art; The National Museum, New Dehli; South Korea's Museum in Seoul; and LACMA, Los Angeles.



Notes to Editors

About Ayyam Gallery

Founded by collectors and cousins Khaled and Hisham Samawi in Damascus in 2006, Ayyam Gallery sought to nurture Syria's burgeoning and dynamic contemporary art scene through landmark non-profit initiatives such as the Shabab Ayyam Project, an incubator for emerging artists. Expansion into Beirut and Dubai enabled Ayyam Gallery to broaden its scope from the promotion of work by Syrian artists to those from the wider Middle East region. In doing so, Ayyam Gallery has established itself as one of the foremost exponents of Middle Eastern contemporary art to the international community.

Today, Ayyam Gallery is recognised as a leading cultural voice in the region, representing a roster of Arab and Iranian artists with an international profile and museum presence, such as Nadim Karam, Safwan Dahoul, Samia Halaby, Sadik Alfraji, Afshin Pirhashemi and Khaled Takreti. A number of non-commercial exhibitions, as well as the launch of Ayyam Publishing, Ayyam Editions, and The Young Collectors Auction, have further succeeded in showcasing the work of Middle Eastern artists with the aim of educating a wider audience about the art of this significant region. Ayyam Gallery Damascus currently functions as a studio and creative haven for artists who remain in the war-torn city. In early 2013, Ayyam Gallery launched new spaces in London and Jeddah.

Exhibition Facts

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Exhibition Dates: 24 April – 30 May 2013

Location: Bougainvillea Center Jeddah, Third Floor, King's Road, Al-Shat'ta

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