

PRESS RELEASE

Ayyam Gallery
Beirut Tower, Ground Floor
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Gallery Hours:

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Mon-Fri: 10:00am-8:00 pm
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Nadim Karam and Safwan Dahoul
Fifth Anniversary Exhibition

30 October 2014 – 10 January 2015

Opening reception: Thursday, 30 October at 7.00 - 9.00 pm

Ayyam Gallery Beirut is pleased to announce its fifth anniversary show, featuring recent works by Lebanese multidisciplinary artist Nadim Karam and Syrian painter Safwan Dahoul. The exhibition's opening on 30 October will serve as a celebration of the space's five years of operation.

Since its launch in 2009, Ayyam Gallery Beirut has become a staple of the local art scene and a hub for new talent. Today, the Marina district outpost is widely recognised for charting the regional development of contemporary art through bimonthly exhibitions and concurrent programs that spotlight a selection of the Middle East's foremost painters, sculptors, and photographers. Karam and Dahoul will be brought together as a nod to the gallery's inaugural event, which highlighted the acclaimed artists through a joint exhibition.

Nadim Karam will debut a series of new steel works exploring his ongoing Hap-situs (Happening + Situation) concept, an interventionist project that utilises whimsical urban sculptures, what the artist refers to as 'toys,' to punctuate the existing social stagnation of cities seized by political precarity or rigid structures. Karam's latest sculptures are based on an extensive, recurring cast of imaginative characters, 'organisms' that alter the cityscape through playful and absurd imagery, providing a new sense of physical and visual dynamism to a given area. The 'ephemeral' nature of these sculptures, which manifests aesthetically and three-dimensionally, is essential to their potential as social intercessions. Certain sculptures, for example, are designed to move throughout urban spaces. The artist's *Diva on a Rhino* (2014) depicts a shimmering four-armed protagonist whose stylised body appears as a cross between the figuration of Phoenician statues and an extraterrestrial being, merging the past with the future in the present. The corten steel rhino that serves as her figurative chariot possesses a hollow body with an outer shell of intricate cutout scenes. For Karam, this fragmented facet of the object provides the visual articulation of its transient quality, allowing for a multiplicity of interpretations.

Safwan Dahoul will be represented with new installments to his continuing Dream series, a body of work that he has produced over the course of nearly two decades. With the outbreak of the war in Syria, the painter has addressed the human toll of the conflict through the symbolism of his psychologically laden compositions. In Dahoul's latest monochrome works, the compact interiors that surround his recognisable heroine have contracted further, as the confines of her shelter appear to be closing in on her form; she is coiled, overpowered, or cornered by the physical dimensions of her setting, and is without a refuge or exit.

References to the impact of the outside world are made through imagery such as rainfall that douses her from an open window, an architectural detail that has served as a metaphoric motif for the artist in the past, as her body seems to disappear before the viewer.

In conjunction with the opening of the fifth anniversary show on 30 October, Ayyam Projects, a sister space located next to Ayyam Beirut, will be launched. This new gallery will offer a special focus on experimental practices by highlighting cutting-edge photography, conceptual art, installation, video, and new media.

About the Artists

Nadim Karam

The multidisciplinary practice of Lebanese artist and architect Nadim Karam incorporates painting, drawing, sculpture, and writing in the creation of monumental imagery, artistic interventions, and conceptual proposals that argue for the social potential of futurist and alternative spaces, particularly those built on dreams. Drawing from a variety of cultural discourses, Karam has fashioned a distinct pictorial language that is based on an evolving series of characters, symbols, and settings, as he narrates the past, present, and future while working towards the reconfiguration of space. Cities are often the inspiration and target sites of his groundbreaking renewal projects and happenings.

Born in 1957 in Senegal, Nadim Karam lives and works in Beirut, where he has led a satellite grouping of Lebanese architects and designers as founder of Atelier Hapsitus since 1996. Karam initially trained in architecture at the American University of Beirut before traveling to Japan in 1982 to attend the University of Tokyo. In Japan, he studied with world-renowned architects and thinkers Hiroshi Hara, Fumihiko Maki, and Tadao Ando, and attained a doctorate in architecture. He was the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Art, and Design at Notre Dame University in Lebanon (2000-2003) and taught architectural design at the American University of Beirut (1993-1995; 2003-2004).

Karam has been commissioned to create large-scale urban art installations by cities across the globe and has participated in international events such as the Liverpool (2006), Venice (1996), and Gwangju (1995) biennales. Recently he has held solo shows at Ayyam Gallery Beirut, Dubai, and London (2013), and has been featured in group exhibitions at venues such as Shanghai JSIP Biennale (2014); Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (2013); Villa Empain, Brussels (2012); and the Royal College of Art (2012).

Safwan Dahoul

Safwan Dahoul explores the corporal and psychological effects of alienation, solitude, and longing that punctuate the human experience at various stages in life. Partly autobiographical, his ongoing *Dream* series utilises the formal properties of painting to recreate the subconscious sense of enclosure that surfaces during times of crisis, whether in mourning, estrangement, or political conflict. Dahoul's recurring female protagonist facilitates this visceral encounter through her contorted body, often-vacant eyes, and minimised yet monumental physicality. Frequently depicted in the confinement of ambiguous settings, she is invariably defined by architectural details and the placement of interior accents such as a table or chair, deepening the state of her disaffection, as even the familiar becomes a site of distress.

Born in 1961 in Hama, Syria, Safwan Dahoul lives and works in Dubai. Dahoul attended the Suheil Al Ahdab Centre of Plastic Arts and the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Damascus before receiving a scholarship to study abroad from the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education in 1987. After relocating to Belgium, he attained a doctorate from the Higher Institute of Plastic Arts in Mons in 1997. Later, he returned to Syria where he taught at the Faculty of Fine Arts for several years.

Dahoul's paintings are held in numerous private and public collections, including the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; The Samawi Collection, Dubai; The Farjam Collection, Dubai; and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, Kuwait. Recently, he has participated in solo and group exhibitions at Samsung Blue Square and Busan Museum of Art, South Korea (2014); Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2014, 2011); Ayyam Gallery London (2013); Edge of Arabia, London (2013); Emirates Palace, Abu Dhabi (2013); and Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (2012).

About Ayyam Gallery

Founded in Damascus in 2006, Ayyam Gallery is recognised as a leading cultural voice in the region, representing a roster of Middle Eastern artists with an international profile and museum presence. Spaces in Beirut, Dubai, Jeddah, and London 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.

Exhibition Facts

Exhibition Dates: 30 October - 10 January

Opening Reception: Thursday, 30 October from 7:00 - 9:00 pm

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

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