

PRESS RELEASE

Ayyam Gallery
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 Sun-Thu: 10:00am-6:00pm
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Faisal Samra: 39

20 October 2014 - 10 January 2015

Faisal Samra in conversation with Myrna Ayad: Monday, 20 October at 7:00 pm

Opening reception and book launch: Monday, 20 October from 7:30 - 9:30 pm

Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz is pleased to announce *39*, the first suggestive retrospective of multidisciplinary artist Faisal Samra. A Bahrain-born Saudi-national, Samra is recognised as a pioneer of conceptual art in the Gulf and a leading contemporary artist in the Middle East. The exhibition will present a comprehensive survey selected by the artist, who will serve as its curator and scenographer, thus offering a rare look into his versatile creative practice. Featuring a variety of media, the exhibition will highlight the many formal investigations that have distinguished his nearly four-decade long career while also underlining his ongoing investigation of the figure through existentialist themes.

Active since 1975, Samra is one of the region’s most experimental artists. Often employing several media in a single artwork, his successive projects have focused on what he describes as ‘finding solutions to a visual problematic,’ what might also be understood as an ongoing breakaway from aesthetic conventions. Samra’s early works, for example, demonstrate his initial interest in surpassing the boundaries of figuration with drawings of subjects that stir despite their stationary positions such as in *Quran Reader* (1978), which depicts a male protagonist whose body appears to dissolve.

Similarly, in his widely acclaimed series *Distorted Reality* (2005-2011), Samra employs digital photography and video as formal components of a larger conceptual framework rather than primary media. The series is composed of performances by the artist, whose identity is concealed by intricate costumes and head coverings, in addition to different objects. Capturing his movement, the camera provides a visual documentation of the sequences of his actions, which are improvised and executed against a predetermined backdrop. The resulting digital prints are reminiscent of early twentieth-century experiments with moving images, in which each frame shows sequential movement, yet within the context of today’s mass media dominated visual culture, the series articulates a rebellion against the burden of representation.

39 will also include such recent works as *Arab Spring* (2013-2014), an installation of twenty-two balloons precariously resting on piles of sand, constituting a metaphor that relates to Samra’s long-standing exploration of the body as it is transformed by various sociopolitical circumstances or moments in time.

The opening of the exhibition features a conversation between Myrna Ayad, Editor of Canvas Magazine and the artist. The event also marks the Dubai launch of a bilingual Skira monograph on the artist that includes texts by Roxana Azimi and Giles de Bure.

About the Artist

Long considered one of the Arab Gulf's leading 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 into a creative repertoire that explores existentialist themes with the figure at its centre. Since the mid 1970s, Samra has tested the prescribed functions of media through meticulously structured works.

Faisal Samra graduated from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and has contributed to numerous noteworthy group shows such as *Word Into Art* (London and Dubai), *Languages of the Desert: Contemporary Arab Art from the Gulf States* (Abu Dhabi, Paris, and Bonn), and *Traversée*, (Paris, Cairo, Rabat). His works are housed in the collections of The British Museum (London), the National Museum (Mexico City), the Modern Art Museum (Cairo), and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art (Doha), among others. He has participated in biennials in Singapore (2008) and Cairo (2008), and is a jury member for the Alexandria Biennale, Egypt. The artist's selected solo exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery, Dubai and London (2014) and Jeddah (2013); HD Galerie, Casablanca (2012); Traffic Gallery, Dubai (2011); Albareh Gallery, Bahrain (2010); Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris (2009); XVA Gallery, Dubai (2007). Recently, he has participated in group shows at Busan Museum, South Korea and Fotofest, Houston, USA (2014), Edge of Arabia, London (2012); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2012); Haeinsa Temple, South Korea (2011); Maraya Art Center, Sharjah (2010), Art Paris, Grand Palais, France (2008).

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: 20 October 2014 - 10 January 2015

Artist Talk and Book Launch: Monday, 20 October at 7.00 pm

Opening Reception: Monday, 20 October from 7:30 to 9:30 pm

Location: Ayyam Gallery Dubai (Al Quoz)

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