

PRESS RELEASE

Nest Gallery

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11:00 - 19:00



Contemporary Uprising: Art from the Middle East

21 May - 25 May 2014

Opening reception: Wednesday, 21 May from 6:30pm

Nest Gallery, Geneva

Ayyam Gallery is pleased to present *Contemporary Uprising: Art from the Middle East*, a collective exhibition of ten renowned artists from Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia, from the 21 to 25 May 2014 at Nest Gallery in Geneva, Switzerland.

Curated by the founders of Ayyam Gallery, Khaled and Hisham Samawi, in collaboration with Stefania Nazzal, the works have been carefully chosen with the aim of introducing the Middle East's vivid contemporary art scene to Switzerland. Politically-inspired and figural works abound in this generous, well-rounded selection, providing a detailed overview of the depth and breadth of subject matter, talent and techniques in the new wave of Contemporary Arab art presently produced throughout the Middle East and the Diaspora.

The artists of this region characteristically draw from the events surrounding them and with every work a social critique is formed. This thematic element of the art allows the viewer to gain an insight and deeper understanding of the culture, the conflict and the quotidian of the Arab world.

Contemporary Uprising: Art from the Middle East will feature several key players in the art scene of the region. With a pedigreed list of biennales, private collections, film festivals and museum exhibitions, the artists on exhibit are at the forefront of art in their respective countries.

The varied perspectives and diversity of media will present a truly enlightening exhibition, engaging audiences with the wide spectrum of ideas present in art from the region and showcasing the importance of the Middle East in global art collecting.

About the Artists

Representing Saudi Arabia is conceptual artist Abdalnasser Gharem, the highest-selling living artist in the Gulf, whose poignant works have addressed such controversial topics as 9/11, censorship, the ecological and social impact of rapid modernisation on his country, and interfaith conflicts and dialogue. As a lieutenant colonel in the Saudi army, his work has proven inspirational for the bureaucratic nature of his performances, site-specific installations, and paintings, which are largely done as calligraphic rubber stamps. As a cultural activist, Gharem is helping grow the Gulf's art world infrastructure through his Amen Art Foundation.

With prodigious talent and psychologically compelling subject matter, Afshin Pirhashemi has undoubtedly secured a place as one of the top contemporary painters from Iran. He presents canvases coloured - if monochromatically - with the contradictions of contemporary Tehran and the hidden facets of its women.

Syrian painter Safwan Dahoul's transcendent canvases touch upon the human experience, revolving around slumber, companionship, solitude and death. A self proclaimed visual memoir, each is hauntingly relevant, reflecting those intimate moments we have collectively experienced. Dahoul's canvases compel the viewer to question, prompting self investigation and empathetic responses. With the uprising in his homeland, his paintings have become less internalised and his trademark heroine expresses a clear reaction to the upheaval and violence occurring within Syria.

Lebanese artist and architect Nadim Karam's multi-disciplinary approach incorporates painting, drawing, sculpture and writing. Fusing various cultural influences, Karam's work transcends social, political and national borders, forming a unique pictorial language, replete with recurring symbols, and with its own original characters and narratives. They form an alphabet of sorts in what is an on-going, sometimes absurdist, exploration of the creative power of dreams. With titles such as *The Heaviest Tears* and *The Lady of the Levant Under Fire*, Karam's latest monochromatic paintings reference the turmoil that has spread throughout the greater Middle East and his distress towards these events.

Iraqi painter Sadik Alfraji describes his work as "dealing with the problem of existence". He confronts the viewer with solitary figures depicted in profile and set against stark backgrounds. These simple forms possess a quiet sadness and sense of isolation; through them, he is able to undergo a cathartic process and address his own displacement from his native Iraq.

Following the outbreak of violence in his homeland, Syrian artist Tammam Azzam has used his artistic practice to reflect on the worsening situation. The artist has been working increasingly with digital media and has often referenced street art, recognising both of these mediums as powerful and direct tools for protest, which are also difficult to suppress. In early 2013, Azzam made headlines globally when his work *Freedom Graffiti* went viral on social media. He enlisted one of the most iconic kisses in art – Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* - to protest his country's suffering; superimposing this image of love over the walls of a war-torn building in Damascus. The work is from his Syrian Museum series, in which imagery from masterpieces of Western art history are combined with scenes of devastation across Syria, to highlight both the destruction of Syria's cultural heritage and to juxtapose some of the greatest achievements of humanity with the pain it is also capable of inflicting.

The unconventional photographs of Syrian artist and filmmaker Ammar Al Beik possess a highly developed cinematic quality. Often taking the form of large ultra-chrome prints, he has recently begun producing overtly political works that incorporate elements of video, sculpture and animation. His photographs toy with the manipulation of light and contrast and delve into the art of visual storytelling. Believing that art must not only imitate, but capture life, he upholds the narrative of his subjects with unflinching scrutiny and heightened sensitivity.

Palestinian artist Oussama Diab applies a conceptual approach to painting by exploiting the stylistic variants of the medium as emotive prompts in order to explore how form can articulate the urgency of sociopolitical issues.

In an age where digital media has taken a dominant role in filtering our everyday experiences and the construction of imagery has become integral to the negotiation of modern life, Diab addresses the contradictions and obstacles of political conflict, globalisation, and exile through playful symbolism, references to popular culture, iconic imagery, and narrative structures. With each new series he adopts a different painting style, reflecting the impermanent nature of art as it becomes increasingly conceptual and further dematerialised.

Athier Mousawi is a British Iraqi visual artist whose work over recent years has centred on posing unanswerable questions against undefined answers and forming a visual narrative between the two. His subject matter is predominately that of Iraq and his diasporic relationship to his intrinsic yet foreign homeland, as well as the idea of nostalgic referencing to how we idolise and remember our past, present and future. Athier's Man of War series explores notions of fluidity and the circumstances in which we become detached from human destruction, and hemes with profound resonance in recent Iraqi history. Subverting the concept of this marine life-form is a reflection of Athier's experience of watching warfare in the Middle East from his position of exile in the West.

With the start of the Syrian uprising and the conflict that followed, Syrian painter Mohannad Orabi adopted an increasingly realist approach to portraiture, drawing inspiration from the various forms of media that are currently forging a visual repository of the war. Martyr posters, Facebook profile pictures, and other types of filtered or composed imagery serve as source material for portraits of Syrians under siege, displaced and in exile, recording a side of the conflict that lies beyond its ideological divisions and political talking points. While the artist retains an interest in the socialisation processes of childhood, his own experiences of now living outside the country have led him to consider the ways in which visual culture, social media, and digital communication have become substitutes for what was once tangible.

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

Nest Gallery

Exhibition Dates: 21 May - 25 May 2014

Cocktail Reception: 21 May 2014 from 6:30 pm

Location: Rue Etienne-Dumont 12-14, 1204 Geneva, Switzerland

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