

Shabab Uprising

From May 8 – June 30, Ayyam Gallery Dubai will present its second Shabab Uprising exhibition, a showcase highlighting 10 of the most critically acclaimed emerging artists working today, including painters Thaier Helal and Kais Salman and photographer/filmmaker Ammar Al Beik.

As part of the Shabab Ayyam program, an incubator for rising talent that was launched with a call for entries in 2007, young artists work closely with the gallery, having their work nurtured and encouraged as they build their oeuvres. Through regional exhibitions, international art fairs and public sales, Ayyam works to establish their global profiles, drawing attention to the wealth of creativity that is produced in the region while introducing an exciting new generation of Arab artists. This year's show will include some of the top pieces by Shabab members, who hail from Lebanon, Syria and Palestine and are based throughout the Middle East. The fanfare surrounding the success of the program has been outstanding, as critics and art lovers respond with overwhelming enthusiasm and the Shabab artists become stars of the local art scene.

Daring experiments in abstraction are seen in the monumental canvases of Thaier Helal, an artist who has become immensely popular in the Gulf. Drawing immediate inspiration from his surroundings, Helal's cerebral works prompt the viewer to consider the intrinsic energy of people and places, as he recreates their presence through explosions of color. Moutea Murad offers a different approach to non-representational art as he invokes the rich heritage of geometric abstraction that has been found in Islamic art for centuries. His intricate compositions are offered as testimonies of a perpetual state of exploration, as the artist explores a virtual dance between converging shapes and lines and picture planes seem to collapse onto each other. Dominated by vibrant colors, he seeks to communicate the serene splendors of the physical and spiritual worlds. Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik's work stands in contrast to Helal and Murad's but is equally commanding. Employing a palette dominated by earth tones, his introspective compositions are influenced by the often-overlooked aspects of our environment, be it the sights of rural landscapes or the surfaces of Damascus's old city walls. Working the canvas with layered applications of mixed media, he recreates the physicality of these settings with immense observation, as cracks appear to divide the composition and the canvas becomes weathered.

Mohannad Orabi's oversized portraits of whimsical characters point to the often-playful nature of contemporary art, one dominated by exaggerated protagonists that offer a sense of optimism amidst the dreary nature of world affairs. Childlike figures shown in carefree scenes evoke various human emotions and interactions, creating a dichotomy of representation that is simultaneously fun and contemplative. Kais Salman presents a more grave view of our collective existence with a controversial body of work that takes aim at the fashion industry and exposes a darker side of society. Gluttonous, scantily clad models stand posed before the viewer as mounds of flesh spill out from what little

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clothing they wear. Their eyes are hallowed and chilling, suggesting the absence of a soul or identity and referring to the dangerous of excess and vanity. While also painting figurative works, Nihad Al-Turk often turns to the still-life format as vehicles for the profound. His softly painted canvases are quiet revelations in human emotions, as they speak of a solitary state of being. The objects in his compositions seem to embody the weight of humanity with all its fragility and serve as powerful anthropomorphic representations.

The sole artist working with a camera, Ammar Al-Beik has been gaining international recognition for both his photography and experimental films. His black and white images that are embellished with colorful details are evidence of a storyteller at his best, as he toys with the properties of light and penetrates the thoughts of his subjects.

Although vastly different in their techniques, backgrounds and artistic visions, the artists of Ayyam's Shabab project have one essential thing in common—they are all taking the global art arena by storm.