

From March 25 till April 30, 2010, Ayyam gallery Damascus will proudly present the solo exhibition of artist Asma Fayoumi. A long established female painter who is based in Damascus, Fayoumi has been crucial to the development of Syrian art for over four decades. Her upcoming show with Ayyam will reaffirm her importance to the regional art scene with an exciting new body of work.

Born in Amman, Jordan in 1943, Fayoumi graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus. Her formative years as a painter were spent in the 1960s with the emergence of a particular school of abstraction that was lead by the Italian artist and instructor Guido La Regina. Working alongside her fellow students Assad Arabi, Faek Dahdouh and Sakhed Farzat, her painting style was fashioned at one of the most crucial times in the Arab art scene—when modernist schools first displayed evidence of a gradual transition into contemporary modes of representation and a charged political climate urged Middle Eastern culture to take up the call for social change. Amidst this dramatic chain of events, she worked closely with pioneering Syrian impressionist Nassir Chaura and prominent hard-edge painter Mahmoud Hammad, influences that are evident in her early work. A well-received solo exhibition in Damascus in 1966 launched her career, as it created a significant buzz. Since then she has been featured in countless solo and group exhibitions both at home and abroad.

Although she has depicted a variety of topics, including mythological themes and grave issues such as war, Fayoumi has remained consistent in the execution of her canvases. Rapid brushstrokes and layered paint reflect a certain freedom—a confidence that has been obtained through years of perfecting her craft. Traces of cubism appear in the outlines of her figures, yet seemingly spontaneous markings give an expressionist feel, demonstrating the many ways in which her work has traversed several international styles. This sophisticated combination of design and application of medium gives the impression of movement, as though the artist has captured subjects who are caught in motion. As a result, the narratives found in Fayoumi's paintings are not only steeped in meaning, they exude an overwhelming sense of energy. A muted palette that is often accentuated by white and grey hues places the focus on her brushstrokes while isolating sections of the composition and emphasizing the emotive qualities of her figures.

A recent series comprised of several large acrylic on canvas works extends her continued interest in depicting the world around her. Not shying away from difficult subjects, a number of these new compositions show oversized forms that are surrounded by whirlwinds of color, as though engulfed by an insurmountable force. Solemn women come to characterize the state of mankind, as tragedy continues to unfold across the globe. Following in a tradition that dates backs to early Arab modernism in which political struggles for independence or the assertion of national identities were often articulated with women as symbolic representations of a people, it's as though Fayoumi's work has come full circle, returning to the powerful signifiers that first established her as one of the region's most intuitive observers.