



Thaier Helal, *Navigating Through Nothing*, 2024, Acrylic on paper, 35 x 50 cm

THAIER HELAL

Navigating Through Nothing

14 November 2024 | 5 January 2025

Ayyam Gallery is pleased to present *Navigating Through Nothing*, a solo exhibition featuring Thaier Helal's most recent body of work.

About the exhibition

In his influential work, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus examines the search for meaning in an irrational universe, laying the groundwork for the philosophy of absurdism. His ideas emerge as a response to humanity's persistent effort to find significance in a reality that lacks inherent purpose. Camus argues that individuals must face and accept the absurdity of existence, recognizing the tension between our longing for meaning and a world that provides no definitive answers. Nowadays, one can contend that the philosophies of absurdism and nihilism encapsulate modern artistic expression, demonstrating their capacity to challenge conventional values and convey human experiences.

This exhibition marks a pivotal moment in the artist's evolution. Initially, Helal's works were tightly bound by a grid-like structure, showcasing a systematic approach. Later, the use of heavier materials, such as papier-mâché, revealed the

liability of that weight, both physically and metaphorically. Eventually, he began to liberate his expression, embracing a more fluid technique that produces authenticity in immediacy. This evolution has allowed him to strip away the constraints of his previous methods, resulting in a more straightforward yet deeply expressive style.

The artist's brushstrokes echo the qualities of abstract expressionists who prioritized emotional storytelling. The new approach, characterized by loose, dynamic strokes, invites viewers to engage with the artwork instinctually, reminiscent of artists who utilized similar techniques, such as Joan Mitchell. By focusing on the expressive potential of each stroke, he draws on the tradition of abstraction, where the act of painting becomes a narrative in itself. This organic nature and depth welcome viewers to find their interpretations within the layered textures and movements.

Artist Statement:

I have long sought to incorporate these concepts into my work. I aim to transform my experiences with mortality into aesthetic forms that deeply resonate with emotions, offering a personal vision that intersects with many experiences around the world. Cultural and intellectual heritage manifests in an archive of images, events, and ideas that cling to our souls, regardless of their significance. This, in turn, becomes a source of inspiration, revelation, varying philosophical interpretations, or even a driver of rebellion against its overpowering control. This overarching process grants me the freedom to experiment with diverse forms of expression. It emerges in colorful abstract spaces consisting of transparent or dense layers and a texture of light and shadow.

By manipulating overlapping visual elements and signals, these layers mimic nature's dynamic, mysterious, and magical manifestations full of fluctuations resembling love, life, hope, anticipation, and birth. They resemble the act of gazing, reflecting, and contemplating the processes of creation, renewal, resurrection, and complex physical and chemical formations. They also resemble astonishing visual compositions occurring through different processes of growth, erosion, depletion, sedimentation, and decay.

These actions parallel the material, spiritual, and visual discoveries made through experimentation with surface terrains. This approach reflects what I see as a fitting portrayal of darkness, nihilism, disappointment, the bitterness of loss, and ultimately, the continuous absurd failures for which I find no logical explanation.

About the artist

Thaier Helal's constant search for experimental forms has led him to include diverse media, arriving at approaches that often blur the lines between painting and assemblage. With an innovative painting style that has progressed over the course of two decades, Helal is recognised as working at the forefront of contemporary abstraction in the Middle East.

Born in 1967, Helal launched his career in his native Syria, where he studied with seminal painters at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Damascus. After relocating to the United Arab Emirates in the 1990s, he developed a distinct method of painting that incorporates unconventional materials such as glue, sand, and coal in an attempt to recreate the physical and sensory aspects of the world around him.

Helal begins each composition with a sketched grid that serves as a compositional base then builds on the surface of the canvas by applying several layers of mixed media, providing a sense of organisation to an otherwise spontaneous picture. This laboured formalism represents the artist's conceptual rendering of the intrinsic code of nature, and extends to investigations of spatial dynamics as shaped by the fluctuation of society and culture. Helal communicates movement and energy through expressionist explosions of colour and automatic brushwork, alluding to organic formations.

In the years following the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, Helal has explored various printmaking techniques and

appropriated imagery in works that isolate the mechanisms of war and represent the growing militarisation of global society. Recent works by the artist that use found objects, such as plastic beads and miniature toys, allude to the adverse effects of globalisation, the advent of consumerist culture, and the power struggles that have triggered these phenomena.

As a longtime resident of the Gulf, Helal has contributed to the regional art scene with an extensive exhibition history that includes solo exhibitions at such venues as the Sharjah Art Museum (2000), in addition to awards from Tehran's Contemporary Painting Biennial (2005) and the Sharjah Biennial (1997). Helal has also influenced the development of local painting as a Senior Member of the Sharjah Arts Institute, and a Professor at the Fine Arts College, University of Sharjah, where he has encouraged emerging artists.

Recent solo and group exhibitions for the artist include Ayyam Gallery 11 Alserkal Avenue, Dubai (2018, 2017); Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2015), Ayyam Gallery London (2015); Ayyam Gallery DIFC (2014); Samsung Blue Square, Seoul (2014); and Busan Museum of Art (2014). Helal's works are housed in private and public collections throughout the Arab world, including the Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Collection, U.A.E.

About Ayyam Gallery

Founded in 2006, Ayyam Gallery is a leading arts organization that manages the careers of both established and emerging artists. Originally based in Syria, it expanded its reach with ventures in London, Jeddah, and Beirut, its blue-chip art space in Dubai has since become its permanent home. Additionally, the gallery's multinational non-profit arts program, furthered its mission to broaden the horizons of international art. The gallery's impact is evident in its widely respected multilingual publishing division and a custodianship program that manages the estates of pioneering artists. These efforts have contributed significantly to documenting underrepresented facets of global art history.

Ayyam Gallery is deeply committed to nurturing the growth of its artists, offering them substantial opportunities for visibility through projects that foster dialogue between various cultural and artistic perspectives. Through its roster the gallery hosts an extensive program of group and solo exhibitions showcasing a wide range of mediums and messages that highlight the diverse voices of the region, which include Samia Halaby, Faisal Samra, Safwan Dahoul, Sama Alshaibi, Kais Salman, and many more.

The gallery's influence extends beyond the MENA region through collaborative projects, loans, and artwork placement in global museums and institutions such as The Institut du Monde Arabe, LACMA, Centre Pompidou, The British Museum, and many more. Reflecting its dedication to engaging with a global audience, Ayyam Gallery participates in international art fairs, such as Art Geneve, Asia Now, Art Paris, Art Hong Kong, Zoom Contemporary Miami, Investec Cape Town, and Art Dubai.

Exhibition Facts

Exhibitions Dates: 14 November 2024 | 5 January 2025

Regular Hours: Monday - Friday: 10 am - 7 pm

Saturday: 12 pm - 6 pm

Location: Ayyam Gallery, B11, Alserkal Avenue, Street 8, Al Quoz 1, Dubai

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