

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Athier, *You'll Never Thrill Me Because You'll Never Kill Me*

Location: Ayyam Gallery Beirut

Date: 15 October – 30 November 2013

Private View: 15 October 2013, 7pm



Ayyam Gallery Beirut presents *You'll Never Thrill Me Because You'll Never Kill Me*, an exhibition by Iraqi artist Athier, who explores symbols of nationhood, displacement and conflict in his recent body of work.

Athier's artistic practice has often focused on Iraq and the diasporic relationship he has with his native country. Within his vibrant and semi-abstract canvases, the artist layers Islamic geometry with organic figurative forms, which split to reveal a liminal area seemingly beyond the picture plane.

In his recent work, Athier focuses on what he considers to be an addiction to conflict in the Arab world, even in those not actively involved in conflict. He identifies this 'addiction' in the constant desire to either discuss death and destruction, or absorb images and footage of this. Athier sees this not just in the behaviour of other members of the Arab diaspora, but in his own; his personal preoccupation reflects both his desire to feel a connection with the region, and to ease the guilt felt at not participating in any conflicts after relocating to Europe before the Gulf War.

Works from the series *The Eagle* (2012) stem from the current uncertainty gripping the Arab world and continue the artist's continuing fixation with the 'eagle of Saladin'. A pervasive symbol of Arab nationalism relating to Saladin, the first Sultan of Egypt and Syria, Athier depicts this eagle neither as egg or bird, but in an amoebic phase. He sees a duality in the eagle symbol: plastered disingenuously across currency and on the Iraqi passport, it represents a lie, but the eagle is also simply a living creature, subject to the cycle of birth and death like all other creatures.

With his series of large-scale screenprints, *Destroy a Lie* (2012), Athier considers the destruction of false symbols and questions how it is possible to remove that which, though ingrained, is not tangible. Meanwhile in triptych *Thrill Me* (2012), Athier chronicles a dream sequence through a series of writhing abstracted forms.

In *Every Hunter can be Hunted* (2012), Athier combines ancient and modern symbolism, merging a portrait of Gilgamesh - the Iraqi King and hunter whose reign is dated circa 2500 BC - with the ubiquitous eagle of Saladin. Rising from beneath the Euphrates, the cloaked King tries to assume the powerful stance he is typically depicted in as part of ancient Assyrian reliefs. His status as a symbol of strength and unity, however, is undermined within Athier's painting. Physically devoured by the lions and eagles he once claimed to dominate, Gilgamesh disintegrates into nothingness, while the deformed eight-pronged star of Shamash he holds upon a pole is crushed.

Notes to Editors

About the Artist

Born in Iraq in 1982, Athier Mousawi lives and works between Paris, London and Istanbul. A keen advocate of arts education, he has led arts workshops in refugee camps in Beirut, Istanbul, Amman and Jarash (2012), and throughout London as The National Portrait Gallery's 'Chasing Mirrors' artist in residence (2011). Previous solo exhibitions include: Cuadro Fine Art Gallery, Dubai (2012, 2011); and The Empire Project, Istanbul (2012). Selected group shows include: Traffic Gallery, Dubai (2012); National Portrait Gallery, London (2011); The Royal Academy, London (2011); Al Mansouriyah Foundation, Paris (2010 - 2012); and British Museum, London (2007-2009).

About Ayyam Gallery

Founded by collectors and cousins Khaled and Hisham Samawi in Damascus in 2006, Ayyam Gallery sought to nurture Syria's burgeoning and dynamic contemporary art scene through landmark non-profit initiatives such as the Shabab Ayyam Project, an incubator for emerging artists. Expansion into Beirut and Dubai enabled Ayyam Gallery to broaden its scope from the promotion of work by Syrian artists to those from the wider Middle East region. In doing so, Ayyam Gallery has established itself as one of the foremost exponents of Middle Eastern contemporary art to the international community.

Today, Ayyam Gallery is recognised as a leading cultural voice in the region, representing a roster of Arab and Iranian artists with an international profile and museum presence. A number of non-commercial exhibitions, as well as the launch of initiatives like The Young Collectors Auction, 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. Ayyam Gallery Damascus currently functions as a studio and creative haven for artists who remain in the war-torn city. In early 2013, Ayyam Gallery launched new spaces in London and Jeddah.

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Exhibition Facts

Date: 15 October – 30 November 2013 ; Preview: 15 October 2013, 7pm

Location: Beirut Tower, Ground Floor, Zeitoune Street

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