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ayyam  gallery



Water, 2016, mixed media on canvas, 190 cm diameter

THAIER HELAL *LANDMARKS II*

9 January - 4 March 2017

Opening reception: Monday, 9 January from 7.00 to 9.00 pm

Ayyam Gallery Dubai (11, Alserkal Avenue) is pleased to present *Landmarks II*, the solo exhibition of abstract painter Thayer Helal.

About the Show

Landmarks II features recent paintings that build on the concepts and forms of Helal's Mountain and River series, which were shown at Ayyam Gallery Dubai (DIFC) in 2014. With his latest body of work, the Sharjah-based artist expands his approach to painting by further experimenting with different media in an attempt to recreate the physical attributes of natural settings such as mountains, deserts, rivers, and lakes.

Although inspired by landforms like the Assi river, Helal's aim is for the viewer to recognise each site according to their past experiences. His new paintings are sculptural and appeal to the senses with added volume and dimension, providing tactile references to these environments. The coarse surfaces of the artist's works are created with organic and synthetic materials such as sand and glue, and describe layers of sediment that accumulate over time. The gestural brushstrokes of his previous works have been substituted for three-dimensional formations that appear to travel across the canvas like waves or dunes.

In *Landmarks II* Helal continues to identify the story of humankind in the growth patterns of nature, associating the ebb and flow of society with the replenishment or decay of natural environments. Alternating between paintings that reference earth or water, Helal alludes to the intrinsic cycle of nature as it progresses through birth, growth, death, and regeneration. Central to these mixed-media works is the concept of evolution: how some things develop despite setbacks while others remain stagnant. For the artist, this duality moves between sustenance (water) and deprivation (sand). A number of the featured works seem to be composed of salt and are relatively sparse. Although striking, these particular paintings describe a mirage. Helal references this phenomenon as a metaphor for the illusions we encounter in life.

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, and was mentored by modern artists such as Mahmoud Hammad. 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 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 organisation that manages the careers of diverse established and emerging artists. Blue-chip art spaces in Beirut and Dubai, a series of collaborative projects in the United States, Europe, and Asia, and a multinational non-profit arts programme have furthered the gallery's mandate of expanding the parameters of international art. With its widely respected multilingual publishing division and a custodianship programme that manages the estates of pioneering artists, Ayyam Gallery has also contributed to recent efforts that document underrepresented facets of global art history.

Exhibition Facts

Exhibition Dates: 9 January – 4 March 2017

Opening Reception: Monday, 9 January from 7.00 to 9.00 pm

Regular Hours: Sun-Thu: 10.00 am to 6.00 pm, Sat: 12.00 to 6.00 pm

Location: Ayyam Gallery Dubai (11, Alserkal Avenue), Al Quoz 1, Dubai

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