

Exhibition: Eric Parnes, 'Custodian of Vacancy: The Iranian Embassy in the USA'

Location: Ayyam Gallery, Dubai (DIFC)

Preview: Monday, 16 December from 7-9 PM

Exhibition Dates: 16 December 2013 - 30 January 2014



From 16 December 2013 to 30 January 2014, Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai is pleased to present 'Custodian of Vacancy: The Iranian Embassy in the USA', an exhibition of unique photographs by Iranian American artist Eric Parnes.

Silent and inaccessible, the Embassy of Iran in Washington, D.C. has been closed since the fall of the Shah and the US Embassy hostage crisis of 1979. In this unprecedented and unique opportunity, Eric Parnes ventures into the calm of this defunct institution, providing a rare glimpse into a world forgotten by history. Once a hub of American celebrity merged with, and immersed in, Persian culture, the Iranian Embassy's current uninhabited status still retains a particular rich aesthetic that captures the exclusive solitary nature of this institution. Parnes' photographs uniquely express a historic moment in time, while simultaneously conveying the immediacy in the artistic emotion of seclusion, by bringing the viewer to a magical space that was once celebrated and alive with vibrant festivities.

Though cushioned alongside the active homes of other standing diplomatic missions from countries on Embassy Row, the Iranian Embassy stands as a custodian of vacancy, having sat in forced solitude for the past 12,000 days. Yet crossing through the gates bearing the traditional Persian coat of arms emblem the Lion and Sun, the dust casts a layer of enchantment over this derelict residence. As if peering through a portal to another world, gilded mirrors and stained glass windows reflect a past in which expansive ballrooms echo the laughter and mingling of Hollywood celebrities, tycoons, socialites, diplomats, politicians and artists.

Decadent soirees held by then-Ambassador Ardeshir Zahedi were attended by the Shah and Shahbanu, her glittering tiara matched only by the brilliance of renowned beauties like Elizabeth Taylor. The glamour of Persia, its mysticism and exoticism was a rare world opened to the highest of American society in the 1970s, and just as quickly the doors were flung shut and forgotten.

This Embassy has become figment of the imagination. Its interiors reflecting traditional elements of Persian folklore and design lie unbeknownst to the majority of Americans who live in its vicinity, and a faded memory to those who attended its vast receptions only four decades ago. This dissolution from the American consciousness is evident and palpable in the resulting grain quality of Parnes' images, which capture the haunting quality and eery silence of each abandoned room.

The majestic building of the Iranian Embassy stands today a living testament to what once was, a silent memorial that is neither recognised nor visited. Eric Parnes peers inside this rich by-gone culture and era as an outsider, an apt metaphor for an American-born Iranian reaching into his own dreams.

Notes to the Editors

About the Artist

Born in the West with immediate family roots in Iran, Eric Parnes' vision reflects one's internal struggle to define identity and can be traced to early childhood experience. As a conceptual artist, the catharsis of creation has compelled him to examine and portray the perceived differences and similarities of the world in which he was born, as well as the echoes of the eras of my forefathers, allowing his concentration on crafting a series of works that revise and explore one's understanding of 'The Orient'.

The term Orientalism has been commonly described as the Occidental West's long time attempt to depict the Middle East. Fantasy-driven concepts and themes, often idealized or romanticized, provided for a continuous melding of these cultures, producing imagery that continues to affect our perception today. Reaching far beyond the borders of the United States and the Middle East, Parnes' art assesses the modern, the mystic, and the visceral reality of a "Neo-Orientalist™."

Today, the delineations between the East and West are increasingly blurred, with the cardinal points both exporting and interpreting their respective societies. As an artist seeking to define Neo-Orientalism™, Parnes' work continues to explore this intriguing correlation and contribute to the intersection of culture and modern identity.

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 Ayyam Publishing, Ayyam Editions, and 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.

Exhibition Facts

Date: 16 December 2013 - 30 January 2014

Private View: 16 December 2013, 7 PM

Location: Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai Gate Village

Tel: +971 4 439 2395

Email: difc@ayyamgallery.com

Website: www.ayyamgallery.com

For press information and images, please email press@ayyamgallery.com or call +971 4 323 6242.