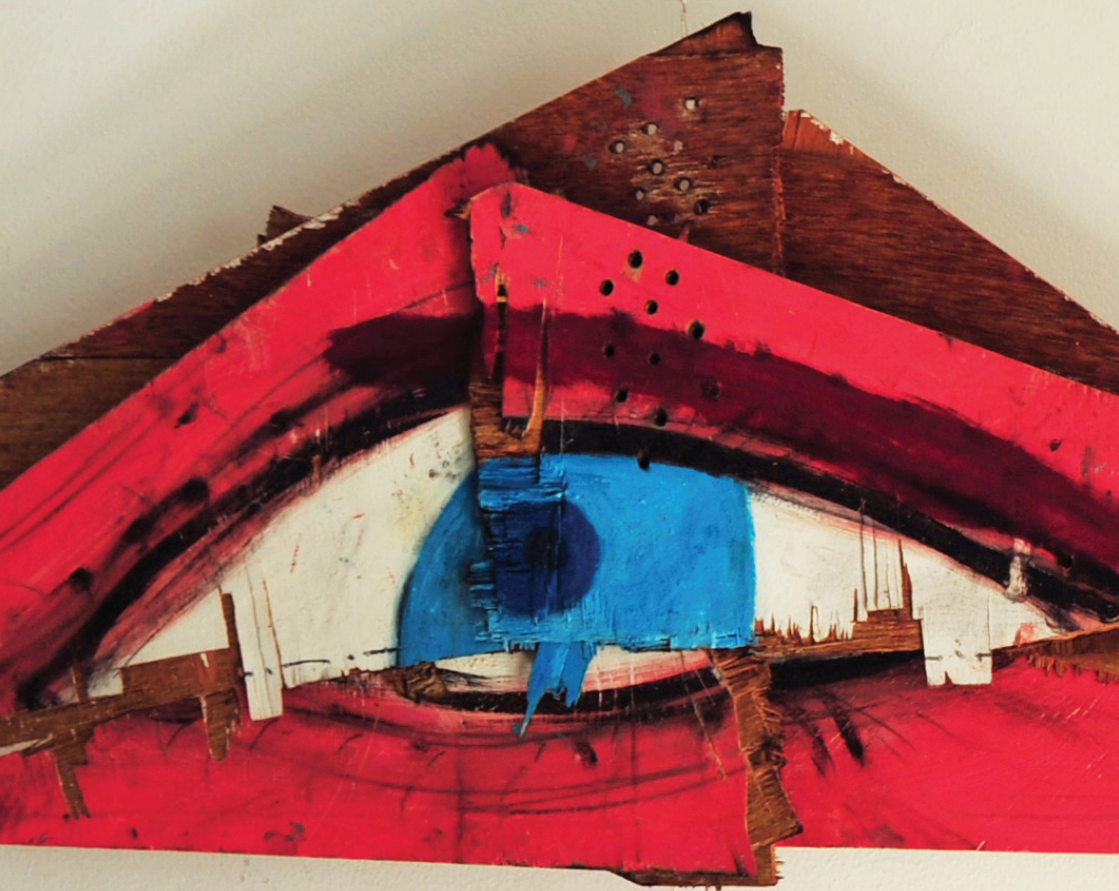


FAISAL SAMRA



C.D.R.

FAISAL SAMRA

Ayyam Gallery London
13 February - 29 March 2014



Born in Bahrain in 1956 of Saudi nationality, Faisal Samra currently lives and works between Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Paris. Samra's works are held in numerous private and public collections including: The British Museum; Institut du Monde Arabe; The Jameel Art Foundation; Almansouria Foundation; and the Khaled Shoman Foundation.

Recent solo exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery, Jeddah (2013); HD Galerie, Casablanca (2012); Traffic Gallery, Dubai (2011); Albareh Gallery, Bahrain (2010); Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris (2009); XVA Gallery, Dubai (2008). Group shows include E.O.A, London (2012); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2012); Haeinsa Temple, South Korea (2011); Maraya Art Center, Sharjah – U.A.E (2010); Singapore Biennial (2008); Cairo Biennial (2008).

Faisal Samra : C.D.R.

Through the Lens of the Artistic, the Political and the Personal

By Zarmina Rafi

Saudi artist Faisal Samra has long been involved in creative fields ranging from graphic design to contemporary art. It therefore comes as no surprise that he is interested in a further exploration of creativity as is evident in his latest exhibition, *C.D.R. - Construction, Destruction and Reconstruction*. Samra has said, 'Creation [...] overshadowed all my life as an artist, living with it each moment of the day, even during sleep'. However, it is not simply 'creation' that the artworks grapple with. Samra is also intrigued by the affect a created object produces versus meaning and energy carried by isolated constituent parts of the same object. Perhaps this points at his impulse to understand life cycles through various renditions of the same object. Lastly, the artist observes the three stages of creation - construction, destruction and reconstruction - and how they relate to the Middle East.

Samra's *Liberating the Idol* is a bold new work with an even more provocative title. Combining the mediums of sculpture, video and photography, this piece is striking in its impact and begs the audience to ask questions of it. What idol and whose liberation is Samra concerned with?

The idol is the artist's careful creation. Lovingly constructed out of clay, patterned with columns of a repeating 'I' on the body, it has a mirror permanently affixed so it may engage in constant self-admiration. In its obsession with self, the idol is reminiscent of the Ovidian Narcissus who fell in love with his own reflection. An infatuation that ultimately led to his own destruction.

The markings of 'I' ask audiences to become attendant to the ego. Samra's work is not didactic though, it does not espouse a theory

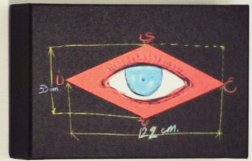
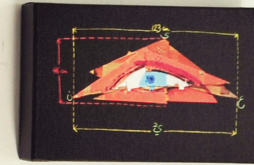
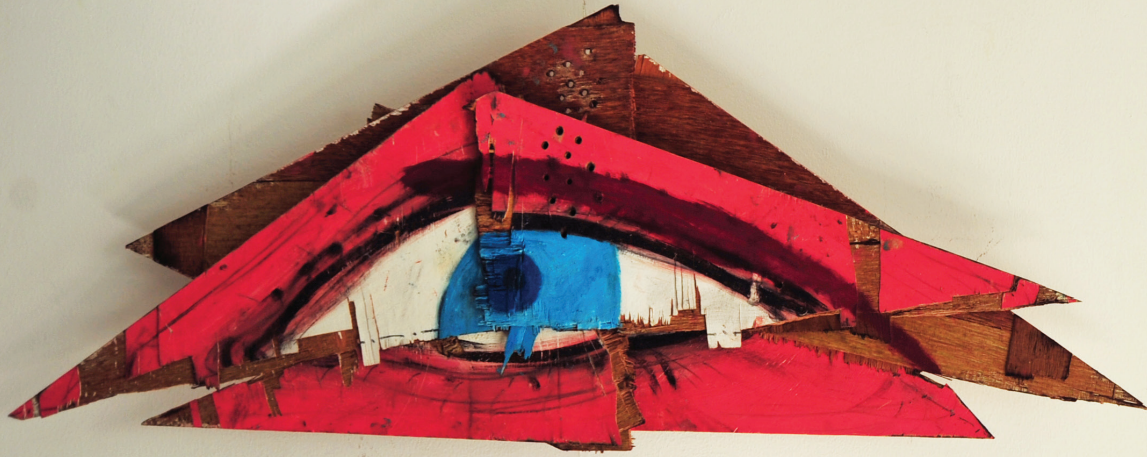
of self-love or of selflessness. The importance is in its deliberate destruction and evolution into a new stage of its life cycle. Upon shattering, the idol's fragmented parts are recomposed in a new alignment. The new formation interestingly takes the form of a circle, symbolising infinite possibility and continuity. The dropping of the idol also points to Samra's interest in transitory performance in addition to the creation of things more durable. Whether the subject of artworks is Samra himself, such as in the *Distorted Reality* series of 2007, or a clay sculpture, the performance happens in real time and its subsequent trace is captured in fragments, videos and photographs. Unlike actual performance, a photo or recording of a performance can be saved for a later date and viewed multiple times if desired. In this dialogue between real time and reproductive technologies, Samra also examines the nature of the artistic medium.

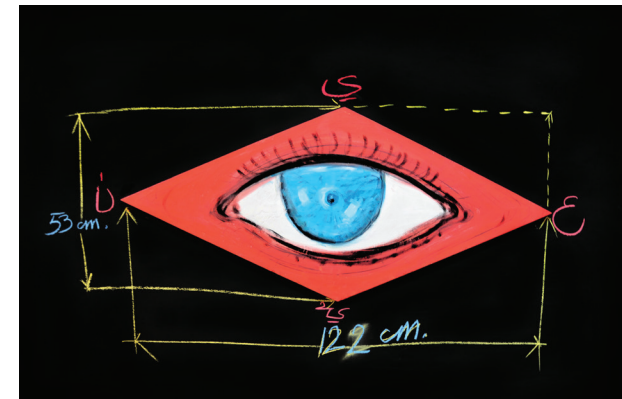
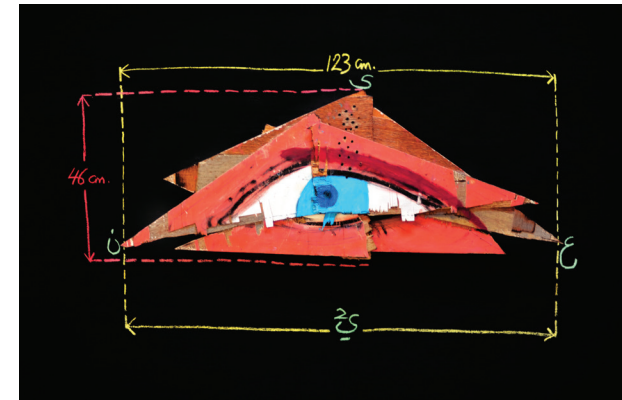
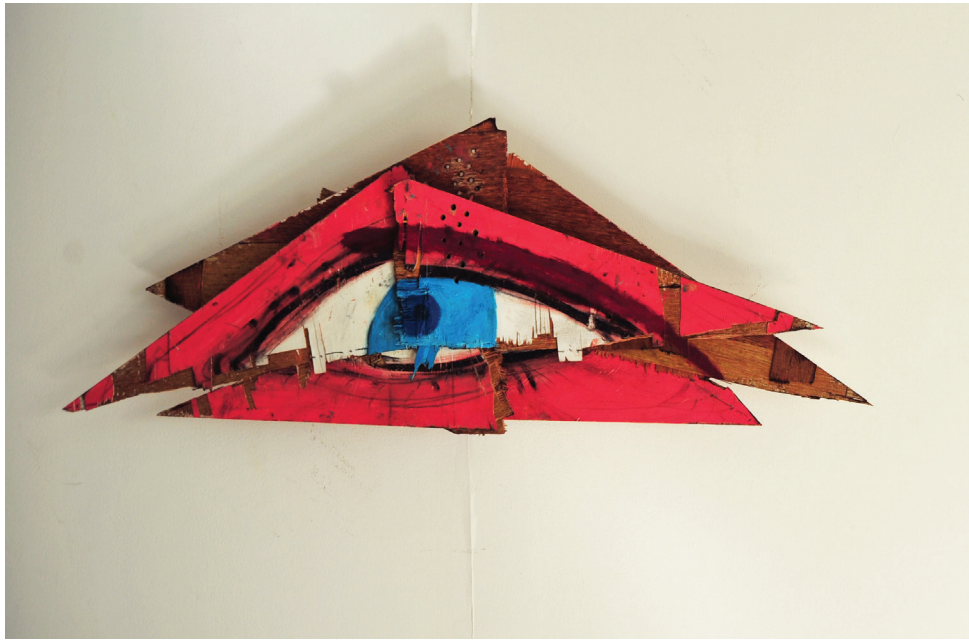
Though *Liberating the Idol* references the self, the Zeina pieces are truly personal works for the artist. In these works, Samra has portrayed his wife, Zeina, in her fight against breast cancer. Portraying the three stages of 'Zeina' - before, during and after undergoing chemotherapy, these images refer directly to cancer and note the resulting changes in the body during the passage of treatment and time. Samra tracks the body of Zeina over a seventeen day period as it changes under threat to the insidious disease, marking dates on the corner of the photograph, measuring distance between the subject's ears and top of the head and the base of the subject's neck, and finally marking out individual letters that come together to form the word 'Zeina'. In the exercise of marking out individual Arabic letters upon the image, Samra once again explores meaning as we understand it in sum versus individual parts. The body of course is the primary example in which to witness the process of perpetual creation, destruction and regrowth. Samra correlates that the body is susceptible

to the threat of illness, as is the land where the artist lives and works to external threats of violence and instability.

For Bahraini-born Samra, it is impossible to think of the three stages of construction, destruction and reconstruction without observing how each has unfolded in the Middle East. Creation takes new meaning when thought of in relation to boundary making, the drawing of divisions and demarcations in relation to the Middle East. Referring to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the artist explains that this changed the face of the Ottoman empire in the 20th century, introducing new boundaries in the Arab world. The 2003 and subsequent invasions of Iraq heralded for the artist a period emblematic of destruction in the Middle East. Artworks such as the mixed media *Blue Eye* and *Green Eye* reference this destruction and the need to reconstruct a new vision of the Arab world in the eyes of the West as what was created before was unfair and imperialistic. *The Chair*, an obviously political piece, remarks upon the seat of power and various methods employed by both Western and local forces in order to usurp power for themselves. What has happened to the seat of power in this day and age? In the installation Samra has created, the seat of power has been rendered useless with alterations such as wooden extensions in orange and black making it impossible for the chair to be sat on. It is reduced to the level of a mere object. In a clever play on words, Samra makes use of Arabic script on the chair as well. Before destruction it states, 'Made in the Arab world' and 'Global Economical Power', while after the reconstruction it states, 'Made in the Occidental world' and 'Global Economical Power'. Here the word 'Arab' is changed to 'Occidental' by placing a punctuation dot on top of the word 'Arab'. Thereby, a simple act of creation changes meaning entirely.

Working through the physical and the conceptual, the works exhibited in *C.D.R. - Construction, Destruction and Reconstruction* show an intense engagement with a subject that has had a life-long impact on Samra both as a person and as an artist. Varied in their medium and presentation, the works present dialogues amongst artistic media and technology, the cyclical effect of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction on a human and political level, and point to the diverse manifestation that any project of 'creation' can assume.

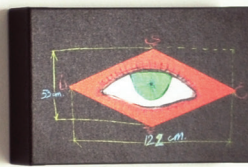
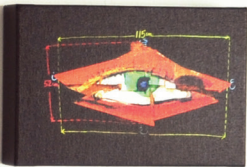


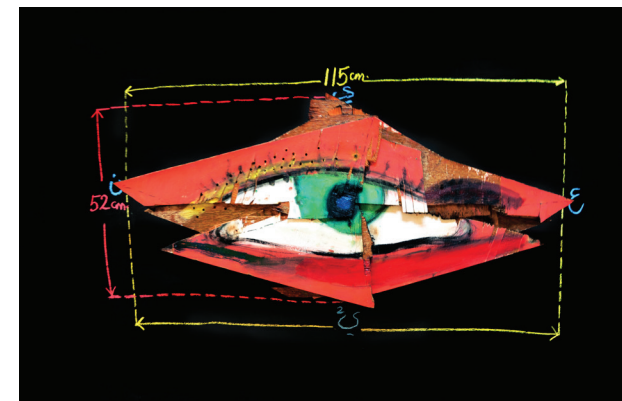
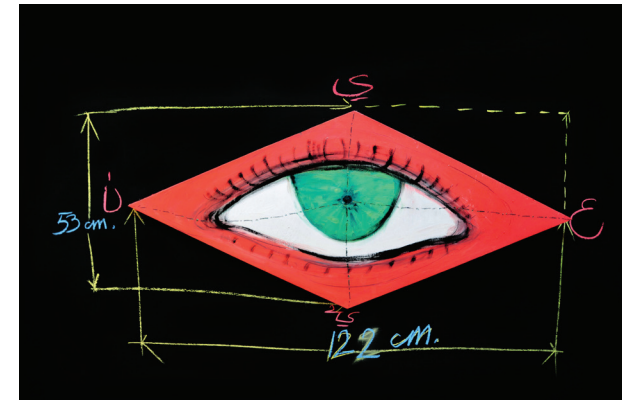
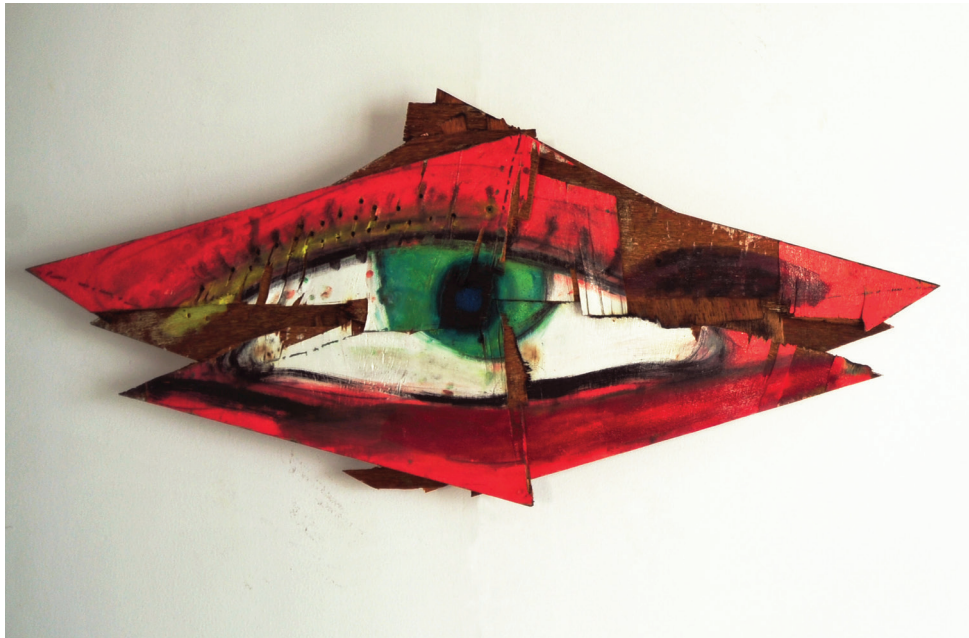


Blue Eye
2013

Installation: Oil, charcoal and pencil on plywood
46 x 123 cm

Two images: Digital print on Goya Canvas Satin Hahnemühle paper
17 x 25 cm each





Green Eye
2013

Installation: Oil, charcoal and pencil on plywood
52 x 115 cm

Two images: Digital print on Goya Canvas Satin Hahnemühle paper
17 x 25 cm each





The Chair
2013

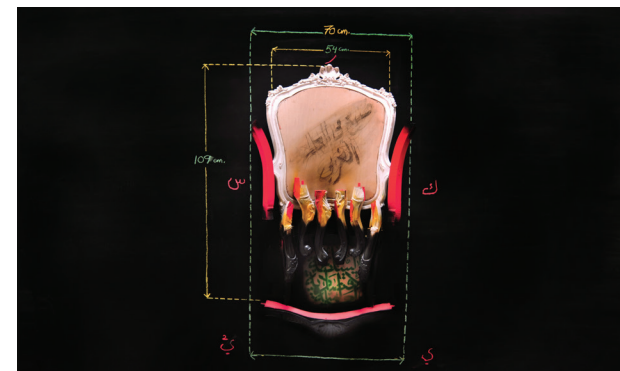
Installation: Oil, charcoal, pencil, plywood and carved wood

109 x 70 x 20 cm

Video: 2:25 min

Two images: Digital print on Goya Canvas satin Hahnemühle paper

31 x 51 cm each







Liberating the Idol
2013

Installation: China ink, dry clay, mirror in plexiglas box

28 x 51 x 5.5 cm

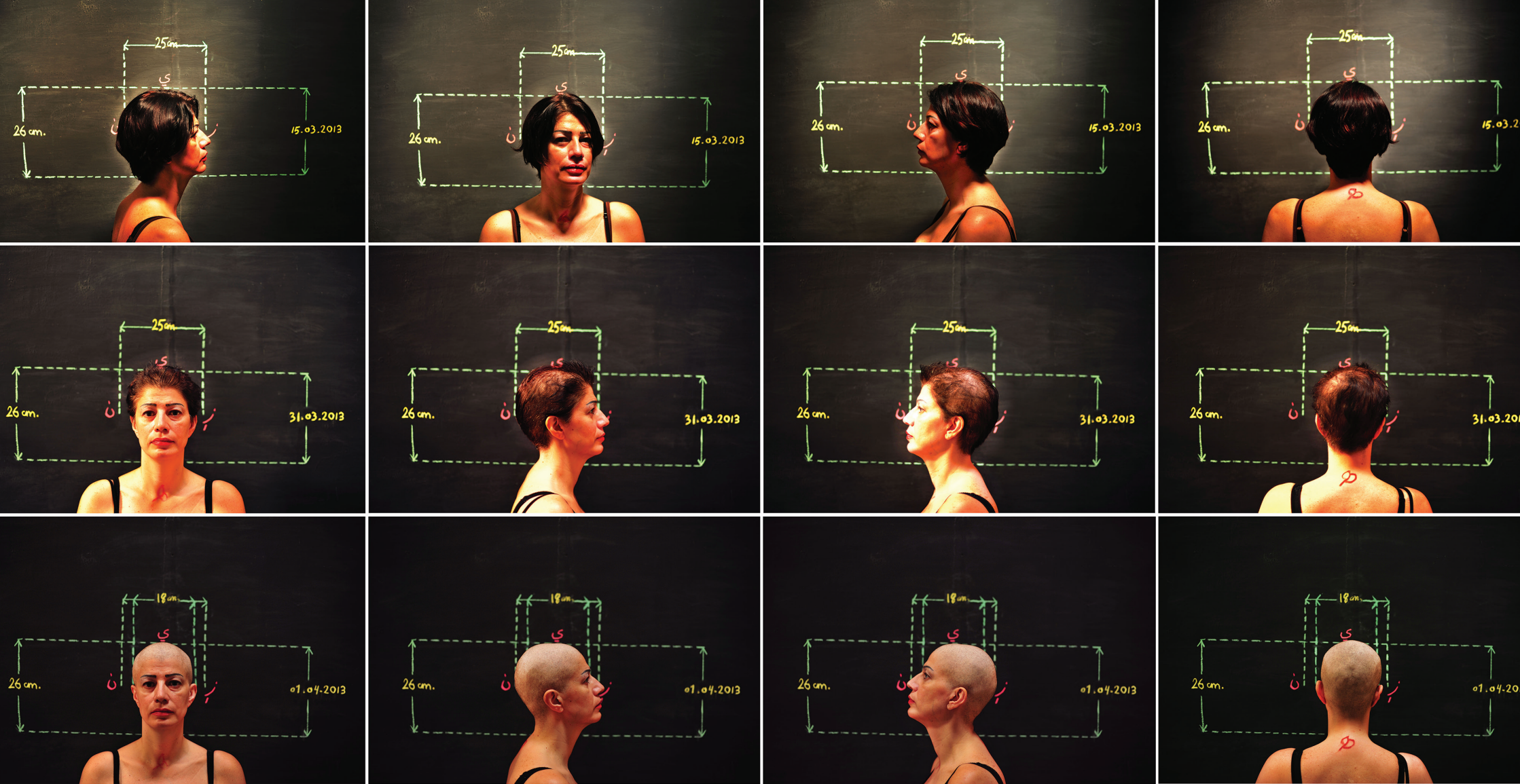
Video: 0:40 min

Two images: Digital print on Goya Canvas satin Hahnemühle paper

31 x 51 cm each



Zeina
2013
Lambda print diasec
120 x 180 cm
Edition of 3



Zeina
2013
Lambda print diasec
40 x 60.11 cm each (twelve images)
Edition of 3

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 recognized 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.

