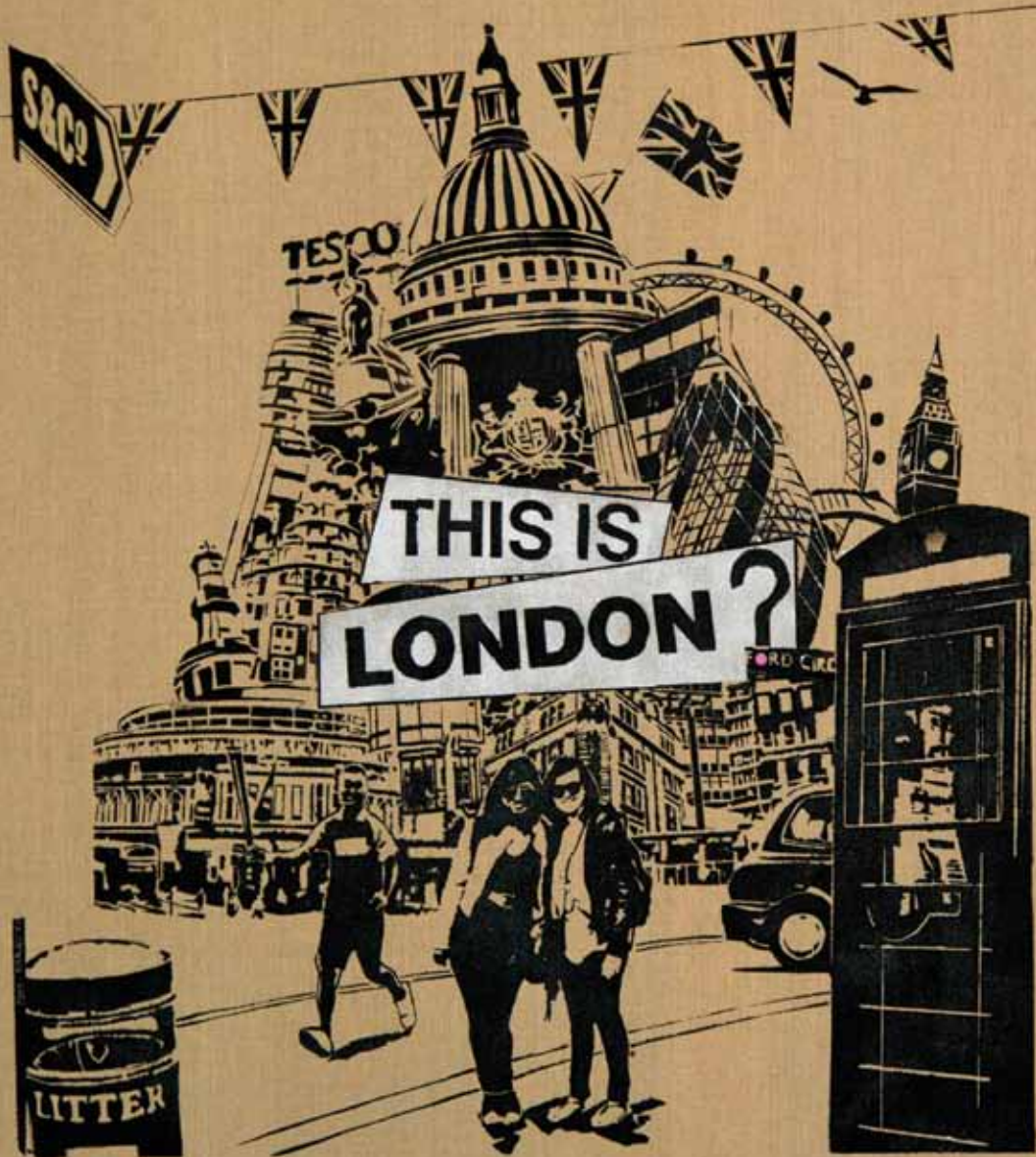


# KHALED TAKRETI



ayyam  gallery

# COMPLETE FREEDOM

KHALED TAKRETI

Ayyam Gallery London  
5 September - 5 October 2013



Khaled Takreti's large-scale compositions explore the psychology behind his female subjects through a painting style that marries contemporary portraiture with a refined sense of design. Inspired by the loving familial relationships of his childhood, recent work also examines his adolescence in 1970's Damascus, acting as a visual diary and means of recording memory and charting time.

Born in Beirut in 1964, Khaled Takreti lives and works in Paris. His work is housed in collections including the Mathaf Museum of Contemporary Art, Doha, Syrian National Museum, and the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts. Solo exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2012, 2010), Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2010), Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2009). Group exhibitions include Mathaf Museum of Contemporary Art, Doha (2011), French Cultural Center, Damascus (2012), *Paris et l'Art Contemporain Arabe*, Paris, Beirut, Sanaa (*Traits d'union* touring exhibition, 2011-12).

Paris-based, Beirut-born Syrian artist Khaled Takreti's large scale compositions are as stylistically diverse as his background and ever changing. Inspired by not only his cultural background, but also his interest in Architecture and Chinese painting, Takreti's artworks imbue contemporary portraiture with a highly refined sense of design.

Admittedly a mirror of himself and a visual diary of sorts, his works touch a note in each of us, stirring and aligning our memories with his own souvenirs of the past. Takreti's emotions are wholly exposed to the canvas and wider audience, illustrating his state of mind during each series. As such, they are decidedly truthful and the images and emotions conveyed transfer directly from his heart to the hearts of others.

Each body of work clearly reflects a progression of his painting style, which develops gradually within each colour palette, yet startlingly in between. As the artist explains, 'each set of works calls for a different energy, a different range of colour.'<sup>1</sup>

In his two early series *My Grandmother and I* (2008) and *I Am a Teenager Again* (2009), his figures evolve from static portraits to those bursting with energy

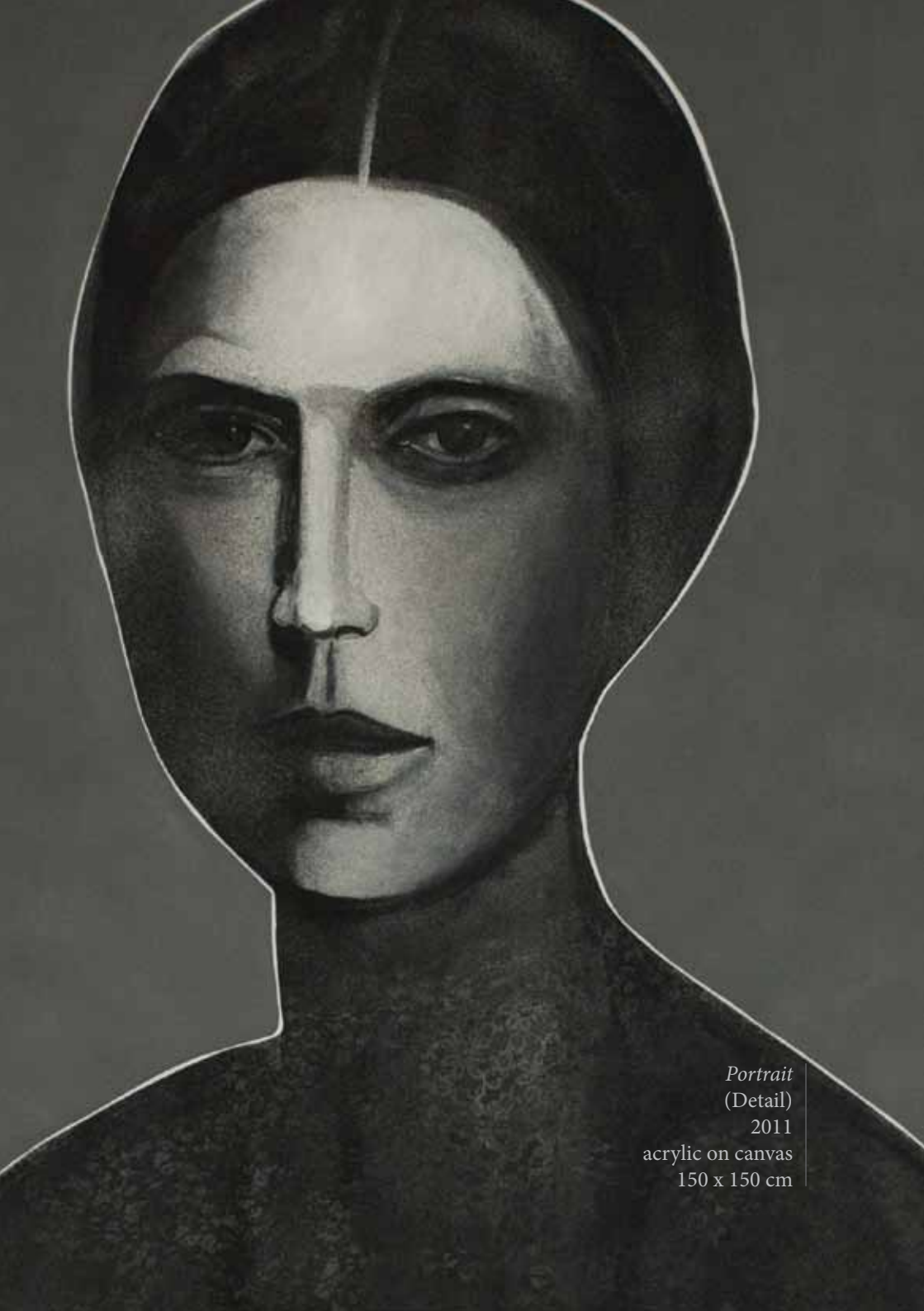
*Auto-Stop*  
2009  
acrylic on canvas  
180 x 180 cm



and action. Subdued, almost vintage photograph colouring becomes saturated with vivid, loudly contrasted hues and unrealistic skin tones, colour blocking and lace overlays.

Stylised, Pop-infused portraits capturing playful scenarios in which characters - both real and imaginary to the artist - jump, dance, play and are surrounded by family presented a convivial adolescence to the viewer.

<sup>1</sup> Farhat, Maymanah. 'The Wondrous Imagination of Khaled Takreti'. Khaled Takreti. 2010. p. 10



*Portrait*  
(Detail)  
2011  
acrylic on canvas  
150 x 150 cm

-- Muted Hues --

The startling change in colour palette and mood of compositions from his two early series to the two later are a result of the events which unfolded in his home country. In the series *Silence*, Takreti's emotions literally bled off the canvas as his paintings ran dry of colour. As the world lost its hope watching the dramatic scenes unfold in Syria, so too did the artist, and his heavily saturated candy coloured canvases turned towards a subdued palette of sepia and grey tones with stark backgrounds. Working with unprimed canvas bearing its natural texture and ecru surface, Takreti rendered his subjects in grey tonalities like that of a photograph.

Many of the portraits in this body of work exuded an almost palpable loneliness, yet there was no sense of weakness in these characters. They stared directly at the viewer, almost challenging him to ponder over the internal thoughts lying behind their detached facades.

Though the artist preferred not to provide his own interpretations for each piece, he acknowledged the irony present in many of these works. His desire with *Silence* was to present a less romantic, more contemporary view of external life. These paintings illustrated the pain he experienced during this difficult period in Syria, a time which had drained the colour and narrative from his works and left his figures standing silent and sparse, leaving the viewer to colour them with their individual interpretations.

-- Complete Freedom --

Throughout his new series Complete Freedom, Khaled Takreti maintains the irony and less romantic view of life first implemented in Silence, though the artist explores not the quiet solitude of his characters, but the overarching societal theme of freedom and its complexities.

Freedom, or more precisely, liberty, is an interesting albeit rather weighted concept. Liberty is defined as the value of individuals to have agency, or control over their own actions. It is the freedom of individuals to exercise their free will without external coercion. Thomas Hobbes, the seventh-century English philosopher and author of Leviathan who originated the theory of the social contract, succinctly stated 'a free man is he that... is not hindered to do what he hath the will to do.' Yet Hobbes' contemporary John Locke, widely known as The Father of Classical Liberalism, refuted his definition as it did not take into consideration the restrictions imposed upon individual liberties by a governing body.

Complete Freedom, however, is less concerned with Locke's account of politicised liberty and focuses on more unalienable, personal liberties. Through his compositions, Takreti explores the freedom we each possess of knowledge, creativity, to choose our life, relationships, nationality, define our characters and alter our appearances at will. These immutable liberties of modern-day societies are freedoms many who are oppressed strive for, yet Takreti analyses the other side of the coin - when these very freedoms extend so greatly that

they inadvertently lead to a state of greater constriction and chaos. Examples of this chaos are when displacement becomes a symptom of immigration and not its cause, when individualism is at the mercy of the masses, our reliance on modern technologies removes and restricts us from nature, and when misperceptions run rife.

In order to represent this chaos, Takreti's canvases have returned to energetic narrative scenes embodying kitschy, vulgar and playful sentiments. His figures no longer stand silently, but convulse, gesture and shout wildly. Even hints of innocence are masked and layered in satirical cynicism, as though the artist wishes to highlight a corrupted innocence. Yet even with this regained fluidity, the sense of pain and hopelessness is still prevalent in both colour palette and content.

Continuing the ecru and monochrome palette of Silence, these new canvases evolve in a notable way. As the artist has stated, 'My technique is always the same. Working a lot, I discovered new elements that I added to my initial technique.'<sup>2</sup> He refers to his characteristically refined, illustrative lines and smooth surface. The new element Takreti incorporates into the works of Complete Freedom is texture through his use of collage and the black-on-black soulages method. He builds his compositions by subverting found images and his own photographs, manipulating, reprinting, and meticulously reworking them through a process of drawing, cutting and painting. The results are strikingly modern, simply balanced compositions that pose subtle, yet poignant questions about our conceptions of freedom.

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<sup>2</sup> Farhat, Maymanah. "The Wondrous Imagination of Khaled Takreti". Khaled Takreti. 2010. p. 10

The scenes Khaled Takreti depicts are not grounded in a particular time or place. Whether of a childhood memory or a societal truth wittily conveyed, his paintings are universal. Observing the evolution of his works is an almost psychological journey and while we have seen the progression from lovingly reminiscent paintings to those almost dejecting the external world, we await avidly await to see where his visual diary will take us next.

Regarding his future works Takreti says, 'My painting reflects my emotions. In the last exhibition and as well as this one, colours escape from my palette for many reasons, general and personal. With this series, I catch a new energy in the movement of my compositions, but the one important element still missing is colour. I hope to feel something soon that will cause its return in my future canvases.'<sup>3</sup>

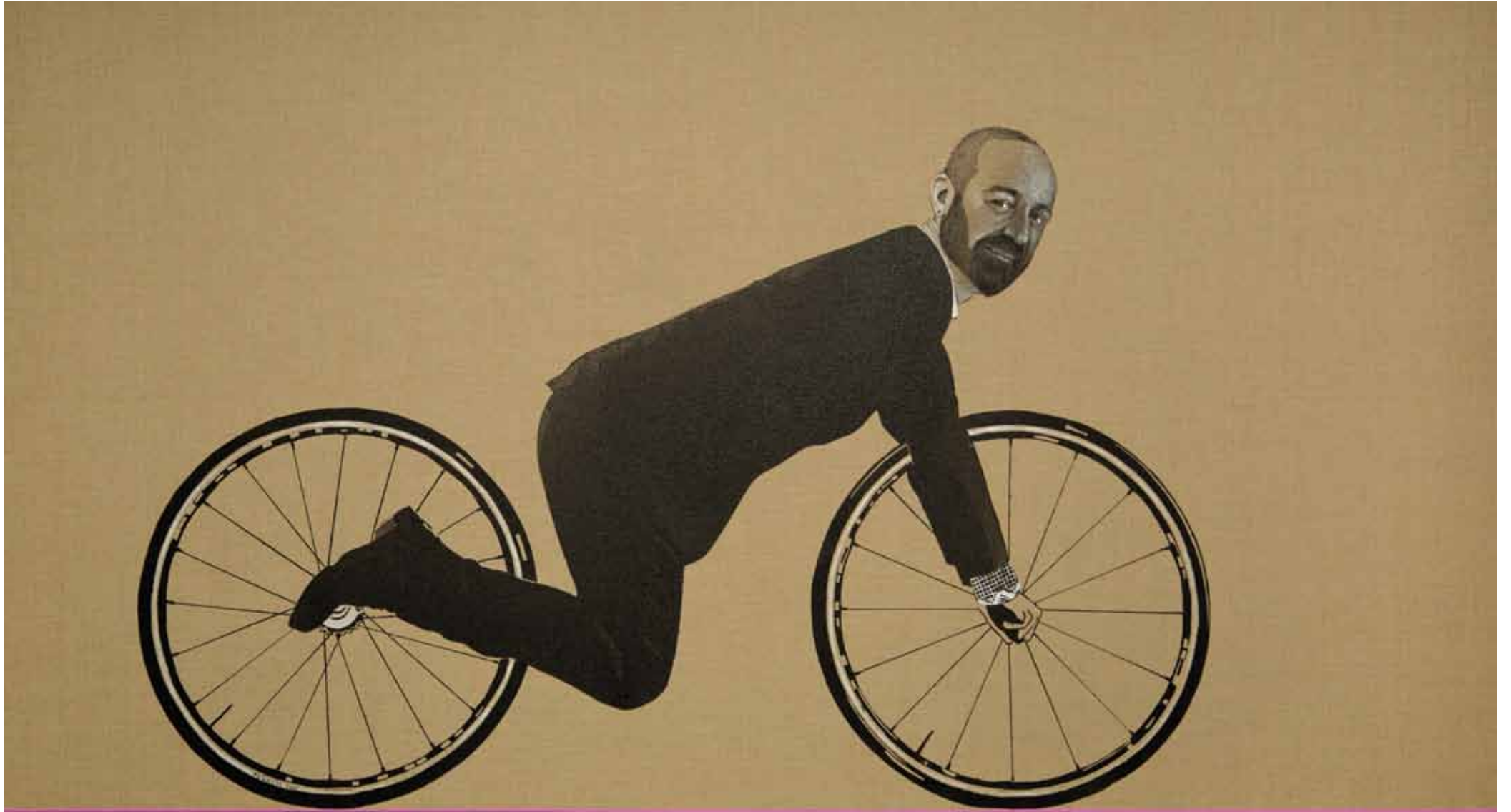




*Photocopies*  
2013  
acrylic on canvas  
106 x 196 cm



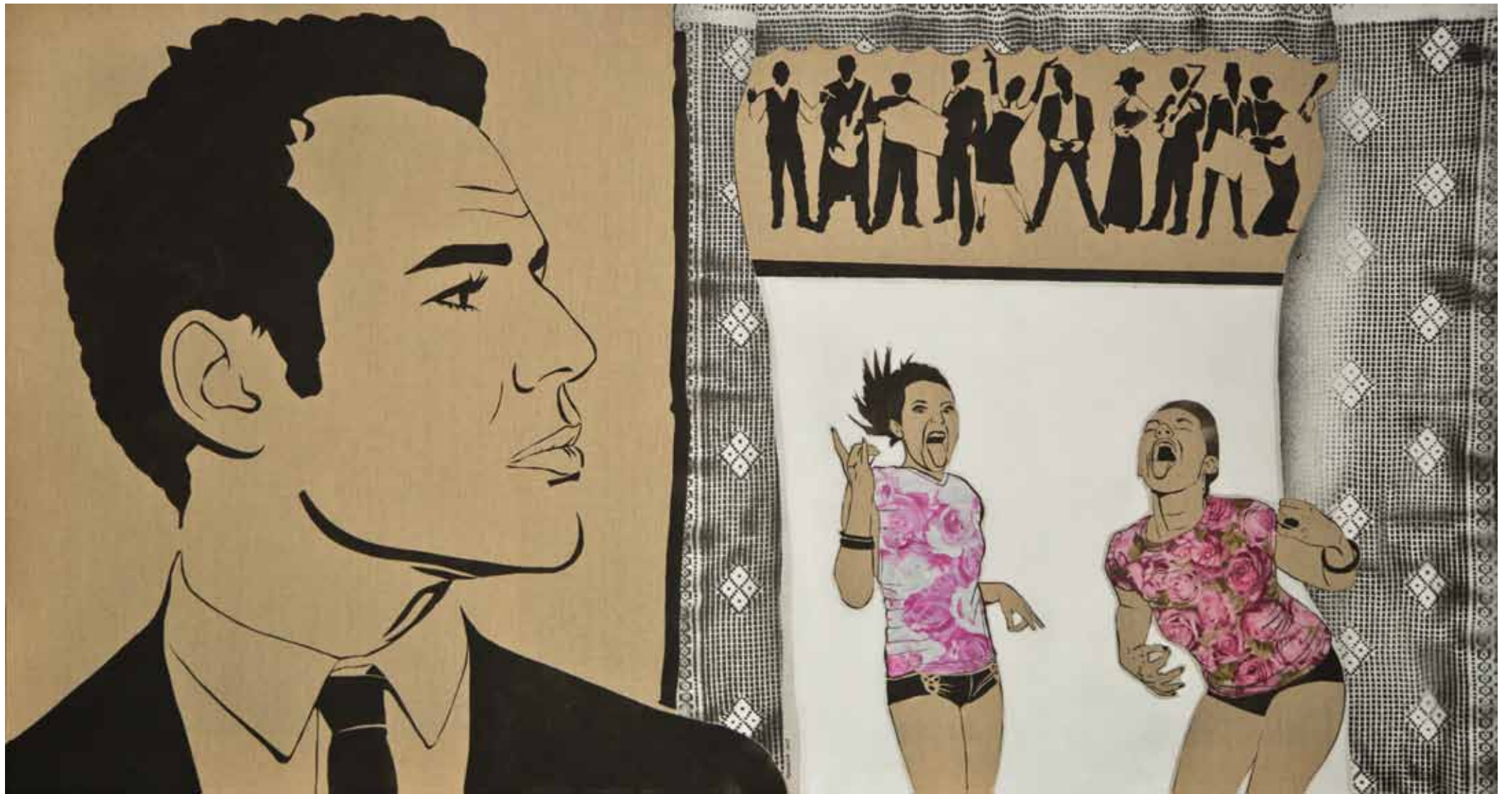
*Les Enfants de la Syrie*  
2013  
acrylic on canvas  
106 x 196 cm



*Ça Roule*  
2013  
acrylic on canvas  
106 x 196 cm

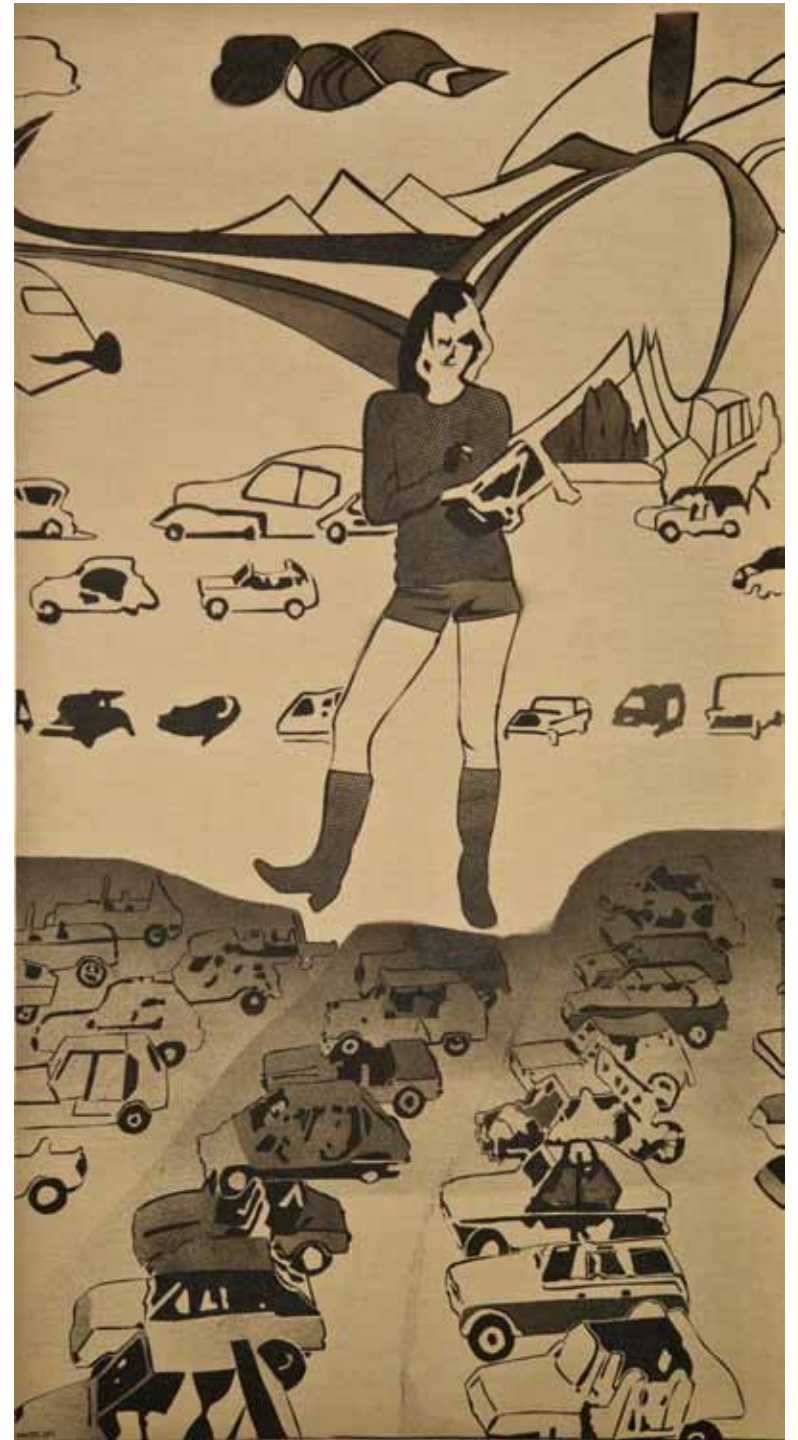


@  
2013  
ink and acrylic on paper  
120 x 248 cm



*Théâtre de la Vie*  
2013  
acrylic on canvas and collage  
106 x 196 cm

*Bio-Tech*  
2013  
acrylic on canvas  
196 x 106 cm



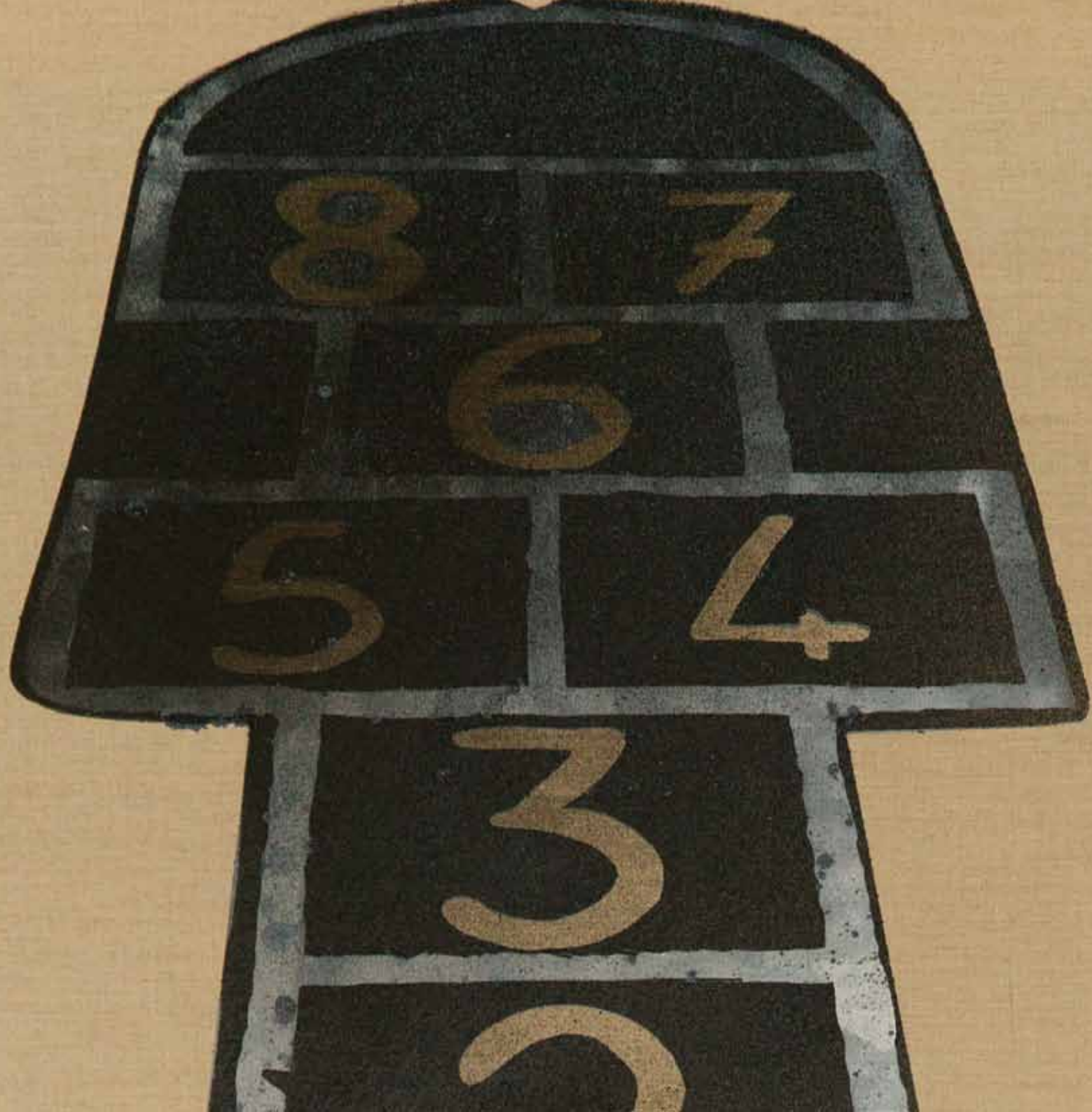


*Chaos*  
2013  
acrylic on canvas  
106 x 196 cm



*Immigration*  
2013  
acrylic on canvas  
106 x 196 cm





8

7

6

5

4

3

2

*Je Pense Ce Que Je Veux*  
2013  
acrylic on canvas  
196 x 106 cm



# 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.



