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Nadim Karam: *Shooting the Cloud* inaugurates Ayyam Gallery's London location

Shooting the Cloud showcases stunning new works by renowned Lebanese artist Nadim Karam. It marks a flawless beginning to Ayyam Gallery's endeavor to promote contemporary Middle Eastern artists in Europe. The artist provides a satirical commentary on love and war through his visually enticing paintings, drawings and metal sculptures. Not to be missed!

[Niamh Bhalla](#) 5th February 2013



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Ayyam Gallery's inaugural London exhibition, *Shooting the Cloud*, features works by renowned Lebanese artist, Nadim Karam. The small but impressive exhibition sets the tone for what promises to be a fresh offering to London's contemporary art scene. The intention of gallery owners Khaled and Hisham Samawi is to showcase contemporary artists from the Middle East in order to challenge popular conceptions of Middle Eastern Art. Its inconspicuous first floor location, accessed via a secure door and heralded only by a demure gold plaque, unfortunately means that only the conscientious art lover is likely to come across the cultural gems that lie within. Replete with the smell of fresh paint, the interior of this hidden gallery is somewhat edgier than its New Bond Street counterparts, and provides a perfect backdrop to the innovative works of Nadim Karam.

Ayyam Gallery

Until 9-Mar
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This series of works is a fusion of painting, drawing, writing and sculpture and a commentary on love and war straight from Karam's imaginative world. Karam has not left behind his large-scale works in preparing for this exhibition: the small metal sculptures included in the show explore a playful dreamlike world and recall his *Urban Toys* found in various cities across the world. Motifs within the works, like the recurring elephant, reverberate with the well-known pictorial language found in his large urban sculptures, like the stainless-steel elephants currently standing in the courtyard of the Arab World Institute in Paris. The extraordinary technical ability of the artist can now be viewed in small scale in these precise and delicately cut metal works. They are truly stunning.

One is immediately struck by the visual allure of the paintings/drawings. Dense glitter surrounds his sketchy childish figures with their bulging eyes, multiple limbs and gravity-defying hair. The use of glitter is surprisingly tasteful avoiding what could easily have been kitsch. Their bright vibrant colours bounce off the pristine surfaces of the sculptures alongside them.

Karam's personal experience of war-torn Lebanon is overtly present in the themes of the paintings. His works are aesthetically pleasing with subtle overtones of violence, destruction and the grotesque. The violence is dealt with in a childlike manner. The whimsical style and spontaneous playfulness of the works may at first appear to jar with the relative gravity of some of the themes attempted. One soon discerns that his satirical approach fittingly conveys the futility and absurdity of war which consumes the artist. The glitter and cartoonish faces of the figures make bizarre the bullets and tankers. The works exude the futility of war but also the possibility of hope. The use of bright colours and glitz overrides any sense of tragedy and seeks to denote the joy that can be found in life. There are also notes of hope found throughout in the recurring flowers and hearts which exist alongside the bullets and tankers. These works speak of peace, love and war.

We are invited into the fantasy world of the artist. His narratives occur in a childish, dreamlike manner where miniature tanks crawl up giant arms and figures play trumpets while seated on airplanes emitting bullets and flowers. It is this dreamlike state with its broken narratives and nonsensical compositions which contributes to a significant element of the surreal in his works. Recognisable elements of our world such as airplanes and tanks exist alongside his imaginary characters that float in immateriality leading to a mixture of dreams and reality. The merger



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insinuates the need to dream in the face of war, a theme explicitly spelled out in works such as *Planting the Dream* (2012). Despite originating in the imaginary world of the artist, the works still embody his response to the real world.

Ayyam Gallery is poised to bring a timely contribution to the European art world in providing a forum for cultural voices from the Middle East. This exhibition of the work of Nadim Karam is a flawless start to such an endeavor and one not to be missed.

Date reviewed: Tuesday 5th February 2013

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Nadim Karam 'Planting the Dream' 150 X 150 cm. Mixed Media on Canvas, 2012 © The Artist and Ayyam Gallery

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