

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Mohannad Orabi, *Profile Portraits*

Location: Ayyam Gallery Jeddah

Preview: 27 February 2013, 6-8pm

Dates: 27 February - 11 April 2013



Ayyam Gallery Jeddah is pleased to announce a solo exhibition by Syrian artist, Mohannad Orabi from 27 February - 11 April 2013. The exhibition will inaugurate the gallery's first location in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and will present new works by this important contemporary Middle-Eastern artist.

Orabi's embellished figures emanate a childlike innocence, reflecting his fascination with childhood experiences. In a response to the changing mood and turmoil in the region, the vibrant colouring and playfulness of his early work has gradually been replaced by an increasingly somber palette and expressive maturity. Where once his figures possessed otherworldly exaggerated features - bulky heads, expressionless and hollowed almond-shaped eyes, and full figures - they have become more clearly defined, with eyes that are noticeably marked with sadness. His characters are no longer able to remain divorced from events unfolding around them. Instead, they are now fully aware and firmly rooted in their tumultuous reality.

The artist was recently forced to leave Syria and is now based in Egypt. The works included in *Profile Portraits* were all created after Orabi left his home country, taking on a new poignancy in light of the fact that the artist must now communicate with friends and loved ones through social media out of necessity rather than choice. Used by many as an inconsequential social platform, Facebook has proved instrumental in disseminating information and mobilising people to action during the Arab Spring. It has allowed the flow of communication to continue without censorship, evolving from a simple brand into a revolutionary

tool. As the conflict in Syria escalates and the country faces an increasingly uncertain future, Orabi's sadness and anxiety at his displacement has given rise to a powerful and arresting body of work using Facebook as the source material.

Taking the Facebook profile pictures that friends have chosen to represent themselves as the basis for his new portraits, Orabi gives them a permanence they would not otherwise have, thereby extending the life of the digital image. Each face in the *Profile Portrait* series is partially obscured by a curtain of dots or circles; Orabi uses this patterned layer to create a barrier between one face and another, and between viewer and subject, echoing the glassy barrier of the computer screen when flicking through an endless stream of online images.

Working with and from memories, Orabi states that we become 'indirectly emotionally connected to these sites'. That each work shares the same title - *Profile Picture* - reinforces the uniformity bestowed on each identity by the social network. Wherever these people are in the world, their digital selves can exist here, suspended, for the artist to study and rework. Orabi is also fascinated in the ability of the profile pictures to function as a mood indicator and an idealised version of how people wish themselves to be perceived.

The curatorial programme of the Jeddah gallery will reflect that of Ayyam Gallery's existing locations in Damascus, Beirut, Dubai and London, showcasing established and emerging Middle Eastern artists with the aim of bringing the art of this significant region to a wider audience. In support of this endeavour Ayyam Gallery will also be launching the Shabab Ayyam competition to search for new artistic talent in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The competition is a continuation of the groundbreaking Shabab Ayyam Project, an incubator programme that since 2007 has nurtured the career of young artists in Syria, Lebanon and Dubai.

On Ayyam Gallery Jeddah, co-founder Hisham Samawi says: "*We have recently witnessed a revival of the Saudi art scene and a concurrent flourishing of international interest in Saudi artists. As was the case in Damascus, Ayyam Gallery's presence will help strengthen existing creative infrastructure to ensure the continued nurturing and success of Saudi artists*".

Born in Damascus in 1977, Mohannad Orabi currently lives and works Cairo. Orabi graduated from the Faculty of Fine Art in Damascus in 2000 and won the



first prize in The Syrian National Young Artists Exhibition in 2006. Solo exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz, Dubai (2009); Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2008), Zara Gallery, Amman (2007); and Ishtar Gallery, Damascus (2006, 2004).

Notes to Editors

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, such as Nadim Karam, Safwan Dahoul, Samia Halaby, Sadik Alfraji, Afshin Pirhashemi and Khaled Takreti. 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 January 2013, Ayyam Gallery launched a new space in London, with a second to open in Jeddah in late-February.

Exhibition Facts

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Location: Bougainvillea Center Jeddah, Third Floor, King's Road, Al-Shat'ta District, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

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