

PRESS RELEASE

Ayyam Gallery
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 Sun-Thu:
 10:00am-6:00pm
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Ali's Boat - (detail), 2015, video installation

Sadik Alfraji: *Driven by Storms (Ali's Boat)*

9 March – 30 April 2015

Sadik Alfraji in conversation with Nat Muller: Monday, 9 March at 7:00 PM

Opening reception and book launch: Monday, 9 March at 8:00 PM

Ayyam Gallery Dubai (Al Quoz) is pleased to announce *Driven by Storms (Ali's Boat)*, a solo exhibition by one of the most prominent Iraqi artists working in the diaspora today, Sadik Kwaish Alfraji. Much of Alfraji's oeuvre addresses the vulnerability of human existence and speaks of loss, exile, fragmentation, and displacement. Curated by Nat Muller, the show premieres an exciting new body of work the artist has grouped around the theme of 'Ali's Boat,' based on a drawing his young nephew, Ali, gave him on a family visit to Baghdad in 2009.

The exhibition includes a series of large-scale paintings, charcoal drawings, artist diary sketches, and stop motion video animation in which the artist blends his distinct aesthetics with that of his young nephew, and of his own children. The plight of a young boy wishing to escape the horrors of present-day Iraq is merged with the artist's own predicament as an exile, unable to return home. In a childlike style—made all the more poignant by the melancholy sadness and gravitas so characteristic of Alfraji's work—the pieces draw on crucial existential questions such as the wish to live in peace and security, the pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment, and the possibility to dream.

Alfraji shows us that life's journey is fraught with obstacles, much akin to the board game of snakes and ladders, which is a returning visual trope in the work. Whether Ali or Alfraji will reach their destination is unknown, the imaginary worlds the artist creates are filled with dark fairytales and wishful, but perilous, journeys. The storm referred to in the exhibition title is as much the violence in Iraq that propels Ali to leave, as it is Alfraji's tempestuous longing for the Baghdad of his childhood.

All works in *Driven by Storms* are created in black – Indian ink, charcoal, graphite pencil, black and white prints. Black is a color the artist feels intensifies the power of expression most, but it also freezes a moment and renders it timeless. As such Alfraji's project, deeply personal as it may be, transcends its geo-political specificity and becomes a universal quest for hope.

The opening of the exhibition will be accompanied by the launch of the first comprehensive monograph of the artist's thirty-year career, edited by curator and critic Nat Muller and with texts by, among others, cultural historian Shiva Balaghi.

The publication is designed by Huda Smitshuijzen–AbiFarès of the Khatt Foundation, and published by Schilt Publishing, Amsterdam.

This exhibition was made possible with financial support from the Mondriaan Fund.

About the Artist

Multimedia artist Sadik Alfraji explores what he describes as ‘the problem of existence’ through drawings, paintings, video animations, art books, graphic art, and installations. The shadowy protagonist who occupies Alfraji’s interdisciplinary works represents a black void, a filter that allows him to explore the intricacies of navigating the precarious nature of modern existence. By rendering his solitary figure as a charcoal-coloured silhouette and minimising the formal properties of his compositions, Alfraji captures the expressed movement and subtle inflections of the body in psychologically laden environments. The artist often records his own narrative in black and white depictions of his recurring character, particularly the loss, fragmentation, and lapses in time that underline the experience of exile.

Born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1960, Sadik Alfraji lives and works in Amersfoort, the Netherlands. He received a Bachelor of Fine Art in Painting and Plastic Art from the Academy of Fine Arts, Baghdad in 1987 and a High Diploma in Graphic Design from CHK Constantijn Huygens, Netherlands in 2000.

The artist’s recent solo shows include Beirut Exhibition Center (2014); Ayyam Gallery London (2013); Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2011); Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2011); Stads Gallery, Amersfoort, Netherlands (2010); Station Museum, Houston (2008); Stedelijk Museum, Den Bosch (2007). Selected group exhibitions for the artist include FotoFest Biennial, Houston (2014); Samsung Blue Square and Busan Museum of Art, South Korea (2014); Ikono On Air Festival, online and broadcasted (2013); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2012); Institut du Monde Arab (2012); Centro Cultural General San Martin, Buenos Aires (2012); Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Algiers (2011); and Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar (2010).

Alfraji’s works are housed in numerous private and public collections including the National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad; The Art Center, Baghdad; National Gallery of Fine Arts Amman; Shoman Foundation Amman; Royal Association of Fine Arts, Amman; Novosibirsk State Art Museum, Russia; and the Cluj-Napoca Art Museum, Romania; Los Angeles Country Museum; and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Alfraji was named Artist of the Year at the Esquire Middle East Awards in 2012.

About Ayyam Gallery

Founded in Damascus in 2006, Ayyam Gallery is recognised as a leading cultural voice in the region, representing a roster of Middle Eastern artists with an international profile and museum presence. Spaces in Beirut, Dubai, and London 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.

Exhibition Facts

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