

**PRESS RELEASE**

Ayyam Gallery  
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***Shurooq Amin: We'll Build This City on Art and Love***

13 November 2014 – 10 January 2015

Ayyam Gallery London

**Shurooq Amin in conversation with Khaled Samawi and Anthony Downey**

Wednesday, 12 November at 7:00 pm

**Opening reception and book launch**

Thursday, 13 November from 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Ayyam Gallery London is pleased to announce *We'll Build This City on Art and Love*, the forthcoming solo exhibition of Syrian-Kuwait artist Shurooq Amin. Recognised for her cutting-edge approach to painting, which combines diverse media in the creation of bold portraits, Amin is a prominent figure of the contemporary Kuwaiti art scene. In her latest body of work, the artist explores a wide range of social maladies, from child marriage in war-affected areas to the marginalisation of migrants in the Gulf, and the moral and material ramifications of stalled construction projects such as Silk City, which initially promised the revitalisation of Kuwait's infrastructure.

In *We'll Build This City on Art and Love* the artist employs materials as diverse as wood, reclaimed photographs, and Braille. Such formal accents are utilised with reference to individual histories while engaging tactile possibilities, and are brought together to expand Amin's chosen themes. Literary figures long admired by Amin, including Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani and British author Lewis Carroll, are among several influences that can be found in the visual motifs of her whimsical yet challenging works.

Works such as *Piece of the Pie: Who Stole the Tarts?* (2014), for example, comment on both the mismanaged state of political affairs in the Arab world, as well as the nature of modern social life in general. The painting depicts a young woman whose face is masked, as is customary for many of Amin's subjects, while she holds a finger to her lips, and a pie in another hand. As men bicker and fight over the largest slice of the pie, the young heroine grows tall like Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* until finally attaining an omnipresence of sorts. In the surreal scene, Amin's protagonist functions as a coquette while towering over the cast of men in a nod to a certain social soft power.

The artist's double portrait *The King of Hearts* (2014) shows a different view of love and life in the Arab world, as a couple is posed in a passionate embrace against a magnificent background of blossoming flowers, reflecting an equalised moment of passion. Such thematic dichotomies distinguish Amin's recent mixed media canvases, as she enters the intimate social spaces of her subjects.

Unique to this exhibition are sombre palimpsest works that bring together significant landmarks from Kuwaiti history, photographic remnants, and charcoal drawings. The build up of layers in the collage works prompts viewers to question the past in relation to the present, to imagine the future as related to the immediate. In covering a range of social issues, referring often to turbulent times and to dark subject matter, in *We'll Build This City on Art and Love* Amin's message is ultimately that of hope. Her central concern being how best to build sustainable relationships, societies, and systems so that the legacy we leave behind is that of strength in place of fracture or stagnation.

The exhibition will also mark the UK launch of a new monograph on Shurooq Amin with a conversation between the artist, Ayyam Gallery founder Khaled Samawi, and Anthony Downey, contemporary art scholar and Editor in Chief of *Ibraaz*.

### **About the Artist**

Born in Kuwait to a Syrian mother and a Kuwaiti father, Shurooq Amin is a leading interdisciplinary artist who is known for her provocative mixed media paintings. In addition to Amin's noteworthy career as a visual artist, she is a widely published, Pushcart Prize nominated poet, and holds a doctorate in Creative Writing and Ekphrasis from Warnborough College, England.

Utilising a postmodern approach to portraiture that combines photography and painting, Amin depicts her anonymous, multi-generational figures with humour and irony as she reveals the intrinsic contradictions of a conservative society built on hidden lives, collective denial, and widespread corruption. Exploring the cultural chasms of modern-day Arab society as it becomes increasingly escapist and steered by global consumerism and popular culture, Amin's works frequently return to one of the most universally taboo subjects: the traditional familial structure and the gender roles that maintain it.

Exhibiting since the mid 1990s, Amin's paintings are housed in public and private collections in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Her selected solo and group exhibitions include: Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2014); Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz, Dubai (2013); Lahd Gallery, London (2011); CAN, New York (2010); Tilal Gallery, Kuwait (2010); and International Cairo Art Biennale (2008).

In 2013, Amin was awarded the title of 'Artist of the Year' by the Arab Woman Awards, Kuwait chapter and was the first female Kuwaiti artist to be auctioned at Christie's in 2012. A retrospective of her work was featured in the biannual art journal, *Contemporary Practices: Visual Arts from the Middle East*.

### **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 muse-

um presence. Spaces in Beirut, Dubai, Jeddah, 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**

Exhibition Dates: 13 November 2014 - 10 January 2015

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