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[OVERVIEW](#) [ABOUT US](#) [LOCATIONS](#) [SERVICES](#) [VIDEOS](#) [OUR TEAM](#) [BOARD OF DIRECTORS](#) [MAGAZINE](#) **BLOGS** [CAREERS](#)[ACCESS](#) [LIFESTYLE](#) [COLLECTING](#)

## CULTURAL CROSSROADS

ROXANE ZAND | [EXPLORING THE ART OF THE MIDDLE EAST](#)

## Urban Toys, Urban Joys

BY: [ROXANE ZAND](#) | January 29, 2013 2:35 PM

Nadim Karam with his exhibition *Shooting the Cloud*, Ayyam Gallery London . Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Photo Susanne Hakuba.

LONDON - Every artist has a language. Few however have worked out a complete visual vocabulary in the same way as [Nadim Karam](#), one of the most talented and exciting artists of the Middle East. His solo show opened to a packed audience at the inauguration of [Ayyam Gallery's](#) Bond St. space on January 24. *Shooting the Cloud* was yet another triumph for an artist whose personal popularity rivals the public taste for his art - a unique pictorial vernacular he likes to call "urban toys." Replete with recurring symbols, this language has its own characters and narratives that form an 'alphabet of dreams.' At once both witty and tragic, his figures weave stories about today's world: military planes and guns are strewn randomly alongside joyful figurines that populate a reflective dreamscape.

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Installation view, Nadim Karam, *Shooting the Cloud*, Ayyam Gallery London . Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Photo Susanne Hakuba.

I met Nadim about eight years ago in Dubai where he was a speaker at one of the first-ever panels on art in that city. The panel was part of a larger conference on the Arab world where a handful of die-hards like myself stayed until the very end to hear him speak. It was a decision none of us regretted. As articulate in person as in his iconic polished-steel sculptures, Nadim transports people into his universe. Always ready with images of his latest projects and sketches, meeting up with him is a bit like opening a special present: there is bound to be an intake of breath the minute he shows off a new concept or one of his engaging drawings. For me, the best works remain his sculptures, although his installations and architectural works, as well as his paintings, carry his trademark energy, playfulness and whimsy.



Nadim Karam, *Flying Elephant*. Edition of 8, 2011 . Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery.

On Thursday night, unprecedented queues of people outside the gallery demonstrated both the quality and draw of the artist, as well as the strong appetite in London for receiving good quality art from the Middle East. Syrian-born co-owners and collectors **Khaled** and **Hisham Samawi**, whose untiring efforts to bring Middle Eastern art to an international audience have clearly succeeded, now boast four galleries: Damascus, Dubai, Beirut, London (and soon Jeddah). Barely tired after the opening, the Samawis hosted 150 people for a most exquisite after-dinner, where collectors from around the world had come together to celebrate this special occasion. It was a night to remember!

Nadim's exhibition was also featured on the BBC World Service arts programme *The Strand*. An interview with the artist can be heard on the podcast edition of the show [here](#) or downloaded from iTunes (26 January episode). The relevant section is about 35 minutes in, but the entire show also has a fascinating piece on the Jaipur literary festival.

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Posted in [Exhibitions](#), [Galleries](#), [London](#), [Middle East and India](#)

<a href="#">Andrew Fletcher(4)</a>	<a href="#">Anthony Barzilay Freund(4)</a>
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<a href="#">Axel Stein(2)</a>	<a href="#">Ben Luke(2)</a>
<a href="#">Beth Iskander(1)</a>	<a href="#">Bridget Moriarity(3)</a>
<a href="#">Charles Saumarez Smith(1)</a>	<a href="#">Chin Yeow Quek(1)</a>
<a href="#">Chris Mahoney(2)</a>	<a href="#">Christian House(1)</a>
<a href="#">Claire Adler(7)</a>	<a href="#">Claude Piening(4)</a>
<a href="#">Daniela Mascetti(1)</a>	<a href="#">Daryn Schnipper(2)</a>
<a href="#">David Bennett and Daniela Mascetti (2)</a>	<a href="#">David D'Arcy(2)</a>
<a href="#">David Goldthorpe(3)</a>	<a href="#">David Norman(4)</a>
<a href="#">Denise Bethel(3)</a>	<a href="#">Elaine Whitmire(1)</a>
<a href="#">Elizabeth Gorayeb(2)</a>	<a href="#">Emily Bierman(1)</a>
<a href="#">Erica Barrish(2)</a>	<a href="#">Eveline van Oirschot(1)</a>
<a href="#">Filippo Lotti(1)</a>	<a href="#">Florent Jeanniard(1)</a>
<a href="#">Gabriel Heaton(2)</a>	<a href="#">Gabriella Mantegani(1)</a>
<a href="#">Godfrey Barker(1)</a>	<a href="#">Harold Yeo(4)</a>
<a href="#">Harry Dalmeny(2)</a>	<a href="#">Henry Wyndham(3)</a>
<a href="#">Hugh Hildesley(24)</a>	<a href="#">Isabelle Paagman(1)</a>
<a href="#">Ishrat Kanga(2)</a>	<a href="#">James Reginato(6)</a>
<a href="#">James Sevier(7)</a>	<a href="#">James Zemaitis(2)</a>
<a href="#">Jamie Niven(1)</a>	<a href="#">Jamie Ritchie(13)</a>
<a href="#">Jeanne Calmont(1)</a>	<a href="#">Jessica Yakubowicz(7)</a>
<a href="#">Jo Vickery(2)</a>	<a href="#">Jonathan Hills(1)</a>
<a href="#">Jonathan Wong(2)</a>	<a href="#">Julia Girard(1)</a>
<a href="#">Julie Belcove(5)</a>	<a href="#">Katie Hunt(1)</a>
<a href="#">Kevin Ching(4)</a>	<a href="#">Lisa Dennison(34)</a>
<a href="#">Lisa Hubbard(4)</a>	<a href="#">Lucila Portoraro(1)</a>
<a href="#">Malcolm Cossons(2)</a>	<a href="#">Maria Bonta de la Pezuela(2)</a>
<a href="#">Mark Poltimore(3)</a>	<a href="#">Matthew Dennison(1)</a>
<a href="#">Michael Macaulay(8)</a>	<a href="#">Morissa Wagner Szymt(1)</a>
<a href="#">Nathalie Marieloni(1)</a>	<a href="#">Oliver Barker(4)</a>
<a href="#">Pamela Fiori(1)</a>	<a href="#">Philip Errington(1)</a>
<a href="#">Philip Hook(3)</a>	<a href="#">Pierre Etienne(1)</a>
<a href="#">Pierre Mothes(1)</a>	<a href="#">Piers Gough(1)</a>
<a href="#">Polly Sartori(1)</a>	<a href="#">Press Office(40)</a>
<a href="#">Priyanka Mathew(1)</a>	<a href="#">Rachel Potts(12)</a>
<a href="#">Roxane Zand(37)</a>	<a href="#">Serena Sutcliffe(22)</a>
<a href="#">Sian Folley(1)</a>	<a href="#">Simon Shaw(1)</a>
<a href="#">Sotheby's(51)</a>	<a href="#">Sotheby's Paris(9)</a>
<a href="#">Sotheby's London(0)</a>	<a href="#">Stephen Roe(1)</a>
<a href="#">Ted Loos(40)</a>	<a href="#">Thomas Phongsathorn(2)</a>
<a href="#">Tim Marlow(4)</a>	<a href="#">Vivienne Chow(1)</a>
<a href="#">Zadok Ben-David(6)</a>	

CATEGORIES

<a href="#">Art Fairs(10)</a>	<a href="#">Auctions(5)</a>
<a href="#">Celebrities(1)</a>	<a href="#">Connoisseurship(2)</a>
<a href="#">Contemporary Art(1)</a>	<a href="#">Doha(1)</a>
<a href="#">Events(14)</a>	<a href="#">Exhibitions(18)</a>
<a href="#">Galleries(10)</a>	<a href="#">Houston(1)</a>

<a href="#">Istanbul(1)</a>	<a href="#">London(26)</a>
<a href="#">Los Angeles(1)</a>	<a href="#">Middle East and India(32)</a>
<a href="#">Museums(8)</a>	<a href="#">New York(1)</a>
<a href="#">Paris(2)</a>	<a href="#">Philanthropy(3)</a>
<a href="#">San Francisco(1)</a>	

[Sotheby's Home](#) > [Inside Sotheby's](#) > [Blogs](#) > [Access](#) > [Cultural Crossroads](#) > [2013](#) > [01](#) > [Urban Toys, Urban Joys](#)

[back to top](#)

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[HELP](#)

[SITE MAP](#)

[SHARE](#)

[PRIVACY](#)

[SECURITY](#)

[TERMS & CONDITIONS](#)

[PRESS](#)

[INVESTOR RELATIONS](#)

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