

SYRIA'S APEX GENERATION



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Nihad Al Turk
Othman Moussa
Mohannad Orabi
Kais Salman

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Curated by Maymanah Farhat

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9 June - 2 August, 2014

Ayyam Gallery Dubai (Alserkal Avenue)

9 June - 2 August, 2014

Ayyam Gallery Dubai (DIFC)

12 June - 2 August, 2014

Ayyam Gallery Beirut

Syria's Apex Generation highlights post-uprising art as an introduction to the rich history of painting in Syria. Featuring the works of Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik, Nihad Al Turk, Othman Moussa, Mohannad Orabi, and Kais Salman, the exhibition and its accompanying publication explore a new school of painting in the midst of expansion despite the disintegration of the Damascus art scene, its original centre. Building on the aesthetic currents set in motion by pioneers in the late 1950s, the included painters navigate the magnitude of the Syrian conflict with allegory, satire, and realism in works that hint at the influence of preceding modern and contemporary artists such as Louay Kayyali, Fateh Moudarres, Moustafa Fathi, Saad Yagan, and Safwan Dahoul. Informed by extensive traditions of expressionism, symbolism, and abstraction, this burgeoning group has forged ahead with the creative objectives of their predecessors, who advocated the social relevance of art.

Majdal Al-Beik, Al Turk, Moussa, Orabi, and Salman were first brought together through the Shabab Ayyam incubator program for young artists in 2007 and quickly became part of a tight-knit intellectual circle that was crucial to their development. Today, although scattered between Damascus, Beirut, and Dubai, they are collectively extending the boundaries of representation and perceived functions of art that have shaped Syrian visual culture for over sixty years.



A Creative Upsurge, Syrian Art Today

Maymanah Farhat

Since the start of the uprising in 2011, art has become integral to navigating the enormity of the Syrian conflict. For many artists reflecting on this time, the renewed status of visual culture—most profoundly felt in the abundance of digital media—has presented new challenges to the subjective domain of artistic production. Engaged in the fate of their country as dissidents, witnesses, and cultural interventionists, Syrian artists have openly questioned the role of art at every turn, publically discussing the ways in which form and representation can be used to communicate the consequent realities of war. Debates immediately surfaced and continue in the cultural pages of periodicals, on social media, in organised talks, and among the various circles now based throughout the Arab world.

Syrian artists have forever advocated the social relevance of art; a conception put forth in the early twentieth century by painters such as Tawfik Tarek (1875-1940), who established the first independent art studio open to the public. Syrian art reached several critical junctures in the decades that followed, and as the country faced transformative events its artists collectively recognised the shape-shifting capacity of visual culture. Through its progressive stages styles were set aside when breakthroughs were made and resonant traditions materialised. Before the present day realists, expressionists, and symbolists (satirists, subversives, philosophers, grieverers, and optimists) there were the pioneers. Contemporary Syrian art reflects a creative upsurge that is nearly a century in the making.

In order to understand the era-defining period currently underway a historical reading of Syria's predominant medium is necessary. Many of the intellectual debates of today resemble the dialectical processes that have guided Syrian art since easel painting was introduced towards the end of Ottoman Rule.

Modern Beginnings

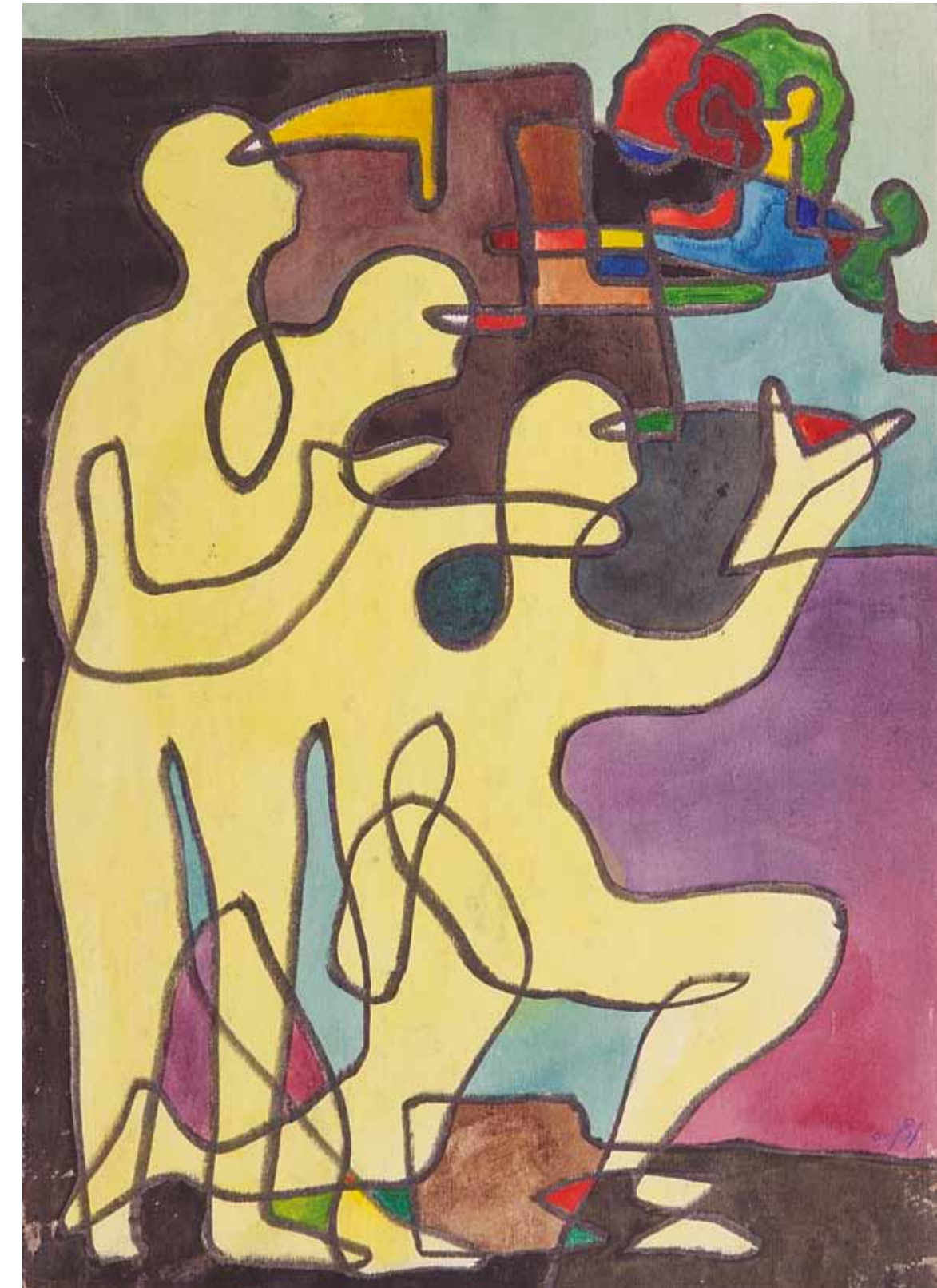
Although the country's formative period in art occurred between the start of the 1950s and the late 1960s, early innovators such as Michel Kurche (1900-73), Mahmoud Jalal (1911-75), Nazem al-Jaafari (b. 1918), and Naseer Chaura (1920-92) laid the foundation for mid-century modernists by defying the constraints of late Ottoman sensibilities and the cultural dictates of French colonialism, which produced a backlog of historical painting, Orientalist-informed genre scenes, and romantic portraits. Artists eventually outgrew these styles, opting instead for naturalistic renderings and the plein-air techniques and manipulation of colour and light of the Impressionists that were the stepping-stones to modern art. Under the French Mandate a small group of artists were sent to study in Paris, including Michel Kurche; others like Mahmoud Jalal traveled to Rome; and just before independence Nasser Chaura and Nazem al-Jaafari trained in Cairo.¹

While the influence of European artistic methods is evident in the work of this time perhaps a more significant fact is that as Syria transitioned into nationhood, artists adopted a tonality in palette and overall emphasis on brushwork, thus communicating the interconnectedness of subjects with their surroundings. Whereas historical paintings and Orientalist compositions depict settings as static backdrops to staged scenes and classical portraiture focuses on rendering idealised physicality, this new approach sought intimate views: the lived realities of Syria. With understated expressiveness and the subdued hues of the country's terrain, they painted cities, villages, and ancient sites, focusing on the rhythms of landscapes and the energy of street scenes. Figures and objects were rendered in portraits and still lifes with painterly treatments matching that of their environments, alluding to an intuitive sense of place felt across Syria's diverse communities. This commitment to local subject matter continued into the modern period.

A 1951 painting by Adham Ismail (1923-63) is identified as the landmark work that confirmed the integration of modernist art modes.² Within the vertical composition of *The Porter* are stylistic details outlining the subsequent course of Syrian art. At the time of creating the historic painting, Ismail had been experimenting with the delineation of space found in Arabesques and the fluid line work of Arabic calligraphy. An untitled mixed media work on paper created in 1950 shows the preparatory exercises that would lead Ismail to develop his larger oil on canvas paintings. In *The Porter* the curvature of these line-based forms enclose small areas of matte colour that make up the bodies of figures, unifying their different shapes. A large staircase diagonally divides the composition, and as the main protagonist ascends to an unknown location he crosses over the corpses (or perhaps spirits) of others. Although the labourer climbs with resolve, his muscular body folds under the weight of a parcel strapped to his back. This Sisyphean scene is contrasted with vertical blocks of colour, which fade from dark to light, indicating the silhouette of a metropolis in the distance.

The Porter anticipates the major shift in aesthetics that would come just a few years later when artists began to earnestly depict the country's disenfranchised population. The painting's expressionist take on the measured build of Islamic art simultaneously confirmed that modern styles could be derived from the region's artistic traditions, particularly through a reconsideration of precursors to the deconstruction of figuration and the reinterpretation of space found in modern art. Further explorations in form motivated several artists to abandon naturalism and the illusionist perspective of classical painting. Palettes were injected with bold colour and abstraction entered compositions as a way of offsetting stylised subjects.

By the end of the decade a new generation had emerged. As these painters popularised modernist styles their impact was amplified with the expansion of the local art scene. The creation of a new wing devoted to Syrian art at the National Museum of Damascus in 1956 and the formation of the Faculty of Fine Arts in 1960, which remains the preeminent art school in the country, provided crucial institutional backing. Elsewhere, artists taught in secondary schools or opened studios offering instruction when academic training was unavailable. Art criticism began to shape cultural discourse while art associations gained in importance with the efforts of painters and sculptors who exhibited during the French Mandate and remained active after independence. One such artist was Nasser Chaura, who created the Society of Art Lovers with fellow Impressionist Michel Kurche in 1951 after opening the Damascus art hub Atelier Veronese with painter Mahmoud Hammad a decade before. Joining the Faculty of Fine Arts as a founding member of the institution's teaching staff, Chaura influenced at least two generations of artists and worked alongside Nazem Al-Jaafari, Mahmoud Jalal, and Adham Ismail, among others, during a thirty-year tenure.



Adham Ismail, *Untitled*, 1950, Mixed media on paper, 32.5 x 23.5 cm

Social Realism, Expressionism, and Modernist Form

Although local painting adopted the usual path of modern art by the early 1960s, splitting between various schools of figuration and abstraction, an informal social realist phase just prior left a permanent mark on the Syrian imagination. Some historians have linked the motivation for this aesthetic thread to the cultural renaissance that orbited the Arab world's mid-century political sphere.³ Others have highlighted the biographical details that might have led certain artists to identify with commonplace or downtrodden subjects. While both theories are historically accurate, what is also revealing is that a number of the period's artists studied in Egypt or Italy as significant social realist movements were underway; seminal among them were Adham Ismail, Fateh Moudarres (1922-99), Mahmoud Hammad (1923-98), Mamdouh Kashlan (b. 1929), and Louay Kayyali (1934-78). In Syria, brief trials with such imagery established a standard for engaging social concerns and addressing political issues or conflicts—a strand of realism that can be detected in decades of art regardless of style, technique, or time period. Bertolt Brecht's criterion for realism in literature, which urged 'making possible the concrete, and making possible abstraction from it,' can also be applied to artworks like *The Porter*, which revolutionised Syrian art. Since the modern period, numerous Syrian artists have reflected Brecht's call for 'discovering the causal complexes of society'.⁴

The modernists introduced what is identified as 'effective form,' an approach to depicting reality that harnesses the plasticity of painting as a necessary source of ambiguity. Max Raphael first defined effective form in his 1941 essay *Toward an Empirical Theory of Art*, which argues that a work of art must not be created as an autonomous object based on a real-life model but should instead activate a sensory process of perception through the merger of form and content, objectivity and subjectivity. Revealing the material and temporal dimensions of context, effective form allows the viewer to 'produce in himself the full import of the work, to renew it again and again.' Here it is worth noting that for Raphael context (or 'the given situation') contains the conflicted union of 'a personal psychic experience and a sociohistorical condition,' which is further problematised by the artist.⁵

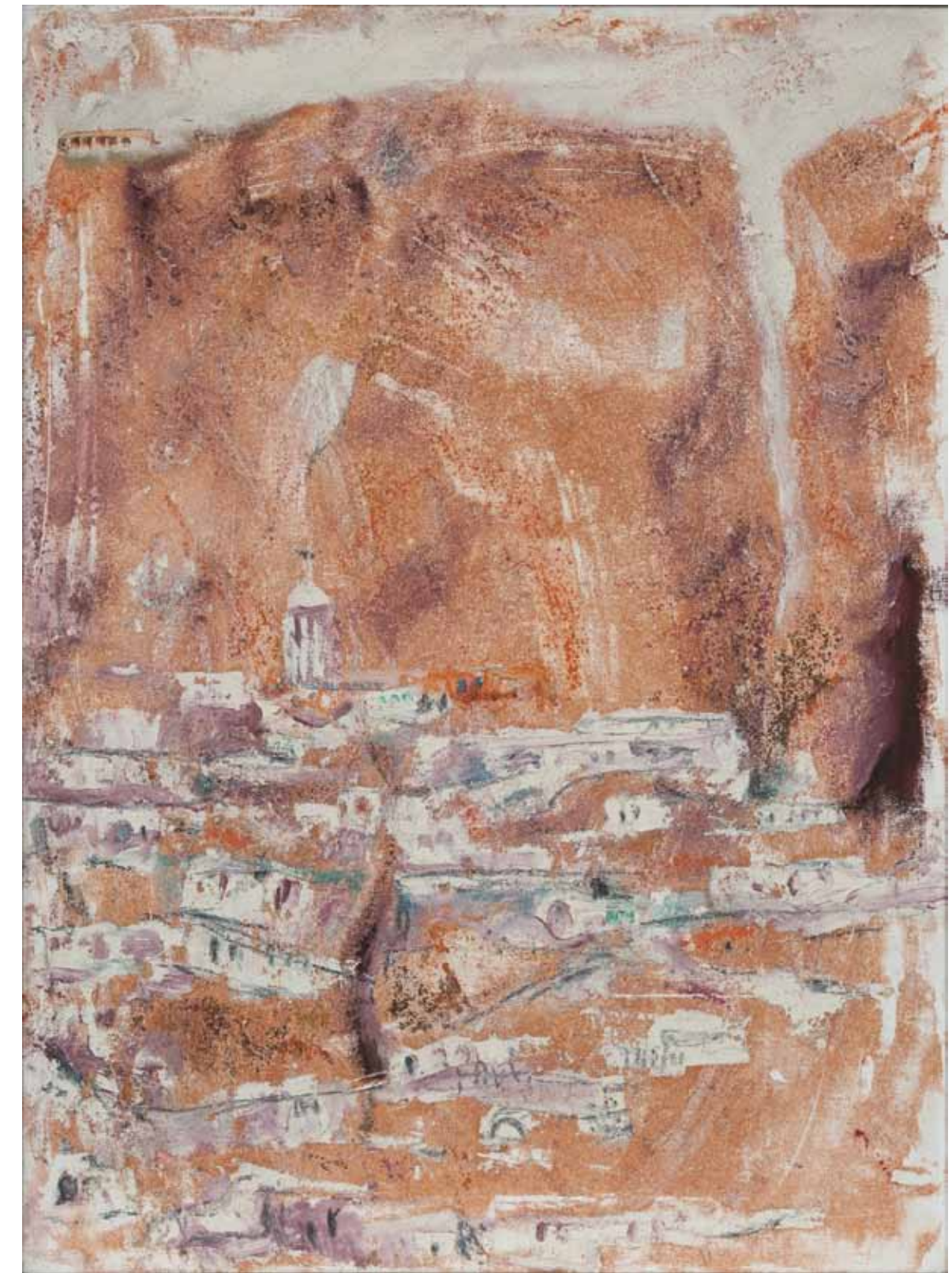
Painters Fateh Moudarres and Louay Kayyali typified this approach in their respective oeuvres despite contrasting aesthetics. After an interest in Surrealism and a momentary departure into abstraction while at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome from 1954 to 1960, Moudarres turned to ancient sculpture and bas-relief when modeling the protagonists of his paintings. With the hollow eyes of Sumerian figurines, the angular headdresses of Assyrian rulers, and the visible outlines of Byzantine icons, his figures embody the continuum of a culture shaped over millennia. He further emphasised this connection by affixing his subjects to their surroundings through tactile brushwork and unified colour schemes inspired by the red-earth scenery of his ancestral village outside Aleppo. In the artist's youth, the natural environs of the village embosomed him as a place of solace and discovery after his father was killed during a land dispute and his Kurdish mother was left to raise him in poverty.⁶



Fateh Moudarres, *Women at the Wedding*, 1963, Oil and sand on canvas, 115 x 124.5 cm

Asaad Arabi describes Moudarres' works as stretching from the unconscious, particularly sites of memory, with alienated subjects ranging from the naïve and expressive to the secular and mythical.⁷ Situated in compact, non-descript settings or against sweeping landscapes in which sky and earth collide without horizon line, the modernist's statuesque figures are crowned the queens and kings of a congruous existence. Often appearing in units, the women and children, large families, and small communities of his paintings fluently move between the natural, spiritual, and mythological realms of Northern Syria. Writing on the artist shortly after his death in 1999, Abdulrahman Munif observed that Moudarres' paintings vary between 'martyrdom, crucifixion, and departure.'⁸ The artist's experience of displacement, initially from the countryside to Aleppo and later to Damascus amid the agricultural crisis of the 1960s, heightened his awareness of class struggle and the underside of a society encumbered by the machinations of power. This emerged as a central theme in his many years of painting, most acutely during periods of militarised conflict in the Arab world. According to Munif, the summation of Moudarres' work constituted a rebellion.

In Moudarres' canvases vigorous strokes and densely painted areas of colour are rendered in a manner similar to the automatic brushwork of Abstract Expressionism and its European parallel Art Informel. The post-war movements sought to activate subconscious creation by borrowing from the lessons of Surrealism. Louay Kayyali stood as Moudarres' formal polar opposite with a comparatively subdued execution of his subjects, whose soft-edged bodies are delicately shaped with thin black lines. Although an accomplished draftsman prior to arriving in Rome, Kayyali's style was refined at the city's Academy of Fine Arts. The younger artist alternated between lightly shaded areas of colour and slightly textured surfaces, making the focus of his compositions their rounded forms. Kayyali's method of envisioning his subjects as sequences of lines and curves given volume through temperate tonal variations stems from the influence of Early Italian Renaissance painting, the direct evidence of which is found in his recurrent adaptation of Madonna imagery. He first experimented with this approach to figuration—which brings to mind the frescoes of Giotto—while in Italy in the late 1950s. Visiting Syria as he neared the end of his artistic training, he began to foresee how such stylisation could be used to engender art as a form of social discourse.



Fateh Moudarres, *Maaloula*, 1974, Mixed media on canvas, 75 x 55 cm

Like Moudarres, Kayyali viewed Syria as ‘two contradictory societies’ divided between the concentration of wealth in the cities and the concurrent marginalisation of rural villages.⁹ Indicating the global popularity of Social Realism at the time, specifically among artists working in formerly colonised nations, Kayyali joined the broader movement of modernist painting that placed disenfranchised subjects as contemporaneous icons of political struggle. Although his figures are dignified, the Syrian painter avoided romanticising their lives; in order to project ‘the refusal of the given social condition,’ as Kayyali advocated, art must ‘look objectively.’¹⁰ The fatigue and alienation of his solitary protagonists often register the experiences of impoverished workers and their neglected communities, recalling the motifs of Italian Neorealism. The artist frequently utilised the physical limitations of the picture plane to establish the mood of his portraits; as his models are rendered with imposing stature, the borders of the composition simultaneously frame them in isolation against vacant backgrounds. In 1959 Kayyali painted a self-portrait with an austere conceptualisation of space as an affecting detail. Depicted in the clothes of a worker, his slender form appears bent, depleted, and trapped by the narrow dimensions of its Masonite board. Emulating the aged quality of frescoes, Kayyali applied several layers of medium over roughly prepared gesso then reworked the surface of the painting to expose its lower layers.



Louay Kayyali, *Self Portrait*, 1959, Oil on Masonite, 116 x 48 cm

Kayyali's investigation of the allegorical potential of historical forms is also visible in the prophetic painting *Then What?* (1965). In the large-scale work huddled women and children encircle a lone male figure. Facing the viewer and paused in uncertainty, they appear in mid journey. The painting's central protagonist is shown with convex posture; the contortion of his body signaling exhaustion, defeat, or despair, as he is loosely rendered and defined by slack lines. A female figure behind him gazes towards the sky, stretching in fear at the sight of something overhead. This focal point pairing resembles Masaccio's shell-shocked Adam and Eve in the fresco panel *The Expulsion from Paradise* (1427).¹¹ Kayyali extends the drama of this familiar scene, creating an explicit association with the biblical narrative.

Undoubtedly representing a displaced people captured in a moment of escape, *Then What?* evokes the ongoing plight of Palestinian refugees, a subject previously addressed by Mahmoud Hammad and Adham Ismail in 1958 and 1960, respectively. When painting *The Refugees* Ismail substituted atmospheric washes, naturalist portraiture, and deliberate strokes for his signature expressionist lines and sectional colour fields. Ismail's style adjustments reveal the type of formal demands that were considered when artists approximated the zones of catastrophe.



Louay Kayyali, *Then What?*, 1965, Oil on canvas, 172 x 190 cm



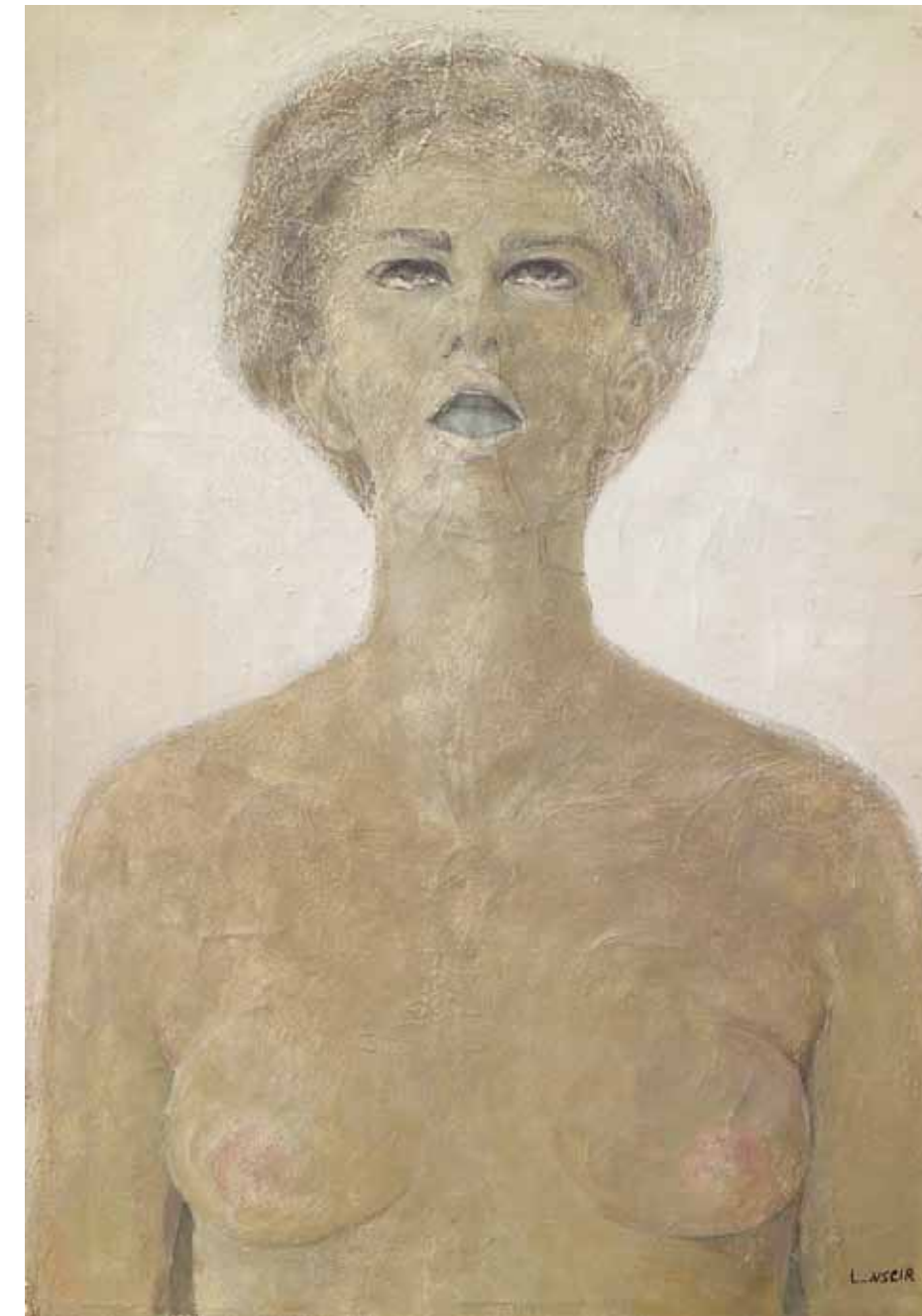
Adham Ismail, *The Refugees*, 1960, Oil on canvas, 65 x 85 cm

For the Sake of the Cause

When Kayyali addressed such themes he released the bodies of his figures from the solidity of careful outlines that canonised pensive mothers, fishermen, street vendors, and shoeshine boys. Without losing the apparent monumentality he applied throughout, he exited the stillness of daily life to enter the chaos of war. In 1967 he finalised a series of charcoal and mixed media works titled *For the Sake of the Cause*, which were exhibited at the Arab Cultural Center in Damascus and later toured the country. Shown in dark fatalistic scenes, men and women are caught in cataclysmic violence, or else visibly tormented by the fear of an anticipated fate. According to biographical accounts, the artist began the series in 1966 as a general exploration of the forlorn state of modern man.¹² Critics and artists disparaged the work, deeming it excessively pessimistic. Kayyali was deeply affected by this unforeseen response and sunk into depression, destroying most of the series. Thereafter, he ceased to produce art for several years. When he returned to painting in the early 1970s, he focused on the emotive impact of colour and enhanced the robustness of his figures.

The political debacle of the Six Day War tested the parameters of visual culture and changed the course of Syrian art. Notwithstanding the overstated reaction to the social realist's emphatically political works, the setback of 1967 led artists to resuscitate the utility of art through experimentation. Abstracted space, viscous brushwork, assertive markings, and densely textured surfaces are but a few of the formal attributes characterising this new direction.

Like Kayyali, Leila Nseir (b. 1941) prefigured the turn in Syrian art that would come as regional political tensions boiled over. A 1965 self-portrait shows the artist disrobed while gasping for air, or perhaps screaming, into nothingness, as her nude torso suggests a moment of vulnerability. Nseir's exposed body is executed in a muted palette with reserved line work that points to the influence of ancient Egyptian art.¹³ The visual impact of such simplified forms causes the viewer to rest their gaze on the sculptural figure that stands before them. Gradations in colour guide the eye upward, beginning at Nseir's softened shoulders before arriving to her troubled expression. The transgressive nature of the self-portrait is manifold. Its withdrawn appearance, which is achieved with a lack of warm hues, implies the image of a departing body or a woman attempting to break free from a constrictive environment. Moreover, by painting herself with such disconcerting intensity, Nseir disrupts the traditional portrayal of the female nude, ridding it of sensual or maternal triggers.

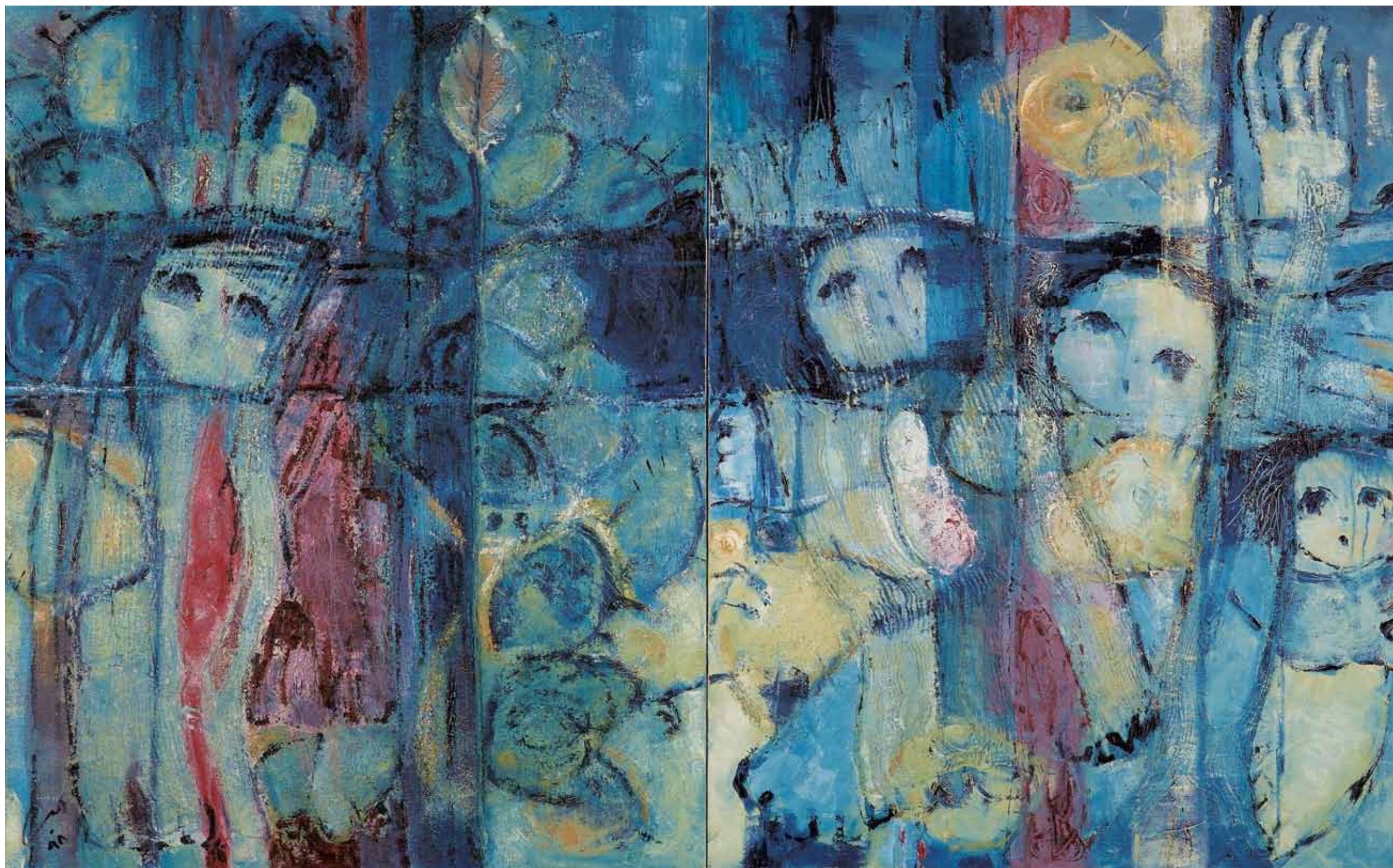


Leila Nseir, *Self Portrait*, 1965, Oil on canvas, 56 x 39 cm

When the conflagration of 1967 erupted, those at the start of their careers such as Elias Zayat (b. 1935), Nazir Nabaa (b. 1938), Ghassan Sebai (b. 1939), Leila Nseir, Asaad Arabi (b. 1941), and Asma Fayoumi (b. 1943) were positioned to lead the transition of local painting from modernist modes to contemporary methodologies. Yet for some, the unanticipated outcome of the war and the ongoing deterioration of the Syrian political situation complicated this process, requiring a new form of objectivity. Asma Fayoumi, who entered the Syrian art scene with abstract paintings guided by her time at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus, cites the social exigencies of an era seized by war as the determining factor for her sudden switch to figuration and the expressionist style that consequently distinguished her oeuvre.¹⁴ Others of this cusp generation proceeded with recognisable styles informed by Syrian cultural signifiers. By placing recurring figures within the desolation of ravaged settings, however, the symbolic worlds of these modern topographers were transformed into the psychological landscapes of war.



Nazir Nabaa, *Napalm*, 1967, Oil on canvas, 115 x 70 cm



Asma Fayoumi, *Qana I*, 1998, Mixed media on canvas, 80 x 130 cm

In Nazir Naba'a's *Napalm* (1967) a distressed nude woman screams as the thew of her body is stretched to its outermost limits. Shrouded in an infernal light that swallows the earth around her, she appears to belong to the artist's mythology-inspired series of goddesses. Although indistinguishable if she is captured in the moment before or after a chemical attack, the fraught contortion of her face and body are frozen in an instance of suspended time. Naba'a later reproduced his martyred heroine in a similar pose in a painting titled *Bahr el Baker School* (1970), which depicts the Israeli bombing of a site in Egypt that killed dozens of children. Sheltering a pair of boys who crouch in fear, she thrusts her body upward as a building collapses and wreckage rains down. When depicting the havoc of the scene, Naba'a employed a cubo-futurist configuration of space that captures the moments before their fatal end, the terror of which is magnified through geometric implosion.

Expressionist techniques were utilised by painters who searched for reflective ways to negotiate the fallout of war and the political crises that ensued. Fragmented into rectangular squares of differing shapes, Asaad Arabi's *Migration to Quneitra* (1973) depicts the path of anonymous figures as they move across the foreground of an abstracted scene. Executed in earth tones accentuated by warm hues of reds and gold, their thickly painted bodies appear to melt into their environmental passageway. The title of the composition references the short-lived recapture of a town in the occupied Golan Heights during the October War. Displaying the artist's gradual move towards non-objective art that would culminate in geometric abstraction several years later, the painting relies on the construction of space in order to invert it, which Arabi views as a pretext to enter the 'intuitive internality' of things. Although faceless, the roughly rendered migrants seem to walk with a solemn pace of apprehension.

Evident in the art of the time is a cathartic form of bearing witness, allowing viewers to confront what is unnamable but nevertheless experiential. To achieve such visual profundity artists modified the aesthetic bases of modern Syrian painting, which by then were steeped in symbolism, allegory, and stylisation. A modernist perception of form that communicates movement across time is extended into an existentialist double portrait in Ghassan Sebai's *Fear* (1977). Engulfed by a nameless force, the protagonists of Sebai's composition are painted with cubist renditions of materiality, allowing the shapes of their bodies to appear in motion as they draw close in search of relief. Overcome by fright, the stout figures are broken into abstracted spaces of colour.

As further turmoil marked the decades that followed, artists assumed the task of routing psychic exits as they passed through an abject state of isolation.



Ghassan Sebai, *Fear*, 1977, Oil on canvas, 80 x 60 cm

Interior Isolation, Exterior Deformation

When Syria's political climate became increasingly bleak in the 1980s, artists mined 'the given social condition' through unrestrained approaches. Marking the height of Syrian Expressionism, colour reached unprecedented concentrations of radiance, although palettes remained tinted with undercoats of black, and seismic lines began to shudder with the fragile loci of human subjects. At the centre of Syria's final phase in art of the twentieth century were explorations of the body, particularly deformation as a metaphor for veiled turbulence. In contrast to protagonists patterned after the muscular frames of ancient prototypes or the elegant contours of saints, the figure in Syrian art became disproportionate, fragile, and transitory.

In *The Logic of Sensation*, a treatise on the paintings of Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze proposes that deformation as an artistic vehicle is always static, occurring at a single position, as it 'subordinates movement to force.'¹⁵ As Deleuze further maintains, 'deformation is obtained in the form at rest; and at the same time, the whole material environment, the structure, begins to stir.'

Alongside varying degrees of altered physicality, space is critical to conveying the 'invisible and insensible forces' that impact the body and lead to its transformation.

As Syria experienced a period of severe isolation in the 1990s, seclusion became a common theme for a number of artists, most visibly for Saad Yagan (b. 1944) and Safwan Dahoul (b. 1961), whose elongated, contorted subjects are confined to solitary interiors. Nazir Ismail (b. 1949) relied on irregular forms in shadowy figures that appear as phantoms of former selves; in the absence of mouths, his mask-like faces remain silent. Artists seeking to make broader statements about the human condition and the general corrosion of social institutions included Ali Moukawas (b. 1955) and Ahmad Moualla (b. 1958), who painted masses of frenzied bodies that overwhelm allegorical scenes. While malformed figures also appear in the works of sculptors such as Assem El Bacha (b. 1948) and Mustafa Ali (b. 1959), the dimensional limitations of painting proved critical as conceptual apertures to enclosed sites.



Nazir Ismail, *Untitled*, 2008, Mixed media on paper, 35 x 100 cm

A precedent for this take on deformation can be traced to Germany-based painter Marwan Kassab Bachi (b. 1934) whose paintings allude to exile as a palpable rupture. Working in Berlin since the late 1950s, Marwan's early expressionist portraits capture the misshapen body as ingress to the psyche. Full-length pictures acquire grotesque accents as subjects are paused just before apparent disintegration.

The émigré's later paintings of collapsed heads frequently include elements of self-portraiture and seem to possess traces of earth as a reference to Syrian landscapes.¹⁶ A 1985 etching by the artist titled *Head* shows an enlarged face layered with mounds of markings. Hidden beneath a surface resembling arid soil, its features are nearly indistinguishable. The slender apparition occupies the expanse of the composition, destabilising the viewer's perception of spatial depth.

In the ethereal works of Saad Yagan weary men appear physically impaired by the arduous passage of time as they assemble at sparse cafés. Their shoulders mirror receding expressions as sunken faces are near carbon copies with the exception of slight variations. Triangular shadows cut across arrangements of single patrons, pairs, or small groups in interiors that are painted in shades of blue but anchored by select areas of flame-colour reds. A single opening to the outside world provides just enough light to highlight the sedentary figures. Thinkers, barflies, daydreamers, and recluses are scattered in darkened rooms although outnumbered by empty tables and chairs. These cavernous sites were painted from observation in the artist's native Aleppo where he frequented taverns throughout his career, ten years of which were spent in the company of Louay Kayyali.

Disaffection is conveyed in the details of Ahmad Moualla's tempestuous scenes. Depicting large gatherings of obscured figures that merge or break apart at certain points, the artist employs theatrical forms such as tragedy, melodrama, and spectacle in monumental compositions that bring to mind the grandness of Baroque historical painting. An untitled mixed media work executed in 1999 shows a public square where a throng assembles at the base of an elevated platform. Atop the stand is a bull, recalling the biblical story of the golden calf. While most onlookers peer up at the beast, a handful of thawed protagonists attempt to exit the plaza. In the upper portion of the painting towering wardens survey the event. Beneath them abstracted areas of white are shown as immaterial forces that spill onto the crowd with ruinous power.



Marwan Kassab Bachi, *Kopf (Head)*, 1985, Etching, 70 x 50 cm

By the early 1990s, the lean figures of Safwan Dahoul's *Dream* series (1987-) began to acquire lengthened body proportions, resembling the asymmetrical attributes of Pharaonic art from the Amarna Period. The willowy woman of his works, whom he often pairs with her equally lithe lover, is portrayed in the quiet of domesticity: in moments of slumber or stationary in languid poses. Dahoul's interiors are sparse and only include the structural elements that are necessary to set compositions, making the focus of his paintings the curved spine and bent limbs of his heroine. The wiry hands of his figures also feature prominently, primarily in depictions where the couple is physically entangled, and are reminiscent of those found in fifteenth-century Flemish icon painting. Such modeling of what might seem inconsequential to the composition, in fact, has weighty inferences. The hands of his figures evoke the extremities of Mary in the crucifixion scenes of painter Rogier van der Weyden and can thus be understood as indicators of inconsolable sorrow. This historical influence is evident due to Dahoul's time in Belgium, where he pursued a Doctorate from the Higher Institute of Plastic Arts in Mons between 1987 and 1997. Several works from this stage of the artist's oeuvre explore the compositional formats of traditional iconography and religious alters.

Adding to the subtle deformation of his figures is the artist's division of space, which creates a clear tension between the body and the implied mechanisms that contain it. Walls, windows, tables, and chairs are arranged to create impenetrable barriers. His figures struggle to find shelter as these fixtures close in.

Dahoul's heroine is modeled after his late wife, artist Nawar Naser (1962-2008), while the male protagonist who frequently appears alongside her serves as an evolving self-portrait. Dahoul began numbering his *Dream* paintings after her passing. As the series progressed he incorporated other symbols such as masks, a deck of playing cards, and a halo. The bodies of his subjects hardened, becoming stone-like and sculptural yet still coiled. The domestic interiors enclosing his portraits slowly dematerialised, morphing into black voids. In 2000, colour left his palette, imparting contrasts in dark and light, a development he attributed to the 'colourless' streets of Syria. Several years later, Dahoul told a Syrian magazine: 'Our souls have been affected to such an extent that we now fear colour.'¹⁷

A survey of Syrian art over the second half of the twentieth century reveals the accrual of formal techniques and a maturation of concepts in the works of Saad Yagan, Nazir Ismail, Ahmad Moualla, and Safwan Dahoul. Examples from the 1990s also confirm that expressionism, allegory, and symbolism all constitute branches of Syrian realism. As the twenty-first century began, a new generation of painters embarked on the path of the many artists before them.



Safwan Dahoul, *Untitled*, 1993, Oil on canvas, 80 x 57 cm



Safwan Dahoul, *Dream27*, 2010, Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 400 cm



Syria's Apex Generation

During the early 2000s Syria's art scene experienced significant growth as nationwide economic reform policies were implemented. New galleries opened; numerous events were launched in partnership with organisations abroad; and the rising profiles of established art spaces like Le Pont Gallery in Aleppo continued to attract international artists and curators. These factors, combined with a push from the rise of an art market in the Gulf, changed how art was created, distributed, and received. True to form, the nature of this renewal ignited debates. The intellectual fervour resulting from such public volleying, although tense at times, provided vital stimulus, even among outspoken cynics. Undeniably, support from diverse proponents allowed Syrian art to develop at a rapid pace.

In 2007 Ayyam Gallery Damascus held a competition for young painters. From one hundred and fifty applicants, ten were selected to join an in-house program for emerging artists while also receiving representation. Shortly after the Shabab Ayyam incubator was launched with the winners of the open call, a tight-knit circle formed around the gallery's happenings and regularly convened at the local studios of its members. Most of the group's painters graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus, where they studied under Elias Zayat, Nazir Nabaa, Nizar Sabour (b. 1958), Safwan Dahoul, and Bassem Dahdouh (b. 1964).

Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik, Nihad Al Turk, Othman Moussa, Mohannad Orabi, and Kais Salman were brought together under the umbrella of Shabab Ayyam. When first encountering their varied paintings, it is perhaps difficult to locate the aesthetic threads that link them other than the subject of today's conflict. Yet the post-uprising art that appears in *Syria's Apex Generation* serves as an introduction to a broader cultural history, the nuances of which can be found throughout the canvases of its artists. The featured works represent a new school of painting that is preserving the notion of art as an act of rebellion.

Despite the invariable sense of severance shadowing the Syrian art scene as

it now functions in small clusters throughout the Arab world, artists remain connected through the shared impulse of responding to the war with visible urgency. Although the onset of the conflict brought the peak of the cultural revival in Damascus to an abrupt end, the momentum that carried it has been retained by this productivity. Logistical issues such as the constraints of transit or the burden of addressing viewers across digital platforms have led some to abandon painting or sculpture for the convenience of photography, video, and graphic art. This phenomenon has produced a broad index of imagery that subverts and intervenes when widely distributed, upturning the media spectacle of the war. Others, such as the painters of *Syria's Apex Generation*, have amended their formal approaches to access the recesses that are buried by competing political narratives. What is remarkable about this phase is that the critical direction of Syrian art has not been compromised—in most cases such trials have refocused the merger of subjectivity with objectivity in search of effective form.

¹ *Contemporary Art in Syria 1898-1998*, ed. Mona Atassi (Damascus: Gallery Atassi, 1998).

² Tarek Al-Shareef, ‘Contemporary Art in Syria,’ trans. Dr. H. Dajani, *Contemporary Art in Syria 1898-1998*, ed. Mona Atassi (Damascus: Gallery Atassi, 1998).

³ Zena Takieddine. ‘Arab Art in a Changing World,’ *Contemporary Practices*, Vol. 8 (Fall 2010).

⁴ Bertolt Brecht, ‘On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism,’ trans. Stuart Hood, *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor (New York, London: Verso, 1980).

⁵ Max Raphael, *The Demands of Art*, trans. Norbert Guterman (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, LTD, 1968).

⁶ See Fateh Moudarres’ essay, ‘Dans Les Labyrinthes De La Mémoire,’ *Moudarres* (Damascus: Galerie Atassi, 1995).

⁷ Asaad Arabi, ‘Matière De L’Oubli Et De La Mémoire,’ *Moudarres* (Damascus: Galerie Atassi, 1995).

⁸ Abdulrahman Munif, ‘Fateh Moudarres, Syrian Artist Who Fought for Justice with Brush, Pen,’ trans. Elie Chalala, *Al Jadid*, Vol. 5 no. 29 (Fall 1999).

⁹ Louay Kayyali, ‘Art’s Linkage to the Reality of the People: Or Art’s Ties to the Reality of the Revolution,’ trans. Hiba Morcos, *ArteEast Virtual Gallery*, <http://www.arteeast.org/2012/03/04/arts-linkage-to-the-reality-of-the-people-or-arts-ties-to-the-reality-of-the-revolution/>, as of 6 May, 2014.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For an in-depth reading of this particular work see the author’s ‘Of Poets and Men: Allegory, Reality and Abstraction as Intersections of Art and Politics,’ *The Samawi Collection: Curated Selections of Arab Art, Volume I* (Dubai: Ayyam Publishing, 2011).

¹² For further information see the ‘biography’ page of www.louay-kayali.com, which includes a timeline of the artist’s life by Fadel El Sibai.

¹³ Rashed Issa, ‘Experimenting and Living Art Essential,’ *Leila Nseir* (Damascus: Ayyam Gallery, 2008).

¹⁴ Maymanah Farhat, ‘Destruction and Renewal in the Paintings of Asma Fayoumi,’ *Asma Fayoumi* (Damascus: Ayyam Gallery, 2010).

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

¹⁶ James V. Parry, ‘Faces in the Landscape: Marwan Kassab Bachi,’ *Canvas Magazine* (November/December 2008).

¹⁷ Kareem Shukr, ‘Safwan Dahoul: Narcissism is a Must for a Successful Artist,’ *Forward Magazine* (March, 2008).

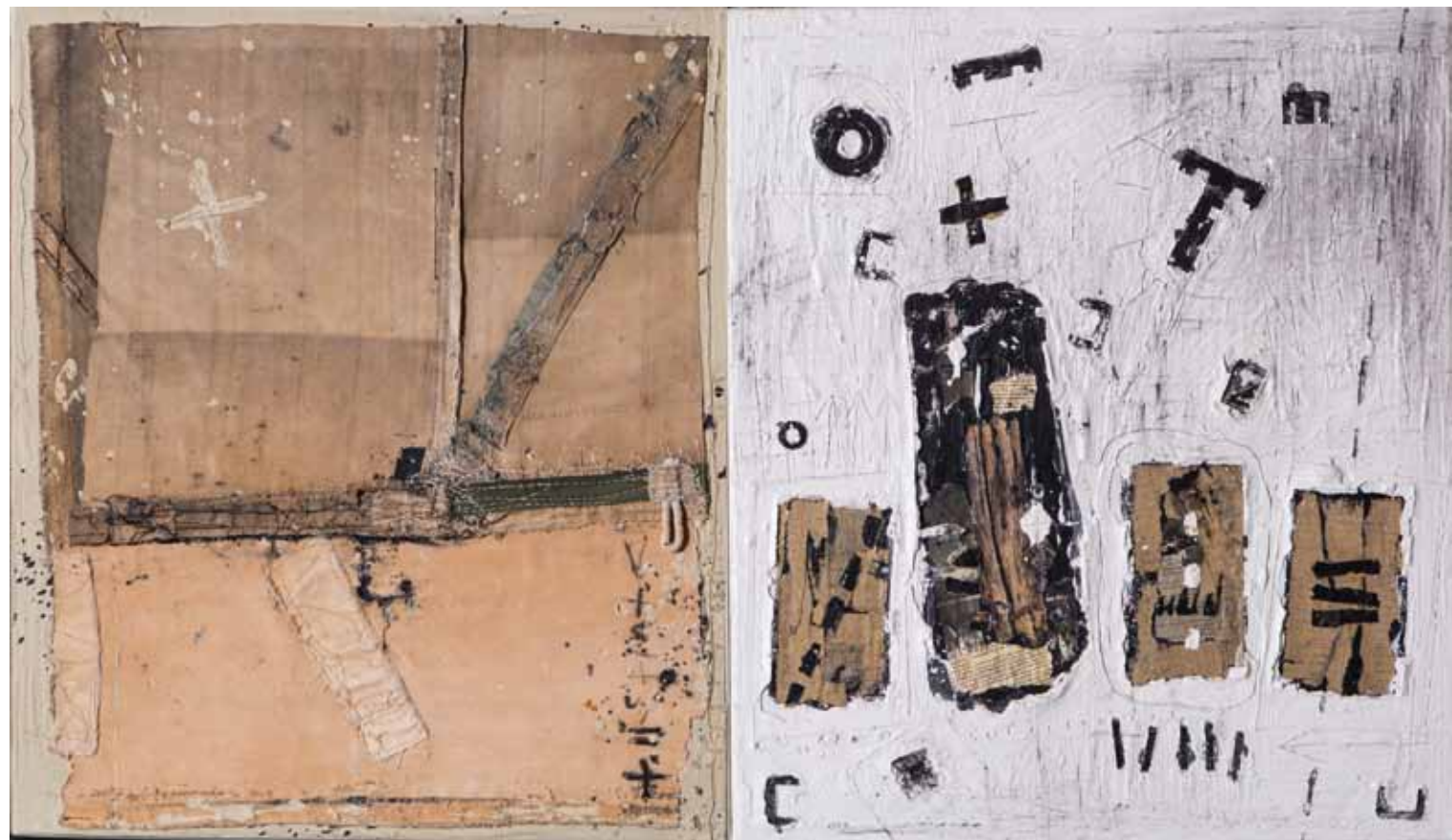


Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik

In his large-scale mixed media works, Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik transforms unconventional materials such as charcoal, plaster, starch, ash, and burlap into evocative mediums that reproduce the patina of imbued surfaces. Basing his “combine paintings” on the weathered layers of graffiti, markings, and cracks that can be found on the exterior surfaces of public spaces, he seeks to explore how such understated facets can serve as records of the oscillation of society over time. Replicating the outer textures, colors, and shapes of deteriorating facades, Majdal Al-Beik excavates the buried traces of past lives, passages that situate cities as reluctant witnesses.

With the start of the recent war in Syria, Majdal Al-Beik’s practice has reflected greater usage of assemblage through the addition of found objects such as small crosses, fabric strips, string, guns, and knives in order to communicate the stark circumstances of life under conflict.

Born in a small village on the outskirts of Al-Hasakah, Syria in 1973, Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik trained at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus. His works are housed in public and private collections throughout the Middle East and Europe and he has been the recipient of several awards, including from the Latakia Biennale and the Shabab Ayyam competition for emerging artists. Selected solo and group exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2013); Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2012); Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2008); National Museum of Aleppo (2006); Tehran Biennale for Art in the Islamic World (2005); Unesco Palace, Beirut (2001); and the British Council, Damascus (2000).



Untitled
2006
Mixed media on canvas
70 x 120 cm



Untitled
2007
Mixed media on canvas
110 x 100 cm



Wall
2007
Mixed media on canvas
140 x 155 cm



Wall
2008
Mixed media on canvas
120 x 120 cm



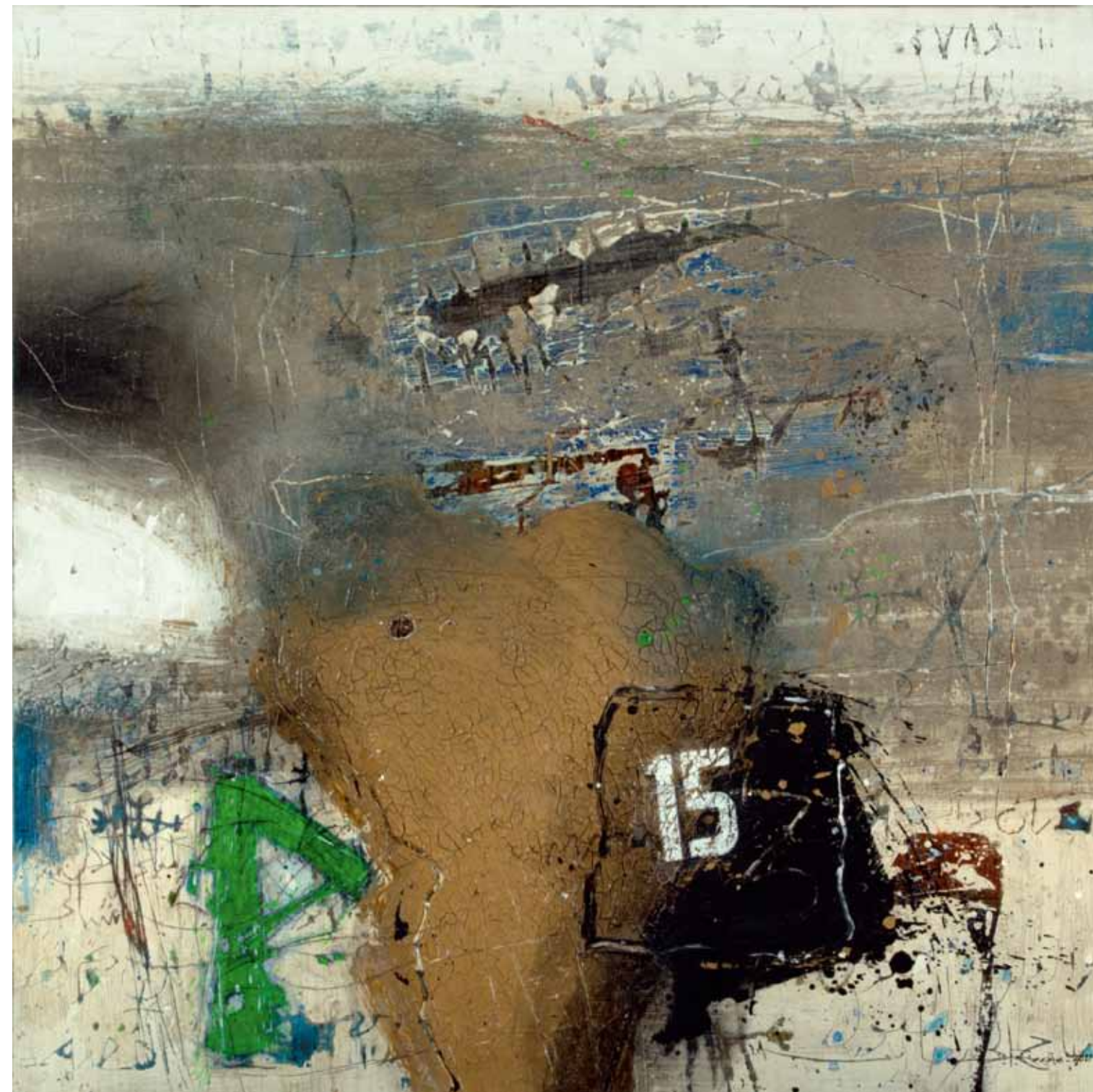
Wall
 2008
 Mixed media on canvas
 170 x 150 cm



White Wall
 2008
 Mixed media on canvas
 80 x 75 cm



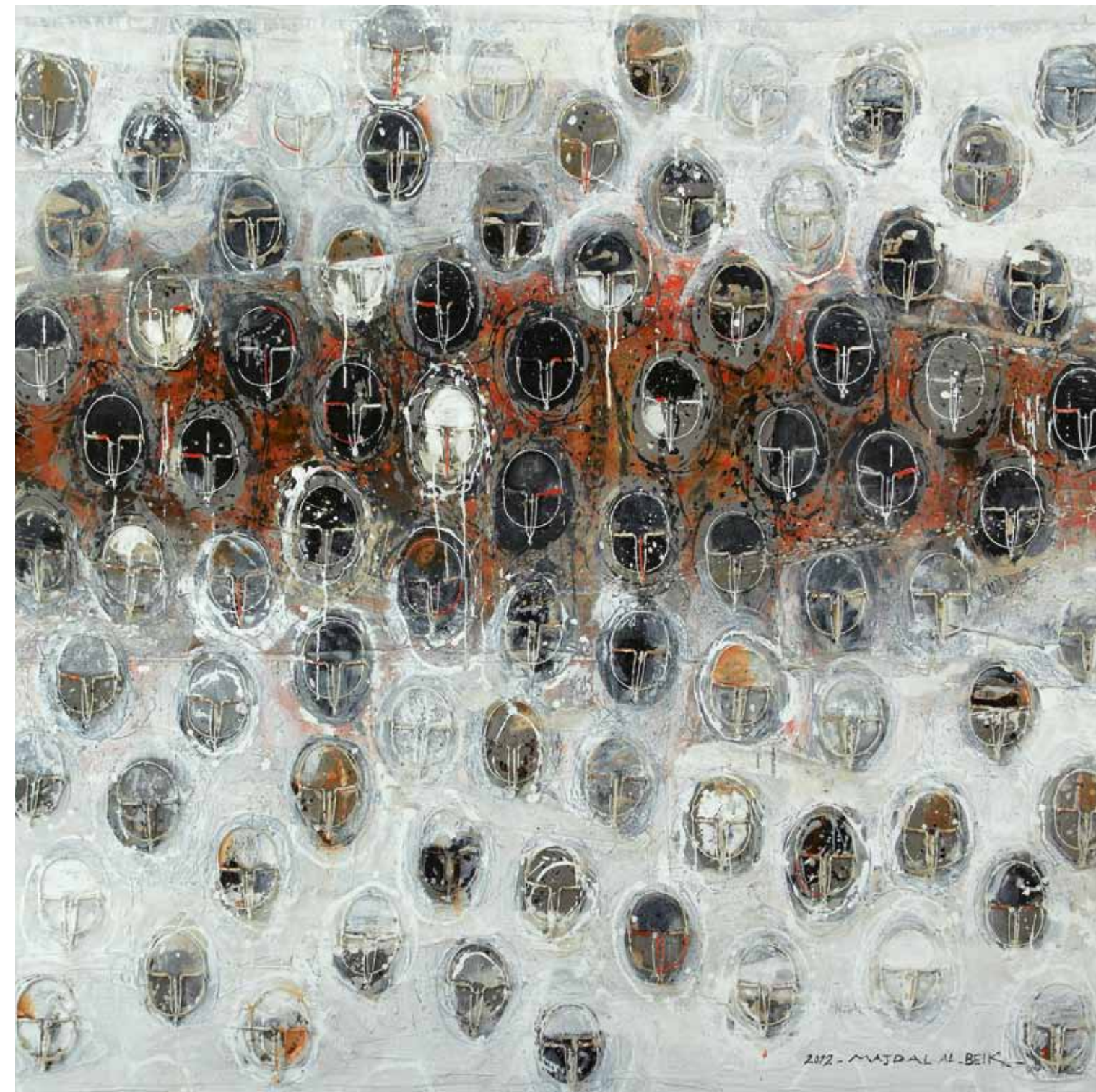
Trace
2011
Mixed media on canvas
130 x 120 cm



Wall
2011
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 180 cm



Pain
2012
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 180 cm



The Trap 2
2012
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 180 cm



Syria, the Fires
2012
Mixed media on canvas
240 x 570 cm



Damascus - Beirut
2013
Mixed media on canvas
120 x 120 cm



Damascus - Beirut
2013
Mixed media on canvas
150 x 150 cm



Wall - Beirut
2014
Mixed media on canvas
150 x 200 cm



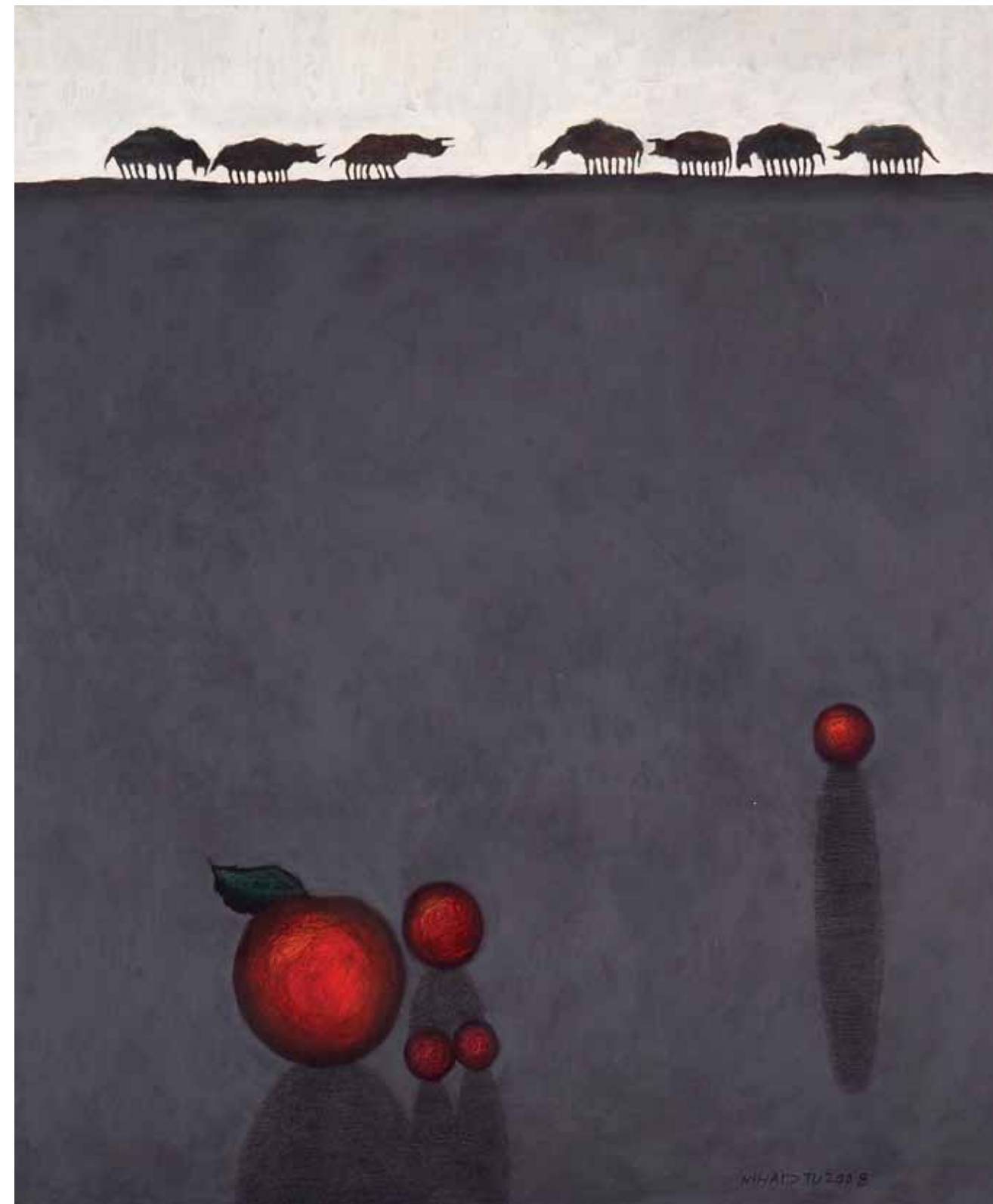
Nihad Al Turk

Informed by readings in literature, philosophy, and theory, many of Nihad Al Turk's deeply psychological compositions can be read as allegorical self-portraits. Central to his work are thematic explorations of the endurance of man amidst the power struggles of good and evil—an existentialist question that has engrossed the artist for some time. Al Turk's regular cast of imperfect creatures, mythical demons, still lifes, and botanical elements serve as the symbolic outcasts, anti-heroes, and rebels of a harrowing narrative. Recently, he has set aside the dark palette of his earlier mixed media paintings by injecting vivid hues in the form of solid colour fields that accentuate figures. This visible sense of optimism is juxtaposed with the quieting of his protagonists through a physicality that is robust and no longer disfigured as they finally escape the weight of their world.

Born in Aleppo, Syria in 1972, Nihad Al Turk lives and works in Beirut. A self-taught artist, he began drawing at a young age and pursued painting in his adolescence prior to launching his artistic career in Syria in the late 1990s. Selected solo and group exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2011); Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2009); the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Damascus (2009); Park Avenue Armory, New York (2008); Mark Hachem Gallery, New York (2008); Diyarbakir, Turkey (2005); and the Latakia Biennale (2003), where he was awarded the Golden Prize.



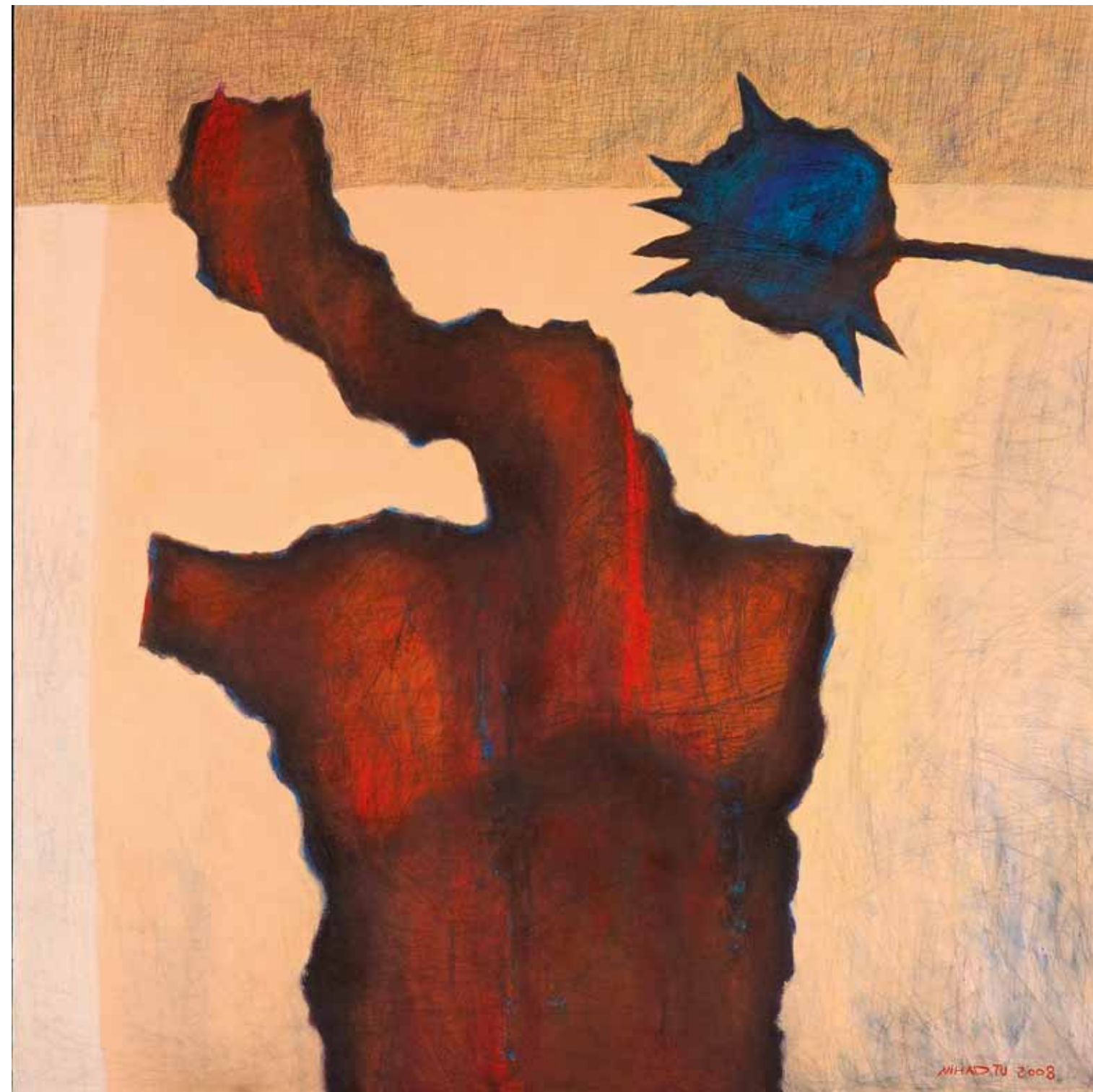
Untitled
2007
Mixed media on canvas
162 x 138 cm



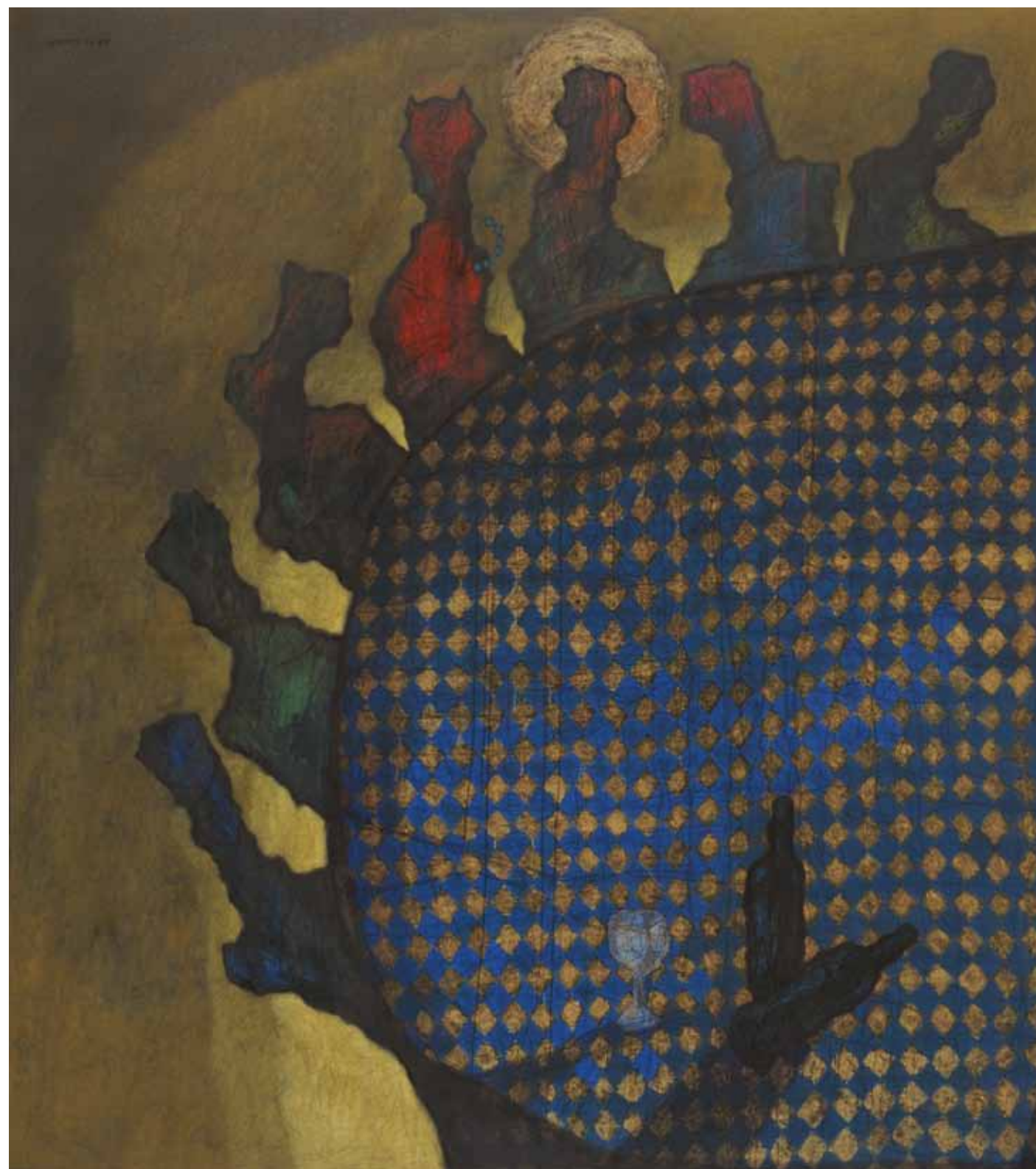
Still Life
2008
Mixed media on canvas
145 x 120 cm



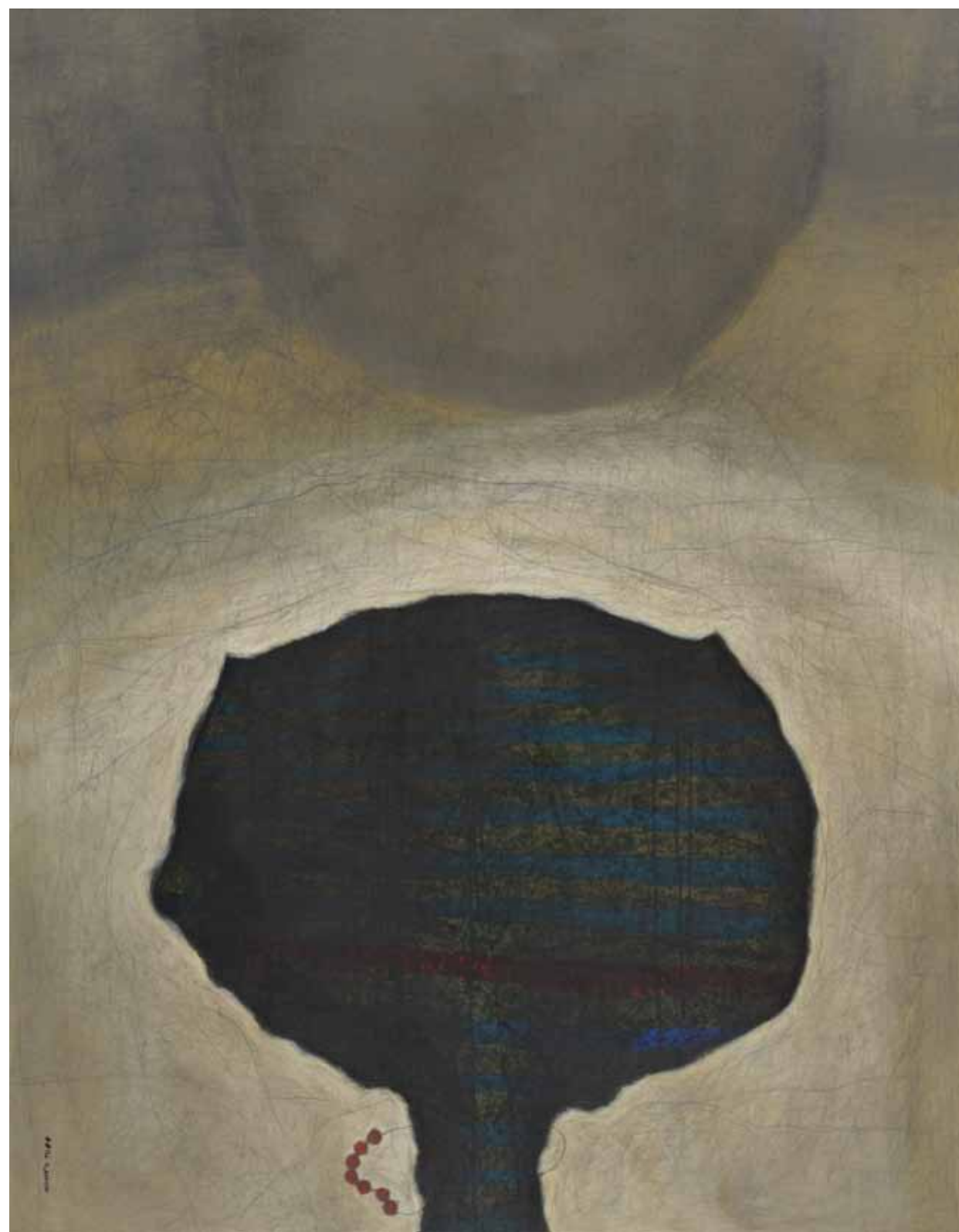
The Hunchback
2008
Mixed media on canvas
150 x 150 cm



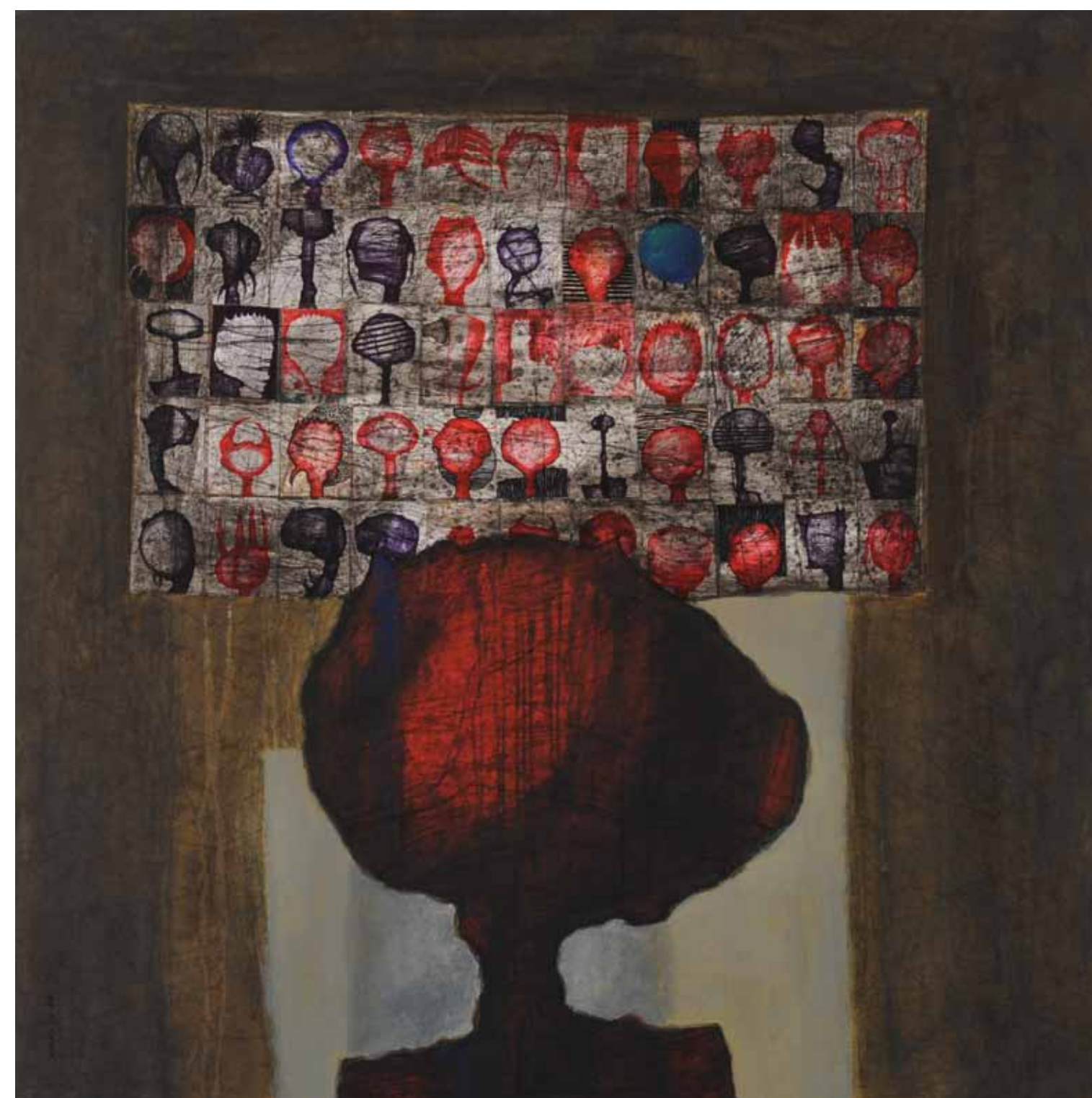
The Fighter
2008
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 180 cm



The Secret Dinner
2009
Mixed media on canvas
190 x 340 cm



Daily Myths 1
2009
Mixed media on canvas
145x 113 cm



Portrait
2009
Mixed media on canvas
120 x 120 cm



Isolation
2011
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 180 cm



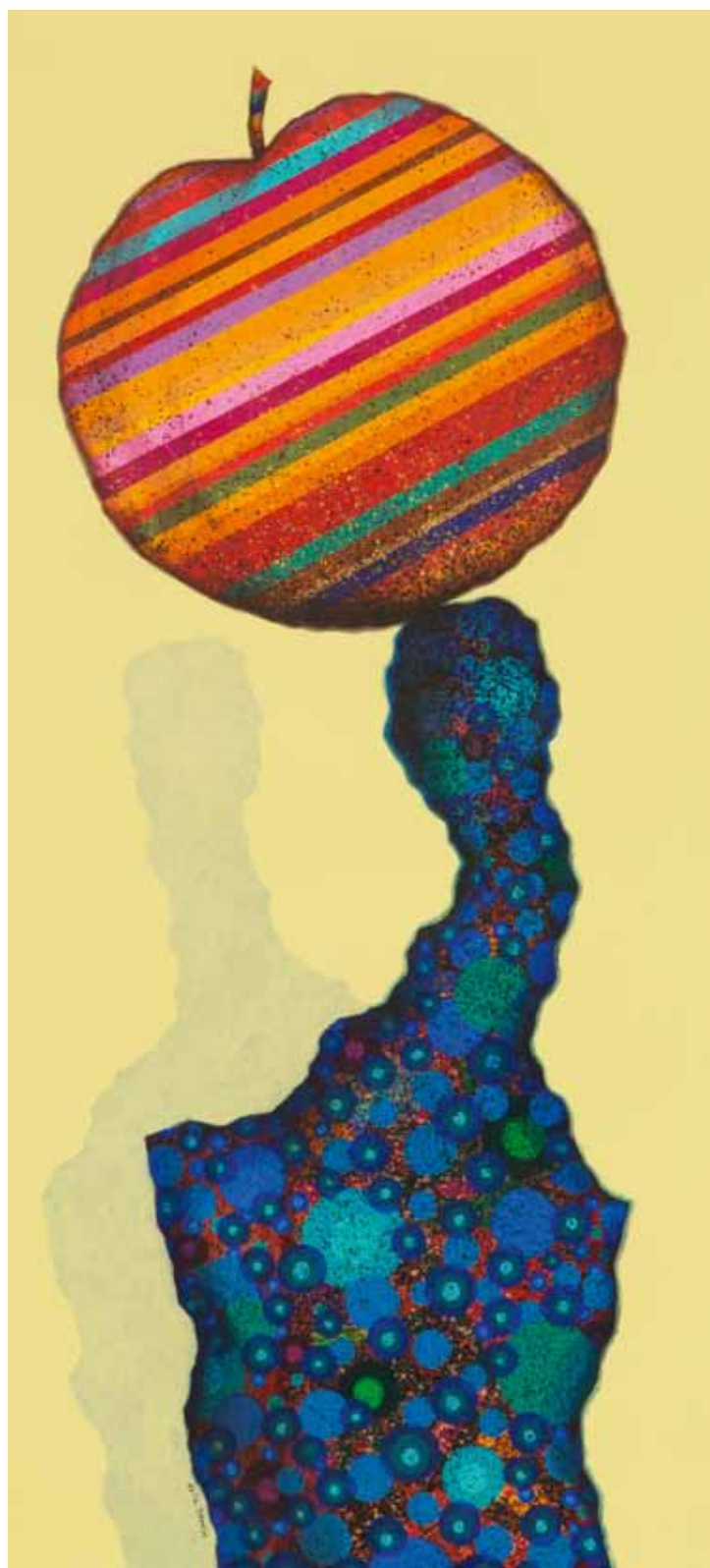
Dialogue
2011
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 180 cm



Shades of Zoradasht
2012
Mixed media on canvas
151 x 151 cm



Table
2012
Mixed media on canvas
197 x 300 cm



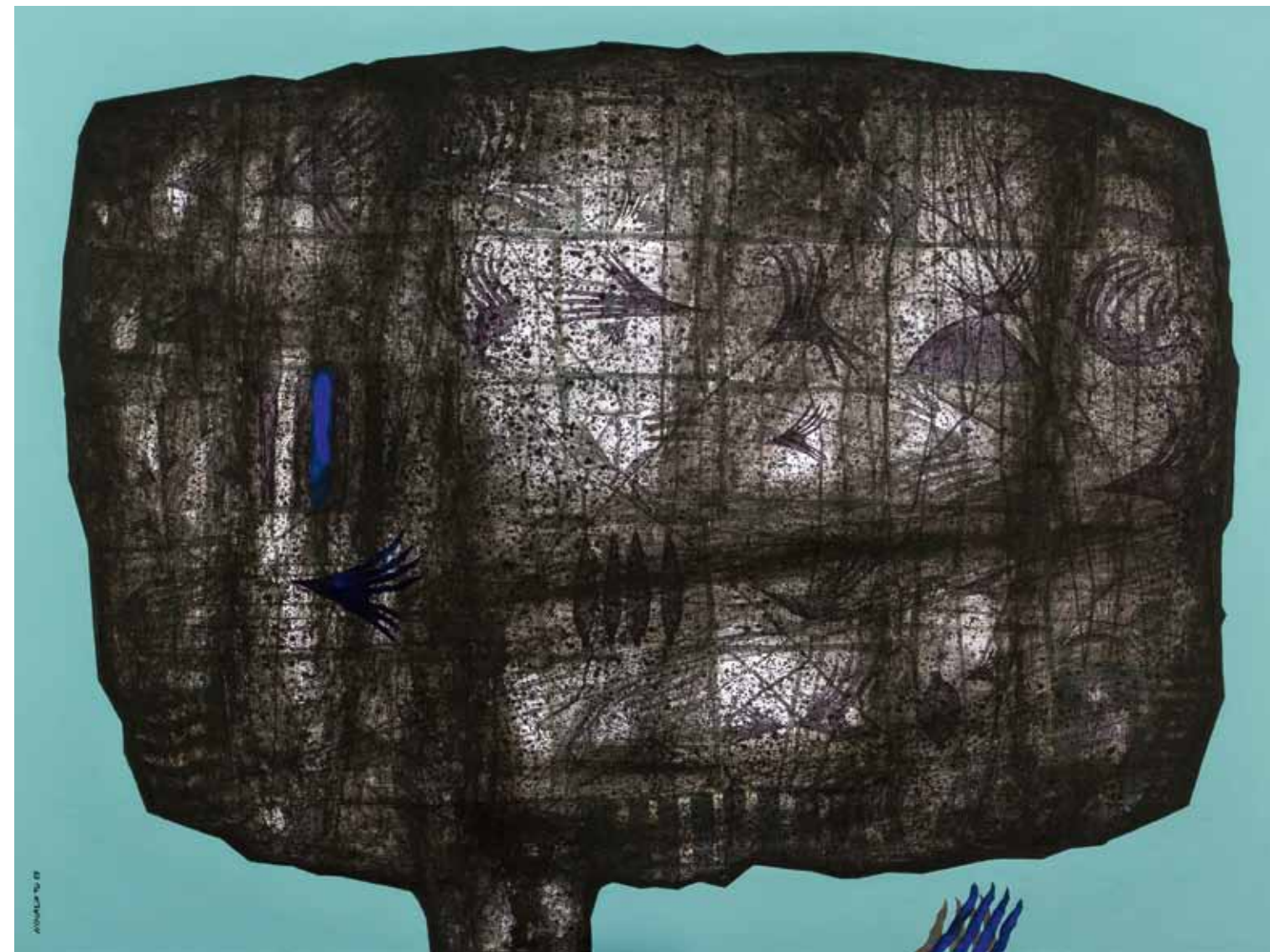
Apple
2013
Acrylic on canvas
197 x 90 cm



Mythological Bird
2013
Mixed media on canvas
200 x 140 cm



Sacred Tree
2013
Mixed media on canvas
120 x 140 cm



Tree
2013
Mixed media on canvas
120 x 140 cm



The Olive
2013
Mixed media on canvas
70 x 246 cm



Bird
2014
Mixed media on canvas
150 x 170 cm



Cluster
2014
Mixed media on canvas
147 x 147 cm



Othman Moussa

Othman Moussa's early paintings capture the often-overlooked poetics of the mundane in realist still lifes that feature humble offerings, for example a battered but polished cooking pot alongside a lone pomegranate or a rusted teapot that glimmers as its exterior catches light. Recalling the naturalism of Spanish still lifes, his initial series emphasises that which provides sustenance with reflective detail and a spiritual sense of monumentality. As the artist's aesthetic progressed, his arrangements of inanimate objects began to take on allegorical traits, evincing subjective themes such as love and desire.

Recently, the impact of the Syrian conflict has entered his compositions, turning everyday objects into subjects of war. Although these works are realised with greater realism, Moussa has simplified his compositions by not including the embellishments of classical examples, such as the silken white cloth in Dutch still lifes that guides the eye across elaborate table settings. Isolating his objects, he focuses on jarring pairings. In these latest works, something as simple as food is now transformed into a weapon, reflecting the presence of violence in the most minor details of life. Other paintings of the series utilise satire as a biting form of social commentary as the thrones of absent monarchs are portrayed in an absurd manner and symbols of power are stripped of their aura.

Born in 1974 in Zabadani, Syria, Othman Moussa lives and works in Damascus. He received his artistic training in painting from the Adham Ismail Center for Plastic Arts (1999) and the Walid Izzat Sculpture Institute in Damascus (2000). Solo exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2012); Ayyam Gallery Damascus (with Assad Arabi, 2009). Group exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz (2011).



Untitled
2007
Oil on canvas
130 x 120 cm



Untitled
2007
Oil on canvas
100 x 68 cm



Untitled
2007
Oil on canvas
130 x 120 cm



Untitled
2008
Oil on canvas
100 x 80 cm



Egg & Loaf of Bread
2008
Oil on canvas
120 x 144 cm



Untitled
2008
Oil on canvas
100 x 80 cm



His Majesty King Yellow
2010
Oil on canvas
150 x 180 cm



Bomb Art
2010
Oil on canvas
93 x 150 cm



The King of Peace
2011
Oil on canvas
150 x 180 cm



Untitled
2012
Oil on canvas
100 x 120 cm



Our Carrot
2012
Acrylic on canvas
100 x 90 cm



Untitled
2012
Oil on canvas
150 x 120 cm



Game
2013
Acrylic on canvas
50 x 75 cm



Untitled
2013
Oil and acrylic on canvas
150 x 200 cm



Untitled
2013
Oil on canvas
150 x 120 cm



Untitled
2013
Oil on canvas
150 x 120 cm



Untitled
The Terror Group series
2013
Oil and acrylic on canvas
150 x 120 cm



Untitled
The Terror Group series
2013
Oil on canvas
150 x 120 cm



Untitled
The Terror Group series
2014
Oil and acrylic on canvas
150 x 120 cm



Self Portrait
The Terror Group series
2014
Oil on canvas
120 x 150 cm



Mohannad Orabi

Dominated by vivacious childlike figures in various scenarios, Mohannad Orabi's previous paintings reflect his interest in the spontaneity of process and the liberation of form that emerges when art is created intuitively without fixed directives. Many of these mixed media canvases were painted as self-portraits, revealing the artist's fascination with the evolution of consciousness in childhood and the wonder and whimsy of the formative years that first shape our comprehension of the world.

With the start of the Syrian uprising and the conflict that followed, Orabi adopted an increasingly realist approach to portraiture, drawing inspiration from the different forms of media that are currently forging a visual repository of the war. Martyr posters, Facebook profile pictures, and other types of filtered or composed imagery serve as source material for portraits of Syrians under siege, displaced, and in exile, recording a side of the conflict that lies beyond its ideological divisions and political talking points. While the artist retains an interest in the socialisation processes of childhood, his own experiences of now living outside the country have led him to consider the ways in which visual culture, social media, and digital communication have become substitutes for what was once tangible.

Born in Damascus in 1977, Mohannad Orabi currently lives and works Dubai. 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 and group exhibitions include *Contemporary Uprising : Art from the Middle East* at Nest Gallery, Geneva (2014); Ayyam Gallery Jeddah (2013); Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2012); Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz, Dubai (2009); Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2008), Zara Gallery, Amman (2007); and Ishtar Gallery, Damascus (2006, 2004).



Self Portrait
2008
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 160 cm



Self Portrait
2009
Mixed media on canvas
160 x 160 cm



Self Portrait
2009
Mixed media on canvas
120 x 400 cm



Self Portrait
2009
Mixed media on canvas
300 x 300 cm



Self Portrait
2010
Mixed media on canvas
120 x 100 cm





Self Portrait
2010
Mixed media on canvas
150 x 120 cm



Self Portrait
2010
Mixed media on canvas
200 x 150 cm



Untitled
It's No Longer About Me series
2012
Mixed media on canvas
200 x 100 cm



Untitled
It's No Longer About Me series
2012
Mixed media on canvas
100 x 90 cm



Profile Portrait
2012
Mixed media on canvas
150 x 150 cm



Untitled
It's No Longer About Me series
2013
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 159 cm



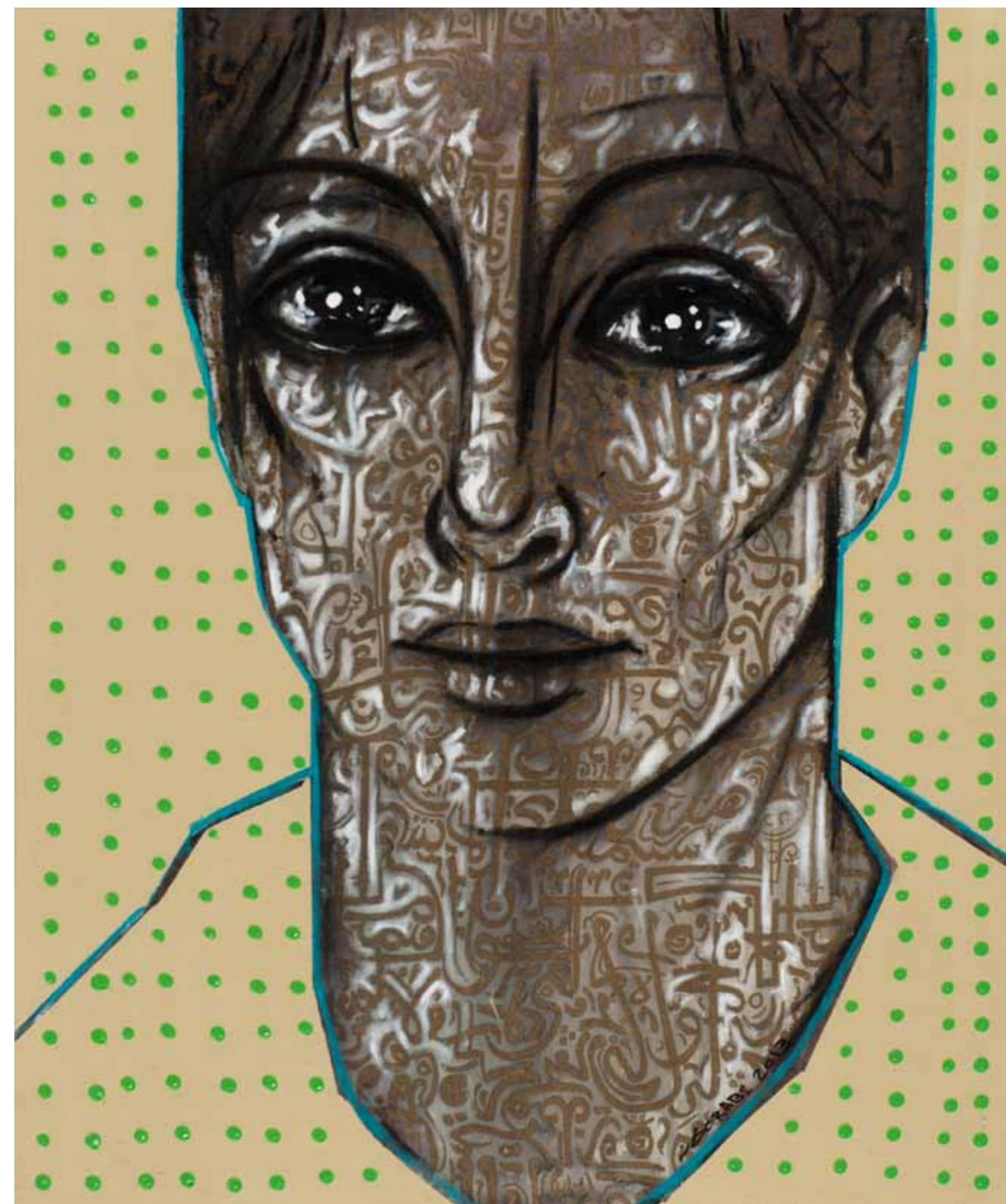
Untitled
It's No Longer About Me series
2013
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 160 cm



Untitled
It's No Longer About Me series
2013
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 160 cm



Untitled
It's No Longer About Me series
2013
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 160 cm



Untitled
It's No Longer About Me series
2013
Mixed media on canvas on wood
120 x 100 cm



Untitled
It's No Longer About Me series
2013
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 159.5 cm



Untitled
It's No Longer About Me series
2014
Mixed media on canvas
135 x 125 cm



Untitled
It's No Longer About Me series
2014
Mixed media on canvas
140 x 170 cm



Untitled
It's No Longer About Me series
2014
Mixed media on canvas
140 x 170 cm



Kais Salman

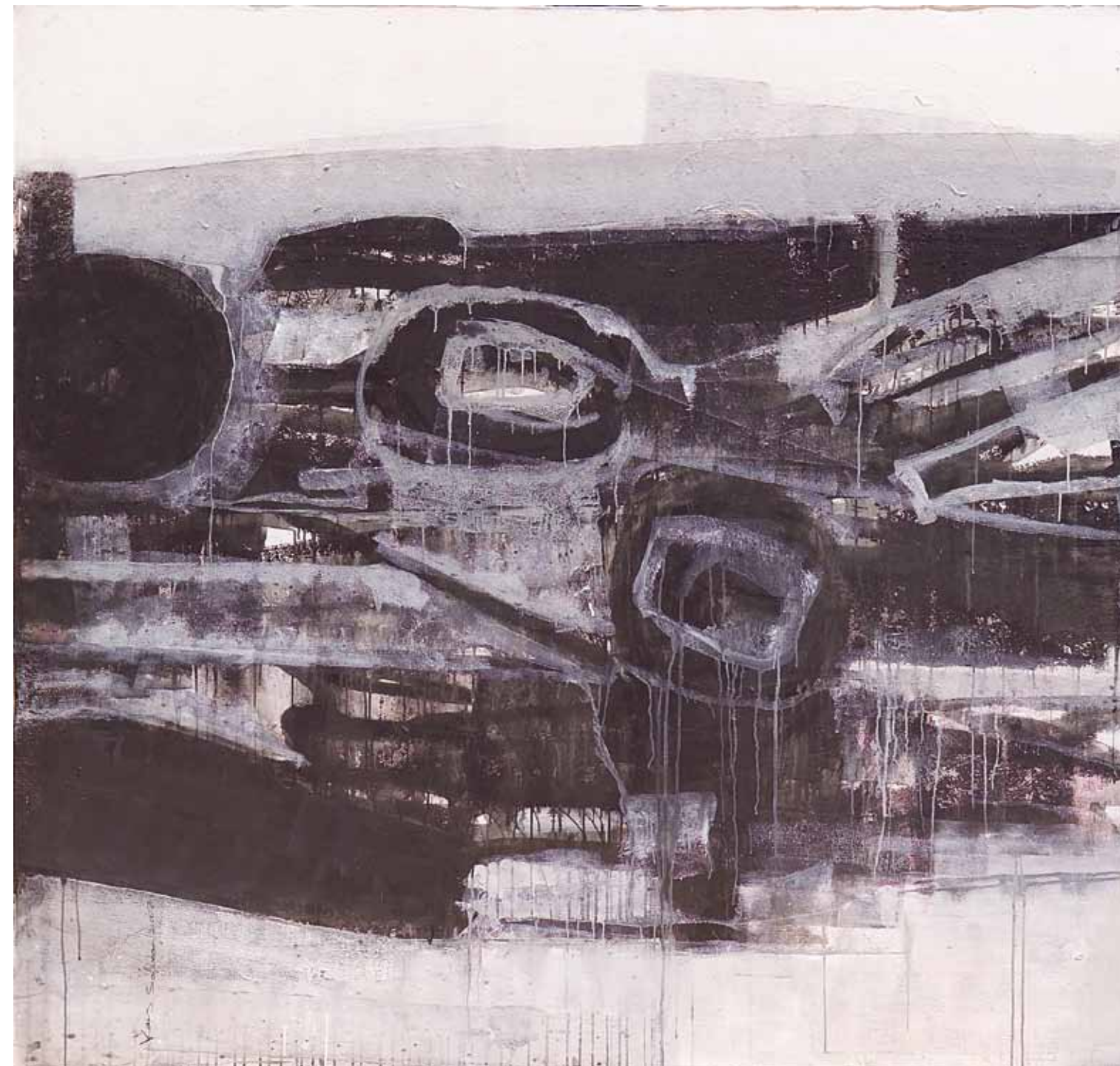
Kais Salman utilises satire to subvert the normalisation of greed, vanity, and ideological extremism that is rapidly defining our era. Working in a satirical tradition that can be traced to the thirteenth-century *Maqamat al-Hariri* illustrations of miniature painter Yaha ibn Mahmud Al-Wasiti, Salman seeks to confront and exorcise sociocultural manifestations of depravity.

Tapping into ugliness and abjection through intentionally hyperbolised figures and mangled objects accentuated by punches of colour and aestheticised forms, each series of Salman's work reflects a type of psychological violence that occurs when excess becomes rationalised and accepted by societies. Terrorism, consumerism, cosmetic surgery, religious fanaticism, imperialism, and the voyeurism of the digital age have all served as topics of Salman's carnivalesque compositions.

Born in Tartous, Syria in 1976, Kais Salman lives and works in Beirut. He received a Bachelor of Art from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus in 2002. His paintings are currently housed in private collections throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. Solo and group exhibitions include the Alexandria Biennale (2014); Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2010); Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2014, 2012); Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz, Dubai (2014, 2011, 2010); Damascus Museum of Modern Art (2009); The Park Avenue Armory, New York (2008); Carthage Festival for Coast Mediterranean Sea Artists, Tunisia (2005). In May 2010, a work from his Fashion Series appeared on the cover of the Wall Street Journal's *Weekend Edition* magazine, a first for an Arab artist.



Car Bomb
2007
Mixed media on canvas
150 x 200 cm



Car Bomb
2007
Acrylic on canvas
190 x 200 cm



Untitled
Fashion Series
2007
Acrylic on canvas
147 x 147 cm



Untitled
Fashion Series
2008
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 180 cm



First Face
2008
Mixed media on canvas
120 x 120 cm



Untitled
2009
Mixed media on canvas
152 x 142 cm



Untitled
2010
Mixed media on canvas
150 x 150 cm



Untitled
2011
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 180 cm



Heavy Fuel
2012
Mixed media on canvas
250 x 750 cm



Untitled
2012
Mixed media on canvas
100 x 90 cm



Matadora
2013
Acrylic on canvas
200 x 100 cm



Untitled
 2013
 Mixed media on canvas
 46 x 166 cm



Media
2013
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 240 cm



Noble Prize
2014
Acrylic on canvas
160 x 100 cm



Ghost Rider
2014
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 200 cm



American Football
2014
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 150 cm



Dead CHE
2014
Acrylic on canvas
160 x 110 cm



World Cup
2014
Acrylic on canvas
160 x 110 cm



Islamic Pope
2014
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 150 cm

About the curator

Maymanah Farhat is a New York-based art historian specialising in modern and contemporary Arab art. She is the Artistic Director and Chief Writer of Ayyam Gallery. Farhat has curated exhibitions in the United States, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Lebanon and is a curatorial advisor to the Arab American National Museum. Her reviews and essays have appeared in publications such as *ArtAsiaPacific*, *Art Journal*, and *Callaloo: Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters*.

She has authored monographs on painters Safwan Dahoul and Samia Halaby and has written catalogue essays for Asma Fayoumi, Thaier Helal, Khaled Takreti, Zena El-Khalil, Mouteea Murad, and Tammam Azzam.

Her initial fieldwork in Syria was conducted between 2004 and 2005, when she traveled to Damascus and Homs to interview over two-dozen painters and sculptors. In 2010 she returned to interview additional artists, including those working under the Shabab Ayyam program.

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, 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.

Syria's Apex Generation highlights post-uprising art as an introduction to the rich history of painting in Syria. Featuring the works of Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik, Nihad Al Turk, Othman Moussa, Mohannad Orabi, and Kais Salman, the exhibition and its accompanying publication explore a new school of painting in the midst of expansion despite the disintegration of the Damascus art scene, its original centre. Building on the aesthetic currents set in motion by pioneers in the late 1950s, the included painters navigate the magnitude of the Syrian conflict with allegory, satire, and realism in works that hint at the influence of preceding modern and contemporary artists such as Louay Kayyali, Fateh Moudarres, Moustafa Fathi, Saad Yagan, and Safwan Dahoul. Informed by extensive traditions of expressionism, symbolism, and abstraction, this burgeoning group has forged ahead with the creative objectives of their predecessors, who advocated the social relevance of art.

Majdal Al-Beik, Al Turk, Moussa, Orabi, and Salman were first brought together through the Shabab Ayyam incubator program for young artists in 2007 and quickly became part of a tight-knit intellectual circle that was crucial to their development. Today, although scattered between Damascus, Beirut, and Dubai, they are collectively extending the boundaries of representation and perceived functions of art that have shaped Syrian visual culture for over sixty years.

ayyam  gallery

www.ayyamgallery.com