

**PRESS RELEASE**

***Syria's Apex Generation***  
**Ayyam Gallery Dubai & Beirut**

**Dubai (Alserkal Avenue & DIFC)**

9 June - 2 August

Opening reception & artists' talk: Monday, 9 June at 7pm  
 (Alserkal Avenue)

**Beirut**

11 June - 2 August

Opening reception & artists' talk: Wednesday, 11 June at 7pm



Ayyam Gallery is pleased to announce *Syria's Apex Generation*, an exhibition featuring recent works by artists Nihad Al Turk, Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik, Othman Moussa, Mohannad Orabi, and Kais Salman. Curated by art historian and Ayyam Gallery Artistic Director Maymanah Farhat, the exhibition will spotlight a new school of Syrian painting in the midst of expansion despite the disintegration of the Damascus art scene, its original centre. This multi-venue group show will be held at Ayyam Gallery's Alserkal Avenue and DIFC locations in Dubai from 9 June until 2 August, and at its Beirut location from 11 June until 2 August.

*Syria's Apex Generation* explores the myriad ways artists are responding to the current conflict in Syria through multifaceted works that reflect a new phase of the country's contemporary art. Focusing on painters who launched their careers in the 2000s when the Damascus art scene experienced significant growth, the exhibition will demonstrate how these artists have contributed to the catapulting of Syrian art over the past decade, which reached a high point just before the onset of the war.

Building on the aesthetic currents set in motion by Syria's modernists in the late 1950s, the featured artists navigate the magnitude of the Syrian conflict with allegory, satire, and realism in works that hint at the influence of preceding artists such as modernists Louay Kayyali and Fateh Moudarres and contemporary painters Moustafa Fathi, Saad Yagan, and Safwan Dahoul. Informed by rich histories 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.

The included painters were first brought together through the Shabab Ayyam incubator program for young artists in 2007 and quickly formed (with other selected artists) a tight-knit intellectual circle that proved crucial to their development. Today, although scattered between Damascus, Beirut, and Dubai, Al Turk, Majdal Al-Beik, Moussa, Orabi, and Salman continue to create works linked by artistic threads that emerged during the early stage of their grouping. Leading their generation, they are currently extending the boundaries of representation and perceived functions of art that have shaped Syrian visual culture for over sixty years.

*Syria's Apex Generation* will be accompanied by an eponymous publication authored by Maymanah Farhat. Talks with artists moderated by the curator will take place during the opening receptions at Ayyam Gallery Alserkal Avenue on Monday, 9 June at 7pm and Beirut on Wednesday, 11 June at 7pm. In Dubai, Ayyam Gallery's founder Khaled Samawi will join the evening's discussion.

## **About the Artists:**

Informed by readings in literature, philosophy, and theory, many of Nihad Al Turk's deeply psychological compositions of imperfect creatures 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. 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.

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. With the eruption of the 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.

Othman Moussa's early paintings capture the often-overlooked poetics of the mundane in realist still lifes that feature humble offerings. Recently, the impact of the situation in Syria has entered Moussa's compositions, turning everyday objects into subjects of war. 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.

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. With the start of the Syrian uprising and the conflict that followed, Orabi adopted an increasingly realist approach to portraiture, drawing inspiration from the various forms of media that are 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.

Kais Salman utilises satire to subvert the normalisation of greed, vanity, and ideological extremism that is rapidly defining our era. Seeking to confront and exorcise sociocultural manifestations of such depravity, he taps into ugliness and abjection through intentionally hyperbolised imagery that is accentuated by punches of colour and aestheticised forms. Terrorism, consumerism, religious fanaticism, imperialism, and the voyeurism of the digital age have all served as topics of Salman's carnivalesque compositions.

## **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, 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**

**Ayyam Gallery Dubai (Alserkal Avenue)**

Opening Reception & Artists' Talk: Monday, 9 June at 7pm

Exhibition Dates: 9 June - 2 August

Location: Ayyam Gallery Dubai (Al Quoz), Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz 1, Dubai

Tel: +971 4 3236242

Email: [dubai@ayyamgallery.com](mailto:dubai@ayyamgallery.com)

**Ayyam Gallery Dubai (DIFC)**

Exhibition Dates: 9 June - 2 August

Location: Gate Village Building 3, DIFC, Dubai

Tel: +971 4 4392393

Email: [difc@ayyamgallery.com](mailto:difc@ayyamgallery.com)

**Ayyam Gallery Beirut**

Exhibition Dates: 11 June - 2 August

Opening Reception & Artists' Talk: Wednesday, 11 June at 7pm

Location: Beirut Tower, Ground Floor, Zeitoune Street, Across from Beirut Marina, Solidere

Tel: +9611374450/51

Email: [beirut@ayyamgallery.com](mailto:beirut@ayyamgallery.com)

For press information and artwork images, please email [press@ayyamgallery.com](mailto:press@ayyamgallery.com) or call +971 4 323 6242 (Dubai) or +9611374450/51 (Beirut).