

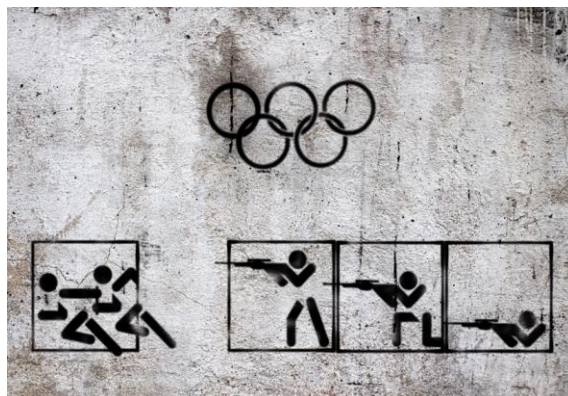
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Tammam Azzam: *I, The Syrian*

Location: Ayyam Gallery London

Dates: 12 December 2013 - 30 January 2014

Opening: Thursday, 12 December 2013, 6-8pm



Syrian artist Tammam Azzam will have his first UK solo exhibition this December at Ayyam Gallery London, coinciding with a show of his work at Ayyam Gallery Beirut from 5 December 2013 – 30 January 2014.

Following the outbreak of violence in Syria, Azzam has used his artistic practice to reflect on the worsening situation in his homeland. After living in Damascus during the first seven months of the revolution, Azzam was forced to leave Syria with his family to escape conscription into the army. Following the loss of his studio due to the relocation, the artist - who was previously a prolific painter - has focused on using digital media. He has also increasingly referenced street art in his work, recognising both this and digital media as powerful and direct tools for protest that are difficult to suppress.

In early 2013, Azzam made headlines worldwide when his work *Freedom Graffiti* (2012) went viral on social media. He used one of the most iconic kisses in art – Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* - to highlight his country's suffering, superimposing this powerful image of love over the walls of a bullet-ridden building in Damascus. The work was one of a series, *Syrian Museum*, in which Azzam inserted appropriated imagery taken from masterpieces of Western art history into photographic scenes of devastation across Syria. These images serve to focus attention on the destruction of Syria's cultural heritage and to juxtapose the creative capacity of humanity with the damage it is also capable of inflicting. The series will be on show in London and a new presentation of *Freedom Graffiti* will be included.

In *Bon Voyage* (2013), the newest body of work on show, Azzam highlights the fragility of political structures in the wake of revolution. Within his digital collages, brightly coloured bunches of balloons carry war-torn buildings lifted straight from the streets of Damascus high above some of the world's best-known political headquarters and landmarks. The buildings below also teeter on the edge of destruction: the UN headquarters in Geneva lie poised to disappear into a sink hole, while a whirlpool in London's the River Thames threatens to swallow up the Houses of Parliament.

In both *Syrian Olympic* and *Exit* (both works 2013) Azzam adopts the stencilled imagery common to street art, bringing together universally recognisable symbols on concrete-like surfaces to articulate the situation in Syria. In *Exit*, a row of armed soldiers stand to attention while a hunched over figure carrying a sack humbly edges out of the frame, echoing the continued exodus of Syrians from their homeland.

Meanwhile in *Syrian Olympic*, the artist combines sports-related symbols of the interlocking Olympic rings, sprinters and shooters, to comment on the perceived inaction of the international community. Similarly, through a new series of lightboxes, *United Russia*, *United Nations* and *United States*, Azzam questions the lack of support to the people of Syria with his repetition of the word 'united'. The artist uses the predominant colours of Arab national flags - red, black and green - to propose a new flag order for a free Syria.

Notes to the Editors

About the Artist

Born in Damascus in 1980, Tammam Azzam currently lives and works in Dubai. Selected solo and group exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz, Dubai (2012, 2009); Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2011); Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2010); Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2010).

Azzam's work is currently on display as part of the 30th Biennial of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on view until 24 November 2013.

About Ayyam Gallery

Founded by collectors and cousins Khaled and Hisham Samawi in Damascus in 2006, Ayyam Gallery sought to nurture Syria's burgeoning and dynamic contemporary art scene through landmark non-profit initiatives such as the Shabab Ayyam Project, an incubator for emerging artists. Expansion into Beirut and Dubai enabled Ayyam Gallery to broaden its scope from the promotion of work by Syrian artists to those from the wider Middle East region. In doing so, Ayyam Gallery has established itself as one of the foremost exponents of Middle Eastern contemporary art to the international community.

Today, Ayyam Gallery is recognised as a leading cultural voice in the region, representing a roster of Arab and Iranian artists with an international profile and museum presence. A number of non-commercial exhibitions, as well as the launch of Ayyam Publishing, Ayyam Editions, and The Young Collectors Auction, 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. Ayyam Gallery Damascus currently functions as a studio and creative haven for artists who remain in the war-torn city. In early 2013, Ayyam Gallery launched new spaces in London and Jeddah.

Exhibition Facts

Date: 12 December 2013 - 30 January 2014

Private View: 12 December 2013, 6 – 8pm

Location: 143 New Bond Street, 1st Floor, W1S 2TP

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