

## **Thaier Helal (Syria, b. 1967)**

Thaier Helal's constant search for experimental forms has led him to include diverse media, arriving at approaches that often blur the lines between painting and assemblage. With an innovative painting style that has progressed over the course of two decades, Helal is recognised as working at the forefront of contemporary abstraction in the Middle East.

Born in 1967, Helal launched his career in his native Syria, where he studied with seminal painters at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Damascus. After relocating to the United Arab Emirates in the 1990s, he developed a distinct method of painting that incorporates unconventional materials such as glue, sand, and coal in an attempt to recreate the physical and sensory aspects of the world around him.

Helal begins each composition with a sketched grid that serves as a compositional base then builds on the surface of the canvas by applying several layers of mixed media, providing a sense of organisation to an otherwise spontaneous picture. This laboured formalism represents the artist's conceptual rendering of the intrinsic code of nature, and extends to investigations of spatial dynamics as shaped by the fluctuation of society and culture. Helal communicates movement and energy through expressionist explosions of colour and automatic brushwork, alluding to organic formations.

In the years following the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, Helal has explored various printmaking techniques and appropriated imagery in works that isolate the mechanisms of war and represent the growing militarisation of global society. Recent works by the artist that use found objects, such as plastic beads and miniature toys, allude to the adverse effects of globalisation, the advent of consumerist culture, and the power struggles that have triggered these phenomena.

As a longtime resident of the Gulf, Helal has contributed to the regional art scene with an extensive exhibition history that includes solo exhibitions at such venues as the Sharjah Art Museum (2000), in addition to awards from Tehran's Contemporary Painting Biennial (2005) and the Sharjah Biennial (1997). Helal has also influenced the development of local painting as a Senior Member of the Sharjah Arts Institute, and a Professor at the Fine Arts College, University of Sharjah, where he has encouraged emerging artists.

Recent solo and group exhibitions for the artist include Ayyam Gallery 11 Alserkal Avenue, Dubai (2017); Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2015), Ayyam Gallery London (2015); Ayyam Gallery DIFC (2014); Samsung Blue Square, Seoul (2014); and Busan Museum of Art (2014). Helal's works are housed in private and public collections throughout the Arab world, including the Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Collection, U.A.E.

A monograph on the artist was published by Ayyam Gallery in 2014.