

The Heart of the Matter

British-Iraqi artist Athier Mousawi returns to Dubai with his latest collection Machine Hearts, inspired by consciousness and conflict

Vibrantly coloured and full of visceral energy, Machine Hearts is the fascinating solo exhibition by British-Iraqi artist Athier Mousawi, who goes by the name Athier. Showing at Ayyam Gallery until May 30, the collection is a continuation of the Man of War series, in which the artist explored the contemporary phenomenon of drone warfare. This new body of work, which centres on large-scale, semi-abstract paintings, attempts to visualise a soldier's modus operandi by asking: What is the unseen core that powers a human killing machine?

"Growing up in the 1980s in the analogue age, machines have always interested me," says Athier, who was born in London to Iraqi parents.

"The exhibition is inspired by the notion of soldiers having machine hearts. What do these hearts look like and what do consciousness and warfare have in common? I explore these questions through the artwork."



Machine Men with Machine Hearts 2, 2015, Ink on paper, 30 x 42 cm



Featuring acrylics, canvases depict twisted, organic elements wrapped around rigid structures, creating dense clusters with a three dimensional quality. But why has Athier, who has exhibited in cities such as London, Paris and Beirut, chosen Dubai in which to display his latest works?

"For Middle Eastern-Western artists, the emirate is a good place to show. It feels progressive and forward thinking. The art scene is thriving with a really international mix of people. It is unestablished, new and exciting," he says.

A graduate of Central Saint Martins art college in London, Athier was invited to exhibit in Dubai six years ago after a gallery owner visited him in London and liked his work.

"I was in Berlin and met an artist whose works were on show in Dubai. She then brought the owner of the Dubai gallery to my UK studio and he invited me to show in the UAE. As the number of galleries grow, the art scene also grows and more people create art here. It is brilliant," he says.