

PRESS RELEASE

Ayyam Gallery
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Walid El Masri: *Cocoon*

5 June - 2 August 2014

Opening reception: Thursday, 5 June from 6:00 to 8:00PM

Ayyam Gallery London is pleased to announce *Cocoon*, a solo exhibition by Paris-based Lebanese painter Walid El Masri, from 5 June until 2 August, 2014. Featuring a new body of work, *Cocoon* will reflect a departure from the artist's ongoing *Chair* series in which an inanimate object provided a point of entry for meditative explorations of the equilibrium of life despite its unpredictable nature. In contrast, the artist's recent works have been inspired by the violent conflict that has besieged his native Syria.

In the new series, El Masri continues formal investigations of movement, repetition, and the transcendence of the boundaries of the picture plane through expressive compositions that utilize space to create a sense of instability in the representation of time. Here, movement refers to four stages in the life-cycle of a butterfly, with a cocoon being, "the silky envelope spun by the larvae of many insects, as silkworms, serving as a covering while they are in the pupal stage," whereas repetition refers to multiple representations of the same subject, and transcendence refers to the reach beyond the physical limits of the canvas, causing the viewer to find himself *in media res*, surrounded by pictorial elements.

Large-scale works in the exhibition examine both change and continuum while an earthen palette allows for studied reflection. Smaller works contain a more palpable energy and dynamism that are underscored by the use of vibrant orange and green, indicating violence and breakage. In the context of a butterfly this signals the moment of transformation in which a larva emerges out of its cocoon as a fully formed butterfly. In some cases the larva is caught in the woven silk of the cocoon; unable to emerge, it suffocates in an encasing of its own creation. Through this analogy the artist puts forth two possibilities for the future of Syria. As if in a cocoon, Syrian citizens lie in wait to see what time will issue forth for the country: a blossoming into something fuller, or a retreat into itself. In his work, El Masri not only offers a painterly examination of Platonism in form, but also provides a timely remark on a lived reality.

Notes to Editors

About the Artist

Painter Walid El Masri's practice revolves around the repeated examination of a single material subject as he explores variations in depth and space through abstracted compositions.

In the past, the artist's subject of choice was a chair, the stillness of which provided an anchoring pictorial element amidst the riotous brushwork of a non-descript setting. Like Morandi's vases or Cezanne's apples, El Masri's depictions are less about the objects themselves and more about the possibility of transformation that is derived from paying close attention to the object over time. In a recent body of work the artist observes movement and vibration as encapsulated in the life cycle of a butterfly cocoon, the dramatic transition of which stands as a symbolic representation of Syria in its current state.

Of Lebanese background, El Masri was born in Syria in 1979. Prior to completing a Bachelor of Art at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus in 2005, he studied the art of mosaic and trained with renowned expressionist painter Marwan Kasab Bashi at the Summer Academy of Darat Al-Funun, Amman, Jordan. Selected solo exhibitions include Europa Gallery Paris, France (2014); Ayyam Gallery Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (2013); Ayyam Gallery Beirut, Lebanon (2013); Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai, UAE (2012); Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz, Dubai, UAE (2009); Art Beijing Contemporary Art Fair, China (2009); Art Hong Kong Art Fair, China (2009) and Ayyam Gallery Damascus, Syria (2008).

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

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Location: 143 New Bond Street

1st Floor

W1S 2TP, London

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For press information and artwork images, please contact press@ayyamgallery.com or +44 (0) 207 409 3568.