

PRESS RELEASE

Ayyam Gallery
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Abdulnasser Gharem: *Al Sahwa* (The Awakening)

Ayyam Gallery, Dubai (DIFC)

17 March - 30 April 2014

Opening reception: Monday, 17 March from 7:00 - 9:00pm

Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai is pleased to announce *Al Sahwa* (The Awakening), a solo exhibition by conceptual artist, Abdulnasser Gharem, to be held March 17 - 30 April, 2014. This is Gharem's first solo exhibition in the Gulf since 2010, and in it the artist looks to symbols, images and events related to the recent history of the Islamic world, in order to formulate possible visions of a harmonious future for the Muslim nation. In the exhibition the artist presents new large-scale stamp paintings alongside silkscreens from *Men at Work* and *The Stamp* series.

The title of the exhibition refers to the "Al Sahwa" movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s that gained great traction in public and university life both in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and across the Middle East. Gharem himself was only in primary school when the "Al Sahwa" began to form within the school setting. At first, participation in the group was an extra-curricular activity but later "it began to shape the identity and growth of the students" to the point that Gharem felt the movement aimed at changing his "spiritual genes," thus turning him into "an unintended victim."

Gharem recounts terrifying moments from that impressionable time in his childhood—a change in dress code came into effect, girls were forbidden from attending school and television sets were thrown out of windows. The focus of the movement was a restrictive version of Islam as deemed appropriate by the "Sahwiin" and it promoted confrontation with anyone who disagreed with said beliefs, including Shi'aas and Sufis.

In a creative re-imagining years later, Gharem proposes a new kind of awakening for the contemporary Middle East. This awakening must be facilitated via creativity, dialogue, exchange of knowledge, discourse on art and education and an attitude of tolerance. In his own words the artist says, I am "hoping to launch a request for the restoration of the real Islam, which believes in pluralism and diversity, and together is committed against extremism."

Seminal to the show, *Hemisphere* and *Camouflage* are two of the largest stamp paintings the artist has made to date. In *Hemisphere* an ancient warrior's helmet is coupled with a green dome of a mosque. The colour green depicts the grandeur of the Muslim world and the faith that stands for peace but has recently been co-opted by elements inimical to a truly Islamic environment. The dome and crescent in the piece also allude to the artist's previous highly acclaimed installation, *Message/Messenger* from 2010.

As someone who has been interested not only in bringing the past to the forefront but also in bringing unofficial history to spotlight, the 2007 piece, *The Path* once again serves as a reminder of those who unfairly perished at the Tihama Valley bridge. The *Moujaz* stamp brings to consciousness bureaucratic processes of an Islamic state while prints from the *Men at Work* series combine images of conquest along with images of public works and maintenance.

Having addressed a variety of difficult issues in his art, Gharem's output becomes increasingly ambitious with each successive show. In this vein *Al Sahwa* asks audiences to think very seriously about interfaith conflict as it increasingly and dangerously gains credence across the Middle East.

Notes to Editors

About the Artist

Abdulnasser Gharem is a conceptual artist who operates over a multitude of fields, challenging the perception of art in his native Saudi Arabia. His work comprises of photography, video, performance and sculpture, examining the nature of life in the modern day. In his performances he playfully uses the street as a canvas to construct a social critique. His performances have welcomed collaboration, involving the community within his projects. As a Lieutenant Colonel in the Saudi Army, themes of control and authority can be felt within this work, as well as a desire to preserve and respect the history upon which traditional art is built. Gharem therefore presents conceptual work that not only harks upon heritage but is politically and socially astute.

Born in 1973, Gharem attended the King Abdulaziz Academy and the Leader Institute in Riyadh before studying at the Al-Meftaha Arts Village in Abha. Following his record-breaking sale at Christie's in 2011, Gharem helped found 'Edge of Arabia' to help promote arts education and to give a platform to contemporary Saudi artists internationally. His works are housed in public collections across Europe and the Middle East and he has exhibited at the Venice, Sharjah and Berlin biennales.

Solo exhibitions include Edge of Arabia, London (2013); Side by Side Gallery, Berlin (2013); XVA Gallery, Dubai (2010); King Fahd Art Village, Abha (2006, 2004) and Attileh, Jeddah (2004, 2003). Group exhibitions include FotoFest Biennial, Houston (2014); ikono On Air Festival, online and broadcasted (2013); Victoria & Albert Museum, London (2012-13); Edge of Arabia, London (2012); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2012); British Museum, London (2012); Katara Galleries, Doha Qatar (2012); Contemporary Istanbul (2012) and the Venice Biennale (2011).

Exhibition Facts

Ayyam Gallery Dubai (DIFC)

Exhibition Dates: 17 March - 30 April 2014

Location: Gate Village Building 3, DIFC, Dubai

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