



ROUTES II

An exhibition of contemporary Middle Eastern and Arab Art

7th - 23rd October 2009

WATERHOUSE & DODD

26 Cork Street London W1S 3ND

+44 (0)20 7734 7800

info@waterhousedodd.com

www.waterhousedodd.com

Monday - Friday 9.30 - 6

Saturday 10 - 2

All works of art, including those not illustrated in this catalogue,
may be viewed online at www.waterhousedodd.com/routes
and are available for purchase upon receipt of this catalogue.

Introduction

We are delighted to present *Routes II*, our second carefully curated group show of contemporary Middle Eastern and Arab Art. We are again proud to show in our London gallery an exciting blend of established international artists and younger emerging talent. In the last 12 months our contacts and general involvement with art in the region have developed significantly, and so this collection features more indigenous artists and better represents the art that is now being produced in the area.

Whilst we have taken a number of aspects into account in our selection, not least our interest in presenting a balanced overview of artists working in different mediums, the most important criteria has been to choose artists on the quality of their work. Our choices have not been influenced by a wish to express any political messages, but it is the right of all artists to convey their views through their art. The works in this exhibition are inevitably a product of and a commentary on many aspects of the artists' lives in the Middle East, including their cultural history, artistic repression, their political views, and women's role in society.

The almost inevitable expression of such views is discussed in Marisa Mazria Katz's thought-provoking essay reproduced in the following pages. We are grateful to Mazria, an internationally famous journalist and commentator on Middle Eastern affairs, for her valuable contribution.

In addition to showing at fairs in Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the last year, we are pleased to have had commissions for our gallery artists from Royal families and various government departments in the region. We trust our associations will develop further with the important development of a new government-organised art fair in Abu Dhabi each November, for which I have been asked to be an ambassador. Art from the Middle East is increasingly being appreciated both in that region and in the West, and we hope *Routes II* helps to aid that process.

Ray Waterhouse

Co-curator, Jemimah Patterson

London, October 2009

Foreword

The recent election in Iran, which fell on the 30th anniversary of the country's revolution, was expected to inculcate a new era in the Islamic Republic. Collectively we wondered if the longings for change, inspired namely by the country's youth, would radically alter the nation's cultural apparatus. Disputed election results led to an outpouring of support for the opposition, which was subsequently countered with rounds of violence. 69 people were said to have been killed and reportedly over 4,000 detained. Fittingly, Mir-Hossein Moussavi, who was among the most vocal in challenging these results, is as an artist himself, deeply connected to the country's community of artists - many of whom were on the frontlines of the demonstrations.

Strained relations between Iran and the West very often means artists act as de facto diplomats - enabling a unique exchange that has not only punctured today's art market, but also political polemics. The hybridization of these two facets, for example, is exquisitely articulated in Shirin

Neshat's film *Tooba*, made in reaction to the events of September 11th, 2001. In an interview about the piece, Neshat describes her personal experience during the attacks and the powerful effect it had on the film: "Obviously it was a reminiscence about what I'd been thinking about Iran, but it really took form after 9/11 as a film installation about paradise, about sanctuary and the need for security, and that tree being the epitome of a saviour or a paradox. It is about you and me and about how everyone in the crowd desperately wanted to be safe, all of us running looking for some kind of sanctuary." Just as it applies to Neshat's journey to sanctuary, the title *Routes II* is wholly relevant to artists like Youssef Nabil, who through his sultry, hand-painted photographs evokes a passage in time. In the case of Nabil, we venture to an almost cinematic-like Cairo seeped in grandeur reminiscent of the city's golden age.



SHADI GHADIRIAN

Be Colourful 2006 C-type print ed. of 10 90 x 60 cm

It is no wonder, then, that Nabil's foray into self-portraiture, which makes up a considerable part of the body of his work, was launched after the artist left his native Cairo. He described this moment in a June 2008 interview as: "I left my life in Cairo behind, and I found myself in a totally new place. I started asking myself questions about life, my life, my country and the idea of being away. In a way, I had closed a door behind me and I was no longer the person I used to be. Again it was the idea of leaving. So I decided to talk about this in my work."

Nabil's trajectory is not unlike Ala Ebtekar's, whose visits to Iran in his late teenage years, after a life spent in the diaspora, impelled a body of work that explores the profound effects of identity. Ebtekar's sources of inspiration for much of his work were found while rummaging through trinkets in Iranian bazaars, in local coffee houses and within the texts of Persian writers like the 12th century poet Farid ud-Din Attar or Nizami Ganjavi.

The pieces on display at *Routes II* beg a question succinctly addressed in Edward Said's essay, *Reflections on Exile*. In this compelling text Said asks: "But if true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture?" It would seem Said's sentiments apply to many of the artists featured in *Routes II*. One such individual is Lalla Essaydi whose art draws from her past experiences living in both her native Morocco and Saudi Arabia. Essaydi's pieces interweave issues such as Arab female identity and are infused with Islamic calligraphic text - an Islamic art form reserved solely for men - strewn across walls and traditional regional garb. Her works seek to explore not just the land from which she hails, but also how her perspective has been shaped by the various societies she has lived in since. When asked to describe her art Essaydi once commented: "In my art, I wish to present myself through multiple lenses - as artist, as Moroccan, as Saudi, as traditionalist, as Liberal, as Muslim. In short, I invite the viewer to resist stereotypes."

LALLA ESSAYDI

Les Femmes du Maroc #22abc 2005 C-type print ed. of 15 Triptych, each panel 61 x 51 cm



As a former fruit seller and volunteer soldier, artist Khosrow Hassanzadeh does just that. Subjects for this Iranian artist, who works in mediums that include painting, drawing and screen-printing, have been as diverse as murdered prostitutes, the eight-year Iran-Iraq War and wrestlers. In his series *Ya Ali Madad* Hassanzadeh embraces an antediluvian form of Iranian martial arts that entwines facets of pre-Islamic culture and Sufism. The popularity of the sport declined after the country's revolution, but traces of it can still be found as decoration on the walls of many of the country's eateries. With Iran and its cultural mores as the essence of Hassanzadeh's work, one wonders how the country's recent election turmoil will shape his future creative endeavors.

Much of the recent popularity of Middle Eastern artists is a direct result of the burgeoning cultural development infrastructure in their native region. Large stretches of the barren sands of the UAE are quickly becoming the future homes for some of the world's biggest museums, including the Louvre and the Guggenheim. In Qatar, the Museum of Islamic Art has already promulgated a kind of Bilbao-effect attracting thousands of visitors who otherwise might have never gone to the Gulf

city. And yet it is important to note that this kind of 'Golden Age' we are witnessing, which is likely the direct result of globalization, is not fleeting. The growth of platforms the world over, which includes the construction of dozens of independent galleries in Middle East capitals like Dubai, means Middle Eastern artists will hold fast to their status as immovable fixtures of the global art scene. What we have witnessed thus far is only the beginning.

Marisa Mazria Katz

October, 2009



PARVIZ TANAVOLI

Heech in the Cage cast in 2006 Bronze ed. of 6 38 x 13 x 14 cm

IMAN AFSARIAN
SAMIRA ALIKHANZADEH
ECE CLARKE
REZA DERAKSHANI
ALA EBTEKAR
MOHAMMAD EHSAI
LALLA ESSAYDI
SHADI GHADIRIAN
KHOSROW HASSANZADEH
NJA MAHDAOUI
FARHAD MOSHIRI
YOUSSEF NABIL
SHIRIN NESHA
AFSHIN PIRHASHEMI
PARVIZ TANAVOLI
SADEGH TIRAFKAN

IMAN AFSARIAN

Iranian, born 1974

Afsarian completed his BA and MA degrees at the University of Art in Tehran in 2000, by which time he was already participating regularly in the Painting Biennials at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.

Afsarian emphasises that he is a realist painter, following the influential painting tradition of Realism, which dates back over a century ago in Iran. He is strongly affected by the aura of an empty space. Afsarian explains "Seeing, after a funeral, the empty chairs of guests left alone beside the wall; looking at the black lace flowers hooked on the wall; staring, in the deep boredom, at the nothing on an empty wall and waiting for the winter light to pass over it. Even facing the nothing in the mirror - these are the moments that make me paint, make me portray the moment of loss and nothingness."

In response to current life in Tehran, Afsarian feels strongly that the people who depart from this life, and the houses which are destroyed daily, should not be forgotten and pass unrepresented but that this melancholy and the 'non-existence' should be made real for us to bear witness to. He has been influenced by the play of shadow and light in Andrei Tarkovski's movies as well as the works of painters such as Vermeer, Chardin, Hammershøi and most importantly, by his childhood memories.



(l) **Untitled (Hexagonal Mirror)** 2008
Oil on canvas 70 x 75 cm
(r) **Untitled (Fireplace)** 2009
Oil on canvas 140 x 150 cm

