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MENAART FAIR 2023

Fann À Porter, Booth B3

3 - 5 February 2023

Villa Empain, Boghossian Foundation, Brussels, Belgium

VIP Preview: Thursday, 2 February from 6 pm -10 pm

General Admission 3-5 February, from 11 am to 7 pm

Fann À Porter is pleased to be participating at MENART Fair 2023 with a collection of works from Syrian painters, Houssam Ballan, and Omran Younes.

About the Exhibition

Fann À Porter's proposed booth for MENART highlights Houssam Ballan and Omran Younes, two Syrian artists whom have been displaced from their native country. In recent years, there has been a significant shift in contemporary Syrian art with artists exploring the impact of the war and the collapse of Syrian civil society in unprecedented ways. New themes have emerged in works that are laden with psychological underpinnings. What this has meant is that in place of direct representation of ruin or displacement, artists are now exploring the cumulative impact of the war and resulting forced migration. The selected artists use their individual works to ask viewers to consider critical questions such as: What effect does displacement have on the body? As traumatic events are internalized, and the displaced are deeply impacted, what weight does exile carry?

In selecting paintings by these dynamic artists, the gallery aims to initiate a conversation on Syrian art, emphasizing how artists are grappling with the adverse effects of war and political crisis with renewed gravitas. Much like twentieth-century post war movements in Europe and the U.S. or art produced during and after the Lebanese Civil War, contemporary Syrian art is shifting to subject matter that does not only address ruin or forced migration but also seeks to mine the experience of exile, revealing its unshakeable effects on everyday life.

About the Artists

Houssam Ballan

Figurative painter Houssam Ballan's canvases are informed by his accomplished technical abilities and through his extensive academic and research endeavour. As an artist, Ballan's frequent experimentation informs the growth in his work as he works intuitively. In his earlier paintings, Ballan's young protagonists are executed with close attention to detail, a form of realism that relies on painterly effects and meticulous line work to create a sculptural sense of figuration. As the bodies of his subjects are given dimensionality, the artist renders their clothes as lines, patterns, and evident brushstrokes with a stylisation that alludes to the passage of time and the presence of an ongoing narrative.

At the centre of his work is the idea that representation cannot solely be based on what one sees, but the understanding of what one is seeing and the feelings it invokes in a person - be it through looking at it from different angles, touching it, allowing it to move you subconsciously, as well as other experiential interactions. Drawing upon the idea that when one tries to remember a person or a specific incident, that person or incident is not remembered in concrete shapes and lines and colours, but blurred into an overall multi-dimensional feeling, the artist minimalises the detail in his work.

Ballan's paintings are reminiscent of icons - the figures are usually situated in the centre of the canvas, adding light to his work without painting any shadows on their faces. The artist

minimalises the size of the figures bodies, ignoring original dimensions, also characteristic of icons. Ballan explains that ‘when painting an icon, Christian painters didn’t care more about the sacred story or idea than other aspects of the work.’

In his latest collection, **Alternative**, the artist takes a minimalist approach, using only a few elements and colour groups that have become the most prominent in his work as of late. At times, he utilizes the same element repeatedly, offering different perspectives on one shape by altering its size.

In the end, each form is a visual message speaking through the language of colour, space, and composition. The work, which is symbolic, also serves as a psychological depiction of the artist’s life.

We do not know where the characters in these paintings live for that connection has been severed. Each piece is a poetic formula — intentionally rhetorical and brief.

Ballan was a tutor and member of the Teacher’s Association at the University of Damascus. The artist was part of the 13th Cairo Biennale, Cairo (2019). In 2020, the artist collaborated on a workshop with Berlin based non-profit, CoCulture e.V. Ballan has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions including MENART, Brussels, Belgium (2023); Fann A Porter, Dubai, UAE (2023, 2022, 2020, 2019, 2018); Agial Gallery Beirut, Lebanon (2022); MADS Gallery, Milan, Italy (2021); Azad Art Gallery, Cairo, Egypt (2021); Litehouse Gallery, London, UK (2020); Cairo Art Fair (2022, 2021, 2020); BBA Gallery, Berlin, Germany (2019); Hafez Gallery, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (2019); Fann A Porter Amman, Jordan (2019); Atelier Sto- ries, Paris, France (2018); Mark Hachem Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon (2014); Arab Cultural Centre (2010, 2007, and 2005); Ayyam Gallery, Damascus, Syria (2006); French Cultural Centre, Damascus, Syria, (2004); among others. His works can be found in numerous private and public collections.

Omran Younes

Since the late 1990s, Syrian painter Omran Younes (b. 1971) has probed the psychological undercurrents of expressionist painting, building on a rich tradition of Syrian modernism that began when artists such as Fateh Moudarres used painting as a way of visualizing the unseen but palpable shifts in Syrian society in the mid twentieth century. Younes is steeped in this history yet remains committed to ongoing experimentation, actively pushing the boundaries of painting in search of ways to communicate the complexity of the human psyche and the physical responses that reveal its fragility, such as instances of fear and pain. This emphasis on the human condition makes works that were inspired by his surroundings in war-torn Syria categorically universal, resonating with viewers from the U.S. to the Middle East. His rich palette, characterized by shades of vermilion, sunburnt orange, lapis, and black, white, and grey, contrasts the warmth of the earth with the vastness of the sky, grounding his scenes in reality. In his most recent works, distinguished by thick, loose brushwork, prickly pear cacti stand in for the anonymous figures of earlier works, anthropomorphic representations of weathered yet resilient protagonists.



Younes received undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Damascus' Faculty of Fine Arts in 1998 and 2000, respectively, and was the first prize recipient of the 3rd Annual Youth Competition in Damascus, among other awards. He has exhibited at galleries and art spaces across the Middle East, the United States, and Europe, including the Virginia Commonwealth University Gallery in Doha, Qatar, while his paintings are held in the collections of institutions and organizations such as the Atassi Foundation.

About Fann À Porter

Fann À Porter is a contemporary art gallery at The Workshop Dubai that represents a diverse selection of emerging international and regional artists.

The gallery aims to nurture the burgeoning and dynamic contemporary art scene through quality exhibitions, non-profit events, auctions, and an active community program.

The gallery's exhibition program includes eight curated exhibitions a year, and features artists working across diverse media.

Fann À Porter has established a series of dialogues and collaborations with curators, writers, governmental entities, and institutions to affirm its commitment to support the long-term development of young contemporary artists from the Middle East.

By hosting a regular public programming including exhibitions, talks, non-profit and charitable initiatives and by participating in fairs, Fann A Porter has established itself in forefront of the region's exciting arts landscape.

Founded in 2006 by Ghada Kunash, Fann À Porter is based at The Workshop, a unique inter-disciplinary community space consisting of an art gallery, a sustainable store, design studio, and a cafe. The Workshop aims to engage the audiences, and support the development of Dubai's arts scene through its extensive programs, educational initiatives, and community projects.

For more information, please contact info@fannaporter.com