



Fann À Porter
Trademarked Under Vindemia Novelties LLC
Villa 45, Street 23B, Jumeirah 2, Dubai, UAE

Press Release

ALTERNATIVE | بدیل

Houssam Ballan | Solo Exhibition

February 22 – March 19, 2023

Houssam Ballan's *Alternative* highlights a large body of work that he produced during a year of significant transition, at a time when he left his home in Damascus to resettle in Beirut. In Lebanon, Ballan experienced a distinct symptom of exile, the feelings of detachment and disorientation that colors displacement, as his life was essentially severed from his native Syria. In this new city, a place where waves of mass exodus and influxes of migration have alternated over the last fifty years, Ballan quickly identified the emotional burden that comes with this experience. While these recent artworks are not outwardly autobiographical, as the artist intentionally limits recognizable symbols that reflect aspects of his life, they are deeply in tune with the experiences of Beirut's diverse communities.

Among the surreal scenes of these paintings, the viewer finds children playing in historic city quarters or safely indoors in a room that seems saturated with a psychological heaviness. Within these paintings, Ballan builds narratives that have multiple reference points, thus making illegible any sense of singularity or linear perceptions of time, the objective being that time and place collapse into each other, making details obsolete.

In *A Game of Hide n' Seek* (2022), for example, several figures (who appear to be children) are shown crouching in a shipping container just beyond the arched doorway of a traditional home. The viewer notes that the building is historic based on its architectural attributes, yet with little embellishment other than checkerboard floor tiles, it is difficult to discern the scene's context. Outside the house, another figure is shown walking barefoot on a pair of stilts, the ends of which are attached to combat boots. These same objects appear in a painting that hangs just above the children's hiding place. This type of imagery has been a symbol condemning the militarization of society since the 20th century's interwar period, which was rampant with uncertainty and tumult. The black objects immediately grab the viewer's attention, clueing them into the anxiety that punctuates a safely guarded world. According to the artist, the boots also can be read as a stand-in for an adult male figure, namely the absence of a father, a common experience for children under siege. The alternative reality that Ballan depicts is not necessarily detached from everyday life, on the contrary it is tied to a deep capacity for empathy. From within the depths of his experiences, Ballan locates the dreamscapes of the subconscious.

The exhibition will open on Wednesday, 22 February at 7 pm at Fann À Porter, gallery space located at The Workshop Dubai, located at Villa 45 - St. 23b - Al Wasl Rd opposite Box Park - Jumeirah 2, Dubai, U.A.E.



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About The Artist

Over the last fifteen years, the paintings of Houssam Ballan have grown increasingly pared down, incorporating abstract elements while eliminating any indication of place and time, as he relies on the potential of emptied settings to signal a particular psychic space. A limited palette, unadorned architectural elements, and scaled down depictions of figures who appear frozen in midair all work to transport the viewer to a place outside their current reality. The sources of inspiration for Ballan's paintings are as varied as Christian iconography, newspaper clippings, and historic photographs, references that point to consciousness and experiences across time and space. Gathering these images blurs the lines that normally separate them, forming what the artist refers to as "a compound image."

Ballan was born in Sweida, Syria in 1983. In the mid 2000s, he pursued an undergraduate degree in the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Damascus while training with a number of international artists via workshops. He was a tutor and member of the Teacher's Association at the University of Damascus for over a decade, and now lives and works in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Ballan has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions across the Middle East and in Europe at venues such as the MENART, Brussels (2023), Fann À Porter, Dubai, UAE (2022, 2020, 2019, 2018), Art Cairo, Egypt (2023), Agial Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon (2022), Lighthouse Gallery, London, U.K. (2020), Cairo Biennale (2019), Hafez Gallery, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (2019), BBA Gallery, Berlin, Germany (2019), Atelier Stories, Paris, France (2018), Mark Hachem Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon (2014), and Ayyam Gallery, Damascus, Syria (2006). His work can be found in private and public collections.

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



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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, a 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 and for interviews, please contact info@fannaporter.com