

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Greed, 2019, oil on canvas, 140 x 140 cm

HOUSSAM BALLAN: *MOTIF*

18 March – 18 April 2020

Opening reception: Wednesday, 18 March from 7 – 10 pm

Fann A Porter, The Workshop Dubai

- Figurative works explore the human condition
- Inspired by his own observations and classical paintings
- Like a composer, his mastery of colour and form reveals itself to the viewer like a piece of music

“I love to watch people and capture them on my canvas. I am interested in the timeless condition of humanity” – Houssam Ballan

The Workshop and Fann A Porter are proud to present Motif, a solo exhibition of recent works by Houssam Ballan, an emotionally driven painter from Syria.

The title of this exhibition alludes to the act of viewing the artwork itself. Just as a listener rarely considers the intricate details of the composition of a piece of music, Ballan’s mastery lies beneath the surface pulling together his artworks and allowing the harmony of colour and form to reveal their stories. As a motif recurs throughout a piece of music, or a work of literature, Ballan’s paintings unravel themselves around his subtle motifs.

About the Exhibition

Interested in capturing the unreliable nature of memory and the familiar uncertainty of lived experience, Ballan pursues a figurative practice to give insights into the daily life of people in his home country of Syria as well as upon the general human condition. His characters are captured in relief and take inspiration from ancient Roman portraits as well as from the oriental Orthodox icons of Fayyoun. Their expressions are loaded with emotion, despite being mostly imprecise and at times, movement is implied, although it remains subtle.

The artist also has a clear dedication to colour, describing his process as delving into individual colours to find a vast world of expression within each one. Here, the musical reference in the exhibition’s title comes into context because, just as a musical composer uses a scale of notes from which to write his music, Ballan has a scale or “maqam” of colours allowing each one to take its full value within his paintings.

Whilst many of the works may seem to depict every-day scenes: women shopping; a wedding dance, a couple kissing; or an orchestra playing, there are several other works inspired by classical paintings, ancient societies or scenes from biblical or literature stories. In one piece, Ballan's figures morph – at times limbless – in front of a deep blue background reminiscent of a battle scene. The subject, as described by the artist, is about two groups of people on either side of a river coming together against a figure of authority. This work was affected by a mural done on rocks in Australia but also carries the title of El Guernica, after Picasso's famous anti-war painting. In another piece, two men with imprecise outlines and faces contorted in struggle, fight in a confined space. Taking inspiration from Goya's seminal work Two Peasants Fighting.

In another particularly striking piece, narrating the story of the head of John the Baptist, loosely depicted figures swirl in gloomy monotone shades around the chopped head at the centre. Inspired by the dark and shadowy style of Caravaggio as well as the artist's subject matter, this piece explores the murky concept of subverted power. Ballan draws his viewer into a myriad of questions looking for answers but finding only an internal journey.

Ghada Kunash, founder and curator at Fann A Porter says: "Houssam highlights the contrasts and contradictions of our daily lives. He manages to capture happiness and tragedy at the same time, painting every day scenes of children playing or people dancing at weddings while the war serves as a backdrop. In his work, we see a whole range of emotions from people falling in love to people fighting and deceiving each other. Although everyone is different, the common factor is that all of the characters are imprisoned, confined within the same cold walls and scarce conditions of war."

Motif is the largest exhibition of Ballan's work to date and the size and scale of this exhibition gives a full perspective across his wide and prolific practice, offering an insight into modern concerns that existed in ancient stories of the human race.



About the Artist

Ballan is a tutor and member of the Teacher's Association at the University of Damascus since 2009. Between 1999 and 2007, he participated in workshops with artist J. Bradley Adams and painter Jose Friexanes, and trained in mural painting with Pierre Palas. Ballan has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions including BBA Gallery, Berlin, Germany (2019); Hafez Gallery, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (2019); Atelier Stories, Paris, France (2018); Fann A Porter, Dubai, UAE (2019 and 2018), Marc 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. Ballan was born in 1983 in Sweida, Syria where he currently lives and works.

About Fann A Porter

Fann A Porter is a contemporary art gallery 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 programme. Fann A Porter has locations in Dubai, UAE and Amman, Jordan.

The Dubai gallery is based at The Workshop, a unique inter-disciplinary community space consisting of a cafe, art gallery, sustainable store and design space, providing visitors with a diversified artistic and cultural experience. Bathed in natural sunlight with its garden, The Workshop is located in the heart of Jumeirah in Dubai.

Fann A Porter Amman is located at Manara Arts & Culture, a creative hub and social space in the heart of Jabal Al Lweibdeh.

For more information and for interviews with the artist, please contact the gallery on +971559480363, or email fann@theworkshopdubai.com