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Dubai & Sharjah - Exhibition

Elias Zayat: After the Deluge Green Art Gallery

14 Sep 2015 – 04 Nov 2015

Elias Zayat is one of the most significant Syrian artists of the 20th century, and a key founder of the country's contemporary art movement. Although he studied in Sofia, Cairo, and Budapest, his oeuvre remains intimately concerned with the history, terrain, and psyche of his homeland. Zayat's parallel life as an art restorer and historian is evident in his rich vocabulary drawn from Byzantine, early Christian, Sufist, and popular iconography.

In *After The Deluge*, Zayat returns to the ancient city of Palmyra, remembered for being one of the few places in the region that managed to exist alongside the Romans without becoming Romanised. Fittingly, it is also known as Tadmor, or 'the town that resisted.' In this, the city parallels Zayat who, despite emerging at the height of Pan-Arabist fervour that culminated in the Naksa of 1967, managed to resist this sweeping aesthetic hegemony to develop his own inimitable visual language.

Here, Zayat draws from the Mesopotamian, Babylonian, and later Biblical account of the flood, which he understands as a metaphor for rebuilding a decaying world after its total devastation, resiting the event in the historical city of Palmyra. The titular

trptych, *After the Deluge* is presented as plea for peace, heralded in the epic by a dove bearing an olive branch. Yet in the central panel, Zayat's doves find themselves locked into a suffocating circular dance high above the remains of a decimated town; a struggle from which it is seemingly impossible to escape.

The only answer seems to be to flee the humanitarian chaos to arrive at a better world as seen in the young men of the side panels, who are poised as if to take flight. The triptych is anchored by a selection from his works on paper, which form a crucial backbone of Zayat's practice. These studies depict the movements of birds, to present both theoretical and literalised new lines of flight.

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lias Zayat, *After the Deluge*, 2014-2015, Mixed Media on Canvas, 175 x 97 cm



lias Zayat, After the Deluge, installation view at Green Art Gallery

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Green Art Gallery is a contemporary art gallery based in Dubai, UAE. Representing a multi-generational mix of artists, the Gallery's program is focused on contemporary artists from the Middle East, Turkey, South Asia and beyond, working across different media, traditional and new, who employ a research based approach. As a gallery that has been active in the region for almost two decades, **Green Art Gallery** has had the privilege of bearing witness to the tremendous transformations the region's art scene has experienced, in terms of artistic production and presentation, audience reception, and the growing role of institutions, small and

large, public and private.

Green Art Gallery was originally established in 1995 by **Mayla Atassi**, when it played a key role in the development of major modern Arab artists including Fateh Moudaress and Ismail Fattah, among others. In 2010 and upon the appointment of **Yasmin Atassi** as gallery director, Green Art Gallery went through a complete rebranding and restructuring of its identity, artist roster and curatorial focus. In 2010, Green Art Gallery relocated to a 3000 sqft warehouse space in Alserkal Avenue which allowed for the innovative and ambitious projects which were to follow. In 2012, **Green Art Gallery** initiated a publication program collaborating with curators, writers, and artists, to expand the reach of its exhibition program beyond “the white cube”. In this way, the Gallery aims to contribute to the documentation, archiving and historicizing of artistic production in the region. Since 2010, Green Art Gallery has participated in various international and regional art fairs including **Art Dubai**, **Moving Image Fair** in London, **Art Basel**, **Art Hong Kong** and **Artissima** Art Fair.

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