

Sadik Kwaish Alfraji: Driven by Storms (Ali's Boat)

Ayyam Gallery Dubai (Al Quoz) is pleased to announce *Driven by Storms (Ali's Boat)*, a solo exhibition by one of the most prominent Iraqi artists working in the diaspora today, [Sadik Kwaish Alfraji](#). Much of Alfraji's oeuvre addresses the vulnerability of human existence and speaks of loss, exile, fragmentation, and displacement. Curated by Nat Muller, the show premieres an exciting new body of work the artist has grouped around the theme of 'Ali's Boat,' based on a drawing his young nephew, Ali, gave him on a family visit to Baghdad in 2009.

The exhibition includes a series of large-scale paintings, charcoal drawings, artist diary sketches, and stop motion video animation in which the artist blends his distinct aesthetics with that of his young nephew, and of his own children. The plight of a young boy wishing to escape the horrors of present-day Iraq is merged with the artist's own predicament as an exile, unable to return home. In a childlike style—made all the more poignant by the melancholy sadness and gravitas so characteristic of Alfraji's work—the pieces draw on crucial existential questions such as the wish to live in peace and security, the pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment, and the possibility to dream.

Alfraji shows us that life's journey is fraught with obstacles, much akin to the board game of snakes and ladders, which is a returning visual trope in the work. Whether Ali or Alfraji will reach their destination is unknown, the imaginary worlds the artist creates are filled with dark fairytales and wishful, but perilous, journeys. The storm referred to in the exhibition title is as much the violence in Iraq that propels Ali to leave, as it is Alfraji's tempestuous longing for the Baghdad of his childhood.

All works in *Driven by Storms* are created in black – Indian ink, charcoal,

graphite pencil, black and white prints. Black is a color the artist feels intensifies the power of expression most, but it also freezes a moment and renders it timeless. As such Alfraji's project, deeply personal as it may be, transcends its geo-political specificity and becomes a universal quest for hope.