

Ibrahim El Salahi: Selected Works, 1962-2010

Skoto Gallery presents *Selected Works 1962-2010 by Ibrahim El Salahi*, an exhibition of dynamic drawings and paintings by the Sudanese-born artist. This will be his second solo show at the gallery and the first U.S presentation of his work since his highly-acclaimed retrospective at the Tate Modern, London in 2013, which was organized by the Museum for African art, New York. The reception will be on Thursday, May 1st, 6-8pm.

Ibrahim El Salahi is celebrated as a pioneer modernist and one of the most significant figures in African and Arab modernism. A leading light in the Khartoum School, he has made significant contributions to the development of post-colonial aesthetics and artistic ideology during the 1960s decade of independence and liberation movements in Africa. His work offers an intensely personal reflection of self, nurtured within the compass of individual and collective history, and in the context of global transformations. The concept of the subconscious is a powerful one and can be very much seen in his work's high originality. He combines Islamic, Arab and African visual and textual traditions with a deep understanding of Western art principles to create work that is highly characteristic and clearly recognizable.

This show will present a strong selection of drawings and paintings from 1962-2010, spanning five decades of a distinguished career as an artist in continuous search for creative excellence. Included are unusually striking works from across the period that seamlessly blend his longstanding interest in the artistic exploration of form and composition with distinctive means of synthesizing aspects of Western art with Arabic calligraphy and diverse cultural traditions. His work encourages us to embrace a more expansive definition of modernity A master of harmony

and dissonance in composition, Ibrahim El Salahi uses the contrast of stark and bold lines against intricate segments of detail and density in his work to reflect on intimate yet universal narratives. The colors and forms of his work explore other worlds and distant places that offer the viewer a freedom of imagination, interpretation and emotional responses.

They Always Appear, an early painting from 1964-65, that was included in his retrospective exhibition at the Tate Modern, London last summer is one of several important works in this show. It is an outstanding canvas from his early years of self discovery and rigorous experimentation. A deeply meditative picture dense with infinite nuances, that expertly exploits the ambiguity that arises between abstract shapes and imagery as well as the intriguing play between formal intention and narrative potential. Imbued with remarkable elegance and lyrical beauty, it captures with vividness the Intensity of the creative energy that informed his emphatic declaration that "there is no painting without drawing and there is no shape without line, in the end all images can be reduced to lines'

The artist in his own words:

"I understand authenticity not as creating something out of nothing, which is beyond human powers, but as a process of making additions, genuinely new in both appearance and substance, to what already exists. One cannot do this without awareness of the self within its cultural milieu, and of a composite history involving its intellectual traditions, hopes and dreams, heritage, ambitions, and experiences. The authentically creative individual is able to grasp all this, and, through insight and perspicacity, to enhance and promote his or her cultural legacy with fresh, relevant contributions firmly rooted in the local milieu. This individual can relate to all humans of all creeds and ethnicities on an equal footing. It goes without saying that being able to learn from the experiences and discoveries of others, and make use of what is learned, is very different from both subordination of the other, and a pitiful dependency on and

fascination with the achievements of the other.

Here lies the core of a problem that many of us have faced without being fully aware of its ramifications. We used to work in isolation from our own world, alienating ourselves from our immediate surroundings of people, environment and heritage. For skills and knowledge we went to foreign schools and imported ideas, orbiting within their magnetic sphere of influence, without pausing to look inside our selves for a glimpse of our possible visions or our own culturally distinctive features. A few, though, were able to see the necessity of returning to their selves and to their local legacy. Their creative production represented a sort of revival and rebirth of the roots of their artistic heritage, not through a boring repetition of irrelevantly obsolete motifs but through a succinct scrutiny of the values inherent in it.

I have finally arrived at the conclusion that the work of art is but a springboard for the individual intellect, or is like a reflecting mirror bringing us back to our own selves, The picture floats freely from within the realm of a simple relationship between viewer and form, an invitation to visual meditation and to a better knowledge of the self.

I am very obsessed with my work. I am a painter and have no other profession. I go to bed dreaming of figures, forms and colors and wake up to translate my visions and dreams into works of art. My style changes, but I keep working on one particular theme inspired by a tree, an acacia locally called haraz that grows on the banks of the Nile. During the rainy season the tree is leafless, and it blossoms with freshly budding green leaves when the weather turns dry and the river flows at its lowest level toward the sea. Through it all, the tree remains steadfast, silently watching over the passage of seasons and time."

Excerpt from the essay "The Artist in His Own Words" by Ibrahim El Salahi, from the accompanying catalogue to the retrospective exhibition "Ibrahim El Salahi: A Visionary Modernist, Tate Modern, London, 3rd July

– 22nd September, 2013, Edited by Salah Hassan, Published by Tate Publishing, London in association with the Museum for African Art, New York. Organized by the Museum for African Art, New York, Curator: Dr. Salah Hassan, the exhibition first opened at the Sharjah Art Museum in May 2012 and travelled to the Katara Cultural Village Foundation, Doha, Qatar in October 2012.

Ibrahim El Salahi was born in Omdurman, Sudan in 1930. He studied in Khartoum and then the Slade School of Art, London in the 1950s. His work has been shown at venues such as PS1, New York; Tate Modern, London; Sharjah Museum, UAE; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Haus der Kunst, Munich. He is represented in numerous private and public collections including The Metropolitan Museum, MOMA and Museum for Africa Art all in New York. Tate Modern, Iwalewa Haus, Bayreuth, Germany, and National Gallery, Berlin He is a recipient of Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship, The Order of Knowledge, Art and Letters, Sudan and the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development Honorary Award. He is in the current exhibition *Post-Picasso: Contemporary Reactions*, Museu Picasso, Barcelona, Spain, He lives and works in Oxford, England.

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