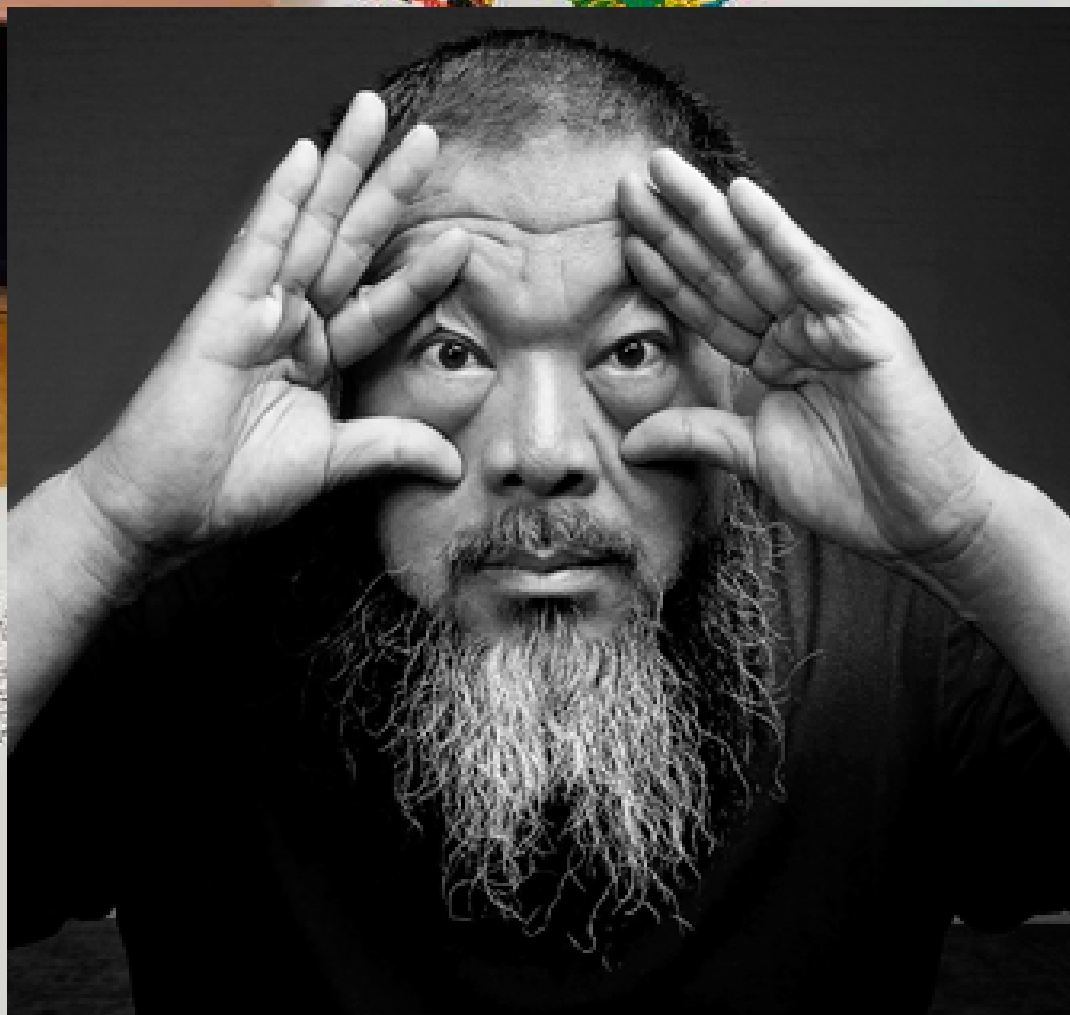


# SELECTIONS

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## DUBAI

## A Bigger, More International Ayyam

Since it first opened in Alserkal Avenue in 2008, Ayyam Gallery has gone from strength to strength. Now the **Samawi cousins** are expanding their Dubai premises and diversifying their line-up

by Laura Egerton

When cousins Khaled and Hisham Samawi moved into Alserkal Avenue's Unit 11 in 2008, they were the first gallerists to spot the potential of the run of spacious warehouses. Seven years after they nestled in amongst mechanics and light industry to show the work of young Syrian artists they had discovered in Damascus, the cousins are delighted with the way the area has transformed.

"In recent years Alserkal Avenue has become the undisputed art centre of the Gulf," says Khaled. "We are proud to have been part of its growth and maturity."

Back in 2008, the grand scale of the Alserkal Avenue gallery was something new to Dubai. In this spacious location, Ayyam Gallery was able to give its artists space to create large-scale installations and stage exhibitions such as the recent *Collapse* by Sama Alshaibi, Nadim Karam's *99 Objects Possible to Find on a Cloud* or Sadik Kwaish Alfraji's *Driven by Storms (Ali's Boat)*. They have held retrospectives of seminal artists of the region, such as Samia Halaby and Moustafa Fathi, as well as group shows and their hugely successful Young Collectors Auctions, which will hold its 24th edition in February. In the meantime, they have opened in DIFC, Beirut, and briefly in London, Cairo and Jeddah.

Now, Ayyam Gallery is expanding its Alserkal Avenue location, taking over Unit 12 next door. Unit 12 offers a smaller white cube space, with a side room suited to showcasing video pieces or smaller works.

The opening exhibition in the space, *A Temple for Extended Days*, brings the triptych *Tomb Sonata in Three Military Movements* by Egyptian artist Khaled Hafez to Dubai for the first time. Created

in 2010, the painting's juxtaposition of threatening military presence, ancient Egyptian iconography and modern day superheroes is as relevant today as it has ever been. The surface of the work is built up from recycled materials — personal notes and musical scores are layered amongst magazine covers and takeaway food containers.

Hafez creates a timeless dystopia, in which a buff athletes stride with purpose alongside animals and guns. He could be illustrating any number of historical or contemporary conflicts, hinting that resolution can only come through the intervention of the supernatural.

The experimental video *The A77a Project: On Presidents & Superheroes* dates from 2009. A cartoonlike animated figure, with the headdress of the ancient god Anubis, marches through the rubbish strewn streets of present-day Cairo to the sound of a staccato disco track, punctuated by extracts from the resignation speech of President Gamal Abdel Nasser. An installation exhibited alongside this work consists of ten glow-in-the-dark Anubis statues resting in sand.

The gallery has exciting plans for the future. Next up is a photographic series from Rula Halawani, an artist new to the gallery's roster. A native of occupied East Jerusalem, Halawani has built her practice by documenting the minutiae of lives and starkness of landscapes under occupation.



ABOVE: Khaled Hafez, *Tomb Sonata in Three Military Movements II*, 450 x 200cm, paper collage, burlap and acrylic on canvas, 2010

BELOW: Khaled Hafez, *Book Of Flight*, 250 x 600cm, 5 canvases, mixed media on canvas, 2010

OPPOSITE PAGE: Khaled Hafez, *The A77a Project*, 2009, video and installation

In March, the space will display new paintings by up-and-coming young Iraqi artist Athier. The gallery has always offered tremendous support to its artists, turning its Damascus space into an artists' studio compound and helping artists to leave the country and seek refuge from the ongoing conflict. In 2015, they launched a young artist-in-residence programme.

Ayyam's relationships with Syrian artists will always be at the heart of their programming, but they also have grander ambitions. "We are in discussions with major international galleries and established international artists for representation in Dubai," reveals Khaled, "as we contemplate the transition of our roster to focus on a more global line-up in place of representing a specific region." ♦

