

Illuminating the Word

10 June – 31 August 2015

**Summer Party and Fitzrovia Lates:
25 June 2015, 6-8pm**

Mir Yaghoub Sangtarash, *Hafez Poem 01 (detail)*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 192 x 145 cm

Within the Middle East, calligraphy holds a special place – both spiritually and artistically. The script of the Holy Qur'an, it has been used for centuries to convey not just God's word, adorning the book itself, but blossoming through the rich tradition of the Islamic decorative arts. It is also, however, an intensely contemporary art form, with its strict geometric rules lending themselves well to innovative new interpretations. From the abstract to the literal, from traditional painting to calligraffiti, the power of the word is explored in myriad ways through the works of today's generation of artists. In *Illuminating the Word* (10 June – 31 August), running in the Project Space alongside the gallery's summer show, *Lumiere*, a selection of artists from Iran, Syria and Tunisia encompass multiple generations and styles to create an illuminated space where the power of the word holds centre stage.

From the large-scale canvases of Mir Yaghoub Sangtarash and Azra Aghighi Bakhshayeshi to the small, delicate works on paper of Khaled Al-Saa'i, the Arabic script is explored in numerous ways – at times able to be read, at others, completely abstract. Some works repeat a single letter form or word, while others bring to life entire phrases and poems.

Kashya Hildebrand was one of the first galleries to showcase calligraphy as a Contemporary art form from the Middle East in Europe, presenting the works of such vanguards as Farhad Moshiri, Charles Hossein Zenderoudi, Ali Omar Ermes, Ahmed Moustafa, Mohammed Ehsai and Nja Mahdaoui. Now, *Illuminating the Word* pays tribute here in London to some of a new generation of calligraphic masters, who so evocatively combine the power of the written word with the power of art.

Notes to Editors:**Kashya Hildebrand**

Founded in 2001, the gallery's artists challenge pre-conceived notions of nationality and cultural identity, creating an environment in which established norms become blurred and characterisations from seemingly contrasting cultures occupy the same visual space. This juxtaposition leads to a simultaneous renunciation and acceptance of the traditional and the contemporary, creating an environment that is in constant flux. Religion, politics, nationality and culture are treated as the foundation of identity, depicted and disseminated to varying degrees. Through painting, collage, sculpture, photography and installation work the artists convey the contestations of the contemporary political landscape.

Abdallah Akar

Abdallah Akar (b. 1952, Tunisia) arrived in France to pursue Science studies at Paris VII University. In 1980, he met – and subsequently studied under – Master Iranian calligrapher Ghani Alani. In 1993, he began teaching calligraphy at the Institute du Monde Arabe, and has collaborated on several international projects, often with a focus on pre-Islamic poetry, and spends the intervening time at his Val d'Oise studio close to Paris.

Azra Aghighi Bakshayeshi

A descendant of the famous court Calligrapher Mirza Karim Khoshnevis Tabhari, Azra Aghighi Bakshayeshi, (b. 1968, Iran) is the only professional female calligraphic artist working in Iran. Receiving her degree from the Calligraphy Association of Iran in Tehran, (1984) she went on to receive a BA in Graphic Design in 1994, her work can be found in the collections of the Tehran Contemporary Museum as well as Malaysia's Islamic Arts Museum.

Maryam Ghanbarian

The works of Maryam Ghanbarian (b.1987, Iran) allow calligraphic line and form to resonate with the natural world. Receiving her MA from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Iran, she has exhibited in Iran, the UK and Switzerland. She was the 2012 recipient of the Special Award in the First International Visual Arts Festival of ECO, part of global celebrations for Norouz (Iranian New Year).

Nja Mahdaoui

One of the Middle East's leading contemporary artists, Nja Mahdaoui (b. 1937, Tunisia) has exhibited at venues such as the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg and the Museum of Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. Studying at the Academy of Arts of Santa Andrea in Rome and the Ecole du Louvre, Paris, his works are in prestigious collections around the world, including the British Museum and the Smithsonian Museum.

Hassan Massoudy

Leaving his native country for France in 1969, Hassan Massoudy (b. 1944, Iraq), received his MFA, Curriculum in Painting from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1970. He has exhibited widely throughout France and abroad, and his work can be found in the collections of the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka Japan; the British Museum, London, UK; the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, Amman, Jordan and Sharjah Museum, UAE, among others.

Khaled Al-Saa'i

Khaled Al-Saa'i (b. 1970, Syria) graduated from the University of Damascus in 1997 with his MA in Fine Art. Today, he is an internationally recognised master of Arabic calligraphy, and has exhibited worldwide, from Germany, France and Spain to the USA, Mexico UK as well as extensively throughout the Middle East. He has won numerous prizes and awards and his works can be found in the collections of the British Museum and Denver Museum of Arts, among others.

Mir Yaghoub Sangtarash

Over the last decade, Mir Yaghoub Sangtarash (b. 1960, Iran) has been experimenting with new modes of calligraphy, moving away from traditional forms of expression to blend traditional and innovative forms together. While largely self-taught as an artist, he has been creating artistic calligraphic works since 2001, and has won numerous prizes and awards throughout his native Iran.

KASHYA HILDEBRAND

LONDON

MORE INFORMATION

Exhibition: *Illuminating the Word*

Artists: Abdallah Akar, Azra Aghighi Bakshayeshi, Maryam Ghanbarian, Nja Mahdaoui, Hassan Massoudy, Khaled Al-Saa'i, Mir Yaghoub Sangtarash

Location: Kashya Hildebrand, 22 Eastcastle Street, W1W 8DE, London, UK

Telephone: +44 (0)20 3588 1195

Dates: 10 June – 31 August 2015

Summer Party and Fitzrovia Lates: 25 June, 2015, 6-8pm

Hours: Monday – Friday 11am – 6pm, Saturday 12 – 6pm

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