

Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet, Berlin is pleased to announce its 7<sup>th</sup> exhibition:

**“ DANCE OF THE SEVEN VEILS ”**

Contemporary works from the Middle East

Halim Al Karim      Dhafer Al Shehri      Amira Behbehani      Shadi Ghadirian  
Abdulnasser Gharem      Majida Khattari      Tahmineh Monzavi      Shirin Neshat

IRAN IRAQ KUWAIT MOROCCO SAUDI ARABIA

**OPENING:**                      Friday, September 20, 2013 – 6 to 9 p.m.  
**EXHIBITION RUN:**              September 20 to December 14, 2013  
**LOCATION:**                      Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet, Berlin

*Dance of the Seven Veils* refers to the beheading of St. John the Baptist demanded by Salome. Interestingly, this tale has antecedents both in the Old Testament and in Assyrian and Babylonian religions, thus revealing a connection between the West and the Middle East, an undercurrent of the exhibition itself.

As the title suggests, it's all about the veil—a controversial topic not just in the Middle East, but also in the West. One need only think of the recent clash between Muslim protesters and riot police in a Paris suburb after attempts were made to fine a woman for wearing a full Islamic veil. Or one need only recall any number of incidents in the Middle East where so-called religious police beat women for *not* wearing the veil.

But the veil is just the tip of the iceberg. This article of clothing has become a symbol of women's rights—the right to drive, to education, to appear without a male relative in public, to work, to vote.... Paradoxically, the question of the veil reveals gender issues even as it conceals the female form.

Our mission is to be a catalyst for contemplation and a platform for artists of significant merit. Consistent with our commitment to relevancy and dialogue, we have chosen works for *Dance of the Seven Veils* which are both contemporary and provocative but which, in the final analysis, transcend their anecdotal and historical content. It is this quality of transcendence that distinguishes, for example, a photograph from a photographic *work of art*. When form overtakes content, craft becomes art, and *timely* becomes *timeless*. Or to put it another way, as a colleague art dealer once said, “Subject matter is only an excuse to make a great work of art.”

Earlier exhibitions at Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet sought to stimulate a dialogue between Modern and Contemporary art through works drawn primarily from the Western tradition. But the world is changing and drawing closer thanks to the Internet and social media. So, we choose to be an active thread in that global fabric: we have broadened our mission in order to explore the connection between Contemporary art from the West and

the Middle East. In fact, we see these two geographical spheres as one: *The Greater West*, stretching from the Arabian Gulf and the Levant to Berlin, Paris and London, and on to New York, Los Angeles and Vancouver.

*Dance of the Seven Veils* pulls on that thread, first sewn in the previous exhibition, which featured the works of Saudi artist Abdunasser Gharem and launched his Amen Art Foundation. The Foundation went on to the Venice Biennale this year, where Abdunasser Gharem brought Dhafer Al Shehri, one of the artists featured here.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

### **Halim Al Karim, b. 1963, Iraq**

Halim Al Karim underwent a harrowing experience during the first Gulf War. Opposing Saddam's regime and its compulsory military service, he took to hiding in the desert, living for almost three years in a hole in the ground covered by a pile of rocks. He survived only through the assistance of a Bedouin woman who brought him food and water and taught him about gypsy customs and mysticism. Understandably, these events have had a profound effect on his life and form the basis for his art practice. Halim Al Karim now lives and works in Dubai and Denver, Colorado. Halim Al Karim has held many solo exhibitions in Dubai, Paris, Holland, the USA, Jordan, and Lebanon. He was nominated for the 2010 Sovereign Art Prize and was awarded the jury prize in the International Cairo Biennale in Egypt. Halim Al Karim was one of six artists whose work was featured at the Iraqi Pavilion at the 54<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, the first Iraqi Pavilion in 36 years. His work is in the collections of major museums, including the Arab Museum of Contemporary Art in Doha, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the Saatchi Collection in London, Darat Al Funun in Amman, L'Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris and the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo.

Biography courtesy of XVA Gallery and Saatchi Gallery

### **Dhafer Al Shehri, b. 1979, Saudi Arabia**

Winner of numerous international photography prizes, young Saudi street photographer Dhafer Al Shehri lives and works in Riyadh. His keen eye for composition and social commentary, and in particular his depiction of traditional subjects in modern contexts, are the trademarks of his work, which bears witness to the transition of Saudi society from the old to the new.

Biography Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet

### **Amira Behbehani, b. 1964, Kuwait**

Amira Behbehani borrows her themes largely from herself, her attachments and her thoughts in the thousands, waiting to be delivered to life. Inspired by Krishnamurthy, Eastern philosophy, Omar Khayyam and Rumi, her semi-abstract works speak in a vocabulary of intimate emotions. The lines act as a connection between the inner and outer worlds of this artist. "It starts with a line," she says.

Biography adapted from Bazaar Magazine

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### **Shadi Ghadirian, b. 1974, Iran**

Shadi Ghadirian was born shortly before the Iranian Revolution. She was one of the first to graduate in photography from the University of Azad, which had been closed during the early '80's after the Revolution. While she was at the University, she encountered some of the earliest works in the history of Iranian photography. These archival images of nobility stiffly positioned with their own *accoutrements* of status sparked her own work, a series of photographs known as the "*Qajar Series*," that capture the private worlds of a conflicted generation of Iranian women today, caught in the cultural crossfire of the hyper-connected Western world and the comparatively stultified environment of their homeland. The paradoxical intrusion of the contemporary, in the guise of objects - usually Western in origin, smuggled into the country, ranging from Pepsi cans to boom boxes wonderfully articulates the schizophrenic nature of life in Iran.

Biography courtesy of Rose Issa and Arsalan Mohammad

### **Abdulnasser Gharem, b. 1973, Saudi Arabia**

Abdulnasser Gharem is one of the most significant Saudi artist of his generation. A pioneering conceptual artist and Lieutenant Colonel in the Saudi army, Abdulnasser Gharem has consistently challenged existing modes of artistic practice in the isolated, rapidly changing Saudi cultural landscape. The different strands within his *oeuvre* include photography, video, painting, sculpture and performance. At the core of Abdulnasser Gharem's work is a negotiation between paving the way for progress (both artistically and socially) and maintaining a connection with Saudi heritage. His desire to preserve and build upon traditional art forms rather than break with the past is a radical gesture in the context of the recent history of Western Contemporary art. Though frequently reflecting on and questioning sensitive issues, his work maintains a respect for history, and the influence of his military role can be felt with references to authority and use of established symbols of power and bureaucracy. Abdulnasser Gharem's role in developing an audience for conceptual art within Saudi Arabia has been pivotal. He has exhibited in Europe, the Gulf and the USA, including at Martin Gropius-Bau and at the Venice, Sharjah and Berlin Biennales. He made history when his installation *Message/Messenger* sold for a world-record price at auction in Dubai, establishing Abdulnasser Gharem as the highest-selling living Gulf artist.

Biography courtesy of Edge of Arabia

### **Majida Khattari, b. 1966, Morocco**

As a political artist, Majida Khattari brings together art, fashion and religion in a way that is at once spectacular and antagonistic. The psychoanalyst Fethi Benslama, who is a specialist on Islam in the West, writes in an article on her work, "It is an approach which, while directed towards one of the most burning aspects of Islam, has managed to create a bridge between the situation of the woman as a theologico-political issue and the contemporary language of the visual arts . . . a bridge between a system of repression of the female body and the system of fashion." In addition to the clothing sculptures, which she presents in fashion show performances, Majida Khattari also works with photography and video installations.

Biography courtesy of Emilie Benoit

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## **Tahmineh Monzavi, b. 1988, Iran**

Tahmineh Monzavi studied photography at Tehran's Azad Art University and has been doing social documentary photography for the last five years. Her photography addresses social issues. She hasn't limited herself to photography, and since 2009, she has been making documentary films as well. In 2011, she earned the first prize of the prestigious *Sheed Award*, an independent, non-profit and non-governmental photography award that goes annually to a social documentary photographer, the only competition in Iran to have International members of the jury, as well as leading Iranian photographers. The year Tahmineh Monzavi won the award distinguished Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam and internationally acclaimed Iranian photographers Manoocher Deghati and Hossein Fatemi were members of the jury.

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## **Shirin Neshat, b. 1957, Iran**

One of the most important artists of her generation, widely acclaimed for her extraordinary video installations and photographs, Shirin Neshat confronts the complexities of identity, gender and power to express her own vision that embraces the depth of Islamic tradition and Western concepts of individuality and liberty through visual metaphor and compelling sound. She was born and raised in Iran but moved to the United States in 1974 after high school to study art. When the Islamic Revolution overtook her homeland in 1979, she was exiled and could not return until 11 years later to a country that bore little resemblance to the one she had left. Shirin Neshat dealt with her displacement by trying to untangle the ideology of Islam through art. The result was a seminal photographic series called *Women of Allah* (1993-1997). In 1996, Shirin Neshat began to explore the medium of film as a means to address these cultural struggles with a clarity that makes them universally poetic. She produced a trilogy of split-screen video installations, including *Turbulent* (1998), *Rapture* (1999) and *Fervor* (2000), all three of which focus on the male/female dynamic in Islamic societies. She was awarded the Golden Lion for *Rapture* at the 1999 Venice Biennale. She also won the Director's Prize at the 2009 Venice Biennale for her film *Women Without Men* (2009) and served on the International Jury for the 2013 Berlinale. Shirin Neshat lives and works in New York City.

Biography courtesy of Detroit Institute of Art & Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet