

ABU DHABI ART 2020 // PRESS RELEASE

"**Abdulnasser Gharem**'s personal reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, have laid the foundation for much of his artistic output, however, *Pause* is the work most closely concerned with the destruction of the World Trade Center. For Gharem, like most of us, witnessing the collapse of the Twin Towers on television was one of those shocking moments that seems to make the earth stand still or pause. This expressive stamp painting is Gharem's response. On the left panel of the diptych are two solid rectangles seemingly rendered in shades of grey but, upon closer inspection, formed of tiny rubber letter stamps in Arabic and English and painted in black and white. The pair of rectangles signifies the digital symbol for "pause" as well as the Twin Towers, which look like ghostly after-images. An incomplete yellow arch—resembling a golden rainbow—straddles the diptych and draws our eyes back to the centre. To underscore the visual connection with 9/11, Gharem has embedded within the composition twenty-seven short quotations formed of stamps painted black and written in reverse. On the far left, just to the right of the golden arch, he offers these words from Sandy Dahl, wife of Flight 93 pilot Jason Dahl, "If we learn nothing else from this tragedy, we learn that life is short and there is no time for hate." (LACMA, Los Angeles 2017)

Random International's "Our Future Selves" presents viewers with their full-length reflection, three-dimensionally distributed as points of light. While the illuminated image is heavily reduced in resolution, it retains the crucial details that engender instinctual recognition. The latest and largest iteration in this series of works, *Our Future Selves* is embedded within its own spatial environment. The installation forms a passageway which onlookers are invited to enter, meeting their own reflection at the end of the corridor before walking on past it. This encounter with the self-image is familiar yet ethereal; the identity of the illuminated figure remains unknowable and ambiguous.

In the series "Two Times" (2014-2016) **Ilya and Emilia Kabakov** merge visual fragments of soviet imagery with those of seventeenth-century Baroque paintings. The Kabakovs confront two very different forms of painting, time frames and realities in a single canvas. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the images of happiness and progress seem to be a persiflage of the reality of the time, which are schematically fixed in memory and burst out like fragments of thoughts in the paintings. Kabakovs carefully thought-out compositions directly reflect the complexity of our mental space, which interweaves personal and collective memories.

Iraqi artist **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 3 years in a hole in the ground covered by a pile of rocks. He survived only through the assistance of a Bedouin woman. His experiences have had a profound effect on his life and continue to form the basis for his art practice. In 2012 Al Karim built an oversized, wet plate collodion camera himself in order to create huge negative-identical photographs; then, at the second last Venice Biennale, he grappled with the medium of glass, using it both for the Murano glass frame and the glass-plate

photographs it contained. In addition, he has experimented with optical film for the first time. The result is as frightening as it is breathtaking and oscillates between extremes of beauty and horrified states. It is a terrain in which Al Karim has moved throughout his artistic career to date. The horrifying traumatic intense experience of flight is always noticeable, subtly. Yet art appears to win the day every time, layered or glazed over it all like some edited, poetic film.