

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Ayad Alkadhi
Umbilical

February 2 – 25, 2012

Opening Reception in Chelsea on Thursday, February 2nd, 6 to 8 p.m.



Ayad Alkadhi, *Sleeping Beauties*, 2011-2012.

Charcoal, acrylic, pen, and pencil on Arabic newspaper on canvas, 72 x 72 in (183 x 183 cm)

Ayad Alkadhi's first solo exhibition in New York City, *Umbilical*, will be on view at Leila Heller Gallery's Chelsea location at 568 West 25th Street from February 2 through 25, 2012. A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition.

The new series of recent paintings and works on paper explores Alkadhi's experiences under the rule of Saddam Hussein, the casualties of war, the Arab Spring, and ultimately confronts immigration and assimilation. Within these broad parameters, the artist weaves personal reflections using sarcasm, humor, anger, sex, and "an honest dose of reality," Alkadhi notes.

Alkadhi's paintings, and the process to create them, embody human struggle: each mark on the canvas is an indication of the artist's presence, his body and his hand, wrestling with his histories, his ghosts, and his materials.

Linda Komaroff, Curator of Islamic Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, writes in the catalogue essay, "We share an interest in the manifold graphic possibilities of Arabic writing, which he freely employs with his own calligraphy as well with newspaper that often functions as the support for his compositions. The words are not mere decoration but merge with and amplify his emotionally charged images inspired by the dreadful aftermath of the American led invasion of Iraq, his homeland, and by his quest for identity as an Arab artist living in post-9/11 New York. He has produced a remarkable body of work that is intensely personal, often tinged with anger but never despondent, and deeply compelling. His is the visual testimony of a self-described survivor."

The layering of such personal and historical content is reflected in the artist's approach and mark making, where strata upon strata of content gets buried beneath successive layers. The works typically start with Alkadhi's signature base of yellowed newspapers pasted onto a canvas upon which he sketches in black and sanguine: bodies, embryos, and faces, thoughts and scribbled notes. A second layer obscures this phase with a heavy-handed brushwork. A third phase overlays controlled and contained bright colored outlines. Sometimes the layers repeat, intersect, and intertwine.

Hot pink and lilac gas pumps hang like streamers from a clutter of battling, bright neon limbs in *Sleeping Beauties*, 2011-2012. The limbs fight against one another to grasp the pumps that fall beneath them—green against blue, blue against yellow. The sleeping beauties, delicate sketches of unborn fetuses, are in the work's second layer. This is the future generation innocent of the news that surrounds them or to the struggles that lie before them.

Born in Iraq in 1971, Ayad Alkadhi lives and works in New York City. He received an MFA from the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. Alkadhi left Iraq in 1994, and has lived in England, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and New Zealand. His work has been shown at a number of institutions in the Middle East, Europe and the U.S. including the Queens Museum of Art and the Austrian Cultural Forum, New York; the Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston; and the Regis Center for Art, Minneapolis.

For more information, please contact Leila Heller Gallery at 212-249-7695 or visit the website at www.leilahellergallery.com.

###

Press Contact:

Nicole Straus Public Relations

Nicole Straus, 631-369-2188, nicole@nicolestraspr.com

Margery Newman, 212-475-0252, MargeryNewman@aol.com

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.