

# LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

## The Whistle of the Souls, a play that never starts Proposal for a public sculpture

March 17 - April 17

**Public opening: March 17**  
**10 am – 7 pm**

Al Quoz Industrial Area 3  
17-A Street  
Warehouse 18  
Dubai, UAE  
+971 50 101 5627



Reza Aramesh, *Action 136. Put this in your record: I'm present!*, 2014, Slide projection.

**Leila Heller Gallery** is pleased to announce *The Whistle of the Souls, a play that never starts*, a solo exhibition by Reza Aramesh, curated by Ali Bakhtiari. Aramesh's site-specific exhibition centers on a single figure sculpted in white marble, entitled *Action 137: 6:45 pm, 3 May 2012, Ramla*. Installed in a warehouse on the edge of Dubai's industrial neighborhood, the work is intended as a proposal for a public sculpture. An adjacent slide projection piece, entitled *Action 136: 'Put this in your record: I'm present!'* further demonstrates Aramesh's polemical exploration of relationships of power and violence.

The installation features a male figure sourced from reportage. His face is covered by his torn t-shirt. He is standing on a concrete block situated in the center of a warehouse the walls of which are painted black. The compelling composition of the sculpture is a crucial aspect of Aramesh's art as a whole. Vacillating between reserved commentary and incisive critique, the artist uses vocabulary of Baroque art to reconstruct a current political act of violence. The work is at the same time a departure from traditional Baroque sensibility in that this marble sculpture is not displayed in an opulent environment. Instead, Aramesh contrasts his figure against the somber black walls of this industrial space.

Aramesh's installation suggests the vulnerability of a rebellious subject by placing a smaller than life marble sculpture in the midst of this large stand-alone warehouse. Yet, in producing a monument to a single event, he seamlessly universalizes repression and anguish. In addressing a long history of artistic representations of suffering, the artist collages cross-cultural references to link contemporary political

# LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

violence to key chapters from art history. Unlike Baroque sculptures, most of which were commissioned by the Roman Catholic Church and the aristocracy as means of expressing their claims to power and control, Aramesh is proposing a monument of an unknown rebellious civilian. The Porters Room serves as an anti-chamber to display a selection of reportage photographs, which have been manipulated and rendered into slides by the artist. Depicted are blindfolded subjects held in isolation before the backdrop of a natural landscape, with all oppressive protagonists removed. These conscious alterations shift the relationship between the viewer and the subject. Looking itself can here be construed as an act of aggression. This piece explores the conceptual relationship between the illumination of the slide projector and the subjects in the photographs who have been denied light. The viewer is a witness to the various environments that the blindfolded are denied access to.

The title is inspired by Saadallah Wannous's 1967-1968 play called *An Entertainment Evening for June 5th*, which is about the opening night of a play entitled *Safir al-Arwah* – "The Whistle of the Souls", a play within a play that never actually starts. The opening takes place in the Damascus State Theater in the aftermath of the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The play represents the manifestation of a collective of people confronted with the responsibility for their tragic and painful demise throughout history. No longer do they resort to glorifying the past or idealizing the future, but instead learn to accept responsibility for their own and their nations' actions. Aramesh's work is thus imbued with the viewer's self-reflection, which questions of the invisibility of the subject within the theater of modern violence. As the title suggests, the play never gets started...

Iranian born **Reza Aramesh's** photographic, sculptural and performance works have received international attention. He has exhibited in many public and private spaces including, the Tate Britain, the Haifa Museum of Art, Israel, the Palais des Arts et du Festival, France, and the Goethe Institute Brussels. The recipient of numerous awards, he has also participated in art fairs and showed with galleries worldwide, and his works are in the permanent collections of the Devi Art Foundation, India and the Nadour Collection, Germany, among others. He currently lives and works in London.

###

**Ali Bakhtiari** started his career as a curator in 2008 with a retrospective of Faramarz Pilaram at Gallery 66 in Tehran. He has curated numerous exhibitions at renowned spaces worldwide such as Saatchi Gallery, London, Salsali Private Museum, Dubai, ShirinNY, New York and Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai. Most recently, he co-curated a seminal retrospective paying tribute to the late Iranian artist Assurbanipal Babilla in Tehran. Bakhtiari currently runs an independent art project called "ABBookness" which focuses on the production of artist books. He lives and works between Tehran and Dubai.

**Press Contact:** Lila Nazemian, Curatorial & Special Projects Associate, [lila.nazemian@leilahellergallery.com](mailto:lila.nazemian@leilahellergallery.com)  
Lauren Pollock, Director, [lauren@leilahellergallery.com](mailto:lauren@leilahellergallery.com)

