

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Y.Z. KAMI

WHITE DOMES

March 9th — April 25th, 2016



YZ Kami, *Rumi, the Book of Shams-e Tabrizi* (2005)

Leila Heller Gallery Dubai
I-87 Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE

"I strive to achieve otherness, that transcendental element. However, I find that element can be the most difficult part of my work to describe in words."

Y.Z. Kami

Dubai, UAE—Leila Heller Gallery Dubai is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Iranian-American artist Y.Z. Kami, *White Domes*, on view from March 9th to April 25th. Best known for his large-scale, seemingly floating, otherworldly portraits, Kami's oeuvre has been described by Homi Bhabha as a "mediated transmission across materials, genres, and time exposures", or a quotidian mystical. In this sprawling installation over the gallery's three exhibition spaces, the artist extends his gaze further, towards an evermore transcendental materiality with paintings, works on paper, and a sculptural intervention.

Anonymity is not a condition of, but indeed a trait of Kami's practice of portraiture, which allows the artist to render tableaux of archetypal but concrete humanity: images of individuals un-idealized but none the less sublime. Each of the portraits of monumental scale presented for this exhibition project an ethereal air, not so much anachronistic as atemporal—defying as well as uniting time. Indeed, these portraits owe an inspiration, according to the artist, to the celebrated ancient Egyptian Fayoum paintings, whose encaustic funerary renderings to this day still evoke a fleshy, saturated semblance of an individual deceased over 2500 years ago. Likewise, for *Untitled* (2011-12) the image of a young woman with dark locks is obscured by the soft gauze of Kami's exalting use of the apotheosizing Sfumato painting style, typical of all of his figurative oeuvre. She, as a figure, is *foreclosed*, turned inward. Reminiscent, even a vestige, of Byzantine portrayals of the Madonna, in this image the mother—her head slightly, her eyes not closed, but averted—stares in loving embrace towards a now absent child. This is a portrait which

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allows no access to the viewer, refusing to return the gaze. The result is a painting verging on paradox: withdrawal and exposure at once. "The infinite *that is accessible*," states the artist, "lies within."

Y.Z. Kami's oeuvre represents an inquiry on the infinite. The artist's methodical *Dome* series, whose minimalist abstraction deeply relates the possibility of the infinite or spiritual transcendence and from which the exhibition takes its name, are the met in this installation by a singular iteration of his floor based sculptural work, previously presented at the Istanbul Biennale, based on a love poem contained in Rumi's *The Book of Shams-e Tabrizi*. At the center of the latter orbital and ever embedded sculptural presentation of uniformly sized inscribed bricks lies a singular and evocative salt element. Flanking the sculpture's central position, on one side is *White Dome*, composed in ink and acrylic on raw linen, and facing its *other* over the vast expanse of incantation, *Black Dome*, composed in gesso, also on raw linen. Each work employs a mandala-like circular structure originally derived from the artist's *Endless Prayers* series of works on paper, themselves evoking Arabic and Persian prayers and mystical verse.

"Consider the act of transformation as a journey toward light", the artist offers. He continues "The whole process requires purification, and the journey is not possible without passing through a phase that is called *nigredo*...The alchemist in his laboratory would encounter dark states of being... also called *blacker than black*. You cannot go toward the light without first passing through darkness, through the 'Dark Night of the Soul.' The *Black Domes* are that moment."

About the Artist

Y.Z. Kami (b. Tehran, Iran, 1956) lives and works in New York. His work has been collected and exhibited by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art, London, and many other institutions worldwide. Solo museum exhibitions have been presented at Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York (2003); Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (2008); Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art, London (2008); and the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (2009–10). His work was included in the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007, curated by Robert Storr).

About the Gallery:

Since its establishment over three decades ago in New York, Leila Heller Gallery has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting creative dialogue and exchange between Western artists and Middle Eastern, Central and Southeast Asian artists. It has garnered a reputation for identifying and cultivating the careers of artists leaving a lasting impact on contemporary art and culture. Currently representing a diverse roster of Western and Middle Eastern artists, the gallery is also active in the American, European and Middle Eastern secondary art markets.

In November 2015, Leila Heller Gallery opened its first international location in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. At 14,000 square feet, the state of the art gallery features three exhibition spaces, making it the largest gallery in the UAE. Showcasing leading regional and international artists, many of whom will be presenting their work in the Middle East for the first time, the gallery is dedicated to supporting the evolving practice of established artists.

For Press Inquiries

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