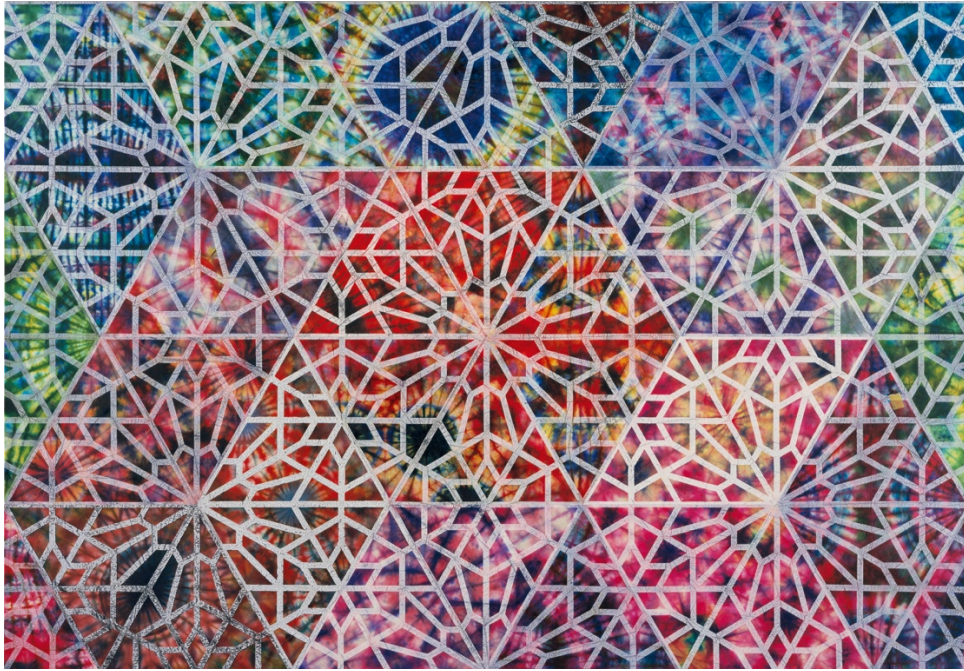


LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

PHILIP TAAFFE

MARCH 19 – AUGUST 31, 2018



Cairene Window I, 2008, Mixed media on canvas, 42 x 60.5 in

Leila Heller Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in the Middle East by Philip Taaffe (b. 1955), one of the most eminent painters of his generation. The exhibition will feature a selection of recent large-scale works on canvas.

Best known for his skillful fusion of techniques, Taaffe has mastered a wide range of processes; including collage, linocut, woodblock, rubber stamp, silkscreen, and marbling — all interwoven into richly complex and highly meditative canvases. He assimilates images, symbols and signs from various sources, transferring them to paper and canvas. Taaffe strives for a visual energy and an optical vibrancy that integrate the decorative with the narrative, and the ancient with the modern – entwining cultural lineages and histories to create something authentic from these interwoven sources.

Taaffe's work combines free gestural painting contrasted with carefully mapped and measured surfaces; including printings from linocuts, hand-drawn relief plates, stencils and silkscreens, often employing traditional techniques such as marbling and gold leaf. The contemporaneity of his works stems from his embrace and appropriation of the language of modernism, though his meticulous, labor-intensive methodology has often been compared to that of medieval manuscripts. As art historian Charles Stein notes, "Taaffe's reinvention of the beautiful represents a kind of valiant inquiry, a conscientious refusal of the suppression of human possibility."

There is a distinctive methodology behind the making of his layered paintings, the assembly, preservation and transmission of information are integral to his process. Through his imaginative *mélange* of art forms and techniques, Taaffe has dissolved the barriers separating artisanship from painting, effectively redefining painting.

In this current body of work, Taaffe derives inspiration from familiar sources, including natural history illustrations, Roman mosaics, microscopic imaging of Viking artifacts, Syrian embroidery pattern books, masks from Mongolia and the Far East, and devices drawn from calligraphy and book design. Optical vibrancy and visual energy underlie these images, reconnecting abstraction to the natural world and exploring the convergence of the optical and conceptual. "I think the power and possibilities for painting today has to do with binding it to a cultural legacy," says Taaffe. "Painting is where these symbolic languages or forms somehow crystallize and reveal their ancestry — and that in turn shows a certain sense of future possibility."

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A striking feature of the paintings in this exhibition is that none of them use the same palette or include the same imagery. Compositionally, the paintings range from compressed layers to airy patterns, such as *Nocturne with Architectural Fragments* (2014), with its layered structure of geometrical lines. Vibrantly colored and heavily patterned, these lines optically vibrate; a mesmerizing experience that compels you to shift your attention between the overall pattern and the individual, oscillating figures, inducing an effect that is both dizzying and pleasant.

At the same time, the subtle play between symmetry and asymmetry in this and other paintings is key to our experience of them. By disrupting the pattern through shifts in color or the deployment of similar but subtly differing forms, Taaffe activates the visual field to the point that one must keep making distinctions, such as undoing the bond between figure and ground. In terms of the internal pictorial narrative, he attempts to tell a story by incorporating diverse geographical and historical subjects and themes, bringing together certain references in unprecedented ways.

Deeply interested in process, Taaffe creates various speeds and velocities in a work. "I plan and deliberate a great deal before I apply certain gestures. The beginning result can take a very long time, and I take a long time deciding and trying things out imperially off the painting, outside of the painting. It's a real process of extended deliberation." Taaffe's paintings teem with activity, he is constantly developing languages that he brings to different pictorial situations, in order to conclude the narrative, making certain unprecedented juxtapositions in the work.

Taaffe's close attention to similarities and differences imbues his paintings with a state of heightened seeing often associated with hallucinations. The radiant light coming from within the paintings, the oscillations and sudden shifts between figure and ground enhance our experience. Through his evolving practice, Taaffe seems to have evolved into a conductor of trance states in a digital age.

About the Artist:

Philip Taaffe was born in 1955 in Elizabeth, New Jersey (USA), and lives and works in New York City and West Cornwall, Connecticut. Taaffe derives inspiration from a variety of sources, including Islamic architecture, Pompeian mosaics, 1960s Op Art, and nineteenth century monographs on natural history. His first solo exhibition was in New York in 1982. He has traveled widely in the Middle East, India, South America, and Morocco. Taaffe lived and worked in Naples from 1988-91. He has been included in numerous museum exhibitions, including the Carnegie International, two Sydney Biennials, and three Whitney Biennials. In 1990 his work was the subject of an extensive critical study in Parkett no. 26 (Zurich & New York). His work is in numerous public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Whitney Museum of American Art; and the Reina Sofia, Madrid. In the year 2000, the IVAM museum in Valencia organized a retrospective survey of his work, with contributions by Enrique Juncosa, Robert Rosenblum, and Robert Creeley. In 2001 an extensive survey of his work was presented by the Galleria Civica of Trento, Italy (with texts by Vittoria Coen and Francesco Pellizzi). In 2004 the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in San Marino (Italy) presented a survey of paintings and drawings based on the artist's explorations with floating pigments and the paper marbling process, accompanied by the Skira publication, *Carte annuvolate* (Cloud Papers) with essays by Peter Lamborn Wilson and John Yau. In 2008 the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg organized a retrospective survey, *The Life of Forms in Art: Paintings 1980-2008*, with a publication by Hatje Cantz, featuring contributions by Markus Bröderlin, Holger Broecker, Kay Heymer, and Brooks Adams.

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.

Press Inquiries: For more information and images, please contact press@leilahellergallery.com