

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

‘Sunken Republic’

by Ayad Alkadhi



The Four Horsemen; 2025; Oil, acrylics and charcoal on canvas; 183 cm x 183 cm

Dubai, UAE – Leila Heller Gallery is delighted to announce the upcoming solo exhibition, a curated selection of artworks by Ayad Alkadhi titled Sunken Republic opening on 27th January 2026.

Sunken Republic confronts the viewer with raw, tangled scenes that resist neat narratives. Explosions of form and fracture echo the chaos of life shaped by political conflict, social unrest, and the relentless pressure to survive. Figures knot together in states of tension — flesh intertwined with bone, plant matter, and clouds of pigment — balancing corporeal solidity with dissolution.

In Sunken Republic, Ayad Alkadhi examines the psychological and physical consequences of living in a world defined by persistent instability. Drawing from lived experience alongside recent global and regional upheavals, the exhibition presents a body of paintings forged through themes of conflict, displacement, and endurance. These forces do not sit at the margins of the work; they form its structural core.

Alkadhi brings bodies, landscapes, and fragments of history into collision, constructing scenes that feel at once deliberate and perpetually on the verge of unraveling. His visual language moves fluidly across art historical and contemporary references — from Renaissance compositional structure to Japanese woodblock aesthetics, alongside the immediacy of street art and comic-book imagery. Precise draftsmanship coexists with drips, neon ruptures, and dissolving edges, creating surfaces that feel both controlled and volatile. Figures twist, fuse, and disperse, hovering between presence and disappearance, as if caught mid-transformation.

Across the exhibition, upheaval operates as both subject and condition. The paintings question who holds power, who is erased, and how identity is reshaped under pressure. Bodies become landscapes; landscapes become contested territory. History is not depicted as fixed, but as something fractured, layered, and continually rewritten. Rather than offering resolution, Sunken Republic proposes liberation as unstable and ongoing — something glimpsed in moments of rupture, in unfinished lines, and in forms

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that refuse to fully settle. The works hold tension without release, inviting viewers to sit within uncertainty and to recognize survival itself as an act of resistance.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Based in New York, Alkadhi is a political painter, war survivor, and immigrant whose lived experience forms the foundation of his practice. Working through a multidisciplinary lens informed by studies in art, engineering, and design, he examines the cultural and geopolitical forces shaping contemporary global and Middle Eastern histories. His paintings position the body as both witness and battleground, reflecting the tensions of displacement and shifting East–West relations.

Ayad Alkadhi is a graduate of New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program at the Tisch School of the Arts. He has exhibited internationally across the Middle East, New Zealand, Europe, and the United States. His recent exhibitions include the Honolulu Museum of Art; the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University; the University of Michigan Museum of Art; the Nevada Museum of Art; the Los Angeles Municipal Gallery; the Queens Museum; the Austrian Cultural Forum and the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art in New York; the Station Museum in Houston; and the Maraya Art Centre in Sharjah, UAE. His work is held in major collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Art, and the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art (Shangri La) Honolulu Museum of Fine Arts, the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, The Barjeel Art Foundation of Arts among others.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Since its establishment over four decades ago in New York, Leila Heller Gallery has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting a 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, Central Asian, Southeast Asian 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 16,000 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. In addition to presenting a dynamic exhibition schedule, Leila Heller Gallery actively organizes shows with world renowned curators, hosts educational panels and film screenings, and produces catalogs and books with scholarly essays. Each year the gallery participates in major international art fairs and stages off-site projects as a platform for exploring new conversations within a wider context of galleries, artists and institutions. Gallery artists have consistently participated in international museum exhibitions and biennials, and are included in leading institutional collections worldwide.