

# LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

## ‘The Blue Note’ by Sultan Bin Fahad



*Yusef; 2026; oil on canvas; 62.5 x 62.5 cm*

Dubai, UAE – Leila Heller Gallery is pleased to present *The Blue Note*, a solo exhibition by Sultan Bin Fahad. Opening in Dubai in May 2026, the exhibition brings together a new body of paintings and bead works that trace the spiritual, cultural, and historical resonances of jazz through Sultan Bin Fahad’s distinct visual language.

In *The Blue Note*, Sultan Bin Fahad turns to jazz not simply as a musical genre, but as a living cultural form— one shaped by memory, faith, improvisation, and collective expression. Through painting, textile-like bead works, and installation, the exhibition explores the early history of jazz and its movement across geographies, identities, and belief systems. Rooted in archival research and oral histories, *The Blue Note* examines how jazz emerged as both sound and social language: a form of rhythm inseparable from spirituality, resistance, and community.

For Sultan Bin Fahad, storytelling functions as a primary medium. Across the exhibition, historical references are neither fixed nor documentary; they are reassembled, edited, and staged. Figures emerge in softened abstraction, their facial features obscured and their gestures suspended in movement. This deliberate ambiguity resists singular ownership and allows the works to speak to the fluid, collective nature of jazz itself—its improvisational structure, its layered ancestry, and its enduring role as a site of cultural authorship.

The exhibition’s new paintings draw on iconic figures and archetypes associated with jazz and Black cultural production. Rendered in luminous palettes and restrained compositions, these portraits evoke both presence and absence, suggesting identities remembered through rhythm rather than fixed likeness. In works such as *Yusef*, *Dakota*, *Dizzie*, *Etta*, and *Coltrane*, Sultan Bin Fahad presents portraiture as an act of reverence—less biographical than atmospheric, where image becomes a vessel for mood, memory, and sound.

Alongside these paintings, Sultan Bin Fahad’s bead works extend his longstanding engagement with language, ornament, and devotional form. Drawing on the visual lexicons of textile, signage, and sacred inscription, these works weave together references to jazz, Islam, and diasporic identity. Phrases such as *Peace and Rhythm*, *Music is Us*, *Gracious and Merciful*, and *Way of Living* frame jazz as both aesthetic language and

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ethical proposition—an improvisational structure through which faith, belonging, and cultural memory are articulated.

Throughout *The Blue Note*, Sultan Bin Fahad considers jazz as a space where spiritual and sonic traditions converge. The exhibition reflects on the relationship between African American musical histories and Islamic thought, attending to their shared values of devotion, discipline, improvisation, and transcendence. In doing so, *The Blue Note* proposes jazz not only as music, but as an architecture of thought: a mode of being shaped by rhythm, improvisation, and the continual remaking of self and society.

Vibrant, immersive, and deeply resonant, *The Blue Note* continues Sultan Bin Fahad's broader practice of reconfiguring inherited symbols and cultural forms within contemporary frameworks. Here, history is not preserved intact, but activated—reimagined through color, pattern, rhythm, and narrative into a living, open-ended composition.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Sultan Bin Fahad (b. 1971, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) lives and works between Riyadh and the United States. Working across painting, photography, and installation, he is known for a self-directed practice that engages storytelling, spirituality, and material culture through layered visual narratives. Beginning as a painter and later expanding into found-object assemblage and intricate bead works, Sultan Bin Fahad has developed a distinct practice that repositions inherited symbols, architectural forms, and historical references within contemporary visual frameworks.

His work has been exhibited internationally, including solo presentations at ATHR Gallery, Leila Heller Gallery New York, Fondazione Fendi, and Rhinoceros Gallery. His work has also been included in major institutional exhibitions including the Islamic Biennale, Desert X AIUla, and the Diriyah Biennale. His works are held in prominent collections including the Toledo Museum of Art, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, and the Royal Commission for AIUla.

## 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.