



Oussama Baalbaki
Watercolors
 Agial Art Gallery
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**EDITOR'S
 CHOICE**

Like many Lebanese painters, the landscapes of his homeland are a fascination and inspiration for Baalbaki. His approach is singular, and perhaps more aware of the present moment. His vibrant, yet soft watercolors ground themselves in the transformations in the urban and rural environment, rejecting neither nature nor culture, but instead accepting them both as part of a broader sense of the landscape. He paints with a steady hand, capturing skyscrapers and mountains in a style he calls 'intellectual realism.' While other contemporary artists may be wary of realism, Baalbaki embraces it: "reality is much richer, more impossible and way more complimentary than the fiction itself," he explains.

The scenes show the artist's deep connection to this land, and the structures that have become part of it. It is both homage and investigation. For Baalbaki, these works are the result of decades of exploring and interpreting his environment: "Painting is something I do since my early childhood. It simply became my language. On the technical level it's like handwriting, it merges fiction with emotion. As for its flat aspect, I find it charming. It's a three dimensional work but on a flat surface. This drives me to measure the thickness of this fictional work. For me, painting is the closest way to imagine an abstract turning into reality."

His sincere approach is inspired by the very concept of the landscape itself. "The landscape is a pure artistic practice...It's an area of feeling nature and the inner self of the artist, for the landscape is most of the time a reflection of the internal world of the artist and a silent medium to express feelings and impressions," Baalbaki explains. For him, the landscape reflects his own psychological and physical experience, connecting the forms associated with nature with something more imagined. He also makes a tribute to the contemporary landscapes of the city, and takes the viewer on a tour through a city that is marked by a delicate balance of dualities and seemingly contradictory forces. His use of light is a critical feature of each watercolor, and serves to counter dark forces that are associated with death, erosion, and the decay of the past. In his words, "Living in the city stimulates anxieties and worries. The duty of the artist is to interact with this anxiety and to transform it into works that emphasize on ethical and moral and mental problematic of our epoch, in an epic and poetic way." Barbed wire, billboards, and dumpsters are rendered with the same strength and beauty as the trees that surround them, as if to say, regardless of wishful memories, this is Lebanon, now.

