

# 'A more important piece than anticipated': Kadhim Hayder's 'Divine Horses' among Middle East art sale at Bonhams

A total of 99 pieces by prominent artists, including Jewad Selim and Monir Farmanfarmaian, are going under the hammer this week



'Divine Horses' was only recently revealed to be part of Kadhim Hayder's 'Martyr's Epic' series. Courtesy Bonhams



Melissa Gronlund  
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Bonhams' Modern and Contemporary Middle East spring art sale will go ahead online on Thursday, June 11, with a strong showing of lots from Jewad Selim, Kadhim Hayder, Omar El Nagdi, Monir Farmanfarmaian and more.

The sale has also brought new information to light about Hayder's important 1965 series *The Martyr's Epic*, which depicts Iraq's Battle of Karbala in 680 AD.

Bonhams is offering the painting *Divine Horses* for sale, which is being consigned

by an Arabian musicologist in Paris. Estimates for the piece range between £50,000 (Dh234,000) and £80,000 (Dh374,000).

The musicologist had received the work as a gift from Iraqi artist Hayder in 1970, when they were both teaching at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Baghdad, and believed it had been painted that year.

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As part of its pre-sale marketing, Bonhams put an image of the work on Instagram, with its date as 1970. But a researcher got in touch to say the work was actually executed in 1965, within *The Martyr's Epic* cycle.

"So it's a much more important piece than we anticipated," says Nima Sagharchi, director of Middle Eastern, Islamic and South Asian Art at Bonhams, adding that this makes it a companion piece to the well-known painting *Fatigued Ten Horses Converse with Nothing (The Martyr's Epic)*, which is in the Barjeel Art Foundation's collection and on semi-permanent view at the Sharjah Art Museum.

"*Divine Horses* was exhibited in Beirut, Baghdad and all around the Arab world in 1965 as part of *The Martyr's Epic*," Sagharchi continues. "In this one, Imam Hussein has died and the horses are mourning him."

Hayder painted around 30 works in *The Martyr's Epic*, but many have been lost.

Other lots in the Bonhams sale include a 1943 painting by Selim, *Women Waiting*, which shows street life in Baghdad in an early example of the Iraqi artist's folk modernism. Estimates range between £150,000 and £250,000.

Two abstract paintings are on sale from the Egyptian artist Adam Henein, who passed away earlier this month: *Beneath the Shadows* (1982) and *The Shadow Rising* (1983), which Bonhams have priced between £5,000 and £15,000 each.

A darkly dramatic work by Fahrelnissa Zeid from the 1960s depicts her daughter as Lady Macbeth, clutching a tall candlestick and challenging the viewer.



Fahrelnissa Zeid painted this portrait of her daughter as Lady Macbeth in the 1960s. Courtesy Bonhams

And, in an unanticipated twist, the Bonhams sale also ventures into the current debate over public monuments, with Mohammed Ghani Hikmat's *Iraq Rises* (estimate £30,000-£50,000), which was commissioned privately in 2006.

Ghani is behind many of Iraq's major public sculptures, including the Freedom Monument in Tahrir Square, for which he cast the bronze elements of Selim's design.

“This is largest and most substantial work by Ghani ever to come to market,” says Sagharchi. “Carved out of a colossal block of limestone weighing nearly 1,000 kilograms, Ghani's composition ... demonstrates the artist's skill at harmonising compositions on a large scale.”



Ghani's 'Iraq Rises' is carved from a single block of limestone weighing nearly 1,000kg. Courtesy Bonhams

Overall, the works are priced conservatively, though Sagharchi he says he has been pleasantly surprised by the amount of interest the works have garnered – particularly from the Emirates, via both existing and potentially new clients.

“It not only gives us confidence in that market,” he says, “but we also see that people have used their time off very productively, to educate themselves and to develop an interest in a field they may have overlooked before.”

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