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Faisal Laibi Sahi: Agony and Recreation



January 28 – March 3 2015

Meem Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of Iraqi artist Faisal Laibi Sahi's recent paintings for the first time at Meem Gallery.

Faisal's oeuvre spans fifty years and demonstrates the artist's continuing commitment to the ancient, traditional, modern and contemporary culture of Iraq. His vividly coloured paintings of individuals and group portraits display ostensibly harmonious scenes of leisure, as demonstrated in his *Coffee House* series and portraits of fruit, textile, shoe shine and laundry vendors. In his exhibition at Meem Gallery, characters such as *The Butcher* and *The Accordion Player* are displayed; and in the case of larger works such as *The Café 2*, we see a grouping of people from the community, a waiter, a general, a couple reading a newspaper.

Faisal renders the works in a stylized realism, the iconography simple and easy to decode, or so it seems. Upon closer inspection, the repetition of forms and figures throughout his work leave a sense of the satirical on the viewer; and open discussion into deeper concerns such as class structure and political hierarchies of contemporary Iraqi culture. Faisal is indeed sardonic in nature, something that is highlighted not only in his art, but can be linked also to his work with the periodical press in Iraq, and the publication of his London based satirical newspaper, *Al Meirasha* (1992-2002).

Other key works in the exhibition include the 1978 masterpiece *Martyrs*, which at 70 x 450cm is truly monumental. Unlike his later work, this particular piece evokes a somber mood is reflected in his choice of palette, greys and black hues of the crowd stand starkly against the white shrouded figure of the martyr.

Born in Basra in 1947, Faisal studied at the Institute of Fine Arts and Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad. In 1974 he travelled to Paris to pursue his studies further at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and Sorbonne Universités. In 1984, he moved to Florence, and after four years there in 1988 he went to Algeria to teach art. In 1991 he moved to London where he lives and works today. Since 1966, Faisal Laibi Sahi has exhibited his works internationally in the Middle East, North Africa, UK, Europe and USA.

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