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Safwan Dahoul Explores Desire and the Subconscious Mind at Ayyam Gallery

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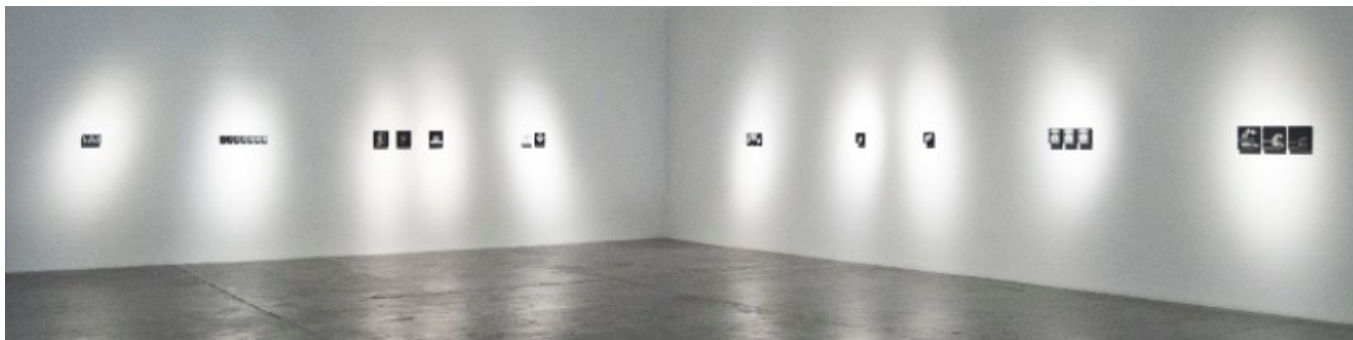


One of the most well known and revered poets of the Arab world, Nizar Qabbani, once wrote that “days will pass, you’ll abandon things you were addicted to, leave someone, cancel a dream, and finally, accept reality.” Qabbani’s insightful words offer timeless advice to lustful dreamers awakened to the subconscious. In believing it was only love and desire that could set the soul free, Qabbani’s words were deeply impactful both in the Arab world and beyond, emblematic of a renewed Arab progressivism that made him one of the most candid, controversial and respected poets of the mid-twentieth century.



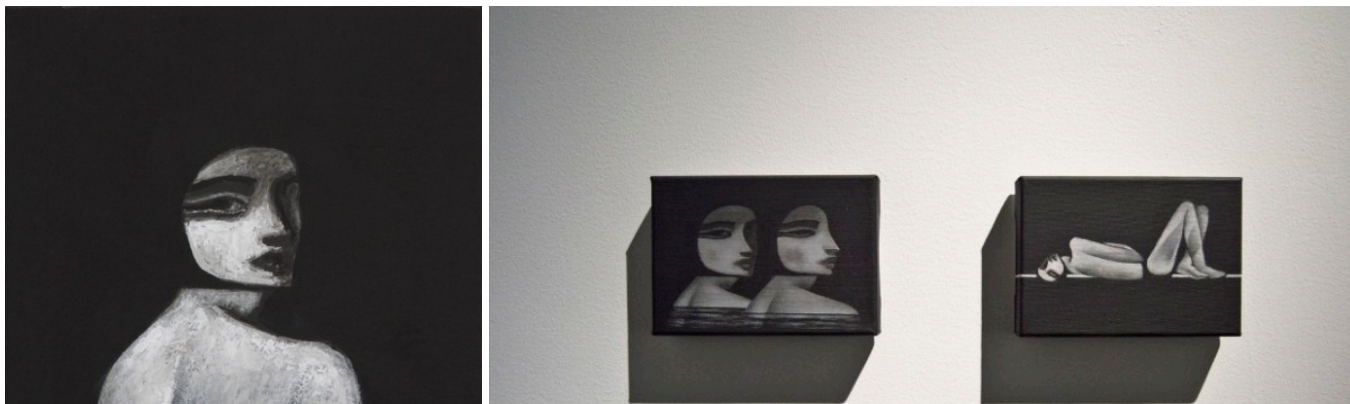
Fast forward to today. Upon encountering Syrian artist Safwan Dahoul’s latest solo exhibition at Ayyam Gallery’s Alserkal Avenue location, Miniatures, I was immediately reminded of Qabbani’s lasting and, perhaps, intuitive impact on the visual arts.

Miniatures begs to be understood subconsciously. It consists of large-scale works that appear subliminally erotic, cerebral, sensual, provocative even. Since 1987, Dahoul's ongoing Dream series—mainly monochrome acrylic paintings on wood—have featured recurring subject matter, an unnamed heroine, dark, often obscured, a figure who, at times, appears alongside crows or religious imagery. The resulting works on display act like a segue into the mind's eye of desire.

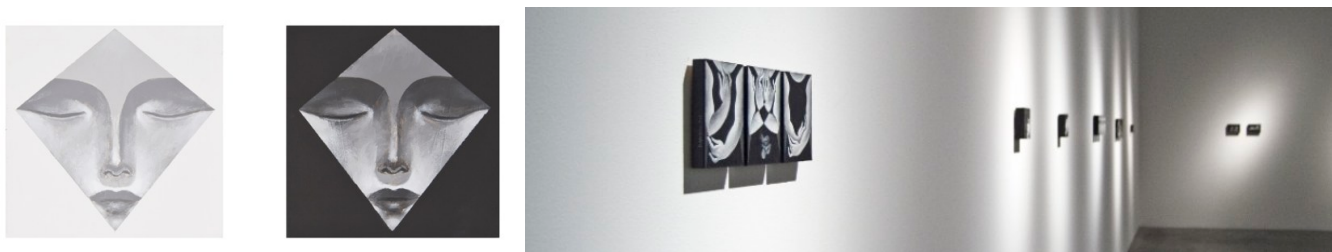


At once, Dahoul's work reveals how dreams—a subject also famously taken up in the West by the likes of Salvador Dali and the surrealists—can lay bare the innermost chambers of the human mind, replete with unsatisfied and never ending states of desire.





In his often cited work the Interpretation of Dreams, the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud wrote that desires affirmed the spectres of the unconscious mind. When studied, Freud believed, dreams could allow one to understand insights into our desires that may not have been apparent otherwise. It's a theme that Dahoul picks up dutifully, masterfully even, via alluring and uncompromisingly mysterious works, which I saw as not an exact depiction of desire, but more so an approximation of it, never fully realized.



As such, it struck me that perhaps Qabbani's poetry is to the mind what Dahoul's paintings are to the eye: representative of a new progressive Al-Nahda—or Renaissance—unafraid of exploring subjects like love and desire in ways that remind us of how timeless these subjects really are.

Safwan Dahoul's Miniatures runs from 9 January – 4 March 2017 at Ayyam Gallery Dubai (12 Alserkal Avenue).

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