

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**SUNDARAM TAGORE PRESENTS THE FIRST
NEW YORK SOLO EXHIBITION OF
CELEBRATED IRAQI-BORN ARTIST HASSAN
MASSOUDY**

Exhibition title: *Hassan Massoudy: Words, Breath, Gesture*

Exhibition dates: February 23 to March 25, 2017

Opening reception: Thursday, February 23, 6 to 8 pm

Venue: Sundaram Tagore Chelsea, 547 West 27th Street, New York, NY 10001

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untitled "O friend do not go to the flower garden, the flower garden is within you"

- Kabir 15th c., 2009, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm

January 23, 2017—Sundaram Tagore Chelsea is pleased to present the first New York solo exhibition of work by Hassan Massoudy, a celebrated Iraqi-born artist based in Paris. Classically trained in calligraphy, Massoudy inscribes oversized letters in vibrant color to create visually striking works which usher traditional Arabic script into a contemporary context. This exhibition features more than 25 works on paper alongside notable paintings on canvas.

Born in Najaf, Iraq in 1944, Massoudy was surrounded by Arabic calligraphy, which adorned the walls of libraries, mosques and religious schools, throughout his childhood. Since an early age, he observed his uncle who was an amateur calligrapher. At 17, Massoudy decided to move to Baghdad to study calligraphy. Living in the capital was an eye-opening experience for the young apprentice as he was exposed to contemporary art exhibitions for the first time.

In 1969, Massoudy moved to France to escape political turmoil and continue his education. He studied figurative painting at the world-renowned École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts while continuing his calligraphic practice. To support himself during his student days, he produced headlines for Arabic magazines. Over time, his calligraphy replaced his figurative paintings entirely.

Today, Massoudy is known for his colorful compositions based on texts from Eastern and Western poets, authors and philosophers. Fascinated by ancient and contemporary writing, he often turns to quotes about love, nature and most importantly, humanism. Once he has selected a passage, Massoudy enlarges a single word from the text and paints it in the center of his composition using a flat brush or instruments fashioned from wood or cardboard. He then incorporates the full passage into the work which he writes using a *qalam* (a traditional writing instrument made from a dried reed).

Following tradition, Massoudy produces his own tools and inks. However, he breaks from the Arabic custom of using black ink by incorporating a bold palette of blues, greens, yellows and reds. He believes that this allows him to fully express himself and convey the emotion of the quotes. Although executed with the utmost control, Massoudy's letters are fluid and charged with energy as he skillfully transforms the written word into evocative images. "When I think my gesture is just right, all the interior conflict ceases," he says. "It's a moment of joy when the alphabet is no longer an instrument of logic but an attitude...Calligraphy reflects my vision of the world, it has become the desire that the world should be thus —filled with a new harmony and freedom."

Calligraphies of Love (Saqi Books, 2017), Hassan Massoudy's new English language book of works inspired by love poems from the Arab and Islamic world, will be released in April.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Hassan Massoudy studied classical calligraphy in Baghdad before moving to France in 1969, where he continued his education at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He has exhibited at prestigious institutions across the globe such as The Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C.; the British Museum, London; Musée des Manuscrits du Mont Saint Michel, Avranches, France; Centre d'Art Contemporain, Abbaye de Trizay; and the Palais des Congrès de Grasse, France. His work is in the collections of the British Museum, London; Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore; and Musée du Quai Branly, Paris. In 2013, he showed at the Sharjah Biennial 11 and two years later he exhibited at *Frontiers Reimagined*, a Collateral Event of the 56th Venice Biennale.

ABOUT SUNDARAM TAGORE GALLERY

Established in New York City in 2000, Sundaram Tagore Gallery is devoted to examining the exchange of ideas between Western and non-Western cultures. With spaces in New York City (Chelsea and Madison Avenue), Singapore and Hong Kong, we focus on mounting exhibitions and hosting not-for-profit events that encourage spiritual, social and aesthetic dialogues. With alliances across the globe, our interest in cross-cultural exchange extends beyond the visual arts into many other disciplines, including poetry, literature, performance art, film and music.

For more information about this exhibition, email press@sundaramtagore.com or call 212-677-4520.

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