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SUNDARAM TAGORE BEVERLY HILLS PRESENTS *SIGNS: CONTEMPORARY ARAB ART*

Exhibition dates: June 19 - July 29, 2010

Opening cocktail reception: Saturday, June 19, 6 - 8pm



Left: Hassan Massoudy, *Untitled (Red)*, 2005, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches

Right: Khaled Al-Saa'i, *Dialogue*, 2008, mixed media on canvas, 38.5 x 56.5 inches

Los Angeles, CA, May 15, 2010—*Signs: Contemporary Arab Art* is a groundbreaking exhibition that provides a rare glimpse into Middle Eastern art world. The first of its kind in Los Angeles, this exhibition showcases the work of seven influential artists from various Arab countries.

Curated by noted German art historian and curator Karin von Roques, the exhibition explores the role of traditional Islamic calligraphy and symbols in the contemporary Arab consciousness. Grappling with aesthetic philosophy, mysticism, tradition, and issues of everyday survival and existence, all seven artists challenge convention and create new visual language. Word art has had a lasting impression on the Los Angeles art scene, beginning with Ed Ruscha's "liquid word" paintings of the 1960s. The *Signs* exhibition illustrates the beauty and impact of writing traditions across the world.

(continued)

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Once the cradle of ancient civilization, the Middle East has a compelling artistic history. For centuries, the written word has played a defining role in Islamic visual culture—a legacy that persists even today. Working with different media, including paint on canvas, collage, ink on paper, wood and gold leaf, these artists take traditional Arabic script and symbols as their point of departure. Qatari artist Yousef Ahmad distills Arabic letters into abstract shapes and gestural marks that sweep across dream-like mixed-media surfaces. Syrian artist Khaled Al-Saa'i is inspired by poetry and Sufi philosophy, and paints spacious landscapes in which words float, overlap and follow their own particular rhythm. Offering a nuanced view of the culture of the Middle East, these innovative artists create complex contemporary works that draw on the spiritual depth of ancient Islamic art.

Rather than singling out Arab culture as "other," this exhibition aims to further intercultural dialogue between the Arab world and the West. Having studied and lived in the Middle East over the past decade, exhibition curator Karin von Roques, formerly the director of the Hermann Hesse Museum in Lugano, Switzerland, has an intimate and unique understanding of the region and its artists. She throws into relief the wide range of work emerging from the contemporary Middle East, bringing its seminal artists to an international audience. Gallery director Sundaram Tagore says, "This exhibition was developed with the prime motivation being connoisseurship rather than the more expected issues of religion or politics. I believe connoisseurship will be the defining factor in the post-recession art world."

The full roster of artists is as follows: Ahmad Moualla (Syria); Ayman Elsemary (Egypt); Hassan Massoudy (Iraq); Khaled Al-Saa'i (Syria); Ali Hassan (Qatar); Georges Fikry Ibrahim (Egypt); and Yousef Ahmad (Qatar).

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