

## PRESS RELEASE

### *Rise of the Cactus*

#### Omran Younis | Solo Exhibition | Beirut Art Days | Multaqa As-Safir

4 – 21 July 2024

Fann À Porter in collaboration with ZAAT is pleased to present Omran Younis's, *Rise of the Cactus* for Beirut Art Days. Showcasing new works from the series, the exhibition marks its continuation as the artist delves into his material exploration and deeply symbolic works.

Making a poignant social commentary on his surroundings, the human condition, and current state of political affairs in the region, Younis combines ideas of post-Modernism with expressionist techniques to develop a painterly language which can be universally understood.

The artist's deep understanding of color and texture is ever present in these works. Transforming universally understood symbols, such as the cactus, into personal emblems, Younis raises questions of how the public interacts and perceives personal symbolic gestures and references. Shifting from his prior focus on the stark realities of war toward these depictions is as relevant as ever in the artist's practice.

Stemming from the artist's *Cactus Story* series, which he began in 2020, Younis continues his shift from depicting the harsh realities of war in Syria. In these works, the artist depicts the cactus: a symbol of resilience and of patience amongst the Arab world; seeing as the word for cactus and patience is the same in Arabic. Though resisting the pigeonhole of being a "political artist", Younis's practice has developed from a figurative one, which depicted these realities more figuratively, to a symbolic one, where these depictions are elaborated in the form of a cactus. Although the subject matter has changed, the message remains ever-present.

The artist says of his work time and again "What is art if not a reflection of the issues preoccupying an artist?"

The current series of works, *Rise of the Cactus*, the cacti emerge from the edges of the canvas and spread like fortresses, protecting themselves and their surroundings, "The cactus invites everything to scream, for it shows that even earth gets its fair share of destruction, nothing is immune, war spares no one and nothing," Younis says in conversation with Zeina Assaf. "But, as a plant it is also highly symbolic, for not only does the cactus resist through its protective spines, but it can also form a protective fence around more gentle plants, sheltering them as a mother protects her children. As with everything I paint, whether cacti or the faces of screaming people, it shows the complexity of life – wonderful and terrible, resisting and feeling."<sup>1</sup>

Through texture, impasto applications, building layers and using color in a deliberate manner, the artist has achieved a pictorial language specific to his message. Where colors have specific representations, and the application of texture can reference violence. These exercises which the artist has imparted unto himself, are a challenge for him to convey ideas of pain or death.

Investigating how lines, shapes, color, texture can be used to convey these ideas, Younis's works veer into contemplation and invites introspection from the viewer. This creates a sense of vulnerability as well as a feeling of pushing and pulling from within the



composition. As we get closer to each work and see how the layers of material interact with the overall work, we can comprehend how the artist has created order within chaos.

1 Assaf, Z. and Wallace-Thompson, A. 'Omran Younis: Blood and Watermelons', Atassi Foundation for Arts and Culture

## قيامه الصبار

كتب السياب في رسالة الى صديقه يوسف الخال (أنني اعتقد بأن بعث الانسان بعد موته هو أكبر انتصار له على الفناء والعدم أنه حين يبعث يكتسب صفة من صفات الاله).

تأتي القيامة مرادفاً للانبعث أذ هي رسالة تبعث الأمل.

حيث الخصب مكان الجفاف والأمل مكان اليأس والحياة بدل الموت والانتصار مكان الانكسار.

أذ هي فلسفة التغلب على جبروت الموت بالتمسك بالحياة.

اذ يقال ان الصبار كان في الماضي ورداً ناعماً ولكنه تعرض للقطف والايذاء كثيراً فقرر أن يحمي نفسه بكل هذا الشوك.

ومن هذه الرؤى بدء هذا المشروع يطرح الأسئلة؟

هل تتأثر كل الموجودات التي لا تملك اللغة بالحروب والانكسارات؛ لماذا لا نسمع انين صراخها رغم أننا نرى بالعين دورتها في الحياة.

هل نحن من يحملها اللغة والمعنى؛ لأننا نملك اللغة وذلك من خلال ما يمر بنا من أوجاع وحروب ورغبتنا من تشبث بالحياة ولو ببصيص من الضوء، أم هي حالة من انصهار الكائن مع الموجودات في الكون.

لذلك نذهب الى انسنة مفردات الطبيعية وتحولها لحالة إنسانية من خلال تشابه الحياة لكل الموجودات.

لأن دورة الحياة لمفردة الصبار هي دعوة للصبر والأمل والتجديد لكل ما تتعرض له، هي بالمختصر دعوة للحياة امام الفناء.