

“Provocations”

by Sami Al Karim and Jonathan Gent

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XVA Gallery, Dubai

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Highlighting the line between the builders of our civilizations and those who are counter-productive to this effort creates a tension in the works of Sami Al Karim. These works can be interpreted as an objection of today’s politics.

Jonathan Gent’s series of paintings titled Women (Vol. 1) play with the provocative, if not incendiary, image of the Islamic veil for Western contexts. Shrouding a spectrum of iconic female figures, from Joan of Arc to Dolly Parton and from Marilyn Monroe to Queen Elizabeth II, Gent most immediately highlights the dark terms of concealment that the veils can signify. There is something pathetic about the eyes that peer out from the shrouds, abject blobs of black paint rendered in the artist’s signature graffito style. In the context of these powerful, and often revered, women, his paintings could appear as a cheap joke about women and Islamophobia. But, like the dumb jokes of a Richard Prince painting, or Prince’s blatantly sexist images, the seemingly silly can be implicitly profound. To poke fun is often to dissipate power.