



Wissam Shawkat ~~Shawkat~~ *Outside*

Vernissage: 26th January, 6pm-9pm

Exhibition Dates: 26th January – 7th March 2017

XVA GALLERY, Al Fahidi Historical Neighborhood, Bur Dubai

XVA Gallery is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition of Wissam Shawkat at XVA Gallery. Iraqi born, Dubai based, Shawkat is known for his conceptual calligraphic style works. The exhibition will present a collection of Shawkat's most recent works on paper and linen, a continuation of a series that marked his departure from traditional calligraphy and made his introduction to the Middle Eastern contemporary art scene.

Artist Statement

I am a calligrapher turned conceptually motivated artist. How does someone self-trained in the most rigid, rule-based medium break out into abstraction? Now more than 30 years into my calligraphy practice, I dutifully studied traditional scripts, compositions, and forms until at last I felt qualified to judge which principles could be overridden and unbound, and which were to remain.

Before calligraphy was canonized as a form it was once considered revolutionary and experimental. My practice is an effort to take it back to that disorienting place that teeters on the edge of what is known and what is unfamiliar.

I am drawn to the graphic value of the Arabic letters well beyond their literal meanings. For instance, the sharp tail of a 'ha' can be cut off from the curved body of the letter and serialized with pen or brush at unrecognizable angles.

Although it may have initially come to me by meditating upon a letter, the ultimate shape is a monumental form that is not exclusively anchored in the Arab world. I am moved as much by old Turkish masters as I am by the Bauhaus, Geometric Abstraction, Futurism, Cubism, and Cecil Touchon's collages.

Beginning with this new body of work, I have chosen to refer to my style and approach as *Calligraphic Form*. This refers to the emphasis on the forms of the letters, their inner and outer spaces and graphic quality, investigated in tandem with the precise shapes of calligraphic characters.

Wissam Shawkat, 2016

Artist Biography

Wissam Shawkat is a conceptually motivated artist with mastery in Arabic calligraphy. Born in 1974 in Basra (Iraq), he was first introduced to Arabic calligraphy at the age of 10 by his primary school teacher Muhammad Ridha Suhail.

Shawkat is largely self-taught in the rigorous medium, attaining mastery through book research, visits to various masters, museum and library collections throughout the region.

He has received numerous prizes for his calligraphy and has participated as both an artist and committee member at multiple editions of the Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial and the Dubai International Calligraphy Exhibition.

his 2011 solo exhibition at Reed Space in New York, introduced a global audience to a series of contemporary compositions. With a 2016 exhibition at Tashkeel (an influential creative hub and gallery in Dubai), Shawkat visually announced his break with traditional calligraphy and his commitment to instead use the letters as a foundation for works of dynamic abstraction.

His style, which is referred to as *Calligraphic Form*, focuses on the precise forms of the letters, but also the abstract shapes generated by examining the geometric spaces inside and outside of their structures.

Shawkat is based in Dubai, where he is engaged full time as an artist, designer, and Arabic typographer. His work is regularly featured in books on Arabic calligraphy and typography, included in museum exhibitions, and acquired by private collectors.

About the XVA Gallery

Established in 2003, XVA is one of the leading galleries in the Middle East that specializes in contemporary art from the Arab world, Iran and the Subcontinent. Exhibitions focus on works by the regions foremost artists as well as those emerging onto the scene. The gallery's artists express their different cultural identities and perspectives while challenging the viewer to drop prejudices and borders. XVA Gallery exhibits both locally and internationally; collaborating with galleries and participating in international art fairs, such as Art Basel Hong Kong, SH Contemporary, Singapore Art Fair and Abu Dhabi Art in 2014, in order to further expose Middle Eastern contemporary art.

XVA Gallery and XVA Art Hotel are located in Dubai's heritage district, now called Al Fahidi Historical Neighborhood. XVA founded and organized the Bastakiya Art Fair from 2007- 2010 as part of its commitment to raising the profile of contemporary art practice in Dubai. For three years XVA was located in DIFC, and has now expanded its premises in Al Fahidi.

XVA Gallery Contact

Eleanor Smith, XVA Gallery Manager

E: ellie@xvagallery.com

E: xva@xvagallery.com

T: +9714 353 5383

M: +97150 153 3813