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SUNDARAM TAGORE NEW YORK PRESENTS *WRITTEN IMAGES: CONTEMPORARY CALLIGRAPHY FROM THE MIDDLE EAST*

Exhibition dates: November 10 - December 3, 2011

Opening cocktail reception: Thursday, November 10, 6 - 8 pm



Left: Nja Mahdaoui, *Astrolabe*, 2009, India ink and acrylic on linen, 68.1 x 78.3 inches

Right: Chaouki Chamoun, *The Apocolypse III*, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 55 x 55 inches

New York, October 7, 2011—The work of more than a dozen influential artists from the Middle East offers a rare glimpse into the contemporary Arab and Iranian art worlds. *Written Images: Contemporary Calligraphy from the Middle East*, curated by noted art historian Karin von Roques, explores the role of traditional Islamic calligraphy and symbols in the contemporary Middle Eastern consciousness.

Arabic calligraphy in all its aesthetic and linguistic complexity is little understood in the West and often regarded as an art form belonging to the classic Islamic arts and, therefore, to the past. In fact, it plays an important role in contemporary Arab and Iranian art. For centuries, the written word has been at the center of Islamic visual culture— a legacy that persists even today.

Artists including Iraqi Hassan Massoudy, and Tunisian Nja Mahdaoui were among the first to look at writing from an entirely new perspective and reposition calligraphy in the contemporary context. They have deftly expanded its potential so it is image as well as language. For them and the other artists in this show, writing is more than the legible word; they use it as a pictorial, formal element, referencing a multitude of issues—religious, social, political and personal.

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Working with different media, including paint on canvas, collage, ink on paper, gold leaf and silkscreen, 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 dreamlike 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. It follows on the success of *Signs: Contemporary Arab Art*, also curated by Karin von Roques, mounted at Sundaram Tagore New York in 2009 and Sundaram Tagore Beverly Hills in 2010. Both shows offer a view of the culture of the Islamic world apart from the usual subjects of politics and religion. Having studied and lived in the Middle East over the past decade, Karin von Roques has an intimate and unique understanding of the region and its artists. With this show, she throws into relief the wide range of work emerging from the contemporary Middle East, bringing its seminal artists to an international audience.

The full roster of artists is as follows: Yousef Ahmad (Qatar), Lulwah Al-Homoud (Saudi Arabia), Khaled Al-Saa'i (Syria), Chaouki Chamoun (Lebanon), Golnaz Fathi (Iran), Hakim Ghazali (Morocco), Ali Hassan (Qatar), Rachid Koraïchi (Algeria), Nja Mahdaoui (Tunisia), Hassan Massoudy (Iraq/France), Ahmed Mater (Saudi Arabia), Ahmad Moualla (Syria), Ahmed Moustafa (Egypt).

GALLERY MISSION

Established in 2000, Sundaram Tagore Gallery is devoted to examining the exchange of ideas between Western and non-Western cultures. We focus on developing exhibitions and hosting not-for-profit events that encourage spiritual, social and aesthetic dialogues. In a world where communication is instant and cultures are colliding and melding as never before, our goal is to provide venues for art that transcend boundaries of all sorts. With galleries in New York, Beverly Hills, and Hong Kong, our interest in cross-cultural exchange extends beyond the visual arts into many other disciplines, including poetry, literature, performance art, film and music.

CURATOR'S PROFILE

Karin von Roques is a noted German curator and art historian who, having studied Islamic art, specializes in contemporary Arab and Iranian art. She is an authority on the Arabic region and its culture and has garnered much praise for exhibitions on modern calligraphy of the Arab world. From 1997 to 2000 she was the director for the Hermann Hesse Museum in Lugano, Switzerland. Von Roques has curated exhibitions for numerous institutions, including the Museum of Applied Arts, Frankfurt; Kunstmuseum, Bonn; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; and the Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi. She has had extensive experience developing Arab art collections, and currently oversees Deutsche Bank's collection program focused on contemporary Arab art. Most recently, von Roques served as a consultant to Sotheby's, London, advising their Modern and Contemporary Arab and Iranian Art Department.

SUNDARAM TAGORE'S PROFILE

Sundaram Tagore is a New York-based art historian and gallerist. He was the first gallerist to focus exclusively on globalization, assembling a roster of artists from around the world. A descendant of the influential Indian poet and Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore, he promotes East-West dialogues through his contributions to numerous exhibitions as well as his eponymous galleries and their multicultural and multidisciplinary events. Having done his doctoral work at The University of Oxford, Tagore writes for many art publications. He was previously a director at Pace Wildenstein Gallery in New York. He has worked with many international organizations including The Peggy Guggenheim Foundation, Venice, Italy, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. He has also served as an advisor for the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the United Nations. In addition to running three galleries, Mr. Tagore is also a filmmaker. His award-winning documentary *The Poetics of Color: Natvar Bhavsar, An Artist's Journey* premiered at New York's MIAAC Film Festival in 2010.

For more information or to arrange interviews with the curator or artists, please email: press@sundaramtagore.com or call 212.677.4520

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