



# عراق: وجهان Iraq: Two Faces

للفنانين العراقيين  
فيصل لعبيبي صاهي ومظهر أحمد

Iraqi artists  
Faisal Laibi Sahi & Modhir Ahmed

البارح  
للفنون التشكيلية

Under the patronage of HE Shaikh Rashid Bin Khalifa Al Khalifa  
Undersecretary of passports and immigration Directorate

Albareh Art Gallery presents a duo exhibition entitled

## Iraq: Two Faces

By Faisel Laibi Sahi and Modhir Ahmad

On Tuesday 5th January 2010 at 7:00 pm  
The exhibition will run until 5th February 2010  
From 10:00 am – 8:00 pm



This brochure is published on the occasion of this duo exhibition  
In partnership with



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Iraq, or Mesopotamia in Classical times, the region that gave rise to the world's earliest civilizations, including those of Sumer, Akkad, and Babylon – has a long history of invasion and occupation from Alexander the Great to Saddam Hussain.

Up until the fall of the last tyrant, Iraq was a proud nation, the forerunner and champion of Arab arts in all forms of expression. Throughout the years Iraq managed to keep her dignity and pride in the well preserved National Museum of Iraq, home of important artifacts from the over 5,000 year long history of Mesopotamia – the most important museum in the world – the Iraqi heritage. The looting of the museum caused intense grief to many Iraqi intellectuals, artists and prominent individuals, of all political stripes – they decried the dismantling of Iraqi culture.

Today, as Iraq is forging a new cultural identity in the wake of a long civil unrest, Albareh Gallery mounts a significant exhibition by two notable contemporary Iraqi artists in an unusual combination – modern realism and post modern two-dimensional art – a clash of two radically different styles that have been coexisting for more than three decades but with one unified objective: To redefine the world view on the Iraqi tradition, modernism and avant-garde.

Faisel Laibi Sahi and Modhir Ahmed, are undoubtedly two of the most important Iraqi artists of this century. Even though the full scope and significance of their art may not yet have been grasped – contrary to most Iraqi artists of their generation, their works have appeared with increasing regularity in museums, galleries and alternative spaces across Europe both in solo exhibitions and alongside the work of their contemporaries.

Both Iraqis are from a generation of artists whose careers have coincided with the sweeping political changes of the 1980s to the present. Their works represent the most provocative aspect in Iraq's cultural void within which especially were valued mimesis, visible power and the passionate concept of genius along with pathos, drama and related humanistic values. These two artists are simultaneously ingenuous and profound, and the depth of their influence becomes apparent only after the fact.

Faisel Laibi Sahi, a Modern Realist has something for contemporary painters to build on, and Iraqi Post-Modernist, Modhir Ahmed has taken up himself some of the challenges his work presents.

Al Basra, the port of Iraq, where the Euphrates and the Tigris meet with a myriad of waterways possesses the largest date palm forest adorned with beautiful flowers, the origin of Sindbad the Sailor and the hometown of Bader Shaker AlSayab, the father of 20th century modern Arabic poetry – was Faisel Laibi Sahi's window to the world.

Growing up with five creative siblings in Basra's diverse culture was a strong foundation and influence to the budding artist. Faisel, guided by his elder brother Ali, discovered his environs by drawing.

The first exhibition of his work was in 1958, at an annual interscholastic exhibition of fine arts in Basra. From then on, every year, he exhibited his works in the regional show that led him to the doors of the Fine Arts Institute in Baghdad in 1964.

Faisal's style had already evolved in Baghdad through his artistic exchange with significant Iraqi artists, even before he left for Paris to study at the National Superior School of Fine Arts of Paris in 1974.

While abroad, the Iran-Iraq War broke out and was followed after by the Gulf Wars, convoluting the formation of a consistent artistic identity in the third wave of Iraqi contemporary art. Many artists had fled the country but only a few have continued to maintain the lion's share of attention. Faisal Laibi Sahi created his own creative canon. He became one of Iraq's leading proponents of the arts, expressing the collective imagination of his country with an aesthetic and language of his own. Pictorial dreams that project nationalist imagery in a trans-cultural dialogue. The artistic world that Faisal creates is rooted in what it means to be Iraqi.

The highly acclaimed Baghdadi Coffee Shop series is Faisal's answer to Iraq's late modernism's formulation of painting in terms of flatness and opticality. He gives us an extremely articulate introduction to the Western alternative, the concept of the tableau - new perceptual approaches to reality - Modern Realism.

Last year he celebrated 50 years of painting. His retrospective follows a sequence of forms emulating the once Iraqi social sphere. Rendered in a pop-like colour spectrum, the works demonstrate Faisal's consummate skill as a painter. The masterful composition together with an eye for decorative details in planes of pure colour, obliquely unfold stories that tend to abstraction. Without a doubt, his allusion to the figurative is thoroughly conceptual. Quintessential Iraqi scenes are masterfully rendered and cannot be compared to those produced by the most novel of «isms.» It leads us back to the artist dealing with creation of the self. Faisal is an "other", as well as all others.

The Iraqi-British artist's depiction of the magnificent and boisterously epic history of Iraq's people inspires a whole nation with respect for its history and hope for its future. Faisal Laibi Sahi's paintings are embedded with a strong social content that examines power relationships between the individual and society - these masterpieces confirms his passionate commitment to Iraq is as undeniable as his genius.

Baghdad native, Modhir Ahmed emerged from the shadows of tyranny and political upheaval and into the light through his life's quest to live for art.

Similar to Faisal, Modhir's creative foundation in Baghdad was decisive for his artistic development. His passion for graphic arts and his move to Poland, shortly before the Iran-Iraq War, could hardly have surprised anyone.

An adventurous and introspective soul, Modhir experienced success and turmoil during this time in his education in Poland. But because of his expressive and utopian spirit, he created his own personal vision that resulted in his signature style.

Modhir's first important one-man show in 1986 at the Gallery Promocyjna in Warsaw, Poland, established him as an emerging figure in the Academy of Fine Arts at Warsaw. Consequently, he exhibited regularly in Poland – his exploration of place, memory and legacy evoke both Iraq and Poland's pronounced periods of chaotic history, while also moving beyond it. His transfer to Sweden was a flight from an impasse.

In Sweden, he took aim at the dominant West and its consolidation of cultural power via complementary forces of globalization and multiculturalism by participating in important international art exhibitions and competitions that consistently won him prestigious awards – Iraq's triumphant entry and Sweden's answer into the global graphic arts arena.

The Iraqi-Swedish artist has a trail blazing record of international awards won for Iraq and Sweden. Modhir received his first international merit in 1992 when he was awarded the jury prize at the 10th Norwegian International Print Triennial, Fredrikstad, Norway. From then on he garnered awards in every Triennial and Biennale from Scandinavia to Poland and from Egypt to France and China.

Modhir's celebrated artworks capture the tenor and grit of contemporary experience without the pretensions of perfection. He spent over three and a half decades deploying innovative techniques while sustaining a consistent evolution – deliberately crude, childlike technique. He has achieved a delicate balance between recognition and un-recognition, figuration and abstraction - a roundup of abstract or near-abstract combined modernist structure with two-dimensional elements and stirring automatism into the mix. The integration of geometry, gesture, and figurative imply a spontaneous and instantaneous event where gesture rises through the geometry of the frame and asserts itself as fundamental energy. Energy that is impregnable yet develops aesthetic, perceptual and concrete forms that reveal displacement, openness and enigma – intelligent, complex and deep.

The human figure is the central metaphor Faisal and Modhir's art.

Iraq: Two Faces puts their work into both a historical and a contemporary context – how we read these images and how they are presented to us vis-à-vis the annals of art history.

Faisal Laibi Sahi and Modhir Ahmed left Iraq to blaze a trail beyond and against the painting of Western modernism. They drove the medium to its limits yet they remain loyal adherents of their motherland and their art continues to flourish and speak to us today and to the people of the future.

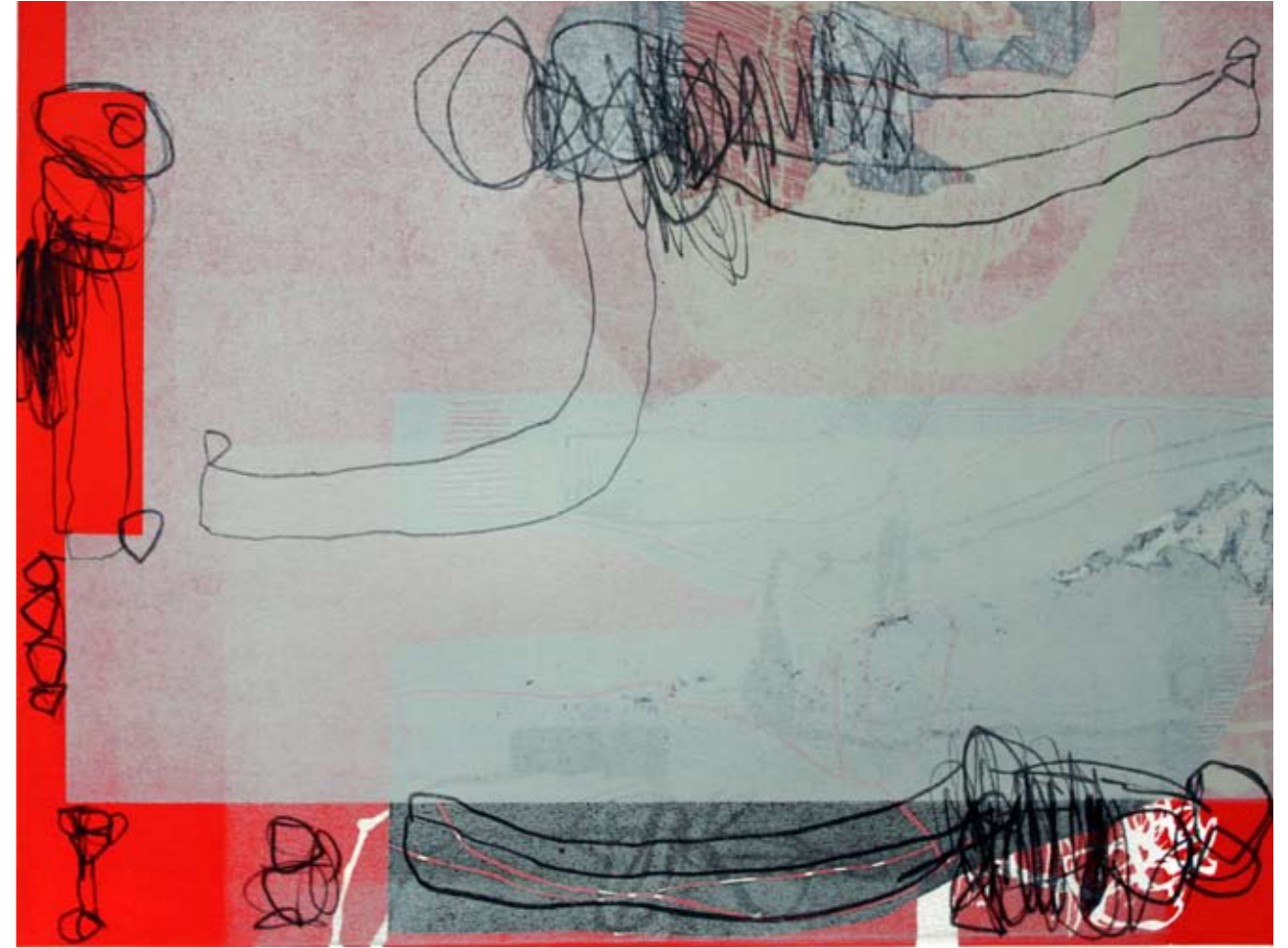
Their body of work, as the show demonstrates, is no longer about style or movements, it is about the creative success and excess of these Iraqi artists' enormous ambition and ferocious production borne from the scars of displacement, while the intensity of their work gives it a timeless quality that holds our attention and makes us think about the life of these people.

Both Faisal Laibi Sahi and Modhir Ahmed reframed the canon of Iraqi contemporary art, while self-consciously searching for their own position in Iraq's history – each proceeding in a self-enclosed manner that they have established in their life, their practice and their thinking for over three and a half decades – earned them an almost untouchable status – for their country – for Iraq.

Maria Victoria Vivero, 2010 – Kingdom of Bahrain



Faisal Laibi Sahi | Oil on canvas | 79x99 cm



Modhir Ahmed | Mixed Media on paper | 43x57 cm



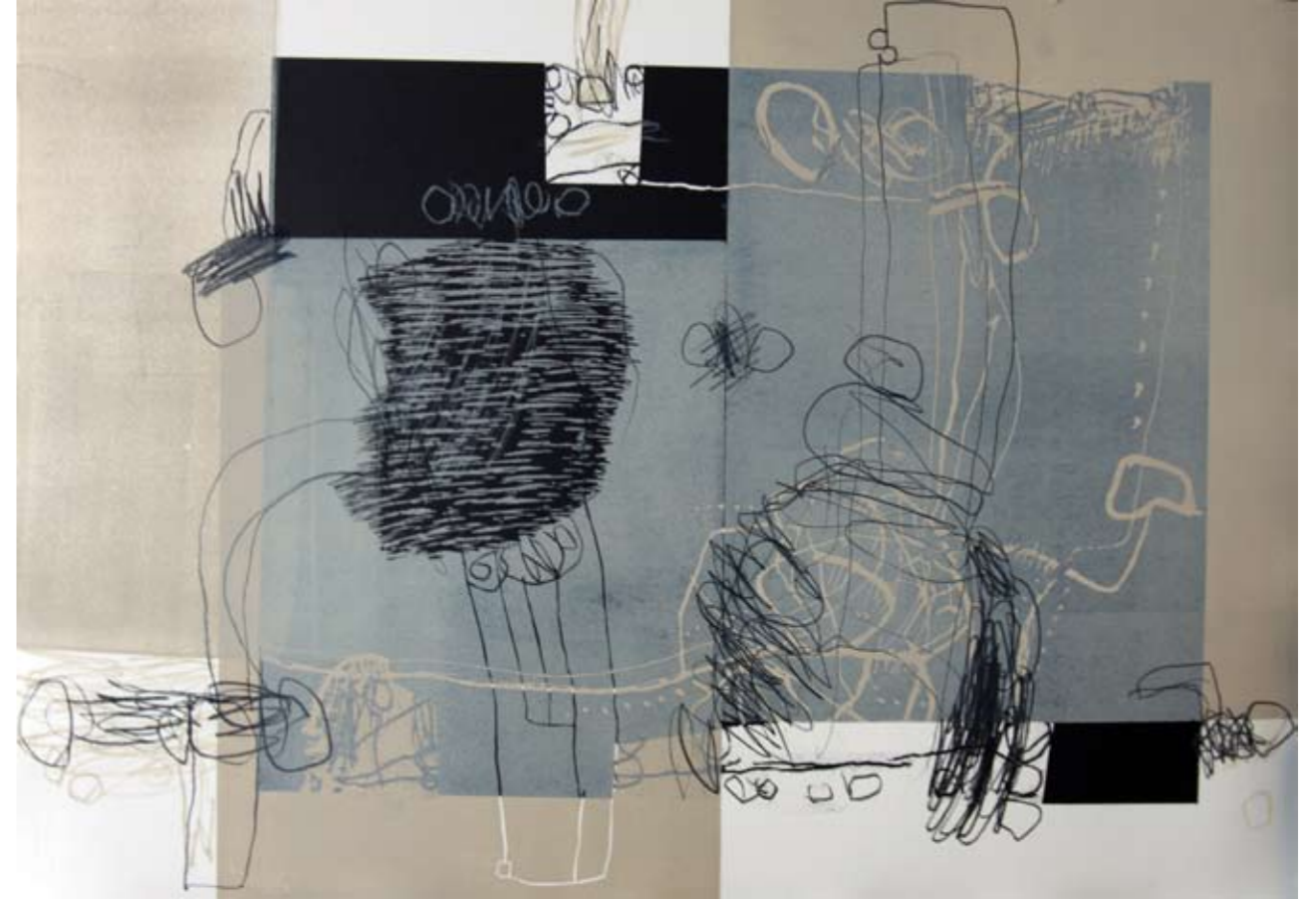
Faisal Laibi Sahi | Oil on canvas | 86x96 cm



Modhir Ahmed | Mixed Media on paper | 43x57 cm



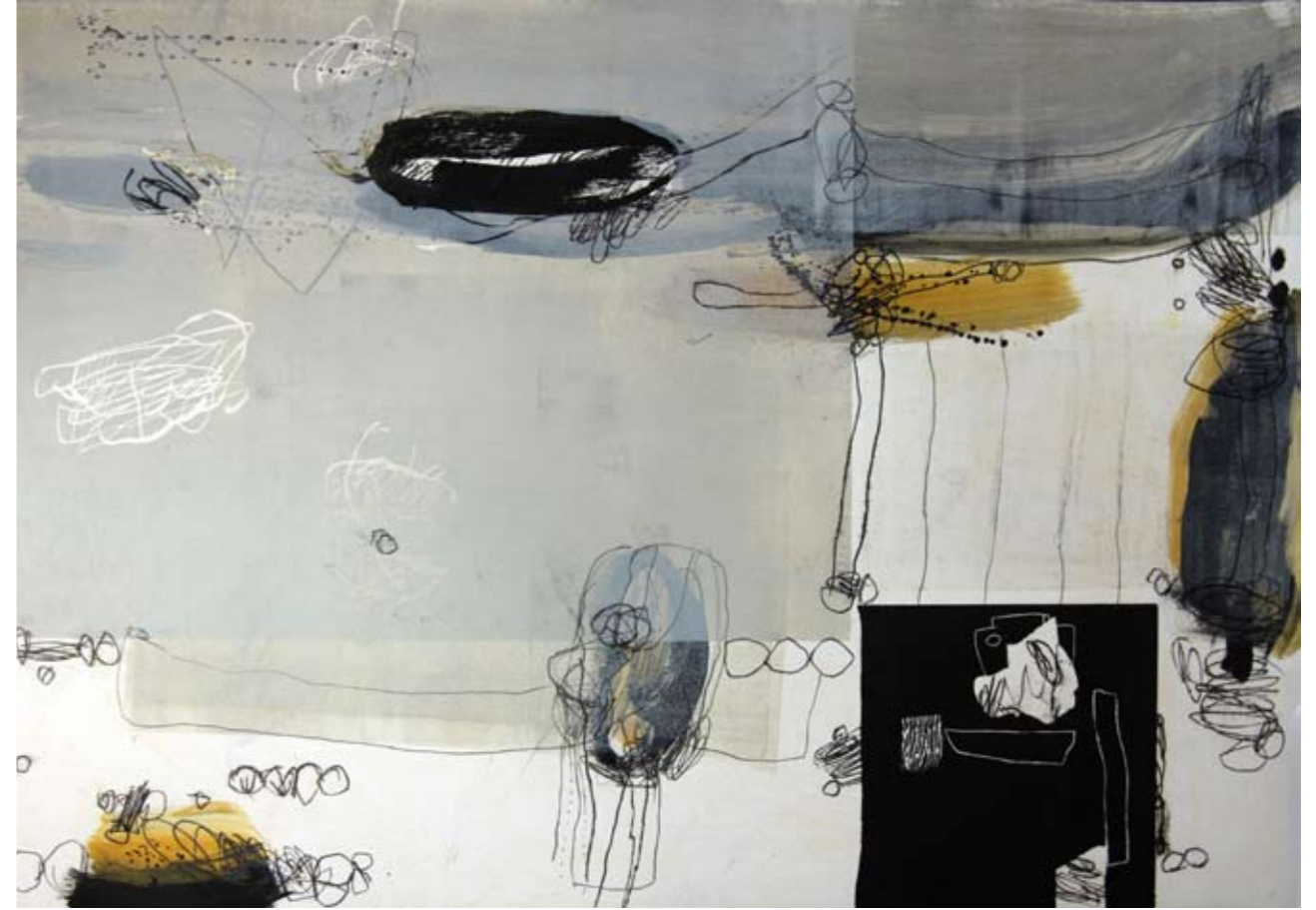
Faisal Laibi Sahi | Oil on canvas | 95x118 cm



Modhir Ahmed | Mixed Media on paper | 78x108 cm



Faisel Laibi Sahi | Oil on canvas | 95x118 cm



Modhir Ahmed | Mixed Media on paper | 122x86 cm



Faisal Laibi Sahi | Oil on canvas | 177x150 cm

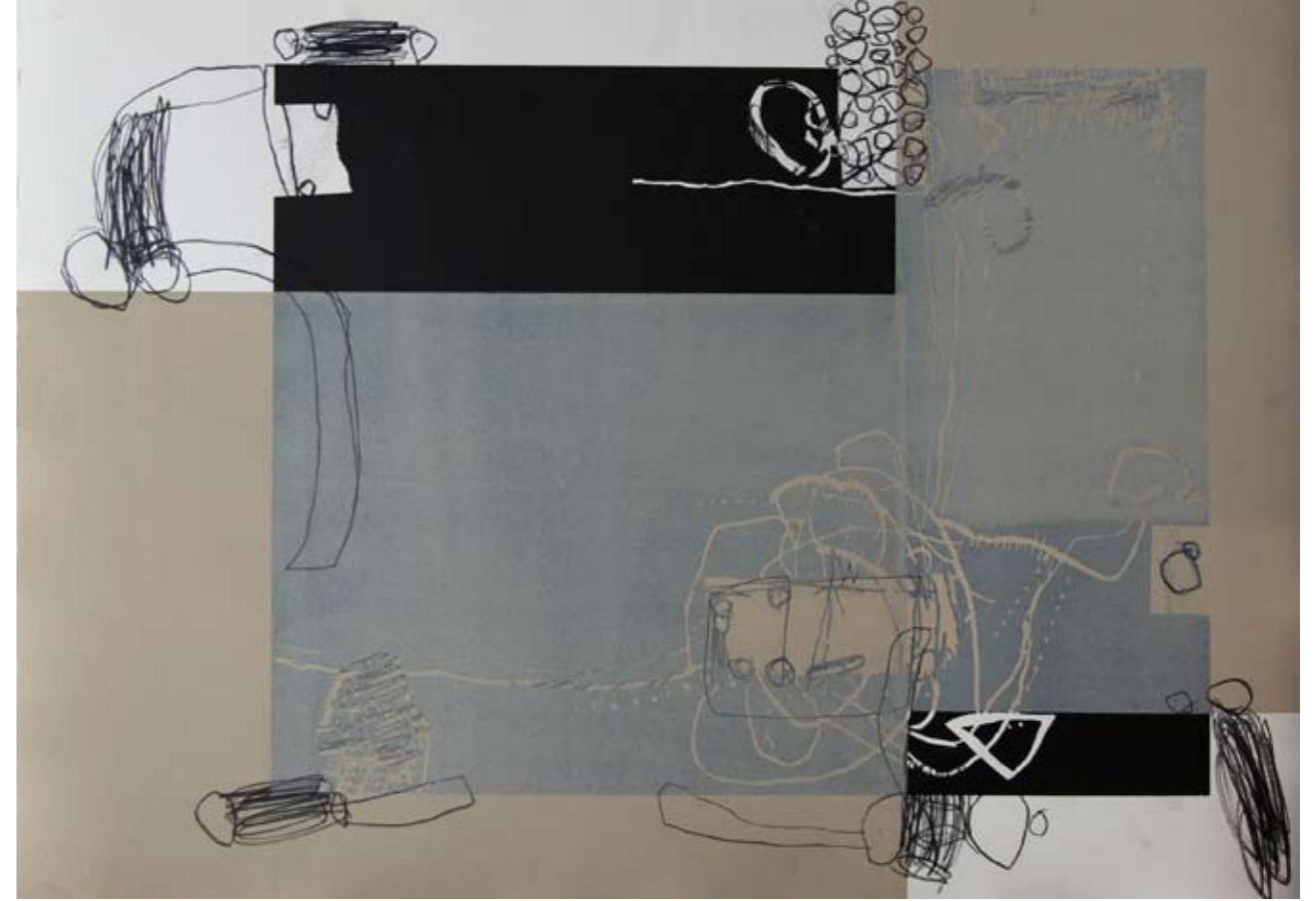


Modhir Ahmed | Mixed Media on paper | 122x86 cm

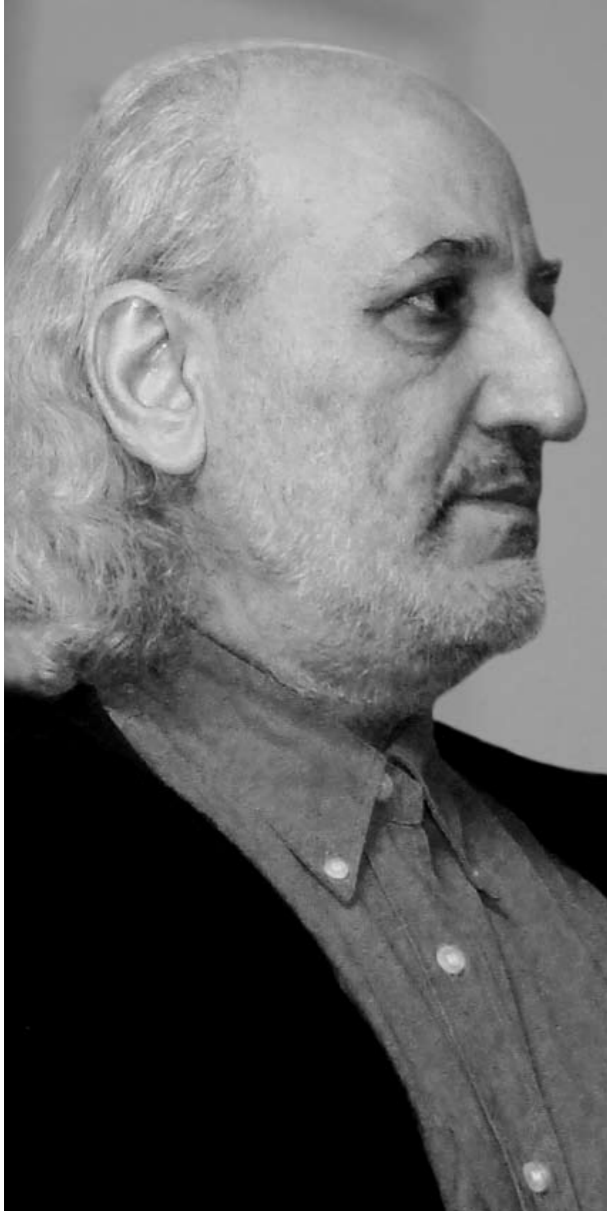




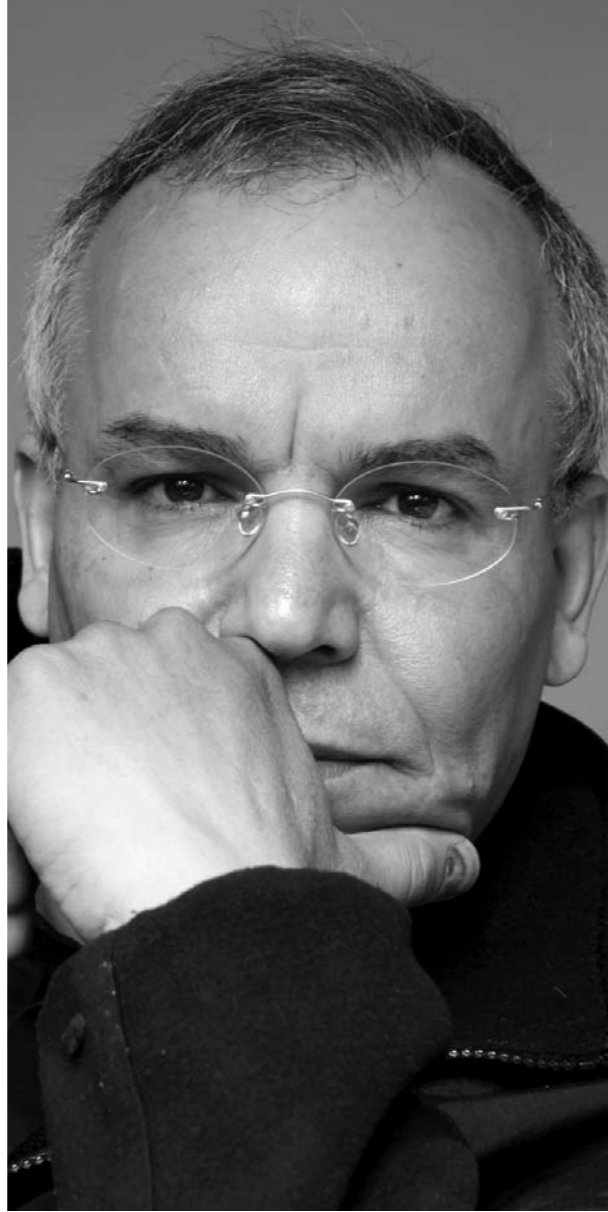
Faisal Laibi Sahi | Oil on canvas | 95x118 cm



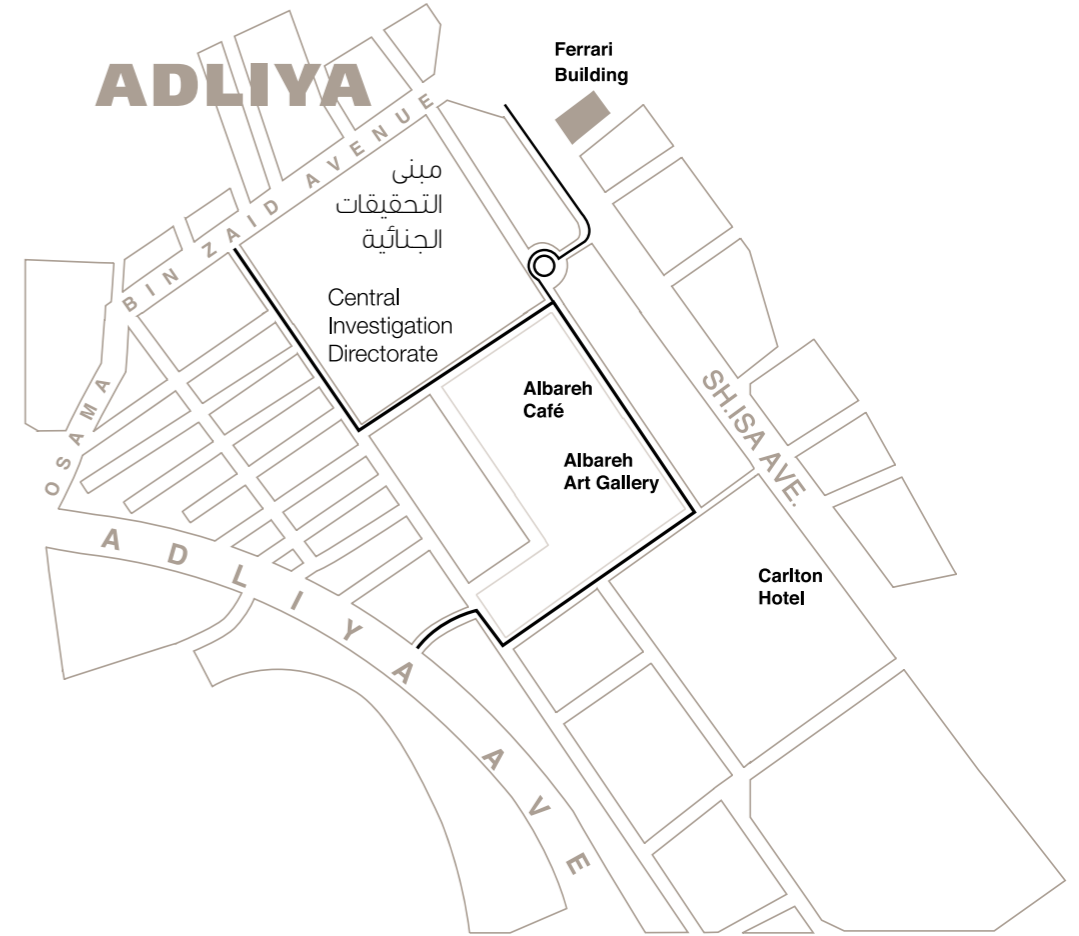
Modhir Ahmed | Mixed Media on paper | 78x108 cm



Faisal Laibi Sahi



Modhir Ahmad



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