

Allam Fakhour and Impounded Art

16 October 2022 – 26 February 2023

Museo Casa Rusca, Locarno

In its last exhibit of the year, the Museo Casa Rusca in Locarno renews its commitment to studying and understanding the many dramatic implications of migration, of flight, of exile. This time it does so with an exhibition that is significant, due both to the depth of emotions expressed by the works on display in its rooms and to the extraordinary tension that these works reveal, starting with the artist's path on a human level. Allam Fakhour is in fact a forty-five-year-old Syrian, resident for a few years in Switzerland, in the Canton of Glarus. This destination is the consequence of his troubled existence, marked by bombs, destruction and massacres that over the years have devastated the appearance and the spirit of his country of origin, Syria.

A land of fertile plains, high mountains and deserts, a crossroads for the ethnicities, peoples and religions that have shaped it over the centuries, making it an extraordinary patchwork of art and history. Nevertheless, Syria remains scarred by a devastating war and violent repressive politics, which Allam has experienced and still experiences in the first person. When still a child, he witnessed bombing, torture and massacres, then with the coming of adulthood and his subsequent degree in sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Damascus, he gained an awareness and a consequent political commitment that have marked his existence and his professional future. His art thus becomes a metaphor for his human journey, accrued and developed also on account of and despite the five years he spent in prison in the early two thousands.

The experience was traumatic, partly exorcised by attempts to make art constructed with the only two substances permitted during his imprisonment: bread and soap. It was a risky endeavour, but Allam succeeded in giving a new guise to those two raw materials, dressing them with a renewed and formidable significance: the struggle to move forwards and the need to clean off the political and mental dirt of his country. The key elements of a production that the artist was to pursue after his release, in 2011, a brief parenthesis before taking flight two years later, heading for Lebanon

and reaching Switzerland in 2015. The journey was a troubled one, only partly facilitated by the U.N. programme for refugees.

The arrival in the West was not a salvation, but the beginning of a reflection, perhaps more mature and aware, on his own existence, life, encounters, but also and above all on the everlasting themes of migration, of escape, of exile, which in Allam are interwoven with and overlap with his own human and professional development, consisting precisely in a realism-expressionism realised by him and taking concrete shape in “faces” where there emerge sadness and pain, loneliness and disorientation, fear and expectation: feelings that reflect the brutal images associated with the killings, crimes, weapons, explosions, but also with the loss of faith in the future, with melancholic and sad memory, with the passion for embodying everything that is new, starting with the Switzerland that has known how to welcome him and to give him new hopes and opportunities.

In this way the artist's works travel back over that path made of present and memory, deeply imprinted in the many “faces” that characterise his artistic production, images marked by fear, sadness and silence. Allam attributes those feelings on one hand to the unknown and to what represents the future, near and more remote, but on the other also to the melancholy over the separation from his own land, from his nearest and dearest. A mixture of feelings and sensations that howl at the spectator with all the strangled voice they have in their throats.

Allam's works are in fact reflections of his life, an extraordinary concentration of sufferings, illusions and hopes, from childhood to today, with his arrival and his settlement in a new land, which is not the point of arrival, but a stage on a path that is yet to be written.

Starting with paper, the material used by him for some of his works and for the installation *Tenda*, an instrument fragile as the human spirit, which, despite its weakness, is nevertheless capable of bearing and waiting patiently, adapting to handle the torments of wandering and suffering. The destiny that is shared by the many refugees of war, often forced to follow a tough trail without a destination, having to come to terms with hospitality that, often recognised as temporary, does not always consider personal skills and desires.

This is therefore the path of Allam Fakhour and his “impounded art”, which struggles to free itself from the chains of oppression, violence and war, the countless facets of human and individual conflicts still experienced personally by the artist. Partly exorcised in the dark colours splashed on

the paper and on the canvas like blood spilled on the walls of a cell, in surreal and seamlessly repetitive scenes that are still being repeated today in Syria. A fragile, weak land, but with extraordinary potential, waiting to emerge into the open to give new life blood and vigour to lives that are still impounded today.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Allam Fakhour was born in 1977 in Salamiyah, a city situated in the Hama Governorate. He lived both his childhood and his teenage years in a world marked by war and bombing. In fact as early as February 1982 Syria suffered the Hama Massacre. Nevertheless, in this context, Allam still succeeded in absorbing the renewed cultural and artistic climate that distinguished his country. There grew in him a strong passion for art, which prompted him to embark on studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Damascus, graduating in 2003 with a specialisation in sculpture. Once he had concluded his education, Allam began to teach sculpture at the Art Institute of Damascus. Thus began his career as a sculptor, and also as a painter, silk-screen printer and set designer. As well as practising his profession as an artist, Allam Fakhour is also a political activist. He was in fact one of the founders, in 2006, of the Shams Gathering group, a movement conducting activities and initiatives in support of freedom and free expression. The aim of this movement was to put an end to the dictatorship. Following the publication of some texts supporting this cause, the group was identified by the Syrian intelligence services and imprisoned. During his incarceration in Saydnaya Prison, which lasted five years, Allam Fakhour suffered physical and psychological torture and was banned from practising any form of art. Despite this prohibition, not succeeding in putting a brake on his creative nature, he began to create sculptures using bread and soap. Two years after his release from prison, Allam Fakhour decided to move to Beirut, where he opened a new studio. From this moment he also began to work as a set designer for a film production company. Again in 2013, the artist made an application to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and in 2015 he received asylum in Switzerland. Today Allam Fakhour lives in the Canton of Glarus and since 2021 he has followed artistic education courses at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).

He still practises his profession as an artist, participating in exhibitions (Hard-Cover Art Gallery, Zurich, 2019) and artistic events (Art Basel, 2019).

Information

Venue	Museo Casa Rusca Piazza Sant'Antonio 1, 6600 Locarno
Date	16 October 2022– 26 February 2023
Inauguration	Saturday 15 October 2022, 5.30pm
Opening times	Tuesday - Friday 10am-12.00 / 2-5pm Saturdays, Sundays, holidays 10am-5pm Closed Mondays
Charges	Adults CHF 15.- OASI/DI benefits CHF 10.- Students aged 18 and over CHF 8.- Free entry for schools and young people aged under 18

COMBINED TICKET MUSEO CASORELLA-CASTELLO + MUSEO CASA RUSCA

Full price	CHF 20 .-
Reduced OASI/DI and groups	CHF 14 .-
Students aged 18 and over	CHF 12 .-

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Volti Fragili (serie), acrylic and oil pastel on canvas, 40 x 30 cm, 2022



Volti Fragili (serie), acrylic and oil pastel on canvas, 70 x 50 cm, 2022



Volti Fragili (serie), acrylic on paper, 125 x 105 cm, 2022



Identificazione, resin, 50 x 40 cm, 2018



Identificazione II, Arab bread and soap, 20 x 25 cm, 2022



Presi di mira (serie), acrylic and oil pastel on canvas, 100 x 100 cm, 2022



Presi di mira (serie), acrylic and oil pastel on canvas, 100 x 100 cm, 2022



Presi di mira (serie), acrylic and oil pastel on canvas, 60 x 100 cm, 2022



Allam Fakhour at work

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