

AL SAWABER

Tarek Al-Ghoussein

November 5, 2017 – January 20, 2018

The Third Line is pleased to present *Al Sawaber*, Tarek Al-Ghoussein's third solo exhibition in Dubai curated by Salwa Mikdadi. Eponymous of a government-housing complex in Kuwait slated for demolition, Tarek's new body of work documents forgotten spaces specific to a historical moment in urban development and the vestiges of lives once lived inside it.



Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Al Sawaber 3685*, 2015-2017, Digital Print, 100 x 150 cm

While Tarek's images examine abandoned spaces and objects, the photographs neither aestheticize the decay that results from neglect nor dispassionately document found conditions. At first glance there are similarities between the scenes from *Al Sawaber* and Robert Polidori's photographs of the interiors in cities like Beirut, Pripjat, Chernobyl, and New Orleans. The richly textured images of environments where decomposition has been seen in motion by catastrophe or conflict reveal the care taken by Polidori to locate and compose vivid scenes of damage and deterioration. In contrast, rather than focusing on making images that appear as painterly vignettes, Tarek considers the relationship between the non-descript apartment units and the individual expressions intended to provide the security and stability essential for "homeliness".

Tarek's framing of the interior heightens the tension between the standardized apartment and personalized treatment, and results in subtly ironic images that reveal idiosyncratic attempts to make an undesirable dwelling inhabitable. Landscapes are common in the wall treatments throughout *Al Sawaber*, whether in the form of fairy-tale castles against pink skies or floral-patterned prints. In more elaborate examples, such as *Al Sawaber 0282*, an oddly scaled bird inhabits a maple forest complete with falling leaves that have turned from green to yellow and red at the end of summer; although the telephone jack remains concealed under a faux forest floor, the electrical outlet stands as a chrome-plated reminder that the reality of *Al Sawaber* is inescapable.

Al Sawaber will likely be demolished in the near future. Tarek's work is therefore timely as it provides insight into the lives once lived in *Al Sawaber* and serves as a record of an important part of the Gulf's recent past. More significantly, the *Al Sawaber* project presents spaces and objects with a sense of irony that never devolves into condescension, resulting in perceptive depictions of how dwellings become the expression of the individuals who dwell within them.

- From an essay by Kevin Mitchell

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Tarek Al-Ghoussein

Tarek Al-Ghoussein was born in Kuwait in 1962. He received his BFA (Photography) from New York University in 1985 and his MA (Photography) from the University of New Mexico in 1989. As a Kuwaiti of Palestinian origin, much of Tarek's work deals with how his identity is shaped in a context of inaccessibility and loss.

Tarek is currently a Professor of Visual Art at the NYU Abu Dhabi. His solo shows include K Files and Sawaber Series, Nevada Museum of Art, USA (2016); K Files, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE (2014); E Series, Kalfayan Galleries, Athens, Greece (2011); A Retrospective: Works from 2003-2010, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE (2010).

His work has been shown in group exhibitions including Negotiating The Future: 6th Asian Art Biennial, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung City, Taiwan; FOTOGRAFICA BOGOTA, FOTOMUSEO, Bogota, Colombia (2017); The Art of Nature, ADMAF Festival, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2017); The Creative Act: Performance, Process, Presence, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, UAE (2017); Presence: Reflections on the Middle East, Metropolitan State University of Denver, Center for Visual Art, CO, USA (2017); View from Inside: Contemporary Arab Photography, Video and Mix Media, Emirates Palace Gallery, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2015); FotoFest 2014 Biennial, The 15th International Biennial of Photography and Photo-related Art, Houston, USA (2014); How Green was my Valley, Whitebox Art Space, New York, USA (2014); Lost in Landscape, Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Italy (2014); Photoquai, Photography Biennale, Paris, France (2013); The Blue Route, Villa Empain, Brussels, Belgium (2013); From Palestine with Hope, Art Space, London, UK (2013); Safar/Voyage, Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, Canada (2013); MinD/Body, DUCTAC, Dubai, UAE (2013) and The National Pavilion of Kuwait 55th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2013).

Tarek's works are collected by museums worldwide including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Freer I Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian, Washington D.C.; Nevada Museum of Art; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; British Museum, London; the Royal Museum of Photography in Copenhagen; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; the Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; the Sharjah Biennial Collection, UAE; the Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Foundation, UAE; and the New York University Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Tarek lives and works in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

About The Third Line

The Third Line is a Dubai-based art gallery that represents contemporary Middle Eastern artists locally, regionally and internationally. The Third Line also hosts non-profit, alternative programs to increase interest and dialogue in the region.

Represented artists include: Abbas Akhavan, Ala Ebtekar, Amir H. Fallah, Arwa Abouon, Babak Golkar, Farah Al Qasimi, Farhad Moshiri, Fouad Elkoury, Golnaz Fathi, Hassan Hajjaj, Hayv Kahraman, Huda Lutfi, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Laleh Khorramian, Lamya Gargash, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Pouran Jinchi, Rana Begum, hand Hesamiyan, Sara Naim, Sherin Guirguis, Shirin Aliabadi, Slavs and Tatars, Sophia Al-Maria, Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Youssef Nabil and Zineb Sedira.

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