

**Tarek Al-Ghoussein**  
*Odysseus*  
22 March – 5 May 2021

Text by Dina Ibrahim

The Third Line is pleased to present Tarek Al-Ghoussein's fourth solo exhibition in its Gallery II. *Odysseus* also proudly debuts the gallery's series of online exhibitions taking place on its new website. The show explores a selection of new works from his ongoing series *Odysseus* where Al-Ghoussein sets out to document a number of islands off the coast of Abu Dhabi where he resides.

Much like Odysseus, the hero of Homer's epic poem of the Odyssey, Al-Ghoussein's work is as much about the journey as it is about the final images.



*Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Abu Dhabi Archipelago, (Hami Rohah Gassar), 2016*

His fascination with the sheer existence of the islands sparked his curiosity to start documenting them back in 2015. Out of the 215 Islands, Al-Ghoussein visited and photographed approximately 30 so far. His pursuit of a complete survey has been challenged by gaps in public information about the islands, access restrictions, and most notably pending permission requests. While he remains hopeful the project can find a path to completion, like the odyssey, the journey is much longer than expected.

Skillfully employing a strong sense of surrealism with their dreamlike color spectrum and whimsical compositions, the world of Al-Ghoussein is at once both delightful and disquieting. Raising more questions than providing answers, the photographs lack specific geographical signifiers, despite being shot in real places. The playful and often absurd interaction between the artist and these dreamscapes leads the viewers to question the islands' ambiguous reality, and perhaps existence. Gradually fading from his own consciousness, Al-Ghoussein chose to omit the islands completely from some of the images, where he can be seen alone at sea, until even himself is absent from the

picture perhaps pondering his own place, as an artist, or more significantly as an Abu Dhabi resident, in relation to the geopolitical landscape of the islands.

Much like Odysseus's story was about his homecoming as much as his journey, a larger significance is placed on the artist choosing to persistently return and continue documenting the remaining islands despite the setbacks. Already six years in the making, one is then left to wonder whether Al-Ghoussein's journey will end up being longer than Odysseus's ten-year Journey.

## About Tarek Al-Ghoussein

Tarek Al-Ghoussein was born in Kuwait in 1962. The child of Palestinian exiles, Tarek also spent part of his youth in the United States, Morocco, and Japan. He received his BFA (Photography) from New York University in 1985 and his MA (Photography) from the University of New Mexico in 1989. Initially working as a documentary photographer and photojournalist, Al-Ghoussein is currently a Professor of Visual Art at the NYU Abu Dhabi.

Tarek uses his practice to explore how identity is shaped within a context of inaccessibility and loss. Evocative photographs depicting abandoned spaces and objects examine both personal and general associations with the Middle East. His photographs of deteriorating buildings do not seek to glamorize the decay but neither are they a detached form of documentation. In these somewhat sardonic works, Al-Ghoussein lingers on the traces of human presence and the attempts to create expressions of individuality within an unsatisfactory habitat. Tarek captures images of places and objects that will soon cease to exist, preserving the narrative of the spaces and their former inhabitants.

His solo shows include *Al Sawaber*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE (2017); *K Files*, CAP Kuwait, Kuwait (2017); *K Files and Al 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).

## About The Third Line

Founded in 2005, The Third Line is a Dubai-based art gallery that represents contemporary 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, Farah Al Qasimi, Farhad Moshiri, Fouad Elkoury, Hassan Hajjaj, Hayv Kahraman, Huda Lutfi, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Jordan Nassar, Laleh Khorramian, Lamyra Gargash, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Nima Nabavi, Poursan Jinchi, Rana Begum, Sahand Hesamiyan, Sara Naim, Shirin Aliabadi, Slavs and Tatars, Sophia Al-Maria, Tarek Al-Ghoussein, yasiin bey, Youssef Nabil, and Zineb Sedira.

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