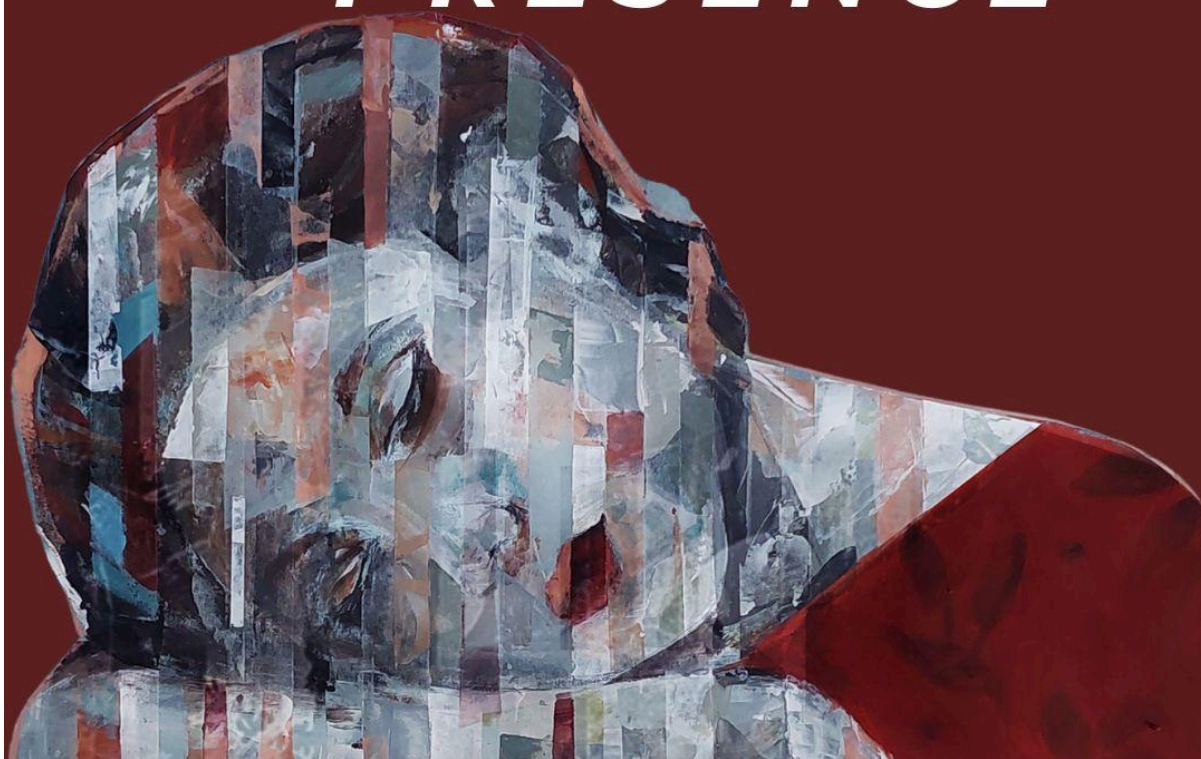


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# THE UNSEEN PRESENCE



**Collective exhibition:**

Ahmed Tallaa, Bassam Kyrillos, Beshar Koushaji, Eyad Jouda, Hikmat Naeem, Ibrahim Hamid,  
Kamal Al Zoubi, Mahmood Al Daoud, and Suheil Baddor.

**Curated by Lina Mikati and Celine Azem**

**February 12 to April 12 2025  
At Firetti Contemporary, Dubai, UAE**

## Firetti Contemporary Presents: The Unseen Presence – A Collective Exhibition on Memory, Migration, and Displacement

February 12 – April 12, 2025

Firetti Contemporary is pleased to present *The Unseen Presence*, a collective exhibition featuring the works of Ahmad Tallaa, Bassam Kyrillos, Beshar Koushaji, Eyad Jouda, Hikmat Naeem, Ibrahim Hamid, Kamal Al Zoubi, Mahmood Al Daoud, and Suheil Baddor. Through painting, sculpture, and mixed media, the exhibition examines the invisible forces that shape history and identity, exploring themes of memory, migration, resilience, and cultural transformation.

Inspired by Nizar Qabbani's poem *Balqis*, the exhibition reflects on exile, war, and the irreversible shifts brought by displacement. Qabbani's verses, which mourn not only a loved one but a homeland forever altered, resonate throughout the exhibition:

*"The sweetest homeland,  
One can't stand,  
Living in such a homeland.  
One can't stand,  
Dying in such a homeland."*

These words frame the paradox of memory—how longing and displacement coexist, how a place remains deeply cherished yet unbearably transformed. *The Unseen Presence* expands upon this idea, moving beyond mourning to explore the persistence of history in fractured realities, shifting identities, and evolving landscapes. Some works embrace nostalgia, while others question its fragility. Some reconstruct the remnants of a vanished past, while others examine the tension between survival and erasure.

### Exploring Migration, Memory, and Endurance

Ahmad Tallaa and Suheil Baddor both investigate the emotional landscapes of migration, yet from different perspectives. Tallaa captures the unseen presence of comfort, depicting sanctuary as fragile and fleeting, where figures exist in liminal spaces caught between nostalgia and uncertainty. His muted palettes reflect the emotional weight of displacement, while moments of warmth suggest resilience. In contrast, Baddor explores the unseen presence of waiting, portraying figures suspended in time, their identities in flux. His layered, abstracted compositions evoke exile as an unresolved state—where bodies are fragmented, and belonging remains elusive.

Similarly, Ibrahim Hamid and Suheil Baddor focus on the experiences of displaced women, yet their artistic approaches diverge. Baddor's fragmented figures mirror the instability of identity and memory, while Hamid preserves figuration, using bold brushstrokes to emphasize the emotional toll of exile. Eyes serve as portals to silent narratives, revealing both grief and resilience. While Baddor leans into abstraction, Hamid balances it with realism, underscoring the endurance of those who carry not just personal loss but the weight of collective displacement.

Memory's instability—both personal and collective—forms the foundation of Beshar Koushaji and Hikmat Naeem's works. Koushaji examines the unseen presence of memory, constructing portraits where faces emerge and dissolve, reflecting the way memories shift between clarity and erosion. His layered compositions speak to the fragility of identity in times of upheaval. Naeem, in contrast, expands this theme beyond the human figure, exploring the unseen presence of lost cities, where architecture dissolves into abstraction. His textured compositions depict urban spaces on the verge of disappearance, with fading structures that evoke histories of war, migration, and erasure. While Koushaji focuses on how individuals carry history within them, Naeem reveals how cities, too, bear the imprints of time and displacement.

Eyad Jouda and Bassam Kyrillos investigate physical and psychological endurance, though through vastly different media. Jouda's wire-bound sculptures embody the unseen presence of silence, balancing movement and stillness. His precariously poised figures reflect the psychological strain of migration, where survival is a fragile equilibrium between resistance and surrender. Kyrillos, in contrast, examines the unseen presence of sacrifice, merging human forms with architectural decay. His haunting imagery presents figures that appear to emerge from—and dissolve into—eroded textures, symbolizing histories of endurance and loss. While Jouda's sculptures suggest resilience through balance and movement, Kyrillos' works evoke destruction, displacement, and survival through decay and fragmentation.

Mahmood Al Daoud also engages with destruction and renewal, but through a more organic lens. His work reflects the unseen presence of transformation, depicting cycles of erosion and rebirth. His layered textures reimagine memory as something that both disintegrates and endures, where loss is not absolute but rather part of a larger process of reinvention. While Kyrillos anchors his work in the material decay of built environments, Al Daoud evokes the passage of time through abstraction, revealing how history leaves imprints long after physical traces have faded.

Unlike the other artists, Kamal Al Zoubi approaches nostalgia through a sense of playfulness, engaging with the unseen presence of nostalgia in a way that bridges past and present. His *LEGO-Inspired Arabic Tower* transforms childhood memories and linguistic traditions into sculptural forms, reinterpreting Arabic calligraphy through a contemporary lens. Where

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other artists explore nostalgia through decay, loss, and endurance, Al Zoubi preserves it through joyful abstraction. His work maintains a tangible connection to the past, where heritage is not something mourned but something continuously reimagined.

Through these distinct yet interconnected perspectives, *The Unseen Presence* invites audiences to witness what lingers in the aftermath—fractured realities, remnants of identity, and histories that refuse to fade. The exhibition asks:

What does it mean to rebuild from ruins?

How do we carry the unseen weight of history?

Can a homeland be reconstructed—not just physically, but through cultural and emotional memory?

This exhibition is not just about loss—it is about resilience. Even in destruction, something remains: a trace, a shadow, an unseen presence shaping the way we exist in the world.

**ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES:**

**MAHMOOD AL DAOUD**

Syrian artist Mahmood Al Daoud, born in 1985, holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Damascus University, Syria. His artistic practice explores the intricate connection between nature and human emotion. Using innovative techniques, he bridges the physical and emotional worlds, crafting works that invite contemplation.

Al Daoud's distinctive color-mixing method involves blending hues directly on the canvas, creating rich textures and multidimensional layers that immerse viewers in his emotional landscapes. Central to his work is the concept of "emotional gravity," where figures are depicted as heavy and still, burdened by profound emotions. This symbolism captures the tension between internal turmoil and the external world, reflecting moments of stillness amidst chaos.

By incorporating natural materials like sand, Al Daoud reinforces his deep connection to the environment, illustrating how it shapes and reflects human emotion. Through his large-scale installations and intimate paintings, he continuously draws attention to the interplay between nature and the human psyche, making the invisible visible through his mastery of texture, color, and composition.

**BASSAM KYRILLOS**

Lebanese sculptor Bassam Kyrillos, born in 1971 in Byblos, is a distinguished artist and academic. He holds a Ph.D. in Visual Arts from Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, France, as well as a Master's and Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Damascus University, Syria, and an additional degree in Visual Arts from the Lebanese University, Lebanon.

Kyrillos's work explores themes of destruction, regeneration, and the human condition. He employs unconventional casting techniques in bronze and aluminum, creating what he describes as "alternate urbanity"—structures that bear the scars of conflict while embodying resilience and renewal.

His sculptures have been showcased in prominent exhibitions, including solo shows such as *Multiverse* (2019) and *Chaos* (2017) in Beirut, and group exhibitions across Paris, Moscow, Hong Kong, Basel, and Dubai. By blending industrial materials with organic forms, Kyrillos captures the delicate balance between decay and regeneration, reflecting on the resilience of humanity and the cyclical nature of life.

**BESHER KOUSHAJI**

Born in Hama, Syria, in 1983, Beshar Koushaji is an artist whose work explores the fragility of memory and identity through portraiture. A graduate of the Damascus University Faculty of Fine Arts, he has developed a distinct visual language that merges fine arts with graphic design, creating portraits that exist in a space between presence and erasure.

Koushaji's recent series of portraits reflects individuals whose faces are fragmented, distorted, or layered in a way that mimics the instability of remembrance. His intricate line work and layered textures create a sense of motion, as if the subjects are dissolving or being reconstructed in real-time. These compositions mirror the way memories shift—some details vividly preserved, others fading into abstraction. His use of bold yet melancholic palettes further emphasizes the tension between clarity and loss, evoking a sense of nostalgia while questioning the permanence of identity.

Initially drawn to the architectural heritage of Syria, Koushaji's focus has evolved to the human figure, particularly portraits of people tied to his past. His works not only document personal history but also reflect a broader, collective experience of displacement and the ways in which memories of home and loved ones are reconstructed over time.

His exhibitions include solo shows such as *Scene* (2019) and *Reflections* (2016) at Wadi Finan Art Gallery in Jordan, alongside participation in major international art fairs including **Art Dubai and Beirut Art Fair**. Koushaji's art bridges tradition and modernity, weaving together personal recollection and universal themes of longing, loss, and resilience.

## HIMAT NAEEM

Syrian artist and educator Hikmat Naeem, born in 1965, is a distinguished visual artist with over 35 years of experience in painting, drawing, and Arabic calligraphy. He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Damascus, Syria.

Naeem's artworks blend abstraction and expressionism, showcasing his mastery of bold lines, vivid contrasts, and dynamic compositions. His creative process often incorporates unconventional materials like old wood and collage, creating harmony between line and color.

As an educator, Naeem has taught painting, art history, and color science at institutions such as the Teachers Training Institute in Suwayda and the University of Damascus. He has participated in over 25 exhibitions globally, including the prestigious Sharjah Biennial for Arabic Calligraphy, and has been recognized with numerous awards, such as the Al Mazraa Literary and Artistic Prize.

Naeem's work reflects intense emotions and cultural narratives, earning him recognition from critics and collectors worldwide. By blending his rich visual memory with a commitment to exploring beauty and meaning, he continues to inspire through his art.



## SUHEIL BADDOR

Suheil Baddor (b. 1957, Latakia, Syria) is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice spans painting, sculpture, and poetry. With a career spanning over 35 years, Baddor's work navigates the complex interplay of memory, identity, and the human condition. His artistic approach is deeply rooted in both materiality and metaphysical inquiry, exploring themes of presence, absence, and transformation.

Baddor studied philosophy at Damascus University before refining his artistic practice under the mentorship of leading Syrian modernists. His sculptures, crafted from wood, bronze, granite, and marble, stand as testaments to his mastery of form, while his paintings in acrylic, oil, and watercolor encapsulate an emotional and poetic depth.

An artist whose journey is as compelling as his work, Baddor embarked on a symbolic bicycle expedition from Damascus to Paris in 1986, engaging with diverse cultures through exhibitions and workshops. Since 1991, he has been based in the UAE, where his contributions to the regional art scene have been supported by the Abu Dhabi Culture Foundation and the Sharjah Museum.

His work has been showcased in numerous exhibitions and is held in esteemed collections across the Middle East, Europe, and Australia. A prolific poet and art critic, Baddor has also contributed to Arabic literature with works such as *Another Form of Melancholy* and *Mirror of Ashes*.

Through his evocative practice, Suheil Baddor challenges the boundaries between artistic disciplines, inviting audiences into a contemplative space where memory and materiality converge.

## IBRAHIM AL HAMID

Ibrahim Al Hamid, born in 1959 in Deir ez-Zor, Syria, is a distinguished artist whose work poignantly captures the broader Syrian migrant experience, weaving together themes of displacement, resilience, and identity. While his work often highlights the emotional journeys of immigrant women, it also reflects the collective struggle of Syrians navigating uncertainty, exile, and transformation.

A graduate of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Damascus University in 1986, Al Hamid has been an active member of several art unions, including the Union of Fine Artists in Damascus and the Fine Arts Association in Sharjah.

Through a rich palette and dynamic brushstrokes, Al Hamid explores the raw emotions of migration, portraying the weight of displacement through figures that hover between abstraction and realism. His compositions are layered with textured surfaces, echoing the complexities of fragmented identities. Eyes and facial expressions play a central role in his work, serving as portals of pain, resilience, and silent stories. By incorporating elements of traditional Syrian visual culture, he contrasts what is lost with what is preserved in memory.

While women often appear as protagonists in his work, symbolizing endurance and transformation, Al Hamid's art extends beyond gender to represent the collective fate of Syrian migrants. His paintings speak to the universality of exile—the silent grief of those forced to leave home and the hope that carries them forward.

His works have been showcased in numerous exhibitions across Syria, Lebanon, the UAE, and internationally, earning widespread recognition. His artistic language blends traditional influences with contemporary techniques, creating an evocative visual narrative that resonates across cultures.

Through his deeply expressive and symbolic storytelling, Ibrahim Al Hamid continues to shed light on the human cost of displacement, urging viewers to engage with the lived realities of migration, resilience, and belonging.

## AHMAD AL TALLAA

Ahmad Tallaa is a contemporary Syrian artist whose work delves into existential themes, identity, and the search for meaning within the unknown. Deeply influenced by the Syrian experience, his art reflects a sense of displacement—not only in the physical sense but in the psychological and philosophical dimensions of existence. His work explores the tension between presence and absence, memory and erasure, reality and illusion, capturing the fragility of identity in an ever-shifting world.

Through muted tones, expressive brushstrokes, and layered textures, Tallaa constructs ethereal, dreamlike compositions, where figures emerge and dissolve into abstract forms. His subjects often appear fragmented, distorted, or partially obscured, mirroring the uncertainties and complexities of self-perception. His work does not depict the Syrian experience in direct, literal terms but instead encapsulates the emotional and psychological weight carried by those who come from a place shaped by history, conflict, and transformation.

Tallaa's paintings embody a profound sense of liminality, as if his figures are caught between different dimensions—between the past and the future, the real and the imagined. His work does not seek to provide answers but rather poses questions:

Who are we beyond the tangible? What remains when identity is stripped of place and time? How do we define ourselves in the face of uncertainty?

Exhibiting across the region, Tallaa has established himself as a thought-provoking artist whose work resonates with those seeking deeper introspection. His paintings are more than visual compositions; they are philosophical encounters, inviting the viewer to confront the unknown and explore the depths of human existence through a distinctly Syrian lens—one shaped by resilience, memory, and the constant interplay between what is lost and what remains.

## KAMAL AL ZOUBI

**Kamal** is a Jordanian ceramic artist and sculptor whose life has been deeply intertwined with the art of pottery. Born into a family of potters, he grew up surrounded by clay, learning the craft from an early age under the guidance of his brothers. His passion for ceramics led him to pursue formal education at the University of Jordan's College of Arts and Design, where he specialized in pottery and sculpture.

Over the years, Kamal has played a significant role in shaping the ceramic arts scene in Jordan. He has founded and managed multiple pottery studios, including his family's longstanding business, and has been instrumental in mentoring emerging artists. His work has been featured in numerous exhibitions and symposiums, and he has created commissioned pieces for individuals and institutions across Jordan.

Beyond his artistic practice, Kamal has been dedicated to arts education. He taught at Cambridge High School in Jordan for five years before relocating to Dubai, where he established the pottery and sculpture department at Al Jalila Cultural Centre for Children. His commitment to fostering creativity in young artists continues to inspire new generations, bridging tradition with contemporary expression in the world of ceramics.

**EYAD JOUDA**

**Eyad Fouzat Jouda** (b. 1980, Syria) is an Abu Dhabi-based artist whose practice seamlessly blends architecture, sculpture, and abstract figurative forms. A graduate of Damascus University with a B.Sc. in Architectural Engineering (2004), Jouda has lived in the UAE since 2005, working in architecture and interior design while cultivating his deep passion for art.

Self-taught in painting and sculpture, Jouda's artistic journey is guided by intuition, meditation, and a poetic dialogue between form and meaning. His sculptures capture the resilience of the human spirit, the fragility of memory, and the tension between reality and imagination. His architectural background profoundly informs his work, lending a refined understanding of balance, structure, and the interplay of light and shadow.

Jouda draws inspiration from daily life, human struggles, and the passage of time, often working with reclaimed construction materials—wood, steel wires, cement, and stone—collected from building sites. This approach not only highlights the transformation of discarded elements into profound artistic expressions but also reflects the artist's meditation on survival and renewal. Each piece is deeply connected to its chosen material, as seen in *Exodus*, where concrete embodies solidity and permanence, or *Sufi Whirling*, where metal wires evoke fluid, continuous motion.

His work primarily explores the human form in movement and emotion, capturing its psychological depth in a way that resonates universally. Jouda believes that in the midst of chaos, art remains a sanctuary—an essential force that enables us to dream and persevere.