

The Armory Show
New York, NY, USA
Claude Lemand Gallery
5-8 March 2015

Art Paris Art Fair 2015
Paris, France
Claude Lemand Gallery
26-29 March 2015



The

Dia Al-Azzawi
The Target, 2014
Sculpture - Maquette
for a monument
©Dia Al-Azzawi
Courtesy Galerie
Claude Lemand, Paris

Al-Azzawi Epic

By Emmanuel Daydé

America was astonished by the avant-garde art it discovered at the first International Exhibition of Modern Art, known as The Armory Show, in New York that took place in 1913. Re-emerging from its ashes in 1999, the most important fair of contemporary art in New York no longer surprises anyone yet it unveils today the scope of Arab modernity, with Dia Al-Azzawi at its front line.

'My work is part of the Renaissance of Arab Art trend, yet it is universal in its dimension and interlocked within contemporary history and culture.' Dia Al-Azzawi

1112 artworks were showcased at the 1913 Armory Show, amongst which the Nu descendant un escalier by Marcel Duchamp that caused an outrage and hence was immediately renamed « Explosion dans une fabrique de tuiles » by an art critic. When Anglo-Egyptian Omar Kholeif was asked to curate the 2015 edition of the Armory Show, it offered the opportunity to the entire Middle East, North Africa and Mediterranean countries to create a new sensation as they brutally found themselves in the spot-light. The Iraqi artist from London, Dia Al-Azzawi, with his hair like a lion's mane, could be accepted there as the Picasso of the East. This pioneer of contemporary Arab art is majestically represented by the Parisian Claude Lemand Gallery. He is not only well-known for his vibrant black and white polyp-tych depicting the Massacre of Sabra and Chatila, but also for his more quiet works that were inspired by the Gulf war. Al-Azzawi worked for a long time with antiquities in Iraq and was hence fully committed, with a joyful tone despite everything, to source his inspiration from his country's memories and culture to challenge time and humans. He fuses the slender Sumerian and Babylonian shapes to the desert roses sliced by sedimentation, and borrows his bright colours from the kilims of the women from Southern Iraq and from the wise lay-out of Arab miniature paintings. His everlasting and saturated painting crystallizes the space, frequently prompting us to blink our eyes in front of it, as if blinded by the desert's sun. In the Mesopotamian era, Gilgamesh told his friend Enkidu, « Despire death, just

focus on life ! ». Like the legendary King of Uruk who did not accept death, Dia Al-Azzawi denounces the vanity of all passionate quests for immortality by tracing signs and by bringing steles into the future perfect. With his open indifference towards abstract or figurative art, the slender figures tangled in Enkidu meets the Great Courtisane of 1987 echo the canvas riddled by bullets of The Target as well as the body parts, such as the arm, leg or horse's head, torn from the monumental triptych The Wounded Soul of 2014. Nonetheless, just like Francis Bacon, « the figurative aspect is rendered more violent and more poignant for the nervous system » by abstracting his tragic figuration on a plain blood-red back-ground. In that way, Al-Azzawi transposes his totemic sculpture of the wounded horse of the imam Hussein, Prophet Muhammad's grandson, who was assassinated in Karbala, Iraq. Resonating the dignity retained in a Passion of Christ, The Wounded Soul refers to the extinction of Iraqi intellectuals. Hus-sein's horse, a popular and religious symbol, with his large Sumerian eye, weeps for Iraq, a terror-stricken country of burnt land. The disasters of war, that are chopped up by an impossible abstraction, as depicted by the young artist Ahmed Al Soudani, would have never existed without Al-Azzawi's raging art. The artist reminds us that « archeologists find it useful to preserve and save everything that remains, rather than reconstructing everything ». Al-Azzawi the magnificent dedicates his art to safe-guarding these last days of humanity.♦

Dia Al-Azzawi

Suspiro del Moro, 2014. Bronze sculpture, 48 x 86 x 18 cm. Edition of 7 + 2 AP.

©Dia Al-Azzawi. Courtesy Galerie Claude Lemand, Paris.





Dia Al-Azzawi, **The Wounded Soul Triptych, 2014**. Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 450 cm
 ©Dia Al-Azzawi. Courtesy Galerie Claude Lemand, Paris.

Dia Al-Azzawi
The Blue Bird, 1983
 Oil on canvas, 70 x 78 cm
 ©Dia Al-Azzawi
 Courtesy Galerie
 Claude Lemand, Paris

Dia Al-Azzawi's important Paintings, Drawings, Sculptures, Books and Prints are inspired by the Nature, Culture and History of Iraq and the Arab World, in a positive and modern vision of Art and Life. Part of his oeuvre is tragic and shows Picasso's influence in Azzawi's works inspired by the slaughters and other violent events raging through the Middle East since decades, and the other part is witnessing the impact of Matisse in his more joyful and colourful works that depict the 'joie de vivre' in the Desert and in the Oriental Gardens of the Arab Civilisation in its opulent periods.

Since 1995, the Claude Lemand Gallery has regularly been exhibiting the works of Dia Al-Azzawi (paintings, sculptures, drawings, books, portfolios of prints), in which the prominent Modern Arab artist shows his positive modernity, as well as his desire for art to contribute to everyone's happiness and to the birth of a new Arab civilization which is in peace with itself and with other civilizations.

The Claude Lemand gallery was the first person to show in the West Dia Al-Azzawi's Sabra and Shatila Massacres, 1982-83. It was in 2003 in Aix-en-Provence, an Homage to the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. This Polyptych is now in The Tate Modern collections. In 2013, I showed in the Grand Palais his first historic masterpiece Al-Mu'allaqat (The Golden Odes, 1978), and his magnificent historical Triptych Bilad Al-Sawad, 1994-95, illustrated and commented in the Catalogue I published in 2013. I produced some of his original books, portfolios of prints and 4 sculptures in bronze, including the monumental Desert Flower, 2008, now in the Mathaf Doha collections.◆◆





Dia Al-Azzawi
**Three Palm
Trees, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas,
240 x 200 cm
©Dia Al-Azzawi
Courtesy Galerie
Claude Lemand, Paris