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## Sarkis

*Aura d'après Vaudou*  
 September 13 - October 13, 2012



## Press release

### SARKIS

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Galerie Nathalie Obadia is delighted to accompany Sarkis for his second exhibition at the Parisian gallery. The artist will be showing for the first time a set of thirteen works in oil on paper inspired by the exhibition *Les trésors du Vaudou* held at the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain in 2011.

Continuing his reflections on the inherent creative possibilities of given mediums – notably in his experiments with watercolour and water –, here Sarkis plays on the physical properties of oil paint. He starts by outlining a shape of pure colour on the paper, skilfully and without corrections. He then leaves the oil paint to spread freely, randomly over the sheet. By edging the figure with the yellow of the oil, the paint breaks out of the limits of its defined spaces, refusing to be fixed, vitally overflowing the overly narrow spatiality assigned by Sarkis. The liquid is sovereign, affirming its autonomy by going beyond the frontiers of its solid, stable corpulence.

What interests the artist here are precisely the different time-frames in which this independent material takes form. Sarkis begins the work by providing the initial impetus, while respectfully accepting the spatial limits of his action. Standing back, he can observe the physical transformation of the freely spreading ink as it administers its own frontiers. The two stages of this process can easily be identified in the space of the painting by the viewer, and this sensorial impression is heightened by the tactile dimension of the paint matter set in motion by the painter's action, and the brutality of his rapid execution.

Where Marcel Duchamp evoked the possibility of a passage – a notion close to Sarkis's heart – from the second to the third dimension by defining the infra-thin, here the artist offers the reverse procedure: a translation of volume into flatness by the absence of colour which creates the aura of the figures. At once simple and complex, the thirteen *Aura d'après Vaudou* require real responsiveness from the viewer in order to be formally and conceptually appreciated. These understated marks, in the margins of Sarkis's actions, gain in presence from the painter's decision to let the oil paint find its own fulfilment.

Born in Istanbul in 1938, Sarkis studied French, painting and interior architecture before moving to Paris in 1964. In 1967 he won the prize for painting at the Biennale de Paris and presented his work *Connaissez-vous Joseph Beuys ?* at the Salon de Mai, in a reference to the man he considered the most important artist of the day. In 1969 he was invited by the critic and curator Harald Szeemann to take part in the now legendary show *When Attitudes Become Form*. Teaching and sharing experience are key concerns of this artist. From 1980 to 1990 he was director of the Art Department at the École des Arts Décoratifs in Strasbourg, and from 1988 to 1995 he ran a seminar at the Institut des Hautes Etudes en Arts Plastiques created by Pontus Hultén. Since the 1980s, Sarkis has taken part in numerous international exhibitions (Documenta, Kassel, the Venice, Sydney, Istanbul and Moscow biennials) and had his work shown in the world's leading museums.

In 2010, in the exhibition *Passages* at the Pompidou Centre, works by Sarkis entered into conversation with works by Kasimir Malevich, the wall from the apartment of André Breton and *Plight* by Joseph Beuys, who is one of Sarkis's inspirations, along with the Russian filmmaker Andre Tarkovsky, one of whose films he explored in the Brancusi studio. *Passages* evoked both the permanent back-and-forth between the studio and the museum and Walter Benjamin's great unfinished work about the arcades of Paris. The exhibition featured a series of recent or specially created works produced by the Pompidou Centre. These works, standing as the artist's KRIEGSSCHATZ (trophies), comprised found objects, art works and ethnographic objects from different civilisations.

In 2011 the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain in Geneva (Mamco) has devoted an important retrospective to the artist entitled *Hôtel Sarkis* (to 8 May) This presentation on four floors brought together 200 works made between 1971 and the present, exploring the artist's different practices (video and sound installations, watercolours, photographs, films) and thus amplifying the resonance of an oeuvre produced in response to other artists, whether musicians, architects, writers, philosophers, painters, sculptors or

filmmakers.

In 2012, Sarkis is presenting *Ballads* (to 30 September) in the 5,000 square metres of the underwater Hangars, at the invitation of the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen and the Port of Rotterdam, as well as *Ailleurs, Ici* (to 31 December 2014) on the estate of Chaumont-sur-Loire, following a commission by the Centre regional council. He has also taken part in the group show *La Triennale - Intense Proximité* at the Palais de Tokyo with his *Frise des Trésors de Guerre*, and showed *Néon, who's afraid of red, yellow and blue ?* at La Maison Rouge – Fondation Antoine de Galbert, as well as *Istanbul Modern* at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, and his work is part of the new hanging, *Vivement Demain*, at the MAC/VAL.

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