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PRESS RELEASE

Lawrie Shabibi at Frieze Masters 2024

Nabil Nahas | Booth S27 | *Spotlight*

9 – 13 October 2024

The Regent's Park, London, UK

Lawrie Shabibi is pleased to announce its second participation in Frieze Masters, held in Regent's Park, London, 9-13 October 2024. Presenting three monumental panels by Nabil Nahas that were on long loan to the Yale Chemistry Department, each 9 x 9 ft (275 x 275cm), these were made in 1973 whilst Nahas was still a student at Yale completing his MFA. Only ever on view at Yale, this is the first time these seminal works will be seen by a broader public.

Nabil Nahas was unusual amongst young Lebanese painters of the late 1960s and early 1970s, travelling to the United States in 1968 for his training rather than Paris. The early experiences he had there, especially his time at Yale studying for his MFA at the start of the 1970s informed much of his subsequent work. There Nahas encountered many of the most prominent contemporary artists of the time, but it was Al Held who was teaching at Yale University at the time that became Nahas's mentor.

Emblematic of Nahas' period of geometric abstraction, which was to continue into the early 1980s, these works show the scale and ambition of Nahas at an early stage in his career and predate by four years those shown in his first gallery solo exhibition at Robert Miller in 1978. Presented alongside two striking abstract paintings from 1978 — the same year and series as one currently on view at Tate Modern — the works show both the influence of Al Held as well as the brutalist architecture of Paul Rudolph's masterpiece, the Yale School of Architecture. They also demonstrate how, as a student, Nahas moved beyond the relative clarity of the older painter to explore the complexities of Islamic geometry.

In America at that time, these paintings must have appeared quite radical: the critic Clement Greenberg's theories of painting were still current orthodoxy - that progressive painting was about emphasis on two dimensionality of the surface. Nahas, already making drawings of geometric patterns in the late 1960s and 1970s, was encouraged by Al Held, who at that time was filling his canvases with rings, cubes and three-dimensional discs. However, there was always a difference: whilst in Held's work complexity comes from the incompatible perspectives his simple forms imply, Nahas was looking towards Islamic art and its tessellated ceramics patterns, seeking to expand these into a three dimensional set-up like honeycomb. The overlapping geometric systems of Nahas' paintings, with their emphasis on optical mixture and the dematerialization of the surface, diverge markedly from the contemporary

works of both Held and Stella. Nahas' use of geometry was less recognizable, as the abstractions of these paintings do not feel so much like geometry as decorative motifs from the pantheon of Islamic art imbued with an eerie luminosity.

With their linear structures and yellow ground, which Nahas used because he was searching not for physicality but intangible luminosity, his work caught the attention of the Harry Wasserman, Professor in the Chemistry Department and himself a keen amateur painter, and the panels were placed in the neo-Gothic lobby of Sterling Lab, the Chemistry Department at Yale University. Nahas says of the mechanical effect of these paintings "I didn't want to feel the paint". The artist's hand was not to show.

These works are the forerunners of several of those in important international institutions, including those in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Tate Modern, and the Barjeel Art Foundation. A study on paper for these works is in the collection of the British Museum.

ABOUT SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight is a section at Frieze Masters for solo presentations of artists working in the 20th century with a special focus on under-appreciated work from the mid-century. Curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver (Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts), *Spotlight* explores unexpected positions, new research into overlooked figures from across the world, and significant early work from established artists.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Nabil Nahas was born in Beirut in 1949 and for the first 10 years of his life, he lived in Cairo. He completed a BFA from Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge in 1971 and an MFA from Yale University in 1973.

Nahas is Lebanon's most renowned living painter, having established himself before the current heightened interest in contemporary art of the Middle East, first in New York art circles as a master of colour, texture and atmosphere. Although thoroughly schooled in Western abstract painting, Nahas takes his inspiration from a diverse range of influences, most significantly nature, and occasionally Islamic art, in particular its abstract geometric and chromatic qualities.

He has participated in several solo exhibitions including: *Tethys*, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, 2023; *Grounded in the Sky*, Château La Coste, France, 2023; *Nabil Nahas*, Ben Brown Fine Arts, Hong Kong, 2018; *Nabil Nahas*, Saleh Barakat Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon, 2016; *Nabil Nahas: Pheonix Dactylifera*, Ben Brown Fine Arts, London, UK, 2014; *Nabil Nahas*, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, UAE, 2013; *Sperone Westwater*, New York, USA, 2013; *Nabil Nahas*, Ben Brown Fine Arts, London, UK, 2011; *Palms and Stars*, Lawrie Shabibi, UAE, 2011; *Works 1970*, Beirut Exhibition Center (BEC), Lebanon, 2010; *Cedrus Libani: Roots and Memory*, FIAF Gallery, New York, USA, 2010; and *Untitled (trees)*, Galerie Tanit, Munich, Germany, 2009.

Numerous group exhibitions include Dallas Art Fair, with Lawrie Shabibi, Texas, USA, 2017; *Jardins d'Orient*, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France, 2016; *New Acquisitions*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, 2012; *Glasstress New York: New Art from the Venice Biennale*, Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), New York, USA, 2012; *Glasstress 2011: Collateral Event of the 54th International Art Exhibition*, La Biennale di Venezia, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti, Berengo Centre for Contemporary Art and Glass, Campiello della Pescheria, Murano, Italy, 2011; Wake Forest University, Casa Artom, Murano, Venice, Italy, 2011; *BARAKAT: The Gift. Contemporary Art from the Middle East and Africa*, Stux Gallery, New York, USA, 2010, among others.

His works can be found in the collections of Tate Modern in London, UK; the British Museum, London, UK; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC, NY, USA; the Vorhees Zimmerli Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA; the Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine, USA; the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA; Barjeel Foundation, Sharjah, UAE; the Flint Institute of Art, Michigan, USA; the Michigan Museum of Art UMMA, Michigan, USA; the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, USA; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar; The High Museum in Atlanta, Georgia, USA and the Portland Museum of Art, Maine, USA.

In July 2013 he was awarded the honour of the National Order of the Cedar, for services to Lebanese culture.

Nahas currently lives and works in New York and Beirut.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Lawrie Shabibi is a contemporary art gallery housed in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. The gallery supports the long-term development of the careers of young international contemporary artists with a focus on those from the Middle East and North Africa. The gallery also organises art historical exhibitions working with an older generation of artists from the region. Liaising with curators, institutions, museums and collectors the gallery has successfully introduced international artists to the region whilst at the same time presenting Middle Eastern artists to the international contemporary art community. By holding a regular programme of exhibitions, screenings and talks, publishing catalogues and participating in international art fairs, Lawrie Shabibi has been a forerunner in the development of the contemporary art scene in Dubai.

For more information on Lawrie Shabibi please visit: www.lawrieshabibi.com

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