

Dispersed Crowds

An Exhibition by Khaled Hourani

May 4 – June 20, 2019

Zawyeh Gallery, Ramallah

The spectacle of crowds in a demonstration, a protest, or a march always attracts me. This scene of people gathering to express a cause has become familiar not only in Palestinian lives but also, more recently, in the lives of most Arab people. Somehow, the spectacle is a declaration that something is not going very well.



What draws my attention to these acts of protest is the similarity in the looks of people taking to the streets, the similarity of their cries, their demands, and the movements of their bodies. Even their silence is the same, though at times the flags, slogans, and places look different. What do these crowds have in common?

Individuals dissolve within the crowds to form a human mass. In those moments, individuality is overridden by unity and agency that is formed in an act of desperation before each individual returns to his/her isolation and fate.



This time, I paint, illustrate, and color these crowds in an attempt to capture the thread that connects all this, on one hand, and life and its mechanics on the other. I am inspired by these protests that I photograph or take part in, and I start to question: What lies between the now and the future, between the individual and the group? Do I want to freeze this moment or that? Do I want to make it eternal by echoing it on canvas? I don't know as I am inclined to doubt. But I can say that these paintings pose an existential question and reflect the limits of the self.

I don't want my work to be solely documentary, as I witness and participate in these live performances in public spaces. I see myself there, and I can see you as well in an event

in which its main substance is people who are suffering from the disruption of the times, places, and politics as never happened before. My works are portraits of unknown people, but they are also personal. Individuals in the paintings might look like us here in Ramallah or like people in other places, such as Khartoum.

This exhibition mostly reflects these moments in which people take to the streets in desperation and as a result of losing hope and feeling collectively and mysteriously that change comes from the base, not from above, from individuals, not from leaders or thinkers.

Khaled Hourani

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