

Nazar Yahya: Reconquista | My Art Guides

Meem Gallery presents a solo exhibition of new works by Texas-based, Iraqi artist **Nazar Yahya**. The solo exhibition, titled **Reconquista**, showcases works exploring Andalusian- Arab heritage, the idea of history and how it can come to be re-examined.

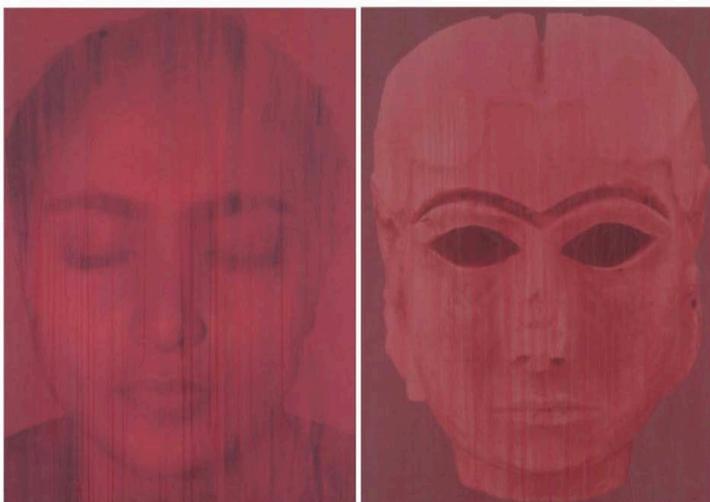
Meem Gallery's central gallery will be converted into a series of spaces in order to attain a particular experience for the viewer. By grouping works together within small, intimate spaces, the viewer encounters them slowly and in a specific order designed to intrigue. Central to this exhibition is a site-specific installation that will show three key pieces in a setting that will provoke a multi-sensorial experience of sight, sound and smell. This particular installation evokes the experience of a highly sensual Andalusian *hammam*, transporting the audience through time. While Yahya presents us various characters and motifs of his reconstructed Andalusia, the exhibition will encourage visitors to explore, as they are directed to move around the different rooms to see the presented works in a manner that is premeditated by the artist.

The show is both a visual and emotional experience. An exercise in bittersweet nostalgia, the exhibition is laden with intention to simultaneously be situated in the present moment as well as the past. The artist's focus on the story of Abu Abdullah, the last Arab leader of Granada, or "Boabdil" as the Spanish have since rendered the name, carries with it the remorse of the last king as he bade farewell to his kingdom with one famous last sigh before being forced to surrender it to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in 1492. The infamous story of the last Moorish king serves as the artist's prompt to investigate many themes including exile, isolation, and the pain over the loss of a homeland; in addition to power rendered antiquated and impotent.

By paying homage to a significant moment in Arab history, Yahya reminds viewers of the Arab world's literary, Islamic and scientific heritage that developed as a result of the era of scientific and philosophical enlightenment of that time period. The philosopher Ibn Rushd is depicted, as are the horses used in the various battles that took place in the fight for the conquest of Granada. Knowledge, culture and history poetically clash together. The vestiges of war and the vast culture that was brought down still remains in the conscience of Europe and the Middle East, particularly for Arabs argues Yahya.

Yahya manipulates the themes and motifs of the historic moment, and the era of Muslim and Arab rule in Spain, to discuss key themes of his ever-expanding oeuvre of work. In visually constructing and narrating the story of Boabdil, Yahya tells the story of many Arabs who have been forced to leave their homeland, forced off or expelled due to politics and power grabs. With subtle symbolism elaborated in intricate works made with a variety of mediums on large canvases such as *Irony of War* and *Transition*, Yahya ultimately tells his own story of having left Iraq and his permanent exile in the United States within the context of a larger one.

Reconquista tells of Yahya's struggle to retain his identity as an Arab in a world where to be Arab means to be many things, but at moments, seems most to be about loss and bittersweet history.



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Nazar Yahya, 6,000 Years Old, 2012. Courtesy of
Wade Wilson Art Santa Fe, New Mexico