

World Civil War Portraits

A solo show by Sara Shamma

Curated by Sacha Craddock

Presented by StolenSpace

May 11th - 25th, 2015

StolenSpace Gallery

The Old Truman Brewery,
London, E1



On May 11th, a major solo exhibition of Sara Shamma's paintings will open at The Old Truman Brewery in London organized by StolenSpace Gallery. The exhibition, **World Civil War Portraits**, is an opportunity to see a selection of new and recent work by internationally acclaimed Shamma, one of Syria's best known artists.

A powerful and moving product of the terrible civil war in Syria, World Civil War Portraits is informed by Shamma's personal experience of the conflict. Forced to flee Syria in 2012 after a car bomb exploded outside her flat, Shamma now lives in the Lebanon with her young family whilst her husband remains working in Damascus.

Shamma, as one of the most perceptive artists of the region, is in a unique position to allude not only to the tragedy of Syria but to the escalating strife in the Middle East and throughout the world. She continues to paint in exile with a single voice which speaks directly of her own experience and creates a connection with the viewer which is hard to ignore.

Art historian Edward Lucie-Smith describes Shamma's approach thus:

'She has also had the courage to react to and comment upon what is happening now, particularly the tragedy now unfolding in her native Syria. Her recent paintings are not in any way journalistic, but they resonate with the tragedy of the current situation in her country.'

Whilst the construction and use of narrative in Shamma's work evokes comparison with the great history painters and 'masters of war' including Goya and Delacroix with his work *'The Massacres at Chios'*, Sara's paintings are emphatically not 'war paintings'. For, whilst Shamma's paintings are rooted in the effects of war they take us instead through an almost cinematic journey of the experience of war - allowing us to see and feel the horror of displacement and loss through the eyes of the refugee, the tortured, the maimed and the terrorised victims of war.

Curator and art critic Sacha Craddock describes Shamma's approach to painting as 'a sophisticated play between the real and the symbolic. Focus shifts in and out as she alludes to a general condition sometimes with heightened detail.'

A recent self-portrait contains differing states and time, the artist shadowed by the skeleton of a mythical monster, stares out, while a party balloon on another plane withers and deflates. The most recent paintings work together to build a powerful state of contemplation. They carry a strange other worldliness about them, that unites a range of hyper real detail, body organs, for instance, with a loose brush stroke across the face.'

One should not be complacent, nor is it possible to remain detached when looking at these images for as Sara observes, it is not just a Syrian civil war anymore - it is becoming a "World Civil War". Every loss is our loss; the fragmentation and dispersal of a vibrant cultural community in Syria just one act of cultural desecration on the world stage, whilst the appalling and ever increasing loss of life serves a terrible roll-call of war on a global scale.

Shamma comments:

'The state of war transforms the life of the individual living in diaspora – irrevocably detached from his life before and almost unimaginably different from the experience of those who live without conflict. The person of diaspora looks at people in a new way; he sees what was previously invisible, he appreciates the significance of the individual and through the act of loss – discovers the true value of being human.'

Anything is replaceable except life, and those who lost their lives are many in my country today, 200 thousands. I want to bring those 200 thousands who were killed in Syria to London, to Europe, I want you to see them, look to their eyes and feel their loss, but I will not leave them dead, I want to bring them to life, I want them to tell their stories, to defend their differences, to convince everybody that they deserved to be alive.'



Notes to editors:

Sara Shamma

Syrian born from a Christian background and before the civil war one of the best-known and most celebrated artists working in Syria, Shamma has numerous exhibitions and commissions to her name. International awards include prizes for the BP Portrait Award 2004, the Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize South Australia 2008 and Florence Biennale 2013. Shamma was nominated Celebrity Partner for the United Nations World Food Programme in 2010. Recent exhibitions include 'Q' at the Royal College of Art in London in 2013 and 'Diaspora' at Art Sawa gallery in Dubai U.A.E in 2014.

StolenSpace Gallery

StolenSpace Gallery, now in its tenth year, has showcased many important exhibitions including work by acclaimed light artist Chris Levine, Pop artist Gerald Laing, Urban artists Shepard Fairey and D*Face. It has also provided an important platform for young, emerging, international artists. Occupying a former Stone

Mason's workshop within walking distance of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, StolenSpace have always had roots in East London and is largely accountable for the art scene that has developed around the gallery in the area over the last decade.

StolenSpace Gallery,
The Old Truman Brewery, 91 Brick Lane, London E1 6QL

StolenSpace _____

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with essay by Sacha Craddock.

For Press Enquiries: Paget PR

Will Paget: will@pagetpr.com

Celia Bailey: celia@pagetpr.com

+44 2(0)7 836 2703

Sponsored by:

Agostine & Raphael Group

Formed in 1957, Agostine & Raphael Group are an international architecture and engineering firm of global significance. They have shaped culture, business and society by delivering lasting, flexible and intelligent design, and are at the forefront of innovative architecture in major capitals around the world including Paris, Beirut, Dubai, New York, Kuala Lumpur, Athens, Qatar and Moscow.

