Phoenix Art Museum

News Release

Phoenix Art Museum and Portland Museum of Art Presents First Museum Survey of Works of Ahmed Alsoudani


PHOENIX (January 29, 2013) – Co-organized by the Phoenix Art Museum and the Portland Museum of Art, Phoenix Art Museum will present Ahmed Alsoudani: Redacted, the first major museum survey of the work of the American-Iraqi artist, beginning March 13 at Phoenix Art Museum. The exhibition will feature more than 20 of the artist’s tumultuous compositions that offer stylized, dysmorphic depictions of the effects of war and violence on humans and our humanity.

“The Phoenix Art Museum is delighted to partner with the Portland Museum of Art on this important exhibition. We are excited for our audience to discover Ahmed’s compelling paintings. As part of a long series of exhibitions featuring the work of young artists, we embrace the project with great pride,” said James K. Ballinger, the Museum’s Sybil Harrington Director.

Alsoudani’s biography is a compelling one. Growing up under the regime of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad, Alsoudani fled the city in 1995 when a youthful act of defiance put him at risk. He then lived as a refugee in Syria before immigrating to the United States where he studied art at the Maine College of Art, Portland (BFA in 2005) and the Yale School of Art (MFA in painting in 2008). His subsequent meteoric career lead to solo and group shows around the world, where he has received much critical acclaim for his uniquely gripping and visceral compositions. Ahmed Alsoudani: Redacted is his first major museum show and will highlight the paintings he has produced since 2010.

Through his personal experience, the artist has developed a keen sensitivity to the effects of war, violence, terror, and political unrest on a global scale. “I’m not just commenting on Iraq but on an experience that becomes universal,” Alsoudani said, referring to Untitled, 2007, a loose, abstracted depiction of the moment the infamous statue of Hussein fell in Baghdad in 2002. His splintered compositions, the overwhelming and sometimes harrowing scenes represented in bold, brilliant, almost primary colors, speaks to the weight of violence, conflict and brutality as a universal experience heightened by a dominant culture wherein violence has become entertainment, in which Hollywood epics and first-person shooter video games are at times indistinguishable from the reality of war coverage and terror strikes.

“Ahmed’s painting demands a lot of his viewers but it also gives a lot. It is at once funny, beautiful, terrifying and intriguing. His strength is to move beyond his experience and the recent history of the Iraq War to embody something universal about our human interactions,” says Sara Cochran, PhD., Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, at Phoenix Art Museum.

Citing Goya, Picasso, Caravaggio and George Grosz as major influences, Alsoudani seeks to create works that depart from a glorification of violence and the heroism of warfare, to become large-scale, primal, graphic and at times disturbing images of disembodied elements and figures, of all-seeing bulging eyes, depicting human suffering in profound, primal ways, composed of blended media, including charcoal drawings, colored gesso, inks, etchings, pastels, and acrylic and oil paints, on large canvases hand-stretched by the artist himself.

Ahmed Alsoudani: Redacted will feature his compelling work on the first floor of the Museum’s Katz Wing of Contemporary Art from March 13 through July 17, 2013. The exhibition will travel to Portland Museum of Art and will be on view September 7 through December 15, 2013. The artist will speak about his work at a public lecture at Phoenix Art
Museum on Wednesday March 13 at 7pm in the Museum’s Whiteman Hall. This event is part of Contemporary Forum’s annual Lecture Series at the Museum and is sponsored by Fennemore Craig, P.C.

The exhibition is co-organized by Phoenix Art Museum and Portland Museum of Art. At the Phoenix Art Museum, it is organized by Dr. Cochran and is made possible through the generous support of Lee and Mike Cohn, CFG Business Solutions, LLC, and the Maxine and Jonathan Marshall Endowment. At the Portland Museum of Art, the exhibition was led by Director Mark H.C. Bessire and members of his staff and supported by a group of donors led by Cyrus and Patty Hagge provided funding to honor the Maine College of Art. The exhibition is also supported by The Bear Bookshop, Marlboro, VT and The VIA Agency.

About the Artist
Ahmed Alsoudani was born in Baghdad in 1975. He left Iraq as a teenager and lived as a refugee in Syria before immigrating to the United States in the late 1990s. He studied at the Maine College of Art, Portland (BFA, 2005), Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture (2006) and graduated with a MFA in painting from the prestigious Yale School of Art in 2008. He is known for his turbulent works that combine charcoal drawing with acrylic paint. In 2011, his work was featured in the Iraq Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale and in the exhibition The World Belongs to You and at The Francois Pinault Foundation at the Palazzo Grassi, Venice. His other major international exhibitions include: La Route de la Soie, at Tri postal in Lille, France (2010); Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East at the Saatchi Gallery in London (2009); as well as shows at the National Gallery of Saskatchewan, Canora, Canada (2007) and the Gwangju Museum of Art, Korea (2007). He lives and works in New York.

About Phoenix Art Museum
Phoenix Art Museum has provided access to visual arts and educational programs in Arizona for more than 50 years and is the largest art museum in the Southwestern United States. Critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions are shown alongside the Museum’s permanent collection of more than 17,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, Western American, modern and contemporary art, as well as fashion design. Visitors also enjoy vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum’s landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona.

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