

YOSSI MILO



For Immediate Release:

Ibrahim Said: *From Thebes to Cairo*

Artist's Reception: May 2, 6-8 PM

May 2 – June 15, 2024

Yossi Milo is pleased to present *From Thebes to Cairo*, a solo exhibition of new work by Egyptian ceramicist Ibrahim Said. Opening on Thursday, May 2 from 6-8 PM and on view through Saturday, June 15, this will be the artist's debut solo exhibition with the gallery and first in New York. This exhibition inaugurates a rotating presentation of works in the *Forum*, activating the gallery's front window as an exhibition space.

Ibrahim Said builds ceramic vessels that take on aerial configurations, suspending voluminous bodies in the air above delicate, yet sturdy bases. Innovative and singular in design, these vessels are nonetheless firmly rooted in an ancient tradition of Egyptian craftsmanship. Said's practice is steeped in Egypt's ceramic traditions; since the age of six, the artist often accompanied his father to his pottery studio in Al Fustat, Cairo, an area known for being a center for ceramic manufacturing.

Frequently working with the form of the water jug, Said undoes its utility to render an object that is practically futile but conceptually rich. The artist's vessels are modeled after those commonly produced during Egypt's *Naqada* period (4000 – 3000 BCE). With these vessels as his departure point, Said incorporates a feature common during the much later Fatimid Dynastic Era (10th – 12th centuries): the filter. During this period, water jugs were constructed with a fine clay filter fitted into their necks, designed to sieve sediment from drinking water. Said transposes these filters from interior to exterior, carving intricate patterns onto the outer surfaces of his jugs. This effectively transforms the function of the jug, stripping it of its ability to hold water, but inviting a new perspective inward; where, according to Muslim belief, true beauty is found. It is the viewer's gaze, rather than water, that is filtered through minute designs into the interior of the jug.

The "filters" that decorate Said's vessels follow complex geometric patterns derived from Islamic geometric principles. While such designs were frequently painted onto the surfaces of Islamic ceramic ware and carved into architectural elements during the Fatimid Dynastic Era, they were not prevalent during the much earlier *Naqada* period. The artist thus engages two distinct ceramic practices that originate from nearly five millennia apart: one from a specifically Egyptian tradition of crafting vessels, and the other rooted in the broader Islamic practice of geometric ornamentation. This fusion imbues Said's vessels with a distinctly architectural quality. The finely detailed patterns of Said's filters recall the richly ornamented surfaces of

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Islamic edifices, forging a link between the two. This quality is enhanced by the immense scale of the vessels in this new body of work, as well as their towering, gravity-defying shapes.

Launching his interest in the architectural to new heights, Said will transform the gallery's back exhibition space into a splendid showcase of Islamic design. Standing within this space will be a series of pillars inspired by The Karnak Temple Complex located in Luxor, Egypt. The columns within the temple system reference the forms of papyrus plants, which were used by ancient Egyptians to make paper, ropes, clothing, and other materials. Said celebrates these sacred columns and the history they embody with these new sculptural works. Surrounding the pillars will be *99 Names of God*, an immersive installation of 100 inverted bowls, each about 12 inches in diameter, that will line the walls of the back gallery. Each bowl is carved with intricate geometric designs and bears one of the 99 names of God as he is referred to in the Quran. These names are written in Arabic script, and include referents such as *Al-Ghafoor*, meaning "The All-Forgiving," and *Al-Muqsit*, meaning "The Equitable." The 100th bowl is inscribed with *Allah*, the single, proper name for God in Islam. Installed as hanging fixtures on walls, these works are spangled with ornate patterns, calligraphy, and reflected shimmering light, mimicking the complex tiling and sacred ornamentation covering the walls of Islam's holiest places of worship. Said also directly engages features of the gallery's architecture in the *Forum*'s first presentation with a grouping of the artist's distinctive Floating Vase works. A selection of vessels will be displayed along the gallery's exterior-facing wall, creating a visible presence for the artist along Manhattan's 10th Avenue.

Said's work is founded on a marriage of ancient Egyptian and Islamic art traditions, drawing upon two extensive timelines of visual and cultural histories, separated by millennia and spanning from prehistory to the modern day. These visual languages are the substance from which the artist creates his own, furthering a notion of inheritance that is at once immediate and latent. Thousands of years of art history are concentrated by Said in his levitating vessels, carved filigrees, and buttressed structures — and yet, their very forms are inherently modern, informed by a contemporary sensibility of design and craft. This meeting of historic and contemporary mirrors his own lived experiences, bringing the artist's familial relationship to Cairo's ceramic manufacturing centers into conversation with contemporary realities of a culturally informed artistic process. In this way, Said's work is at once primeval, ancient, and current, an extant element of tradition and an innovation still unfolding.

ABOUT IBRAHIM SAID

Ibrahim Said has previously exhibited in solo and group shows at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, NY; 10th Korean International Ceramic Biennale, Icheon, South Korea; Saatchi Gallery, London, UK; Museum of Art and Design, New York, NY, among others. Said's work is part of public collections, including the Des Moines Art Center, IA; the Colby Museum of Art, Waterville, ME; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland; Center of Islamic Art, Kuwait; Fustat Ceramics Center, Cairo, Egypt. Said currently lives and works between North Carolina and Cairo, Egypt.

ABOUT THE FORUM

Ibrahim Said's solo exhibition *From Thebes to Cairo* will commence Yossi Milo's programming in the Forum, a new initiative that activates the gallery's front window as an exhibition space. Drawing on the classical notion of a central space that facilitates an exchange of ideas, the Forum opens a direct opportunity for works of art to reach the public, making use of the visibility offered by the gallery's front window. The Forum will continue to offer parallels and counterpoints to Yossi Milo's ongoing exhibition program, opening new dialogues between works on view in the gallery's interior and exterior. Through multimedia programming, online components, and nighttime activations, the Forum extends the gallery's exhibition space outwards onto the street level and opens the program to directly engage with the city itself.

For more information, please contact Jack Cassou at 212.414.0370 or jack@yossimilo.com or visit the gallery's website at www.yossimilo.com.

Pictured, from left to right: *Floating Vase 30*, 2022-2023; *Floating Vase 26*, 2023; *Floating Vase 24*, 2023; *Minaret 2*, 2023; *Floating Vase 22*, 2023; *Floating Vase 29*, 2023