

IBRAHIM EL-SALAHİ

*THE MILK OF DREAMS*

@The 59th Venice Biennale

23 April – 27 November 2022

Vigo is proud to announce Ibrahim El-Salahi's participation in the 2022 59th Venice Biennale, '*The Milk of Dreams*' curated by Cecilia Alemani.

El-Salahi's 'Behind the Mask' series, created between May 2020 and September 2021, is a distinct group of 99 black and white drawings predominantly in black ink on the back of medicine packets, envelopes and small scraps of paper, a continuation of his current mode of working made famous by his '*Pain Relief*' series. When Ibrahim is drawing he becomes lost in his work and has a temporary respite from his sciatica, chronic back pain and other ailments. These works have been created from the comfort of his armchair, the artist refusing to let physical restriction limit his continuing ambition to communicate at the age of 91.

Of these works the artist says: "The mask, apart from being a protective shield, to me feels like a self-imposed sign of silence regarding all things long forgotten, that need to be reawakened in us and relived in the wondering and fascinating act of creativity."

Venice Biennale Curator, Cecilia Alemani, stated: "*The Milk of Dreams* was conceived and organised in a period of enormous instability and uncertainty, since its development coincided with the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. La Biennale di Venezia was forced to postpone this edition by one year, an event that had only occurred during the two World Wars since 1895. So, the very fact that this exhibition can open is somewhat extraordinary: its inauguration is not exactly the symbol of a return to normal life, but rather the outcome of a collective effort that seems almost miraculous. During these endless months in front of the screen, I have pondered the question of what role the International Art Exhibition should play at this historical juncture, and the simplest, most sincere answer I could find is that the Biennale sums up all the things we have so sorely missed in the last two years: the freedom to meet people from all over the world, the possibility of travel, the joy of spending time together, the practice of difference, translation, incomprehension, and communion. *The Milk of Dreams* is not an exhibition about the pandemic, but it inevitably registers the upheavals of our era. In times like this, as the history of La Biennale di Venezia clearly shows, art and artists can help us imagine new modes of coexistence and infinite new possibilities of transformation."

In 2013, Ibrahim El-Salahi became the first artist of African birth to be given a full retrospective at Tate Modern. His work is included in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Art Institute of Chicago; The National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC; The British Museum, London; Tate Modern, London; The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, UAE; The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Newark Museum, Newark; Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah; The National Gallery, Berlin and many others.

In June Vigo Gallery will curate simultaneous solo exhibitions of previously unseen work created in the run up to El-Salahi's Retrospective at Tate Modern at Vigo, Masons Yard and in the Quadriga Galleries at Wellington Arch Museum in a pioneering partnership with English Heritage. At the same time his Pain Relief drawings will be the subject of a solo exhibition at The Norwegian Drawing Association - Tegnerforbundet which will travel in an expanded format to The Drawing Centre in New York in October. In a busy year the 91 year old will also have a solo exhibition of his Pain Relief canvases at Hastings Contemporary (April) and participate in upcoming group exhibitions at the Chrysler Museum of Art (October), and the Fisk University Galleries (October). Vigo Gallery exclusively represents Ibrahim El-Salahi.

For more information, please contact [info@vigogallery.com](mailto:info@vigogallery.com)

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