

PRESS RELEASE

Doa Aly: The House of Sleep **10 December 2013 – 7 January 2014**

For its second exhibition, Gypsum Gallery is thrilled to present a solo show of drawings and paintings by Cairo-based artist Doa Aly. *The House of Sleep* marks the artist's return to painting, a medium she had studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cairo. It is an intense new body of work inspired by a tragic love story by the Roman poet Ovid in his epic work *The Metamorphoses*. The exhibition poses a question central to art practice: how does a painter translate a literary narrative, with its plot, characters, relationship dynamics and drama into a two-dimensional surface?

As in many of her earlier video works, Aly's engagement with mythology and turn-of-the-19th-century fiction is based on a close reading of tales of passion and longing. Ovid's *The House of Sleep* is a central episode in the story of Alcyone and Ceyx, a moving tale of conjugal love and mourning. When Ceyx dies in a shipwreck, Alcyone continues to hope and pray for his return, until an apparition impersonating his fate appears to her in her sleep.

Aly's process for interpreting the text is delicately poised between figuration, symbolism and abstraction. She converts sentences, characters and pivotal moments from the poem into assigned shapes and patterns traced from anatomical illustrations of bones and images of catatonic patients - a reference Aly is accustomed to using as a metonym for human movement. Aly's use of bones as the foundation of her artistic vocabulary stems from her interest in the interplay between verbal and non-verbal communication - a theme that is very much present in the love story.

Her reliance on classical sources, whether Roman mythology or medical and scientific treatises, such as the 20th century edition of *Gray's Anatomy*, places Aly's practice within a fine art tradition. Her visual language is cryptic, often due to the way in which she buries her references under an accumulation of layers.

A psychologically charged atmosphere characterizes her work. Aly's paintings are fiercely expressive even though the brushwork is non-gestural. Her pencil drawings are sensual, graphic and exhibit a potent struggle between fragility, control and abandon.

The artist's work has been presented by many institutions worldwide including Tate Modern, London, UK; The New Museum, New York, USA; International Center of Photography, New York, USA; Haus Der Kunst, Munich, Germany; Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, Berlin, Germany; Argos, Brussels, Belgium; Arnolfini Museum, Bristol, UK; Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève, Switzerland; Darat Al-Funun, Amman, Jordan; Beirut Art Center, Beirut, Lebanon; Contemporary Image Collective, Cairo, Egypt and Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt. She has participated in major biennials and triennials in the cities of Busan, Istanbul, Gwangju, Guangzhou and Dakar.