

**TAMARA AL-SAMERAI: MAKE ROOM FOR ME**

21 January – 18 February 2014

For its third exhibition, Gypsum Gallery is delighted to present a solo show of drawings and paintings by Kuwaiti artist Tamara Al-Samerai entitled *Make Room For Me*. The exhibition is loosely inspired by Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, a book that the artist revisits from her youth. Al-Samerai engages with the book as a story about societal values that tackles notions of revenge, fear, love, jealousy, absence and death, while negotiating the boundary between adolescence and adulthood.

A sense of anxiety underlines *Make Room For Me* – at times palpable and at others, subtle. In Al-Samerai's acrylic paintings, drama is suggested through traces and shadows. The tension is silent, discernible through the quiet emptiness of the paintings: a pack of dogs running towards an unspecified object, a vacant chair, a solitary cactus, an open laptop. Inanimate everyday objects seem to take on a life of their own and the space that Al-Samerai stages hints at an invisible presence.

In another series, a sequence of charcoal on canvas drawings resembles an action packed storyboard. At the center of each drawing, two androgynous girls are involved in an intense encounter with one another. Action is visible through remnants of erased images and changes made along the way, suggesting an ongoing confrontation. The drawings theatrically explore role-play, play fighting, rivalry and reconciliation – subjects Al-Samerai examines with unwavering rigor throughout her works. But it often remains unclear whether the depicted struggle is internal, between ego and alter ego, or external, between real or imagined characters and the threats they face.

Al-Samerai's work is visceral, and often deliberately unpolished. Frayed edges, masking tape, dripping paint and raw canvas characterize her drawings and paintings. The images and stories she creates, along with her aesthetic sensibility and eerie compositions tap into primal emotions that underscore our fragile existence as human beings.

Trained as a painter, Al-Samerai's practice includes illustration, photography, animation, video and installation. Her work has been presented by many institutions worldwide including Agial Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France; White Box, Munich, Germany; Beirut Art Center, Beirut, Lebanon; Darat Al Funoon, Kuwait and Site Gallery, Sheffield, UK. She has also participated in art projects and workshops in Denmark, Finland, Germany, UK and Lebanon. Tamara Al-Samerai lives and works in Beirut.