

Ahmed Morsi

The Flying Poet

Aicon Gallery Exhibition December 6th – January 12th, 2019

Press Preview & V.I.P Reception: Thursday, December 6th, 2018

35 Great Jones St, New York NY 10012

“...The atelier remains,
as though I had not abandoned it,
for more than 60 years,
embracing the sea view.”

”The unfamiliar Royal Ras Al Teen Palace,
moorings of the shipping boats,
screams of the seagulls...”

*Verse from "Elegy for the Mediterranean Sea", written by Ahmed Morsi and translated from Arabic.



Ahmed Morsi, *Clocks II*, 1998, oil on canvas, 82.25 x 120 in.

We are delighted to present *The Flying Poet*, a debut solo exhibition by renowned artist **Ahmed Morsi**, at Aicon Gallery.

The works in this exhibition span Morsi's oeuvre from the 1960's till the present moment – a time period reflecting the artist's residence in New York City. Morsi was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1930. Drawing on his memories of his upbringing, Morsi employs a series of surrealist motifs that appear to take a dip in the metaphysical. In an essay for **Artforum**, critic Kaelen

Wilson-Goldie observes, “Morsi appears to proffer Surrealism - with its endlessly adaptable and perpetually useful language – as a bridge between the modern and the contemporary.”

His variously populated images seem to have origins in ancient Egyptian iconography - the sadness of his creatures derived by animating an ancient past with modern life. He does this by assembling his compositions as a series of continuums between different planes. The theatricality of his painted spaces is



Ahmed Morsi, *Untitled (Soprano)*, 1997, acrylic on canvas, 87 x 60 in.

undeniable. Ambitious visual plains, characters in varying degrees of definition and a sense of pathos, all pointing to a moor that exists out of time. The oblong and angular heads of his subjects go a long way in underscoring the absurdity of the scene. Shadows are sparse implying an omnipresent light. Ritual meaning and symbolism are employed in a way that indicates a poetic obsession with the weight of culture and the isolation of people, a nod no doubt to the artist's beginnings as a poet. The monumental scale of many of his works add to their stature as windows into another world.

Having grown up in Alexandria, Egypt, Morsi was exposed to a cosmopolitan culture. Visions of a fictive, invented Alexandria run through most of Morsi's work and his practice offers a powerful and mystical meditation on remembrance and the passage of time. It is important to understand the context in which Morsi developed his language of surrealism. Alexandria in the 1940s became a haven for artists and activists fleeing the Third Reich, culminating in the formation of the *Art and Liberty Group* and later the *Contemporary Art Group*. It is here that Egyptian Surrealism realized its full form, its proponents using the metaphysical in

revealing a deep sense of anguish and displacement. Morsi's visual vocabulary takes root in this potent soil. In his essay on Morsi, poet and art critic Jonathan Goodman notes, "Despite his implied preoccupation with the distant past, Morsi had to discover an imagery that would allow the spirit of his time to enter his art. In that sense, the dolorous atmosphere of his works must be considered a nod to contemporary problems and life. It is the tension between the artist's longing for another kind of time and his resigned acceptance of the present that gives his art its poignancy and great depth."

Ahmed Morsi (b. 1930, Alexandria) is an artist, art critic and poet with a career that spans seven decades of creative output. In the 1950s, he simultaneously studied literature at Alexandria University and painting at the studio of Italian master Silvio Becchi. In 1974, Morsi moved to New York City, where he continues to paint, write and critique from his Manhattan home. His work is in public collections including the Egyptian Museum of Modern Art, the Alexandria Museum of Fine Arts, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Sharjah Art Foundation, Barjeel Art Foundation and in various notable private collections in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, France, England and the United States.

Please contact Aicon Gallery (dheeya@aicongallery.com) for more information.