



*Untitled 1 (from Witness Portrait Series), 2004,
Lambda print on aluminum, 59 x 118 inches (150 x 300 cm)*

Halim Al Karim

Witness from Baghdad

Opening Reception: Thursday, October 27, 6 – 8 PM
October 27 – December 23, 2011

Stux Gallery is pleased to present the photo-works of the Iraqi artist, **Halim Al Karim** in his first major solo exhibition in New York, “Witness from Baghdad.” Born in Najaf, Iraq in 1963, Halim Al Karim spent his early years in Beirut, Lebanon. The family returned to Iraq when Halim was nearly 10, settling in the city of Baghdad. His subjects’ blurry, optical instability (what Rosalind Krauss calls “holding the referent at bay”), metaphorically describes the artist’s perspective about Iraq at the time: “...the situation was really out of focus. The government pushed us to become part of their machine, with the goal of stripping us of our humanity and values. Day by day, year by year, we were confused and distrustful of everyone.” This period marked a crisis in photographic veracity; information systems were increasingly corrupted during the course of Iraq’s wars, images were manipulated and used as weapons, or alternatively they were shielded from public view in an attempt to hide ubiquitous injustices.

During the Iran-Iraq war, Halim’s family was forced out of their home in Baghdad. Halim was unwillingly conscribed to serve in the Iraqi military during the first Gulf War, which the artist describes as, “a fearfully lonely and harrowing journey.” Halim Al Karim soon escaped the military and sought refuge in a rock-covered hole in the southern Iraqi desert. He attributes his physical and emotional survival to an elderly Bedouin woman who brought him food and water, as well as educated him about mysticism and gypsy customs. Aided by this wise and kind stranger, the artist retreated to a deeply meditative state that enabled him to distance his memory from the atrocities of war. He emerged from seclusion on occasion, refusing to disclose his whereabouts to his friends or family for fear of jeopardizing his family and his own safety. This period had a profound effect on the artist, resulting in his everlasting commitments to self-discovery and the expression of his core beliefs through art.

Rather than documentarily recording these devastating experiences, the artist chose to communicate what he endured through a vocabulary of psychologically expressionistic images. Halim’s artistic style pushes the viewer to reflect upon the interpretive absence of clarity: the obscurity of the subject leads us to seek what is lost, in hopes of regaining it in the annals of our memories.

Begun in 1985 and continuing today, *Hidden* is the artist’s earliest photographic theme and incorporates the Sufi concept of “al-batin” in Arabic, one of the ninety-nine names of Allah that denotes “truth” when recited. The series *Hidden War*, *Hidden Prisoner*, *Hidden Face*, *Hidden Victims* and *Hidden Love* all reference the artist’s perspective that humanity is best preserved from brutal acts of violence when an inner focus is maintained and hidden from view. A number of works within the theme are covered with a tightly stretched sheer scrim of white or black silk; this compositional device represents a transcendental portal to the subconscious, where the serene human form latently lies protected underneath.

Iraqi artist **Halim Al Karim** currently lives and works in Denver, USA and Dubai, UAE. In 2011 Halim was selected to represent Iraq in the Venice Biennale. His work has been widely exhibited at venues such as the Saatchi Gallery, London, UK, The ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, DE, XVA Gallery, Dubai, UAE, The Paul Klee Museum, Bern, Switzerland and The Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, Colorado. Halim’s work is also part of numerous public collections, including the Saatchi Gallery, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, UK, The George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, Texas, USA, The Royal Association of Fine Arts, Jordan, Arab Museum of Contemporary Art, Doha, Qatar and L’Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA), Paris, France, amongst others.

-Madeline Yale

For further information please contact the gallery at Andrea@stuxgallery.com.