

# ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Hiba Kalache

*Belliphonic*

November 2 – December 22, 2023

In 2004, in her final book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag considers a question posed by Virginia Woolf's 1938 reflection on the roots of war, *Three Guineas*: "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?" Separated by more than sixty years of history and technological advancement, both women considered whether photographs documenting the atrocities of war could be an effective vehicle to prevent future violence.

In 2020, an explosion of ammonium nitrate stored at the Port of Beirut in the capital city of Lebanon marked one of the most powerful non-nuclear explosions in history. In the chaos that descended upon Beirut in the aftermath of the explosion, Hiba Kalache made the decision to leave her family home for the fourth time. Returning to San Francisco, where she earned her Masters of Fine Arts at California College of the Arts in 2005, she set up a studio and returned to work, insistent upon processing this latest chapter of violence through her paintings.

Trying to make sense of the cycles of war that led to her displacement, she churned through diverse sources: the writing of Susan Sontag, the poetry of Etel Adnan and the history of art, delving into a study of Islamic miniatures. Reveling in the color and detail of the forms, the familiar patterns of the calligraphy resonated with the gestures that kept appearing in her own work. The vivid blues and yellows that represent prophesy and divinity in the miniature tradition inflected the new paintings that seemed to erupt out of her with an urgency and forcefulness: a will to survive.

The exhibition title, 'belliphonic,' comes from Martin Daughtry's term referring to the vast array of sounds that are created by conflict; not only weaponry, but motorized vehicles, sirens, generators, even the propaganda that fills the air in the wake of an insurrection. Kalache's body carries these sounds just as she has carried new life in her womb. Something of the belliphonic is translated through the act of painting, the memory of a sound inflecting her hand. But there is also a refusal to submit, to collapse in the wake of tragedy.

The paintings are abstract, but they attempt to depict something of the moment we find ourselves in today. They are both an act of protest and an attempt at escape. They look for beauty and rebirth in the explosion of blossoms spilling over a casket. They collapse time, pulling from historical references, grasping for

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answers to unanswerable questions, and challenging us to move forward with empathy and find connection through our shared humanity.

Kalache's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Saleh Barakat Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon and The Running Horse Contemporary Art Space, Beirut, Lebanon. Group exhibitions include Beiteddine Palace, Beit ed-Dine, Lebanon; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France; Villa Romana, Florence, Italy; Beit Beirut Museum and Urban Cultural Center, Beirut, Lebanon; Newcomb Art Museum at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA; The Boghossian Foundation, Brussels, Belgium; California College of the Arts, San Francisco, CA; and the San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA.

For more information please contact Altman Siegel at [info@altmansiegel.com](mailto:info@altmansiegel.com) or 415-576-9300.