

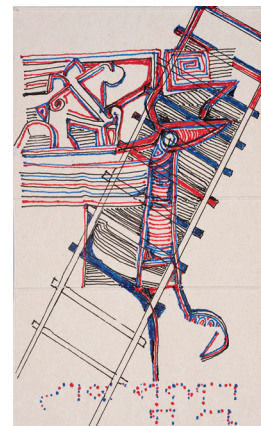
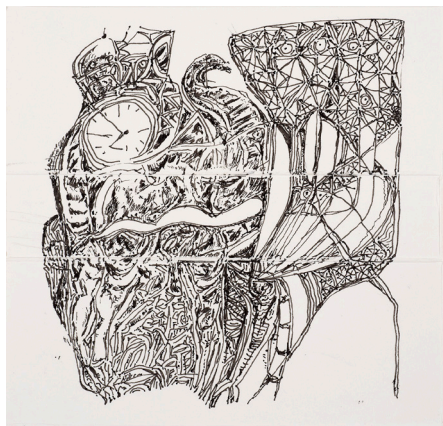
Ibrahim El-Salahi: Pain Relief Drawings

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Free Admission
Wednesday-Sunday: 12–6pm



New York, NY . . . Born in 1930 in Omdurman, Sudan, Ibrahim El-Salahi has been a prolific, innovative, and highly influential international voice in the contemporary art discourse for more than sixty years. Featuring 122 drawings from the artist's most recent series, *Ibrahim El-Salahi: Pain Relief Drawings* will mark the first museum presentation of El-Salahi's drawings in the United States. Drafted on the back of medicine packets, pill bottle labels, envelopes, and scraps of paper, the task of creating this intricate pen and ink series serves as a form of respite for the ninety-one-year-old artist, who finds diversion from his chronic pain through his daily drawing practice.

A British citizen for decades, El-Salahi makes drawings that are deeply connected to postwar European modernism but are also profoundly embedded in the unique cultural milieu of Sudan, a country with strong traditions emanating from Arabic, Islamic, and African visual culture, as well as local decorative arts and crafts. After studying at the Slade School of Art in London, El-Salahi returned to the capital of Sudan in the late 1950s to become a founding member of the celebrated Khartoum School, a bellwether group of artists that represented the flowering of modernism in the Islamic world. El-Salahi created a distinctive visual language that was inspired by the Surrealist figuration and geometric abstraction he was exposed to as a student in Europe, but also Islamic calligraphy and indigenous Sudanese ornamentation. From his mural-sized paintings to his tiniest sketches, all of El-Salahi's work can be seen through the lens of drawing, with line as the unifying element between the abstract and the figurative, decorative pattern and narrative.

The *Pain Relief* series is a significant new body of drawings—made in the artist's ninth decade—that incorporates the richness of his hybrid visual vocabulary with world-ranging influences. El-Salahi started the series in 2016 when back pain reduced his mobility and caused him to rely on medication for relief. A diagnosis of Parkinson's disease further hampered his movement and added to his intake of prescription drugs. As medicine packets and pill bottles began to accumulate around him, El-Salahi began to repurpose them, opening them, cutting them, and drawing on them with pen and ink. In the past five years, El-Salahi has produced hundreds of *Pain Relief* drawings, despite his advanced age and compromised physical ability.

Throughout his career, El-Salahi has emphasized the connection that exists for him between making art and praying, as if the act of creation carries with it a spiritual power to comfort and maybe even to heal. Although El-Salahi has not spoken explicitly of the restorative powers of drawing as a practice, the sheer number of these small works indicate that their making has developed into a kind of ritual—akin to El-Salahi's practice of praying five times per day.

Ibrahim El-Salahi: Pain Relief Drawings is organized by Laura Hoptman, Executive Director.

Prior to the New York opening, the exhibition traveled to Tegnerforbundet in Oslo from June 9 through July 31, 2022, and will travel to Kunsthalle Zürich in winter of 2023.

Publication

Ibrahim El-Salahi: Pain Relief Drawings is accompanied by a new edition of the ongoing Drawing Papers series. Featuring full-color illustrations of all of the works on view, the publication also includes essays by The Drawing Center's Executive Director Laura Hoptman and by the artist Hassan Musa. The publication will be available for purchase at The Drawing Center and in its online bookstore at drawingcenter.org. As with every publication produced by The Drawing Center, it will also be available to read in a digital format, free of charge.

Credits

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