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PRESS RELEASE

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Lawrie Shabibi presents *Breathing Space*
A solo exhibition by Algerian artist Driss Ouadahi

6 February to 14 March 2012



Lawrie Shabibi is proud to present *Breathing Space*- the first solo exhibition in the Middle East for Driss Ouadahi. For this exhibition Ouadahi continues to take as his subject matter the lost idealism of the modern architecture in the mode of Le Corbusier and the metropolises that were made in its image. Gridded glass-clad skyscrapers, which were once synonymous with the avant-garde architecture of the early 20th century and meant to enable a cleaner, more ordered existence, evolved over time into symbols of wealth and achievement on the one hand, and faceless housing estates on the other, segregating the societies that dwell in them. Ouadahi's paintings of repetitive grids and walls have an unnerving absence of human life and are discreet observations of urban alienation and the isolation and disconnection that exist in many modern cities today, particularly in lower quality housing developments. In this exhibition we see sterile modernist public housing developments, wire netting and underground passageways, each linked with Ouadahi's core concerns of geometric abstraction, transparency, opacity or reflection.

Ouadahi's large formal reflected skyscrapers, produced in broad brushstrokes applied horizontally, are montages of spaces and places he knows. In the foreground of these works are a grid pattern, which seems at once a barrier between the viewer and the background architectural elements in which the scene is reflected. In his other works, he is preoccupied with facets that separate the buildings or link them together, such as fences, walls and underground passageways. His freehand paintings of wire-netting are lavished in such detail that they nudge photo-realism: these fences are common in the metropolitan suburbs of France and Algeria, demarking privileged zones into which entry is not permitted or from which escape is difficult. His underground passageways on the other hand have an air of eerie expectation – a crime scene waiting to happen - and resonate remoteness and seclusion.

Amongst the works in the exhibition are three important paintings that were first shown in the 2010 Cairo Biennial, held shortly before the second Egyptian Revolution, and which miraculously survived the chaos and turmoil that followed.

Ouadahi's practice reflects both the artist's North African background and his long ties to the new trends within German painting, especially within his adopted city of Dusseldorf. Originally from Algeria, Ouadahi was a graduate of Dusseldorf's prestigious Kunstakademie, which counts amongst its former students Gerhard Richter and Andreas Gursky, and Peter Doig amongst its professors. Following his studies, like many of its former students, Ouadahi has remained in the city ever since and maintained close ties with the Kunstakademie.

About Driss Ouadahi

Born in Casablanca, Morocco, of Algerian parents in 1959, Driss Ouadahi grew up in Algeria. He studied at the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux Arts d'Alger before enrolling and subsequently graduating from the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, the city where he now lives and works. Ouadahi has exhibited in solo exhibitions in New York, San Francisco, Düsseldorf, Germany, Marseille (Istres) and Paris. He has also taken part in a number of group exhibitions, most recently in *Le Retour*, 3ème Festival International d'Art Contemporain d'Alger; *Magreb: Dos Orillas*, Círculo de Bellas Artes, Madrid; *Future of a Promise* at Venice Biennale 54, Cairo Biennial 12, and CU Art Museum, University of Colorado in Boulder.

Further information on Lawrie Shabibi can be found at www.lawrieshabibi.com.

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Lawrie Shabibi is a contemporary gallery located in Dubai's Al-Quoz industrial district focusing on both established and emerging contemporary artists from the Arab world, Iran, North Africa, South Asia and Turkey. Founded in 2010 by William Lawrie (former director of contemporary art at Christie's) and Asmaa Al-Shabibi (former managing director of Art Dubai), the gallery engages the public with art that imparts a cultural and political discourse together with a powerful aesthetic.