

## Press Release

### Wael Shawky *The Gulf Project Camp*

September 13 – October 16, 2019  
504 West 24th Street, New York  
Opening: September 12, 6–8pm

For his first exhibition at Lisson Gallery New York, Egyptian artist Wael Shawky will transform the gallery into an immersive sculptural environment as part of his new work, *The Gulf Project Camp*. The space will feature a monumental crenelated wall installation that bisects the gallery and acts as a stage for a selection of fantastical new bronze sculptures. Alongside this, Shawky will present a series of large-scale wood relief works, highly intricate cast glass sculptures produced in Venice, and a suite of around 50 new ink and oil drawings. This exhibition will be the artist's first in the city since his solo presentation at MoMA PS1 in 2015.

Shawky creates powerful and profoundly relevant works that re-present history through an alternate lens, reflecting on significant moments through epic, intoxicating films that feature surreal landscapes and painted backdrops. Telling tales from the complex history of Shawky's native region, his works invite analysis into collective belief systems, from faith to the recording of history. Over the past three years, Shawky has been working on a new project, undertaking research for the development of a major new film series, entitled *The Gulf Project*. Focusing on the history of the Arab Peninsula from the 17th century to the present day, the research charts the development of the region and the transformation of urbanism in Gulf societies by following the histories of the major ruling families. For his exhibition at Lisson Gallery, Shawky explores many of the themes central to this developing project, looking at this period through the lens of migration, trade, economy, religion and tribal alliances. As with previous bodies of work – including *Cabaret Crusades* (2010-15) and *Al Araba Al Madfuna* (2012-15) – Shawky references historical documents and artefacts, but as a platform to create a layered, alternative approach to an existing narrative.

Setting the scene within a theatrical environment that echoes the adventures of his films, a large-scale wall installation will sit at the heart of the exhibition. This sprawling work will also act as a plinth for a series of new bronze sculptures that fuse architectural and zoomorphic references. Weaving throughout the exhibition, the installation creates the backdrop for a familiar yet illusory world, where historical sites, political figures and fantastical creatures co-exist.

Beyond this stand three translucent cast-glass works, produced with the Berengo studio. Two of these take inspiration from the 16<sup>th</sup> century Persian miniature paintings, *A Camp Scene* and *Nighttime in a Palace*, attributed to Mir Sayyid 'Ali, a well-known painter from the Safavid and Mughal courts from 1550-1574 CE. These works are each only 28cm by 20cm yet contain a wealth of detail illuminating Muslim society during this time. Shawky uses these scenes as starting points for his visual stories, intervening with his own layer of 'myth', questioning the concepts of history and fantasy, and how multiple accounts of the past have been conceived, recorded and reshaped by posterity.

The exhibition will also feature several intricately carved wooden reliefs made from wood dated between 400 and 2000 years old. These include a major, never-seen-before, five-panelled work depicting the site of Mecca. Rather than illustrating the familiar scene of pilgrims flocking to the religious site, Shawky removes all figures, focusing entirely on the political and historical significance of the architecture, and imbuing this landscape with a mystical and spiritual ambience through the presence of select mythical creatures.

Alongside this, Shawky will present a collection of delicate drawings, rendered in graphite, pigments, ink and oil, including a number previously exhibited at Sharjah Art Foundation, as well as new pieces made especially for the exhibition. Drawing is a fundamental aspect of Shawky's practice, acting as a vehicle for storytelling, where fictions can become realities. These works similarly depict recognisable scenes and figures from history, from King Faisal to Nixon, yet alongside surreal depictions, encouraging us to acknowledge the blurred boundary between real and imagined, and reassess what we consider to be fact and truth.

## About Wael Shawky

Based on extensive periods of research and enquiry, Wael Shawky's work tackles notions of national, religious and artistic identity through film, performance and storytelling. Whether instructing Bedouin children to act out the construction of an airport runway in the desert or organizing a heavy metal concert in a remote Egyptian village, Shawky frames contemporary culture through the lens of historical tradition and vice versa. Mixing truth and fiction, childlike wonder and spiritual doctrine, Shawky has staged epic recreations of the medieval clashes between Muslims and Christians in his trilogy of puppets and marionettes – titled *Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show Files* (2010), *The Path to Cairo* (2012) and *The Secrets of Karbala* (2015) – while his three-part film, *Al Araba Al Madfuna*, uses child actors to recount poetic myths, paying homage, rather than mere lip-service, to the important narratives of yesteryear.

Wael Shawky was born in Alexandria in 1971 where he lives and works. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at ARoS, Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, Denmark (2018); Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Yinchuan, China (2017); Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy (2016); Fondazione Merz, Turin, Italy (2016); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2016); Fondazione Merz, Zurich, Switzerland (2016); MATHAF, Doha, Qatar (2015) and MoMA P.S.1, New York, NY, USA (2015); K20 Düsseldorf, Germany (2014-15); Serpentine Galleries, London, UK (2013-14); KW Contemporary Art Institute, Berlin, Germany (2012); Nottingham Contemporary, UK (2011); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, USA (2011); Delfina Foundation, London, UK (2011) and Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella, Italy (2010). He has participated in the 14th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2015); the 11th Sharjah Biennial, UAE (2013); Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany (2012); the 9th Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2012); SITE Santa Fe Biennial, NM, USA (2008); the 9th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2005); and the 50th Venice Biennale, Italy (2003). Recent awards include the inaugural Mario Merz Prize (2015); the Award for Filmic Oeuvre created by Louis Vuitton and Kino der Kunst (2013); the Abraaj Capital Art Prize (2012); the Schering Foundation Art Award (2011), as well as The International Commissioning Grant and an award from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, in 2005. In 2010, Shawky founded the educational space MASS Alexandria.

## About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and develops over 60 international artists across two exhibition spaces in London and two in New York as well as its new space in Shanghai. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie, to the international public for the first time. The gallery represents leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Liu Xiaodong, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully, as well as a number of renowned artist estates, including Roy Colmer, the Leon Polk Smith Foundation and the John Latham Foundation. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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