

## **AHMED MORSI**

YOU CLOSED YOUR EYES IN ORDER TO SEE THE UNSEEN  
Opening reception on 27 Oct 2017, 7:30 - 9:30 pm

27 October - 2 December 2017

Gypsum is pleased to present “You Closed Your Eyes in Order to See the Unseen”, the gallery’s first solo show of old and recent works by New York-based artist Ahmed Morsi. The exhibition takes its title from a poem penned by the artist in 2001 and published in his diwan “Dress Rehearsal for a Season in Hell”, and later incorporated in his painting “Poetry II” from 2008. “You Closed Your Eyes in Order to See the Unseen” brings together a collection of paintings, drawings, poetry, prints, photographs and an Artist’s Book that were mostly made in his Manhattan studio over the span of more than three decades from 1974 until 2012.

Featuring a selection from the artist’s extensive oeuvre, this exhibition draws attention to the distinctive pictorial lexicon that Morsi has carefully amassed over the years to articulate the resolute hold that the Mediterranean port city of Alexandria has had on his psyche and imagination. In these works, Morsi mines Alexandria’s fabled artistic and literary history for his iconography, while juxtaposing it against everyday elements from New York City, his home for the past forty years. Mannequins, horse skulls and androgynous figures are set against undefined backdrops. Like riddles, Morsi reassembles his disparate elements in elusive, lyrical compositions, where time lapses, and the sea is a palpable presence.

In one painting, the profile of a regal, angular female donning a blue gauzy diadem begs to be read as a reference to Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemaic queens whose vanished Alexandria was made out to be as dazzling as it was decadent. Cleopatra fashioned herself as the goddess Isis, and the story of Isis, Osiris and Horus, provides a wealth of icons that surface in Morsi’s vocabulary. This includes a coffin that Osiris was trapped in by his brother Seth, a vicious fish that devoured one of Osiris’s vital body parts, the falcon eye that Horus lost in battle and bequeathed to his father Osiris, among numerous other visual clues that are inspired by ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman mythologies.

Morsi pays homage to the Greek Alexandrian poet C.P. Cavafy in a suite of ten etchings from 1990 that take the form of an Artist’s Book, including a number of Cavafy’s poems eloquently translated to Arabic by Morsi himself. In minimal line, and haunting imagery, the prints evoke the mournful and elegiac spirit of the poems without illustrating their content. In another work entitled “Wedding by the Sea” from 2012, Morsi pays a double tribute to his fellow Alexandrian artist Abdel Hady El Gazzar. “Wedding by the Sea” acts as a sequel to “Elegy to El Gazzar”, a striking work painted two years after Gazzar’s untimely death in 1968.

Visions of a fictive, invented Alexandria run through most of Morsi’s work and his practice offers a powerful and mystical meditation on remembrance and the passage of time. His body of work bears witness to the artist’s life as an Alexandrian that has been living away from home since the 1970s.

## BIO

Ahmed Morsi (b. 1930, Alexandria) is an artist, art critic and poet with a career that spans seven decades of creative output. In the 1950s, he simultaneously studied literature at Alexandria University and painting at the studio of Italian master Silvio Becchi. In 1974, Morsi moved to New York City, where he continues to paint, write and critique from his Manhattan home. His work is in public collections including the Egyptian Museum of Modern Art, the Alexandria Museum of Fine Arts, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Sharjah Art Foundation, Barjeel Art Foundation and in various notable private collections in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, France, England and the United States.