

CANINES

S E R W A N B A R A N

أجيا
للفنون التشكيلية



AGIAL
art gallery

Cry 'Havoc!'; and let slip the dogs of war – Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare

*To err is human; to forgive, **canine*** – unknown author (word play on Alexander Pope *To err is human; to forgive, divine* from his “Essay on Criticism”)

Virtue to [small people] is that which makes modest and tame: with that they have turned the wolf into a dog and man himself into man's best domestic animal – Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Friedrich Nietzsche

Dating back thousands of years, the dog has been domesticated to perform a variety of roles, among them hunter, herder, guard, companion, and healer. The dog has served as a protection or shield from perceived or real threat, and obversely, as an instrument of power used by the military and police to rouse fear. In his artistic practice, Serwan Baran symbolically deploys the figure of the dog in its multifarious and shifting role to comment on historically-specific political activity on one level, as well as to reflect in more general terms on the human condition.

In some of his paintings, Baran represents the dog as ferocious beast in order to express the petrification experienced by local subjects in Iraq onto whom dogs were unleashed during the 2003 invasion – a petrification that is subsequently experienced by the viewer. On another less specific level, this work is motivated by what Baran characterizes as the animality of the human, which is not exclusively beastly. Paradoxically, it is into beastliness which the human is domesticated.

In another body of work, Baran draws on mythologies, such as the ancient Egyptian, to investigate the role of guardian performed by a mediating figure like Anubis who assists the soul's transition to the afterlife. Such a figure finds expression in Baran's work in both the split – between the bodies of the human and the dog – and point of contact, which is located in the neck. This link in the neck serves as a metaphor for the transition between life and death, or rather, the link between life and the afterlife.

Over nearly a decade of employing the dog as motif, the human figure gradually recedes from Baran's work. Veering toward the transcendental, it is not accidental that this work is the most gestural of the artist's practice. The withdrawal of the human coincides with the shift from an idiom closely associated with 19th century realism to abstract expressionism. The figure of the dog is reduced to a painterly gesture which positions the artist's own body in relation to the bodies represented in the work. The gesture retains the ambiguity in the different roles and functions performed by the dog, and underscores an ambivalence with regard to the human condition. It is the human which, for Baran, swings between friend, lover, beast and healer.

Natasha Gasparian
Beirut, 2018



Acrylic on canvas | 60x80cm | 2014



Acrylic on canvas | 138x120cm | 2017





Acrylic on canvas | 138x170cm | 2018



Acrylic on canvas | 170x138cm | 2017



Acrylic on canvas | 209x175cm | 2016



Acrylic on canvas | 120x120cm | 2017



Acrylic on canvas | 120x120cm | 2017



Acrylic on canvas | 165x238cm | 2016



Acrylic on canvas | 60x120cm | 2017



Acrylic on canvas | 140x120cm | 2017



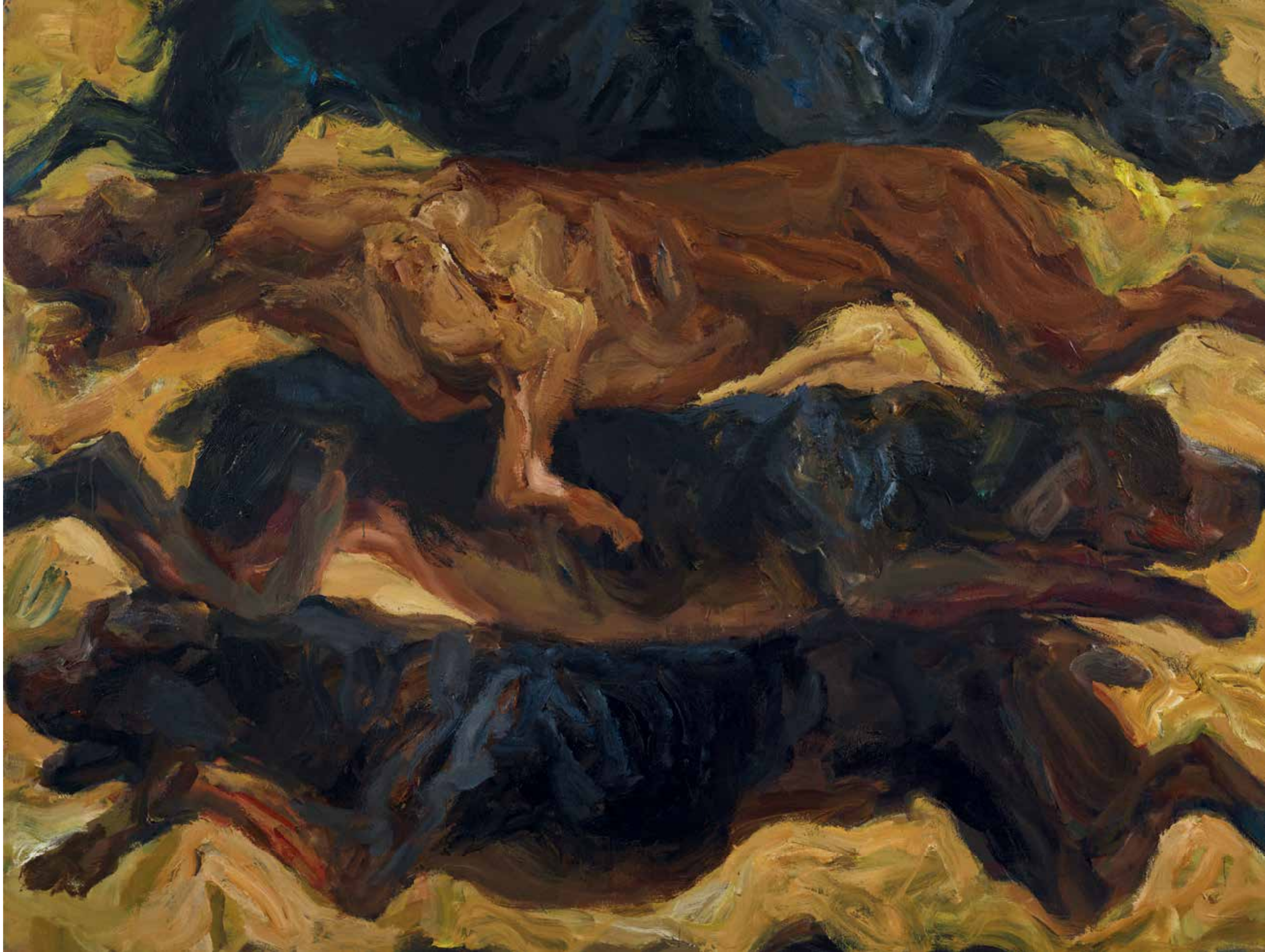
Acrylic on canvas | 140x120cm | 2017



Acrylic on canvas | 140x120cm | 2017



Acrylic on canvas | 140x120cm | 2017





Acrylic on canvas | 150x140cm | 2017



Acrylic on canvas | 174x174cm | 2017





Acrylic on canvas | 140x120cm | 2017



Acrylic on canvas | 140x120cm | 2017





Acrylic on canvas | 120x100cm | 2016



Acrylic on canvas | 90x90cm | 2016



Acrylic on canvas | 98x125cm | 2016



Acrylic on canvas | 60x90cm | 2016



Acrylic on carton | 51x72cm | 2017



Acrylic on canvas | 55x75cm | 2017



Acrylic on canvas | 40x30cm-each | 2017

About the Artist

Serwan Baran (b.1968) grew up in Baghdad. He received a degree in Fine Arts from the University of Babylon, and moved to Amman during the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Since 2013, Baran has been living and working in Beirut. He has had solo exhibitions at Nabad Art Gallery in Amman (2013), Matisse Art Gallery in Marrakech (2013), among other galleries Amman, Damascus, Tokyo, and various Iraqi cities. He has participated in the Cairo Biennale in 1999, Al-Kharafi Biennial in Kuwait in 2011, and the fourth Marrakech Biennale in 2012. He has also participated in group exhibitions in Aleppo, Amman, Baghdad, and Doha. Most recently, his work was included in the 2018 exhibition "Face Value: Portraiture (A Gallerist's Personal Collection)" at Saleh Barakat Gallery. Baran is a member of several artist associations including, the International Association of Art, the Iraqi Fine Artists Association and the International Network for Contemporary Iraqi Artists.



Serwan Baran | 2018

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