

OUSSAMA BAALBAKI  
AN INNER LIGHT



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## An Inner Light

Look, a soft face, the building's hard edge, a car mirror situating the viewer beside you. In the work of Baalbaki movement in time is expressed in the strokes of the brush, and the reality that is explored in his paintings is unwieldy, yet somehow familiar.

Light is a way around these paintings, whether in the glow of the sun, the play of the evening pink on the side of a building, or felt within the close building up of dark and light brushstrokes slowly illuminating the side of a face, the turn of a hand. From the perspective of light, the subjects are perhaps less significant than the movement of that light that passes across and through them. And yet, the subject does make a difference.

Baalbaki is fully situated within his paintings – a series of self-portraits providing an intimacy with his world that we somehow believe. In a world saturated with images, with the knowledge of the unreal that can be easily contained within that image, we find a place here that perhaps we also believe. Here is a place to rest on an image.

Indeed, the face staring back at us might be at rest, or watching the mirror, and as we look around, look into another image, and another, we understand that this face is also the one looking out at the view – that the landscapes of this artist are yet another mirror of intimate life.

The intimacy of a view seen from a distance pervades the work of Baalbaki. The viewer is not allowed to remain distanced, to de-attach. Instead, we remain by his side, remembering how he looked at himself, thinking how we look to ourselves.

The landscape of the face becomes the landscape of his view. The internal world becomes external while remaining within.

This is the oddness of Baalbaki, and the brilliance.

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Looking at these paintings the viewer might ask, is reality unwieldy like this, is it at times monochrome, at times too hard, too bright, filtered through an iphone. These are good questions to ask.

Taken together, the treatment of his subjects might confuse the eye – is the artist trying only to show the world before him, or to show us that the world before him is subject to continual change. Is the work about the image, or a simple expression of what his vision passes in front of his eyes. The question should be unanswered, is one of how to be in the world, this world.

The time of Baalbaki's paintings are in two parts. The first time is art historical, the second technological,



and the two combine in the interest in the *capturing* of an image, a record, a faithful depiction of what is seen with the eyes, the what and the how. The image might be a landscape, a self-portrait, a cat - might be seen through the screen of a mobile phone, or filtered only through the eyes - what seems important is that there is an image, there is a filter, and that it is shown in good faith.

As art historian Mieke Bal has noted in her writing on contemporary time;

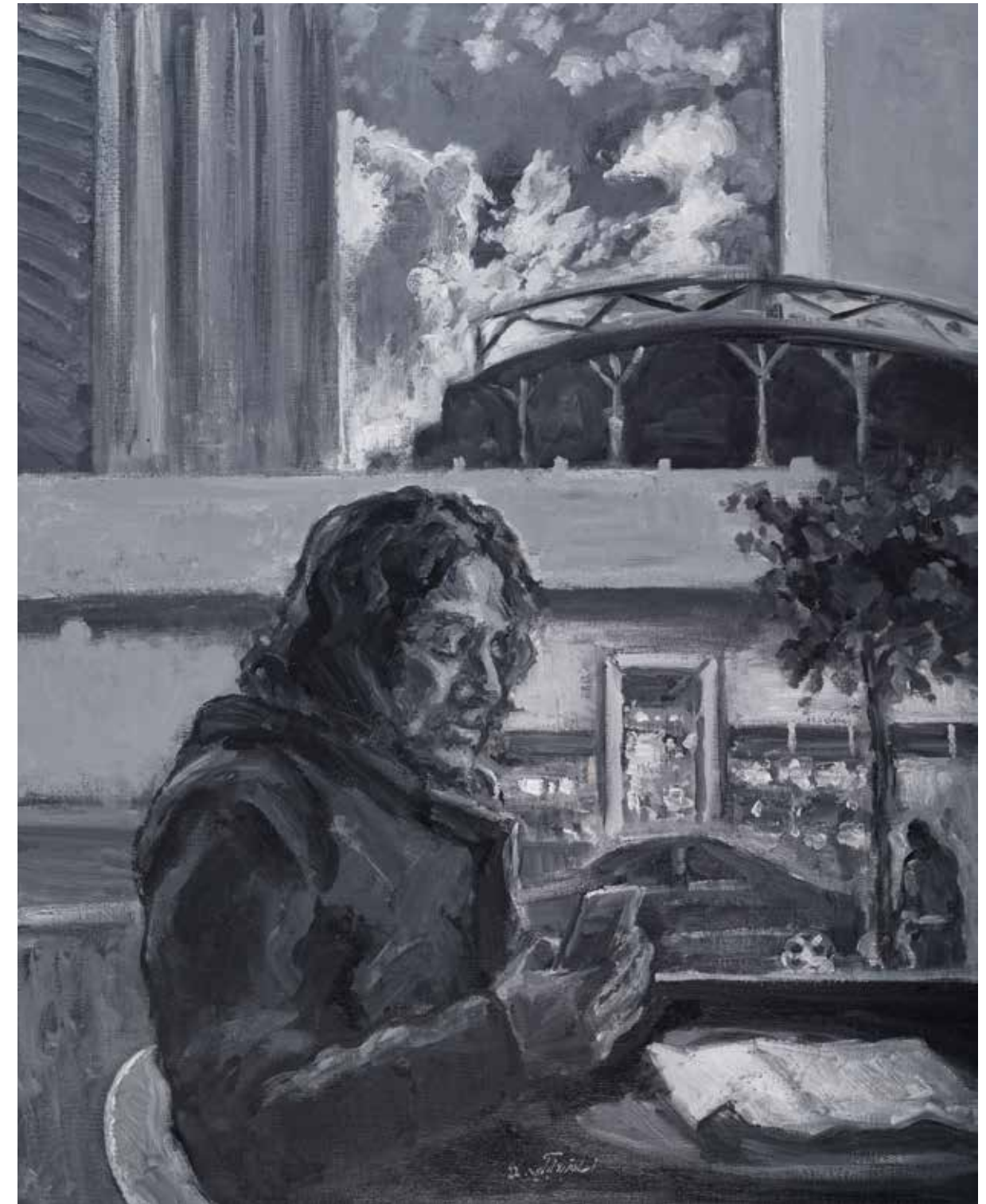
*Although it is obvious that images can evoke or represent time – the past, the future or two or more moments simultaneously – it is more difficult to see how they can be in time without simultaneously unfolding that being in time as film and literature do: in a sequential development; a time axis, whose continuity moves forward. The temporal realism that sticks to those media is just as tenacious as the confusion outlined above, even if different rhythms can bring temporal variation into play, as in fact they routinely do in those media.<sup>1</sup>*

Time is central to painting, as it is captured, made visible, held together.

From the earliest viewing devices to the impressionist focus on the act of viewing, to each subsequent attempt to capture an image, a fleeting moment on wall, paper, canvas, the point is to record the fleeting as it passes, and with some sense of veracity. To remain true to lived experience we must resolutely hover in the place that is intimate, that is the intimacy of the stroke, eye, light, that strange place in which we are alone catching a glimmer of time pass across our eyes.

Whether portrait or landscape, Baalbaki's most compelling works define the subject in one of two ways; most stubbornly obtuse, or most clearly defined. Both are possible, he seems to tell us – both are reality. The shining light of the sun *is* too bright, my bedroom can be greyscale, *I can* be like this, you can be unsure, the iphone *is* in front of my eyes as much as the sun is in front of my eyes, and look, each image is true.

Amy Todman  
May 2024



Self-Portrait

Acrylic on canvas | 150x120 cm | 2022

<sup>1</sup> Bal, Mieke, 'Sticky Images: The Foreshortening of Time in an Act of Duration' (in Groom, Amelia (Ed.), TIME: Documents of Contemporary Art. 2000 (Whitechapel Gallery, London; The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts)).





Neighbors

Acrylic on canvas | 115x130 cm | 2024



Untitled

Acrylic on canvas | 115x130 cm | 2023





Coherent

Acrylic on canvas | 100x120 cm | 2023



Untitled

Acrylic on canvas | 130x120 cm | 2023





Untitled

Acrylic on canvas | 60x90 cm | 2021



Untitled

Acrylic on canvas | 50x80 cm | 2022

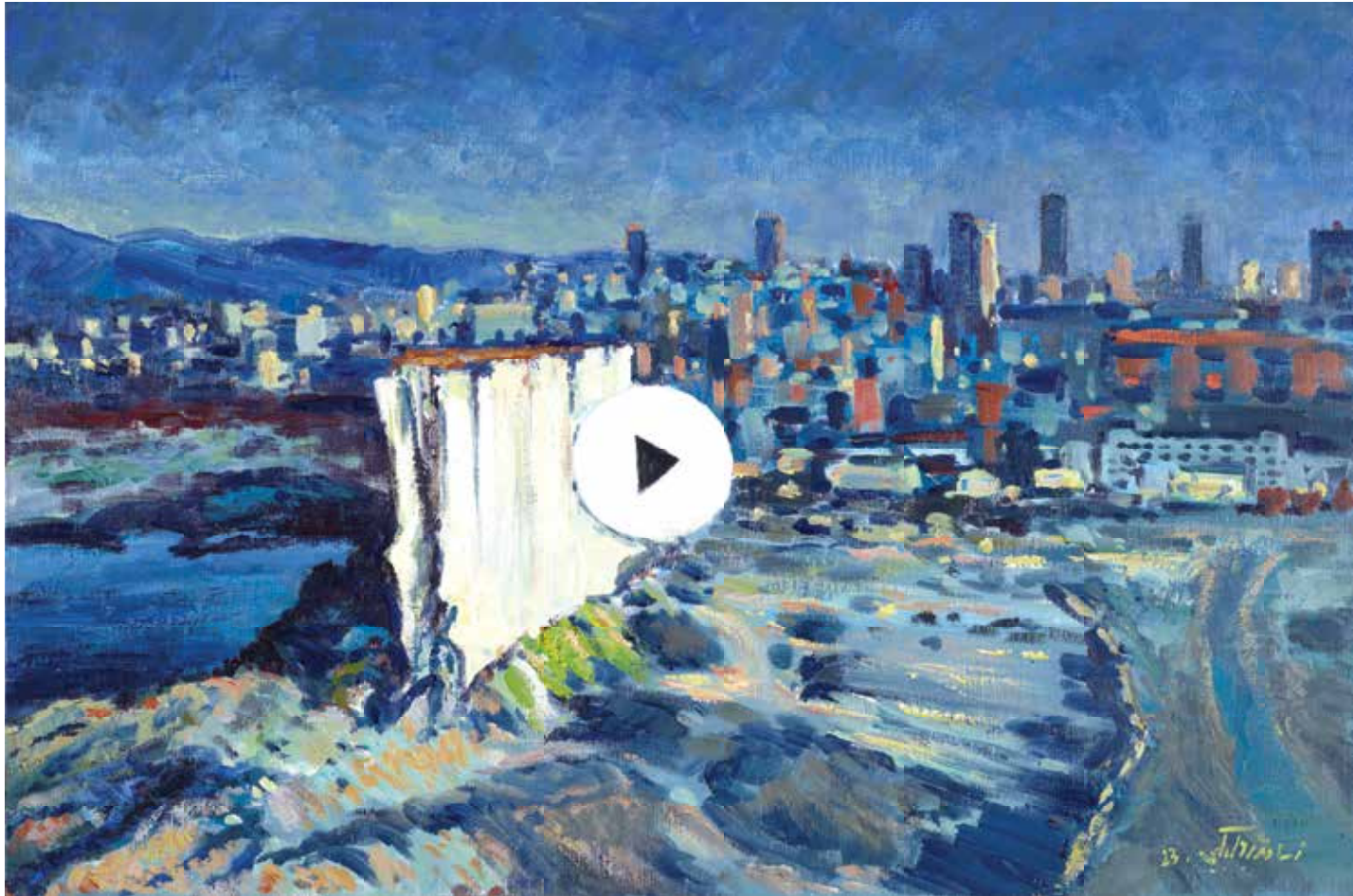




Untitled

Acrylic on canvas | 150x180 cm | 2024





“Time isn’t Flying”  
Acrylic on canvas | 80x120 cm | 2023



Untitled  
Acrylic on canvas | 80x120 cm | 2023





Mineral Sunset

Acrylic on canvas | 50x80 cm | 2022





Where to?

Acrylic on canvas | 200x300 cm | 2023





Untitled  
Acrylic on canvas | 70x100 cm | 2023



Rapture  
Acrylic on canvas | 70x100 cm | 2023



A Critical Night  
Acrylic on canvas | 200x200 cm | 2023







Untitled

Acrylic on canvas | 150x180 cm | 2020





Untitled

Acrylic on canvas | 80x100 cm | 2021



The Shaking House

Acrylic on canvas | 70x90 cm | 2022



Resistance

Acrylic on canvas | 200x200 cm | 2024







Untitled  
Acrylic on canvas | 80x100 cm | 2021



Untitled  
Acrylic on canvas | 70x100 cm | 2023





“Ecce Homo”

Acrylic on canvas | 150x180 cm | 2022





Monday Noon

Acrylic on canvas | 200x200 cm | 2023

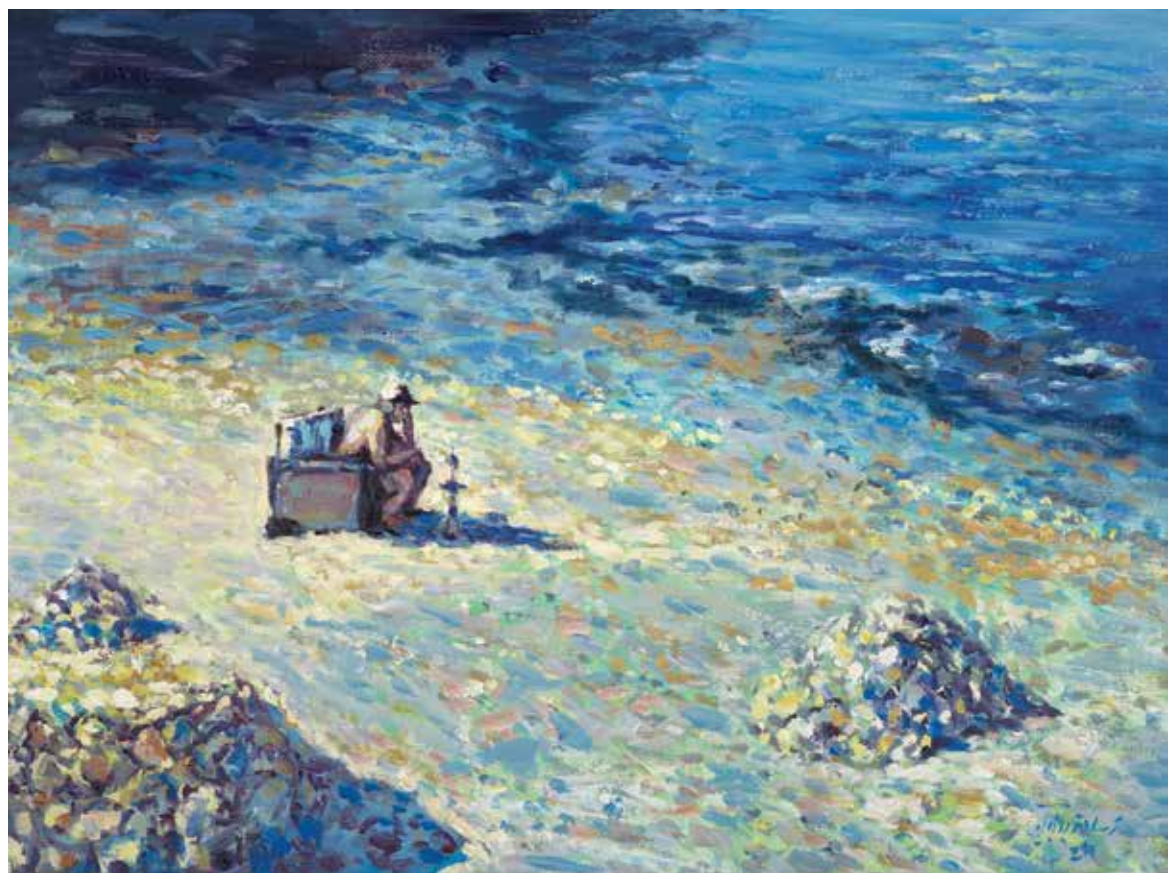




Family Portrait

Acrylic on canvas | 195x210 cm | 2018





The Fisherman's rest  
Acrylic on canvas | 60x80 cm | 2024



Lebanese Rural Landscape  
Acrylic on canvas | 50x70 cm | 2024





A Visit / Mediterranean

Acrylic on canvas | 50x60 cm each | 2023-2022

Vigilant Tourism / Fate

Acrylic on canvas | 40x50 cm (lower) 60x70 cm (upper) | 2024-2023





Untitled

Acrylic on canvas | 115x90 cm | 2020



The Dignitary

Acrylic on canvas | 120x80 cm | 2023





Echo / Untitled

Acrylic on canvas | 60x50 cm (left) 70x50 cm (right) | 2022

Sleep - Death

Acrylic on canvas | 100x120 cm | 2020



## About the Artist

Oussama Baalbaki was born in the village of Odeisse in the South of Lebanon in 1978. He graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts at the Lebanese University in 2002. He has participated in group exhibitions in numerous institutions, including the Sursock Museum in Lebanon, as well as abroad, in the cities of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, London, Miami, Munich, New York, and Washington. His solo exhibitions include *Paintings in Black* (2004) at Dar El Nadwa, *Scenes of Isolation* (2007) at Safana Gallery, and *Less smoke, and more...* (2009), *Rituals of Isolation* (2011), and *Pleadings of the Light* (2017) at Agial Art Gallery, as well as *Shadows of Gloominess* (2014) at Tanit Gallery hosted in collaboration with Agial Art Gallery, *Watercolors* (2019) at Agial Art Gallery, *Pleadings of Light* (2017) at Saleh Barakat Gallery, Group exhibition *Face and Faces* at Beit Beirut (2024). In 2009, he won the silver medal for painting at the "Jeux de la Francophonie". Baalbaki lives and works in Beirut.





SALEH BARAKAT GALLERY

ساليه باركات

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