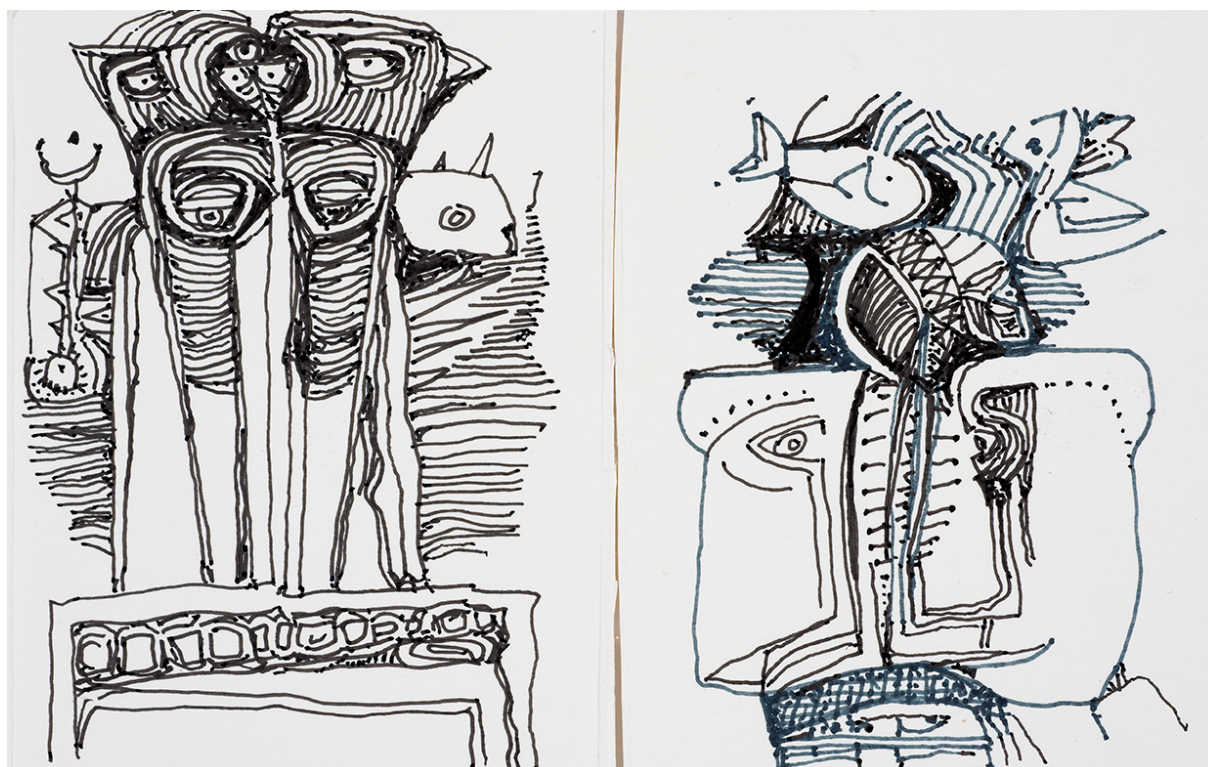


PRESS RELEASE

Ibrahim El-Salahi - *Pain Relief Drawings*



Ibrahim El-Salahi, *Pain Relief Drawing*, 2016–2018. Pen and ink on the back of a medicine packet. 8.6 x 13 cm.
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Between June 18th and July 31st, The Norwegian Drawing Association presents Ibrahim El-Salahi's first solo exhibition in Norway. El-Salahi (b. 1930, Omdurman, Sudan) is a key figure in African modernism. This exhibition is produced in collaboration with The Drawing Center in New York, where it will be shown later this year, and consists of 89 drawings from the series *Pain Relief Drawings*. The exhibition is curated by Laura Hoptman, director of The Drawing Center in New York. For the exhibition Tegnerforbundet has invited the Norwegian-Sudanese artist Ahmed Umar (b. 1988) to contribute with new drawings. El-Salahi's and Umar's works create a dialogue between two generations from the same country.

Between Islamic art history and Western modernism

El-Salahi's work is rooted in the modernism of post-war Europe and in traditions from African and Islamic art history. Inspired by Arabic calligraphy, surrealistic figuration and geometric

abstraction, El-Salahi's distinctive pictorial language is most often expressed through drawing. His style transcends geographical and cultural borders and has inspired artists in Sudan and elsewhere in Africa for generations.

Pain Relief Drawings

Since 2016, El-Salahi has created a series of works consisting of hundreds of small drawings that he calls *Pain Relief Drawings*. He started the series when back pain reduced his mobility, making him reliant on painkillers. After his diagnosis with Parkinson's disease, his movement became further restricted, resulting in an even higher intake of prescription drugs. These medicine packages serve as the canvas for the drawings in the series.

The series invokes drawings made by El-Salahi in 1975, during a six month prison stay in Khartoum, Sudan, for political crimes that were never substantiated. With a smuggled pencil, he drew on fragments of paper torn from the packaging of food deliveries received by his fellow prisoners. Due to limitations of size and time to make these drawings, El-Salahi mastered a compositional technique in which he started from a small, central point - described by the artist as a nucleus - from where he worked his way outward. The *Pain Relief* series is made using a similar technique. With the prison drawings in mind, El-Salahi has said that he considers every *Pain Relief Drawing* to be a kind of nucleus in itself. "It's the origin; that's the main thing," he explains, referring to his new works.

This way of thinking is a common factor throughout El-Salahi's art practice, characterized by a personal connection between making art and prayer, as if the act of making carries with it a spiritual power to comfort, perhaps even heal.

Ibrahim El-Salahi: Biography

Ibrahim El-Salahi is a prominent figure in the art world. In the 1950s, he was one of the founders of the Khartoum School, a leading group of artists representing the rise of modernism in the Islamic world. Since the 1960s, his works have been exhibited at renowned institutions around the world, including The British Museum, London; MASP, São Paulo; Institut du Monde Arab, Paris and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. His most recent solo exhibitions include a retrospective display at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (2018) and Tate Modern, London (2013).

El-Salahi's works can be found in various public collections, including the National Gallery of Victoria, Sydney; The National Gallery, Berlin; British Museum; Tate; Guggenheim Museum; The Art Institute of Chicago; Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Smithsonian Institution.

El-Salahi lives in Oxford, United Kingdom.

The meeting of two generations

During the exhibition period, the Norwegian-Sundanese artist Ahmed Umar will show new drawings in dialogue with El-Salahi's work in the gallery's project room. El-Salahi is an important inspiration to Umar's practice.

In the exhibition Ahmed Umar is showing the work *Ruqyah* رُقْيَا: *Invocation* where he is taking the concept of *Pain Relief* from a traditional perspective. He is creating an installation with

prayers that are believed to have remedial or healing qualities for spiritual, psychological or physical pains.

In Islam, Ruqyah is a practice performed by the prophet and approved by him. Briefly, it is to recite verses from the Quran or to pray to Allah in supplication for the purpose of curing someone's ailment, or one's own ailment. Ruqyah is believed to heal from a large array of pains: headaches, evil eyes, depression ... even cancer! The invocation is performed by a Muslim who is in ablution and while placing his right hand on the location of the ailment if possible, or on the subject's forehead if not possible. The person performing the invocation and the subject must both believe with certainty that healing comes from Allah not from the person making the invocation, nor from the invocation in itself.



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