

🕒 Sep. 30, 2017 | 12:03 AM

## Art from the end of the world



👤 Zalfa Halabi | The Daily Star

BEIRUT: "Of things to Come," the first solo exhibition by Iraqi painter Nazar Yahya now at the Mark Hachem Gallery, revolves around the end of the world as we know it. "What will it look like? I wonder," the artist's statement reads. "Should I quake or should I rejoice?" This line of inquiry led him to research and think about what the real weight of that moment would be, and how it can be translated into painting.

Yahya says that he believes that the end of the world will be a painless and beautiful moment, not only to him but for the rest of humanity as well. It'll be the day we will all be alleviated from the bearings of the current world we live in, he explains. Everything will be gone and there will only be silence.

Most, if not all, of the 20 recent paintings hanging at Mark Hachem boast deep Prussian blue backgrounds that give the works a sense of expansiveness. Whether applied flatly against more detailed depictions of meteor-like shapes or against a reinterpretation of Da Vinci's Vitruvian man, or even a rendition of the famous photograph of Einstein with his tongue out, that blue radiates an eerie sense of calmness.

When asked why he chose blue as a dominant color for this show, Yahya replied, "blue is happiness ... The sky is blue. Everything is blue. We live in a blue universe."

A stark contrast with its complementary color, a fiery orange theatrically showers some of the paintings and adds a dynamic and dramatic feel to them.

"Fragile" is a large, 142x142 centimeters, painting that depicts a disfigured version of the Vitruvian man, Da Vinci's most recognizable illustration barring the "Mona Lisa."

Like most of the renaissance painter's work, this cornerstone anatomical study is based on geometry and is believed to be an analogy that centers on the perfect proportionality of the human body according to the laws of the universe.

While this choice for “Fragile” seems clichéd at first, Yahya’s representation shows a rather insignificant man, the face of whom is covered by a blotch of turquoise blue. A hint, perhaps, at the insignificance of everything and anything that has happened so far in human history faced with the end of the world.

“Singular,” “Family of 13,” “Family of 4,” “Family of 3” and “Family of 8,” make up a series of paintings that bear meteor-like shapes floating against a deep blue background. Based on the outline of an image of a meteor captured by NASA, these abstract shapes were recreated by the artist by drawing an outline and leaving the center hollow and unpainted.

These shapes reveal the stretched canvas material underneath, around which the halo of colored lines accentuates their contours. Clean and vibrant yellow, red, green and blue lines englobe the rock formations like frequencies or radiations.

“I wanted the meteors to feel like they’re animated,” Yahya explains, “so I looked up the size of the meteors and their shapes on NASA’s database and tried to stay more or less faithful to it.”

This less straightforward series give more room for imagining and interpreting such a moment in the history of humanity. The act of hollowing out the shape of the meteor rather than painting it is a more accurate interpretation of this long-awaited yet ungraspable moment.

We won’t know what that will feel like until it happens.

Nezar Yahya’s solo “Of things to come” is on display till Oct. 14 at Mark Hachem Gallery.