A visual encounter confronts the viewer with jewel-toned backgrounds and a dark subject. Disturbing images reveal threatening beasts, spaces, marked by Alsoudani’s agitation, despair, and political circumstances. I’m not trying to depict them in their circumstances. I am away physically and mentally, but I’m observing the state of being and hear things.

Alsoudani’s exile has been well documented throughout the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) and the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003, and he began English before he began painting. His paintings in this altered world by his individual and battle are the metal desk lamps.

SEPTMBER 6, 2012 – JANUARY 6, 2013
WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

AHMED ALSOUDANI
MATRIX 165

A visual encounter with a painting by Ahmed Alsoudani feels more like a visceral confrontation with the aftermath of violence. The artist intentionally uses alluring, jewel-toned background colors, reminiscent of Renaissance palettes, to temper the dark subject matter, but the vivid tones give way to the surreal assemblage of disturbing imagery. Raw and injured flesh and corrugated metal tubing with dangerous jagged edges are graphically rendered alongside haunting spectral figures and threatening beasts that emerge in ghostly variations of gray from the compressed spaces, marked by heavily barred windows and reinforced steel cages. Overall, Alsoudani’s agitated and chaotic compositions convey impressions of devastation, despair, and political unrest. However, the artist explains that the aggressive work does not directly depict war:

I’m not trying to make “war paintings,” but paintings about war. I’m more interested in depicting the effects of war on people who live under these circumstances. So generally I don’t show actual battle scenes in which there are soldiers, or fighting or weapons. I’ve been in the unique and painful situation of observing the war and being in the U.S. while my family remains in Baghdad. I’m away physically, but I talk to my family very often, so I feel caught between. The state of being “between” two places and two worlds allows me to see and hear things from a different point of view.¹

Alsoudani’s exile and personal history are central to his work. His story has been well documented.² Born in Baghdad, Iraq, in 1975, the artist grew up there during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) and the Gulf War (1990–1991). Alsoudani immigrated to the United States in 1999, initially landing in Washington, D.C., where he learned English before moving to Portland, Maine, to attend the Maine College of Art.³

Alsoudani began art school in 2001, just weeks before the tragic events of 9/11 when the world changed. The new, heightened levels of security across the nation affected the Iraqi native more than most. In addition to being uprooted from his own war-torn country, the young artist now faced suspicion and xenophobia in America.⁴ In the paintings in this exhibition, Alsoudani refers to homeland security and this larger altered world by incorporating restricted areas, numerous recording devices (individual and banks of microphones), signs of surveillance (staring eyes), and metal desk lamps commonly used in interrogation.
Over the past year, Al Soudani has turned to focus on violence, death, and the byproducts of war. In Untitled (2012), abstracted portraits of leaders and byproducts of the war are depicted. The subject matter is indicative of the many deaths and injuries that have been incurred during the war in Iraq, as well as the many deaths and injuries that have been incurred in the war in Iraq. In the image, a blue sleeve—possibly a part of a military uniform, or a part of a larger system—protrudes into the scene. A wooden podium, which has been destroyed and is now used as a support for a patch of hair, is also visible. A pipe, carrier of the oil, protrudes into the scene. Oil—in the form of a painting in the exhibit—focuses on the right side of the painting. A patch of hair, to the right of a patch of hair, is also visible. Cogs and tubes, which are parts of the system, are visible. A conveyor belt is visible, which is possibly used as a support for the system. Behind the conveyor belt is a patch of hair, which maintains the life of the system. A partition is visible, which is possibly used to separate the system from the rest of the scene. Behind the partition is a patch of hair, which maintains the life of the system. The subject matter focuses on death and the byproducts of war. Al Soudani has used the image to speak about the many deaths and injuries that have been incurred during the war in Iraq, as well as the many deaths and injuries that have been incurred in the war in Iraq. The image is a powerful statement about the many deaths and injuries that have been incurred during the war in Iraq, as well as the many deaths and injuries that have been incurred in the war in Iraq.
Over the past year, Alsoudani has shifted his approach to his subject matter. Rather than focus on violence, the most recent paintings address the reasons behind the violence. Untitled (2011; cover image), the signature image for the exhibition, is an abstracted portrait of a corrupt dictator—his true identity is not important, as such leaders can be found across the globe. (The artist also prefers the viewer to draw his own conclusions in reading a narrative.) The portrait subject dons a non-specific military uniform, and his ghoulish face is a hideous tacked-together construction of byproducts of the violence he generates—misplaced body parts, shrapnel, tubes, and electrical elements. A single light bulb occupies one of three available sockets for a brain, a reptilian protuberance replaces a nose, a puckered anus stands in for a mouth, and a trio of eyeballs stares downward toward a broken microphone awaiting its words. In the lower left, a small monkey, with two lamps trained on it, represents mimicry and what leaders become when they lose sight of their actions.

In Untitled (2012; image 2), Alsoudani represents corruption in the tortured form of another grotesque creature—a raw, pocked-flesh sock puppet emerging from a blue sleeve—that takes its place before a bank of microphones. Supporting the wooden podium, a hollow dog-like phantom keeps watch through gas mask lenses, its ribs exposed. Behind the scenes, in back of a broken mirror, terrifying hybrid ghost-beasts, connected by ribbed tubes, oversee the spectacle with a variety of glaring eyes. A barred window traps the subjects in the space, and a heavy metal pipe, carrier of the precious oil at the monetary heart of so many political conflicts, protrudes into the scene.

Oil—in the form of a peeled-open oil can—also features prominently in the largest painting in the exhibition, Untitled (2012; image 3). A corrupt and aging dictator (on the right side of the canvas) defies death with continual “watering,” from his grassy patch of hair, to his failing body that is held together with an alarming array of metal cogs and tubes, wires, electronics, and pills. He stands vertically only with the support of a harness and three chains, while propped against a wood ledge topped by a glass partition. Behind the glass curtain, Alsoudani reveals the complex machinery that maintains the life of any number of ancient, ailing political leaders. A decrepit conveyer belt is attended by the artist’s signature specters and monsters (rendered all or partially in charcoal). Ironically, they assure an endless supply of replacement hearts (for the heartless dictator). A spare arm with gloved hand waits in the wings; chessboards punctuate the strategic game and continuing charade, while time stands still in an alarm clock without hands.

The subject matter in Alsoudani’s art is derived from his personal experience, friends and family, as well as world politics—and most certainly not only the Middle East. He begins most mornings by visiting BBC Online to follow the latest news.
matter. Rather behind the exhibition, is an important, as such never to draw his non-specific instruction of channel, tubes, and sockets for a mouth in for a mouth, waiting its represents.

7. Sculptured form emerging from supporting the mask lenses, rendering hybrid a variety heavy metal mechanical conflicts,

in the largest dictator (on his grassy array of metal with the support sheathed by a glass machinery that decrepit refreshers (rendered replacement in the wings; while time stands 

experience, friends Middle East. At the same
time, he generally ponders political stories for multiple years before bringing the content into his paintings. Although Alsoudani’s work is regularly associated with powerful war-themed masterpieces like Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937), and Francisco Goya’s *Disasters of War* (1810–1820) and *The Third of May 1808* (1814), the artist finds connections to other artists. He is more interested in viewing his work as an extension of the New York School that gave America its own identity in the art world, outside of the Eurocentric art scene. Alsoudani particularly aligns his work with the movement’s Philip Guston and Willem de Kooning, who both employed figuration and abstraction in an expressionistic language. Like Guston, whose unique style and lexicon included a signature large head, the sole of a shoe, a hanging light bulb, and cigarette as recurring imagery, so Alsoudani continues to develop his own personal technique and visual vocabulary. Alsoudani’s work already looks like no other contemporary painter’s.

Steeped in recent history, his compositions often blend together a wide variety of imagery and approaches in his compositions, often mixing a combination of a wide range of images alongside monochromatic compositions and experiments in abstraction. Endlessly engaging his work on realistic and abstraction, Ahmed Alsoudani is an artist of the contemporary art world.

**PATRICIA HICKS**

Emily Hall Tremaine Collection
Steeped in recent political subjects and narratives, Alsoudani’s paintings employ a wide variety of conflicting elements that combine to bring explosive power to his compositions. Using equal parts realism and abstraction, along with the unusual combination of acrylic painting and charcoal drawing that highlights vibrant coloration alongside monochromatic grays, the artist activates the already visually-loaded compositions and complex themes with these additional dynamic contrasts. Endlessly engaging and open to interpretation, his art is about war, and so much more. Ahmed Alsoudani’s wildly agitated paintings express the pervasive anxiety of the contemporary world in which we live.

PATRICIA HICKSON
Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art
AHM

EDUCATION

2008  MFA, Painting
       New Haven, CT
2006  Skowhegan School
       Madison, ME

SELECTED SOLO

2012  Ahmed Alsoudani
       Atheneum M
       New York, NY
2011  Ahmed Alsoudani
       Los Angeles, CA

SELECTED GROUP

2013  Francis Bacon, Paula Rego, & 
       Marlborough
2011  Boundaries of War
       Haunch of Venison
       Wounded War Pavilion, Germany
       The Future of Anxiety 
       54th Venice BIennale
       The Francois Pinault Foundation
       The Saatchi Gallery
       Columbus Museum of Art

SELECTED COLLECTION

Burger Collection
Dar Noor Collection 
Francois Pinault Foundation
The Saatchi Gallery
Columbus Museum of Art

Ahmed Alsoudani’s works employ the unusual power to employ the unusual power to 
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AHMED ALSOUDANI

EDUCATION
2008 MFA, Painting, Yale School of Art, New Haven, CT
2006 Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, Madison, ME
2005 BFA, Maine College of Art, Portland, ME
2004 Yale School of Music & Art, Norfolk, CT

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2012 Ahmed Alsoudani / MATRIX 165, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT
Ahmed Alsoudani, Haunch of Venison, New York, NY
Ahmed Alsoudani, L&M Arts, Los Angeles, CA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2013 Francis Bacon, Philip Guston, Paula Rego and Ahmed Alsoudani, Marlborough Fine Art, NY
2011 Boundaries Obscured, Haunch of Venison, NY
Wounded Water, 54th Venice Biennale, Iraq
Pavilion, Gervasuti Foundation, Venice
The Future of A Promise: Contemporary Art from the Arab World, 54th Venice Biennale, Venice
The World Belongs to You, Palazzo Grassi, The Francois Pinault Foundation, Venice
2010 Le Route de la Soie, The Saatchi Collection, Tri postal, Lille, France
Natural Renditions, Marlborough Gallery, New York, NY

SELECTED COLLECTIONS
Burger Collection
Dar Noor Collection
Francois Pinault Foundation
The Saatchi Gallery
Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH
Mead Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, MA
Bates College Museum of Art, Lewiston, ME
Portland Museum of Art, Portland, ME
Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, VA

WORKS IN THE E

Untitled, 2010
Charcoal and acrylic
80 x 80 in.
Private collection

Untitled, 2011
Charcoal and acrylic
87 1/2 x 63 1/2 in.
Private collection

Untitled, 2012
Charcoal and acrylic
72 x 108 in.
Courtesy the artist &
American, born 1975, Baghdad, Iraq
Lives and works in New York, New York

ARTIST TALK
MATRIX Gallery Talk
Ahmed Alsoudani
Thursday, September 6, 6:00 pm
Ahmed Alsoudani will in the Eleanor H. Bunc

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

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<thead>
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<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Charcoal and acrylic on canvas</td>
<td>80 x 80 in.</td>
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<td>34 x 32 in.</td>
<td>Courtesy the artist &amp; Haunch of Venison, New York</td>
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MATRIX 165 is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, The Dedalus Foundation, and the Atheneum Museum of American Art.

Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum's exhibition of the Arts, which also includes the

**Notes:**
1. Ahmed Alsoudani in Conversation with Sarah Schneidman.
2. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. It should be noted that Alsoudani's journey from Iraq to New York is a significant part of his story.
7. Suzannah Biernoff, “The Impact of the Arts and the Arts Campaign and the National Endowment for the Arts, which also includes the

See www.huffingtonpost.com
ARTIST TALK

MATRIX Gallery Talk
Ahmed Alsoudani
Thursday, September 6, 2012
6:00 pm
Ahmed Alsoudani will discuss his artworks in the Eleanor H. Bunce Gallery.

Venison, New York

MATRIX 165 is supported with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, and The Dedalus Foundation, Inc.

The MATRIX program is also supported by the current and founding members of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art’s Contemporary Coalition.

Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided in part by the Greater Hartford Arts Council’s United Arts Campaign and the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development’s Office of the Arts, which also receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

2 Alsoudani’s journey from Iraq to the United States is discussed in great detail in his conversation with Robert Goff. Ibid., pp. 59-60.
3 Ibid.
5 Discussion between the author and artist in the artist’s studio, 3 June 2012.
6 It should be noted that Alsoudani’s paintings are all untitled in order to not lead the viewer’s reading of the compositions.