

# AHMED ALSAUDANI HAUNCH OF VENISON - LONDON



Iraqi-American Ahmed Al Saudani is showing for the first time at Haunch of Venison. Al Saudani's substantial canvases — placed at pivotal intervals on two of the three floors of this renovated Georgian townhouse (originally Admiral Nelson's living quarters) — are in part neutralized by their sterile surroundings to such an extent that they appear unintentionally emptied of their morose drama. It may be that the walls should have been painted a deeper color, or the lighting dimmed dramatically in order to elevate these tormented works; but as they are, they barely manage to generate the outrage they intend. Installation choices aside, Al Saudani's canvases do recall something of the grotesque theater of Max Beckmann, George Grosz and Otto Dix. Yet Al Saudani's clear resolve to complete canvases with bright, even washes of color make these works less intense. There isn't a feeling of utter forboding that will you further into these paintings.

*Untitled* (2011) is a work in which a gagged and demented head appears on a chopping block with a set of contoured hands cradling

a baby cactus. The image references R.B. Kitaj, as Al Saudani's estranged figure appears to have lost all sense of humanity and has instead metamorphosed into a tragic Dr. Jekyll character. Another work, in which the lower part of the canvas is portioned off with a landscape of tree stumps, is then littered in the adjoining two thirds of the canvas with deflated animal skins, glass bottles and threads of colored pipe; a textured mix of man-made artifacts with human and animal body parts that suggest something more sinister. Yet the depraved ugliness of this work is curtailed by Al Saudani's palette, in which colors that should be deeply unappealing are too warm, thus divorcing the content from the visual experience. *Untitled* (2011) is another sizable work of mummified heads, detached or loosely attached limbs and blood disassembled mess onto canvases; a troubling reality that the artist wants to allude to from a safe distance.

*Kajash Punj*

AHMED ALSAUDANI, *Untitled*, 2011. Charcoal and acrylic on canvas, 152 x 135 cm. Courtesy Haunch of Venison, London / New York. Photo: Peter Mallet.