



## Endless Night

**Nabil Kanso**

Curated by: Mohammed Rashid Al-Thani

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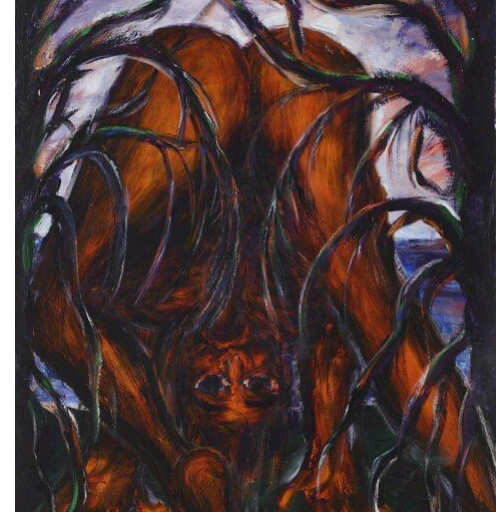
### Institute of Arab and Islamic Art

22 Christopher St, New York NY, 10014

IAIA is pleased to present *Endless Night*, the first institutional solo exhibition of Nabil Kanso (1940–2019) in New York. This exhibition unveils Kanso's practice, which is deeply rooted in themes of war and human suffering. Born in Beirut, Lebanon, Kanso grew up at a time when the geopolitical landscape of the Arab region was being reshaped by the Arab-Israeli War. This exhibition explores Kanso's long standing devotion to protest art by investigating the interwoven relationship between social injustice, myth, memory, and medium.

Coming from a region beset by war, Kanso found himself a foreigner in America during a tumultuous period in the country's socio-cultural and political restructuring. In 1968, while completing his BA and MA at NYU, Kanso set up his studio in Manhattan amid a climate of unprecedented protest against America's military intervention in Vietnam. Kanso's large, unstretched paintings bring to life a powerful and confrontational cluster of human-sized figures—leaping and floating—reaching outward to a world in a state of complete disintegration. He did not intend for his paintings to recount specific historical events, but rather to serve as a manifestation of emotions, and tragedies associated with global conflicts. His paintings unearth a unique visual iconography which weave together elements of neo-expressionism with mythological imagery, citing both contemporary and classical sources.

In the early 1980s, Kanso created a series of 242 macabre tragicomedy ink drawings called *Leaves from the Theater of War (1980-1992)* that detail his personal account of the realities of war. On view for the first time since the series was created, these drawings were made after Kanso's visit to his homeland in 1982 at the height of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-90), during which Israel's invasion saw the Siege of Beirut and the tragic Sabra and Shatila Massacre, which killed thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese Shias. These dark-humored, sharp-edged drawings invoke Francisco Goya's series *The Disasters of War*, while providing a more explicit reading of the role political elites play in inflicting systemic violence and societal division. Kanso's drawings, like his paintings, are living testimonies that emphasize no matter how distant or foreign a conflict is, one cannot be fully removed from the consequences of war and its impact on the essence of our shared humanity. In his commitment to protest art, Nabil Kanso's work at its core reminds us that resistance, in its various forms, is an emblem of unity and hope in a time of division, destruction, and terror.



### Mission

The Institute of Arab and Islamic Art (IAIA) is an independent, non-profit center that promotes and advances the artistic and cultural dialogue between New York City and the Arab and Islamic worlds. Through outreach programs, a multidisciplinary exhibition space, a knowledge-building facility, residency program and an emphasis on collaborations with cultural organizations, IAIA provides a convivial, welcoming environment to learn about and engage with an often over-simplified culture.

### Contact IAIA

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**Nabil Kanso:** *Born in Beirut, Lebanon, Nabil Kanso (1940-2019) became part of the art scene in the 1960s, while receiving his BA and MA from New York University. In 1971, Kanso expanded his studio to encompass an entire five-story townhouse, which he called 76th Street Gallery and where he held numerous exhibitions through the early-to-mid-1970's. Having witnessed the devastation brought about by a fifteen-year civil war in his homeland, Kanso made anti-war activism a central tenet of his practice. His mural-sized paintings address messages of peace, pacifism, and humanism. Offering a unique historical continuity that spans decades of both political and painterly movements and ruptures, his oeuvre swelled to take on accounts of many of the world's gravest atrocities. In the 1980s, he launched his multi-exhibition project "Journey of Art for Peace" across Central and South America, the Middle East, and Europe which included solo exhibitions in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Panama, Kuwait, and Switzerland.*