

**JAMES
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PRESS RELEASE

Sarah Awad
Instruments of Culture

September 1 to October 8, 2011
Opening Reception
Thursday, September 1st, 6-8PM

Gallery hours are Tuesday - Saturday 11:00am - 5:00pm
Additional images are available upon request

Power of Aphrodesia, 2011
Oil on canvas
60 x 67 inches

James Harris Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of paintings by Sarah Awad. The show will feature her most recent works from 2011. Awad's paintings are philosophical examinations of how space (physical, psychological, and imagined), can exist within a painting. This often involves the reinterpretation of historical architecture through abstraction. Psychological, social, and political space is also present, due Awad's use of figures and social rituals.

Awad's study of social rituals and human-place relationships began with an examination of emptied out spaces with histories pertinent to the development of national identity like repurposed military forts, originally used for national defense turned educational tourist facility, and outdated military weaponry like cannons. Older paintings include abstracted versions of Nuremberg stadium, alluding to sport as the fusion of theater and violence, and the failed ambitions of civic architecture. The altered functions of buildings lead the landscape to point to an absent history; one that can be changed and reinvented. The paintings reflect the constructed nature of history as is portrayed by built spaces, public space, and civic space.

Sarah Awad's most recent paintings visit museums of artifacts, reliquaries, and statuary. These museum paintings are based on the cast courts in the Victoria and Albert museum in London. For the artist, such spaces act as receptacles for relics and are themselves tombs and repositories for dead things. In these paintings, the body presents itself as architecture, complicating the relationship between site and body. The figure is both a psychological interruption and an integral part of the layout of the space, functioning as a reminder of how we replicate our body as a site for contemplating our mortality.

Drawing from many historical periods, Awad reveals the position of the museum as it attempts to simultaneously record and archive civilizations' cultural production and history. She interrogates and negotiates the hierarchy of institutions. A complicated critique emerges from the combination of subjective paint handling, such as moments of pleasure attached to line work and color, with heavily modeled sculptural elements, which suggests the weight of the cultural institution.

Awad's paintings fluctuate between figuration and abstraction; architectural forms creates two and three-dimensional structures within the painting. Awad continuously moves between ground and figure by piecing together shapes and carving objects out of blocks of color. Fictional moments develop by reworking old paintings, simplifying them through layers of paint so that only what is necessary to maintain the point of attraction remains.