



BASSIM AL SHAKER
Resurrection, 2023
Oil on canvas
80 x 60 inches

BASSIM AL SHAKER

Four Minutes

September 8 - October 21, 2023

Rhona Hoffman Gallery is pleased to present our first solo exhibition with Chicago-based Iraqi artist Bassim Al Shaker, titled *Four Minutes*. The exhibition consists of new wall and ceiling mounted oil paintings that abstractly refer to the artist's experience during various periods of political and humanitarian turmoil in his home country of Iraq.

In 2013, Al Shaker was selected to participate in the Venice Biennale as part of the Iraqi Pavilion; since then his artwork has served as a vehicle to share his heritage and identity, and reflect on the country's more recent history. The paintings that comprise *Four Minutes* illustrate environments Al Shaker witnessed after the detonation of bombs during the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. In the moments that followed such explosions, Al Shaker recalls the sky, the air, the swirl of debris above, and the deafening silence. Although these paintings are inspired by a finite period within this traumatic experience, Al Shaker wants the viewer to know: "These paintings are not about death. They are not about the bomb. They are about the moment after. Each painting is a new beginning. There is death, but I have a new life. I am still alive." A mindset of resilience and gratitude for life is evident in the exuberance and energy that pulsates through Al Shaker's paintings. His palette is rich and layered while the frenetic brushstrokes breathe movement into the canvas.

Academically trained in painting and drawing at an art high school in Baghdad and the University of Baghdad College of Fine Arts before pursuing his MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Al Shaker's paintings are ethereal and atmospheric, evoking historical painters such as Jean-Honoré Fragonard, J. M. W. Turner, and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. His canvases in *Four Minutes* are obscure and otherworldly landscapes, thresholds into a separate dimension – a liminal space one might move through to access an alternate reality. Tendrils and plumes of smoke or flame waft up from the paintings' foreground; flecks of pink, blue and purple oil paint punctuate the otherwise predominantly earthen tones of green, brown and

yellow that populate the canvas. In addition to the sumptuous wall paintings, an engulfing, suspended ceiling painting titled *Sky Revolution* depicts a moody, muddled sky. But as the dark clouds part and inch their way out of the pictureplane, a warmer, celestial atmosphere emerges.

Al Shaker's skillfully rendered, emotive paintings were originally conceived out of hardship, but they can now be understood as a celebration of survival and new beginnings.

Bassim Al Shaker (b. 1986 Baghdad, Iraq) is a Chicago-based artist and filmmaker. Al Shaker received his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and his BFA from the University of Baghdad College of Fine Arts. Al Shaker has exhibited work in Documenta Fifteen (Kassel, Germany); The Venice Biennale for the Iraqi Pavilion; The Arizona State University Art Museum (Tempe, AZ); FLXST Contemporary (Chicago, IL); and MANA Contemporary (Chicago, IL), among other venues. His work has been written about in publications such as The New York Times, ArtNews, Artnet, e-flux, NewCity, WBEZ Chicago, and Phoenix New Times.