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“Basil Alkazzi, Odyssey of Dreams” opens at Bradbury Gallery

“One can regard Alkazzi’s odyssey of dreams as a journey from darkness to light ... For Alkazzi, the aim of art is spiritual enlightenment.”—Art Critic Donald Kuspit

“Odyssey of Dreams: A Decade of Paintings, 2003-2012,” the latest body of work by internationally renowned British artist Basil Alkazzi, will open at the Bradbury Gallery Thursday, August 29 at 5pm. Arkansas State University is the first venue for this travelling exhibition that will be seen at university art galleries and museums throughout the U.S. through 2014.

The exhibition and an accompanying book of the same name present Alkazzi’s beautiful and brilliantly colored large-scale gouaches on hand-made paper. According to a spokesperson for the artist, these mystical, abstract renderings of nature reflect the artist’s deep engagement in the spiritual and metaphysical aspects of painting.

Alkazzi’s long and distinguished career spans four decades from 1973 to the present. He was born in Kuwait and raised in England where he attended art school. He exhibited regularly in London from 1978 to 1987 at the Drian Gallery, whose director, Halima Nalecz, jump-started many important artistic careers. His work was included in annual exhibitions of the National Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Printmakers from the 1970s through the 1990s.

Since 1985, Alkazzi has lived in New York at various times. From 1995 until 2000 he was granted residence in the United States under the immigration rubric of “an artist of exceptional ability in the arts.”

His work has been shown throughout the country in museums and galleries, and is in the collections of over two dozen museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Hirshhorn Museum – Smithsonian Institution; San Diego Museum of Art; San Antonio Museum of Art; New Orleans Museum of Art; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Nelson Atkins Museum of Art; Tel-Aviv Museum of Art, Israel; The National Council, Kuwait; and Centrum Sztuki, Warsaw.

The curator of the exhibition is Judith K. Brodsky, Distinguished Professor Emerita, Rutgers University. During her tenure as co-founder and co-director of the Rutgers Institute for Women and Art at Rutgers with Ferris Olin, she organized and curated many notable exhibitions, including a major retrospective of Faith Ringgold’s work: *Declaration of Independence; 50 Years of Art by Faith Ringgold*; the group show *How American Women Artists Invented Postmodernism: 1970-1975*; and most recently, the critically acclaimed multi-site exhibition and catalogue *The Fertile Crescent: Gender, Art, and Society*.

In his essay in the book accompanying the exhibition, Kuspit writes about this series of paintings, “They finally metamorphosize into the glorious flowers ... Like Mondrian’s flower paintings they are sacred icons, but unlike Mondrian’s flowers those of Alkazzi are not decaying and melancholy but jubilant and growing—not nature on its last legs, ready to be abandoned in Mondrian’s geometrical abstractions, but nature full of joie de vivre, all the more so because it remains mystically abstract.”

It is Alkazzi’s hope that “Odyssey of Dreams” elicits from audiences “Awe at the sublime Soul within Life, and nature, and so, within themselves.”

The Bradbury Gallery 2013-14 season begins with two exhibitions held concurrently, “Odyssey of Dreams” and “Drawings by Carroll Cloar.” The mounting of the Alkazzi exhibition coincides with his 75th birthday. This year also marks a century since Arkansas artist Cloar’s birth, making the combination of these two exceptional artists a particularly interesting pairing.

Bradbury Gallery hours are noon to 5pm Tuesday through Saturday, 2 to 5pm on Sunday and by appointment. The gallery is closed on Mondays. The exhibition and the reception are admission-free and open to the public. For more details contact the Bradbury Gallery at 870-972-3471, by email at bradburygallery@astate.edu, or visit the website, bradburygallery.com.