

Press Release
For Immediate Release

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***Rocky Mountain Biennial Artist Selected for
Prestigious Florence Biennale in 2009***

The Rocky Mountain Biennial now on view at the Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art is a strictly regional overview of contemporary art. However one of the artists in the show has international roots and presence. Sami Alkarim is an exception to the idea of a 'homegrown' artist. Alkarim is an Iraqi artist born in 1966 in Lebanon. His father was a professor in the American University in Beirut, Lebanon, until 1974 when his family moved to Baghdad, Iraq. In 1985, Alkarim enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad until he was expelled from the University for making art in protest of the Albaath regime. Fleeing Iraq as a political refugee Alkarim lived in many countries searching for a home. He finally settled in America, continuing his Fine Arts education at Metro State College and then the University of Colorado in Denver.

Alkarim's work on view at FCMOCA is the largest single work in the exhibition. The painting "Worn Out Memory" is a triptych (3-panel painting) that measures six feet high by eighteen feet wide. Guest juror Michael Paglia selected the work for second prize in the exhibition. Apparently others have recognized the significance of the work as it has also been accepted into the prestigious Florence Biennale, December 5 – 19, 2009.



The Florence Biennale is one of several important international contemporary art exhibitions held every other year. Selected by a panel of twelve international awards jurors, artwork by hundreds of international artists will be exhibited in the Historical Fortezza da Basso in Florence, Italy. In collaboration with the United Nations, the Biennale works in collaboration with the United Nations as a participant in the "Dialogue Among Civilizations" program. "Artists have a special role to play in the global struggle for peace. . . Art opens new doors for learning, understanding, and peace among people and nations," said UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2003. For the last Florence Biennale in 2007 more than 17,000 people attended the 10-day exhibition.

"Worn Out Memory" is a work in response to the destruction of Alkarim's once beautiful Baghdad homeland, but it is also a testament to hope and finally love. Even without the back-story, the painting's glorious reds and rich earth tones, with its rugged surfaces hint at the emotional impact of a war-torn existence, exile, and finally awe for natural beauty and the hope of rebirth from the flames of war. Using unique materials such as gunpowder, metal powder pigment and mineral pigments all layered on delicate handmade paper, Alkarim makes the case that the materials of warfare can be subverted to tools for peace and expressions of beauty and love.

"Worn Out Memory" is on view with the other artworks in the Rocky Mountain Biennial through January 3, 2009. Visitors can stop by on Wednesdays at 12:15 p.m. for an "Art Break" – a 15-minute tour of 2-3 works in the exhibition. Art Breaks will continue year-round for an opportunity to feed your soul as well as your stomach.

For information please contact Jeanne Shoaff, Curator & Director of Programs, FCMOCA at 970-482-2787.

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