

Elad Larom

Baal HaSulam

Artist House, Jerusalem

January – March 2025

*Baal HaSulam*¹ is a speculative portrait, seeking to trace fluctuations in the balance of power relations between truth and fiction, original and imitation. In a time when the notion of "truth" is fluid and subject to interpretation due to the prevalence of advanced technologies, Elad Larom delves into the status of painting and the painter as mediators of reality.

Larom brings together religious art and contemporary AI technology. He borrows concrete images from the vast visual repertoire of medieval and Renaissance art, employing the traditional fresco technique (mural painting executed on wet plaster), which was widely used in interior wall decoration in religious buildings.

In the AI software, Larom combines images from art history with photographs of his own work and content from the worlds of science and science fiction. Through textual instructions, he manipulates the algorithm to produce images with aesthetic characteristics of frescoes. The images challenge a long-standing religious-Christian iconographic tradition, undermining it and the establishment it represents. The expropriation of religious content gives rise to archetypal, universal images.

The exhibition features frescoes on terracotta panels in a square uniform format, alongside charcoal and pastel drawings on paper inspired by the cartoons (preparatory drawings) used as basis for the murals. While the medium is different, the works share the same features. The compositions demonstrate a fragmented, enigmatic "frame" featuring a figure or an event, much like a cinematic close-up. They are charged with alertness and tension, indicating the presence of a powerful higher force. A rich repertoire of facial expressions, bodily gestures, and expressive hand positions, identified with religious art, recurs in the works, driving the visual drama and pointing to a hidden layer concealed within the body of the work.

In *Baal HaSulam*, Larom establishes a fictional mystical-symbolic world which is not founded on a distinct corpus, hence disallowing a conclusive interpretation. Through the veil of mystery shrouding the works, however, despair, helplessness, and death flicker. The ostensibly impossible encounter between religious art and artificial intelligence enables Larom to move freely between periods and styles, creating a timeless dialogue between the

¹ Heb. "Owner of the Ladder"—name given to Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag (1884–1954) after his commentary on the Book of Zohar.

tangible, the spiritual, and the digital. Whether "deliberate forgeries" of ancient icons, representations of worship and adoration for a futuristic religion, or metaphorical fragments, Larom's new icons evoke thoughts about the fragility of human existence.

Sally Haftel Naveh