

# MARTOS GALLERY

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## Nabil Kanso *THE TOMORROWS*

OPENING FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH, 6 - 8 PM  
September 6 - October 5, 2024

Martos Gallery is pleased to present *The Tomorrows*, an exhibition of eight paintings by the Lebanese-American artist Nabil Kanso (1940 - 2019). Organized in collaboration with the artist's family and curator Kathryn Brennan, the show will run from September 6th through October 5th, 2024, with an opening reception on September 6th from 6pm to 8pm.

As a form of resistance over his nearly five-decade artistic career, Kanso—a lifelong pacifist—dedicated his art to confronting continuous cycles of violence that were, in his words, “assaulting the very essence of humanity.” Between the mid-1970s and 2018, Kanso created works addressing the Vietnam War, the Lebanese Civil War, the Gulf War, the Iraq War and Abu Ghraib, mass incarceration, and a wide range of mythological and literary subjects. Fearlessly political, Kanso once recalled how one of his earliest supporters, the legendary art historian and inaugural director of the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred H. Barr, mused that gallery walls “might become frightened by the intensity, fury, and scale of the paintings.” Many of the artist’s figurative expressionist works are monumental, equally reflecting his ambition, the gravity of his subjects, and his understanding of what painting into the historical canon requires.

Born in Beirut in 1940, Kanso moved to New York in 1966, where he earned degrees in political science at New York University in 1970 and 1971, an important foundation on which he built his life as a painter. As Kanso explained, “I think an artist cannot detach himself completely from the world [or] make believe that we don’t live in this world. We are part of it. And we respond to it in an artistic way.” In 1974, he began making what he called “mobile murals,” large-scale paintings that can be rolled and transported far and wide. In the face of institutional censorship, he exhibited widely in Central and South America during the mid-to-late 1980s, presenting his work in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela. The expansive nature of his canvases amplify the physicality of Kanso's brushwork—his paintings are palpably infused with his life force—creating a field in which his viewers are immersed, allowing them to meet his figures face-to-face.

*Vietnam* (1974), with its charged, complex composition of figures densely entangled, fighting and writhing amid a fiery palette, is a tour-de-force. The Book of Revelation is the inspiration for *Apocalyptic Riders* (1984)—one of eighty-eight works comprising the series, “The Split of Life”—while *Cries and Silence I and II* (1994) honor the lives lost to the Holocaust. The exhibition also foregrounds Kanso’s deep literary involvement with paintings such as *The*

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*Confronting Mother* (1991), which can be read as an allegory of the artist and his work. Her face, half hidden by flames that engulf the large white bird before her, the woman looks out at the world unflinchingly, inviting the viewer to meet her gaze.

Nabil Kanso (1940–2019) lived and worked in Atlanta, Georgia for most of his career. His paintings are currently featured in a major installation at Atlanta's High Museum of Art, *The Journey of Art For Peace*, and were shown alongside his drawings in a recent exhibition curated by Mohammed Rashid Al-Thani at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Art (IAIA) in New York. His life is the subject of the scholarly biography *Lebanon and the Split of Life: Bearing Witness through the Art of Nabil Kanso* by Meriam Soltan (Anthem Press). In February 2025, *Nabil Kanso: Echoes of War*, curated by Rachel Winter, will open at the Edythe and Eli Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University.