

**ARTFORUM**

Sharjah

**Tarek Al-Ghoussein**

SHARJAH ART FOUNDATION  
Arts Area  
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Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Self-Portrait 5*, 2003, color photograph, 23 5/8 x 31 1/2".

A man strides across an airfield toward a plane. A Palestinian scarf is wrapped around his head; his face is obscured. This is Tarek Al-Ghoussein's best-known photograph from his series of "Self-Portraits," 2002–2003. We immediately presume the subject is a terrorist—the very association which Al-Ghoussein himself provokes in some. The artist was born in Kuwait to Palestinian parents, and went to school in the US. With his "Self-Portraits," he is not only answering the prejudices that continue to misrepresent Palestinians as terrorists, but also plying a sense of solitude and wanderlust. These aspects of the work

## **GALERIE BRIGITTE SCHENK**

become especially intense in another photograph, in which Al-Ghoussein depicts himself walking past a painted ship, followed by his shadow. The work tells of simultaneous desire and resistance; its shadow gives the Palestinian diaspora a symbolic, lingering image.

This magnificent retrospective at the Sharjah Art Museum, comprising both this early series and his work up through 2010, clarifies the extent to which Al-Ghoussein expresses his image testimonials through a play of contrasts: the shift between close and wide in the photographs of concrete walls reference the Israeli-restricted areas in the Palestinian territories, or the balance between transience and permanence, as when he explodes a big blue plastic plane in the middle of the vast desert, and then poetically includes blue remnants from the blast—caught in a nearby fence—in the frame of several of his other photos. These are the contrasts through which Al-Ghoussein's work convincingly transforms direct political references into the existentially universal.

Translated from German by Diana Reese.