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## Press release

Y.Z. Kami  
*Endless Prayers*

21 November 2008 – 11 February 2009

Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art is pleased to present the first UK solo exhibition of paintings, collages and photographs by the Persian born artist Y.Z. Kami. This diverse group of works has been created over a period of ten years and will be shown for the first time in this country.

The most striking works in this exhibition are undoubtedly Y.Z. Kami's large and frontal painted portraits of ordinary people, each of whom entirely fills the canvas, often measuring three metres by two metres. Despite their imposing size and intense presence these portraits are neither flattering nor psychological; rather, they depict the subjects as they are, absorbed in their own world. This characteristic together with their fresco-like quality, executed using a special painting technique, endows the figures with a certain lack of materiality resembling that of Fayum portraits which were painted to accompany Egyptian mummies in their graves. In some of the paintings the eyes of the subjects are closed, but in others they are open and they gaze either inwardly or at a fixed point in the distance. No eye contact can be established by the viewer and each painted figure seems to carry its own distinct history within itself.

The same frontal perspective and detachment is prevalent in Y.Z. Kami's monumental photographs of Islamic sites and architecture. For Y.Z. Kami, architecture, like human beings, speaks of its own history and at times he combines architecture with portraits of people to create some poignant works, such as *Dry Land*, 1994–2004 and *Konya*, 2007.

The exhibition will also feature Y.Z. Kami's collages, entitled *Endless Prayers*. These works are made by gluing countless minute brick-shaped cut-outs from various books on to the canvas in circular arrangements or according to some Islamic architectural detailing of domes. The spiralling patterns are inspired by the whirling motions in the rituals of dervishes found in the Mawlawi order of Sufism, who profess that the act of spinning undoes the ego, cleanses them of the self and finds the sole unity of God. The Mawlawi order of Sufism was founded by the thirteenth century Persian poet, Rumi, whose work has played an important role in Y.Z. Kami's life and work since he began studying it as a young man. The work entitled *Konya*, 2007, was made in homage to the poet and bears the name of the town where Rumi spent the last years of his life, died there and has his mausoleum there.

Y.Z. Kami was born in 1956 in Tehran, Iran, and now lives and works in New York. He has had many solo exhibitions in America, for example Barbara Toll Fine Arts, New York, 1992 and 1993; Holly Solomon Gallery, New York, 1996; Deitch Projects, New York, 1998 and 2001; Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 2003; John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, 2007 and Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles, 2007. Kami's work is in the collection of several major museums in the United States, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, all in New York.

An extensive events programme will run alongside this exhibition. More information can be found at [www.parasol-unit.org](http://www.parasol-unit.org).

Supported by Arts council, England

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Additional donations have been provided by Blackwall Green, the Gagosian Gallery and Fatima Maleki.

### **Visitor information**

Gallery opening times: Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm and Sunday, 12 – 5pm

Admission: Free

From Angel tube, turn left out of the station and onto City Road. Continue down City Road for ten minutes and turn left onto Wharf Road before the Texaco Service station.

From Old Street Tube, leave the station from exit 1 and walk up City Road for five minutes. Turn right onto Wharf Road after the Texaco service Station.

Buses 43, 205 and 214 all travel down City Road.

### **Notes to editors**

Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art is a new public space and educational charity where private initiative and public support work hand in hand to create one of London's most vibrant art institutions. The core activity of Parasol unit is an innovative and thought-provoking exhibition programme showing international and UK-based artists. Each year, Parasol unit mounts four exhibitions in a variety of media, usually accompanied by a publication. In order to encourage the widest possible access to its exhibition programme, the foundation does not charge an admission fee.

### **Next exhibition**

Robert Mangold  
*Works from the 1980: sX + and Frame Paintings*  
25 February – 8 May 2009

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