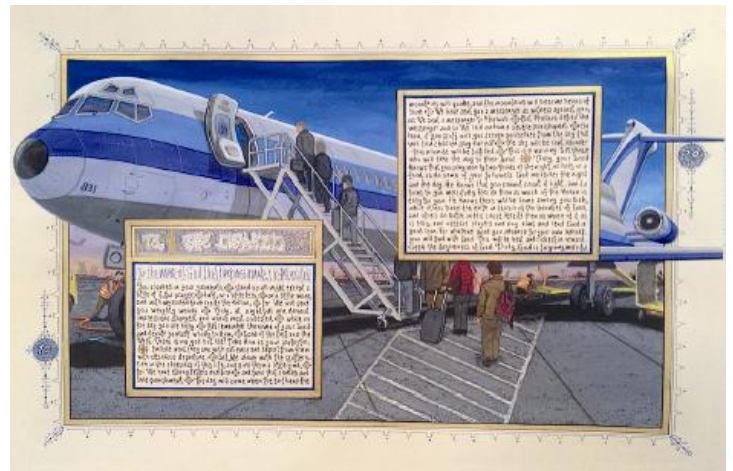


## Sadow Birk American Qur'an

September 7 – October 12, 2013

Opening Reception: Saturday, September 7, 6-8pm



**P·P·O·W** presents the next installation of Sadow Birk's *American Qur'an*. Over the last five years, Birk has been transcribing the Qur'an according to historic Islamic traditions, illuminating each text with coinciding scenes of contemporary American life. Compelled by the ongoing complexities of the relationship between Western and Middle Eastern societies, tensions heightened by the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Birk's series combats the misunderstandings surrounding Islam and the Qur'an. Through this ongoing project Birk hopes to bring to light the significant consistencies present in the teachings of Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

In this exhibition there are twelve suras (chapters) on view, out of 114 in total, which are commonly arranged according to length rather than by chronological order. Birk transcribes the English-translated Qur'an using hand-lettered script inspired by the American graffiti writers of his surrounding Los Angeles neighborhood and follows the traditional formatting of the color inks and design of each passage. He then illustrates each sura with visual interpretations of the text, bridging the gap between the ancient lessons and everyday American life with painted vignettes such as grocery shopping, fashion shoots, surfing, house fires, landscaping, basketball, operation rooms and airports. Birk's compositions mix contemporary form with that of Persian miniature painting and medieval manuscripts, which he has traveled the globe researching for over a decade. He has done extensive research at the Institut du Monde Arab in Morocco, the Cité Internationale des Artes in Paris, the Museu Calouste Gulbenkian in Lisbon, and at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin which houses one of the largest collections of hand-illuminated Qur'ans in the world.

The *American Qur'an* series reflects Birk's continued interest in promoting awareness and understanding of religious texts, as was also the focus of his illustrated version of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, 2004, and of societal conflicts as he highlighted in his *The Depravities of War*, 2007, which narrated scenes of the Iraq War. Birk continues working on the *American Qur'an* which, when completed, will be nearly 400 pages.

**Sadow Birk** received his BFA from Otis Art Institute in 1988. He has been the recipient of numerous awards, fellowships, and grants, including: Guggenheim Fellowship, J. Paul Getty Fellowship, NEA grants, COLA fellowship in Visual Art, and Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship Award. He has had several solo museum exhibitions including: the Andy Warhol Museum, Katzen Art Center, San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, San Jose Museum of Art, the Laguna Art Museum, the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, and the Heidelberger Kunstverein in Heidelberg, Germany. His work is in numerous museum collections including: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Harvard University Museum, the De Young Museum, The Getty Center, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Jose Museum of Art, the New York Historical Society, and the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art.