

Australian Artists of Arabic Origin Identity and Hope

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DECLARATION

The work submitted in this paper to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due knowledge is made in the context. This thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Jamal Joumaa.

11/08/09.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

When you plant, plant in your own backyard.

"إذا أردت أن تزرع. ازرع في أرضك"

This is a popular and wise proverb that elders tell their grandchildren. It is very relevant, especially when the borders of the world are shrinking to the size of a village. Simply, this wisdom expresses the nature of relationships and the connection between yourself and somewhere that belongs to you. Nurture those close to you and the fruits will be yours.

In my homeland, there was a time when the stories walked among peoples, and their heroes sat with them in their homes or in the old café and shops, breathing, falling in love and dreaming with them; but not dying like them. That time has vanished and disappeared.

It is said in my homeland that when drawings disappear from the homes of ordinary people, and appear in the corners of museums or in the homes of the rich, and when the stories are left in a neglected book on the shelf, it is a sign that we have broken with the past. It is also said that the stories do not exist just in the books, but are with people where they live and travel with them. They have the strength of life and fecundity. The ornaments and the symbols that appear in the windows and in the old doors of homes, and the spontaneous writings on the walls, which still hold through time, do not lose their power, if they shine in the light of people's eyes and in the rhythm of life, and grant people a sense of meaningful identity.

The borders of this village are getting wider: either it goes out into the world or the world comes to it. Just one person can become as a floating seed that the breeze carries on an arid summer day, and goes far away to look for a new life, to grow in a

fertile land. Culture becomes like a travelling rain cloud: rain may not fall here, but it enriches life where it does fall.

When the storyteller's hands have begun to shake with age, and his voice trembles, that is the time when his grandchildren must carry on with all that the storyteller loves. They spread to the four corners of the earth; their fingers are dusted with Henna and the dyes of their land; and in their eyes are the colours of the horizon. They become artists.

The storyteller has to survive in a generation of visual artists that converts the tone of his voice to a rhythm of colour, and the movement of hands to a line. They are expressive of their nostalgia for the time of childhood: for their mothers' veiled heads, and their grandmothers' tales. The old tales, which are rich in proverbs with valuable meanings, are transferred with those artists to a vision made with shadow and lights on the surface of their paintings. The experience of writing and reading these tales becomes something different with the visual forms, which can be understood by people of different languages. "Art has the capacity to spread between cultures... because the transition of the visual forms is faster and more public."¹

The new generation goes to live in any country that may welcome them. They have to carry their heritage in their hearts and their paintings, announcing their loyalty to the glowing ornaments and the beautiful words, engraved on the friezes of mosques and old buildings, on ceramic pots; to the walls of alleys which show the history of a nation; to the windows of love and the doors of hope. They are assured of their belonging to humanity and their new homelands through the line and colour of their paintings, and the stone of their sculptures.

Since 1970, exhibitions of many different artistic styles have been held in the galleries of the major cities of the world, including Australia. These include exhibitions of visiting artists of Arabic origin who, before returning to their countries, left some signs of their experience in the gallery archives: the elegant catalogues, the

¹ Diorden, D. (May 2002). " اكتشاف القناع الأفريقي " *The Discovery of African Mask*. The Magazine of International Literature. Kuwait, the National Committee of Culture Art and Literature. pp.72-88.

artistic readings of their artworks, and the paper cuttings of the reviews. Critiquing one of these exhibitions, *Over My Dead Body*, held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney in 2005, John McDonald commented on the work of the English-Palestinian artist Mouna Hatoum:

Mouna Hatoum seeks to unsettle viewers by presenting them with common things seen in unfamiliar way... in art, simplicity is often a virtue, but so many of Hatoum's works are based on simple conundrums and turnabouts, that this survey has a mechanical feel. As a displaced Palestinian woman artist, making video installations about the body, she is a contemporary curator's dream come true...²

This criticism does not take account of the narrative component, the local cultural element which grants the artwork its historical significance and cultural function. In the symbolism, there is an existential connotation that the artist tries to express through all her work, as in the image of the eye facing the bayonets of occupation. This is a visual interpretation of the traditional saying: "The eye can face the awl".

This is one of many such sayings - others include 'the blood overcomes the sword' and 'the sail defeats the sea' - which have been adopted in various art forms since the middle of the last century with the rise of national artistic and cultural movements in Arabic countries. These sayings reflect the spirit of resistance against the power of occupation, and a refusal of the spirit to resignation.

So, the understanding of the idea or the symbol in the artwork can reveal things that open a vast door to the viewer, for a better understanding of the human, social and historical conditions which govern the life of a specific group of people in a period of time. As John George has commented, these are factors which contribute to the manifestation and development of the art.³

2 McDonald, J. (April 9- 10- 2005 spectrum). *Bloodless Coup*. Sydney, the Sydney Morning Herald.

3 George, J. (1982). "خارج الحلقة السحرية". *Outside the Magical Circle*. London. Funoon Arabiah. No. 2-V2. Pan Middle East Graphics and Publishing Ltd, Achilles House. Dar Wasit. p. 87.

Conundrums and turnabouts: Mona Hatoum's works *Light Sentence*, left, *Over My Dead Body*, right, and a detail from *Grater Divide*, below.



Figure: 1.

Mouna Hatoum, *Over My Dead Body*, 1988-2005.
Inject on PVC with grommets. 204.5 x 306cm.

Many of the works relate to local and popular conceptions. Some of these are understandable to the majority of people, because of their strong connection with an international cultural heritage; but there are many symbols whose historical and social significance needs explaining. These local elements and symbols represent the emotional and human loading of the artwork. The artwork was, and remains, a cultural means of expressing individual, local and general human experience, through a specific aesthetic vision, presenting it in a social framework, so the narrative elements come to the fore.

Exhibitions by visiting artists or temporary residents can express the importance of art across cultural differences, and have the capacity to extend bridges that nurture creative interactions between peoples. Such exhibitions by visitors may present a picture of artistic and cultural life in a society but they have a different aim from exhibitions by artists displaced from their traditional contexts, such as the collective exhibitions by artists of Arabic origin who were born in Australia, or who arrived through the waves of immigration. These sorts of exhibitions represent a rich cultural, historical, social and artistic picture, achieved by groups of artists from different generations who have different cultural visions; they display the diversity in style, technique and aesthetics of both their homeland and their host society.

Despite these different cultural visions, art is still a common human language, as artist Mazin Ahmad notes: “The response of the audience and the impact of an artwork is a reflection of its expressive capacity and its aesthetic values. It’s a message that extends beyond the borders of its place of origin.” But it does so in a new multicultural society as Jasam Hasan notes:

...where the artist lives in artistic anxiety, this concern may crystallize, as an aesthetic and cultural gap, between the artist and the viewer, who has a different cultural and artistic tradition. It’s important that the artist maintain his own cultural milieu and his social values, which configure his emotional and psychological construction, and his way of thinking, but the continuing link and the artist’s understanding of his new culture and society may take time, according to the artist’s background and his ability in dealing with a different way of life, in a new environment. Multiculturalism in art and culture leads to additional knowledge. It means research into new ideas, which expand the artist’s knowledge and his artistic potential, and add a new artistic stream, to the culture of the host society.”⁴ (Translated by the author)

The aesthetic link between art and the audience may still relate to the viewer himself as an artistic and cultural response. Artist Ali Abbas comments:

There are two kinds of audience: the first has a sense of responsibility to the artwork, this audience has a good knowledge about art, and is interested in visiting art galleries, and the second has not. Despite that, my art is inspired by symbols and the cultural values of my homeland, and I work with the vocabulary of abstraction, which lives in our social memory. I believe that the artwork is a common sensual image. Maybe we do not understand its meanings, but this is reaching out sensually to the viewer. Sense is a unique guide for any person of different culture... my artistic message is one whether in my home

4 Hasan, J. (2005), from the statement of the artist Jasam Hasan. Sydney, 11-04.2005.

land or in my host society. For example: human love is one, in my country or in any other country.”⁵ (Translated by the author)

But who were the audiences attending to those artists, and sharing with them the celebration of art? The response to these cultural activities can be an individual and emotional experience for those with the ability to understand one another; it is relevant to the person’s own culture, and their desire to look for something beautiful, rich in its moral and cultural indications and human. But this understanding is not a general cultural trend. What is the degree of harmonization between their artistic language, and the general cultural landscape in their host lands? What are the reactions to these exhibitions? What was the nature of the response, and the effect on its audience?

For example, viewers’ comments, in the guestbook of the *Songs of Travelling Birds* exhibition, which was held in August 2005 in Blacktown Art Centre, featuring four Iraqi artists, are varied but express the nature of response in each case according to the person’s cultural attitude. One of these comments uses vocabulary that points to a sort of artistic literacy: “I liked.... the Iraqi artists in exile, for their freedom of image, colours and line. A universal theme: humanity”.

Emotional and spontaneous responses were also present in the guests’ book, such as: “The Arabic/Iraqi artists’ exhibits portrayed the dark with glorious colours”, and another stated: this art is sensational!!. Other comments pointed to the need for understanding of other cultures: “I like them, but I don’t understand them.” This is my purpose - to develop a fuller understanding of the cultural meanings in these artworks.

These samples of the viewers’ responses point to three essential values in human cultural response: aesthetic pleasure, human identification and understanding of the other. Besides these comments, the exhibition catalogue foreword, written by John Cheeseman, director of Blacktown Art Centre, expressed the important role of art in personal and social life. He presents the work in a cultural context, considering new

⁵ Abbas, A. (2005), from the statement of the artist Ali Abbas. Sydney. 20-04.2005.

cognitive and aesthetic approaches to the contemporary cultural landscape in Australia:

The colours of desert, the symbols of ancient peoples and the narratives of places... bring audiences fresh ways of interpreting and imagining Iraq. Their methods also shed new light onto how we might re-interpret and re-imagine the stories and landscapes of contemporary Australia.

The exhibition presented an educational, social and cultural challenge to the intellectuals and researchers who are interested in examining contemporary art in Australia, in terms of cultural difference and ethnicity. A multitude of aesthetic, cultural and historical issues are being raised in the critical literature, but we need to know more about these issues from the point of view of the artists themselves. Through an improved understanding, maybe we could have a better appreciation of how the work of Australian artists of Arabic origin contributes another aesthetic and human dimension to the Australian cultural landscape.

Since the 1970s, there has been growing cultural and academic interest in the position of migrants in Australian life, especially migrants from a non-English speaking background; migrants' issues have become topics of general concern. Some "may see different routes to political mobilization, cultural expression" as an effect of the multiculturalism policy of 1970 and 1980, "that is still relevant for the present and beyond"⁶; there is dependence on a "wider national Australian identity"⁷ to express the reality of the new society, which is "based on a plethora of different customs, social beliefs and rituals, socio-economic backgrounds and creative traditions."⁸ Where hybridity has become "the way in which identity formation, especially for diasporic populations, draws on and combines different elements, to create something

6 Foster, L. E. (1989). *Diversity and Multicultural Education: a Sociological Perspective*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin. pp. 190-191.

7 Ibid. p. 4.

8 Gouriotis, C. (1998). *Between Worlds*. Catalogue, *Arabmade* exhibition. Casula, p. 6.

new... [Identity becomes] as an energy field of different forces”⁹. In the effort of bringing different cultures together, “in the context of social and long historical process.”¹⁰ Con Gouriotis, notes:

...during the last two odd decades, there have been various state responses on how best to encourage the dynamic and complex links between culture, diversity and the traditional (and to a lesser degree) avant-garde art forms.

Simply put, in order to promote an open-ended self critical approach to new artistic possibilities and multi layered identities in the realm of so-called community and ethnic arts, there has been much polemical heat generated over this period of time.

How do we best foster the (in)visible rich seams of hybridized cross-cultural art that characterise our diverse cultural landscape?

How do we not continue discriminating against non-English speaking artists ...who are located outside the more familiar aesthetic and cultural modernist traditions of the Anglo-Celtic canon? In a society where we still (regrettably) categorise diverse artistic and ethnic experience under the shadow of the homogeneity of mainstream culture.

What critical vocabularies and mechanism of representation, do we construct in order to locate and define the interactive creative energies that mark multicultural Australia?”¹¹

⁹ Al Hage, G.(2002). *Arab-Australian Today, Citizenship and Belonging*. Melbourne. Melbourne University Press. pp. 131-132.

¹⁰ Hamdan, A. (2005). "اشكالية الهوية والانتماء – سلسلة الأوستراليون العرب، الجزء الأول" *The Problematic of Identity and Belonging. Arab- Australians*. Part1. Sydney. Arab-Australian Centre for Political Studies. pp. 32-33.

¹¹ Gouriotis. (1998). *Between Worlds*. p. 7.

It is not just Australian critics and researchers who have tried to address these new issues about cultural difference. This is a response to new social demands, and is a part of the work of establishing a kind of harmonization between different cultures and ethnicities. The shifting demographic changes which have occurred following the Second World War, have contributed to the diversity of culture and ethnicity, which distinguishes the life of different European capitals. In the US, Novak¹² has distinguished between two ethnicities:

The old ethnicity which was strengthened by a kind of ignorance of other, and the new ethnicity, which emerges a positive predisposition characterized by sympathy with others and greater creativity and mutual interchange.

For Novak, as "the new ethnicity is internalized so also is the experience of multiculturalism."¹³

But the ignorance of otherness identified by Novak remains problematic. It takes different shapes in different societies, according to the different ethnic groups from which they are composed. It is also relevant to the unbalanced cultural relationships between the countries of 'the third world and the West'. According to John George:

Western Art critics didn't pay serious attention to those countries that lie outside the magical circle of London, Paris and New York ...the notion of contemporary style, which represents the spirit of era as a comprehensive international style of this century is a topic which needs more revision, given the absence of an understanding of the historical and cultural background to the diversity of nations.¹⁴
(Translated by the author).

¹² Foster. (1989). p. 190.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ George. (1982). p. 87

What is the logic that permits art critics in Europe and US, he asks, to refuse the artistic product of the countries “which are outside the sacred temples in London, Paris and New York, and to consider them as of secondary importance?”

It is impossible to study the modern art of any country as a phenomenon isolated from the factors which contributed to the manifestation and developing of this art; for this reason, the art critic in the west is confused when he is looking at the art of those countries.

...The renewal of acknowledgment, and admiration of historical achievements of Islam, as expressed by Delacroix 1863-1798 - who admired the Arabic tradition and environment in Morocco - still does not give Arabs any pleasure. Their endeavour is to create an art reflecting their contemporary society and their present concerns; an art benefiting from the effect of European artistic examples, but their art tradition will help them to avoid imitation and copying of styles from the magical circle... by adding a simple touch of Arabic decorative tradition.¹⁵ (Translated by the author).

This difficulty in evaluating and understanding the work of artists of Arabic origin, appears also on the individual level; as George Wittet mentions in his 1982 Foreword to the Catalogue for an exhibition of the Kuwaiti artist Basel Al Kady, held in London:

...it's rare to meet a contemporary artist who has this congruity between the identity of his art and culture and his personal beliefs, and has the ability to express his inner self, far away from the artistic modes which Art Critics welcome in London and New York... his art is a special Phenomenon... it is the reason why the historian of modern art faces difficulty, when they try to classify him as a distinguished artist, in their books.¹⁶ (Translated by the author).

15 George. (1982). p. 87.

16 Wetit, G. (1982). "معرض باسل القاضي" *Basel Al Kady Exhibition*. London. Fnoon Arabiah. No. 5. V2. Pan Middle East Graphics and Publishing Ltd, Achilles House. Dar Wasit. p. 154.

But is it possible today to speak about one culture as a disjunctive state? Or to put the different cultures side by side or in opposition, as separate and contained entities in a changeable world, when these are countries in which migrants constitute an integral part of the social organisation? In the shadow of the phenomenon of globalization, and new technological communication, the mixed space itself requires consideration.

The collective exhibitions held for the first time in some European centres, like Spain in 2005 under the title *Arabic Artists in Spain*, and Canada in 2003, seem a logical response to this new reality. They present a view of culture considered as a space for meeting between peoples.

However, such exhibitions, as much as they pose questions or present answers, still point to the need for vigour in dealing with the issues raised by this art. These exhibitions, while a logical step, were also an:

...aesthetic and moral choice, representing a refusal to put cultural memories side by side, as we see in the celebratory meetings between cultures and nations. It is a choice which opens the door to a creative and interactive culture, which makes every one of us a hybridized entity, in a state of perennial renewal.¹⁷ (Translated by the author).

This was the idea behind the biggest art exhibition held in Canadian history, in the Museum of Civilizations of Ottawa, in April 2003.

Twenty six Canadian artists of Arabic origin express their love for their homeland and its heritage, present and future, the nature of life in the host land, by the techniques of modernism, sharing a deep vision, which communicates authenticity, roots and belonging... this art has a love of a special kind, through works that are balanced between the

¹⁷ Shala, A, H. (2003). "تظاهرة تشكيلية عربية في أوتاوا" *Arabic Plastic Manifestation in Ottawa*, Kuwait. The Kuwait magazine. April 2003. No. 234. The Ministry of Information. p. 112.

new century's demands, connecting with thousands of years of human civilization.¹⁸ (Translated by the author).

In Australia, the beginning of a serious cultural attempt to present the art activity of Australian artists of Arabic origin, was marked by the Casula Powerhouse exhibition held in 1998. This collective exhibition “perhaps is one of the first of its kind” to the artists of second generation immigrant sons. Their art is characterized in general by the dominance of national heritage, which returns in its symbols and cultural values to the artists' homeland. Until 1970, such art activities tended to be seen as a phenomenon isolated from Australian mainstream culture during a time when any art practice outside the Anglo-Celtic cultural frame was not readily understandable.¹⁹

With the growth of a cultural climate which has emphasized equal opportunity and respect for cultural difference, the reception of this work began to change. It began to receive more exhibition opportunities, such as *Beirut/Sydney-Sydney/Beirut*, *Fibro*, *Coptic Icons*, *Y2K6*, and *East of Somewhere* in 2001, which were held in Casula Powerhouse. Nevertheless, there is still a significant gap in understanding, which serves as a block to the wider reception of the work of these artists.

Catalogue articles accompanying the *East of Somewhere* exhibition point out that:

...the different forms of cultural domination have prevented migrants from participating fully in the shaping of Australian culture, and cut short any attempt to establish a space of dialogue between Arabic culture and dominant society, because in some cases their ethnic identity merely provided them with a niche others could not easily fill, nor did they necessarily want.²⁰

[and]

18 Shala. (2003) p. 112.

19 Gouriotis. (1998). p. 7.

20 Shalbak, I. (2001). *A Space for Dialogue*. Catalogue of *East of Somewhere* exhibition. Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre & Liverpool Regional Museum.

Most of mainstream museums and art exhibitors have a responsibility for the fractures and discontinuities of these art activities to contribute, and represent the actuality of people's experiences in Australia. It is needless to say, aspects of a distinctive Arabic experience as an integral and constructive aspect of Australian life was nowhere in evidence.²¹

In his introduction to the *East of Somewhere* exhibition catalogue, Con Gouriotis reflects indirectly on this critical issue of "those artists who define the in-betweens of culture":

Does anyone care if there are winners or losers in mainstream society? Isn't the success of being an artist, the ability to slip between mainstream and minority cultures?

But those artists nevertheless have a vital contribution to make:

They are showcasing perspectives that locate a new and sophisticated visual language in Australian Art. Their art liberates the main-stream culture and their own from monoliths into involving form. Their practices are multi-disciplinary. They are fresh, determined and immediate, and between them have a wealth of ability.²²

Australian artists of Arabic origin are requesting their rights as Australians to present their artistic experiments side by side with other ethnic communities in the new cultural and social landscape of Australia.²³

In the *East of Somewhere* exhibition, or other exhibitions with similar goals, one can notice the dissimilarity in expressive trends between one artist and another. Despite

21 Nikro, S. (2001). *Interminable Murmurs, Art's Estrange Men*. Catalogue of *East of Somewhere* exhibition. Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre & Liverpool Regional Museum.

22 Gouriotis, C. (2001). *An Introduction* for the catalogue of *East of Somewhere* exhibition – Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre & Liverpool Regional Museum.

23 Shalbak. (2001). *A Space for Dialogue*.

this variation, the aesthetic language is the invisible connection between their works; this appears like a harmonized mass, and opens simultaneously different significant cultural and aesthetic visions, which depend on a rich artistic and civilized heritage.

We can notice clearly the appearance of this artistic trend to draw on the inspiration of national heritage from the middle of the last century. This tendency works through a local vision, to realize a contemporary rewriting of the national traditional values in art, and takes its subjects from the visual artistic tradition of Arabic regions: decorative elements, calligraphy, symbols of popular art, folklore and the local legends.²⁴

One of the factors which underpin this artistic stream, is the important transformation in western art arising from the trend towards abstraction, which directly inspires and is inspired by the art traditions of ancient nations. This is evident in the experiments of major artists of the twentieth century such as Picasso, Matisse and Paul Klee, who displayed much excitement about Arabic artistic tradition. Through their writings, these artists became theoretical and practical guides for Arabic artists, who tended to foster a specific expressive vision in their local traditions.²⁵

These pioneering artists paved the way for the consciousness of heritage, which became a broad artistic stream in the Arabic region. Their artistic experimentation has brought theoretical concerns to the foreground for artists of the next generations, in their homeland or in their host countries.

Modernist traditions dominate the art of migrant artists despite their differing approaches, whether in form or content, reflecting their efforts, “to construct home in Australia and to construct Australia as a home” and to maintain their cultural tradition

24 Balata, K. (1982). "البحث والمعاناة: التصوير العربي المعاصر" *The contemporary Arabic Painting: the Research and the Suffering*. London. Funoon Arabia Magazine-V2. 1982. Achilles House. Dar Wasit. p. 38.

25 Bahnassi, A. (1998). "الحضور العربي في ابداعات الغرب في القرن العشرين" *The Arabic Presence in the Western Creations in the 20th Century*. Paris. Al-Wahda magazine. No. 70/71.

in such a way as "to establish an aesthetic language, which transgresses the boundaries of ethnicity and marginality."²⁶

Those artists are critically informed of how art, like any other form of contemporary cultural production, is based in the interactive dynamism that takes place between culture, diversity and place. Art is enmeshed in history, space and time.²⁷

It is this heritage that is the focus of this study, which seeks to find out more about how the work of Australian Arabic artists reflects the historical, social and political concerns of their homeland, as well as those of their host society. They are "crossing bridges to the home of civilizations" as the artist Faisal al Saadi puts it.

Therefore, I shall consider in a historical review, the appearance of this art activity since 1970 to the present. Following this, I will address the literature on the conditions which have affected those artists both in their host society and in their homeland.

The main body of my research is concerned with the work of several Australian artists of Arabic origin who are my peers, and is informed by ongoing dialogue with them. From the beginning, the important step was to communicate with established artists who had exhibited their works in public galleries. According to my plan of study, I selected nine artists who live in Sydney and three artists from Lebanon. My enquiry is guided by these questions about the artists:

- 1 - What is their relationship to the early beginnings of art in the Middle East?
- 2 - What are the distinguishing features in their paintings?
 - a - What are the conceptual elements, and where are they derived from?
 - b- What are the representational techniques, and the aesthetic influences behind them?

²⁶ Shalbak, I. (2001). Study.

²⁷ Gouriotis, C. (1998). p. 7.

- 3- What are the cultural concepts and the symbolic values?
- 4- What are the moral, cultural and social significances behind the traditional symbols used in the work of these artists?

Hence, I will identify:

- The local and the oral popular stories and the inherited popular beliefs, which inspired their artworks; the moral, human and the social values which lie behind it.
- The ancient magical and religious beliefs expressed through relationships with signs, symbols and colours.
- The human and the cultural values of legend, and their reflection on contemporary cultural values.
- The inspiration of the ancient Arabic calligraphies, signs and historical patterns used in the work of the artists.
- The political, historical, cultural and social issues, considered important, and represented in their works.

I have interviewed the participating artists to find out about their techniques and their artistic styles, or how individual artists select symbols, signs and cultural and artistic elements in their work; especially since some of these elements belong to oral tradition, and can only be accessed through conversations; these conversations have enriched the study, and give it more vivid and specific dimension.

Following that I will point out the most important artworks of those artists and analyse them, by studying their characteristics, and clarifying the symbols and the cultural elements.

From these enquiries, I will be in a position to discuss some overarching questions:

- a.* Do these paintings express the historical and the social conditions in both the artists' host society and in their homeland?
- b.* Do these paintings have distinctive artistic and cognitive values as a result of the dual focus in their representation?

This study has three frames. A historical, a geographical, and an aesthetic frame.

1. A historical frame is set by the appearance of the symbols of traditional art, Arabic calligraphy and the culture of ancient civilizations on one hand and Australian political, social, environmental and the cultural influences on these paintings on the other hand.
2. A geographical frame is set by the location of this study in Australia, with a focus on aesthetic and symbolic traditions in the middle east.
3. An aesthetic frame is set in the artistic dimensions of this study, especially in calligraphy, and the ornaments of Islamic art tradition. (I choose these cultural fields, because of their continuing importance in contemporary painting).

This study seeks to explore these concerns by finding out more about the influences, inspirations and traditions behind the work of the Australian artists of Arabic origin, by contributing to a better understanding of the aesthetic and conceptual elements in their works. It is at the same time an artistic and cultural attempt to respond to some key questions posed about multiculturalism in Australian cultural life. As Gouriotis identifies, the main cultural keys include:

The critical vocabularies and mechanism of representation that we construct, in order to locate and define the interactive creative energies that mark multicultural Australia.²⁸

The response of the artists I have selected to participate in this study was a guiding influence during the stages of this study. They gave the time to meet, discuss and be interviewed, provided the benefit of their varied views and experiences in life, art and culture, insights into their artistic styles and techniques, and their cultural ideas. Their statements have permitted me to deepen and give the study a specific dimension. The meetings with those artists are continued in a friendly atmosphere, as I was following

²⁸ Gouriotis. (1998). p. 7.

their artistic activities as a fellow artist. The majority of the interviews were done in the Arabic language, as most of the artists did not speak English well. Thus, in regards to this thesis, all the artists' statements, and all the information derived from articles and resources in Arabic, are translated into English by me.

For me, to work with these artists was an impressive experience; it was not just on a theoretical level, but also in the practical project, which was to curate an art exhibition of selected works by me and some of them. The goal of the exhibition was to serve as a meeting space for the cultural dialogue between the audience and these artists, so that they had the opportunity to explain to the viewer how they select symbols and motifs in their work, and what the significance of these elements is in their personal vision.

To curate an art exhibition in the public realm involves working in a social framework. For the Blacktown Arts Centre, who hosted the exhibition under the direction of John Cheeseman, I prepared a proposal to justify the importance of this exhibition. Preparations included dating, studying and analysing the art of the featured artists.

This, in addition to the seminars and the workshop activities, provided the viewers with an appropriate cultural background to enable them to understand the works of these artists, to engage with them, and appreciate their cultural and aesthetic values; a social and human sharing in a multicultural society.

I worked with the curator of Blacktown Arts Centre and the other staff to arrange the exhibition space, collect the works of artists, and write and prepare the catalogue material, which was in Arabic and English. The exhibition was opened on 3rd of July, by Mr. John Philips AO, Chancellor of University of Western Sydney.

The evening of the third of July was like a social meeting and a happy occasion for the audience, the artists and me, an opportunity to meet in a cultural and artistic space.

A poem for the occasion of the opening

Coffee

Jamal Joumaa

From where you are coming?!
Which way you got a long,
...and how you have arrived?!

Come on, let's have our cups...
and go on together... hand by hand.

They say: there is at the uttermost of the horizon.
A space for hope without tears...
And a field of spring.
Then, we do not separate.

من أين أتيت؟!
أي طريق سلكت... وكيف وصلت؟!!

تقدم لنتشرف قهوتنا... ونمضي معا
فقد أرهقتنا الطرق...

يقولون: هناك في أقاصي الأفق...
مساحة للرجاء بغير دموع
وساحة للربيع
ثم لا نفترق.

Chapter 2

The Arabic community: its life, art and effects

Introduction

Experimentation in the art of painting, as a specific form of expression, is also a kind of individual response.²⁹ In other words, it is an expression of individual perception of the events of the past and the present. It is also the artist's vision of the future. Through experiments, an artist questions him or herself about how to formulate clear ideas for a vision and to provide guidance in a changeable world.

In my study of the work of Australian Arabic artists, I have noticed that the symbolic and the artistic values and cultural engagements inspired by these works are derived from two main sources. The first is a vast cultural heritage in contemporary Arabic painting. The second reflects environmental, educational and political conditions, which have affected these artists in their homelands and as migrants in their host society.

Thus, a contextual view of political, social, artistic and cultural conditions is an important key to understanding the nature of the artistic work produced by these artists.

2.1 Australian Influences

In her book *The Arab Migrant in Australia*, Najat Moursi notes that: "Letherby in her study about Arabic migrants in Australia, which was submitted to the University of Melbourne in 1988, has set the year 1860 as a date of the beginning of the Arabic immigration, and the main factors which were behind this immigration were the difficulties of the economic, the social and the political conditions in Arabic countries under the Ottoman occupation, as the researcher Hani Al Raheb noticed"³⁰.

²⁹ Gouriotis. (1998). p. 7.

³⁰ Moursi, N. (1989). "المهاجرون العرب في أستراليا" *The Arab Migrants in Australia*. Melbourne. Nada Publications. pp. 30, 39.

As Tanous Aown³¹ and Hani Al Raheb³² have pointed out, the majority of the first migrants were Lebanese peasants, without English language skills or work qualifications. They resided in Sydney and in Melbourne, and preferred to work as peddlers. This type of work permitted them to be in contact with their new society and environment.³³

Between 1931 and 1948, a small number of migrants from different Arabic countries arrived in Australia. However, the last five decades have seen what is considered to be a second wave of Arabic immigration, characterised by skilled immigrants of different ages who, coming from a war torn region and because of their suffering during a period of great instability, have had goals for a better life.³⁴

These second wave migrants have tried to preserve their local traditions in their new social environment. Living in the same area permits them to enrol their children in the same schools.³⁵ Thus, the children of the next generation are brought up in a specific social space, where the rules of the social activities and traditions have been constructed and configured according to customs and social traditions from their parents' homeland. The aim is to be "at home in the world... and with a sense of familiarity and shared symbolic forms... a sense of direction that one is going somewhere, it is also a sense of social and economic mobility and a hope in a better future".³⁶

Since the last century, the conditions of Arabic immigration have been affected by two main factors. The first is related to the migrants themselves, the nature of their

³¹ Aown, T. (2001). "موسوعة الهجرة اللبنانية الى أستراليا، الجزء الأول، بداية الهجرة وتطورها" *Encyclopedia of Lebanese Immigration in Australia. Part 1. The Beginning of Immigration and its Development*. Melbourne. Al-Haditha Publishing. p. 99.

³² Moursi. (1989). pp. 39-40.

³³ Aown. (2001). p. 125.

³⁴ Moursi. (1989). pp. 38-40.

³⁵ Aown. (2001). p. 122.

³⁶ Al Hage, G. (2005). *Migration and Settlement Dynamics among Lebanese Migrants*. Retrieved on: 5-04-2005, from: <http://www-personal.arts.usyd.edu.au/ghahagea/lebanesediaspora.htm:2f1>

work, language and social life, or, 'in general', their existence in the framework of a new society. The second is related to the political and social policy of the Australian government before 1970. This date was an important turning point in Australian life, especially in the lives of migrants. There was a new federal government policy, which affirmed that:

...all members of the Australian community have an equitable opportunity to participate in the economic, social, cultural and political life of the nation.³⁷

This new vision granted the Arabic community a new kind of stability as part of the mainstream of life in Australia.

Najat Moursi stresses the importance of the opportunities provided by English language courses, help in establishing ethnic press houses, sports, art events and social clubs.³⁸ Celebrations from popular tradition, formerly limited to the Arabic community as ways to compensate for their isolated life in Australian society, broadened into occasions for the people of other communities to meet and participate.³⁹

2.2 The Beginning of Initiatives in the Arts

Studies of Arabic immigration in Australia, such as *The Arab Migrants in Australia* by Najat Moursi and *The Encyclopaedia of Lebanese Immigration* by Tanous Aown, do not contain any discussion about artistic activity in Arabic communities during the first period of Arabic immigration in Australia, from 1860 to 1914. This was a time for the search for stability in a new society amongst people who were mostly from the working class. But Najat Moursi, who dedicates a chapter to Arabic artists, especially

³⁷ Foster, L . E. (1981). *Australian Educational: A Social Perspective*. Sydney. Prentice-Hall of Australia. p. 153.

³⁸ Moursi. (1989). pp. 33-36.

³⁹ Aown. (2001). p. 123.

in Melbourne, records that the Algerian artist Hamidou Bin Saeed, who immigrated to Australia in 1947, held his first exhibition in Carlton, Melbourne, though no date is given for this exhibition; the same artist participated in two later exhibitions, in 1980 and 1983. One of these was for jewellery and the second was a ceramic exhibition.⁴⁰

Following this artist, we find Joseph Accary who arrived in Australia in 1950. After this date, several artists came to Australia and started to exhibit their works, including the artist of Syrian origin, Abdel-Kader Yougon, who held his first exhibition in 1981 in the Pacific International Hotel in Manly, Sydney. So there is evidence of Arabic artistic activity in Australia before 1980.

The joint efforts of these artists led to two exhibitions in Melbourne in 1987: *The Exhibition of Arabic Artists*, presented in August by The Arabic Women's Association for Solidarity,⁴¹ and *Arabesque*, an exhibition for The Middle East United Artists, which opened on 21 February in Victoria Health Access Gallery.⁴²

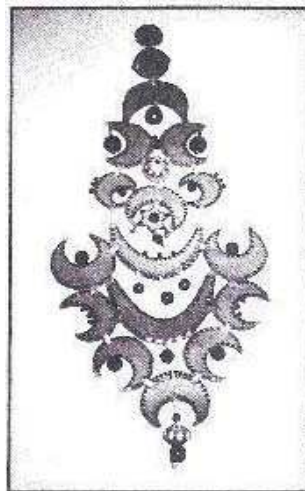


Figure: 2.

Amani Abdel-Masih. *Composition of Crescent* (1987).
Medium:unknown. Dimensions:unknown. Melbourne.

⁴⁰ Moursi. (1989). p.173.

⁴¹ Ibid. pp. 168-169.

⁴² Tomayan. F. (1987). Catalogue of *Arabesque* Exhibition. Melbourne.

In the *Arabesque* exhibition, the diversity of topics and styles is noticeable, and also along with the presence of aspects of local heritage in works that return in their subjects and their themes to the artists' homelands. This appears as a decorative abstract trend inspired by Islamic and local traditions, as seen in the work of Magdy Eskander and Amani Abdel-Masih, or as an expressionist trend, such as in the work of Mohamed Hijazi, and as a form of realism with an impressionist influence, while the subjects are inspired by Middle Eastern landscapes.

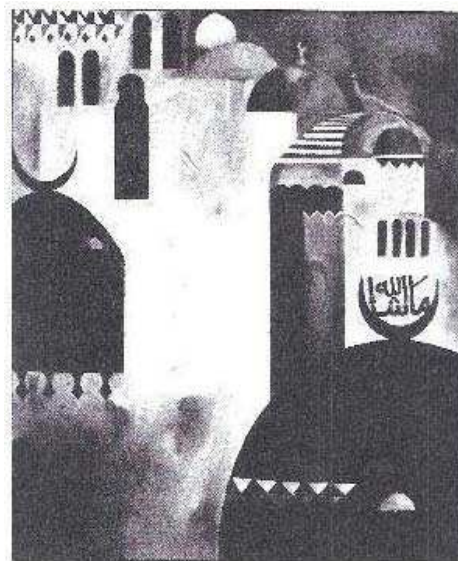


Figure: 3.

Mohamed Hijazi. *Composition*. (1987).
Medium:unknown. Dimensions:unknown. Melbourne.

In parallel to the artists of this period of immigration, whose works display the common strategy of migrants of returning to their inherited culture, also noticeable are some artists who try to benefit from the local cultural landscape in Australia.⁴³ This is evident, for example, in the work of the artist Abdel-Kader Yougon, in *Antara and Abla's*, which is of a traditional topic, configured with "the agile movement of Arabic calligraphy."⁴⁴ Subsequently, this artist tends to depict features of Australian landscape and images from past Australian life, as seen in the image of *The Gold Mines of Victoria*.

⁴³ Shalbak, I. (2001). *A Space for Dialogue*. Catalogue of *East of Somewhere* exhibition. Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre & Liverpool Regional Museum.

⁴⁴ Moursi. (1989). p. 175.

Since 1998, the works of artists of Arabic origin have become serious artistic and cultural concerns, represented by a group of exhibitions held in the Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre in Sydney: *Arabmade*, *Beirut-Sydney-Sydney Beirut*, *Fibro*, *Coptic Icons* and *Y2K6*, as a part of *Australian Prespecta*. These were aimed, as Con Gouriotis observes, at: "examining, reappraising and connecting the diverse communities in Western Sydney..." through different forms of expression. The catalogues of these exhibitions record that most of the artists graduated from Australian universities, or TAFE colleges. This also includes migrant artists, who graduated from the universities of their countries of origin, and have continued their studies in Australia.



Figure: 4.
Abdel-Kader Yougon, *Antara and Abla*. (N.D).
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: Unknown. Melbourne.

On the level of the artists' activities and their relationship with their social milieu, official and local administrations have worked to create means of developing cultural responses and personal relationships between artists and audiences of different communities. This response has developed over time, with the efforts of different organisations, such as the NSW Ministry for the Arts, Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE), Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, and the museums, especially Powerhouse Museum, and the Liverpool Regional Museum. These efforts also appear in the City Councils' activities and their art galleries in Parramatta, Liverpool,

Blacktown, Fairfield, and Penrith, which have worked to encourage and embrace exhibitions from diverse ethnic groups

The artistic experiments by Australian artists of Arabic origin have been developed in Australian cultural life through the years, benefitting from the educational, academic and social conditions that have helped to deepen the artists' awareness of the culture of Australian society.

These influences manifest themselves differently between one artist and another. This depends on the nature of the relationship between the artist and his or her existence in a new environment.

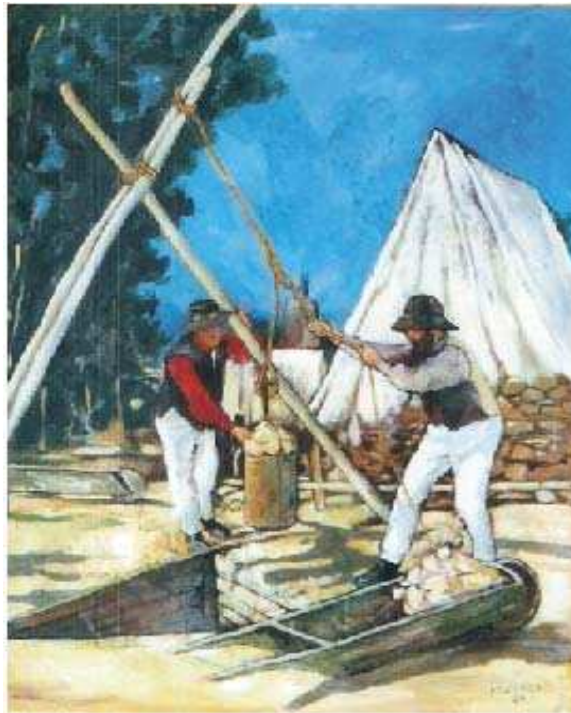


Figure: 5.
Abdel-Kader Yougon. *An Image From the Gold Mines of Victoria*. (1989)
oil on canvas. 120 x 95cm.

2.3 The Influences on Contemporary Arabic Painting

Contemporary Arabic painting has developed through western artistic influences since the arrival of westerners in the Arabic countries, with the French occupation of Egypt and the presence of some French artists in Egyptian life since 1799. This influence grew gradually; for example in Lebanon these influences have been evident

since the 16th century.⁴⁵ In Egypt, the turning point towards a modern art was the establishment of the School of Fine Arts in Cairo in 1908.⁴⁶ In Iraq, the Institute of Fine Arts was established in Baghdad in 1939.⁴⁷ But the independence of the Arabic countries since the middle of the twentieth century has led to the appearance of a nationalistic political ideology. This has left its imprint on different sides of cultural life, especially on the art of painting, which becomes a reflective mirror of the historical, intellectual, social and political changes.⁴⁸

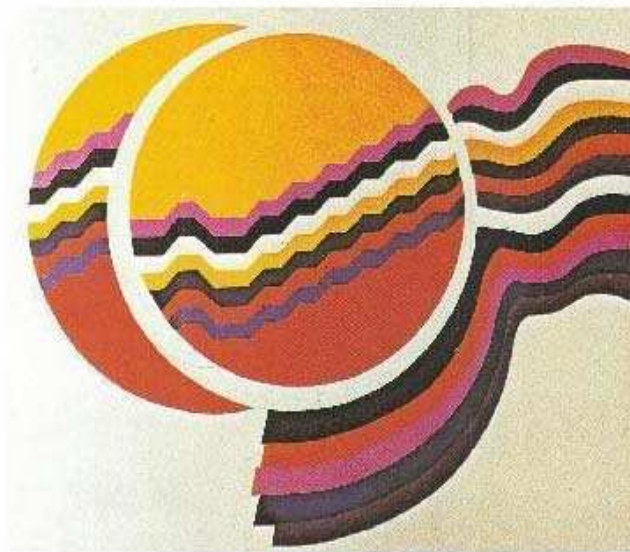


Figure: 6.
Mohamed Shaba'a. *Abstract Form*, (ca 1982).
Medium:unknown. Dimensions:unknown, Morocco.

The experiments by Arabic artists with contemporary painting have gone through many changes and variations. Their aim is to realise an independent artistic identity, in order to distinguish Arabic painting from Western painting and its aesthetic concepts. These attempts are distinguished by an abstract nationalistic and artistic trend, which appeared in the middle of the last century.

⁴⁵ Bahnassi, A. (2003). "الفن التشكيلي العربي". *The Arabic Plastic Art*. Damascus. The First for Publishing. p. 65.

⁴⁶ Bahnassi. (2003). p. 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 79.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 243.

This trend worked on one hand through a local vision, to realise a contemporary rewriting of the national traditional values in art, and on the other hand benefited from the artistic experiments of some famous artists such as Picasso, Matisse and Paul Klee, who were inspired by aspects of life in Arabic countries, their popular traditions, and the arts of ancient civilizations. These experiments became an artistic guide to the Arabic artists, in their new artistic endeavours.⁴⁹

Those artists tend to express value in the human being in the past and in the present, and take their pictorial elements from popular legends, the signs and the cultural symbols of the old civilizations. Alternatively they took their subjects from popular cultural signs, decorative elements and calligraphy. In addition, they used some traditional artistic devices, such as repetition and symmetry. These artistic elements provided a vast field for artistic experiment.⁵⁰



Figure: 7.

Fateh al Moudarres, *Three People*, (ca 1982),
Medium:unknown. Dimensions:unknown. Syria.

⁴⁹ Bahnassi. (2003). p. 244.

⁵⁰ Balata, K. (1982). "التصوير العربي المعاصر: ألبحث والمعاناة" *The contemporary Arabic Paintings: the Research and the Suffering*. London. Funoon Arabia Magazine-V2.1982. Achilles House. Dar Wasit. p. 38.

2.4 Lebanese Art as an Example

Artistic experimentation in Lebanon provides an important example of the nature of the artistic changes in Arabic countries. This experimentation is characterized by the artists' attempts to search for their identity in heritage through contemporary vision. The importance of this country as an example of the development of modern art in the Arabic region resides in the artistic and the cultural role of Lebanon in contemporary Arabic cultural life since 1970, with Beirut being named as the capital of contemporary Arabic plastic art.

Lebanon is more open than other Arabic countries to French influence, and to western culture in general, because of its geographical situation and through connections with the countries situated on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.⁵¹



Figure: 8.

Mustafa Farrouk. *Mountain's Bread*, (1945).
Watercolour. 45 x 35cm, Lebanon.

The biographies of Lebanese artists confirm the western influences on modern art in Lebanon, because the interaction of those artists with European societies and their cultural milieu is stronger than in the case of other Arabic artists.⁵² (Translated by the author).

⁵¹ Balata. p. 35.

⁵² Baker, A. (1998). "مجيء الفن بمفهومه الأوروبي الى العالم العربي" *The Arrival of Art with its European Concept to the Arabic World*, Al- Manama. Al-Bahrain. Dar-Al ward. Al Ayaam. p. 181.

These western influences appear at an early stage in the works of Daoud Al Corm (1848-1930), Khalil Salibi (1870-1918), and in the works of the writer Jubran Khalil Jubran (1838-1931).⁵³

2.5 Modern Art and Authenticity in Heritage

An interest in western culture and a connection with the major capital cities of art in Europe has led artists such as Saliba Al Douwaihi, who lived in New York from 1950 to 1955, to search for authenticity in oriental artistic effects based on the new aesthetic of Mondrian, which appeared in the New York School. The artist's search for the signs in landscape, and his tendency to simplicity and geometrical abstract balance, led him to experiment with unity in diversity, which he finds in the aesthetic of arabesque.

Western artistic influences appear in the movement of romantic abstraction which appears in the works of Chafik Abboud and Salwa Rawda-Shoucair, who lived in Paris. These effects have appeared also in Beirut, with an artistic movement that called for a return to origins in the symbols and signs of the old near-Eastern civilizations. To this artistic movement belonged, amongst others, Saeed Akl, Paul Giragosian, Wajih Nahle, Rafik Charaf, Aref Al Rayess and Mounir Najm.

The movement is characterised by influences from expressionism and abstraction originating in Paris, Rome and Madrid, combined with a search for the particularity of an Arabic plastic art in the middle of the last century.

Beirut has also witnessed the motivated search for authenticity and identity in art. This has led to the birth of expressionism, with critical visions of a strained reality, reflecting the social and political crises of the Arabic region. These trends appear in the work of Rafik Charaf, Hasan Jouny, Ibrahim Marzouk.⁵⁴

⁵³ Bahnassi. (2003). pp. 65-66.

⁵⁴ Sultan, F. (8th of January, 2000). "خمسون عاما على فنون بيروت، الضوء من أوله" *Fifty Years of Beirut's Arts, the light from its Beginning*. Al Nahar Culture. Beirut. p. 11.



Figure: 9.
Saliba al Douaihy, *Landscape*, (N.D). Medium:Unknown.
Dimensions:unknown, Lebanon.

2.6 The Influences of the National Artistic Trend

Artistic movements inspired by popular tradition and cultural heritage have paved the way for new cultural, educational and artistic visions. They led to the establishment of *The Union of Arabic Artists* and the appearance in 1971 of a distinguished artistic group in Baghdad known as *The Group of One Dimension*, of which some of the Lebanese artists were members.⁵⁵

Artistic and cultural meetings in some Arabic capitals were numerous. Experimental artists, the majority of whom were lecturers at the universities and other art institutions, were trying to define the aesthetic and symbolic dimensions of their experiments; they became the guides for students of the next generation, and participated in deepening their view of their heritage, as well as of contemporary issues.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Sultan, F. (7th of December, 1996). " *الهوية والأصالة في الفن العربي المعاصر* " *The Identity and Authenticity in the contemporary Arabic Art*. Beirut. Al Nahar Culture. p. 15.

⁵⁶ Bahnassi. (2003). pp. 11-245.



Figure: 10.

Amin Al-Basha, *Composition in Blue*, (N.D)
oil on canvas. 76 x 76cm. Lebanon.

Rafik Charaf, Hasan Jouni and Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki are three Lebanese artists whose works warrant analysis, for the nature of their topics and their role in the Australian-Arabic experiment, which is inspired by contemporary Arabic trends and their colourific suggestions; whilst also presenting a continuous artistic connection between the artists and their countries of origin. This experiment reflects the particularity of the Australian life, and is distinguished by political, cultural, educational and environmental influences.

Before discussing their work, I would like to offer some clarification of the term 'colourific' which is essential to their aesthetic.

Colourific

In this study I use the term "colourific", as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), as:

The property of producing colours, specifically through proficient treatment by an artist, the values of colours, which impart the artistic elements in the painting their reconfiguration, and emphasise their rhetorical and cognitive values.

I use this term in the sense of being loaded with colour, as in the symbolism of colours. I also use the term, as defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, to describe properties that are capable of communicating colour. This term (colourific) is used in my study accordingly:

- Characteristics produced through the artistic treatment of colours, the aesthetic and expressional values, which help in the formation of the constructional elements of the artwork, and grant it them their rhetorical and cognitive justifications. These characteristics have the capability of creating a sort of communication, through the symbolism of colours, between the artwork and the viewer (that permits him to interpret the aesthetic and cultural values of the artwork, according to his mental or cultural attitude).

I use this term to indicate a quality of the artistic process, also to describe the aesthetic, the cultural and the artistic performance in a painting, or experiment.

2.7 Rafik Charaf

Rafik was a painter. He was born in the city of Baalbek, Lebanon, in 1932 and died in 2000. He graduated in 1955 from the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts, then from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (Saint Fernando) Madrid in 1957. He received the First Prize of the UNESCO Exhibition, the Prize of the Lebanese Ministry of Education in 1955, and the State Prize of Art in Lebanon in 1973. He was the Director of the Institute of Fine Arts in Beirut (First Department) from 1982.

Rafik participated in twenty-five exhibitions. His solo exhibitions were well received in Vienna, Madrid, Kansas, Detroit-Michigan and in Washington DC. Rafik's name and works have been recorded in four international encyclopaedias: *The Encyclopaedia of Sao Paolo - Brazil*, *the Encyclopaedia of Lebanese Contemporary Arts*, and *The Encyclopaedia of Paris Biennial of the Contemporary Trends* in 1963.

The work of this artist is distinguished by an abstract expressionist tendency. The elements of his artistic subjects depend on the elements of the local environment, the ornaments of popular tradition, scripts, and the simple forms of human body. Rafik uses different materials to achieve his work, including oil colour, pencil, canvas, paper and cardboard.

Influences and themes

Rafik Charaf grew up in a popular social milieu and a historical city called Baalbek in eastern Lebanon, where customs and the inherited popular traditions were the cultural references of his people. In this environment, the popular stories and heroic legends about the virtues and the vices of the people present Rafik with educational sources, and played a formative influence on his personality. Rafik was a dreamy child, but had a strong awareness about his social environment. He spent his time amongst the monuments of his city and its fertile fields, and gazed with curiosity and a special love at the sculptures and the ornaments, which embellished Jupiter's temple.

This interest in art accompanied him during his life as a student, and despite the difficulties of his life, which he faced as a person from the working class, his enthusiasm and his love of art led him to study it in the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts, then in Madrid. When he came back to Beirut, he worked as an art teacher, and between 1955 and 1965 as a lecturer at the Lebanese Institute of Fine Arts. The beginning of his artistic emergence was through works and subjects which expressed his feelings about life and people:

I lived in the poorest suburb in Beirut, which represented a concourse for the migrants and labourers from Baalbek and south Lebanon. So I drew my life with the others, and I drew the mental shock I experienced in response to life.⁵⁷

Between 1960 and 1986, Rafik completed numerous works whose titles included *the Masks, Barbed Wires, Cuts, Stones, Birds* and *Fields*. He sought inspiration for his subjects and their symbols from this environment.

Amongst the distinctive titles of his works, which clarify the relationship between this artist and his inspiration, are *Birds* and *Fields* which allude with a poetic sense to a state of liberation and lost childhood memory, to the fields of Baalbek and their endless space, where I was dreaming and playing... The works of this phase were not just a childhood vision; they were also an expression of the intensity of Arabic life in our present time, which tends to seek freedom outside the gravity of culture and civilization.⁵⁸ (Translated by the author).

⁵⁷ Taha, S. (1984). "حوار مع فنان" *Dialogue with an Artist*. Almakased magazine, No. 21 V3. Beirut. pp. 74-77.

⁵⁸ Baydoun, A. (1982). "معرض رفيع شرف" *Rafik Sharaf's Exhibition*. London. Funoon Arabiah N1. V2. Pan Middle East Graphics and Publishing. Ltd. Achilles House. Dar Wasit. pp. 150-151

The Paintings

The Birds

In *The Birds*, the artist's desire was to draw the act of flying, the dream of flying. The bird is not the bird of nature; this bird is coming from the artist's mind and his studio to invade an impressionist space, opposite to the imaginary land. Form in his work is abbreviated to a stylised movement, and tends to a decorative abstraction. We are before the rhythm of the thing, not the thing itself.⁵⁹

After this achievement, which expressed his vision for freedom and belonging, Rafik Charaf began seeking inspiration from the other side of his heritage, when his artistic subjects were inspired by the themes of popular stories, popular drawings, talismans, the world of oriental icons and Arabic miniatures.

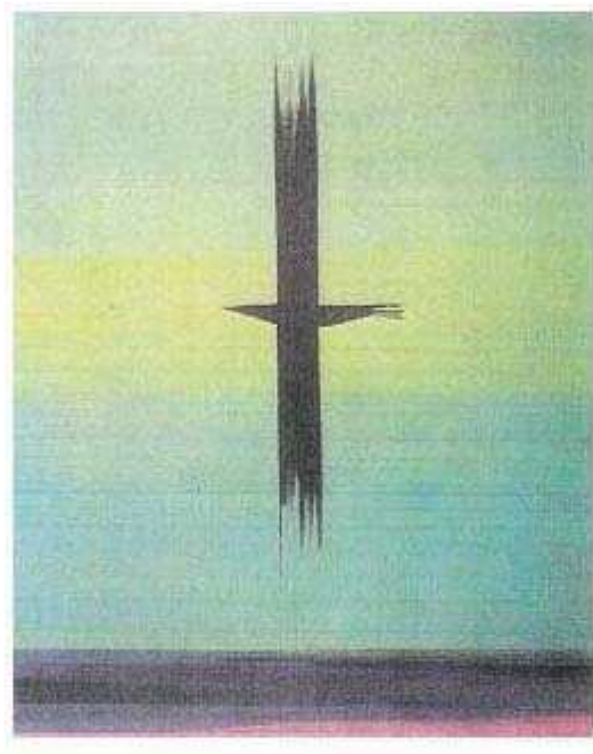


Figure: 11.
Rafik Charaf. *The Bird of the Green Space*, (1969)
oil on canvas. 71 x 65cm, Lebanon.

⁵⁹ Baydoun. pp. 150-151

My inspiration from popular art is an attempt to give back to this tradition its legitimacy, after a neglected period in the name of modernisation of culture... I am inspired by my tradition, in the same way as the contemporary artist who was inspired by the African Mask, the Ancient Fetishes and the Drawings of the Ancient Caves.⁶⁰
(Translated by the author).

Rafik "may have been the first Arabic artist who adopted this trend."⁶¹ This was "the most important and distinguished trend not just in the history of Lebanese art, but also in the history of Arabic contemporary art."⁶²

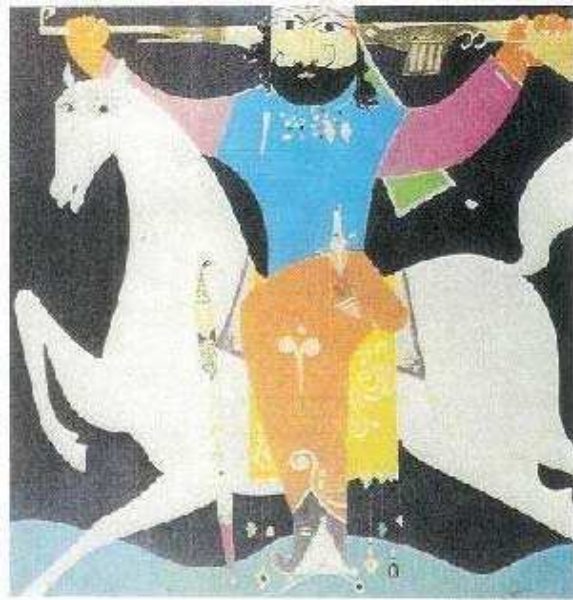


Figure: 12.

Rafik Charaf. *A Cavalry Man* (ca. 1970)
oil on canvas. 75 x 64cm . Lebanon.

Antara and Abla

The main motivation behind this trend in the works of this artist is the war of 1967, which occurred between the Arab countries and Israel. Rafik Charaf was looking for a

⁶⁰ Taha. (1984). pp. 74-77.

⁶¹ Bahnassi. (2003). p. 273.

⁶² Baydoun. (1982). pp. 150.151.

new spirit that refuses defeatism. This led him to the inspiration of legendary heritage. He found a compensating spirit in the history and the heroes of popular stories, where the distance of space extends to breath and victory is foreshadowed in his symbols, with heroes like *Antara* and *Abu Zaid al Hilali*.⁶³ (Refer to *Al Sira Al Shaabyyah* or the Popular Story. p. 171-175 of this thesis).

But Rafik Charaf does not look for illusion, nor does he demand victory. He is an artist who deals with a visionary tradition, which drives him as a cultural obsession; he alludes to heroism in symbols and recuperates it from legendary space for our contemporary life, to inspire the Arabic personality, which refuses weakness; "this personality that is expressed in the Arabic literary tradition, through different stories, which connote the value of liberty, welfare and justice, such as; *Sirat Antara = the story of Antara*."⁶⁴

This artist deals with legend and popular story as a spiritual and human tradition in history. He looks for a dimension in the reality of human beings other than the rational, emotional and revolutionary sides:

Legend is another sort of revolution in the history of the human being. At a time when no plan or method of revolution existed, I assume the legend was the original and primitive type of all revolutions... through this logic, I am not calling for a revival of the hero from history; my idea is to stimulate and recollect the concept of heroism, which liberates our human being from the states of siege and slavery.⁶⁵

(Translated by the author).

In the works of *Antara and Abla* as in the *Icons*, the artist chooses his subjects from literary tradition, where "subjects are expressed by drawings and pictures, as we find in the works of the Syrian popular artist Abou Subhi al Tinawi and the Tunisian artist

⁶³ Taha. (1984). p. 74.

⁶⁴ Kanso. A.(1990). "التصوير الشعبي العربي" *The Arabic Popular Paintings*, Kuwait. The National Committee of Culture. pp. 94-95.

⁶⁵ Taha. (1984). p. 74.

Mohamed al-Feriani. These artworks are distinguished by the presence of the element of the story and the narrative approach, which determines the design of the picture, the drawing of personalities, and their positions in the artistic composition."⁶⁶

These popular works⁶⁷ seem traditional in comparison with Rafik Charaf's art, where the diversity in the use of warm colours and the interest in decorative elements, where the personalities, the horses and their movement, the narrative element, the lines and the surfaces of colours and their proportions, are converted through the artistic treatment in a decorative mode. So the painting of Rafik Charaf is overstated in its traditional approach and speaks for ordinary people.⁶⁸

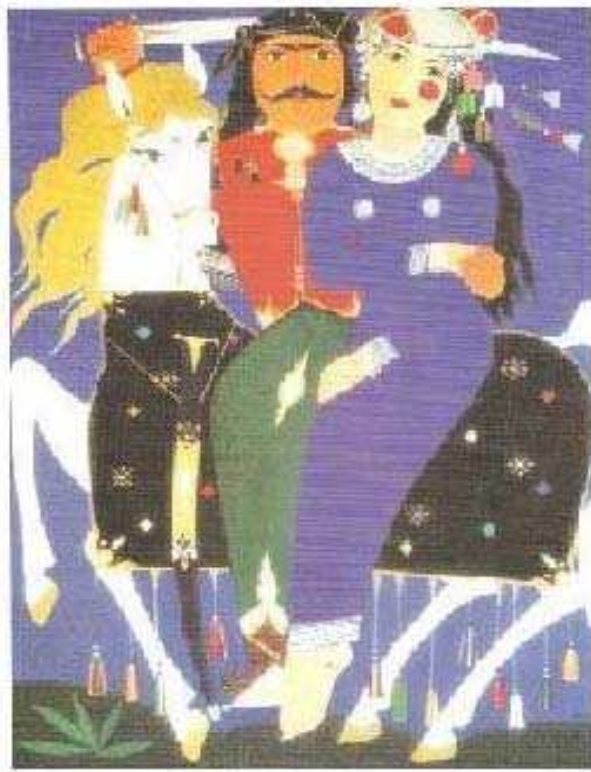


Figure: 13.

Rafik Charaf, *Antara and Abla*, (ca 1970).
Medium:oil on canvas. Dimensions:unknown. Lebanon.

⁶⁶ Bahnassi. (2003). p. 273.

⁶⁵ In this context and for the importance of these popular drawings in the popular environment of Arabic region, I have presented samples from this art on page 216.

⁶⁸ Baydoun. (1982). p.153.

Icons

In *Icons*, the religious sense exists in artistic formation of the works, granting them their values. These works which are characterised by psychological and spiritual states, were created during the Lebanese Civil War. This started in 1975 and in one of its stages became a feud, where the country was suffering and bleeding because of the conflict between members of one society. Rafik notices: "This conflict is threatening a fundamental harmony in my culture and life... art was the primary means by which I could restore a balanced harmony to my inner self" So the artist's quest to regain stability in his soul and culture, lead him to complete a lot of works which portrayed the spirit of his homeland, and expressed the relationships that connect Islamic and Byzantine heritage, as a national legacy and a breathing space for creation:

In Islam as in Christianity, there is the piety of the human being and its innocence. There is in each religion, a loneliness and humility before the secret of the universe and life. This feeling has a particularity in the inner self of this person; it is something close to nature more than to culture... I find this similarity also, in the artistic influential exchange between the two civilizations of Islam and Eastern Christianity. In the spirit of civilizations I find brotherhood and not war. I have expressed this brotherhood through these works, and I find this rhythm far away from the shock of reality and its maladies. ...This human spirit is inspired by the sacred arts, which are represented by the oriental icon, and the Arabic miniatures.⁶⁹ (Translated by the author).

In Rafik's works, there is noticeably an interest in the use of eastern artistic styles, which portrayed human personalities, with the absence of shadow, the disappearance of the third dimension, the use of gold, and a vagueness, which controls the space of the painting.

⁶⁹ Taha. (1984). p. 80.

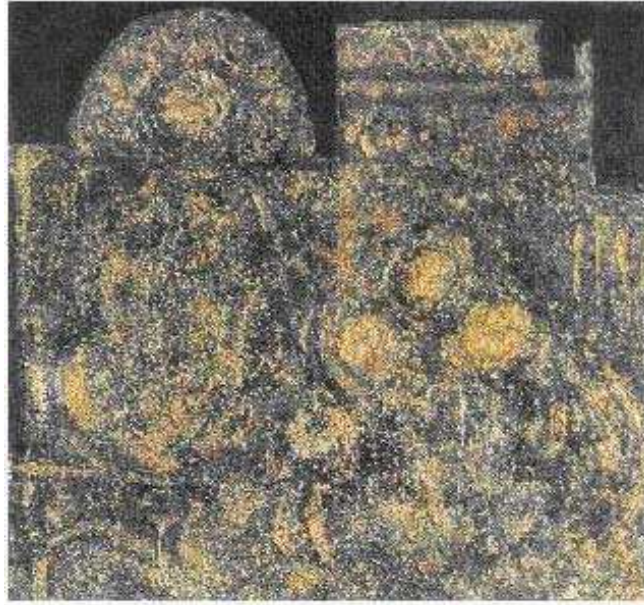


Figure: 14.

Rafik Charaf, *Dialogue*, (N.D), mixed media. Lebanon.
100 x 100cm. Lebanon.

In these works, we are taken into an aesthetic world with a surrealist touch, composed of historical and legendary formations. The gold colour controls the surface of the painting and the treatment of its surface reveals the spreading of unclear personalities on different levels, or reconfigured in a circle. This idea is one which is well known in the world of Islamic painting. The turban of the old wise man or the Sheik converts to a halo. The ceremonial system appears clearly: the teacher and his student are in fixed positions, and there is an eidolon man suspended in the middle of the painting. "It is a sacred system for teaching, which represents the construction of the ideological leadership and its basis."⁷⁰

The works of Rafik Charaf, which appear as a call for revival of the values of the Arabic tradition, are also calls for revival of the values of justice and welfare, and a return to adopting spiritual values and wisdom as a guide and a way of life governing the relationships between people.

⁷⁰ Baydoun. (1982). p. 153.

Symbols and Synonyms in Rafik's Artworks

- The bird: the act of flying and freedom.
- Arabic writing: the symbolism of letters as an abstract artistic shape.
- The horse: authenticity.
- The woman: the beloved one.
- The sabre and the rifle: power.
- Arabic decoration: traditional artistic elements.
- The gold colour: symbol of holiness.
- The old wise man: the wisdom.

2.8 Abdel - Hamid Baalbaki

Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki is a painter, and a poet. He was born in 1940. In 1967, he graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Institute of Fine Arts at the Lebanese University. In 1974, he obtained a Diploma of Higher Studies, from the International High School of Arts (ANSAD), Paris. In 1992, he became the head of the Lebanese Association for Painting and Sculpture, then a lecturer at the Lebanese Institute of Fine Arts at the Lebanese University, Beirut.

He has exhibited in more than forty countries. His work has featured in group and solo exhibitions in Lebanon, Iraq, Tunisia, Syria, United Emirates, Egypt, the United Kingdom (London) and France (Paris). His works are characterised by an expressionist-realist style with a symbolic logic. He executes his work in oil on canvas or on cardboard, relying on the strength of drawing and line, the rhythms of the colours and their symbolism to express the artistic subjects, without intermediary materials or treatment to the surface of the artwork.

Influences and themes

Abdel-Hamid grew up in a small village in south Lebanon, and later moved with his family to Beirut, where life became a continuous struggle for survival. This however did not stop the young Abdel-Hamid, whose artistic aptitude had appeared since childhood.

During his study at the teachers' training college in Beirut, he focused on writing poetry and art. Abdel-Hamid developed under the supervision of the pioneer artist Rachid Wehbi, who guided him in the artistic and the technical side of his work. His teacher's influences were very clear on the artist's work, which tended to expressionist realism.

After his graduation from the Lebanese University, his study in Paris permitted him to obtain a clear understanding of Parisian artistic trends, of expressionism in particular, which were distinguishing features of his works during his artistic life. However,

what attracted him deeply was the Art of Caves with its expressive dimension, and the Islamic and Arabic arts of miniature.

Abdel-Hamid devotes his art to the ordinary people. His artistic journey, which started in 1974, represents a reflection of this cultural vision, and his interest in popular tradition, social life and the environment:

Art is the real mirror of the people's values and hopes; for ordinary people represent the broader section of society, core of vital cultural interaction; art has always been in the grasp of the ordinary person, despite the difficulty in understanding of its theoretical terms.⁷¹
(Translated by the author).

Thus, this artist takes his themes from his environment, and presents his work to the ordinary people. He expresses himself through deep emotion and expressive vision, which assists in realising and expressing the strength of the relationship between form and content. This sort of artistic approach appears in different topics, especially in the landscapes, in the old suburbs and in the paintings of peasant family life.

Abdel-Hamid's art is distinguished by a personal cultural vision, and sensual touch, which gives his artistic achievement a special aesthetic quality. This appears in *Another Spring*, *The Café Shop* and *Ashura* artworks.

The paintings

Another Spring

In his work *Another Spring*, the artistic treatment combines the human senses with a proficiency in portraying the elements of subject, and this grants the work its authenticity of expression: the poetic touch, and the brightness of colour, derived from a countryside environment, and accompanied with the feeling of belonging,

⁷¹ Baalbaki, A. (2006), the statement of the artist Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki. Beirut. 06-07-2006.

gives the human face of his subject a noble character. The values of expression are apparent also in the movement of the hands, and the interest in detail. Even the background of the painting is not just a harmonized surface, representing the space of different elements of the artwork. Rather it represents a vital part of the artistic idea and is a space of contemplation, which puts the viewer in a world controlled by human effort.

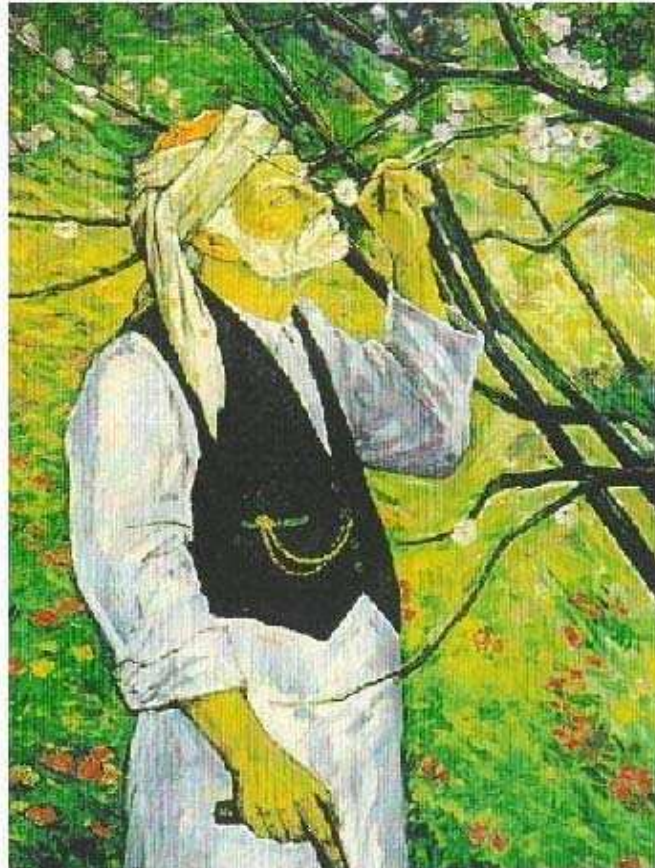


Figure: 15.

Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki, *Another Spring*,
(1988), oil on canvas. 100 x 70cm, Lebanon.

This appears clearly in *Another Spring* where the old man is playing with the flowers of the almond tree. In this work Abdel-Hamid tries to reconcile the duality of time: the flowers of the spring and the autumn of age. This painting interprets the popular proverb: "زرعوا فأكلنا ونزرع فيأكلون", "*what they planted, we are eating; and what we are planting, they will eat*".

The Café Shop

In *The Café Shop*, the artist's treatment tends towards modification, simplicity and exaggeration in the portrayal of facial features in different states of expression, where every human figure or movement represents a different attitude and participates in the creation of the aesthetic space of the artwork.

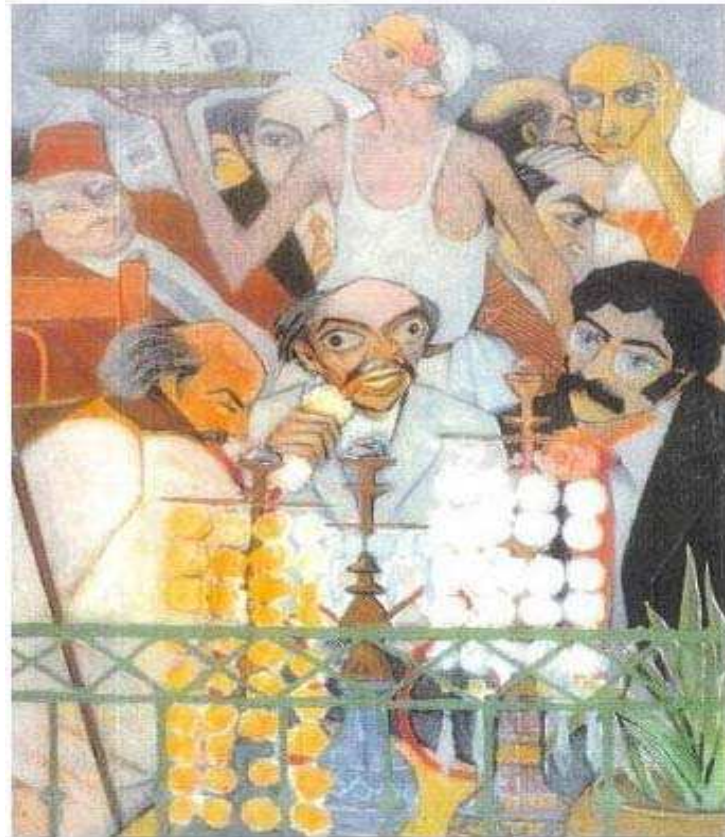


Figure: 16.

Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki, *The Cafe Shop*, (ca 1990),
oil on canvas. 110 x 90cm. Lebanon.

The artistic composition of this painting combines different human figures. These figures are built into integrated aesthetic relationships and spread across the surface of the painting. The people sit in different positions. In the middle, the *garçon*, who carries a teapot with a feeble body, makes his way between the tables. The old man who spends his life serving the customers, is staring into nowhere. He does not want or does not like to know what is going on around him. He believes that every person

around him has his particularity; but life for this *garçon* still has its special flavour; so he puts a flower behind his ear.

In front of the *garçon*, at the left hand side of the painting, a fat man is wearing the red tarbush; this man with his dress relates to a past time and a different temperament. The artist looks at the world of the café through a vast window, the green geometrical ornaments of the window banister meet with the small beads, coloured white and yellow, that embellish the argyles. These add an aesthetic dimension in the evocation of the old popular environment.

In this painting, there is more than an expressive attempt to capture a passing moment in café life, or to record the personalities with their different situations. The artist tries to portray a part of the life of ordinary people, with their concerns and interests. The positions of the people, their features, the psychological and the skilfully portrayed expressions clarify the capacity of the artist in recollecting different states of life, through different human types; where some of them are listening deeply to their friends, or alone in a pondering state, or, with his eyes widening, to carry on a conversation accompanied with a deep sense of the enjoyment of smoking.

Ashura

The political and individual concerns in the life of the ordinary person, people in their social environment, and their tradition, were a vast and original space for his artistic inspiration. These are distinguished in his works with a new expressive and cultural vision inspired by Islamic history and popular tradition. These were expressed through murals, such as *The Civil War*, *The Woodsman* and *Ashura*.

The mural *Ashura*, is executed in oils in an expressive epic spirit, and with an oriental aesthetic sense. It represents the last scene of a traditional popular drama, where the Shiite Muslims of Iraq, Lebanon and some other regions of the world, celebrate the martyrdom of Al-Husain, and the battle which occurred in the region of Karbala city in Iraq.

The composition of this work consists of three dimensions. The first dimension starts with a horizontal line. On this line a ghostly white horse in a rebellious pose heads towards the wide desert. This represents the spirit of this event, its social, political and historical aspects, in the refusal of oppression and slavery.

The second horizontal line presents a part of the crowd, which stands to witness the scene of this tragedy. Their black clothing and facial features evoke a general state of sadness. The third line represents the advance of the cortege, which moves from the left hand side to the right hand side of the painting. The cortege of the sad women captives in their black clothing is the centre of the tragic scene. In the middle of the scene a manacled cavalry man, represents Zain Al-Abedin the son of Al Husain riding a camel decorated in black; Abdulla Bin Zyad, the leader of the Omayyad army sits and reviews the group of captives. This group is led by a cavalry man, with a sword that represents the sword of oppression. The personality of this cavalry man is inspired by the typical character in Arabic shadow theatre "Karagoze" = "قراقوز"; this personality is characterized by idiocy, hastiness and vociferation.⁷²



Figure: 17.

Ashura's Mural, 1967, oil on canvas. 270 x 230cm. Lebanon.

⁷² Saad, F. (1993). "خيال الظل العربي" *The Arabic Shadow Theatre*. Beirut. All Prints for Distributing and Publishing. pp. 217-221.

In this work, the symbolic values derived from the social and the natural environment are varied. The palm tree that lives and struggles for its existence in the harsh desert, still bears fruit. The horse, which represents authenticity and noblesse, appears in a rebellious movement. The Islamic architectural elements indicate the social milieu of this scene. The faces and the women's hands, coloured by indigo, indicate sadness, according to popular tradition. The red symbolises the blood covering the bottom of the picture.

Ashura is an attempt of an artist to express the struggle between good and evil.

...A struggle, that is expressed in different subjects in the world; each artistic attempt tries to deal with this topic from its local elements and from a different point of view ...my inspiration of the tragedy of Karbala is the return to our history, with a new cultural political and social reading. It is the feeling of being under oppression and the need to face that oppression, which provokes these people to perform this event; this feeling may be liturgical, however the essence of this idea is to recollect this state of oppression as a way for facing it, as Abdel-Hamid notices. (Translated by the author).



Figure: 18.
Karagoz, A Picture of the Syrian Shadow Theatre Personalities. (N.D).
Medium:unknown. Dimensions:unknown.

Symbols and Synonyms in Abdel-Hamid's Artworks

- The spring: renewal and hope.
- The flowers of the almond tree: renewal, and the return of life.
- The old man: the autumn of age.
- The horse: authenticity.
- The hands of women, which are stained by the colour indigo, indicate sadness.
- Islamic architecture: the social environment.
- The palm tree: patience and the weal.
- The red colour: blood.

2.9 Hasan Jouni

Hasan is a painter. He was born in Beirut in 1942. In 1964, he received a Diploma in Painting from the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts in 1964, and in 1965, he received a Diploma in painting from Foster Academy of Fine Arts, Fálnia, Spain. Then in 1970 he obtained a Diploma of Teaching Art, from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (Saint Fernando) Madrid, and in 1984 a Diploma in History of Art, from the Faculty of Fine Arts (The Independent University-Madrid). He has been a member of the Lebanese Artists Association in Beirut since 1965, and Head of the Department of Painting at the Lebanese University for seventeen years.

In the period between 1970 and 2003, Hasan participated in various solo and group exhibitions and in four Biennials: the Biennial of Kuwait in 1972, the Biennial of Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1973 and 1975, in 1974 and the Biennial of Alexandria, Egypt. He has also exhibited in Beirut, Dubai, and Damascus; Paris, London, United States, Geneva, and Frankfurt.

Hasan's artwork is characterised by a symbolic expressionist style with an impressionist sense. Hasan is skilled in watercolour, but his major works are executed in oil on canvas, depending on the strength of line and the intensity of colour.

Influences and Themes

Hasan's study in Madrid has given him the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the western artistic schools, especially the Spanish School, from Velasquez up to the artistic stages of the 1970s in Madrid, "in their important artistic trends and tendencies, distinguished by their experimental spirit... and the presence of their influence was clear at the beginning of my artistic life"⁷³

⁷³ Jouni, H. (2006), the statement of the artist Hasan Jouni. Beirut. 07-07-2006.

Hasan grew up in a popular suburb, with poverty as background to his childhood, And he reports that:

The first formation of my memory, my earliest drawings were about the people in the daily struggle of their lives; those people, whose shadows I drew in black and white, and eventually in colour, those were my parents and the people to whom I belong.⁷⁴ (Translated by the author).

In this artist's social milieu, the human being is the centre of the artistic construction of his artwork ...as he notes: man usually treats issues of richness as a specialised field, and poverty as an affecting sentimental state.



Figure: 19.
Hasan Jouni, (2005). *The Newspaper Seller*,
oil on canvas. 120 x 100cm. Lebanon.

In his work, Hasan tries to recognise the inner world of the human being: "I know the state of solitude, individuality and gloom; and I also recognize the outer worlds, which have participated in a sort of general solitude."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Jouni. (2006).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

The Lebanese civil war, the Israeli war against Lebanon, and the continuous violations of South Lebanon since 1948, still affect him:

...physically and psychologically, and bring me back to the swirl of death and the worries of life; these bring me close to a state of surrealism, that I have expressed in several artworks under two titles, *Expatriation from the South* and *Expatriation to the South*. [this spirit appears in *The Newspaper Seller*]. Well, you can notice how the crowds of people spread on the surface of the painting, and how I worked to build the masses and the elements; how I dealt with the structure of the mass, the shadow, the light, and the background which represents the perfect scene to a vanishing reality. You will also see the moment of absence, which I have tried to express on the faces of those personalities; this has cost me at times an additional artistic and psychological effort.⁷⁶ (Translated by the author).

The artist, who tries to express the psychological states of human beings, tends also to inspire the aesthetic of his homeland, through various topics: the particularity of place, and the daily life of his people in the old suburbs.

The Paintings

Break Time

In *Break Time*, Hasan paints with the sensibility of the heart and with lightness of colour. He deals with colours and lines which configure the movement of the bodies, the faces and the other elements in a spontaneous expressionist mode. Light has a physical reality; the land and its expanse are portrayed in vast, vivid colouring touches. Modification becomes a way for achieving expressionist effects, depicted through a personal aesthetic and cultural vision; with a particularity that appears in

⁷⁶ Jouni. (2006).

the colour treatment, where the beautiful modification and the light expresses an idealised vision of peasant life.

Hasan took the subject of *Break Time* from a field of wheat in south Lebanon, where the peasants are sitting in their break time, relaxed; they encircle their food, while some of them continue collecting the rest of the crops that are spread in the field.

The colours of summer grant the work its special features. Light flows on the elements of nature: the land, the heaps of wheat, the horizon, and the peasants, giving these elements their impressive presence.



Figure: 20.
Hasan Jouni, *Break Time* (1998),
oil on canvas. 165 x 100cm, private collection, Lebanon.

It is a simple geometric composition, with the peasants sitting in a circle at the bottom of the painting, while other peasants lie in the field, along the surface of the painting in different planes, and parallel to the circle.

In this work, the artistic, emotional and pictorial emerge through the artist's interest in depicting the different movements of the peasants in their working environment, or during their time of relaxation. This interest affirms a commitment to the environment that distinguishes the work of this artist.

Popular Suburb

For Hasan the popular suburbs are a favoured theme. In his work *Popular Alley* Hasan portrays a customary and traditional scene, its rarity derived from the artist's ability to convert the ordinary in life and environment, to an aesthetic creation. He uses light to discover the meaning of their elements, and selects the colours that harmonise with reality.



Figure: 21.
Hasan Jouni. (2005). *A Popular Alley*, oil on canvas. 135 x 100cm.
Private collection, Lebanon.

This work is characterised by the balance between the sentimental and the rational, and by the vitality of movement in the elements of the composition: the cars, the shops, the bird seller, the people in their traditional environment, the café shop and the peddlers. In *Popular Alley* the relationships of the artistic elements are presented in a symbolic way, in complete harmony, in which the work presents a beautiful display of the popular milieu in its daily life.

At first sight, the painting appears to be a normal scene, beautiful and clear. However, after careful observation, the viewer begins to discover the aesthetic of the urban

features: the ordinary things in the street, the old windows of homes, the arcade, the people, and the peddler; the human presence in ordinary life focuses the expressive vision of this scene.

The artist's ability appears in his rapid interpretative response to an artistic idea: in his choice of perspective, and in his enthusiasm in the portrayal of the brightness of the surfaces. Colour plays a primary role in this artist's work, as he is able to manipulate successfully this tool to convey his inner thoughts. For Hasan Jouni, colour is the identity of light. Thus light gains its tone from the reality of things, which are limited by the line that increases the value of performance. The expressionism and the symbolism in this artist's painting are derived firstly from the human being and his environment, and secondly from the colour which realises the vital connection between the viewer and the artwork.

The artist's interest in popular life also appears clearly in his portrayal of the world of the old café shops, where people can spend their time smoking the *Argileh* and reading their newspapers. In the evenings some of these café shops bear witness to a different life.

In *Al Hakawati = The story teller*, Hasan tries to recollect a beautiful image of this life: after the evening prayer, the café shop, with its old walls decorated with drawings of popular heroes, converts into a spontaneous theatre. The scattered chairs are rapidly arranged into a circle. The story teller, in his popular dress and with the spontaneous and well calculated movements of a person who has exceeded middle age, sits in a position where everybody can see and listen to him.

Al Hakawati welcomes the enthusiasts, and begins with them another episode from his old book *Sirat Antara = سيرة عنتره = the story of Antara*, or one of another popular stories. In these stories, legend, history, literature and chivalry are blended in narratives of victory, defeat and heroism, with the values they stand for. The *garçon* presents a cup of tea or café to the customers. The repetitive rhythms of the sound of the *Argilhes* mix with the low noise that rises from somewhere and the smoke goes up over the heads. Suddenly, silence prevails and the story teller begins his recitation.

In *Al Hakawati*, the expressive values take on their appearance in a distinctive way. The descriptive performance gives the rhythmic aspect of the colour treatment its role in the general construction of the painting. The skill in the creation of the different movements and positions of the personalities reveals an internal human rhythm, which throbs with life; as in the number of details that are proficiently recorded. It grants the artistic text a sense of poetry, which engages with a mythical time that one may be able to draw on or imagine, yet a time that will never come back.



Figure: 22.
Hasan Jouni, *Al Hakawati = The Story Teller*, (2005),
oil on canvas. 100 x 60cm. Lebanon.

In this work, as in all his works which are inspired from local sources, Hasan recalls from memory the artistic elements of his subjects, and reconstructs them according to his artistic vision, the aesthetic of which is derived from a technical experience; and an understanding of the expressional potential of modern artistic values, which appear in the context of the artistic composition in harmonised states.

In his work, reality meets with abstraction and expressionism, mixed with emotion. Thus, his art is the fruit of the deep penetration into ordinary life:

Through my artistic journey, I worked to develop my artistic compositions depending on different artistic styles, in a way that my experiment appears to reveal the potential in expressing the states of human being, with an expressive loading.⁷⁷

In his work, the continuing movement of line and the transformation of colour combine in a dynamic that does not end with two antithetical artistic styles. It is the artist's attempt to create a particular aesthetic and artistic vision, benefitting from the expressionist values of different art schools.

Symbols and Synonyms in Hasan's Artworks

- The worker woman: human sharing.
- The old suburbs: authenticity.
- The popular life: the simple life.
- The story teller: educator.
- The popular café: a meeting place

⁷⁷ Jouni, H. (2006).

Friends

Jamal Joumaa

Even at that last moment, when you are thinking that you have left some of your things behind, and tidied up others in your backpack, to start your long journey, you may never have known if there was a strong and invisible line knitted between yourself and all that you were leaving behind. This is because, you may be able to depart your homeland but the homeland does not depart from you.

There, in the uttermost corner where you have settled; when the people are busy with their worries and needs, a few artists bring together fragments of their past and leftover memories, to paint what no one has ever seen before.

Their imprint will be clear and vital, for they are friends of colour and of sentimental cognition.

Chapter 3

Artists in Australia

Introduction

The artistic and cultural endeavours that have inspired a national heritage, have taken various routes in the works of artists of Arabic origin in Australia. Each of those attempts has dealt with this heritage, through a technical vision and explanatory mechanisms that were suitable to the selected subjects.

These artistic activities were numerous, and they harmonized with the new concepts and cultural terminology of the new movement of contemporary Arabic painting, which worked to move beyond the impressionist approach, trying to reveal various expressive individual ideas, and sought to explore structural relationships, symbolic equivalences, legendary space and historical human examples that have parallels in the present and gesture towards it.

This art represents an artistic cultural extension of the artists' experiments in their countries of origin, or is a "way of staying in touch with my homeland" as the artist Fatima Killeen notes.

3.1 Artistic readings in the works of the artists

3.1.1 Fatima Killeen

Fatima Killeen was born in Casablanca, Morocco, where she studied at the School of Fine Arts *Les Beaux Arts*. In 1988 she studied painting and photography at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington DC.

She came to Australia in 1994 and continued her Bachelor Degree in painting and printmaking at the Canberra School of Art, ANU. In 1997 she graduated with First Class Honours and three graduation awards.

Fatima has taken part in group and solo exhibitions in Canberra and Sydney. Several of her exhibitions were held between 1999 and 2005 including: *Oil, Stone and Soil, Generous Soil, A La Moroccan*. Amongst her group exhibitions held between 1997 and 2005 were: *I Remember 1948, East of Somewhere, Madonna, Diaspora*. Between 1998 and 2005 she received, the Wattan Art Prize at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, and a number of art grants, including Arts ACT Government Grants in 2001 and 2005. Her artworks are held in public and private collections in Morocco, Singapore, Germany, Switzerland, Los Angeles, Ohio and Washington DC.

The work of this artist is characterised by abstraction with an expressionist and symbolist tendency, where the white surface transfers to a chromatic experimental space of mixed media. This gives vivacity and the rough touch to her painting.

The artistic elements of her works are derived from echoes in the daily life of her people in her homeland; from the artistic vocabularies of her heritage, or the signs and symbols of her host society. Ideas materialise as they convert to line and colour, so as to reconfigure in the mind of the viewer on different levels. This represents a new cognitive and artistic journey, and a wide field for contemplation and inquiry.

Influences and Themes

Fatima lived in Casablanca in a cultural milieu which was interested in national and human issues, and the appreciation of Islamic and Arabic traditions, in a way that configured her personality and her cultural view towards life, and became to her an unlimited source of inspiration after her graduation from the School of Fine Arts in Casablanca.

I am very much interested in drawing on the cultural values and symbols of my own traditions as inspiration of my work. Those values were part of growing up and still remain a part of my daily life. The values I took for granted and never questioned. Values that I have only now started to appreciate.⁷⁸

Her concern is to keep both Islamic design and Arabic calligraphy alive in a multicultural society, and to give identity and existence to her own culture, through her art which incorporates the colours of her new environment. This appears clearly in her first solo exhibition in Canberra, which was held under the title *A La Moroccan* in Togarong Arts Centre in September 2001, as Sonia Barron notices:

In many of her paintings a scrap of textile, a remembered wall mosaic or other architectural feature, recognisably Islamic in origin, are set against an ochre surface, perhaps intended to symbolise the different environment she now finds herself in. Painting in acrylics, she works back her surfaces, creating a gritty texture and in some instances has incorporated actual sand. Her stencilled patterns and calligraphy are often fragmented, presumably personal memories of places and events ...it is the exotic content and decorative qualities of Killeen's precisely articulated compositions that most Western eyes may well respond to.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Killeen, F. (2005), the statement of the artist Fatima Killeen. Canberra. 10-06-2005.

⁷⁹ Barron, S. (2001). *Exotic Qualities With a Moroccan Mood*. An article was written for *A La Moroccan* exhibition. Canberra, the Canberra Times. 5 September 2001.

This relationship with her tradition is accompanied by a strong concern for national and social issues in her second homeland, and the problems of the contemporary human being, with a sentimental dimension.

In the *Generous Soil* exhibition, which was held in ANCA Gallery 2003 and in her last solo exhibition *Oil, Stone and Soil* held also at ANCA Gallery, ACT in October 2005, which dealt with the war in Iraq, Afghanistan and Arab Palestine, and immigration issues in Australia, Fatima tends to expose to the audience, both politically and culturally, “the other side of the story, as they do not get to hear, the other point-of-view in the daily news”⁸⁰. This engagement with events that pose more than moral and political questions has enabled her to discover an expressive approach, based on symbolism and human references.

The Paintings

The works inspired by Arabic calligraphy and ornaments appear as a love story between a homeland and an artist who knows how to materialise her nostalgia for the places of her childhood, and understands how the cultural references and the imaginary of these locations can be transferred into visual expression, through surface detail and patterns; and through scripts clothed in meaning, but unlimited in depth.

Out of The Letter Box

In *Out of the Letter Box*, which represents a letter from home, telling about celebrations and events happening there, the artist tends to use the script in an aesthetic way through an octagonal star, which represent the main part of the artistic composition. In this work, the script takes its expressive values by forming an artistic

⁸⁰ Grishin, S. (2003). From an article written for ‘*The Generous Soil*’ exhibition, the Canberra Times, Canberra.

space that extends clear and beautiful from the middle of the star, disappears through its dark sides, and reconfigures as repetitive rhythms, formed around the star and representing a part of the dark blue background. This letter is "...something from home and I'm dying to read what's happening there."⁸¹

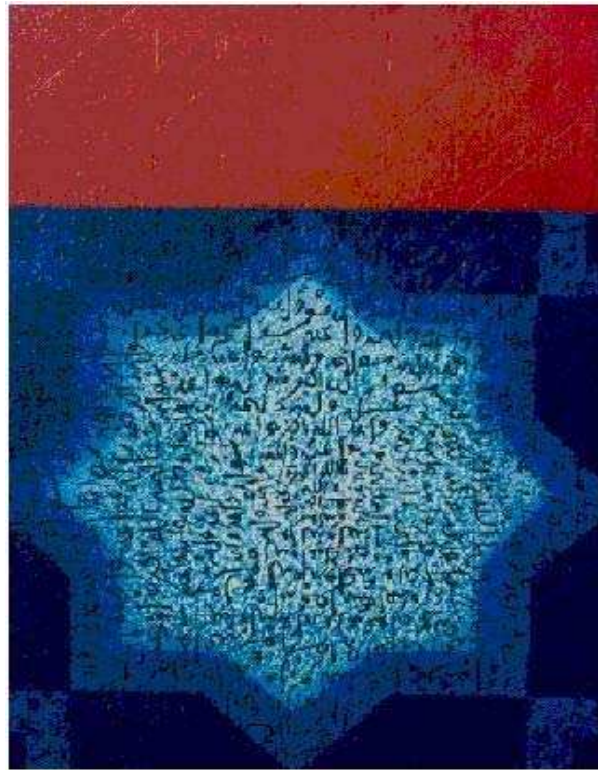


Figure: 23.
Fatima Killeen, *Out of The Letter box*, (2001),
mixed media. 25 x 35cm. Lebanon.

Staged How We Are Represented Now

Fatima's concern in presenting the aesthetic through her work, converts to a concern with the meaning of the idea and how to clarify it to the viewer:

I used the writing and the design as visual symbols of declaring the literal connection to my birthplace. Most of the time, I would use the writing in abstract shapes. The viewer did not have to know what the

⁸¹ Killeen. (2005).

writing meant. Recently I have started using writing, as a headline is used in a newspaper, and I translate the meaning in the title of the work, because of the political concerns that are driven by the political climate in which we now find ourselves.⁸²



Figure: 24.
Fatima Killeen, *Staged How We Are Represented Now*, (2006),
mixed media. 100 x 122cm, Canberra.

The script which was used for a purely aesthetic purpose, partially transfers to provide an integral meaning in the context of the painting as witnessed in *Staged How we are Represented Now* – 2005, representing a part of the war against Iraq; in an historical context, connecting between different times, as it shows two different attitudes towards the world and the human being. This painting depicts a prisoner of Abu Ghraib jail in Baghdad, and beside him in a parallel position, a young girl sitting with her ornamental clothing and behind her a lightened arabesque background; this girl, Zouhra, was a model for the French artist Matisse. The girl and the prisoner in this painting are portrayed as the product of the decline of the Arabic nation as a

⁸² Killeen. (2005).

powerful civilisation, before the power that represents the other face of the materialistic civilisation.

Opposite this world the writing, which is taken from Andalusian friezes, presents an Islamic proverb saying that every power shall vanish, before the power of God; *God is the Almighty* = لا غالب الا الله. This wisdom decorates the top and bottom of this painting, as a significant sign to the benevolence of power.

In his book *Islamic Art*, the researcher and Lebanese artist Samir Al Sayeg observes:

When Arabs engraved their wisdom on the friezes of their first buildings in Andalus, the point of view of the Muslim artist was limited to art and its [spiritual and aesthetic] functions. From the beginning, this artist was not interested in building the cities as a sign of victory and as an ambition for more power, like the tradition of victory in previous civilisations. He was interested in building the city of God. The city that doesn't know victory because it is never defeated, is the city of the one right, which witnesses on the temporality and the evanescence of every thing. Just god is the eternal, the triumphant and the rich"⁸³ (Translated by the author).

In this painting, Fatima refuses the logic of war and the culture of invasion also attempting to compare the two different victorious images: the oppressive one, and the modest one that sees in his triumph, the weakness on the front of the power of the Creator. Fatima is calling for a civilized and moral attitude between nations and people.

⁸³ Al Sayeg, S. (1988). "الفن الإسلامي" *Islamic Art*. Beirut. Dar El Marefah for Publishing and Distributing. p. 36.

Homeland: The Hanged Key

In *Homeland: the Hanged Key*, dedicated to the Palestinian refugees, Fatima points to a human and emotional subject, which relates to five million people who left their homes and spread throughout the world. They are still dreaming of returning to their homes. The story of the key is essential. Many of those people took the keys of the doors their homes with them, and have kept them since 1948. Fatima notes: "This work represents a segment of a wall from a refugee camp; the surface is covered with pieces of tin – within which hangs a treasured key; the key is a promise of homecoming"⁸⁴



Figure: 25.
Fatima Killeen, *Homeland: The Hanged key*, (2003),
mixed media. 90 x 60cm, Canberra.

⁸⁴ Killeen. (2005).

I am tapping into the Australian expression: home is where you hang your hat. I want the viewer to feel what it is like to live in a refugee camp day-after-day.⁸⁵

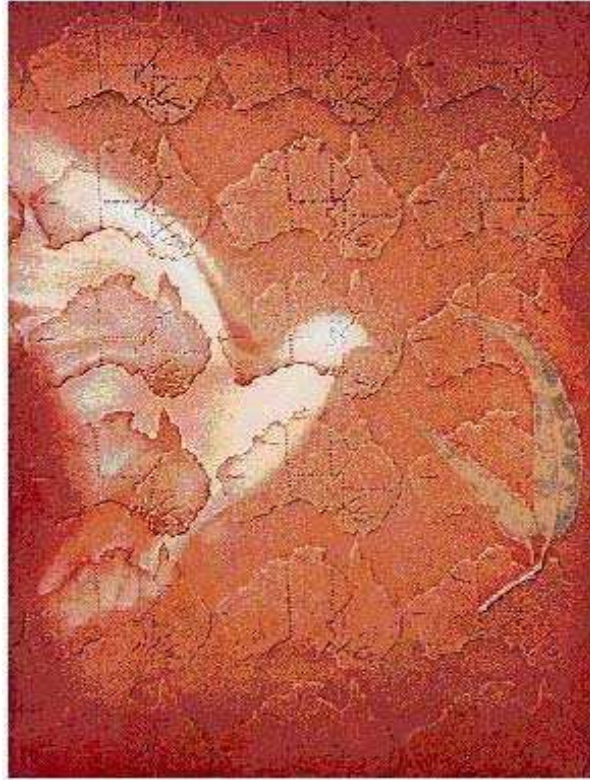


Figure: 26.
Fatima Killeen, *Legal Illegal, Seeking peace*, (2003),
mixed media. 50 x 70cm. Canberra..

Legal Illegal, Seeking Peace

In the *Generous Soil* series, where illegal immigration is a central concern, this artist aims to raise questions about human form, human rights and our sense of place. The title of this exhibition “refers to the generosity of the land, which asks no questions, and doesn’t need visas or documents - in stark contrast to the people (and their hardline politics)⁸⁶ inhabitants of the land, who cause problems for a migrant. The migrant is pictured as a transparent white dove flying over the Australian map

⁸⁵ Killeen.

⁸⁶ Musa, B. O. (August 28, 2003). *Between Two Worlds*, the Canberra Times. Canberra.

(depicted with repetitive sandy units that cover the surface of the painting) towards a couple of gum leaves, in search for a place to live and hope in peace. This is the idea behind her painting *Legal, Illegal Seeking Peace*. (Refer to 4.7.1.2.1, The Conditions of Life, p. 184).

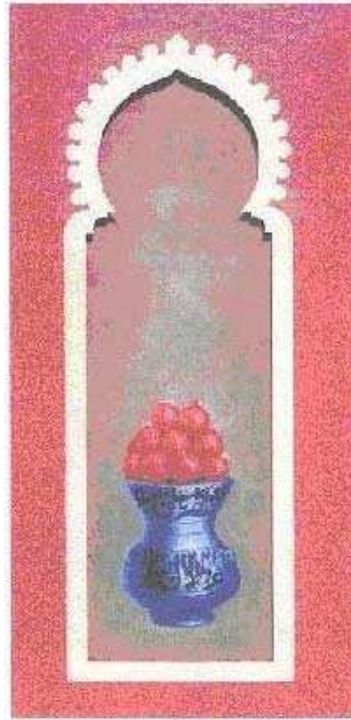


Figure: 27.
Fatima Killeen, *Generous Soil*, (2001),
mixed media. 90 x 120cm. Canberra.

Generous Soil

In *Generous Soil*, Fatima expresses her love and appreciation for her second homeland, represented as a pot of fruit. The bowl is filled with fresh and vernal fruit. Fatima has portrayed the bowl with an oriental frame. It is an architectural element, an arch of Islamic Moroccan style, surrounded by a beautiful florid colour. The bowl that appears on a dark background represents the heart of the painting and its centre.

Despite this appreciation, she still speculates with a deeply critical sense: “the land may be sacred, but our daily realities are different!” Fatima still worries: “about other

people who remain in detention... stuck in time and place... waiting for the unknown”⁸⁷

Facing life and the world is the way of an artist. Abstract forms do not erase the human trace, because the painting is an expression of the human life, which inhabits its details. Painting, for this artist, is a way of life. It is a substitute home. It is the vase containing her memories. The painting is a playground of existence to an artist who lives between two worlds, was born in one, and settles in the other, which grants her the love of the land and its beautiful colours.

Symbols and Synonyms in Fatima 's Artworks

- The key of the door: home and hope.
- The human figures in a state of occupation.
- Arabic calligraphy: identity.
- Botanical and geometric decorative elements: traditional artistic elements.
- The dove: peace.
- Bowl of fruit: generosity.

⁸⁷ Killeen. F. (2004). Statement for *Sacred Grounds* exhibition. The Chapel Australian, Centre for Christianity and Culture, 22 April 2004.

3.1.2 Samih Luka

Samih Luka is an iconographer and a painter. He was born in Cairo, Egypt. In 1964, he studied at Ain Shams University in Cairo, and graduated in 1967 with a Bachelor of Sciences, Mathematics and Education. From 1986-1969, Samih studied painting and drawing at the Studio of Arts at American University of Cairo. Then he studied the Contemporary Coptic Art at the School of Contemporary Iconography in Cairo, Egypt.

His icons and religious paintings can be found in churches in Cairo, Sudan and the USA. He has exhibited in several galleries, participated in the exhibition of American University of Cairo in 1967, and between 1970 and 1992 held three solo exhibitions in Al Fashir and Niala in Sudan and Al Fayum in Egypt.

He immigrated to Australia in 1988. He is an Australian resident and lives in the suburb of Lurnea, NSW. In Australia he has taken part in group and solo exhibitions in Canberra and Sydney. Several of his exhibitions were held between 1992 and 2005. His solo exhibitions include: *GEA Hellenic Estia Ltd*, Exhibition. *Coptic Art Exhibition*, St, Mark Cathedral church, Sydney. *Coptic Martyrs* at Casula Powerhouse and *Coptic Art Exhibition* at St Antonious Church, Guildford in Sydney. Amongst his group exhibitions, held in Sydney are: *Arabmade* exhibition, Casula Powerhouse, Liverpool, in 1998; *the Survivor Art Project*, The Performance Space, in 1995; *Coptic Art Exhibition*; and *La Femme*, Casula Powerhouse, in 1992.

Samih's art is an example of the continuity of the ancient Egyptian iconographic traditions in contemporary iconography and painting techniques as in the use of natural oxides and in the technique of colour mixing and method of painting from dark to light, following the tradition of ancient Egyptian artists; in addition to the use of gold as a main colour in the icon.

In his works one may distinguish two trends: firstly, his interest in iconography, inspired from historical and sacred events in Christianity, and secondly, his work through the modern artistic schools to express his feelings about his life in Australia.

Influences and Themes

Samih grew up in Cairo, however his regular visits to rural areas in Egypt especially Al Fayum provided him with an insight into the other face of Egyptian life, with its simplicity and spontaneity, a life that still attracts him:

My memory is still filled by the beautiful landscapes, the peasants working in the fields and the images of ordinary people in their daily life... the life which I like to recollect through my painting.⁸⁸ (Translated by the author).

For this artist, belief in art as a way of life, and as a device for dealing with the world through a particular vision has granted him a spiritual dimension. Samih discovers values and ideals in the world of the Coptic icon, with its distinguished presence whether in the heart of the believers or in the churches. This artist is: “possibly the only practitioner of Coptic art in Australia”⁸⁹

Samih's presence in Sydney proved a valuable gift to the Coptic community, as he:

has provided Sydney audiences with a spiritual and historical connection through his paintings of biblical stories with their artistic elements which derived from the early fusions of the many cultural and political shifts down the ages... as well as locating his particularity of the bicultural experience in his more contemporary imagery.⁹⁰

This artist's work is distinguished by its sources of inspiration, which reflect the nature of the cultural spirit of a society in which the artist has chosen to live, as Con Gouriotis notes:

⁸⁸ Luka, S. (2005). Personal communication. Sydney, 9-05-2005.

⁸⁹ Abboud. (1998). From an article written for the works of *Samih Luka* in *Arabmade*'s exhibition. Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre.

⁹⁰ Ibid. (1998).

...Luka's works, specifically *Licorice Seller*, represent within their engaging thematic, formal and critical concerns reflections of his own practice... [which] is based on a hybrid expressive project to create stimulating juxtapositions, images and forms, that directly represent the topsy-turvy surreal contradictions, tensions and themes central to bi-culturalism and exilic marginality.⁹¹

Samih as an iconographer tends to create a world outside this world, where Sanctity is the sole subject and the vision is divine beauty. This world is represented in the icon by the holiness expressed through the human; a world is as pure as it is rich in significances and meanings, that moves viewer to the celestial, and "opens the door to the world of the ideal and the power of the soul"⁹², and brings him closer to his human self and to god, by the symbol and the golden colour. This world represents the era of monks, saints and martyrs, such as *The Saints of the Coptic Church*, *Saint George* and *Saint Mena*, *The Holy Family Journey to Egypt*.⁹³

Works such as *The Icon of Saint Marcus* and the painting of *Saint Jonah*, appear as responses to the human need for a generous and spiritual space that aims to liberate us from the physical and temporality of daily life, through the recall of historical or religious events, which are reconfigured in a proverb that may serve as a guide in our life, or direct us in our personal explorations.

The Paintings

The Icon of Saint Marcus

In this icon the viewer may notice the artist's interest in ancient Egyptian iconic traditions, through his technique, colour mixing and the method of painting from dark to light; and his use of natural oxides. The general frame of this icon represents an

⁹¹ Gouriotis, C. (1995). Catalogue of *Arabmade's* exhibition. Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre.

⁹² El Seriani. U. (1995). *The Coptic Art*. Cairo. Anba Roues. pp. 88-89.

⁹³ Abboud. (1998).

architectural element that refers to an arcade, which opens at the top of the arch and draws a small half circle.

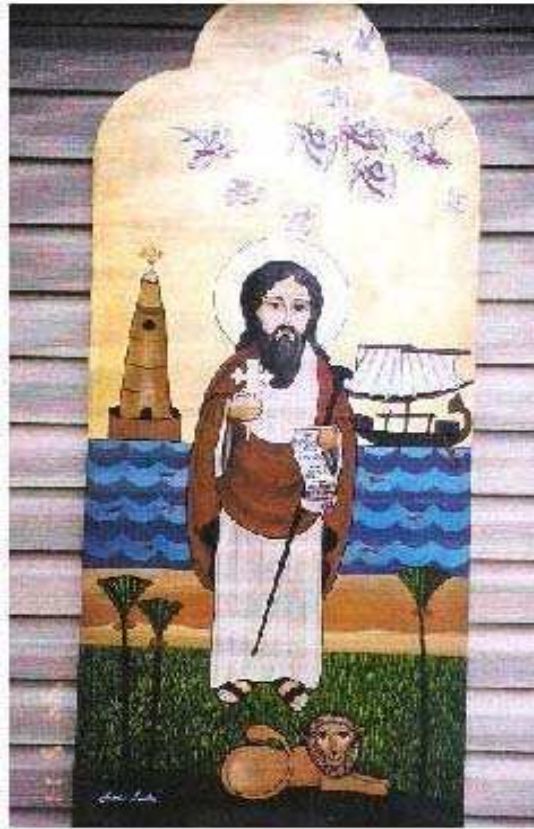


Figure: 28.
Samih Luka. *The Icon of Saint Marcus*, (ca 1995),
natural oxides. 167 x 67cm. Sydney.

The icon represents Saint Mark standing as a calm presence, a halo surrounding his head. In his left hand is a letter in Arabic script, the right hand and the eyes speaking to the viewer. The round face, the beard and the dresses have been inspired by Arabic style. Below and in front of the Saint is a seated lion, the symbol of Saint Mark (the saviour of the Christian faith).

At the top of the icon the bright sky refers to a sublime world, where angels are flying above the Saint. At the left hand side of the icon and at the line of horizon, the Alexandrian lighthouse, embellished by the cross, appears in a sea with a ship; also noticeable is the way the palm trees which surround the Saint are drawn. The

elements of the composition are managed with symmetry and a geometrical sense, with the Saint in the centre. (Refer to 4.7.1.1.4, Historical Place. p. 181).

In this work the viewer notices the richness of the symbols of different traditions in expressing the religious sense.

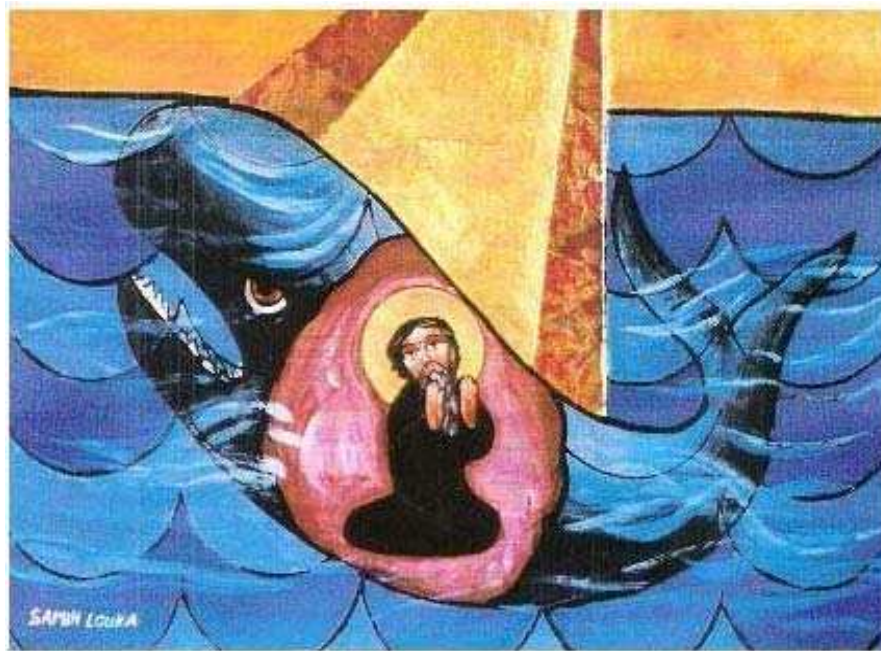


Figure: 29.
Samih Luka. *The Icon of Saint Jonah*, (ca 1995),
natural oxides. 35 x 27cm. Private collection.

The Painting of Saint Jonah

Samih, who has devoted himself to popular, as well as artistic, heritage, has also found new aesthetic values in some of his religious subjects. These effects are clear in *Saint Jonah*, where the mythological scene expresses the Saint's suffering in an unknown and a surrealist world inside the abdomen of the whale. This painting is executed through a symbolic expressionist vision. Along with the painting's contemporary feel, Samih manages to maintain a sense of ancient Pharaonic style in drawing the lines of the sea water as his ancestors did many years ago.

The illustrative and educational idea is the main feature of this work. Thus, the artist focuses on the state of adoration of this Patient Saint; sun rays penetrate the deep sea, and embrace the body of the Saint, as a symbolic representation of celestial care.

Civil Integration

Samih has also been influenced deeply by the Australian environment, and by human and social issues mixed with popular and local inspiration from his home of origin. Pharaonic effects with expressionist and surrealist touches are prominent in his artworks, especially in *The Licorice Seller*.

In this work, the artist has distanced himself from the world of religious iconography, to explore another world, where he comes closer to surrealism. He connects two geographically and historically distant worlds, which are united by the present human situation in Australia as a gesture of civil integration and human harmony.

His choice of symbols in expressing his chosen theme is extremely effective. The viewer notices in the top part of his artwork the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House, meeting with the Pyramids, and *flucca*, an Egyptian traditional boat, which makes the onlooker think that it is travelling the Nile. In the beginning of this work, the Licorice Seller appears in his traditional clothing, carrying a drink tank and offering a cup of his drink to an Australian lady sitting in a green garden, looking gently at him, and behind them is a bed of flowers. Behind this work, which carries some of the artistic characteristics close to surrealist and expressionist trends, lays the true significance of the icon. The artistic treatment and mixing of colours seems natural, made from a mixture of egg, vinegar and natural oxides.

When the artist determines the elements he will draw, he moves from the dark colours to the light. In the artist's interpretation, the human is depicted as having lost its bone formation, as is the case with the figure in the Coptic icon.

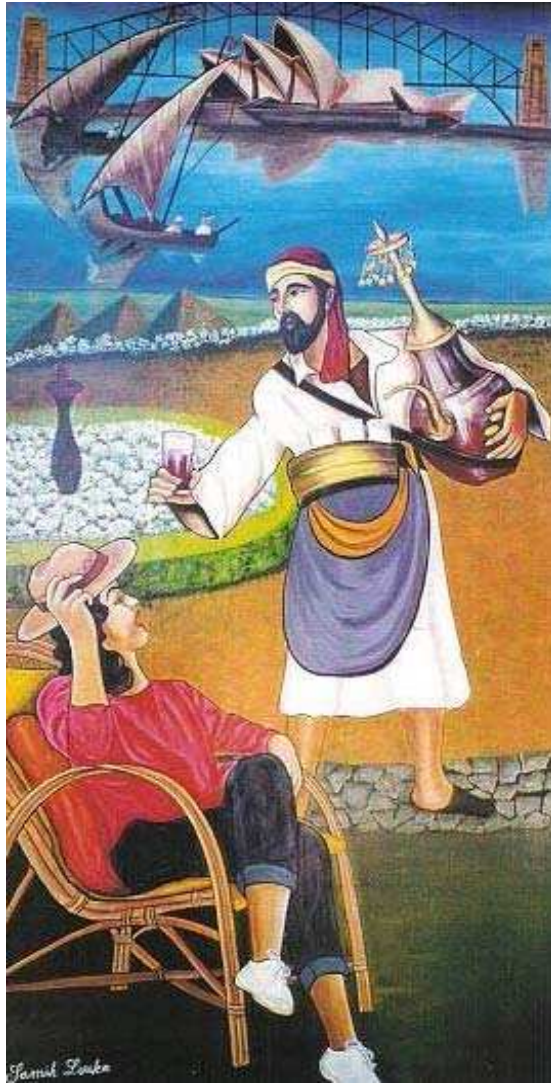


Figure: 30.
Samih Luka. *The Licorice Seller*, (ca 1998),
natural oxides. 120 x 60cm. Sydney.

The artist does not seem to have an interest in perspective, whether it is near or far. This is apparent in the size of the Opera House, which is supposed to be smaller than the sailing ship or the pyramids, which are in front of the observer, or the size of the Licorice Seller compared to the woman sitting in the fore section of the painting, and in the strength of the lines, which relate to Pharaonic art. The internal movement and general rhythm of the painting reduces the strength of the lines, nevertheless, the artist has succeeded in putting all of these elements together.



Figure: 31.
Anonymous. *The Licorice Seller*, (N.D)
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown. Egypt.

Symbols and Synonyms in Samih's Artworks

Samih Luka takes his symbols from history, tradition, and the environment. These symbols express spiritual, religious, human and artistic meanings:

- The Dolphin: Heshmat notes that the dolphin which saves the drowned from dying, converts to a symbol of Christ who saves people from drowning in sin.⁹⁴
- The cross: symbol of life.
- The rays of the sun are also symbols of life in ancient Egypt.
- The lion: symbol of St. Mark, the saviour of the Christian faith in Egypt.
- The white dove was a symbol of the souls of saints and martyrs.
- The ship was a symbol of the church (the ship of guidance and survival).
- The bunches of grapes and vine leaves symbolise Christ's saying: "أنا الكرمة وأنتم الأغصان" "I am the vine and you are the branches"
- The halo: the luminous circle, which surrounds the head of saint.
- The fish: symbol of Christ.
- The pigeon: symbol of the holy spirit.
- The Pyramids: edifice.
- The Opera House: urban and cultural.
- The Sydney Harbour Bridge: human communication.

⁹⁴ Heshmat, M. (16, August.1998). "الرمز والتراث القبطي" *The Symbol and the Coptic Tradition*. Cairo, the cultural page, Watani newspaper.

3.1.3 Mazin Ahmad

Mazin was born in 1964. He is an abstract painter. He graduated from Baghdad Academy of Fine Arts in 1990. He is a member of Iraqi Artists Association and a member of Iraqi Visual Artists. Mazin has exhibited in Baghdad and Jordan, as well as the United States, Austria, Germany and Sweden.

Mazin emigrated to Australia in 2002, and since that time he has exhibited in several galleries around Sydney including two solo exhibitions, the first in March 2005 at Artroom Gallery, Manly, and the second in June 2007 at Fairfield City Council Gallery. Mazin was selected to represent Australia in the 5th International Biennial of Contemporary Art, Italy, in December 2005. He is a member of Liverpool and Fairfield Network-Sydney, and Casula Powerhouse Art centre.

This artist's language is largely traditional. The colours taken from his environment exhibit an expressive style, distinguished by abstract and expressionist trends. These qualities are derived from traditional Iraqi art and design, and also from the emotional and existential moments of his present life in Sydney.

Mazin works with a serious treatment to the surface of the painting and its elevations, combining different materials and techniques such as acrylic, oil colours, collage, cardboard, to make suitable effects and enrich the general condition of the artwork; in his search for an aesthetic language, he achieves a continuous link between past and present.

Influences and Themes

Mazin spent part of his childhood in a densely populated suburb in Baghdad. This popular environment and the warmth of human relationships he experienced became a part of his cultural life, which was enriched by his interest in the old civilization of his country. This tradition became the window through which Mazin looks to the world, and an existential state of the artist in his relationship with life.

During his academic life, Mazin was interested in the art of local artists, inspired by popular tradition, such as: Jawad Salim, Hasan Shaker al Saeed and Fayek Hasan. In addition to those artists, he was interested also in the works of Gustave Clement, Paul Klee, Kandinsky, Bacon, Miro, and Rothko.⁹⁵

The relationship between Mazin and Sydney started when he took the first steps on its land, and he speaks in an emotional way about those moments, his wishes, and what he expected; then how his dreams came true in the city, which granted him its love, since he flew over its skies:

When I arrived in Australia I was carrying many bags with me; the heaviest and the biggest was full of my dreams that would become reality in this beautiful land. Since the first moment, I felt a warm relationship between myself and this land. And here was another journey ahead of me; a journey within my art... so I started this magnificent artistic journey within this soulful land and worked hard to capture its symbols of humanity.⁹⁶

For a migrant artist, there is a concern with creating an artistic language, which combines the artistic vocabularies of his individual local culture with those from the culture of his new homeland, its symbols and colours.

I found myself wanting to reflect all this as well as my history, civilization and symbols of my past. To do that, I worked hard to find a visual shape for that relation between my past and present. The question was how was I going to express myself with my art, and where would I be able to exhibit it?⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ahmad, M. (2005), the statement of the artist Mazin Ahmad. Sydney. 09-05-2005.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Mazin is not the only artist who has this anxiety. There are also other artists who are looking for opportunities for help, in directing their artistic activities in their new society. The response was rapid and parallel to their expectations: "One day I was invited to a meeting between artists and artworkers at the Liverpool Art Resource Centre. This meeting was very warm, and "I was happy to find out that people were willing to listen to me, and take note of those ideas to use them to help an artistic reality come true". In this helpful space Mazin starts his journey; he exhibits in some galleries. One of these exhibitions was in the MLC gallery in Ultimo, Sydney and was organized by Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre. In December 2005, he represented Australia in the Fifth Annual International Biennial of Contemporary Art, held in Florence, Italy.

As for Mazin, this journey doesn't ever stop. It may start with every artwork he creates, but it does not end nor is limited by a painting; because his love both for his country of origin and his second homeland and his appreciation for the human space of Australian life, represent the source of his inspiration. This is expressed through his works with cultural vision; noticeable in *The Voice of Civilization, Dome and Crescent, The Café Shop and Rug on Beach*.

The Paintings

The Voice of Civilization

This work deals with the political and human condition in Mazin's country. The artistic composition controls the surface of the painting; it is an ancient architectural form of edifice, with symbols taken from the art and architecture of ancient Iraqi civilizations. The edifice is converted into a human shape that rises in the sky, rebellious and valiant. In other words: it is not rubble; it is an interlocked construction and a human body in one.

This work does not challenge the reality of the human figure or the construction of a historical building; instead it challenges the artist to know how to combine different forms, meanings and ideas, and how to configure these in order to express the reality of his people.

This artist deals with his theme from different places and different times, and unifies them in a creative form that appears in the painting as an expression of an internal force of life, and as an act of reflection of the artist's inner self. It is a vision striving to become an image, a prophecy for a new birth, and a promise for the resurrection of a nation: human and architectural.

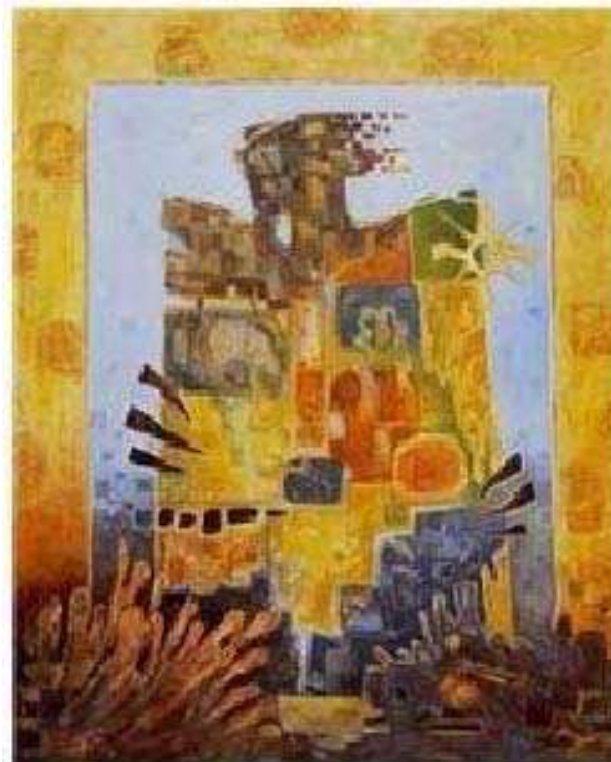


Figure: 32.
Mazin Ahmad, *The Voice of Civilization*, (2004)
mixed media, 130 x 105cm, Sydney.

Dome and Crescent

This spirit is also present in the *Dome and Crescent*, where the artist took his artistic vision and its aesthetic and cultural values from an Islamic architectural element. This is the dome, symbol of the skies and wisdom.

In this work, the ordinary geometrical form disappears and paves the way for another artistic relationship: the artistic construction of the dome as a main mass controls a wide space of the painting, and a coloured crescent at the top of the painting represents a balance with the dome. Botanical and geometrical ornaments spread onto the surface of this mass, through bright or dark places. The dome stands beautiful and proud: ornament upon ornament or light over light.



Figure: 33.
Mazin Ahmad, *Dome and Crescent*, (2005),
acrylic on canvas . 90 x 105cm, Sydney.

The Café Shop

As for Mazin, "the influence by the new environment is a logical response, because the artist is a part of the land's memory, and his artistic production connects harmoniously with the cycle of life"⁹⁸

In *The Café Shop*, Mazin paces another step towards his new environment through a beautiful idea portrayed with human sense. He records what he feels around him, in the new social space.

⁹⁸ Ahmad. (2005).

In this work, the aesthetic meets with features of ordinary life and its rhythms in a café shop, in Newtown in Sydney. A small world in itself, the café shop symbolizes the world we live in. A variety of accents of different languages spread in its space. Even the English language takes on a different flavour when it mixes with the aroma of the café that diffuses animating and delicious streams.

The presence of Mazin in this small world went unnoticed to all but a few. He feels from the first moment a belonging to this human presence: the happy laughter that accompanies a delicate joke. The silence that appears on a face, the words of promise of a young man, when he holds the hand of his beloved, the sad gaze of a person taking the first step towards leaving his friend, to absence, and a hand that rises and draws an idea to confirm something that is happening or that will happen. It is here where wishes may be realized, and projects of life are drawn. Here, human relationships are confirmed or ended: they continue or vanish.



Figure: 34.

Mazin Ahmad. *The Cafe Shop*, (2007),
mixed media. 100 x 100cm, Sydney.

As for Mazin, the sign, the smile, the dreaming glance, the beautiful or the sad words, all convert to colour and writing onto the surface of his painting. The small world of the café shop is rendered a metaphor, which takes its warmth from the Uluru colours of Australian nature.

Mazin looks onto this world through a special and personal window; a rectangular window decorated with ornaments; with small squares, and spiral lines in an ovate form. The window is the symbolic entrance to the world of the café shop, and configures from red squares in various dimensions. These squares overlap or separate, and between them, geometrical and botanical forms appear as decorative elements. The window mediates a vast surface coloured by degrees of sandy colours. This surface includes English writing, with its vocabularies derived from the words of ordinary life in the café shop.



Figure: 35.

Mazin Ahmad, *Rug on Beach*, (2007),
mixed media. 100 x 100cm, Sydney.

Rug on Beach

In this work, Mazin tries to portray an image of his existence in his new homeland. He draws inspiration for his artistic subject from two main elements, the location of Bondi Beach in Sydney, and a popular rug from his homeland.

Mazin, who feels peace and a sense of belonging to this place, is laying his rug on the beautiful sandy beach. Here he can sit and enjoy the vast horizon and the extent of the blue. The rug, embellished by signs and ornaments, gleams on the soft sand. Mazin creates his own example: "Home is where I lay my rug," as he also recollects the Australian popular saying: "Home is where you hang your hat."

The composition consists of simple relationships. This is represented by the rug, which appears as a rectangular surface that extends over a vast part of the painting and mediates it. The surface is limited from both sides of the artwork, by coloured spaces consisting of degrees of light blue and yellow that represent the beach.

The red rug, which controls the surface of the painting, appears as a combination of simple geometrical units of small squares and rectangular forms; their surfaces are limited by opposite and linear lines; these lines play the connecting role in the artistic composition. The linear lines end at the bottom of the painting with small geometrical elements drawn in the form of triangles, and represent with the ornamental elements, which appear at the bottom and outside of the painting, the edge of the rug. The surface of the rug is achieved by spontaneous and rapid touches, with variations in the degrees of the dark and light red. The decorative units, the triangles, the squares and the signs, coloured by the yellow, blue and dark touches, play a balancing role to the warmth of the red surface of the rug.

The beach embraces the popular rug and gives it the opportunity to express itself. The strong contrast between the colour of the beach and the red rug deepens the artistic and inspirational value of the artistic composition. The edge of the rug, which starts outside the frame of the painting and does not end at the line of the horizon, or at the top of the painting, is an expression of the unlimited human participation in the

enrichment of the quality of life in his new homeland; and an expression of a symbolic presence and endless continuity to the value of love.

Symbols and Synonyms in Mazin's Artworks

-The crescent: a sacred symbols in the Islamic culture, because the name of crescent in Arabic language has the same letter of the name of god in that language.

Crescent = (ل ل ل) - **God** : (ل ل ل) = الله

-The sun: the life and proverb.

-The dome: the sky and wisdom.

-The historical edifices: human civilization.

-The ancient writings: human presence.

-The geometrical and botanical decorative elements: traditional artistic elements.

3.1.4 Ali Abbas

Ali Abbas is a painter; he was born in 1964 in the city of Al Nasiriah in south of Iraq. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts of Baghdad and graduated in 1991. He is a member of the Iraqi Artists Association, a member of Iraqi Visual Artists, and a member of Iraqi Photographers Association. He has participated in various exhibitions in Baghdad, including his solo exhibitions: *The Memory of the Land* and *Doors of Henna* in 2000-2003, in *Zaman* Gallery, Beirut, and in 1998 *The Phoenix Bird*, in Azamel Gallery, Baghdad, in addition to several group exhibitions in Lebanon and Cuba.

Since his arrival in Australia he has been living in the city of Fairfield within the Liverpool region. He is a member of NAVA, and has participated in the exhibition *Feeling Thought and Beliefs*, which is was held in 2005 at Fairfield Gallery and at the Museum of NSW, and *Songs of Travelling Birds* exhibition at Blacktown Art Centre. Ali works with a special treatment to the surface of the painting, reconfigured by acrylic with a rough texture which combines different materials, such as oils, acrylic, collage of textiles, paper and cardboard.

Influences and Themes

Ali's childhood has played a big role in the formation of his personality: "even now, I like the spontaneity of things, this spontaneity helps me to create through my painting a new system to the colouring elements."⁹⁹

His life in a popular environment, and the historical region Uruk, which is filled by the walls of old monuments, presents him with rich sources for pondering and inspiration. What attracts Ali is "the human traces upon the things, the walls and the doors of the old shrines; the traces which still appear, despite the disappearance of the human being who has left these traces."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Abbas, A. (2005), statement by the artist, Sydney. 20-04-2005.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

This interest in signs and their significances leads him to another horizon in popular tradition, enriched with the cultural and aesthetic readings in folklore and popular customs and symbols. He is also influenced by the artistic visions of the artists Mark Rothko, Matisse, Kandinsky and Paul Klee and by the writings of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, T.S. Elliot, Victor Hugo, Leo Tolstoy and others. “These readings played a big role in strengthening my belief in the importance of art, which is not just in understanding the life, but in changing it also”¹⁰¹

This cultural and artistic background gives Ali's art its social and human characteristics, with a vocabulary that derives from popular tradition and the details of the daily life of his people. The spontaneity, which distinguishes his art is not simply drawn from popular themes, but it also stems from the artist's approach:

When the colour brush touches the white surface, I feel that the real and the imaginary, the small details which configure the features of life, all will transform to colours through the system of the painting.¹⁰²

In his works Ali tries to give his painting a human face, which expresses the emotional life behind the doors of ordinary people's homes. The places in his work may be filled with lament and vociferation, or with the cheerful celebration of a new born. Wishes gleam as a beam of hope across the surface of the painting. Ali's art is an attempt to read symbol, in a panorama that is rich in psychological and suggestive variations.

The work of this artist is distinguished by an abstract expressionist tendency, and in the use of the glowing colours, with a fauvist appearance. The agile movement of the line, the emotivity and the spontaneity of the treatment add a symbolic space to the composition of the artwork, which tends to the simplicity of construction. The geometrical and botanical decorative elements become a field for the artist's versicoloured dialogue; however he expresses his inner self, its ambition and suffering from a tired memory, a memory that is struggling to materialize itself

¹⁰¹ Abbas. (2005).

¹⁰² Ibid.

through the colour. This is noticeable in his works, which represent the artist's sensuous tendency to search for a psychological balance between the self and reality, between the internal and the external, as in: *the Doors of al Henna, The Journey of Candles, Drawings After the Class Work and the Last Letter*.

The Paintings

In these works, the artist was inspired by traces of drawings on doors or windows of alley ways, where every wall or door carries a particular story, which transfers in the artist's vision to an aesthetic subject; the rhythms of colour induce a contemplative state in the viewer. He also tries to speak about the customs and rituals of the women of his country: when a woman prepares a votive offering, she lights candles on the window of a shrine, or fixes coloured rags and puts some henna on her door, waits for her wish to be realized; the door becomes a representational image expressing wishes, hopes and lost dreams.

The Door of the Henna

In this work, the artistic composition, combines the elements of a door, a wall, an entrance, candles, and some symbols and decorative elements, and is distinguished by the simplicity of construction.

The old door with its upper section draws the shape of an arch and refers to a religious environment. This door occupies a large area of the painting and the wall surrounding the door represents the bright background of the artwork. The bottom of the painting is a vast blue entrance that leads towards the door and vanishes in its darkness.

The glowing colours that spread on the surface of the painting, express a psychological and symbolic dimension of hope and a state of ease. The colours of the henna and the traces of hands with their imprints, are loaded with emotion; where the small coloured crescent, fixed at the top of the door is indicative of incoming happiness.

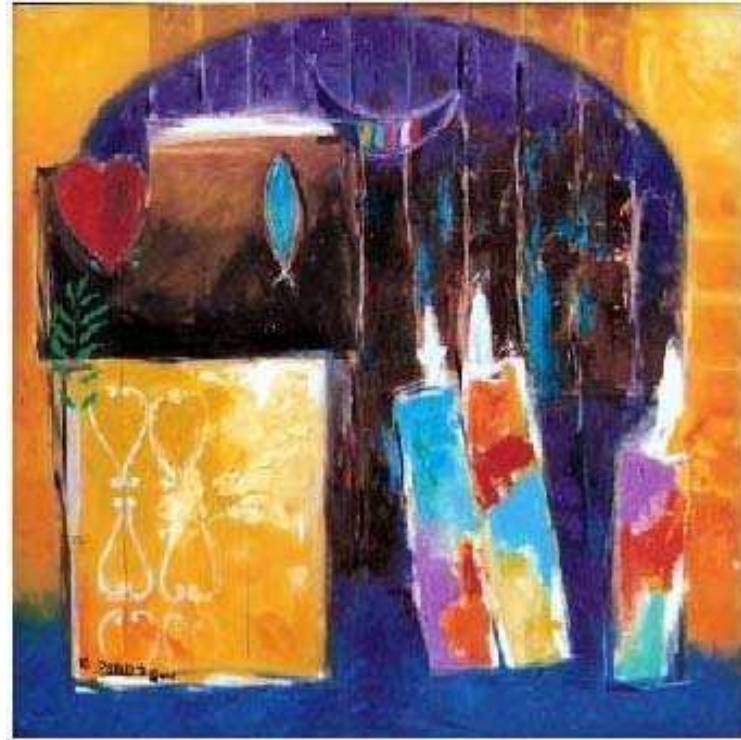


Figure: 36.

Ali Abbas, *The Door of the Henna*, (2001),
oil on canvas. 70 x 70cm.

The candles stand before the door as columns reconfigured from light and white halos, suggesting metamorphosis: The yellow as a natural light, red is as the colour of love and blue, which represents purity and confirms a state of optimism.

The symbols, which spread at the door and beside it, the fish, the heart, the green branch of myrtle that reclines on a decorative rectangular beam, represent the elements of the vow, which convert to signs of optimism in the realization of the vow.

The Journey of Candles

In *The Journey of Candles*, the fauvist values of the colours are saturated on the surface of the painting. Two long black shapes represent the two boats, creating a balancing effect with the values of different colours. The boats reach their destination at the door of a shrine. The door portrayed from colours, hopes and the dreams represents the centre of the painting. Ali's boat carries the vow, which is expressed by

candles, a branch of myrtle, a fish, ornaments and the heart that throbs as a flag fixed on a spear. These elements are the votive offerings Ali presents to - The Saint Khuder: The Green One - master of the water.



Figure: 37.
Ali Abbas, *The Journey of The Candles*. (2000)
oil on canvas. 150 x 100cm.

The artistic construction is divided into two parts. One part is filled with the elements of the vow and the meanings of love and hope, and the other by light which occupies a vast surface of the painting. Light which takes on an aesthetic and artistic value in the painting, represents also a symbolic substitute to the vow.

The boat that lands before the door of the shrine joins and balances the two sides, and the symbolism of the event, where the heart is the centre, situated on the border of hope of realization of the wish. The crescent which points to the happy outcome appears at the top of the painting and in the right hand corner, and represents a bright and balancing element in the artistic construction.

In the series *Drawings after Class Work*, executed in Sydney, one may notice a distinguishing trait of an artist, who has a wide awareness of place, a deep sense of past time, and conviction in the hope to come. The idea behind these works lies in the short interval of ease that the children spend after class work, when they draw in their

exercise books; where the forms, figures, animals and symbols spread over the white papers, spontaneously.

In these works, Ali goes back in his memory to the time of childhood; he glances to the world with a child's eye; he paints like a child with an audacious approach in the composition and in the use of colour, but with a memory infected with the turbulence of time: these are the white or the black holes, which spread at different places onto his paintings. These holes lead to void and emptiness, caused by the destruction of the features of a place, or by the loss of a friend or a beloved one.



Figure: 38.
Ali Abbas. *The Palm Tree and Neighbours*. (2005),
oil on canvas. 90 x 90cm, Sydney.

Palm Tree and Neighbours

In this work, something that is full of signs will appear in a new birth; it may be an event, symbols, an ornament that embellishes the part of a window, or the hand of a child that left its traces on the wall of an alley.

The painting then converts to a celebration of colour, like in a domestic rug, and a mood expressed by a small girl who carries her heart on her head and another girl who carries the dates of her palm tree to present them to her neighbours; a human eye glances from a dark space, and a decorated window is achieved by spontaneous touches.

The artistic composition is divided into two parts. The first part controls the left hand side of the painting, and the other its right hand side; these two parts are open on a vast light surface. In this painting Ali recollects the features of a popular alley, through a tired memory, a memory that has suffered from the events of time. In this artwork, the proficiency in the treatment of the artistic elements, occupied both with the artist's rational and emotional vision to the place, converts the painting to a colourific achievement.

Ali's palm tree is not just a tree that grants its dates to the neighbours, it is also a green connection, which strengthens the relationship between them.

The Last Letter

When Ali speculates on the letter he receives from his family, he assumes that his mother's tears, mixed with the small words, have converted the writing to talismans and signs. His eyes go deep between the lines, which are written on the paper of an old exercise book; he smells the odour of her nostalgia, and hears her voice. The voice of his mother continues with a monotonous, repetitive rhythm as a magical fetish, which liberates Ali from the frame of time and place.

In the letter, Ali sees himself as a small child coloured in red and yellow; the boy is standing between the words of the letter; between the two edges of dream and reality, and behind him are the lines which the book of time has drawn before vanishing.

The composition of this work tends to structural simplicity, and consists of two parallel longitudinal lines that divide the painting into two equal parts, mediated by a

white space with light lines. Below and in the middle of the painting, a small child stands as a warm big mass.

The work appears as an integral decorative unity, distinguished by the pliability of letters with their spontaneous movements. The treatment adds a symbolic space on the dark background, where the rhythms of the colours, reconfigured from yellow and blue, increase the suggestive values.



Figure: 39.
Ali Abbas. *The Last Letter*. (2006),
acrylic on canvas. 120 x 100cm. Sydney.

Ali's painting shows a sensual world, poetic and expressive; its elements arise suddenly, maculated by the mud of the first parturition. Despite Ali's proficiency in the alphabet of construction and metamorphosis, his work is an instantaneous creation achieved with his own particular logic.

Symbols and Synonyms in Ali's Artworks

- The heart: the love
- Al Mash-houf: a small traditional boat, from the ancient Sumerian times.
- The crescent: traditional symbol.
- The eye: human presence.
- The fish: prosperity.
- The door: the hope.
- The candles: the light and prayer.
- The palm tree: fertility.
- The botanical and the geometrical elements: traditional artistic elements.
- The palm of the hand, the hand of Fatima: to avoid the envious one.

3.1.5 Jasam Hasan

Jasam was born in Iraq in 1953. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts of Baghdad, with a Bachelor Degree in Arts in 1979. He continued his study and obtained an Advanced Diploma in 1982, when he became an assistant teacher at the Academy. Jasam's artwork has been received internationally. He is a member of the Iraqi Artists Association, a member of Iraqi Visual Artists, and a member of the International Artists Association. He has participated in three Biennials in Baghdad, Cairo and Bangladesh. His work has also featured in "Iraq Contemporary Art", and he received two art prizes: the first prize of Al-Wasiti Exhibition and the first Prize of the Youth Exhibition. Jasam has also exhibited in Jordan, Bahrain, China and Italy.

Jasam immigrated to Australia in 2002, and has been living in the city of Liverpool, NSW since then. He has participated in three exhibitions in Sydney: the first two exhibitions were *Poem from Iraq* at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre and the *17th Liverpool City Arts Prize*, at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre in 2003, and the third was a solo exhibition in 2005.

The work of this artist is characterised by abstract expressionist values. His artistic themes depend on elements of the local environment, the ornaments of popular traditions, and the simplicity of the human body. Jasam works with different materials to achieve his artwork, such as: oil, acrylic, watercolour, pencil, canvas, paper and cardboard.

Influences and Themes

Jasam grew up in a rural town called Al Amara in the southern marshes of Iraq. It is both a historical and rural area, rich in its beautiful and rough environmental aspects:

Where the life of people in those marshes is inseparable from nature; they live in floating houses which they fix to the marsh bed, work hard all day either in fishing or farming.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Hasan, J. (2005), the statement of the artist Jasam Hasan. Sydney. 11-04-2005.

This region grants the visitor a sense of ancient times; this feeling does not only relate to the way people live, which harmonizes with the necessity of the place and the continuity of their ancient traditions, but also to the ruins of Sumerian monuments, which spread everywhere.

In this region, Jasam spent time, and drew on its aspects and symbols:

Just as our ancestors did many centuries earlier... when I look at the Sumerian clay tablets and see the way they used to draw in an attempt to capture the world around them, I recall our own attempts as children in the early years of school. Back then, we were all attracted to depict the simple symbols of our landscape: the palm trees, boats, hunters, fishermen, women working in the fields.

Jasam's interest in art began to develop in high school with the help of some skilled artists, especially Sobaih Abboud and Mahoud Ahmad. After high school he studied art at Baghdad University under the supervision of distinguished artists Fayek Hasan and Hasan Shaker al Saeed. Thus the influence of those teachers with other local artists such as Jawad Salim and Lisa Al Turk were clear in his artistic beginnings. After his graduation, Jasam attempts to realize artworks that reflect the Iraqi experiment since 1960.

At this stage Jasam's painting reflects a concern for his social environment. In his first solo exhibition held in 1991, at Baghdad Art Centre Gallery, his interest in the art of the local artists inspired by popular tradition, is accompanied by an interest in the works of international artists such as Gustav Klimt, Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Picasso, David Hockney, and the impressionists of first and second generation such as Gauguin, Van Gogh, Toulouse Lautrec.

Jasam considers the art of painting in general as a continuous attempt to produce aesthetic forms from the ordinary elements of life and the environment:

I believe, it is a never-ending attempt to produce an alternative vision where the visible converges with the way we see it and the state of

mind with which we associate... when painting, I feel sincerely devoted to a process that has been going on from the beginning of times and which will go on forever. It is the eternity of lines and colours that we happen to witness and might participate in by what could be at the end a tiny little variation in the everlasting series of artistic attempts.¹⁰⁴

In Sydney, the beginning of a new life was hard, especially for the migrant artist, but Jasam found his way, and starts to understand more about art in Australia: “In Sydney I was interested in visiting the Art Galleries,... and what attracted me was the richness of Australian art and its strong international presence, by the successful experiments of skilled artists”. Among those artists who interested him are John Olsen, David Larwill, Brett Whiteley and Colin Lancelly.

Jasam has participated in several group exhibitions, in Liverpool and Fairfield and in one solo exhibition which was held in April 2006 at MLC Gallery, Sydney.

Man and woman were the main symbols of his works, in addition to artistic vocabularies and local elements that contributed to developing his artistic vision, which is achieved by spontaneous and rapid lines, and tends more to an abstract trend. He has established an expressive style based on the manipulation of elements from human bodies:

through a personal point of view, where the painting appears as a propositional work that poses query, and provokes the viewer to participate in the artistic and the cultural reading of the artwork.¹⁰⁵

This work displays an abstract expressionist tendency with the use of varied materials including: oil, acrylic, water colours, pencils on papers and the cardboard.

¹⁰⁴ Hasan. (2005).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid (2005).

His art represents a personal history, and his feelings, expressed through line and colour, are mixed with images from his dreams and the past moments of daily life. He mentions that: “I have tried to penetrate the crucial facts of existence and its secrets”.

Jasam who lives with a deep sense of sadness, notices the shrivelling of emotion in human life. He tries to look for leftover justifications of the human existence, through his aesthetic research, to reach the human spring, which grants us the pleasure and the superiority of the soul, and the work that gives life; the sense of continuity and beauty.

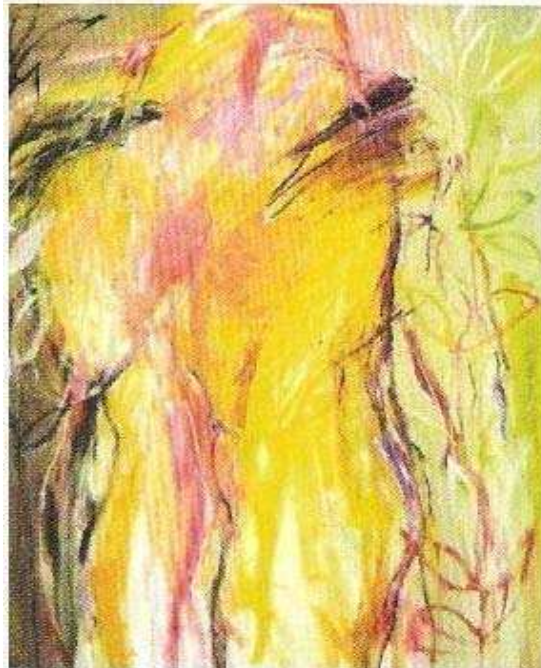


Figure: 40.
Jasam Hasan. *Untitled 1*: (from the series, *The Conditions of Humanities*), (1999), acrylic on canvas. 50 x 70cm, Sydney.

The Paintings

Untitled 1

In the artwork *Untitled 1*, from the series the *Conditions of Humanities*, the composition reveals the human figures mediating the surface of the painting. Those refer to two persons embracing. The light spreads on the elements; the beamy colours, which consist of red, yellow and to a lesser degree of white, immerse the bodies. The colours tremble through rapid touches like a firebrand. The agile lines drawing the botanical leaves, stream harmoniously with the lines of the bodies.



Figure: 41.
Jasam Hasan, *Untitled 2: (from the Series, The Conditions of Humanities)* (1999), acrylic on canvas. 100 x 100cm. Sydney.

Untitled 2

In the artwork *Untitled 2*, from the series *the Conditions of Humanities* done in acrylic, the blue and the gray colours control the surface of the painting, and merge with an abstract space; the composition is organised around two figurative forms but its significance exceeds the figurative idea and reveals a face from human life, through a geometrical ornamental background whose symbols are taken from popular carpets and old signs. The coloured linear touches, starting from the top of the painting, are poured on the human bodies as a waterfall of light and colour, and appear as the lodes of a rare mineral.

In these works, Jasam presents a unique artistic vision, where the bodies are transferred from the academic forms and reconfigured according to a personal and dreaming imagination. Simplifying the lines, the human bodies merge one into another to form different characters, where they live in a loving space, sad at times, in a feeble modernist life. The aesthetic sense reflects the cultural attitude of an artist who tries to go beyond local space, without distancing himself from his origins.



Figure: 42.
Jasam Hasan. *Untitled 3: (from the Series, The Conditions of Humanities)*, (2006)
acrylic on canvas. 100 x 100cm, Sydney.

New Life, New Ideas

In Australia, his work starts gradually to move towards a new colourific space:

This appeared as a study in colour, and a search for significance. The focus on figurative elements as a means for inspiration is still as it was before, when the composition of the work was dependent on the internal dialogue of the figure, or between two or more figures in different positions, and conveys an emotional state.¹⁰⁶ (Translated by the author).

In this work, the artist is still attracted to the magic of the human body with its possibility in configuring and reconfiguring to different forms with their unlimited linear and coloured relationships. Also, a vital space for interpretation - as seen in *Untitled 3* - depends on the diversity in the values of the glowing and the warm

¹⁰⁶ Hasan. (2005).

colours. The background consists of coloured surfaces that help strengthen the visual relationships. The line which defines the bodies draws the movement of fire that gives another aesthetic dimension, rich in significance. The warm colours are cumulative and spread with a sentient feel, achieved through skilled technique and grant the viewer a sense of movement.

Between one artwork and another, one can notice a sort of disjunction, but an apparent disjunction, for there is a unifying characteristic, which connects these works, regardless of the diversity of visions: the vocabularies of social life and the local environment are still the common denominator.

Since 2006, the interest of the artist in the human figure vanished and tended to a more abstract form that draws its elements from popular constructions, as seen in his work *New Horizon*.



Figure: 43.
Jasam Hasan, *New Horizon*, (2007).
45 x 45cm, acrylic on canvas. Sydney.

In this work, the artistic composition appears as a cohesive combination of the forms of a window, a door and an arch, based on the homes of popular alleys. The aesthetic of these elements meets in a coloured space and a harmonized texture. The wall is a partition between the things in a limited space, and a sign that indicates the beginning of a surface and its ending.

The general construction of the artwork tends to simplicity and abbreviation; but the spreading of colours and their regulation according to rhythmic relationships, the alternation between the tones of the warm and the cool colours, permit the viewer to notice a composite artistic construction, realized through an artistic vision that depends on a sense of equalization between the surfaces of colours.

In these works, noticeable also is his attempt to discover the interior life of his subject, where the artistic elements collaborate to serve the expressive states of ordinary life: the traces on a part of an old wall, arch and window, or a small branch of a plant. He tries to communicate the idea that colour is a language that cannot be abbreviated, the language that has the capacity to move both the viewer and the artist to a space wider than the borders of the painting. Instantaneously, we discover that we are reading different chapters, in a sophisticated book.

Symbols and Synonyms in Jasam's Artworks

- The human body form: human presence.
- The traces of the old walls: refers to a human existence.
- The geometrical and botanical decorative elements: traditional artistic elements.
- The arch, the door and the window: traditional architecture elements.

3.1.6 Alia Hasan.

Alia Hasan is a painter; she was born in Iraq. She worked as a social worker, and participated in various exhibitions in Baghdad. When she left Baghdad she exhibited her work in Jordan and in Syria. Since she arrived in Australia she has been living in the suburb of Lidcombe, in Sydney.

She is a member of MAC, and has participated in several exhibitions in Sydney, in Casula, and in Canberra; her last participation was in *Inside Out* exhibition, which was held in 2006 in Auburn. She has received a number of awards. She currently teaches the art of calligraphy in schools and community organizations.

Alia works with a special treatment to the surface of the painting. This surface is reconfigured by acrylic with a rough texture, according to the artist's technical vision, which combines different materials, such as oil, acrylic, paper and cardboard.

Influences and Themes

Alia took her first artistic influences from her family milieu, which was interested in music and painting. She was to work regularly with her sister, who was also a painter. This life encouraged Alia to develop her artistic tendency, especially in Arabic calligraphy.

Alia's artwork has been affected by ancient and modern Islamic art. She was interested also in the works of the artist Hachem Al Baghdady who was a teacher of Arabic Calligraphy at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad; this appears in her work through colours and symbols, which give her paintings their modernist look.

In Sydney, Alia was concerned about the response of the audience towards an art with different aesthetics, based on Arabic Calligraphy with an ornamental trend. What surprised her however was the positive response of the viewers, and their awareness

of the aesthetic and cultural values of different civilizations. This response encouraged her and enhanced her artistic experiment:

I noticed the positive response of the viewers towards my works, and considered the questions posed by some of them, to clarify an idea, a symbol or a technique, as an expression of their need for understanding, and a sign of love and appreciation.¹⁰⁷ (Translated by the author).

Her concern with clarifying her artistic ideas leads her to write an explanatory note, in such a way that it appears as an aesthetic addition in the artwork. Alia feels content after every art exhibition, because she lives and touches the vital interaction in a multicultural society.

This artist presents a contemplative and spiritual world, dominated by a mystic soul and the sensation of redolent words, through an artistic cohesive style. The main idea which directs her is to create an artistic vision that depends on Islamic architectural elements, Arabic calligraphy and the meaning of words, and the search for balanced relationships. This leads to the creation of a sentimental link between the viewer and the work.

The beauty of Arabic calligraphy is like something which lives in my unconsciousness, and the revival of this beauty is my message. The letters I have drawn are a clear expression of this aesthetic and emphasize the traditional values and ancient symbols that are spreading on the space of my painting¹⁰⁸ (Translated by the author).

¹⁰⁷ Hasan, A. (2005), the statement of the artist Alia Hasan. Sydney. 25-06-2005.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

The Paintings

The Far Away City

In this work, the artist draws an imagined world, very far from the real world but with vocabularies that are close to human beings; who can reach this world through a deep state of quietism and belief; it is a symbolic world that invites them to imagine the city of dream and peace, where the fields, the streets and each of its architectural elements, are designed in a symbolic way, where everything tends to god.

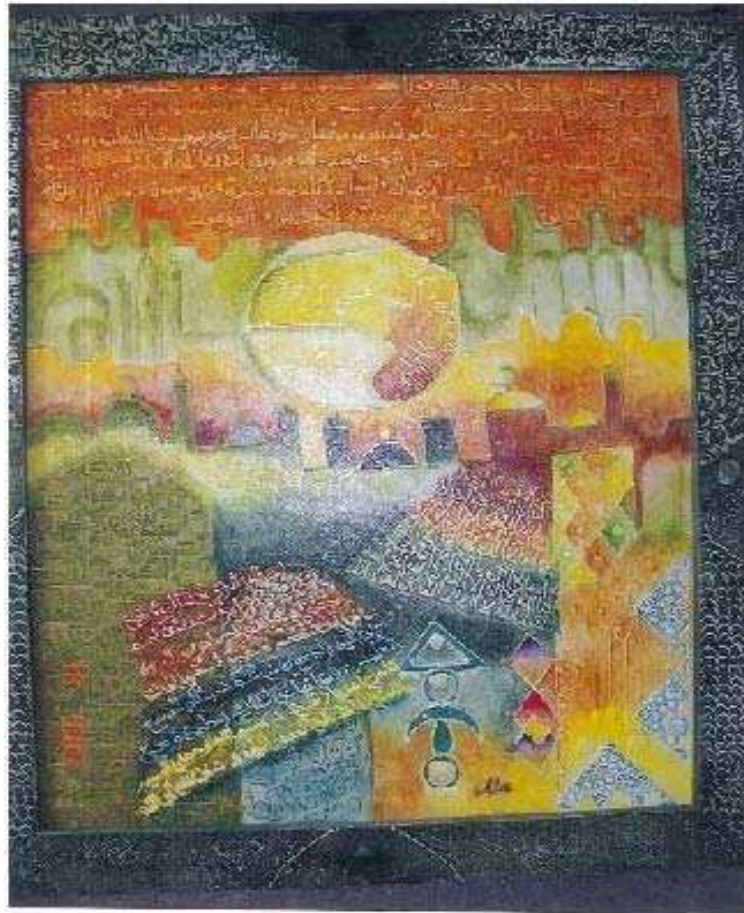


Figure: 44.
Alia Hasan, *The Far Away city*, (2004)
mixed media. 110 x 90cm, Sydney.

The space of the city coloured in orange, is converted to a writing space with Koran verses as the most distinguished symbol in Islamic thinking.¹⁰⁹ this is the symbol of god (الله= Allah), and the name itself is a symbol, which includes all the sacred meanings, because it is based on ‘the verse of light’:

*(35) Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.
The parable of his light, is as if there were a niche
And within it Lamp: the lamp enclosed in glass; the glass as it were
A brilliant star: lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the East
Nor from the West, whose oil is well-nigh luminous
Though fire scarce touched it: light upon Light!
Allah doth guide whom he will to His Light: Allah doth set forth parables
For men: and Allah, Doth know all things. (Surah 24: Al Nur).*

The viewer can reach this world from the window of the heart. The moon is portrayed through an imaginary sense and through calligraphy. It mediates the top of the painting and the image of a far away city, immersed in light and hope. The writing is continually spreading through the rhythmic repetition of the name of god, which unifies its tonal values. The curious eye moves between one surface of light and another, through fields, loaded by the rhythms of colour. The musicality that the viewer may feel through the artistic shapes of the letters, is enriched by the words’ meanings. The artist has succeeded in depicting the personal spirit, and in representing the imaginary state in an expressive space.

In this artwork, one may be able to find a surface of sadness. This may be through the persistent repetition of the name of god, the recitation of the Koran, which is a call to patience and to god’s mercy. This state of sadness seems to evoke solitude, and a state of fatalism. But this work also points to a space of optimism and hope, which we find in the meaning of the written word, as in the colours of the rainbow.

¹⁰⁹ Shacht. J & Bosworth. C. E. (1998). *The Legacy of Islam*, Part 1. p. 368. Kuwait, the World of Knowledge. No, 233. the National Committee for Arts, Culture and Literature.

The Door

In *the Door* as in *the Far Away City*, the search for the world of peace and hope is the idea which the artist tries to present. The composition of the artwork, takes the form of a door with decorative units that take the form of octagonal stars in apparent and unclear rhythmic repetitions. (Refer to 4.7.1.1.4 , Historical Place. p. 182).

The door provides an expressive vocabulary to the artist, who tries to construct around and through it her artistic and human vision. Above this door, the writing taken from a chapter of the Koran reads as follows:

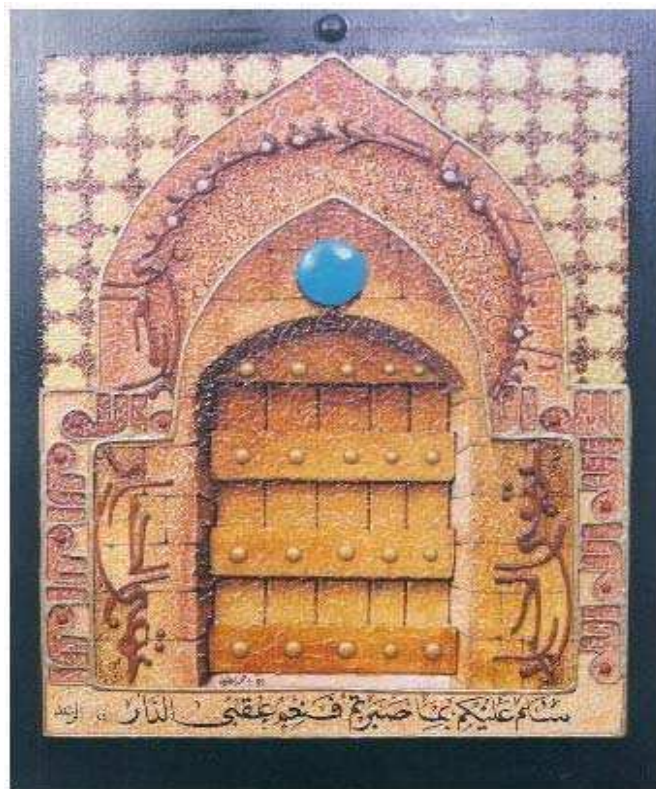


Figure: 45.

Alia Hasan. *The Door*, (2004),
mixed media. 90 x 70cm. Sydney.

"سلام عليكم بما صبرتم، فنعمى عقبى الدار"

Peace unto you yet

Persevered in patience! Now

How excellent is the final Home! (سورة الرعد = Al Raad = the Thunder, N24),

Surah 13. P: 585. Quran.

This was written in Kufi script, and draws an arc surrounded by botanical ornaments. This writing is repeated by the Nashk script at the bottom of the painting. In this painting, the signs and spiritual significations enrich the artistic text, and make the eyes question: what is behind this door, and beyond? The tones of the brown convert to internal lights that give the door and what's inside it the meaning of sacredness.

In these works, every element appears beautiful and equable in its pictorial surface, and leads the viewer to the world of contemplation and prayer, a world settled by the agile words and their streamlined movements. This artistic vision, inspired by an aesthetic heritage, and presented through inherited popular symbols, is also enriched by experiments in technique, which intensify the beauty of letters and their appearance in an artistic space.

The Tree of Life

In this work, the artist announces her belonging to the human race and her yearning for peace and freedom, in her search for a fertile life with hope and dignity.

In the areas of disaster and war, sufferings, frustration and desperation become the reality of human beings. Hope remains the mirage, or the horizon, which lights from far away, on the road travelled by those looking for a better life. This is still one of the major concerns of this artist. This is the way in which she reached her destination: Australia is that giant tree that tries to tell viewers the story of migration from its humble beginnings to its happy or sad endings.

This painting, done in water colour on paper, and sized 133 x 93 cm, seems like a celebration of human existence. Groups of birds represent migrants spreading in different expressive movements, around and onto a big tree which symbolizes Australia. Its branches extend in the space of the wide ocean and onto the surface of the painting. English and Arabic scripts surround it and spread in its space.

At the top right hand corner of the painting, we can notice some symbols which point to war, the main reason for immigration. A military aircraft and a tank fire at a nest, which symbolizes home. The giant tree is filled by the fluttering of wings. The scared

and baffled birds are liberated from their prison, and trying to reach the tree, which represents their last shelter across the seas.



Figure: 46.
Alia Hasan, *The Tree of Life*, (2004),
watercolour on Paper. 133 x 93cm, Sydney.

At the top, on the other side of the tree, the birds who reached their peaceful place, embrace their babies; some of those birds are feeling happy, while others await an unknown destiny, in a cage which represents the detention centre, suspended on the border of hope, even though he sees its oasis from the window of his detention. On one side of this cage, an explanation, written in English, clarifies the symbols of the painting:

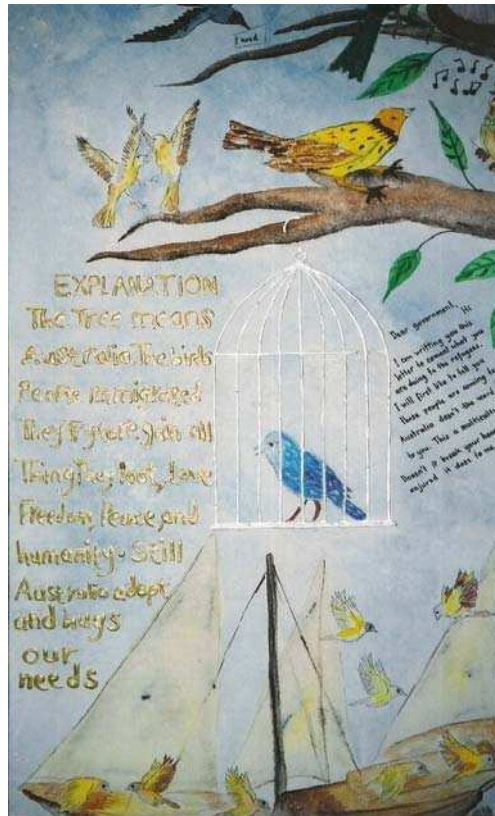
The tree means Australia.

The birds, the migrants.

They try to regain all the things they have lost:

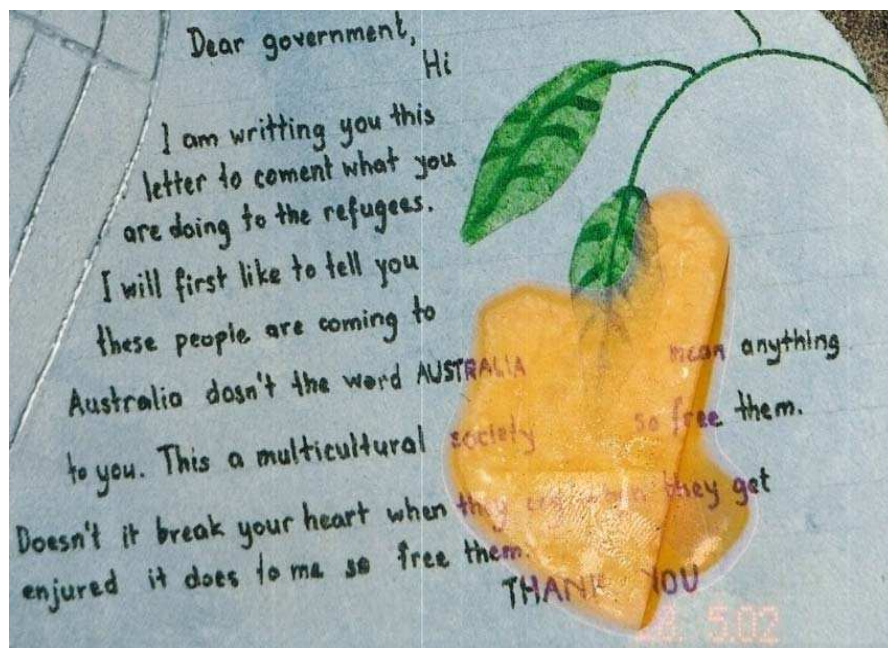
Love, peace, and humanity.

Still, Australia adopts and hugs our needs.



Detailed.

On the other side of the cage, a letter is written with spontaneous and emotional words. It reads as follows:



Underneath the cage, an old migrants' boat does not succeed in reaching the Australian shores, and awaits its destiny between the waves of the ocean, where some of the birds are flying with panic above and around the boat, while others are sinking into the dark waters.

The human existence comes before any other consideration, and protecting this existence is of utmost importance. In this painting, identity is cancelled, borders disappear, and people take the form of birds and speak their language..

The works of Alia Hasan are an emotional product, and a vision that harmonizes with the continuing link between humans. Meanings are engraved on the façade of time, reflected in architectural elements or ornaments on the surface of her painting. Her love of the world of letters, and the aesthetic values, which lie in the letters and behind them weaves through it an absolute vision, spiritual and beautiful.

Symbols and Synonyms in Alia's Artworks

- The moon and the crescent: fertility and hope.
- The Arabic calligraphy: artistic element and meanings.
- The far away city: the city of dream and peace.
- Islamic architectural elements, the dome, the minaret, the arc of porch.
- The geometrical and botanical decorative elements: traditional artistic elements.
- The door: hope.
- The giant tree: Australia.
- The birds: people.
- The cage: prison.

3.1.7 Abbas Makrab:

Abbas is a painter. He was born in Baghdad, 1967. He completed his studies at Baghdad Academy of Fine Arts. He is a member of the International Professional Artists Association, and of the Iraqi Plastic Association. His works have been exhibited in group and solo exhibitions in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Holland and Australia.

Since his arrival in Australia in 2001, Abbas has been living in Liverpool NSW where he is continuing his Masters degree at the National School of Arts. He is a member of NAVA. In 2003 he participated in two Community Art projects, the first in Sule College under the title: *Because You Can't See It, It Doesn't Mean It's Not There*, and the second under the title: *Artists, Refugee First World, Freedom and Final Destination*. Between 2003 and 2004 he participated in several exhibitions, such as *Coloured Visions*, at the MLC Powerhouse Gallery, Sydney; *Feeling Thought and Beliefs* Exhibition, at Fairfield Gallery and the Art Gallery of New South Wales and *Poems from Iraq*, at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre.

His art is distinguished by an abstract trend, the use of different materials to develop his artwork, especially acrylic, and the treatment of the surface of the canvas to get suitable effects, which enrich the expressive values in his painting.

Influences and Themes

Abbas's human and cultural life has been enriched from different artistic and literary sources, and the works of famous artists and their writings such as Mark Rothko and Paul Klee, which were an artistic and aesthetic guide to this artist's experiment.

In Iraq, he was interested in the work of the artist Hasan Shaker al Saeed and his inspiration from the popular art and the traces of the walls. In his earlier artistic attempts, he built his painting:

as a panel of mud. The idea was to add a historical and environmental legitimacy to my artistic construction, which includes the signs of the

old walls, symbols or the forms which reveal the shapes of human beings; I worked with the colour, which may produce a state of contemplation for the viewer. This sort of artistic treatment may refer to the sentimental environment from where I came.¹¹⁰ (Translated by the author).

In Sydney this artistic attempt tends to another direction distinguished by symbolic expression. It depends on a daring imagination in creating the elements of its world, and constructing them in his artwork, outside time and place, where elements and human bodies are liberated from the gravitation of reality:

I believe I can transfer the place in my mind, and I wander the world in my memory, as I can imagine a place, which has no link with any place.¹¹¹

Abbas's new life has permitted him “to get a new cognitive experience and freedom. This freedom grants me a wide surface of expression, thus, I feel closer to the painting”¹¹². The discoveries of the world of museums and art galleries also granted him another source of knowledge, which gave him clear ideas about the Australian art of painting, especially the works of the artist Whiteley, and his artistic vision and abstract capacity; in addition to his interest in the musical movement and the colour in the works of Elizabeth Cummings.

His study in Sydney grants his symbolic vision another dimension, and new technical interests. He is still occupied with his metaphorical world, but his research tends to another direction; the events of history or the epic texts and the fetishes, which represent a cultural and human catalyst to an artist who likes to be inspired by the tradition of his homeland:

¹¹⁰ Makrab, A. (2005), the statement of the artist Abbas Makrab, Sydney. 02-07-2005.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

I don't like to be inspired from history or the legendary texts for a pictorial vision.... I prefer to discover the state, the meaning, which lies beyond the vocabulary of historical events or the legend text.¹¹³

(Translated by the author).

In his project for the Masters degree "*Gilgamesh: The Reality and The Imaginable*", this artist is inspired by and follows the dynamic spirit of the Gilgamesh epic, in immortality and death, love and friendship, the search for knowledge and happiness. Despite the difference in time and place, these questions remain questions of contemporary human life, as Abbas notes:

So the expression or the answer should be through contemporary means and a new vocabulary.¹¹⁴

What attracted him to the Gilgamesh epic is the trace, which Gilgamesh left behind; he realized his immortality in a literary work and adventure, regarding to the questions of life which remain as riddles, but included many aesthetic and human meanings. So his purpose is not just to discover a part of the aesthetic and the human space of this epic:

His aim is to leave some traces behind; I believe that every human being tries to leave his traces upon the things as a sample of immortality. This is what I'm doing through my artwork.¹¹⁵

The viewer may notice that in *Sunset Twice Sometimes*, and *Incantation of Love*, which reveal the artist's individuality and his expressive style, the duality of modernist vision and the inspiration of the cultural heritage are expressed through line, signs and figures, in a harmonized composition, with an emotional resonance which extends the artistic space and grants the viewer aesthetic and mental enjoyment.

¹¹³ Makrab. (2005).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

The Paintings

Travelling Around the World

In this painting, Abbas reflects clearly his symbolic approach, where the human bodies, shapes and the other elements are converted to new creatures. The artistic construction is composed from signs and human forms, which indicate fatigue and a deep sense of anxiety. The features of those humans seem like figures that have come silently from the edge of memory. They stand in immobility and in a distracted state, behind a big framed rectangle. The square points to a balanced geometrical relationship with the general frame of the painting, which draws the frame of a square. Two of those people who wandered the real world or the internal world of the artist are standing behind the square, and the other awaiting in a dark space. Those look for a gleam of hope and a light to follow. Their sadness and frustration are represented by the degrees of the dark and the pale brown colour.



Figure: 47.
Abbas Makrab. *Travelling Around the World*, (2005)
mixed media. 80 x 80cm. Sydney.

The human figures have lost their facial features, though they have kept their general human characteristics, and refer to people of a time and place that have vanished, or to those who belong to any time and place. Those may be the artist's inner self with its psychological transformations; they may be one figure or the figures of different people with similar features, life and suffering.

Silence and calm characterize the rhythm of the painting; so silence appears to the viewer as a catalyst for thinking and pondering.

Way to The Sky

In this work, the triangle refers to a pyramid form and represents the main element in the composition. The direction of the triangle indicates a sort of height, and aims upwards, indicating the spirituality of this artist and his desire for purification.

The artistic composition consists of three vast coloured surfaces in the form of rectangles, with different degrees of brown colour. These degrees control the surface of the painting. The nature of the surface or its elevations helps the colour in its transformation, through the technical treatment of the acrylic paint. Its elevations achieved by rough acrylic touches grant these surfaces an ornamental sense.

From the top and the left hand side of the painting, the dark brown colours with the spontaneous traces control the surface of the first rectangular shape. The second rectangular shape is a vast surface that mediates a part of the painting; the degree of colour and the ornament distinguishes it from the light surface, which is situated at the right hand side of the artwork. These coloured surfaces are connected by two big stripes that appear as beams with linear traces. The triangular form mediates the central part of the composition, and represents a big mass that plays the connecting role with the other elements. The white which colours a big part of the edges of the painting integrates the artistic composition and represents also a frame to it. This work reveals interlocked geometrical and artistic relationships, which present the consistency of the painting's construction.

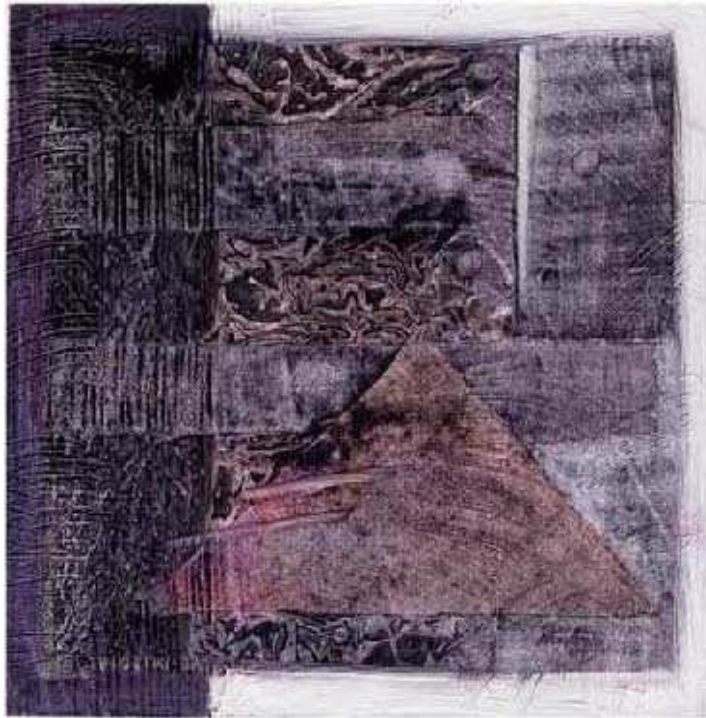


Figure: 48.
Abbas Makrab, *Way to The Sky*, (2005)
mixed media. 90 x 90cm, Sydney.

The metaphoric and the symbolic way, which distinguishes the work of this artist, is still apparent in his works; through the search for new forms and visions. In these works, Abbas tries to present an artistic text through a perspective, which permits the awareness of the viewer to participate in the creative process.

Sunset Twice Sometimes

The aestheticism in colours, which is expressed in the use of one colour with its hues, that characterizes his painting before his life in Sydney, converts to a richness of colour. Abbas notes:

The painting, which appears as an aesthetic expression, and commensurate with the artist's sentiment, is also a hypothetical product of the time and the place that is the polar of sentimental relationships, which affects the creative process of such artist.¹¹⁶ (Translated by the author).

¹¹⁶ Makrab. (2005).



Figure: 49.
Abbas Makrab, *Sunset Twice Sometimes*, (2006)
acrylic on canvas. 163 x 148cm, Sydney.

The painting achieved by a cohesive composition which incorporates a vision that is open to different readings, noticeable in *Sunset Twice Sometimes*, which explains the artist's interest in expressing his idea, that mixes the real with the imaginary through an emotional treatment. Where the viewer stands before a personal world, of an artist who tries to create his own legend, its traces appear through an artwork; its artistic vocabularies consist of the sensibility, the tone of colour and the line of the agile movement.

In *Sunset Twice Sometimes*, the visual relationships, from the values of the warm colours, the presence of line and its role in combining between the different surfaces of elements, and the consistency of the composition; reveal a new experience of the artist, which he has gained during his project work for the Masters degree.

The line converts the formal values of the human bodies, to different shapes of different surfaces. These surfaces are configured from coloured units; with harmonized relationships from the yellow, the white and the various degrees of red. The artistic construction consists of different forms of human figures and spontaneous signs that integrate the texture of the painting through the treatment of colour. Those

melt in the light, where an exceptional presence of a human figure mediates the painting and plays a distinctive role in the artistic text. This human form dives deeply into the colours; it bathes in the light, with a streaming agile movement.

In this work Abbas expresses his deep feeling about life. The sun which lights him and upon the elements of the world is two suns in one, and when it sets, it sets twice, once behind the line of the horizon and a second time in his heart.

The artist tries to materialize his particular relationship with the light and expresses the gladness of colour as a sort of freedom, which he feels; the freedom which converts the human being to a transparent creature reconfigured from light and spirit.

Incantation of Love

In this work, the artist tries to reconfigure reality and its sequence of events according to his own interpretation. Thus, he employs talismanic language, but through the principles of painting.

Talismanic writing with its signs and symbols becomes an artistic theme. The spread of elements with their details, the human figures with their different forms on the borders of the painting are designed around a vast violet surface in the middle of the artistic composition; this surface represents the focal point of the power of magic, which realizes desire and converts the imagined to the real.

The general artistic composition of this painting builds from different small components into vast surfaces, in forms that are like squares. From the left hand side and from the top to the bottom of the painting a linear vast surface is divided into various small spaces. These start at the top with a square that includes signs or magical writing that refers to talismanic writings.

In the other coloured parts, the human figures portrayed in reverse positions appear as artistic elements reconfigured from touches of red, yellow, blue and light green.

These small surfaces appear in contrasting or harmonized states in their artistic environment.

At the right hand side of the painting, the touches of colour continue also with a linear shape parallel to the linear surface of the left hand side. These also include some signs which refer to human elements, or as spontaneous colouring relationships. These appear beside a lightened violet surface that controls the central part of the painting. The long blue spontaneous touch, which mediates the square as a sign or trace, plays a visually connecting role with the background and in the strength of the artistic composition.



Figure: 50.
Abbas Makrab. *Incantation of Love*, (2006)
acrylic on canvas. 80 x 80cm, Sydney.

In this incantation, the artist tries to recall images and phantasms of people whom he may have loved, and seeks through the power of this fetish to meet them. Those may be his parents, his beloved; or all those expecting his coming at any moment.

The painting of this artist is a place in which new creatures are generated, in an aesthetic form, where the line and the colour are converted to bright elements that vault from the zone of heart, to the space of mind.

This painting is a reflection of the first sight of things that are transferred to an image belonging to another hypothetical world. It is the magical glance, which attracts and surprises us, whereby we feel the warmth of the sunshine or the reflection of the shadow on the surface of the heart, for the first time.

Symbols and Synonyms in Abbas's Artworks

- The forms of human bodies: the forms of different lives.
- The traces of the old walls: human existence.
- Talisman: invisible power.
- The sun: the life and hope.
- Geometric elements: traditional artistic elements.

3.1.8 Khaled Sabsabi

Khaled was born in Tripoli, Lebanon in 1965. He immigrated to Australia with his family in 1979, where he obtained his Masters degree of Art in “Time-based Art, New Media” in 2004 from the University of New South Wales.

Khaled has participated approximately in twenty nine exhibitions, which were held between 1995 and 2005, in Sydney, Perth, Beirut and Anatolia in Turkey, China, Poland, New Zealand; from the Audio Commission exhibitions, the 3rd Digital Art Festival Rosario, Argentina 2007 and Valencia, Spain in 2008, and Canada.

From his selected solo exhibitions: in 2007, *ON`n`ON* Exhibition, Campbelltown Arts Centre and Arts NSW, *Resort*, Audio and Video installation; the Tuhi Centre for the Arts, University of Auckland, New Zealand; in 2005, *Ali or ʿali* Audio and Video installation, Casula Arts Centre and Campbelltown Arts.

"From the late '80s, Sabsabi has been actively involved in community work, especially with at-risk communities, in youth prisons, refugee camps and other facilities. This strong commitment to social advocacy resonates in his art practice. While his work is informed by a diverse social and political landscape, it resists overly didactic readings."¹¹⁷

Influences and Themes

Khaled grew up in the suburb of Granville in Western Sydney. When he finished high school, the teenager, who was from a non English speaking background, and who was interested in Hip-Hop music, works to achieve an artwork that communicates with people through an original language. Thus he works after his graduation to create a cross cultural form with an approach to express the condition of his community as well as to produce an art that reflects the issues of his wider society.

¹¹⁷ Sabsabi, K. (2008). From the biography of the artist Khaled Sabsabi in *Tales of Colour* Exhibition.

Through these works Khaled achieves an appropriate artistic form to a world collecting some of his parts, and some of his concerns, in a space of sound and image. The place which is prepared as a theatre is constructed from different elements of life, managed in a way that the viewer can feel and touch the artistic or the cultural idea of the work. He becomes a part of the scene, and he has the ability to understand and analyse it through another perspective.

Khaled's art is a sort of challenge, a challenge to the means, which allowed him to create or to express the idea from different views or perspectives; as it is also a sort of challenge to the idea itself, noticeably in his last art project *Ali orع ali*, the idea of identity and land, or political ideas in general. The artwork has to challenge the viewer or the listener who is interacting with it.

In my work I would just want to express who I am, and my work over the time has always been as an expression of my surrounding either directly or indirectly.¹¹⁸

This work which is materialized from different elements appears as a visual expression, and creates the symbolic or the conceptual suggestion, which has social, historical and cultural indications that speak to the viewer or the listener. As for Khaled, the artist has moral and human responsibility towards the general human issues of his society:

I suggest that at this point in history...art has a duty, to make a statement and to be responsible; this duty extends to the artist.¹¹⁹

That should be the voice of his people. The artistic subject of such an artist may return to an individual experience, a personal vision, to an aesthetic phenomena or a political statement; for Khaled the idea is a mixture of all of that, as it represents the important part in creating his message, and the way of connecting with the viewer or the listener, which has always been the essence and the foundation of his artwork.

¹¹⁸ Sabsabi, K. (2005), the statement of the artist Khaled Sabsabi. Sydney, 6-9-2005.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. (2005).

Khaled's journey with art is varied; he was involved in performing and in creating music for some short films, after which he worked in making installation works for nearly ten years:

the work with installation was interesting for me, because this allowed me to use different materials that I could access to express my ideas from different points of view, by employing sound narratives, choosing images and creating others.¹²⁰

The last major works, which were exhibited at Casula Powerhouse and at Blacktown Art Centre in 2005, were installation works, titled *Ali or ξ ali*. These works were the result of three years travel to Lebanon, thinking, working and collecting digital materials.

In *Ali or ξ ali* exhibition catalogue, Lisa Havilan the Director of Campbelltown Art Centre notes:

Khaled Sabsabi true to his intentions has created a work that makes a significant contribution to contemporary visual arts practice within Australia. It has been a great privilege to work with Khaled and witness his process and practice as *Ali or ξ ali* has emerged.¹²¹

Con Gouriotis the Executive Director of Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre commented:

He has produced an important artwork. Co-existing in this artwork titled *Ali or 3li* is a complex interweaving of Arabic and Australian geography, theories and personal journeys presented as a film and sound installation ... and creates a dialogue between venues and explores complex local and global issues.¹²²

¹²⁰ Sabsabi. (2005).

¹²¹ Havilan, L. (2005). Catalogue of *Ali or ξ ali*. Campbelltown Arts Centre.

¹²² Gouriotis, C. (2005). Catalogue of *Ali or ξ ali*. Campbelltown Arts Centre.



Figure: 51.
Khaled Sabsabi, *Slash/Camps*. (2006).
Video Projection. 16 x 12m. Sydney

The Works

The exhibition was a joint initiative between the two centres, and contains dual representations of almost identical content, the sun, and the features of destruction in the architecture and the sound of his country of origin.

The work itself has many layers, even from its title, in the idea of saying the word in Arabic as *عالي* = *علي*, is the idea of cooperating or adapting to change people to think in a new place, it is like choosing between East and West; that is the sort of entry level, but the work has more layers than this:

Personally I feel there is no difference between East and West, it is not just about boundary or war, it is about distraction and initially is about land and where people feel most advanced. For me the idea of the difference between East and West is a sort of distraction, and I choose the image of the sun, which is a universal image that rises upon the

entire world. I put two images of the sun one opposite the other, and they rise manipulating and twisting.¹²³

Two Suns

There is something behind these images; it is the idea which liberates the viewer from the norm, which distinguishes between east and west, and engages them in this distraction. It is about people taking their own views, and they have to realize their humanity.

Then there are two suns or two images - each measuring 20m x 15m - that appeared on the walls of Casula Powerhouse Centre; each sun opposite the other, these images were chosen from two distant places. (Refer to 4.7.1.1.2, Actual Place. p. 180). Only occasionally do geography and art correspond with one another, as directly as they have done here; and convert this work to an affirmative and vital one. What makes this work interesting is that it affirms: life and humans are the most important.

Images

Khaled's personal experience and the pictures imprinted in his memory in the Palestinian camps, have shortened the distance between his eyes and heart, and converted to video images, portrayed as a sun that appeared in several spaces.

Suspension is invoked in the context of dialectic between dark and light. This setting and not setting reveals the pulsation of reality, [the meaning of things on the walls of tin, which converts to homes, and the states of time in the eyes of people].

In the sun's rising and falling, suspension between hope and sadness, appearance and disappearance yet sustained, constitute a duration in which the sound, like fragrance permeates and reconstitutes a massive spatial remembrance of a thousand and one ingredients...

¹²³ Sabsabi. (2005).



Figure: 52.
Khaled Sabsabi, *Ali or ʿAli = Ali*, (2006),
Video Projection. 20 x 15m, Sydney.

The work is multilayered in both media and content. The sound is repeatedly folded in time and space. Folded and layered in both composition and display. Folded, blended smooth space forms an agency in the context of the bordered and barrier space of occupancy. In this way the work builds up meaning through massing and repetition, pulling in the content of social and political crises.¹²⁴

Dedication

Khaled devoted his exhibition to the Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali and his cartoon character Hanzala. Naji who was described by the international union of the newspaper publishers as one of the greatest cartoonists since the end of the 18th

¹²⁴ Hobbs, I. (2005). *I Wish this Paper Were Sound. Ali or ʿAli* Catalogue. Campbelltown Arts Centre.

century, and granted him the "Golden Pencil of Freedom", was killed in London in 1987 by unknown person.¹²⁵ This artist and his character inspired Khaled. Naji as a responsible artist; and Hanzala as a symbol of the nation's innermost resistance, he is the voice of resistance, the witness; the guide of his people and the guard of the values of justice and liberty, and the strength on a global scale to be able to stand. Hanzala the ten year old boy is the symbol of the artist's childhood, as he left Palestine at that age.

This character was created by the artist Naji al-Ali who draws the figure in every cartoon as a witness; he never turns once, and always looks towards his homeland. For Khaled, Hanzala is a contemporary hero. Where people talk about the popular heroes of the past, Hanzala stares out at the world through a child's eyes; he knows by instinct the values of good and justice; his presence is the presence of childhood in the world. He is not just the arrow of the compass, which points to Palestine, evoking the experience of refugees looking to their land from far away; or like the viewer looking to the images of the place he can never reach, through barbed wire in Campbelltown Art Centre Gallery; or when you live in a beautiful sandy place but your children cannot play, because the fields are planted with land mines.

This logic poses moral and human questions, not just about Palestine in geographical terms, but Palestine in its humanitarian sense - the symbol of a just cause - it is located in all the places of catastrophe.¹²⁶

Khaled in trying to follow Hanzala's traces has created his figure using the lines of this character; constructed with speakers, these were installed purposefully in a small room away from the other works. Everything appears sad. In this deserted space, Hanzala is looking emotionally through two monitors onto himself, the world, and the future.

¹²⁵ Al-Sheik, S. (2006). "في الذكرى الثامنة عشرة لاستشهاده: ناجي العلي" *Naji al-Ali. In the 18 Memorial of His Martyrdom*. Retrieved in 2/10/06 from <http://altshkeely.com/2006/tashkkeel/106/naji-alali.html>

¹²⁶ Hobbs. (2005).



Figure: 53.
Ali or Eli, General View. Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre.

The Window of Sound

Sound is the other face or the rhythm of object and its echo in the artwork; the other window, which is the viewer or the listener, explores through it the horizon that the artist discovered, the aesthetic space and the presumed place where the concepts and their indications reveal themselves. The sound itself in the installation was again very layered, from very different places, from his journey over the past three years in Lebanon, there was sounds from the traffic in Beirut; sounds from the religious places, mosques and churches. There were many imaginary sounds, taking and manipulating and harmonizing, in a way, which allows the audience or the viewer to go through the space, to be able to navigate their way and find the narrative within all these themes.

The idea of sound or sound narrative or storytelling using sound is a very important thing to me, and it represents what sound is. If you could imagine or listen, imagine and create an image... Installation, video, sound for me are just other tools, or means of expression, which allowed me to create my work, same as a painter, using the brushes and technique as tools, while he could easily paint with his fingers, this is what I feel, this is how easily I could play with sounds or images.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Sabsabi. (2005).

Responsibility

In the work of Khaled, the artistic scene depends on the metaphor of the tight connection between the materials and the technique of its achievement, this work is based on proficiency and an artistic sense, with an expressionist trend and a poetic spirit, which reveal the skill in benefiting from the image of life, its details and the sounds which accompany their rhythms.

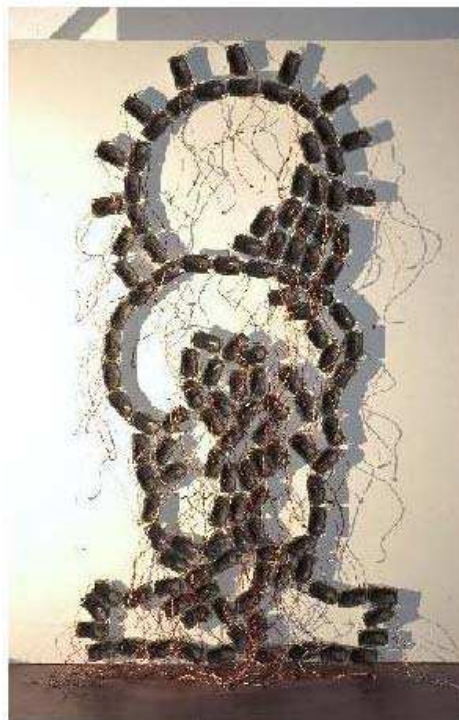


Figure: 54.

Khaled Sabsabi, *Hanzala Looking Into Himself*, (2006), Sydney.

Khaled like every responsible artist is concerned with making a statement that makes sense with reference to either his own or the spectator's culture and his aesthetic sense; and on the other hand he strives to create his particular language. The local, is the apparent: place, shape, sound of every object is respected. Each figure, image, or symbol reveals the meaning of its presence by a definite gesture. His subjects, architecture, sun, a boy, and the sound effects are taken from the details of everyday life to which the artist belongs, and connected with a human view that grants the artwork the indicatives, which exceed the physical dimensions.



Figure: 55.
Khaled Sabsabi, *Ali or Eli*. Dimensions: 3 x 2.6m, Sydney.

He tries to establish the language that expresses the problems of contemporary human life, or to create a new vision, which is combined with human concepts, and based on local elements of Australian environment and his country of origin. This work, cannot be judged solely within the context of art. It can also amount to evidence in a historical case; not a personal but a human, a social and cultural one.

Symbols and Synonyms in Khaled's Artworks

- The Sun: the unity of the world.
- The camp: the life of refugees
- The barbed wire: the prison and occupation.
- The sounds of the ordinary life activities: human presence.

3.1.9 Faisal al Saadi

Al Saadi is a painter; he was born in Missan, in Iraq, in 1939. He studied at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad and graduated in 1965. After his graduation, al Saadi spent his life as an artist, a goldsmith and a silversmith. He was also an art teacher, and he has exhibited in several exhibitions around the world; including England, Holland, Germany, Sweden, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon. In Iraq he was a member of numerous organizations such as: the Iraqi Artist Association, the International Association for International Artist Union, the Iraqi Plastic Arts Society, and the International Arts League.

He has been an Australian resident since 2004, and has lived in the suburb of Liverpool NSW since his arrival in Australia. He held his first exhibition in Australia in 25 Nov 2006 in Liverpool Museum, under the title *Babylon Birdsongs for Peace*.

Al Saadi's work is distinguished by a particular artistic style, with an abstract trend and expressionist and cubist touches. Al Saadi uses oil colours as a main material in his painting, he also works skilfully with ink and pencil on paper.

Influences and Themes

Al Saadi's artistic life in Iraq was influenced by a cultural and artistic trend, which was calling for an art that inspires popular life, the symbols of local environment and the legacy of the ancient civilizations of his country. He was attracted by the works of the artists who worked through this trend, such as Fayek Hasan, Jawad Salim and Hasan Shaker al Saeed.

Faisal who spent his childhood in the marshland region in south Iraq, which has witnessed more than one civilization during its history, is still the devoted son to the legacy of this region and its people, and portrays their wishes for a better life. So his works appear as a reflection of his cultural vision with the sense of freedom of expression "that construct a bridge, which curtails the distance between what it was, what it is and what will be."¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Al Saadi, F. (2006). Personal communication. Sydney. 05-07-2006.

In the catalogue of Faisal's first exhibition, in Liverpool Museum, Nicholas Tsoutas the Artistic Director of Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, notes:

"Babylon Birdsongs for Peace is an exhibition that is inspirational for the creative spirit that characterizes Al Saadi's desire for survival and cultural continuity..."¹²⁹

Faisal takes his artistic vocabularies from different sources, from the Iraqi environment and the epic space of Gilgamesh. He skilfully employs the particularity of time and place, converting its creative and human values to an aesthetic language, whose elements and symbols derived from the life of his people, which seemed as a critical vision loads it with an emotional tendency, and engages with his cultural memory, and his life; in an attempt to reflect the present of the Iraqi life, through heroic elements of legend and the vocabularies of the ancient art values on the mural sculpture of the Sumerian and Babylonian civilisations, which distinguished by abstraction, and the respect of essential values of expression, in elements and forms.

The Paintings

This sort of creative writing distinguishes his work and characterizes this artist with his own stylistic approach, as established in *Baghdad Nights*, *Forward to Back*, *Coldness*, *Calm* and *Enkidu in Babylon*.

Baghdad Nights

Baghdad's Nights gives a rare glimpse of the occasional remembered, joyful times, with people gathered at home. In this painting, the artistic construction mediates and controls a vast surface of the painting. This composition consists of four women in their local dresses; they circle their friend who plays music. The harmonization and the calmness that accompany the listening to the music, appear on the faces of the women, also on the doves sitting or flying and enjoying the warmth of the music,

¹²⁹ Tsoutas, N. (2006). Foreword. the catalogue of *Babylon Birdsongs for Peace* exhibition. Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre. pp. 4-6.

which streams into the space of room. The summer time brings some of its gifts also, in the fruit which embellishes the table, on the left hand side and at the top of the painting.



Figure: 56.
Faisal al Saadi, *Baghdad Nights*, (2001),
oil on canvas. 110 x 90cm. Sydney.

The colours spread on the surface of the painting, in rhythmic repetitions. The opposite shadows balance the values of pale light and reduce the strength of the vertical and the horizontal lines, which convert the surface of the painting to geometrical relationships. That seems closer to a cubist touch, and converts the details to a visionary rhythm, which grant the viewer the sense of textile; in a decorative trend that controls the general construction of the artwork, and reminds the viewer of combinations of the painted glass.

From the first glance at this work, the viewer is faced by the strength and some of the complexity of the work construction, through a cohesive motif. Opposite this, is the artist's need for expressing the vital movement of his personalities, and the alternation between the different degrees of colours, with their harmonizing rhythms, which exceeds the descriptive concept to a symbolic vision that grants the artwork its distinguished appearance.

The horse plays an important symbolic role in the work of this artist: "it is an animal accompanied by the rhythm of our society in its history and represents one of its symbols"¹³⁰. Thus, the artist uses these values as environmental, human, moral and aesthetic features; this is noticeable in some of his artworks such as: *Coldness*. (Refer to Symbols and concepts in the works of artists, 4.2.5. The Horse. p. 151).



Figure: 57.
Faisal al Saadi, *Coldness*, (2001),
oil on canvas. 66.5 x 40cm, Sydney.

Coldness

In *Coldness*, which deals with a political issue, the horse symbolizes the artist's peoples; the horse with his crest draws the shape of a laurel that appears from a coloured background on the right hand side of the painting and tends to a light space. The fatigued horse and the coldness, which distinguishes this work by the hues of the blue colour, has balanced the anger and the pride of this horse, which express the spirit of rebellion, over the top of the sadness that beams from his eyes.

¹³⁰ Al saadi, F. (2006). Personal communication. 11-07-06

The linear and geometric construction, which draw the body of the horse grant him its strong appearance. These lines are continued through the surface of the painting and unify different elements, with spaces of different surfaces and degrees of colours in a strong artistic composition.



Figure: 58.
Faisal al Saadi, *Calm*, (1999),
oil on canvas. 65 x 56cm, Sydney.

Calm

This artwork reveals the propensity of the artist for peace and freedom. The relationships of the warm colours embrace the two agile bodies of the gazelles, under a tree with decorated branches. The gazelles sit in a peaceful state. The agile lines, which draw their bodies, harmonize with the strong lines that compose the general structure of the artwork. The sun, which appears at the top and in the middle of the painting, and through the beautiful branches, adds to the scene another sense of warmth. The doves, symbolizing peace, fly in the space of the painting with different movements.

Enkidu in Babylon

In *Enkidu in Babylon*, the artist portrays the moment where *Enkidu* converts to a new creature; human emotion is bright in his eyes and roughness is calmed. *Enkidu* appears with a head of bull and a human body; the strong creature who lived between the wild animals becomes closer, from the secret which joins two lovers; the woman reclines in a dreaming nap, resigned to the strong hand of *Enkidu*. Behind this scene, a beamy sun appears upon a new fertile world; this world is protected by magical symbols, and represented by a snake and a scorpion for defending the spirit of evil according to Mandaean popular belief.



Figure: 59.
Faisal al Saadi, *Enkidu in Babylon*, (1999),
oil on canvas. 70 x 68cm. Sydney.

Faisal's artwork is achieved through memory filled by pictorial heritage and a purposive consciousness. He puts the viewer in a visual deceptive state of the third dimension, and works through a combination of languages, where colour has a dynamic presence, and a function that serves other elements, forms, personalities. Light spreads through the geometrical units which structure the work, in harmony with the different surfaces of the painting.

This art is dependent on the senses, combining different artistic styles from different civilizations. This stimulates the viewer to share with the artist the meaning of beauty, which is revived or renewed through the vocabularies and the elements of life of the Iraqi environment, in a warm dialogue between the imaginary and the memorable, or in a struggle between the persistence of life and the ascendance of time.

Symbols and Synonyms in Faisal's Artworks

- Enkidu: friend of Gilgamesh.
- The snake and the scorpion: to avoid the spirit of evil.
- The horse: authenticity.
- The geometrical and the botanical ornaments: traditional artistic elements.
- The dove: peace.
- The gazelle: delicacy.
- The plant: symbolizes fertility.
- The palm tree: indicates to the country of the artist.

Flying around You

Jamal Joumaa

...I am staring at every detail of every miracle, you have created, and every trace your hands have engraved on the façade of time.

...I speculate on each rhythm of an exhalation of wind, and a swish of a brook...
On each granule of sand which embraces its thirsty sister, in your vast Sahara.

I am flying over your space, to breath in something of your wisdom, and I become the bird of fire that belongs to your horizon.

Chapter 4

Symbols and concepts in the works of the artists

Introduction

Symbols are considered to be important components for artistic composition in the works of Australian-Arabic artists. These emerge in the context of the artworks as distinctive elements and enrich their meanings. They appear as aesthetic elements, which the artist selects as forms of expression to deepen the artistic idea in the work and give it their values. These are the values of society, "...because the society sets the values of symbols, and grants the materialistic elements their particular meanings, to become symbols..."¹³¹

Symbols appear in the works of the artists with different forms from different sources, such as decorative and botanical elements, heroic examples of men and women from history, the epic texts or popular stories, Arabic calligraphy, signs and ancient writing, which have magical and aesthetic dimensions. These appear as elements and signs that refer to the artist's visions, and his relationship with place and time; or expressive elements of events from contemporary life, which pose through them political, social and human issues.

These symbols can be categorised as:

- concepts and customs.
- animal, botanical and environmental elements.
- mythological and historical personalities.
- architecture and edifice.
- universal and natural phenomena.

¹³¹ Kanso, A. (1990). "التصوير الشعبي العربي" *The Arabic Popular Paintings*. Kuwait. The National Committee of Culture. p. 99.

4.1 Concepts and Customs

4.1.1 The number one and the letter 'Alef'

The idea of oneness is considered to be a symbol of the universe, and the symbol of a personal god.¹³² In Islam, the number one has its symbolic meaning. The god is one and the creator of the universe; it is the truth for every believer, and the essential base upon, which Islamic art is built. This appears through mathematical and geometric systems of Arabic and Islamic art of decoration.

The (Alef = أ) is the first letter in the Arabic script. It is also the letter which systemizes all the letters of the Arabic alphabet. So it is the measure of all the other letters, their forms, length; curves, and circulations.¹³³ The distinguished Arabic poet Baland Al Haydari notes aesthetic and formal importance in the Alef letter, which is similar to the number one. As he says: “the Alef stands as a sabre.”¹³⁴

"Geometric principles play an essential role in Arabic calligraphy. As Khatibi and Sijelmassi write in *The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy*, the legibility of a text and the beauty of its line require rules of proportion."¹³⁵

(See Alef and the measuring system of Arabic alphabet, page 217).

¹³² Nakash, F. (2001). "رموز وأساطير، اشارات، لوك بنوا، Luke Benoit - Signs, Symbols and Legends. Beirut. Dar Owedat for Publishing and Distributing. p. 67.

¹³³ Al Sayeg, S. (1988). "الفن الإسلامي" *Islamic Art*. Beirut. Dar El Marefah for Publishing and Distributing. pp. 65-67.

¹³⁴ Al Haydari, B. (1996). "تأثير الإسلام في تطور الكتابة العربية" *The Influence of Islam in the Development of Arabic Script*. Al Arabi Magazine, No. 455. p.103.

¹³⁵ The Organisation of Islamic Arts and Architecture. (2002). *Arabic Calligraphy, The Alif as calligraphy's unit of proportion*. Retrieved on 19/1/09, from: <http://www.islamicart.com/main/calligraphy/module.html>



Figure: 60.
Anonymous, *Gabriel The Messenger*, (N.D). Medium:unknown.
Dimensions:unknown. The Point magazine. Beirut.

4.1.2 Angels

In the Arabic world, angels have a particular esteem in the hearts of people, since it is believed that the angels are God's messengers and the saviours of prophets.

Popular artist have drawn the angels with wings, in human shapes and with beautiful clothes. Artists have been inspired by the following Koran verse of "*Surat Fatir: 35* :

الحمد لله فاطر السماوات والأرض
جاعلا الملائكة رسلا أولي
أجنحة مثنى وثلاث ورباع
يزيد في الخلق ما يشاء
ان الله على كل شيء قدير
35:سورة فاطر

*(1)Praise be to Allah,
Who created (out of nothing?)
The heavens and the earth,
Who made the angels?
Messengers with wings-
Two or three, or four (pairs):
He adds to creation
As He pleases: for Allah
Has power over all things.*

The most popular angel in popular culture is Gabriel whose name means, in the Semite language *Gabraeel* the messenger of God = *Gabra* = messenger + *Eel* = God.¹³⁶

4.1.3 The Heart

The heliographic language indicates that the heart was drawn in ancient Egypt in a cup form. The heart is the centre of the human being, according to the ancient Egyptian tradition, and the spring of knowledge before becoming the centre of sensations; it is the master of time by its rhythm.

In Islam, the heart is the throne of God, and when the Koran speaks about the Godly Soul which breathed into Adam and gave him the life; this matter is related to the heart, as "Djili=الجيلي" the poet has claimed, and the spiritual vision of Sufism refers to the "eye of heart"¹³⁷

4.1.4 The Hand and The Eye

Kanso observes that most people, especially in the popular environment, believe that the open hand (with its five fingers), fronting the face of the envious one, will prevent the evil of eyes. In the Arabic region, this hand has been drawn on the doors of homes, on the trucks, and hung as pictures on the shop walls and in the popular cafes; used also in amulets, which are made from gold or silver and hung it on the fronts of children to prevent envy.¹³⁸ In relation to the five fingers of the hand, Yunis notes that the number five has magical characteristics in the popular thinking.¹³⁹

The belief in the 'envious eyes' goes back to the ancient eras. In Arab countries, this open hand was called the hand of Mary by the Christians, the hand of Fatima in North

¹³⁶ Kanso. (1990). pp. 89-90.

¹³⁷ Nakash. (2001). pp. 60-95.

¹³⁸ Kanso. (1990). p. 104.

¹³⁹ Yunis, A. H. (1983). "معجم الفولكلور" *The Dictionary of Folklore*. Beirut. Library of Lebanon.p. 117.

Africa for the Muslims, and the hand of Al-Abbas in the Arab region of Middle East.¹⁴⁰ (Al Abbas he is Al Imam Al Abbas bin Ali, the cousin of prophet Mohamed).



Figure: 61.
A Palm of the Hand, (N.D).
Medium: silver. Dimensions: unknown. Morocco.

Islamic thinking considers envy as a malicious sickness, this separates the human being from his God, as noticeable in "*Surat: Al Nisa 4*":

*"Or do they envy mankind
For what Allah hath given them
Of his bounty? But We
Had already given the people
Of Abraham the Book
And wisdom, and conferred
Upon them a great kingdom"*
"Surah: Nisa" 4.

أم يحسدون الناس على ما آتاهم الله
من فضله فقد آتينا آل ابراهيم الكتاب
والحكمة وآتيناهم ملكا عظيما.
"سورة النساء" 4

¹⁴⁰ Kanso. (1990). p. 104.

and in "Surah 113: Al Falaq":

*(1) Say: I seek refuge
With the Lord of the Dawn,
From the mischief
Of created things;
(5) And from the mischief
Of the envious one
As he practices envy.*

قل أعوذ برب الفلق
من شر ما خلق
ومن شر حاسد إذا حسد
سورة الفلق: 113



Figure: 62.
Anonymous, *The Hand and The Eye*, (N.D),
Popular drawing printed on paper. 20 x 30cm. Beirut.

Popular artists drew beautiful pictures against envy and the 'evil of eye', one of these pictures, represents an open hand, mediated by an eye, with writings such as : يا حافظ = *Ya Hafez*, which means "O Keeper" and "Glory to God", this picture is surrounded by

two verses of the Koran. One of these verses is *Surat Al Alaq* and the other is *Surat Al Nas*. These pictures were decorated by geometric and botanical ornaments.¹⁴¹

4.1.5 The Sabre

The sabre is the image of lightning and the weapon of the gods. It represents temporary power, like the prince who ensures peace and justice. In addition to its spiritual power, which is represented by the poets, the sabre is the lightning that illuminates the truth and cuts the darkness of ignorance.¹⁴²

4.1.6 The Talisman

A talisman is an amulet, which includes lines and magical numbers or ancient writings, used throughout the Arabic region, in the belief that it has magico-religious powers, to protect against danger, to cure disease, to give strength and to promote good fortune, or to avoid evil and to bring good luck in general. Shikahni observes, that there are natural talismans which have signs and pictures or strange writings, which could not be understood, that have serious effects on people.¹⁴³

4.1.7 Candles

Candles were used through the ages, in magical and religious or funeral ceremonies, in wedding celebrations and festivals. These were also used in magic works and in votive offerings. Popular belief considers that the lighting of candles plays a safety role in magical works.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Kanso. (1990). pp. 104-107.

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 84.

¹⁴³ Shikhani, S. (1988). "الخرافات" *The Fables*. Beirut. Ezz-Aldin for Publishing and Distributing. pp.97-98.

¹⁴⁴ Yunis. (1983). p. 154.

4.2 Environmental and Animal Elements

4.2.1 The Palm Tree

The palm tree is an ancient symbol, associated with prosperity and fertility in popular thinking. Contemplation of this tree is considered to return people to their spiritual background and ancient roots. With its beautiful form and its elevated values, the symbol of the palm tree caught the imagination of ancient Arabic poets. In the literary scenes of poetry, a strong relationship between the beauty of the palm, the she-camel, the horse and the woman can be found. This imaginative tradition is still present in contemporary Arabic poetry and as a specific field in Arabic literature.¹⁴⁵



Figure: 63.

Anonymous. *A Palm Tree with Two Fish*, Popular symbols, (N.D).
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown.

The Phoenicians created a synthesis between the palm, which was regarded as "the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden" in Semite belief, and Ishtar the goddess of fertility who breathed from its fruit the dates, when she was born. In some sources, it is said that the tree was generated from the same portion of mud as Adam, and should therefore be honoured as a relative of mankind. The fruit itself gives its name to another goddess *Damour* = *Tamour* or *Tamer*, which means in Arabic *Tamr* = dates = **تمر**.

¹⁴⁵ Kanso. (1990). pp. 100-101.

The palm was also identified with the tree of paradise in ancient Egyptian culture, where its form has a strong aesthetic role. Its form appears as an artistic and pictorial element and as a design motif in architecture, typically seen on the columns of temples. In Egypt, it still has a special aesthetic role in the design of gardens.¹⁴⁶

4.2.2 The Olive Tree

The olive tree is one of the trees, which proliferate in the Arabic region, especially in Palestine. "This tree has been considered in Islam as "the pivotal centre"¹⁴⁷ Thus, the Muslims and the Arabs in general have considered this tree to be a blessing tree.

4.2.3 The Almond Tree

The almond tree also has its symbolic meanings; the blossom of the almond tree is an announcement for the return of life in the spring season.¹⁴⁸

4.2.4 The Lion

The lion was considered to be a symbol of power and courage. It has a distinguished space in the popular imagination, and in thousands of names in the Arabic language, as it was one of their gods.¹⁴⁹ Coptic artists drew the lion as a symbol of St Mark. Popular artists embellished this artistic expression, they drew the lion beside the hero, or the hero riding the lion, as in the popular drawing *al-Zir Salem Rides a Lion*.¹⁵⁰ This artist drew the lion with simple lines without details, and with human eyes.

¹⁴⁶ Abou Assaly. (Sept 1999). "شجرة الحياة" *The Tree of Life*. The Kuwait Magazine, No. 191. Kuwait Ministry of Information. pp. 16-19.

¹⁴⁷ Nakash. (2001). p. 50.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 54-55.

¹⁴⁹ Al Houte, M. (1982). "الميثولوجيا عند العرب" *The Myth of Arabs*. Beirut. Al-Nahar Publishings. p. 107

¹⁵⁰ Amer, S. (1981). "التعبيرية في الفن الشعبي" *Expressionism in Popular Arts*. Cairo. The Egyptian General Committee of Book. p. 48.

These characteristics appear in a picture representing a lion killing a serpent by the sword; this indicates that “the right is a power and the wrong is usually defeated”.¹⁵¹

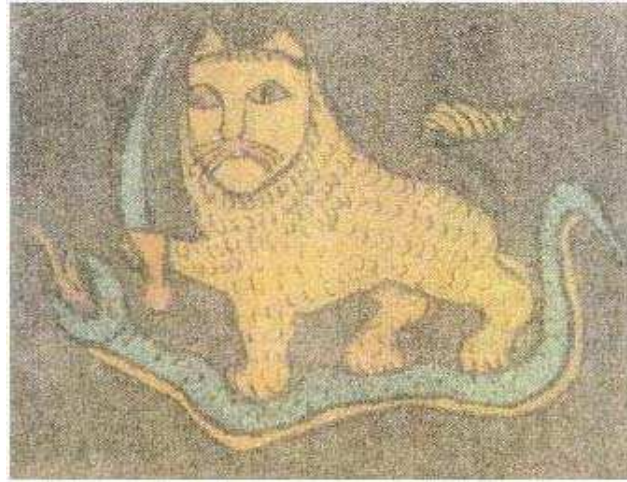


Figure: 64.

Anonymous. *A Lion*, a popular symbol from the Egyptian tattoo, (N.D).
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown.

4.2.5 The Horse

The horse is a beautiful animal characterised by strength, loyalty, smartness and bravery. This animal was one of the main symbols of fertility, and has a distinguished role in legend. The horse occupied a distinguished place in the Arabic life before Islam. As Korshid observes:

The relationship between the Arab and the horse appears clearly in the ancient poetry, where you can not find a poem, which doesn't describe the horse as the main part of the cavalry weapons, and sharing with him the victory. So the horse has been connected with the concept of war, heroism and chivalry.¹⁵²

Kanso notes that some Arabic customs, such as the selling of a horse, create affinity in the social environment. According to popular tradition, the horse in dreams points

¹⁵¹ Kanso. (1990). p. 102.

¹⁵² Korshid, F. (2002). "أديب الأسطورة العربي" *Literary of the Arabic Legend*. Kuwait. The World of Knowledge. N482. The National Committee of Culture. p. 99.

to good luck. The popular stories speak about magic horses, which come from nowhere to help the heroes in their struggles.¹⁵³ The interest in the horse is continued with Islamic tradition, the Prophet Mohamed notes that welfare is made up "of three things: the woman, the home and the horse"- as with popular artists, who drew the horse and decorated him with cavalry, or in military themes."¹⁵⁴

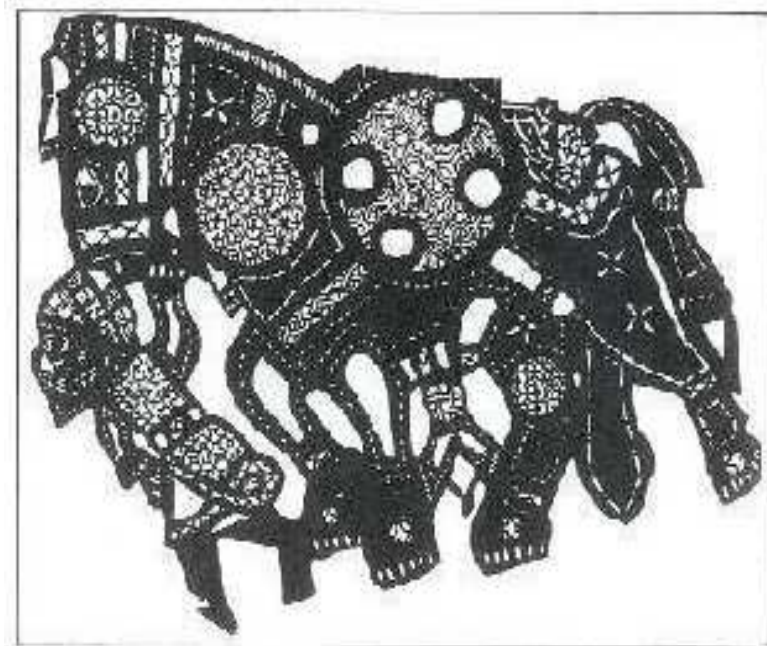


Figure: 65.

Anonymous. A Horse and Cavalry, a drawing on leather for the shadow play, (N.D). Dimensions: unknown. Egypt.

4.2.6 The Fish:

The fish signifies fertility, welfare, happy life and offspring.¹⁵⁵ Ali Zayor observes that the fish is an old symbol and an important symbol in Christianity, the fish is a symbol of renewal in mythology, as in the Arabic legend, the Semite civilisations and in the celestial religions. Often, the fish indicates resurgence or resurrection. The fish appears as a symbol in the Pharaohs' legend, in Coptic texts, in tattoos, in popular

¹⁵³ Yunis. (1983). p. 171.

¹⁵⁴ Kanso. (1990). p. 121-123.

¹⁵⁵ Amer, S. (2005). *The Tattoo in Folk Art*. Egypt. Retrieved on: 16-04-05, from: <http://www.sis.gov.eg/eginfnew/culture/folklore/html/>. p. 24.

painting and on Islamic ceramics. This has been used on amulets of gold or silver, and precious stones, which hang on the foreheads of children, and above their beds. Popular artist have drawn this symbol on potteries, woven objects, glass and paper. This appears beside other symbols such as the palm, the hand, the crescent, flowers, Islamic decorative elements and Arabic writings."¹⁵⁶



Figure: 66.
Anonymous, Popular symbols. (N.D).
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown. Egypt.

4.2.7 The Eagle

The eagle is a solar symbol. It was considered to be the king of birds and the sky; and represents courage, justice and the sublime.¹⁵⁷

4.2.8 Birds- the Dove

In his book : *Signs , Symbols and Legends* Luke Benoit observes that:

From the beginning, the human being has admired the birds, which have the ability to fly, and reach the place of gods. Thus the birds have been considered the gods' messengers. The wings of the birds and their flight, have symbolized

¹⁵⁶ Kanso. (1990). p. 107.

¹⁵⁷ Nakash. (2001). p. 46.

the sublime states of existence. The language of birds is important in the Koran, indicating the divine knowledge.¹⁵⁸ (Translated by the author)

The dove was a sacred bird in Mecca where there was a god called *The Feeder of Birds*¹⁵⁹.

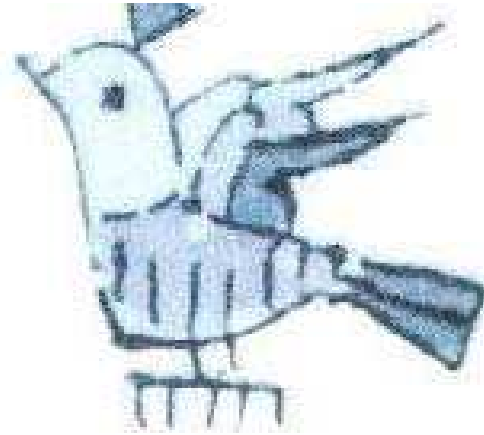


Figure: 67.
Anonymous. *A Bird*, popular drawing, (N.D).
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown. Egypt.

The Iranian poet and philosopher Farid Al-din Al-Attar has written a long poem (5000 lines) under the title *The Language of Birds* which expresses in a sophisticated way the spirit of Sufism.¹⁶⁰

In the Arabic legend, there is the story *Seif Ibn Dhi Yazan*, where the birds play a symbolic role, where redeeming spirits inhabit the birds, which become saviours and advisers to the heroes of legends. Farouk Korshid commented that: “these birds are symbols of divine providence, which nothing can stop, and may use the birds to help the believer.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Nakash. (2001). p. 45.

¹⁵⁹ Al Houte. (1982). p. 107.

¹⁶⁰ Nakash. (2001). pp. 44-45.

¹⁶¹ Korchid. (2002). p. 124.

4.2.9 The Camel

The camel was one of the sacred animals for the Arabs before Islam.¹⁶² They appreciated the role of this animal, which has different values in the desert environment; thus they called it "the ship of the desert" and "the patience", as in the woman who called her husband (my camel) = my helper, which means he who helps her in the hard times.¹⁶³



Figure: 68.

Anonymous, *the Camel of Mahmal*: (the camel who carries the bride). (N.D).
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown. Egypt.

4.2.10 The Gazelle

The gazelle is a beautiful animal, which appears in the literary scenes of ancient Arabic poetry as a synonym for the lissom, mildness and the beauty of the eyes of a woman. The Arabs knew of the adoration of some animals such as the lion and the she-camel; they also used to adore the two golden gazelles in Mecca.¹⁶⁴

The gazelle in Arabic legend plays the role of motherhood, as in the story of *Seif Bin dy Yazan*, where the gazelle suckled the child Seif when his mother left him in forest; the gazelle looked after him until a hunter found him.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Al Houte. (1982). p. 105.

¹⁶³ Kanso. (1990). p. 124.

¹⁶⁴ Al Houte. (1982). pp. 55-56.

¹⁶⁵ Korchid. (2002). p. 125.

4.3 Architecture and Edifices

4.3.1 Edifices

The construction of edifices, such as pyramids and temples appears as a substitute for the mountain, because the high places were the first stages in the climb to top of the ridges. Geometrically, the edifice serves as a centre, the central point, which formed the circle. Geographically, edifices represent different traditions of ancient civilizations, custom and religious visions, which are reminiscent of sacred lands, immaculate lands or sacred palaces. Each building - a city, a temple or a sacred place, was a centre for the world and the world should develop from that centre.¹⁶⁶

In the Babylonian Genesis epic *The Enioma Elesh*, the god Mardouk after he finished the creation process, met all the gods who proclaimed him as a master of the universe. They built the city of Babylon, and in the middle they built the Ezajela temple, which reached the clouds, and in an impressive ceremony they announced the fifty names of Mardouk.¹⁶⁷

4.3.2 The Dome

The dome is the celestial character of the circular form; this is the idea, which has accompanied the minds of builders' who have for a long time tried to achieve this character in the form of the dome.¹⁶⁸

4.3.3 The Door

The main element of the house, the door is the passage from one place to another, or from one state to another. From the usual to the special or sacred space, the open door is a passageway that symbolizes pleasure and knowledge.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Nakash. (2001). p. 55.

¹⁶⁷ Sawaah, F. (2002). "مغامرة العقل الأولى" *The First Adventure of Mind*. Damascus. Dar Alaa'edin for Publishing and Distributing. p. 55.

¹⁶⁸ Nakash. (2001). p. 75.

4.4 Universal and Natural Phenomena

4.4.1 The Crescent

The crescent is an Islamic symbol, indicating optimism, and appears in religious art beside a star.¹⁷⁰

As Luke Benoit observes:

The crescent is like a cup, and each container, represents the renewals and the promises. It is like the form of Noah's Arc, which floats on the water of a deluge; and it is represented by the letter (N) = (ن) in the Arabic language, it represents resuscitation in the Islamic tradition, because of the monthly rhythm of the crescent in its transformations.¹⁷¹ (Translated by the author).

4.4.2 The Moon

The moon is one of three important gods in ancient Arabic belief, which are the Sun, the Moon and Venus. It is believed that the moon has serious effects on the human being and all creation.¹⁷² The moon was *Sin*, the master of plants, for the Babylonians, as it was the measure of time in the Babylonian's Genesis epic - which was called *The Enioma Elesh*.¹⁷³ The temples of the moon were across the cities of Uruk in Iraq, Ariha in Palestine and in Sinai. The moon was a Mandaean's main god.

¹⁶⁹ Nakash. (2001). p. 77.

¹⁷⁰ Kanso. (1990). p. 108.

¹⁷¹ Nakash. (2001). p. 59.

¹⁷² Al Houte, M. (1982). p. 91.

¹⁷³ Sawaah. (2001) p. 77.

Before Islam, Arabs believed that the daughters of God were three: "Manat = مناة" is the dark moon; "Al-Lat = اللات" is the full moon, and "Al-Oza أوزا".¹⁷⁴

The eclipse of the moon is an ill-boding omen in the popular tradition, and if a halo appears around the moon, this points to rainy weather. The moon with its transformation, its presence or absence, inspired the human being in his creation.¹⁷⁵

4.4.3 The Sun

The adoration of the sun is not too old for the Arabs in their history, this may have started with their social transformation to an agricultural society, in the Arabian Peninsula. Al Houe observes:

Herodotus has mentioned that the Nobtus adored the goddess "Oro-Tal", which consists in the Aramaic language of two words: Oro = Light + Tal = High, which means the "High Light" or the sun.¹⁷⁶

4.5 Mythological and Historical Personalities

The mythological and historical figures, which the Australian artists of Arabic origin reported had inspired them with symbolism in their works, such as Enkidu and Gilgamesh, are known in world history and cultural heritage. Therefore, they are only mentioned by their names in this study.

¹⁷⁴ Al Houe. (1982). pp. 95-97.

¹⁷⁵ Yunis. (1983). p. 177.

¹⁷⁶ Al Houe. pp. 92-94.

4.6 The Main Sources of Inspiration

Introduction

The abstract forms represent key elements for the artists of Arabic origin in this study. These were inspired from different sources, as configured in the artistic construction of their works. Some artists tend to benefit from Arabic calligraphy, the forms and samples of Islamic art, and some of them tend to benefit from the decorative elements, the scripts and the signs that are inspired by art of ancient civilizations, such as the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations, as in the values of local legend and historical personalities. Artists are also inspired by the epic texts and customs in popular traditions; where the artists seek to create artistic and aesthetic relationships benefiting from the meanings and the aesthetic values of these traditions.

In this respect, this study will focus on three main sources of inspiration, according to their importance in Arabic legacy on the one hand, and on the other hand the vivacity of their symbols and artistic vocabularies in contemporary Arabic painting, and particularly in works of artists of Arabic origin in Australia.

4.6.1 Patterns and Calligraphy of the Islamic and Ancient Civilizations

The first attempts, inspired by these patterns and calligraphy, appeared in the exhibitions of the French Artists Group of Calligraphy, which occurred in the middle of 1950s. These exhibitions showed some abstract works inspired by geometrical signs, which existed in ancient calligraphy and were called by Assadour Azo, the Lebanese artist who lives in Paris, as "the field of power" in the artwork, and it was considered as "a new mechanism".¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Sultan, F. (1998). "الهوية والأصالة في الفن العربي المعاصر" *The Identity and The Authentic in the Contemporary Arabic Art*. Beirut. Al Nahar Culture magazine. No. 323. 16/8/1998.

In the Arabic region, these patterns from the Phoenician, Aramaic and Islamic traditions, and Arabic scripts appeared in the works of some pioneer artists, such as the Lebanese artist Saeed Akl, (since 1945), with his painting *Between East and West*. The interest in these patterns was clear also in his solo exhibition which was held in the Hall of the Orient in 1963, as in the works of Lor Gharib, Wajih Nahle and Rafik Charaf with different experiments".¹⁷⁸ In Egypt, this movement appears in the works of the Contemporary Art Group in 1945. For example, the effects of this movement can be seen in the works of Mahmoud Saeed who tries to benefit both from popular art tradition, Coptic and the ancient Egyptian art.¹⁷⁹



Figure: 69.
Yousef El-Douik. *Composition*. (N.D).
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown, Palestine.

In Iraq, an artistic movement, which inspired by national traditions, calligraphy and folklore, appeared at the beginning of the 1950s with Baghdad's *Modern Art Group*

¹⁷⁸ Sultan. (16/ 8/1998). Study.

¹⁷⁹ Bahnassi, A. (2003). "الفن التشكيلي العربي". *The Arabic Plastic Art*. Damascus. The First for Publishing. p. 272.

which consists of distinguished artists, such as Fayek Hasan, Jawad Salim and Hasan Shaker al Saeed.¹⁸⁰

In the context of inspirations from Islamic patterns, calligraphy and decorative art, the pages (218-225), show examples that draw from different styles of the art of calligraphy, and examples of Contemporary Arabic painting which were inspired of calligraphy, Islamic and popular ornaments.



Figure: 70.
Husain El-Jabali, *Symphony of the Line*, No. 2.
Wood cut Graphics. 80 x 70cm. Egypt.

4.6.2 Patterns from Ancient Civilisations in the Works of Australian-Arabic Artists

In Australia, these patterns appear in the works of artists of Arabic origin as continuous artistic developments, in the frame of a vast trend in contemporary Arabic painting since 1970.

¹⁸⁰ Nader, S. (1982) "حسن شاكر آل سعيد: البحث عن أثر في الثقافة" *Hasan Shaker Al Saeed, the Research for a Trace in the Culture*. Funoon Arabiah No. 7. London. Pamegap Ltd. Achilles House. Dar Wasit. pp. 67-68.

In *Incantation* by Abbas Makrab the magical script is used. The small triangles, the botanical elements with abstract forms, which derived from the Sumerian and the Islamic tradition, are integrated in a decorative style in the works of Jasam Hasan, such as *The Conditions of the Humanities No 2*, in the works of Ali Abbas, such as *The Journey of Candles*, and in my own works, the triangle as an aesthetic geometrical element plays an important role in the artistic composition of the work. These are used in the works of Mazin Ahmad, *Dome and Crescent*; the Sumerian spiral appears in *The Café Shop* painting and in my work *The Rhythm of the System*. Noticeable also are the effects of Pharaohs, and the Hellenic architectural designs in the works of Samih Luka *St Mark* and *St Jonah*.

In addition to these ancient symbols and signs, which influenced the works of artists both in their homelands and in their host society, certain artists tend to give more attention to the Islamic patterns and Arabic calligraphy, which distinguished these patterns.

4.6.3 Islamic Patterns and Calligraphy in the Works of Australian-Arabic artists

In Australia, artists of Arabic origin employed these artistic traditions through their personal visions in ways that grant their works an oriental sense; benefiting from the aesthetic construction of Islamic architecture and symbols. This is noticeable in the *Dome and Crescent* by Mazin Ahmad to the aesthetic relationships of the arabesque as apparent in *Out of the Letter's Box* by Fatima Killeen; and from the botanical and the geometrical elements in the works of Alia Hasan.

These artists try to benefit from the aesthetic features of Arabic calligraphy and its meanings, or from the movement of Arabic script in the state of the normal writing. This is distinguished by spontaneous movements, converted to artistic ambiguous semblances. The script takes its expressive values away from the meaning, where the way of treatment adds a symbolic space in the work. This appears in the work of Ali Abbas *The Last Letter* and Fatima Killeen's work *Out of the Letter Box*.

In these artistic attempts, as in *The Door* and *The Far Away City* by Alia Hasan, the use of Islamic decorative designs and some of Arabic calligraphy styles, such as the

kufy, the Nahsk or the normal writing are noticeable, to create an artistic vision that depends on the meaning of the words.

The influence of this tradition appears in the works of the artists in this study, with different contexts and techniques, which grant their art aesthetic and cultural dimensions.

4.6.4 Legend and Folklore

Introduction

In his book *The Encyclopaedia of Folklore and Arabic Legend*, Shawki Abdel Hakim notes:

...most of the spiritual elements and popular beliefs which appear in our folklore in general and in the fabled stories that have affected our lives, go back to the Sumerian civilization, which appears in Iraq around 3000 B.C. These legendary and folkloric legacies were adopted by the Semite nations, the inheritors of the Sumerian period, and were influenced by spiritual elements and cultural practices in these nations; represented through history by the legacy of the early Semitic civilizations of Babylonian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Phoenician, Aramaic and Arabian nations. These were reconfigured through Arabic language, and configure the mother resource of Arabic tradition that has clarified and completed its features in the Islamic period.¹⁸¹

(Translated by the author).

The traditional subjects which spread in this region are diverse and represent a human cultural legacy, in epics and stories, such as *The Arabian Nights*, the stories of animals and birds in *Kalila wa Dimna*, *Gilgamesh*, *Semiramis*, *Adonis and Ishtar*, the life of the Bedouin, their legacy and wisdoms, also the *Nimrods* = Giants of Iraq, the Giants of Palestine, the stories of the Pharaohs, *Luqman the Sage* with his Nine Eagles and Wisdoms, and the *Three Teachings of the Bird*; and from the field of popular narratives: the stories of *Al Zir Salem*, *Seif Bin dy Yazen*, *sirat of Bani Hilal*, *Antara and Abla*, *Aziza and Yuniss*, and *Al Amira Zat Al Hemma*.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Abdel-Hakim, Sh. (N.D). "موسوعة الفولكلور والأساطير العربية" *The Encyclopaedia of Folklore and Arabic Legends*. Beirut. Dar Al Awda. pp. 12-13.

¹⁸² Abdel-Hakim. p. 12-13.

NB - as for the importance of the popular stories in the history of Arabic culture and social life, and as a source of inspiration for the popular and contemporary artists in the Arabic region, I will illuminate on some of these stories, in pages 168-177.

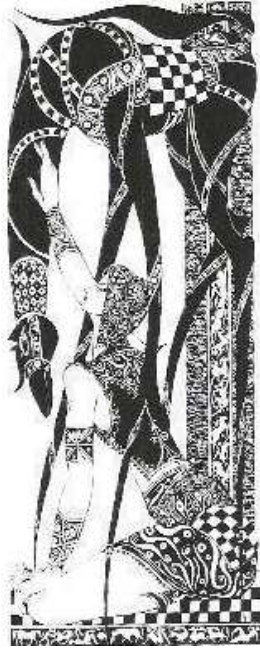


Figure: 71.
Adel Makadesh. *The Woman and the Horse*, (legendary creatures,
...when the story converts to a history),(N.D).
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown. Tunis.

Since 1950, the Arabic tradition has become a source of individual poetic and artistic inspiration to artists in Australia, influencing the symbolic construction of their awareness, and their attitude toward the world and life. Establishing new creative systems and artistic vocabularies depends on a deep sense of history and visions that integrate different times, places and civilizations.¹⁸³

183 Al kobaissi, T. (1987). "التراث العربي، كمصدر في نظرية المعرفة والابداع", *The Arabic Legacy, as a Source in The Theory of Knowledge and Creation*. Baghdad. The Ministry of Culture and Arts. p. 41-54.

NB - as examples, I have introduced in the pages 226-227, some samples from the works of Arabic artists who inspired of legend and popular stories.



Figure: 72.
Dia al-Azaoui, *the Story of the Three Apples, "the night 61"*
(Contemporary inspiration of the Arabian Nights) (N.D),
medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown. Iraq.



Figure: 73.
Cesar El Gemeyel, (N.D). *The Death of Adonis*.
medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown. Lebanon.

4.6.4.1 Influences in the Works of Australian-Arabic artists

Arabic folklore and legend have been sources of inspiration to the artists of Arabic origins in Australia. This inspiration appears in some of their works, as a sort of appreciation of the early sources of human awareness in their homelands. Thus, these artists seek to renew artistic vocabularies, or to create the means, which have spiritual and symbolic dimensions, and a language that controls the sentiment of the viewers by its authenticity and reality.



Figure: 74.
Mazin Ahmad. *Gate and Secrets*, (2006).
acrylic on canvas. 150 x 150cm. Sydney.

Among those artists inspired by symbols of legend and popular art is the artist Faisal al Saadi. In his work *Coldness*, the horse is notable, a legendary creature in ancient Arabic literature, as the main element in this painting. This theme also appears in *Calm*, the gazelle which is the symbol of mildness, and motherhood in Arabic legend; and in his works on the Gilgamesh epic visible in his painting *Enkidu in Babylon*.

The interest in these traditions also appears in the work of Mazin Ahmad. Mythological personalities and symbols from ancient civilisations play key parts in the artistic composition, and the cultural relegations of the artworks. These appear in

Gate and Secrets, which refer to the idea that only love is the saviour of civilization and its features.

The inspiration of mythology appears in the work of Samih Luka's *Saint Jonah*, which presents patience as a human value, and represents the saint as an ideal. This inspiration also appears in the works of Ali Abbas in *The Journey of Candles*, which is inspired by the popular tradition and customs of presenting the vows to Khuder or to Al Imam Al-Mahdi. This appears in the *Doors of al Henna*, inspired by popular customs in Iraq.

السيرة الشعبية "Al Sira Al Shaabyyah"
Or the Popular Story:

سيرة = Sira = (a story).
سير = Siar = (stories).

"Sira", is an Arabic word, which means biography. In Arabic literature this word points to the interpretation of the prophet Mohamed's life, and is indicative of the stages of life of a distinguished person. It includes his achievements, wisdom and the inner self.¹⁸⁴

In his book *The Arabic Popular Painting*, Kanso notes that the definition of "sira" places it between history and literature. It is historical since it deals with the life of a person who has left behind important traces, or a group of people who played a distinguished role in the past. But the "sira" is richer than a history, because it is also concerned with the individual's emotions, and describes the details of their personal

¹⁸⁴ Yunis. (1983). p. 148.

life. It is literature because it is coloured by its author's impressions, by cultural and social conditions, and by its expressive styles. In Arabic countries the "sira" became the cultural nourishment of ordinary people, in the cafés, the shops and the markets. These stories = *sir*, entered deeply into the lives of people and so have survived from one generation to another. Some of their personalities have been adopted in the popular environment because of their exemplary qualities; they were considered models of social, moral and religious values. Thus, some popular versions of the stories have appeared, belonging to different historical periods.¹⁸⁵ (Translated by the author).

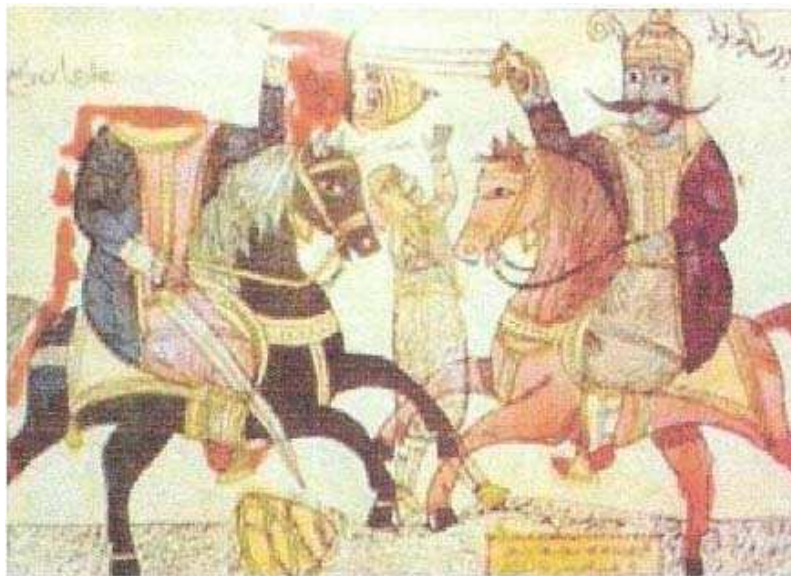


Figure: 75.

Anonymous. *A Sample of Popular Drawings that Records Biography and Story*. (N.D).
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown.

Some researchers such as Abdel-Hamid Yunis agree that some of these stories are written by an unknown or a single author, some are by several, and many aspects of them belong to the authorial imagination. *Al-hakawati* = الحكواتي or the storyteller performs his role in the evenings, especially in the popular café. *Al-hakawati* is a Syrian term for this poet, actor, comedian, historian and storyteller. Its root is *hikayah* = حكاية a fable or story, or *haka* = حكى, to tell a story, *wati* = واتي, and it implies expertise in a popular street-art. The "hakawati" is neither a troubadour, who travels from place to place, nor a *rawi* = راوي, whose recitations are more formalized and less freely interpreted. The hakawati has popular counterparts in Egypt, where he

¹⁸⁵ Kanso. (1991). pp. 64-67.

is often called *sha'eir* = شاعر = "poet."¹⁸⁶ Despite that the performance of some stories can continue for six months, when the storyteller starts with another story. The preferred time for people to sit around the *hakawati* is Ramadan. Talal Majzoub notes that:

...this particularity returns for two reasons, the first is the topics of the stories, which pertain to Ramadan and the values that represent it, these values are materialized by the personalities of heroes. The second is that the people need a special time, so at the evenings, when people have rest from the ordinary day's work, and have their dinners after a hard fasting day. They have showers and after the dusk prayer, they go to listen to Al Hakawati, where they enjoy their time."¹⁸⁷
(Translated by the author).

Storytellers have begun to disappear from popular Arab life, but some of them still recount these popular stories in the cafes and at festivals in the major capital cities, such as Cairo and Damascus.

Inspiration

Popular artists have been inspired by the topics of these stories, which express chivalry and heroism, the struggle for freedom and equality, love and self-esteem, slavery and discrimination. The drawings are numerous with the diversity of varying personalities, harmonised with the social and political conditions of their environments. The most popular topic in these stories was the story of *Antara Bin Shaddad*.

The raconteurs of this story were called the poets. They counted on their memories and their capacity for developing a mental picture of its events with their recitations, unlike the raconteurs of other stories, who were reading from written texts.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Barbara, A. (2006). *Tales in the Hood: the Last Hakawati*. Retrieved on 12-03-06, from: <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/index/Titles.aspx>

¹⁸⁷ Na'eem, R. (2005). "أخبار المدينة" *The News of the City*. Retrieved on 2/13/05, from: http://www.seesaida.alhayat.org/akhbar/200411/3_hakaouti.htm

¹⁸⁸ Kanso. (1990). p. 64.



Figure: 76.
Antara and Abla, a popular drawing, (N.D).
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown.

Sirat of Antara Bin Shaddad "سيرة عنتره بن شداد"

The writer of this story is an unknown author, but Kanso notes that some researchers agreed that the scientific and the historical materials of the story belong to "Al-Asma'ee", the Arabic writer in the 2nd Century *Hijri*.¹⁸⁹

The story of Antara has been considered to be a most distinguished work in Arabic ancient literature. Its hero is a famous knight and a poet from the pre-Islamic period. His personality has been connected with his poems. One of these poems was posted on the wall of Al Ka'ba beside the poems of another six outstanding poets.¹⁹⁰

These poems are known in the history of Arabic literature as The Seventh Suspending = The Muallaqat = **المعلقات السبع**. These are seven Pre-Islamic Arabic poems from around the 6th Century AD that are considered to be the best of their kind. They were written on

¹⁸⁹ Kanso. (1990). p. 95.

¹⁹⁰ Yunis. (1983). p. 149.

parchments using golden ink, and hung on the walls of the Ka'ba for all to see.¹⁹¹

The story of Antara, which is composed of nearly ten thousands lines, tells about the events which occurred in the Arabian Peninsula and its surrounding regions, before the prophet Mohamed's mission. This story deals with five hundred years of Arab history, and reflects the transformation of Arabic life in that period.¹⁹² (Translated by the author).

Antara was born to an Ethiopian woman, a concubine to an Arab father who belonged to a tribe widely known for their strength and courage. His father refused to recognise him as his son, as was the case with many black children born in these circumstances, he insisted on treating him as a slave. When Antara, or Antar as he is called in the colloquial Arabic language, became a young man he fell in love with his cousin Abla, but was not allowed to marry her as his father refused to give him his name.

Antara soon became eminent for his courage, generosity and intelligence. This led him to be eventually recognised by his father. One day their tribe was fighting another tribe who won an earlier battle, capturing many of their men, and robbing them of some of their possessions. Antara's father turned to his son and said: 'Fight Antara'. Antara replied: 'A slave cannot fight. He is only good for milking and similar chores'. The father then said: 'Fight you are free'. Antara fought and won. He freed the captives and returned all the stolen possessions to his tribe. He then wrote a long poem describing the battle vividly and expressing his love for Abla. Antara's uncle agreed eventually to let him marry his daughter, after his father recognised him.¹⁹³

The *sira* of Antara deals with a social topic, and declares the Arabic opinion about ethnicity and discrimination, from the eleventh century AD. It has an educational purpose, in respect to self achievement. When Antara, who was a slave and a black

¹⁹¹ Arberry, A. John. (2005). *The Muallaqat*. Retrieved on 18-04-005, from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A3994176>

¹⁹² Kanso. (1990). p. 94.

¹⁹³ Yunis. (1983). p. 149.

man, herding camels, became the first cavalry warrior in the Arabic region and one of the distinguished poets; he was able to marry his beloved Abla and supported his people against their enemies.

Yunis observes: "This story has attracted some European intellectuals as a distinguished literary work, such as Lamartine, and the critic Hyppolyte who considers this story one of the international epics such as *Siegfried* and the *Song of Roland*, and *Odyssey*."¹⁹⁴ The hero of this story becomes an example of chivalry and courage, where Kanso noted that:

Antara was the example, on which the Europeans created their cavalry forces; the story of Antara is the source, from which Europe drew its ideas about chivalry.¹⁹⁵ (Translated by the author).

Besides this story, I will shed some light on some other distinguished stories, because of their importance to Arabic literature and society.

Sirat of Al Amira Zat al-Himma "سيرة الأميرة ذات الهممة"

"This epic popular story, from the 8th century AD, with its personalities and events, is Palestinian in origin, and dates to a particular historical period, going back to pre-Islamic time from the end of the Abbassian state."¹⁹⁶

The story is an echo of the historical events that occurred between the Arabs and the Romans, in their struggle for the Mediterranean region, and reflects how the Arabs had faced the foreign invasion. It is also a social document, which presented the woman with characteristics of courage, heroism, leadership and faith.

¹⁹⁴ Yunis. (1983). pp. 148-150.

¹⁹⁵ Kanso (1990). p. 72.

¹⁹⁶ Abdel-Hakim. (ND). pp. 404-405.

This story (which is composed of many of parts the complete one is 26 thousand pages long and has been preserved in Berlin State Library), has influenced Byzantine literature since the middle ages; and it was translated into the Persian and Turkish languages in the Ottoman period.¹⁹⁷ (Translated by the author).

"سيرة سيف بن ذي يزن"

This popular story goes back to the Mamluke period in Egypt. Muhamed Al Naggar observes that it is the biography of Seif Bin dy Yazan or the 'Nile Epic':

...a reading of Egyptian geographical folklore and the legend of the origin of Egypt and its sacred Nile. In this biography, Egyptian characters are evident in pivotal issues such as the Nile, the foundation of Egyptian cities on the Nile banks, and the Arabicization of Egypt.

The prophesised birth of the hero Seif indicates his heroic role in the biography. It also gives reference to the appearance of Islam, and the flourishing of Egypt during Seif's days. It also states that the Nile will flow in Egypt and the Arabs will inhabit Egypt. The hero grows up and the incidents get more complicated, the hero had to bring the book of Nile (which is a sacred book associated with the sacred river Nile) as a dowry for queen Shama, daughter of king Afrah who had adopted the hero since he was a foundling. The story of finding the book of Nile is one of the most adventurous chapters of the biography. It is full of wondrous creatures and episodes and it ends with the discovery of the sources of the Nile, and the flow of the Nile in Egypt for the first time. The prophecy becomes true and Seif conquers Egypt and becomes the king of Egypt and all the Nile countries.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Kanso. (1990). p. 94.

¹⁹⁸ Al Naggar, M (2005). *Egypt in Arabic Folk Biographies*. Retrieved on 16-04/05, from: <http://sis.gov.eg/eginfew/culture/Folklore/html/>

"سيرة بني هلال" Sirat of Bani Hilal

Bani Hilal is an Arabic tribe whose story poses issues about migration from the Sahara. Their way of life is represented by chivalry and the associated principles of uprightness and generosity, These characteristics appear in the main personalities of this popular story:

- The sultan Hasan, who represents generosity, the qualities of reason and good sense.
- Abu Zaid al Hilali, who represents experience, knowledge and courage.
- Diab bin Ghanem, who represents enthusiasm.¹⁹⁹

This story was and remains a vast source for popular and contemporary artists' inspiration. (Translated by the author).

"سيرة الظاهر بيبرس" Sirat of al-Zahir Bebars

Al-Zahir Bebars was an army leader in the Mamluk period and the hero of Ain Jalout's battle in Syria, where he destroyed the Mongol army, then became the king of Egypt. He turned to face the Crusaders' army invasion, and after a hard battle occupied the Great Syria region.

The events of this story originated from history, but the descriptive details are created from imagination, and pictured historical events in the Middle East, Africa, Portugal, India, Sudan and Ethiopia.²⁰⁰

This story was created by an unknown author. The historical period of this popular story began in the Abbasside era, and reached the Ayoubi period in Egypt. This biography records the history of Arab identity in general and Egyptian identity in particular, from the appearance of the

¹⁹⁹ Kanso. (1990). p. 95.

²⁰⁰ Yunis. (1983). p. 163.

Turks, on the political scene in Baghdad in the year 232 AD until the modern age.²⁰¹ (Translated by the author).

"سيرة علي الزبيق" Sirat of Ali al-Zaibak

This story belongs to the literature of *Al Shuttaar* = الشطار = Mental and shrewdness, which is considered to be another sort of chivalry. Some researchers have been able to connect its appearance with the social, historical and economic development of cities such as Baghdad and Cairo.²⁰²

This story is one of the famous tales in Arabic popular literature, it may have been written in the Mamluk period, but its author is still unknown, despite the heroes of this story being historical personalities, its events belong to Cairo life, and its social, economic and political transformations. The story is a critical literary work on the social and political corruption of government administrations, and the absence of security when the law favoured a few individuals. Ali al-Zaibak was faced with this situation, and then armed himself with the same weapon as his enemies, the cunning and the cleverness, to gain power in Cairo.²⁰³ (Translated by the author).

"سيرة الزير سالم" Sirat of al-Zir Salem

This *sira* was started and developed through time in a popular environment, but as Yunis notes; this story was written in the Mamluk period, when Egypt was under Ottoman occupation.²⁰⁴

This story dates back to an Arabic tribal war, which continued for forty years and was called 'Al-Basus' war. There are two texts of this *sira*, one of them is considered a part of Arabic classical literature and poetry.

²⁰¹ Al-Naggar.(2005). Study.

²⁰² Yunis. (1983). p. 167.

²⁰³ Kanso. (1990). p. 94.

²⁰⁴ Yunis. (1983). p. 139.

The second text is more popular, its roots go back to folkloric resources, and it kept the centre of events in Palestine and Great Syria. This dates for true events of emigrations, conflicts and wars between tribes. The hero of this story is Al Zir-Salem, the cavalryman and the poet, who was to govern a great empire with Damascus as its capital 3000 years ago.²⁰⁵ (Translated by the author). Justice and facing oppression are the main topics of this story.

²⁰⁵ Abdel-Hakim. (N.D). pp. 333-334.

4.7 Aspects in the Works of Australian-Arabic Artists

4.7.1 The Aspects of Place and Human Elements

The works of the artists of Arabic origin are reflective of their sense of belonging to place. This appears in their works at different levels, and their expressions take different forms and styles. Their artistic visions toward place, are part of their continuous dealings with reality, on psychological and inspirational levels, which the artists express through their work, as human or aesthetic subjects. This reflects an important relationship between the eye of the artist and the place.

In the works of these artists, the expressions of place appear as individual visions. This grants their works diversity in the use of systems of artistic values, concepts, symbols and signs in their works, which depend on the idea that comes from past or present, and evoke the artistic construction. This artistic construction, which belongs to the artist's memory on the one hand, connects on the mental level directly, with the features of place and its different elements on the other hand.

4.7.1.1 Aspects of Place

The symbols and the artistic elements which are represented in the aspects of place in the works of artists of Arabic origins, play important roles in the construction of aesthetic worlds that express the values and cultural contents of these works.

4.7.1.1.2 Actual Places

This is the sense of place in everyday life expressed in the works of some artists who present skilful formations of ordinary things in a sentimental spirit. This reflects the artist's need to confirm the identity of the place, through its different elements. These appear in *The Popular Alley*, *Al Hakawati* and *Break Time* by Hasan Jouni, and in *Another Spring* and *The Popular Café Shop* by Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki and *Baghdad Nights* by Faisal al Saadi.

The aspects of place appear also in the architectural elements of:

- The old popular arcades.
- The red tile of the rooftop.



Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki, detailed,
from *The popular cafe shop* painting.

- The interior arches of the homes and the old café shops.
- *The Mashrabia* = المشربية
- The ornamentations of the banister, with its decorative geometric and botanical elements.
- The coloured glass at the top of doors and in the windows.

Other aspects, which point to the popular environment, in these works are:

- *The Nargileh* = الأرجيلة
 - The Turkish *tarboosh* and the cap of the shopkeeper.
 - The cap = "Al kalnasawa = القنسوة
 - *Al- Kimpaz* = القمباز, a large dress covering the body, with the waistcoat over it.
- The aspects of the place occasionally belong, as in the work *Homeland: the Hanged Key* by Fatima Killeen, to a real world controlled by feelings of sadness and protest. The features of this world are reconfigured by the walls of tin. This place is one of the Palestinian camps in the Arabic world.

- In the *Licorice Seller* by Samih Luka, the reality and the imaginary reconfigure the world of this subject from two different environments - Australia and Egypt - which indicate them by some civilised urban elements. (Refer to Civil integration, p. 76-77).



Khaled Sabsabi, detail, from the video work of the artist.

- The place in *Ali or ʿali* also, by Khaled Sabsabi, is a symbolic expression of the unity of the world, represented by two images of the sun. These come from two different places, south Lebanon and from the Liverpool region in Australia.

4.7.1.1.3 Imaginary Place

- In other works, the place appears as an imaginary world that replaces the real one. The vast natural space is a prepared theatre; it is organised to represent the event, as noticeable in *The Bird of the Green Space* by Rafik Charaf.
- It is also an imaginary place, which inspire its elements and symbols with the places of the sacred events and history, or from the Old Testament. The place is also a water milieu (the sea) and the abdomen of whale, as noticeable in the *Saint Jonah* icon by Samih Luka.

- The place in the work of some artists is a hypothetical and imaginary world, which exceeds the ordinary world, but gains its identity from symbols and signs taken from the old walls of alleys in Iraq as in the work *Horizon* by Jasam Hasan. It is an imaginary place in the works, inspired by literary and epic texts as seen in *Enkidu in Babylon* by Faisal al Saadi.



Samih Luka, a historical place, detail, from *The Saint Marcus Icon*.

4.7.1.1.4 Historical Place

Some artists refer to the sense of place to their country of origin, as seen in *Voice of Civilisation* by Mazin Ahmad, which is inspired of the Babylonian edifice in Iraq. The historical place can be seen in the *Saint Marcus* icon, by Samih Luka, the Alexandrian light house, the Pharaohs sailing boat and the palm trees, which are decorated in a Pharaonic way; these architectural and botanical elements belong to the features of the city of Alexandria, in the Hellenistic period in Egypt.

In *Ashura* (which is depicted as an historical event) by Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki; the aspects of the place and environment are represented by:

- The building with Islamic architectural elements.
- The palm tree.
- The horse and the camel.

In *The Door* by Aliaa Hasan, the decorative and the architectural designs around the door, as in the door itself, are inspired by the structural elements of the old shrine; this reflects a sense of oldness and the historical environment in the artist's homeland.

4.7.1.1.5 Symbolic Place

- Some artists are inspired by popular environments in symbolic ways, as is noticeable in the work of Ali Abbas, *The Palm Tree and Neighbours*, *The Doors of Al Henna* and in *The Journey of Candles*. Elements of architectural traditions are seen - the popular alley, the door, the window, and the ornaments of the banister and the palm tree - as in *Al Mash-houf* = المشحوف, with the boat in a Sumerian style. This boat is used in the south of Iraq to the present day.²⁰⁶

- This sense of place takes on a comprehensive meaning, when the artist uses the religious symbol, or the decorative elements and Islamic architectural samples, as in *Dome and Crescent*. The place is a symbolic world, which appears in *The Far Away City* painting by Alia Hasan, where its fields are decorated by Arabic scripts and ornaments.

- The symbolism also points to the place, as expressed in the arabesque ornamental background of the artworks, and as in the prison of Abu Ghraib in Iraq in *Staged How We Are Represented Now* by Fatima Killeen, which deals with an international political problem.

- The place also appears in the works inspired by some aspects of the Australian environment, integrated in the artistic constructions, which express the sense of belonging to the life and the existence in Australia, as seen in *The Licorice Seller*, where the Sydney Opera House and Sydney Harbour Bridge feature. The aspects of Australian environment also appear in:

²⁰⁶ Abbas, A. (2005), the statement of the artist Ali Abbas. 25-04-2005.

- The sense of place that appears as a symbolic expression of Bondi Beach in Sydney, in *Rug on Beach*, and also in *The Café Shop* by Mazin Ahmad, who presents the place through two symbolic ways: the first, through English writing that indicates to a sort of cultural identity, and the second through the symbolic use of colours, which indicates to Australian environment by the brightness and the appearance of the sandy colours.



Fatima Killeen, detail, from *Generous Soil* painting.

- The sense of place as a pot of fruits, which indicates Australia, in *Generous Soil* by Fatima Killeen, where the place has generosity that helps refugees and migrants. The sandy colours also appear in the works of Fatima as a symbolic indication of the Australian environment.

- The place as a geographical aspect, which indicates Australia, in *Legal Illegal, Seeking Peace* by Fatima Killeen, where a dove flies over the Australian map.

- The symbolic place also appears in *The Tree of Life* by Alia Hasan, in which Australia is represented as a tree of life, and the last shelter of the people who were suffering from war and catastrophes. The place as a symbol takes another human dimension. It is a green giant tree with roots, which extend to the water of the ocean.

4.7.1.2 Human Elements

4.7.1.2.1 The Conditions of Life

- In *The News Paper's Seller* by Hasan Jouni, people are suffering from vagrancy and expatriation, because of the war in Lebanon. In this work the people are filled with embarrassment and the feeling of absence; they have a uniform look, their features indicate pain, the loss of security in a place open to the unknown.

- In *Staged How We Are Represented Now*, by Fatima Killeen, the human being is suffering from the prison of occupation. He is a refugee, as portrayed in *Ali or ξali* by Kahled Sabsabi. But he also revolts against the oppression, as in *Ashura* by Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki.

- The human being also appears in a symbolic way in *The Tree of Life* by Alia Hasan, where there are birds of different colours, symbolising people from different cultures and nations; and as a dove looking for something that could change his life and enable him to achieve his humanity in a generous land, in *Legal Illegal, Seeking Peace* by Fatima Killeen.

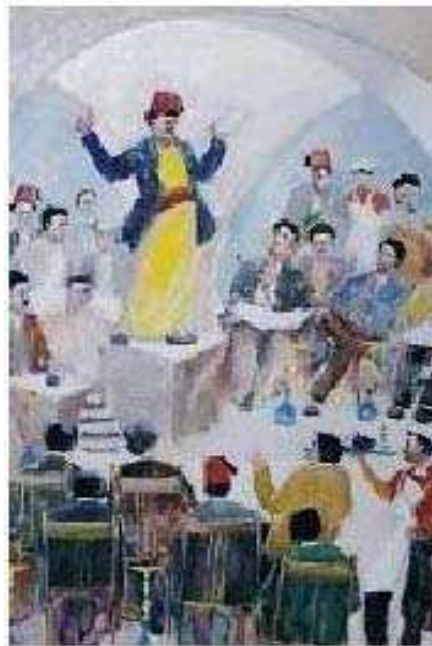
-The human being is also a horse, which represents sadness, anger, pride, and the spirit of rebellion, as in *Coldness* by Faisal al Saadi.

- He is a boy, who thirsts for the time of childhood in *The Last Letter*, and the girl, who carries her heart on her head as a sign of love, in *The Palm Tree and Neighbours* by Ali Abbas.

- In the painting *Composition No. 1*, from *The States of Humanity* series, by Jasam Hasan, the human being's body melts and overlaps with other human figures. The reality reconfigures with a new form, in a meeting, that realizes humanity far away from the physical reality. The human being is not in a state of solitude, but he belongs to others.

4.7.1.2.2 The Social Environment

In works on the popular environment, such as *The Storyteller*, *Popular Alley*, and *Break Time*, the human being is portrayed in a social and work environment, with active movement.



Hasan Jouni, detail, from *Al Hakawati* painting.

- The Arabic traditional features and aspects of the environment appear especially in the clothes of women and men in *Another Spring* and *Ashura's* by Abdel-Hamid. Baalbaki, and also in *Antara and Abla* by Rafik Charaf, in *The Licorice Seller* and the icons of *Saint Marcus* and *Saint Jonah* by Samih Luka.
- In *The Licorice Seller*, the Australian woman with her modern simple clothes, the white sport shoes and her traditional hat can be seen.

4.7.1.2.3 The Popular Stories

In *Antara and Abla* by Rafik Charaf, the modes of dress also define a part of the social environment.

4.7.1.2.4 History and Civilization

The human features in some artists' works take their presence from ancient civilisations. The human being is the centre of the work and has a clear purpose in the work, as in *The Voice of Civilisation* by Mazin Ahmad. (Refer to *The Voice of Civilization*. p. 81-82).

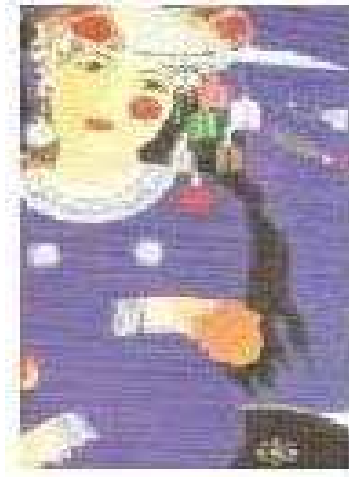


Figure: 77. Rafik Charaf, *Abla*. Beauty and ornaments, detailed.

In the works of Abbas Makrab, such as *Travelling around the World*, and *Sunset Twice Sometimes*, the features of the human being disappear, tend towards simplicity and refer to a symbolic vision.

4.7.1.2.5 The Literary Texts

- In *Enkidu in Babylon* by Faisal al Saadi, which is inspired by the Epic of Gilgamesh, the woman appears as a beautiful dreamer. The man appears as wild and strong, but delicate.

The place and the human elements were in the centre of the artists' interests. These appear in their works as different formations. What distinguishes these experiments is the way they deal with the reality of human beings and place through a contemplative and critical vision; in a purposeful spirit and deep consciousness of the importance of place in expressing the particularities which configure some aspects of identity.

4.7.3 The Social, Human and Political Indications

Despite their individual spirit, which characterise the work of these artists, the social and human issues, either in their homeland or in their host society, appear in the centre of their concerns. These artists work to express their loyalty to the human being through their efforts to pose issues that have global and human dimensions, such as the environment, the problems of immigration and expatriation, solidarity with oppressed people, opposition to wars and ambitions for peace.



Samih Luka, detailed, from *The Licorice Seller's* painting.

4.7.3.1 The Role of Woman

One of the indications of social life is the valuation of the role of women, who appears as a main personality, or as a partner to the man in the artwork. Different examples can be seen, in the works of artists:

- As an historic or a symbolic personality, with a civilised and human presence, as in *Enkidu in Babylon*, by Faisal al Saadi.

- In *The Licorice Seller* by Samih Luka, the woman represents Australian society, on a symbolic background. This idea is expressed through the delicate appearance of the

Australian woman, and by the licorice seller who presents to her a cup of a popular drink; as a sign of valuation, of what his second homeland grants him.

- In the work of Rafik Charaf, *Antara* and *Abla*, inspired by a popular story, the woman represents the values of sincerity, love and solidarity with her beloved. The woman is also the hard worker in *Break Time* by Hasan Jouni.



Figure: 78.
Hasan Jouni, *The Cafe Shop*, (2005), oil on canvas. 110 x 70cm, Beirut.

Other social aspects appear in some works of artists:

4.7.3.2 The Café Shop

The café shop is a favourite place, for meeting people and communication. This role is expressed in the works, which carried the same title and inspired by the café shops in the artists' homelands. In these works, the traditional features, which indicate the café life in the popular suburbs, are a place for meeting, announcing the time of marriage, the newborn, or catching up on social and political events; these appear in *The Café Shop* by Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki. As well, *Al Hakawati = The Story Teller* by Hasan Jouni, also illuminates a part of the lifestyle before the appearance of radio,

television and other new means of communications. The presence of the story teller = *Al Hakawati* is cultural and educational necessity, presenting moral and human values which enhance the social unity between people.

4.7.3.3 Moral and Political Issues

The artist tries to portray a true image, which is taken from his real social life, whether in his homeland or in his host society. He materialises the events, personalities and ideas in his works, which appear as echoes of the internal power of life, and calls of protest and solidarity. Moral and political images, which have specific social and general human sides, appear in the artist's works, as in:

- *Ali or ĞAli* by Kahled Sabsabi. *Hanzala*, the child who lost his country, and lives in a camp. The child through his awareness, grows up within this tragedy, to become a symbol of hope and the innermost spirit of a nation.

- *Staged How We Are Represented Now*, by Fatima Killeen. The man who stands naked against the power of occupation, has nothing to lose; he has only the belief in his right to a life with dignity, as a human being.

- *The News Papers Seller* by Hasan Jouni, opposing the war and the logic of invasion, by portraying the frustration and the loss of hope of a normal life, and the vagrancy of people whether in their homeland, or the outside world.

- *The Voice of Civilization* by Mazin Ahmad, expressing the belonging of man, to his roots in history, and his right to a new born life.

- *Ashura* by Abdel-Hamid. Baalbaki, and *Antara and Abla* by Rafik Charaf, reflect the spirit of resistance against the power of oppression, and express a refusal of the spirit of resignation. Through the revival of heroic references, they are calls to defend rights and liberty.

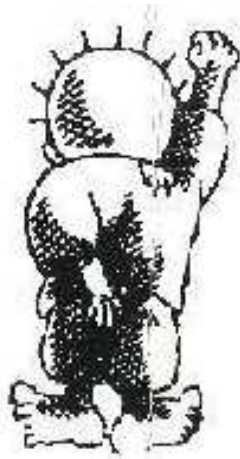


Figure: 78.
Naji al-Ali, *Hanzala*, (1987),
the character of the Cartoonist Naji al-Ali, Beirut.

- In *The Tree of Life* by Alia Hasan, and in *Generous Soil and Legal Illegal, Seeking Peace* by Fatima Killeen, adopting moral and human logic, which exceed political considerations in dealing with issues of refugees and migrants in Australia.
- In *Another Spring* by Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki, which expresses the belief in the renewal of life, through the symbolism of spring.
- In *The Bird of the Green Space* by Rafik Charaf, which portrays the man who uses dreams to exceed the physical state, to move away from isolation and meet the other, to achieve his humanity.
- In *The Doors of Al Henna* and *The Journey of The Candles* by Ali Abbas, expressing the human sense that accompanies the votive offerings at the old shrines, or lighting the candles which stream across the river, presented for the return of an absent or beloved one, or the healing of a sick person.
- In the icon *Dialogue* by Rafik Charaf, he calls for revival of the religious moral sense, characterized by sanctity, educating the man who is distinguished by wisdom and knowledge, or the man who seeks to get them.

- In the icon of *Saint Jonah* by Samih Luka, portraying the human being who materializes the purity and dignity, and in *The Door* by Alia Hasan which grants the man the hope and the power of the soul through verse and wisdom.

- In *The Far Away City* by Alia Hasan, she expresses hope in building the city, as an abbreviation of both the world of real, and the world of ideals - the city, which may be built by the good word for a good life.



Alia Hasan, detailed, from *The Far Away City*.

In some of these artistic experiments, one notices the stress the artist puts on the clarification of the idea for the viewer. It is not just through artistic and aesthetic values, but also in the use of English and Arabic writing, which may be used occasionally for aesthetic necessities; these are employed as a means of expression and as a connecting link with viewers in a multicultural society.

Chapter 5

Artistic reading of the works of Jamal Joumaa

Within the frame of this study, I seek to identify artistic influences, inspirations, and traditions behind the works of particular participating artists of Arabic origin; and I, as one of those artists, am inspired both by the local tradition of my original homeland, and some of the cultural and the artistic elements of my second homeland, Australia. I will introduce aspects of the cultural and the artistic influences which affected me in life and art; as well as that, I will present an account of these elements in some of my works.

5.1 Life and Work

I was born in Lebanon. I am an abstract expressionist painter with an interest in poetry and literature. I completed my undergraduate degree at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Damascus in 1978. I immigrated to Australia in 1995, and completed the degree of Master of Arts at UWS in 2003.

I have exhibited in several exhibitions, and in two solo exhibitions – at the School of Contemporary Art Gallery - Penrith 2001–2003; at the Spanish Cultural Centre, Beirut, 1987; at the Young Artists, Beirut, 1984; at the Al-Shaab Gallery, Damascus, 1982; at the Cultural Centre of South Lebanon, Beirut, 1982. I worked as an Art Editor in *Al-Bilad Magazine*, Beirut In 1992-1995. I worked as an Illustrator in Samir's Children's Magazine, 1986 – 1990 Beirut. I worked also as an art teacher, from 1980-1995 in Al-Amiliah Technical College Beirut; and in the Teacher's College of Tyre. I have published two books - *The Theory and Art of Drawing* 1986; *Drawing with Coloured Pastels and Gouache* 1988.

My paintings are influenced by the movement of abstraction expressionism, and often based on simple geometric shapes, inspired by the Arabic popular artistic tradition, which is distinguished by cohesive geometrical relationships displayed in the traditional design of rugs, and in lines of the Bedouin tent. The geometrical triangle as

a main aesthetic element is used in repetitive rhythms. The symbolism of the letters in Arabic calligraphy integrates geometrical and botanical units in aesthetic relationships. These elements have inspired Islamic art and design and popular art.

Most of my artworks are in acrylic; I also work with black ink, and watercolours. Sometimes I also use collage for creating the effects that serve the aesthetic of composition. These paintings were developed over my years of study, in an attempt to explore the emotive potential of colour, and simple abstract shapes, through a contemporary vision.

Influences and Themes

I grew up in a popular environment, and the life which I have experienced between the edge of the desert in Jordan and the hills of southern Lebanon, has left an important influence in defining the nature of my culture and belonging. My study at the University of Damascus gave this life an academic dimension, especially in a traditional city like Damascus, where daily life is an interpretation of and in harmony with the popular culture that people live. This way of life, which I have experienced in addition to the interesting historical and beautiful places, which I have visited, is accompanied by interest in historical, literary and art studies. Then, my participation in some art exhibitions, in Beirut and in Damascus and the cultural forums, which accompanied them, enhanced my interest in the popular art tradition and culture of the ancient civilizations; and added another dimension to my life and culture.

This interest leads me also to the works of a variety of artists of the Arabic region, such as the Syrian artist Fateh al Moudarres, who devoted his life to the expression of the life of the peasants and their traditions in the Syrian rural area, with expressive styles and techniques; Nazir Nabhaa for his works which are inspired by Syrian heritage; Abdel Kader Arnaout, and Mahmoud Hammad with their experiments in calligraphy. From Egypt, I am interested in the work of Abdel Wahab Moursi, for its techniques and sense of heritage, Salah Taher as an abstract painter and Omar al Najdi who inspired the popular life and tradition of the Egyptian environment. From Iraq, I am also interested in the work of Hasan Shaker al Saeed for his experiments in Arabic calligraphy, Fayek Hasan and Jawad Salim with their inspiration from the

human and Iraqi tradition, and in the work of Mohammad al Malahi and Farid Belkahia from Morocco.

I am particularly interested in the works of a variety of expressionist artists, such as van Gogh, the modernist artists Rothko, Picasso, Kandinsky, Matisse, Paul Klee, and Mondrian.

I immigrated to Australia in 1995. As a person from a non-English speaking background, I went to study in an English course. It was the first step in my journey, which permits me to be involved in my new life in Sydney, and grants me the opportunity to continue my study in the field of the art of painting in 1999, in the University of Western Sydney. My project for the thesis was under the title *The Influences of the Coptic Icon on Contemporary Art in Egypt*. During my study I was under the supervision of the artist Graham Marchant. This study permitted me to get new educational, human and cultural experiences. My supervisor's advice enhanced my belief about art as a device that produces amazing space of freedom in mind and reality, with a pure space to breathe. The artistic anxiety, which was like a mist, forbidding me to choose vocabularies of expression in a new society, has vanished. I still remember when he told me "be your self". This has provoked me to be free but more responsible towards my work. The feeling of freedom in artistic expression, should be associated with the artistic vision, and limited by the conditions of expression and its potentials: the understanding of colours, the techniques as a necessity for the expression, the clarity of the artistic and cultural idea, which reflects itself as a general harmonisation in the construction of the elements of the painting.

During my life study my work has become more abstract. My interest in the symbolic expression, and the cultural references of the country of origin also become clearer in this work. But parallel to this and in the sentimental and the mental level, the feeling of belonging towards my new society starts to become clear and strong in my inner self. The need to discover the elements, which distinguished the culture and life of this society, leads me to the world of libraries, museums and art galleries, such as the Art Gallery of NSW, Powerhouse and Liverpool Museum. The exhibitions of these galleries provided me another source of artistic knowledge, and clear ideas about the Australian art of painting. So I find myself interested in the works of numerous artists, such as Brett Whiteley, Arthur Boyd, Tim Maguire and John Firth Smith.

This stage of my life has seen some cultural changes, which deepen my ideas about my work, art and life in general. Thus, my aim was to create visual literature in my art. An aesthetic world is far from the descriptive logic, which declines before the aesthetic sense and the imagined vision. The elements of the artistic composition represented by symbols and visions display a theme that transcends the details of ordinary life, the elements, and geometrical shapes, are signs inspired from heritage or cultural ideas. The relationship between artistic elements, colour and composition will be organized in a manner that takes into account the aesthetic values of the form in visual arts and also serves the internal unity of form and content. But this work is also about ideas, concepts and beliefs. Its elements are inspired from symbols of my tradition and my personal view about life and my surroundings, and I hope its aesthetic and perspective, makes the life of the viewer, tolerable and meaningful. This spirit was behind the two solo exhibitions in 2002-03, which were a part of my Masters study at the UWS.

The Paintings

In the work *Composition No 1*, harmonisations, simplicity, and the rhythmic sense, which appear in the construction of artistic composition, are the general atmosphere of the painting. This painting consists of three artistic movements. The first configures a frame which represents the edges of the painting and refers it to a continued circular movement. This frame is coloured with ochre, dark brown and white triangles. These white triangles are configured by the interior rhythmic gleam movements of the frame. The frame surrounds a vast green surface, which represents the background of the painting. At the right hand side of the painting, a small light green frame draws the form of square. The ornaments or the geometrical elements, which consist of coloured small triangles, are inspired by the artistic relationships with the popular rug.

The decorative square appears as a complete visual and artistic unit, and as the interior artistic movement of the general composition of the painting. In this square noticeable also are two visual rhythms. One of them appears as an ascending movement; where the artistic composition of the ornaments, and the dark small triangles which exist at the bottom of the composition refer to an ascending movement extending from the left hand side, to the top of the right hand side of the

square composition. Opposite this ascending movement, there is another descending movement, this reconfigured by a decorative arrow starting from the right top part of the square and extending to the bottom of the left hand side of the composition.



Figure: 79.
Jamal Joumaa, *Composition*, No. 1, (2007),
acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100cm, Sydney.

The rhythmic relationships of the decorative unities, which are reconfigured by coloured triangles of different degrees, are combined with the structures of these two movements. This combination plays an important role in confirming the compositional unity and its visual stability. The relationships, between the contrast and harmony of the values of glowing colours, help configure an aesthetic space that offers the viewers the enjoyment of rhythmic colour movement. This interior movement represents visually, a balanced space to the green calm background, and as another opposite movement, to that of the frame of the painting.

The Life of the System

The idea of this painting was inspired by a work of the artist Jacky Redgate. In her exhibition, that was held in the Museum of Contemporary Arts in 2005-2006, her work had the same title (*The Life of the System*). In her painting, the artistic composition represents a façade of a building consisting of two storeys surrounding a

dark shadow that refers to the mass of the building and its dimension, with an abstractive cohesive construction mediating the gray space of the painting.

In this work Redgate tends towards geometric simplification. As abstractive relationships, their harmony and cohesion are derived from the simple relationships of colours, which are limited and abbreviated to the structural surfaces, in squares and rectangular forms. These are configured as different parallel surfaces, with red and white colours. The rhythmic rotation between the colours red and white plays an important role, in reconfiguring a new life to the elements of construction, according to a structural and analytical vision; the simplifying of the form and purity of colour, grant this geometrical system new aesthetic meaning.

The idea of the life of the system symbolizes a deep reality, in the organization of the elements of its nature, through systematizing codes. It also appears in the rhythm of constructions, in the works of modern artists and in the art of some old civilizations, such as Islamic art. This rhythmic life grants these art forms their symbolic and aesthetic values; as human works parallel to the system of the real and distinguished from it. They take their importance existence and their symbolism from themselves, where forms and colours are taking their places in this independent world, according to the necessity of artistic construction.

The interest in geometrical form, which appears in most of my works, goes back to an interest in systems, the rhythm and harmony of its elements in the work, which reconfigure them according to a new vision, another aesthetic reality, where the colours represent identity and vitality. This is what attracted me to the work of the Jacky Redgate.

In the work, *Composition No 2*, the artistic composition depends on the analysis and reconstruction of a design of a popular rug, where its elements are converted to the white and red coloured streaks of linear surfaces. This design is reconfigured from the left hand side to the right hand side of the painting, on a background consisting of red and yellow surfaces. This in part integrates the artistic composition with a cohesive design and harmony.



Figure: 80.
Jamal Joumaa. *The Life of the System*, (2006),
acrylic on canvas. 100 x 70cm. Sydney.

From the left hand side, the artistic composition starts with a white linear surface representing a rhythmic transition from the red background to a narrow decorative stripe consisting of small white and brown dark squares, then a dark brown streak, adjoining it with other red and ochre stripes. These streaks extend from top to bottom of the artistic composition. In the middle of this composition a linear white narrow stripe consists of three parts, these achieved in a way that produces on the dark brown background, which surrounds it, a rhythmic movement that reveals another dimension in the middle of the design. From the middle towards the right hand side of the painting, another linear decorative streak consists of small white and brown dark squares, then two white and ochre linear stripes, are achieved in a way that produces a visual movement, in the frame of the general artistic construction.

The composition of this work is inspired by a simple geometrical system, which governs the design in a popular rug. The elements of the popular design, converted to artistic relationships, overlapping and revealing a new aesthetic dimension, dependent on the rhythmic rotation between colours and the geometrical surfaces.

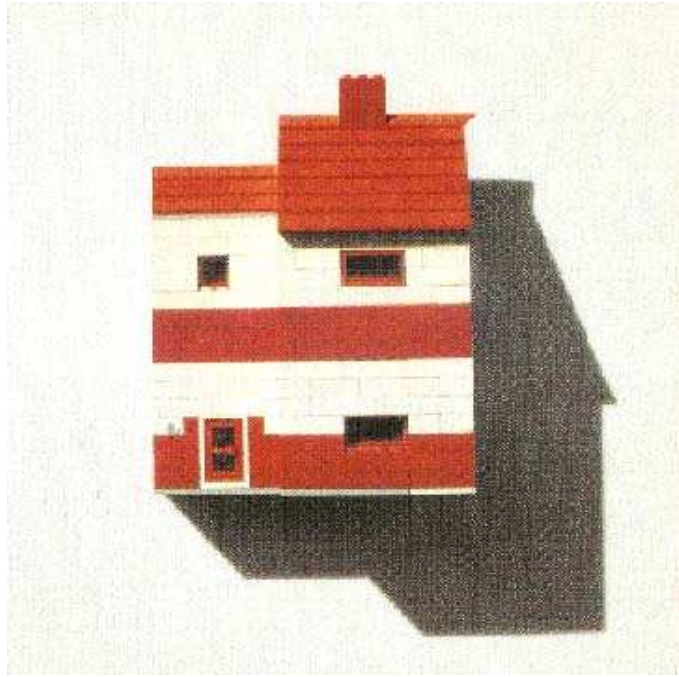


Figure: 81.
Jacky Redgate, *The Life of The System*. (1988), Sydney.

Composition No. 2

The artistic design of this painting takes a different formation, of a popular traditional design of an earring which is one of the ornamental elements of women in the local Arabic environment. The artistic composition mediates the surface of the painting, which represents a gray background, and consists of two main geometrical parts: the triangle, which mediates the top of the painting; then the rectangular mass that represents a larger surface of the artistic composition. Between these two main elements, a small silver crescent plays a role of visual connection between the two parts.

The small geometrical triangular forms appear as the main aesthetic element in the artistic construction. These triangles have been used in the triangle at the top of the painting, through rhythmical relationships, with harmonic colouring consisting of brown, yellow on an ochre background, and other repetitive rhythms between light and dark violet. Then, an ochre small triangle reduces the strength of this coloured group. Below this group, the artistic relationship of triangles, which are in continual rhythm, is surrounded by transverse lines with different degrees of blue, brown, red

and yellow which help strengthen the elements of the artistic construction in the larger triangle.

The crescent is an Islamic and popular symbol in the local Arabic environment. It mediates the triangular and the rectangular parts of the artistic composition. The rectangular part represents a surface surrounded by a light gray frame. This helps create a quiet visual transition, from the darkness of the gray background to the glowing colours of decorative elements.

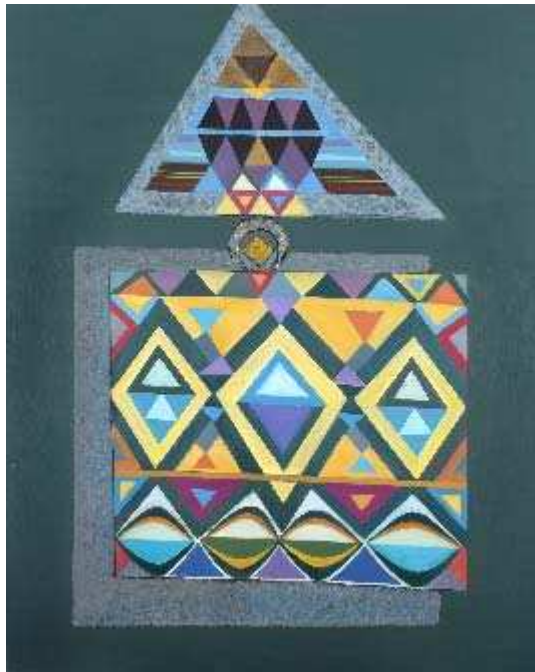


Figure: 82.
Jamal Joumaa. *Composition, No. 2*, (2004)
acrylic on canvas. 100 x 85cm. Sydney.

The decorative elements that make up the composition of the rectangular surface, are inspired by ornaments of local tradition, which are engraved on wood and created to embellish the platform and the friezes of mosques and the halls of oriental palaces. The composition is represented by three geometric diamond elements drawn by a dark green colour, and configured on a background of glowing triangles, consisting of yellow and red degrees. Other small triangles with different rhythms of colours are allowed to produce visual dimensions in this part of the painting.

The diamond forms control the middle of the painting, with relationships of equal and unequal blue triangles of different values and degrees. The dark green lines extend to the bottom of composition, and configure other geometrical relationships that have a rhythmic rotation. These dark lines end in small curved lines drawn in the forms of crescents, with dark green and white colours, and surrounded by different degrees of rhythmic colours.

This work reveals some traditional artistic expressions, such as repetition and symmetry, through the way it is used in the construction of geometrical elements, which make up the artistic composition, and are connected by a crescent as an Islamic symbol. It is an attempt at formation, of an artistic design that refers to an aesthetic form in a local popular environment, reconfiguring it by different techniques and materials, in a way re-invigorates as an aesthetic form.

The Appearance of the Alef

The Appearance of the Alef is a celebration of the alphabet, through an artistic reading of the letter Alef which is the first letter in Arabic language, because of the values and the meanings that distinguished this letter in the Arabic memory.

The alphabet recalls to our minds, different issues and concepts: language, writing, culture, civilization, and the values that give the human being its humanity. The letter (*Alef* = أ) is the first letter in Arabic language, which is the equivalent to 'a' in the English language. It is also the letter which systemises all the letters of the Arabic alphabet. It is the measure of letters, their forms, length, curves and movement of their circulations.²⁰⁷

Thus, the celebration by the *Alef* is an acknowledgement and appreciation of the values of this letter, which led an old poet to comment: "The consistency and the straightness of Alef, antecede other letters of language". The distinguished Arabic poet and art critic Baland Al Haydari notices an aesthetic and formal importance in

²⁰⁷ Al Sayeg, S. (1988) "الفن الإسلامي" *Islamic Art*. Beirut. Dar El Marefah for Publishing and Distributing. pp. 65-67

the letter Alef, which is similar to the number one, he states: “The *Alef* stands as a sabre”.²⁰⁸ This recalls the symbolism of the sabre, as a spiritual power represented by the poet. The sabre is the lightning that illuminates the truth and cuts through the darkness of ignorance.²⁰⁹



Figure: 83.
Jamal Joumaa. *The Appearance of the Alef*, (2003),
acrylic on canvas. 85 x 80cm, Sydney.

The name of God = Allah in Arabic language begins with this letter. It is the first letter of the word (read = اقرأ), which is also the first word when the messenger Gabriel asked the prophet Mohamed to read.

The artistic composition of this work, represented by a decorative stripe, is configured from geometrical triangles with different rhythms of colours. This stripe extends from the top to below the left hand side of the painting. Beside this ornamental stripe and parallel to it, the letter *Alef* which refers to the number one that stands in a

²⁰⁸ Al-Haydari, B. (1996). "تأثير الإسلام في تطور الكتابة العربية" *The Influence of Islam in the Development of Arabic Script*. Kuwait. Al Arabi Magazine. No. 455. p. 103.

²⁰⁹ Nakash, F. (2001). "الوك بنوا، اشارات، رموز وأساطير" *Luke Benoit: Signs, Symbols and Legends*. Beirut. Dar Owadat for Publishing and Distributing. p. 84.

background of different colours, of red, gray and orange. Beside it and toward the right hand side, a green coloured surface is designed as an open book.

From below and in the middle of the painting, a composition of different elements drawn in the form of a fabled bird stands with vainglory. The bird has a white wing and the other is configured from botanical leaves. The letter *Alef* represents the head of the bird and its neck, joining it with a long curving movement in a script rhythm that connected parts of the artistic elements.

From the right hand side of the painting, and from the top to the bottom, the relationships of red, blue and yellow colours are reconfigured in pen. To the bottom and beside it, there is a decorative form, which consists of triangles of different colours. This form represents an aesthetic and artistic necessity, as a parallel mass to the ornamental stripe, which controls the left hand side of the painting.

The artistic relationships of the opposite and the harmonised coloured surfaces refer the viewer to the sense of superimposed surfaces and their harmony with the different parts of the artistic composition of the work.

The Rhythm of the System or Icon

This interest in geometrical units, as artistic elements that have an aesthetic possibility, also appears in *Composition No. 4* or *The Rhythm of the System*. In this artwork the artistic idea depends on the inspiration of the name of *God* = الله. The calligraphy plays an important role in strengthening the artistic composition and gives the artwork its identity. The name of God mediates the centre of the painting through different repetitive movements and rhythms. This is surrounded by geometrical shapes of bright yellow. This writing, which starts from the right hand side of the artwork, is integrated with the geometrical triangular units in interlocked relationships; it ends with a vast ochre circular surface that opens to infinity, and draws the letter **ه** = **H** that is the last letter of الله = *Allah*.

The geometric shapes in the calligraphy play the main role in the general artistic composition of the painting, which combines geometrical shapes consisting of

squares and triangles of different levels. The spiral appears as a mathematical framework that governs and systemizes the general construction of the artwork.



Figure: 84.
Jamal Joumaa. *Icon - The Rhythm of the System*, (2008),
acrylic on canvas. 100 x 100cm, Sydney.

This spiral configures an interior movement, designed from different small geometrical triangle forms, coloured especially with blue, and leads to another visual dimension in the painting.

The artistic units are converted into coloured relationships of different degrees. The rotation between the harmony and the contrast of colours is produced in a visual rhythmic that gives the geometrical elements the vitality of movement. The painting is an attempt to create an independent abstract world consisting of colours and forms. It derives its aesthetic from a particular interior necessity, where the forms are systematized through the artistic sense, and the mathematical form helps in its construction.

These samples of my work, reflect the tendency to execute art as an expressive language, its artistic dimension derives from the inspiration of elements of the Arabic tradition, and benefits from the cultural and the artistic experience of my adopted country. Thus this artistic attempt, with its expressions and content, is a part of the art

activity of Australian artists of Arabic origin, with its diversity of themes and aesthetic, which expresses their cultural interests and their artistic potential in materialising their visions and the pictorial elements of their inspirations through their paintings.

5.2 Conclusion

Despite the migration of some artists of Arabic origin to Australia since 1947, experimental Australian artists of Arabic origin only began to gain attention for their work from 1975 onwards. The works of those artists who have a migrant background, distinguished, on one hand, by the continuous link between themselves and their cultural heritage and the political and human conditions of their homelands, and on the other hand, being inspired by the social, cultural and political issues of Australian life, which reflect the type and nature of relationships between the artists and their host society.

It is important to note the commonalities in efforts of artists to realize their arts with individual imprints, in an attempt to create an aesthetic contribution that confirms their own particularity. In their cultural trends, originating from the values and concerns of their social existence; exploring new artistic values and symbols, and working through different artistic trends and techniques, in ways that reflect their visions about art as a duty, and represent a cultural, aesthetic and moral responsibility, toward the societies of their homelands and their adopted country.

At present, this art activity is recognized as having made a vital contribution to Australian cultural life, incorporating serious artistic and cultural concerns, represented by a group of exhibitions. Thus, this study is in the frame of these cultural and artistic efforts, dating to the beginning of this activity in Australia, studying the educational, political, social conditions, which help in the development of this art. It

focuses on exposing the artistic elements and their aesthetic and cultural values, the symbols and their relocations, which appear in the works of the participant artists in the frame of the study.

In the context of this work, the Blacktown Arts Centre has staged on the third of July 2008, an art exhibition under the title *Tales of Colour*, which comes as a reflection on and a practical expression to the theoretical side of this study. This exhibition was an artistic and cultural event, which presented to the audience, samples of the participating artists' creations, with different styles, themes and cultural backgrounds. It was also a meeting place, with a human and social indication, providing a space for the dialogue between the viewers of different ethnic groups from different ages and cultures; in which they are joined through their needs for knowledge of the others and their cultures, with a human spirit that harmonizes with the value of a multicultural society.

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- Samples from the Popular Paintings.



Figure: 85.
Anonymous. *Al Zir Salem*, (N.D), a printed popular drawing,
medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown. Egypt.



Figure: 86.
Abou Subhi al Tinawi, (1952), *Antara and Shiboub*.
A drawing under the glass. 45 x 23cm, the Museum of Popular Tradition. Damascus.

- Alef and the Measuring System of Arabic Alphabet.



Fig. 88.

The measuring system of Ibn Muqlah is based on a circle with a diameter that equals the height of the letter Alef. It controls the correct proportions of the letters by comparing them to the circle, and by diagonal dots written with the calligraphy pen.



- Ibn Muqlah, is a great calligrapher (d. 940)
- Sakkal M. The Art of Arabic Calligraphy, Part 2.

Retrieved on 15/7/08, from:

<http://www.Sakkal.com.ArtofArabicCalligraphy.html>

Figure: 87.

Page No. 7, from the manuscript of Ibn Muqlah
"A Letter in the Knowledge of Script"

In this letter Ibn Muqlah explains the theory of the straight and the curve in the forms of letters. He notes that the letters return to the straight line which is the diameter of a circle, and the curve line that is its perimeter

(Al Sayeg. S. (1988). *IslamicArt*,p. 223).

- Samples from the Art of Arabic Calligraphy with different styles.

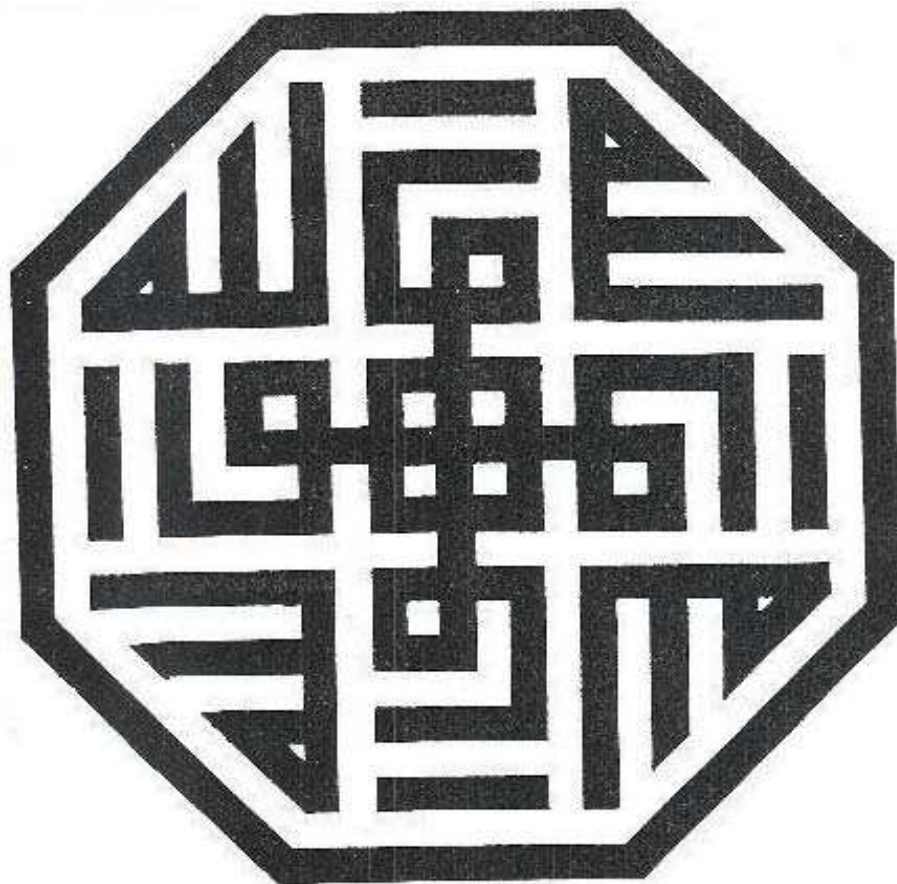


Fig: 89.

Anonymous, Turkey Calligrapher. (N.D) *He Is The God.* geometrical Kufi style,
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown.

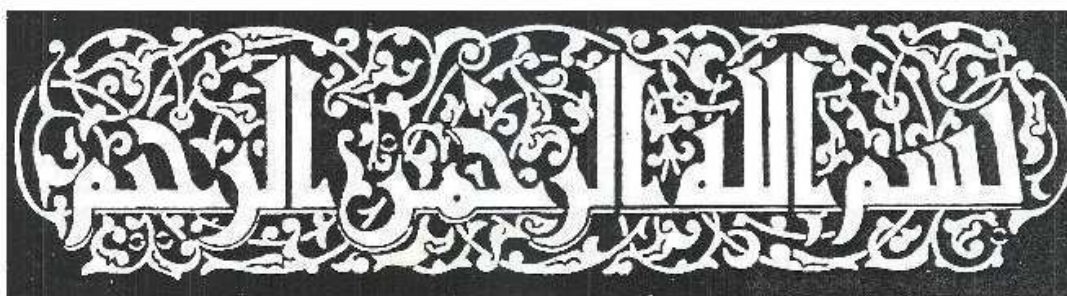


Fig: 90.

Mohamed Ali Makawi. (N.D). *Basmallah: On The Name of God.*
Sample of leafed Kufi style. Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown.

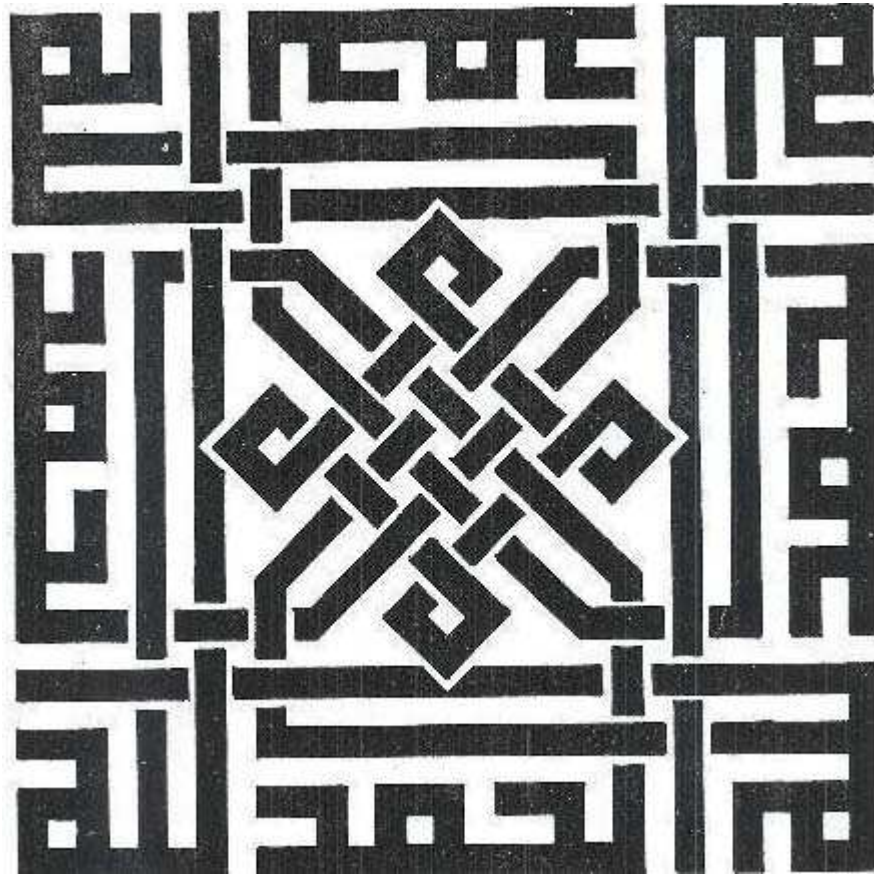


Fig: 91.

Anonymous, (1404. H). *Thanks for God.*
 Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown.



Fig: 92.

Abdel-Kader Ahmad, *A sample of decorative script, by Thuluth and Ejazah styles,*
 (N.D). Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown.

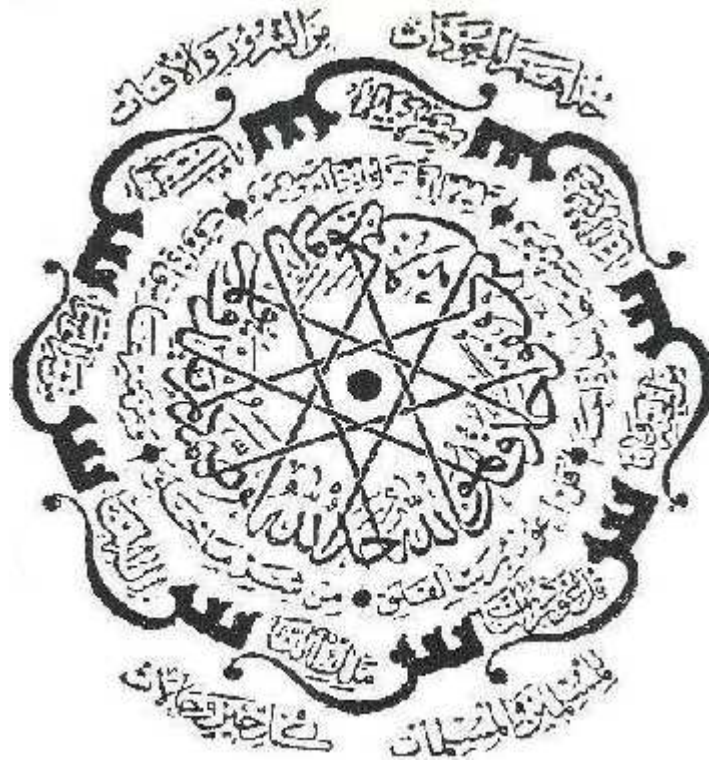


Fig: 93.

Abdel-Kader Ahmad, *Koran Verses with a decorative style, achieved by Kufi, Thuluth and Naskh scripts around an octagon star*, (N.D)
 Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown.

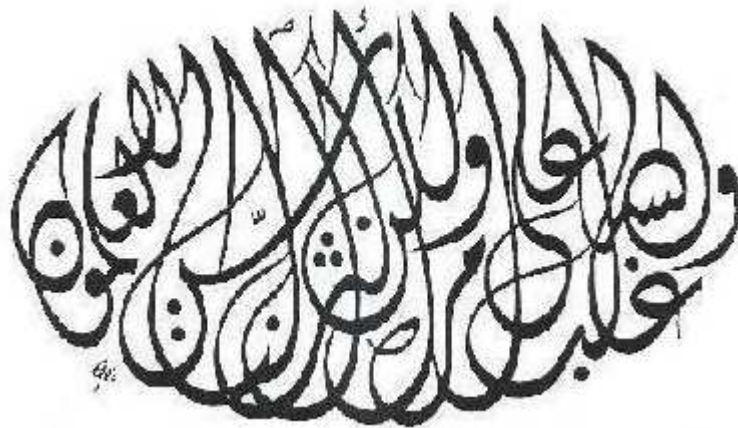


Fig: 94.

Anonymous. *A sample of Deewani style*, (N.D)
 Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown.



Fig: 95.

Anonymous. *The Name Of Mohamed* repeating, (where the script converts to ornaments).
(N.D). Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown.

- Samples from the Contemporary Arabic Painting that inspired calligraphy.

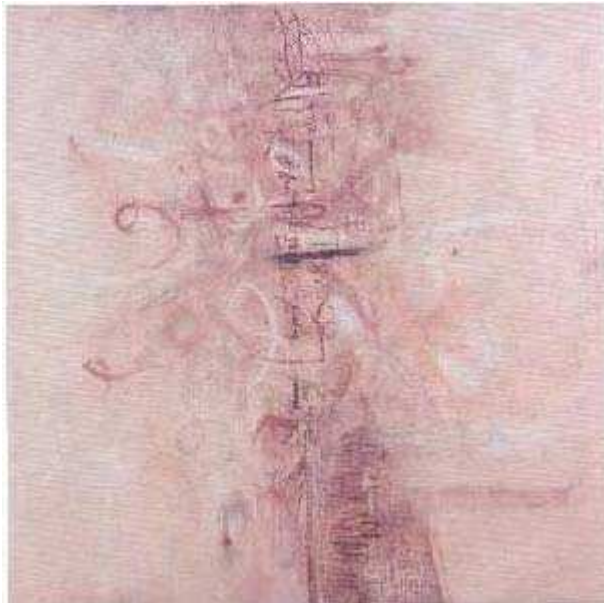


Fig: 96.

Hasan Shaker al Saeed. *Composition*, (inspired of the writing on walls),
(N.D). Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown. Iraq.



Fig: 97.

Wajih Nahle, *Composition*. (ca 1982-1992),
oil on canvas. 200 x 132 cm. Beirut.

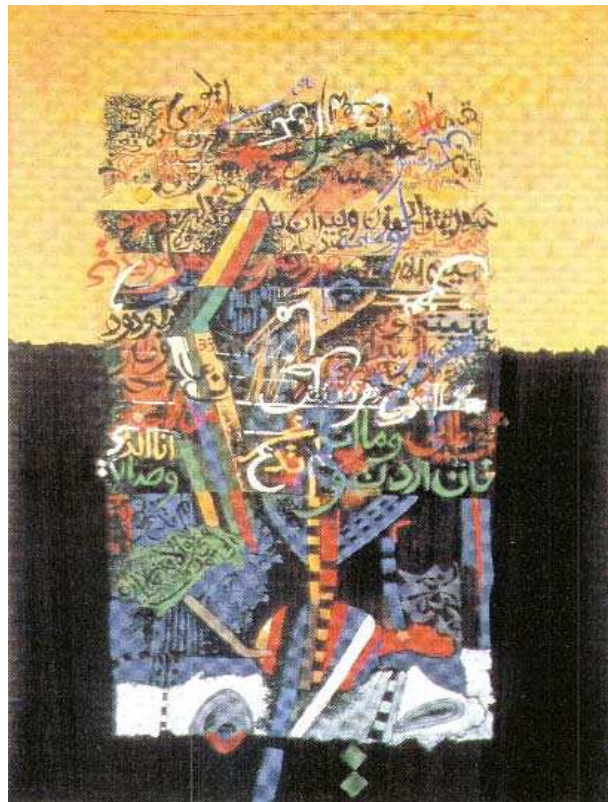


Fig: 98.

Dia al-Azaoui, (1978), *Composition*,
gouache on paper. 100 x 60 cm. Iraq.



Fig: 99.
Khalil al-Zahawi, *Composition*, (1968),
Medium: unknown. Dimensions: unknown. Iraq.

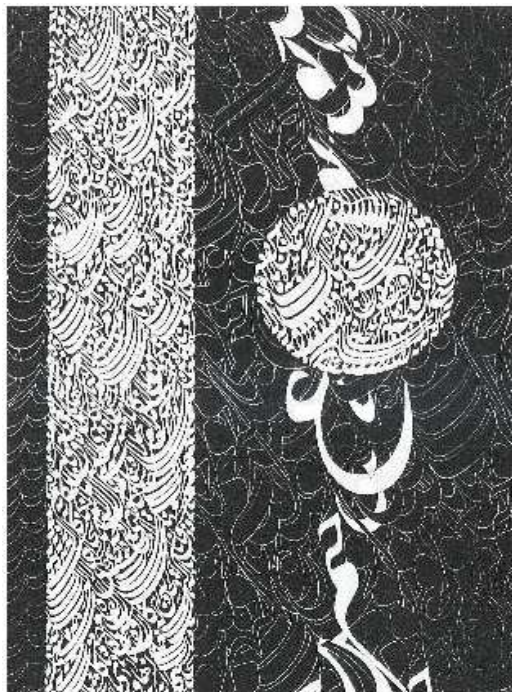


Fig: 100.
Khalil al-Zahawi, *Composition*, (1968),
Medium Unknown. Dimensions: unknown, Iraq.

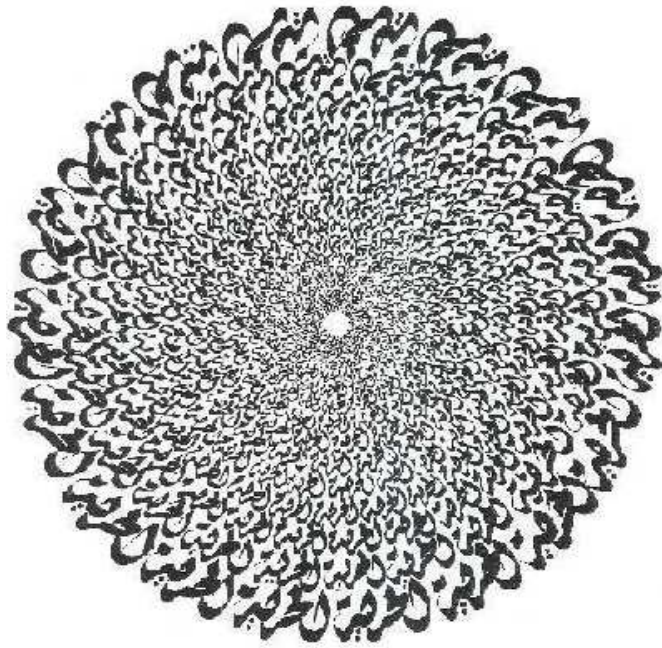


Fig: 101.

Hasan Massoudi, *Liberty*, (N.D)
Black ink on paper. Dimension: unknown, Paris.

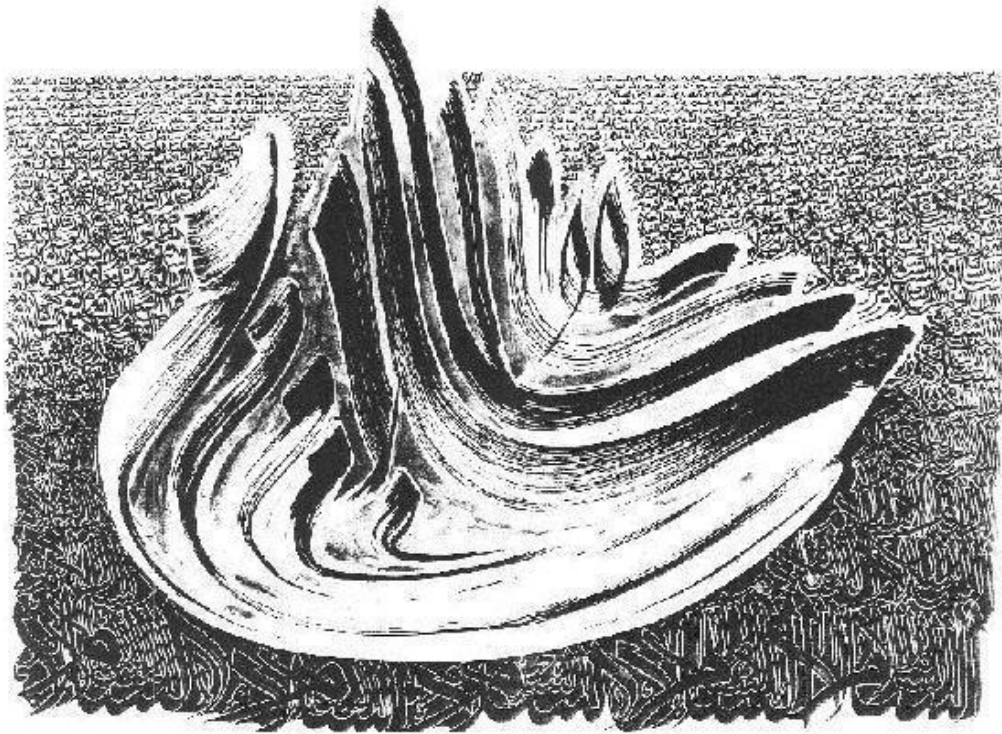


Fig: 102.

Hasan Massoudi. (N.D). *Peace*. Black ink on paper.
Dimensions: unknown.

- Samples from the contemporary Arabic Painting that inspired Islamic and popular ornaments.



Fig: 103.
Ahmad Shibrain, (1998) *Ornaments*.
oil on canvas. 80 x 80cm. Sudan.



Fig: 104.
Wajih Nahle, *Composition*. (ca 1982-1992),
mixed media. Dimension: unknown. Lebanon.

- Samples from the contemporary Arabic Painting that inspired legend and popular stories.

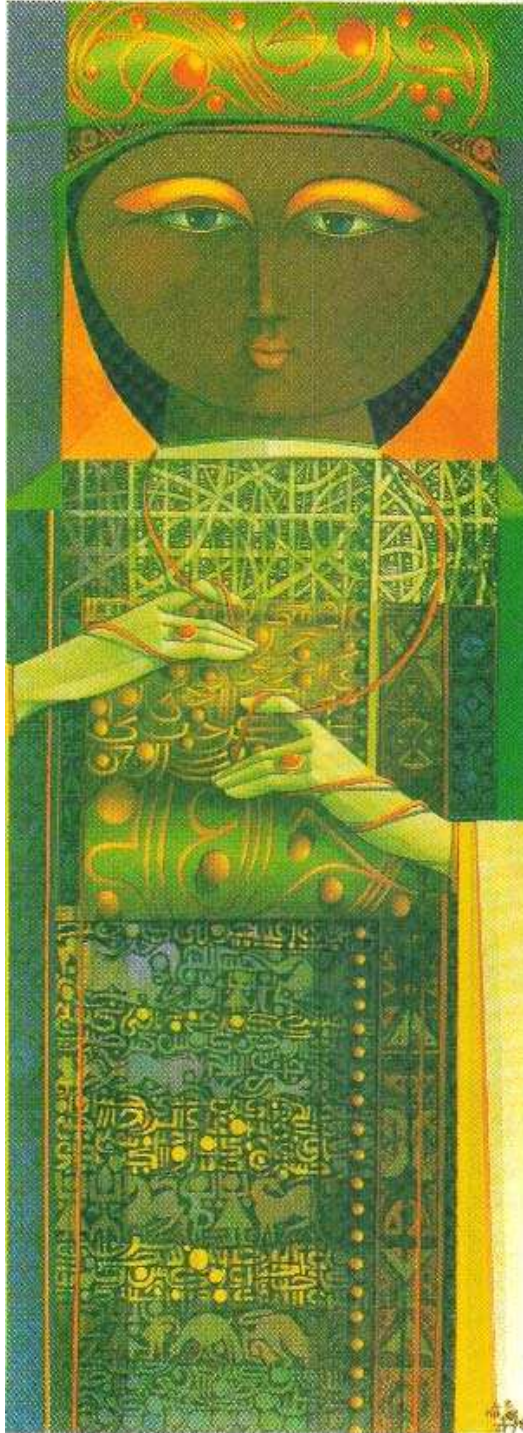


Fig: 105.

Adel Makadesh (2005), *inspiration of Al Sira Al Hilalyah*. (Sirat Bani Hilal)
Medium: unknown. Dimension: unknown. Tunis.

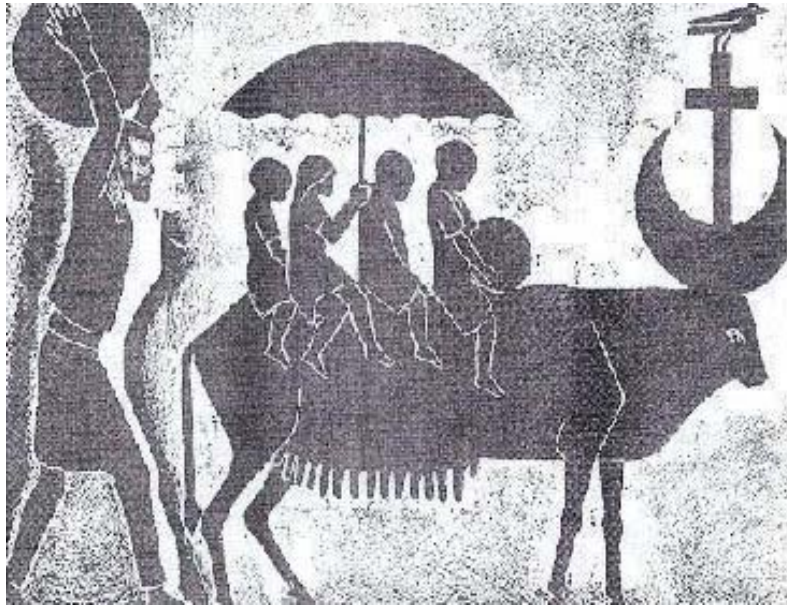


Fig: 106.

Mustafa Al-Hallaj, (N.D), *the Legend of the Artist Al Hallage*.
(Human, religious and animal elements reconfigured to present an image
of the Palestinians struggle for liberty)
... Medium: unknown. Dimensions unknown.



Fig: 107.

Nour Al-Din Fatihi. (N.D). *The Grand Bridge*,
ink on paper. Dimension: unknown. Morocco.

- Samples from the Works of Australian-Arabic artists in 2008.



Fig: 108.

Fatima Killeen. (2008). *Rumiyat... Dreaming Paradise*.
Mixed media. Dimensions: 59 x 51 x 15cm. Canberra.



Fig: 109.

Jasam Hasan. *A Man and a Woman*,
acrylic on canvas. 100 x 100cm. Sydney.



Fig: 110.

Faisal al Saadi. *To Unknown*, (2008),
oil on canvas. 90x80cm, Sydney.



Fig: 111.

Ali Abbas. (2008). *A Relationship*.
Mixed media. 100 x 100cm. Sydney.



Fig: 112.

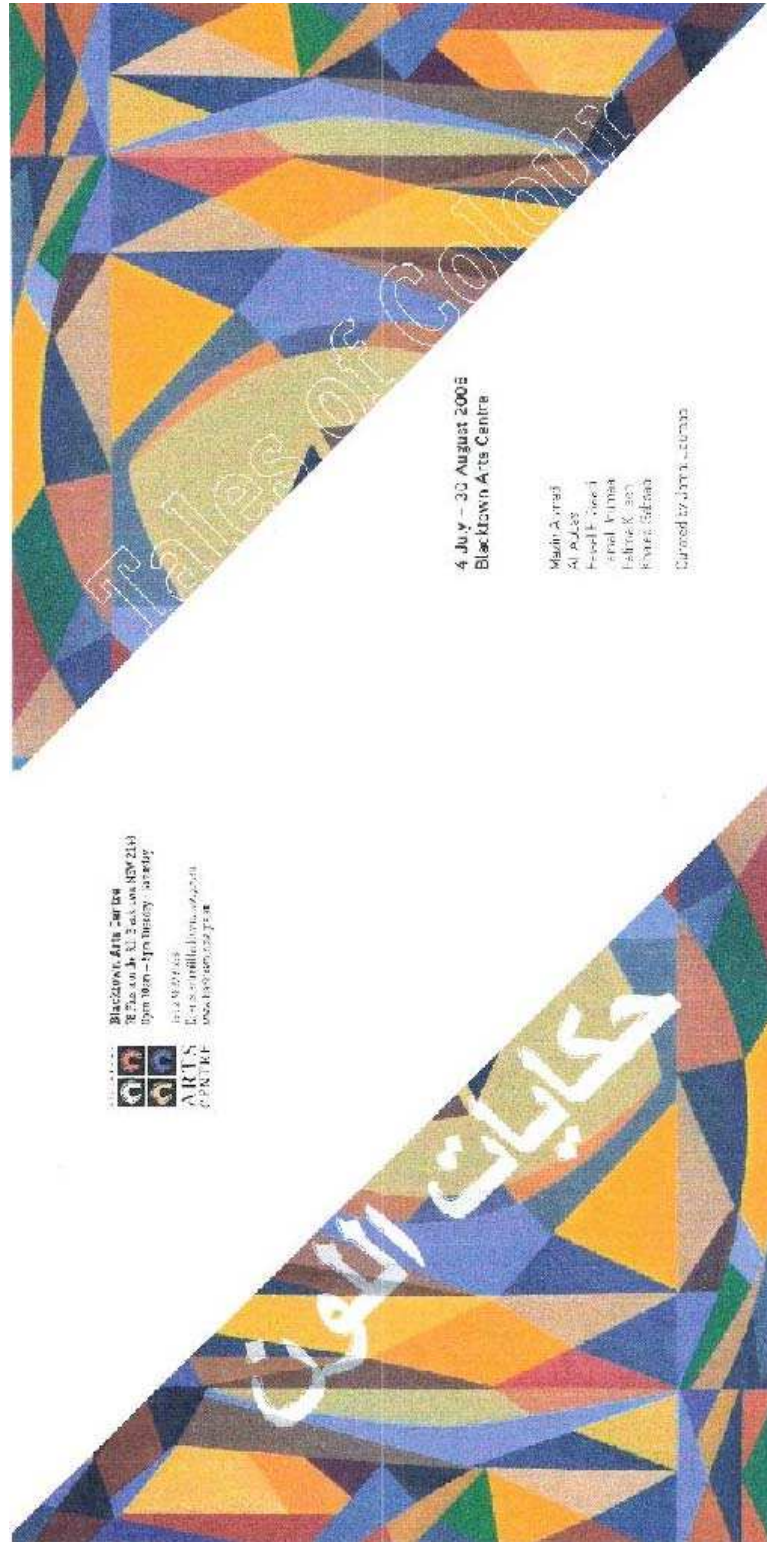
Khaled Sabsabi (2008). *On N On*, Installation.
Dimension: Variable, Sydney.



Fig: 113.

Mazin Ahmad. (2008). *At Your Door*. Mixed media. 100X100cm, Sydney.

1. The catalogue of Tales of Colour's exhibition, the card of invitation, the opening, and some images from the exhibition's activities.



2. Card of invitation.

Blacktown Arts Centre
78 Flushcombe Rd, Blacktown NSW 2148
Open 10am - 5pm Tuesday - Saturday
T: (02) 9839 6558
E: artscentre@blacktown.nsw.gov.au
www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au

Blacktown City Council

University of Western Sydney
Digital Knowledge to All

ARTS CENTRE

Tales of Colour

Blacktown Arts Centre
4 July - 30 August 2008

Mazin Ahmad	مازن أحمد
Ali Abbas	علي عباس
Faisal El Saadi	فيصل السعدي
Jamal Joumaa	جمال جمعه
Fatima Killeen	فاطمة كليين
Khaled Sabsabi	خالد سبسي

Curated by Jamal Joumaa
من أبداع وإدارة جمال جمعه

3. Entrance to the exhibition.



4. The Chancellor of University of Western Sydney,
Mr. John Fillips, AO.



5. The Mayor of Blacktown City, Mr. Leo Kelly.



6. John Cheeseman, director of Blacktown Arts Centre.



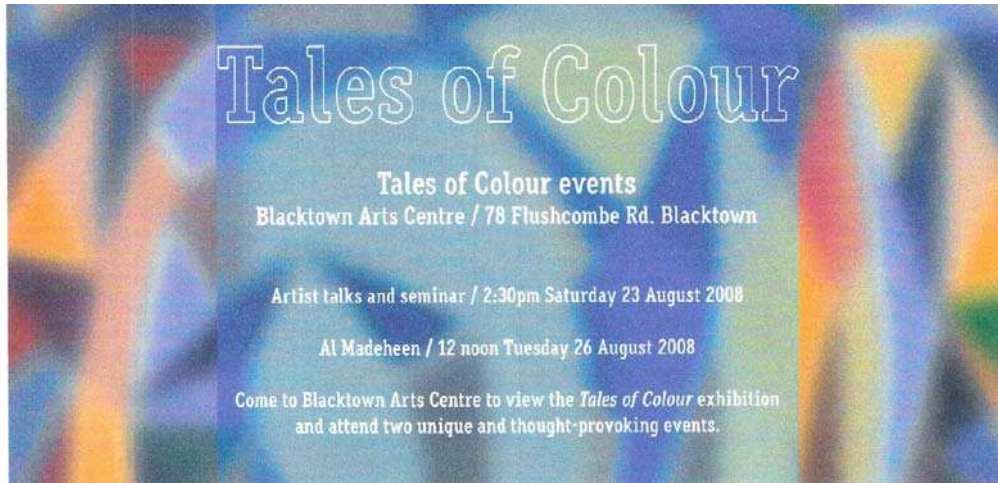
7. (L to R), Mayor of Blacktown city, Jamal Joumaa, Chancellor of U.W.S Mr. John Fillips AO, Dr. Brendon Stewart, Dr. Ronaldo Morelos, the artists, Fatima Killeen, Khaled Sabsabi, Faisal al Saadi, Ali Abbas and Mazin Ahmad, and some guests.



8. Jane Goodall.



Events.



Tales of Colour

4 July – 30 August 2008 / Where: Gallery 1, Blacktown Arts Centre / Free admission.

The *Tales of Colour* exhibition features Arab Australian artists whose works dissect contemporary migrant perspectives from the personal to the political.

They express a connection between two worlds - born in one and settled in another - in which cultural symbols are shared and transformed. Through the works we encounter ancient civilisations, folklore and personal stories that coalesce in a contemporary intercultural dialogue of universal significance.

Featuring Mazin Ahmad, Ali Abbas, Faisal Al Saadi, Jamal Joumaa, Fatima Killeen, Khaled Sabsabi. Curated by Jamal Joumaa.



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Artist talks and seminar

2:30pm Saturday 23 August 2008

Where: Gallery 1, Blacktown Arts Centre.

Bookings: Please phone 02 9839 6558. Free event.

This event discusses the development of contemporary Arab Australian artistic practice and the transformative cultural narratives of Middle Eastern countries.

The key speakers Jamal Joumaa and Nour Dados - both doctorate students - will present papers exploring social and cultural inspiration in Arab Australian artists' work and the political context of memory, conflict, public space and art.

Artists featured in the *Tales of Colour* will also discuss their artistic practice and works from the exhibition.

Artist talks and seminar proceedings

- 2:30 Introduction: Dr. Brendan Stewart
Presentation: Jamal Joumaa, Australian artists of Arabic origin: Colours and Inspiration
Artist talk: Ali Abbas
Artist talk: Faisal Al Saadi
- 3:10 Break & refreshment
- 3:25 Presentation: Nour Dados, From Place to Memory: Spaces of War/Spaces for Art.
Artist talk: Khaled Sabsabi
- 3:55 Q & A
- 4:10 Close

Speakers

Ali Abbas (Artist, *Tales of Colour*)

Born Al Nasiriah, Iraq. Emigrated to Australia 2004. Graduated from the Baghdad Academy of Fine Arts 1991. In his detailed and colourful paintings, Ali links the past and present, as colours of popular rugs converge with the Australian landscape to produce a new horizon of cultural fables.

Faisal Al Saadi (Artist, *Tales of Colour*)

Born Missan, Iraq. Emigrated to Australia 2004. Graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts, Baghdad 1965. Faisal has an extensive and diverse artistic practice, beginning as a painter and a ceramicist in the 1960s, Faisal has also produced delicate jewellery and intricately woven rugs.

Nour Dados

Nour Dados lectures in Communications at the University of Technology, Sydney where she is completing a doctoral thesis titled *Lost and Found in Beirut: Memory and Place in Narratives of the City*. Her presentation will draw on a number of arts projects produced in Beirut in order to reflect upon the ways that war reshapes cultural spaces and arts practices in post-conflict societies.

Jamal Joumaa (Artist and Curator, *Tales of Colour*)

Jamal Joumaa curated the *Tales of Colour* exhibition and is currently completing doctoral studies at the University of Western Sydney.

His presentation examines the emergence of Arab art in Australia and the social factors which facilitated its growth. His research highlights the artistic influences, inspirations, and traditions of selected Arab Australian artists in an attempt to understand their relationship to cultural diversity and contribution to the Australian cultural landscape.

Khaled Sabsabi (Artist, *Tales of Colour*)

Born Lebanon. Emigrated to Australia 1979. From the late '80s, Sabsabi has been actively involved in community work and his strong commitment to social advocacy resonates in his art practice. His work, predominantly video installations, is socially engaged, exploring the polemics and ambivalence of cultural encounters often at points or zones of contact that are deeply fraught.

Dr Brendon Stewart

Dr Brendon Stewart is the academic coordinator of the Masters of Analytical Psychology, School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney. His research brings together analytical psychology, Buddhist thought, cultural studies, ecological theory, creativity and learning. His work encourages the re-telling of important cultural stories in such a way that newness may be incorporated into familiar cultural patterns.

Al Madeheen

12 noon Tuesday 26 August 2008

Where: Gallery 1, Blacktown Arts Centre / Bookings: Please phone 02 9839 6558. Free event.

Al Madeheen, a quartet of Sufi musicians from Syria, will perform amongst the *Tales of Colour* exhibition creating a truly unique experience.

The musical performance will be accompanied by whirling dervishes - in ancient costumes, dancing and evocatively interpreting the poetic messages and meaning of the music and songs. They will play traditional drums and tambourine, whilst the words of the songs will take their inspiration from Rumi and other Sufi poets and writers.

Al Madeheen formed in Syria twenty years ago and their unique sound and wondrous technique is a success story that has taken them on tour across the world.

The musicians' visit to Australia is sponsored by Rissalah College, Lakemba.



Samples from the media release.

August 29, 2008. - Blacktown Arts Centre Site.

Art from the desert, stories from ancient lands

Friday, July 11, 2008

Arabic Australian Artists reflect on their lives and the state of their homelands in Tales of Colour exhibition

Six Arabic Australian artists from war torn Iraq, the Levant and North Africa explore the connections between ancient and contemporary traditions and arts practices, consider the space between the individual and conflict, probe the distance between people and difference and dip into the emotive personal response of the imagination.

These six artists feature in a new exhibition entitled *Tales of Colour* at Blacktown Arts Centre. The exhibition is now open and runs until Saturday, August 30. A public program featuring artist talks, workshops and a seminar will accompany the exhibition with details available at a later date.

Developed in a partnership between Blacktown Arts Centre and the University of Western Sydney (UWS), the exhibition showcases the work of professional Arabic Australian artists. The exhibition is curated by Jamal Joumaa as part of his doctorate studies at UWS.

UWS Lecturer, Dr Ronaldo Morelos says, "Tales of Colour offers a refreshing alternative to the current political and cultural dialogue on conflict and difference in our contemporary global environment. The exhibition and public programs are an intervention in the way Arabs are understood and 'othered' via the media".

Moroccan born artist, Fatima Killeen's work embodies her search for peace among cultural identities, difference and lived experience. Her work, 'legal illegal, finding peace' ponders the political story of finding refuge and fleeing to Australia; and offers a different possibility

Lebanese born Khaled Sabsabi's multimedia installation interrogates the impact of the media spectacle on conflict. He explores the relationship of the individual to that spectacle via an installation on Israel's bombing of Lebanon in 2006.

Abstract painter Mazin Ahmad explores the intricacies of human existence and its anchoring in history and land. While Mazin uses the symbology of Iraqi artistic traditions to convey meaning, he also draws upon Australian colours to imbue his work with the contemporary experience of cultural diversity.

Other artists featured in the exhibition include Ali Abbas and Faisel Al Saadi, both from Iraq, Jamal Joumaa from Lebanon, who is also the curator.

Blacktown City is the largest Local Government Area in Australia and is home to over 160 cultures. It is an area where ground-breaking collaborations between the arts and community have engaged in distinctive ways with the concept of 'art.'

<http://www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/news-and-events/news-releases/art-from-the-desert-stories-from-ancient-lands.cfm>

- From the *Blacktown Sun* (Fairfax Community Newspaper) 13 August 2008



New view: Artist Ali Abbas with two of his paintings from the *Tales of Colour* exhibition.
Photo: Fiona Cuthbert.

Arabic and Aussie

SIX local Arabic-Australian artists have put their works in an exhibition which shows how growing up or settling in Australia has influenced how they now view their culture and tradition.

The artists, originally from Lebanon, Iraq, North Africa and Morocco, allow their particular techniques and individual interpretations to shine through their works, which are currently on show at the *Tales of Colour* exhibition at Blacktown Arts Centre.

The works feature mixed media, video presentations, oil

on canvas, acrylic on canvas and colour collographs.

Director of Blacktown Arts Centre John Cheeseman said the exhibition helped to change misunderstandings in Australia of the Arab nations and their people.

"The heritage and beauty associated with their artwork are largely ignored and the region's people are forced to confront, or flee from, the core issues facing the contemporary world," Mr Cheeseman said.

The exhibition came about through a partnership between Blacktown Arts Centre and the

University of Western Sydney (UWS). It is curated by Jamal Jouraa as part of his doctorate studies at UWS.

A public program is also on offer featuring artist talks, workshops and a seminar.

Tales of Colour is open to the public Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, until August 30, at the Blacktown Arts Centre, 78 Flushcombe Road, Blacktown.

Details: For more information on the public program or the exhibition, call 9839 6558 or visit www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au.

(حكايات اللون) معرض للفنانين العرب في غرب سيدني باستراليا

التاريخ : 2008/08/20



من كميل شلالا

سيدني - 13 - 8 (كونا) -- تحت عنوان (حكايات اللون) افتتح في جامعة غرب سيدني معرض للفن التشكيلي بمشاركة عدد من الفنانين العرب من لبنان والعراق والمغرب وسواها. وافتتح المعرض الذي يستمر حتى نواية الشهر الجاري رئيس جامعة غرب سيدني البروفسور جون فيليبس بحضور جئند من الشخصيات الاكاديمية والثقافية والتروية والسياسية والاعلامية. ويضم المعرض الذي يقام في مركز الفنون في بلاكاون بالتعاون مع جامعة غرب سيدني لوحات تمثل الايقونات واخرى عن مقاومة الاحتلال في لبنان وفلسطين والعراق واخرى تستلهم التراث الشعبي والاسلامي في المغرب اضافة الى لوحات اخرى تجريدية وكتيبات من سلسلة فن السلوك للطفل. وقال منظم المعرض الفنان جمال جمعه ان اللون هو الذي يروي الحكاية من خلال اللوحة التي لديها امكانية الانتشار بسهولة بين مختلف الشعوب والثقافات. واذاف جمعه في مقابلة مع وكالة الانباء الكويتية (كوبا) ان المعرض اقيم لابرار الثقافة العربية واكتشف عن رموز الفن والتراث في العالم العربي حتى يتسنى للمشاهد الاسترالي من مختلف الانثيات ان يتعرف عن قرب على الحضارة العربية. واعتبر ان الفنون لا زالت تملك امكانية مد جسور تعدي عملية التفاعل الابداعي بين الناس وتعزز التواصل بين شعوب العالم وان العمل الفني يعبر عن هوية وامل ويطرح الفنان في مجتمع متعدد الثقافات لابرار هويته الثقافية والحضارة العريقة التي ينتمي اليها. واشاد الفنان جمعه بتجاوب الجمهور الاسترالي مع المعرض حيث ابدى اهتماما رائدا باللوحة العربية مثنيا على الفنانين العرب الذين يتزايد عددهم في الاعتراب بشكل كبير نتيجة الحروب والهجرة من الشرق الاوسط.

- من جانبه قال مدير مركز الفنون في غرب سيدني جون شيزمان ان الفنانين يستلهمون من التعددية الثقافية وطرق الحياة والحضارات التي تحيط بهم اساليب جديدة للتواصل والحوار. بدوره قال الفنان علي عباس انه عندما نلامس الفرشاة المعموسة باللون السطح الابيض "ينتابني الاحساس بان الحقيقة والخيال يتشابكان او يد طعل تركت بصماتها على جدران الزقاق الخلمي كل هذه الاشياء تصطب ابراد على القماش المرعب". اما الفنان مارت احمد فاكد ان قضية الانسان وعلاقته بين التاريخ والارض هي التي جذبتة الى عالم الفن موصحا انه يحاول ببساطة ان يضع على مساحة القماش الصفة الجوهرية المميزة لحياة الانسان لذلك لجأ الى استخدام الرموز المألوفة من الحضارات القديمة والتقاليد الموروثة بالاضافة الى استخدام الالوان المواقية والمرسطة بهذه التربة ذات الطبيعة الخاصة. وقال الفنان فيصل السعدي انه بدأ نشاطه الفني كرسام وجزاف منذ الستينات وفي خلال رحلته الفنية الطويلة يمكن من الدمج في اعماله بين رموز البيئة العراقية والالوان الحديثة في عالم اليوم سائلا نفسه "كيف من الممكن نقل افكار الزمن الماضي مع التقنيات المعاصرة لعالم اليوم ومحاو لا اكمال هذه المهمة ووضع حجر في اساس مثنى لاحداد الماضي فائم على الرموز العنية. وقالت الفنانة فاطمة كيللي ان اهتمامها كرسامة تهبش في مجتمع متعدد الثقافات هو في الحفاظ على هوية الفن الاسلامي والخط العربي من اجل ابقاء الهوية وحياتها في مجتمع متعدد الثقافات. وعرض الفنان خالد سيسبي فيلما وثائقيا عن الاعتداءات الاسرائيلية على جنوب لسان في شهر يوليو 2006 حظي بالاعجاب والتقدير. (النهاية) ك ن س / ا ع م

English and Arabic Glossary

A

- Amin El Basha.....	أمين الباشا
- Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki	عبد الحميد بعليك
- Al-Husain Bin Ali.....	الحسين بن علي
- Abdulla Bin Zyad.....	عبد الله بن زياد
- Al-Abbas Bin Ali	العباس بن علي
- Antara Bin Shaddad	عنترة بن شداد
- Abla.....	عبله
- Al Hakawati	الحكواتي
- Abou Subhi al Tinawi	أبو صبحي التيناوي
- Al-Zir Salem	الزير سالم
- Al Ka'ba	الكعبة
- Al Khuder	الخضر
- Ali al-Zaibak	علي الزبيق
- Al Amira Zat al-Himma.....	الأميرة ذات الهممة
- Al-Lat.....	أللات
- Al Oza	العزة
- Aramaic.....	أراميين
- Ashura.....	عاشوراء
- Adonis.....	أدونيس
- Arthur Boyd	آرثر بويد
- Abdel-Kader Arnaaout.....	عبد القادر أرناؤوط
- Al Mash-houf.....	المشحوف
- Aref Al Rayess.....	عارف الريس
- Aziza and Yunis.....	عزيزة ويونس
- Assyrian	آشوريين
- Ayoubi Period	المرحلة الأيوبية
- Al-Basus War.....	حرب البسوس
- Al-Zahir Bebars	الزاهر بيبرس
- Ain Jalout.....	عين جالوت
- Afrah	أفراه
- Ariha	أريحا
- Abu Zaid al Hilali	أبو زيد الهلالي
- Al Shuttaar	أنشطار
- Assador Azo.....	أسادور أزو
- Abdel Wahab Moursi.....	عبد الوهاب مرسي
- Al Imam Al-Mahdi	الأمام المهدي
- Al-Asma'ee	الأصمعي

B

- Babylonians البابلين
 - Baalbek بعلبك
 - Bani Hilal بني هلال
 - Bagdad Arts School مدرسة فنون بغداد
 - Bacon بيكون
 - Brett Whiteley بريت وايتلي
 - Byzantine بيزنطي
-

C

- Chafik Abboud شفيق عبود
 - Cesar El Gemeyel قيصر الجميل
 - Chaldeans كلدانيين
-

D

- Damour دامور
 - Daoud Al Corm داوود القرم
-

E

- Eel ايل
 - Enioma Elesh انيوما ايليش
 - Ezajela ايزاجيلا
 - Ebla ايلا
 - Elizabeth Cummings أليزابيت كامينغ
 - Enkidu أنكيدو
-

G

- Gilgamesh جلجاميش
 - Graham Marchent غراهام مارشنت
 - Gustave Clement غوستاف كليمنت
 - Group of One Dimension تجمع البعد الواحد
 - Ghassan Al Hage غسان الحج
 - Giants of Palestine عمالقة فلسطين
 - Garden of Eden جنة عدن
 - Gabriel جبرائيل
-

F

- Fatima فاطمة
 - Farouk Saad فاروق سعد
 - Fateh al Moudarres فاتح المدرس
 - Fayek Hasan فائق حسن
 - Farid Al-Din Al-Attar فريد الدين العطار
 - Farid Belkahia فريد بلكاهيا
-

H

- Hikayah حكاية
 - Hakawati حكواتي
 - Hand of Al-Abbas كف العباس
 - Hanzala حنظله
 - Husain El-Jabali حسين الجبالي
 - Hamed Abdullah حامد عبد الله
 - Hamed Saeed حامد سعيد
 - Habib Srour حبيب سرور
 - Hasan Jouni حسن جوني
 - Hypolit هيبوليت
 - Herodotus هيرودوتس
 - Hasan Shaker al Saeed حسن شاکر آل سعيد
-

I

- Ibrahim Marzouk ابراهيم مرزوق
 - Ishtar عشتار
-

J

- Jawad Salim جواد سليم
 - Jacky Redgate جاكى رد غيت
 - Jubran Khalil Jubran جبران خليل جبران
-

K

- Karagoze كراكوز
- Karbala كربلاء
- Kandinsky كاندنسكى
- Kimpaz قمباز
- Khalil Salibi خليل صليبي
- Kalila wa Dimna كليلة و دمنة

- Khatibi خطيبي

L

- Lion Tolstoy ليون تولستوي
- Lukman لقمان
- Lor Gharib لور غريب

M

- Mari مدينة أو مملكة ماري
- Manat مناة
- Mardouk مردوخ
- Mark Rothko مارك روثكو
- Matisse ماتيس
- Mashrabia مشربية
- Mohammed al Malahi محمد المليحي
- Moustafa Farrouk مصطفى فروخ
- Mondrian موندريان
- Mecca مكة
- Mardouk مردوخ
- Mandaens مندانيين
- Muallaqat معلقات
- Mamluke period المرحلة المملوكية
- Mahoud Ahmad ماهود أحمد
- Mohamed al-Feriani محمد الفرياني
- Mounir Najm منير نجم

N

- Nimrods of Iraq العراق نماريد
- Nazir Naba'a نذير نبعة
- Naji al-Ali ناجي العلي
- New York Arts School مدرسة فنون نيويورك

O

- Oro-Tal أورو تال
- Omar al Najdi عمر النجدي
- Odysseus أوديسوس
- Omayyad أموي

P

- Phoenix	فونيكس
- Phoenicians	الفينيقين
- Phoenix bird	طائر الفينيق
- Palm Sunday	أحد النخيل
- Palmyra	تدمر
- Paul Klee	بول كلي
- Picasso	بيكاسو
- Pyramids	الأهرامات
- Papadopolu	بابادوبولو
- Paul Giragosian	بول غيراغوسيان

R

- Renoir	رينوار
- Richard Etinghouzen	ريتشارد اتنجهاوزن
- Rafik Charaf	رفيق شرف
- Rothko	روثكو
- Rachid Wehbi	رشيد وهبي
- Raphael	رافائيل
- Romance Art School of Paris	مدرسة فنون باريس الرومانسية
- Rawi	راوي

S

- Semite	الساميين
- Sabre	سيف
- Sumerians	السومريين
- Shamash	شمش
- Shamas	شمس
- Solomon	سليمان
- Sira	سيرة
- Surah	سورة
- Seventh Suspending	ألمعلقات السبع
- Shadow play	خيال الظل
- Saint Marcus	سانت ماركوس
- Saint Jonah	سانت جونا
- Saeed Akl	سعيد عقل
- Seif Bin Dy Yazan	سيف بن ذي يزن
- Sydney Opera House	سدني أوبرا هاوس
- Sydney Harbour Bridge	سدني هاربر بريدج
- Saliba Al Douwaihi	صليبيا الدويهي
- Salwa Choukair	سلوى شقير
- Semiramis	سميراميس
- Sinai	سيناء
- Siegfried	زيغفريد

- Song's of Roland	أغنية رونالد
- Sha'eir	شاعر
- Shama	شامة
- Salah Taher	صلاح طاهر
- Sobaih Abboud	صبيح عبود
- Sijelmasi.....	سيجلماسي

T

- Tadmor.....	تدمر
- Tamr.....	تمر
- T.S Elliot.....	ت. س. أليوت
- The Alexandrian light house.....	منارة الإسكندرية
- Tarbush	طربوش
- The licorice seller.....	بائع العرقسوس

U

- Uruk	أوروك
- Union of Arabic Artists.....	اتحاد الفنانين العرب

V

- Velasquez.....	فيلاسكيز
- Victor Hugo	فيكتور هيغو
- Van Gogh.....	فان غوغ
- Vinus.....	فينوس

W

- Wajih Nahle	وجيه نحله
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Z

- Zain Al-Abedin.....	زين العابدين
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