

THE GRASS ROOTS OF IRAQI ART

BY
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Published By

Wasit Graphic and Publishing Limited
Piermont House 33 - 35 Pier Road, st. Helier Jersey C. I.

“Art in Mesopotamia has always been like its people, who have been the product of the land and climate. They have never reached decadence and never achieved perfection; for them perfection of craftsmanship has been a limitation on their selfexpression. Their work has been crude but inventive, has had a vigour and boldness which would not have been possible with a more refined technique. The artist has always been free to express himself, even amid the state art of Assyria, where the true artist speaks through the drama of the wounded beast.”

- Jewad Selim -

I

Until a few years ago it was possible to write about Iraqi art in more or less comprehensive terms as a phenomenon of some strange unexpected significance in a country that had begun to develop, together with its physical potential, its inner powers, its vision. However, as the country gained in economic growth in the last fifteen years or so, this phenomenon has assumed such dimensions that any but a detailed account would fall short of giving a true picture of its place in the intellectual life of Iraq. Anyone who saw the first Arab Biennale in Baghdad in 1974 realized this: furthermore, Iraqi painting and sculpture seemed then by far the most powerful in the vast pan-Arab exhibition. They were as good, as vital, as any in the world. The second and third Biennales, held respectively in Rabat, Morocco, in 1976 and in Benghazi, Libya, in 1979, confirmed this impression.

In the space of thirty years Iraqi art has thus come into its own as a thing of distinction. The art world outside may fly into all kinds of new directions, so many creations of the inventive mind may elicit surprise or wonder with their novelty, their technique, often seeming to anticipate the look of the next technological change, but there will always remain the painting itself, the canvas, the individual's personal relationship with his own creation, to which Iraqi art can be favourably referred and compared. For a small country like Iraq, which has only just come out of centuries of stagnation, this is no small achievement.

It is interesting to note that the State's recognition of the artists, apart from providing art education and scholarships (which goes back to the thirties), was first accorded officially just about a quarter of a century ago when, in February 1956, the first comprehensive exhibition of Iraqi art was held at Al Mansour Club in Baghdad under royal patronage. The exhibition was so successful that the artists got together soon later that year and launched the Iraqi Artists Society. When after the 1958 Revolution the Ministry of Information was established, it extended State patronage to artists and their exhibitions on a large scale. The Artists Society and the Ministry of Information, combining forces, made the exhibiting of almost any artist worth the name an easy affair that cost him or her next to nothing. Moreover, the Ministry, building up its permanent gallery of modern art, bought works from nearly every artist who held an exhibition.

Jewad Selim, *Boys with Watermelons*



I

When in April 1951 the late Jewad Selim delivered a speech at the opening of the first exhibition of his group, the Baghdad Modern Art Group, he said that a writer had called him and his fellow artists 'the enemies of the people': he forgave him saying, however, that he did not expect more than three per cent of the public to react favourably to what the members of his Group were trying to express although, he predicted, the public would soon be on the artists' side. His prediction was indeed justified: exhibitions came in rapid succession, the air buzzed with arguments about the artist's intent among the painters and sculptors themselves, among members of the public — mostly young intellectuals and university students — and in the newspapers. Fortunately, a number of artists were quite articulate whether as speakers or writers: their case was put across in manifestoes, public meetings and lengthy, often heated, articles.

There were in the fifties three major groups, each led by a prominent painter, which embodied this struggle for the recognition of the artist and his view of the world: the S.P. (Société Primitive), led by Fayek Hassan, the Baghdad Modern Art Group, led by Jewad Selim, and the Impressionists (made up largely of post-impressionists and cubists), led by Hafidh Duroubi. These groups have remained fairly active until recent years, comprising in all about fifty painters and sculptors. As more and more artists returned from their studies abroad (in London, Paris, Rome, Warsaw, Zagrab, even Peking), or graduated from Baghdad's own Fine Arts Institute and Fine Arts Academy (the latter being part of Baghdad University), groups in the sixties tended to multiply or splinter off, with many artists, of course, preserving their independence. There were the Academicians, the Innovationists, the New Vision Group, the One-Dimensionists and others. Each group prided itself on being revolutionary after its own fashion, ranging in its creed from the intensely political to the intensely religious or mystic. Actually the ideological lines, political or otherwise, often cut across the groups' formations in a remarkable way. What mattered in the final analysis was individual talent: the brilliant creators were of their own making. Each group contributed its valuable share to the general discussion and examination of ideas, just as it also made exhibitions easier to hold for the artists themselves.



Hafidh Duroubi, *Trees*



Hafidh Duroubi, *Baghdad*

One fact that has always to be recognised in understanding Arab art today is that however revolutionary Arab artists may be in concept and in aspiration, a spirit of tradition hangs on to them which they cannot, will not, shake off. However much they may subscribe to the view of 'internationalism' or 'cosmopolitanism' in modern art they will not give up the notion that their identity can only be shaped by rooting themselves in a tradition of their own, which helps to give a distinction to their work, marking them off as the creators and extenders of a national culture. Iraqi artists, most of whom have very good knowledge of other nations' art history, have right from the start attempted to bring into existence a view of art which might be called Iraqi, or Arab. Hence their harking back to Sumerian and Assyrian sculpture, to Arab painting, manuscript illumination and calligraphy, to folk motifs found in handicrafts and handwoven rugs and to local popular themes. Their achievement in style is the child



Shakir Hassan, *Graffiti*

of this wedding of tradition to present-day contemporaneity. It is only thus that we may begin to understand the works of Jewad Selim, Shakir Hassan, Kadhem Haider, Dia Azzawi, Mohammad Ghani, Khaled Rahal, Suad Attar, and many other leading artists. Whatever originality they may possess is thus connected, in one way or another, with the grass roots of their society, even though the connection may not always be readily visible.

Similarly, most Iraqi artists are deeply concerned with the dilemmas of twentieth century man and their own relevance to their times. They consider their work, basically, as part of the struggle of an Arab nation emerging as a new force in today's world. Much of their symbolism derives its inspiration from the fight for freedom and independence of Palestinian revolutionaries. However personal the vision or the ultimate style, these are some of the major factors that make up their work.



Kadhem Haider, *from the Martyr's Epic*

Dia al Azzawi, *O Rain!*

III

An interesting case is the work of **Fayek Hassan**, who remains, however much he shuns the limelight, the doyen of Iraqi painters.

For over forty years Fayek Hassan has been producing paintings of remarkable quality. When Iraq was yet, intellectually, outside the stream of the art movements of the West, Fayek Hassan, who had studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in the mid-thirties, was doing his work driven almost by instinct, proving the high quality of his drawing and colouring.

His understanding, however, of the significance of colour and the importance of style as part of a trend in an epoch, came to him some time later through a few Polish painters who, themselves students of Pierre Bonnar, had an unexpected influence on three or four Iraqi artists during the War Years in Baghdad, when a large number of Poles came to Iraq as refugees. (Jewad Selim was another artists to be thus influenced, after he had spent a couple of years studying art in Paris and Rome.) Hassan's work suddenly seemed to mature: it acquired that personal quality that marks a good artist.

Since then his painting has gone through a number of phases each, in a way, reminiscent of one of the successive trends that gained currency in Europe since the turn of the century: from impressionism to cubism, thence to abstract and then to expressionism, and finally to a form of realism. What is so remarkable in all these phases is the originality he has always shown in dealing with subjects that are intensely local, intensely Iraqi.

Together with his friend Jewad Selim, Fayek Hassan was for some time in search of a distinctive Iraqi style, which right from his beginnings he seemed to seek through emphasis on the 'popular' essence of his subjects. His cubism in the fifties was a mixture of Arab forms largely derived from the 13th century Baghdadi illuminator Yahya al Wasiti, and current European forms. But his peasants, his bedouins, his fishermen - his constant themes - belonged very much to the waters of Tigris and Euphrates. His harvesters, his curd-sellers, however cubistically stylized, laboured under a clear Mesopotamian sun.





Fayek Hassan,
extreme left: *Fishermen*
left: *Women*
below: *Old Quarter*

When after that he took a plunge into abstract painting, he found inspiration mostly in Iraqi folk arts. He would either balance his colour planes seemingly geometrically or so manipulate them as to suggest ancient Iraqi sites. But the abstract could not satisfy Fayek Hassan for long; it was for him simply a step in the direction of expressionism, which turned out to be one of the richest periods of his career. He charged his paintings, which now became intense and sombre, with images of poverty and suffering, a strange mixture of compassion and horror, and succeeded in bringing up to the surface the hidden agonies of his people, with faces and figures often suggestive of nightmares.

Finally he abandoned all that for a style which we may loosely call realistic, on account of its content, though impressionistic would perhaps be a more accurate term. Making good use of his rich technical skill, Fayek Hassan now concentrated on painting the local themes that obsessed him visually. The scenes amidst which he was born, amidst which he spent many years of his life, became the main source to feed his imagination. His pictures got filled with the back streets of Baghdad: with their age-old architecture, their haze, their sun and shade, their motion and their stillness, their primitive shops and their popular characters. He was intent on coming to closer grips with his direct visual experience of a scene he knew to be vanishing soon: it was a daily experience never so faithfully recorded by any other Iraqi artist.



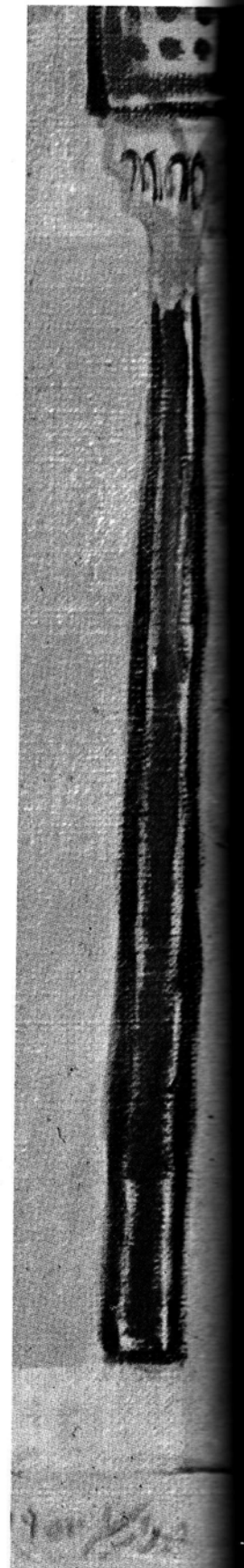


Fascinated as he was by scenes of the city, where against the sense of old times having come to a standstill he also saw life bursting with freshness and vitality, he later became even more fascinated by scenes of country life. Into them he sketched ages of hard work and endurance such as had been the lot of the peasants for centuries. His paintings thus seem to reach down to the essence of his people's experience. With his recent passion for the portrayal of horses and riders, the horses turn into symbols of the Arab psyche. A kind of glittering, reckless optimism pervades, like the reflection in a falcon's eye in one of his riders' portraits. His Iraqi roots are all that matter to him: he celebrates life and celebrates man's endurance in it.

Having said all this, upon looking again into Fayek Hassan's achievement, one wonders whether the artist was not carried away by his subject a little too much. Having mastered the styles current in the world, he did not quite venture into experimentation with a style that might stem from his country's accumulated heritage. And yet he managed to create a corpus of work which at its best captures the Iraqi spirit of things to a unique degree, which has kept him in a leading position among Iraqi artists all along.

The only other artist who enjoyed similar popularity in his lifetime was sculptor-painter **Jewad Selim**, who died in 1961 at the age of 41. By no means as prolific as his colleague Fayek Hassan, he excelled him by the intensity of his vision and by the avidity of his search for a style that would serve that vision, which earned him a place in the modern movement not only of leadership, but of inspiration. No single artist has had so much influence on art in Iraq, an influence that has in time overflowed Iraq's borders to the rest of the Arab world, largely through the work of the last ten years of his life - the painting and the sculpture which he based on endless experimentation and developed through constant, untiring discussion, theorization and argument.

After studying for a couple of years in Paris and Rome, Jewad Selim worked in the War years at the Archaeological Museum in Baghdad, which gave him a thorough grounding in ancient Sumerian and Assyrian sculpture. He also taught at the Fine Arts Institute, sculpted and painted a lot, and for about six years kept a Journal of





Jewad Selim, *Street Musicians*

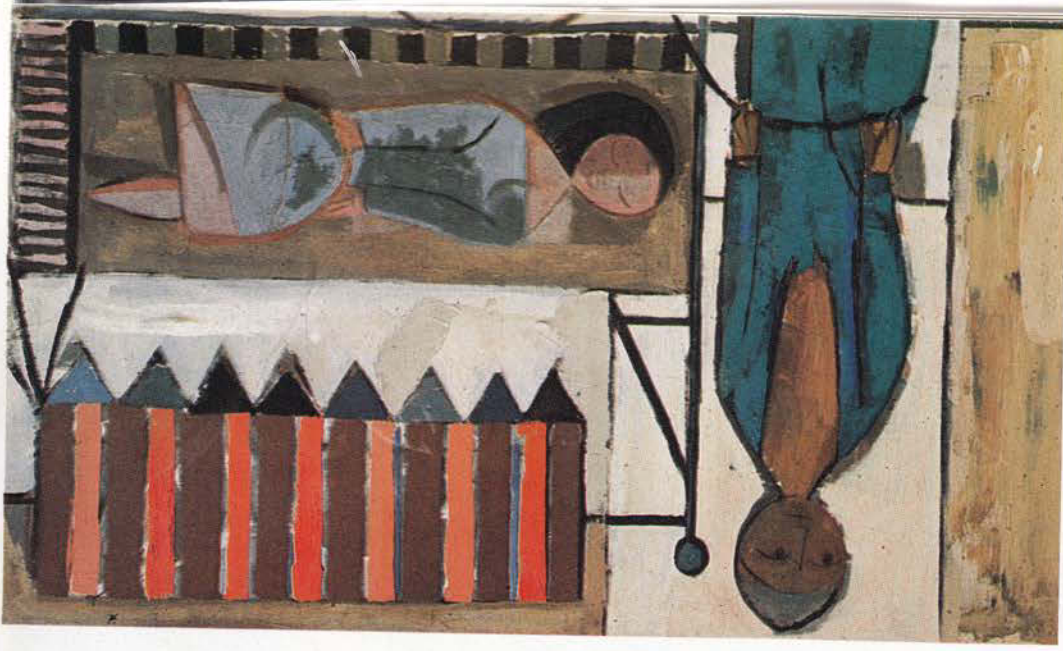
a very personal nature which he filled with sketches, notes on art in several languages and self-analytical comments on his work and how he wanted it to develop. This very important journal came to light after his death (the present author edited and published excerpts from it). It revealed the profound, almost obsessive nature of his quest for an Iraqi mode of creation rooted in the tradition and culture of his country; it foreshadowed and often explained what he endeavoured to achieve in later years.

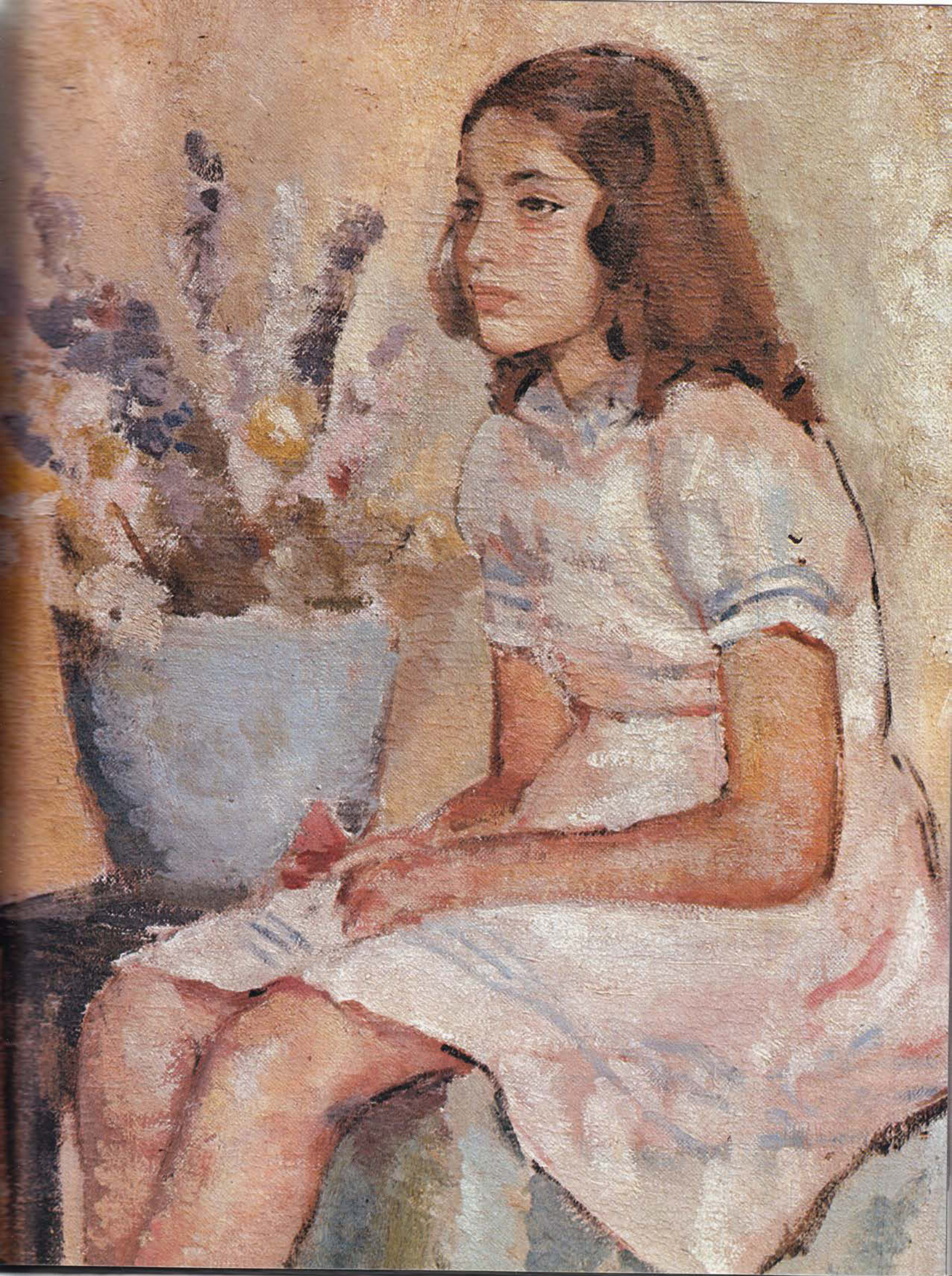
Perhaps Jewad Selim, who later studied sculpture in the London Slade School from 1946 to 1949, was the first artist to make his contemporaries aware of the problem of style and tradition followed soon, with more systematic articulation, by his younger colleague Shakir Hassan al Said. In spite of his immense knowledge of the history of painting and sculpture, Selim preserved an innocence, a freshness of vision, which made him draw creatively on local forms, symbols, habits, superstitions - all the folk lore still active in the older alleys and coffee-shops of Baghdad and the surrounding countryside. But all this he skilfully related to the works of the past, from Sumner's diminutive sculptures, to Assyria's mighty marbles, from Al Wasiti's powerful illuminations and calligraphy to the ancient figure-filled copperware of Baghdad and Mosul. And the whole thing, to be valid, had to be related to the modes and experience of our times. When he formed the Baghdad Modern Art Group in 1951, Selim had no idea that he was, in fact, providing a volatile movement, whose members were an amazing mixture of professionals and amateurs, with a direction not so rigid as inspiring.

Jewad Selim, *Women Waiting*



Jewad Selim, *The Lady and the Gardener*
opposite: *Portrait of a Girl*





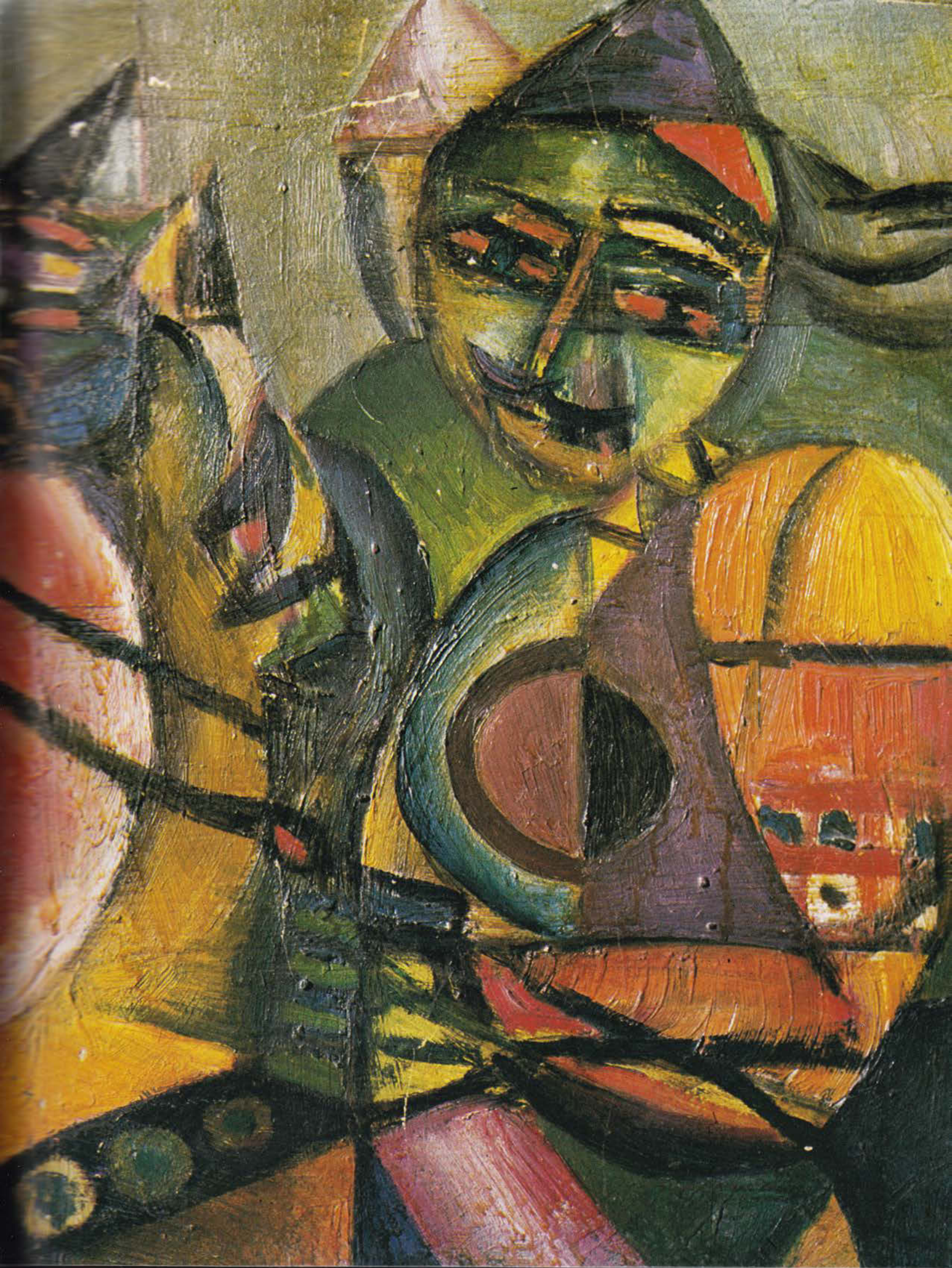
While his friend Fayek Hassan taught painting at the Fine Arts Institute, he taught sculpture, and between them they were responsible for the early discovery or development of many talents. Selim's work in the meantime came out in an interminable flow of drawings, paintings, sculpture, even book-covers and silver ornaments. When with the 14th July 1958 Revolution Iraq was declared a republic, he was commissioned to make the Monument of Liberty in bronze. For an artist to have completed this enormous complex monument (which he cast in Florence) in less than eighteen months was indeed a spectacular achievement. Spread out in fourteen 8-metre high groups over a 50-metre long frieze, it stands in the heart of the capital, dominating Liberation Square. It embodies Jewad Selim's peculiar combination of power and lyricism, of the Iraqi and the Universal, together with a mystical tragic love for his country. In style, it is the final result of twenty years of study, experimentation and heart-searching. (For a full study of Jewad Selim, please consult the present author's book in Arabic: "Jewad Selim wa Nassab al Hurriya," published by the Ministry of Information, Baghdad, 1974).

In **Shakir Hassan al Said**'s work, we see the progress of a similar spirit of search, theorization, and love. No Iraqi artist has written about art in general, and about the artist's reflections on his own work in particular, as much as Shakir Hassan al Said. A younger friend and disciple of Jewad Selim's, he was one of the more active members of the Baghdad Group, supplementing his paintings and drawings with a great deal of written enunciation of the Group's main ideas - which were often his own. His writings over the last twenty-five years have come to form a sort of a body of doctrine which, though not easy to define, has had a considerable influence on the direction the Iraqi art movement has sometimes taken after Jewad Selim's death.

Basically, there has always been a religious vein in his work which has in the end assumed the proportions of a mystical vision. He started with the world as seen, and gradually developed towards a concept of the world as felt and as thought: it has been a slow agonized shift from the concrete to the abstract, but always with an emphasis on the local, the Arab, the popular.

Shakir Hassan, *Arab Horseman*

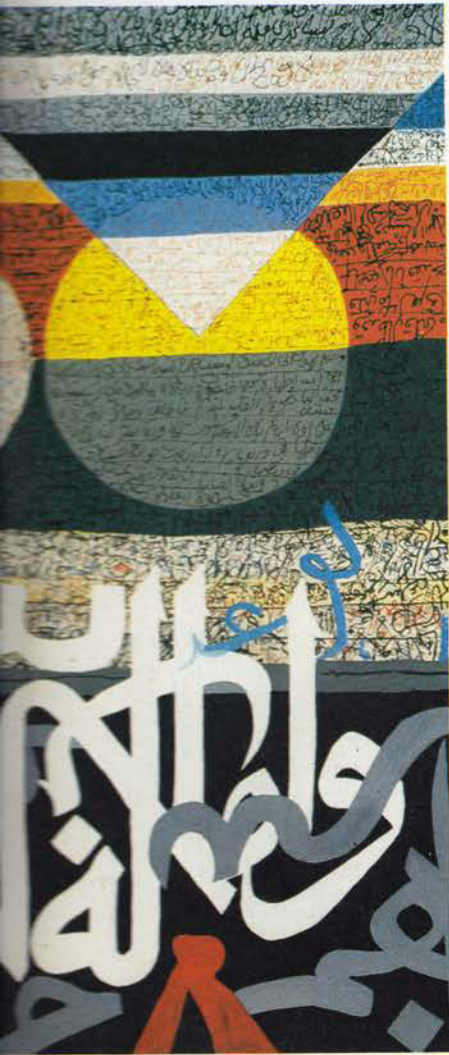




Shakir Hassan, *Letters on a Derelict Wall*
below: *Woman*





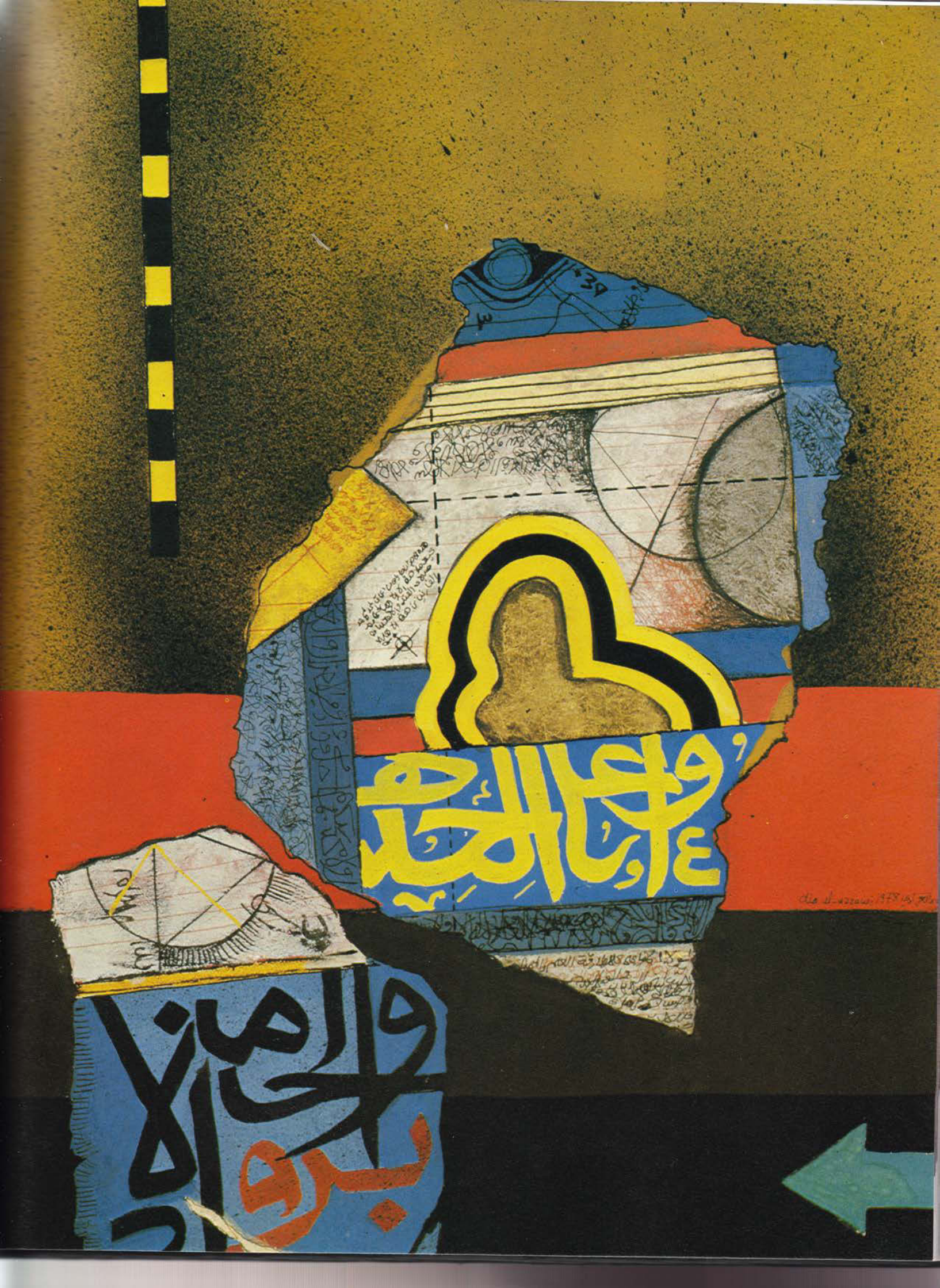


Dia al Azzawi, *Calligraphy*
opposite:
Composition with Calligraphy

This has carried him through a succession of styles which first stemmed from folk-motifs, in form as well as in content. Having gone through a period of powerful expressionism in depicting the life of the poor in Iraq (his influences came from sources as wide apart as Al Wasiti, Paul Klee and modern Mexicans), and after six years in Paris, he first developed a traditional popular Arab style in iconography, especially common in Syria, into a naive style of his own, incorporating child-like calligraphy with primitive drawing. Soon later, accepting the old Moslem injunction against human representation, he abandoned any drawing that had the slightest figurative suggestion and devoted his entire attention to calligraphy.

It was not, of course, the highly-stylized and rule-ridden calligraphy of Arab tradition, but a break-down of writing to its simplest, freest form of individual letters as such. The letter, for him, is not only charged with possibilities of free form, but with mystical connections bordering on magic. The scribble on an old derelict wall, with hints of graffiti and the patina of time and oblivion, becomes a means of exciting a state of mind akin to an intense vision. He has called this kind of painting one-dimensionist, meaning by the 'one dimension' that which connects man with God. The result has been works of originality and strange power. Also, a great influence on many artists, each of whom adapts the new letter-trend to his own technique and style.

There is a great deal of Islamic spirit in this, dynamically conceived and treated. Dia al Azzawi is another artist who, even in his mid-twenties, had already found in Islamic signs and symbols a springboard for his imagination, and in more recent years treated Arabic letters creatively, though with greater 'formalism' than Said, and later to an altogether different effect. Poetry remains one of the main sources of his inspiration: in his graphics whole poems - amorous or heroic, but never his own - are sometimes written round through, his hallucinatory figures, which reminds one sometimes of William Blake's poem-pictures. For Azzawi, this is a modernization of a method once employed by mediæval Arab scribes and illustrators. In fact, his historical consciousness, as he has studied both art and archaeology, goes as far back as the Sumerians, in whose sculpture he has found an idiom to be employed in his painting, often to

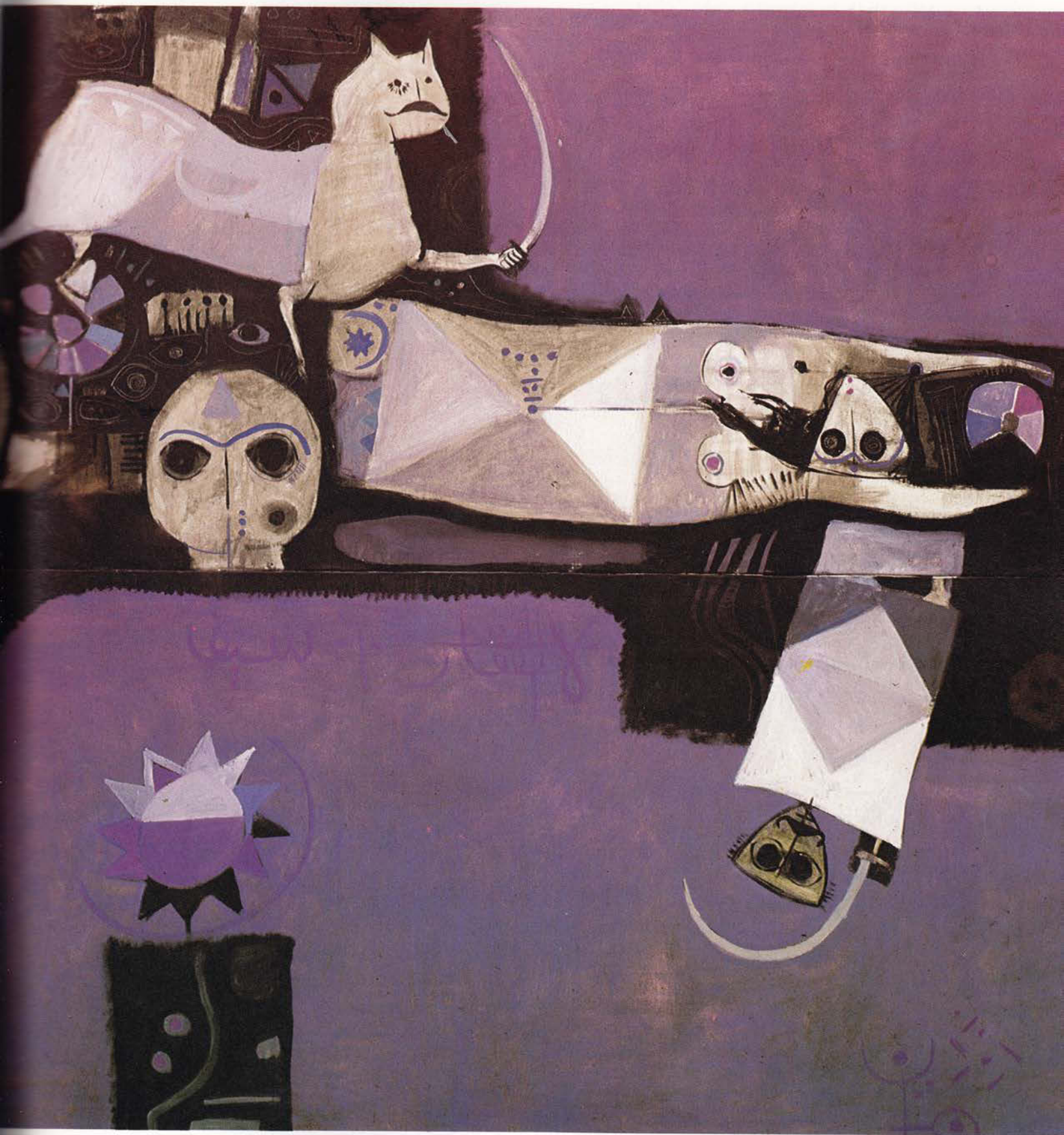


Dia al Azzawi, *Epic Allusions*
opposite: *The Dreamer and the Dream*



startling effect. In love, also, with popular art, with the Arabian Nights, with modern Palestinian poetry, he gives his work, quite spontaneously, a richness of metaphor and allusion which could only be found in Jewad Selim - who had a healthy influence on Azzawi in his earlier years.

Dia al Azzawi's work - ranging from small delicate drawings to vast multiple canvases - has been in its development a gradual resolution of a problem: how to use Islamic signs and symbols without seeming precious or merely folkloric, how to hark back to Sumerian sculpture and Babylonian myth, employing both in their own right or as a ground for the convolutions of freely scripted poems, without seeming to be merely an illustrator, how to merge all these with the spontaneity of a dreamer in whose visions emerge shapes and figures of an inexplicable power. His painting thus functions on a multiplicity of levels: historical, literary, religious, all subjected to the severe discipline of a modern sensibility.



Whether inspired by the ancient Mesopotamian epic "Gilgamesh", the passion and martyrdom of Hussein at Karbala, the love intrigues of the Arabian Nights, or the tragedy and heroism of Palestinian freedom-fighters, he is first and foremost a superb colourist and a skilled draughtsman whose visions, rooted as they are in the psyche of his people, materialize in forms suggestive of allegories for our times. His recent work, at its best, sustains an elegiac tone of great depth.

A similar elegiac tone has marked the work of **Kadhem Haider** for some years, ever since he painted a large number of pictures on the martyrdom of Hussein at Karbala, but in a manner quite different from that of Azzawi. For him the religious inspiration of Islam comes through a sense of tragedy, in signs and symbols that he makes his own; horses, helmets, swords, spears, men, women, tents, conspiracies, treacheries - the whole phantasmagoria of ancient battles in a peculiarly personal idiom.

Man defiant though prisoner, though martyred and quartered: such has been his theme for a long time, partly derived from Arab history as he understands it, where much of his modern vision is rooted. But Kadhem Haider has also employed his style in telling of man in search of himself, in search of love, in search of wonder. He unabashedly mixes the figurative with the abstract, but having devised a vocabulary of distinctly personal forms, the mixture serves his purpose well, when figure and abstract seem to exchange function and complement one another very much as in Sumerian art. His Buraq is thus in part the horse of the Prophet's night journey, and in part the soul's journey through the dark blues of man's endless night of mystery.

For **Ismail al Sheikhly** the religious inspiration of Islam belongs to the women he has for many years now observed, wondered at and idealized, as they visit mosques or holy shrines in great numbers. This is the calculated observation of the visual artist: the women are arranged, re-arranged, and dis-arranged in compositions of endless variations, all celebrating a mysterious pilgrimage in quest of more love, more fruition. The scene is intensely Iraqi and of the people, presented in a sophisticated treatment that hovers between the calligraphic and the abstract, often distilled down to daubs of sheer colour.



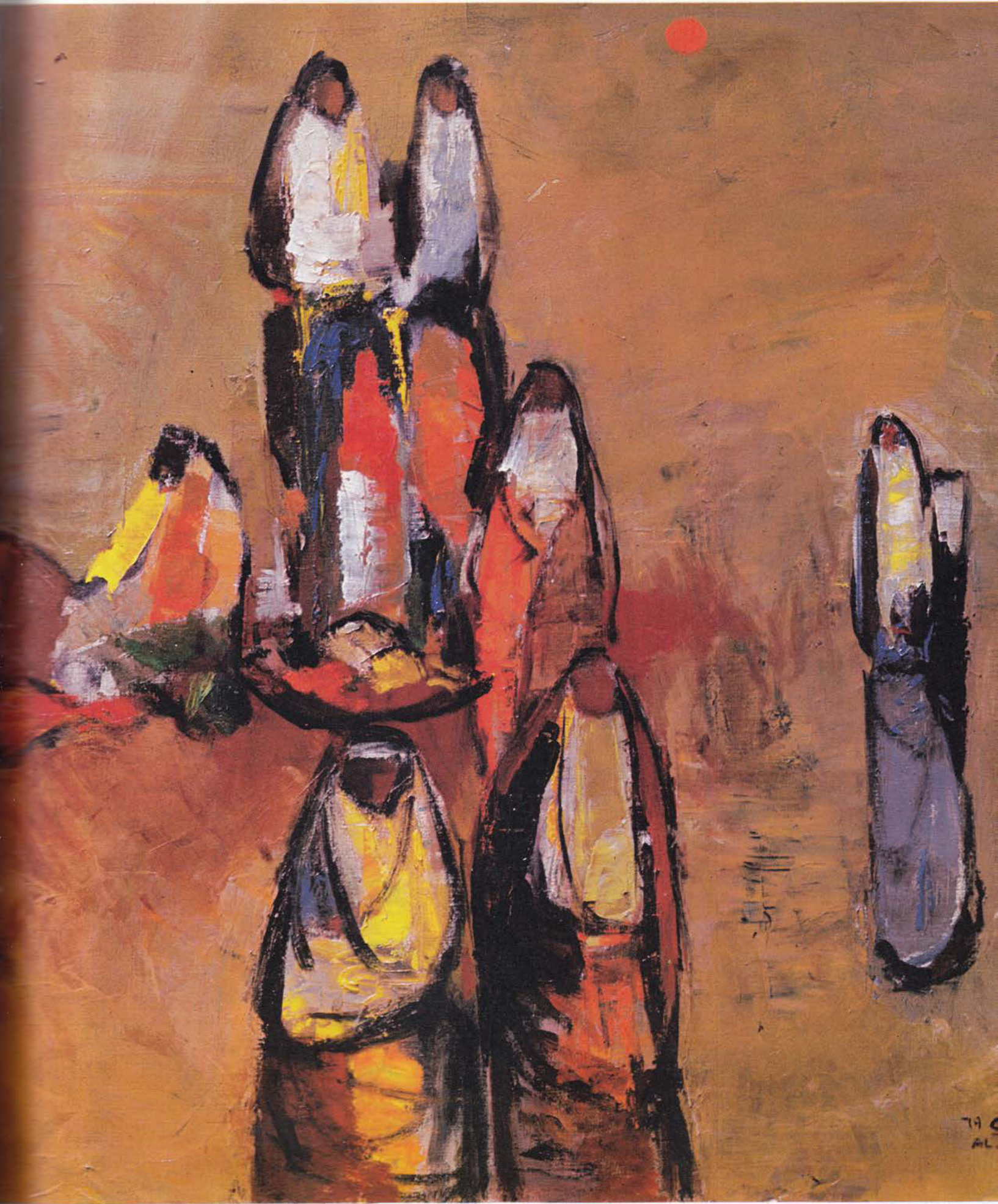
Kadhem Haider, *Man and Matter*

Kadhem Haider, *Al Burag*



Ismail al Sheikhly, *Women and Tent*





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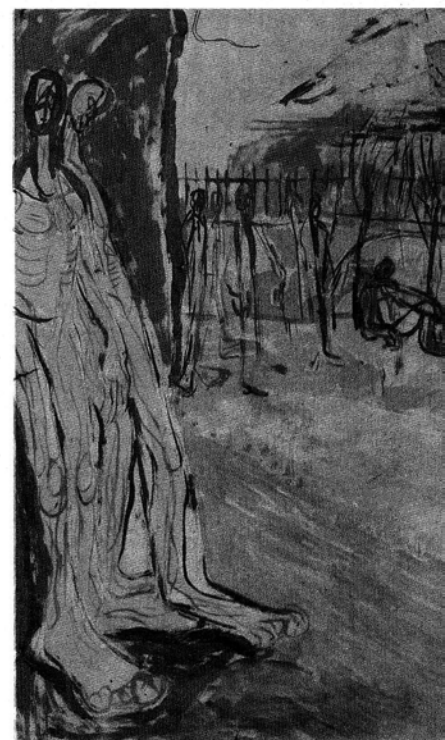
Mahmoud Sabri, *Prostitutes Waiting for Customers*

Ismail al Sheikhly came to his female figure groupings via a period of female faces, two or three (or four at most) to a painting, in which the stylized eyes were bright with amorous visions: they were mostly done in emphatic lines over scratches of minimal colour. A lyrical spirit, akin to that of Arabic poetry, prevailed. It came to the artist, who had studied in Paris, after his earlier emotional involvement in portraying the poor peasants rescuing their children and their few possessions from a flooding Tigris.

Involvement in the life and hardships of the poor and the dispossessed was indeed the distinguishing mark of much Iraqi art in the early and mid-fifties. **Mahmoud Sabri's** work was then perhaps its most powerful exponent. The artist's agony was partly political, partly existential, and so the treatment of his social themes was full of pain, protest and anger, but quite indifferent to the nicer questions of style and tradition which bothered other artists. When ten years later Mahmoud Sabri developed in Prague his theory of 'quantum realism' in art in a brilliantly analytical and closely argued essay which revealed an intelligence of unique sharpness, the haunt' visual of his paintings had given way to a great mathematic abstract: the local life-giving roots were lost to a cold universal law.

Other artists, however, coming to the scene in the sixties, took up the themes of the poor and the oppressed with a greater consciousness of style. While Fayek Hassan was going through his expressionistic period with such themes, **Mahoud Ahmad** was giving them monumental dimensions. Himself coming from southern peasant stock, his graphic details had an authentic ring to them. In his large paintings, the anguish of his men and women assumed the ennobled force of tragedy - timeless, and yet immediate and relevant. Mahoud Ahmad learned a great deal from Mexican painters, no doubt, but he made good use of what he learned. The celebration of the hard life was part of the Iraqi experience, but the artist soon also saw the seductive qualities of its symbols and human relationships. And so he would paint his furtive lovers in a tent or in a boat, or the formalized blue tattoo on a woman's body with a hidden significance: an invitation to love. He would also employ free calligraphy whenever it suited a specially poetic subject.

Mahmoud Sabri, *Women and Cactus*
below: *Unemployed*



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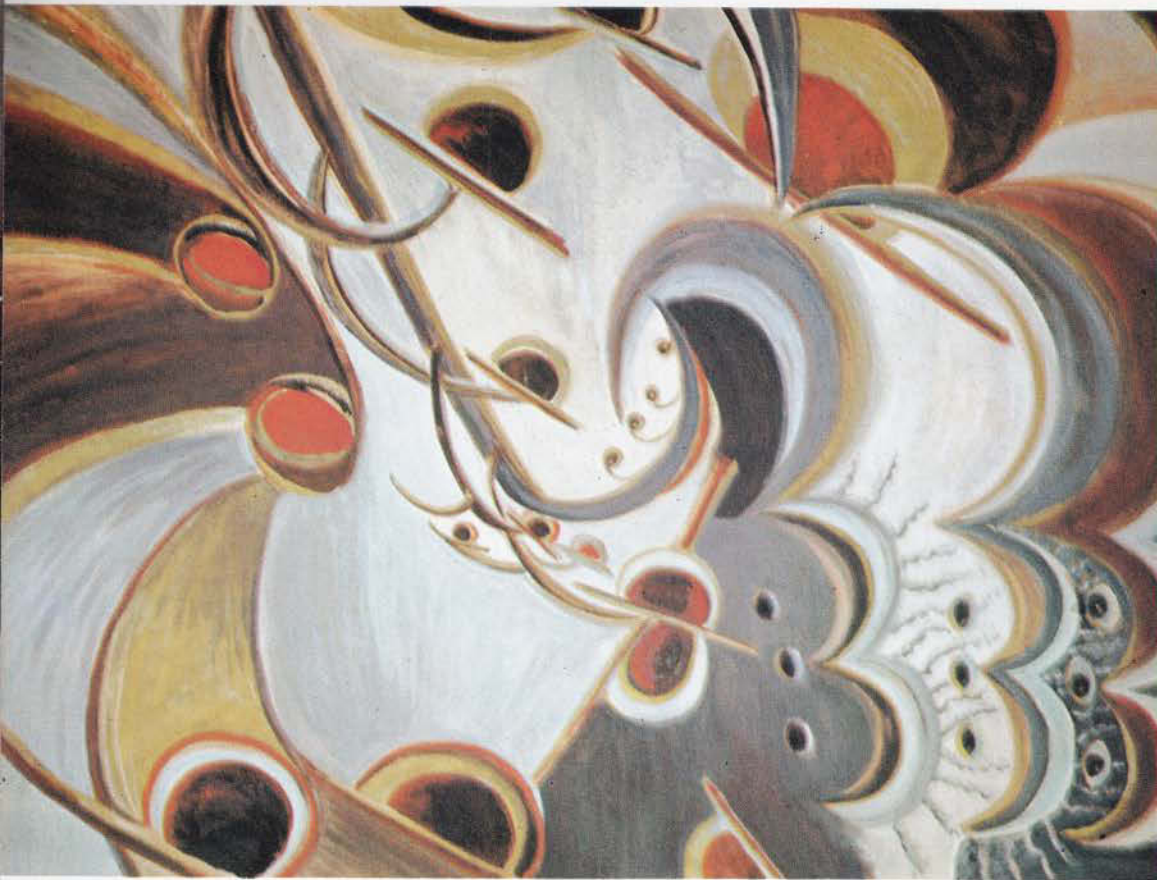
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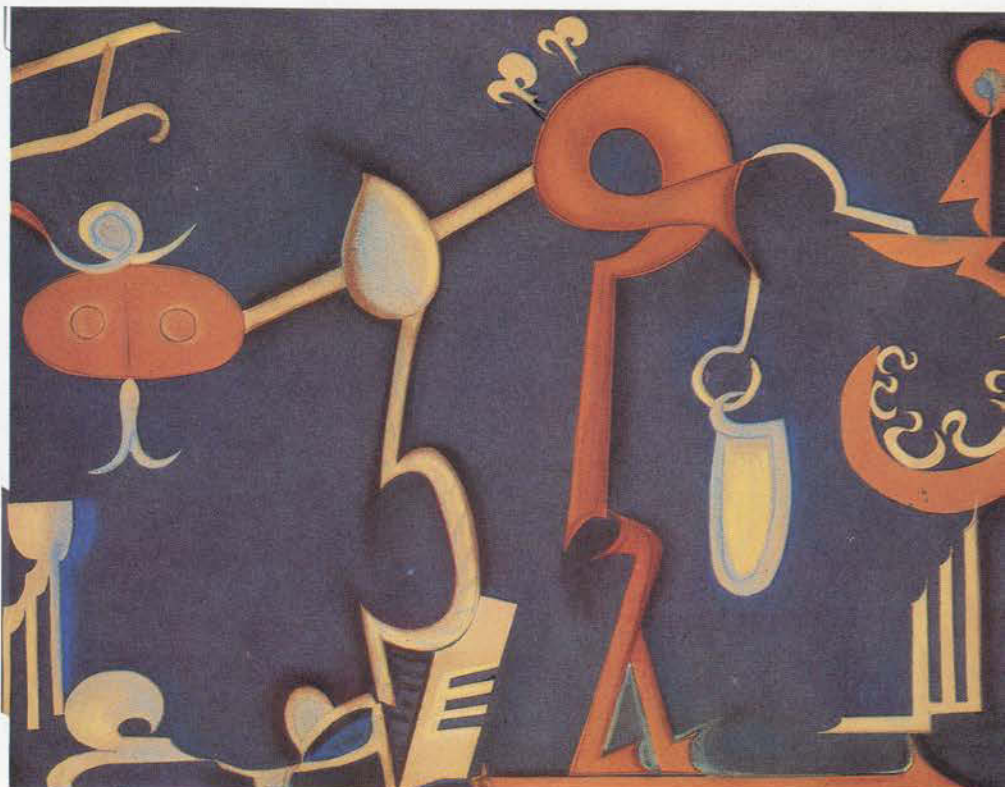
Now calligraphy for the Arab artist was for centuries a major outlet of creativity: he employed it inventively and in endless modulations to express a powerful aesthetic impulse often associated with 'spiritual' feelings, largely because most of the phrases thus written were of a religious nature. The words were sufficient unto themselves as 'content', the beauty of their meaning being reflected in the beauty of their configuration. With the advent of the one-dimensional trend in the sixties, calligraphy for the painter had acquired a freedom of form and significance which the old calligraphers would not consider relevant to their sacred conventional art. Already **Madeeha Omar**, back in the late forties and early fifties, had made whole paintings out of individual letters: she was the forerunner of this way of turning the alphabet into a pretext for linear and colour compositions. **Jameel Hammoudi**, away in Paris at the time, brought this new 'script' into his abstract paintings, then gradually, after his return to Baghdad, and especially more recently, made the letter the *raison d'être* of many of his works.



Madeeha Omar, *Variations on the letter 'Noon'*



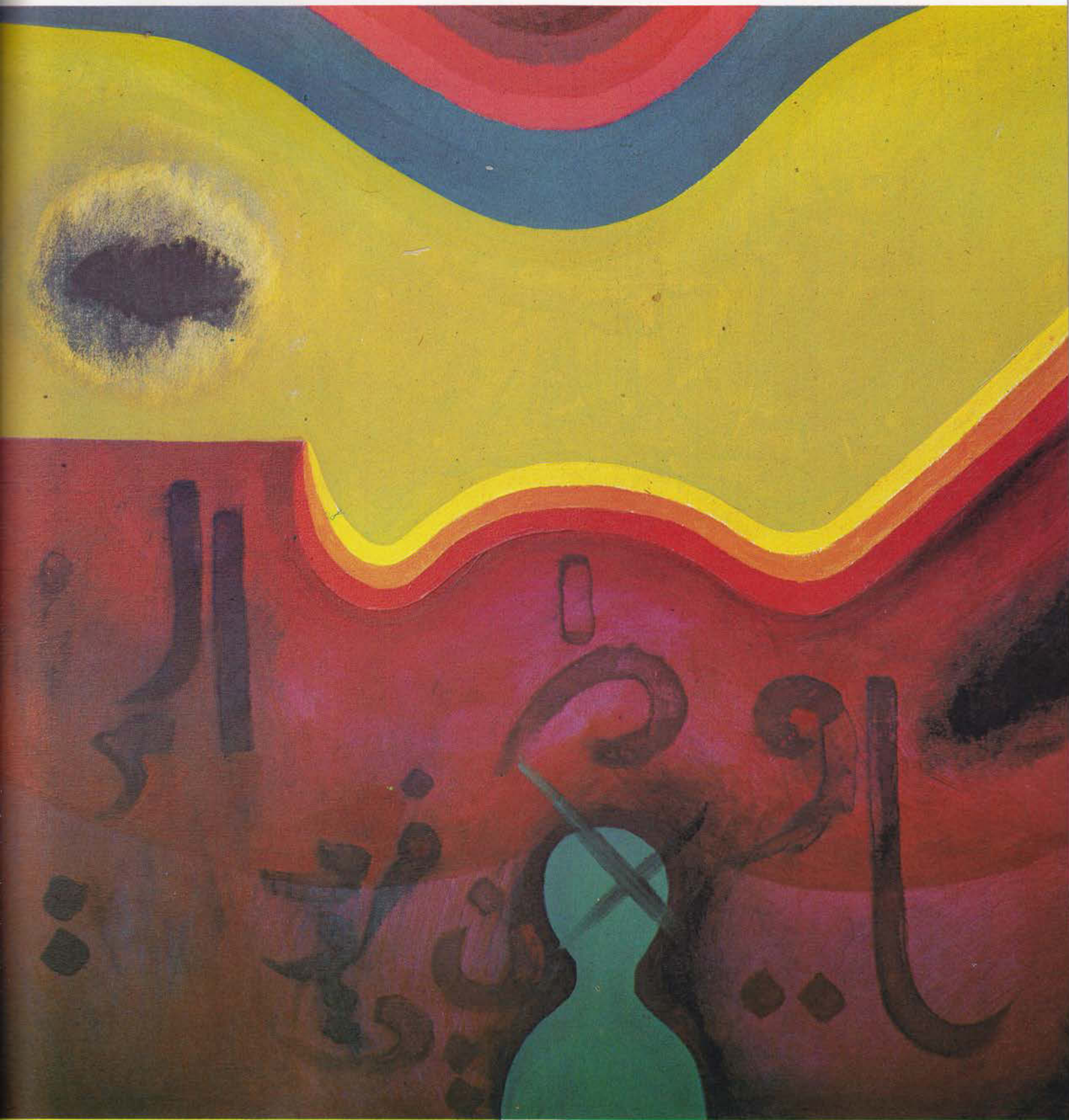
Mahoud Ahmad, *The Tattoo*



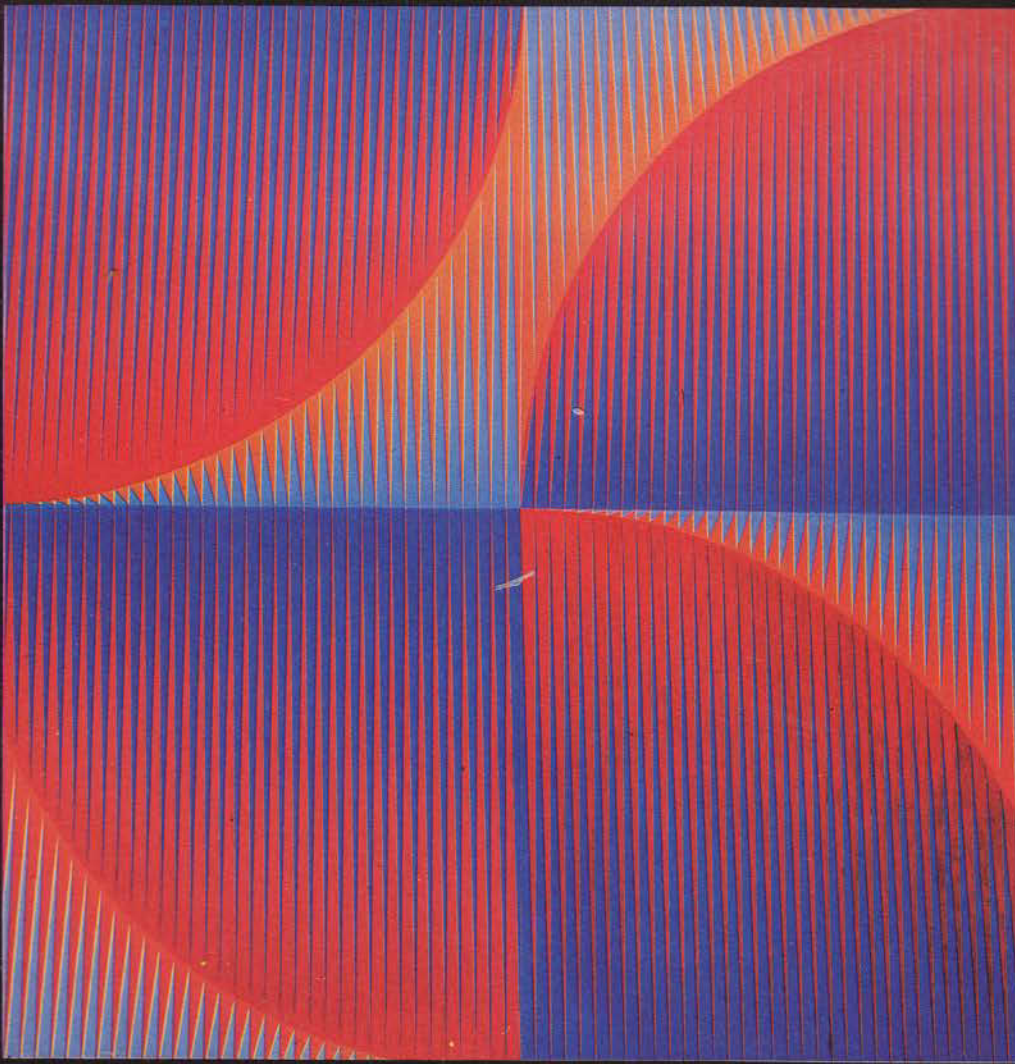
Madeeha Omar, *Alphabetic Figures*



Mahoud Ahmad, *President Saddam Hussain with the People*



Rafa al Nasiri, *Words and Memory*



Hashim al Samarchi, *Form*

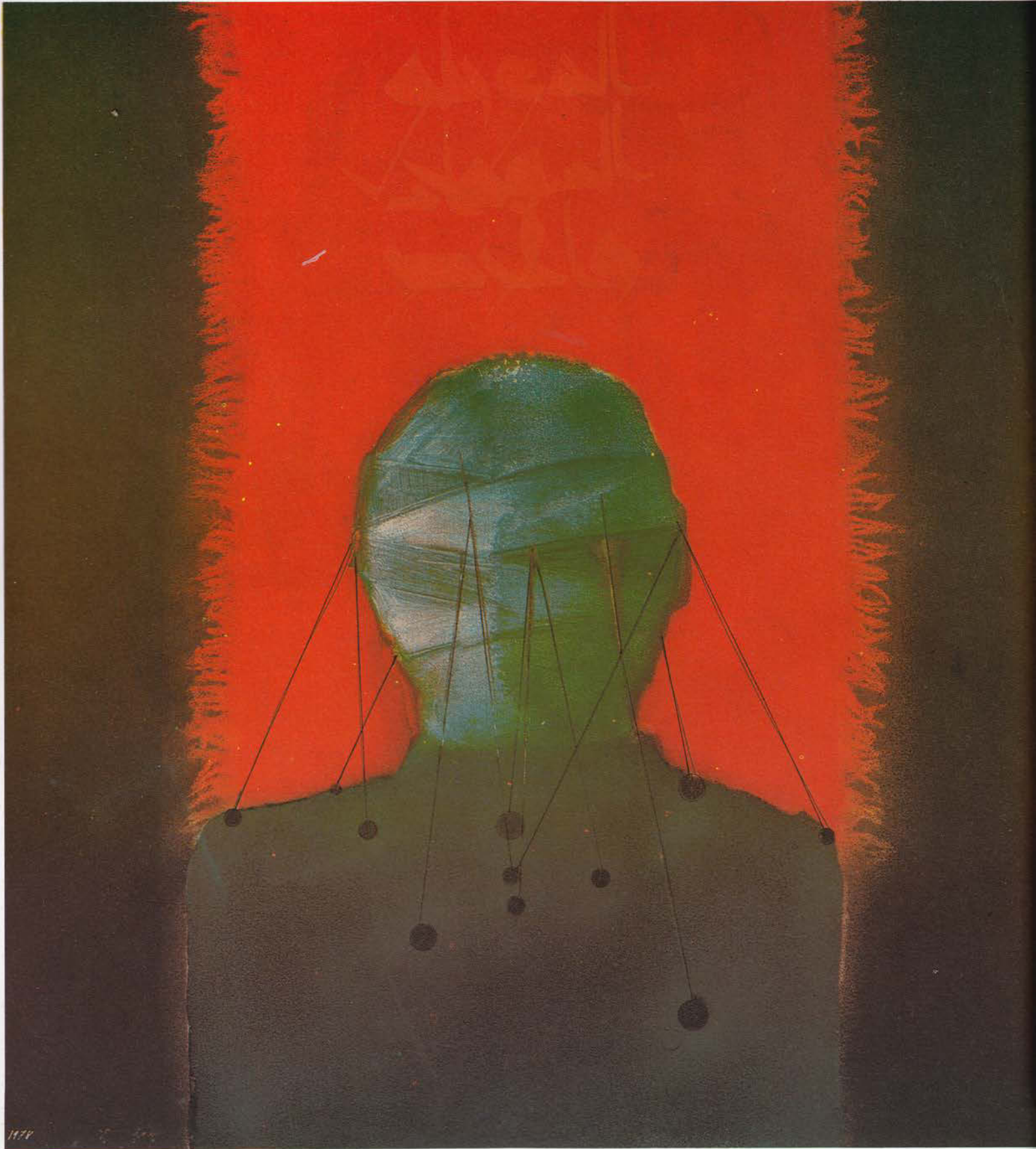


Rafa al Nasiri, *Horizon*

Rafa al Nasiri , a basically abstract painter, came for some time under the spell of Arabic calligraphy, when he began to use whole phrases, usually of a devout nature, as a centre for his canvases. Soon, however, he was to seek the formal values of individual letters for his new kind of plastic variations. The relation between his original graphic skill, heightened by his study of Chinese art in Peking, and his novel manipulation of the alphabet, has thus been emphasised. Having mastered the distribution of balances, extensions, and empty planes, he achieves a harmonic lightness, a sheer visual delight, which once marked his earlier non-calligraphic work. More recently he has taken even greater liberty with his forms: words, haphazard numbers, crosses and circles, become symbolic graffiti, suggestive of repressed agonies. The poetic undertones thus join forces with the purely visual sensation.

Hashim al Samarchi is perhaps the one artist among all his colleagues who deliberately limits himself to the purely visual. He was an abstract painter right from the start, and later became (except for Mahdi Mutasher, who resides in Paris) the most prominent Op artist in Iraq, perhaps in the whole Arab world. With his great love for delicate lines, geometrical forms and contrasting colours, it was a short step for him to adopt Arabic calligraphy as a base for his inventive graphics. Mixing letters, words, phrases sometimes a whole short poem - with Op figuration and colours, he gives one a feeling of surprise, of opening up to an unexpected sense of beauty. In Hashim al Samarchi's art there is a suddenness of impact like that of an arrow flying in a dazzling curve: an impact of freshness, delight, amazement. It is the nearest thing to pure music. Upon closer examination one is struck by the discovery that a great deal of this actually derives in spirit, however imperceptibly, from the old illuminated manuscripts of the Koran. It is the artist's gift to make it so much a part of 20th century experience.

In a new period in his career, Samarchi now uses the human figure in such a way as to add an emotional charge to his highly refined style. Almost deliberately he creates a disturbing opposition between the aesthetic visual and the tragic content.



Hashim al Samarchi, *Man and Words*



Kutaiba Sheikh - Noori, *Forms and Circles*



Kutaiba Sheikh - Noori, *Circles*

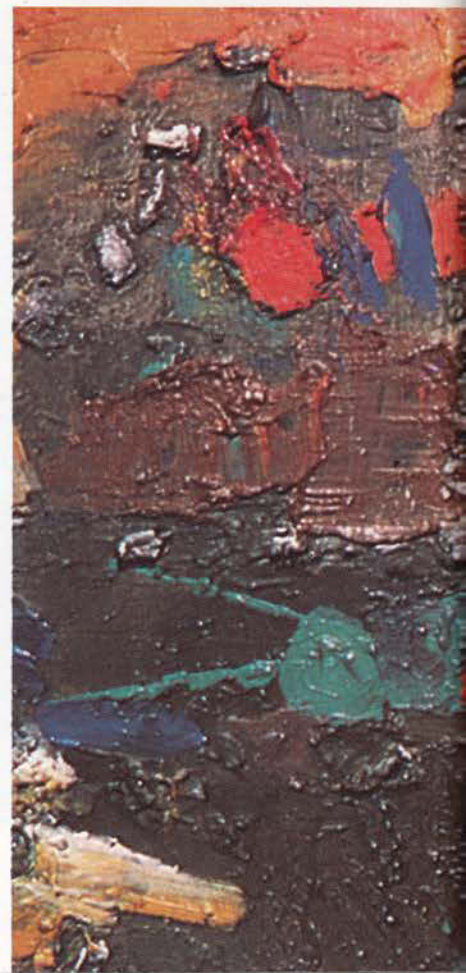
For some time in his career, **Kutaiba Sheikh-Noori**, a doctor by profession, took up calligraphy in a style inimitably his own. For a number of years he had made his mark as a painter by working out what may be described as expressionistic arabesques by the use of the circle in a highly inventive manner, maintaining that the circle was the universal essence of all forms. The next step for him was to exploit circular lines in writing (or, more exactly, drawing) words and phrases: his almost geometrical arabesques, which he had formulated into expressions of mental states of mystical quest, now assumed 'verbal' meanings as well. But Kutaiba Sheikh-Noori was too dynamic a person to stay long with those basically balanced forms and harmonies. From calligraphy he moved on to what finally shattered the seeming perfection of the circle - and the surgeon in him brought out in his new work, unexpectedly, all the blood and confusion and pain that rage under the skin, in the jungle of tissues of the human flesh avidly going through mounting intensities. Perhaps it is significant that his last exhibition, shortly before his tragic death in a speeding car accident, was made up of paintings all about man trying to penetrate the inhuman solid walls that beset him. Which was a far cry from his former circle-inspired calligraphic play: it was desperate rejection, a hopeless rebellion.



On the other hand, calligraphic expression in **Nadira Azzouz's** paintings depends very much on the meaning of the Arabic verses she uses; the image seems to emerge from the words themselves. She does not quite illustrate: but rather, she allows the visual to capture the oral, and expand it. There is something peculiarly feminine not only in her choice of words, but in her choice of colour and composition as well, explicable perhaps in the context of an Iraqi woman's passions. Things akin to burning coals suddenly glow and let off sparks through a brazier full of ashes.

This late use of writing has come to Nadira Azzouz after a long period of abstract expressionism in which she was almost unique among her Iraqi contemporaries. For her, painting has often been a communication with inner visions, inner eruptions, to which no figure or word could do justice. Hence her emphasis and resourceful play on colour. In her recent work one can see her striving after a more lyrical, a more diaphanous effect, suggestive of technical mastery.

But **Mohammad Ali Shaker** creates a complete dichotomy between





Faraj Abbo far left: *Illumination*
 Mohammad Ali Shakir, *Still Life*
 Nadira Azzouz, below: *Inner Visions*



calligraphy as the art of the scribe and painting as the art of the painter, although his beautiful scribe's calligraphy gains a great deal in colour and texture from his skill as painter and lithographer. In fact, his lithography may be his best medium; it often combines a calligraphic sweep loaded with figurative expression, which one misses in his impressionistic scenes of Iraqi daily life, done mostly in pale sunny oils.

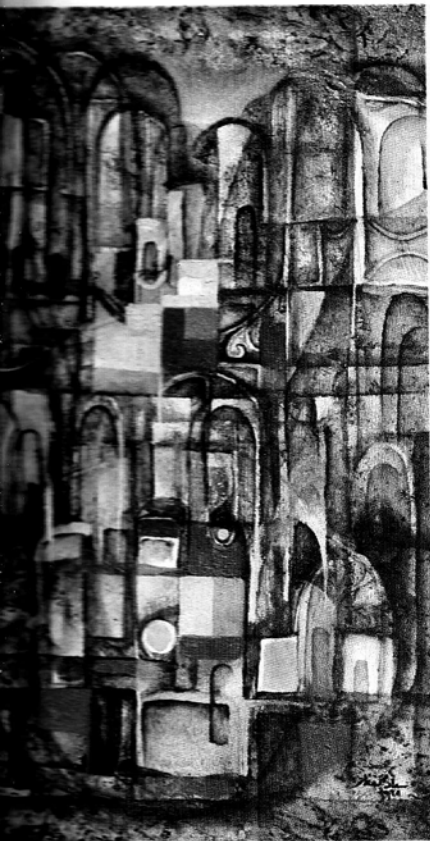
Scènes of daily life, in town or country, were once done by Faraj Abbo under conscious influences of ancient Arab illuminators. Never bothered by the actual use of words, he made good use of the heavy outlines and colour planes of the old artists, but largely in an experimental spirit. This led him in the early seventies to an enormous experiment with abstract designs inspired by old arabesques, many of which, ranking now among his best works, were festive celebrations of the joys of colour: in their own non-figurative way, they indicated the Arab artist's symbolic expression of his love for the richness inherent in all that lives.

IV

In Iraqi art, traditional influences come under all kinds of disguises. The guiding spirit has often been the artist's desire to join a consciousness of time (forms and themes associated with old Arab and pre-Arab art in Iraq) with a consciousness of place (folk motifs, customs, scenes), subordinating both to the needs of his own creative impulse. In Suad al Attar's work all three forces are at play in various degrees of intensity in the different phases of her work.

Having made use of folk forms and symbols in her pictures of the mid-sixties, she gradually shifted to much older sources of influence: Abbasid and occasionally Assyrian. The emphasis on line, which the artist seems to have acquired from certain types of linear modulation in Arabic medieval illuminations and from Assyrian bas reliefs, released an unexpected energy in her paintings of the early seventies, which she has channeled into expressing a private vision of great lyricism. Rooted as it may be in old Abbasid art, her work goes through intensities and stresses of its own, where dream and reality intercross in a style that, finally, unmistakably, is her own.

Suad al Attar,
opposite: *Tree*
below: *City Forest*



For some time the "garden" was a favourite theme of hers: the heavy foliage suggested the luxury of a personal paradise where birds had women's faces. But soon the garden turned into a wild forest, with trees once in a while bursting into flames. Even the city turned into a kind of forest. Small figures, mostly women, could be seen through the trees. But the trees in later canvases began to shed their leaves, and the bare branches shot up and intertwined to catch an occasional fiery sun where human figures had completely disappeared. The arboreal theme then shifted down to the roots, which Suad al Attar turned into a vibrant arabesque of savage power. Her city in the meantime was reduced to rock, both forest and city thus acquiring a strange symbolic force. When the artist at last adopted etching and lithographic printing, she carried into them much of the personal vocabulary she had thus developed in her painting over a period of nearly twenty years.

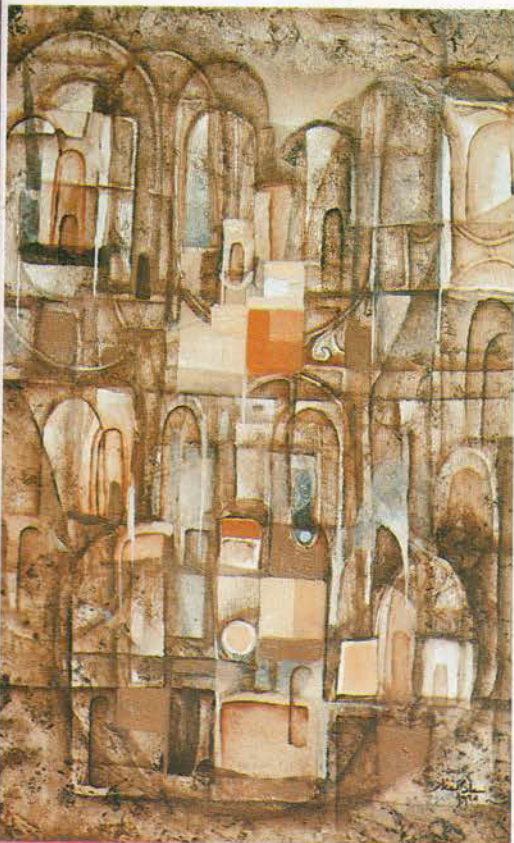
The crossing of time and place is strongly sensed in the old village houses of Nuri al Rawi. They may be heavy with the artist's nostalgia for his childhood and lost innocence; nevertheless, they embody for

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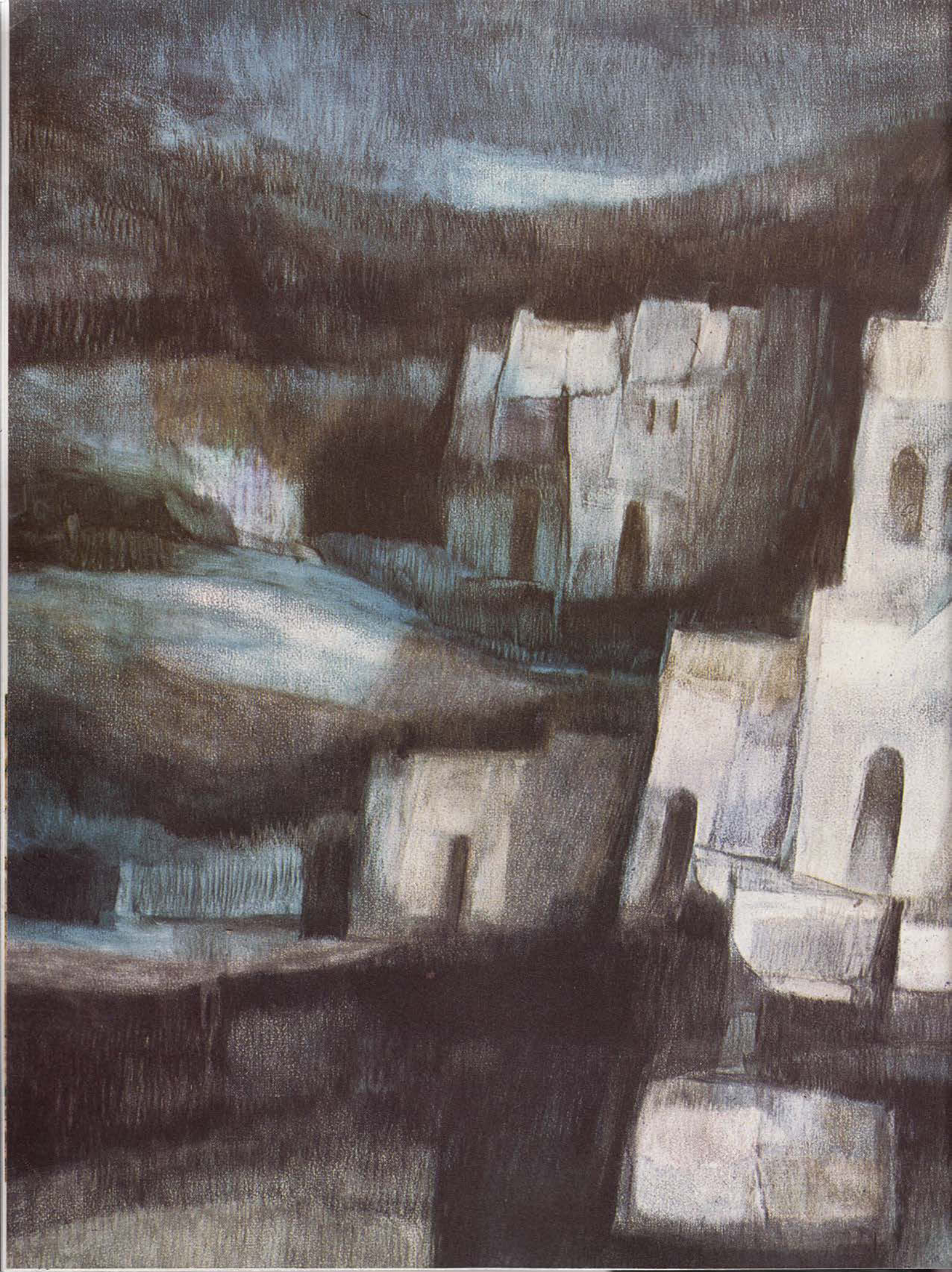
Suad al Attar,
opposite: *Tree*
below: *City Forest*

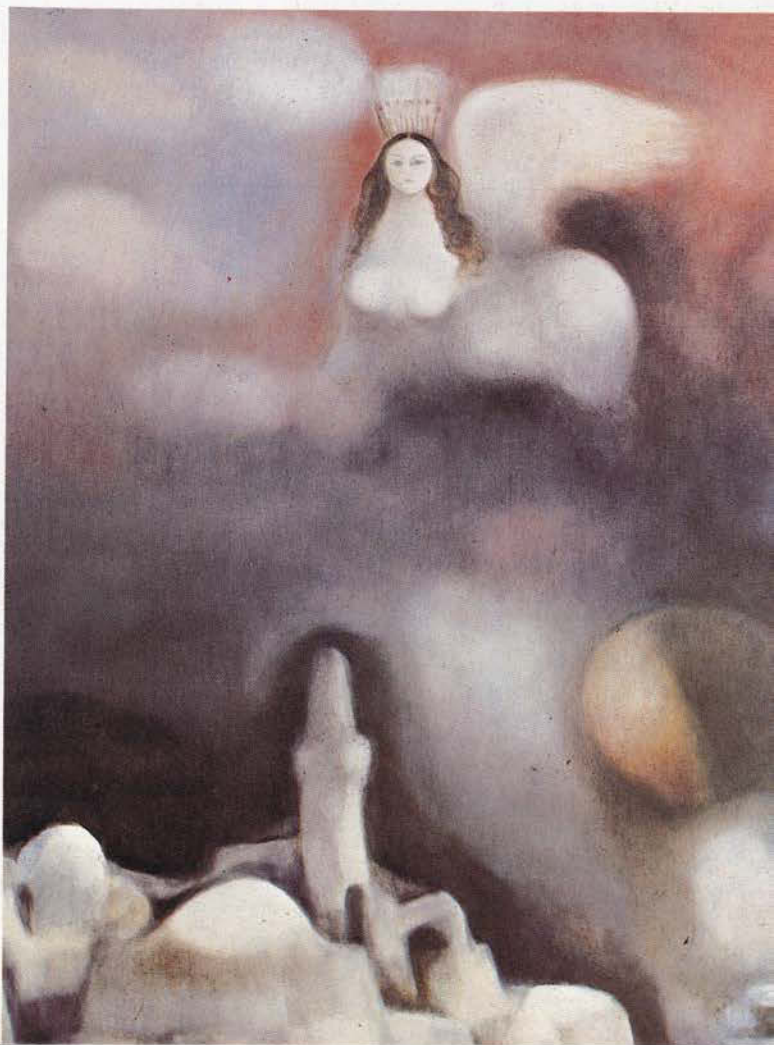
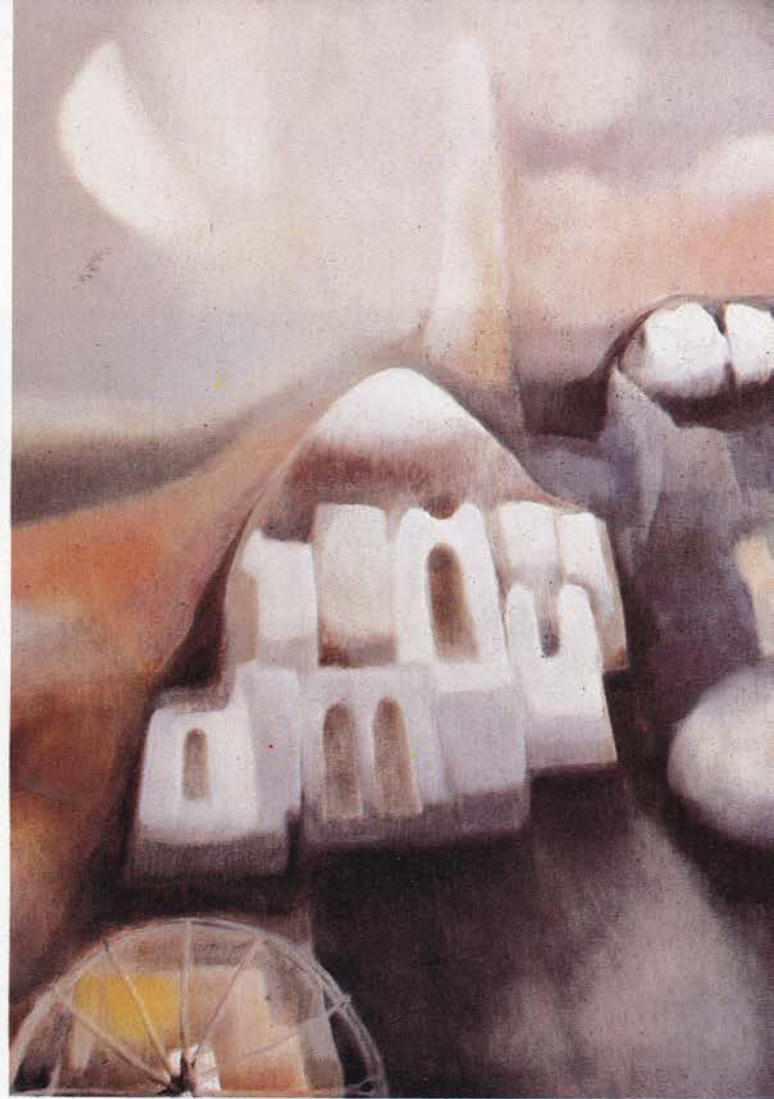


For some time the "garden" was a favourite theme of hers: heavy foliage suggested the luxury of a personal paradise where birds had women's faces. But soon the garden turned into a wilderness, a forest, with trees once in a while bursting into flames. Even the city turned into a kind of forest. Small figures, mostly women, could be seen through the trees. But the trees in later canvases began to shed their leaves, and the bare branches shot up and intertwined to create an occasional fiery sun where human figures had completely disappeared. The arboreal theme then shifted down to the roots, where Suad al Attar turned into a vibrant arabesque of savage power. The city in the meantime was reduced to rock, both forest and city taking on an acquiring a strange symbolic force. When the artist at last adopted etching and lithographic printing, she carried into them much of her personal vocabulary she had thus developed in her painting over a period of nearly twenty years.

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Ghazi al Saudi, *Composition*

him the local roots which nourish his imagination and determine the qualities of his style.

There is a deceptive softness of tone in Nuri al Rawi's paintings, through which, soon enough, one senses an intensity of dream, of memory. There may not be a single human figure in this obsessive landscape of his, and yet it glows with human passion, equally obsessive. The square houses, the solitary mosque, the domed tombs of holy men on bare hills promising miracles to generations of villagers, the distant river with the ancient water-wheels - all seem to emerge through a haze of memories of childhood, as much as through the moon haze of a haunted mind.

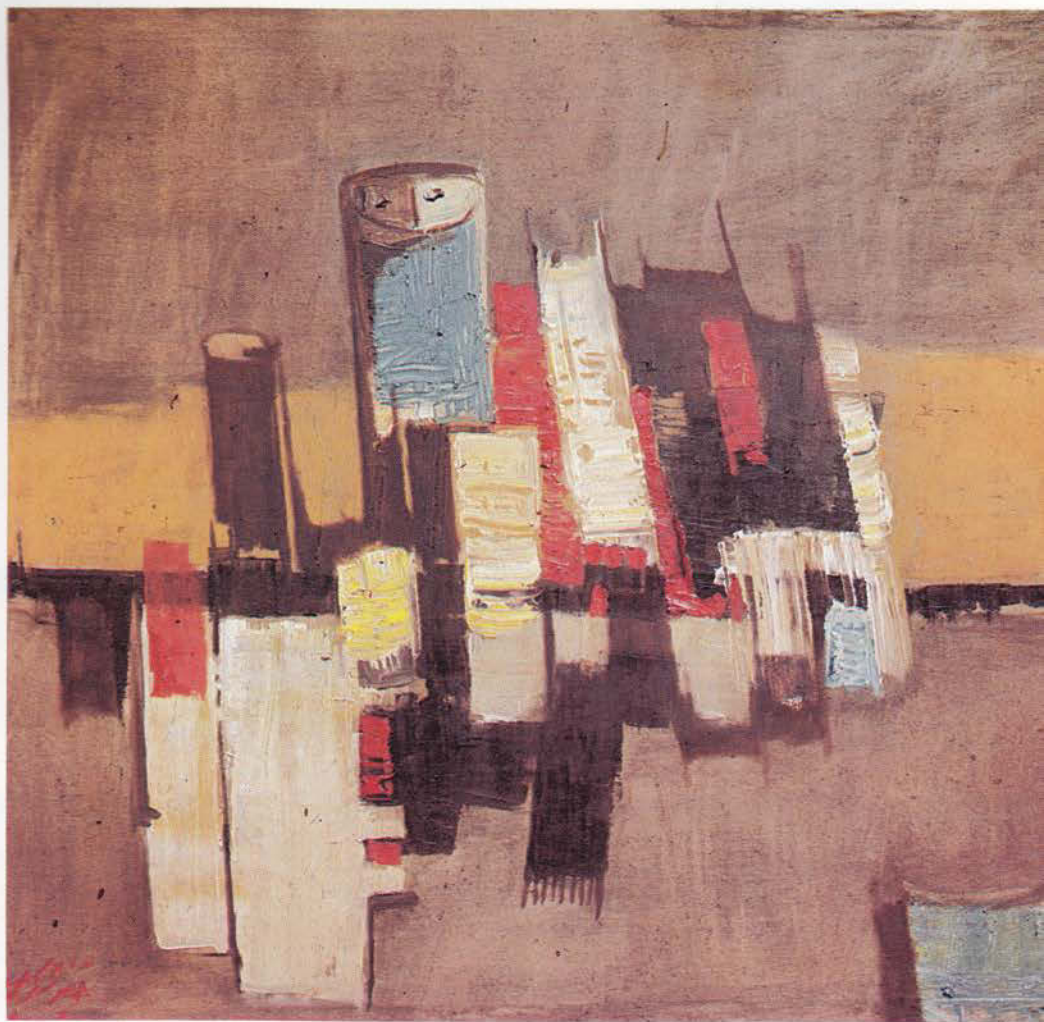
This is poetry of place. It is one way of going back to the roots through the evocative force of image. Conscious of the change his surroundings are going through - a process to which he has been contributing himself - the Iraqi artist finds psychological sustenance in the mystery of his origins. So much talent comes to the ever-expanding metropolis from villages rich in associations which a painter like Nuri al Rawi turns into a lyrical, allusive theme. His variations on such a theme are mystical in the purest sense: communication with nature is one of love and secret identification, where rocks and clouds, inner self and outer vision, are interchangeable. And the Buraq, the flying horse of the Prophet which may on a certain holy night open the gates of heaven for those who watch for it, is also the awaited sign of all wonder, when the seemingly empty houses of a mountain village may turn into the crowded city of God.

In contrast, the city of Ghazi al Saudi, today's Baghdad, is the actual place implanted in a time that goes back some eight hundred years. Al Wasiti's illustrations of *Maqamat al Hariri* have been a constant inspiration for him, not only in his smaller canvases and ceramics, but also in his large frescoes, where he employs the old Arab gold, blue and red with black outlines in the representation of city scapes translated into a modern idiom.

Such an idiom is also evident in Khudayer Shakarchi's translation of back-street scenes into cubistic abstracts. From vertical arrangements of colour patches, reminiscent of clothes hanging on a







Khudayer Shakarchi, *Backyard*

Ghazi al Saudi, *Baghdad*

line in women's backyards, he has moved on to the women themselves, often done monochromatically in intersecting lines. As his paintings got darker and more figurative, they became more and more suggestive of social comment. But his original cubism has remained as a foundation for his superimposed compositions, thus balancing the aesthetic abstract against the emotional significant.

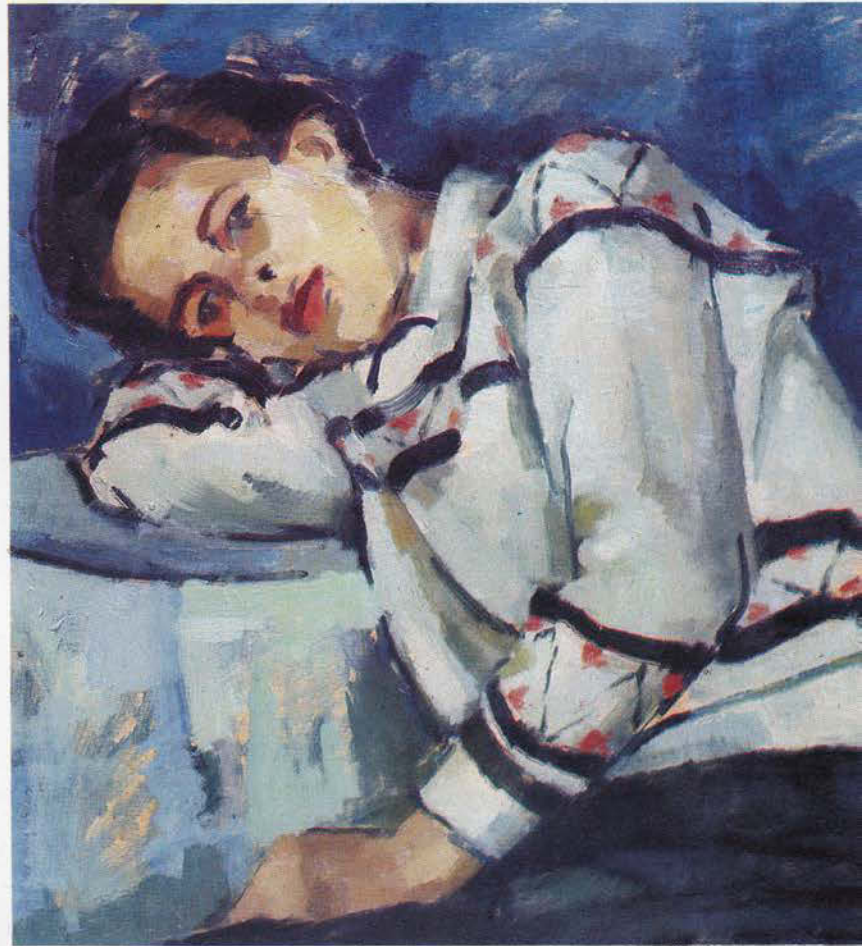
Hafidh Duroubi's cubistic treatment of the city, however, is devoid of emotion, and deliberately so. His vast canvases of Baghdad, at their best, explode visually, though mostly in blues and greys. Educated in Rome and London he did his best work at first (in the late forties and early fifties) very much in the English post-impressionist tradition, noted especially for the Cezannesque structure of landscape and figure. Cubism came to the artist afterwards, bringing further restraint to his purely stylistic treatment of streets, buildings, bridges, river-banks, alleyways, domestic interiors. His human beings, small against their gaint background, were completely dominated by their refracted surroundings, which was not exactly what other Iraqi artists were doing. His love was the city itself, however much he floundered in expressing his love.

For Hafidh Duroubi then, the modern idiom was a servant of his love for the physical Baghdad, dynamically experienced. If one considers Saad al Ta'i to have been influenced by him at an early stage, one cannot but see how Al Ta'i exploited cubism by stressing the human rather than the object, so much so that the surroundings almost cease to exist against the dominance of the figures, however small. To them the city does not exist: they are very much there, brooding and lost, in a kaleidoscopic vacuum. Once in a while they come forward, delighted in what they are doing, as in his fishermen mending their nets.

Saad al Ta'i, *Boats*



In contrast, Khaled al Jader's canvases opt for a naturalism oblivious of current idioms. His themes are people in the street, in the alley, in the market, in the village. They are the poor men and women of daily life with their many children, ungainly to look at but alive and vigorous. Whenever Dr. Jader concerns himself with the human content of his painting, its Iraqi nature is distinctive. But his preference of blues and greys all these years



Hafidh Duroubi, *Portrait*
left: *Family*



Khaled al Jada
Villagers

M. Mahrud
Guns



has tended to make his landscapes, his towns and his villages look very much alike: so much so that one can hardly distinguish in his work between a French and an Iraqi village. The impressionist influences he acquired when he studied in France in the early fifties have never really worn away. But his crowds, which always seem to be in motion, relate him to his roots through their own significance, through the weight of their very presence.

Naziha Selim is one painter who shed her French influences, after seven years in Paris, in her studied return to a local, almost naive, style in portraying the life of Iraqi women. Partly decorative, her mostly linear figures are placed somewhere beyond happiness and misery. They are there, doing their little chores, drinking their *istikans* of tea, dancing in a wedding: old as ever, new as ever, and capturing a Baghdadi spirit akin to that of an old Baghdadi song.

Naziha Selim, *Women at Home*

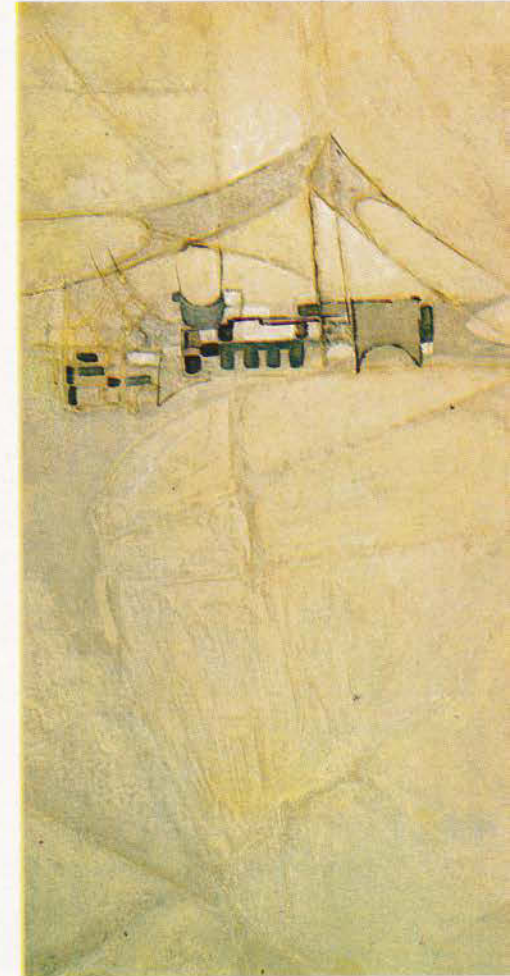
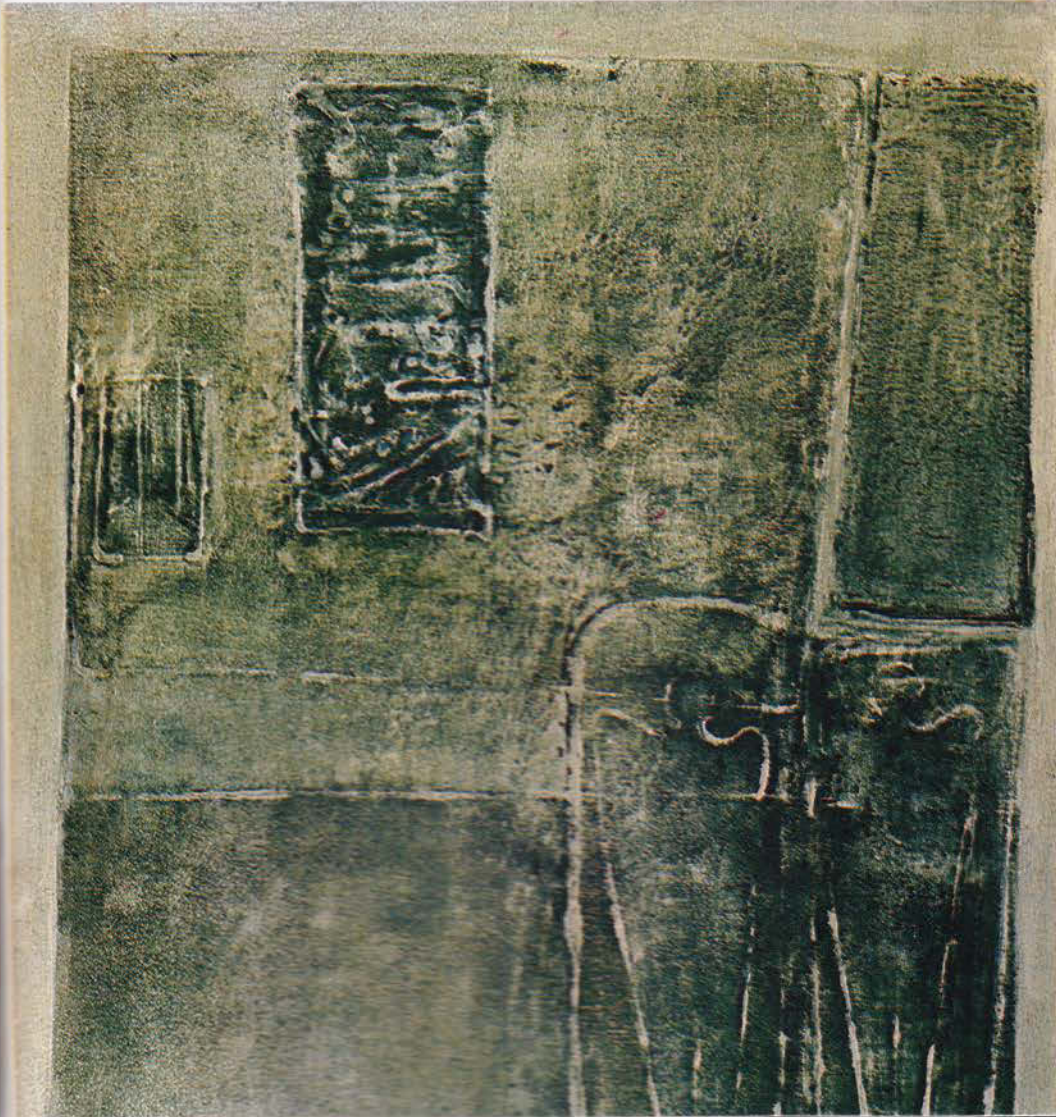


But Saadial Kabi will have none of that. His sand-coloured, sand-textured canvases are the very creations of the sandy spaces of an Arabian desert with an occasional dark tent, an occasional unidentifiable figure, extremely lonely. His work stems from this very consciousness of space and atmosphere. When he weaves a phrase, usually with a tragic implication, into his canvas, the vastness remains of an arid earth, lovable, incomprehensible, and tragic. His idiom, however, is as modern as any.

Mohammad Mahrudin's idiom is equally modern, though for a different purpose. His mainly abstract compositions, done in very dark colours and often in wooden collage riddled with bullet-holes and traced in lines suggesting human heads, are disturbing reminders of what he calls "this strange world." However much it betrays the Polish influences he has carried with him ever since he studied

Saadi al Kabi, *Palestinians Martyred*

Saadi al Kabi, *Tent*



in Warsaw, his work is charged with a somberness of statement and evocation that gives it its consistency. With their forceful stark idiom, his large paintings are never easy to forget.

The modern idiom, when updated, tends to determine an artist's choice of a rather unexpected medium. Saleh al Jumaie, for example, is very particular about his medium, which is usually a mixture of metal (mostly aluminium) and acrylic, and through it he continues an old concern with the darkneses of the soul - from the sorrows of tragic love to the horrors of genocide to which the Palestinians have been subjected for thirty years. The artist's roots, however, are in the archaeological sites of ancient Iraqi cultures: but his contemporary awareness feeds these roots and brings about in his work a haunting mixture of the beautiful and the agonized. His non-figurative almost monochromatic structures are very rarely completely abstract, just as his figurative compositions seem to aspire to the condition of the abstract; both are tense, time-laden, and haunting.

The ground patterns of archaeological sites, in which Iraq is particularly rich, have indeed provided the original impulse in shaping the ground pattern and sometimes the texture of the work not only of Jumaie but of, among others, Rakan Dabdoub . More recently, the quality of the age-old marble walls of the houses and dilapidated castles of Mosul, where he lives, has given him further ideas of colour, texture, and form. But he immerses his images in sensuous joy: the patterns of time, for him, are a visual feast to be relished in full. His art is in fact a plastic reduction of all sense perception to a concrete image. Having been educated as a sculptor tells favourably on his painting, whether in its structure or in its tactile quality.



Rakan Dabdoub,
Pleasures of the letter 'B'



right, *Old Forms*



Salch al Jumaie, *Painting*

But a great childlike joy pervades, in a world not given much to joy. As he goes on painting he has a way of restructuring his vision over and over again: adding, altering, omitting, varying - but keeping the one essence alive and incandescent. His work suggests a mystical experience of light and rapture, of dream and pleasure.

Hameed al Attar, *Ishtar*

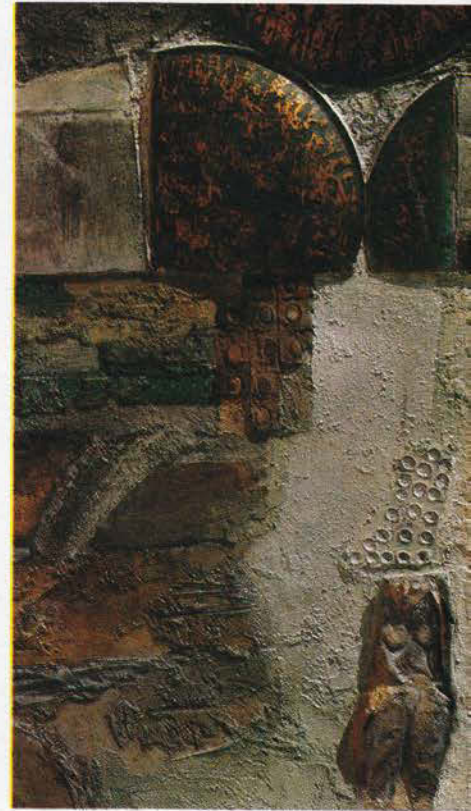
In almost every painting of his, Rakan Dabdoub has at least a couple of protruding points which seem central to his design. They may be erect nipples, closed eyes, or the mouths of guns. They may be nails or rivets which penetrate walls and hit upon secrets. There is always something erotic about them - they are seductive, but can also be forbidding with a mortal touch to them.

Rakan Dabdoub's female figures, however sculptural, even metallic, he makes them - to endow them with maximum touchability - are conscious transpositions of ancient Ishtar, love in the soul and in the flesh, in a world haunted by yesterday but anxiously waiting for tomorrow.

For Hameed al Attar also, Ishtar is a recurrent theme, but Gilgamesh is even more so. His work, a mixture of painting, collage, and bas-relief, is a revisualization of Babylonian sculpture and myth through a twentieth century magnifying lense, perturbed, grandiose, and shattered. The heroic Gilgamesh, questing hopelessly for immortality, is of today: man in bitter struggle for a godship that cannot be attained. The artist's works carry the debris of ancient history with bravado: bronze, stone and sand, together with human muscle and bone, combine in a desperate attempt to unify the sense of time in a repeated allegory.

It is interesting to note Hameed al Attar's progress from his paintings of the colourful Baghdadi souqs of the fifties, to his chromatic collages of popular fabrics into fiery abstracts in the sixties, up to this final stage of mythical figures and anguished questioning done in minimal, mostly earthy, colours. The austerity is severe, stemming from the vision of a tragic ritual which for the artist, within the totality of his historical experience, is as relevant today as ever. Hence the power, and sometimes the shock, of his creations.

Hassan Abd Alwan, *From The Arabian Nights*





Rakan Dabdoub, *Reclining Woman*

When we look at **Amer al Ubeidi**'s work, we find it is Arab history that moves his imagination most. Many of his symbols and forms derive from it, to be so reshaped as to suit his modern purpose. His early canvases were conceived as semi-abstracts full of suggestions of old things and figures - they seemed to echo with the sounds of battling armies in wars of conquest. But he was also suggesting with his dark blues and reds some of today's sorrowful sights, from refugee tents to city tenements.

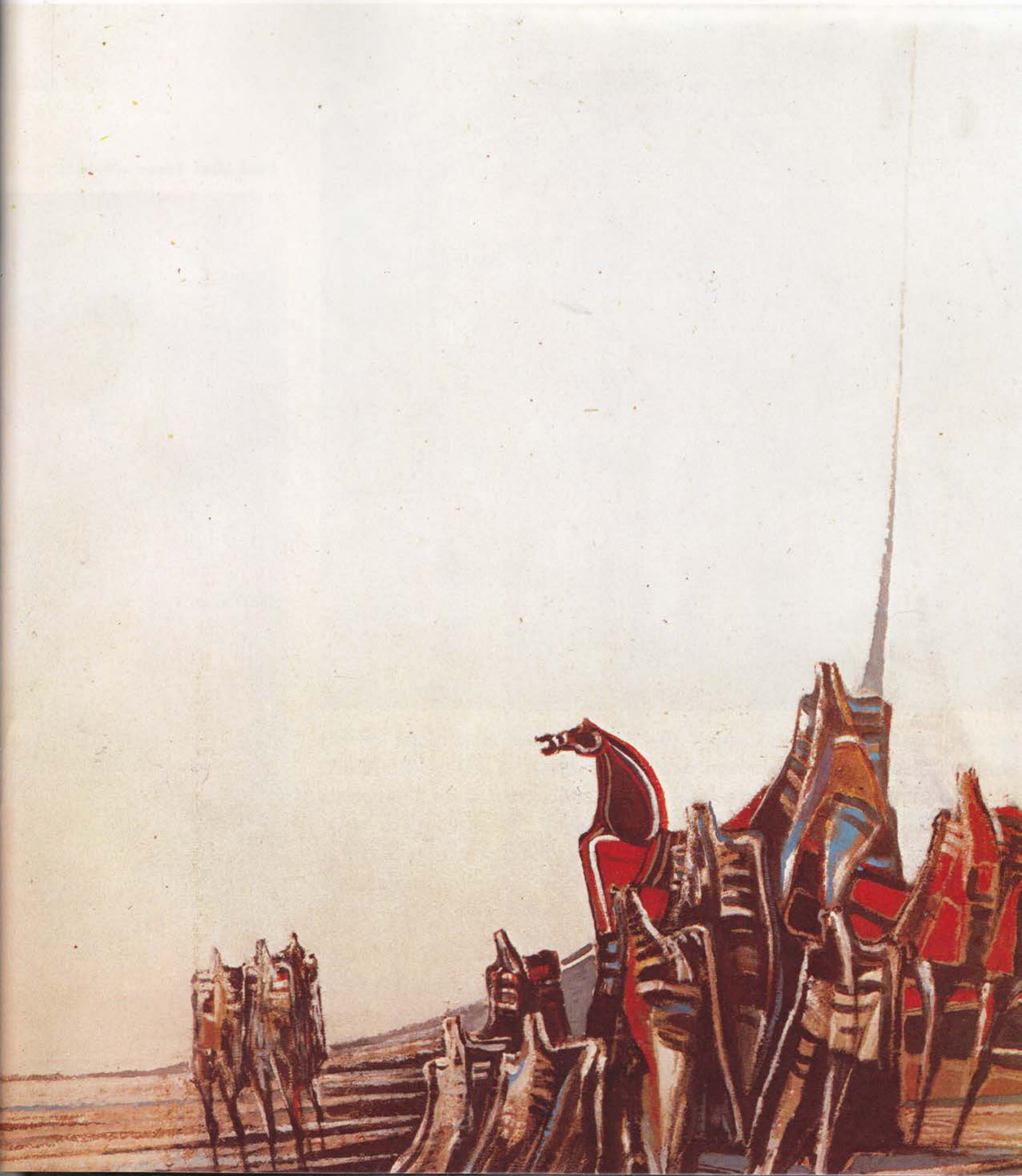
Amer al Ubeidi, *Horses*
Shafiq al Kamali, *Roots*

Amer al Ubeidi's strong point, however, has been his love of form. When he shifted to the portrayal of horses (which in an obscure way were an extension of his old theme), he saw them arrayed in lines, from which he distilled a certain composition that would bring out the dynamic relationship between their silhouettes and the space around them. From crowdedness and sound and clatter, the artist gradually moved out to openness, space, and silence: from a sense of time past to a sense of space present. It is the vastness of Iraqi plains that is finally expressed through the stylized horses that are about to leap from the fringe of each of Ubeidi's paintings.

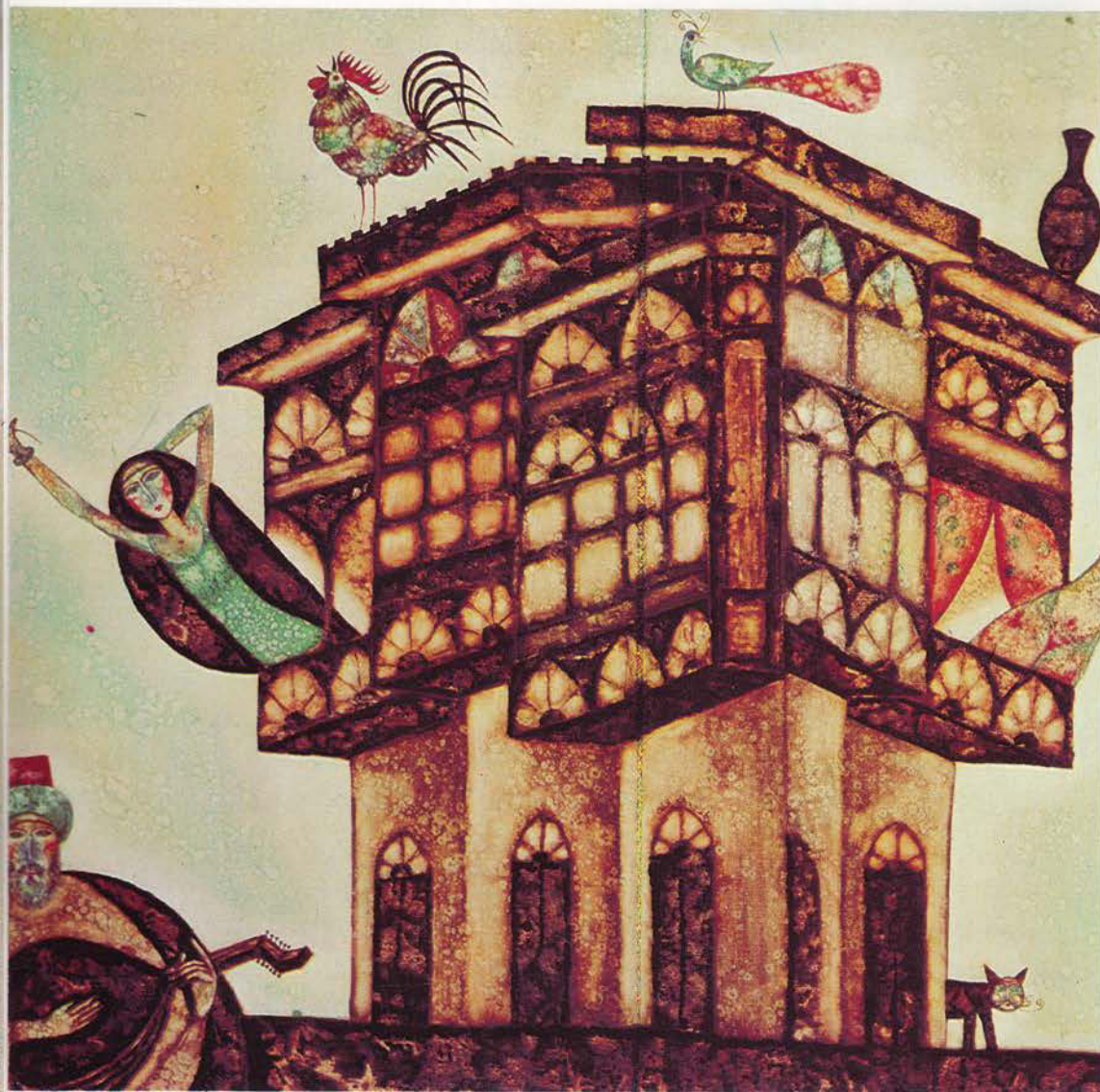
Historical consciousness transcribed into a visual experience will probably be found at its most explicit in the work of **Shafiq al Kamali**. As the artist is in fact a poet who also paints, his transcriptions are mainly poetic; that is, he gives visual renditions to verbal images rich in associations with Arab chivalry, old wars, bedouin love. His style, unconfined to method, benefits from its imaginative freedom, as it owes its validity to the image alone. This gives Kamali's work a peculiar impact, rather akin to that of the art of D.H. Lawrence or William Blake. Both Lawrence and Blake had learnt their basics from other painters, only to create pictures beyond the stylistic possibilities of any of their contemporaries. And so it is with Shafiq al Kamali.

If his painting exchanges merits with his poetry, it is for the enrichment of both. And in both, his Arab roots are most alive. He mirrors the past in the present, and like a good warrior he finds in the love of women an inspiration for chivalry as well as art.





Hassan Abd Alwan, *A Lover's Serenade*



In the canvases of Hassan Abd Alwan there is a more or less similar 'Arab consciousness, but to a totally different effect. A mixture of folklore, Arabian Nights, and traditional architecture, Alwan's work is art as fantasy, a surrealist arabesque. Harking back as it does to old Arabic illuminations, it has the added distinction of being very humorous, a quality rare in Iraqi painting. And yet the artist's craftsmanship is such that his delightful fantasies give his canvases a significance well beyond that of mere illustrations.

Among humorists in Iraq Nizar Selim was very prominent for many years. When he turned painter, he carried over into his work the sharp eye and skilled drawing of a cartoonist. His paintings, on the whole, form a running commentary on life around him, marked

Fuad Jihad, *Dinner with Musicians*



Nizar Selim, *Prepare the Tea, My love*



with much compassion. Many of them look like character studies which, in actual fact, are Iraqi types, closely observed.

But the countless men and women who fill the canvases of Fua Jihad are not so easily placed. For him all content is divorced from the particularities of time and place: it is a kind of aspiring to the absolute. To achieve this (one wonders how deliberately?) he revives the gold, red and other bright colours of the Byzantines or, more accurately, of the Iraqi and Syrian church paintings of the 13th and 14th centuries, bestowing on his figures a look of holiness, complete with halos and medieval postures. A sheikh's cloak may well be taken for an apostle's mantle. The facets of Iraq's tradition, as it spans a good five-thousand years of varied history, are indeed endless.



V

Among sculptors, the consciousness of roots is most intense in Khaled al Rahal, Mohammed Ghani and Ismail Fattah, to name only three of the several top sculptors busy working in Baghdad. What I said about Khaled al Rahal some years ago still applies: he recaptures the element of joy in ordinary life more than any other. His knowledge of the older alleys of Baghdad (which goes back to his boyhood and adolescence) is first-hand, and having gone himself once through the agony of the gutter he has come out with drawings, paintings and sculptures mostly related in theme to this basic experience, but suffused with power and existential joy never plagued by sentimentality.

Although in his earlier sculpture Assyrian influences were dominant, he has brought to his best work the passion and vigour of the traditional image of the care-free lover glorying in sexual abundance: the women, especially, vibrate with the intensity of being alive in the flesh. Whether he sculpts them in relief, as in his exquisite "Women in a Public Bath", which he did in his early twenties, or in the round, as in his much later "Reclining Woman", he displays a mastery of monumental construction whose very rhythm and modulation make it light as air. His "Shergawi Woman On her Wedding Night", slim, balanced, enigmatic, glories in her own femininity, and embodies the poetic image of southern maidenhood. In most of his works, he has the power to bring out in woman her Iraqi essence, whether it be her wide eyes, her long plaits of hair, her fat firm buttocks, or simply the way she half-wraps her figure in a voluminous *aba*. His large stone statue of an Iraqi woman and child, in Baghdad's Zowra Park, has the sensuous qualities he portrays best: a seeming flight expressive of the relish and love of life. The same thing may be said of his sculptures of heads, or horses, or bulls: they are charged with an inner power that seems to erupt in all directions.

Khaled al Rahal studied in Rome, where he also lived for many years. But it is doubtful whether Rome had anything to teach him by way of sculpture; if anything, it distracted him into painting for too long a time, when he found he could sell anything he painted for a good price. His talent had developed in his teens in Baghdad without any instruction, except for what he learned by his concentration on Sumerian and Assyrian sculpture at the Iraq Museum, where he

fortunately worked for some years, during and immediately after the War. When it came for him to study his art academically, his sculpture had already acquired a maturity of its own, firmly rooted in Mesopotamian tradition. Hence, his return to his country in the early seventies, after long absence abroad, has given a new impetus to his energies, which may be seen in his monument in celebration of the Baath Revolution which he cast almost singlehanded in a makeshift foundry in Baghdad.

Emotionally more restrained, Mohammed Ghani is also formally more deliberate: there has been a studied, consistent growth in his style over the last thirty years. In a formative period of his life, his style was influenced by his scrutiny of Sumerian sculpture and ancient cylinder seals (with the succession of elongated figures they leave in an impression), which is detectable in a large number of smallish figures of standing women in their traditional *aba* that he carved in wood. This was upon his return home after seven years of study in Rome and Florence where, in 1959 and 1960, he was of great help to his master and friend Jewad Selim in casting the giant bronzes of Selim's Liberty Monument in which, apart from the emphasis on man's tragic condition, there was the stress of the need to find modern guidelines in ancient Mesopotamian styles.

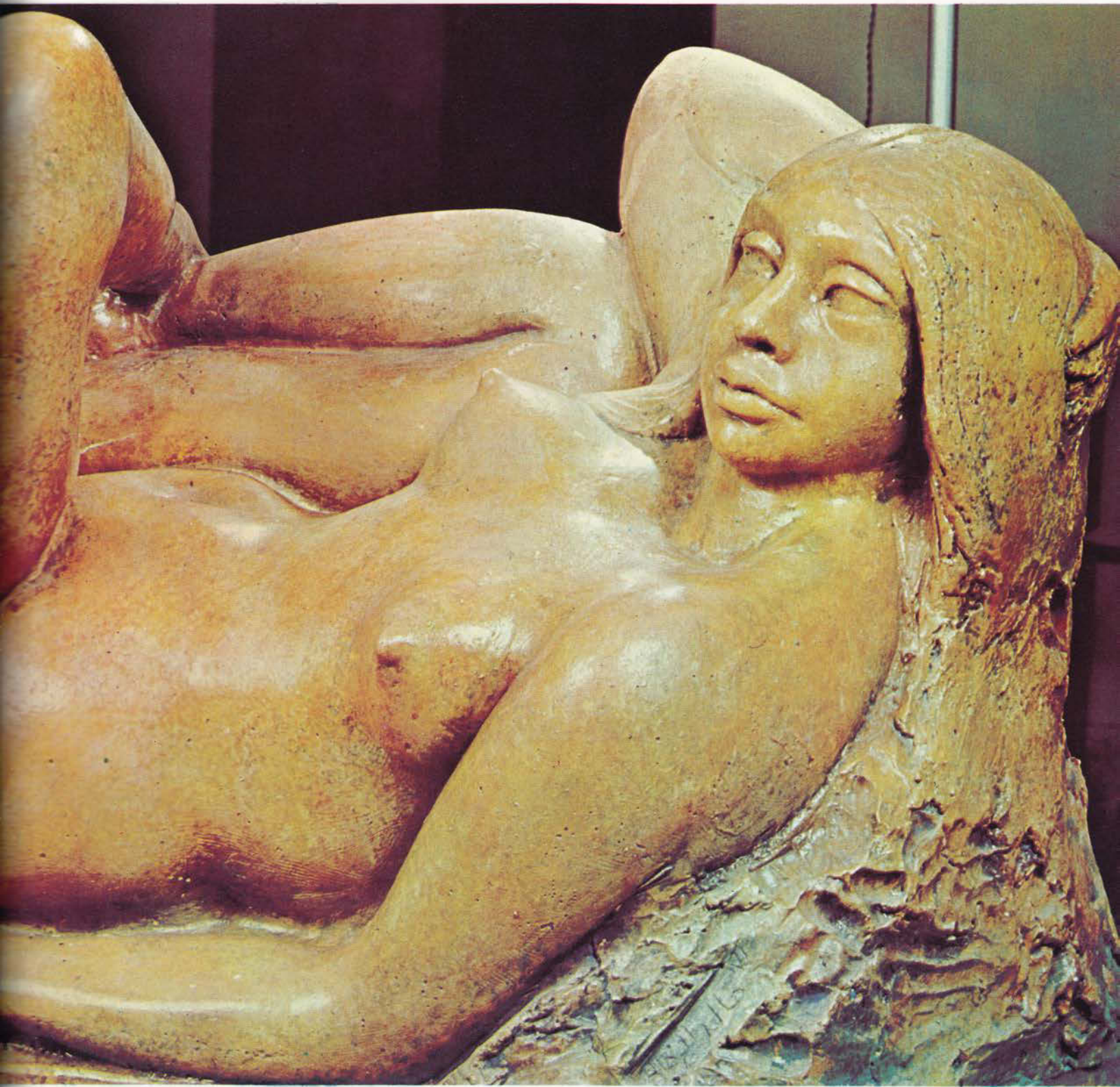
A main theme for him was the life and pursuits of simple people, which he captured in stylized low-reliefs done largely in wood. In the late sixties, he did many semi-abstract figures representing men and women, solitary or in groups, derived in form from the shapes of Baghdadi graves and tombstones: there was in them a sense of life and fortitude, a rejection of the premonitions of death. In working on them the artist reaffirmed the necessity of drawing upon traditional local forms, employing even their symbolic associations in addition to their purely structural motifs.

A later interest in old arabesque spurred him on to a novel treatment of it, mostly in the carvings of large wooden doors, using much freer and more inventive forms where seemingly erratic convolutions replace the traditional repetitive floral patterns. But even these uneven, almost surrealist convolutions are so devised as to

The Builders

Khaled al Rahal, *Shergawi*
Woman On her Wedding Night





Khaled al Rahal, *Reclining Woman*



suggest calligraphy and arabesque. When actual words or phrases are used, they are subjected to the same distinctive treatment.

This tendency, in return, has had its effect on Mohammed Ghani's figures; the anatomy, the clothes, the general construction, all assume a free calligraphic form. Whether it is a single nude or a multi-figured frieze telling the story of medicine in Iraq, the sinuous lines and planes multiply, disperse and gather with the force of this peculiar logic. In his well-known fountain of Murjana, the "Arabian Nights" young woman who foils the stratagem of the forty thieves hidden in their enormous jars, in the famed Ali Baba story, the sculptor gives this concept of his a monumental structure. (In popularity, Murjana now ranks only next to Jewad Selim's Liberty Monument).

It is only natural that much of this should go into Ghani's large sculptures, which have been taking up most of his time in recent

Mohammad Ghani. *Murjana and the Forty Thieves*



years. What a far cry from the old small statues in teak wood whose subtle plasticity one discovered by exploring them by hand, to these towering bronze structures in which the artist still hopes not to lose the feeling of intimacy he likes to establish between his work and the viewer. But the sense of his own style, with roots thus deeply implanted in Iraqi soil, never really falters: it gives him the sureness of touch that marks all genuine art.

With Ismail Fattah - who like Rahal and Ghani also studied in Rome - the few monuments he has made, as well as the smaller works he has been producing since the mid-sixties, are related to his country's experience by virtue of their themes rather than their actual style. His beautiful statue of the great Abbasid poet Abu Nuwas may look like a Gothic Christ, but he knows it. He knows his bronzes owe more to modern sculpture than to Sumer or Assyria. To him this is a technical point which is no cause for worry as long as he can express his Iraqi themes in a manner related to the present. If his style, which has its emphatic qualities, derives from contemporary sculpture, his confidence may lie in the fact that sculpture in our time derives from a vast mixture of cultures mostly medieval or ancient, and especially middle-eastern, anyway.



Ismail Fattah, *Composition*
right *Freedom Fighters*



In this respect Ismail Fattah is in good company with a number of younger Iraqi sculptors, such as Miran al Sadi, Nida Kadhem, Ittihad Karim, and others.

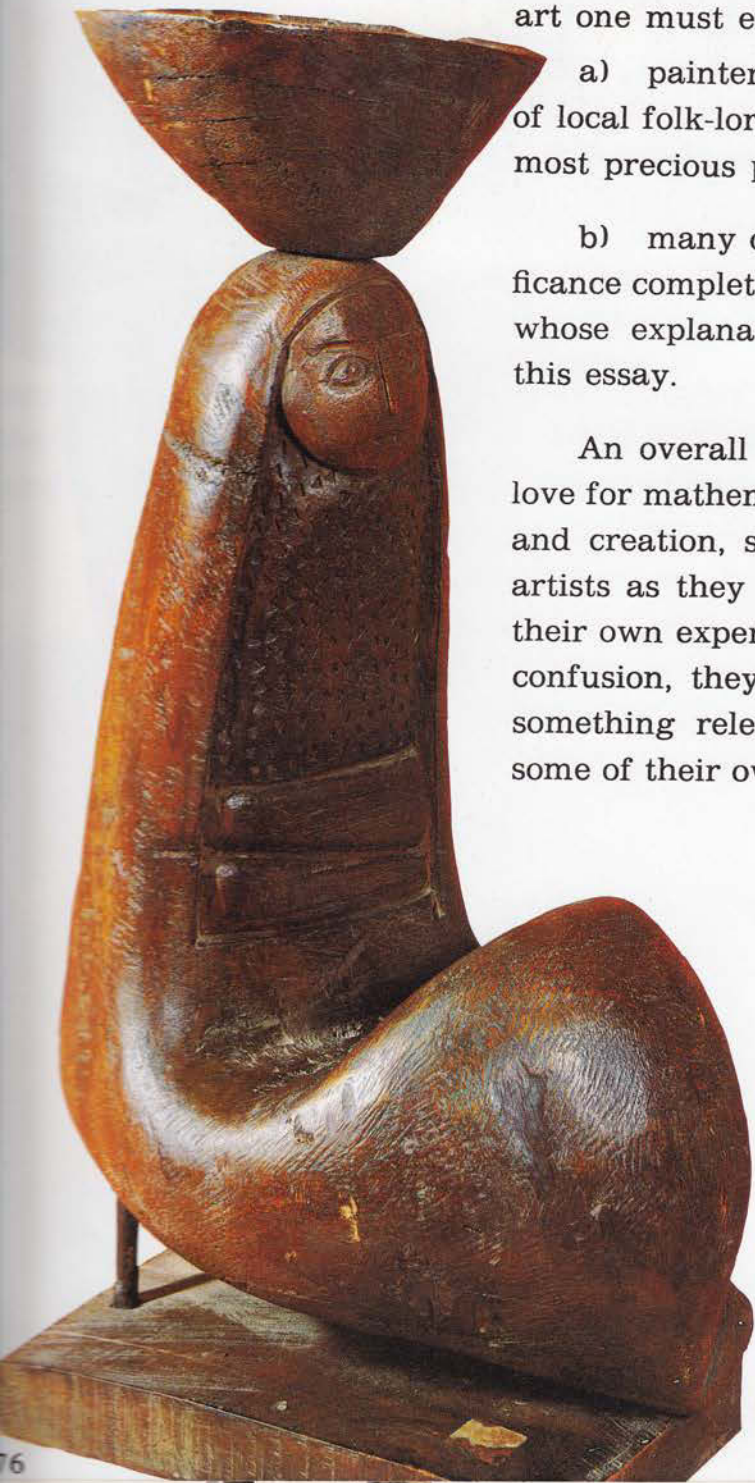


In conclusion, having considered the importance of roots in Iraqi art one must emphasize that :

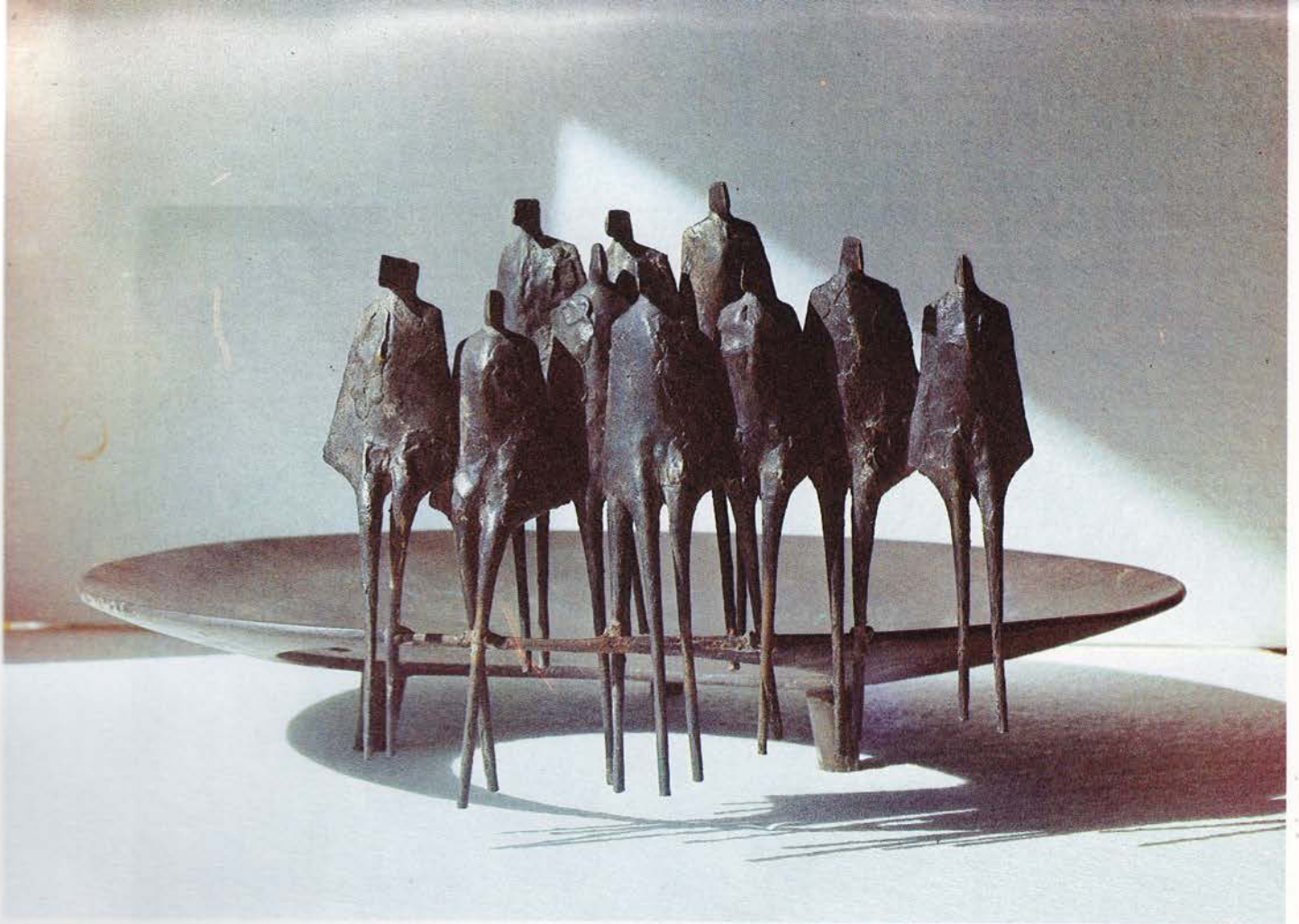
a) painters and sculptors in Baghdad are not mere perpetuators of local folk-lore, since their individual creative vision is in fact their most precious prize, and that,

b) many of them have accomplished works of power and significance completely unrelated to the question of roots as here discussed, whose explanation lies elsewhere. They fall outside the scope of this essay.

An overall Arab spirit is dominant, nevertheless. The old Arab love for mathematics, for some kind of symmetry, for order in concept and creation, seeps however unconsciously into the works of these artists as they give shape to a vision which helps them understand their own experience as well as that of others. In a world noisy with confusion, they try to make their voices heard, because they have something relevant to say. This is part of their inheritance, and some of their own contribution to the civilization of our times.



Miran al Sadi, *Woman with a Pot*



Ittihad Karim. *Men at the Fountain*



Nida Kadhem. *Head*



*Jabra I. Jabra,
The Artist and his Family*

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His writings on Iraqi art are a major reference on the subject because of the long active years he has spent since 1948 with Iraqi artists as painter, critic and mentor, apart from being a founding member of the Baghdad Modern Art Group. He was educated at the Arab College, Jerusalem; Fitzwilliam House, Cambridge University; and Harvard University.