



Mahmoud Sabri in his Baghdad studio. c. 1958. Behind him is his 1958 painting *Massacre in Algiers*.

efforts by artists ranging from the very young, such as Laith al-Mumayaz, who is only thirteen years old, to prominent artists such as the distinguished Akram Shukri.

[...] The exhibition was particularly abundant with works for murals. These are, relatively speaking, wonderful images that can be linked, with some reservation, to Mexican murals made after World War I and the victorious Mexican Revolution. There are some points of comparison also between Mexican works and murals painted by the likes of Nouri al-Rawi, Kadhim Haidar, Tariq Madhloum, Ismail Fattah, and Khalid al-Jader. More importantly, it should be mentioned that Mahmoud Sabri, with his two mural paintings *Dante's Inferno* and *Massacre in Algiers*, offered a well-laid foundation for this turn toward mural art, which has at its core a humanistic disposition and an honest and popular understanding of the viewer as an individual and as part of a collective.

It should also be mentioned, for the sake of objective historical truth, that *The Exhibition of the Rejected*, a show of works rejected by a certain committee under the now-defunct colonial rule, was presented to the arbiter-public by a group that included both skilled artists as well as the pretentious and artless.¹ That was in addition to the *Algeria Exhibition*, which was banned by officials and opportunists after it had been planned as our artists' contribution to Algeria's heroic battle. These exhibitions, I would venture to say, along with individual revolutionary impulses—clandestine at times, open at others—helped to firm the roots of this revolutionary exhibition, and contributed to its progressive content, its comparative dimension, its core of diligent struggle.

If this means anything, it means that the exhibition at hand has history, roots, and solid underpinnings. Let us see, then, if the exhibiting free artists have benefited from their postrevolution freedom, if they have managed to absorb the revolution's substance, dimensions, development, struggle, and future. [...]

Among the authentic endeavors, we should note that the three paintings by Nouri al-Rawi—*Invitation to Joy*, *Between Two Worlds*, and *Affinity*—are good paintings in which culture and awareness are clearly foregrounded, despite the lack of detailed attention to color techniques and composition. *Invitation to Joy*, a painting that displays sensitive lyricism, is a revolutionary work despite showing neither blood nor victims—which are naïve expressions, and overused. It also displays a humanistic disposition, as well as being cloaked in poetry.

The same can be said for Kadhim Haidar, an artist who, like al-Rawi, belongs to the Circle of Contemporary Art.² His three paintings—*The Iraqi Revolution, 14th of July*, and *I See in Your Hands the Power to Destroy Colonialism*—also reflect cultural

understanding and a developed, progressive awareness. When considering that his paintings are, moreover, almost large enough to be murals, and that the symbols in *The Iraqi Revolution* are truly symbols of revolution, we can observe how successful Kadhim has been in portraying the revolution, and in expressing his views via a semi-expressionist and realist route, and via the modern techniques he followed. This painting depicts the imprisoned nation, the sun, heavy chains, and at the same time the people's uprising, the breaking of the chains. But that uprising remains captive, limited, as long as the soldier is not part of it. Once the soldier does take part, in a third section of the same painting, which corresponds to the July 14 Revolution, the nightmare recedes; the monster of colonialism and the traitors it employed are killed and the corpse is buried: a cadaver of dissolution and decay presented in the middle of the painting. That is how the Iraqi Revolution was: a glorious people's revolution in its beginnings, development, and victory. *14th of July*, however, is not as successful a painting as the one just considered. It seems, generally, to lack the consecrating popular hatred against traitors. More importantly, however, we notice that the color composition is generally pleasing, and that the modern technique the artist utilizes is a good means to express what he wanted.

The artist Tariq Madhloum, who fuses ancient arts, especially Persian and Assyrian, with modern art in order to bring forth a unique character in Iraqi art, contributed paintings that are copious in number and rich in quality. His five works—*The Flame of Freedom*, *War and Peace*, *The Immortal Incident of the Bridge*, *The Sheikh and His Subjects*, and *Impressions of the Dawn of 14 July*—are all genuinely good paintings, excellent in theme and content, in addition to their technical distinction. On analyzing his *Sheikh and His Subjects*, we note that Madhloum gathers together, in a satisfactory manner, several dimensions of the theme and content he wants: the feudal lord staying up all night next to a prostitute at a nightclub; the farmer who toils in the land, tilling, sowing, and harvesting; women farmers at the receiving end of the compounded oppression of the feudal society; cattle, palms, trees; the castle of the feudal sheikh—all existing within the big prison that the feudal system has imposed in collaboration with colonialism. If we contemplate another painting by the same artist from the time of the revolution, after his earlier paintings had shown us the dark colonial era, we find a brilliant design, first in its mural-like aspect, and also in its fusion of lyricism and realism, in its rich color composition, in its intelligent, supple assembling of the chapters of the revolutionary struggle. Al-Rihab Palace, the palace of treason,³ is depicted in flames and destroyed by military bullets while the soldiers climb to its top; at the base is the front of a big prison. One prisoner burns in agony, another is being tortured; a policeman plays the role of a guard dog—and in spite of all this the people go forth, carrying the flame of freedom. In the middle of the painting are figures carrying the body of a martyred prisoner; behind them a girl lights the revolutionary flame. The painting is guarded on the sides by two political prisoners, a man and a woman, who have broken their chains and are surging with the doves of peace toward the light.

Artist Ismail Fattah—whose relief sculpture *Jamila* we discussed in a previous issue of *al-Adab*—presents here a mural-like oil painting, again titled *The 14th of July*. This one depicts people attacking the traitors, while military soldiers light the flame of freedom. Prison is symbolized by a window at the base of the painting, where a dove of peace circles before surging forth on the winds of freedom. In the background,

a Baghdad mosque watches over the scene. The color composition serves the painting's theme and content brilliantly. However, haste—and the influence of *Massacre in Algiers* (discussed in a previous issue of *al-Adab*) by Mahmoud Sabri, who in turn was influenced by [Pablo] Picasso's *Guernica*—has deprived the painting of the detailed understanding that might have granted it new dimensions. Nonetheless, it is important to say that painting's content, generally speaking, has merit, and heralds a revolutionary beginning for the artist.

[. . .] It also remains to be said that *The Exhibition of the Revolution* was but a route and a point of departure toward the new Iraqi art in the new era.

Notes

1. Eds.: This counter-exhibition was organized in Baghdad by Kadhim Haidar in 1958 after he and other young artists were rejected from an exhibition at Nadi al-Mansur ([Baghdad's] al-Mansur Club).
2. Eds.: Kamal al-Din seems to be referring to a short-lived artists' group comprised of Kadhim Haidar, Nouri al-Rawi, and Ibrahim Abbo.
3. Eds.: Al-Rihab Palace in Baghdad served as the residence of the royal family until the 1958 revolution, when military officers surrounded it, forced the family to surrender, and executed them.

—Jalil Kamāl al-Dīn, "Fī Ma'raḍ al-Thawra" (excerpt), *al-Ādāb* 6, no. 9–10 (September–October 1958): 87–90. Translated from Arabic by Nariman Youssef.

PROCLAIMING ARAB UNITY

On February 1, 1958, Syria joined Egypt as a single republic under the presidency of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, forming the United Arab Republic (UAR)—it lasted until a September 1961 coup d'état in Damascus. These texts are from Egypt during that period of heightened national sentiment. Artist Hamed Said published "The Freedom of Art" in *al-Majalla* in August 1958, dedicating it to the newly created Ministry of Culture and outlining a Goethean view of artistic development. The second text in this section was written in 1960 as the catalogue introduction to the UAR Pavilion at that year's Venice Biennale, which featured both Egyptian and Syrian artists. Author Salah Kamel was an Egyptian artist then serving in Rome as director of the Egyptian Academy and cultural councilor for the Egyptian embassy.

See Plate 20 for a replica of Salah Abdel Kerim's *Cry of the Beast*, featured in the 1960 UAR Pavilion.

The Freedom of Art (1958)

Hamed Said

A look at the life of Egyptian, Greek, European, or Chinese art from beginning to end is sufficient to demonstrate how the artistic thought of any of these arts takes shape over time in successive forms, the latter of which cannot come to being before those that precede it, and the former of which cannot come to being after those that succeed it. The same happens with respect to the artistic thought of an individual artist if his growth takes a sound and natural course.

We call this logical coherence *the logic of time* in the work of art. In our opinion, it is a vital concern that deserves respect. We also believe that it must not be interfered with, obstructed, or interrupted, in order to allow the artistic thought to grow and live