

Rafa Al Nasiri: 50 Years Retrospective

An exhibition that provides a thorough overview of the artist's universe – extending from Iraq to Europe via China.



Rafa Al Nasiri. *Beside the River*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 150 cm

Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts

Amman, Jordan

11 November – 11 December 2013

Rafa Nasiri, the prominent Iraqi artist based in Amman, will be hosted by Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, celebrating 50 years of his art career as a painter and printmaker. The exhibition, to be opened on 11th November, embraces around 100 art works, prints, paintings and art- books, produced during a period

extending from 1963 to 2013 in different places of the world, thus providing a visual journey through time and place.

Rafa Al Nasiri's basic training was in the Institute of Fine Arts, Baghdad (1956-1959) under the supervision of Iraqi masters, themselves ingenious artists, such as Faieq Hassan, Jawad Selim, and other pioneers of contemporary and modern art in Iraq. His masters were his ideals, both as creators and mentors. In that art laboratory Nasiri learned painting according to European techniques, and devoted his life completely to his career. Yet, when he was offered a scholarship to continue his university studies, he favored China rather than Europe. This courageous decision by a 19 year old artist marked his career life with a unique mingle of East and West.

When the Chinese came to Baghdad in 1959 loaded with works of ivory, copper, silk, ceramics, and printmaking, I was still a student in the last year of my studies at the Institute of Fine Arts. The most wonderful Chinese antiques and masterpieces were organized and displayed in the main hall of the Institute so we, the students, could see them dozens of times every day.¹

In China, where he spent four years (1959-1963), at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Peking, Nasiri was tutored by ingenious contemporary Chinese artists who also became his mentors in art and life. He did not simply learned the techniques of contemporary and ancient Chinese art, but adopted their attitude towards art and life; learned accuracy, dedication and patience. From China back to Baghdad, Nasiri was the first specialized Iraqi printmaker; he held classes and established a professional graphic department in the Institute of Fine Arts, Baghdad.



Rafa Al Nasiri. Al Ahwar Girl, (The girl from the marshes)
1965, woodcut 60 x 40 cm

I returned to Baghdad in August 1963, from Hong Kong, immediately after the exhibition to become the first Iraqi artist specialized in printmaking. After one week of my arrival, I took my papers and submit them to the Ministry of Education to be assigned in the Institute of Fine Arts. But it was only in 1965 that I became a professor in the Institute of Fine Arts, and started to hold printmaking classes. I found the techniques applied at that time limited only to wood-cut and linoleum, due to the limited financial supplies.²

As an artist Nasiri maintained a realistic style which he followed during his courses in both Baghdad and Peking. Later, in 1967 up to 1969, he was granted another scholarship by the Gulbenkian Foundation and got further training at Gravura, Lisbon.

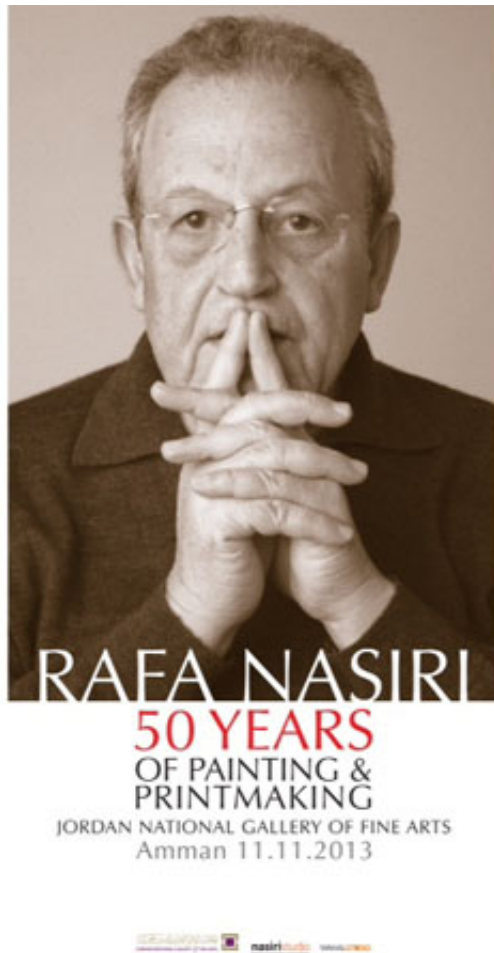
In 1967, the Gulbenkian Foundation granted me a two-year fellowship for training in Gravura, Lisbon. At this time, the West was undergoing major and quite rapid social

*and political transformations, and art reflected many of these changes. There were many forms of modern art developing such as abstract art, Pop art, Earth art and performance art; all undergoing different phases of creative transformation, ranging from experimentation to maturity. Calligraphy was also a popular art form amongst the abstract painting techniques in Europe at the time.*³

It was in Lisbon that Nasiri became impassioned with abstraction, and shifted completely to abstract art. Mixing his Chinese expertise with Western techniques, his art seemed remarkably distinguished. Along these decades, Nasiri has been manipulating his entire potentials and knowledge to build up his career both as painter and printmaker, grasping every possible chance to brush up constantly his thoughts and techniques.

Throughout his career, art was Nasiri's means to achieve freedom on an individual and artistic level. This retrospective is a view at the passing of time, political and artistic engagement, history and remaking history through Nasiri's innovative methods and unwavering vision. Nasiri sends a thoughtful message to the new generation of Iraqi artists regarding the importance of innovation, artistic achievement and love for country:

*Keep doing art for humanity.
Keep using your spirit, ideas, and skills
for creating good art.
Keep living in the beautiful moments of your time.
Keep loving your homeland.”
Rafa Al Nasiri, September 2013*



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Rafa Nasiri: 50 Years of Printmaking Book Launch

On this occasion, or coinciding with it, SKIRA, published an art book entitled: Rafa Nasiri: 50 Years of Printmaking to be released on October. The book covers the artist's long life experience as a prominent graphic artist, and documenting the various stages of his career. It includes articles written by: James Harithas, Director of Station Museum for Contemporary Arts, Huston, Etel Adnan, the prominent Lebanese-American poet and artist, Teresa Parker, printmaker and art critic, Maria Vivero, art critic, creative director of artBahrain, Modhir Ahmad, one of Nasiri's brilliant students, a competent painter and printmaker, Director of Falun Graphic Center in Sweden, Saadon Fadhil, Iraqi art critic, May Muzaffar, Iraqi poet and art critic, in addition to a statement by the artist himself.

ENDNOTES

1 My Visual Resources: Place and Time between East and West

Amman, November 2010

2 Fifty Years in Printmaking – Interview with Rafa Nasiri

Amman, April 2013

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