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A TRIBUTE TO RAFA NASIRI

25 January - 25 February 2014



Rafa NASIRI

Bawabat
Acrylic on canvas
150x180 cm
2009
RN29



Nabad opens "A Tribute to Rafa Nasiri," an exhibition of works by twenty-four Iraqi artists representing two generations and tracing the influence of the 1960s generation, Rafa Nasiri and his colleagues on later generations.

Rafa Nasiri (1940-2013) was "one of the major drivers of artistic change in Iraq and one of the most effective and active artists exhibiting regionally and internationally," writes Dia Azzawi in his introduction to the exhibition catalogue. After studying in Iraq, China and later in Portugal, Nasiri returned to Iraq in the late 1960s with a high level of technical and professional knowledge enriched with a spirit of openness, presenting a collection of artworks that marked the "richest beginnings in the history of Iraqi and Arab printmaking."

The exhibition includes selected works by three groups of Iraqi artists. The first group consists of those artists who signed "The New Vision" manifesto in 1969, which declared the need for avant-garde work and for new, daring ideas based on modern aesthetic values that adhered to ethical principles. They are, Dia Azzawi (UK), Rafa Nasiri, Saleh al-Jumaie (USA), Ismail Fattah, Mohammed Muhriddin (Jordan) and Hashim Samarchi (UK).

The second is a selected group of artists who emerged during the 1960s, including Suad al-Attar (UK), Salem al-Dabbagh (Iraq), Issam al-Said, Ali Talib (The Netherlands), Saadi al-Kaabi (USA), Faeq Hussein, Yahya al-Sheikh (Norway), Saad Shaker, Tariq Ibrahim (Iraq) and Makki Hussein. Finally, a group of Nasiri's most outstanding students, including Modhir Ahmed (Sweden), Amar Dawod (Sweden), Nedim Kufi (The Netherlands), Hanaa Malallah (UK), Karim Risan (Canada), Samer Usama (New Zealand), Khalid Wahal (Canada) and Nazar Yahya (USA).

Painter and printmaker Rafa Nasiri is widely-known in the Arab world and beyond for his culturally rich artworks and distinctive style. During the last decade, he had been inspired by poetry as varied as that of Al-Mutanabbi, Mahmoud Darwish and Etel Adnan. This poetic journey, coupled with a preoccupation with the element of time, has produced works that celebrate beauty, love and the homeland. Born in 1940, he studied painting and printmaking in Baghdad, Beijing and Lisbon. Since 1963, he held over 35 solo exhibitions in the Middle East, Europe and the Far East and participated in numerous group exhibitions and international biennales around the world. His retrospective exhibition, "Rafa Nasiri: 50 Years of Painting and Print Making" opened at the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts in Amman in November 2013. Nasiri won awards for his work in Iraq, Norway, France and Austria. He published three

books, in Arabic, on contemporary Arab Art.

Rafa Nasiri died in Amman on the 7th of December 2013, "leaving behind a rich legacy of creativity, memories, and hearts full of love," as his wife May Muzaffar wrote in her eulogy to Rafa.

Rafa was a friend to all of the artists whose works are on display in this exhibition, and taught a number of them. In Azzawi's words, Rafa Nasiri was "one of us in his desire to preserve an Arab approach and an Iraqi spirit in art.... Rafa's artistic experience is a reflection of our individual experiences, and the experiences of those whom he taught, with the various opportunities given us across different countries. This collective exhibition is an expression of our loyalty to this long-standing friendship and a reminder of how we were and what we have become."

As part of the exhibition "A Tribute to Rafa Nasiri," Lebanese writer Charbel Dagher presented a lecture about Rafa Nasiri, his rich artistic legacy and his influence on different generations of Iraqi and Arab painters and printmakers.

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