

Iraqi art and artists celebrated in new book

Arabic-English publication looks at the development of creative works over 40 years

By Dina Aboul Hosn, Staff Reporter Published: January 28, 2012 00:00



Iraqi artist Dia Al Azzawi with one of his works. Al Azzawi is co-editor of *Art in Iraq Today* that was launched at the Grand Hyatt in Dubai along with an exhibition showcasing paintings and sculptures from the late 1960s until 2010. Image Credit: Zarina Fernandes/Gulf News

Dubai: Celebrating 40 years of modern Iraqi art, Meem Gallery has launched a book called *Art in Iraq Today* in cooperation with Crescent Petroleum.

The book, published by Skira publishing of Italy in collaboration with Meem Editions, is the most important publication on Iraqi art in 40 years, since the first booklet by the same name was published in 1971.

The bilingual (Arabic-English) publication was launched on Wednesday at the Grand Hyatt hotel with a keynote speech by renowned Iraqi artist Dia Al Azzawi, co-editor of the publication.

The event showcased important paintings and sculptures featured in the book, spanning more than 40 years from the late 1960s until 2010, and a musical band playing traditional Iraqi tunes, including the famous Maqam, set the perfect background for the exhibition and book launch.

Majeed Jafar, chief executive of Crescent Petroleum, said Art in Iraq Today is a unique book which brings together a group of Iraqi artists with varying methodologies, but who are united in their experience of exile after having spent their formative years as artists in Iraq.

"The flow of artistic creativity in Iraq has never ceased — from the dawn of history 5,000 years ago, to Iraq's leadership in modern Arab art today.

"This consistency in high quality Iraqi art is demonstrated in this outstanding publication on contemporary art that we are here to celebrate today," Jafar said.

The book includes essays on featured artists, a number of artist statements and exhibitions lists, a bibliography as well as colour plates of the works exhibited at Meem earlier this year.

The book also highlights the importance of the artists contributions, and Iraqi art in general, to contemporary Middle Eastern art history.

Enduring talent

Al Azzawi said although the artists examined in this publication are now part of the Iraqi diaspora, their work demonstrates the enduring talent of two generations of artists whose work represents Iraqi art today, as the book and gallery made clear.

He expressed his happiness at launching the book, which is the first of its kind to document the development of Iraqi plastic arts in 40 years.

Art in Iraq Today includes works by renowned Iraqi artists such as Modhir Ahmad, Dia Al Azzawi, Ahmad Al Bahrani, Amar Dawod, Gassan Ghaib, Ali Jabbar, Halim Al Karim, Nedim Kufi, Hanaa Malallah, Rafa Al Nasiri, Mahmoud Obaidi, Kareem Risan, Delair Shaker, Ali Talib, and Nazar Yahya.

At the conclusion of the launching ceremony, Al Azzawi, Ali Taleb, and other artists autographed copies of the book, which will be available for sale at Meem Gallery.



A visitor browses through the book. Image Credit: Zarina Fernandes/Gulf News

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1/1 < >