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## The House That My Father Built

Sadik Kwaish Alfraji

The House That My Father Built, (Once Upon a Time).mp4



### Q&A with Sadik Kwaish Alfraji

**LYL:** 'The House That My Father Built (Once Upon a Time)' is an enormous composition in which a cycloptic giant stoops over a series of mesmerizing images that revolve around three actual objects: a photograph of your mother, your father, and your father's clothes hanging on the wall. Perhaps you could begin by telling us a little about the moment that inspired this work?

**SKA:** It is a moment that is not easy to forget, as it has always accompanied me. A moment when I was fully aware of death and its implications of nonbeing at the same time as my feeling of existence was at its peak. Except now it became an existence which carried its opposite—non-existence—within. An existence suddenly sharp and painful and burdened with anxiety. My father had died, and with that a big part of me. Awareness of death seized me, touched me and became a part of me, so that the shape of death was everywhere.

Death is mostly perceived as the death of an *other*—nothing to do with you. When my father died, Death touched me in the person of my father and for the first time became a reality to me, albeit rough and condensed. As I stood there in my father's mostly empty room looking at his shadowy belongings, I realized that my father had gone.

**LYL:** With the sketches constantly being rubbed out and new ones being filled in the titular house of the piece, you invoke a history that is tumultuous with change. Can you tell us about the bigger events alluded to in this video?



**SKA:** I wouldn't call them events as such; they are more like daily happenings which appear and then vanish to give way to new ones. I intended those drawings inside the house to be memories observed from a time machine. People grow old and die. Things come and go with no logic behind the flux. In drawing these pictures, I was guided by a deep longing for some kind of fulfillment, for life and the love that accompanies it. All those figures soaring and floating around the house are just messengers of a soul thirsty for a glimpse of that long gone childhood that can never be revisited.

**LYL:** At seven meters high, your piece dwarfs exhibition visitors. How does the physical size of the installation affect the way your work is received?

**SKA:** I would have made it even bigger if I could. My intention was to decenter the viewer's ego by dwarfing him, and reminding him that we are stories that play out for a short while and afterward disappear forever.

Furthermore, the projection *should* be big and it *should* fill the entire wall, because that moment of existential awareness that I allude to *is* intense. Because it's an awareness that is so total that it's the only thing you can see. Herein lies one of the contradictions of life: we are infinite, on the one hand—seeing all things through the prism of our perception, but on the other, we are also so small—our bubble-like existences leaving no trace whatsoever when they are over—that we cannot claim to be necessary at all to the world.

**LYL:** To what extent do you see yourself as an Iraqi artist? What do you think your works say about Iraq today, if anything, and how do you find yourself relating to its tragic recent history?

**SKA:** Iraq was where I was born and where I grew up to become the person I am today. My identity is tied to Iraq, and to a certain extent, so is my temperament that is colored by a certain Southern sensitivity, heavy with poetry and grief. What happened—and is still happening—in Iraq touches me so deeply and so strongly that it will always influence my work. For those who know it, war is a walking death—a vicious virus that eats away at the soul. (And by the way, all odors can be forgotten but that of death. It has a smell that clings to you for life.) I lived with it day in and day out all through the eighties and nineties, until I left the country. But my attachment to what happens in Iraq, both as a human being and an artist, does not detach me from what happens elsewhere in the world. *The blood that is shed is red anywhere.* ♣

#### Read bio

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**Sadik Kwaish Alfraji** was born in Baghdad in 1960, and studied at the Institute of Fine Arts and the Academy of Fine Arts in Iraq. In 2000, he obtained a High Diploma in Graphic Design from the CHK Constantijn Huygens in the Netherlands, where he is now based, working as a print maker, designer, and visual artist. He began to create art in the 80s, when he was still living in Baghdad. Since then, he has participated in countless exhibitions in the Middle East, in Europe, in Asia and in the US. His work often blends art and philosophy to expand the formalistic and conceptual boundaries of his aesthetic. His haunting mixed media compositions (which are but one example of the intense expressionism often found in his graphic work) explore a variety of themes ranging from existence and the universal human condition to the experiences of exile and fragmentation. He has said of his work: "I do not paint out of luxury, and do not seek beauty, but as an attempt to reason with the world and with myself....Yet, always, the result does not exceed a restless sort of crying."

Click [here](http://www.sadik.nl) (<http://www.sadik.nl>) for his website.

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