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## THE “FREE” ART OF OCCUPATION: IMAGES FOR A “NEW” IRAQ

Nada Shabout

ART IS INDEXICAL OF SOCIETY. It is expressive and reflective of its culture. Visual production has a continuous dialectical relationship with culture. Within the spaces shaped by this dialogic, new identities are negotiated and contested forming new and renewed cultural icons to the extent that Mieke Bal argues that “art thinks culture.”<sup>1</sup> The dynamics of this relationship is impacted by political upheaval and is further complicated by outside interference often reflecting a new imposed modus operandi. Contemporary Iraqi art in the aftermath of the US-led invasion has taken on various roles, be that of resistance, documentation, testimony, prediction and hope.

In the postmodern era of image-making, possibilities of interpretation are as limitless as those of creation. Jean Baudrillard’s definition of simulacrum, for instance, shattered the eternal art historical concern with the relationship between origin and copy. He argued that a movement from “representation” to “simulation” distorted the relationship between sign and referent. Some contemporary Iraqi works evoke Baudrillard’s “simulacra” in its hyper-realist definition of the “absence of reality,” specifically in their disconnect with their lived reality.<sup>2</sup> Baudrillard places the postmodern age in what he classifies as the third order of simulacra, which is dominated by a “precession of simulacra,” where the representation precedes and determines the real, as “copies without originals.”

Within the framework of occupation, these contemporary works further expose a campaign for “visualizing” Iraqi culture and spatially reconfiguring Baghdad in an effort to construct images for a “new” Iraq through ideological cultural reconstruction. In other words, these works could not be examined within the context of an art historical tradition attentive to styles and aesthetics. After all, Baudrillard declared that seeing is “no longer believing,” and Mirzoeff added that it “is interpreting.”<sup>3</sup> Given the exorbitant events taking place in Iraq since 2003, one cannot simply view its visual production in terms of cultural

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icons and their new meanings as transformations reflecting the formation of a "new nation," or the metamorphosis of the Iraqi nation within the current debate.

This essay is concerned with the discourse of power within which these works were produced. These objects of art are thus examined from the perspective of the ideology of their making (artist/patron) and that of their promotion/reception (viewer). Any visual analysis offered here is incidental and does not reflect a detailed stylistic evaluation. These works are seen as existing outside the development of Iraqi modern art insofar as they are disjunctured and reflect isolated incidents that have not been accepted or contextualized by Iraqi artists, but rather subsist on the periphery of established Iraqi art discourse.<sup>4</sup> "Art no longer has a link with history and continuity, but is caught in a chain reaction, that of simulacra and simulation."<sup>5</sup>

#### CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The power of visual language led to a subjugation of art and artists to the authority of politics, as attested by the various cases found in the history of art throughout the ages. Since the revolution of 1958 which ended the reign of the Iraqi monarchy, art in Iraq has served periodically (or systematically) as a propaganda apparatus. Much has been said about the Baath's and Saddam's exploitation of art to further their agendas. Arguably, there were initially some perceived benefits in Saddam's policies for the arts. There were however, equally long lasting damages. The relationship of Saddam Hussein to the development of the visual arts needs much examination and elaboration that is beyond the purpose of this essay. The Baath's censorship in regards to visual arts nevertheless, seems to be specifically misunderstood. The consensus among Iraqi visual artists is that while Saddam did not force any artist into producing propaganda art, he certainly rewarded those who did.<sup>6</sup>

For the purpose of this argument, my main contention with Saddam's policy would be in adopting and supporting Social Realism as the visual style of choice to represent his social revolution. Social Realism as an art style detached from its sources as a movement has been the preferred style exploited by many totalitarian governments around the world during the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> It not only influenced popular taste in Iraq, it also halted the progress of the Iraqi abstract movement considered the most advanced in the Arab world. More significantly, the general censored atmosphere at the time subdued the optimism and excitement of the previous decades and crushed the spirit of experimentation. One of the most direct implications of this has been the complete misinterpretation of contemporary Iraqi artists' preference for abstraction as a necessary means of evading Saddam's censorship, and not because of artistic considerations and/or decades of development. Of particular interest to note here is that most Iraqi artists, after the end of their imposed isolation and prohibition, and in exposure to global postmodernist trends, are currently reevaluating the notion of abstraction perceived by them as the ultimate progress and goal.

While there were several layers restructuring Iraq's historical memory since 1958, Saddam has been strongly condemned for his vision of Iraqi history and the policies he has enforced to create a new identity and image, both visually and literary, to fit this vision. This vision could easily invoke Baudrillard's second order of simulacra, where reality is ideologically masked. Moreover, representation of reality has always been ideological insofar that interpretation is always constructed by simulacra. In the realm of art history, Saddam has been accused of reinterpreting much of Iraq's past through various historical periods from Mesopotamia to the modern age. This could be illustrated through a simple comparison between Saddam's *Victory Arch*<sup>8</sup> and Jawad Salim's Freedom Monument, *Nasb al-Hurriyah* which are both historical public monuments regardless of the disparity in style and expression.

An uncontested masterpiece and a landmark of Baghdad, *Nasb al-Hurriyah* was the first public monument in Iraq to be built by an Iraqi artist, a bas-relief mural in bronze (50m x 8m), commissioned by the new Iraqi military regime in 1959 to celebrate the revolution. Its dynamic yet ordered composition of twenty-five connected figures, divided in ten units, visually narrating the revolution and the events which surrounded it, resembles letters of an Arabic verse in their movement and flow from right to left.<sup>9</sup> On a formal visual level, Salim succeeded in combining the linear quality of Arabic characters and stylized forms of Sumerians and Babylonians with modern Western styles, creating within the framework of modernism a nationally significant iconography. The narrative was organized in several interconnected groups, expressing injustice, resistance, solidarity, hope and ambition, and portrayed in a style of abstract expressive symbolism.

The Victory arch, on the other hand, represents the arms of Saddam with a sword in each fist in reference to the sword of Sa'ad ibn-abi-Waqas, the commander of the Muslim army that defeated the Persian Sassanid Empire in A.D. 637. The structure rises to forty meters above the ground with five thousand Iranian helmets appropriated from the battlefield dribbling at the base like peanuts from a bag. In the Mesopotamian tradition, as in the Babylonian Ishtar Gate, the arch was duplicated on the other end of the vast new parade ground in central Baghdad. The image was sealed with a televised inaugural public ceremonial performance by Saddam himself on a white stallion, this time in reference to Shiite tradition. Officially, the monument was launched to the public in commemoration of a victory in the Iraq-Iran war, although it was conceived prior to the supposed victory. The Victory Arch carries multiple layers of symbolism and was meant to place the president in the tradition of Muslim army commanders, as part of a wider campaign that started in 1979, when he allegedly traced his lineage as a descendent of the Prophet.

Certainly monuments provide a physical form of the collective memory of a place and a people. Both monuments of course could (and should) be seen as propaganda campaigns of glorification: one glorifying a nation and the other glorifying a ruler. Nevertheless, while the audience of both is the people of Iraq, the reception of each monument differs dramatically. Given its stylistic innovation and aesthetic value in the construction of *turath* Salim's *Nasb al-*

*Hurriyah* remains till this day a strong icon of the Iraqi nation. A humanistic composition juxtaposing several familiar concepts in Salim's oeuvre: eternal calamity, motherhood, and fertility, is as timeless and universal in its iconography as Picasso's *Guernica*. Saddam's monument on the other hand, has always been a matter of strong controversy.

Of particular interest today is the fate of these two monuments following the US-led invasion. Throughout his rule, Saddam did not dare touch the iconic image of Salim's *Nasb al-Hurriyah*. The new Iraqi interim government was quick to display their act of good faith in restoring Iraq's most important pre-Saddam public monument. On January 23, 2004, a long overdue and desperately needed mission was initiated by Iraq's interim Minister of Culture to restore and preserve *Nasb al-Hurriyah*. The *Victory Arch* monument, on the other hand, according to the Iraqi Ministry of Culture, has been placed under the custody of the Iraq Memory Foundation and its founder Mr. Kanan Makiya. An official order by Iraq's interim Government in 2005 granted the organization a 40-year lease to establish the "Crossed Swords" Complex as a Museum of Remembrance.

While the notion of a "Museum of Remembrance" in itself is not the issue and is perhaps a natural development in view of Iraq's circumstances, the fact that a private foundation headed by a man that remains in the center of controversy because of his role in relation to the US-led invasion poses a major problem. Many legitimate considerations notwithstanding, the main implication here is that the vision and dimension of this "memory" will be set by a limited number of individuals, most of whom (if not all) did not experience life in Iraq during the specified period of this memory. Thus, it will be interesting to see what future plans awaits the monument; is it going to be "confronted" or "excised," given that the "one day" Mr. Makiya anticipated in 1991 has finally arrived.<sup>10</sup>

#### POLICY OF ERASURE AND REPLACEMENT: IMAGES FOR THE "NEW IRAQ"

How should we then evaluate Iraq's image production since April 2003? In art historical evaluation, one typically encounters two distinct but broad trends, and a third space in their intersection. The first trend could be described as a reaction to the drastic ensuing events, as manifest in a group of works that I would label "occupation art." These works tend to be representational, symbolic and metaphorical. The main objective of this trend is not aesthetics. The second trend seems to have continued, in varying degrees, its artistic developments through the sanctions and for a while after the invasion. The concern of artists working within this trend is the continuity in Iraqi art history, aesthetic development and stylistic innovations, while maintaining a focus on the dialogue of identity between the local and the global, and/or experiments that transcend nationality. There is in addition a third trend that is strictly and purely commercial in its aspiration.<sup>11</sup>

This assessment however, does not highlight or deservingly celebrate the progress achieved by individual contemporary artists, such as Hana Malallah, Kareem Risan and others, who survive today in the same manner they did under Saddam's regime by staying secluded and out of the lights of the media. Instead, it questions the ideology followed by the new empire in structuring and advertising new visual images for Iraq created by occupation art as representative of contemporary Iraqi visual production. The local process of history erasure or replacement that was practiced by Saddam is now reinstated, in its post-Saddam guise, by the global American one. Media culture is largely aiding in this process insofar as it is defining the future of post-Saddam contemporary Iraqi art, particularly as it is beginning to be recognized by the West.<sup>12</sup>

Since I wrote this essay, further developments have only confirmed my argument of an ideological cultural erasure now practiced by the indoctrinated Iraqi officials as well. During October of 2005, two public works in Baghdad by the renowned sculptor Khalid al-Rahal were dismantled. The first one was the bust of Abu Jafar al-Mansur, the Abbasid Caliph and founder of the original round city of Baghdad during the eighth century. The second was the memorial of *al-Maseera*, "The March of the Baath Party." So far, there are no confirmed reports stating the identity of the responsible party behind the explosion of the bust of Abu Jafar al-Mansur. It is of significance to mention that according to rumors the bust of Abu Jafar al-Mansur was exploded because of its offense to Shiite sentiments, while *al-Maseera* because of its Baathi narrative. Journalists from al-Sharq al-Awsat newspaper who visited the site reported rumors to the effect that both acts were ordered by the DeBaathification Commission.<sup>13</sup> The Commission did order the dismantling of *al-Maseera* and a number of other monuments. According to Khalid al-Shami, director of the Culture and Education Department of the government's DeBaathification Commission, "we just want to tell (Iraqis) that the Baathists are part of a dirty history that will not come again. The dominant culture of Iraq used to be a culture of violence, even in the statues."<sup>14</sup> Such a statement obviously reflects an ignorance of the history of many celebrated world monuments from the Greek age onward, where victory was achieved through violence and disregard to human loss on both sides.

Thus, DeBaathification aims at more than just erasing the era of Baath rule from the Iraqi collective memory. Such policy does more than the obvious of promoting and supporting sectarian strife. It also seriously inflames Iraqi emotions. The Iraq-Iran war constitutes a major reality in Iraq's recent history with human loss and implications that changed the social fabric of Iraq. Removing the relief sculpture that honored Iraqi soldiers captured by Iran from its stone panel which stands empty in Mustansiriyah square now, is equal in its repercussion to changing the status of Iraqis who died during the war with Iran from "martyrs" to "victims of Saddam."<sup>15</sup> The designation of "martyr" was the only solace to Iraqi families in dealing with their loss.

In retrospect, the beginning of this policy was evident from the first days that followed the US-led invasion with the systematic destruction of Iraq's

institutions. What the shocked Iraqi people and world intellectual community did not grasp at the time was that this was the launching of a campaign aimed at erasing Iraq's heritage. This policy of erasure and replacement is continuously transmitted and sustained through the media.<sup>16</sup>

The first physical example of this policy was the pulling-down of Saddam's statue in al-Fardoos Square. This haunting image was advertised as iconic of: "the fall of Baghdad," "the fall of the Baath," "Iraq's liberation," and one should add, "US imperialism." The world witnessed the joy of Iraqis celebrating their freedom, achieved through collaboration with and then submission to, the US forces present in the scene. Symbolically, that was accomplished first by presenting both Iraqis and US soldiers physically pulling the statue and then allowing US military machinery to finalize the pull. Given the symbolism of the act, one must question the reason behind the image of the US soldier placing the American flag on top, precisely in view of various reports elucidating the US Army's psychological operations in Iraq. And while it was hastily removed, as the act was found to be too revealing of intentions and in bad taste, the effect of image remained, as did the overall symbolism even after several reports of how staged an event it was, and where the very limited number of Iraqis present in the scene was manipulated and sensationalized by the media. Of course, these revelations were not allotted equal coverage in the media to correct the previous image. Moreover, words cannot counter the supremacy of "sensual immediacy" produced by the first encounter with the image.

To solidify the intended message, a self-proclaimed group of mainly amateur artists who called themselves *Jama't Najeen*, the Najeen Group, were allowed to permanently reconfigure a space that had a direct association with the war on Iraq as it was constantly featured in the background of all media coverage. The Najeen defined themselves as "an artistic and literary group of Iraqi professional artists and art students in Baghdad that survived the past and the war" (hence the name *najeen*, survivors, from the root *naja*, to survive).<sup>17</sup> On May 29, 2003 they unveiled the partially completed *Statue of Najeen* in al-Fardoos Square, as "a gift to every Iraqi and through them to humanity."<sup>18</sup> The statue was described in Western media as "featuring a central figure beneath a crescent moon that stands atop a pedestal where a statue of Saddam Hussein once stood." It revolved around three concepts: peace, love, and freedom.<sup>19</sup> While there is much to be said about the haphazard construction of cliché images in terms of this subject and style of the statue, and it was in fact criticized by some, its significance is in its being, in its timing, its iconic positioning and media acknowledgment. The Najeen Group might have a message to disseminate or may even advance a stylistic potential. The fact remains however, that public monuments are not the realm of experimentation, particularly when for better or for worse and despite all valid arguments, they will persist as historical manifestations of an era.

Further, if one is to accept it as an act of public will, then it could only be evaluated as a manifestation of and perhaps this epitome of kitsch. The vital question would be by whose permission was it allowed to be erected? Insofar as

public monuments embody a reflection of the national collective memory, they are an essential tool for government propaganda and are not forfeited to the will of the public. A case in point is the action taken by the coalition forces upon their entrance to Baghdad when they immediately seized the sites of *Nasb al-Shaheed*, the *Unknown Soldier*, the *Victory Arch*, and others for fear of them becoming public rallying points igniting national pride and thus calling for resistance. Therefore, it was a tactical act to allow this al-Najeen statue, which appeared virtually over night following the well-publicized images celebrating the fall of the Baath regime fêted in Western media as an example of Iraqi defiance and its will to endure. Ascertaining their role and policy, the Coalition Authority funded a bronze cast of the statue a few months following its creation.

The second example demonstrating and sustaining the occupation's imperial policy of erasure and replacement in creating surrogate images for a new Iraq is seen in the endorsement of the works of the newly famed painter Essam al-Azzawy, known as Esam Pasha. An amiable and ambitious young man with perhaps untapped potential, he was virtually unknown in the Baghdad art scene before 2003. With no formal art education, Pasha has been the one "Iraqi artist" discovered by Western media, and thus featured in nearly all of the very few articles on the subject, both in print media and cyberspace. It is of great significance to emphasize here that his promotion is greatly resented by contemporary Iraqi artists, who perceive it as a deed of alienation and marginalization of their work. Many artists I interviewed felt that this unfair assessment by Western media does them and Essam injustice by giving him a false sense of grandeur which will further distance him from established and accomplished Iraqi artists.

Moreover, emerging as the quintessential contemporary Iraqi artist, he is being hailed as a "talented artist, grandson of former Iraqi prime minister of the royal family Nuri al-Said, multilingual, impetuous, and only 28 years old, Esam Pasha is destined [sic] to become one of the foremost figures in the Baghdad art world of the post Saddam era, specially after he made the first post-war mural in Iraq."<sup>20</sup> Stylistically this is certainly a crudely exaggerated complement. The aesthetics of his art is not the point here. His endorsement by Western media as representative of contemporary Iraqi artists is. "Pasha" made his début into the post-Saddam art era with his 13-foot high colorful mural, *Resilience*, painted over a portrait of Saddam at the entrance of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in the al-Mustansiriya district in Baghdad. In expressionist stokes of yellow, orange and purple, images portrayed in the mural are a collage of clichés: traditional elements of Baghdadi architecture of mosques, ancient columns, and Islamic paraphernalia engulfed in blue promising skies, bathed in the rays of a purifying sun and protected by the doves of peace. Of his own work Essam explains, "[t]hroughout the embargo of the 1990s and two Gulf Wars, many Iraqis suffered. And, even though suffering continues today, the bright side is that Iraqis are resilient and persevere. That is why I gave the title, *Resilience*, to the huge mural I painted over a portrait of Saddam Hussein after Baghdad fell."<sup>21</sup>



The mural presents a good example of an imperial construction and manipulation of new visual metaphors endowed with multiple levels of symbolism. It is the first portrait of Saddam to be painted over and the first official public mural in Baghdad to be executed only six months after the fall of the regime. Further, al-Azzawy's pedigree was further exploited providing additional opportunities for cementing the aim's of this policy by emphasizing the link of the post-Saddam era with one of today's most idealized pre-Saddam era's, the period of the Iraqi monarchy portrayed by many as the only legitimate national Iraqi government.<sup>22</sup> Only his lineage in relation to Nuri al-Said is highlighted in articles glorifying his work and personality, focusing on his "much exaggerated acceptance of the occupying powers," while completely neglecting his father's position for instance, during the Saddam regime.<sup>23</sup> Romanticized and devoid of any references of its surroundings, the work has been described as Disneyesque, fantasy-like and decorative. Moreover, it has been contrasted to the somewhat veiled yet poignant criticism of the years under sanctions, wondering if these are images of denial or unfounded romantic optimism. Whereas the content/subject of the work and its portrayal in terms of style provides for interesting analysis, what is of greater significance here is the process of erasure or replacement the mural perpetuates.

More importantly, it was encouraged and funded by the American military. The sum of \$918 was awarded to al-Azzawy from the discretionary fund provided to senior US commanding officers.<sup>24</sup> According to al-Azzawy, "the whole thing started as a joke," as he sat with US soldiers, for whom he worked as a translator, "day after day staring at an ugly damaged portrait of Saddam."<sup>25</sup> The officer in charge jokingly asked him if he "could do something about it," and al-Azzawy found in the suggestion an inspiration to initiate a campaign to visually clean up the city. He was asked to submit a proposal and funding was approved. To insure legality, he approached the Ministry of Labor, the lawful owner of the mural, for permission which was granted provided that they were not responsible for funding. Naïve as one might find the actions of the young Mr. al-Azzawy, the full legal and moral responsibility remains with the occupying power. One might not fault the soldiers for taking the liberty to instigate change, but there was a lack of or perhaps a deliberate lack of supervision to stop them from fulfilling such initiatives. This case presents another example of the occupying force's blatant disregard of UN Security Council Resolution 1483 of May 22, 2003, reaffirmed in October 16, 2003 in Resolution 1511. Both Resolutions emphasize the temporary role of the Coalition Authority, as well as the protection of Iraq's heritage by establishing a ban on international trade in Iraqi cultural property.

Another example of "Occupation art" and the deliberate process of erasure is the statue by the artist "Kalat." This work not only presents us with a new mode of subjugating art to politics, but a new form of exploitation in negotiating the notion of "self and other," and thus should be viewed within the dynamics of colonialism. According to a news release from the Iraqi Coalition Provisional Authority, "the statue was created in 2003 with bronze removed from a palace in Tikrit, Iraq. The artist used a photograph of a real American

soldier, 1st Sgt. Glen Simpson, who posed for the sculpture.”<sup>26</sup> Several press releases told of further details:

During the Saddam era, the Iraqi artist who goes [sic] by the nomme d’art of “Kalat,” was required to create hundreds of statues of the megalomaniacal dictator, Saddam Hussein. After Operation Iraqi Freedom, Kalat was so grateful for his new-found liberty that he decided to melt down three bronze busts of Saddam and sculpt a new creation honoring the fallen Americans who gave their lives for his freedom and that of his country. The statue in honor of the heroic Coalition forces was a true work of love.<sup>27</sup>

A report by the *Wall Street Journal* that included an interview with the artist, however, told of a less romantic story. According to the *Journal* report, the artist, Khalid Alussy (“Kalat” is an Americanization of his first name), is a “sculptor-for-hire.” He was not forced to create the statues for Hussein, but rather offered his services to the former regime “because I needed money for my family and to finish my education. And I decided to make statues for the Americans for the exact same reasons.”<sup>28</sup> The statue was on display outside the palace, which has become home to the 4th Infantry division. It is to be eventually shipped and displayed at the memorial museum in Fort Hood, Texas.

According to Sgt. Maj. Charles Fuss of the US Army’s 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division who commissioned the sculpture, it represented a familiar “scene many in Iraq have witnessed in one form or another. A soldier kneels before a memorial of boots, rifle and helmet – his forehead resting in the hollow of his hand. Behind and to his right stands a small Iraqi girl with her hand reaching out to touch his shoulder. The little girl portrays, in her eyes and presence, a sympathy mixed with gratitude. She was added to remind people of why the sacrifice was made. “Allegedly, the addition of the little girl was requested by Fuss himself to narrate the connection between the US and Iraq. Moreover, Fuss claims that the sculpture is “about freedom for this country, but it’s also about the children who will grow up in a free society.”<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the evident hierarchy in the composition of scale and status between the soldier and the little girl emphasizes the binary opposition of West and East in the perceived relationship of dependency advocated through the parental image of the soldier and as supported by the rhetoric of Fuss.

## IDEOLOGY AND REPRESENTATION

Aside from the ideological concerns associated with this policy of erasure, its encouraged accompanying style of portrayal is equally troubling. Turning to representational means of expression, particularly symbolic and Surrealistic, is a tradition connected with hardship and political repression. It was thus an expected representational style favored by many young Iraqi artists who lacked decent opportunities for art education in view of Iraq’s history of continuous wars in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is not only true in regards to a large number of young contemporary Iraqi artists, including members of al-Najeen and Mr. al-Azzawy, but is also the case for students of Baghdad University’s College of Fine Arts.

It should be noted, and in response to various criticism, that the choice of a representational style is not subject specific or limited to romantic and optimistic images of denial devoid of Iraqi daily struggle. I would like to stress here that it is in fact a further tragedy, and a consequence of the same policy of erasure, to reduce discussion of contemporary Iraqi art to a discussion of positive or negative portrayals in relation to content. Nevertheless, it is also the style of choice to express anger and despair in reaction to the US-led invasion. The *Abu Gulag Freedom Park* exhibition of June 25, 2004, organized by Qassim al-Sabti, the owner of the most influential and only semi-active gallery in Baghdad today, *al-Hewar* Gallery, focused on the humiliation of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Gharib prison.<sup>30</sup> Among the exhibited sculpture was an appropriated image of the Statue of Liberty with chained hands in place of her head, restrained feet, and a robe set on fire by the torch of freedom.

Two years after the invasion, reports from Iraq convey the end of its local art market where neither state nor private patronage exist. The only accessible market today is one that conforms to virtual reality, where many Iraqi artists took advantage of the global market provided by the internet. As is expected after two years of occupation, the art scene seems to have been reconfigured by artists to function as a tool of defiance whose subject matter is politicized. This is true in regards to most of today's Iraqi art production. New art organizations are forming and dissolving constantly, with aspirations for recovery, continuity and improvement of Iraqi art. Certainly political events have affected style and subject matter. A representational style relating to Iraq's progressive modern art movement is reflective of a visual and intellectual poverty.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, there still is a vital trend of Iraqi contemporary visual discourse which presents various experiments that belong to a wider global postmodern age and offers interesting dialogues with issues of globalization and cross cultural influences, particularly in light of the last thirteen years of seclusion and sanctions against Iraq.

Changes in content and style in the work of Iraqi artists before and after the fall of the Baath regime, however, reflect more than an aesthetic progression or choice. In their artistic evolution they reflect imposed changes in Iraq's dominant discourses in history, politics, and its social fabric. The future of Iraqi art is invariably linked to the future of Iraq as a nation and to its various cultural identities. Moreover, the conditions and ramifications surrounding Iraq's modern art heritage and contemporary production are akin to that of antiquities in terms of erasure and destruction. Therefore, UN Resolutions mandating the protection of cultural heritage and property and covering all cultural aspects should not only be relevant to the protection of ancient archeological sites in Iraq but must be heeded to protect all modern and contemporary public artifacts as well.

## ENDNOTES

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1. Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
  2. Jean Baudrillard, Sheila Glaser (Translator), *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994).
  3. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).
  4. While many argue that the notion of "Iraq" art is not applicable to Iraq's visual production particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, various examples by numerous Iraqi artists attest to an art historical continuity charged by creativity and innovation. As such, the notion of an Iraqi art, uniquely and distinctly Iraqi, could be supported even today.
  5. Baudrillard, "Beyond the Vanishing Point of Art," trans. Paul Foss, in Paul Taylor, ed., *Post-Pop Art* (Cambridge: MIT, 1987, 1989).
  6. As reported to the author by all interviewed Iraqi artists. I would like to stress that I did not encounter any evidence to the contrary. No doubt that there are always exceptional cases but this seems to be agreed upon by Iraqi artists I interviewed inside of Iraq in June 2003, as well as in diaspora.
  7. Social Realism in the visual arts is the equivalent of classicism in architecture in terms of its familiarity to the masses because of its style of representational Realism. It was thus the style of Soviet art, Chinese revolutionary art, Nazi art and a number of "third world" governments. Its representational realism presented itself to didactic purposes and allowed propagandistic exploitation.
  8. The plans for the monument were first announced in a speech by the president on 22 April 1985, and was officially opened on 8 August 1989. The design was finalized by the eminent Iraqi sculptor Khalid al-Rahal first, and after his death, by another eminent Iraqi sculptor Mohammed Ghani, under Saddam Hussein's close supervision.
  9. For details see Jennie Matthew, "Baghdad's Liberation Monument being restored," *Middle East OnLine*, 01/23/2004, <<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/iraq/?id=8619=8619&format=0>>.
  10. See Samir al-Khalil [pseud.], *The Monument: Art, Vulgarity and Responsibility in Iraq* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1991).
  11. Works within this trend vary from copies of known Orientalists' works to painting snapshots of American soldiers, as well as a thriving forgery market. A commercial art market is centered around a strip of galleries in the Karradah district in Baghdad, and caters mainly to the foreign visitors community of Iraq. The decade of sanctions cliential of United Nations personal are replaced today by American soldiers. This market caters also to a growing art market in the Arab Gulf region, which favors local versions of Orientalist themes.

12. See Baudrillard, Charles Levin (translator), *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis: Teleos, 1980).

13. Al Sharq Al Awsat, "Baghdad Worried about an Afghani Taliban Movement that Removes Memorials and Statues There," *Al-Mendhar*, 11/1/2005, <<http://www.almendhar.com>>.

14. Larry Kaplow, "Iraqis clash over history in Baghdad's art," *Cox News Service*, 10/30/2005, 11/29/2005, <http://www.azstarnet.com/sn/attack/100176>.

15. Ibid.

16. See Sinan Antoon, "Monumental Disrespect," in Middle East Report 228, Fall 2003, for an account detailing the condition of the *Martyr's Monument* in Baghdad in July 2003.

17. The group's first production was a panoramic play, *They Passed Through Here (Maru min Huna)*, presented in al-Rasheed Theater on May 4, 2003.

18. *Liberal Education* newspaper, issue #3, June 2003. The group also hosted a cultural week in the city of Sulaymaniya in northern Iraq. Their ambitious future plans included finishing the statue, publishing an art and cultural magazine under the same name, producing a movie, and organizing an art exhibit.

19. Photo Ap, *Taipei Times.com*, 6/2/2003, 7/15/2003, <<http://www.taipetimes.com/News/photo/2003/06/02>>.

20. *Art Vitae.com*, 9/2/2004, <[http://www.artvitae.com/artist\\_portfolio.asp?aist\\_id=217](http://www.artvitae.com/artist_portfolio.asp?aist_id=217)>.

21. Essam al-Azzawy, *Tears of Wax*, unpublished statement.

22. Al-Azzawy claims to be the son of Najah Nuri al-Said, who passed away in 1997.

23. Al-Azzawy asserts that the occupation of Iraq pains him, although he does not see it any different than the rule of Saddam. He explains his relationship with American soldiers as that of human relationships with individuals who have no power other than following orders. As for his work with them as a translator, he sees that as a chance to help facilitate the communication between members of the occupying powers and Iraqis for the benefit of Iraqis. As accustomed to years of mere survival under harsh personal and economic circumstances, he also found in this inevitable situation new means for survival for his and his family. Essam al-Azzawy, Telephone interview by author, Aug. 11, 2005.

24. See Scott Peterson, "An Iraqi whose art spans worlds," *Christian Science Monitor*, 8/29/2003, 5/6/2004, <<http://csmonitor.com/2003/0829/p06s01-woiq.htm>>..

25. Essam al-Azzawy, Telephone interview by author, Aug. 11, 2005.

26. David Emery, "Statue by Iraqi Artist 'Kalat' Pays Tribute to U.S. Soldiers," *Urban Legends and Folklore*, 2/2004, 3/4/2004, <[http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/bl\\_kalat\\_statue.htm](http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/bl_kalat_statue.htm)>.

27. As quoted in *Break the Chain.org*, 7/2/2004, 7/5/2004, <<http://www.breakthechain.org/exclusives/kalat.html>>.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Sammy Ketz, "Iraqi artists show ugly wounds of US occupation," *Middle East onLine*, 06/07/2004, 06/20/2004, <<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/culture/?id=10196>>.

31. The discussion of abstract vs. representational styles recalls the debate that surrounded the commission of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. While a figurative sculpture by Frederick Hart was the compromise that facilitated the erection of Maya Lin's minimalist design, the popularity of it as a monument demonstrates the success of its ideology.