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A Visit To Lebanese Artist Tagreed Darghouth's Mar Mikhael Studio In Beirut

## ARTISTS

# *A Visit To Lebanese Artist Tagreed Darghouth's Mar Mikhael Studio In Beirut*

BY Maie El-Hage / May 21, 2019

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*Lebanese artist Tagreed Darghouth explores social and political themes in her artwork. Maie El-Hage visits the artist in her studio in Mar Mikhael, Beirut*

In a tranquil Mar Mikhael apartment, finished with Neo-classical white cornice details and a terrazzo floor, **Lebanese artist** Tagreed Darghouth has claimed what was once a residential space and transformed it into her studio. On a quiet Monday morning, light floods in through the floor-to-ceiling windows, illuminating the space in which the artist works. Canvases of 150x200cm and smaller pieces of 50x60cm rest against the walls, which are dappled in drips of acrylic paint, the artist's chief medium. The visible gesturalism of her paintings seems to spread even across the floor, lined with layers of nylon and Kraft paper. The main impression of the **studio** space is that this is a place of movement, colour and action.

"I work everyday, I come everyday to the atelier," says Tagreed. Work is a continuous, uninterrupted process from morning to late afternoon. Darghouth may work and re-work a canvas, put it aside, and return to it after addressing another piece. The process is more cyclical than linear, and there are many stages before arriving at a finished piece. "A tree may have another tree below it, and a third tree below that. I benefit from the layering because I am also creating a background." There is layering, there is deletion, and there is also the element of surprise. "I don't have a premeditated idea, sometimes I get surprised by the end-result. When that happens, I would be very happy."





*Artist Tagreed Darghouth. Courtesy of Tabari Artspace*

In the artist's own words, a viewer's first encounter with the artwork is visual. Beneath the vigorous brushstrokes, brightened by an array of unnatural colours, there is always one, recognisable element. In *Strange Fruit* and *The Tree Within* series, that element is the olive and the olive tree. There are also skulls, meat, meat mincers and caterpillar excavators. The element is always centred and enlarged in

size, or “magnified”, becoming iconic. A viewer may recognise the element, and indeed the variations on a theme that the artist has created for the Tabari Artspace show in Dubai. The following step would be to question the message behind the work, and that is where the artist unveils her political and social messages.

The Olive Tree, in its full glory, or sadly viewed as a tree stump, refers to the Palestinian olive tree, and their said destruction or confiscation, the tallying of which is even archived by local organisations. The subject, then, is aggression whether actual or metaphorical. The meat mincer is a machine that becomes an allegory for aggression, while the Caterpillar Excavator is more literal in that reference. Darghouth is concerned that when aggression happens, or happens often, and no one discusses it, it becomes normalised. In her opinion, “we are not supposed to get used” to acts of aggression. She aims to “spotlight” these events that are seldom discussed, feeling a responsibility to share it through her ability to paint and tell stories.

Darghouth also points to a multitude of cultural references through her painting. For example, the title Strange Fruit is borrowed from Billie Holiday’s song by the same name, which also addresses aggression and persecution.





*Views of Tagreed Darghouth's studio in Mar Mikhael. Courtesy of Tabari Artspace*

Darghouth has had an intense and vibrant career. Having graduated from the Lebanese University in Beirut in 2000 where she studied fine arts, she encountered the supervision of Syrian artist Marwan Kassab Bashi during the Ayloul Summer Academy of 2000 and 2001, which was organised by Darat Al Funun in Jordan. Darghouth cites Kassab Bashi as the most influential person in her career, finding inspiration in his teaching methods and thought processes. Darghouth has exhibited in solo shows and group exhibitions locally and abroad since.

The show at Tabari Artspace will be the second and final edition for Darghouth's theme on aggression and violence, drawing from works such as Strange Fruit and The Tree Within series. Darghouth is set to present works embodying all the techniques that she work with over the course of her career, including gesturalism, layering, and a monochromatic choice of colours.

Darghouth describes her work as leaning more towards **German Expressionism**, insisting on expressing “her” colours, and using visible, vigorous brushstrokes, rather than adhering to the “realism” of the element she is depicting. She also admits an affinity for the Abstract Expressionism of Willem De Kooning, the Dutch-American artist mostly active in the 1950s. The colour and figurative abstraction of De Kooning’s artwork inspires the artist, who readily states her ambition: “If I can push the figurative to be rich in abstraction as De Kooning’s work, it would be for me a good step forward for my work.” Regardless of the future direction of the Darghouth’s painting, it is apparent that, with this show, she has arrived at a pinnacle in her artistic expression—one that celebrates her as one of the foremost Arab abstract expressionists working today.

*Tagreed Darghouth: Strange Fruit launched at Tabari Artspace 18 March until 1 May 2019*

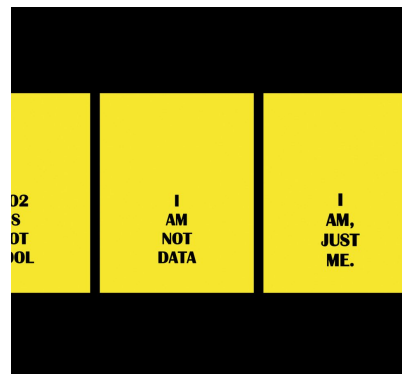
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