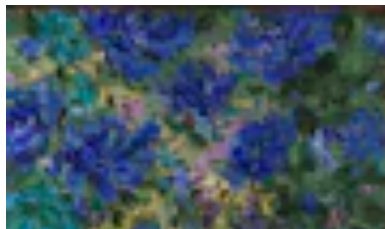
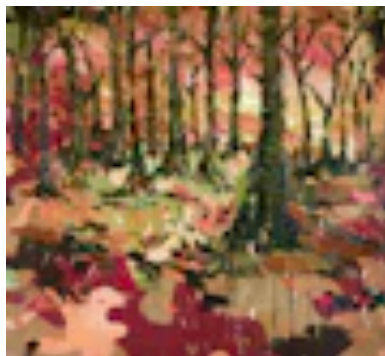


An Interview with Tagreed Darghouth



Tagreed Darghouth, From the Series Gardens and Jungles 1. 2023. Acrylic on printed fabric. 168 x 183 cm. Image from Tabari Artspace

Tagreed Darghouth's expressionist paintings engage with important contemporary issues of politics, technology, and the body, as well as with an approach to painting that draws on artists such as Georg Baselitz, Markus Lupertz, and Marwan Kassab Bachi. This is part of an interview from February 2024 where we discussed Tagreed's painting technique and her exhibition *Gardens and Jungles* held at Tabari Artspace, Dubai, in September 2023.

Martin Nixon: One of the things that interests me is why you were attracted to painting when a lot of artists in the last twenty years have been doing more sculptural, installation type work.

Tagreed Darghouth: I've always loved painting and this is what I studied at the Lebanese University of Fine Arts. After graduation, I briefly studied art installation at the ENSAD, Paris, but I discovered that this wasn't really my passion. For me, painting was and still is way more challenging, and the feeling of content that sparks after achieving a 'good' painting is incomparable.

MN: How did your painting change when you met Marwan?

TD. Marwan chose artists that were fresh graduates. I developed a technique throughout the years, taking into consideration his remarks after the intensive workshops. He didn't actually guide us towards a certain technique, especially not his. He stressed the idea that there should be a subject, a gesture, and lots of passion. I guess my technique was eventually influenced by him and the German school because of his attitude. I started to enjoy German Expressionism more and more, and it somehow touched me. The fact that there is a gesture puts me physically and mentally in a highly engaged mode with the painting, and this is how things continued.

MN. Yes, one of the things that jumped out at me when I first saw your work was the connection to German Expressionism. Which of those

painters are you most interested in?

TD. I'm in love with Georg Baselitz's paintings, especially the *Heroes* series. I always revisit his works when I want a feast for my eyes. I'm extremely fond of his colour palette. He catches me in both the way he thinks and the way he paints. Besides him, I also enjoy the work of Markus Lupertz, the palette of De Kooning, Joan Mitchell, and Soutine. Soutine, by the way, was a favourite artist of Marwan.

MN: My interpretation of Marwan is that his work is quite poetic and introspective. With your work there's much more of an engagement with social issues and the world around you, it doesn't seem introspective.

TD: Being raised in a hot spot, living my childhood in Saida, moving from the age of 17 to Beirut, and being around people who are very much into politics affected my themes a lot. I think the introspective element lies in how I build the painting and not in the final figure. It becomes a personal painting, not because of the themes I pick, but rather through the process it goes through. I keep defying, challenging, and continually trying to overcome what I already learned and know. I directly ruin an 'okay' painting in the pursuit of another one that might surprise me. Plus, I think we have to share the language that we own with others, and there must be something that the viewer should be highly interested in because it's a conversation at the end of the day. I try to choose themes that would resonate with viewers and would shed light on certain things that interest me a lot.

MN. Let's talk about these new paintings (figs. 1 and 2). Can you say how you moved to these?

TD: This is from my recent exhibition at Tabari Artspace. The theme is driven from Stephen Graham's book *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*. The title of the show was chosen later after the remark of the EU representative for foreign affairs, Mr. Josep Borrell, who unwittingly

described Europe as the garden that should be protected from the "jungle", aka the rest of the world. The landscape (fig 1) is executed on top of a military patterned fabric. The *Gardens and Jungles* exhibition is an aesthetic attempt to defy a new world order that is taking place. The military camouflage pattern, used as a background in the artwork, stands as a metaphor for this militarisation of our societies. The simple objects painted over the camo pattern: landscapes, flowers, trees, and birds, are for me objects of defiance. The concept behind the work was simple: deconstruct the pattern and reconstruct it back to its original form - nature.

MN: Is this idea of using a canvas with a pattern already printed on it and painting over it something new?

TD: Yes, I don't usually do it. I used it once when I worked on the domestic helpers' theme back in 2010, in one of my Beirut shows. I painted the portraits of the desperate runaway helpers, picked from local newspapers, over the bright fabric that is usually used for their outfit.

MN: In this painting (fig.2) the colour palette is quite different from other paintings of yours that I've seen.

TD: Yes. This painting belongs to a previous theme that tackled the Beirut port explosion. A few months after the explosion, which severely affected both my studio and my apartment, my father passed away. I felt that I lost everything. Back in Saida, where I grew up, we had a huge garden. My father made it a real jungle of plants, trees, and pets. It was a happy place for us despite the never-ending civil war. The flower paintings connected me with my father again. They were a tribute to him, and therapy for me.

[1] For a further discussion of Tagreed Darghouth's connection to Marwan and German Expressionism, see Martin Nixon, *Expressionism and Engagement. Tagreed Darghouth, Ayman Baalbaki, and the Legacy of Marwan Kassab Bachi*, Dubai Collection website:

<https://dubaicollection.ae/en/story/expressionism-and-engagement-tagreed-darghouth-ayman-baalbaki-and-the-legacy-of-m>

[2]See for example Jorge Liboreiro, "Josep Borrell apologises for controversial 'garden vs jungle' metaphor but defends speech" *Euronews*, 19 October 2022.

<https://dubaicollection.ae/en/story/expressionism-and-engagement-tagreed-darghouth-ayman-baalbaki-and-the-legacy-of-m>