



Dots signs and lights

Most of Bahrain knows Himat's work: he designed the metal and light mural that adorns the terrace of Al Riwaq gallery and sheds a diffuse red light on it at night time. This Iraqi artist has exhibited several times in Bahrain, and was back at AlRiwaq in November for an exhibition "or Shaker Hassan Al Said; a tribute to a late Iraqi artist whom one could consider as Himat's master. Himat was raised in Kurdistan, and from an early age was exposed to arts. His brother was studying fine arts. And Himat was surrounded by many books, including art books, poetry, literature . if he first attempted writing poetry, he quickly realized that he had more affinity for painting. It is in his adolescence, when he was 15 or 17, that he became serious about it, and took contact with Shaker, already a renowned artist who was writing an arts column in a daily newspaper. "I was surprised by his reaction to my work. He encouraged me, wanting to see how my work progressed." But the relationship between Himat and Shaker went beyond that. Shaker introduced Himat to Sufi poetry, to the Al Wfaq group but also to the works of western artists like Tapiès, whom he truly admired, as well as Miro and Mathieu. " He was talking of the " here", the temporal, and of the "elsewhere", the spiritual.

Learning of Shaker's death truly saddened Himat. For 25 years, if not in the daily reality, at least in a spiritual sense, Shaker had been his master. Despite 15 years of exile, Himat kept in contact with him and their telephone conversations guided Himat through his research and his work. " I had stayed 15 years without seeing him. During our last telephone conversations , I had understood he had already left us, he had reached the spiritual. I did not know how to react to his death. I started drawing in a sketch book. But I didn't seem sufficient. I was looking at his paintings. I pulled out the work from the sketch books, and started to destroy every thing. Then I started to e it back together. Then I wrote the letter (published in the catalogue), for him of course, but also for me. " Finally, inspired by a particular piece of Shaker, Himat created a series of works, each f which uses and develops from an element from that specific work of Shaker.

The exhibition also included other Himat's pieces, where light is always at the center of the creation. Cut out and painted materials let the light through and the painting becomes visible on both sides of the surface. Dots and signs inscribe a language turned towards infinity, the beginning and the end. As infinite as light. " Light exists everywhere, although it is sometimes invisible. How one can paint it is the real question. Images become blurred when seen from too close. While one can understand light better when nearer. And writing is only a set of adot. Hallaj already talked about this a thousand yeas ago. " Himat's approach to work realy represents a structured research to a particular objective. " I prepare my own surfaces and my won colors; I want them to be different from other colors and other surfaces. I think of the light in my head, and then I wrk at recreating it with the paint".

If the Al Riwaq mural is representative of Himat's conceptual work and research on light, the choice of the materials, metal and electric light, is unusual in his approach. " I was invited to the Assila festival in Morocco, to do a fresco alongside other painter. However, I really felt that my work was not homogeneous with theirs,

and I went in search of my own wall. In a small street of the village, I found a magnificent wall, really perfect for me. As I stayed longer in Assila, I saw magnificent walls, windows, doors So I started painting everywhere. I painted about 10 windows and doors! Then I came to Bahrain and Bayan at Al Riwaq Gallery wanted something different for the terrace. I saw the works in progress, the use of metal, and the idea of this external wall came about. The architect accepted the extension of his design to the outside, and it became really interesting to mix the different materials, especially at night. "

Himat has been living 15 years in exile, and is now based in Paris. Are the exile and the war impacting his work? " For me there was a war problem before the war. It all started from school, with the problems between the Kurds and the Arabs. In turn we were studying in Kurdish and Arabic. Every one was impacted. While the town where I lived was very mixed. Political problems got in between people, and love transformed into hatred.

When the war broke out in 2001, I was in Japan for an exhibition, and stayed on for six months. Then went to Jordan and finally in Paris, where I live to this day. I am an abstract painter. War does not directly impact my work. But there is sadness. I want to move away from the war, I want to do some that relates to life.

" Paris has really become my home. I have spent 15 years there, I have all my stuff , all my friends there. A magnificent book " Himat" has been published by Bernard Noël, who prefaces it alongside Michel Butor. It includes pictures of Himat's painting, frescos and also his " art books", amazing art pieces that incorporate and illuminate poetry by his friends Andre Velter, Adnois, Bernard Noel and Gotaro Tszumi.

By helene poirier

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Himat

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