

The Selims in their studio in Baghdad

JEWAD and LORNA SELIM

THE visual arts have burst on Iraq in a deluge of talent. For centuries without any new artistic movements, Iraq today is the scene of one of those sudden flowerings of painting and sculpture that sometimes spring up without any warning.

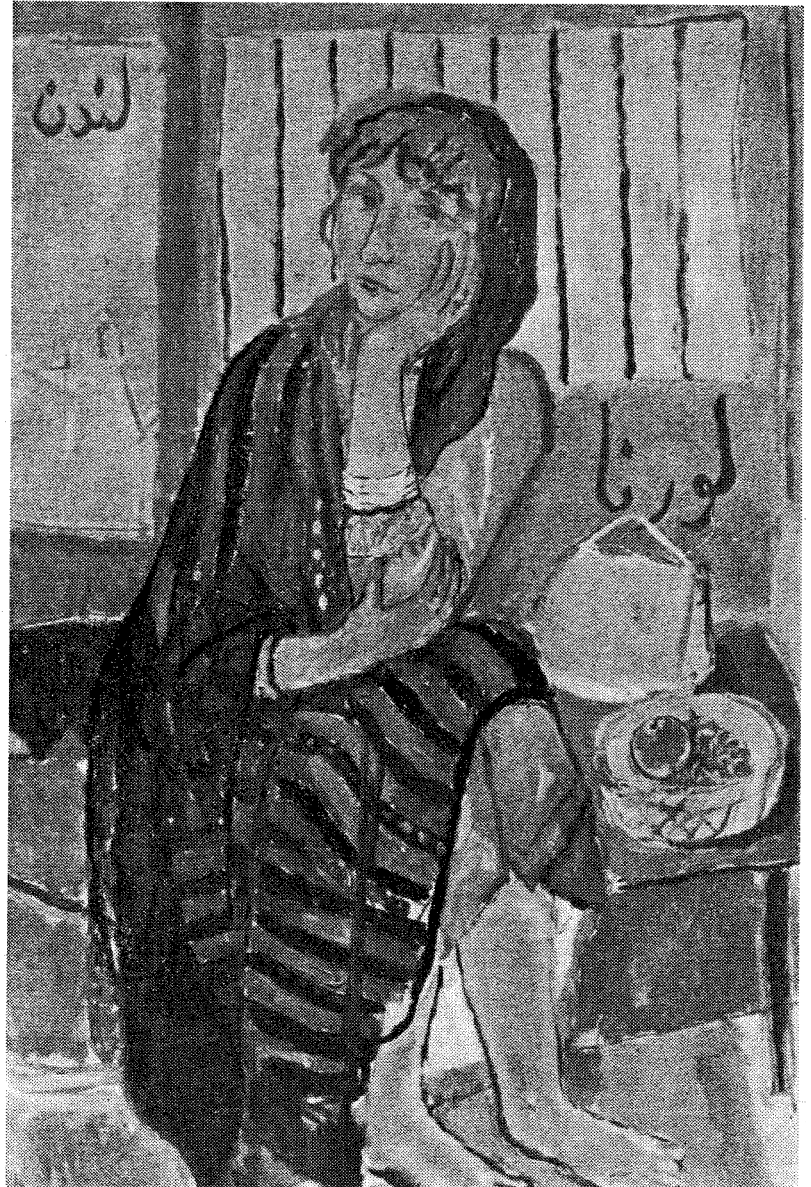
At the forefront of this movement—still far too diversified to be styled a “school”—stands the talented Selim family: Jewad, his wife Lorna, sister Nazihah and brothers Nizar and Suad. The two women, Lorna and Nazihah are painters; Nizar and Suad are cartoonists. Jewad works in all media: paint, stone, metal, wood and more-recently ceramics.

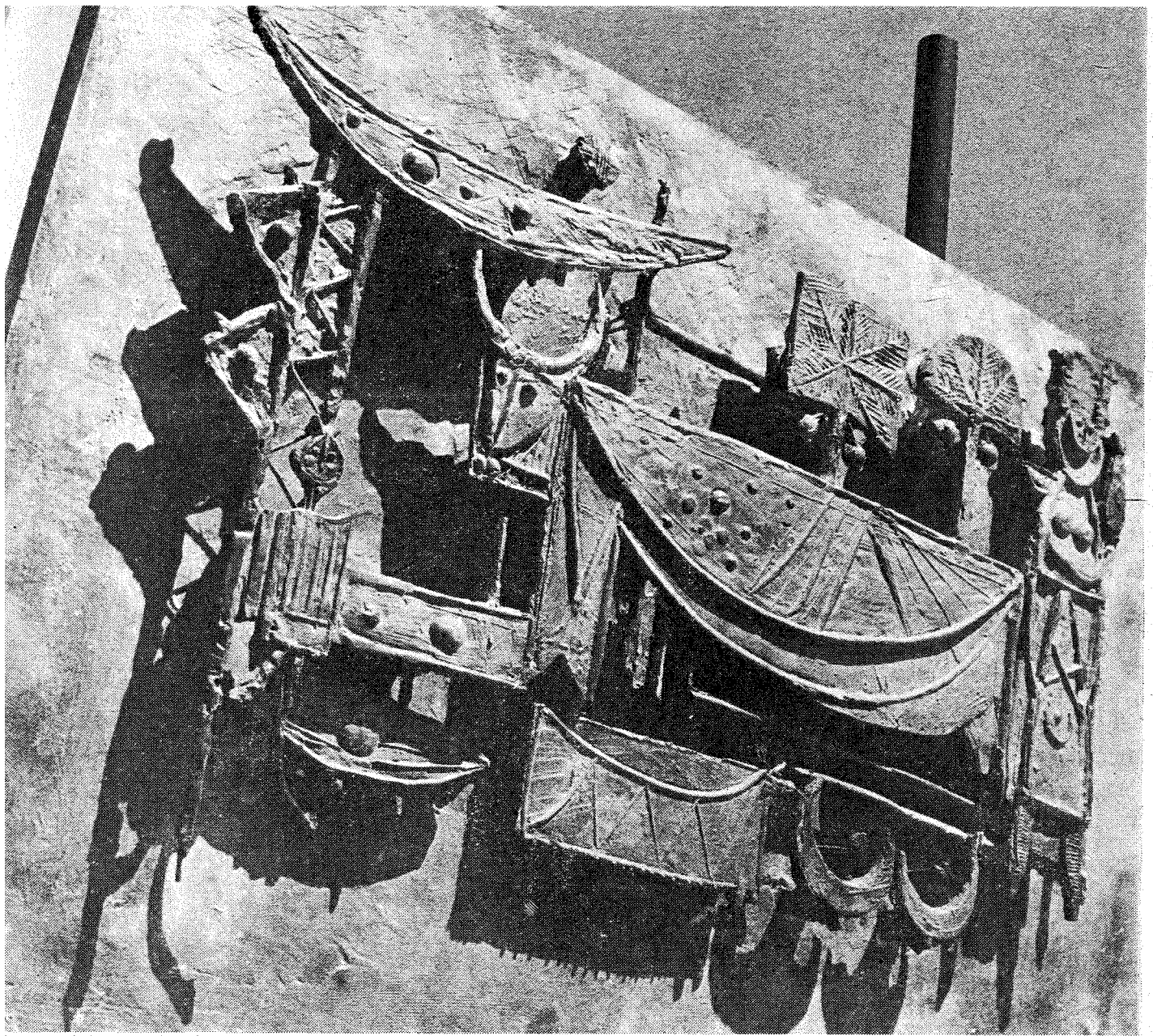
Each one is quite different, not only in media but in style as well. Yet despite their differences, the work of the Selims has much in common. All of it marries European training with Oriental themes and traditions. Even Lorna, born in England, paints as a contemporary Iraqi, calling on ancient and medieval styles to represent life in today's Iraq, a country in transition.

Her husband commented on Lorna's painting, “She came to Iraq with a good eye and sense of proportion and she loved what she saw here. You have to love to do good work.”

An Iraqi critic added, “Lorna came to our country and found beauty where none of the rest of us had noticed it before. Other artists began to study the rich artistic tradition which had been under their

“Lorna”, Jewad Selim, 1948, oil, 23” × 30”





"Pastoral", Jewad Selim, relief in plaster, 48" x 35", (from the collection of Dr Muhammed Makkiya)

ses all along. She has had a profound influence."

Jewad Selim is an artist who has thought deeply about his work. "You've got to know where you come from to know where you are going," he says. Working at the Baghdad archaeological museum in 1940, he delved into the deep artistic heritage of his country. He has said, "The lines, forms and softly muted colors I use were favored by artists as long ago as 2000 B.C. when the ancient cities of Babylon and the even older Sumer in the Euphrates Valley were the centers of art, learning and fabulous beauty."

Sculpture has an even greater importance for Jewad than painting. He is an award-winner in the 1954 world-

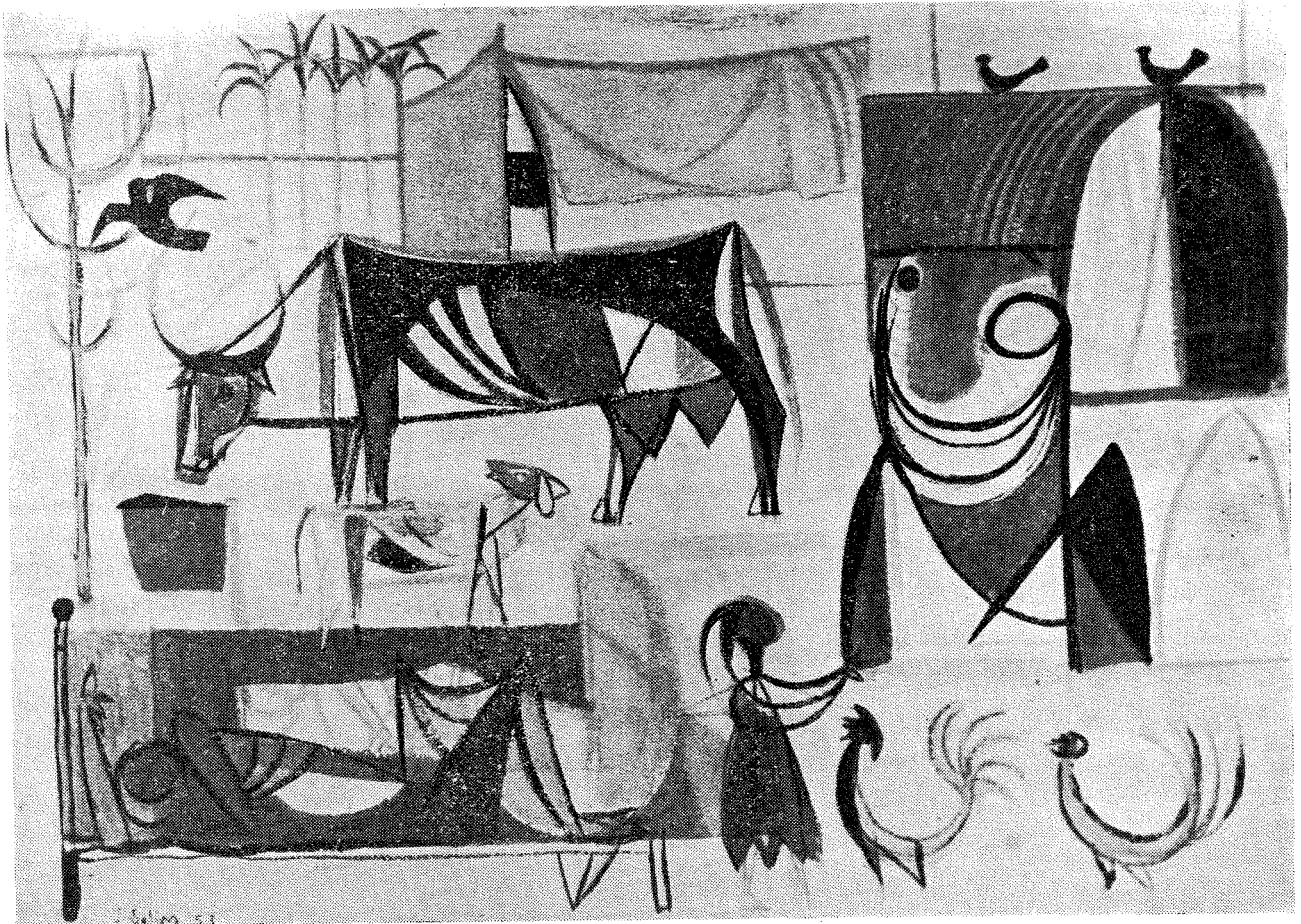
wide sculpture competition for the "Unknown Political Prisoner," Jewad is founder and director of the sculpture department of the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad.

In his sculpture as in his painting Jewad harks back to Islamic and ancient Iraqi traditions. But his devotion to the past is not slavish. He has little respect for the Iranian miniature painters who are working today in the same precise tradition of the seventeenth century.

Asked if he owed more to contemporary art or to his Iraqi traditions, Jewad replied, "To the moderns. I am an Iraqi but I am also a man of the twentieth century. I could wear an *abbayah* but it wouldn't make me an Abbassid, would it?"

The home of Lorna and Jewad Selim houses painting and sculpture from many times and places. There are African masks, a renaissance Italian painting by an unknown artist, many Selim originals and in one corner hangs a rather staid oil of a man in the red tarboush and uniform of an Ottoman officer. This painting is a self-portrait by Mohammad Selim, Jewad's father and the first of the artistic Selims. To the right hangs a crayon sketch of birds in flight, the contribution of Zainab, the five-year old daughter of Lorna and Jewad.

"She appears to have some talent," Jewad said proudly. And well she should. For Zainab begins the third generation of this talented Iraqi family. *(continued overleaf)*



"Serriffa Dwellers", Jewad Selim, 1953, tempera, 40" x 22"

Mosaic mural, Jewad Selim, 1956, 5m x 3.5m., the motif being an Arab kitchen, (from the house of Farouk, Fatah)

