

Shared Pain, Shared Imagery

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Palestinian artist Sliman Mansour's iconic painting *Camel of Heavy Burdens* finds new life in two sculptural interpretations by Iraqi artist Ahmed Albahrani. Albahrani's daughter Rim explores the two artists' shared experiences for *Selections*

Grief is what they have carried for years, over their weak shoulders that hauled the pain of their ancestors. They no longer have the urge to stand up for their heritage. Their vision of light is no longer a perception of hope, but now bears the loss of belief and the memories of a place which once could be called home. An uncertain future is no news for many people in the Middle East. The idea of belonging has been diminishing since the beginning of the Arab liberation movements. The subject of war and its outcome has been explored for many years through art and media, yet each audience is left to overcome their own individual limitations when it comes to understanding what it means to have your own identity abolished. One great artist who has conveyed the struggle of losing his homeland is Palestinian artist Sliman Mansour. Through his art, he strives to reclaim the extensive heritage of his country. Mansour's 1973 painting *Camel of Heavy Burdens* transferred the Palestinian issue into a struggle that many other Middle Eastern nations are familiar with. The painting was gifted to Libya, where it was destroyed during American air strikes in 1986.



Mansour is one of millions displaced by conflicts in the Middle East, often the result of misguided Western interference. Born in Birzeit, he spent the majority of his life in the Occupied Territories of Palestine. He captures the destruction of a country through materials from his homeland, paintings with mediums such as henna and mud. In *Camel of Heavy Burdens* he portrays the heritage of Palestine through an image of a traditional old Arab porter carrying the heavy eye-shaped map of Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock.

The eye encapsulates what is most significant in a person's life, and through its painstaking detail the painting creates a window to look through for hope. Mansour distilled a nation's emotions and created a symbol for the Palestinians, a conceptualisation of their burden.

In a second edition of the painting, Mansour created a larger work that left his

audience awe-struck. Only by combining painting with another form of art could he create a louder statement, and to this end Mansour has partnered with artist Ahmed Albahrani.

Albahrani, who was born and raised in Iraq, is similarly conversant with the pain of losing a country. He has created two bronze sculptures of Mansour's influential painting. Together, both artists represent two countries with fascinating histories, heritage and values, which they carry and display through their art.

In recent years, Albahrani has been focusing on representing his fatherland through metal sculptures that reflect his memories, growth and desire for Iraq to return to its potency. His sculptures based on Camel of Heavy Burdens intensify the viewer's imagination, as Mansour's imagery steps out of the canvas and become a three-dimensional reality. The first sculpture is two dimensional, measuring 180cm high and designed to be placed against a white wall, manipulating the ordinary definition of a painting with its bronze medium. The details of the city of Jerusalem become more extensive in Albahrani's smaller piece, measuring 80cm tall. Unlike the painting, when walking through the three-dimensional sculpture we see the artist's work creating the features of a traditional barrier.

What both of these artists have in common is their love for their countries. Mansour paints Occupied Palestine through traditional symbols that evoke the burden of losing a homeland. Similarly, Albahrani uses bronze as a medium to represent Iraq's lasting determination to once again become a united country with a shared history and rich opportunities. Their art work together produces a narrative of memories, a path to hope that pays tribute to the painful truth of the 21st century struggle – a struggle that many nations in the world long to end.

by Rim Albahrani

by [Selections Magazine](#)

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