



T.C.
ÇANKIRI KARATEKİN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

**A TALENTED REPRESENTATIVE OF MODERN
IRAQI PAINTING: MUZAHM AL-NASIRI**

Sarr Khalid NAYYEF

MASTER'S THESIS

Supervisor
Prof. Dr. Ersoy YILMAZ

Çankırı – 2023

T.C.
ÇANKIRI KARATEKİN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

**A TALENTED REPRESENTATIVE OF MODERN
IRAQI PAINTING: MUZAHM AL-NASIRI**

Sarr Khalid Nayyef
ORCID: 0000-0002-8932-1913

MASTER'S THESIS

Supervisor
Prof. Dr. Ersoy YILMAZ
Second Supervisor
Prof. Dr. Hamid IMHEDEE

Program: Art and Design-English

Çankırı – 2023

CONTENTS

CONTENTS.....	i
SCIENTIFIC ETHICS STATEMENT	iii
TEZ KABUL VE ONAY	iv
FOREWORD	v
ABSTRACT	vi
ÖZET.....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. RESEARCH TOPIC AND CONTEXT	1
1.2. FOCUS AND SCOPE OF THE THESIS	2
1.3. RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH	3
1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS	5
1.5. METHODOLOGY	6
1.5.1. Data Collection.....	7
1.5.2. Data Analysis	7
1.5.3. Ethical Considerations	8
1.6. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
2. OVERVIEW OF IRAQI ART HISTORY.....	12
2.1. ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN ART	12
2.2. ISLAMIC ART	12
2.3. INFLUENCE OF PERSIAN AND ARAB TRADITIONS	13
2.4. MODERN IRAQI ART MOVEMENT.....	14
2.5. INFLUENCE OF WARS AND CONFLICTS	15
2.6. CONTEMPORARY ART SCENE	18
3. MAJOR PERIODS OF MODERN IRAQI ART	21
3.1 EARLY 20TH CENTURY	21
3.2. THE BAGHDAD GROUP FOR MODERN ART (1951-1958)	24
3.3. THE 1960S AND 1970S.....	28
3.4. THE 1980S AND 1990S.....	31

3.5. CONTEMPORARY IRAQI ART.....	32
4. MUZAHM AL-NASIRI AND HIS ART	38
4.1. EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION.....	38
4.2. ARTISTIC EVOLUTION AND THE CAREER OF MUZAHM AL-NASIRI	39
4.3. STYLISTIC OVERVIEW OF HIS PAINTINGS	42
4.4. THEMES AND MOTIFS IN MUZAHM AL-NASIRI'S ARTWORKS	45
5. SAMPLE ARTWORKS	48
5.1. WOMEN	48
5.2. EVERYDAY LIFE	58
5.3. IMAGINATIVE REPRESENTATIONS AND ABSTRACT WORKS.....	67
5.4. HORSES	76
6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	81
6.1. CONCLUSIONS.....	81
6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS	83
RERERENCES	85
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	90

SCIENTIFIC ETHICS STATEMENT

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented following academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work. In addition, I declare that there is no personal data in the thesis belonging to anyone except for the ones used with written consent; that I give my consent for my data, which features in the printed or electronic copy of the thesis that I submitted, to be included in the thesis; and that any material in written, visual, audio or other formats, the copyright of which belongs to someone else, is used in the thesis only within the framework of ethical principles and/or by obtaining the necessary permissions.

19/ 05/2023

Signature

Sarr Khalid Nayyef

TEZ KABUL VE ONAY

ÇANKIRI KARATEKİN ÜNİVERSİTESİ GÜZEL SANATLAR ENSTİTÜSÜ

Sarr Khalid Nayyef, tarafından hazırlanan *A Talented Representative of Modern Iraqi Painting: Muhazem Al-Nasiri* başlıklı bu çalışma, 19.06.2023 tarihinde yapılan Tez Savunma Sınavı sonucunda oybirliğiyle başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından Sanat ve Tasarım Anabilim Dalı Sanat ve Tasarım-İngilizce Programında Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

TEZ JÜRİSİ ÜYELERİ

Danışman	: Prof. Dr. Ersoy YILMAZ	İmza:
Üye	: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Esra ERTUĞRUL TOMSUK	İmza:
Üye	: Prof. Serkan İLDEN	İmza:

ONAY

Bu tez, Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Enstitüsü Yönetim Kurulunun 15/06/2023 tarih ve 19/01 sayılı oturumunda belirlenen jüri tarafından kabul edilmiştir.

.....
Prof. Dr. Ersoy YILMAZ

FOREWORD

Praise be to God, the source of all goodness and the ultimate achiever of good deeds. Today, I present to you my research titled *A Talented Representative of Modern Iraqi Painting: Muhazem Al-Nasiri*. It is my sincere hope and aspiration that this research will be well received by all of you. I humbly pray to God for success in presenting and writing this research. This study encompasses comprehensive information related to the topic, addressing the key aspects one would expect to find in any specialized research. I assure you that I will carefully consider all your directives and comments regarding my work. I am immensely grateful for the attention and guidance provided by my supervising professor, Dr. Ersoy Yılmaz. His trust in me has been a great source of motivation and I deeply appreciate his guidance, knowledge, and patience in overseeing my progress. This support has encouraged me to exert greater effort in delivering the best possible work. I would also like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the leadership of the Institute of Fine Arts at Çankırı Karatekin University, represented by Professor Dr. Ersoy Yılmaz, for their assistance and support in academic and artistic matters. Furthermore, I express my gratitude to my family for their unwavering support throughout this endeavor. I am truly thankful for the love and encouragement they have provided. I would also like to express my gratitude to all those who have supported me and stood by my side, even if I have not mentioned them individually. Lastly, I would like to add my heartfelt thanks to my husband, my mother, and my father for their unwavering support and love.

19/ 05/2023

Sarr Khalid Nayyef

ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: A Talented Representative of Modern Iraqi Painting: Muhazem Al-Nasiri

Author: Sarr Khalid Nayyef

Supervisor : Prof. Dr. Ersoy Yılmaz

Thesis Type: Master's Thesis

Abstract:

This master's thesis examines the stylistic features and thematic characteristics of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings within the broader context of Iraqi art. Through a comprehensive analysis of his works, including a compilation of images sourced from web, books, and catalogs, this research explores the intricate interplay of style, form, and content in Al-Nasiri's artistic expressions. With a focus on the artist's preference for working on female figures, the analysis uncovers a distinct artistic style that merges traditional and modern elements, showcasing Al-Nasiri's exquisite brushwork, thoughtful composition, and skillful use of color. The thematic exploration in his paintings reveals a deep connection to Iraqi cultural heritage, intertwining historical narratives, sociopolitical commentary, and personal experiences. The incorporation of Islamic design vocabulary and cultural symbols enhances the artistic identity of Iraq within a global artistic landscape. Situating Al-Nasiri's works within the larger Iraqi art context, this research highlights the significance of his contributions in preserving cultural identity, responding to evolving artistic trends, and offering a nuanced portrayal of femininity and the role of women in Iraqi society. Key conclusions of this thesis include the recognition of Muzahem Al-Nasiri as a prominent figure in Iraqi art, with his paintings representing a captivating blend of tradition and innovation. The analysis reveals his meticulous attention to detail, capturing the beauty and grace of female figures while addressing broader societal and cultural themes. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Al-Nasiri's artistic achievements, emphasizing his role in the narrative of Iraqi art history. The research also underscores the importance of further exploration of other influential Iraqi artists and the preservation and documentation of Iraqi art to foster cultural exchange, promote artistic dialogue, and shape a vibrant and inclusive artistic ecosystem. By examining the unique stylistic features, thematic preoccupations, and cultural symbolism inherent in Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings, this thesis offers valuable insights into the artist's contributions and their significance within the broader Iraqi art landscape. The transformative power of his works is evident, reflecting a rich tapestry of Iraqi cultural heritage and reinforcing the artistic identity of Iraq in a global context.

Keywords: Modern Iraqi art, painting, Muzahem Al-Nasiri, style

ÖZET

Tezin Başlığı : Modern Irak Resminin Yetenekli Bir Temsilcisi: Muhazem Al-Nasiri

Tezin Yazarı : Sarr Khalid Nayyef

Danışman : Prof. Dr. Ersoy Yılmaz

Tezin Türü : Yüksek Lisans

Özet:

Bu yüksek lisans tezi, Muzahem Al-Nasiri'nin resimlerinin stil özelliklerini ve tematik özelliklerini daha geniş Irak sanatı bağlamında incelemektedir. Web, kitap ve kataloglardan alınan görüntülerin bir derlemesi de dahil olmak üzere eserlerinin kapsamlı bir analizi yoluyla bu araştırma, Al-Nasiri'nin sanatsal ifadelerindeki karmaşık stil, biçim ve içerik etkileşimini araştırıyor. Sanatçının kadın figürleri üzerinde çalışma tercihine odaklanan analiz, Al-Nasiri'nin zarif fırça işçiliğini, düşünceli kompozisyonunu ve ustaca renk kullanımını sergileyen, geleneksel ve modern unsurları birleştiren farklı bir sanatsal stili ortaya çıkarıyor. Resimlerindeki tematik keşif, Irak kültürel mirasıyla, iç içe geçmiş tarihsel anlatılarla, sosyopolitik yorumlarla ve kişisel deneyimlerle derin bir bağlantı olduğunu ortaya koyuyor. İslami tasarım sözlüğü ve kültürel sembollerin birleştirilmesi, Irak'ın sanatsal kimliğini küresel bir sanatsal manzara içinde geliştiriyor. Al-Nasiri'nin eserlerini daha geniş Irak sanatı bağlamına yerleştiren bu araştırma, onun kültürel kimliği korumaya, gelişen sanatsal eğilimlere yanıt vermeye ve Irak toplumunda kadınlık ve kadınların rolüne ilişkin nüanslı bir tasvir sunma konusundaki katkılarının önemini vurguluyor. Bu tezin temel sonuçları arasında Muzahem Al-Nasiri'nin, gelenek ve yeniliğin büyüleyici bir karışımını temsil eden resimleriyle Irak sanatında önde gelen bir figür olarak tanınması yer alıyor. Analiz, daha geniş toplumsal ve kültürel temaları ele alırken kadın figürlerinin güzelliğini ve zarafetini yakalayarak detaylara gösterdiği titiz dikkati ortaya koyuyor. Bulgular, Al-Nasiri'nin sanatsal başarılarının daha derinden anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunuyor ve onun Irak sanat tarihi anlatımındaki rolünü vurguluyor. Araştırma aynı zamanda, diğer etkili Iraklı sanatçıların daha fazla keşfedilmesinin ve kültürel alışverişi teşvik etmek, sanatsal diyalogu teşvik etmek ve canlı ve kapsayıcı bir sanatsal ekosistem oluşturmak için Irak sanatının korunması ve belgelenmesinin önemini vurguluyor. Bu tez, Muzahem Al-Nasiri'nin resimlerinde bulunan benzersiz üslup özelliklerini, tematik meşguliyetleri ve kültürel sembolizmi inceleyerek, sanatçının katkıları ve daha geniş Irak sanat manzarası içindeki önemi hakkında değerli bilgiler sunuyor. Irak kültürel mirasının zengin bir dokusunu yansıtan ve Irak'ın sanatsal kimliğini küresel bağlamda pekiştiren eserlerinin dönüştürücü gücü ortadadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Modern Irak sanatı, resim, Muzahem Al-Nasiri, üslûp

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2-1 Falah Al-Saidi, <i>Explosive Politics</i> , 2007, oil on canvas, 60x70 cm. (Source: Naji & Hussein, 2021, p.5378).....	16
Figure 2-2 Thomas Hirschhorn, <i>The Incommensurable Banner</i> , 2007, Fabric, spray paint, printed materials, plastic, adhesive tape, 4m x 18m (variable) (Source: Stephen Friedman Gallery, 2023).	17
Figure 3-1 Ismael Al-Sheikhly, <i>The Card Players</i> , 1970, oil on canvas, 80x96,5cm. (Source: Invaluable, 2023).....	23
Figure 3-2 Ismail al-Sheikhly, <i>Watermelon Sellers</i> , 1958, oil on canvas, 79.5 x 97.5 cm. Source: Christie's auction, October 30, 2008. © 2019 Christie's Images Limited.	26
Figure 3-3 Hassan, Faik, <i>Bedouin Tent</i> , 1950, oil on canvas, 58 × 74 cm . (Source: Artsy, 2023).	27
Figure 3-4 Hassan, Faik, <i>Playing Children</i> , 1953, oil on canvas (Source: Hamzah et al., 2021, p. 118).	28
Figure 3-5 Numerous murals during that period portrayed Saddam Hussein as an affable and approachable leader, projecting an image of him as a figure who exhibited genuine concern for the welfare and well-being of all segments of society. (Source: Fast, 2005, p.20).....	32
Figure 3-6 Souad Al-Attar, <i>The Garden of Aden</i> , 1993, oil on canvas (Source: Kazem & Yacoup, 2023, p.995).....	34
Figure 3-7 Farouk Hassan, <i>Unfinished Childhood</i> , 2007, oil and various materials on canvas, 70x70 cm. (Source: Naji & Hussein, 2021, p.5377).	36
Figure 4-1 Muzahem Al-Nasiri in Irak in 1989, with courtesy of the artist.	39
Figure 4-2 A recent portrait photo of the artist. (Source: Al-Nasiri, 2021).	42

Figure 4-3 Al-Nasiri with two large paintings each depicting a woman's face (Source: Allan, 2021).	46
Figure 5-1 Muzahem Al-Nasiri, <i>Pharaonic Princess</i> , 2002, oil on canvas, 170 x 130 cm. (Source: Al-Nasiri, 2020).....	48
Figure 5-2 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, <i>His Woman Reads</i> , 1997, oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm. Courtesy of the artist.	49
Figure 5-3 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, <i>Reem Aljamaly</i> , 2019, oil on canvas, 90 x 90 cm. (Source: Al-Nasiri, 2019).....	51
Figure 5-4 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, <i>Untitled</i> , 2020, oil on canvas, 170 x 170 cm. (Source: Al-Nasiri, 2020b).	53
Figure 5-5 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, <i>Untitled</i> , 2018, oil on canvas, 170 x 170 cm. (Source: Al-Nasiri, 2018).	55
Figure 5-6 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, <i>Portrait of a Girl</i> , 2021, oil on canvas, 150 x 90 cm. Courtesy of the artist.	56
Figure 5-7 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, <i>Untitled</i> , 2007, oil on canvas, 70 x 80 cm. (Source: MutualArt, 2018).	58
Figure 5-8 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, <i>Sitting Women</i> , 2007, oil on canvas, 150 x 80 cm. Courtesy of the artist.	60
Figure 5-9 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, <i>Cigarette Seller</i> , 2006, oil on canvas, 100 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist.	61
Figure 5-10 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, <i>Direct Model</i> , 2013, oil on canvas, 100 x 90 cm. Courtesy of the artist.	63
Figure 5-11 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, <i>Portrait</i> , 2013, oil on canvas, 120 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist.	65
Figure 5-12 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, <i>Suite and Woman</i> , 2013, oil on canvas with different materials, 150 x 200 cm. Courtesy of the artist.	67

Figure 5-13 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, <i>The Liberated Girls</i> , 2019, oil on canvas, 220 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist.	69
Figure 5-14 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, <i>Woman and Pigeon with Dry Rose</i> , 2015, oil on canvas, 285 x 165 cm. Courtesy of the artist.	70
Figure 5-15 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, <i>The Wall</i> , 2012, oil on canvas, 150 x 90 cm. Courtesy of the artist.....	72
Figure 5-16 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, <i>Childhood Wall</i> , 2006, oil on canvas and various materials, 150 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist.	74
Figure 5-17 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, <i>Horses</i> , 2018, oil on canvas, 150 x 90 cm. Courtesy of the artist.....	76
Figure 5-18 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, <i>Horse</i> , 2018, oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist.....	78

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. RESEARCH TOPIC AND CONTEXT

The research topic of this thesis delves into the fascinating world of Iraqi painting, with a specific focus on the captivating works of Muzahem Al-Nasiri, an esteemed and influential Iraqi artist. Al-Nasiri's artistic journey has left an indelible mark on Iraq's vibrant art scene, making significant contributions to the country's artistic heritage. Through a meticulous examination of the stylistic elements and underlying themes present in Al-Nasiri's works, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the unique characteristics of Iraqi painting and the artistic expressions of contemporary Iraqi artists.

The realm of Iraqi art boasts a rich history intertwined with diverse cultural influences. In recent decades, Iraq's artistic landscape has undergone transformative shifts, influenced by various socio-political factors. The dynamic Iraqi art scene seamlessly blends traditional techniques with innovative approaches, as artists grapple with questions of identity, heritage, and the rapid pace of societal change. Amidst this landscape, Muzahem Al-Nasiri has emerged as a prominent figure, navigating the complexities of contemporary Iraqi art and leaving an indelible impact.

Studying Al-Nasiri's works holds immense significance within the broader context of Iraqi art. By closely examining his artistic vision, stylistic choices, and thematic explorations, this research seeks to unravel how his works reflect the unique cultural and historical milieu of Iraq. Al-Nasiri's paintings serve as windows into the intricacies of Iraqi society, capturing the spirit of resilience, cultural identity, and the ongoing interplay between tradition and modernity. They offer valuable insights into how contemporary Iraqi artists navigate their heritage while responding to the socio-political landscape of the present.

Moreover, Muzahem Al-Nasiri's works exemplify the larger artistic landscape in Iraq, where artists grapple with themes of war, displacement, cultural preservation, and the quest for identity. By analyzing Al-Nasiri's stylistic features and thematic choices, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding

of the artistic climate in Iraq, shedding light on the unique challenges and inspirations that Iraqi artists face. The findings of this research not only celebrate the artistic achievements of Muzahem Al-Nasiri but also offer valuable insights for scholars, art historians, and enthusiasts seeking a comprehensive understanding of Iraq's dynamic and evolving art scene.

Through an examination of the stylistic elements in Muzahem Al-Nasiri's works within the broader context of Iraqi painting, this research not only recognizes his contributions to Iraq's artistic landscape but also provides a platform for exploring larger artistic conversations and creative expressions within the country. It seeks to emphasize the significance of studying his works as a means to better comprehend the artistic climate, cultural heritage, and the resilience demonstrated by Iraqi artists in the face of adversity.

1.2. FOCUS AND SCOPE OF THE THESIS

The purpose of this thesis is to embark on a comprehensive exploration of the stylistic features of Iraqi painting by closely analyzing the works of Muzahem Al-Nasiri. Through a detailed examination of Al-Nasiri's paintings, this research seeks to identify and interpret the distinctive artistic elements, techniques, and thematic motifs that characterize his body of work.

The scope of this research encompasses a thorough examination of Al-Nasiri's paintings, spanning various periods of his artistic career. Through a meticulous visual analysis, the study will delve into the specific stylistic choices employed by Al-Nasiri, including his brushwork, composition, color palette, and the application of various artistic techniques. Additionally, the investigation will explore the thematic content present in his paintings, which encompass cultural heritage, historical events, sociopolitical commentary, and personal narratives.

Furthermore, the research will contextualize Al-Nasiri's works within the broader art historical framework of Iraqi painting, considering the influences, trends, and artistic movements that have shaped the development of Iraqi art. By examining the stylistic features of Al-Nasiri's works, this thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the unique characteristics of Iraqi painting while also

highlighting the artist's individual artistic voice and his contributions to the Iraqi art scene.

The research will draw upon an extensive range of primary and secondary sources, including Al-Nasiri's paintings, exhibition catalogs, interviews, art critiques, and relevant scholarly literature. By employing a combination of visual analysis and art historical research methodologies, the study aims to provide a nuanced and comprehensive exploration of the stylistic features and thematic content within Al-Nasiri's works.

It is important to note that while this thesis primarily focuses on Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings, it does not attempt to provide an exhaustive analysis of his entire body of work. Instead, the research aims to offer a representative selection of his works that exemplify his artistic style, thematic preoccupations, and his contribution to the broader Iraqi art context.

By undertaking a focused investigation into the stylistic features of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings, this research aims to contribute to the scholarship on Iraqi art, deepen our understanding of contemporary Iraqi painting, and shed light on the artistic legacy of one of Iraq's prominent artists.

1.3. RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The research conducted in this thesis holds significant relevance and importance within the field of Iraqi art and beyond. By examining the stylistic features of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings and exploring their broader implications, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary Iraqi painting and its cultural significance.

First and foremost, studying the works of Muzahem Al-Nasiri is crucial in recognizing his valuable artistic contributions to the Iraqi art scene. Al-Nasiri's paintings have garnered both national and international acclaim, establishing him as a prominent figure among Iraqi artists. By critically analyzing his artistic style, thematic choices, and creative techniques, this research acknowledges and

celebrates Al-Nasiri's artistic legacy, offering a comprehensive exploration of his significant artistic contributions.

Furthermore, the research delves into the broader relevance of studying contemporary Iraqi painting. Iraq boasts a rich artistic heritage shaped by its diverse cultural and historical contexts. Understanding the stylistic features and thematic motifs in contemporary Iraqi art is essential in appreciating the country's cultural identity and artistic expressions. By focusing on Al-Nasiri's works, this research provides insights into the unique artistic vocabulary, techniques, and themes that reflect the broader Iraqi artistic landscape.

Moreover, the research sheds light on the interplay between tradition and innovation in Iraqi painting. Contemporary Iraqi artists, like Al-Nasiri, grapple with the complex dynamics of preserving cultural heritage while responding to the demands of a rapidly changing society. By studying Al-Nasiri's artistic choices, including his incorporation of Islamic design elements and cultural symbols, this research explores how artists navigate their artistic practice within the context of Iraqi identity and global influences.

Additionally, the findings of this research have implications for the broader field of art history and cultural studies. The examination of stylistic features and thematic content within Al-Nasiri's works contributes to a nuanced understanding of artistic developments within Iraq and the broader Middle East region. The research also fosters comparative analysis and dialogue between Iraqi art and other global artistic movements, nurturing a more comprehensive understanding of art's role in cultural expression and societal narratives.

Lastly, this research holds educational value for scholars, artists, and art enthusiasts interested in Iraqi art and its diverse manifestations. By offering a detailed analysis of Al-Nasiri's paintings, this thesis serves as a valuable resource for future studies, providing a framework for further investigations into Iraqi art and its place within the global art scene.

In conclusion, this research highlights the relevance and importance of studying the stylistic features of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings within the context of Iraqi art. By acknowledging Al-Nasiri's artistic contributions, exploring the broader implications of contemporary Iraqi painting, and contributing to art historical scholarship, this research aims to deepen our appreciation and understanding of the artistic expressions and cultural identity within the vibrant Iraqi art scene.

1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The research conducted in this thesis is driven by specific objectives and thought-provoking questions that guide the exploration and analysis of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings. Let's take a closer look at these objectives and research questions:

Objectives:

To delve into the stylistic features of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings and identify the unique artistic elements, techniques, and visual language he employs in his works.

To explore the thematic content present in Al-Nasiri's paintings and examine how it reflects the cultural, historical, and sociopolitical context of Iraq. We aim to investigate the influence of Islamic design vocabulary and cultural symbols in Al-Nasiri's works, and understand their role in shaping the artistic identity and expressions of contemporary Iraqi painting.

To situate Al-Nasiri's paintings within the broader art historical framework of Iraqi art, considering the influences, trends, and artistic movements that have shaped the development of Iraqi painting.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of Al-Nasiri's artistic contributions to the Iraqi art scene and his place within the broader context of contemporary Iraqi painting, while also acknowledging the unique perspectives and contributions of other Iraqi diaspora artists.

Research Questions:

What are the predominant stylistic features observed in Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings? How do these features contribute to the visual language and artistic expressions within the realm of Iraqi painting?

What are the recurring thematic motifs in Al-Nasiri's works, and how do they reflect the cultural, historical, and sociopolitical context of Iraq? How does Al-Nasiri engage with issues of identity, heritage, and contemporary challenges within his artistic narratives?

How does Al-Nasiri incorporate Islamic design vocabulary and cultural symbols in his paintings? What is the significance of these elements in shaping the artistic identity and expressions of contemporary Iraqi painting?

How do Al-Nasiri's works align with or diverge from the broader art historical developments and movements in Iraqi painting? How do they contribute to the ongoing dialogue between tradition and innovation within the Iraqi art scene?

What is the significance of studying Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings in the context of contemporary Iraqi art? How do his works contribute to our understanding of the cultural heritage, artistic expressions, and the evolving artistic climate in Iraq?

How does Al-Nasiri, as an Iraqi diaspora artist, engage with issues of identity, heritage, and contemporary challenges within his artistic narratives?

By addressing these objectives and research questions, this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings, offering valuable insights into the stylistic features, thematic content, and artistic contributions of one of Iraq's esteemed artists.

1.5. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions, a combination of qualitative research methods and art historical analysis will be employed in this thesis. The methodology encompasses the following key steps:

1.5.1. Data Collection

A thorough examination of books, academic articles, and other academic publications on modern Iraqi painting was conducted. These sources provided a foundation for understanding the historical, cultural, and artistic context of Iraqi art, serving as a basis for the study of Muhazem Al-Nasiri's works.

Exhibition and auction catalogues were extensively reviewed to gather information on Al-Nasiri's participation in art events, his exhibition history, and critical responses to his artworks. These catalogues provided valuable insights into the reception and recognition of Al-Nasiri's paintings within the art community.

The artist's official website, as well as his Facebook and Instagram accounts, were analyzed to explore the visual elements, artistic statements, and interactions surrounding Al-Nasiri's works. These digital platforms offered a unique opportunity to examine the artist's recent works, artistic development, and engagement with his audience.

Two direct conversations with Muhazem Al-Nasiri were conducted via email exchanges. These conversations allowed for a deeper understanding of the artist's perspectives, motivations, and creative processes. The insights shared by the artist provided valuable firsthand information to complement the analysis of his artworks.

1.5.2. Data Analysis

A series of paintings by Muhazem Al-Nasiri were collected for in-depth analysis. These paintings were analyzed from a formal, stylistic, and semantic point of view. Detailed examinations of composition, color palette, brushwork, symbolism, and thematic content were conducted to understand Al-Nasiri's artistic language and the messages conveyed in his artworks.

The collected paintings were subjected to a rigorous formal analysis, focusing on the visual elements and their relationships within each artwork. Stylistic analysis delved into the artist's unique techniques, brushwork, use of color, and

composition choices. Semantic analysis involved interpreting the symbolic motifs, thematic content, and the messages embedded within Al-Nasiri's works.

A comparative analysis was conducted to situate Al-Nasiri's paintings within the broader context of contemporary Iraqi art. This involved examining the works of other Iraqi artists, identifying similarities, differences, and influences between their works and Al-Nasiri's paintings. Comparative analysis also explored connections to global artistic trends and movements, providing insights into the artist's place in contemporary world art.

The research will involve an extensive review of relevant art historical literature and scholarly works that discuss Iraqi art, contemporary art movements, and the broader context of Middle Eastern art. This literature review will provide a foundation for contextualizing Al-Nasiri's works within the larger art historical framework, considering the influences, trends, and artistic movements that have shaped Iraqi painting.

1.5.3. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the research process. Proper citations and acknowledgments were given to all sources consulted. Written consent was obtained from the artist for the use of his artworks in the study. Confidentiality and privacy were maintained in all direct communications with the artist.

It is important to note that this research approach is qualitative in nature, focusing on the subjective interpretation and analysis of the artworks. The methodology aims to provide a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Al-Nasiri's paintings and their broader significance within the context of Iraqi art.

By employing this methodology, this thesis endeavors to contribute to the existing scholarship on Iraqi art, deepen our understanding of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's artistic contributions, and provide valuable insights into the stylistic features and thematic content within his works.

1.6. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Ghanem (2012), art stands out as a distinctly human activity, serving as a vital medium for expressing thoughts, emotions, and perspectives on the world. It encompasses a wide range of expression methods employed by artists. The research question focuses on identifying the constant elements within the variable style of the plastic artist Ismail Sheikhly. The significance of this research lies in the creation of a cohesive visual composition built upon the artist's extensive experience in refining his style and mastering the technical tools associated with it. Additionally, the study aims to enhance the technical awareness of recipients and students, particularly in the fields of art education, educational studies, and art criticism. Ismail Al-Sheikhly, known for his extensive contributions to Iraqi plastic art, serves as a prominent figure in this domain. The study examines his artistic productions between 1980 and 1990.

Included the study is defining the concept of style and artistic style, as well as analyzing samples of the artist's work. Through this analysis, the study uncovers significant findings regarding the artist's consciousness, the nature of their vocabulary, and the interplay between form and color in creating a distinct aesthetic style that sets their artwork apart. The artist's general style leans towards simplicity, avoiding intricate details and focusing on the relationship between shapes and the overall composition. The symbols represented by the female figures in their work possess a distinct appearance that transcends reality while conveying meaningful messages. The artist employs various techniques, such as vertical curves, diagonal lines, and intersecting formations, to shape the overall visual impression. While there are certain similarities between this study and the current research, differences may arise in terminology, research objectives, and overall artistic trends pursued by different artists.

As in another study explained by Al-midhati (2013), delves into the stylistic diversity found in the drawings of a group of four artists, particularly focusing on the role of intellectual and artistic culture in presenting contemporary art with an emphasis on identity, locality, and originality. The importance of this research lies

in identifying the diversity of graphics and studying the stylistic variations within the drawings of the Group of Four, which span the period from 1981 to 2012 in Iraq. The second chapter comprises a theoretical framework with three sections. The first section defines diversity and explores its historical roots in contemporary Iraqi painting, using the Group of Four as a model. The third chapter analyzes 19 sample models within the research's scope.

Additionally, Chapter IV presents the results and conclusions derived from the analysis of these sample models. One of the most significant findings is that the artist's grant shapes the ability to extend beyond the pictorial surface, creating a sense of distraction and dismantling within the artwork, which encourages recipients to actively participate in interpreting the aesthetic message conveyed through color rhythms. The study emphasizes the role of the recipient and highlights the significance of popular taste and culture. The artists' thoughts emerge from moments of subconscious inspiration, resulting in a variety of styles that are unique to each artist and fueled by pictorial and symbolic ammunition that stimulates free imagination.

The Group of Four is characterized by its adherence to a guaranteed intellectual and aesthetic vision. Each artist possesses an independent style and distinctive stylistic features in their artistic production. The study showcases the stylistic shifts of each artist within the group. While both studies share a focus on the Iraqi style of painting, "Iraqi Painting: Muzahem Al-Nasiri and His Works" explores the stylistic diversity within Iraqi drawing, specifically within an Iraqi art group, while the current study centers on a case study of stylistic features. Among the conclusions drawn by the researcher are:

The introduction of new techniques in painting has brought forth new ideas, replacing traditional and classical approaches. New materials and mediums have emerged, resulting in previously unfamiliar textures.

The artist's exploration of different locations and contexts has contributed to the maturation of their ideas and the enhancement of their artistic performance.

The motivation for Iraqi artists to work with materials extends beyond their physical properties. The materials themselves possess their own structures and an independent aesthetic existence. These properties have an impact on the artwork when employed, affecting the strength of their influence on the elements.

This study aligns with a case study of stylistic features in Iraqi painting, specifically focusing on Muzahim Al-Nasiri and his art. It explores the technical methods employed in Iraqi painting and the incorporation of modern technologies by artists to advance the field.



2. OVERVIEW OF IRAQI ART HISTORY

The overview of Iraqi art history provides a contextual background for understanding the artistic traditions, influences, and developments that have shaped the art scene in Iraq. These are some key points to consider:

2.1. ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN ART

Iraq is home to the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, which produced some of the earliest known artworks in human history. Mesopotamian art includes iconic works such as the Ziggurats, intricate cylinder seals, and relief sculptures depicting scenes from mythology and daily life.

2.2. ISLAMIC ART

With the advent of Islam in the 7th century, Iraq became an important center for Islamic art and architecture. The artistic expressions of Islamic civilization, including calligraphy, geometric patterns, and decorative motifs, found prominence in mosques, palaces, and manuscripts.

According to Dabrowska and Hann (2008), calligraphers were highly regarded and generously rewarded by kings, aristocrats, and intellectuals during a period when ornamental designs based on Arabic letters adorned houses and palaces. Mubarak Al-Makki's mastery of the Kufic lettering style and Yahya Al-Wasiti's renowned 13th-century book illuminations, which offer valuable historical insights, exemplify the artistic excellence of this era. These artistic endeavors encompassed various aspects of life, including architecture, furnishings, weaponry, and national attire. Baghdad, serving as the intellectual hub of the Islamic world during the Abbasid era (AD 750-1258), witnessed a flourishing of art, science, and philosophy. However, the devastating sack of Baghdad by the Mongols had profound consequences for the artistic landscape, leading to a period of decline. It was not until the early 20th century that art in Baghdad began to regain its vigor, characterized by a fusion of ancient and contemporary elements (Dabrowska & Hann, 2008, p. 278).

In accordance with religious guidance, Muslim artists received instructions not to represent human figures in their artistic creations, as it was believed that the act of creating life was reserved solely for Allah. Consequently, a prevalent approach adopted by many artists involved embellishing buildings with intricate floral and geometric designs crafted from small ceramic tiles. Furthermore, these buildings were adorned with excerpts from the Qur'an, skillfully rendered in a form of artistic handwriting known as calligraphy (Fast, 2005, p.20).

2.3.INFLUENCE OF PERSIAN AND ARAB TRADITIONS

Iraq's location and historical ties have resulted in the blending of Persian and Arab artistic influences. Persian miniature painting and calligraphy, as well as Arab contributions to poetry and literature, have shaped the cultural and artistic landscape of Iraq.

For example during the period of the Ba'th regime, the artistic landscape in Iraq witnessed the emergence of a new generation of artists who commenced their artistic endeavors in the 1970s and 1980s. Within this context, the Ba'th regime exhibited a favorable disposition towards artists whose creative output resonated with Mesopotamian and local influences. These artists garnered official recognition and commendation through favorable reviews published in the daily press and artistic journals. They were celebrated for the historical richness and depth of their artistic expressions, and were upheld as exemplars to be emulated in the cultivation of an Iraqi art movement (Baram, 1999, p. 71).

According to Baram (1999), the influence of Mesopotamian aesthetics can also be observed in the architectural style of public buildings, particularly in Baghdad. This is evident in the construction of the Sheraton Hotel, which was named Ishtar Sheraton upon its completion in the late 1970s. The design of the hotel's entrance was specifically crafted to resemble the renowned Ishtar Gate, now located in East Berlin. The entrance was adorned with an imitation of the iconic glazed colored ceramic tiles, featuring depictions of walking animals. Notably, the dragon motif was prominently repeated throughout the design. To create an immersive experience for tourists, the interior decorator thoughtfully placed a contemporary

rendition of the goddess Ishtar in the hotel's lobby, skillfully crafted to exude sensuality and capture the essence of Ishtar (Baram, 1999, p. 76).

2.4.MODERN IRAQI ART MOVEMENT

The early 20th century marked a significant period in Iraqi art history, characterized by the emergence of the modern Iraqi art movement, which aimed to amalgamate Western artistic practices with local traditions. As described by Dawson (2023), this era witnessed the flourishing of numerous art groups, spurred by the formation of the country following the First World War and its subsequent independence from British rule in 1932, instilling a sense of liberation and the dawn of a new era. The author highlights the prevailing theme of nationalism, albeit with diverse visualizations of the concept of the "nation" among Iraqi artists. Over the ensuing five decades, amidst the ebb and flow of war and peace, artists embarked on fervent explorations of novel modes of artistic expression. Pioneering figures such as Jewad Selim, Faiq Hassan, and Shakir Hassan Al Said assumed pivotal roles in establishing modern art institutions and introducing innovative artistic approaches.

As Dawson (2023) highlights, the contemporary discourse surrounding the era encompassing the 1930s to the 1970s and its associated artistic movements is predominantly framed within the realm of Modernism. This period serves as a focal point for discussions concerning the evolution and progression of artistic practices during that time. By employing the terminology of Modernism, scholars and critics seek to contextualize the diverse artistic expressions and cultural shifts that transpired within this significant temporal span.

Ba'athist Era and State-Sponsored Art: Under the rule of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq (1968-2003), art became subject to state control and propaganda. The regime promoted a specific aesthetic ideology, emphasizing themes of Arab nationalism, socialism, and Saddam Hussein's cult of personality. Many artists faced censorship and limited artistic freedom during this period (Hunt, pp.77-86).

2.5. INFLUENCE OF WARS AND CONFLICTS

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the Gulf War (1990-1991), and the subsequent conflicts have imprinted a lasting impression on the artistic landscape of Iraq, infusing it with a profound emotional resonance and introspective quality.

As per Baram's (1999) analysis, the onset of the war with Iran gave rise to a new genre of popular art in Iraq, characterized by paintings, posters, and daily press drawings. These artistic expressions predominantly focused on portraying the unity of the Iraqi people and their intrinsic bond with the land. The unity among Iraqis was occasionally depicted through the visual representation of Kurds and Arabs standing together in defense of their homeland. However, a more prevalent approach involved the incorporation of Iraqi soldiers, children, or women intertwined with motifs emblematic of Iraq's landscape. This symbolism aimed to convey the contemporary unity existing between the Iraqi nation and its territorial domain. Another technique employed was the integration of present-day individuals, particularly President Saddam Husayn, into the historical context of Iraq, spanning ancient and medieval eras. Such artistic renderings sought to foster a connection between the people and the land, emphasizing their intertwined existence (Baram, 1999, p. 78).

Within this war context, Shabout (2013) notably underscores the significance of the US-led invasion, which served as a pivotal event in shaping the trajectory of Iraqi art:

There is certainly much to be said about the destruction of history and heritage in Iraq during the past century. Such a discussion, however, becomes particularly significant to the years of sanctions and following the US-led invasion. The extreme and sudden disintegration of Iraq's cultural institutions and structures following the 2003 invasion, with its short-and long-term ramifications, presents an unprecedented case. (p.5)

These tumultuous periods of history have had a far-reaching impact on the lives of Iraqi citizens, leaving scars of collective trauma and upheaval. For example

Explosive Politics (2007) by Falah Al-Saidi directly touches the violence that Iraqi people experienced. (See Figure 2-1).

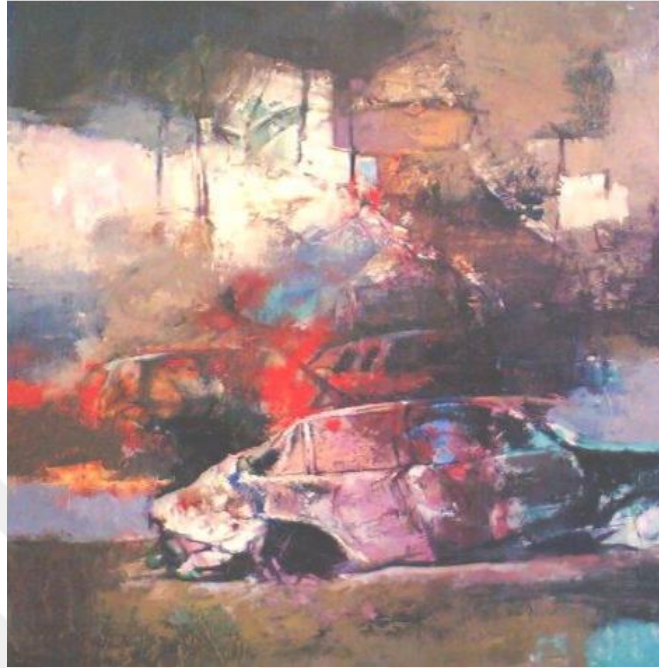


Figure 2-1 Falah Al-Saidi, *Explosive Politics*, 2007, oil on canvas, 60x70 cm. (Source: Naji & Hussein, 2021, p.5378)

In his analysis, Luckhurst (2012) provides insightful commentary on the art installation titled *The Incommensurable Banner* (2007) by Thomas Hirschhorn: "Thomas Hirschhorn's art installation *The Incommensurable Banner* (2007) - an eighteen-meter-long collage of photographs of the mutilated bodies of Iraqi civilians, composed of images excluded from Western media representations of the war - had a powerful intervention to make. Contemporaneity needn't be marked by such literalist imperative, of course" (p.714). (See Figure 2-2).



Figure 2-2 Thomas Hirschhorn, The Incommensurable Banner, 2007, Fabric, spray paint, printed materials, plastic, adhesive tape, 4m x 18m (variable) (Source: Stephen Friedman Gallery, 2023).

In response, artists have emerged as powerful agents of expression and healing, utilizing their creative endeavors as a means to navigate the complex tapestry of war's consequences. Through their artworks, artists have fearlessly confronted the horrors of war, encapsulating the visceral realities of violence, loss, and the anguish experienced by their fellow countrymen. They bear witness to the shattered lives and communities, to the profound displacement of individuals and the erasure of cultural heritage. Each stroke of the brush, each sculpted form, and each captured image becomes a testament to the enduring spirit of the Iraqi people amidst unimaginable adversity.

Reflecting the nuanced complexities of their experiences, artists infuse their works with a tapestry of emotions. They explore themes of profound grief and mourning for the lives lost, the irrevocable changes wrought upon landscapes and cityscapes, and the displacement of countless individuals seeking refuge and solace. Yet, amidst these narratives of despair, a resounding spirit of resilience emerges, showcasing the unwavering strength and determination of a people united in their struggle.

The artworks born from these conflicts serve as a powerful testament to the enduring power of creativity, offering a cathartic outlet for both artists and audiences alike. Through their evocative creations, artists bridge the gap between personal and collective narratives, connecting viewers to the profound humanity embedded within the stories of war. They invite contemplation, empathy, and a deeper understanding of the complexities that unfold in the aftermath of conflict.

Ultimately, Iraqi artists stand as courageous conduits of memory, hope, and transformation. Their artworks serve as a poignant reminder of the enduring spirit that continues to thrive within the Iraqi people, even in the face of unimaginable adversity. In the midst of war's ravages, art emerges as a beacon of solace, resilience, and the timeless pursuit of healing, as artists endeavor to reclaim and redefine the narrative of their nation's history (Bahrani & Shabout, 2009).

2.6. CONTEMPORARY ART SCENE

The post-2003 period witnessed a revitalization of the Iraqi art scene, with increased artistic freedom and the emergence of new generations of artists. Contemporary Iraqi artists engage with diverse themes, experimenting with various media and engaging with local, regional, and global art contexts.

The contemporary art scene in Iraq has undergone significant transformations in recent decades. Contemporary Iraqi artists explore a wide range of themes in their artworks, reflecting their individual experiences, cultural heritage, and engagement with social and political issues. Some common themes include war, conflict, identity, memory, diaspora, gender, and social justice.

Contemporary Iraqi artists employ various artistic mediums and techniques, including painting, sculpture, installation art, photography, video art, performance art, and digital media. This diversity of practices allows artists to experiment with different forms of expression and engage with local and global artistic trends.

The establishment of independent art collectives, artist-run spaces, and galleries has played a crucial role in nurturing the contemporary art scene in Iraq. These platforms provide opportunities for artists to showcase their works, collaborate,

and engage with local and international audiences. Some notable institutions include the Iraqi Artists Association, Ruya Foundation, and the Baghdad Contemporary Art Museum.

The enduring repercussions of wars, conflicts, and political instability in Iraq have left an indelible mark on the realm of contemporary Iraqi art. Within this context, numerous artists courageously confront the profound traumas stemming from war, violence, displacement, and the erosion of cultural heritage. Through their artistic expressions, these creators delve into the depths of personal and collective narratives, defying prevailing accounts while illuminating the inherent resilience embedded within Iraqi society. As eloquently elucidated by Ghazoul (2013), "Over the course of nearly a century, Iraq has been subjected to relentless waves of political and cultural upheaval, culminating in its tumultuous occupation by American and Allied forces, which tragically ravaged Iraq's societal fabric and cultural legacy" (p. 216).

Contemporary Iraqi artists have gained recognition and exhibited their works in major international art events and exhibitions. Participation in biennials, art fairs, and cultural exchanges has provided opportunities for Iraqi artists to engage with the global art community, expand their networks, and promote cross-cultural dialogue (Naef, 2012).

Many contemporary Iraqi artists use their works as a means of social commentary, critiquing political systems, social inequalities, and human rights issues. Through their artistic practices, they engage with societal debates, challenge power structures, and advocate for change.

Iraqi artists also explore the preservation of cultural heritage in their works. They draw inspiration from ancient Mesopotamian art and incorporate traditional artistic techniques and motifs into contemporary contexts, creating a dialogue between the past and the present.

According to Buckley (2008), a profound link exists between Iraqi "heritage" and Iraqi "contemporary art." Jewad Selim, in particular, emphasizes the direct continuity between contemporary Iraqi art and the heritage of Iraq. Selim argues

that "Mesopotamian art from any epoch... is not confined to fine art" but encompasses a rich tradition of folk art as well. From Selim's perspective, all forms of Mesopotamian art, including traditional and ancient art, serve as a significant source of inspiration for contemporary Iraqi artists. Furthermore, Selim highlights the shared project between contemporary Iraqi art and heritage, asserting their role in shaping national and cultural identity. He suggests that contemporary art by Iraqi artists actively contributes to the "preservation" of enduring elements (Buckley, 2008, p. 293).

Despite the challenges posed by ongoing conflicts, limited infrastructure, and economic constraints, the contemporary art scene in Iraq continues to thrive, with artists making significant contributions to the global art discourse while reflecting their unique perspectives and experiences as Iraqis.

Understanding the historical trajectory of Iraqi art provides valuable insights into the cultural, social, and political factors that have influenced the works of artists like Muzahem Al-Nasiri and their contributions to the broader art landscape.

3. MAJOR PERIODS OF MODERN IRAQI ART

Modern Iraqi art is a dynamic and vibrant tapestry that reflects the country's rich cultural heritage, historical experiences, and artistic innovations. The development of modern Iraqi art can be attributed to the pioneering efforts of influential artists such as Jewad Selim, Shakir Hassan Al Said, Faeq Hassan, and Kadhim Hayder. These pioneers, through their unique artistic visions and creative expressions, laid the foundation for a distinct Iraqi modern art movement. They broke away from traditional artistic conventions, drawing inspiration from diverse sources such as ancient Mesopotamian art, European modernism, and Islamic calligraphy (Shabout, 2019, p.242). Their works explored themes of cultural identity, history, spirituality, and social engagement, capturing the struggles, aspirations, and resilience of the Iraqi people. The contributions of these pioneers expanded the horizons of artistic expression, and their artistic legacies continue to inspire and influence contemporary Iraqi artists, shaping the trajectory of modern Iraqi art as it evolves and responds to the ever-changing social, political, and cultural landscape.

3.1 EARLY 20TH CENTURY

According to Fast (2005), the inception of Iraq's modern art movement can be traced back to the early 1900s, when the territory was under Ottoman control. During this period, military officers who received their training at Ottoman schools in Istanbul, the capital of Turkey, were introduced to the use of oil paints. Subsequently, with the ascension of King Faisal to power in the 1920s, efforts were made to facilitate the education of Iraqi artists in Europe, coinciding with the era of the artistic movement known as expressionism. Artists practicing in the expressionist style ventured into innovative explorations of color and form, prioritizing the portrayal of emotions over the representation of realistic scenes (Fast, 2005, p. 20).

According to Yousif's (2021) analysis, the artistic movement in Iraq gradually began to be linked to global thought and European methods through the implementation of artistic missions aimed at studying outside Iraq. Yousif

highlights the emergence of new methods that brought about transformative changes in the course of Iraqi art. The influence and cross-fertilization with European art played a crucial role in shaping the Iraqi art experience.

Yousif (2021) explains that Iraqi artists, having received education from European art institutes and academies, engaged in a dynamic process of interaction between their studies and their individual artistic visions. This interaction fostered a strong aspiration for the birth of a serious artistic movement, leading to the establishment of the painting branch. During this stage, artists consciously departed from imitation and embraced more liberated artistic methods that formed a solid foundation for the crystallization of the concept of plastic art as a cultural awareness, ultimately uplifting Iraqi society (p. 9020).

According to Dabrowska & Hann (2008) during the 1930s and 1940s, a notable shift occurred within the Iraqi art scene as a generation of talented young artists embarked on scholarships abroad. This group, collectively referred to as Al-Ruwad or "The Pioneers," later recognized as the 'fifties generation,' encompassed esteemed individuals such as Faiq Hassan, Jewad Selim, Ismail al-Sheikhli (see Figure 3-1), Kamil Chadirji, and Nadhim Ramzi. Their experiences and exposure to international artistic influences played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between modernity and heritage, thus shaping the trajectory of Iraqi art. Spanning the period from the late 1930s to the 1950s, these artists navigated the delicate

balance between embracing modern artistic expressions and preserving their rich cultural legacy (p. 278).



Figure 3-1 Ismael Al-Sheikhly, *The Card Players*, 1970, oil on canvas, 80x96,5cm.
(Source: Invaluable, 2023).

Johnson (2021) provides an overview of the critical engagement of Iraqi artists during the late 1940s with the Euro-American art movement known as impressionism. Their critique centered on the inherent unsuitability of impressionism's approach to framing the environment when applied to the Iraqi landscape. Within this argument, a fundamental premise emerged, suggesting that Iraqi artists were unable to effectively capture European-style landscapes due to the distinctive nature of their own environment. Concurrently, European artists' depictions of the Iraqi landscape in the early twentieth century further reinforced the notion of its divergence from the European milieu. These paintings, characterized by the portrayal of bright sunlight and vast expanses of desert, perpetuated the conceptual separation between the Iraqi and European landscapes, a theme deeply rooted in the Orientalist discourse of the nineteenth century (Johnson, 2021, p.41).

Within this general framework the early 20th century signifies a momentous epoch in the progression of modern Iraqi art. Impacted by the currents of European

modernism and spurred by nationalistic fervor, artists commenced a departure from entrenched artistic conventions. Renowned trailblazers, including Jawad Selim (1921-1961), who attained eminence as Iraq's foremost sculptor and established a school of plastic art profoundly influenced by ancient Mesopotamian artistic traditions, as well as Faiq Hassan (1914-1987), embraced a contemporary artistic idiom that harmoniously interwove facets of Iraqi cultural heritage (Saad, 2008, p. 50; Al-Khalil, 1992, p. 97; Baram, 1999, p. 65).

3.2. THE BAGHDAD GROUP FOR MODERN ART (1951-1958)

Gupta and Takesh (2021) provide an overview of the transformative nature of the 1950s in Iraq, characterized by significant shifts in the realms of art, environment, and politics. This decade commenced with a national development initiative spearheaded by the elite, only to culminate in a momentous anti-monarchic uprising on 14th July 1958. Amidst these divergent visions of progress and revolution, individuals within the Baghdad modern art community navigated the delicate balance between aspirations for institutionalization and state support, while simultaneously engaging in more radical assessments of the prevailing societal norms. The complex interplay between these factors gave rise to dynamic negotiations within the artistic milieu of Baghdad during this transformative era.

According to Baram (1991), the exploration of ancient Mesopotamian culture and Iraqi folklore has been a consistent endeavor among Iraqi painters, sculptors, playwrights, and poets since the early 1950s. Within the realm of plastic arts, two distinct groups emerged during the period between 1950 and 1953, and several of their founding members continued to be active well into the late 1980s. The first group, known as the Avantgarde Group or the Group of Primitive Art, was established in 1950. Official publications of the Ba'th party indicate that this group drew inspiration from primitive Iraqi art and Iraqi folklore. Prominent painters Fa'iq Hasan (born in Baghdad in 1919) and Isma'il al-Shaykhali (born in Turkey in 1927) led the group. Despite the advent of Ba'th rule, the Avantgarde Group thrived, expanding significantly in size and garnering esteemed recognition. Some of its members secured lucrative positions, exemplified by al-Shaykhali's role as the director-general of the Culture Department of Plastic Arts in 1986. The second

group, known as the Baghdad Modern Art Group, coalesced around Jawad Salim, Iraq's renowned modern artist and a Communist, alongside his colleague Shakir Hasan (born in Baghdad). According to the aforementioned publications, this group aimed to depict "modern life while maintaining a perspective rooted in the artistic heritage of ancient Iraq." Notable members of this group who remained active during the second Ba'th regime included Nuri al-Rawi (born in 1925), Mahmud Sabri (born in 1927), Tariq Mazium (born in 1933), and 'Ata Sabri (born in 1913) (Baram, 1991, p. 69).

The formation of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art in 1951 was a pivotal moment in Iraqi art history. Comprised of artists including Kadhim Hayder (1932–1985), Jawad Salim (1920-1961), and Shakir Hassan Al Said (1925–2004), the group sought to promote modern art practices and foster a national artistic identity. (See Figure 3-2). They incorporated elements of Arab and Islamic art while experimenting with abstraction and expressive forms (Saad, 2008, p.51; Al-Khalil, 1992, p.80, 89; Assaf, 2011, p.13; Hamzah et al., 2021, p.117). Jawad Salim and Shakir Hassan Al Said hold a prominent place in the collective memory of Iraq and its people, evoking a profound sense of nostalgia. Regarded as the epitomes of a revered "golden" era, their artistic legacies have left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape of Iraq (Bloom & Blair, 2019, p. 258).



Figure 3-2 Ismail al-Sheikhly, *Watermelon Sellers*, 1958, oil on canvas, 79.5 x 97.5 cm. Source: Christie's auction, October 30, 2008. © 2019 Christie's Images Limited.

(p.70).

According to Taus-Bolstad's (2005) publication, Faik Hassan pursued his artistic education in Paris, France. Upon his graduation in 1938, he returned to his homeland of Iraq and assumed the role of creator and director of the painting and sculpture department at Baghdad's Institute of Fine Arts. Additionally, he played a pivotal role in establishing several artist collectives, including the renowned Pioneers Group in 1950 and the Corner Group in 1967. Throughout his illustrious career, Hassan actively participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions, in addition to showcasing his artworks in the esteemed national exhibitions of Iraq. His paintings have garnered both domestic and international acclaim, distinguished by their masterful execution and their exploration of social and political themes. (See figure 3-3). Notably, one of Hassan's most celebrated pieces, the mural entitled *Celebration of Victory*, graces Baghdad's Tiran Square, serving as a testament to his artistic prowess (p. 70).



Figure 3-3 Hassan, Faik, *Bedouin Tent*, 1950, oil on canvas, 58 × 74 cm . (Source: Artsy, 2023).

As per Hamzah et al. (2021) essay, an analysis of Faik Hassan's painting *Playing Children* (1953) reveals an endeavor to introduce a fresh paradigm in Iraqi art.(See figure 3-4). The concept of simplification in this context does not pertain solely to technical aspects such as color or composition, but instead begins with the selection of subject matter that aligns with the intentions of the artwork. *Playing Children* exemplifies a perspective rooted in modernity, as it incorporates elements of Islamic or eastern aesthetics while simultaneously depicting a recognizable Iraqi reality through the lens of cultural identity (Hamzah et al., 2021, p. 118).



Figure 3-4 Hassan, Faik, *Playing Children*, 1953, oil on canvas (Source: Hamzah et al., 2021, p. 118).

3.3. THE 1960S AND 1970S

During this vibrant epoch, the realm of Iraqi art bore witness to a rich tapestry of artistic movements and styles, showcasing a remarkable diversity. Artists embarked on explorations encompassing a wide array of themes, including social realism, abstraction, and surrealism, among others. Esteemed figures such as Ismail Fattah, Dia Azzawi, and Rafa Nasiri emerged as influential proponents, leaving an indelible mark on the expansion of artistic expression and experimentation (Al-Ali, 2013).

The 1960s marked a significant period in the development of the Iraqi art scene, characterized by institutional advancements and the establishment of prominent galleries. The Institute of Higher Education, subsequently transformed into the Arts College, was founded, providing a platform for artistic education and nurturing emerging talents. Notably, the esteemed architect Rifa'at Chaderji inaugurated the Aya Gallery, which served as a notable hub for artistic expression. Concurrently, Mohamed Makiya, along with two other architects, established the

Wasiti Gallery, later relocating to Britain and founding the influential Kufa Gallery (Dabrowska & Hann, 2008, p. 279). These initiatives contributed to the flourishing artistic landscape of Iraq during this transformative decade.

In the 1960s, an emergence of abstract art among younger artists was noted, with a significant shift occurring towards the end of the decade following the defeat in the Six Day War, leading to an increased prominence of committed art, or "al-fann al-multazim" (Naef, 2012).

Nefedova (2019) makes the following general assessment about Iraqi artists' orientation towards abstract art:

Abstract art occupies a double place in the Arab mindset. Artists and critics recognized abstract art as the international norm for advanced art, but at the same time many of them argued that the Arab-Islamic aesthetic tradition had always produced idealistic, abstract art, and they claimed that modern Arab artists were the legitimate inheritors of a long, philosophically sound tradition of abstract art. Practitioners of abstract art very often referred to the theory that a form of abstract art was rooted in local Islamic tradition, and was thus naturally integrated into contemporary Arab art. For example, the use of letters of the Arabic alphabet became mere forms in abstract composition, and the art of Islamic calligraphy, as well as of arabesque surface design, could be classified as biomorphic abstract art. (p.8)

However, after the Ba'th party came to power, the realist style in art began to gain strength. According to Naef (2012), in response to the prevailing sense of despair brought about by the defeat, the group "Toward a New Vision" (Nahum al-ru'ya al-jadida) was established in 1969, aiming to counteract the prevailing intellectual climate. The rise of the Ba'th party, which seized power in 1968, capitalized on this revolutionary mindset. Elias Farah, a prominent thinker within the party, advocated for a stylistically unrestrained yet nationalist approach termed "nationalist realism," dedicated to the nation's cause. Muhammad al Jaza'iri, author of a book on committed art published in 1977, emphasized the need for art to align with the Arab question (qadiya) and be accessible to all, dismissing abstraction as a bourgeois phenomenon. The regime demonstrated its commitment

to the arts by establishing new museums and exhibition spaces and expanding existing ones. Culture, as outlined in the report of the Eighth Regional Congress of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, was recognized as an integral component of the Party's development strategy and consequently, the Iraqi government's agenda. The Revolution sought to attract writers, artists, intellectuals, and journalists to contribute to the dissemination of its objectives (Naef, 2012, p. 477).

Assaf (2011) places special emphasis on the pivotal role played by Mahmoud Sabri, born in 1927. According to Assaf, Sabri propelled Iraq towards the contemporary through his groundbreaking manifesto and theory titled "Quantum realism," which took shape in 1971. Sabri's conceptual framework drew inspiration from scientific discoveries in the domains of chemistry and physics, forging an intricate link between art, science, and technology. This transformative paradigm shift moved beyond the confines of the instinctive and mechanistic approach of the "Agricultural Period," venturing into a profound exploration of the molecular anatomy in the "Nuclear Era." In doing so, Sabri transcended not only national and cultural boundaries but also expanded the very horizons of artistic creation (Assaf, 2011, p. 13).

Additionally in her analysis, Nefedova (2019) highlights the adoption of realism in Iraq during the 1970s, despite the absence of any official designation of the style in Arab countries. During this period, the dominant influence of the ruling Ba'ath Party over cultural centers and fine art schools led to the prominence of a propagandistic art approach that favored the socialist realist style. Nefedova underscores the widespread embrace of this artistic direction, indicating its prioritization within the Iraqi context (p. 13).

According to Nefedova (2019), the realm of realist Arab art emerges as a domain claiming to offer an authentic and impartial portrayal of existence, intended to resonate with the common laborers while providing them with spiritual upliftment—a parallel echoed in the Soviet conception of realist art. Arab artists primarily engaged in two distinct strains of realism: one centered on capturing the natural environment and the routines of everyday life, and the other revolving around the utilization of realism for propagandistic and political ends. The

adoption of realist aesthetics derived from its inherent capacity to comprehensively respond to calamitous events, thereby assuming symbolic significance. Consequently, the language of realism became inextricably linked with propaganda, often intersecting with the Palestinian resistance movement (Nefedova, 2019).

3.4. THE 1980S AND 1990S

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and the Gulf War (1990-1991) had a profound impact on Iraqi art. Artists responded to the traumas of war, political repression, and social upheaval through their artworks, reflecting themes of loss, displacement, and resilience. This period saw a rise in socially and politically engaged art, with artists using their works to critique power structures and advocate for change (Al-Ali & Al-Najjar, 2013; Al-Khalil, 1992, p.146).

During the period of Saddam Hussein's regime (1979-2003), the Iraqi government actively commissioned artists and provided financial incentives for the creation of artworks that propagated the glorification of Iraq and its leaders. Notably, numerous artistic creations centered around the portrayal of Saddam Hussein himself. Vast posters, murals, and sculptures depicting Hussein were prominently displayed on buildings, within public parks, and in city squares.(See Figure 3-5). However, following the overthrow of Hussein's government, a significant number of these artworks have been removed by the Iraqi populace as well as coalition forces present in the country (Fast, 2005, p.20).



Figure 3-5 Numerous murals during that period portrayed Saddam Hussein as an affable and approachable leader, projecting an image of him as a figure who exhibited genuine concern for the welfare and well-being of all segments of society. (Source: Fast, 2005, p.20).

According to Baram (1999), an illustrative instance of artistic commissions sanctioned by the Ba'th regime can be found in Mukhlid al-Mukhtar's bas-relief, prominently displayed in the Babylonian Hall of Baghdad's Saddam International Airport. Spanning an impressive area of eighteen square meters, this marble relief is said to portray "Babylonian sites and emblems" while incorporating "elements derived from the ancient artistic heritage of Mesopotamia, in modern design." Another notable example is Sa'd al-Shamari's sixteen-square-meter bas-relief located at the Irrigation Ministry. Employing a distinctively Assyrian style, this artwork symbolically conveys the enduring significance of irrigation in Iraq, tracing its historical lineage from the Sumerian civilization to the technological advancements of the contemporary era (Baram, 1999, p. 71).

3.5. CONTEMPORARY IRAQI ART

The contemporary art scene in Iraq has undergone significant transformations in recent decades. Contemporary Iraqi artists explore a wide range of themes in their

artworks, reflecting their individual experiences, cultural heritage, and engagement with social and political issues. Some common themes include war, conflict, identity, memory, diaspora, gender, and social justice.

Contemporary Iraqi artists employ various artistic mediums and techniques, including painting, sculpture, installation art, photography, video art, performance art, and digital media. This diversity of practices allows artists to experiment with different forms of expression and engage with local and global artistic trends.

The establishment of independent art collectives, artist-run spaces, and galleries has played a crucial role in nurturing the contemporary art scene in Iraq. These platforms provide opportunities for artists to showcase their works, collaborate, and engage with local and international audiences. Some notable institutions include the Iraqi Artists Association, Ruya Foundation, and the Baghdad Contemporary Art Museum (Shabout, 2019, p.259). Furthermore, as noted by Shabout (2006), a significant institution emblematic of the president's keen involvement in and support for the arts was the Saddam Center for the Arts. Situated on Haifa Street in the heart of Baghdad, this establishment was unveiled in 1986 as the designated abode for the assemblage of modern and contemporary Iraqi art until its closure in April 2003. This colossal edifice, characterized by its seven-tiered configuration, stood as a monumental testament to the artistic endeavors of the nation (p. 288).

The legacy of wars, conflicts, and political instability in Iraq has had a profound impact on contemporary Iraqi art. Many artists address the traumas of war, violence, displacement, and cultural loss through their works, offering personal and collective narratives that challenge dominant narratives and highlight the resilience of Iraqi society.

Contemporary Iraqi artists have gained recognition and exhibited their works in major international art events and exhibitions. Participation in biennials, art fairs, and cultural exchanges has provided opportunities for Iraqi artists to engage with the global art community, expand their networks, and promote cross-cultural dialogue.

Many contemporary Iraqi artists use their works as a means of social commentary, critiquing political systems, social inequalities, and human rights issues. Through their artistic practices, they engage with societal debates, challenge power structures, and advocate for change.

In their artistic endeavors, Iraqi artists demonstrate a profound commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage. Their creative explorations are deeply rooted in the rich legacy of ancient Mesopotamian art, wherein they skillfully integrate traditional artistic techniques and motifs into contemporary settings. By doing so, they establish a thought-provoking discourse that bridges the realms of the past and the present. As noted by Iraqi painter Nazar Salim, the cultural mission undertaken by Arab artists can be characterized as the pursuit of "arabizing art" (Al-Khalil, 1992, p. 70), signifying their endeavor to infuse art with Arab cultural identity and resonance.(See figure 3-6).



Figure 3-6 Souad Al-Attar, *The Garden of Aden*, 1993, oil on canvas (Source: Kazem & Yacoup, 2023, p.995).

For example in Al-Attar's work, *The Garden of Aden* (1993), a combination of Assyrian art and Islamic influences can be discerned. (See Figure 3-7). Kazem and Yacoup (2023) provide an analysis of the painting, highlighting its portrayal of the man and woman in a manner that evokes notions of obsession and emotional attraction between them. Drawing inspiration from traditional forms of Assyrian art, as well as incorporating Islamic influences and a touch of mythology, the artwork immerses the viewer in a dreamlike vision where temporal and spatial boundaries dissolve. It conveys a sense of inner peace and harmony, reflecting the stylistic tendencies of Muslim artists within the Islamic civilization. The artist, Souad, exhibits a profound interest in exploring the spiritual connection between the woman and man, depicting their relationship from the dawn of human existence, reminiscent of the romantic bond portrayed in the story of Adam and Eve. The painting captures the woman in a deep slumber, reminiscent of Ophelia's serene repose, while her lover stands beside her, signifying the enduring nature of their bond. The Sumerian mythological elements present in the artwork accentuate the presence of ethereal drapery enveloping the deceased lovers, evoking a mummified stillness and invoking a sense of sacredness, passion, and imagination that transcends conventional reasoning. This fusion of elements creates an atmosphere of strangeness and dreamlike qualities, enticing the viewer to explore its exotic and evocative ambiance (pp. 995-996).



Figure 3-7 Farouk Hassan, *Unfinished Childhood*, 2007, oil and various materials on canvas, 70x70 cm. (Source: Naji & Hussein, 2021, p.5377).

On the other hand Farouk Hassan's artwork, *Unfinished Childhood* (2007), exemplifies the collage method in contemporary Iraqi art. According to Naji and Hussein (2021), the abstraction in the painting, which contains many emotional and sensory connotations with an aesthetic subject, shows Hassan's ability to express and communicate these dimensions through the semantic presence of his technical tool. The authors note that Hassan achieves a meaningful relationship between form and content, creating a cohesive integration within the artwork.

In their analysis, Naji and Hussein (2021) discuss the title of the work, *Unfinished Childhood*, emphasizing its significance within the broader context of the artwork. They highlight the interconnected relations between the environment, the events depicted, and the human entity, particularly in relation to childhood. The authors argue that childhood occupies a central place in the memory of recording events, encompassing emotional dimensions and the experiences that shape one's cultural or professional identity (p. 5378).

Throughout the dynamic narrative of Iraqi art, Perdawood emphasizes the rich cultural heritage and the unique social and historical contexts that shape the experiences of Iraqi artists. Within these contexts, Iraqi artists employ their creative works as reflections on the nation's history and culture, fostering cultural continuity and challenging prevailing narratives. Understanding the historical context of Iraq is pivotal in comprehending the evolution of contemporary Iraqi art, as Perdawood aptly suggests. The contemporary Iraqi art scene emerges as a continuation of enduring themes deeply ingrained in Iraqi art throughout history. It is within this ongoing artistic continuum that the nation's identity is perpetuated and reimagined by contemporary artists, as Perdawood's (2023) analysis elucidates (p. 938).

Perdawood's (2023) analysis highlights the resilience and vitality of the contemporary art scene in Iraq, as artists navigate ongoing conflicts, limited infrastructure, and economic constraints. Despite these challenges, Iraqi artists continue to make significant contributions to the global art discourse, offering unique perspectives and experiences grounded in their Iraqi identity. The framework of historical periods provides a valuable lens for understanding the development of modern Iraqi art, as Perdawood observes. However, it is important to recognize that art movements and styles often intertwine, and individual artists transcend specific temporal boundaries.

4. MUZAHM AL-NASIRI AND HIS ART

4.1. EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Muzahem Al-Nasiri was born in Mosul, Iraq around 1958. His artistic journey began with the completion of his primary, middle, and high school studies, spanning from 1964 to 1977. During this period, Al-Nasiri honed his artistic skills and developed a passion for visual expression.

In pursuit of further artistic education, Al-Nasiri enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad¹ from 1985 to 1994. During his time at the academy, he learned drawing from prominent artists such as Faiq Hassan, Walid Sheet, Muhammad Ghani Hikmat, Turki Hussein, Maher Al-Samarrai, Shnyar Abdullah, Muhammad Al-Araibi, Najm Haider, and other Iraqi artists in the fields of painting and sculpture.

After graduating, Muzahim Al-Nasiri worked as a painter at the Abu Mitty Gallery, located near Babylon Cinema in Baghdad. Together with two other artists from Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra, they established their own studio in Karada. Later, he left Iraq and travelled to Syria, where he participated in art exhibitions, including the exhibition of the common wall, and engaged in other important artistic activities. He then relocated to Qatar, where he has been residing until the present time. Muzahim Al-Nasiri has participated in numerous significant art exhibitions and festivals, and he has also hosted a specialised art programme titled "Art Programme" on the Qatari channel. In this programme, he presented various aspects of drawing and provided technical courses teaching the principles of drawing (Al-Nasseri M. , 2022). (See Figure 4-1).

¹ The Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad is a prestigious institution within the Iraqi art community, recognized for its commitment to nurturing artistic talent and promoting visual arts. Established in 1961, the Academy offers comprehensive programs in various artistic disciplines, providing students with rigorous training in both theory and practice. With a faculty of accomplished artists and educators, the Academy imparts knowledge and mentorship to aspiring artists, fostering individual expression and cultural preservation. Exhibitions and opportunities for showcasing artwork further contribute to the development and recognition of emerging artists, solidifying the Academy's role in shaping the artistic landscape in Iraq.



Figure 4-1 Muzahem Al-Nasiri in Irak in 1989, with courtesy of the artist.

For many years, he utilized his artistic skills to create captivating artworks that resonated with viewers. His artistic pursuits were shaped by the cultural heritage, rich history, and diverse influences of his home country.

4.2. ARTISTIC EVOLUTION AND THE CAREER OF MOZAHIM AL-NASIRI

Muzahem Al-Nasiri, an exceptionally talented artist, embarked on a remarkable journey as a freelance painter in Iraq, investing numerous years in refining his artistic abilities and producing captivating artworks. Nevertheless, following the significant events of 2003, he faced the arduous choice of departing from his native land. Driven by the desire to explore fresh avenues for artistic expression and to reach a wider audience with his creations, Al-Nasiri made the decision to relocate and establish his new artistic home in Doha, Qatar. As Saad (2008) succinctly summarizes, the general motivations underlying this departure can be outlined as follows:

The wars and isolation which faced Iraqis from the 1980s to the present have affected the nation widely and presented a massive challenge to social and cultural life. Art during this time has often been utilised to promote political agendas and

propaganda. This, of course, meant that the state did continue to show support for artists, and to show an interest in what work they were creating. A climate of volatility and suffering either encouraged or forced many artists and intellectuals to settle abroad. Throughout his artistic journey, Al-Nasiri has actively participated in numerous prestigious exhibitions, both regionally and internationally. In 2006, he had the privilege of showcasing his artwork at the Emirates Palace Hotel in Abu Dhabi, UAE, as part of an exhibition featuring selected paintings and sculptures by Arab artists. This opportunity provided him with a platform to showcase his unique artistic vision and connect with art enthusiasts and collectors from diverse backgrounds. (p.54)

In Ghazoul's (2009) scholarly work, the notion that physical separation from one's homeland does not equate to a complete abandonment of identity or a disregard for historical roots is emphasized, stating "Being away does not mean severing identity or dismissing the past" (p. 234). The author further highlights the contemporary reality of a globalized world where territorial boundaries are becoming less significant, and underscores the deep-seated connection that diasporic Iraqis maintain with their native country, drawing a parallel to the sentiment felt by diasporic Irish individuals towards Ireland, expressing that "We live in a de-territorialized world but diasporan Iraqis cannot imagine themselves without Iraq, just as diasporan Irish cannot imagine themselves without Ireland" (p. 234). Undoubtedly, this sentiment resonates with the experience of Muzahem Al-Nasiri, as he, too, exemplifies the enduring attachment to Iraq despite residing outside its geographical confines.

The following year, in 2007, Al-Nasiri participated in a notable exhibition titled "The Walls" at the Free Hand Gallery in Damascus, Syria. Collaborating with the artist Ahmed Al-Karkhi, the exhibition offered an exploration of artistic expression through various mediums and themes, allowing Al-Nasiri to contribute his distinctive artistic perspective to the collective showcase. This exhibition offered a distinctive artistic dialogue, inviting visitors to explore the conceptual and aesthetic dimensions of the presented artworks while engaging with the wider socio-cultural context of the region.

In 2008, Al-Nasiri's artistic endeavors led him to participate in the Arab Forum for Plastic Art, which was organized by the Qatar Plastic Arts Association and the Cultural Village Foundation (Katara) in Doha, Qatar. This event provided a platform for artists to exhibit their works and engage in discussions and exchange of ideas within the artistic community.

In 2018, Al-Nasiri's artistic prowess was recognized once again when he participated in an exhibition titled "The Elite" at the Qatar Plastic Arts Association. This event showcased the exceptional talents of artists and served as a testament to Al-Nasiri's commitment to his craft and his continued contributions to the art scene in Qatar.

Furthermore, Mozahim Al-Nasiri participated in significant art auctions, including the notable event entitled "Art of Uruk: Land of the Rock, Creations by the Descendants of the Cradle of Civilization, the Land of Innovation, Evolution, and Elevation." This auction took place in December 2020, hosted in Al Reem Island, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The occasion provided a prestigious platform for artists, showcasing the artistic contributions stemming from the rich historical legacy of Uruk, a city renowned for its cultural and creative heritage. Al-Nasiri's involvement in this auction highlights his recognition within the art community and signifies his contribution to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the artistic traditions and contemporary expressions originating from this historic region.

In 2022, Mozahim Al-Nasiri actively took part in the "Masarat 1 Exhibition" held at the esteemed Al Markhiya Gallery situated in Katara. Al-Nasiri's participation in this collective exhibition showcases his artistic prowess in effectively manipulating the interplay between color and light. His artworks intricately weave together elements of realism and abstraction, generating a visual language that captivates viewers. Through bold and dynamic paintings, Al-Nasiri engages the audience in a journey of exploration, challenging traditional notions of color and inviting contemplation of abstract concepts. In these evocative works, he deftly encapsulates the essence of his thematic explorations, while simultaneously manifesting a diverse range of artistic expressions (Qatar Moments, 2022).

Currently residing in Doha, Qatar, Muzahem Al-Nasiri works full time from his studio, dedicating himself to his art practice. As a member of the Iraqi Plastic Artists Association, he maintains a connection with his roots and engages with fellow artists and the artistic community. Moreover, Al-Nasiri's involvement as a member of the International Association of Fine Arts highlights his commitment to artistic exploration, collaboration, and his ongoing dedication to the field of visual arts. (See Figure 4-2).



Figure 4-2 A recent portrait photo of the artist. (Source: Al-Nasiri, 2021).

Through his participation in exhibitions and his artistic pursuits, Muzahem Al-Nasiri continues to leave an indelible mark on the art world, captivating viewers with his evocative works and contributing to the diverse and vibrant artistic landscape of the region and beyond.

4.3. STYLISTIC OVERVIEW OF HIS PAINTINGS

In the early stages of Muzahim Al-Nasiri's career in Iraq, he focused on capturing the reality of everyday life and the people around him. He depicted landscapes, countryside scenes, and social interactions without embellishment, aiming to convey the rawness of life. His paintings showcased nature from various perspectives and angles, utilising light to create a sense of depth and realism.

Colours were used to simulate reality, emphasising the interplay between shadow and light. Through his brushstrokes, Al-Nasiri infused his emotions and experiences into his work, creating a medium that engages the senses and evokes emotions. As Al-Nasiri transitioned to a new phase in his artistic life by leaving Iraq and moving to Syria, his style began to evolve. He participated in wall exhibitions where he departed from his previous approach and started incorporating detailed realism into his subjects, particularly focusing on ageing walls affected by climate and time. This exploration of texture and the addition of magical realism elements created a three-dimensional effect with symbolic undertones. Continuing his journey, Al-Nasiri relocated to Qatar, where he further expanded his artistic repertoire. He embraced hyperrealism and meticulous attention to detail, infusing his work with anthropomorphic symbols and elements of magical realism. He also experimented with combining realism and abstraction, employing bold brushstrokes and various techniques. Despite these explorations, he remained dedicated to painting landscapes, still-life compositions, and themes related to horses. Additionally, he delved into personal portraiture, showcasing exceptional precision while infusing elements of magical realism. His artistic range also encompassed abstract paintings, often incorporating collage techniques and different materials. In summary, Muzahim Al-Nasiri's artistic journey involved a progression from capturing the reality of everyday life in Iraq to exploring magical realism and symbolism in Syria and Qatar. He constantly pushed the boundaries of his style, combining realism, abstraction, and elements of the fantastic to create a unique and captivating body of work.

Muzahim Al-Nasiri's paintings depict the realism of everyday life in a dignified and poetic manner, offering insights into the artist's own journey and style. He initially experimented with figurative and emotional elements, showcasing an unrestricted style that blended realistic and abstract expressions. The artist's mastery of colour and ability to manipulate its spectra and degrees played a significant role in his work. His paintings draw from the aesthetics of the Middle Ages and beyond, serving as a cultural heritage. When observing Al-Nasiri's brushwork, one senses a frank challenge between the artist and the portrayal of intricate details. Each unit or detail within his artistic compositions stands as an

individual and captivating painting, seamlessly integrating with the overall reality and temporal factor of the artwork. The great Iraqi artist performs a magnificent artistic symphony as a result of Al-Nasiri's intention, which is not merely reproduction or imitation but rather a redistribution and reimagining of the subject matter.

According to the Chiswick Auctions website, Muzahim Al-Nasiri's artistic focus lies in the realm of portraiture, where he delves into the exploration of the symbiotic relationship between the subject's personality and the artist's interpretation. The website highlights that Al-Nasiri's works emanate his own distinct personality, evoking a range of emotions such as love, boredom, panic, and depression. The artist's ability to transform the ordinary into the abstract is emphasized, as he fearlessly challenges the boundaries of color and form, aiming to establish a profound connection with the viewer. The psychological aspect of color holds significance in Al-Nasiri's artistic practice, serving as a conduit for expressing his own moods, emotions, and personal experiences. Ultimately, Al-Nasiri's evocative art draws us into his inner world, inviting us to engage with his introspective narratives and embark on a journey of visual and emotional exploration.

Symbolism plays a crucial role in Muzahem Al-Nasiri's artworks. Each element within his compositions is carefully selected and imbued with symbolic meaning, creating layers of interpretation and allegory. Al-Nasiri employs symbolism to convey profound ideas, emotions, and messages, inviting viewers to engage with the deeper significance embedded within his art. These symbolic representations enhance the visual narrative, enriching the viewer's experience and fostering a deeper appreciation for the complexities of his artistic expression.

The artist's vast array of artistic expressions spans music, painting, literature, theatre, and other domains. While he initially focused on academically painting scenes from real life, he also ventured into abstract painting, employing collages and different materials on various occasions. Al-Nasiri seamlessly merged realistic and abstract styles, often incorporating them into the background of his works. Later on, he dedicated himself to hyperrealistic portraiture, infusing his

paintings with a touch of magical realism that set them apart from the works of other artists.

4.4. THEMES AND MOTIFS IN MUZAHM AL-NASIRI'S ARTWORKS

Muzahem Al-Nasiri's art is characterized by a profound exploration of various themes. His paintings delve into the depths of human experience, touching upon notions of identity, memory, and the human condition. Through his artwork, Al-Nasiri invites viewers to contemplate the intricacies of the human psyche, often depicting introspective and contemplative subjects. The themes he addresses resonate with universal emotions and experiences, allowing viewers to forge personal connections with the narratives unfolding within his art.

The artist places great emphasis on the academic aspect of his work, displaying high levels of professionalism and skill. Most of Al-Nasiri's paintings revolve around social topics inspired by public life, as evident from the titles he assigns to his works, such as *A Woman with Dry Roses*, *The Dove*, *The Woman's Meditation*, *The Sitting of Women*, *The Animal Shepherd*, *Café Folk*, *Horses*, *Belly Dance*, *Ballet Dancers*, *Landscapes*, *Set-Live*, and portraits. In recent years, he has gravitated towards hyperrealism and magical realism, intertwining his realistic style with his imaginative faculties in many of his paintings. Al-Nasiri is a genuine Iraqi artist dedicated to reconnecting with his heritage, originality, and tradition. His realistic style resonates deeply with viewers, avoiding the labyrinths of abstraction and ambiguity. He prioritises transparency in presenting his aesthetic ideas. As one of the most prominent creators in Iraqi visual arts, he combines the literal, academic, and stylistic aspects, drawing influence (Al-Nasiri, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

Mozahim Al-Nasiri's artistic endeavors delve into the nuanced portrayal of Iraqi women, capturing their physical presence while imbuing them with a sense of contemplative dreams. Notably, his distinctive style often incorporates the attachment of various elements, such as flowers, fishes or birds, to the faces of the depicted women. (See Figure 4-3). Through this artistic choice, Al-Nasiri

accentuates the beauty of these women while drawing inspiration from the complex tapestry of social issues prevalent in public life (Al-Nasiri, personal communication, November 15, 2022).



Figure 4-3 Al-Nasiri with two large paintings each depicting a woman's face (Source: Allan, 2021).

Al-Nasiri's works also exhibit a celebration of nature as a wellspring of creativity. However, his interpretation of nature surpasses a literal depiction of trees, rivers, birds, and light. Instead, he employs nature as a symbolic entity, evoking a duality of joy tinged with a subtle undercurrent of sadness. This fusion of emotions allows for a multifaceted exploration of the human experience within the context of the natural world (Al-Nasiri, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

Within the realm of Iraqi visual arts, Al-Nasiri has established a formidable presence and a distinct artistic voice. His unique style and skill set him apart from his contemporaries, solidifying his position as an artist of significance. Through his poignant representations and thoughtful incorporation of symbolic elements, Al-Nasiri succeeds in capturing the essence of Iraqi women, while also shedding

light on broader societal issues. This dedication to artistic exploration and his ability to navigate the complexities of the human condition contribute to his notable achievements in the realm of visual arts. (Al-Nasiri, personal communication, July 23, 2023).

Muzahem Al-Nasiri's art frequently draws inspiration from Iraqi cultural heritage and historical contexts. His artworks incorporate visual references and allusions to ancient Mesopotamian art, folk traditions, and historical events. By interweaving cultural and historical elements, Al-Nasiri's paintings establish a connection with Iraq's rich cultural legacy. Through these references, he not only honors his heritage but also encourages dialogue around cultural preservation, historical memory, and the intersections between past and present. (Al-Nasiri, personal communication, July 23, 2023).

He demonstrates a profound knowledge of Arabian horses, their various types and colours, and the intricate details of their physical structure and aesthetics. His expertise shines through in his smooth and realistically illusionistic glossy paintings. Audiences have always been captivated by artworks that deceive their eyes, making them believe they are witnessing the real thing rather than a simple representation. Al-Nasiri is rightfully regarded as one of Iraq's foremost artists in the realm of realistic painting (Al Dawood, personal communication, December 5, 2022).

5. SAMPLE ARTWORKS

5.1. WOMEN



Figure 5-1 Muzahem Al-Nasiri, *Pharaonic Princess*, 2002, oil on canvas, 170 x 130 cm. (Source: Al-Nasiri, 2020).

This painting showcases a captivating portrayal of a woman immersed in the act of playing the harp. Created in 2002 using oil on canvas, this artwork embodies a harmonious blend of beauty, strength, and symbolism (See Figure 5-1).

The central figure, adorned with a gold headdress and necklace, exudes an air of royalty and elegance. Positioned on an ornate throne, her crossed legs and delicate hand placement on the harp strings exemplify both poise and dexterity. The artist's attention to detail in depicting the woman's profile and expression of concentration adds a sense of depth and introspection to the composition.

The contrast between the dark brown background and the vibrant colors of the woman's clothing and jewelry creates a visually striking effect, drawing the viewer's attention to the protagonist. The inclusion of two towering pillars on either side of her enhances the grandeur and importance of the scene, evoking a sense of historical or mythological significance.

Notably, the presence of a sword resting atop its scabbard in front of the princess introduces an intriguing element of strength and power. This symbol serves as a reminder of the multifaceted nature of the depicted figure, blending her inherent beauty and grace with an underlying sense of resilience and authority.

While rooted in realism, the painting also incorporates symbolic elements. The inclusion of the pillars and the sword introduces a touch of metaphorical significance, further enhancing the narrative and thematic depth of the artwork.

Overall, *Pharaonic Princess* is a masterful composition that captivates viewers with its blend of aesthetics, symbolism, and storytelling. Muzahem Al-Nasiri skillfully conveys the juxtaposition of beauty and strength, inviting contemplation and appreciation of the timeless allure of this artwork.



Figure 5-2 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, *His Woman Reads*, 1997, oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

The painting titled *His Woman Reads* by Muzahem Al-Nasiri is a captivating example of his artistic style, characterized by a blend of realism and impressionism. Completed in 1997, this artwork showcases Al-Nasiri's ability to

convey emotion through his brushwork and incorporates elements of eroticism (See Figure 5-2).

The artwork presents a depiction of a young woman in her twenties, adorned in a resplendent pink gown, wholly engrossed in the act of reading. The artist's meticulous attention to detail is discernible in the deliberate portrayal of the woman's countenance, encompassing her delicate facial expressions and the intricacies of her cascading tresses, which exhibit a rich, dark brown hue. The lifelike representation of the subject establishes an air of familiarity and human connection, resonating with the viewer's sensibilities.

Al-Nasiri's brushwork embodies the qualities of impressionism, employing unrestrained and expressive strokes that encapsulate the very essence of the scene. This technique imparts a palpable sense of movement and vivacity to the painting, extending an invitation to the viewer to engage with the artwork on a profound emotional level. The impressionistic brushstrokes engender a visual dynamism that breathes life into the composition, endowing it with vibrancy and animation.

Moreover, *His Woman Reads* incorporates elements of eroticism, as subtly implied through the artist's deliberate portrayal of the woman's allure and the intimate act of reading. This discreet erotic undercurrent bestows upon the artwork an added stratum of intricacy and fascination, thereby provoking the viewer's imagination and eliciting a sensual response.

In summary, *His Woman Reads* demonstrates Muzahem Al-Nasiri's artistic style, combining realistic elements with impressionistic brushwork. The presence of impressionistic strokes infuses the painting with movement and vitality, while the inclusion of erotic undertones adds depth and intrigue to the composition. Together, these artistic choices create a compelling and evocative artwork that engages the viewer's senses and invites contemplation.



Figure 5-3 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, *Reem Aljamaly*, 2019, oil on canvas, 90 x 90 cm. (Source: Al-Nasiri, 2019).

The painting, portrays a woman in a brown dress with her hand on her head, exhibiting a serene smile and a relaxed demeanor. The artist employs a representational style, depicting the subject with a focus on realism and attention to detail. The woman's long dark hair, styled away from her face, accentuates her delicate facial features, including high cheekbones and full lips. The closed eyes suggest a sense of contentment, further enhancing the overall atmosphere of tranquility (See Figure 5-3).

The artist's use of muted shades of grey, browns, and blues contributes to the painting's sophisticated ambiance. These subdued tones create a subdued color palette, evoking a sense of calm and subtlety. The artist's deliberate choice of these colors also enhances the prominence of the woman's smile, which stands out

amidst the more reserved hues. This juxtaposition creates a visually appealing contrast, simultaneously infusing the artwork with a sense of warmth and sophistication.

The inclusion of jewelry in the painting adds an element of refinement and elegance to the composition. The gold or silver metal links of the bracelet on the woman's wrist, as well as the ornate necklace adorned with colorful stones, accentuate her attire and enhance her overall appearance. These meticulously rendered details contribute to the overall aesthetic appeal of the artwork and reinforce the theme of style and sophistication.

Additionally, the presence of a painting within the painting, depicting another individual holding a paintbrush, introduces an element of artistic introspection and self-reflection. This secondary artwork in the background serves as a subtle nod to the creative process and the artist's profession. It adds depth to the composition and invites viewers to contemplate the relationship between the artist, the subject, and the act of creation itself.

Overall, Muzahem Al-Nasiri's painting adeptly captures a moment of joy and relaxation through its skillful portrayal of a woman with refined features and a captivating smile. The artist's attention to detail, use of muted colors, and incorporation of jewelry all contribute to the painting's evocative and aesthetically pleasing nature. This artwork showcases the artist's ability to merge elements of style, elegance, and everyday comfort, making it suitable for various purposes such as fashion magazines or advertisements for clothing stores and beauty products.



Figure 5-4 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, *Untitled*, 2020, oil on canvas, 170 x 170 cm. (Source: Al-Nasiri, 2020b).

Al-Nasiri presents a compelling portrayal in this painting, demonstrating a distinct style and evoking a sense of intimacy and connection between the depicted woman and nature (See Figure 5-4). Employing a representational approach, the artist skillfully captures the subject's physical attributes and imbues the artwork with a sense of beauty, gracefulness, femininity, and strength.

The woman, depicted with long, dark hair and fair skin, serves as the central focus of the composition. Her delicate facial features, including her almond-shaped eyes, small nose, and full lips, are rendered with precision, contributing to the overall realism of the portrayal. The artist's attention to detail extends to the woman's attire, as seen in the intricate details on the bodice and sleeves of her dark-colored dress. This level of intricacy adds an element of refinement to the composition while emphasizing the subject's elegance and femininity.

Notably, the inclusion of the single flower, delicately placed behind the woman's ear, establishes a connection between the figure and the natural world. The

flower's dried petals, predominantly brown with hints of yellow at their tips, contrast with the woman's fair complexion, drawing attention to the symbiotic relationship between the human form and the transient beauty of nature. This juxtaposition contributes to a sense of temporal and emotional depth, inviting contemplation of themes such as the passage of time, the cycle of life, and the interconnectedness of human existence with the environment.

The background, executed in light grey, serves as a muted yet effective backdrop, allowing the woman's features and the colors of the flower to emerge prominently. This choice enhances the visual impact of the composition by directing the viewer's gaze towards the subject's face and the organic elements. The understated background also evokes a sense of calm and serenity, complementing the overall atmosphere of the painting.

In sum, Muzahim Al-Nasiri's painting manifests a distinctive style characterized by its attention to detail, realistic portrayal, and thematic exploration of the relationship between the depicted woman and the natural world. Through the artist's adept handling of composition and color, this artwork communicates an intimate moment that conveys notions of beauty, gracefulness, femininity, and strength.



Figure 5-5 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, *Untitled*, 2018, oil on canvas, 170 x 170 cm. (Source: Al-Nasiri, 2018).

Al-Nasiri presents a captivating composition in this painting, showcasing his distinctive artistic style while evoking a range of emotions through meticulous attention to detail and thought-provoking symbolism (See Figure 5-5). The artwork depicts a woman with a profound and intense expression, adorned with several roses in unconventional ways. Notably, a rose is portrayed as lodged in her throat, adding a striking element of visual metaphor. Additionally, the woman's bosom is embellished with seven roses, adhered to her clothing with adhesive tape.

The use of symbolism in this piece is particularly noteworthy. The rose stuck in the woman's throat speaks to a silenced voice or stifled emotions, suggesting a sense of constraint or inner turmoil. This element conveys a deeper narrative of struggle or unexpressed emotions within the subject. The presence of seven roses, affixed to her bosom with adhesive tape, adds another layer of symbolism. This

unconventional arrangement may evoke themes of attachment, vulnerability, or the burden of expectations placed upon individuals.

Al-Nasiri's meticulous attention to detail is evident in the rendering of the woman's features and the precise depiction of the roses. The artist's deliberate choice of muted yet evocative colors further enhances the somber atmosphere of the painting, creating a mood that resonates with introspection and emotional depth.

In summary, Mozahim Al-Nasiri's painting demonstrates his unique artistic style and adeptness in conveying complex emotions through symbolism and composition. The inclusion of a rose stuck in the woman's throat and the unconventional arrangement of roses on her bosom with adhesive tape adds layers of meaning and invites viewers to reflect on themes of constraint, suppressed emotions, and societal expectations. This thought-provoking artwork stands as a testament to Al-Nasiri's skillful craftsmanship and ability to evoke powerful emotions through visual representation.



Figure 5-6 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, *Portrait of a Girl*, 2021, oil on canvas, 150 x 90 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

In *Portrait of a Girl* created in 2021, Al-Nasiri demonstrates a thoughtful artistic composition that juxtaposes a realistic portrait with abstract elements, some of which carry symbolic representations. (See Figure 5-6). The artist skillfully integrated these components into a cohesive unit that resonates with the theme of the artwork, incorporating the artist's contemplations on womanhood. The abstract shapes intersect with the human form, derived by the artist, reflecting both the artist's inspiration from the surrounding environment and their vivid imagination. This is evident in the vocabulary of the artwork and the suggested formations, which also convey simplicity and a spirit of optimism. The explicit use of colours such as red, violet, and green, along with their subtle gradations, form semiotic relationships, collectively creating an immersive and imaginative atmosphere.

Muzahem Al-Nasiri skillfully infused his subjects with aesthetic visions that mirrored his preoccupations and explorations of the interplay between shapes and colours. The artist aimed to blend realistic forms with abstraction, a characteristic feature found in many of his works, thereby asserting his contemporary style. This was particularly evident in compositions that focused on specific aspects of the painting. The artwork conveys an emotional narrative, as indicated by the profound and crystallised vision, while the form is imbued with rich human content, accentuating the artistic product's uniqueness and its inclination towards modern experimentation.

The artist displayed a keen interest in portraying space, which harmonised with the realistic forms evident in the technical execution of the artwork. The resulting colour spaces serve as indicators of the spatial dimension, allowing for an interpretive reading of the artwork. This artistic product emerged as a manifestation of the artist's cultivated culture. Through his formations, the artist endeavoured to convey his innermost emotions and thoughts, liberating himself from relying solely on visual and sensory perceptions of the physical world. This departure from traditional conventions and surroundings allowed for a more personal and imaginative exploration, transcending the constraints of realism.

Al-Nasiri effortlessly recognised the boundless capacity of the human face to express and unveil the depths of the soul, enabling genuine communication with

others. Through meticulous attention to detail, the artist effectively captured the entirety of the individual's personality, encompassing their physical, psychological, and social characteristics. In particular, the technique of physical description played a pivotal role in portraying the character's essence, an essential aspect of realistic painting. Al-Nasiri skillfully employed this technique to define the external features of the woman, offering us a vivid depiction. "She possessed a youthful countenance with porcelain-like, fair skin. Her face had a slightly elongated shape, accentuating her most striking features gorgeous blue eyes that complemented her flowing, blonde hair." Al-Nasiri's portrait of this woman expertly conveyed her self-awareness and the image she sought to project through her appearance, skillfully balancing the interplay of revealing and concealing to bring out her nuanced details.

5.2. EVERYDAY LIFE



Figure 5-7 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, *Untitled*, 2007, oil on canvas, 70 x 80 cm. (Source: MutualArt, 2018).

Muzahim Al-Nasiri showcases his artistic prowess and evocative style in the untitled painting executed in 2007 (see Figure 5-7). Executed in oil on canvas and measuring 70*80 cm, the artwork portrays a woman adorned with a black

headscarf, commanding attention with her intense gaze and carefully rendered facial features. Illuminated by the strategically placed light source, her dark and piercing eyes emanate a profound sense of depth, while her slightly parted lips suggest a state of concentration or contemplation.

The woman's attire, consisting of a long-sleeved garment embellished with intricate patterns along the edges, contributes to the overall composition of the artwork. The meticulous attention to detail in depicting the clothing enhances the visual impact and adds an additional layer of complexity to the subject matter.

The predominantly white background, subtly interwoven with hints of brown tones, creates an intriguing contrast against the figure, emphasizing her prominence within the composition. This deliberate juxtaposition amplifies the visual impact, further accentuating the woman's presence and separating her from the surrounding environment. Notably, Al-Nasiri skillfully employs acrylic paint in select areas, enhancing texture and imbuing the painting with additional depth.

As a whole, this painting captivates viewers by encapsulating a fleeting moment in time, effectively eliciting both emotion and contemplation. The artwork possesses an immersive quality, drawing observers into its depths, inviting them to engage with the profound narrative embedded within. Through his masterful technique and meticulous attention to detail, Al-Nasiri successfully communicates a powerful atmosphere that resonates with the viewers, evoking a sense of introspection and compelling them to explore the layers of meaning present within the artwork.



Figure 5-8 Muzahim Al-Nasiri, *Sitting Women*, 2007, oil on canvas, 150 x 80 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

The painting *Sitting Women* by Muzahem Al-Nasiri showcases his distinct artistic style. Completed in 2007, this artwork demonstrates Al-Nasiri's ability to capture a moment of daily life within an indoor setting. The composition primarily focuses on three figures, two women, and a child, drawing attention to their presence through the artist's deliberate use of color, composition, and attention to detail. (See Figure 5-8).

Al-Nasiri's style in this painting exhibits elements of realism and contemporary representation. The figures are rendered with detailed facial features, suggesting a level of individuality and possibly drawing inspiration from mythology or folklore. The use of modern clothing juxtaposed with potentially mythological references adds an intriguing layer of ambiguity and invites interpretation.

The artist's choice of a neutral color palette, featuring shades of grey and white for the background, directs the viewer's attention to the central figures. The play of light and shadow, particularly on the figure sitting on the right, creates a sense of mystery and depth.

The painting captures a moment of activity and domesticity, as depicted by the woman on the left engaged in cooking over an open flame. The presence of scattered bowls and plates hints at the preparation of food or a shared meal, conveying a sense of warmth and companionship. The relaxed expressions and body language of the figures further enhance the feeling of contentment and harmonious interaction.

Overall, *Sitting Women* showcases Muzahem Al-Nasiri's ability to depict everyday moments with a touch of intrigue and cultural references. His use of realism, contemporary representation, and attention to detail combined with the inclusion of mythological elements creates a visually engaging artwork that invites viewers to reflect upon the intersection of tradition and modernity in domestic settings.

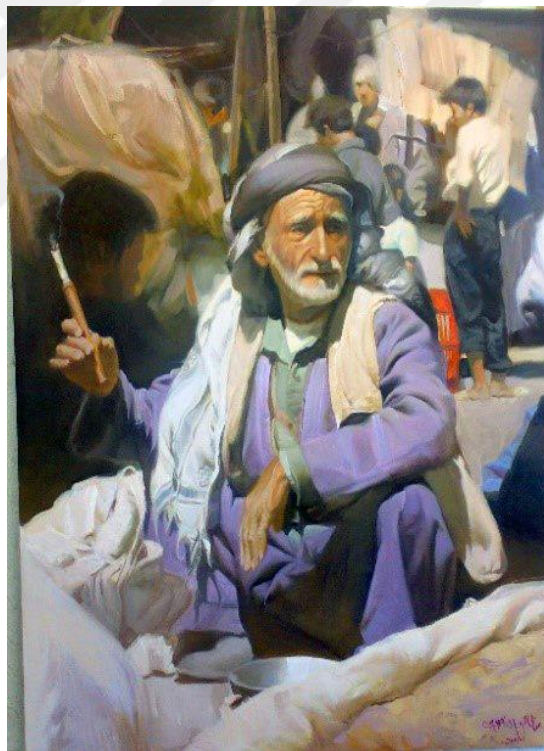


Figure 5-9 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, *Cigarette Seller*, 2006, oil on canvas, 100 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Muzahim Al-Nasiri's painting, titled *Cigarette Seller*, showcases his distinct artistic style and demonstrates his skill in capturing the essence of his subjects (See Figure 5-9). Through his use of oil on canvas, Al-Nasiri presents an intimate

scene featuring an elderly man immersed in the act of smoking a cigarette. The artist's attention to detail and meticulous execution contribute to the overall realism and depth of the composition.

The focal point of the painting is the elderly man, whose contemplative expression and distant gaze evoke a sense of introspection. The artist's ability to convey the man's emotions through subtle facial features is noteworthy, as it invites viewers to engage with the subject's thoughts and reflections. The man's clothing, a grey shirt and trousers, hints at the indoor setting, possibly within a domestic environment or studio space.

Al-Nasiri employs a muted color palette dominated by shades of grey, which lends a somber and introspective atmosphere to the painting. The deliberate choice of colors reinforces the contemplative nature of the scene and adds a sense of depth and complexity to the overall composition. Additionally, the presence of other figures in the background, their backs turned towards the viewer, suggests a narrative element and invites speculation about the broader context of the painting.

The artist's skillful attention to detail is evident throughout the artwork. Notably, the hands of the elderly man exhibit a subtle blur, suggesting movement and capturing a sense of realism. This attention to capturing the nuances of the human form adds depth and texture to the painting, enhancing its visual appeal and creating a captivating experience for viewers.

In conclusion, Muzahim Al-Nasiri's "Cigarette Seller" exemplifies his artistic style and proficiency in realism. Through his meticulous execution and thoughtful portrayal of the elderly man, Al-Nasiri invites viewers to contemplate the subject's emotions and ponder the broader narrative implied by the presence of additional figures. The painting's subdued color palette and intricate attention to detail further enhance its artistic merit and contribute to its overall allure.



Figure 5-10 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, *Direct Model*, 2013, oil on canvas, 100 x 90 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

The painting titled *Direct Model* by Muzahim Al-Nasiri, completed in 2013, captures the essence of a mature man with a sense of seriousness and contemplation. (See Figure 5-10). The subject, depicted in his mid-sixties, wears glasses that add an air of intellectual depth to his appearance. The artist has skillfully portrayed the man in an indoor setting, with a warm color palette of browns and greys creating a subdued and introspective atmosphere. The attention to detail is evident in the man's clothing, which reflects contemporary fashion trends with its modern style and color choices.

Al-Nasiri's expertise is showcased through his meticulous approach to depicting the man's facial features. The fine brushstrokes reveal individual strands of hair, wrinkles, and creases, conveying the passage of time and capturing the subject's unique character. The artist's focus on realism extends to the man's glasses, which

have thin frames that rest elegantly on his face, adding a touch of sophistication and authenticity to the overall composition.

Throughout the painting, Al-Nasiri's skillful use of brushwork creates a sense of texture and depth, making the various elements come to life. The viewer can almost feel the fabric of the man's clothing and the warmth of his skin. This attention to detail not only enhances the realism of the artwork but also allows for a deeper emotional connection with the subject. The man's hands resting on his lap, fingers intertwined, evoke a sense of introspection and contemplation, inviting the viewer to reflect alongside him.

In summary, *Direct Model* exemplifies Muzahim Al-Nasiri's ability to humanize his subjects through meticulous attention to detail and a realistic artistic style. The painting transports us into the world of the mature man, capturing his presence and inviting us to engage with his thoughts and emotions. Through his masterful brushwork and careful composition, Al-Nasiri creates an artwork that resonates with viewers, offering a glimpse into the complexity and depth of the human experience.



Figure 5-11 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, *Portrait*, 2013, oil on canvas, 120 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Muzahim Al-Nasiri's painting titled *Portrait*, created in 2013, presents a captivating depiction of an elderly man, emanating a strong sense of wisdom and character. (See Figure 5-11). Through the skillful use of oil on canvas, Al-Nasiri brings forth a textured and visually engaging artwork.

The composition is centered around the subject's face, skillfully framed within the surrounding picture frame. The man's long black hair and beard contribute to his distinguished appearance, suggesting a lifetime of experiences and stories. Notably, the white shirt he wears draws attention to his face, intensifying the focus on his expression.

The piercing gaze of the subject captures the viewer's attention, evoking a sense of confidence and authority. His eyes lock with ours, as if inviting us to delve into his world and explore the depths of his being. This direct engagement fosters a connection between the viewer and the depicted individual, encouraging us to reflect on his unique story and personality.

Adding to the painting's allure, a series of vintage photographs are arranged behind the subject. These faded images of different sizes evoke a sense of nostalgia, transporting us to moments of the subject's past. They hint at a rich personal history, inviting us to imagine the events and people that have shaped his life.

A trumpet positioned near the subject's head serves as an intriguing element within the composition. It suggests a possible involvement in music or other artistic endeavors, offering insights into the subject's creative spirit and passions. This detail adds depth and complexity to his identity, inviting contemplation about the range of his artistic expressions.

The slight parting of the subject's lips infuses the painting with a touch of anticipation. It hints at a forthcoming utterance or melodic outpouring, igniting our curiosity about the words or music that may follow. This evocative gesture invites viewers to ponder the significance of his imminent communication and invites us into a moment of shared emotion and expression.

In conclusion, Muzahim Al-Nasiri's *Portrait* captures the profound beauty and intrigue of an older individual's life story. Through meticulous attention to detail and a masterful composition, the artist compels us to connect with the subject, reflecting on his experiences, creative pursuits, and personal history. The intense gaze, vintage photographs, and the presence of the trumpet all contribute to the painting's enigmatic quality, enticing viewers to embark on a journey of contemplation and appreciation for the complexity of human existence as immortalized on canvas.

5.3. IMAGINATIVE REPRESENTATIONS AND ABSTRACT WORKS



Figure 5-12 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, Suite and Woman, 2013, oil on canvas with different materials, 150 x 200 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

The painting titled *Suite and Woman* by Muzahem Al-Nasiri, completed in 2013, showcases the artist's unique style and ability to evoke a sense of mystery and connection between the depicted figures. (See Figure 5-12). In this artwork, two statues take center stage, one resembling a winged person and the other likely representing a horse. Through his choice of subject matter and composition, Al-Nasiri invites viewers to delve into the interplay of symbolism and interaction within the painting.

Al-Nasiri's artistic style in this piece can be best described as a harmonious blend of realism and imaginative representation. The statues are meticulously crafted with intricate details, particularly in their facial features, which imbue them with a sense of depth and individuality. The figure with wings, situated on the left side of the painting, is portrayed in a dynamic pose, arms outstretched as if mid-flight. The presence of a blue hat on the figure and the upward gaze suggest a contemplative connection to the celestial realm.

On the right side of the painting, we encounter the second statue, which appears to be an animal, most likely a horse. Al-Nasiri pays careful attention to capturing the horse's essence, focusing on details such as its flowing mane and muzzle, thus infusing the sculpture with a lifelike quality. The slight turn of the horse's head towards the figure with wings creates a sense of implied interaction and mutual awareness, adding to the intrigue of the composition.

The background of the painting predominantly consists of muted shades of grey, contributing to the overall ethereal atmosphere. This deliberate choice enhances the enigmatic quality of the scene, directing the viewer's attention to the interaction between the two statues. Al-Nasiri's use of subdued colors further deepens the sense of intrigue, encouraging viewers to contemplate the underlying relationship and symbolism embedded within the composition.

In conclusion, *Suite and Woman* exemplifies Muzahem Al-Nasiri's artistic prowess in seamlessly blending realism and imagination. Through meticulous attention to detail, evocative portrayal of the figures, and the ethereal backdrop, the artwork captivates and stimulates thought. Al-Nasiri's distinctive style invites viewers to embark on a narrative journey and explore the symbolism present in the painting, fostering a space for personal interpretation and introspection.(See Figure 5-13).



Figure 5-13 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, *The Liberated Girls*, 2019, oil on canvas, 220 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

The painting titled *The Liberated Girls*, completed in 2019, presents a visually captivating scene featuring a group of nine women engaged in an airborne dance. (See Figure 5-13). However, it is important to approach this artwork not only from a formal perspective but also with a critical lens that acknowledges the socio-political context surrounding women's freedoms in the Middle East.

The artwork's title, *The Liberated Girls*, implies a sense of freedom and empowerment. However, it is essential to consider the social and political realities faced by women in the Middle East, which often involve significant restrictions on their freedoms and opportunities for self-expression.

While the composition and vibrant colors of the painting evoke energy and joy, it is necessary to question the underlying message being conveyed. Does this artwork accurately reflect the complexities of women's lives in the Middle East, or does it unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes or present a limited understanding of freedom?

Taking into account the broader socio-political context, women in the Middle East have long fought for gender equality, contending with challenges such as limited access to education, restrictions on personal autonomy, and societal expectations that confine them to traditional gender roles. The artwork's portrayal of women

joyfully defying gravity through dance raises questions about whether it adequately addresses the intricate and diverse struggles experienced by women in this region.

As viewers, it is crucial to approach artworks critically, particularly when the title suggests a sense of liberation that may not align with the lived experiences of women in the Middle East. By examining the artwork with sensitivity and acknowledging the socio-political realities that impact women's freedoms, we can engage in a deeper exploration of the challenges they face and contribute to more inclusive and nuanced artistic representations.

In summary, *The Liberated Girls* by Muzahim Al-Nasiri presents a visually captivating scene, but it is essential to engage with the artwork critically, considering the socio-political context surrounding women's freedoms in the Middle East. By questioning the portrayal of liberation and exploring the complexities of women's experiences, we can foster a deeper understanding and contribute to more nuanced artistic representations.



Figure 5-14 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, *Woman and Pigeon with Dry Rose*, 2015, oil on canvas, 285 x 165 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

In this painting, Muzahim Al-Nasiri demonstrates his remarkable artistic skill by rendering a portrait of a girl adorned with a white dove perched on her left shoulder. The artwork showcases a meticulous level of precision and attention to detail, incorporating elements of hyper-realism and magical realism. A notable feature is the inclusion of a dried flower, seamlessly integrated into the painting to create a three-dimensional effect. Al-Nasiri's expertise in depicting lifelike roses is particularly striking, as they exhibit an astonishing level of realism. To achieve a sense of balance and depth, the artist skillfully employs various shades of brown and their derivatives to carefully position the shadows within the composition. The lighting is expertly utilized to accentuate the girl's face in the mirror and the dove's face, adding further depth and dimension to the artwork.

This piece exemplifies the genre of magical realism, portraying a woman with braided hair accompanied by a white dove perched on her shoulder, adorned with intricately drawn dry roses. Through his exceptional artistic skill, Al-Nasiri captures the aesthetic significance of the woman, serving as an expressive symbol of beauty and compassion. (See Figure 5-14).

The painting also reflects the artist's engagement with a world characterized by societal restrictions and a cautious approach. However, Al-Nasiri's rich visual culture empowers him to explore the female form in his works, recognizing the essential role women play in society. The profound subject matter infuses the artwork with captivating visual energy, seamlessly intertwined with color and form. Each element is meticulously balanced, resulting in a harmonious and powerful expression, executed with meticulous attention to even the smallest details.



Figure 5-15 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, *The Wall*, 2012, oil on canvas, 150 x 90 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

In his artwork titled *The Wall*, created in Suria, Al-Nasiri adeptly explores the concept of a wall. The painting portrays a segment of an aged wall embellished with an assortment of paintings, posters, and a predominantly brown color palette. Political and social pamphlets are haphazardly affixed to the wall, leaving behind remnants of torn paper. The faded inscriptions on the remaining fragments and the wall's surface, exemplified by the white word "Homeland" set against a dark blue background, contribute to the overall composition. Furthermore, light blue and pink paper scraps are seamlessly integrated into the wall, enhancing its visual narrative. (See Figure 5-15).

Mozahem employed oil colours and utilised the technique of optical illusion. For example, brightly coloured fish and heart shapes with a playful touch are located on the bottom right side of the painting. Another section on the left side features a similar technique, including the depiction of shadows that create an illusion of anthropomorphism, seemingly distant from the painting's surface.

Al-Nasiri has made significant strides in developing his artistic language, characterized by a remarkable ability to convey his experiences. One of the distinguishing features is his departure from stereotypes, as he engages in a dialogue with his forms, delving into their historical context before bringing them to life on canvas. In his artistic paintings, Al-Nasiri effectively communicates social content by capturing scenes that unveil the intricacies of daily reality, thereby emphasising its societal significance. Furthermore, the artist skillfully employs various symbols to construct the narrative within his artwork. Al-Nasiri assigns multiple colour values to the forms, enhancing them with strong lines that lend the work a sense of depth and dimension across different levels.

Plastic painting embodies a contemporary concept where the artist relies on their perception of form in all its aspects to bestow upon objects a distinct aesthetic value beyond their inherent worth. This approach transforms shapes into flattened fragments and overlapping slices, seamlessly integrated within the pictorial space. Such a transformation often necessitates the abandonment of traditional techniques used to depict perspective, space, and the play of light and shadow. Consequently, the significance of the shape lies not in its entirety but in its fragmented parts, challenging conventional notions. Modernity, as both a concept and a practise, allows the viewer to revisit the past through the lens of present circumstances. It suggests that the passage of time should not serve as a criterion for determining the novelty of a work, regardless of its age.



Figure 5-16 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, *Childhood Wall*, 2006, oil on canvas and various materials, 150 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Al-Nasiri's painting titled *Childhood Wall* presents a visual composition that revolves around a collection of children's drawings adorning a wall. (See Figure 5-16). The central drawing takes prominence, depicting two children standing side by side with their arms intertwined in a gesture of unity and camaraderie. Surrounding this central piece are numerous smaller drawings in an array of vibrant colors such as orange, yellow, blue, and green. Adding to the composition, a piece of paper adorned with more colorful drawings is affixed to the wall above the central drawing. Notably, an office supply item, likely a stapler or tape dispenser, is positioned in the bottom right corner of the frame.

Upon closer examination, additional elements come into view. A small yellow circle is discernible on another white surface near the top left corner of the image, while towards the center, there is a close-up depiction featuring either stripes or dolls in a variety of colors. Collectively, these elements create an ambiance imbued with creativity and joy, evoking the experience of collaboratively engaging in artistic pursuits with friends or family members.

Al-Nasiri's artistic style in *Childhood Wall* exhibits an emphasis on capturing the innocence and imagination of childhood through the use of vivid colors, childlike drawings, and the depiction of playful interactions. The composition skillfully utilizes the placement of the central drawing to draw the viewer's attention and evoke a sense of unity and connection. The surrounding smaller drawings, with their diverse colors and subjects, contribute to a rich tapestry of childhood expression.

However, one might argue that the inclusion of the office supply item in the bottom right corner appears somewhat incongruous within the overall theme of the artwork. Its presence may introduce an element of discordance or disrupt the otherwise harmonious atmosphere created by the children's drawings. Furthermore, while the incorporation of diverse elements and details adds visual interest, the composition could benefit from a more focused arrangement to enhance the coherence and impact of the central message.

5.4. HORSES



Figure 5-17 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, *Horses*, 2018, oil on canvas, 150 x 90 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

In the oil painting titled *Horses*, created by Al-Nasiri in Suria in 2018, the artist demonstrates remarkable skill and craftsmanship in portraying the captivating beauty and profound significance of purebred Arabian horses. The composition of the artwork centers around a group of eight horses, rendered in a captivating interplay of elegant white and brown tones. These magnificent creatures are accompanied by knights who stand prepared for battle, serving as symbolic representations of strength and valor. Al-Nasiri's meticulous attention to detail is evident throughout the painting, as exemplified by the carefully executed portrayal of the dynamic movement of the clouds. The artist employs a juxtaposition of contrasting colors such as blue, violet, yellow, and orange to depict the clouds, seamlessly blending them with the radiant light emanating from the setting sun. (See Figure 5-17).

The Arabian horses depicted in the artwork exhibit lively and spirited gestures, capturing their playful nature as they flick their tails and paw the ground. Al-Nasiri's intention in creating this artwork is to shine a spotlight on the inherent qualities of strength, nobility, and originality embodied by these remarkable

creatures. In doing so, he seeks to encapsulate the essence of both the knight and the steed, intertwining their attributes within the visual narrative. Furthermore, the portrayal of the men in the painting conveys a sense of toughness and greatness, effectively capturing their resilience and imposing stature.

Through meticulous brushwork and a discerning choice of colors, Al-Nasiri masterfully brings forth the horses' majestic presence and the knights' unwavering determination. The composition serves as a testament to the enduring bond between humans and these awe-inspiring creatures. The artwork invites viewers to appreciate the profound significance of Arabian horses and to reflect upon the intertwined qualities of strength, nobility, and originality that define both human and equine characters depicted in the painting.

The artist employed a distinctive technique in executing this painting. Notably, the composition is divided into three distinct parts: the sky, the group of people and horses, and the earth. Each section is characterised by its own texture and employs a different colouring technique, yet they seamlessly blend together on a single canvas. This artistic approach carries a philosophical message, invoking a sense of joy and openness. The colours adorning the horses appear to celebrate the beauty of the desert, creating a vibrant and captivating visual experience. Through his paintings, the artist provides a comprehensive panorama of the Arabian horse, reflecting the public's enduring fascination with these majestic creatures, particularly in Gulf societies.



Figure 5-18 Al-Nasiri, Muzahim, *Horse*, 2018, oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

In *Horse*, Al- Nasiri skillfully painted a complete portrait of a horse using shades of white and grey, with blue accessories near its eyes. The horse is positioned within the frame of the painting, set against a background dominated by neutral colors. The combination of the horse and the background creates an intriguing and harmonious visual composition. They rely on each other, as if they are interconnected and cannot exist without one another. This interplay adds to the exotic allure of the horse. To enhance the viewer's experience, Al-Nasseri incorporated three light yellow roses onto the surface of the painting. The roses give the illusion of lying on the board, seemingly secured by adhesive. The artist

paid meticulous attention to detail, capturing the roses with remarkable three-dimensional accuracy, making them appear remarkably lifelike. Notably, Al-Nasseri carefully considered the placement of shadows, adding a sense of perspective and depth to the painting. The level of detail and the illusion created by the roses can leave viewers amazed. Upon touching the roses and adhesive, one discovers that everything is skillfully rendered through the artist's drawing techniques, with no physical elements added to the painting. Through his creative approach, the artist effectively communicates his unique perspective and evokes a sense of interest and intrigue in the viewer. This demonstrates the depth of his artistic vision and his ability to convey his inner world through his paintings. .(See Figure 5-18).

The painting *Horse* by Muzahem Al-Nasiri can be compared to the depiction of horses in the works of the renowned Iraqi painter, Faeq Hassan. Both artists explore the theme of horses, albeit with distinctive approaches and styles.

In Faeq Hassan's paintings, the horses often embody a sense of dynamism and energy. His brushwork is bold and expressive, capturing the powerful movement and muscularity of the animals. The horses in Hassan's works exude a sense of vitality and strength, with an emphasis on their physical form and the portrayal of their distinct features. The artist's use of vibrant colors and gestural brushstrokes adds to the liveliness and intensity of his equine subjects.

On the other hand, Muzahem Al-Nasiri's painting *Horse* takes a different approach. The horse in Al-Nasiri's work is rendered with a sense of precision and attention to detail. The artist focuses on achieving a realistic portrayal of the horse, utilizing subtle shades of white and grey to create a soft and delicate rendering. The inclusion of blue accessories near the horse's eyes adds a touch of visual interest and accentuates its gentle nature. Al-Nasiri's meticulous technique and careful consideration of shadows contribute to a sense of depth and perspective within the painting.

While Faeq Hassan's horse paintings emphasize movement, energy, and bold brushwork, Muzahem Al-Nasiri's *Horse* leans towards a more serene and

contemplative portrayal, showcasing the beauty and elegance of the animal. Each artist brings their unique artistic sensibility to the depiction of horses, offering distinct interpretations and capturing different aspects of their subject matter.

Overall, the comparison between these two Iraqi painters highlights the diversity of artistic approaches and styles within the representation of horses. Faeq Hassan's dynamic and vibrant renditions contrast with Muzahem Al-Nasiri's delicate and realistic portrayal, showcasing the versatility and individuality of these talented artists.



6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has undertaken a comprehensive exploration of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings, aiming to examine their stylistic features and thematic content within the broader context of Iraqi art. Through a meticulous analysis and interpretation of his works, this research has successfully achieved its objectives of shedding light on Al-Nasiri's artistic contributions, examining the cultural significance of his paintings, and situating his works within the evolving landscape of contemporary Iraqi art.

The analysis of Al-Nasiri's paintings has revealed a distinct artistic style that beautifully combines traditional and modern elements. His exceptional brushwork, thoughtful composition, and masterful use of color create a visual language that captivates viewers and reflects his unique artistic vision. Furthermore, a recurrent theme in his works is his affinity for depicting female figures, which serves as a means of exploring femininity, beauty, and the portrayal of women within the Iraqi cultural context.

The thematic exploration within his works highlights the rich cultural heritage of Iraq by interweaving historical narratives, sociopolitical commentary, and personal experiences. Al-Nasiri's paintings stand as a testimony to the enduring resilience and spirit of the Iraqi people, while his portrayal of female figures adds a nuanced perspective on femininity and the role of women in Iraqi society.

The research findings emphasize the significance of studying Al-Nasiri's works within the broader context of Iraqi art. His paintings not only represent individual expressions but also contribute to a collective artistic endeavor aimed at preserving cultural identity and responding to the evolving artistic climate in Iraq. By incorporating Islamic design vocabulary and cultural symbols, Al-Nasiri not only reinforces the Iraqi artistic heritage but also establishes a visual language that resonates with global audiences. The synthesis of tradition and innovation showcased in his works illustrates the dynamism and vitality of contemporary Iraqi painting.

This thesis addresses the research questions and offers a deeper understanding of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's artistic achievements and their broader implications. The analysis of his paintings sheds light on the significant role he plays in the narrative of Iraqi art history, providing insights into the distinctive stylistic features, thematic preoccupations, and cultural symbolism present in his works. Moreover, this research serves as a platform for dialogue and comparative analysis, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the Iraqi art scene within the global artistic context.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. While insightful, the focus on Muzahem Al-Nasiri's works represents only a fraction of the diverse and vibrant Iraqi art landscape. Future research could expand upon this study by examining other influential Iraqi artists and their contributions to the development of contemporary Iraqi painting. Additionally, a more extensive examination of the reception and impact of Al-Nasiri's works among art critics, scholars, and the public would further enrich our understanding of his artistic legacy.

It is essential to recognize that in today's globalized world, diasporan Iraqis maintain a deep-rooted connection to their homeland, much like diasporan Irish people and their attachment to Ireland. This sentiment holds true for Muzahem Al-Nasiri, who embodies the enduring love for Iraq despite living outside its physical borders.

As an Iraqi artist residing abroad, Al-Nasiri's artistic expressions are profoundly influenced by his connection to Iraq. His paintings not only reflect his personal artistic vision but also convey a longing for his homeland and a desire to share its rich cultural heritage with a wider audience. Through his artwork, Al-Nasiri navigates the complexities of displacement, nostalgia, and cultural identity, keeping alive his deep ties to Iraq and letting them shape his creative process.

The diasporan experience of Muzahem Al-Nasiri offers a unique perspective within the realm of Iraqi art. His artworks serve as a conduit for preserving and reimagining Iraqi cultural identity, transcending physical boundaries and enabling an ongoing dialogue between the artist and his homeland. By incorporating themes

and symbols that evoke Iraq's vibrant heritage and embody the experiences of diasporan Iraqis, Al-Nasiri's paintings act as a bridge, fostering a sense of belonging and connecting communities, even in the absence of a physical presence.

In conclusion, this thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings, highlighting his distinctive artistic style, thematic explorations, and contributions to the Iraqi art scene. By examining the interplay between tradition and innovation, the incorporation of Islamic design vocabulary, and the reflection of Iraqi cultural identity, this research deepens our appreciation and understanding of Al-Nasiri's artistic expressions within the broader context of Iraqi art. Moreover, the recurring focus on female figures adds a compelling dimension to his body of work. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding Iraqi art, cultural heritage, and the transformative power of artistic expressions in shaping societal narratives.

6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the insights and discoveries gained from the analysis of Muzahem Al-Nasiri's paintings and their significance within Iraqi art, I propose the following recommendations:

Further Research on Iraqi Artists: While this thesis has focused on studying Muzahem Al-Nasiri's works as a case study, it is important to explore the artistic contributions of other talented Iraqi artists. Future research should delve into the works of other notable painters, sculptors, and multimedia artists from Iraq to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse artistic expressions within the country.

Preservation and Documentation of Iraqi Art: Given Iraq's rich cultural heritage and complex history, it is crucial to prioritize the preservation and documentation of Iraqi art. Institutions and organizations should collaborate to establish comprehensive databases, archives, and digital platforms that safeguard and make accessible the works of Iraqi artists, including those of Muzahem Al-Nasiri.

Promoting Cultural Exchange and Dialogue: The artistic expressions of Muzahem Al-Nasiri and other Iraqi artists provide a valuable opportunity for cultural exchange and dialogue. Efforts should be made to organize international exhibitions, symposiums, and artist residencies that showcase Iraqi art, fostering cross-cultural understanding. These initiatives will help promote the work of Iraqi artists, forge meaningful connections with the global art community, and enrich artistic diversity.

Art Education and Training: It is crucial to invest in art education and training programs to nurture the talents of young Iraqi artists. Collaborations between art institutions, universities, and practicing artists can provide valuable mentorship and workshops, helping to cultivate a new generation of Iraqi artists who can build upon the rich artistic legacy of their country.

Support for Artistic Endeavors: Recognizing the significance of the arts in society, it is important for stakeholders, including government agencies, philanthropic organizations, and private entities, to provide financial and logistical support for artists in Iraq. Grants, scholarships, and residencies can facilitate the creation of new works, research projects, and collaborations, empowering artists to continue their creative exploration and contribute to the cultural landscape.

Engaging the Public: Public engagement with art should be encouraged through initiatives such as public art installations, exhibitions in public spaces, and educational programs for schools and communities. These efforts will foster a sense of cultural pride and ownership while also increasing awareness and appreciation for Iraqi art and artists.

By implementing these recommendations, we can create an environment that supports and nurtures artistic creativity in Iraq. It is important to preserve and promote the rich cultural heritage and contributions of artists like Muzahem Al-Nasiri. The exploration and appreciation of Iraqi art are essential for preserving cultural identity, fostering artistic dialogue, and creating a vibrant and inclusive artistic ecosystem.

RERERENCES

- Al-Ali, N. (2013). Putting contemporary Iraqi art on the map: A conversation with Maysaloun Faraj. In N. Al-Ali & D. Al-Najjar (Eds.), *We are Iraqis: Aesthetics and politics in a time of war* (pp. 35–47). Syracuse University Press.
- Al-Ali, N., & Al-Najjar, D. (Eds.). (2013). *We are Iraqis: Aesthetics and politics in a time of war*. Syracuse University Press.
- Allan, A. (2021, May 2). *Mozahim Al-Nasiri (Iraq, 1958)* [Image attached] [Status update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/ayham.allan.9/posts/1824085177756765>
- Al-Khalil, S. (1992). *The monument: Art, vulgarity, and responsibility in Iraq*. University of California State.
- Al-Nasiri, M. [@muzahemAl-Nasiri]. (2018, March 16). “My painting at the second Arab meeting measures 170-170 cm.”. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/BgZQTMKBNvV/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- Al-Nasiri, M. [@muzahemAl-Nasiri]. (2019, September 16). “Special order portrait for Reem aljamaly Oil on canvas 90\90cm”. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/B3cFKKVfGRK/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- Al-Nasiri, M. [@muzahemAl-Nasiri]. (2020, September 16). “عشرين قبل رسمتها لوحة” Oil on canvas 170x130 cm”. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CFM-1TEDzgS/>
- Al-Nasiri, M. [@muzahemAl-Nasiri]. (2020b, November 17). “Oil on canvas. - 170x170cm”. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CHr25pBlhRX/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

- Al-Nasiri, M. (2021, March 7). [Image attached] [Status update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100000250068632>
- Artsy. (2023). *Faiq Hassan*. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/faiq-hassan-bedouin-tent-1>
- Assaf, A. (2011). Watershed. In *Wounded water: Six Iraqi artists interpret the theme of water* (p.13). Gangemi Editore.
- Baram, A. (1999). *Culture, history, and ideology in the formation of Ba 'thist Iraq, 1968-89*. St. Martin's Press.
- Bahrani, Z. & Shabout, N.M. (2009). *Modernism and Iraq*. Miriam & IRA D. Wallach Art Gallery.
- Bloom, J. M., & Blair, S. S. (Eds.). (2019). *Islamic art: Past, present, future*. Yale University Press.
- Buckley, B. (2008). Mohamed is Absent. I am Performing: Contemporary Iraqi Art and the Destruction of Heritage. In Stone, P. G., Bajjaly, J. F., & Hamdani, A. (Eds), *The destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq* (pp.283-311). Boydell Press.
- Dabrowska, K., & Hann, G. (2008). *Iraq: Then and now: A guide to the country and its people*. Bradt.
- Dawson, A. (2023, January 16). *Modern Iraq: The New Vision Group*. Dubai Collection. <https://dubaicollection.ae/en/story/modern-iraq-the-new-vision-group>
- Fast, A. (2005). *Iraq. ; the culture*. Crabtree Publishing Company.
- Hamzah, T., Hussein, H., & Mubarak, A. H. (2021). Relationship between semantic and aesthetic dimensions of contemporary Iraqi painting and modernity arts. *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana*, 26(1), 114-122.
- Hunt, C. S. (2005). *The history of Iraq*. Greenwood Press.

- Ghazoul, F. J. (2009). Literature and the arts in contemporary Iraqi culture. *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, 3(3), 233-236.
- Ghazoul, F. J. (2013). Lyrical Resistance: The Example of Saadi Youssef. In N. Al-Ali & D. Al-Najjar (Eds.), *We are Iraqis: Aesthetics and politics in a time of war* (pp. 216–230). Syracuse University Press.
- Gupta, H., & Takesh, S. (2021). Prelapsarian landscapes and post-diluvian politics in mid-century Iraqi art. *Journal of Contemporary Iraq & the Arab World*, 15(1), 67–83. https://doi.org/10.1386/jciaw_00040_1
- Invaluable. (2023). Lot 402: AL-SHEIKHLY Ismael (1924 - 2002) Huile sur toile "Les joueurs de cartes". <https://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/al-sheikhly-ismael-1924-2002-huile-sur-toile-les--402-c-6f443bb9c0>
- Johnson, S. (2021). Battle ground: Environmental determinism and the politics of painting the Iraqi landscape. *Journal of Contemporary Iraq & the Arab World*, 15(1), 41–65. https://doi.org/10.1386/jciaw_00039_1
- Kazem, I. S., & Yacoub, S. E. (2023). The dualism of man and woman in contemporary Iraqi painting (analytical study). *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture*, 33, 983-999.
- Luckhurst, R. (2012). In war times: Fictionalizing Iraq. *Contemporary Literature*, 53(4), 713–737. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41819534>
- MutualArt. (2022). Muzahim Al-Nasiri. Retrieved April 19, 2023, from <https://www.mutualart.com/Artist/Muzahim-Al-Nasiri/EAD88B0E2A0C5EE5>
- Naef, S. (2012). Not just “for art’s sake”: Exhibiting Iraqi art in the West. In Tejel, J., Sluglett, P., Bocco, R., & Bozarslan, H. (Eds.), *Writing the modern history of Iraq: Historiographical and political challenges* (pp.475-501). World Scientific Pub Co Inc.

- Naji, H. A. A., & Hussein, H. K. (2021). The effect of emotional dimensions in contemporary Iraqi painting. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(7).
- Nefedova, O. (2019). Art and artists crossing borders: Untold stories of the first Iraqi art exhibition in the USSR. *Stedelijk Studies*, 9, 1-16.
- Perdawood, H. A. (2023). Identity status in the works of Iraqi contemporary artists. *Lark Journal For Philosophy, Linguistics and Social Sciences*, 2(49).
- Qatar Moments. (2022, May 20). Al Markhiya Gallery Launches “Masarat 1 Exhibition” in Katara. Retrieved May 19, 2023, from <https://www.qatarmoments.com/al-markhiya-gallery-launches-%E2%80%9Cmasarat-1-exhibition%E2%80%9D-in-katara-477319.html>
- Saad, Q. (2008). Contemporary Iraqi art: Origins and development. *Scope (Art)*. https://www.academia.edu/195102/Contemporary_Iraqi_Art_Origins_and_Development
- Shabout, N. (2006). The Iraqi Museum of Modern Art: Legal implications of the 2003 invasion. *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Profecionals*, 2(4). 285-299.
- Shabout, N. (2013). Bifurcations of Iraq’s visual culture. In N. Al-Ali & D. Al-Najjar (Eds.), *We are Iraqis: Aesthetics and politics in a time of war* (pp. 5–23). Syracuse University Press.
- Shabout, N. (2019). Contemporary trajectories: Iraqi art in context. In Bloom, J. M., & Blair, S. S. (Eds.), *Islamic art: Past, present, future* (pp.237-261). Yale University Press.
- Stephen Friedman Gallery. (2023). *Thomas Hirschhorn*. Retrieved April 12, 2022, from <https://www.stephenfriedman.com/artists/41-thomas-hirschhorn/works/4923/>
- Taus-Bolstad, S. (2005). *Iraq in pictures*. Lerner.

Yousif, N. A. (2021). Genealogy of the female body and the sensual and expressive selection of the body in contemporary Iraqi art. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(7).

