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Al-Bahloly, Saleem

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The Freedom of Despair:
Modern Art and Political Violence in Baghdad
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by

Saleem Hadi Al-Bahloly


A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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in

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University of California, Berkeley


Committee in charge:

Professor Stefania Pandolfo, Chair
Professor Alexei Yurchak
Professor Samera Esmeir
Professor Beate Fricke


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Abstract

The Freedom of Despair:  Modern Art and Political Violence in Baghdad, 1941-1979

By

Saleem Hadi Al-Bahloly

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

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Professor Stefania Pandolfo, Chair


This dissertation asks what the artwork could offer when other forms of action and expression had been foreclosed by political violence.  It considers art practice in Baghdad during the nineteen-sixties and seventies, in relation to the collapse of liberal forms of politics and, later, the collapse of a form of anticolonial liberation struggle introduced by the Palestinian liberation movement, which subsequently provided a framework for leftist politics.  My argument is that, during these years, the modern artwork underwent a transformation that reconstituted it as the site of a particular kind of speech, implicated in a particular kind of politics, neither liberal nor anticolonial.  Following the eclipse of the public sphere in the aftermath of a coup by the Ba'ath Party in 1963, it came into interaction with an ancient tradition of mourning that precipitated a shift in art practice from a concern with representation to a practice of rhetoric.  Over the nineteen-seventies, as the possibilities for political action narrowed, this practice of rhetoric evolved a distinctive critique of violence.

Organized into three parts, the dissertation charts a trajectory of art practice across which the artwork became a site of critique.  Part One examines the establishment of a discursive foundation for the practice of modern art in Baghdad during the nineteen-forties and fifties, on the basis of a medieval history of manuscript illustration and in the context of a broader cultural renewal.  It focuses on the artist Jawad Salim's (1920-1961) discovery of Yahya al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri*, and the ways in which that discovery shaped his conception of modern art.  Part Two examines the transformation of art practice following the persecution of leftists by the Ba'ath Party in 1963.  It focuses on how, in circumstances where neither an appeal to the law nor political action were possible, the artist Kadhim Hayder (1932-1985), in a series of paintings entitled *The Epic of the Martyr* [Mulhamat al-Shahid], set a new paradigm for art practice by introducing into the artwork a rhetorical form drawn from the mourning celebrations that commemorate the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn. Part Three traces the legacy of this rhetorical form in the practice of the artist Dia Azzawi (1939-).  It focuses on a critique of violence he developed over the course of the nineteen-seventies, following the collapse of the Palestinian liberation movement.

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# Preface

It was the first week of June, in 2007, and I was again in Amman, Jordan.  I picked up a newspaper from a street vendor, and on the back of the paper, I saw an announcement that the Iraqi art historian May Muzaffar would be giving a lecture that afternoon on the Renaissance, at Darat al-Funun, an arts center supported by the Khalid Shoman Foundation.  Later that week, I met with May, a poet and translator who has been writing about art since the early nineteen-seventies.  We met in the work space she shared with her husband, the artist Rafa al-Nasiri, perched on the side of a hill, in the neighborhood of Jebel al-Wubeideh.  When I told her that I was interested in writing a dissertation about art practice in Baghdad, she explained to me that the first thing I had to understand was the ancient connection in Iraq between the production of art and suffering.  She went on to tell me about the Assyrian lion-hunt, the attention devoted to rendering the details of wounded animals, and the ways in which the wounded animal functioned as an allegory for human suffering.

By that point, the American invasion and occupation of Iraq had unleashed horrific sectarian violence that was continuing to send large numbers of Iraqis over the border into Jordan.  The exodus had in fact begun before the invasion in March 2003, and it proceeded in waves:  first the rich, then the middle-class, and finally the poor, who simply left everything and ran.  I had been in Amman two years earlier, and in December 2005 I watched, with tremendous emotion and humility, Iraqis of all kinds make their way to the dozen polling places set up in Jordan where they voted for the first time in their lives.  But by 2007 something else was happening.  Hundreds of scientists, professionals and academics were being targeted for assassination or ransom, and May worried that for the first time in its millennia-long history her land was without any artists and intellectuals who could give form to its suffering.

Indeed, it seemed that there was little left in Iraq of its history of modern art.  Decades of war and sanctions had already sent many artists into exile, and those that had stayed were now leaving in the aftermath of the American invasion.  In the chaos that had followed that invasion, the Institute of Fine Arts had been torched, and the collection of the National Museum of Modern Art in Baghdad had been partially looted.  The National Library and Archives had been simultaneously destroyed by fire and water; while one group set fire to its holdings, another was dismantling its copper pipes, causing the place to flood.  Later I would learn that the documentary record had already been foreclosed long before, whether because there were things people did not say about what they did, or because they themselves had been forced to burn documents – such things as letters – lest they be seen by the wrong people and misconstrued.  By the time I began the research upon which this dissertation is based, in the summer of 2007, an entire history of art had, in the span of less than one hundred years, come in and out of existence.

What follows here is a fragmentary portrait of art practice, composed from various visual and documentary materials left by a history that already at the start of my research in 2007 was receding further and further into an unrecoverable past.  Some of these materials I have found in national and university libraries; others in the personal libraries of artists, in the old book market of Beirut and in bookstores opened by Iraqi expatriates in Amman.  The art world in Baghdad produced a copious amount of writing, and I set out to read all of it, beginning with a series of critical texts, and following footnotes back to newspaper and magazine articles.  Despite this record, the art itself is its own best document.  My first view of it was in the pages of books and journals, and later in exhibition catalogs.  Some of this art was only printed once or twice, in

black and white; some was reprinted multiple times, each reproduction imputing a different tone to the colors. Eventually, I was able to see work "in the flesh" – in California, London, Beirut, Amman and Doha – and to get from the artists themselves high-resolution of images of their work held in private collections.

In this dissertation, I have selected only a thin slice of the history of modern art in Iraq to write about. I have tried to understand what problem the artists sought to address, and to locate that problem both in the discourse and in the art itself. In writing about the work of the artists Jawad Salim, Kadhim Hayder and Dia Azzawi, I have tried to follow how this problem shifted in relation to Iraq's political history. These problems were not self-evident, however; the language artists used had meanings they no longer have, or that had a meaning in a context that has been lost. My interpretative method, of both the discourse and the art, has been to reconstruct that context as much as possible, by laying out alongside each other different kinds of documents. In this way, I have sought in writing this dissertation to compose what is an image of art practice.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of the artist and poet Ibrahim al-Zayir.  Born in 1944, in the town of Amara in southern Iraq, Ibrahim embodied much of the history that I have tried to tell here.  As a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad, he joined the Iraqi Communist Party, in order to fight for a world that was more just than the world he was born into.  After the Iraqi Communist Party effectively collapsed in the mid-nineteen-sixties, he joined the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and moved to Lebanon, where his pursuit of justice took the form of cultural production attached to anticolonial liberation struggle.

It is through Ibrahim, a review that he wrote, that I have been able to understand something profound about the history of modern art in Iraq, what lies at the heart of this dissertation.  In the end, however, art could not save Ibrahim from despair.  On April 24, 1972 he shot himself in a room in the Tariq el-Jdide neighborhood of Beirut.

This conversation came back to her very often over the next few years when, in Baghdad, Amman, Damascus and Jerusalem, nightmares were accumulating.  In the streets near these cities' prisons, you could hear the wails of political prisoners.  At least, Marie-Rose (as many others) said to herself, people in Lebanon live under regimes that, while corrupt, are still made of "nice guys."  No one seemed to want to admit that cruelty was a part of a moral cancer that was spreading through the whole of the Middle East.

Etel Adnan, *Sitt Marie Rose*

# Introduction

This dissertation offers an anthropology of the artwork in relation to a history of violence that foreclosed some of the different forms of political action and expression that have emerged in the Middle East during the twentieth-century.  It traces a trajectory of art practice in Baghdad, from the establishment of a practice of modern art during the nineteen-fifties, in the context of a broad cultural renewal and the formation of a public sphere; across the nineteen-sixties, when the liberal forms of politics established over the previous two decades broke down; and through the nineteen-seventies, when a form of anticolonial liberation struggle, introduced by the Palestinian liberation movement, that succeeded liberal politics also collapsed.  During these years, as the persecution of leftists resulted in a withdrawal from the public sphere and a disengagement from political parties, and later, as the Palestinian liberation movement, which subsequently provided a framework for leftist politics, broke apart, a distinctive form of art practice developed in Baghdad, in which the artwork functioned to create an opening or an outside where a different kind of speech, with a different kind of politics, neither liberal nor anticolonial, became possible.  This other kind of speech took the form of an image, one that sought not to express an opinion or take a position, but to turn away and, under the gaze of a time to come, to make a claim to justice.  The politics of this speech lied in this operation of withdrawal, whereby the artwork, when dissent or opposition had ceased to be possible, rather than confronting an oppression, functioned to secure a place beyond the reach of that oppression, a place where a horizon of justice, foreclosed elsewhere, might be opened.

This distinctive form of art practice originated in the aftermath of a coup by the Ba'ath Party in 1963, when the arrest, torture and even execution of thousands of people associated with the Iraqi Communist Party transformed the conditions of speech in Iraq.  The modern artwork had been introduced to Baghdad at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the form of landscape painting, by retired officers in the Ottoman Military, and, during the nineteen-forties and nineteen-fifties, it had developed in relation to a rediscovered history of medieval manuscript illustration and in response to contemporary social and political problems.  But in the mid-nineteen-sixties, following the Ba'ath coup of 1963, the artwork came into interaction with a very different tradition of representation, and that interaction engendered a new paradigm of art practice in Baghdad.

What I am referring to here as the modern artwork is a historically specific means of visual representation that first came into existence in the sixteenth-century in Italy and southern Germany, though, as art historians have recently shown, it arose out of a longer history of the image stretching back to antiquity, and subsequently developed under a particular set of conditions in Europe which we would describe as secular, bourgeois, and capitalist.[1]  It entailed the production of an image, often on an autonomous support, though not always, and within a pictorial space that might be consistently called into question but that nevertheless remained anchored in appearances, if not in their reproduction then in their negation.  Already, when the artwork was introduced to Baghdad, where it was displaced from the historical conditions of its formation, its pictorial structure had been loosened; taken out of the context of the modernist deconstruction of illusionism, and removed from the art market, the artwork had already become

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[1] On this long pre-history of the artwork, see in particular:  Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence:  a History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago:  University of Chicago Press, 1997); and Werner Hofmann, "Die Geburt der Moderne aus dem Geist der Religion," in *Luther und die Folgen für die Kunst* (München:  Prestel, 1983).

the object of different kinds of inquiry.  But in the aftermath of the coup in 1963, its referential structure was transformed by the introduction of a form of a particular kind, one drawn from an Islamic tradition of remembrance, and that did not operate through appearances.

In a series of paintings entitled *The Epic of the Martyr* [*Mulhamat al-Shahid*] (fig. 0.1-0.6), shown at the National Museum of Modern Art in 1965, the artist Kadhim Hayder transposed onto canvas imagery from the ritual performances that annually commemorate the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn.  Killed in a seventh-century battle for refusing to recognize the right of a corrupt caliph to rule the new Islamic community, the Imam al-Husayn is mourned and celebrated in southern Iraq as a testimony to truth in the face of injustice.  Over the course of several centuries, a suite of performances evolved to commemorate this act of truth.  All of these performances, however, are based on a particular concept of representation, whereby the construction of an image of loss functions rhetorically as an image of justice.  In order to remember, and to renew, Husayn's testimony to truth, the performances restage the pathos of his martyrdom, by coupling the recitation of poetry narrating the battle with imagery that render present the referents of that poetry.  In processions and reenactments, horses and costumed figures function not to represent or illustrate the Battle of Karbala but rather to arouse in the audience the pathos of the Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom.  That pathos was a living image of justice.  In the series of paintings *The Epic of the Martyr*, Kadhim Hayder employed the imagery of horses and figures in order to reproduce in the artwork that image of justice staged by the performances.

Seen outside the historical context of Hayder's practice, and the longer history of remembrance of Husayn's martyrdom, the horses and figures in *The Epic of the Martyr* appear as simple figurative representations, and the reduction of their volume and the minimization of their features end up inexorably evoking some variety of modernism.  For many, the ecstatic gestures and frontality of the figures will probably call to mind Picasso.  Hayder, in fact, anticipated such a misrecognition; in an interview published at the time of the exhibition, he expressed his concern that the foreigners who acquired some of the paintings would not understand the semiotic operation at the heart of the work, the sequence of substitutions whereby the horse stands in for the fallen martyr, "carrying the spirit of the knight after his martyrdom".[2]  Despite their figurative nature, the horses and figures are not visual forms; they are, as the documentary record shows, and I will explain at length, rhetorical devices that functioned as formulae, condensing and arousing a pathos, as they did in the rituals.  In the aftermath of the Ba'ath coup, the image of pathos staged in the artwork had a particular significance.  Reproducing the rhetorical act of the rituals in the paintings, it created in the artwork an image of justice, at a time when, after thousands had endured an experience of profound injustice, justice could be sought neither through an appeal to the law nor through political action.

If things had been different, if the almost year-long persecution of leftists had not terrorized the population from expressing an opinion, the reproduction of this rhetorical act in painting would have been a one-off.  But in the peculiar speech conditions that followed the persecutions of 1963, this rhetorical act had a transformative effect on the practice of modern art in Baghdad.  By demonstrating the possibility of a certain kind of speech in the artwork, a kind of speech that was not only oblique but that also made a claim to justice, it precipitated a shift that I will characterize as a shift from representation to rhetoric, and describe as a loss of reference.  The visuality of the imagery of horses and figures in *The Epic of the Martyr* did not refer back to the seventh-century battle in which the Imam al-Husayn was slaughtered nor did

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[2] Suhail Aslan, "Kadhim Hayder:  Simphoniya al-Alwan," *Al-Jumhuriyya*, No 472, April 26, 1965.

they refer back to the rituals themselves; because the imagery functioned as devices that performed a claim to justice, their visuality hung suspended in the artwork.  This break between visuality and reference took hold in the work of a cohort of artists inspired by *The Epic of the Martyr*, opening a space in the artwork where forms did not pass into meaning but hovered inscrutably, creating a second, outer image that was almost purely visual and masked the underlying rhetorical image.  As the Arabic-speaking Middle East found itself faced with narrowing possibilities for political action, and confronted with new kinds of violence, this gap between what one sees and what things mean enabled the development of different forms of critique.  The form of art practice that issued about this transformation of the artwork, and one form of critique it made possible, is the subject of this dissertation.

Immediately, when *The Epic of the Martyr* was shown at the National Museum of Modern Art in 1965, it was hailed by reviews published in newspapers as a turning point in the short history of modern art in Iraq.  What kind of turn modern art subsequently took was not immediately articulated, but looking back twenty-years later, the artist and art historian Shakir Hassan Al Said observed, in his two-volume, *Chapters from the History of the Visual Art Movement in Iraq* [*Fusul min Tarikh al-Fann al-Tashkili fi al-Iraq*], that the paintings "marked the beginning of a new era characterized by individual research [*al-bahath al-zati*]."  Recognizing that they had established a new paradigm of art practice, Al Said went on:

> *The Epic of the Martyr* in 1965 amounted to a clear indication of the future of Iraqi visual art in the sixties. It was necessarily in its time an inspiration to the young artists to search for new visions, sometimes possessing metaphysical dimensions and sometimes epic.  We will find its effect deeply rooted in the works of some artists in the nineteen-sixties and perhaps in the nineteen-seventies as well.[3]

The most prominent of these young artists inspired by *The Epic of the Martyr* was an artist named Dia Azzawi.  Born in Baghdad in 1939, Azzawi belongs to a generation of Iraqis who came of age at the end of the nineteen-fifties, amidst the culture of political expression cultivated by the liberal politics of that decade, by the newspapers, parties and demonstrations, and in particular by the Iraqi Communist Party.  Perhaps it was on account of their youth, or the intensity of their experience, but this generation was formatively scarred by the persecutions of 1963.  Following the decimation of the Iraqi Communist Party that year, many writers, artists and intellectuals of Azzawi's generation withdrew from the public realm, until the end of the decade, when, disillusioned with party-based politics, they rediscovered politics in the form of the Palestinian liberation movement.

It wasn't long however before the Palestinian liberation movement, as an anticolonial liberation struggle, began to collapse.  Its collapse in the early nineteen-seventies dramatically revealed a general condition in the Arab world, a vulnerability to forms of unjust violence.  The "nakedness" of the Palestinian leadership in the face of Israeli intelligence operations in Beirut, as another artist put it, demonstrated to everyone their own nakedness to state violence.

That sense of nakedness, of exposure to an injustice beyond recourse, had first been felt in 1963, but, for Azzawi, it was renewed again and again over the nineteen-seventies:  in 1970, when the Palestinian liberation movement was crushed by the Jordanian military; in 1974-1975 when the Iraqi government fought a war against its Kurdish citizens in the north of the country;

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[3] Shakir Hasan Al Sa'id, *Fusul min ta'rikh al-harakah al-tashkiliyah fi al-'Iraq* Volume Two (Baghdad:  al-Jumhuriyyah al-'Iraqiyah, Wizarat al-Thaqafah wa-al-'Ilam, Da'irat al-Shu'un al-thaqafiyah wa-al-Nashr:  Tazi' al-Dar al-Wataniyah lil-Tawzi wa-al-l"ilan, 1988) Volume Two, 45.

in the siege and destruction of the Tel al-Za'atar refugee camp in Beirut in 1976. In his practice, Azzawi developed a critique of that unjust violence, in the sense that he created images that sought not, as he would clarify, to document or to protest, nor to mourn, but rather to open up the gaze of justice. That critique centered on a particular mode of figuration, in which the human form functioned not to represent the human body but to record a non-human violence, so as to denounce that violence as unjust.

Underlying this critique of violence was a concept of representation that *The Epic of the Martyr* had reactivated in the artwork from the centuries-old history of remembrance of the Imam al-Husayn, and that Azzawi, in his first years out of art school, took up in the nineteen-sixties. Following the collapse of the Palestinian anticolonial liberation struggle in 1970, and faced with a new kind of unjust violence, that concept of representation became the basis of a form of critique. Azzawi named it "martyrdom" [*istishhad*] – the popularization of the term by the Iranian revolution and then the Iran-Iraq war was still a few years away, and the word still had an archaic ring to it, a sense located somewhere between history and religion – and he understood it as a "consciousness to record the truth." It consisted of an act of transfiguration, whereby the image of an injustice had the rhetorical power of making an appeal to a justice of a higher order

I speak here of a critique of violence, both in the sense that Walter Benjamin attributed to such a critique, and in a very different sense. Benjamin recognized that the question of violence is a question of moral description, and thus he defined a critique of violence as discerning the moral status of a use of force [*Gewalt*] by discerning its relation to law, on the one hand. and to justice, on the other. "The task of a critique of violence can be summarized as that of expounding its relation to law and justice. For a cause, however effective, becomes violent, in the precise sense of the word, only when it comes into moral relations. The sphere of these relations is defined by the concepts of law and justice."[4] Benjamin, reflecting on possibilities for revolutionary violence, focused on the relation between force and the law, leaving to the side the question of the relation between force and justice. The critique that I refer to here, employing Benjamin's locution, was not concerned with the law but with that other part of a critique of violence that Benjamin outlined but did not take up – the relation between force and justice. Thus, when artists spoke of violence, it was always already in moral terms, in relation to the question of justice: *zhulm* or *quhr* – and never *'anf*, violence in a bald sense.

There is a second difference that illuminates the significance of the art practice considered in this dissertation for critical theory. What I am calling a critique of violence was conceived of not simply as an analytic act but a political one as well. The rhetorical forms that *The Epic of the Martyr* had transposed to the modern artwork from the remembrance of the Imam al-Husayn had been embedded in an ancient political topography, in which the remembrance of Husayn was distinguished from the formulation of juridical norms or the armed overthrow of corrupt regimes. They constituted an act of memory that, in the context of the earlier history of Islam, was also a political act inasmuch as it refused to recognize an unjust regime and addressed itself to the justice of a higher order. When Kadhim Hayder transposed imagery from the mourning rituals into painting, and used that imagery as an oblique critique of the events of 1963, he not only transformed the artwork into a site of rhetoric, he also reactivated in the artwork that ancient act of memory.

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[4] "Critique of Violence," *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings: Volume 1 1913-1926* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 236.

In its reactivated that act of memory is most evident in what is probably Azzawi's most well-known work, a series of drawings that he produced following the siege and massacre of the Tel al-Za'atar refugee camp in Beirut in 1976.   In the aftermath of the collapse of the Palestinian anticolonial liberation struggle, he envisioned the drawings as an "expression that attempts to create a free memory that persists against oppression".   Introducing the drawings, he wrote:

> [The drawings] are not to mourn nor are they to be a document of a dark massacre; rather they are an expression that attempts to create a free memory that persists against oppression [*iniha ta'bir yuhawwal khalq dhakira hurra tatawasal dhid al-qhur*] until the time comes when its flame will burn forth brilliantly, a time that will summon the blood of friends and brothers, hastening the advent of those coming from the gates of martyrdom; a time when the nation will be as bread, unpolluted by blood and dirt, a space unhindered by black deceptions and nets of disguise, a beautiful time when feet will move safely and men will not sell their dreams.

The drawings were not just a critique of an unjust violence; the persistence of the image against that violence was also a form of political action, the form the remembrance of the Imam al-Husayn took when transferred to the artwork.

The anthropology of the artwork offered in this dissertation is an anthropology of how the artwork, in conditions of political closure, was able to create an opening, where rhetorical forms and representational concepts belonging to intellectual traditions, some long-lapsed, could be reactivated and made available as a critical vocabulary for modern politics.   In examining the critique of violence enabled by the reactivation of a concept of representation drawn from the remembrance of the Imam al-Husayn, and formulated in the artwork, this dissertation seeks to challenge the identification of the political in the liberal tradition with a certain kind of public speech, and to show that the closure of the public realm was attended by the formation of other spaces.   In the rest of the introduction, I situate art practice in Baghdad during the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies, and the critique of violence it formulated, in relation to a liberal interpretation of political violence.

## The Freedom of Despair

My point of departure lies in an observation made by the poet and critic Suhail Sami Nader about art practice in the aftermath of the Ba'ath coup in 1963.   This observation came in a review of a series of paintings shown by Dia Azzawi at the National Museum of Modern Art in Baghdad in 1975.   In the paintings, a human figure strains against the bonds that silence him, until the force of those bonds shatter his human form (fig. 0.8-0.10, 3.1-3.8).   Writing in the weekly cultural supplement to the newspaper *al-Jumhuriyya*, Nader described the paintings as the resolution of a problem that had occupied Azzawi for the previous ten years.   This was a problem of expression that, he claimed, had first posed itself in the nineteen-sixties but that Azzawi couldn't address adequately at that time because the aftermath of the Ba'ath coup in 1963 had isolated him in his own "individual experience."

> Today Dia Azzawi opens a new window on the subject of his past – all of those beautiful forms on guard for their freedom.  He worked in secret and there he discovered the human [*yaktashaf al-insan*]!
>     I would characterize today's works in terms of the search for freedom in expression.  This search is actually not new for Dia Azzawi, but it is something that he has not ever been able to undertake.  He was indulgent in enjoying the delights, even as he despaired.  He was full of tricks, designs and all kinds of

interests, but he was not able to get away from direct individual experience [*al-tajrabat al-shakhsiyyah al-mubasharah*] towards the shared experience of cultural forms [*al-thaqafa*].[5]

Nader had been, like others, astonished by the paintings, because they were such an apparent break from the work Azzawi had become known for, on stories from *The Arabian Nights* or topics from Iraqi folklore. When Nader speaks here of the "delights" that Azzawi enjoyed "as he despaired," and the "tricks, designs and other interests," he has in mind those paintings from the nineteen-sixties, with their ravishing color, decorative motifs, and obscure renderings of legends and stories (fig. 0.11-0.12). However, because there had been something inscrutable about those paintings, and because their forms did not have any shared meaning, Nader judged this early work as "personal" [*al-shakhsiyyah*] in contrast to "cultural forms" [*al-thaqafa*] which would have a common meaning based on a "shared experience".

He explained this individualism as an effect of the "insecurity" that plagued intellectuals during the nineteen-sixties – an allusion to the detainment and sometimes torture of leftists following the Ba'ath coup in 1963: "And he is justified by the entire situation of the nineteen-sixties, as well as by the bitter despair [*al-ya's al-naziq*] – the despair of intellectuals. For the nineteen-sixties were characterized by the disruption of social life, confusion, fear, and the collapse of all guarantees on the safety of intellectuals." However, Nader observed, while the persecution of leftists brought about a withdrawal from the public expression of ideas, it also cultivated a new kind of individuality, characterized by what he called "the freedom of despair".

> But amidst all of this the intellectual acquired a surprising freedom: the freedom of despair [*hurriyyat al-ya's*]. An individuality [*fardiyya*] without origin began to feel its way about, moving about suddenly on the surface of life, and that grew into a blind psychological reaction, in the form of books and pre-existing cultural forms. There emerged an art of interior experience that did not have knowledge of reality. It would have been strange of course had this art not appeared in those conditions, as the routes to the outside world were laid with mines…The constrained social life which did not allow for a diversity of realistic work [*tajarib*] and a feeling for life allowed the distortion of this experiential knowledge [*khibrat*], and causes consciousness to exhaust itself by drowning itself in itself.

With the public sphere compromised, artists and intellectuals withdrew into arcane inquires and historical investigations, where they could work with found forms, as it were, which possessed their own logic and thus provided a kind of artistic alibi. In these forms, largely culled from the past, they discovered a region where they could experience a freedom foreclosed in the public world of the present.

The problem, in Nader's view, was that this freedom was individual and had no relation to contemporary reality; it led to an art turned in upon itself. Thus he described Azzawi's work as "a quasi-revolutionary romanticism" that

> was able to develop an art that in those days was self-contained [*maktafiyyan bi-zhatihi*]. It did not go beyond the familiar, the concrete [*al-hassi*], and the visual [*al-'ayani*], despite the fact that most of its vocabulary and its forms are borrowed either from ancient history or popular folklore.
> This tendency resulted in a folding inward; it substituted individual experiential knowledge [*khibra*] for a reality that was not individual, a reality that was instead cultural. It substituted signs of reality [*mu'alim al-waqi'*] for another reality that screams in secret and through the signs of past

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[5] Suhail Sami Nader, "al-Tajruba wa al-thaqafa wa hurriyat al-ta'abir" [Experience, culture and freedom of expression, *Al-Jumhuriyya* (Baghdad), March 22, 1975.

civilizations.  Here in this region precisely we discover the art of Dia Azzawi – a magical mixture of borrowings, obscurities and pure aesthetics.

Even though Azzawi drew on themes from popular culture and history, these themes were trapped or caught in the visuality of their forms.  Nader did not see these forms as attempts at introducing cultural difference into the modern artwork, leaving some kind of "imprint" [*tabaa'*] of identity as artists in the nineteen-fifties had sought to do.  Indeed, he recognized Azzawi's attempt at allegory, to substitute one set of signs for another, to scream in secret through the signs of past civilizations.  But the allegory didn't work, because in it the forms didn't signify.  They referred to nothing outside themselves.

For Nader, reproduced in art practice was the problem of subjectivity at large.  The problems of the public world, he claimed, "were reproduced on the surface of the painting, and historical problems transformed into problems of design."  This did not mean that art could solve the problem of subjectivity in post-1963 Iraq; the relation between history and design here was one-way; there was no passage back from the artist's achievements in his practice to the world in which he was living.  That fundamentally was Nader's critique of what he called the freedom of despair.

> At a time fragmented by different (political) trends, the absence of holistic or cohesive cultural trend, the artist's consciousness of crisis is reproduced on the surface of the painting [*al-satih al-taswiri*] and historical problems are transformed into problems of design [*tasmimiyya*].  He had the Iraq Museum.  He was robed in the spirit of terror and drowned in feelings that are heavy and sweet with the secrets of the figurines, and the empty eyes that say nothing, the beads, the writings, the engravings and the amulets.  The circle of his search extends to national folklore where the emotions of people grab hold of the world, on their own terms, and freeze the moment of consciousness in a shared symbol.

In compositions where Azzawi appropriated amulets (fig. 0.13) or in paintings that quoted popular practices, such as the hand-print left on the shrines of Najaf and Karbala (fig. 0.14), there was only silence.  One might ask about the speech of this silence, of the terror and the sweetness, of the emotion itself.  After all, Nader seemed to understand quite well what was going on.  But still the silence had no discernible grammar according to which it could be heard.  The absence of a referent left the paintings inscrutable.  The popular and historical forms came with a trade-off; they offered freedom, but at the price of signification.  He could acquire a vocabulary, but that vocabulary was mute.  The borrowed forms trapped him in their hermeneutics, and they left the viewer, located on the other side of the work, with a pure formalism.

> From the pierced palms, the banners, the writings, and popular stories, Dia Azzawi has knitted together a carpet stretched across the canvas, creating an affect, even though this symbolic weaving of his does not point outside itself – that is, to history, to the problems of life or the concrete aspects of existence – as much as it remains bound to the materiality of the artwork itself, that is, to every piece of it – the forms, the arrangement, the movement of lines.  If its sad emotional composition emerges from psychological life [*al-hayat al-nafsiyya*], especially in its world of captivating colors, it drowns itself in the beauty of pure form.  For the silence of his vocabulary keeps [Azzawi] from being completely free in regard to form.

For Nader, the paintings shown in 1975, entitled *Halaat Insaniyya*, and given the English title, *Human States*, marked Azzawi's recovery of a freedom in regard to form.  He had finally abandoned his earlier practice of drawing on "culture" as a library of forms and developed instead a vocabulary that could speak.  "It seems to me now that Dia Azzawi has led his private problem in the surface of the painting to its end.  Embodied in this work [*Human States*] is the

past subject which Azzawi has worked on for ten years:  the secrets have ended and Azzawi has arrived at a juncture."  This juncture was defined by a new vocabulary in which expression was not muffled by form.   This vocabulary was that of the human body, which here is not a depiction but a corpus of signs.

> The human is present not only to the extent that it is represented by its body; a severed head is a semantic and formal abbreviation in making that presence manifest, and Dia Azzawi uses its expressive side more than he uses its purely formal side.  By means of [that expressive side], he delimits a human position [*mawqif insani*]: the human state and the position of the artist in relation to it.  For example, Dia does not bridle the head with an inner sorrow but rather makes it scream with tangible meaning:  in protest?  in pain?  Perhaps both, but it is clear that Dia possessed the inner freedom and a strong experience that made him freer in expression and less restrained by the power of inner form.

What Nader does not say is that the paintings were an attempt on Azzawi's part to speak about his experience during a war fought by the Iraqi government in Kurdistan in 1974-75.  But what he does say, or at least what his description of the paintings indicates, is that the paintings were rhetorical objects, images that speak rather than simply show.

In Part Three, I will return to *Human States* and its use of the human form, but I begin with Nader's review because it offers an insight into the practice of art at a time when the public sphere normative to the liberal political tradition had collapsed.   Taken as a document of art practice in Baghdad, it puts before us three ethnographic or social facts, if you will, that are foundational to the anthropology pursued in this dissertation.  (1) It identifies a break between visuality and reference in the artwork in response to the speech conditions that followed the Ba'ath coup in 1963, (2) it points to a rhetorical function later performed by the artwork, at least by 1975, and (3) it indicated that the collapse of the public realm (or at least as a place where speech is secure) was attended by the emergence of other zones, and those zones were neither public nor were they private in the liberal sense; that the artwork was embedded in, if it did not actually enable, a peculiar topography of the political.

While the first two of these social facts concern the ways in which art practice in Baghdad has been shaped by a history of political violence, the third opens up a bigger question that challenges key assumptions of the liberal tradition of political thought.  Although Nader, in distinguishing between the personal [*al-shakhshi*] and the cultural [*al-thaqafa*], presumed a variation of the liberal distinction between the public and the private, he recognized the existence of a freedom, even if only to dismiss it, that was located neither in the public nor the private but in the *forms* themselves, reactivated from literature or from the objects of another time in the artwork.  Granted, that freedom was constrained by the semantic limits of the forms themselves, and perhaps that freedom was even "private" to the extent that whatever meaning they offered was not intelligible from the outside, could not be read off the forms themselves, as it were.  Nevertheless, in identifying a freedom found in these forms, Nader outlined a topography – he refers to this other place as a "region" [*mantaqa*] – that cannot be mapped onto the liberal topography of the public and the private.  He named the subjectivity enabled by those forms "the freedom of despair" [*hurriyat al-ya's*]; but we could take that name, with its ironic attribution of freedom to a state of un-freedom, as the name of a topography of the political unintelligible to the liberal tradition, a topography upon which actions acquire their significance in relation to a set of coordinates that are not that of the public and the private.

Mapping this topography, I focus in this dissertation on a concept of representation introduced by Kadhim Hayder in *The Epic of the Martyr* that produced the break between visuality and

reference Nader observed in Azzawi's early painting, re-constituted the artwork as a rhetorical object, and re-activated in it an ancient topography of the political in which the creation of a memory addressed to a justice to come was distinguished from judicial reform and armed uprising. While this dissertation is limited to tracing the trajectory of this concept of representation in the practice of Dia Azzawi during the nineteen-sixties and seventies, it is important to recognize that this form of art practice was occurring alongside that of others. Here I will point to two.

In his review, Nader had emphasized that the break between visuality and reference he pointed to in Azzawi's art, and the involution of the artwork that issued from that break, was not unique to Azzawi. During the same years, he noted, the artist Shakir Hassan Al Said composed a manifesto entitled *The Contemplative Manifesto* [*Al-Bayan al-Ta'amali*], which "confined 'lived experience' [*khibrat mu'ashat*] as he called it to the surface of the canvas. [Al Said] looked for the spiritual 'essence' [*al-mahiyya*] bound up with a search in the past, that in the context of his subject can be called 'formless form'." Published in 1966, in the literary supplement of the newspaper *al-Jumhuriyya*, Al Said's statement was not just a statement on his own practice but also the articulation of a more general shift in art practice in Iraq. He had been a founding member of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, an art group formed in 1951 by the artist Jawad Salim in order to clear a discursive space for modern art in Iraq. The Baghdad Group had sought to establish a historiographic basis for modern art by framing it as the renewal of a medieval history of manuscript illustration, and a particular method of art practice followed from this historiography of renewal. I will have more to say about that founding moment in Part One, but the point I want to make here is that in *The Contemplative Manifesto*, fifteen years later, Al Said was recognizing that things had changed.

Al Said wrote that the concerns that had preoccupied artists in the nineteen-fifties – relating modern art to a long, discontinuous history of art in Iraq and constituting a public for this art – had given way to an individual concern with technique and interest in the materiality of the artwork.[6] He characterized that concern with technique and interest in materiality in terms of a pursuit of truth [*al-haqiqa*]: "Since the nineteen-fifties, our artist has been trying to bind his present to his past with tradition, artistic means, and practicing in light of modern artists methods; and after working to cultivate a public for his art, he now finds himself brought to the point where he begins his course, by way of contemplation, to arrive [at the truth]." This shift in artistic problem, from a concern with history, style and the public to a concern with truth, brought about a broader reassessment of the artwork. The earlier interest in constituting a public had "led the artist to base his work on a humanism. The result was that the artistic material itself was not the basis for work…[now] the artist becomes more interested in technique and subject matter, that is, in means of expression with which to set down his existence rather than to disrobe it."

Though Al Said's emphasis of the materiality of the artwork over the public may recall similar concerns of the historical avant-garde, he conceived of the necessity of the material in theological terms.

> The material belongs to a world that is created, and thus preceding any act of composition…[it is already determined by] the will of the creator [which] manifests itself in a moment of fear, when the artist is led, in his role of contemplation, to witness it…[It] is an attempt to be aware of the objective world as a field for

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[6] *Al-Jumhuriyya*, Thursday, June 23, 1966. Vol 43, No 880.

the appearance of truth…the artwork is thus a mere description of the non-human presence brought about by human freedom.

This approach to artistic material, as the site for the manifestation of a non-human truth, would define Al Said's practice over the following decades. Three years later, he went further in conceptualizing the materiality of the artwork, by drawing on the medieval Islamic philosophy of Illumination in order to think the written line in the artwork as the presence of the non-human in the material.[7] The philosophy of Illuminationism, he wrote, "which refers the human to the non-human…calls for the art of writing [*fan al-kitaba*] or the painting of the line [*al-rasm al-khati*]." Conceiving of writing in terms of the Illuminationist referral of the human to the non-human enabled a number of analytic distinctions that built towards a peculiar hermeneutics of truth. "The significance of Illuminationism is that it displaces the human with the divine…it pushes the human to its limit, at which point it is severed from formal expression [*ta'bir shakli*] and acquires a new form as an expression in script [*ka-ta'bir khati*]." What this meant, to locate the human not in expressive form but in script, could be made clearer by looking to "the prayers of the believer which are reduced in Islamic art to their form." Key here is the fact that those prayers are constituted as a movement in time. "The written Arabic line…is a temporal movement that unconsciously provokes human intuition to seek the secrets that the line mysteriously pursues." Because of this temporality of writing, when transposed into painting, the written letter opens up within the art-form of painting a horizon that extends beyond painting, a horizon out of which a "non-human vision of the human" [*ru'iyya insaniyya la-insaniyya*] can emerge.

The temporal construction of the letter secures for it its heterogeneity, and, constituted in line, it can never be aestheticized to the point that it loses its reference to language. In a third text, written at the beginning of the nineteen-seventies, Al Said elaborated, "On the painted surface, the letter functions technically as a witness to the world of language; besides its calligraphic features it retains an aura from the world of linguistic form."[8] As a witness, the letter has had its semiotic functions suspended, allowing the existential aspects of language to come forth in the artwork and to function then as a means of relating to truth. These ideas about the truth-functions of the written line, first formulated in the mid-nineteen-sixties, would constitute the basis of Al Said's practice for over the next decade (fig. 0.15-0.16).

Other artists also came to focus their practice on material – rather than, say, cultural forms – though in less theorized ways. During the same period, Saleh al-Jumaie, an artist close to Azzawi and who would later join him in issuing a statement entitled *The New Vision* in 1969, began working with scrap aluminum. After losing his job as an auditor in the passenger transport service in 1961, during a purge of suspected leftists intended to weaken the Iraqi Communist Party, al-Jumaie got a job at the print studio of Nadhim Ramzi, where he learned film-stripping.

Like Azzawi, al-Jumaie's early practice was shaped by the experience of 1963. Two of al-Jumaie's brothers had been studying in the Soviet Union, which cast suspicion on the family. During the events of 1963, the Ba'ath Party stationed a tank in front of his house. It was al-Jumaie's good fortune that an order for his own detainment had been mistakenly sent to his

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[7] Shakir Hassan Al Said, *Mulamah al-Hadara al-Islamiyya fi al-Fann al-Tashkili* (Features of Islamic Civilization in Visual Art) (Baghdad: Wizarat al-I'lam, Mudiriyat al-Thaqafah al-'Ammah, 1969).

[8] Shakir Hassan Al Said, "*Al-Junaib al-Filasilifiyya wa al-Tekniqiyya wa al-Ta'bariyya lil-B'ud al-Wahid*," (The Philosophical, Technical and Expressive Aspect of the One Dimension), in *Al-B'ud al-Wahid: Aw al-Fann yastalhim al-Harf* (Baghdad: Wizarat al-I'lam, Mudiriyat al-Thaqafah al-'Ammah, 1971), 9.

former employer, giving him time to flee Baghdad.  In those years, the political divide between the Ba'athists and the leftists cut across families.  Jumaie had a cousin who was a member of the National Guard and who was able to supply him with a *laissez-passer* so that he could take a teaching job he had just been assigned at a school in Khanaqin, a town on the border with Iran. There, in a small hotel, looking out his window at the patrols moving up and down the street, he lived for ten months in fear.

After the Ba'ath Party was removed that November, Jumaie was transferred to a Ministry of Education audio-visual center in the town of Baquba, where he made visual aids for Iraqi schools.  At the same time, he resumed working part-time at Ramzi Print.  One day at Ramzi Print he picked up an aluminum plate left-over from the printing process and began to subject it to fire.  The aluminum plate was coated with a light-sensitive layer, and when it was exposed to the sun, the light created a solid image.  The color of that image could be altered by applying heat to the aluminum.  As he began to manipulate the scrap metal and subject it to heat, Jumaie found himself releasing into it all the anger that had built up inside of him at what had happened. Years later, he would say that there was something swollen in his stomach that he put into the aluminum.  He would continue to work with aluminum for decades, affixing it to canvas and using it to model the human body (fig. 0.13-0.14).


The art practice that I focus on in this dissertation was centered not on artistic material but on a form of a particular kind.  The reason I focus on the art practice of Kadhim Hayder and Dia Azzawi is that it evidences an unconscious history of forms, one that invites a particular anthropology of the artwork.  This anthropology has to do with the ways in which the artwork had the capacity to create an opening or an outside, where concepts of an ancient political tradition could be restaged, in order to provide the means for a critique of modern violence.

The tradition of mourning the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn in the Battle of Karbala in the eighth-century, still in the aftermath of the prophecy of Islam, cultivated a particular kind of representation, in which the representation of an injustice had the rhetorical effect of refusing an established political order and claiming the justice of a higher reality.  The political nature of the remembrance of Husayn led very quickly to the destruction of his grave and the prohibition of mourning of his death.  However, over the centuries, forms of remembrance evolved, initially in poetry and later in performances, sometimes in public but most often behind closed doors.  In the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, the mourning rituals underwent tremendous growth, and by the nineteen-thirties it had again become a language for a modern political critique, such that the Prime Minister Yasin al-Hashemi tried to ban the mourning celebrations.  In 1965 Kadhim Hayder transposed those forms of remembrance into painting, and introduced that ancient rhetorical practice of appealing to the justice of a higher order into the modern artwork, where, with the collapse of leftist politics, it furnished the means of a critique of violence.

It was in the work of Dia Azzawi that this ancient rhetorical practice would become the basis of a modern critique of violence.  In his practice, that act of memory, whereby the representation of injustice transmuted that injustice into image of truth, and thus a claim to justice, became dissociated from the remembrance of Husayn and joined to a particular use of the human figure.  That human figure, which came to dominate Azzawi's drawings, paintings and prints between 1970 and 1983, was itself the condensation in the artwork of a history of violence.

When Azzawi first began working with what he called "martyrdom", in his first few years out of art school, it was as a form of popular culture, embedded in a constellation of symbols that defined popular life in Iraq:  amulets and talismans, decorative motifs from rugs

and furniture, but also Iraq's landscape of shrines and the practice of visiting them.  Thus, early on, he explored the concept of martyrdom as it was embodied in a set of symbols employed in the ritual remembrance for the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn, such as a horse missing its rider or a palm signifying the severed hand of Abbas, martyrdom.  But over the nineteen-sixties, Azzawi's use of the concept of martyrdom became dissociated from its ritual iconography.  He developed an understanding of martyrdom as a formula for what he referred to as tragedy [*masaa*], and as he did, he came to see martyrdom in terms of a narrative of struggle.

Around the same time, at the end of the decade, like other leftist artists and writers in Iraq, he became involved in the Palestinian liberation movement, which had introduced to the Arab World a new form of anticolonial liberation struggle, embodied in the subjectivity of the *fida'i*.  The Palestinian liberation organizations had set up bases in Jordan from which to launch armed struggle at Israel.  However, between September 1970 and April 1971, the Jordanian military moved to expel the organizations from the country, and the liberation movement began to come apart.  At that point, where anticolonial liberation struggle ran up against the might of the state, the ancient rhetorical practice Hayder introduced into the artwork, of transfiguring the experience of an injustice into an appeal to the justice of a higher order, exerted itself in Azzawi's practice, surging forth to extend the politics of anticolonial liberation struggle beyond its limit.

What I will show is that the concept of martyrdom offered that struggle an afterlife in the image.  Entering the image, the *fida'i*, the subject of the Palestinian liberation movement, underwent a transfiguration, becoming a figural device, whose human form functioned as a surface upon which an unjust violence could both be inscribed and denounced as unjust.  This inscription of an unjust violence on the human figure was not, as in the tradition of war photography, the representation of a reality to be protested, nor was it the documentation of a violation addressed to the law.[9]  It was not just a representation but an act that had a specific efficacy, as it was bound up with an ancient form of political action; as Azzawi would explain to a Moroccan newspaper in 1975, and I will elaborate on in Part Tree, the creation an image of that unjust violence was an attempt, in some sense, to escape it.

The history of unjust violence that came to be inscribed upon the body of the *fida'i* in the artwork is a history of violence that, to a large extent, remains to be written.  Though this violence lacks a name, its history registers in the artwork, in Azzawi's practice and that of other artists who sought to give a face to this nameless, faceless violence.  One task of the anthropology offered here is to excavate this history by constructing an account of art practice in Baghdad during the nineteen-sixties and seventies.

The contours of this history of violence are marked by the foreclosure of the possibility of justice through political action.  Inscribed on the body of the *fida'i* was not only the violence

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[9] In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag offers traces a genealogy of war photography which she sets in the context of a longer history of representations of suffering.  Although the origins of war photography lies in the recruitment by the American and British governments of photographers to document the Crimean and American civil wars, Sontag shows that the encounter of the new practice of photography activated an established, though still quite modern, sensibility toward violence.  According to that sensibility, which emerged in the seventeenth-century, gratuitous violence, which is neither productive nor redemptive, in excess of any end, is something to be morally protested and eliminated.  Sontag argues that the tradition of war photography was subsequently shaped by this modern, secular sensibility towards violence. *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York:  Picador, 2004), 42-43.  In this vein, see as well Talal Asad, "Reflections on Cruelty and Torture," in *Formations of the Secular:  Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford:  Stanford University Press, 2003).

of the forced depopulation of Palestinian villages in 1948 by the Zionist movement, but the suppression by the Arab states in later decades of the Palestinians' struggle to liberate their conquered land.  The expulsion of the Palestinian liberation organizations by the Jordanian military in 1970-1971, accompanied by the destruction of refugee camps, haunted Azzawi's practice for years.  It heralded a new era where a certain existential security had been lost, where the Arab regimes, which had once been hailed as their peoples' savior, had now turned on them, producing a condition of generalized statelessness.  At the same time, however, Azzawi identified the events of Black September in 1970 with the violence of 1963, and then the Kurdistan war in 1974, and later the siege and massacre of Tel al-Za'atar in 1976.  Each was a repetition or iteration of a more general form of unjust violence stalking the Arabic-speaking world.

To some extent, this identification of different episodes of political violence with each other issues from a new framework for art practice that emerged at the end of 1969.  That fall, Azzawi led an initiative called *Towards the New Vision* that attempted to reconstitute art practice on a regional or Arab level.  Seen within that framework, Black September in Jordan in 1970, the Kurdistan war in 1974, the siege and massacre of Tel al-Za'atar in Beirut in 1976 could all be resolved into a single history of injustice.  However, I would like to suggest that in identifying these events with each other, Azzawi's practice is recording a history of violence that has largely escaped the historiography of the Middle East.

In thinking of violence in such an iterative fashion, Azzawi was not idiosyncratic for we find a similar historiography of violence in what is considered to be the textbook on the history of Iraq.  Originally published in 1978, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq:  A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists and Free Officers*, written by the historian Hanna Batatu, argues that the political turmoil of modern Iraq is a result of the disruption of local forms of life caused by Iraq's integration into the world economy, and that communism (and Ba'athism, too, on some level) offered a solution to that disruption.  It is an experimental work of Marxist historiography that seeks to explore the possibilities of class as an analytical category for Middle Eastern history, but rather than rely on the analytic power of historiographic categories, it draws on police files, interviews with high-ranking actors, and a wide array of documents, incorporating character profiles and statistics, in order to construct what is hands-down the most detailed study of the political life of any country in the Arabic-speaking world.  And yet, when it comes to the violence of 1963, what was the decisive event of modern Iraqi history for a generation, Batatu considers that violence beyond the explanation of the historiographic methods, Marxist and otherwise, that he employed.

> If, given the whole previous sequence of circumstances, the defeat of 1963 was, in all probability, unavoidable, could the extreme violence that attended the defeat have been obviated?  It is, of course, possible that the reaction of the Ba'athists might not have been as fierce, had the Communists been 'prudent' or, if one prefers, 'timid,' and offered no resistance on the day of the coup.  But in truth the violence of 1963 is largely explicable by the violence of 1959, which, on a close reading of history, certainly did not mark a new departure in the political life of Iraq.  For isn't the violence of 1959 explained to no little degree by, for example, the violence in the royalist prisons in 1953, or by the previous tribal, racial, inter-quarter, and family violence and feuds in Mosul or Kirkuk, and these by still earlier violence?  Evidently the chain of causation here is infinite.  And if one is inclined to attribute the violence, at least in part, to doctrinal influences, then one would have also to explain how these doctrines happened to arise, and why minds of masses of people came to be susceptible to them, in both the immediate Iraqi and the more distant and wider contexts.  Clearly there is no end to this sort of enquiry.  Indeed, when one takes the long view of things, one finds it increasingly difficult to blame or condemn, for more often than not

> political forces get entangled in complicated series of causes which they themselves did not set in motion, and which are largely beyond their power to master.[10]

Batatu does not exactly answer the question he poses, whether or not the brutality of 1963 was historically necessary. Instead, he reformulates it, as a general historiographic question about violence. Violence, he suggests, follows its own historiographic physics that upsets any attempt to identify relations of causation, and frustrates any assignment of responsibility that might follow from identifying those relations. The violence of 1963 did not have to do with the struggle between the Ba'athists and the communists, he concludes, but was rather a repetition of the violence of 1959, and that violence was a repetition of an earlier violence still, and so on, in an infinite regression. The problem with this historiography, Batatu recognizes, is that, as one proceeds down that regression, very quickly relations of causation evaporate, and with them the ground for blaming or condemning. It is in this regard, that the critique of violence formulated in Azzawi's drawings, paintings and prints acquires its significance. For it elaborates a concept of justice without assigning responsibility, one that depends upon opening up within the artwork the gaze of truth.

## The Limits of the Liberal Tradition

The anthropological significance of the critique of violence formulated in the artwork comes into relief when juxtaposed to a critique of violence of a very different kind, one formulated in the terms of the liberal tradition of political thought. Exemplary of this liberal critique is a book by the Iraqi architect and dissident Kanan Makiya entitled, *The Republic of Fear: the Politics of Modern Iraq*.[11] The book originated out of an argument between Makiya and his father, Mohammad Makiya.[12] The elder Makiya was a prominent architect, who had founded the School of Architecture at the University of Baghdad, and in 1979 he accepted – or had been forced to accept – a commission from Saddam Hussein to redesign the city of Baghdad, in preparation for the meeting of the Conference of Non-Aligned Nations scheduled for three years later. At the time, the younger Makiya was living in London, working at his father's office, and he objected vigorously to the commission. In order to articulate his dissent of his father's action, Makiya turned away from architecture and began to read political theory. At the same time, he began to do the research upon which *The Republic of Fear* is based. However, in researching and writing the book, Makiya was also reassessing his own earlier political commitments, to the program of revolutionary politics propagated by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In writing *The Republic of Fear*, Makiya was abandoning the Marxism that structured his previous political thinking, and starting to think instead about violence and its legacies in Iraq. He did so by drawing on the liberal tradition of political thought, and in particular the work of Hannah Arendt. The book can be seen as a document of the same moment in the Arab world in which Azzawi was working, when certain modes of political action had collapsed, and forms

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[10] Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 993-994.

[11] Kanan Makiya, *The Republic of Fear: the Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989 [1998]).

[12] Here I am drawing on the profile of Kanan Makiya in Lawrence Weschler, *Calamities of Exile: Three Nonfiction Novellas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

of critique began to take their place. However, where Azzawi's critique was formulated in the visual artwork, Makiya turned towards liberal political thought.

Based on documents found in the New York Public Library, the book began by identifying the specific institutions of violence employed by the Ba'ath Party in the nineteen-seventies. These institutions, it claimed, had been set up by a young Saddam Hussein following the failure of the first Ba'ath coup in 1963, though they were only operationalized a decade later. Departing from this observation, Makiya develops the argument that it was not violence that brought "an end to politics" but "the end of politics" that enabled the violence of the Ba'ath. The book is thus subsequently concerned with two lines of inquiry.

On the one hand, it traces the *origins* of Ba'ath violence to the specific variety of Arab nationalism formulated by the party, in which, according to Makiya, the collapse of morality and politics made any expression of dissent an act of betrayal, making it impossible for the party to have a relation to opposition that is not one of elimination. The devastating attack on leftists in 1963 was an expression of this peculiar Ba'athist variety of Arab nationalism but it proved unsuccessful inasmuch as the military intervened to check the actions of the National Guard. It was only once the military and all other public institutions had been taken over, as the Ba'ath were sure to do in the nineteen-seventies when they returned to power, by making party membership a requirement, that they could enact their doctrine.

On the other hand, then, the book is concerned with tracing the *conditions of possibility* for the return of the Ba'ath to power in 1968 and the execution of their program. The explanation Makiya offers for these conditions centers on the collapse of the public sphere that had formed in Iraq during the nineteen-forties and fifties. I want to walk through his account of the collapse of the public sphere, because it leads him to conclude that at a certain point politics "ends." The idea there can be an end to politics is particular to a republican thread of conceiving the political in the liberal tradition.[13] By discussing Makiya's account, I hope to highlight the epistemological limits of the ways in which in the liberal tradition conceives of the political in terms of a certain kind of public speech.[14]

In Makiya's account, the collapse of the public sphere in Iraq occurs in two stages. The first occurred in the aftermath of the revolution in 1958, when competition between the Iraqi Communist Party and the Ba'ath Party transformed the erstwhile public into "masses". Prior to the revolution, a broad front was secretly formed among members of different political parties, united in opposition to the Hashemite monarchy by the suppression of civil liberties, severe economic inequality and discontent with the monarchy's pro-Western foreign policy. After the revolution, however, that shared terrain of opposition fractured over the issue of Arab unity,

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[13] On republican notions of politics in the twentieth-century see Peter Graf Kielmansiegg and Horst Mewes, *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: German Émigrés and American Political Thought after World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Hannah Arendt, *The Recovery of the Public World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979); Michael Halberstam, *Totalitarianism and the Modern Conception of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

[14] This is not a merely academic exercise, for the formulations of American policy towards Iraq has been predicated on liberal concepts of the political. Though Makiya was not part of the neoconservative movement in the US that since the late nineteen-eighties had made regime change in Iraq its top policy priority, that movement's interpretation of political life in Iraq was framed in terms of a concept of totalitarianism, which is predicated on a particular concept of the political, and the idea that there could be an end to politics. Furthermore, the presumptions of the liberal tradition are shared by the historiography of Iraq. Recent scholarship on Iraq has focused on the robust political and artistic life of the nineteen-forties and nineteen-fifties, in silent contrast to the nineteen-sixties and seventies, when one is led to assume such a life did not exist. Hence the title of Orit Bashkin's nonetheless fascinating book: *The Other Iraq*.

which had been become urgent with the unification of Egypt and Syria into the United Arab Republic the same year.  In the struggle that ensued, between the Iraqi Communist party, which advocated an independent Iraq, with its sights focused on internal social reforms, and the Ba'ath party, which advocated immediate union, the debate that had characterized political life in the nineteen-fifties gave way, Makiya claims, to the mobilization of supporters in the streets.  The Ba'ath coup in February 1963 was the culmination of that street contest.

If the struggle between the Iraqi Communist Party and the Ba'ath Party had transformed the public into masses, the aftermath of the coup created a "moral vacuum," as broad segments of the population were repelled from politics period, first by the persecution of leftists at the hands of the National Guard and then in the following years by a manic turn-over of cabinets. The Ba'ath Party had been removed from power by the military in November 1963, but that "moral vacuum," Makiya claimed, cleared the way for the Ba'ath Party's unobstructed return into power in 1968, after the previous government, dominated by military officers, had been discredited by defeat in the Arab Israeli war in 1967.

The second stage in the destruction of the public sphere comes after the Ba'ath return to power, and unlike 1963 it was carried out not with weapons but with language.  Makiya asks how a party that had no more than a few thousand members when it came to power in 1968 could dominate a country of so many millions.  His answer focuses on the different moves by which the Ba'ath gradually foreclosed the possibility of any kind of space where one could hold positions for or against, belong to this party or that, a space, in other words, of disagreement and persuasion.  He proceeds to identify the ways in which the Ba'ath Party completely occupied the space of civil society, rendering any opposition impossible.  It did this by integrating the party with the state, and using the institutions of the state to expand party membership, such that increasingly large parts of the population became integrated into the regime.  The effect, Makiya claims, was the cultivation of a combination of complicity and fear that registered in the foreclosure of speech.

> The point, in brief, is that between 1958 and 1968 the self-assurance of the masses gave way to a debilitating moral vacuum as they lost or at least questioned all instinctual knowledge of themselves accumulated over several decades of a slow political emergence.  Their own 'truth' could no longer be taken for granted, and was open to being managed or shaped into something else…In such a setting, terror laced with culpability, the fear of death becomes an inordinately powerful and positive force for holding the body politic together.  The Ba'ath understood this bond, and vigorously fashioned it in Iraq.  Over the years, they succeeded in placing this new kind of fear at the centre of the modern Iraqi condition and to it must be credited the durability of their rule.
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> Whether such a regime exists can be judged from its ability to suppress story-telling.  In a very important sense, the telling of stories by word of mouth or through print, journalism, and the media, is the only way political actions as such acquire meaning.  Of course, everyone tells us the story as they saw it, but without all the different stories that surround a public act, no remembrance attaches to it, and the event simply ceases to exist in the collective experience of a community.  This is what differentiates politics – the domain of public actions – from say artistic or intellectual creation which has as its end artifacts or ideas imbued with a meaning in and of themselves that becomes detached from the private actions of their creator.
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> For every sphere of life, the world of Ba'athism substitutes 'analysis' sprinkled with lies for the magnificent human impulse to tell a story.[15]

In conceiving of politics as a kind of "story-telling," Makiya is drawing upon a concept of action elaborated by Hannah Arendt in *On the Human Condition*.  It is because he thinks of politics in

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[15] Makiya, *The Republic of Fear*, 60-61.

these terms that he will judge the replacement of speech with empty and circular ideological analysis as bringing about an end to politics.

Makiya goes on to explain that what brought an end to story-telling and enabled the Ba'ath to colonize speech with ideological formulae was the deployment of a peculiar discursive formula that functioned to cast dissenters outside the political community. This formula consisted of accusing political opponents of acting as the agents of an imperialist project; reinforced by the creation of a network of informers that extended into the family, it led to self-silencing. As a speech act, the accusation of "imperialist" functioned to de-naturalize citizens, redrawing the boundaries between inside and outside, and producing a condition of statelessness from within.

Makiya claims that the Ba'ath had recovered this formula from an earlier nationalist movement that arose in Iraq during the nineteen-thirties. Nurtured in the military of the young state, it culminated in a succession of coups until it was finally aborted in 1941. When the first Ba'athist circles were established in Baghdad, in 1949, by Syrian students, they inherited the legacy of that earlier iteration of Arab nationalism, and they revived its formula of anti-imperialism. The first use of this formula by the Ba'ath was in the aftermath of the Arab states' defeat in a war with Israel in June 1967. In a demonstration on September 6, they protested that defeat by decrying the presence of a "fifth column" in their midst. But the Ba'ath Party wedded to this idea of "an outside in our amidst" something that did not exist in the first iteration of Arab nationalism, and that was a particular moralization of politics internal to the Ba'athist project, which made dissent an act of treason.

Once in power, the Ba'ath Party operationalized this formula of anti-imperialism, which it had revitalized and deployed in the post-1967 demonstrations, and had refitted with its own moral concept of politics, in a series of trials and hangings, beginning in January 1969 with several Jewish "spies" in Tahrir Square in central Baghdad. The trials and hangings continued throughout the year, as industrialists, army officers, and intellectuals, were convicted of "spying." At first they were attended by the appearance of trials and the demonstration of evidence, but eventually they were carried out without due process. Makiya interprets the hangings as an attempt on the part of the new regime to secure the political identification of the masses; but they also marked the beginning of a series of political killings that were intended simply to remove opposition. Because the Ba'ath did not dissociate opinions from the people who held them, and thus insisted that those who disagreed had to be eliminated, it made police work, so Makiya argues, a substitute for politics. Arbitrarily categorizing and excluding individuals from the political community, it made many of its own citizens effectively stateless, either subjecting them to arrest, torture, and imprisonment; by deportation, as it did to tens of thousands of Shia and Kurds; through outright assassination; or war, as in 1974-1975 when the Iraqi air force bombed Kurdish villages in the north of the country, displacing as many as one hundred thousand people.

By the end of that war, in 1975, politics, Makiya claims, had been brought to an end, putting in place the conditions for the violence that he began the book documenting.

> At this juncture politics as such came to an end. But instead of a vacuum, institutional violence took over – violence that could only reign supreme *after* all politics had ended. The resettlement of Kurds, for instance, took place after their overwhelming defeat; and the deportations of two hundred thousand Shi'ites to Iran had nothing to do with any real threat to the regime. The explosion in the size of the repressive apparatus and the ascendancy of a police state over the army also followed the end of politics, which can be dated roughly around 1975.

> The peculiar feature of the second Ba'athi regime, therefore, is that it developed unmistakable signs of a real social base (as measured by party growth, public support for Saddam Husain, more armed men, and statification) after all politics had ended and in an atmosphere of rampant violence no longer directed at real enemies, but at everyone.[16]

The idea of an "end of politics" belongs to a particular tradition of thinking about politics, one that identifies the political with a certain concept of public speech. In a footnote, Makiya explicitly acknowledged that his interpretations had been inspired by Hannah Arendt's analysis of Nazism and Stalinism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. That inspiration is evident not only in the notion of an end of politics but also in his use of the concept of masses, for instance, to interpret the political history of Iraq in the nineteen-sixties. Thus, prior to the revolution in 1958, Makiya writes, the Iraqi Communist Party appealed to a "classed society", but over the decade following the revolution that classed society "disintegrated" into "masses" which the Ba'ath could respond to in ways that the Iraqi Communist Party no longer could.

The idea of the "masses" [*jamahir*] was already a part of Ba'athist ideology, and it seems that it is from Ba'athist ideology that Makiya takes the term. But he makes a mistake that leads him ultimately to the conclusion that at one point politics died. Even though he smartly recognizes that what makes that ideology ideological is that it does not purport to describe things as they are but as they ought to be, Makiya ends up taking the Ba'athist discourse on the masses as in fact a description of things are. Thus, his recourse to Arendt. Ba'athism may have drunk from the same intellectual well as Nazism, but that doesn't mean that people in Iraq, however withdrawn into themselves were atomized and stopped thinking; atomization was a product of industrialization, and Iraq was hardly industrialized.

Because Makiya adopts the historiography European totalitarianism as his interpretative framework, he sees the transformation of a public into masses as leading to the disintegration of the self: "After 1958, the 'parts' were losing the ability to 'think' themselves separate from 'the masses'; the walls of the self were disintegrating for individuals, parties, classes, and social groups."[17] It was with this disintegration, in the nineteen-sixties, that Makiya identifies as the beginning of the end of politics. "Whole chunks of intellectual life were beginning to choke up long before the Ba'ath came to power for the second time. Moreover, the language of politics was not only becoming the same; it was collapsing in on itself. Words were running into each other until they all meant the same thing. Distinction and nuance meant less in ideas; the ability to think politically was slipping."[18]

Now, at this point I would like to refer back to the review by Suhail Sami Nader with which I began, and which suggests a very different situation than that indicated by Makiya's liberal analysis. In fact, Nader had insisted that the exact opposite had been the case, that the circumstances of the nineteen-sixties, in provoking a withdrawal from the public sphere, had not broken down the walls of the self but reinforced them, and even trapped the self within its walls. Within those walls, to use Makiya's terms, the self found what Nader called the freedom of despair, and out of that freedom, new terrains of "intellectual life" actually emerged.

My purpose here is not to dispute Makiya's account nor to pick at the weaknesses in his argument, but rather to demonstrate how the republican tradition of thinking about politics, most prominently formulated by Hannah Arendt, with its emphasis on public speech, can leave wide swaths of life invisible. For, Kanan Makiya knew better. In 1962, his father, Mohammad

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[16] Ibid, 236
[17] Ibid, 242
[18] Ibid, 248

Makiya, had opened the first private art gallery in Baghdad, Riwaq al-Wasiti, where both Kadhim Hayder and Dia Azzawi held their first solo shows; and Makiya himself would later expand the family's own art collection to include some eight hundred works. Within the terms of the liberal theory of action employed by Makiya in the passage cited above, this art is relegated to "the private actions of their creator" where it is distinct from the "domain of public actions" which is recognized as the domain of "politics". Unlike "public actions" a multiplicity of stories does not crystalize around art. But what would it be to think about art practice differently, outside the terms of a concept of action predicated on a distinction between the public and the private?

Anthropologists have shown that where the public sphere normative to the liberal tradition is absent other spaces emerge where different practices are cultivated that cannot be understood within liberal concepts of politics. Let me point to two examples, one from post-reform China and the other from the late Soviet period. Working in contemporary Beijing, Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang have examined the revival of an ancient practice of nurturing life called *yangsheng*. Encompassing a wide range of activities, the practice of *yangsheng* is conceptually grounded in a classical body of literature where it is related to good lordship. Farquhar and Qicheng suspect that resonances of that association linger on, even if those resonances are not positively identifiable, and they argue that *yangsheng* demonstrates, "political but non-confrontational forms of life."[19] Their argument about the political nature of *yangsheng*, in its revival, rests upon situating that revival against the historical backdrop of Maoism. Maoism was characterized by an ongoing program of distinguishing between the Chinese people and its enemies, and in its constant political mobilizations, Farquhar and Qicheng claim, Maoism cast everyone in a "zone of indistinction" in which life was politicized. In the period of economic reforms initiated in 1978, when the work collectives that had ordered life in the Maoist era were dissolved and health-care underwent a kind of privatization, "life in many forms [became] a focus of the political passions of the people."[20] This investment of political energies into the singular activity of nurturing life, Farquhar and Qicheng argue, is a form of "nonaction" – a kind of power named in the Chinese tradition as *wu wei*, that refuses the distinction of friend and enemy characteristic of modern forms of sovereignty, in their Maoist iteration and otherwise. "*Yangsheng* is not about freedom or overt political power…*Yangsheng* allows people to 'escape without leaving' a sometimes uncertain social and political order that is both experienced and remembered as fragile." Because these practices often occur in public space, Farquhar and Qicheng understand their power and the act of escape they perform in spatial terms: "The power that is mobilized in *yangsheng* practice is not a domination from above or resistance from below…it creates a space apart." That power, secured by the revival of an ancient practice, and taking the form of an intensive investment in life, understood in terms of the Chinese concept *jingshen*, was political, they argue, not because, as theories of what Michel Foucault called "biopower" contend, the modern state had taken upon itself the responsibility to administer the life of its citizens, and then here citizens were taking life back in their own hands, but rather because the power of that investment in life lied in its disavowal of politics of a particular kind.

Alexei Yurchak has identified a similar political disavowal in the late Soviet period. He has shown that the trajectory of the Soviet project, from the nineteen-twenties through the

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[19] Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang, "Biopolitical Beijing: Pleasure, Sovereignty, and Self-Cultivation in China's Capital," *Cultural Anthropology* (20:3, 2005), 310.
[20] Ibid, 320.

nineteen-eighties, led to the creation of spaces where one could occupy subject positions that were enabled by the dominant discursive regime and, at the same time, outside it.[21]  As a revolutionary project, Sovietism had erected an authoritative discourse, which of necessity limited the scope of public speech, and thus precluded the possibility of a liberal concept of the public, understood in terms of the formation and expression of opinions.  However, at the same time, as a revolutionary project, it sought to re-create consciousness through language, and this led to a broad experimentation with language.  This experimentation eventually had to be reigned in, and it was, Josef Stalin, who as "author" authorized a particular discourse.  Now, Yurchak claims that after Stalin died, the established language of revolutionary Sovietism underwent a crisis of discursive authority, and as a result of this crisis, language was normalized in a way that de-subjectivated public speech.  With this normalization of language, a gap grew between form and its meaning, and within this gap spaces opened up, where different forms of life, different *tusovka*, or milieus, came into existence:  activities likes hiking, forms of collecting, but also art practices and forms of writing.  Paradoxically, in these spaces, uniquely created by the Soviet project, one could be non-Soviet.  Enabled by the normalization of language, they were inside, and yet, non-Soviet they were outside – a location called *svoi* in Russian that constituted, Yurchak argues, a peculiar form of public.

In addition, we could say then that, unlike the liberal topography of the public and the private, the conceptual grammar of *yangsheng* was embedded in a political topography organized in terms of action and nonaction; and that in the Soviet case, the topography of politics was organized not in terms of public and private, but, keeping with the Russian, in terms of inside and outside.  In both cases, we are confronted with forms of action that do not entail the kind of public speech identified with the political in the liberal tradition.  While Farquhar and Qicheng draw on the concept of *wu wei* to articulate the political significance of *yangsheng*, Yurchak is particularly hard pressed to come up with a concept that can articulate the political significance of the actions he maps.  He ends up drawing upon a notion of suspending the political proposed by Frederic Jameson, the idea that where the possibility of action has been foreclosed, representations of utopia can disrupt a political reality.  Yurchak invokes Jameson's notion of suspending the political in order to draw out the stakes of the various ways in which individuals during the nineteen-seventies and eighties cultivated a wide array of different interests that dislocated them from the present and its political reality.[22]  In particular, he focuses on two groups in Leningrad, one called the *mit'ki*, which experimented with forms of living that were illegible according to prevailing norms, even while remaining within recognizably Soviet spaces, and propagated those forms of living in unofficial literature that circulated underground called *samizdat*; and another group that came to be called the necrorealists, which began by staging spectacles that, by virtue of their absurdity, produced illegibility.  Both groups produced, Yurchak argues, a form of political dis-identification that he wants to contrast to liberal notions of dissent or opposition.

This dissertation seeks to construct a "ethnographic contrast" – to borrow Farquhar and Qicheng's phrase – to liberal conceptions of the political that is both similar and different to those offered by Farquhar and Qicheng and Yurchak, by examining the practice of art in conditions where forms of political action and expression had been foreclosed, not by revolutionary ideologies but by political violence.  Like *samizdat*, and the experiments of the *mit'ki* and the *necrorealists*, the practice of art described in this dissertation involves the

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[21] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton:  Princeton University Press, 2006).

[22] Alexei Yurchak.  "Suspending the Political:  Late Soviet Artistic Experiments on the Margins of the State," *Poetics Today* 29:4 2008, 713-733.

production of forms.  And like *yangsheng*, this practice reactivated an ancient concept of political action, as a response to modern political problems.  It was through a production of forms that reactivated an ancient concept of political action that the artwork became the site of a concept of speech different from that presumed by the liberal tradition.

What differentiates the form of art practice I consider here from both *samizdat* and *yangsheng* is the question of justice that emerged out of the experience of political violence.  The concept of speech that developed in the artwork sought not to protest or to oppose but to turn away and make a claim to justice.  For, the form of political action reactivated in the artwork, unlike *yangsheng*, was not connected to a practice of good lordship, but quite the opposite, was connected to an experience of victimhood, or *dhahiyya*, as Azzawi would term it, and it consisted of an act of memory addressed to a future moment of reckoning.  The temporal horizon of this act of memory issued from a theological tradition in which the arena of ultimate justice was located someplace beyond, at a Day of Judgment to come.  Under the gaze of that distant justice, the act of remembering the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn acquired its political significance, in distinction from the formulation of law or the revolutionary overthrow of a corrupt regime.

In reactivating that form of political action, the artwork displaced itself in two fundamental ways.  On one level, it positioned itself as a site of memory, in relation to the closure of the state as a site of political action, and in relation to the impossibility of revolution.  On another level, this repositioning of the artwork as a site of memory entailed a transformation of the artwork's structure of representation.  Thus the anthropology of the artwork offered in this dissertation considers not only what art practice offered, when others forms of action and expression were unavailable, but also how the artwork itself was transformed. This transformation entailed a shift in the representational structure of the artwork:  from an act of giving form to the world, addressed to a public, to a form of rhetoric, buried in the artwork and addressed to the gaze of a future reckoning.

In order to give a sense of the transformation of the artwork into a site of memory, and the shift from representation to rhetoric instigated by *The Epic of the Martyr*, the dissertation begins with the establishment of the discursive and pictorial foundations of a practice of modern art during the nineteen-fifties.  Those foundations were laid by the artist Jawad Salim on the basis of a rediscovered history of manuscript illustration in Baghdad in the thirteenth-century.  Since the introduction of landscape painting by the Ottoman officers, painting had been something private, in both the sense that painters did not address a public in the work and that their practice did not have significance beyond their personal interests.  In 1951 Salim attempted to move that private practice of painting into the public sphere that had been forming in Baghdad during the nineteen-forties and fifties, by founding an art group called the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, that both situated the artwork in relation to a public and based the practice of modern art on a history of medieval manuscript illustration.

The existence of a unknown history of painting in Baghdad was discovered in 1941, in reproductions of a thirteenth-century manuscript containing illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri* by a painter named Yahya al-Wasiti.  In Part One, I show that the major effect of this discovery was to dissociate modern art from its formative history in Europe and to emplot it in a different historiography.  Within this historiography, modern art was interpreted as the renewal of a history of painting lost centuries ago.  As the architect of this renewal, Jawad Salim did two things that shaped the subsequent development of modern art in Iraq, and that were foundational for the specific form of art practice whose trajectory is traced in this dissertation.  One was that

he put forward concepts for organizing the practice of modern art, and the second was that, in proposing a method for developing a modern art in Iraq, he situated modern art in relation to other traditions of representations.

Because no one in Baghdad at that time had actually seen the manuscript with al-Wasiti's illustrations, which was in the collection of the Bibliothèque nationale in France, it was only through its historiography that it could be accessed. Because Salim interpreted modern art as a renewal of this lost history of painting, he appropriated the concepts from this historiography in order to orient the new practice of modern art. The central concept of this historiography was the idea of a Baghdad School, a school of painting distinguished by the painting of life. Unbeknownst to Salim, the idea of the Baghdad School had been formulated by the diplomat and orientalist Eustache de Lorey, in an attempt to distinguish those manuscripts supposed to have been produced in Baghdad during the twelfth and thirteen-centuries from other illustrated manuscripts. Also unbeknownst to Salim was the fact that the interpretation of al-Wasiti's illustrations as a painting of life issued from an attempt on the part of de Lorey to find in the illustrations a solution to the pictorial problems of European modernism. Still, the idea of a Baghdad School, and the concept of modern art as a painting of life, structured art practice throughout the nineteen-fifties.

The second thing Salim did was to outline parameters for the practice of modern art in Baghdad. At the beginning of the nineteen-fifties, it was not at all clear what exactly modern art would be, dislocated from the European circumstances of its emergence. With the founding of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, and its attendant claim to restore a Baghdad School of painting, Salim proposed that the goal of modern artists was to develop a distinctive style for rendering modern life. That style could be forged, Salim argued, by taking devices and techniques from various "modern" styles – cubism, impressionism, abstraction, surrealism – and melding them with "local" elements, which included such things culled from the popular life as the geometric patterns found in traditional rugs or the crescents ornamenting mosques, as well as forms inspired by the history of ancient and Islamic art modern Iraq inherited.

Other artists disagreed. Although they accepted the historiography of renewal, and its concept of a Baghdad School, they argued that the focus of modern art should not be on formulating a distinctive style but on giving form to the social and economic transformations taking place in Iraq, and they found forms from the Mesopotamian or Islamic past ill-suited to the task of rendering the hard realities of contemporary life. They claimed that only modern styles were up to the task, as they had been forged in similar circumstances. The major voice of this camp was an artist named Mahmud Sabri, and I discuss his arguments in Part Two.

Still, Salim's method, both as it was outlined in a manifesto issued by the Baghdad Group and demonstrated in his own work, situated the practice of modern art in relation to other formal traditions. He cleared the space within which the form of art practice traced in this dissertation evolved. For it was within the paradigm of art practice established by Salim, of introducing difference into modern art, that Kadhim Hayder drew upon imagery from the mourning rituals of the Imam al-Husayn, and that later Dia Azzawi turned to forms of popular culture – even as both artists broke with the project of the Baghdad Group, to bring back into existence something called the Baghdad School by formulating a style.

A final word on method. The concept of the artwork as such is a modernist one, and it encompasses an array of objects produced in a variety of media, whether painting or print, film, photography, performance, music, writing or installation. Nevertheless, when we speak of the

artwork, we speak of a peculiar discursive space where a particular kind of production of forms takes place. The anthropology of the artwork offered in this dissertation focuses on that production of forms, and it does so without either reducing those forms to the qualities of an object or assigning those forms a meaning. Neither treating the artwork as a discrete object nor attending to the ways in which that object is embedded in different social formations, the dissertation is concerned with what takes place inside the artwork, with the forms that are produced there and their relation to the historical circumstances of their production.[23]

In conceiving of the artwork in terms of the productions of forms, I am influenced both by both the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, emerging as they do out of a modernist context, and the ways in which artists in Baghdad conceived of their practice. For Lévi-Strauss, the artwork solved one of the longest standing epistemological problems in the European philosophical tradition, that of the opposition between the abstract and the concrete. Demonstrating the possibility of concrete forms of abstraction, the artwork collapsed the opposition between the two and enabled Lévi-Strauss to argue that concepts need not be abstract, but can emerge immanently in the perception of sensible – concrete – differences. On the basis of this interpretation of the artwork, he developed not only an anthropology of human thought, but also an entire anthropology of human life, as intimately entangled in symbolic forms that were fundamentally non-human. The perception of sensible differences engendered a system of intelligible differences that provided the basis for structure of relationships, from which other sets of relationships, each possessing different levels of abstraction, could be endlessly derived. The arguments he made in *The Savage Mind* invited an anthropology that centered on forms, always constituted on the order of the non-human, that structure human life; but they also invited us to look again at the artwork, and the peculiar mode of thought it enabled.

During the same years that Lévi-Strauss was reconceiving of human thought on the model of the artwork, artists in Baghdad were conceiving of the artwork in similar terms, as a production of forms, though for very different reasons. Because the artwork had been introduced to Iraq without any of the institutions that accompanied it in Europe – the art school, the museum, galleries, a market – it presented itself to artists primarily as a problem of form, and the relation of those forms to the historical context within which artists were working. It is important to recognize that form [*shakl*, pl. *ashkal*] meant something different in Baghdad than it did in the European philosophy tradition. Here, outside the concerns of moral philosophy, in which the category of the aesthetic was shaped, and outside the conditions of bourgeois society in which the aesthetic was isolated from any social or historical context, questions of form in art practice opened onto broader questions of society and history, as I will show. It is, thus, on those questions of form that the anthropology of the artwork offered in this dissertation is focused.

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[23] Kirsten Scheid has elegantly, and concisely mapped the anthropology of art in these terms in, *Painters, Picture-Makers, and Lebanon: Ambiguous Identities in an Unsettled State*, PhD Dissertation, Princeton University Press, 2005, 27-29.

Part One

# Renewal

## Jawad Salim

Sometime in 1941, having been forced to return to Baghdad after his study of art in Europe was cut short by the outbreak of the Second World War, a twenty-one year-old artist named Jawad Salim came across an article in the French picture magazine, *L'Illustration*.[1]  The article reproduced five illustrations from a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Maqamat of Hariri* by an artist named Yahya al-Wasiti (fig. 1.1-1.6):  a scene of a provincial governor attending the sermon of a preacher in a mosque; a parade celebrating the end of Ramadan; a train of camels with undulating necks and stomping feet; a ship sailing on the Persian Gulf; a literary gathering outside Baghdad where a group of men sit around a fountain listening to an oud performance.

In these few illustrations, reproduced in the article, Salim was brought face to face with a history of painting that he had not known existed – and a history of painting that employed pictorial devices that were unfamiliar to him.  Most likely he noticed, for instance, that the scene of the sermon in the mosque (fig. 1.2), which occupied two full pages, had been first drawn in ink on paper, that the figures had been traced in outline, and then the shapes delineated by those lines, almost ornamental in their rhythm and regularity, filled in either with luxuriant patterns or colors.  He might have noticed how each face was rendered distinctly, and that the play between the repose of the bodies traced in silhouette, each like the others, and the turned heads, each unique, created a sense of rapt attention.  Salim might also have noticed how context was constructed with fragments, such as a strip of grass or a minbar (a kind of pulpit) which functioned metonymically to indicate a mosque.  He might have noticed as well that no attempt was made to disguise the surface upon which the illustrations appeared, and that the scenes appeared more vivid for standing out against the blank paper.  I say "he might have noticed" because, although there is almost no documentary record of Salim's influences, many of these features, indicative of a pictorial concept every different from that of the European tradition, would appear in his own painting several years later.

Reproduced in the article, the illustrations had been separated from the text of the *Maqamat*, and, isolated in this way, they appeared congruent with the kind of panel painting Salim had been practicing.  In a short text that accompanied them, entitled "Le Miroir de Bagdad," written by the French diplomat and orientalist Eustache de Lorey, Salim read that the illustrations were not illustrations of a narrative but "works of Islamic painting" [*la peinture musulmane*] that depicted "the mysteries and singularities of oriental life," in a city until then known only through literature but that could now be seen, as if directly, in painting.

> The tales of the *Arabian Nights* have preserved for us an image of the East that has survived all other.  For us Baghdad is nothing but the city of the cruel charms of Harun al-Rashid.  It is populated by the wonders of the fable.  It is such that it shows delightful fictions to our spirit.  Of this city of legend, a city much less historic than imaginary, the works of Islamic painting have left us remarkable images where centuries after

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[1] Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Jawad Salim wa-Nusb al-Hurriyah:  dirasah fi atharih wa-ara'ih* (Baghdad:  Wizarat al-I'lam, Mudiriyat al-Thaqafah al-'Ammah, 1974) 22-23.

the reveries of Shahrazad we find the mysteries and singularities of oriental life. Two works occupy the inhabitants of Baghdad, entertaining them and satisfying their taste for stories. These books, widely renown, read passionately by generations of Muslims were copied, illustrated and taken as a pretext for the masterpieces by the great calligraphers and painters. They are the most popular works of Arabic literature after the Quran. They offer us, as in a mirror, the everyday story of life in Baghdad.[2]

According to this text, it was, paradoxically, the love the inhabitants of medieval Baghdad had for stories that led to the creation of these images; the "most popular works of Arabic literature" were a "pretext for the masterpieces by the great calligraphers and painters". The *Maqamat of Hariri*, which al-Wasiti had illustrated, comprised fifty scenes, set in different parts of the Islamic world, in which a middle-aged named identified as Abu Zayd exploited, and exercised to artistic effect, the rhetorical capacities of the Arabic language to bamboozle, and in some cases, swindle his audience. In the introduction de Lorey wrote to the *Maqamat of Hariri* and al-Wasiti's illustrations of them, certainly addressed to a French audience, Salim read that each *maqamat*, or assembly, consisted of a kind of ethnographic portrait, a *tableaux de moeurs* that the illustrations sought to render. "Most of the assemblies comprise scenes of everyday life [*tableaux de moeurs*] which the miniatures portray for us [*nous rendent tres sensibles*]." And Salim read that this portrayal focused on circumstantial details that portray something called "life," which abides in "simple and pleasant practices". "Almost all of the tableaux that the miniatures preserve for us of life in Baghdad in the thirteenth-century allow us to see the simple and pleasant practices, far from the rigidity that is assumed and that they acquire much later." These "simple and pleasant practices" include such things as the clothing of the women attending the sermon and "delights" like the "spectacle of the flowing water" in poetry games, which join poetry and music, or the trumpets and drums that celebrate the end of Ramadan. "All the scenes reproduce the life itself [*la vie meme*] of the period, restoring the color and the familiar details, allowing us to conjure, in a setting borrowed from reality, the taste and preferences of a foreign soul."

That rush of color and detail was as stunning to Salim as it was to de Lorey. Later, in a letter to his friend Khaldun, Salim would refer to the brilliant color of al-Wasiti's illustrations, and invoke their pictorial concept as a model for his own painting. In fact, over the following years, these five reproductions of the thirteenth-century illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri* by Yahya al-Wasiti, and this historiography, of a medieval tradition of painting *life* in Baghdad, would provide a basis upon which Salim would constitute a foundation for the modern art that he had gone to Europe to study.

The form of painting Salim had known up until that moment – on an autonomous support, whether paper or a canvas panel, set in some kind of representational relation to the physical world – had been introduced to Baghdad at the beginning of the twentieth century by officers in the Ottoman military.[3] These officers had been trained in landscape painting at the War College in Istanbul, and after the Ottoman Empire dissolved at the end of the First World War, they retired to Baghdad, where they continued to paint. Some of these retired officers taught drawing and painting in the schools of the newly established Iraqi state, introducing the techniques of

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[2] Eustache de Lorey, "Le Miroir de Bagdad," (*L'Illustration*, Noël 1938).
[3] For that history, see Shakir Hassan Al Sa'id. *Fusul min ta'rikh al-harakah al-tashkiliyah fi al-'Iraq* Volume One, (Baghdad: al-Jumhuriyyah al-'Iraqiyah, Wizarat al-Thaqafah wa-al-'Ilam, Da'irat al-Shu'un al-thaqafiyah wa-al-Nashr: Tazi' al-Dar al-Wataniyah lil-Tawzi wa-al-l"ilan, 1983).

drawing and painting to a relatively large number of Iraqis.[4]  Their own painting was largely pastoral – herds of sheep, mosques on the Tigris – interested in reproducing such visual effects as the shadows cast by the sun or the reflection of the sky in the water, isolating them and reassembling them into composite pictures (fig. 1.7).   Salim was the son of one of these officers, Haj Mohammad Salim al-Mawsuli, who after moving the family from Ankara to Baghdad in 1921, was a tutor of King Faisal's children.[5]

By the time Salim was in school, he was taught drawing and painting by an intermediate generation, who had learned techniques of drawing and painting from the Ottoman officers but had not themselves gone to art school, or at least not yet.[6]  Beginning in the early nineteen-thirties, the education minister, Sati' al-Husri, arranged for a handful of students to study art in Europe. Akram Shukri, who left for London in 1931, was the first to go, and he was followed by Faiq Hassan, who went to Paris in 1935, Atta Sabri who went to Rome in 1937, Hafidh Droubi who also went to Rome, and Jawad Salim who left for Paris in 1938.

The idea of sending Iraqis to Europe to study art was part of a broad vision al-Husri had for establishing a historical foundation for the national consciousness that had emerged among the Arab provinces in the late Ottoman Empire.  Of Syrian descent, Al-Husri had been one of the empire's major intellectuals.  Having served as a teacher in what today is Greece, where he pioneered a number of education reforms, he had a particular perspective on the empire, and he struggled to save the empire by developing a new framework for Ottomanism grounded in historical consciousness rather than national belonging.[7]  After the empire dissolved into nation-states, he reworked his ideas about Ottomanism into a program for Arabism.  In 1920, King Faisal was named the ruler of Iraq by Britain, which, according to the treaty that brokered the Ottoman Empire's dissolution following World War I, had taken over administration of the provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul.  Al-Husri moved to Baghdad, where he was appointed the minister of education and later the director of antiquities.  In 1941, a nationalist coup overthrew the monarchy, and the British reinvasion of the country, and the elimination of nationalist elements that followed forced him to leave Iraq and settle in Lebanon.  However, as an educator, he had argued for a technological transfer from the West, and it had been in that spirit that, in his capacity as minister of education, he had arranged for artists to study in Europe. But he had in mind a particular idea about the role art would play in cultivating a historical consciousness as a basis for the new state of Iraq.  Thus, when Akram Shukri returned from London in 1936, he was employed in a laboratory at the Iraq Museum, where he would work preserving archaeological objects until 1963.  Jawad Salim and Atta Sabri, along with other artists such as Khalid al-Rahhal and Issa Hanna, would do the same.

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[4] Other notable military painters [*asker ressamlar* as they were known in Turkish, the primary language of the empire] include:  Mohammad Saleh Zaki, Al-Haj Mohammad Salim al-Mosulli, Amin Zaki, Ihsan Sami, 'Asim Hafidh.

[5] Other artists were also the children of *asker ressamlar*:  Atta Sabri, the son of Ihsan Fatmi; and Zaid Saleh, the son of Mohammad Zaki Saleh

[6] These were Nasir Ouni and Qasim Naji at Al-Ma'mouniyya Ibtidaiyya (elementary school), and Abdel Karim Mahmud and Atta Sabri at Al-Gharbiyya Mutwasit (middle school).  In 1938 Qasim Naji would go to the Academy of Berlin where he would study sculpture for one year, and then Camberwell School of Arts in London where he would study painting for another. According to Khalid al-Qassab, at Mutwasit, the director the school, Abd al-Ghani al-Charchafchi, allowed Salim, Issa Hanna and Zaid Saleh to use a sports room as a studio, and to paint during gym class.

[7] William Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist:  Ottomanism and Arabism in the life and thought of Sati' al-Husri* (Princeton, N.J.:  Princeton University Press, 1971).

The knowledge brought back to Baghdad by these students found an institutional base that had formed under a different set of circumstances.  Independent of al-Husri's ambitions, Muhi al-Din Haidar, an Ottoman musician who played the oud as well as the cello, opened a music institute on Abu Nawas Street.  For a brief period of time, Atta Sabri and another artist, 'Azra Haya, informally taught painting there.  When the institute relocated to the Bataween neighborhood, a painting wing was added and Faiq Hassan, who had recently returned from Paris, became its first instructor.  Upon his own abortive return to Baghdad in 1941, Salim was hired to teach sculpture, at the same time as he was assigned to the restoration of the Abbasid Palace.

As these artists returned from abroad, the unreflexive painting of landscapes and portraits introduced by the Ottoman officers, and taught to their students, began to give way.  The canvas seemed to peal away from the world around it, and increasingly confront the artists as a blank space where a new problem of form gradually arose.  At first, this reflexivity on the means of representation consisted of an experimentation with different styles.  For instance, in a painting of the Mirjan mosque in Baghdad (fig. 1.8), Akram Shukri employed what might be identified as a post-expressionist technique of working with color, by making a particular mode of applying paint perform a certain representational work.  The street is laid in long, unordered strokes; the mosque and the minaret are built up on the canvas with tight strokes of golden yellow almost stacked like bricks; the blue and white of the sky are applied in short bursts that appear to rise up from the city and float up across the sky.  Against the brilliant and concentrated gold of the mosque, and beneath the open sky, the people moving about appear as formless shadows.  Techniques like those Shukri had learned in London raised questions about representation that didn't exist for the Ottoman officers – and that also didn't exist for artists in Europe.  This new reflexivity about the means of representation opened onto bigger questions about the artwork, and what kind of art artists working in Baghdad would produce.  It was precisely as this question was arising that, at the behest of Sati' al-Husri, Atta Sabri, who had been Salim's art teacher in middle school, showed him de Lorey's article in *L'Illustration*.

In light of the reproductions, and de Lorey's text, the art that Salim had gone to Europe to study now appeared differently.  It seemed to have a history in Baghdad, and that history, available only in these few reproductions and their accompanying interpretation, offered a starting point or a foundation for establishing a practice of modern art.

Part One traces the ways in which the rediscovery of al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqamat* provided a basis for the practice of modern art in Baghdad.  It tells two stories about this rediscovery.  On the one hand, the illustrations were framed by the set of circumstances in which it resurfaced.  In the context of the early twentieth century, they appeared as solutions to the pictorial problems of European modernism, and thus, it was in those terms that Eustache de Lorey interpreted them.  On the other hand, however, even when they had been isolated from the manuscript and displayed as if they were free-standing paintings in *L'Illustration*, the illustrations exceeded those circumstances.  For, in their sheer facticity as artifacts, they evidenced the existence of a history of painting, as well as its loss, and thus enabled a different historiography of modern art, one in which modern art was the renewal of a medieval tradition of manuscript illustration lost centuries before.  And as images, existing apart from their discursive framing, the illustrations offered the example of a certain kind of picture, based on a pictorial concept foreign to the western tradition of illusionism and constructed using a different set of pictorial devices.

Though Salim had begun his training in sculpture, and taught sculpture at the Institute of Fine Arts upon his return, the image would become the essential site where he would both conceptualize the artwork and build up a body of work. In the three sections that follow, I consider the ways in which al-Wasiti's illustrations, framed initially in terms of modernist question of color, provide a pictorial foundation for developing a modern art in Baghdad; and then how the historiography surrounding the illustrations provided a discursive foundation for developing that art.

## In the Land of the Date Palm

Jawad Salim's first encounter with al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri* had already been framed by de Lorey's organization of them; they had been separated from the text, and presented as a "mirror of life". His own interpretations of the illustrations, however, were shaped by the circumstances of the Second World War.

The war had both isolated Baghdad, compelling artists there to conceive a practice of art independent of Europe, and at the same time brought foreigners to the city, making it possible to conceive of Baghdad as some kind of exile capital for art. In a letter to his friend Khaldun al-Husri,[8] written following the liberation of France near the end of the war, Salim, looking forward exuberantly to continuing his study of art in Europe, reflected on the war years in Baghdad.

> I am one of those who believes in the future. I have confidence in tomorrow, and I believe in the victory of what is right. Each person looks now to the future. It is towards the future that he or she moves. Tomorrow peace comes and the ghosts of death and the spirits of evil are dying in their houses. Has not Paris, the Ka'ba of art, been liberated? Has not the prophet Picasso come out into the world again after his withdrawal into his house for four years during which he did not see Paris, even as he was living in Paris? Picasso says now, "the intent of the innovative artist today is to keep mankind from sliding into the depths of chaos." These are his words after the liberation of Paris.
>
> During those four years when Paris and Europe stopped producing beautiful work, Baghdad did not stop working. It worked slowly and silently. It was poor, ignorant. But it worked during that period of four or five years. The first institute of art was founded, and a government museum for painting and sculpture was opened. And the first strong movement in the fields of theater and classical music arose.
>
> They were few, those who were from all sides faced with the difficulties of creative work and in getting the public to understand and to appreciate that work. As for their work, as the first revival [*bi-sifatihim al-Ba'ath al-awal*] in five centuries, their attempt to prepare the way for the coming generation was difficult. Their work was limited to composing [*ta'lif*] in the colored dream of this Bedouin [al-'urabi] which persists in the books of history and in the ornamentation of Arabic architecture, and going even further back, to moving between [*ta'lif*] a man who lived in the heart of Mesopotamia thousands of years ago, and made from the clay of the earth beautiful figurines, and a mode of expression that came from London, Paris and Rome.
>
> As for the public, despite its naivety and failure to appreciate this new thing, the public provided the artist with a fertile ground for cultivating the seeds of a new culture.
>
> During this limited period of time, many people came to Baghdad. If Europe had stopped their work, Baghdad welcomed them, and opened to the artist in particular a new visual world under the shadows of its domes. These were not students of the Beaux-arts in Paris or the Slade School in London but rather they were individuals with new ideas and who mixed in their artistic production their contemplations, their studies of the world, their feelings and their imagination.[9]

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[8] The son of Sati' al-Husri.
[9] November 16, 1944. Excerpts from his journal were edited and published in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra. *Al-Rihla Al-Thamina* (Bayrut: Al-Mu'assat al-Arabiyya al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1979).

In this letter, we can see that the discovery of an earlier history of painting determined how artists thought about themselves and what they were doing. Salim did not refer to himself and the other artists working in Baghdad as the first modern artists in Iraq, but rather as the "first revival in five centuries." That legacy put before them a particular artistic problem, one organized in historiographic terms, of how to negotiate a "mode of expression that came from London, Paris and Rome" with the history of art that they saw themselves as belonging to, a history whose nearest point of reference was manuscript illustration and decorative architecture but that stretched back to the clay figurines made by distant, unidentified men in ancient Mesopotamia. The illustrations enabled a particular historiographic imagination, and that historiographic imagination, because it established a history of art in Baghdad, made it possible, along with the presence of foreigners brought to the city by the war, to conceive of Baghdad as an independent center of art.

The foreigners brought to Baghdad by the war offered Salim interlocutors, people who brought ideas to the city and with whom he could talk about what it was that he was doing. Those debates influenced the ways in which Salim viewed the illustrations, by drawing his attention to al-Wasiti's use of color. When Salim, in his letter to Khaldun, described the work of artists during the war years as "composing in the colored dream of the Bedouin which persists in the books of history," he was referring to the illustrations, framed now according to a new understanding of color.

In 1941, the artists Akram Shukri and Issa Hanna, and the filmmaker Karim Majid, requested permission from the Ministry of the Interior to establish a society [*jamai'yyat*] for the arts. A number of such associational groups, called *jamai'yyat* in Arabic, had been forming in the previous years.[10] That February a group of artists, architects and others interested in the arts met in the home of Haj Mohammad Salim al-Mawsuli – Jawad Salim's father – for the first meeting of the Society of the Friends of Art [*Jama'iyyat Asdaqa' al-Fann*]. Supported financially by Darwish al-Haidari, the society organized lectures and held annual exhibitions. They were Baghdad's first exhibitions, and they located the showing and viewing of art in a space that was public and non-commercial.

The society's activities attracted different foreigners who were passing through the city. In the winter of 1942, three Polish officers stationed in Baghdad showed up at the Society's second annual exhibition, where they met Salim and other artists. The three Polish officers were artists who claimed to have studied in Paris some twenty-years earlier. They were not in Baghdad for more than six months before moving on to Damascus and Beirut, but for the brief time that they were there, they offered Salim the semblance of what he had been forced to abandon to Paris. On the basis of that shared experience, in another place, one that had in some fundamental sense ceased to exist, the Poles and the Iraqis, each speaking a language that was not their own, reconstructed, for a short period of time, something of what they had lost. In another letter to Khaldun al-Husri dated July 23, 1943, Salim wrote about his time with the Poles:

> Faiq Hassan and I met them at our annual exhibition. That meeting was exciting, especially after they found out that we are 'Parisians'. A solid friendship arose among us that offered us the effect of Paris, as

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[10] See Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). Bashkin argues that these groups constituted a critical infrastructure for the development of civil society in Iraq.

much as we could and was possible in Baghdad.  I got to know things from them that I hadn't dreamed of, things that will have a very great influence on my life.

I've started to know now who the impressionists and the post-impressionists are; I know the worth of the modern French school.  I know what color is.  I know color, and how to use colors.  Now I've started to understand Cezanne and Renoir and Van Gogh and the paintings [*sawr*] of the great artists of the Italian schools, and Goya etc.  But I've learned something more than this; I know now the sanctity of work.  I know the value of time.  We would work each day from beginning to end without a break, and in the evening we would get together in the Café Brasilia to drink French coffee and engage in our long debates.  We called this café of ours "Café Dome" and we would argue about everything, and we were the last to leave the café.[11]

The three Polish officers – Jozef Jarema, Jozef Czapiski, and Edward Matuszczak – claimed that they had studied with the post-impressionist painter Pierre Bonnard.[12]  Bonnard emphasized an interpretative use of color in his work, and to Salim, it seemed that that method of using color, in which the Polish officers had trained, had been eclipsed by the time he was in Paris at the end of the nineteen-thirties.

When I was in Paris I wasn't interested in painting [*al-taswir*] with the great love I have for it now, especially the modern French school.  I returned to Baghdad knowing nothing about this school which I used to admire.  In Paris few people knew that school truly, apprehending its secrets, because painting was in those days was dominated by Picasso, Matisse, Braque and Dali.  Paris embraced these artists full-heartedly because her heart was sick; she saw in them the best medicine for her tired and spiritless nerves.  If this strong reaction swept away everything, few painters remained in the manner of Cezanne, and the greatest in France now is Pierre Bonnard who is considered one of the most famous "colorists" in the present era.

Salim clearly took what the Polish told him at face-value.  Still, the art historian Romy Golan has written that the devastation of the First World War had transformed the relation between painting and nature, and what she calls a *rappel à l'ordre* following the war in France led to an abrupt break with the hazy, psychological color of Cezanne and Bonnard, and erected in its place a return to the orderly picture of a renewed classicism.[13]  Preserving the knowledge of pre-war modernism, The Poles would make Salim think about color in new ways.

Let me step back and say something about his painting up until that moment.  On his way to Paris in 1937, Salim spent the summer in Lebanon, where he stayed with Khaldun at Souk al-Gharb, a resort in the mountains where Khaldun's father, Sati el-Husri, had a house.  Two watercolors Salim did that summer in Lebanon offer some sense of how he thought about color, and painting more broadly, before going to Paris (fig. 1.9).  Color, we can see, is used here to render objects in the world, to capture the sandy brick of the red-roofed house, the umbrella pines and the shadows they cast, and the hazy mountains beneath the mid-day sun.

When Salim arrived in Paris, he took classes in model-drawing and art history, in order to prepare for the *concourse*, the entrance exam to the École des Beaux-Arts.  He was fascinated by the models that posed for his courses, and he sent Khaldun watercolor-sketches of the women.

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[11] July 23, 1943, reprinted in Jabra, "Al-Fanan fi Shibabihi:  Mukhtarat min youmiyyat Jawad Salim," *Al-Rihla Al-Thamina*.  (Bayrut: al-Mu'assat al-Arabiyya lil-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1979) 159-162.

[12] On the background of the Polish artists, see *A La recherche d'une modernité arabe: l'évolution des arts plastique en Egypte, au Liban et en Irak* (Genève:  Slatkine, 1996); and Jan Wiktor Sienkiewicz, *Polish Artists in Lebanon 1942-1952* (Beirut:  Polish Embassy, 2013).

[13] Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France between the Wars*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

On one postcard, of a model during her fifteen minute hourly break, Salim commented, "She is more tempting with clothes on than when she is naked!" (fig. 1.10). He also sent letters with sketches of scenes from movies he saw, such as *The Garden of Allah*, with Marlene Dietrich, *Tarzan and his Mate* (1934), *Mid-Summer Night's Dream* (1935), and *The Black Cat* (1934) – and he included short commentary, reiterating his dislike of Marlene Dietrich in *The Garden of Allah*, for instance, or praising the creativity of *Tarzan and his Mate* (fig. 1.11). During this time, he sketched scenes from Paris, in ink and charcoal, of such things as the stalls of booksellers on the banks of the Seine (fig. 1.12) and the intensity of human and vehicular traffic in a roundabout (fig. 1.13).

Finally, in April 1939 he sat for the *concourse* in sculpture. He placed fourth, and was assigned to the studio of André Gaumont. After Germany invaded France later that year, Salim transferred to the Accademie di Belle Arte in Rome, but shortly thereafter he was forced to return to Baghdad. In a watercolor of a piazza he did before leaving, as in everything he did in Paris, we can see that he though of color as a physical quality of objects (fig. 1.14).

The conversations Salim had with the Poles, at the Café Brasilia in the winter 1941-1942, made him think about color in a way he hadn't before. And so he wrote to Khaldun about the "coup" that had occurred in his painting – alluding to an actual coup, carried out by Rashid al-Gailani, in April. This coup consisted in seeing color not as a quality of objects but an element that could perform interpretative or compositional functions in the construction of a picture. I want to emphasize here that Salim grounded this *coup de couleur* in al-Wasiti's illustrations. In fact it seems that, in his conversations with the Poles, he got the idea that post-impressionist uses of color had in fact been inspired by the encounter of European painters with other pictorial traditions. He wrote to Khaldun:

> In every country of the world there is color, even in the land of Babam and the Eskimos. My friend, the whole world is color, even in the mud that is in front of our street, it is filled with color.
> One of the things which the French painters benefited from greatly was their study of Eastern painting [*al-sawr al-sharqiyya*], a deep study into the vivid colors and how to use them. Take all of Eastern painting from the Land of the Rising sun to Africa.

The art of Japan had been in vogue in Paris since the 1860s and had multiple influences on the development of European modernism.[14] It is also possible that Salim's mention of Africa is a reference to Matisse's sojourns in Morocco, where he had his self-identified "discovery of color".[15] It is likely that at the time the Poles were in Paris, the relation of European art to other artistic traditions was organized in different terms. Not only did the Poles introduce Salim to a method of working with color that had fallen away in the interwar period, they also oriented him on a geography in which Europe was decentered, making it possible for al-Wasiti's illustrations to be summoned into a particular relationship with modern art.

> Take Yahya al-Wasiti, the greatest of the painters to appear in Iraq, which you call void of color – the land of the date palm [*bilad al-nakhil*] – he has eternalized it in his pictures and color, or better yet, eternalized himself because his pictures were different from what he sees in front of him, because he creates his pictures. I don't think you remember the picture Atta Sabri enlarged of al-Wasiti's from the collection of the Maqamat of Hariri. It is a picture that represents a group of camels, and the camels of Iraq you know

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[14] Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: the Japanese Influence on Western Art in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Harmony Books, 1981).
[15] Rémi Labrusse, *Matisse: la condition de l'image* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

very well.  Their color is not the color of dirt.  Rather this great genius paints [*sawriha*] each camel in a color appropriate to the color next to it.[16]

The picture of camels Salim referred to in his letter had been one of the illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri* he had seen reproduced in "Le Miroir de Bagdad" (fig. 1.4).  Arrayed horizontally, the camels are each painted a different color and drawn in a distinctive pose; at the same time, the composition of the camels is patterned – the arch of their backs on the right, proceeded by their raised necks on the left, and a forest of legs, framed on the ends by two camels bending down to eat grass.  It is an illustration of the thirty-second *maqamat*, set in Tayba, where Abu Zayd had been posing as a jurist [*faqih*], answering questions about proper ritual and social practice.  In compensation for his advice he is given a "string of camels" [*zhoud*] and a singing girl [*qaynat*].  The illustration depicts the string of camels, and next to them a woman, who could be interpreted as either the singing girl or the camels' herder.[17]

In his letter to Khaldun, Salim does not mention the narrative context of the maqamat but rather considers the illustration solely as a painting of camels.  He focuses on the fact that the camels are painted in a way that was purposively different from their appearance in the phenomenological world of objects, and that difference Salim understood as an integral part of creating images.  In painting the camels al-Wasiti was free to assign them whatever color he wanted, and he did so based on the distribution of color within the picture.  Released from representation, color became available to do different things.

Salim was cementing an understanding of the construction of the picture, in relation to medieval manuscript illustration, framed in terms of a modernist question of color.  In paintings he did in the years 1942 and 1943, he experimented with what he had learned about color from his conversation with the Polish artists and grounded in a reading of al-Wasiti's illustrations.   Here strong, almost garish colors sit heavy next to each other on the canvas, in excess of the figurative image they construct.  In *Ladies in Waiting* [*Nisa Intithar*], Salim depicts a brothel in Baghdad's red-light district (fig. 1.15).  Looking over the shoulder of the man at the bottom left, we see three women, one standing up, the other two sitting with their arms folded over their legs.  Their faces are almost blotted out by the very patches of color that compose them; rather than portray the women's appearance, color paints a profile of desperation.

Since the French artist Edouard Manet painted *Olympia* in 1865, the figure of the prostitute has become a major topos of European modernism.  But in Baghdad the figure of the prostitute had a different significance, produced by the confrontation of modern life in the city with the tribal countryside.  Most of the girls who ended up working as prostitutes in Baghdad had fled their families in the countryside, in order to seek their freedom in the city.  Inevitably their brothers would find them, and, to expiate the family's disgraced honor, kill them.  Having acted, compelled by some moral logic, the brothers would be left beside themselves with grief.  Though guards were posted at the entrance to the street that functioned as Baghdad's red-light district, the police often did nothing about these murders.  Thus the figure of the prostitute

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[16] Letter reprinted in:  Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Al-Rihla Al-Thamina:  dirasat naqdiyya*.  (Beirut:  al-Mu'assat al-'Arabiyya li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1969):  159-162.

[17] Oleg Grabar has observed that this is only one of a double-page illustration.  He did not realize that it had been Eustache de Lorey who had originally split up to the double-paged illustration.  "Pictures or Commentaries:  the Illustrations of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri," In *Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East in Honor of Richard Ettinghausen*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (Middle Eastern Center University of Utah and New York University Press, 1974), 85-104.

appeared to many as emblematic of a more general collision of a tribal moral order with that of the modern state.[18]

Another emblem of that confrontation was the figure of the sheikh who frequented Baghdad's cafes. In *The Sheikh*, Salim painted this figure, as if under the light of a café, against the backdrop of the city (fig 1.16). The folds of his headdress frame his angular face, dominated by his long hooked nose. He is positioned against an ornamental background. Set high, the horizon is occupied by a symbolic cityscape consisting of palm tree and the dome and minaret of a mosque or shrine. The area below the horizon, and surrounding the figure, is organized into a pattern of indistinct shapes. Some of these shapes, like the diamonds on the left and the triangles on the right, will reappear ten years later. There, however, the shapes will be clearly traced and color will be subordinated to line; but here the form of the shapes is overwhelmed by the color.

By 1945, however, Salim would question color. "In a picture I made of Hussein, the office boy, I realized that I am not suited to be a painter, because I see something and my brush does something else. Many times I have come to the conclusion that I do not see colors with the strength that is required of a first-rate painter, and I don't want to be a mediocre painter. I think in terms of form and shape more than in terms of colors."[19] Indeed he would write to Khaldun that "the first work of art I loved and admired" was a sculpture he completed in September 1945, a relief that portrays the figure of the *usta*, the practitioner of a tradition of building that was on the verge of disappearance (fig. 1.17). Salim had been inspired to create the work after observing one of the last *usta*s left in Iraq working on restoring the corridor of the Abbasid palace in Baghdad. "I like the way he looked, and the sense, movement and life about him, his interest and conviction in his work, and the historical and the artistic greatness of the thing he was trying to repair." Salim's rendering of the *usta* was entirely with line, not color. In the nineteen-fifties, he would return to al-Wasiti's illustrations, but, I argue, he would so in terms of line.

Even though he had doubted his ability with color, when he went to London at the end of the war to finish his studies, he pursued the post-impressionist method of using color he had learned about from the Polish artists. Though he enrolled at the Slade School to study sculpture, he was still very much interested in painting, but because his education was in sculpture, he pursued painting on his own, in somewhat of an autodidactic fashion, by studying books and visiting museums.[20] He completed the curriculum in two years, and devoted his last year in London to these pursuits. Like most art students, he spent long periods of times drawing and studying works in the galleries of museums.

It is difficult to specify what in Salim's encounter with the European modern art informed his own practice, what devices he might have drawn on from the work of Cezanne, or from Picasso or Matisse, because the only documents of any such dialogue, on the level of form, are his paintings and drawings themselves. We might guess that the reduction of volumes to a simple geometry in his paintings was inspired by the cubist deconstruction of objects, or that the kind of ornamental composition, seen in the background of *The Sheikh*, was inspired by Matisse. We cannot know for sure, and that question is not the question I pose here. What is nevertheless clear is that Salim returned to al-Wasiti's illustrations, and that the devices he drew from modern

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[18] See Ali Wardi, *Lamahat ijtima'iyah min tarikh al-'Iraq al-hadith* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Irshad, 1969).

[19] October 3, 1945. Jabra, *Al-Rihla al-Thamina*, 177.

[20] Ulrike Khamis, "Lorna Remembers," in Maysaloun Faraj ed., *Strokes of Genius*, 41.

artists in Europe passed through a pictorial concept shaped by a medieval tradition of manuscript illustration.

Salim's return to al-Wasiti is evident in the fact that he took on, as his own practice, the project of painting life in Baghdad. Upon his return to Baghdad in 1949, he began work on a series of drawings and paintings that depict life in the city, and that he would come to call the series *Baghdadiyyat*, which connotes something like scenes from days and nights in Baghdad. It included scenes of children playing, boys eating melon, musicians playing in the street, wedding festivities, a bus turning the corner (fig. 1.18-1.21). In 1956, Salim told the journal *Al-Adaab* that "any artistic production that is important and good, at any time or in any place, is a *mirror* upon which is reflected the reality as it is lived."[21] We might say, keeping with Salim's citation of de Lorey's description of al-Wasiti's illustrations, that the series *Baghdadiyyat* depicts the "simple and pleasant practices" in which "life" subsides.

Beyond their representational objective, *Baghdadiyyat* evinces a pictorial concept that, I argue, was revived from al-Wasiti illustrations, and that is bound up with a particular use of line. The paintings and drawings in the series share a basic pictorial grammar. Figures are modeled according to a geometric formula – a teardrop face balanced on triangular shoulders, with a rectangular truck and elliptical limbs. The surrounding space, which is never a space that the figures seem to occupy, is then organized into patterns and shapes. A basic linear structure integrates figuration and composition into a single formal system.

The basic pictorial grammar of *Baghdadiyyat* is most visible in a work from 1956, which can be taken as a kind of story-board where a number of different scenes appear on the same surface (Fig. 1.22). The scenes are composed with ink-lines that do not just model the figures, do not just mark off bodies, but also trace their movements. Silhouetted against the paper, the different vignettes then appear as if animated characters on a film reel. In addition to animating the figures, the swooping lines format the space of the canvas, creating from the scene a composition. Color is then grafted onto this linear infrastructure.

The 1956 work indicates a predominance of line in the series, and what is important about that line is the ways in which it relates to the surface upon which it is drawn. It traces shapes but never volumes, and the surface is neither negated nor is it emphasized in its own right; it functions simply to stage what happens on it. This relation of line to paper, or the lack of ground, makes it possible for line to perform the double function of at once rendering bodies in motion and breaking up the scene into a composition of shapes that can be patterned with different colors. The paintings thus oscillated between the figurative and the compositional, and that oscillation, enabled by the relation of line to surface, imparts to the works a fabular quality.

But Salim's return to al-Wasiti was not only pictorial, it was also discursive. The debates and conversations of the wartime years had left him with the desire to establish an intellectual foundation for the practice of art in Baghdad, and to that end, in 1951, he formed an art group, called the Baghdad Group for Modern Art. By forming an art group, Salim had sought to clear a space for modern art, to position it in the public sphere, where it would have a public. Thus, the group issued a manifesto in which it sought to problematize the artwork, and in the manifesto, it publically and formally invoked the history of painting represented by al-Wasiti's illustrations as a basis for developing a practice of modern art in Baghdad. In doing so, it defined modern art as a "renewal," and mobilized the historiography on the manuscript containing al-Wasiti's

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[21] "Al-Adab tastaqi al-fann wa al-hayat al-'arabiyya," *Al-Adaab*, January 1956, Vol 4 No 1, 7. Emphasis added.

illustrations as a framework for building up a modern art.  Thus did the practice of art come to be organized in terms of a school of painting, on the model of the medieval Baghdad School.

## The Baghdad School

During the three years Salim was in London, a new political culture emerged in Baghdad that would shape the world into which he sought to locate the artwork upon his return.  Before looking closely at the formation of the Baghdad Group, let me step back and say something about the political culture that formed in the second half of the nineteen-forties.

The public sphere that developed in Baghdad during the nineteen-forties and fifties had a number of antecedents.[22]  Prominent Iraqi families had long held a kind of salon called *majalis*, and at the beginning of the twentieth century, Iraqi officers in the Ottoman military had formed an underground political organization called *al-Ahd* which established a space for the exchange of ideas.  But the establishment of a press with the formation of the Iraqi state in the nineteen-twenties gave rise to a new kind of discursive space, and what was particular about that space was that, as Orit Bashkin has shown, it formed in opposition to British rule.  Because writers could not address the British presence head-on, they veiled their critique of the colonial administration in arguments for democracy, pluralism and the freedom of speech.  Such arguments had a strategic value.  Overt imperialism was no longer acceptable following the First World War, and therefore the British were forced to give their interests in the Middle East a liberal appearance.  Thus were the norms of political liberalism introduced as a subterfuge for anticolonial politics.

By the nineteen-thirties, however, the presence of these norms had inspired a genuinely liberal politics, constituted in a group of intellectuals and politicians called the al-Ahali group and the Iraqi Communist Party.  That politics however misfired.  In 1941, with the support of the al-Ahali group, an officer in the Iraqi military named Rashid Ali al-Gailani led a group of officers in a coup that overthrew the monarchy and distanced Iraq from Britain.  Aligning Iraq with Germany in the Second World War, the coup provoked the British to re-invade the country and restore the deposed monarchy.  With the reinvasion, political life in Iraq collapsed virtually over night.

After the war ended, an attempt was made, with the initiative of the palace, to restore some kind of political life in Iraq.  In December 1945 – a couple of months before Salim departed for London – the Regent Abd al-Ilah invited applications for the formation of political parties, igniting a flurry of activity.  Because the British invasion had virtually cleared the political scene of right-wing or nationalist elements, the way was left wide open for the leftist currents that had begun to take shape in the nineteen-thirties.  Nevertheless the application of the Iraqi Communist Party to form a party was not approved, but it operated underground, and proved to be a major political force.  Before long, the government sought to circumscribe the field of political action authorized by the regent's invitation.  Various restrictions were placed on publications, party activity and public assembly.  Still, having been brought into existence, that field of political action only grew, with each demonstration, and it grew as those demonstrations were continuously put down with force.

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[22] Orit Bashkin. *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009).

The first demonstration in which the police opened fire on protesters occurred in the summer of 1946. [23] In June of that year, the underground Iraqi Communist Party and the licensed parties organized a demonstration in which thousands rallied against the attacks of Zionist settlers on the native inhabitants of Palestine. In the process of breaking up the march of thousands of students and workers, the police ended up firing on the protesters, killing one student. A few days later, thousands of workers at the Iraqi Petroleum Company in Kirkuk went on strike. After a week, that strike was broken up by the police. Ten were killed and seven wounded.[24]

The use of force by the government in these two incidents drew intense opposition. In response to the opposition, the government only further tightened its hold over the new space of political action it had opened. Elections held in 1947 were rigged, dissent was punished with court cases, newspapers were intermittently shutdown on charges of functioning as a "criminal instruments," licenses for parties were revoked.

Things, however, really came unraveled in 1948, in what is known as the *Wathbah*, or Leap. With the political climate already tense, the relationship between Iraq and Britain, formalized in the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, came up for renegotiation. The negotiations were held in London, and they triggered protests in Baghdad of such magnitude that the protests threatened to topple the regime. They began with a strike by students at Baghdad Law College who had got wind of the terms being negotiated. When the terms of the treaty were publically announced a week later, a protest that had begun with the students avalanched over the next three days, enfolding workers, professionals and the *shargawiyya*, and absorbing the different grievances these people had against the current political order. When it was announced that the treaty had been concluded, the city was rocked by demonstrations beyond the capacity of the police to suppress them. The regent was forced to form a new cabinet, parliament was dissolved, and elections were called. The impending reforms, however, were interrupted by the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war in 1948. The war led to the declaration of martial law, which became a pretext for intimidating voters.

So, when Jawad Salim returned to Baghdad in July 1949, he returned to a city that was simmering with discontent.

At first, upon his return, Salim fell back in with the circle of artists he had been a part of before leaving for London. After the war ended, the Society of the Friends of Art had gradually petered out, until it was finally dissolved in 1948. However something of its organizational form, of the *jama'iyyat*, persisted in different groupings that subsequently emerged: in the short-lived atelier opened by Akram Shukri; the "free studio" [*al-marsam al-hurr*] held by Hafidh Droubi at al-Bab al-Sharqi, which from 1946 through the early nineteen-sixties would function as a salon for writers and artists; and in a group of artists, mostly students at the Institute of Fine Arts, that gathered around Faiq Hassan, the painting instructor at the Institute. Himself an instructor of sculpture at the Institute, Salim frequented Hassan's gatherings.[25] Initially, they would meet once a week at Hassan's house, where they would discuss, as Khaled Qassab recalled in his memoirs, "the views of art and its schools, those imported and those inherited from ancient

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[23] Batatu. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 532.

[24] Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 532-533.

[25] Zayd Saleh, Ismail al-Sheikhly, Khalid al-Qassab, Yusuf Abdel Qader, Faruq abd al-Aziz, and Nuri Mustafa Bahjat.

civilizations."[26]  In 1943, these artists began to take trips on Fridays to the orchards and fields in al-Jadariyya, then on the outskirts of the city, where the University of Baghdad would be built a few years later.  There, camping in the orchards belonging to Haj Naji, they would paint, discussing with each other what they saw and the work that they did.  These excursions continued throughout the nineteen-forties, and they cultivated among their participants a certain sense of collectivity, which got formalized into an identity.

One day in February 1947, in a gesture of self-mockery, Faiq Hassan, referring to these trips to the faux wilderness of the orchards to paint, suggested that they call themselves "Société Primitive," abbreviated as S.P.  It was an inside joke but it consolidated an identity.  That October they took a car trip to Kurdistan, in the north of the country, moving from Erbil to Shaqlawa and to Rowanduz, where they hiked and painted in watercolor, the waterfalls and villages around Haj 'Amran, with their bridges crossing rivers lined with walnut and oak trees, and peasants working in fields of wheat.  They took other trips to the north, to al-'Amadiyya, Biyara and Tawila, near the Iranian border.  When Salim returned from London in 1949, he joined them on a trip to Duhok, Zawita, Sawartuka and Sarsank.  Others joined as well: Mahmud Sabri, whom Zayd Saleh had met in England; a doctor, Qutaiba Sheikh Nouri; Issa Hanna; and Abdullah al-'Amari, a military engineer.

The last exhibition held by the Society of the Friends of Art had been in 1943. Throughout the years of their excursions, the artists surrounding Faiq Hassan did not exhibit the paintings they made on their trips.  However in December 1950 they held a first exhibition. They got the idea from an exhibition of Salim's work hosted in October by the architect Nezar Ali Jawdat, an architect who had recently returned from studying at Harvard.  Jawdat hung the white walls of his modernist home with Salim's work and for a period of two months opened it to the public to view.  Inspired by that exhibition, the artists in Societé Primitive arranged to show their paintings for three days at the new home of 'Abd al-Aziz al-Qassab, who had been a Minister of the Interior in the twenties and thirties and was the father of one of the artists.[27]  In order to provide a framework for the exhibition, the artists presented themselves as the Pioneers [*al-Ru'ad*], though they continued to use the brand "SP" as a shorthand.

Despite the fact that many people were invited and may have seen the paintings, the Pioneers' exhibition of one hundred and fifty paintings was private, not only in the sense that it was held in the home of a private individual, but also in the sense that the painting itself was private, made without any idea of a public in mind.  Since it was introduced by the Ottoman officers, painting had been a private practice in Baghdad, even when it was exhibited at the shows organized by the Society of the Friends of Art during the war.  It was in order to move painting into a public space that a few months later Salim broke with the Pioneers in order to found the Baghdad Group for Modern Art.  When the group held its inaugural exhibition in April 1951, it did so not in a private home but at the Museum of Folk Costumes [*Mathaf al-Azya*], a small building located in the Bab al-Sharqi neighborhood which was torn down at the end of the decade to build Tahrir Square.

In some respect, the Baghdad Group certainly owed something to the example of art groups in Europe, but it inherited the organizational form of the *jamai'yyat* from the Pioneers, and before that, the Society of the Friends of Art.  However it went beyond these earlier models of associational activity by forming around the artistic problem of establishing a modern art in

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[26] Khalid al-Qassab, *Dhikrayat fanniyah* (London:  Dar al-Hikmah, 2007), 26.

[27] A missile would later destroy the house during the Anglo-American invastion of Baghdad in 2003.  See al-Qassab, *al-Dhikriyaat al-fanniyyah*, 122.

Iraq, and by explicitly locating the practice of art in the public sphere that had been taking shape since 1945. At the basis of its problematization of art, and underwriting its publicization of the artwork, was the spectral history of painting evidenced by al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri*.

The formation of the Baghdad Group was attended by two documents in which the terms of art practice were laid out and defined. One was a manifesto read out at the opening of the group's inaugural exhibition, held in the museum's gardens, by the young artist Shaker Hassan Al Said but most certainly conceived by Salim. As a speech act addressed to an anonymous public, its very proclamation could be seen as clearing a space for the artwork in the public sphere. It acknowledged that what it called *fann al-taswir* – the art of creating an image – was something unknown to Iraq, and it offered a set of arguments for what intervention this art of the image could make in modern Baghdad and how that art might be developed. The manifesto then proceeded to outline a method for bringing into existence this new art of the image. Positing a vocabulary for the practice of art, it is arguably the founding document of modern art in Iraq. In what follows I offer an analysis of that vocabulary.

Adopting the language of awakening [*ayqatha*] that was circulating in the nineteen-forties and fifties, the manifesto offered *fann al-taswir* as a means for generating the distinct modern consciousness [*ayqatha 'asriyya*] so many were seeking – though "consciousness" is not the right word. It ineluctably revokes the post-Cartesian concerns of European philosophy, or the concepts of Marxist politics, whereas the *ayqatha* the manifesto pointed to was a "wakefulness" to the contemporary triggered by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Arabs' rediscovery of their forgotten history.

> While western civilization expresses itself in the realm of art in such a way that defines the modern era [*al-'asr al-rahin*] by the aspiration to be free through modern practices, the public [*al-jumhur*] is ignorant of painting [*fann al-taswir*] as a measure of the awakening of the country [*ayqathat al-bilad*] and its handling of the problem of true freedom.
>
> Nevertheless a new trend in painting [*fan al-taswir*] will offer itself as a solution to the problem, by creating a modern consciousness [*ayqatha 'asriyya*], following the path the first steps along which were followed by the artist of the thirteenth century, the new generation will find the beginning of the path it must travel has already been done by its forebears, surviving through dark times and danger, and so the modern Iraqi artist bears the weight of both modern culture [*thaqafat al-'asr*] and the imprint of the civilization he belongs to.[28]

Positioning fann al-taswir in the context of the cultural renewal called the *Nahda* or Arab Awakening [*al-Istayqatha al-'Arabiyya*], the manifesto pointed to the existence of a precedent for this new art of the image, but it referred to this precedent in only the vaguest terms – a single un-named artist and no explanation of what exactly he did in the thirteenth century. But the mere existence of this precedent saddled the modern artist with a particular artistic problem that the manifesto proceeded to outline. *How to work within a modern art form and yet "imprint" that art with enough of the artist's own history such that the art he produces would be a revival?*

The manifesto formulated this problem as a problem of style, which it understood to be the concept proper to modern art. "On the one hand a modern artistic style is the

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[28] The manifesto was republished in Shakir Hasan Al Sa'id, *al-Bayanat al-faniyyah fi al-'Iraq* (Baghdad: Wizarat al-I'lam, Mudiriyat al-Funun al-'Ammah, 1973).

core of the idea we will realize…On the other hand our efforts will be in vain as long as we have not given it the mark of renewal [*al-tajdeed*] and innovation [*al-ibda'*].”

> This initiative which appears today in the form of the first exhibition of modern art and brings together a variety of studies of impressionism, expressionism, surrealism, cubism, abstraction, is a first initiative after World War II that takes the firm step towards the creation of the singular personality of our civilization [*al-shakhsiyya al-fatha li-hadaratna*].  Unless we realize ourselves in art, as is the case in other intellectual fields, we will not find the strength to plunge into the adversities of a brutal life; but work that is simply done in modern styles does not solve the problem we are aiming at, and that is the necessity of creation that introduces new elements [*'anasar*] into our styles.

It is important to emphasize that at that time, in 1951, what this “singular personality” [*al-shakhsiyya al-fatha*] pronounced by the manifesto was yet to be created.  Everything was still so new – the state of Iraq had only existed for thirty years, the past was being rediscovered at the same time as new technologies were being introduced.  We have to struggle to imagine that sense of possibility and openness.

Whatever that “personality” might be, the manifesto saw that it would be constructed with modern styles that incorporated heterogeneous elements. This was a method that the manifesto based on an interpretation of Picasso, whom it invoked as the paradigmatic modern artist.

> Picasso, the artist of the time, who has become part of the basis upon which modern art [*al-fann al-hadith*] stands, would not have gotten to where he is without passing through stages which revealed to him how to search for new elements in its sources.  It was not for nothing that he sought out the primitive art of Andalusia, then African art, and then the work of impressionist writers as the first steps leading him to what came to be called the Cubist school.

> It seems then that among the many different paths which branch off in front of us, there is a method that we have to explore, requiring on the one hand that we become aware of current styles and on the other that we discern elements [*'anasar*] which will nourish our works.

To these artists in Baghdad, Picasso demonstrated the capacity of the modern artwork to open itself up to other traditions; he made it possible to conceive of difference within the artwork, and as even an essential part of modern art.

In Baghdad, the styles of European modernism appeared outside the specific histories in which they had been formed.  The hazy light of impressionism; vivid, expressionist uses of color; surrealist experimentation with the unconscious; abstraction’s refusal to reproduce appearances; and analytic deconstruction of objects characteristic of cubism were all equally available as devices and means of representation.  What artists in Baghdad would have to do, according to the manifesto, is to integrate with devices drawn from these styles formal elements particular to what the manifesto speculatively called *al-shakhsiyya al-mahliyya*, or the local personality.

> We have to demonstrate the extent of our understanding of western styles and then our consciousness of the local character [*al-shakhsiyya al-mahliyya*].  It is this character, of which most of us today are ignorant, that will correspond to the place of others on the scene of international thought.

It was not clear what these formal elements would be, nor was it clear what exactly *al-shakhsiyya al-mahliyya* referred to.  It is essential to keep in mind here the historical context, of

the transition from the imperial order of the Ottoman era to the new system of nation-states. Iraq's ruling class had been educated in Turkish, and the history recovered by the Nahda was in some ways as new as the technologies and governmental forms being introduced. Those were heady days, when the question of *who are we* was open and exciting.

It is also important to keep in mind that the point was not simply to introduce difference into the established styles of modernism; the point was to bring about a renewal of painting. Thus, with this prospectus on the building of a new modern art, the manifesto announced the formation of a new "school" of painting, one that would renew a school of painting that had collapsed seven centuries before:

> And so today we proclaim the birth of a new school of painting [*madrasa jadeeda fi fan al-taswir*], whose origins derive from the civilization of our time, with the styles and creeds [*mathahib*] it has brought about, and from the unique imprint [*tab'a*] of eastern civilization. In this way let us re-erect the great field of painting that collapsed after the emergence of the school of Al-Wasiti – or the school of Mesopotamia – in the 13th century. And in this way, let us restore the chain of transmission that was interrupted by the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols, for the sake of our own civilization and for world civilization the development of which all peoples work together.

In speaking of a school of painting, the manifesto gave the Arabic word *madrasa* a metaphorical sense that it hadn't previously had. The concept of a school marked off a space within which this new modern art would be built. It functioned to organize difference in modern art – a difference that was not of the variety of national difference that would emerge a little while later in the context of post-colonialism; it was a specific kind of historical difference, a difference in time.[29] In this regard, it is worth nothing the invocation of civilization [*hadarat*] here, rather the invocation of the nation.

It is a testament to the peculiar historical sensibility of the *Nahda* that even though the manifesto declared the rebirth of a school of painting associated with Yahya al-Wasiti, the method it proposed for doing so was modeled after Picasso. Its interpretation of Picasso, as the paragon of modern art, for having introduced difference into modern art, was inspired from a book by Gertrude Stein published in 1938.[30] In the early nineteen-forties, Salim's brother Nizar, along with classmate Adnan Ra'uf, created an art journal entitled *Al-Saba* [Boyhood]. They produced a number of volumes, each handwritten, containing drawings and watercolor illustrations, poems, and essays. One of the volumes included a translation of the beginning of Stein's book on Picasso. The translation is unsigned, but given the fact that Jawad contributed a watercolor to the same volume, it seems likely that he knew the book, if he did not actually translate the text. Furthermore, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra claimed Salim would often invoke something he attributed to Gertrude Stein, "that the most important period Picasso went through was when he was influenced by the Arabic line and Arabic ornamentation, and Stein went on, that is natural, Picasso is Spanish and Spain is Arab."[31]

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[29] This framework of a school of painting was taken up by other artists who were no affiliated with the Baghdad Group. In 1956, when, in a special issue dedicated to the visual arts, the Lebanese journal *Al-Adaab* interviewed a number of artists across the Arab world, Hafidh Droubi, who in two years earlier had founded his own art group, the Impressionists, spoke of "seeing himself still engaged in the attempt to found a modern Iraqi school."

[30] Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1938).

[31] Jabra, *Nasb al-Hurriyya*, 40.

It would seem that Salim was inspired by Picasso to find formal difference in motifs like the triangular patterns of rugs or architectural ornaments like the crescent crowning mosques. In this drawings and paintings, these are abstracted into geometric forms in which the figurative and the decorative are collapsed such that they are able to perform the double function of both organizing the picture plane and creating an image. We can see for instance in regard to the the triangular pattern in *Girl and Bird* or the crescent made into an arc that animates bodies in the 1956 work or in *Children Playing*. Salim also found sources of formal difference in Iraq's archaeological history. The flat gaze of the almond-shaped eyes in *Man and Wife* (fig. 1.23) reproduces the frontality of Assyrian sculpture is reproduced.

If Salim worked in his painting to formulate a style, one that would bring into existence a modern art in Baghdad, he did not think that this was the purpose of the artwork. Rather, as a "mirror of life" art was something the artist had to say. The fact that Baghdad had no surviving tradition of visual art, and that modern art was something completely new, meant that a case had to be made for what the artwork would do, what it offered. In a speech Salim gave at the opening of the Baghdad Group's inaugural exhibition, and that was later published in the newspaper *Sada al-Ahali* under the title, "The Renewal of Painting" [*Al-Tajdeed fi al-Rasm*], he made an argument for the artwork by defined it on the model of speech. In what follows, I walk through Salim's conceptualization of the artwork as a form of speech, and then I reflect on how this conceptualization leads to a semantic displacement of the Arabic word *taswir*.

Salim began his case for the artwork by modeling the artist on the figure of the writer. In Baghdad in 1951 this was not a generic analogy; the writer was a new, modern political figure. Speaking in the first person, from the position of the *musawwar*, Salim began by drawing out the similarities and differences between the construction of an image and the writing of words on a page.

> I am not a writer, the man who writes, whose instrument is the pen. For my instruments are color, line, form [*furm*]. Even though we are both a man who sees [*bashr yandhar*]: the writer sees and feels, if he is a true writer, and in the inner recesses of his mind, wondrous symbols form feverishly, symbols that are words, which he then marks [*yukhatt*] on a piece of paper and says: Read! And if you were to read, you would follow what he says word for word and you would feel what he wants to say, and you would then come to see, with a new eye, what is going on around you. But if you are unlucky, or one of the 97% of Iraqis, then you are in another world, a world other than that of the writer.
>
> As for me, as a sculptor and a painter [*musawwar*], there is no difference between the writer and me, I also see, but what I see does not ignite into those wondrous symbols that the writer brings into existence; rather there are other symbols that arise in my mind, and they are lines, colors, and forms: they are my language, which I bring into existence, placing it on a canvas or in a statue, then saying: Look, or read my symbols! If you do not want to take the time to look, or if you are among that percentage, then we live in different worlds.[32]

Like the writer, the artist formulates symbols that he sets down before the world in order for them to be 'read'. Where the writer's symbols take the form of words, which he writes out on paper, the artist's symbols materialize in color, line and form. If the artist's symbols were unreadable to most Iraqis, so were the words writers put down on the pages of newspapers.

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[32] The text of the speech was reprinted in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Jawad Salim wa Nasb al-Hurriyya*, 189-194.

For Salim this production has a particular purpose, and that is to reflect on life and to communicate that reflection to others. Modeling the practice of art on writing led Salim to understand the pictorial means of "color, line and form" in terms that were not aesthetic but linguistic; they were means of signification that functioned according to a combinatorial logic similar to that of words; they were elements organized into a statement addressed to others. This identification of the artist with the writer, and of art with writing, occurred at a time when newspapers were routinely losing their licenses over something as simple as the printing of a poem. In putting himself in the position of the writer, Salim was putting art in the broader sphere of political life.

The public Salim had in mind was not a national public, but one that was at once universal, because it could extend to all of mankind, and limited, in the sense that it was confined to those who can read or are willing to look.

> The writer and I want to share with all mankind [*bashariyya*] what we have to say. Each person [*insan*] would like to experience the privileges [*mazaya*] of the mental life of man ['*aqliyyat al-insan*], as an individual in human society. The privilege of reason and thought can only be ascertained through exchange and experience [*tajarab*]. I tell my friend what I am thinking, but it is not enough for me to do only that; and so I address [*ukhatab*] all mankind. The animal doesn't have anything to say; it wants to live and doesn't know why it is living. The writer and I, we want to live but also to know why we are living. We have something in our heads that thinks.

Salim acknowledged, and felt that he had to acknowledge, that art could do nothing for the problem of hunger that in inflationary Baghdad motivated a lot of political activity, but nor for that matter could writing.

The universality of the public Salim imagined for the artwork had to do with the fact that art was a "international language". In defining art as a language, Salim sought to differentiate the images hung on the walls of the hall of the Museum of Folk Costumes, where the Baghdad Group had its first exhibition, from the images that one finds in everyday life: family portraits, pin-up calendars, tabloids, Argentine Tango, films from Egypt and Hollywood. "That is the general taste. Here in this exhibition we are trying to keep with what mankind produced, even if to the slightest extent, by working in a international language [*al-lougha al-'alamiyya*], the language of painting [*taswir*], as Iraqis, inspired by what affects us in our environment, in the world around us."

Salim and the other artists had critics, and defining art in this way, as a language, was also a response to those critics, who were attacking the artists from both sides, as it were. On the one hand, there was "a good hearted poet" who decried the artists as "enemies of the people who battle every Iraqi loyal to his nation," presumably because this art was foreign. On the other hand, there were those who did embrace painting but insisted that it be transparently representational:

> And the part of our public that does have an appreciation for art and for painting amazingly imposes their own desires on you: "None of this is good. You have to do something that people understand." These people want us to paint an apple and write under it "apple" (yes, it is an apple, totally an apple), and the view of the sunset on the Tigris and under it "sunset" or a picture of a date palm and under it "date palm" [*nakheel*] or a beautiful girl, and she has to be beautiful because art is beautiful and under it we write in beautiful script, "Waiting".

It was in reply to both this demand for an easy picture and the mistaken but "good hearted poet" that Salim defined art as a language with which the artist speaks. "Art is a language [*al-fann*

*lougha*].  We must get to know this language, even if only a little bit.  What is the painter [*musawwar*] trying to say with his words for example, his words that are colors, lines and shapes?"  What makes art a language is that it is comprised of elements that are rearranged into a signification.

But this combinatorial understanding of painting – as comprised of basic aesthetic elements that are organized into an act of speech – also offered a way to think about continuity and discontinuity over time.

> This language uses the same words but cast in a new mold that keeps with the influences of the modern age.  In poetry for example, it is no longer normal for the poet to write a poem that is like poetry from the pre-Islamic period.  Painting in different eras shares a few basic elements – the beauty of color, the beauty of lines and the beauty of forms – which are combined to faithfully express something about the sensibility of the artist of each era.  The true artist must know what he paints and why he paints.  What does a picture of date palm mean painted as you would see it in a photograph?  Where is the expression in a picture of an apple rendered literally?

Sustaining the analogy of artist and writer, Salim pointed to poetry, a more familiar art form, as a model for the historicity of form he was claiming for painting.  At the time, poets in Baghdad were rethinking the meter and conventions of Arabic poetry, and experimenting with a new, free style, giving birth to modern Arabic poetry.  Just as modern life seemed to demand a different kind of poetry, so did painting vary from period to period, in terms of the specific way in which its constitutive elements of color, line and form are configured.

Salim conceived of this configuration as a structure, and a temporal signature, which he referred to as in terms of *tajanis*.  "In painting [*taswir*] the harmony of colors is complicated and important, as in music.  For in a good picture, ancient or modern, the colors do not just come out and show themselves.   In each picture there is a particular coherence [*tajanis*] that changes the spirituality of the picture with lines, dimension, shadow and light."  Thus was artistic work located not on the level of representation but on the level of the articulation of color and line, an articulation that is historically specific.

Conceptualized as a language, painting here spoke rather than showed.  It was trained not on objects but on states of life.

> Modern art is really the art of our time [*fann al-'asr*].  Its complexity is a product of the complexity of our time.  It expresses many things:  worry, fear, the terrible disparity in most things, massacres, the alienation of man from God, the new ways of looking at things brought about by new theories in psychology and the other sciences.
>
> Take for example the picture "A dog howls on a cold night", one of the works in the exhibition.  It renders an image of the wilderness of night – the darkness, the cold, the sound of the dark howling:  this is a modern, living subject that lives with us.  How do you express these things? How do you cast them in a way that is effective?  No doubt you use colors and lines, but it would be laughable to paint that scene photographically.
>
> Suppose you ask one of us, why are the domes of mosques glazed in blue?  That's because the mosque is a divine spirit, and nothing like blue expresses that.
>
> The artist follows what is going on around him and expresses that faithfully, but he has to know how to realize that expression. [33]

Salim set the expressive function of the image against the naturalism of the photograph.  Expression was for him a metaphorical operation, in the sense of a shift in registers, where

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[33] Full text reprinted in Jabra, *Jawad Salim wa al-Nasb al-Hurriyya*,189-194.  Translation is mine.

something in the world is not represented by reproducing its part but re-constituted on another level, in different set of terms.  Divine spirit is reconstituted on the plane of color as blue.

In light of this conception of art as a language, and expression as a metaphor, we can apprehend something else about the drawings and paintings Salim produced in *Baghdadiyyat*.  Now, around the same time as Salim spoke of art as a language, in combinatorial terms, a new conception of language was emerging, formulated initially by Ferdinand de Saussure and then Claude Lévi-Strauss, as a closed set of signs that stands apart from the world it refers to.  The fact that the figurative geometry and the compositional construction of space in *Baghdadiyyat* is more or less common across the series of drawings and paintings means that there is no essential relation between form and what is represented.  The forms Salim has elaborated in the drawings and paintings are constructed in relation to each other, and thus constitute a set that stands apart from the world.  There is no movement of forms from the world to the paintings.  The paintings are instead sealed, creating a closed system of forms that can only stand in a metaphorical relation to the physical world.   If Salim understood painting as a mirror of life, then in what way was *Baghdadiyyat* a reflection of life?  In a strictly semiotic sense, the fact that the figuration is formulaic precluded any indexical reference to objects in the world.  The only thing that *Baghdadiyyat* could reflect of life was *life* itself.

In both the manifesto of the Baghdad Group and "The Renewal of Painting," the Arabic words *sura* (image), *taswir* (the act of making of an image), and *musawwar* (the image-maker) are employed to describe the practice of modern art.  These words have deep semantic histories, tethered to concepts of the image [*sura*] grounded in the Islamic tradition.  Repurposed in these documents to describe the practice of modern art, they were displaced them from these genealogies, where they were related to the creation of life in particular ways.

Distinct from *fanan* – "artist" in a more general sense – and *rassam* – "painter" which conveys the sense of a technical craft – *musawwar* means one who makes images [*sawr*, sing. *sura*], and as in English, *sura* refers at once to something concrete and metaphysical.   Although the concept of the image named by *sura* was inherited from Greek philosophy, it was reconceived in the Islamic tradition to entail not the production of a copy but a certain notion of life-giving creation.  In the Quran, the word *musawwar* is a predicate of God.  "He is God the Creator, the Inventor, the Fashioner [*musawwar*]; to him belong the best names.  Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him.  And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise" (59:24).  In this context the act of the *musawwar* is distinct from the act of reproducing visual appearances.

This distinction between creation and the production of a likeness is clear in a verse that attests to the unique capacities of Jesus Christ as a prophet.  In the Quran, when Mary is told that she will have a son whose name will be Isa al-Messih, one of the capacities attributed to him as a messenger is the capacity to create from clay the likeness [*hai'at*] of a bird and, with the permission of God, to breathe into it the spirit that will give it life:

> She said, 'How am I to have a child when no man has touched me?' [The angel] said 'God creates what he wills.  When He decrees a matter, He says, 'Be' and it is.  And He will teach him writing and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel and to be a messenger to the children of Israel saying:  'I came to you from with a sign [*bi-aya*] from your Lord that I create [*khalq*] for you from clay as in the clay of the bird [*k-hai'at al-tir*], and then I breathe into it and it is a bird with the permission of God.  I will heal [*ubari'*] the blind and the lame.  I give life to the dead with the permission of God.  I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your houses.  Indeed in that there is a sign for you if you are believers' " [3:45-3:49].

The likeness [*hai'at*] of the bird shaped from clay is distinct from the life that clay acquires only when suffused with breathe; the root *sawwar*, as a particular act of divine creation from which *musawwar* derives, names that act of giving life – and not the creation of a likeness.

It is elsewhere, however, not in the Quran but in a corpus of statements attributed to the Prophet Mohammad, made in specific practical contexts, that the words *musawwar* and *taswir* appear in relation to the production of images. These statements are referred to as *hadith* for the fact that they had been "reported" by those close to the Prophet and then transmitted from person to person until they were compiled into collections in the ninth century. Together with the Quran they ground the Islamic tradition. A vast number of the reports consist of variations on the same statement or practice. In the collection compiled by al-Bukhari, several different reports repeat the same judgment made by the Prophet on the image [*sura*] and the image-maker [*musawwar*]. This one, narrated by the Prophet's wife Aisha is representative: "The Prophet entered and there was a curtain with pictures [*sawr*] on it. His face got red with anger, then he took the curtain and tore it apart. She said that the Prophet said the people who make these pictures are those who will receive the most severe punishment on Judgment Day."[34] In another *hadith* report it is a pillow Aisha has made for the Prophet that has pictures; in another is added "Whoever makes a picture [*sawr sura*] in this world [*fi al-dunya*] will be asked on Judgment Day to breathe spirit into it, and won't be able."[35] Here, as in the Quran, *sura* refers to a particular kind of creation reserved for God. Life is a property of things conferred not by appearance but by God.

When Salim used the word *musawwar* to refer to the modern artist, and *taswir* to refer to painting, he displaced them from their semantic histories secured by the *hadith* and the Quran. Of course, in the intervening centuries, these words had semantic itineraries that I cannot map here, but nevertheless they retained a fundamental semantic grammar, based on the distinction between likeness [*hai'yat*] and created life, between the picture [*sura*] and the animate world. In his re-signification of the terms, Salim employed the terms *musawwar* and *taswir* to refer to a practice of art that involved neither the mimetic reproduction of likenesses nor the reproduction of those living things that God has created. Rather, in this practice of art, where he set the image [*sura*] apart from the naturalism of the photograph, the image was turned around, as it were, so that the relation of representation went the other way; the image was not a representation of something in the world but an address, a speech act that went out into it. In Salim's understanding, the aesthetic elements of color and line functioned not as pictorial means with which to reproduce appearances but as signifiers with which to express something about modern life.

In his own painting, I would argue, on the basis of both the documentary record and the formal structure of his work, that what Salim wanted to express about modern life was life itself. Thus not only did he displace *sura* but also joined it to a different concept of life, one organized not in terms of creation but in the peculiar sense that animated the Nahda. The modernity of Salim's re-signification does not simply have to do with the emergence of a notion of a public [*al-jumhur*] to which the image [sura] would be addressed in a new way; it was has to do with the peculiar juncture between de Lorey's historiography of al-Wasiti's illustrations as a painting of life and the ethical sensibility of the Nahda. For, the public sphere that formed in Baghdad during the nineteen-forties and fifties was not the public sphere of bourgeois society, though it has some genealogical relation to it. It did not emerge in order to consolidate an autonomous sphere of rationality, nor did it form around opinions, nor was it solely organized around political

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[34] Sahih al-Bukhari 6109, Book 78, Hadith 136
[35] Sahih al-Bukhari 7557, Book 97, Hadith 182

participation.  Rather it had to do with a sense of a revival, of a coming to life after centuries of death.

The language of awakening employed in the Baghdad Group's manifesto originated with the discovery of another manuscript, several decades earlier, in a monastery in the Lebanese mountains.  In his 1938 book, *The Arab Awakening*, George Antonius told the story of the "revival of the Arabic language and with it, a movement of ideas which, in a short lifetime, was to leap from literature to politics."[36]  This revival of the Arabic language had been enabled by the establishment of schools by American missionaries in Syria and Lebanon in the 1830s and the introduction of a printing-press with Arabic typeface, but it owed, Antonius claimed, much more to the discoveries of a curious young Christian in Mount Lebanon named Nasef Yazeji, whom the missionaries employed, along with another Christian, Butrus Bustani, to compose textbooks on Arabic grammar and rhetoric for their schools.

By Antonius' own account, the Arabic language had "degenerated".  The natural divergence of "spoken idioms" had been counteracted for

> as long as Arabic culture remained active and flourishing and the traditions of the classical age alive.  But with the decay of Arab power and civilization, which received their death-blow with the Ottoman conquest, those traditions were lost and the live spoken idioms threatened to swamp the standard language and taint it with their own debasement…To make matters worse, the literature of the classical ages had vanished from memory and lay buried in oblivion.  The patterns of literary expression were lost and the spiritual influence of a great culture removed; and, however missionaries might exert themselves to teach, minds remained starved and ideas stagnant.[37]

Yazeji was one of these "starved minds" who was driven by his own curiosity to re-discover the literature that had "vanished from memory":

> Books were not available in print, so that his only recourse was to the manuscripts stored in monastic libraries…His exploration of libraries took him into the heart of the lost world of classical Arabic literature, and revealed to him the desolation wrought by the centuries.  From that moment the problem of how to revive the past became his dominant interest.  The beauty of the buried literature had awakened the Arab in him and bound him by a spell.  He became the apostle of its resurrection.[38]

The books Yazeji wrote in his attempt at reviving the Arabic language became the basis for a new kind of community formed around the intellectual regeneration of the Arabs.  The project of this regeneration was formalized with the creation of a society of learning, proposed by Yazeji and Bustani, called the Society of Arts and Sciences.  It provided a model for other societies, the most important of which was the Syrian Scientific Society, which in the aftermath of a round of massacres between Maronite Christians and Druze in 1860, took on a political function, as an attempt at transcending the sectarian divisions that had led to the conflict.  According to Antonius, these societies, inspired by the rediscovery of a lost literary heritage, functioned as the model for the network of secret societies that arose across Syria in opposition to Ottoman rule, and that constituted the backbone of the Arab movement for autonomy and eventually independence.  Many of the leaders of that movement had originally come from Iraq, and when

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[36] George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening:  the Story of the Arab National Movement* (New York:  Capricorn Books, 1946), 37.
[37] Ibid, 38-39.
[38] Ibid, 45-46.

King Faisal was appointed the king of Iraq, they joined him in Baghdad, where they established the first Arab state.

Jawad Salim's own biography was shaped by that moment. An officer in the Ottoman military during World War I, his father had been sympathetic to the movement for Arab autonomy, and to the officers who had taken part in the Arab revolt against Ottoman rule. Following the Ottoman defeat, Haj Mohammad Salim al-Mawsuli was sentenced to death. He was rescued from the execution squad by his wife, Malika, whose brothers had been classmates of the new ruler of Turkey, Mustafa Ataturk, at Semise Effendi School. Malika interceded with Ataturk to spare her husband, and knowing Salim to be a good man, Ataturk granted her request. A year after Jawad had been born, the family was allowed to flee, on foot, over the mountains of Kurdistan to Baghdad.

At the time Jawad Salim established the Baghdad Group for Modern Art in 1951, Baghdad was the center of Arab nationalism, but it was a nationalism that took the form of a cultural revival.[39] The discovery of al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri* enabled modern art to be emplotted in the larger historiography of that revival. A few months after the founding of the Baghdad Group, Salim gave some introductory remarks at the opening of another exhibition, held at the British Cultural Center. In his remarks, he narrated the development of modern art in Iraq by beginning with the exhibition of al-Wasiti's illustrations in Paris in 1938, repeating de Lorey's text almost verbatim but inflecting it with the tone of rebirth that characterized the Nahda.

> Before the outbreak of World War II in 1939, an extraordinarily important book was exhibited at the National Library in Paris. That book was the Maqamat Al-Hariri, which narrates the adventures of a fugitive called, Abu Zayd. The book was one of the books that satisfied the literary need of the residents of Baghdad and their interest in stories and pleasure. Successive generation of Muslims read it with interest and love, over the course of its transcription and embellishment by different transcribers and illuminators, such that the book was a vast space where calligraphers and painters displayed their artistic genius. The book reflected, with all the faithfulness of a mirror, a living image of the daily life of the people of Baghdad. This book composed by al-Hariri at the beginning of the 1150s contains a story or *maqama*. The copy which the Bibliothèque nationale exhibited was the copy of a great Baghdadi painter, Yahya al-Wasiti who is considered one of the most prominent founders of the Baghdad School of painting in the thirteenth century.
> …For five centuries after its fall Baghdad lay in twilight darkness and terrible despair, and that continued until the years of the First World War when Iraq became a new country [*baladan jadeedan*] and Baghdad became its pulsing heart. And the first step in the struggle for the sake of culture was the development of the arts.[40]

What we see here is that the manuscript containing al-Wasiti's illumination of the *Maqamat of Hariri* organized the development of modern art in Baghdad, not only by providing it with a discursive framework, but also, more profoundly, by staging a particular experience of time. Pointing to the exhibition of the manuscript in Paris, Salim sought to invoke the history of painting it demonstrated as a basis for developing a modern art in Baghdad. In doing so he was led to include the interval of "darkness and despair" that separated the history of painting evidenced by the manuscript from the one he was introducing. However this interval between

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[39] One year later, the Free Officers would overthrow the Egyptian monarchy and would inaugurate a new post-colonial version of Arab nationalism, what Majid Khadduri has called the second-generation of Arab nationalism.
[40] The text of the speech, originally given in English, was printed in Arabic translation in a special issue of *Afaq* devoted to the plastic arts. "Contemporary Painting in Iraq" [*Al-Rasm al-Mu'asir fi al-Iraq*], (Afaq, 198?) 166-167.

the collapse of the old tradition and the emergence of the new gave rise not to a sense of loss but to an ardent desire, evident in the vitalism of Salim's vocabulary.  It is optimistically and not cynically that Salim speaks of Iraq as "a new country" and "Baghdad as its pulsing heart."

Not all artists agreed that the kind of revival sought by the Baghdad Group was viable. Another camp thought that a modern art could be created by giving form to the economic and social transformations taking place in the country, others that the problem was not one of style but of subject.  Nevertheless those artists operated within the same historiographic coordinates established by al-Wasiti's illustrations – a philosophy of history in which a tradition of art practice had been lost, with the effect of clearing a space for a new practice of art but also raising questions about the location of that space in time.

## Memories of an Origin

Something called the Baghdad School never existed, even though there had in fact been a practice of manuscript illustration in medieval Baghdad, one that had inherited and evolved out of the Byzantine tradition in the pre-Islamic period.  For a brief period of about hundred years, between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, the Islamic world exploded with images. This explosion included in particular the proliferation of illustrated manuscripts, not only of the *Maqamat of Hariri* but also of medical, technical and other literary works, such as Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica*, Al-Jazari's *Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices*, and the collection of fables, *Kalil wa Dimna*.  The cause of this explosion remains something of a mystery to historians of Islamic art, but what is clear is that efflorescence was brought to a sudden end by the Mongol conquest of the Middle East in the thirteenth century.  Though the conquest did not totally destroy Baghdad, and the city even remained the winter capital of the Mongols for some time, it initiated a new political geography, and gradually the city's painters dispersed to different parts of Iran, and any memory of a practice of painting eventually vanished.[41]

It wasn't until the nineteenth century, when a number of manuscripts surfaced in Istanbul, testifying to the existence of a practice of illustration in Baghdad, that that history was discovered.  The manuscript containing Yahya al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri* had, among many others, been purchased by the French diplomat and orientalist Charles Schefer, who built up a formidable collection of Arabic, Turkish and Persian manuscripts.  After Schefer died in 1898, the Bibliothèque nationale de France acquired his collection.  Though al-Wasiti's illustrations were known to a small group of scholars, they were not shown publically until 1925, when individual folios were shown at the Bibliothèque nationale's *Exposition orientale*.  The exhibition was criticized for the absence of any curation that distinguished the illustrations from each other.[42]  So when the manuscripts were shown again at *Les Arts de L'Iran* in 1938, the curators, Eustache de Lorey and Henry Corbin, developed a typology, grouping the manuscripts in the collection into 'schools' – of the painter Behzad, the Timurid school, schools at Tabriz and at Shiraz and the Baghdad School.

The typology was based on a peculiar historiography of painting, in which an art form developed linearly towards the achievement of realism and then declined from there into stylized decadence.  Anchoring that historiography was the manuscript containing al-Wasiti's

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[41] Marianna S. Simpson, "The Role of Baghdad in the Formation of Persian Painting," in *Art et Société dans le Monde Iranien,* ed. C. Adle (Institute Français d'Iranologie de Téhéran:  Paris, 1982) 91-116.

[42] See avant-propos by Julien Cain in *Les Arts de L'Iran*.

illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri*, which de Lorey identified as the paragon of Islamic painting, because it demonstrated the attainment of a realism over against pictorial formulae inherited from the Byzantine and Sassanid arts.  He arrived at this interpretation because he had applied to al-Wasiti's illustrations the pictorial concept of the post-Renaissance tradition of illusionism.  This was not, however, a category mistake, but rather an attempt to see in this "Islamic painting" a solution to the pictorial problems of European modernism.

The exhibition *Les Arts de l'Iran: L'Ancienne Perse et Bagdad* at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, in 1938, was an enormous exhibition that displayed different kinds of artifacts from historical Iran, a geography that extended from the Mediterranean to China, and that, as the introduction noted, was vanishing with the establishment of the new Iranian nation-state. Gathering objects from a number of different museums in France, the exhibition included metal-work, ceramics, textiles, and miniatures, ranging from the third to the eighteenth century.  At the center of the exhibition was the manuscript containing al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri*, presented as the masterpiece of what de Lorey called the Baghdad School.

In the exhibition catalog, de Lorey characterized the Baghdad School as the culmination of a history of painting that had begun in the seventh and eighth centuries with the mosaics of the Great Mosque in Damascus, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and the frescoes of Qusayr Amra; had progressed through the ninth century frescoes of Samarra and eleventh and twelfth century frescoes at Fustat, and that had finally found itself with the attainment of a particular kind of realism.        .

> We owe to the Baghdad School the credit of the first Islamic manuscripts containing painting to have come to our knowledge.  They date to the beginning of the thirteenth century.  During the five centuries before, as Islam was establishing and organizing its power, we have only very rare testaments to Islamic painting…
>
> What appears to us with the miniatures of the Baghdad School is not an art that is still figuring itself out but a perfected technique that has already mastered the different traditions it has been influenced by.  The Baghdad School represents the tendencies of Islamic painting at the moment of its blossoming, with the last Abbasid caliphs, a brilliant civilization with Baghdad at its center.[43]

For de Lorey, because Islam not only lacked an art of its own but was in fact "hostile to art since it counsels its believer to refrain from representing living forms", it had to draw on the traditions of ancient Iran and Byzantium.  The works belonging to the Baghdad School mark the surpassing of these traditions which Islam had taken over; they demonstrate, he claimed, the attainment of a signature style, evident in the vitality of its forms:  "The art that develops there is distinguished by the realistic character of its forms and by the almost ornamental character of the landscape. The composition reflects decorative intentions of great refinement, and the representation of space is purely linear."[44]

The manuscript containing al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri*, known by its ascension number, *manuscrit arabe 5847*, "is the most remarkable of the Baghdad School." The transcendence of the Sassanid and Byzantine traditions inherited by Islam occurred through the achievement – and for de Lorey it was an achievement – of a form of realism; and it was the

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[43] Henry Corbin et al, ed.  *Les Arts de l'Iran:  L'Ancienne Perse et Bagdad.*  (Paris:  Bibliothèque nationale, 1938) 108.
[44] Ibid, 109

realism de Lorey discerned in al-Wasiti's illustrations that made them the finest instance of that painting which was singularly Islamic.

> Instead of submitting to traditional formulas, accepting without modification the clichés of Christian or Sassanid art, he is inspired by what he sees, he takes as models the familiar scenes of Muslim life that he observes, and he takes from the charming work of Hariri not images [*des images livresques*] but tableaux whose everyday scene provides him with the subject [of his paintings] and their elements.[45]

Although the subjects of the paintings may have been determined by the text, de Lorey claims, their rendering, though not illusionistic, owed something to the observation of life, inasmuch as they contained a certain vitality. "Not only is [the art of al-Wasiti] content to construct extremely precise details, not only does it concern itself with apprehending life in all its complexity and according to all its contingencies [*hasards*], but it also knows to interpret and represent the finest psychological nuances, and of the characters rendered in proportions that are little verisimilar it makes figures that are human and full of life [*extremêment vivant*]." It was inconceivable to de Lorey that this vitality might belong to that rarified world brought into existence by narrative. Instead he took it as an indication that the illustrations comprised a world apart from the text, and for that reason were paintings and not miniatures.

> Because of the variety of themes to be met there, because of the importance of the compositions that adjust to a diverse reality, [the miniatures] are proof that they belong less to the art of the miniaturist than to the art of the painter. It is the realistic scenes that go well without the book that they comment on, because with their soft colors, the tonalities little varied but subtle, they tend above all to illustrate life itself.[46]

The possibility that life could be illustrated without a naturalistic representation is contingent to a particular moment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when the collapse of the European tradition of illusionism allowed a freer idea of what realism could be. Here was a rendering of life that employed none of the painterly devices of light, shading and perspective developed by the Western pictorial tradition since the Renaissance.

Elsewhere, in other writings, de Lorey had set the art of Islam in an analogy to European modernism, as if it offered solutions to the pictorial problems that preoccupied modern artists. In an article entitled "Picasso et L'Orient Musulman," published in *Gazette des Beaux-arts* on the occasion of a Picasso retrospective at Galeries Georges in 1932, he explored a "*correspondance*" between the "Cubist line" and that "play of line" in Islamic art "that has itself as its model".[47] Both, de Lorey argued, are the outcome of a process of transfiguration. Muslim artists, working under the prohibition of falsely reproducing God's creation, had to disguise what they borrowed from nature, and that attempt at disguise led to a process of transfiguration.

> It is necessary that on the Day of Judgment God is not able to recognize images of his work. [The artists] seek then to denature nature as much as possible, to represent it masked; thus their satisfaction with stylized forms which possess the schematization so extensively elaborated that it is difficult to discern the models: they are not any more lions, elephants or peacocks; they are no longer idols, but by a series of transmutations, a world is born inspired by nature, which appears to be nothing but a memory of its origin

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[45] Ibid, 113

[46] Ibid, 113

[47] Eustache De Lorey, "Picasso et L'Orient Musulman," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Vol 8 No 2, 302.

[*qui ne semble plus se souvenir de son origine*] and where we recognize the precise spectacle of geometric forms.[48]

Cubist painting, he claimed, passes through a similar set of transmutations that strip nature bare, not under the pressure of prohibition but in order to escape the clutches of realism.

> The canvases where the abstract style triumphs rarely give up the appeal of mimetic forms [*des formes imitées*]: we recognize in them a guitar, a pipe, a carafe, the phantom of a man, all kinds of allusions to a world that [the paintings] cannot in spite of everything get away from. In roundabout ways, realism, which they want to free themselves from, exercises an almost irresistible constraint over their invention and, even in their most disconcerting manifestations, their art is nothing but nature stripped bare and abstract – like the arabesque, the last metamorphosis of the *rinceau*, a figure of the realist flora of Hellenistic decoration, but sublimated, released from all hindrances, established by this liberty in the world of the imagination.

The cubist transfiguration produces a hermetic quality that "is inspired by a kind of abstract realism" which "substitutes the schematic representation for a reality whose initial forms are recognizable." This schematization centers on the transformation of things into lines, and it functions, so de Lorey suggested, in a way similar to that of the *homa* – a tree in the decorative arts of Islam whose trunk, palms, and fruits are stylized into unreality. He pointed to works in the show at Galeries Georges: "The three still-lives of 1931 are, in this respect, also characteristic of the successive representations of the *homa* in different Islamic decoration: the jug, the pitcher, the fruit bowl are only reconnected to their realist signification by increasingly elliptical reminiscences [*reminiscences*]."[49] As in the passage quoted above – *se souvenir de son origine* – here the concept of memory recurs as a way to describe a non-mimetic transfiguration of the world into image.

> But in the other two works the line has conquered for good its liberty: the arabesques obey the secret laws of their development, not the impetus of the forms that have engendered them. Merely by a more systematic tangle of lines, [the arabesques] indicate the place and the shadow of the object that they were…in the end other forms are born that represent nothing but themselves. Elsewhere, the entire composition, by its linear character realizes the ambitions that we find manifested in all Islamic decorations.

For de Lorey what is demonstrated by these analogies is "a relation…between the Islamic East and modern art" that is both non-historical – grounded in "spirit" and "principles" – and genealogical [*filiation*]. On the one hand, as he recognizes, an entire history of art separates the two, with "new techniques, the invention of new devices and seven centuries of masterpieces and models which artists today have more the desire than the ability to dismiss." On the other hand, however, Cubism and Islamic art share a Byzantine origin, inasmuch as the early methods and forms of Islamic art were drawn from Byzantine art, and inasmuch as the Fauves sought to recuperate a concept of color from Byzantine antiquity, and Cubism "did nothing but give an extreme form to that which was announced in certain formulas of Cezanne, in the processes of the Fauvists". The analogy de Lorey drew was based on a distant, shared history.

It was with this mindset that de Lorey had been thinking about the illustrated manuscripts in the collection of Charles Schefer. The following year, in another piece published in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, he argued that what he was then calling *l'école abbaside* did not deserve to play

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[48] De Lorey, "Picasso et L'Orient Musulman," 304
[49] Ibid, 307

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second-fiddle to Persian painting which is better known.  "By its originality in expression, its refusal of perfection inherited and not discovered, in a word, by its curious *resistance to academicism*, it represents a very precious moment of Islamic art."[50]  It is strange anachronism, to read the painting of thirteenth-century Baghdad as a resistance of a academic painting, and it betrays a peculiar pictorial equivalence.  It was because de Lorey saw the illustrations in analogy to European modernism that he saw them as illustrations of life, and thus considered them apart from the text.  If he employed the concepts of European art to interpret objects produced by a very different history, it was not out of ethnocentrism but rather out of the perception of a kind of pictorial identity between modernism and Islamic art.

Despite de Lorey's historiography, in which al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri* are the culmination of a history of painting that began on the walls of bathes and mosques, the illustration of manuscripts has in fact a different genealogy.  Historians of Islamic art have tended to locate the development of pictorial art in the Islamic tradition at the interface of the Quranic prophecy with the Byzantine and Sassanid traditions, and they have tended to characterize this art, notably in consideration of the Dome of the Rock or the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, as an attempt on the part of the new faith and political power to distinguish itself from its predecessors.[51]  However, the development of manuscript illustration in Baghdad has a different origin, one that lies in the translation of Greek manuscripts into Arabic.  In the Byzantine period Greek manuscripts were often illustrated, and as these were translated into Arabic, so were the illustrations reproduced.  The introduction of paper in the tenth century gave rise to a rather vast production of illustrated manuscripts, which remained largely in the Byzantine iconographic tradition until the thirteenth century, when formal features began to appear in the illustrations that could not be reduced to Byzantine precedents.[52]  Eustache de Lorey interpreted the appearance of the features as the achievement of a realism resulting from an observation of life, and as marking the emergence of a distinctly Islamic painting.  But is it possible to account for the emergence of these features differently?

The art historical scholarship is, for the most part, unhelpful here, as it has inherited de Lorey's assumptions.  In his major study, *Arab Painting*, Richard Ettinghausen simply reproduces de Lorey's account in *L'Illustration*:

> In the immensely varied and sustained effort of the Maqamat illustrations executed in Baghdad, Arab painting reaches its apogee.  This is in spite of the fact that the al-Hariri text seems in itself to offer little to an illustrator…For centuries Arab readers have admired the many allusions, ingenious metaphors, plays on words, riddles and other tours de force that give these picaresque adventures their literary merit.  The illustrator as an artist is oblivious to such philological attractions; he can use only the situations created for the delivery of these verbal conceits.  However, since the fifty chapters take place in many localities, these

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[50] Eustache de Lorey, 'La Peinture Musulmane:  L'École de Bagdad', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 6e, X, 1933, 1.  Emphasis added.

[51] This argument was made paradigmatically by Oleg Grabar in the *Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven:  Yale University Press, 1973).  Mohammad Alami has gone beyond Grabar's formal analysis to examine the aesthetic theories that mediate that juncture.  See *Art and Architecture in the Islamic Tradition:  Aesthetics, Politics and Desire in Early Islam* (I.B. Tauris, 2014).

[52] On the effect of the introduction of paper, see Jonathan Bloom, "The Introduction of Paper to the Islamic Lands and the Development of the Illustrated Manuscript," *Muqarnas* 17 (2000), 17-23.

paintings in their deliberate effort to be as explicit a possible give us an unparalleled insight into the life of the Arab world.[53]

Not only does Ettinghausen repeat the historiographic judgment that the illustrations of the *Maqamat* are the zenith of what is here called not unproblematically 'Arab' painting, he understands their relation to the text as no more than opportunistic, exploiting the many different settings of the story to paint life. Ettinghausen even goes so far as to describe the illustrations, in an un-cited citation of de Lorey, as an "incomparable mirror of medieval Arab civilization".

The first, sustained attempt to think about al-Wasiti's illustrations was a monograph by Oleg Grabar that compared the different illustrated manuscripts of the *Maqamat of Hariri* produced during the century of images that preceded the Mongol invasions. Grabar identified three ways in which *manuscrit arabe 5847*, the manuscript transcribed and illustrated by al-Wasiti, went beyond the established tradition of book illustration: (1) They include architectural settings or landscape elements that are extraneous to the story of each maqamat and whose function is less illustrative than it is structural, giving each illustration the integrity of an independent picture. "[T]hey lose their immediate narrative significance and are transformed into self-contained pictures because they omit references to the heroes of the book."[54] (2) The protagonists are rendered with a "psychological refinement" even though "the gestures are too general to be understood as specific illustrations of the specific context." (3) The illustrations are interpretations of the text. "5847 is a learned manuscript in the sense that its painter read and re-read the text in order to endow his images, whatever source they came from, with the most complex interpretation possible." I want to emphasize this third characteristic that, in Grabar's view, distinguishes al-Wasiti's illustrations from other illustrations of the *Maqamat*. What Grabar is saying is that what has been recognized as the masterpiece of Islamic painting is unique inasmuch as it sought to actually interpret the text. This goes against everything that has been said about the illustrations, which emphasize their autonomy from the text, as a painting of life.

Nevertheless, even though Grabar saw al-Wasiti's illustrations as interpretations of the text, he could not think them in relation to the text. This may be because, as David Roxburgh has recently pointed out, the problem was already circumscribed by the concerns of a long tradition of scholarly commentary on the *Maqamat* by grammarians which emphasizes the linguistic aspects of the work over its narrative.[55] The question Grabar posed repeatedly of the manuscript was: "Why illustrate a work meant to be enjoyed not for its narrative or plot but for its language, and that does not lend itself to illustration, like the Bible or the Shahnameh, which involve precise events?" His answer – which de Lorey had offered decades before – is that *Paris 5847*, like the Leningrad and Istanbul manuscripts, "emphasizes the setting of the stories and interprets the book as a series of natural, human, and architectural backgrounds within which the speeches and adventures of Abu Zayd take place." Though Grabar proposes that the illustrations are concerned with the settings, he seems to dissociate setting and story. He does not consider to what extent these settings might be inflected by the narrative, their design oriented around the story they stage. After all, the location of a narrated event only becomes apparent to the illustrator through the narration. This inattention to the narrative mediation of setting result from the fact that in this and other studies of the illustrated manuscripts of the *Maqamat*, Grabar is

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[53] Richard Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva: Skira, 1962), 104.

[54] Oleg Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 133.

[55] David Roxburgh, "In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri's *Maqamat*," *Muqarnas* 30 (2012).

more interested in the figure of Abu Zayd and its appearance in the illustrations, and thus he relies upon a certain relation of representation between the illustrations and the world. Because the gestures of these figures have no iconographic correlate, he explains them by default, as deriving from observation of the world, even though "they are too general to be understood as specific illustrations of a specific event." Though he suggests this figure might have an origin in either princely cycles, shadow theater, or the genre of exotic literature, Grabar identifies it as "an invention of the predominantly Arab world," reflecting the emergence of a "new urban bourgeoisie" during the period in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Marshall Hodgson called "the new Sunni internationalism."[56] This social history is predicated on and reproduces Eustache de Lorey's original historiography of realism and its dismissal of narrative. If we take Grabar's point, despite himself, that "5847 is a learned manuscript in the sense that its painter read and re-read the text in order to endow his images, whatever source they came from, with the most complex interpretation possible" – then how might the illustrations be put back into relation with Hariri's text?

David Roxburgh has attempted to do something of the kind in a recent essay, where he argues that the illustrations function as a kind of thematic frame for the text. He argues that the fifty different anecdotes in the *Maqamat*, each taking place in a different city and with an individual scenario, develop the "theme" of "the play between truth and falsehood, between semblance and dissemblance"; that the stories, in other words, are not just about Abu Zayd and Harith but about language and its social uses.[57] The illustrations might then be seen as depicting scenes of inter-subjective speech in which the act of speaking is "conveyed through the pose of the figure". What de Lorey saw as the location of the realism of the figures, in the line that outlines them, Roxburgh claims is a metaphorical displacement of the text into image. This metaphorical relation of image to text – i.e. reconstituting on one level something from another – frames the *Maqamat* in a particular way, and it points to a different interpretation of the figure of the prototypical Arab identified by Grabar. Understood in relation to the text itself, that figure would instead be a subject-position in language, and not the representation of a new social class. In the text, as Roxbourgh points out, Abu Zayd has no stable biographical identity; his persona is different in each anecdote, and the reader is never given the truth. In the illustrations, however, he is rendered distinctly. That he acquires in the images the identity he lacks across the various assemblies, Roxburgh argues, frames the *Maqamat* in a particular way, and that is in terms of the theme of discourse and its truth-claims.[58]

Roxburgh moves us beyond the premise first established by de Lorey and taken over by Ettinghausen and others that the narrative was just a pretext for the painting of life. The interpretation of realism was offered to explain the vitality of al-Wasiti's illustrations over against the Byzantine formulae he inherited. Can that vitality be thought differently, without a concept of realism? Could that vitality actually be the product of narrative?

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[56] Oleg Grabar, "The Illustrated Maqamat of the Thirteenth Century: the Bourgeoisie and the Arts," In *The Islamic City*, ed. A. Hourani (Oxford, 1970), 207-22.
[57] Roxburgh, "In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri's *Maqamat*," 182.
[58] There has been an attempt to understand the silhouetted construction of the figures in the illustrations as transposition of the conventions of shadow plays onto the pages of books. But the brilliant color of the illustrations, as Roxburgh has pointed out, works against such an interpretation. Furthermore the figures in al-Wasiti's illustrations are not always rendered in profile, and when they are it is because they are turned to each other, engaged in an act of speech. See Alain George, "The Illustrations of the Maqamat and the Shadow Play," *Muqarnas* 29, 2012. The argument, though suggestive, is troubled by the fact that the oldest extant puppets postdate al-Wasiti's illustrations by one hundred years.

A starting point for rethinking that apparent vitality can be found in Grabar's own arguments, in a discussion of the architectural settings in al-Wasiti's illustrations.  He observed that, though the settings derive from ancient formulae, they are different in each illustration, but nor are they "realistic": "for they do not seek to translate physical reality into a visual illusion.  What they do instead is translate *memories* of the surrounding world into partly conventional signs."[59]  The idea that the figurative images are "memories" of the natural world echoes, if unwittingly, de Lorey's account of the Islamic transfiguration of nature quoted above ("*une monde est né qu'inspira la nature, qui ne semble plus se souvenir de son origine*").  However what I would like to pick up on here is what Grabar calls their "translation".  By his own argument, this "translation" of "memories of the surrounding world" occurs through the mediation of the story about Abu Zayd.  What is unique about al-Wasiti illustrations, in Grabar's view, is that, whereas most of the other illustrated manuscripts aimed to transform the text into a book, al-Wasiti sought to interpret the text.  "The illustrations did not acquire an autonomous function, separated from the passages they illustrate. Nor did they ever come to support meanings external to the texts, as Persian and Ottoman manuscript illustration did."  This tenacity of the image to text Grabar judges as their "visual failure".  But what if it marks instead the work of narrative in forming the illustrations?  Is it possible that the vitality of al-Wasiti's illustrations is not the result of observing life but an effect of this relation between image and text?

In this section, I have shown that al-Wasiti's illustrations were already entangled in the pictorial concerns of European modernism, and that those concerns precluded any inquiry into the relation of the illustrations to Hariri's text.  However, in the previous sections I have shown that, even though the illustrations had already been framed by de Lorey's curation of them, when Salim first saw them in the pages of *L'Illustration*, they exceeded that framing, not only because, as artifacts from a history of painting, they grounded a historiography of art in which modern art could be interpreted as a renewal but also because they were *images*, and offered a model for a different kind of picture.  It is my argument that the different works making up *Baghdadiyyat* are based on a use of line inspired by al-Wasiti's illustrations.  That use of line was not just a pictorial device; in its groundless relation to surface it was bound up with a particular pictorial concept.  If the illustrations' pictorial concept had been rendered invisible by de Lorey's interpretations and the art history that subsequently adopted them, it was recuperated in *Baghdadiyyat*.

There had been no attempt to disguise the fact that the illustrations were made on the same paper upon which the text of the Maqamat was transcribed; this was a surface that one does not see through but reads off.  We might characterize this pictorial concept as metaphorical in the sense that it does not attempt to reproduce appearances but to reconstitute the world in its own set of terms, and we might contrast it to a metonymic picture, which reproduces fragmented aspects of the world in order to represent it.  Of course metaphorical pictures are composed of fragments just as much as metonymic pictures, but the analytic difference I am attempted to draw here has to do with how those fragments are produced.  The fragments from which al-Wasiti assembles the scenes of the *Maqamat* have been cut and shaped by the narrative with which the illustrations are ineluctably bound.  It is that work of narrative, the invisible way in which it organizes the images, that produces what Grabar described as a translation or memory of the physical world.

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[59] Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat*, 145.  Emphasis added.

Seeing the illustrations shorn from the text, Salim could still recuperate their relation to narrative, by reviving in his own work their relation of line to surface. This both produced, and is evident in, the fabular character of *Baghdadiyyat* despite the fact that there is almost never any mediating narrative. However, toward the end of the nineteen-fifties Salim made his own "manuscript illustrations" of a few stories from *One Thousand One Nights*, where the appearance of text coupled with the formal language of *Baghdadiyyat* reveals the lost narrative dimensions of the pictorial grammar of Salim's work (fig. 1.24). Here, an excerpt from the text of the 509$^{th}$ night is written in calligraphic script with dialectical markings.

> She said, "It has come to me, Oh Favored King, that Jan Shah saw many things in the apartment, and he marveled at them. He walked until he entered the palace which was in that apartment and he looked…He entered the tent and slept in that tent for a long time then [xxxx] and got up and walked until he went out the door of the palace and sat on the chair in front of the palace, marveling at the beauty of that place. As he was sitting there, three birds flew up before him out of the air, in the form of the dove [*fi sifat al-hamam*], then the birds landed next to the lake and played for an hour, and after that they shed their feathers and became three girls as if they were moons and unlike anything in this world."

The illustration beneath the text portrays the wondrous transformation of the birds into girls, around a tree, where the birds ostensibly landed, next to a body of water. Out of the water one girl rises, to her left another stands up, her feathers falling from her side. Still in the midst of transformation, the third is half-bird half-woman. The girl standing next to the tree and the girl still half-bird are rendered in three-quarters profile of triangular. This scene of metamorphosis is composed using the same figurative formulae Salim used to depict contemporary life in Baghdad, and joined to it, in the rendering of the grass and the branches of the tree, are some of the pictorial conventions of manuscript illustration. The congruency of Salim's formal language with the conventions of manuscript illustrations points to a common use of line, a use of line governed not by appearance but by the narrative dimensions of text. What we see here, then, is that Salim revived in the modern artwork the pictorial concept of a medieval history of manuscript illustration.

The significance of Salim's engagement with al-Wasiti's illustrations of the Maqamat is that it put modern art on a different footing, wherein the modern artwork was situated in a relation to various aesthetic traditions whose forms and concepts it could restage. It was within this paradigm that, in the mid-nineteen-sixties, Kadhim Hayder would transpose imagery from the mourning celebrations from the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn into the artwork and completely transform its representational structure.

Part Two

# Memory

Kadhim Hayder

The last week of April, 1965, the walls of the gallery of the National Museum of Modern Art in Baghdad were hung with a new kind of painting.  Each of the thirty-five canvases was a different size, and they were large enough for one artist to comment that they were not paintings but a form of theater.  Indeed, in the paintings, a cast of human figures and horses seemed to confront the viewer, sometimes with ecstatic gestures (fig. 0.1 – 0.7).  Anatomical details had been minimized to basic features, such as arms and legs or the manes on the horses, and those features were then simplified to a geometry of arcs and angles.  This minimization and simplification left the figures and the horses so tautly suspended between figuration and abstraction that they seemed to quiver, to be charged with a tension, as if at any moment they will exceed their figurative form.  And in fact, in a few of the paintings, where the horses merge into each other, it seems that some had.

These figures and horses stood poised on a barren landscape that was constructed in different ways:  a receding plane divides the sky and the earth; a sun-disk that distinguishes time as neither night nor day; a thrashing of thick brushstrokes that sit heavy on the canvas, creating atmospheric weight, or a scaffolding of thin, white lines cross the paintings, as if tracing the dimensions of a different kind of space.  Deep, bold color seemed to overlay the figures and horses with a new body, and the landscape with a new terrain.  The horses appear luminescent against the grey, the graphite, the brown and the deep blues of the sky and the earth.

The signature feature of the paintings, however, is the way in which the immanent abstraction of the figures and the horses seems to originate from within.  The horses strain their necks in a cry that we can see but not hear.  The sound of that suppressed speech, and that muted cry, reverberates in the line that traces their silhouette; it spreads out across their bodies, extending their shape and dissolving their features, smoothing out their volume into a surface, inflating the bellies of the horses with the force of their muted cries.

Entitled "The Epic of the Martyr" [*Mulhamat al-Shahid*], the series of paintings was accompanied by a poem, composed by the artist and printed in the exhibition catalog.  Each painting corresponded to a verse, which it had as its individual title.

حدث الاجيال عما قد جرى

Tell the generations what has happened

يا قوم

Oh people

هو ذا الهيكل يعلو من جديد

This is the structure that will arise anew

انه يفنى و يفنى ليعود

He disappears, disappears only to return

عجبا للدهر

Wonder of the age

كم طاف به قلب شهيد

How long did he wander with the heart of a martyr

World raised up on arms

عالما فوق الذرى

This is the structure that will arise anew

هو ذا الهيكل يعلو من جديد

This is the heart that irrigates deeply

هو ذا الحب عميقا يورق

He is the memory of the encounter

انه ذكرى اللقاء

And an abyss more splendid than any abyss

و هوى اروى من كل هوى

He is the memory of the encounter

انه ذكرى اللقاء

Oh abyss deeper than any abyss

يا هوى اعمق من كل هوى

Thus the structure arises anew

و اذا الهيكل يعلو من جديد

The people were determined in the matter

عزم القوم على امر

For it was a battle

فكانت معركة

A forest of a thousand, fierce swords waiting

غابة من الف سيف شرس منتظرة

Ten [horses] raging with hatred trample on the face

عشرة في الغيظ من حقد على الوجه تدوس

And here only a knight remains

و هنا لم يبق الا فارس

An impenetrable shield

درع حصين

Everything is still as it is, oh moon

كل شي لم يزل .. يا قمرا

It remained like heavenly bodies turning

باق كافلاك تدور

Then spoils were sold

ثم اسلاب تباع

And a horse with a heavy heart is sold

و حصان مثقل القلب يباع

Ten horses fatigued converse with nothing

عشرة تعبى تناجي و العدم

This is the sword, tired and sterile

هو ذا السيف عقيم متعب

Thus the structure will arise anew

فاذا الهيكل يعلو من جديد

He disappears, disappears only to return

انه يفنى ليفنى ليعود

Here is a voice calling my village

ها هنا صوت ينادي قريتي

Walking to the symbol of the martyr

مشيا الى رمز الشهيد

He is the structure that will arise anew

انه الهيكل يعلو من جديد

Do you think that one day the knight,
        with the heart of the martyr will return?

اترى يوما يعود الفارس ذلك القلب الشهيد

انه يفنى و يفنى ليعود

For he disappears, disappears only to return[1]

The poem is composed as a series of predicates, belonging to an unnamed subject, and posited in the demonstrative mood. Take for instance, "This is the structure that arises anew" or "This is the love that irrigates deeply". What is being pointed to by the deictic "this" [*hua tha*] is a quality of the unnamed referent of the poem. This grammar stages a play between presence and absence. While the quality pointed to by "this" is present – because we are looking at it in the paintings – the unnamed referent is absent. In fact the whole existence of the poem can be read as a response to that absence; thus, we are prompted by the first line to "Tell the generations what has happened."

Of course it is clear from the title of the exhibition that the unnamed subject of the poem is the eponymous martyr; but it is important to note that its grammatical absence in the poem is itself a quality of the martyr, that the martyr can only exist obliquely, in the predicates elaborated by the poem. Considered then in their relation to the paintings, the verses do not simply name the individual paintings, but also make those paintings predicates of its unnamed subject. They are the presence of something absent.

The exhibition coincided with the annual festival that commemorates the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn. The grandson of the Prophet Mohammad, the Imam Husayn is believed by many Muslims to have been the rightful heir to the spiritual and political leadership of the Islamic community when he was killed in 680 CE, in a battle against the scion of the nascent Umayyad dynasty Yezid. In that battle, which took place in the desert east of the Euphrates river, in what came to be called Karbala, Husayn chose to fight to a certain death, rather than recognize the right of a corrupt man to rule. In southern Iraq, the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn is grieved as the loss of the justice brought by the prophecy of Mohammad, and at the same time his martyrdom is celebrated, as a loss that in circumstances of injustice testified to the truth. Each year enormous public celebrations re-stage the pathos of that loss, and in re-staging that pathos renew the claim to truth which that original loss had performed. Known in Iraq collectively as the *ta'ziyah*, these celebrations consist of a suite of performances that narrate and reenact the Battle of Karbala according to an established cycle of motifs. These performances include nightly sermons and poetry readings, held either in the private homes of individuals or in a kind of community center called a *husayniyyat*; wailing sessions during which participants beat their chests; processions of white horses and costumed characters embodying the battle's dramatis personae; and dramatizations of the battle in the street.[2]

The horses and figures in the paintings hanging on the walls of the National Museum of Modern Art were recognizable to viewers as the horses and figures they saw in the performances

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[1] Not a single copy of the exhibition catalog has been found, and over the years many of the paintings have been separated from their original titles. However I found the poem reprinted in two reviews of the exhibition: "Fi mu'ridh al-Fann," *Kul Shay* April 26, 1965 and Suhail Aslan, "Kadhim Hayder: Simphoniya al-Alwan," *Al-Jumhuriyya*, No 472, April 26, 1965. In the exhibition catalog, the poem had been translated into English by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra. The only original English title we have is "Fatigued, Ten Horses Converse with Nothing," which had been scrawled on the back of the canvas. The English here is my translation.

[2] In Arabic, *ta'ziyah* means "mourning" but in a sense that should be clearly distinguished from the sense which the concept of mourning has acquired in the Western tradition, notably in the writings of Freud and Walter Benjamin. The purpose of the ritual performances was not to dissipate the sense of loss, but on the contrary to perpetuate it, in order to renew a particular claim to justice. Here, paradoxically, and this is the theology of it, the performance of the loss returns what was lost.

taking place in the streets of Baghdad and other towns in southern Iraq. For instance, in *This is that love that irrigates deeply*, which entered the national collection and became iconic of the series, a visitor to the exhibition in 1965 would have identified the nude, white figure, with the motif of Zainab, the sister of Husayn, being taken prisoner to Damascus. It is a motif developed in poetry recited at nightly readings, represented in pageants and acted out in street dramatizations, where she, escorted by an armed guard, is accompanied by a rider-less white horse with a red saddle, signifying the martyred Husayn.

However, in the paintings, the figures and the horses do not *represent* the street performances nor do they *illustrate* the Battle of Karbala. They did not signify people and animals out in the world but functioned as rhetorical devices that performed a certain kind of speech act. By using figurative forms in this way, rhetorically rather than representationally, *The Epic of the Martyr* broke with the practice of art that had been developing in Baghdad over the previous twenty-five years, when modern art was conceived as a painting of life, one that might draw on different pictorial conventions or devices, but that nevertheless sought to picture something in the world.

The paintings had been made by the artist Kadhim Hayder in the aftermath of a coup in February 1963, when civilian members of the Ba'ath Party conspired with officers in the military to overthrow the regime of Abdel Karim Qasim. What was significant about the coup was not who it removed from power and who it instead put in place; what was significant about the coup was that it was attended by the liquidation of the Ba'ath Party's rival, the Iraqi Communist Party, and the persecution of leftists of all kinds. The result of that persecution was that it repelled Iraqis from politics. With the threat of being accused of communism hanging like a sword over one's head, people ceased to speak as they had, and the public sphere, understood as a space where opinions are exchanged, closed.

My argument here is that, in those conditions, *The Epic of the Martyr* introduced into the modern artwork a different concept of representation, one drawn from the ancient practice of remembrance surrounding the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn, and that enabled new rhetorical possibilities at a time when the modalities of liberal politics, in which political differences are adjudicated through persuasion and electoral process, had collapsed. In those paintings, Hayder transposed into the artwork a peculiar kind of form from the mourning rituals. That form, evolved out of a history of remembrance, and tethered to a particular concept of memory, was a rhetorical figure that operated with an emotive force to produce a testimony that exceeds the speech positions of liberal politics. Where liberal politics consists of taking a position or expressing an opinion, this form executed a turning away, in the acknowledgment of a different arena of justice, and thus representation. Displaced to painting, it reenacted this gesture in the artwork, establishing a new paradigm of the artwork, as an act of turning away.

In making this argument, I focus on the status of the imagery of horses and figures in the paintings, showing that they were not representations but rhetorical forms. In order to highlight the rhetorical character of this imagery in the artwork, I first set *The Epic of the Martyr* against the backdrop of art practice in the nineteen-fifties, when the emerging modern art of Baghdad was drawn into a representational relation to politics. I then go on to explicate the rhetoric of these forms, the kind of speech that they stage in the artwork and the form of politics with which that speech is bound up. Finally, in order to demonstrate the specific rhetorical functions of the artwork as a site of memory, within the field of speech in the mid-nineteen-sixties, I juxtapose to the paintings a pamphlet issued by the Iraqi government on the events of 1963.

**The Artwork in the Public Sphere**

In Part One, I described how the discovery of a lost history of manuscript painting provided a foundation for the practice of modern art and how, with the formation of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art in 1951, Jawad Salim moved what had been a private practice of art into the public sphere that had been reactivated following the end of the Second World War. Things, however, changed very quickly. Very soon, that public sphere ran up against the repressive authority of the monarchy. The overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy by a group of officers in 1952 rattled the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq, especially as broadcasts from Cairo began to fill cafes Baghdad's cafes. Newspapers were closed, political parties were banned, elections were rigged and demonstrations were brutally repressed. The founding of the Baghdad Group ushered the artwork out into the open, where it was brought to address the same public addressed by the newspapers. But as the experience of state violence began to overtake the project of cultural revival outlined by the Baghdad Group's manifesto, another group of artists, the Pioneers [*al-Ru'ad*], brought the practice of modern art to engage the political issues of the day. It was that group that Kadhim Hayder joined when he began painting in the early nineteen-fifties.

The Pioneers evolved out of a loose collectivity of artists organized around Faiq Hassan, the main painting instructor at the Institute of Fine Arts. In the early nineteen-forties they had begun taking trips to the countryside to paint, initially to the orchards in al-Jadariyya, which at that time was on the outskirts of Baghdad, and then later, beginning in 1947, to the mountains of Kurdistan in the north.[3] They took to referring to themselves, somewhat ironically, as "Société Primitive," or simply S.P., but in December 1950 they held a first exhibition, and for the sake of the exhibition, they called themselves *al-Ru'ad*, or the Pioneers.[4] After the formation of the Baghdad Group situated art practice in the public sphere, the Pioneers crystalized into an art group. They never issued a manifesto, but the artists associated with the group converged around a practice of giving form to the various social, economic and political transformations taking place in Iraq. The curatorial text introducing their eighth annual exhibition, held at the Institute of Fine Arts in April 1958 acknowledged that convergence.

> At the end of 1950, in a small house on the banks of the Tigris, a group of artists held a first exhibition under a new name, the Pioneers [*al-Ru'ad*]. Those who participated at that time would not ever have thought that that exhibition of theirs would be a beginning of a new period of Iraqi art, a period full of movement, activity, and creativity. For they were just a group of friends brought together by their common orientation towards life and their strong desire to develop Iraqi art. Eight years have passed since this exhibition during which the understanding of both the people [*al-naas*] and the artists has developed. If it is possible for us to relate the Pioneers to a particular artistic practice, then it is very clear that they reflect in their work during this period a strong tendency to express the world around them, a solid connection to the ground which trembles beneath it, and a deep perception of the turbulent era through which they are living. That small exhibition which was held one evening years ago on the banks of the Tigris will always remain the point from which contemporary Iraqi art departed in its new dispensation.[5]

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[3] My account of the Pioneers is taken from Khaled al-Qassab, *al-Dhikriyyat al-Fanniyya*.
[4] The exhibition was held for three days in the home of Khaled al-Qassab, and the work shown was private, in the sense that it had not been produced with any intention to be exhibited, or in regard to any kind of public.
[5] Reprinted in Jalil Kamal Al-Din, "*Tama'alat fi Mu'aridh al-Ru'ad*," *Al-Adaab* 6 (5) 1958, 87.

In a review of the exhibition published in the journal *Al-Adaab* the critic Jaleel Kamal al-Din remarked that "the typical subject of the Pioneers, in hundreds of works, realistic and popular...is the struggling human [*al-insan al-kadih*]." Though Faiq Hassan had been the Pioneers' original center of gravity, he was quickly supplanted by a younger painter named Mahmud Sabri, who became its paradigm. Kamal al-Din judged Sabri's painting of the massacre of a village during the Algerian revolution (fig. 2.1) "the pinnacle of the works of the Pioneers, and perhaps of all Iraqi artists, this year." It was Sabri who articulated the relation between art practice and politics during the nineteen-fifties.

Born in 1927, in the Mahdiyyah neighborhood of Baghdad, Mahmud Sabri was representative of a generation of Iraqis inspired to produce through politics a world more just than the one into which they were born. He first became involved in social activism as a student at al-Markaziyya secondary school, where he and a group of students that included the future playwright Yusuf al-Ani, Hafidh Tukmachi, and Adeeb George petitioned the director of the school to use the school's facilities to conduct literacy classes during the summer break.[6] After graduating from al-Markaziyya in 1945, Sabri won a scholarship to study social science in Loughbourgh, England. He had been interested in drawing since childhood, and in Loughbourgh he enrolled in art classes at night, which amounted to little more than model drawing. There he met another Iraqi, Zaid Saleh, who was studying engineering. Saleh introduced Sabri to other Iraqi artists studying in England at that time, and later, in 1949 when they had both returned to Iraq, to the group of artists that became the Pioneers.

After working briefly as a translator in the Department of Economics, Sabri took a job at Rafidain Bank, where he worked until the revolution in 1958. At the same time he became involved with the underground Iraqi Communist Party. In those years the Iraqi Communist Party, even though it was illegal, attracted a broad segment the Iraqi population because it offered people analytical concepts. As the historian Hanna Batatu has written, in those years, "there was an unassuaged thirst for ideals…Islamic ideas…were in a state of progressive decomposition…out of accord with the needs, desires, and life experience of an ever-widening number of socially conscious Iraqis…Nationalism appealed to the heart and had little to offer the mind." But moreover:

> …the government feared thought. In an Iraqi context, thought – of the more serious kind – was essentially unsettling. To think meant to raise questions that would have involved, sooner or later, probing into the foundations of society and a rejection of much of what existed, things being what they were. Naturally enough, the government did not merely clamp down at will on open manifestations of independent thought, but never introduced political philosophy or anything directly bearing on politics into the school or college programs. The result was ironic but perfectly congruent: in times of suppression – which were frequent – the Communist underground enjoyed a near monopoly in the propagation of theory.[7]

In 1956 Sabri published an essay entitled "The Problem of Contemporary Iraqi Painting" in *Al-Adaab*, in which he employed the rough cut historical materialism being handed around among the party's members to think about the relation between the practice of modern art developing in Iraq and the multiple social and economic transformations the country was undergoing.[8] Taken as a document of art practice, it could been seen as a follow-up to the texts generated by the

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[6] Bahjat Sabri Bedan, dir. *Mahmud Sabri: Bayna al-'Alamayn: al-Juz al-Awal*. YouTube video, 13:43. May 31, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62ffXxZZpvA.

[7] Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 481.

[8] Mahmud Sabri, "Mushkilat al-Rasm al-Iraqi al-Mu'asir," *Al-Adaab* (January 1956) 65-69.

founding of the Baghdad Group four years earlier.  Then, when Jawad Salim, had formed the Baghdad Group, he had sought to create a public for modern art.  That public now seemed to exist, as Sabri observed:

> With the same rapidity of the economic, social and intellectual transformation of Iraq, the art movement [*al-tiya'r al-fanni*] proceeded slowly and calmly in the first years and then violently and forcefully in the past few years.  For exhibitions not longer are comprised of biased admirers only; the number of those disgruntled by the form and content of exhibited art has grown, and the point is no longer the quantity, size and formal adherence to nature.  Rather the point has become the quality, composition and expression of nature.  In this way there are now supporters [*ansar*] and opponents [*khasum*] of this or that artist, and concepts have begun to slowly crystalize around the different art groups, and with that the first signs of the composition of an art public.[9]

The problem has now become a problem of those concepts, or of representation, and it issued not from the discontinuity between a lost history of medieval painting and the modern artwork, but from what Sabri referred to somewhat euphemistically as the "social and economic transformations" Iraq was experiencing.  Those transformations, Sabri noted, had come to be the focus of artists.

> As the cruelty of social life has intensified, artworks have begun to emerge showing traces of that cruelty in their form and content.  In fact the concepts of beauty have begun to change such that one has come to take a certain pleasure in expressions of this cruelty as well as to find in it a field for activity…our society is full of everything, of beauty and ugliness, tranquility and violence, simplicity and complexity, cruelty and compassion, abundance and poverty.  All of these contradictions are there, embodied day after day, confronting the artist in his comings and goings.  It is for this reason that he wanted to produce something in which life pulses [*shayan tanbadh fihi al-hayat*], or that reflects truthfully these aspects of his society.[10]

The question is how exactly the artist can do that.  In addressing this question, Sabri departed from the historical materialist premise that art is a reflection of the means of production.  "So inquiry into the art movement in Iraq must look at the form of the society, in which it grows and develops, particularly the current relation between material changes on the one hand and intellectual changes on the other hand, and the extent to which the former effects the latter." However Sabri recognized that the practice of art that had developed in Iraq far outstripped the material conditions in which it arose.

> And what is happening is that one finds the goals people set for themselves developed faster than economic life, given a sharp contradiction between the dominant social and economic relations and the intellectual and material relations on the other.
>    For the dominant mode of production is agricultural, with its simple style and type of property ownership, which is feudal.  Even in the past few years, manufacturing has had no real effect in forming a source of inspiration for an industrial art in any significant sense, or embodying the contradiction which has started to appear between the old and new modes of production, in any way that its effects would be reflected in literary and artistic production.[11]

The historical materialist wisdom produced the paradox, of an art that did not reflect the economic conditions of its production.  But it was precisely this paradox that circumscribed for Sabri the problem.  It was precisely because the practice of art was not a reflection, in the

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[9] Ibid, 65.
[10] Ibid, 65.
[11] Ibid, 66.

historical materialist sense, of the material conditions of its production, that it could nevertheless get out in front of those conditions and reflect them in a representational sense.

There was here an excess of the intellectual over the material, and that excess, for Sabri, marked the subjectivity of the artist:  "Even though the rapid economic development which has occurred in the past few years has caused a marked development in artistic production, [that development in artistic production] is a result of changing understanding of the artists and their perception of society."   On the one hand the subjectivity of the artist was a function of the peculiar nature of the artwork.  The artwork is a commodity [*bida't*], Sabri noted – not because it possessed exchange value but because it "met certain human needs and desire" – but it is "at the same time an expression of the social position of the artist, of his hopes, his philosophy, and his view on life, that is, the position of a certain social class and its hopes and philosophy."  On the other hand the subjectivity of the artist resulted from the fact that the artist was situated outside the division of labor, and thus was released, at least in part, from the demands of a market, and could focus on an "artistic problem."  "The Iraqi artist is not a professional [*mutarifan*], in the sense that he does not live from his art alone.  All of the artists work jobs that vary in the degree of their relation to the subject of their interest."  What this means is that "in some paintings, the motivation of the artist to arrive at his artistic problem is clear, and in others it is clear that his desire is to get money."  In pursuing their artistic problem, artists produced work that inevitably reflected the transformations taking place in Iraq, and that work got shown to a public who were introduced to something that they had never seen before and were not accustomed to seeing.

Now, the artistic problem centered on form.  In keeping with his historical materialism, Sabri specified that it was form that made the artwork an expression of the social position of the artist, and because the artist was positioned out in front of the market, we might say, his exploration of form was unhindered by the demands of the market.

> Form [*al-shakl*] in art is composed of a number of elements such as color, surface, and line, and it consists of their organization into compositions.  But in his capacity as a part of society, the artist uses all his mental and emotional resources in crafting these compositions.  Thus the operation does not occur in isolation from society but rather as a reflection of his relation to it.  In this structure the artist reflects his feelings, emotions and thoughts, and in doing so reflects the feelings, emotions and thoughts of that segment of society with which he is bound and empathizes.[12]

By virtue of the simple fact that the configuration of color, surface and line in a painting is produced by the artist, that configuration reflects the social conditions in which the artist lives and works.  What this definition of form implied was that the forms employed by the artists were, despite their intentions, responsive to the changes going on around them.  New subjects had been thrown up by the various economic and social changes taking place in Iraq, and those subjects raised questions of form.

> The economic, social and intellectual transformations in Iraq have created new subject matter and new conditions that have led to the emergence of new concepts, philosophies and positions among people, and the artists among them.  Naturally in conditions like these it becomes necessary to change the old artistic forms which are no longer appropriate or no longer capable of expressing the new contradictions, and to replace them with forms that are more adequate.  Thus we see in the artists, individuals and groups, a proclivity for expressionist, abstract, cubist and surrealist tendencies, and in various kinds of formal experiments, because, as they say, "they want to arrive at something!"

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[12] Ibid, 67.

This feeling is nothing more than another aspect of the material reality, and that is that the new goals which the artists have set for themselves, and which reflect economic, intellectual and social developments, have started to demand another, more fitting form for expression. The contradiction lies in the existence of conflicting social relations and the new material conditions which these developments have created. The artist's drive towards surrealist, abstract, and cubist forms, etc. is not blind imitation of the West, as some say, but the result of conditions we have mentioned, as a rich source for solutions to their current artistic problems. [13]

I will come to what exactly those new subjects were in a minute, but for now I want to stay with Sabri's argument that those modern subjects, produced by recent economic and social changes, demanded a new, modern form. The historical materialist understanding of form, as an effect of relations of production, led to the judgment that the various aesthetic traditions modern Iraq had inherited were to be set aside, their forms unviable for rendering the "new subjects."

And so we ask now, where is the Iraqi artist headed in his search for new forms? He has Assyrian and Babylonian works, but are their forms, expressive of societies like the Babylonian and Assyrian, with the simplicity of their modes of productions, their stability and the slow pace of their development, their absolutist, priestly organization, their simplistic, mytho-epic concepts and doctrines adequate to expressing a society like Iraqi society with its faced paced development, its sharp contradictions and its manifold and complex concepts and beliefs?

Or is he heading towards works of Islamic art, with its inscriptions, ornamentation and a few paintings passed down in some manuscripts? It seems that he excludes that as well for inscriptions and ornamentation are closer to architecture than to painting…As for the few paintings handed down in some manuscripts, because of their rarity and the fact that they don't circulate haven't left any effect to speak of on the art movement.

No resource remained in front of the Iraqi artist then other than the resources of western art. Here he had to chose the period whose forms are appropriate for expressing his own conditions. In this choice he was motivated by a set of economic and intellectual factors. The choice of works closest to him – the works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – works of the romantic, impressionist, expressionist, abstract and surrealist movements, because the economic and intellectual conditions which created these movements have begun to grow in another form on the soil of Iraq, establishing the material origins necessary for the emergence of a representative art movement. For modern intellectual and economic developments in Iraq are an extension of the modern developments of European civilization. [14]

Though Iraqi artists find themselves surrounded by objects from the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations and by architectural remains of the medieval Islamic period, the forms potentially to be culled from those objects are ill-suited to rendering "the new subjects" of modern life. There is a rebuke here to the program of revival outlined by the Baghdad Group, and to its method of producing difference in the modern artwork. The fact that life in Iraq was being transformed by processes – and this is the historical materialism – that are bigger than Iraq and that are centered in Europe, necessitate the adoption of the styles that correspond with those processes.

What were those new subjects that demanded new forms? Sabri didn't say, but throughout his work recurs an elongated figure, with sinuous limbs, often appearing without context, or as if having just stepped forward out of an oblivion to confront the viewer with the fact of its existence (fig. 2.2-2.3). This figure is what people in Baghdad called the *shargawiyya* (sing. *shurugi*). Literally meaning "one from the east," *shurugi* referred to the deracinated peasants that inundated the city during the nineteen-fifties, building their huts of mud and reed – known in

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[13] Ibid, 68.
[14] Ibid, 68.

Arabic as *sarifa* – on the city's perimeter (fig. 2.4). The *shurugi* was not just a peasant or a migrant, but rather the outcome of a series of economic, legal and political processes, over the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, by which the relation between sheikhs and their tribesmen in southern Iraq had been transformed into a relation of landlord to peasant. These processes have been a major theme in the historiography of Iraq, and for the residents of Baghdad they were condensed in the apparitional and feared figure of the *shurugi*.[15]

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a number of nomadic tribes that had roamed the Syrian desert settled in southern Iraq, where they took up agriculture. Land was owned collectively and farming was oriented to meet the needs of the tribe. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire instituted a set of reforms designed to re-exert control over its provinces and increase its tax base. Among these reforms was the introduction of a new type of land tenure, in which land holdings would be registered in the name of an owner in exchange for tax revenue. As deeds were issued for land that had previously been collectively owned, and those deeds were issued in the name of the sheikhs, a new concept of private property was introduced to the tribes.

At the same time as large tracts of land were being registered in the name of the sheikh, the introduction of steamship transport on the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, combined with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, was bringing southern Iraq into the world economy. Integration into the world economy resulted in a shift in agricultural practice from subsistence farming to supply internal consumption, to the production of commodities for export, notably grain. In these circumstances, the sheikh, now a property-owner, came to relate to his tribesmen as a source of labor, for an enterprise to whose profits he was the unique claimant.

But it was not only this new economic relation that resulted in the dissolution of the tribal relation; for, though the sheikh may legally own the land his tribesmen farmed, his authority still rested on their recognition. However, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, when the provinces of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul were consolidated into a new state under British mandate, the sheikhs acquired a peculiar kind of sovereign power over their domains, secured not through recognition but military force. Seeking to create a counterweight to the power of the king they appointed to rule Iraq, the British allotted the sheikhs seats in a parliament and granted them authority over the countryside. From this point forward, the rule of the sheikhs depended less on the recognition of their tribesmen and more on the might of the state. When tribesmen rebelled against their sheikhs, the sheikhs mobilized the military of the new Iraqi state against them.

The new sovereign power acquired by the sheikhs enabled the elaboration of particularly brutal forms of agricultural exploitation. Assessed an impossible production quota, and often forced to borrow against their share of a harvest, the tribesmen-turned-peasants fell into a cycle of indebtedness and poverty so abject it is astounding that human life persisted in these conditions.[16] These de-socialized human beings teetering on the brink of survival fled the countryside in mass, to escape the misery and violence of indentured servitude, with the result that large parts of southern Iraq, a land so fertile that it had earned the area its historical name –

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[15] See Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*; Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq: 1900-1963: Capital, Power, Ideology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997); Robert Fernea, *Shaykh And Effendi: Changing Patterns of Authority among the El Shabana of Southern Iraq* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
[16] Batatu cites an article by Dr. A. Critchley: "Obersvations on a Socio-Medical Survey in Iraq," *Journal of the Iraqi Medical Professions*, 4:2 (June 1956).

*Balad al-Sawad* [*The Black Earth*] – were left uncultivated. They amassed in Baghdad, where they built slums of mud-huts on its perimeter, often on waste dumps where they didn't have to pay rent. The *shargawiyya* almost doubled the population, "ma[king] the capital city top-heavy with people and problems."[17]

Artists produced work on this new ring of settlements. Jawad Salim's geometry, evenly spacing out the components of this life, gave the starving figure the grace of arcs (fig. 2.5). In Sabri's painting, they are faceless, silhouetted against the mud hut dwellings (fig. 2.6). They occupy a small part of the scene; against the black hovel they appear as iconographic forms – the man in tribal posture and the woman as mother in a nativity. It is as if they are rendered in terms of an iconography, outlined as recognizable motives of the tribal man and woman and her child, because there is something essential about them that can't be seen, or that has no form as yet.

The inhabitants of these huts became the city's laborers, who toiled and starved as the price of food rose. Since the Second World War, the price of food in Iraq had entered an inflationary spiral. It began with the stationing of British troops in the country, which exerted a huge demand on consumer goods, especially grain, and was fed by domestic agricultural shortages and the influx of cash from oil revenue at the beginning of the nineteen-fifties. Inflation was aggravated by the depression of wages, owing to massive migration from the countryside which was swelling the labor supply.[18]

The widespread experience of economic hardship, and for many the misery of it, compelled the urban working and lower-middle classes to participate in the forms of opposition organized by the political parties, despite the repression the opposition faced from the monarchy. But it was the *shargawiyya* who were the major protagonists of the demonstrations that constantly convulsed Baghdad. They were also, as Hanna Batatu has observed, the city's policemen, the ones who were deployed to put down those demonstrations. Simultaneously the face of the miserable and the face of oppression, the figure of the *shurugi* embodied social inequality and political repression.

As suggested by its name, it had an apparitional quality. It dwelled at the edge of visibility, in literal obscurity on the fringe of the city where there was no electricity. Coming in and out of view as it appeared in protests and then withdrew, the *shurugi* enacted the political drama of expression and repression, playing both parts, of the political subject and the police. In it, that which was continually denied was trying to force itself into view. Though continuously beaten back, it persisted in asserting itself. The *shurugi* would also become a focus of Kadhim Hayder's early work, though he would render it in a way very different from Mahmud Sabri.

Born in 1932, Hayder grew up, like Mahmud Sabri, in the al-Fadhil neighborhood of Baghdad. As a child he had a natural proclivity to draw, but his first introduction to the visual arts occurred in elementary school, when Mohammad Saleh Zaki – the father of Ziad Saleh who met Sabri in model drawing class in Loughborough and introduced him to the Pioneers – came to his class to give a guest lesson on drawing. Zaki had learned painting as an officer in the Ottoman military, at the War College in Istanbul. After the empire dissolved, he retired to Baghdad, where he taught drawing in schools. He asked the students in Hayder's class to draw a fish, and Hayder drew a fish in such a peculiar way that it prompted Zaki to ask after his reasoning in drawing the

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[17] Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 134.
[18] Ibid, 470-475.

fish.  Hayder explained that the fish was still alive.[19]  Not long before, his mother had died, and perhaps the difference between life and death was something Hayder was acutely aware of. Zaki encouraged him to pursue the visual arts, and later, when he was a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, and he dedicated the textbook he wrote for the Academy, *Lines and Colors* [*al-Takhtit wa al-Alwan*], to Zaki.

Hayder was also interested in writing, and he went on to study literature at Dar al-Mu'alamin (the Higher Institute for Teachers).  At the same time he enrolled in night classes at the Institute of Fine Arts.  While he was still a student, he joined the Pioneers, participating in their collective excursions to the countryside to paint.  In an early work from one of those trips, a watercolor of boats moored to the shore of the Tigris painted in 1952, one can see the peculiar private character of the Pioneers' painting, concerned as it is only with what it sees (fig. 2.6). This concern is evident in the way in which the depiction of the scene incorporates the angle of vision from which it is painted, and that angle of vision is built into the appearance of the objects; they are painted as they present themselves to Hayder standing on the bridge.  A bright and sandy sunlight washes over the scene, buoying the colors on the surface of the paper, perhaps even lifting them off the objects Hayder sees and diluting them in heat and dust.  Any mass or dimensionality, even the shadows created by this light, are resolved into regions of color. The picture is unfocused and lethargic; rather than trying to show, it does no more than look. That privacy of artistic practice that would be shattered by the economic and political turmoil of the nineteen-fifties.

By the time Hayder graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts five years later, in 1957, his painting had come to focus on the figure of the *shurugi*.  In his rendering, the *shargawiyya are* modeled with bulging muscles that make their bodies awkward, even inhuman.  They are faceless, without any qualities other than their laboring bodies robbed in *dishdashahs* (fig. 2.8). This modeling functions semantically to mythologize the *shurugi*; for in Hayder's painting, the *shurugi* is not just a laborer but also a political subject.  Shortly after the massive protests that erupted in support of the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956, and that were brutally put down by the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Said, Hayder painted *He Told Us Everything As It Happened* (fig. 2.9), in which the canvas is divided into panels that lock around a muscular figure seated at the center.  Sitting in tribal posture, his body is folded into a square.  The herculean musculature, sculpted as if from stone, in hard, clear lines, is heroizing, and yet, despite the monumentality of his body, he is confined. His feet are pressed against the wall of the black square he occupies; the pressure of this wall on his body indicates that it is not a framing device but a form of constraint.  He gazes into the distance, his eyebrows furrowed in contemplation, his eyes focused on a memory that visualized in the frieze of stick figures running to the left.  Drawn in thin, black lines and circles, the figures dramatize scenes of state violence, scenes that are at once obscure and vivid:  a man is beaten, a plane drops bombs, another man pulls the injured to safety, a boy waves in duress, a woman cradles her child, tanks advance; we see a woman is dragged into a room, or perhaps raped, another woman held captive, a policeman kneels down to fire on what looks like a group of veiled women, lined up on the shore of a river. The minimalism of these figures, their reduction of life to the faint marks of broken bodies and desperate gestures, is itself the representation of a second violence, one that forces the memory of the event to take this esoteric form.  The frieze recalls the narrative depiction of war in Assyrian stone reliefs, but here the narrative depiction of violence is employed as a supplement

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[19] Kadhem Hayder. '*Kadhem Hayder: Akhafa al-Majhoul wa al-Uslub hua Ana*' (Kadhem Hayder: The Unknown is Terrifying, and I Am the Style).  *Alif Ba* (1984).

to the restrained figure who, though speechless, dominates the painting. He tells us, and he doesn't tell us.

The *shurugi* is imagined here as a figure of interdicted speech. The protests of the nineteen-fifties, and their repression, transformed him into an emblem of not only toil but also an experience of state violence and the struggle against it. It was in this context, of the government's repression of civil liberties, that the critical capacity of the narrative of the Battle of Karbala first suggested itself to Hayder. In a painting entitled *The Struggle of the Hero* [*Masra' al-Batl*] (fig. 2.9) the mythologized laborer is projected onto a scene where the Umayyad soldier al-Shimr has just slayed the Imam Husayn. Standing over the decapitated body of Husayn, al-Shimr holds out Husayn's severed head by the hair, as blood runs down the face and drips down into space. A ray from the sun reaches out to touch the severed head, as the laborer, looks on from the right. He is constrained by the black casing in which he appears on the scene, a passive witness, immobilized despite his strength and the sword in his hands, before an injustice against which he is powerless.

This composition of *The Struggle of the Hero* was inspired by popular illustrations of the Battle of Karbala sold in the shrine cities of the south (fig. 2.10). Hayder was not unique in employing the narrative of the Battle of Karbala as a political language in the context of the suppression of civil liberties. Poets such as Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab were also using the Battle of Karbala as a political allegory in their poetry.[20] But it was only under certain conditions, and very recently, that the narrative of the Battle of Karbala had become available as a political language.

Since the early nineteen-thirties, the poetry in the *ta'ziyah* had become increasingly political, and the size of the mourning ceremonies had grown dramatically. The Iraqi anthropologist Ibrahim al-Haidari, who has traced the growth of the ta'ziyah in the first half of the twentieth-century, attributes the increase in participation to the influx of *shargawiyya* from the countryside. The mourning rituals of the ta'ziyah, he claims, offered these deracinated peasants a set of forms for expressing the suffering they experienced both in the countryside and in their migration to the city.[21] He suggests that the sheer magnitude of the misery they poured into those forms infused the ta'ziyah with a new intensity, leading not only to the multiplication of processions but also the development of more aggressive forms of flagellation involving metal chains and swords.

Al-Haidari argues that as the mourning rituals of the ta'ziyah received this new, modern species of misery, they underwent a kind of secularization, losing their eschatological horizon and becoming a form of popular culture. Historically, the martyrdom of Husayn had been mourned as the loss of justice in the world and in anticipation of the day when the Mehdi would come to restore the justice that had been lost.[22] As the *shargawiyya* participated in the mourning rituals, the remembrance of Husayn's martyrdom functioned less as an expectation of a justice to come than as an allegory for contemporary experience. And as the mourning rituals were transformed into a form of allegory, the poetic narration of the Battle of Karbala became an occasion for political critique. This critique was of a particular kind; articulated in poetry and addressed to the Imam Husayn, it was oblique to the state, and it invoked an authority and a principle of justice that was not that of the state. In fact in 1935 the government of Prime

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[20] Ibrahim al-Haidari, *Taraajidiyya al-Karbala': Susiyulujiya al-Khiṭab al-Shi'i* (London: Dar al-Saqi, 1999), 380-390.
[21] Ibid, 218
[22] Ibid, 218.

Minister Yasin al-Hashimi attempted to ban the ta'ziyah processions, and to exert state control over the *khutba* and poetry readings which had become a site of criticism. Throughout the nineteen-fifties it was a site of protest against the monarchy, and a number of its poets were arrested.

The "social, economic and political transformations" invoked by Sabri in his essay came to a head on July 14, 1958, when a group of military officers, acting on the basis of a secret network of cells that had been built over a period of years, overthrew the Hashemite monarchy. The motivations of the officers involved were mixed, but nevertheless they acted upon a broader terrain of public opposition that had been laid by the various forms of deliberation and expression that developed since the Second World War, and that had been strengthened by the monarchy's suppression of civil liberties. The ban on political parties, the revocation of newspaper licenses, the regular imprisonment of students, politicians and intellectuals, and the government's use of force against its own citizens had made civil liberties one of the major causes of the revolution. After the revolution however, the consensus forged in opposition to the monarchy gave way, and the politics of pan-Arabism, amplified by the context of superpower rivalry, polarized the population to the point of armed conflict.

Pan-Arabism encompasses an entire family of meanings, but the origins of that family of meaning can be traced to Syria under French colonial rule. There the idea developed that the major political issue facing the Arabic-speaking populations of the Middle East was their fragmentation into a number of different states, and that the key to their cultural and political revival lay in unification into a single political entity. This idea was popular among a large number of Iraqis, and its appeal was intensified in light of the mutual defense agreement, called the Baghdad Pact, which the monarchy had signed with Turkey, Iran and Pakistan – effectively severing Iraq from its Arab neighbors. However to a large number of other Iraqis the project of pan-Arabism was threatening, not only because one third of the country was Kurdish and another third was Shi'a, and though Arab, had been made wary of the state by their experience under Ottoman rule; pan-Arabism was threatening because it was hostile to the leftist agenda of the Iraqi Communist Party. With the unification of Egypt and Syria into the United Arab Republic in 1958, the issue took on concrete urgency, forcing a decision to be made over Iraq's prospective merger.

At the same time, in the euphoric aftermath of the revolution, the Iraqi Communist Party which had been perhaps the principal organ of opposition to the monarchy, even as it was banned, grew so popular that it provoked the CIA to intervene and support the Ba'ath Party in its contest against the ICP. As Hanna Batatu noted in his history of the Iraqi Communist Party, "Allan Dulles, the director of the CIA, described the situation as 'the most dangerous in the world today.'"[23] It has since come to light that, to the regret of CIA agents, horrified by the brutality of the Ba'ath Party, the United States actively contributed to the persecution of leftists and the subsequent collapse of the public sphere in Iraq.[24]

In the aftermath of those events, when Hayder returned to the remembrance of Husayn, it was not to the narrative of the battle that he returned, but to the imagery in the performances that had developed in supplement to the poetry – imagery that was mute but emotionally charged.

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[23] Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 899.

[24] See Karen Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal*. Through student organizations operating as a front, the CIA obtained lists of names and addresses which it passed on to the Ba'ath Party.

Unlike the narrative of the battle which laid out two clearly defined discursive positions of good and bad, the imagery of horses and figure did not constitute a discursive position.

## From Representation to Rhetoric

Having given some sense of the representational nature of art practice in the context of the nineteen-fifties, I want to move to an interview Hayder gave many years later, published in the magazine *Alif Ba*, in which he was asked precisely about the ways in which *The Epic of the Martyr* broke with that practice. The subject of *The Epic of the Martyr* had come up when the interviewer, a former student of Hayder's, zealously pointed to the work as a paradigm for the art of the nineteen-sixties. The interview took place against the backdrop of the Iraq-Iran war, and there was only so much one could say publically, or even privately, and so Hayder's response was evasive. Still, his responses point to something essential about his method in *The Epic of the Martyr*, that the figures and the horses had the status of "non-artistic material" [*al-madda al-ghayr al-fanni*] which he then subjected to a particular set of devices in painting.

> *Alif Ba: The question of generations comes up again and again among literary scholars. What generation do you see yourself as belonging to?*
>
> Kadhim Hayder: I belong to the era in which I am living. I am against the idea of generations separated into periods of ten years – the fifties or the sixties. I began in the fifties and still work in the eighties. I do not belong to a single generation. I belong to all generations.
>
> AB: *Personally I see you as belonging to the generation of the sixties. Let me be clear: in that period there was a rebellion against the traditions of the Pioneers* [referring not the group but to the first generation of modern artists]. *Then in* The Epic of the Martyr *you presented a 'vision'* [ru'iyya] *that represents the rebellious and innovative* [mutajadida] *spirit of the sixties.*
>
> KH: Sure, but I consider the most recent period (the eighties) more important than all the previous periods.
>
> [He is silent. Then he thinks about it and says]
>
> In the fifties I began to do a number of things that are more important than the sixties. For the first time, I used non-artistic material in the artwork, such as a tree trunk or needle and thread. I tried to exit the traditional canvas, in the sense of getting out into the external environment of the artwork [*al-khuruj 'an al-lawha al-taqlidiyya min nahiyyat al-muhit al-khariji lil-'amal al-fanni*].
>
> AB: *What else?*
>
> KH: I wrote on the canvas and introduced different material with the motivation towards abstraction [*al-tajreed*].
>
> AB: *What were you wanting to do with this "abstraction" or this tendency?*
>
> KH: It was the love of getting out of the context of the traditional artwork.
>
> AB: *But* The Epic of the Martyr *is done with techniques developed from classical work.*

KH:  [It was] a development of likeness [*lil-hayaa*] (form [*al-furm*]).  The figures and the horses were subjected to the idea of design [*fikrat al-tasmim*].  And more than this they were subjected to the principle of repetition originating in the ancient arts of Iraq, Sumerian in particular. [25]

Hayder located the break that his interviewer was looking for not in the nineteen-sixties but in the nineteen-fifties, and it involved "exiting the traditional canvas, into the external environment of the artwork."  He referred to a painting he had made in 1955 entitled *The Porter* [*al-Hamal*], in which, in his depiction of the load borne by the workers who transported goods around the city on their backs, he had affixed the truck of a tree to the canvas.[26]  When the interviewer countered that, on the contrary, *The Epic of the Martyr* seemed to be a traditional artwork – meaning oil on canvas – Hayder indicated that, no, the figures and the horses also had the status of "non-artistic material" whose visual appearance [*al-hayaa*] could be modified.  Like the trunk in *The Porter*, the imagery was in some sense external to the artwork; the paintings were not just oil on canvas but the appropriation of the ritual imagery and its subjection to a number of aesthetic operations, whether the kind of linear modeling characteristic of design [*tasmim*] or the device of repetition inspired by the art of ancient Mesopotamia.  If, as Hayder indicates in this interview, the imagery has the status of "non-artistic material," then what kind of material it is?  And what does that non-artistic material do in the artwork?

Before pursuing this question, by looking at the ritual function of the imagery in the context of the *ta'ziyah*, I want to return to the paintings themselves, in light of Hayder's comments here concerning his method.  The shift that *The Epic of the Martyr* instantiated in art practice in the aftermath of 1963, and that I am characterizing here in terms of a shift from representation to rhetoric, occurred on the level of what I think of the structure of the artwork.  When Hayder explained in the interview that what he had done in *The Epic of the Martyr* was to apply the idea of design [*fikrat al-tasmim*] and the device of repetition to the figures and the horses, he was describing an entirely different construction of the image.  Here I would like to address that construction by asking what Hayder meant by "the idea of design" and how the device of repetition functioned in the paintings.

Let me begin with repetition.  We can see this for instance, in *Fatigued, Ten Horses Converse with Nothing* (0.3), where the motif of the white horse is multiplied, and those multiplications are superimposed upon each other.[27]  In order to understand what repetition is doing in the paintings, I first want to look at the function of repetition as a compositional device in the art of ancient Mesopotamia, and to do that, I turn to arguments made recently by the art historian Zainab Bahrani about the concept of representation subtending that art.  Bahrani argues that representation in Assyrian and Babylonian art was not mimetic but performative; it did not portray the world so much as it intervened into it.  Focusing on representations of war, she shows that these representations of war sought not depict violence but to organize the violence

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[25] Kadhem Hayder. '*Kadhem Hayder: Akhafa al-Majhoul wa al-Uslub hua Ana*' (Kadhem Hayder: The Unknown is Terrifying, and I Am the Style), *Alif Ba* (1984).

[26] Neither that work, nor an image of it, has surfaced amidst the dozens of paintings from the period that have surfaced in the past few years, as work acquired by private collectors has been sold off.

[27] It had not been unusual for artists during the nineteen-fifties to employ compositional devices drawn from the art of ancient Mesopotamia in their painting.  For example, other artists such as Jawad Salim and Tariq Madhlum had adopted the technique of rendering horizontal relationships vertically (fig. 2.12).

unleashed by war, by justifying it.[28]  This performative function of the image in organizing violence issued from a particular understanding of the universe, as an enormous constellation of signs in which the will of the gods can be read, and a particular understanding of violence, as something occurring in a domain outside that of the law, a domain which was that of the gods. What this meant for representation was that images did not stand apart from the world, as its reflection, but rather were semiotic entities like every other object out there.  Thus the bodies repeated in Assyrian and Babylonian representations of war were not depictions of casualities of war but themselves signs that functioned to discursively organize, and thereby justify, the violence of war.  It seems that, recuperated in *Fatigued, Ten Horses Converse with* Nothing, that principle of repetition has a similar semiotic function; it doesn't just create a nice picture, but works to loosen the motif of the horse from its ritual context, making it available as a formula for articulating the pathos of 1963.

When Hayder spoke of the "idea of design" [*fikrat al-tasmim*], he was referring to principles that he had learned while in art school in London.  Between 1959 and 1962, Hayder studied lithography and theater design at the Central School of Arts and Design.  In those years, London was a center for experimental printing-making.  The visual effects of the techniques of print-making that he learned suggested to him different ways of modeling figures, using color and applying paint on canvas.  One technique Hayder learned, invented a few years earlier by Stanley Hayter, was viscosity printing, which is characterized by its thick bands and layering of colors.  In viscosity printing, acid is used to etch deep and wide grooves in the metal plate.  Ink is then rolled over the plate, falling into the groves.  When the plate is pressed on paper, the grooves leave thick bands. The ink is produced by adding six colors to oil in various quantities. The oil separates the colors by density, with the heavier colors rising to the top.  As the ink is rolled onto the plate, it creates a distinctive layering of color.

One viscosity print Hayder produced in London is *Animal Anatomy of the Human* [*al-Tashrih al-hayawani lil-insan*] (fig. 2.13).  Here a quadruped moves awkwardly across a moonlit terrain.  The bulky body of the creature recalls the body of the *shurugi* in his paintings in the nineteen-fifties.  The body has been etched using line-engraving, but the area surrounding the creature however has been done using the viscosity method.  It is composed of broad bands in which different grades of blue and red have been layered, creating the effect of a nocturnal atmosphere.

In *Animal Anatomy*, we can also discern the influence of stage design; we can see that the theatrical construction of space has been applied to the two-dimensional image.  The picture plane is focused on the body of the creature, which is pivoted laterally, as if shown to us.  It is at once placed in a narrative context and isolated from that context.  Here, it seems that the rectangular dimensions of the stage, already an abstraction of natural space, has been transmuted into landscape, and this landscape takes on the theatrical function of "staging" a character. Furthermore, the gaze of the creature is fixed straight ahead, off-screen as it were.  There is something essential about the picture that cannot be discerned from what is visible in it.  The placement of a figure in this space generates a hermeneutic gap in the picture.  We don't know what we are looking at.

The linear modeling, schematic landscape and nocturnal color palette of *The Epic of the Martyr* are clearly anticipated in *Animal Anatomy*, as well in other prints from his time in London, such as *Siffeen Mountain at Night* (fig. 2.15).  I would like to argue that this aesthetic profile was produced as an effect of the procedures Hayder learned in art school which he then

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[28] Zainab Bahrani, *Rituals of War:  the Body and Violence in Mesopotamia*. (New York:  Zone Books, 2008).

adapted to painting. The deep grooves created by the techniques of viscosity print-making are translated into oil painting as broad brushstrokes that neither are subordinated to a representation nor are self-referential applications of paint; they sit on the canvas, building space or context for the figures in non-illustrative and non-indexical ways. That space of context is further produced by a kind of layering of colors derived from the chromatic depth created by viscosity printing. As for the imagery of horses and figures themselves, their linear modeling in *The Epic of the Martyr* seems to have been suggested by the hard lines etched on copper plates, as in the modeling the creature, in which the contours of the body are given in outline leaving its mass flat and undefined. The placement of the horses and figures on a landscape rendered metonymically by a star-disk in the sky or metaphorically by a structure of thin, white lines seems to reproduce in painting the spatial conventions of stage design. The cumulative effect of this translation of the aesthetic effects into painting was to produce a particular form of abstraction, one that did not target the figurative nature of the imagery so much as it targeted their structure of reference. It is a form of abstraction on the level of the intelligible rather than the visual. This abstraction had two functions, it both loosened the imagery from their ritual context but it also suspended that imagery in the artwork, preventing it from reattaching itself to another context. Thus, this practice of art, which Hayder described in the interview with *Alif Ba*, as "developing the visuality of the figures and horses" and "subjecting them to the idea of design…and the principle of repetition" was oriented not towards giving form to something out in the world but in producing a non-referential image.

In order to consider the status of the ritual imagery in the *ta'ziyah* in the paintings, and what it does in the artwork, I turn to an ethnography of the *ta'ziyah* celebrations written by the Iraqi anthropologist Ibrahim al-Haidari. In the mid-nineteen-sixties, around the same time that Kadhim Hayder was working on *The Epic of the Martyr*, al-Haidari conducted fieldwork on the celebrations in Kadhimayn, a suburb of Baghdad where two Shi'i Imams, Musa al-Kadhim and Mohammad al-Taqi, are buried. The celebrations comprise a sequence of performances: nightly sermons and poetry readings [*majalis*], sessions of self-flagellation [*latmiyya*], processions [*murakeeb*], and theatrical re-enactments [*tashabih*]. At the core of these performances is a tradition of vernacular poetry chanted by a *radoud*. Al-Haidari argues that the poetry functions to bring participants to a state of ecstasy, and that the ritual acts of self-flagellation, the processions of costumed figures and the dramatizations of the battle all serve to heighten the arousal staged by the poetry.

Poetic recitation lies at the very origin of the remembrance of the Imam Husayn. Over time this poetry came to be supplemented by bodily practices and, more recently, by imagery. The earliest instance of mourning recorded in the *hadith* dates to the ninth century, and it took the form of a lamentation [*ni'aha*] in which Husayn and the other family members of the Prophet killed in the battle were elegized in poetry. This poetry gradually developed into a genre of biography, called *maqtil al-Husayn*, that was read and recited in private, behind closed doors. In the tenth century, after centralized rule of the caliphate collapsed, and the Shi'i dynasty of the Buwayids came to power in Baghdad, the lamentations were permitted to take place in public. The practice arose whereby people would march through the street wailing. Over time this march of wailers became ritualized into processions accompanied by chants called *latmiyya*, which became the dominant feature of the mourning of Husayn.

Under Seljuk and most of Ottoman rule, however, the processions were banned, and people reverted to the form of private poetry readings, where individuals would gather secretly in

their homes to hear poetry lamenting the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn.  In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman governor of Baghdad, Ali Rida, relaxed the ban on the mourning of Husayn and allowed public poetry readings, which he attended himself. The *latmiyya* processions first introduced during the reign of the Buwayids were revived, and gradually the public recitations of poetry narrating the Battle of Karbala came to be supplemented by interpretative gestures.  These gestures – such as the brandishing of a sword – would occur in moments of silence, between poetic utterances, in scenes that came to be called *da'ira*, in reference to the circle of people who would gather around – and distinct from the more visual term for scene in a theatrical sense, *mashhad*. By the end of the nineteenth century, these gestures had evolved into a kind of theatrical performance called, *al-tashabih* or *al-shabih*.  In the intense atmosphere created by the poetry in the ta'ziyah performances, these imagery that evolved out of these gestures appeared as if the irruption of the real.[29]

Thus, the imagery of horses and figures that appeared in the processions and performances of the ta'ziyah in the nineteen-sixties had developed in excess of both the narration of the battle and the bodily practice of self-flagellation; they did not illustrate the narrative recounted by the poetry, but functioned, like the beating of the chest, to arouse in the participants a certain affect.  This is how that arousal worked:  In his recitation of the poetry, the voice of the *radoud* materializes before the participants scenes from the battle.  The poetry would often be addressed to the protagonists of the battle, such as to Husayn himself or to his sister Zainab.  As the participants repeat the verses, they are drawn into a relation with protagonist, and with the original event.  The imagery of horses and costumed characters functioned as a support in that operation of presencing performed by the poetry, staging an affect that materializes into a kind of living-image of the original martyrdom of Husayn.[30]

What the imagery did as non-artistic material in *The Epic of the Martyr* was to recreate in the artwork that living image of truth staged by the performances.  This effect is evident in a review of the exhibition by the artist Ibrahim al-Zayir.  Writing in the newspaper, *al-Thawra al-Arabiyya*, al-Zayir observed that the paintings:

> stir in the spirit [*al-nafs*] that powerful rhythm which recurs each year, when the remembrance of the martyrdom of Husayn comes around, as it does these days. While I was at the exhibition, I heard the beat of the drums, and I saw in the background the men, boys and children in the mourning processions … In the paintings I see the horsemen, the heroes and the enemy, I see the summer sun, I see the headless martyrs, the sad, tired horses which have lost their courageous riders.  I see the battle in all of its violence in which everything perishes.[31]

In al-Zayir's description, the paintings don't show anything.  Looking at the painting, he *hears* the sounds of the mourning rituals, and what he *sees* is neither the depicted figures nor the rituals but that original scene of loss that the rituals attempt to recover.  In restaging that scene of loss in

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[29] Indeed, in his ethnography, Al-Haidari documents instances where those who played the part of Abbas or Husayn's sons (at that time, in Iraq, Husayn himself is not represented) or al-Shimr, the Umayyad solider who slayed Husayn, are never entirely separated from their role, inasmuch as it is considered virtuous to be put in the place of Husayn, and the disrepute of playing Husayn's killer spills over into ordinary life (though with an ultimately redemptive result).

[30] The idea that of a living image generated by ritualistic performances I take from Niklaus Largier, *In Praise of the Whip:  a Cultural History of Arousal* (New York:  Zone Books, 2007).

[31] Ibrahim al-Zayr, "*Ma'ridh Kamil 'an Masaa' al-Husayn*", *al-Thawra al-Arabiyya* (9 May 1965).

the paintings, the imagery reproduced in the artwork the image of truth performed by the rituals. Al-Zayir went on:

> In the paintings of this epic, I take assurance and conviction in the truth [*al-haqiqa*] which they express, and that is the lesson of the martyr Husayn and his tragedy, which affirms that truth is eternal, and that it will be victorious…

The truth al-Zayir invokes here, that reassures him and shores up his convictions, is not the truth of the rituals but the truth of the paintings.  This is an unprecedented experience of the artwork in Iraq.  For, "truth" names a relation between memory and politics forged within a theological tradition, a relation between memory and politics in which practices of remembrance open up a horizon of justice.  The truth al-Zayir invokes is a figure of justice.  What has happened here, with *The Epic of the Martyr*, is that horizon of justice has been transposed from the theological tradition to the artwork.

But that is only one side of the experience of truth; Al-Zayir finds the truth that he seeks. He says that he "takes assurance and conviction in the truth [the paintings] express."  What of this desire for assurance and conviction?

Ibrahim al-Zayir was born in 1944, in the town of 'Amarah in southern Iraq, and grew up in the mud-hut slums ringing Baghdad, where his father worked a police officer.  He was one of the hundreds of thousands of *shargawiyya* who were pouring into the capital city from the south during the nineteen-forties and nineteen-fifties.  So many of the *shargawiyya* came from 'Amarah – thirty percent – that the historian Hanna Batatu wrote of the "'Amarization of Baghdad."  And so many of those, with a fearlessness borne of desperation, staffed the monarchy's police, deployed to suppress demonstrations, that he wrote also of the "Amarization of its police force".[32]  But al-Zayir's father was a religious man, and it seems likely that al-Zayir grew up attending the ta'ziyah celebrations.  However, while in art school, refusing to accept the life that was handed to him, al-Zayir joined the Iraqi Communist Party.

On February 8, 1963 a group of officers in the Iraqi military, in co-ordination with civilian members of the party, rebelled against the regime of Abdel Karim Qassim.  They deployed tanks to different parts of Baghdad and air bombed the Ministry of Defense where Qasim had his office.  Thousands of people came out into the streets in opposition to the coup, blocking the advance of the tanks and congregating in the square in front of the Ministry of Defense.  Since coming to power in the revolution that overthrew the Hashemite monarchy in July 1958, Qasim had undertaken a number of reforms that tangibly improved the lives of the lower classes, and it was those who had benefited from the new housing projects he initiated, the labor laws he had passed, and the schools he opened – the urban poor and working class – that came out into the square protesting in his defense.  Unarmed, they were felled by the hundreds, without witness.[33]

Over the next two days, even after Qasim had surrendered, the Iraqi Communist Party mounted, from the poorest neighborhoods of Baghdad, an armed resistance to the rebellion.

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[32] Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 134-135.

[33] My account of these events is drawn from Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq:  A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists and Free Officers* (Princeton:  Princeton University Press, 1978), 966-994.  See also Hamid Bayati, *Asrar inqilab 8 Shubat 1963 fi al-'Iraq fi al-watha'iq al-sirriyah al-Baritaniyah* (London:  Mu'assasat al-Rafid, 1996); and Fadhil Azzawi, *al-Ruh al-hayyah: Jil al-sitinat fi al-'Iraq* (Damascus: Dar al-Mada, 1997).

Once that resistance had been crushed, the militia of the Ba'ath Party – the National Guard [*Haras al-Qawmi*] – carried out a sweeping house-hunt, most likely with logistical assistance from the C.I.A., to eliminate their political rival.  Some were shot on the spot, inordinate numbers of others were arrested.  Not only workers and students, but also professionals like doctors and lawyers were carried by train through the desert to the prison Nuqrat al-Salman.  Many died in the heat.  In his history of the Iraqi Communist Party, the historian Hanna Batatu writes that "the number of those seized so taxed the existing prisons that sport clubs, movie theaters, private houses, an-Nihayah Palace and, in the first days, even a section of Kifah Street, were turned into places of confinement."[34]  Over the following ten months, until the Ba'ath Party was removed by the intervention of the military, the National Guard continued to raid homes and arbitrarily detain people at one of its regional centers, where detainees were often beaten, and sometimes tortured.

During these events, al-Zayir was arrested and held at Qasr an-Nihaya, where he was tortured.  It was perhaps a little over a year after he was released that he saw *The Epic of the Martyr* and reviewed it in the newspaper *al-Thawra al-Arabiyya*.  In his description of the work, as not a painting of life but an expression of truth, al-Zayir was articulating a new paradigm for art practice in the peculiar speech conditions that followed the Ba'ath coup.  That period of violence, between February and November 1963, transformed the conditions of speech, as Iraqis now avoided the forms of public expression that had brought into existence a robust public sphere in the years following the Second World War.  Al-Zayir's review enables us to understand that in the aftermath of the events of 1963, *The Epic of the Martyr* demonstrated a different kind of speech. What kind of speech that was can be divined from two essays written by the artist Dia Azzawi decades later.

Azzawi had first met Hayder in 1964 at Riwaq al-Wasiti, a gallery that had been recently opened by the architects Mohammad Makiya and Said Ali Mathloum on Sa'dun Street in central Baghdad.  After graduating from the Institute of Fine Arts, Azzawi got a job at the gallery, where Hayder showed the prints, etchings, drawings and watercolors he did while studying in London.  The crackdown on the University of Baghdad, thought to be a hotbed of communist activity, had been especially harsh, and Azzawi was one of the many students and professors who were arrested.

In a profile of Hayder's practice, published in the early nineteen-nineties, Azzawi wrote that in the difficult years that followed the coup, *The Epic of the Martyr* had used the concept of martyrdom as a "symbol" that "cried out in tragedy":

> The exhibition of *The Epic of the Martyr* left a prominent mark in the history of the modern art movement in Iraq; it was held in political and cultural circumstances that were complicated, and it made the concept of martyrdom, stripped of any religious meaning, a contemporary symbol crying out tragedy [*ja'lan min istishhad ramzan mu'asiran dhaja li-masaa*].[35]

Azzawi did not mean symbol in the sense of a hermeneutic act that generates a specifiable meaning.  Rather, here, the symbol functions as a rhetorical device that articulates a cry – a passion that, though in excess of semantic speech, nevertheless is organized by a grammar,

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[34] See Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 985.
[35] Dia Azzawi, "Kadhim Haidar: sirat al-fanan, sirat al-lawhat," *Nsus* 1, no. 1 (1994), p. 69.

which Azzawi names "tragedy" [*masaa*].  What this symbol enabled was a type of speech that could speak without taking a position or expressing a political view.

Just out of art school, and having been detained for two months in the aftermath of the Ba'ath coup, Azzawi had been deeply influenced by *The Epic of the Martyr*, and during the nineteen-sixties worked with the concept of martyrdom in his own practice, as I describe in Part Three.  In describing *The Epic of the Martyr* as "crying out in tragedy," he was applying the vocabulary of his own practice to the source of its inspiration.  He saw the concept of martyrdom not in the ritual context of the remembrance of the Imam Husayn but as a formula of tragedy belonging to the popular culture of Iraq.

Thus, in this essay Azzawi emphasized that the concept of martyrdom [*istishhad*], as Hayder had used it, was not properly religious.  It was not the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn itself, as an event in the history of Islam, that functioned as the symbol, but the narrative or memory of that martyrdom, constituted in the body of forms that developed over and against the historical event. Thus Azzawi pointed to the fact that, in using imagery from the processions, Hayder sought to recreate in painting the effect of the *ta'ziyah* performances, to "preserve a clearly celebratory, theatrical air consistent with the staging of the epic scene which takes place each year in a number of Iraqi cities."  The *ta'ziyah* celebrations were in excess of the religious significance of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn, and it was precisely this excess of the 'popular' over the 'religious' that, for Azzawi, enabled the concept of martyrdom to function allegorically:

> For this reason, [*The Epic of the Martyr*] was an interpretation [*muw'allan*], and not an exposition [*la sharihan*] of the epic [staged in the processions]. From here comes its symbolic dimension, as something socio-cultural and not religious, especially as Kadhim relied upon a modern poetic text he wrote, whereby each line would be the title of one of the paintings, as if he were telling his own version of the *Maqtil al-Husayn*, differing in its meter and flow from the popular text, and yet still carrying in its fold the "blood-soaked" secrets of this epic event.[36]

If it was possible for Hayder to compose a poem in free verse, different entirely in meter from the poetry employed in the ta'ziyah, and for that poem to still bear "the blood-soaked secrets of this epic event," it was because the memory of that event lied not in an aesthetic form but in a narrative concept.

Azzawi wrote that while Hayder was in London he developed an interest in "the human and its surroundings" [*al-insan wa muhitihu*], which he explored using the form of a cube (fig. 2.14).  As a "symbolic representation of forms of siege and captivity [*al-hisar wa al-sijin*]," this use of the cube, Azzawi claimed, was borrowed from Francis Bacon, with the difference that:

> for Kadhim, the human, as he conceived it, had fewer movements, his features less distorted. The canvas draws its value from a notion of the human as a fixed being, confronted by the contradictory worlds that surround him; they are constituted between the impassive fixity of the human, on the one hand, and the cruelty of the oppressive boundaries of the cube, on the other.  Out of this antagonism emerges a rich composition that radiates the energy of rejection and protest.[37]

This constitutive tension between the immobility of the human figure and the world constraining it is already present in *He Told Us Everything As It Happened* (1957) and *The Struggle of the*

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[36] Azzawi, "Kadhim Hayder," 69.
[37] Ibid, 68.

*Hero* (1958).  What seems to have happened while he was in London was that Hayder abstracted some concept of the human from the experience of the *shargawiyya* – in *Three Cubes and a Man* he we see the same figure of the *shurugi* from his paintings the year before – and his enlistment of the cube was part of that abstraction.  We can see traces of the cube in *The Epic of the Martyr*, in the thin, white lines that cross the scenes.  The human has disappeared, and here these traces of the cube function neither construct space nor do they mark a set of constraints.  They are fundamentally illegible; one cannot know what they are or what they do.  For Azzawi the antagonism between the human and the cube generated an "energy of rejection and protest." Perhaps the presence of the white lines in *The Epic of the Martyr* marks the occultation of that energy into the forms of the artwork.

In another essay Azzawi wrote that *The Epic of the Martyr* established a new paradigm for the artwork.[38]  Seeking to identify the conditions that brought about an artistic efflorescence in the nineteen-sixties, he described the juncture of a new institutional landscape with the influx of new ideas about art practice.  The construction of the National Museum of Modern Art and a center for the Society of Iraqi Artists with a gallery, both financed by the Gulbenkian Foundation,[39] the opening of private galleries like Riwaq al-Wasiti, and the existence of an array of foreign cultural centers that showed work – all made it possible for artists to have solo shows for the first time.[40]  At the same time Baghdad was being infused with new ideas.  In 1962 the Institute of Fine Arts was integrated into the University of Baghdad, and its faculty now included a printmaker from Poland[41] and a ceramicist from Cyprus.[42]  A second cohort of students was returning from studying art abroad – from Rome, London, Paris, Poland, China and the Soviet Union.[43]  Amidst the explosion of exhibitions that resulted, with these artists returning from such a range of different places and showing in different venues, "the two most important exhibitions, in terms of the reactions they elicited," wrote Azzawi, "were *The Epic of the Martyr* and the exhibition of painting and sculpture by Ismail Fattah."

The significance of *The Epic of the Martyr* lied in its demonstration of what art practice could do in the "complicated political conditions" following the Ba'ath coup:

> In the spiritual climate and complicated political conditions that followed the bloody coup of 1963, there was a need for subjects of this sort, subjects that went beyond the common subjects of Bedouins, cafes, suqs and the other subjects taken up by artists of the nineteen-fifties. [Kadhim Hayder] tried to introduce something else into the artwork, forms taken from popular tradition and transferred to the structure of the canvas, *forms charged with popular emotion* [*ashkal…shahin bi-ha al-wijdan al-sha'bi*].[44]

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[38] Dia Azzawi, "*al-Sitinaat: Izdihar al-w'ai al-Tashkili*," *Faradis* 5, no. 4 (1992).

[39] The Gulbenkian Foundation was endowed with the fortune of Calouste Gulbenkian, a Portuguese Armenian financier who held a major stake in the Iraq Petroleum Company, and who because he made so much money from Iraq, wanted to give back.  The international projects of the foundation were restricted when Salazar came to power in the nineteen-seventies.

[40] Other galleries include Ourzdi Bek and Aya Gallery.  Among the foreign cultural centers were Society of the Friends of the Middle East, the British Institute, the Soviet Institute, the French Cultural Center, and the Czech

[41] Roman Artimovsky,

[42] Valentinos Charamblous

[43] Mohammad Ghani Hikmat, Mohammad Ali Shaker, Ghazi al-Saudi, Miran al-Sa'di, Ismail Fattah and Rakan Dabdub from Rome; Kadhim Hayder and Sa'ad Shaker from London; Shaker Hassan Al Said, Mohammad al-Husni, Jamil Hamudi, and Saleh al-Qarghuli from Paris; Mohammad Mehr al-Din from Poland; Rafa al-Nasiri from China; and Mahud Ahmad, Mohammad Aref and Shams al-Din Faris from the Soviet Union.

[44] Dia Azzawi, "*al-Sitinaat: Izdihar al-w'ai al-Tashkili*," 91, emphasis added.

In *The Epic of the Martyr*, Hayder was not painting life, as artists had sought to do in the nineteen-fifties; the imagery of horses and figures from the ta'ziyah were not representations but themselves "forms charged with popular emotion."

These "forms charged with popular emotion," and their capacity to "cry out in tragedy" in painting, bears a startling resemblance to what the art historian Aby Warburg called *Pathosformeln* – literally, formulae of pathos. With the concept of *Pathosformel*, Warburg had sought to name a gestural language that had been employed by the ancient Greeks for expressing emotion and that was revived in Renaissance art. He sought to emphasize in particular the fact that these gestures were not just aesthetic forms but possessed an "emotive force". Discussing an engraving made by an unknown artist in Mantua (fig. 2.14), which he argued had inspired Albrecht Dürer's famous engraving of the mythological scene of the death of Orpheus, Warburg wrote of Orpheus' gestures:

> For the death of Orpheus was more than a studio motif of purely formal interest: it stood for the dark mystery play of Dionysian legend, passionately and knowingly experienced in the spirit and through the words of the ancients…The *Death of Orpheus* engraving drew added emphasis from that tragic dance-play, the earliest work of the famous Florentine humanist: for it set Orpheus's sufferings, acted out and vigorously expressed in melodious, native Italian, before the very same Mantuan Renaissance society to which the unnamed engraver showed his image of Orpheus's death. Mantua and Florence here coincide, bringing true, antique formulas of intensified physical or psychic expression [*Pathosformeln*] into the Renaissance style of depicting life in motion.[45]

The gestures in the engraving, he claimed, were not realistic depictions of life but a formula for expressing an emotional state. These formulae were born in theatrical performance, and in the engraving they cited the performances that sought to re-stage in "melodious, native Italian" a form of tragedy recovered from "the words of the ancients." Thus was the nascent naturalism of Renaissance art, recuperated from the rediscovery of classical painting, crosscut by the use of rhetorical forms intended not to create a realistic representation of life but to express an emotional state.

Like the gestural language Warburg described as *Pathosformeln*, the imagery of horses in the paintings of *The Epic of the Martyr* were expressive forms transferred from performance to panel and deployed in an image, where they were recognizable to viewers familiar with the performances which occurred in the streets of Baghdad (fig. 2.15). Pointing to this similarity is productive because it grounds a crucial difference. As is evident from his reference to "Dionysian legend," Warburg's thinking about the relation between art and pathos was influenced by Nietzsche's conception of tragedy. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche claimed that Greek tragedy was an original art form that expressed, and consoled man for, the essential nothingness of life. It was an art form produced by two "art-impulses" that he names Dionsyian and Apollonian, the one expressing in music the imponderable abyss of life and the other stabilizing the cry of that music into images of characters and narrative.[46] The tragic form was at

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[45] Aby Warburg, "Dürer and Italian Antiquity," *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity* (Getty Research Institute, 1999), 555.

[46] To a large extent, Nietzsche's conceptualization of tragedy was part of an attempt to re-claim the ancient art form, as revived in nineteenth-century Germany by the composer Richard Wagner. It is worth noting that Walter Benjamin, in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, would trouble the identification Nietzsche had sought to make, by identifying the differences between ancient tragedy and the *Trauerspiel*, which was born out the secularization of the medieval morality play and which later evolved – or devolved – into opera.

once a gaze into the abysses of human existence and a turning away from that abyss. The pathos that is condensed in Warburg's *Pathosformeln* is the pathos of that imponderable abyss.

Now the pathos condensed by the imagery of the *ta'ziyah* – or to use Azzawi's language, the emotion that it bears – is profoundly different. It was bound up with a particular concept of memory that goes back to the early history of Islam. When the practice of mourning the martyrdom of Imam Husayn first developed in the eighth century, it had been part of a broader opposition to the absolutism of Umayyad rule.[47] That opposition resulted, on the one hand, in the formulation of a legal tradition called the *shari'a*, as a body of guidelines intended to ensure that government abided by the principles of justice introduced by the prophecy of Mohammad, and on the other hand in the eventual overthrow of the Umayyads by the Abbasids in 750 CE.[48] The remembrance of Husayn, beginning with assemblies at his grave in Karbala and continuing in forms of lamentation after his grave was destroyed, constituted a different sort of political response to oppression, one that operated neither through the law nor through revolution, but rather through a particular work of memory in which the act of remembrance transformed an historical instance of injustice into an image of truth. To mourn Husayn was to deny the ruling government the authority it claimed for itself, and to recall the injustice of his death was to invoke the justice of a higher order.

This work of memory occurred through a specific set of aesthetic forms, initially in poetry recited behind closed doors, and then beginning in the tenth century in processions of wailers who would beat their chests. In the late nineteenth century the poetic lamentation was supplemented by a use of imagery – of horses, swords and figures – that did not so much as illustrate the poetry as to condense into a gesture the pathos which the poetry had restaged. That pathos – aroused by the rituals and condensed in the imagery – was a living image of justice; and a justice that was neither the justice of the law nor that of revolution.

## The Politics of Memory

My argument has been that the transposition of the imagery of the ta'ziyah into the artwork had a rhetorical function, enabling a kind of speech that did not involve the expression of an opinion and thus taking a position, but that rather opened up a horizon of justice. In order to give a sense of the speech conditions into which *The Epic of the Martyr* was intervening, and to highlight the efficacy of that rhetorical act performed by the imagery of the ta'ziyah in the paintings, here I wish to juxtapose to the paintings a document produced by the Iraqi government in the aftermath of 1963.

In November, ten months after the coup, the military, led by Abdel Salaam Aref intervened to put an end to the activities of the Ba'ath Party's militia, National Guard and to remove members of the Ba'ath Party from power. The ostensible reason for this second coup was the National Guard's refusal to subordinate itself to the military. The National Guard had

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[47] The remembrance of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn began almost immediately after his death in the seventh century, and from the beginning it had a political significance. The people of Kufa had pledged their loyalty to Husayn and promised to stand by him in a confrontation with Yezid, but at the last minute, they backed out. Out of regret that they had betrayed Husayn, and in resistance to Umayyad rule, which was demanding increasingly more tax revenue, the Kufans gathered at he grave of Husayn in Karbala. Eventually the Umayyads, and after them the Abbasids, sought to prevent people from visiting the grave, until finally the Abbasid caliph Mutawakil destroyed the grave and forbade visitation to the site.

[48] Marshal Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 241-279.

operated independently, and this independence deepened a rift between the civilian members of the party, from whom the National Guard took its orders, and its members in the military. Following the removal of the Ba'ath Party from power, the Aref regime published a pamphlet detailing the abuses committed by the National Guard entitled *The Deviants* [*al-Munharifun: min al-Hiras al-Qawmi fi al-Mad al-Sha'ubi: tahta ashi'at 18 Tishrin a-Thani 1963*]. For us, years later, the pamphlet has the status of a document that offers a picture of the political landscape in 1963, a landscape in which the authority of the law is opposed to revolution invoked by the Ba'ath Party, and in which testimony and documentation were part of the struggle between political groups rather than a procedure of justice.

The pamphlet assembled various kinds of materials: internal memos submitted by government agencies reporting acts committed by members of the National Guard; formal complaints filed by citizens; the medical reports written by doctors on detainees National Guardsmen brought to hospitals and clinics who were severely injured or had died under torture; lists of those who were missing; testimonies of torture and rape; photographs of the centers where detainees were tortured and raped, of the implements used during interrogation and of the sites in the desert where those who died under torture were buried. The pamphlet published lists of names of perpetrators. It printed the alleged confessions of repentant members of the National Guard and the testimony of those who had been held and tortured. The random searches, the arrests, and the torture were all described, in detail, with pictures and names.

The purpose in compiling these materials, however, was not to document the actions of the National Guard, at least not in the forensic sense of gathering evidence of an injury that could be adjudicated by the law. Rather, the documents assembled in the pamphlet were presented as a form of exemplarity, or *'abar*, offered and intended to be read not in the mode of witnessing but as a kind of moral lesson about the enemies of the political community. The actions of the National Guard were attributed to elements that had infiltrated the organization – elements it named, using the peculiar vocabulary of right-wing Arab nationalism, as *al-shu'ubiyya*. The term *shu'ubiyya* is an old term, initially referring to a literary movement in the ninth and tenth centuries that sought to recover the pre-Islamic textual traditions of non-Arab Muslims in Iran. It was re-signified in the twentieth century by the Ba'ath to refer to the political opponents of Arabism, and in particular to communists. As it became part of the conceptual machinery of Arabism, the nomination functioned to draw a line, to exclude a political position by casting the person who holds it outside the political community. Its use here, to name the abuses committed by members of the National Guard, indicates the prevailing political imagination following the coup. The materials compiled in the pamphlet was introduced thus:

> For groups of *al-shu'ubiyya* and other agents took advantage of the presence of the National Guard. They joined it, distorting the message it bore on the 14 Ramadan 1383 [February 14, 1963], in order to undertake arbitrary criminal acts [*'amal ijramiyya t'asifiyya*], and disturbed the peace of the country, upsetting the peace of the citizens at a time when your great army was undertaking its sacred duty in the north to liquidate local communist elements and reactionary separatism [i.e. the Kurds].
>
> Accustomed to disrupting the peace, these provocateurs did not benefit from past experiences in crushing the Popular Resistance [the militia of the Iraqi Communist Party] but rather paid a group of mercenaries, drawn from *al-shu'ubiyyin*, agents, and deviants to infiltrate the forces of the National Guard in order to undertake acts that every citizen loyal to his religion and his honor would call cowardly and would shy away from hearing of.
>
> And so putting in your hands, oh honorable citizen, this pamphlet, in addition to what your hands have touched and what you have seen with your eyes, much more than what came in the vile, unethical

acts, we present it for the sake of memory, history and exemplarity [*'abar*] for those deceived by them; perhaps the memory will be beneficial to the believers.[49]

By describing the "deviant elements" who "infiltrated" the National Guard as *al-shu'ubiyyiin*, the pamphlet was identifying these elements with the Iraqi Communist Party. It appears absurd to identify the perpetrators with the very victims of the acts committed by the National Guard. But what is evident in this identification is the absence of a vocabulary with which to articulate political difference. Any and all difference is externalized from the political community and falls under the sign of *al-shu'ubiyya*.

The pamphlet traced the deviance of the elements that infiltrated the National Guard back to what it called Abdel Karim Qasim's "deviation" [*inharafa*] of the revolution in 1958. By "deviation" it meant Qasim's departure from the revolution's "lofty Arab principles" by supporting "local Communists and traitor separatists [i.e. the Kurds]" in an uprising in Mosul in 1959 led by Colonel Abdel Wahab Shawaf, and later in a standoff in Kirkuk that same year. The coup in February 1963 – known as "the revolution of 14 Ramadan" – was then "the restoration to Iraq of its pure Arab face." It was as part of that revolution that private individuals had formed organizations like the National Guard. However, the pamphlet emphasized that those organizations were to be subordinated to the Ministry of Defense. Thus, it reprinted the law enacted on February 8, 1963 creating the National Guard: "The purpose of forming the National Guard is to re-empower the Arab nationalist youth by training them in the use of arms in order to cooperate with the armed forces in defending the Arab nation and to maintain the internal security in accordance with instructions issued by the Ministry of Defense." The problem was that the National Guard refused to comply with the instructions of the Ministry of Defense.

As the months went by the Ministry of Defense received a mounting number of complaints about the actions of National Guardsmen, not only from victims and their families but also from National Guardsmen themselves, reporting thefts during searches of cafes and homes, attempted rape, and extortion (accusing someone of being a Communist and then clearing them after the transfer of a specified sum of money).[50] These abuses had been traced to the Office of Special Investigations based in the Qasr al-Nihayah and run by 'Ammar 'Aloush. This office was part of the larger Committee of Special Investigations established by the National Guard with the purpose of attaining some operational autonomy in order to fight "communist elements". When the Ministry of Defense moved to intervene in the office's operations, it was blocked by the leadership of the National Guard. In a cable dated June 4, 1963, reproduced in the pamphlet, the commander of the National Guard, Munthar al-Wandawi rebuffed the authority of the military and claimed for the National Guard the authority of the revolution.

> the National Guard is a popular force, possessing an independent leadership, and no one has the right to issue such orders [as those threatening the dissolution of the National Guard should it not rein in its activities] except he who is the representative of the people [*lahu sifat tamthal al-sha'b*] and in these revolutionary circumstances the right to issue such orders belongs solely to the national assembly of the leadership of the revolution…The mistakes and violations made by some National Guardsmen are individual mistakes, the likes of which occur in every army, police and other apparatuses. The leadership

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[49] Government of Iraq, *Al-Munharifun* (Baghdad, 1964), 4.

[50] Other complaints denounced members of the National Guard as communist or "sexual deviants" [*munharifan jinsiyan*]; they would claim that the named individual, whose sexual deviance or an Iranian origin were widely known throughout the neighborhood, used his position in the National Guard to force people to submit to his desires.

of the National Guard is the highest authority responsible for the oversight and correction of such issues as raised in the two cables.  The leadership of the National Guard contests any claim that it is at fault for the actions of its members.  I demand the return to the law and the cancelation of the two wires above [which had demanded a cessation of the National Guard's activities].[51]

The pamphlet cited this cable as evidence of the "deviance" of the National Guard leadership.  Turning to address the reader, it commented on the National Guard's refusal to recognize the law of the state:

> Is such a thing possible, oh citizens?  Did you hear what al-Wandawi said?  He demands that the wires be returned to the law.  What law does al-Wandawi mean?  Is it the law of the state that states that all citizens are equal before the law?  Or does he mean the law of the "Ba'ath Party" (the law of the National Guard) which al-Wandawi understands to be permitting party members the right to kill – and lynching, and destruction and the violation of sanctities, the violation of the honor of women, looting, robbery, insults, what does this reckless *shu'ubi* mean???[52]

On the one hand, the Ba'ath Party authorized its actions in terms of its status as "representatives of the people in revolutionary conditions."  On the other, the response of the Aref regime to these actions was to denounce the "arbitrary acts" [*'amal ta'safiyya*] of the National Guard in terms of the "violation of the law" [*mukhalafat al-qanun*].

It was in this context that the rhetorical act of *The Epic of the Martyr* acquired its significance.  That rhetorical act consisted of a turn away from both revolution and the law, and the opening up of the horizon of a different kind of justice.  In conditions where dissent had ceased to be possible, it offered the model of memory, making available in the artwork a form of critique which had developed over centuries of mourning the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn.

Transposing into painting the imagery of horses and figures from the *ta'ziyah* performances had the effect of recreating in the artwork the pathos those performances aroused.  In this tradition of mourning, that pathos was an image of justice.  But when that pathos was displaced from the ritual context of the remembrance of Husayn to painting, it became an image of justice neither in the register of the divine nor in that of the state but in the register of the artwork.  Thus, over the following years, when neither recourse to juridical process nor revolutionary change were possible, it would become a place where the memory of an oppression could open a horizon of justice.

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[51] Al-Munharifun, 72-73
[52] Government of Iraq, *Al-Munharifun*, 73.

Part Three
# Critique
Dia Azzawi

In March 1975 Dia Azzawi showed a series of paintings and drawings at the National Museum of Modern Art in Baghdad. Across the series, a human figure is rendered in an attempt at speech that is increasingly suppressed (fig. 0.8-0.10, 3.1-3.8). Set in a kind of anti-world, this figure strains against the bonds that suppress his speech, until, under the force of this suppression, he loses his human form and is reduced to silent fragments. As the figure loses its integrity, different forms of annotation appear as if to document or diagram this operation of suppression and fragmentation. Arrows hang suspended in space. Metrics run along the top of the paintings. Cartographic practices employed in the planning of military operations are applied to the human form, partitioning the surface of its face into quadrants labeled with letters. Writing appears that is intermittently legible, enough to indicate that it is the kind of writing found in letters sent home from the front: "If the public only knew, that death is something terrible…Darkness would be better."[1] Azzawi initially gave the series the title, *I am the cry, what throat will give voice to me?* [*Ana al-sarkha, aya hanjarat ta'jifuni?*], a line from a poem by Fadhil Azzawi. But for reasons that have since been forgotten, when the works were exhibited at the National Museum of Modern Art, they were labeled *halaat insaniyya*, which acquired the English translation, *Human States*.[2]

Many of those works were exhibited again, in September of that year, along with several prints Azzawi had made over the summer (fig. 3.9-3.11), in a joint show with Saleh al-Jumaie at L'Atelier Gallery in Rabat. On the occasion of that show, Azzawi gave a long interview with the Moroccan newspaper *Al-'Ilm*, where he outlined the parameters of a form of critique that lied at the center of his practice, and that is the subject of this third part of the dissertation. By 1975, his practice had already come to be defined by work on what he referred to as tragedy [*masaa*] in the Arab world, and in the interview with *Al-Ilm*, he was asked to what extent the tragic [*masawiyya*] character of his work had a religious or historical motivation [*du'afa'*]. In his response, Azzawi explained that religious traditions and history offer models for giving form to contemporary experiences of tragedy [*masaa*]:

> The tragic feeling [in my work] often uses motivations [*du'afa'*] of religious or historical origin, whether in actual events or in the model of the human [*al-namuthaj al-insani*] offered in religion or history. This use, however, is responsive to contemporary states [*halaat mu'asira*], where tragedy [*masaa*] is growing in different ways and on different levels; whatever is historical [in his work] is historical in the sense not of events but in the sense of time and its extensibility [*al-imtidad al-zamani*]. Within this understanding of the historical, I see that impetus [*du'afa*] as not determined by its origin.[3]

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[1] Azzawi himself rendered the title of the work in English as *Human States*, in the sense of states of human existence, and in French as *Conditions Humaines*. To some extent this bilingualism had a long history, owing to the fact that the practice of art from the beginning was understood in international or global terms; but it also has something to do with the fact that since the sixties the context for showing art, or at least the imaginary of showing art, exceeded that of the nation.

[2] Since the nineteen-seventies, the signification of *halaat insaniyya* has shifted; it now signifies "humanitarian cases" but then, just before the global spread of humanitarianism colonized the concept of the human [*insan*], *halaat insaniyya* meant something very different.

[3] Idris Al-Khouri, "Al-Mulhaq fi hadith ma' al-risam Dia al-Azzawi: al-naql al-harfi min turath ou min al-tajarab al-haditha: istilab; al-naql al-tashkili khadi' l-mafahim zhouqiyya shakhsiyya," *Al-'Alm*. September 8-19, 1975.

Although Azzawi did not specify what this tragedy was that was "growing in different ways and on different levels," he had in mind the events of the Ba'th coup in 1963, the collapse of the Palestinian liberation movement, and the recent war in the north of Iraq, where for a year the Iraqi government had launched a war against its Kurdish citizens in the north of the country. He identified each with the other as episodes in a contemporary history of political violence in the Arab world.

In his reply to *al-'Alm*, Azzawi went on to give a concrete example of how he drew upon an historical concept in order to give form to this contemporary experience of tragedy, and that concept was the concept of martyrdom, conceived of as a state [*halat istishhad*].

> What I am trying to do is to calmly remove the human [*al-insan*] from the dungeons of oppression [*al-qama'*] and murder [*al-qatl*] to a place where it is possible for its body to be spread wide on the face of the earth, in order for it to be broken and thereby released from the legacy which makes it an oppressed creature. Is this a document of protest? Perhaps, but here you can clearly see the historical impetus [*al-dafa' al-tarikhi*]. Here, the state of martyrdom [*halaat istishhad*] or the state of resistance [*halaat muqawama*] comes to not be governed by the limits of a particular model; it is only a consciousness to record the truth, in the sense of its ability to take on [*imtathal*] and pair ideas of historical origin [*du'afa*] on the one hand and contemporary states [*halaat mu'asira*] on the other.

Though the concept of martyrdom was derived from an historical source – Azzawi did not specify which – it was abstracted in his practice to mean, in the circumstances of the present, "a consciousness to record the truth". Understood in these terms, *halaat istishhad* suggested a different way of thinking about the human [*al-insan*] as both a form and a concept. It was a "state" [*halat*] in which the human figure was not a representation of the human being but instead a surface upon which a history of violence could be inscribed. Thus the *halaat insaniyya* depicted in the paintings and prints were *halaat istishhad*; in them, human form was transfigured into a face for something non-human.

However, this act of transfiguration was not simply an act of representation or inscription. The point, Azzawi said, was to "remove the human from the dungeons of oppression and murder" so that it might be "released from the legacy that makes it an oppressed creature." If the concept of martyrdom, understood as a consciousness to record the truth, possessed a semiotic power, it also possessed a rhetorical power. By transforming itself into a reflection of an unjust violence, the human could in some sense escape that violence.

Even though Azzawi did not use the word to describe it, when looking back at the practice of modern art in relation to the history of political violence in the Middle East, this use of the human form appears as a kind of critique, inasmuch as it makes a claim to justice. And seen as a kind of critique, it raises a question, about the relation between the practice of art and the trajectory of politics across the nineteen-sixties and seventies in Baghdad. How was it that the artwork could offer a place "outside the dungeons of oppression and murder" where the human could be moved and his "legacy as an oppressed creature" broken?

In Part Three, I trace the formation of this critique in Azzawi's practice, and then examine the rhetorical work that it performs following the siege and destruction of the Palestinian refugee camp, Tel al-Za'atar in 1976. In doing so, I develop the argument that with the successive collapse of different forms of political action, the artwork had come to be located at the limit of politics, where it functioned to open a space within which a different kind of

politics became possible, one beyond the forms of both liberalism and anticolonial liberation movements.

That politics issued from the concept of representation that here is named "martyrdom," and it consisted in the establishment of a relation to justice. Azzawi had been first introduced to the concept of martyrdom in the aftermath of the Ba'ath coup in 1963 by Kadhim Hayder's series of paintings, *The Epic of the Martyr*, which I discussed in Part Two. Those paintings had demonstrated the ways in which the story of the Battle of Karbala provided a way of talking about the events of 1963 without referring to them directly. When Azzawi began exploring the concept of martyrdom in his own practice, he approached it in the context of a broader interest in folklore, as cultural formula for tragedy, embodied in a set of symbols. Although those symbols were the expression of an experience of injustice, their presence in the artwork did not make any direct reference to the contemporary world. In the years following the Ba'ath coup, his work, like that of other artists, did not point outside itself; it lacked reference.

However, in 1968, his practice began to undergo a major shift, in two ways, largely precipitated by the poetry of Muzaffar al-Nawwab. One, inspired by the ways in which al-Nawwab's poetry constructed images in language, Azzawi began to work increasingly with text. Secondly, inspired by the ways in which al-Nawwab's poetry spoke truth to power, he began to produce work that engaged more directly to contemporary politics. The concept of martyrdom continued to lie at the center of his practice, but with these two shifts, it moved away from symbols towards narrative and acquired a human form.

This shift occurred in the broader context of the intellectual and political opening created by the abysmal defeat of the Arab states in a short war with Israel in June 1967. In that context, many leftists in Iraq who had been repelled from liberal forms of politics by the events of 1963, rediscovered politics in the form of anticolonial liberation struggle introduced by the Palestinian liberation movement. This struggle was located outside the framework of the state and was embodied in the subjectivity of the *fida'i* [pl. *fida'iyyun* or *fida'iyyin*].[4] Like many artists and intellectuals in Baghdad, Azzawi began to associate with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine [*Al-Jabha al-Sha'biyya li-Tahrir Filastin*]. However, while others traveled to the camps in Jordan and Lebanon, where they either trained in armed struggle or worked on newspapers and magazines, Azzawi, who was not able to leave Iraq, would engage with the Palestinian liberation movement through the texts it produced. He began to use these texts in his practice, interpreting the struggle they narrated in terms of the concept of martyrdom he had been working with throughout the nineteen-sixties.

The application of his earlier work on the concept of martyrdom, to texts on the Palestinian liberation struggle, led to the development of a particular method of figuration, one that generated a human form that functioned not as a representation of the human being but rather as a critical depiction of an unjust violence. Despite the conceptual functions performed by this human, it was composed of concrete forms that Azzawi had developed over a number of works, and on the basis of a variety of texts – a journal, short stories, oral testimony, poems – documenting the struggle of the Palestinian liberation movement. A little more than two years after it came to prominence in March 1968, offering to a broad population of the Arab countries an alternative form of politics, the movement began to collapse. In 1970-1971, the Jordanian military moved against the liberation organizations, pushing them out of their bases in the Jordan

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[4] *Fida'i* is often translated into English as guerilla or freedom fighter, though during the nineteen-seventies it was often left un-translated in the western press. I choose not to translate it in order to maintain its singularity, as a subject emergent from a particular history.

valley and sending them into ideological free-fall.  Horrified by the violence unleashed by the Jordanian state, and seeing it as a turning point, not only in how the Arab states related to the Palestinian liberation movement but also in how they related to their own citizens, Azzawi produced an art book, containing series of drawing on the basis of a journal kept by a *fida'i* during the siege of a refugee camp in Amman.  With those drawings, the *fida'i* entered the artwork, where in a body of subsequent drawings, paintings and prints, it acquired an afterlife as a figural device that, as Azzawi told the Moroccan newspaper *al-'Alm* in 1975, "recorded the truth" of "oppression and murder," and in that way "release[d] the human from its legacy as an oppressed creature."

I use the word afterlife to describe this process of transfiguration, by which the political subject of the Palestinian liberation movement becomes a figural device, because the human form here is not just a device but the sedimentation of a history of violence, and the sedimentation of that history in the *image*.  By speaking of an afterlife, I wish to point to a relation between anticolonial liberation struggle and art practice, in which the political forms of that struggle persist as a critical vocabulary in the artwork, even after that struggle has encountered its limit.

In the four sections that follow, I first set Azzawi's adoption of the concept of martyrdom in the context of his early practice and trace its development across the nineteen-sixties.  In particular, I examine a shift that takes place in his practice at the end of the nineteen-sixties, when inspired by the poetry of Muzaffar al-Nawwab he rethinks the relation of his art to politics.  In the second section, I examine a statement Azzawi issued in 1969, along with five other artists, in which he set down a new vocabulary for art practice and that located his practice in the new sphere of political activity that opened around the Palestinian liberation organizations.  I then go on to consider a sequence of work Azzawi produced on the collapse of the Palestinian liberation movement, in order to show how the figure of the *fida'i* gets transfigured into the critique of violence Azzawi described in the interview I began with.  Finally, I look at this critique of violence, as it is applied to the destruction of the Tel al-Za'atar refugee camp in 1976, and in order to evaluate its rhetorical capacity, I juxtapose it to the response of the PLO.

## The Historiography of Tragedy

Dia Azzawi was fifteen-years-old in 1956, when demonstrations in support of Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal erupted across Iraq.  The move on the part of the Egyptian President to nationalize the man-made waterway built at the expense of thousands of Egyptian lives in the nineteenth century had provoked an invasion by Britain, France and Israel.  Since he had come to power in 1952, with a group of officers who overthrew King Farouq, Nasser had a low profile outside of Egypt, but by standing up to the West he became overnight the unwitting hero of Arab nationalism, and in cities across Iraq people poured out into the streets to rally behind him.  Then a student at al-Markaziyya High School, Azzawi joined them.  It was his first foray into leftist politics.

Troubled by the example Nasser and the Free Officers had set in Egypt, the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq brutally repressed the demonstrations.  In the town of Najaf, the aggressive response of the government set off even more aggressive demonstrations that exceeded the control of the police and threatened to do precisely what the monarchy had sought to forestall.  In the midst of the government crackdown, Azzawi, like many students and teachers who had participated in the demonstrations, was expelled from school.  After things had quieted down,

King Faisal II made a tour of the schools, in an attempt to diffuse tension between the people and the government. Faisal was known to be a lover of the arts, and in fact he took private painting classes with Atta Sabri, one of the teachers at the Institute of Fine Arts.[5] In order to impress the King on the occasion of his visit to al-Markaziyya, Azzawi, who had been known for his prodigious artistic abilities, was re-admitted and his watercolors were shown to Faisal. Impressed by his work, Faisal invited Azzawi to the palace, where he promised him a scholarship to study abroad. But Azzawi would never go abroad to study to art. Shortly after that meeting, in 1958, a group of officers overthrew the monarchy, and the king was executed.

Giving up on the idea of studying art in Europe, and appeasing a father who disapproved of an artistic career, Azzawi enrolled at the College of Arts [*Kulliyyat al-Adab*], in what was at that time in the process of being restructured into the University of Baghdad, where he studied archaeology. There he attended a studio held by the artist Hafidh Droubi in the mornings at the College of Arts. Known as *al-marsam al-hurr* (the Free Studio), it was attended by writers, artists and playwrights. The next year he enrolled in night classes at the Institute of Fine Arts, though he continued to attend Droubi's studio in the mornings at the university, and sometimes another studio Droubi held in the afternoons.[6]

Instruction at the Institute of Fine Arts was organized into two studios, one taught by Faiq Hassan and the other by Atta Sabri. Azzawi placed into the studio taught by Faiq Hassan. The education was academic, beginning with drawing first plaster of Paris replica of famous sculptures, such as the *Disk-Thrower*, and then progressing to painting live models. A couple days a week Azzawi was taught art history by Kadhim Hayder and anatomy by Dr. Nuri Bahjat. As students worked, Faiq Hassan would circulate offering his comments in response to their work. But Hassan never stopped at Azzawi's easel. Whether that was because Azzawi's work was already so advanced, or because Azzawi had been a member of Droubi's art group, a rival of Hassan's own, he never knew.

After graduating from the Institute of Fine Arts in 1964, Azzawi set out to establish himself as an artist, by distinguishing his own practice within the field of practice that had been established over the previous fifteen years. Although he had attended Droubi's studio, and even assisted Droubi in his large paintings, Azzawi found himself drawn to the model of art practice set by Jawad Salim, in which modern art was situated in relation to Iraq's historical traditions. During the nineteen-fifties, artists in Baghdad had worked to develop a body of art that would distinguish a "Baghdad School" of painting. Some, like Mahmud Sabri, sought to do so by painting motifs symptomatic of the social and economic transformations of modern life. Others sought to do so by mining the different histories and traditions they found themselves inheriting for formal devices. By the time Azzawi had finished art school, the project of renewal founded by the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, to re-establish a Baghdad School of painting, had expired; Salim was dead, and the Ba'ath coup the year before had radically transformed the conditions of art practice.

But the method upon which that revival had been based, of introducing difference into modern art by drawing on forms from the world the artist inhabited, appealed to Azzawi. Whether it was because he had studied archaeology, or because the history of art taught at the Institute of Fine Arts was limited to a truncated version of European art, presented in black and white reproductions, without any mention of the ancient civilizations of Iraq he was studying in

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[5] Rafa' Al-Nasiri, *Rihlati illa al-Sin* (Beirut: al-Mu'assah al-'Arabiyah lil-Dirasat wa-al-Nashr, 2012), 47.
[6] Daytime enrollment was restricted to students who entered the Institute straight from middle school. Those who attended high school or university were enrolled in night classes.

his classes at the University of Baghdad, Azzawi had a clear sense that lying beyond the self-identified history of art was a broad field of forms that he could draw on in his practice. As a student, he had experimented with modeling the human body after Sumerian figurines, with their stout, tubular torso and blocked heads, with large eyes and singular eye-brow (fig. 3.12). Though he ended up moving away from the archaeological objects he had studied in the Iraq Museum, under the criticism that they were too archaic, too estranged from the present, that knowledge opened Azzawi up to a wide array of material from popular culture: decorative motifs, amulets, talismanic sayings, southern Iraq's landscape of shrines, legends about the Imam Husayn, stories from *The Arabian Nights*.

Such things as the triangular motifs found in rugs or the crescents that top the domes of mosques had been appropriated by Jawad Salim and other artists in the nineteen-fifties as elements with which to formulate a style that could found a modern art in Iraq. But in the aftermath of the Ba'ath coup these motifs had a different significance. Whereas previously they had been sought for their aesthetic form, they now became indices of everyday life, which took on a valence, as it lied outside the domain of modern politics and was not oriented towards the state.

The first paintings he made out of art school consisted of compositions, what he called *takween*, in which a variety of archaeological and popular motifs were configured into structures braced by surrounding color. In *Ancient Symbols* [*Ramuz Qadima*] (fig. 3.13), for instance, eyes from Sumerian figurines, triangular patterns from traditional rugs made in the south called kilim, crescents that ornament the domes of shrines, and amulets such as the palm are isolated from the context in which they appear in popular life and are rearranged on canvas, where they are all equilibrated as symbols. They are turned side-ways and fitted next to each other to form blocks. Such compositions were inspired by the construction of kilim, which ordered decorative motifs against the background of a solid color. The radiant orange in *Ancient Symbols* functions to hold the motifs together.

Jawad Salim had used some of the same motifs in his painting; the crescent and the triangular patterns can be seen in the background of *Baghdadiyyat* (fig. 1.22) as shapes that break up the picture plane. But here Azzawi was using them in a new way, and in a different context. He used these and other motifs as conscious parts of popular culture, as citations of the cultural landscape where they predominate, in the southern part of the country. In his paintings, he taps them not only for their formal properties, as Salim had done, but for the efficacy they are thought to possess as *symbols*.

This importance of efficacy over form is evident in the fact that he equates talismanic sayings which lack a visual form with these symbols. Another painting, *The Jealous Will Not Prevail* [*Al-Hasud La Yasud*] (fig. 3.14) is organized around a talismanic saying sowed into a rug that appears suspended in white on the right. The saying, *al-hasud la yasud*, which is the painting's title, appears in a hadith attributed to the Prophet Mohammad about envy [*al-hasd*], but here what is cited is the saying's pragmatic dimension, as an utterance made by people, either to others in a moral lesson or warding off the effects of envy. Like other moral slogans such as *al-'adil asas al-mulk* (justice is the basis of rule) such talismanic sayings were elements in the landscape of everyday life.

This interest in what linguists would refer to as the symbols' pragmatic dimensions was a result of Azzawi's training in archaeology, in which artifacts were not isolated for their aesthetic features but situated in a social context. In these compositions, and in subsequent work Azzawi

did throughout the nineteen-sixties, it was as if he had turned the archaeological gaze onto popular culture in contemporary Iraq.

During the same year, 1964-1965, his first out of art school, Azzawi had a job at the gallery Riwaq al-Wasiti, where he hung Kadhim Hayder's first show following his return from London, as well as shows by Ismail Fattah and Ghazi al-Saudi. When *The Epic of the Martyr* – the series of paintings where ritual imagery from the remembrance of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn was transposed into the artwork – was exhibited at the National Museum of Modern Art in April 1965, Azzawi knew from his relationship with Hayder that Hayder was using the ritual imagery in order to speak about the events of 1963 without referring to them. The paintings deeply affected Azzawi, as he had been caught up in the dragnet cast by the National Guard in the aftermath of the Ba'th coup.

Though he was not a member of the Iraqi Communist Party, he was involved in the General Union of Iraqi Students [*Ittihad al-talaba al-'amm*], a student association at the University of Baghdad with pro-Soviet leanings, and he was a supporter of Abdel Karim Qasim, making banners for demonstrations the Union organized in his support. Qasim had been one of the leaders of the revolution in 1958, and afterwards became the leader of Iraq. Though he was popular among the poor and working classes, for the many social and economic reforms he oversaw, he was vilified by the Ba'ath, which attempted to assassinate him in 1959.

Because of his involvement with the Union, and his support for Qasim, Azzawi's name was on the lists, which, we now know, the CIA compiled and passed along to the Ba'ath Party.[7] When the police came to his house, they found materials that cast suspicion on him, such things as a letter from his brother, a Union member, who was studying in London. Azzawi was arrested, and spent ten days at a police station, in a room four meters by four meters, crammed with sixty people, before being sent to Baghdad Central Prison. During his interrogation, he could hear the screams of the party leadership being tortured, made to divulge names of party members. After two months, he was released, on April 28, 1963. The experience so radically effected him that he changed his birthday to the date of his release.

In the uncertain circumstances that followed the coup, *The Epic of the Martyr* set a new model for art practice. It inspired Azzawi to produce work that was rhetorical, in the sense that it spoke without reference, and in particular to consider the rhetorical productivity of the concept of martyrdom. The rhetorical turn inspired by *The Epic of the Martyr* took place both on the level of the structure of representation and on the level of the concept of martyrdom. Unhinging visuality from reference, it introduced a gap between what is visually present in the artwork, the colors and figurative shapes to be seen, and their absent referent. Forms pointed rather than depicted or metonymically reproduced aspects of their referent. Throughout the nineteen-sixties, Azzawi's work, like that of other artists, acquired an inscrutable character. The paintings did not give themselves up in their visuality. Secondly, *The Epic of the Martyr* drew Azzawi's attention to the rhetorical value of the concept of martyrdom, embodied in a range of cultural symbols that populated everyday life. As he worked with these symbols, he became aware of the ways in which they were embedded in a broader cultural landscape of southern Iraq. Listening to the *radoud* chant the story of Husayn's slaughter in public spaces during the celebrations of Ashura, one was, as Azzawi would describe years later, drawn closer to oneself and one's own experience. Gradually he would abstract from the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn a concept

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[7] Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal*, 287-288.

of what he would come to call tragedy, which in the context of southern Iraq, had the status of a particular form of action.

However, the next eighteen months, Azzawi's practice was put on hold by military service. In June 1965, shortly after *The Epic of the Martyr* was shown at the National Museum of Modern Art, the regime of Abdel Salaam Aref – a military officer who had collaborated with the Ba'ath Party in February 1963, but moved against the Party in November, leading their removal from power – launched a war against the Kurdish population in the north of Iraq. One condition of enrolling in the University of Baghdad was that Azzawi was required to do a year of military service. Due to the events of 1963, his service was postponed, but shortly after his first solo show at Riwaq al-Wasiti in 1965, he had enter six months of officer training. He was then stationed for a year in the village of Dinarta, near Erbil.

Upon returning to Baghdad, Azzawi began exploring for himself the symbolization of the fallen martyr through the figure of the horse. In *Min al-Asatir al-Sha'biyya* (Folklore Mythology), painted in 1966, a horse, outfitted with the equipment of its absent rider, moves alone across the sky, beneath the crescent moon and above a shrine below (3.15).[8] The construction of the painting is organized around the symbolic act performed by the horse. At the time, Azzawi had been exploring different compositional techniques, and in order to emphasize the symbolic character of the horse, he employed the pictorial conventions of manuscript illustration. These conventions, evident in the construction of space, through the separation of a chalky white sky and a deep brown earth, and the flatness of the scene, had a graphic effect. The horse appears in shadow, and it is rendered in motion, as if to indicate that despite its fallen rider, indicated by the battle standard that has fallen forward, the horse persists in the martyr's absence.

Over the next two or three years, Azzawi returned repeatedly to the symbol of the horse, exploring different constructions that collapsed its semiotic properties with the ornamental form of decorative motifs (fig. 3.16, 3.38, 3.39).

The motif of the horse, like the crescent and star, and the triangles, opened onto a broad cultural landscape that Azzawi identified with southern Iraq and its geography of shrines. After returning from the 1965 Kurdish war, Azzawi worked on archaeological preservation teams at Hatra and Ukhaydir in the south, which offered him the occasion to witness life in the shrine towns, where he would make regular trips to stock up on provisions. In the towns, he observed the ways in which people relate to the shrines, how, for instance, they pursue solutions to problems in their lives by appealing to the Imams buried there with pieces of green fabric that they would tie to the grill surrounding their tombs, or by seeking from a mullah or a sayyid a kind of talismanic prescription called *ta'widh*. He also observed how the shrines and their festivals serve a social function, by offering the only opportunity, in a community where the sexes are strictly segregated, for boys and girls to meet each other. Azzawi's archaeological interests and his fascination with these practices in Karbala materialized into paintings such as *Aqnat al-Jouf*, or *The Pretender's Mask*, as it came to be known in English (fig. 3.17), which integrates the mystery of a rather formless archaeological site called al-Jouf that he used to pass on his way to Karbala, and the women he would observe at the shrine, veiled and yet shot through with desire. Having grown up in the city, the flat expanse of the desert surrounding the shrines was striking to Azzawi, and inspired the composition in *Aqnat al-Jouf*; the formless panel is interrupted by the

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[8] Although designated an English title of "Folklore Mythology" a closer translation from the Arabic would be "From Popular Legends"

sudden opening of a fissure down the right-side of the painting, out of which vaguely decipherable symbols emerge, along with a mask and a hand-print. The eruption in the painting almost reproduces the ways in which the shrine towns appeared suddenly in the desert.

The shrines themselves were the subject of paintings. In *Najaf*, the shrine containing the tomb of Ali is represented by an arrangement of decorative motifs organized around a low-set horizon line (3.18). This composition had originated in drawings where different symbols were strung together, along with domes, minarets and arched facades, and built up into shrines that float on the page. A number of these drawings were published in *Al-Amilun fi al-Naft* (Oil Workers), a major cultural monthly published by the Iraq Petroleum Company (fig. 3.20). Presented under the title "The Knight and the Victim" [*Al-Faris wa al-Dhahiyya*], they were accompanied by a short, interpretative text written by the artist and critic Nuri al-Rawi.[9] In the drawings, the figurative and the decorative are collapsed into a form, which is neither figurative nor decorative, and produces a peculiar kind of image, in which something is gestured at but not named. In his text, Al-Rawi wrote that what is pointed to in the drawings is a symbol [*ramz*] of the victim [*dhahiyya*] which offers "the bloody image of the martyrdom of the human [*al-sura al-damiyya li-istishhad al-insan*], when there is no god who would carry out its heroic role in his place." This abstraction of the shrine presents the shrine as a metaphysical place. Even when he depicting the shrine as a site of practices, as in *Visit to Al-Qasim* (fig. 3.19), which portrays pilgrimages to the shrine of Imam al-Qasim – the son of Imam Musa al-Kadhim, one of the leaders of the Shi'a Muslim community but who was revered by both Shia and Sunni Muslims – outside Hillah, the shrine is not depicted as a physical place in the world but as a symbolic place.

In 1968 Azzawi's practice began to shift, and the critique implicit in the concept of martyrdom became more explicitly articulated as a formula for what Azzawi calls tragedy. This shift is evident in an interview, published on the occasion of a show at Gallery One in Beirut in 1969, in which Azzawi invoked the victim as the basis of a political critique:

> The transformation of the human [*al-insan*] into a victim means its transformation into its opposite, and the acceptance of the human to become a new Husayn is the issue of our time [*qabul al-insan an yakun Husaynan jadidan fi sabeel qima hiya masala hatha al-'asr*]. For the victim is no longer kneeling down, without chains beneath the sword of the executioner, but rather has become the tearing through of the fake [*tamazaq al-zayif*], even onto death.[10]

The interview had been conducted with the poet Muzaffar al-Nawwab, and it was published in the magazine *al-'Ulum*, a high-brow weekly edited by Buland al-Haidari and produced in Beirut for the most part by Iraqi writers. Al-Nawwab had commented on Azzawi's use of the symbol of the victim, and how he uses this symbol to create a sense of a tragedy in his paintings. He observed that the victim is not necessarily iconographic but sometimes lies in a use of color so intense that it produces the semiotic density of a symbol.

> MN: In your colors there is a victim even when there are no forms. As in some paintings there is real material presence of the victim, such as in *Abbas* or *An Eighth Husband of a Woman* or *Coffin*, whereas in other paintings the victim takes a decorative form or in 'Wedding Party' or an archaeological animal. This victim is often about to arrive. You feel that it will come. It is not in the past. Here your work with tradition appears as something possessing contemporary vitality. Perhaps this means that you expect a

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[9] Nuri al-Rawi. "Al-Faris wa al-Dhahiyya" *Al-Amilun fi al-Naft* No 69 (December, 1967), 10-14.

[10] Muzaffar al-Nawwab, "Fi Mu'aridh Dhiyya al-'Azzawi fi Galeri Wahid: muqabala bayna Dhiyya al-'Azzawi wa Muzaffar al-Nawwab," *al-Ulum* Vol 14, No 5, 1969, 64.

tragedy or have uncovered its advent.  Or perhaps it means that you are trying to kill tragedy with its
perpetual presence, by preparing the sadness in people to face it, so as to reject it.

Azzawi replied that the symbol of the victim belongs to an Iraqi tradition of tragedy, but that he
uses it in the present as a truth act, in order to "tear through the fake" [*tamazaq al-zayif*].

> DA:  The notion of the victim has not been something unfamiliar, either to Iraqi tradition or to
> contemporary Iraq.  It is easy to transform *Wedding Procession* into a procession of coffins, for words to
> become an elegy, for the decorative elements to be a tattoo on the arms of the victim.  The urgency of the
> issue of tragedy, which is a part of an ancient Iraqi tradition, in its social and its religious senses, throws
> itself in a direct way in my works, such that the canvas transforms into the witness of a grave or the flower
> placed at the feet of the martyr rejecting his own death.
>> The transformation of the human [*al-insan*] into a victim means its transformation into its
> opposite, and the acceptance of the human to become a new Husayn is the issue of our time [*qabul al-insan
> an yakun Husaynan jadidan fi sabeel qima hiya masala hatha al-'asr*].  For the victim is no longer kneeling
> down, without chains beneath the sword of the executioner, but rather has become the tearing through of
> the fake [*tamazaq al-zayif*], even onto death.

Here we find an early formulation of the critical practice Azzawi would describe to the
Moroccan newspaper *al-'Alm* in 1975.  He indicated that his use of tragedy in his paintings,
embodied in the cultural symbols of martyrdom, was a response to contemporary events.  And he
indicated that in this use of tragedy, the symbol of the victim [*dhahiyya*] was a symbol for the
deformation of the human [*al-insan*] into something it is not.  "The transformation of the human
into a victim means its transformation into its opposite."  However, this transformation of the
human was not a form of abjection; the victim may have been an anti-figure of the human but it
also was a subject-position, we might say, with critical power.  Thus, Azzawi insists that, at that
particular moment, everyone is forced to inhabit the subject-position of the victim – "The
acceptance of the human to become a new Husayn is the issue of our time" – because it enables a
different form of politics – "the victim…becomes the tearing through of the fake."  The concept
of martyrdom was now seen as performing this rhetorical work, of tearing through the fake.
    In the aftermath of the Six-Day War, this idea of fakeness, or *tazayif*, circulated as an
expression of the disillusionment with a certain politics of Arab nationalism, organized in
political parties and centered on the state.  What had been so disillusioning was not only the
defeat of the Arab states in the war but the fact that the Arab governments lied to their citizens.
The Egyptian government had broadcast on the radio that it had shot down a score of Israeli
planes, when in fact the entire Egyptian air force had been destroyed on the ground.  The fake
[*zayif*] that Azzawi was referring to in the interview was the emptiness of Arab politics, and in
describing his use of the symbol of the victim as a device with which to "tear through" [*tamazaq*]
this fakeness, he was articulating the beginning of an attempt to found a different kind of politics
in the artwork.

In the previous four years, Azzawi's practice had been turned away from the public realm, but
now it was beginning to open up.  On the one hand, this shift in his practice was part of a more
general opening up [*infitah*] in Iraq that followed the defeat of the Arab states in a short war with
Israel in June 1967.  The defeat had so discredited the regime and so aroused the population that
it became possible to publically demand the establishment of democratic institutions, the release

of political prisoners, and the reinstatement of those who had in the previous years had been dismissed from their jobs for political reasons.[11]

On the other hand, however, the opening up of Azzawi's practice was inspired by the singular example of the poet Muzaffar al-Nawwab. Azzawi knew of al-Nawwab from Droubi's studio at the College of Arts, which al-Nawwab had attended; and he had cropped up in 1965, when his painting was shown at the annual exhibition of the Impressionists Group at the Gallery of the Iraqi Artists Society, even though al-Nawwab himself was in prison. Al-Nawwab had been an active member of the Iraqi Communist Party. In the aftermath of 1963, he had fled to Iran but the SAVAK, the Iranian intelligence agency, returned him to Iraq, where he was put in prison. In 1968 al-Nawwab and a group of other Communist prisoners dug themselves out of Hala prison, and their escape galvanized leftists who had grown disillusioned with the Iraqi Communist Party. But it was al-Nawwab's poetry that precipitated a shift in Azzawi's, both in terms of a turn to engage contemporary events and in a turn to text.

While al-Nawwab had been in prison, his poetry circulated underground, even though he had yet to publish a collection of his poems. He would recite his poems orally among a group of friends or enclose them in letters. Much of the poetry that was circulating had been written before 1963, but some of the poems had to do with the experience of 1963 itself. Particularly well-known was a poem called "Hassan al-Shamus" (Hassan of the Suns) about the mother of a soldier killed fighting with the Communists against the Ba'athists. She comes from the south to Baghdad looking for her son and crying out against the Iraqi Communist Party's abandonment of its members. When al-Nawwab published his first collection of poems, *Lil-Rayl wa Hamad* (For the Rail and a Lemon), in 1968, he asked Azzawi to produce eight illustrations to accompany the poems (fig. 3.21).

The work of illustrating the poems introduced Azzawi to the idea of working with text, which would become a major feature of his practice. That year he produced a number of paintings inspired by al-Nawwab's poems (3.22, 3.23), but the paintings did not so much as illustrate the poems as elaborate the idea they tried to develop. For instance, one painting entitled, *Crying Wolf* [*tha'ib yuawi*] (fig. 3.23) was based of the poem "The Tribes of Saud" [*'Ashair Sa'ud*], which described a revolt of peasants against the sheikhs in 1962 that was crushed by the army. The suppression of this revolt had not been reported in the press, and the poem sought to address the dissonance between how things are and how they are reported. Made in the aftermath of 1967, Azzawi's painting focused on this theme, of the misrepresentation of the truth, which seemed to be a recurring motif of politics. In 1963, when the Ba'th misrepresented Qasim, and in 1967, when the Egyptian radio announced to the Arab world that it had won a defeat against the Israelis, when in fact entire Egyptian air force had been destroyed on the ground.

In the painting, Azzawi drew on figures from the poem, but used them not to illustrate the suppression of the revolt but to develop the idea that things are not as they seem. The painting is concentrated in the lower half of the canvas, where a figure is crouched on the bottom right and another figure lies horizontally across the painting. Though recumbent, its body is contorted, his arms reaching up, rigid and his bearded face rotated to the left. Surrounding his body are the sort of decorative motifs, recognizable from *Ancient Symbols*, which function as indices of southern Iraq, where the revolt took place. There is no landscape, only the black that holds the figures and the decorative motifs together.

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[11] Fadhil Azzawi, *al-Ruh al-hayyah: jil al-sitenaat fi al-'Iraq* (Dimashq: Dar al-Mada, 1997), 151-152.

At no point, when the painting was shown in Baghdad, Beirut and Kuwait, did Azzawi indicate that it had been based on a poem by Muzaffar al-Nawwab. The painting was left fundamentally unreadable; you could not know what it was you were seeing, and that was the point. Inscrutability had been an essential feature of Azzawi's practice, as well as in the practice of other artists, throughout the nineteen-sixties. Here, however, the inscrutability had a different logic; it did not issue from an absence of reference, but from a new logic of the fragment that had been borrowed from poetry. For Azzawi, al-Nawwab's poetry possessed a distinct visuality. He was struck by the capacity of poetry to create a fragmentary image, to position elements that invite but at the same time forestall interpretation, that leave the viewer hanging. This was the politics of poetry, in combating *tazayif*, and Azzawi sought to reproduce that experience of "suspicion" in painting.

As Azzawi began to take a new interest in text, and as he began to conceive of poetry in particular as a political act, he went back to the Sumerian and Babylonian legends of Gilgamesh, which he had first been introduced at the University of Baghdad, and had been working with over the years. Now, he considered them not simply as archaeological objects or literature but as poetic acts, performed in opposition to the gods.

The legends surrounding Gilgamesh revolve around how Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, is forced to confront the fact of human finitude. Two-parts divine and one-part human, handsome and virile, Gilgamesh had ruled tyrannically, claiming for himself first right on every beautiful woman in his kingdom. Responding to pleas from his people, the gods sought to tame Gilgamesh by sending him a companion, named Enkidu, whom he will love and be forced to lose. Together the two undertake acts that challenge the gods. They slaughter the beast Humbaba who inhabits the cedar forest of Lebanon, where he is put on earth to terrify men; and, when, in revenge, Ishtar sends the Bull of Heaven to kill Enkidu, they kill the bull as well. In revenge, the gods afflict Enkidu with a fatal illness, forcing Gilgamesh to confront the grief of losing his beloved friend. After witnessing the death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh travels to the ends of the earth to learn the secret to eternal life from Utnapishtim – the sole human being to survive the Great Flood organized by the gods to destroy humanity, and who was granted the eternal life enjoyed exclusively by the gods.

The legends are often accorded a narrative integrity, which, like the Odyssey, they never had. The poems that narrate these legends had only been discovered in the nineteenth-century, in fragments recorded on clay tablets excavated near Mosul. They were composed in Akkadian and written in cuneiform script, but they were versions of much older poems, composed in Old Babylonian, which were themselves versions of original legends composed more than four thousand years ago in Sumerian. In the early nineteen-sixties, these legends, translated into Arabic, were circulating in magazines, published as part of a new consciousness of popular literature – *al-adab al-sha'bi* – what was coming to be called, folklore [*al-foklor*].

Between 1965 and 1968, Azzawi produced several works on Gilgamesh. They come back to the legend in different ways, but focus on the vexed relation between Gilgamesh and the gods. Initially his engagement with Gilgamesh was prompted both by his study of archaeology and the release of a translation from Akkadian to Arabic by Taha al-Baqir.[12] Excerpts of al-Baqir's book were published in *Al-'Amilun fi al-Naft*, and the editor, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, asked Azzawi to provide illustrations for it (fig. 3.24). However, in a painting, *Ishtar, ya Hubi* (Ishtar, my love) (fig. 3.25) he focused on the relation of both love and hostility between Gilgamesh and

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[12] Taha al-Baqir, *Malhamat Kalkamish: udisat al-'Iraq al-khalida* (Baghdad: Matba'at ar-Rabita, 1962).

the goddess Ishtar.  Like other early works, the painting is fundamentally a composition, and the figures appear as archaeological objects.  The figure of Gilgamesh, modeled with the stout body of Sumerian figurines, lies across the canvas, his arms splayed and head cocked, gazing out.  Beneath him is a construction of decorative motifs.  In the upper left are the impassive visages of the gods, deriving their hollowed features and stone faces from figurines.

Following his military service in the north over the year 1965-1966, Azzawi began working with the story of Gilgamesh in a different way, not as an archaeological object but as a narrative about the human fear of death.  Inspired by *The Epic of the Martyr*, he saw the story of Gilgamesh, in light of the Battle of Karbala, as a struggle against injustice that could service as an allegory for contemporary experience.  In an ink drawing, tinted with copper-colored gouache, Gilgamesh, and behind him Enkidu, are attacked by the Bull of Heaven, sent down by Ishtar, as retribution for Gilgamesh's rejection of her advances (fig. 3.26).  Traced in ink, the figures are then outlined by crosshatching.  As in *Ishtar, ya Hubbi*, the hero's arms are splayed as he is attacked from above by a lion, but his features are abstracted and the point of contact between the lion and the hero is left under-elaborated; instead the attack is rendered in terms of the gestures, the splayed arms of the hero and another hand, spot-lit, reaching behind him.

However, in 1968, when Azzawi, inspired by al-Nawwab's use of poetry, returned to the Sumerian and Babylonian legends, he did so in order to think about them, not as archaeological objects nor in terms of their narrative content than in their status as poetic representations.  His investigations resulted in an essay that he published in *Al-'Amilun fi al-Naft* in December 1968, entitled, "Poetry and the Human:  On Sumerian and Babylonian Legends," in which he explored the concept of the human [*al-insan*] elaborated in Sumerian poetry.  Modeled on the epic hero, the concept of *al-insan*, Azzawi argued, functioned as a means to conceptualize the experience of injustice.  I pause here on Azzawi's arguments because they articulate a concept of figuration, in relation to the experience of injustice,  that would come to characterize his practice over the next ten years.

Locating the origins of poetry in legends, and perhaps in that way assimilating Azzawi's new interest in poetry to an earlier interest in popular literature, the essay began with the observation that figuration lies at the core of both poetry and legends:  "the poet and the writer of legends…possess a single talent and that is the power of figuration [*tashkhis*].  They are only able to represent something by giving it an inner life and a human form."[13]  Because "the oldest legends are religious songs, and then poetic epics," Azzawi based his understanding of figuration in poetry on a definition of epic poetry he took from the eighteenth-century German aesthetic philosophers Johann Goethe and Friedrich Schiller.  "The epic poem [*al-qasid al-mulhami*], as the poets Goethe and Schiller have defined it, portrays [*yusawwar*] a discrete act in figurative terms [*min al-nahiyya al-shakhsiyya*], and it portrays the man who does an act that is completed in the outside world, separated from himself (such as fighting or wandering, or any act that entails a tangible vastness)."[14]  The epic was a poem in which the human form of the protagonist did not have any ontological substance but rather was the configuration of a subject-less act.  This use of the human figure as no more than the embodiment of an action entailed a particular form of narrative in which the action embodied by the hero is deferred by a sequence of obstacles.  "The epic poet relies upon the story [*al-hakayat*], which in its narrative of events,

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[13] Dia Azzawi, "Poetry and the Human:  on Sumerian and Babylonian legends" [Al-Shi'r wa al-Insan:  fi al-asatir al-sumeriyya wa babiliiya], *Al-Amilun fi al-Naft* (No 81 December 1968), 3.
[14] Ibid, 3.

distances its heroes from the goal whenever they approach it."[15]  By prolonging the journey of the epic hero, the epic dramatizes the injustice borne by that hero at the hands of the gods.

> The poet realizes his interest in the individual hero through the model of the adventurer who is undeterred by any obstacles in realizing his desire, however many those obstacles may be, and even if they have their source in the gods (as in the adventures of Gilgamesh in the cedar forest struggling with the spirits Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven).  By at times exceeding the boundaries of historical reality, the poet achieves a remarkable literary contrast that grants us an aspect of the feeling of the loss of political justice [*al-'adalat al-siyasiyyat*].  In it light is thrown on the ruling class which aims to acquire fame and wealth, subjecting the people [*al-ra'iyyat*] to serve it in making national gains personal (the attempt of the King of Uruk to control the city of Arta); and poetry is not apart from that.  It is no wonder that we find poems and songs that praise them.  In this way it puts before us an individual model that arouses a mood of compassion and refusal.[16]

I would like to point out here that Azzawi characterized the narrative of obstacles in terms of a "loss of political justice" that "arouses a mood of compassion and refusal."  In this identification of epic narrative, and its method of figuration, with a representation of injustice that Azzawi's allegorical reading of Gilgamesh is particularly evident.

In regard to the narrative method of figuration, Sumerian epic poetry is similar to the Greek, Indian and Teutonic epics.  "What distinguishes Sumerian epic poetry…is the model of the hero, as it gave only little importance to the subjective aspect in portraying its character.  He is himself not individualized or particular.  He is a general hero, his individual attributes closer to the attributes of the ordinary man."  Babylonian and Sumerian works were distinguished by other features that Azzawi identifies:  a religious background makes the gods central actors in the hero's struggle, the individual model of the hero substitutes for any historical context, characters interpret events according to factors outside the reach of the human [*kharij nitaq al-insan*], thematic elements are integrated with narrative ones, and there is no development of the hero's psychic or emotional life.  Azzawi focused on how these features of Babylonian and Sumerian poetry lead to the formulation of an epic hero who moved in a space of profound injustice, located outside the jurisdiction of the law.

> In *The Epic of Gilgamesh* the features of the human appear as nothing more than a complaint against the oppression [*zhalm*] of the hero of the city and spite from his ethical acts, without there being for this position subjective effectiveness, but rather these are content with staying in their rooms and exercising their spite and anger.  This emergence, despite its passivity, appears powerful and in a form taken by the challenge to the divine oppressor of the human [*li-muzhalim al-insan al-illah*]; it is a kernel of human rejection [*rafidh insani*] of the worlds of unjust power [*al-sultah al-j'airah*], and the legality that props it up, the legality that is fundamentally based on a metaphysical dimension, far from human reality.[17]

The poetic representation of the hero in his struggle is here understood as a form of action in conditions where there is no possibility of action ["without there being for this position subjective effectiveness"]; this representation acquires its significance, according to Azzawi, in its opposition to the "divine oppressor of the human".  The reference of unjust power and the cooption of the law suggests that this is about more than Babylonian poetry.  It sees in the Sumerian poem the first instance of the human as a symbol of suffering and subjection, but it

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[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid, 5.

also sees in the poetic narrativization of the human the capacity to transfigure that suffering into an act of truth.

The remarkable thing about epic representations of the human seems to be that, because the human is conceived within a relation to injustice, they are not necessarily based on a figure. At the same time as Azzawi was writing the essay on figuration in epic poetry, he revisited the theme of his earlier Gilgamesh paintings, the theme of the relation between Gilgamesh and the goddess Ishtar, which he was now articulating as a relation of the human to injustice. Entitled *min al-Asatir al-Sha'biyya* (given the English title, *Folklore Mythology*) (fig. 3.27), the painting, which is quite large, consists of an assembly of colorful forms against a black background. Recumbent in the upper right hand corner is Ishtar, with the silhouette of the Bull of Heaven to her side. In the space beneath them hovers an edifice of decorative motifs, creating balance and intrigue. The image of the goddess poised in an inaccessible space is enough to render the experience of injustice narrated in the epic.

In this painting, Azzawi was experimenting with something else that he got from al-Nawwab's poetry, and that was its capacity to lay out fragments, in an almost visual way, that created an image in language, at once vivid and unclear, and thus arousing interpretation and suspicion. One cannot know by looking at *min al-Asatir al-Sha'biyya* what it depicts, one cannot know that it depicts the relation between Gilgamesh and Ishtar. Unlike Azzawi's earlier Gilgamesh works, which remained within the narrative concept of the epic, this painting, like *Crying Wolf*, in an attempt to reproduce the fragmentary image of poetry, stays on the surface, as it were; it does not refer back to the narrative, but uses the narrative to create forms that simply elicit suspicion. This method would lie at the center of Azzawi's practice for the next ten years.

The opportunity to illustrate al-Nawwab's poems, when al-Nawwab published his first collection of poetry, not only opened Azzawi up to poetry, but put him in the position of working between text and image in a sustained way. Working between text and image pushed his work with the concept of martyrdom away from symbols and towards narrative. That year, 1968, he developed a series of drawings on the narrative of the of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn, as it is popularly told. Entitled *Maqtil al-Husayn* (he gave it the English title of *The Blood of Husayn*),[18] the forty-eight drawings in the series are based neither on the symbols and motifs that had dominated his work in the previous four years, nor are they based on the ritual imagery, as Kadhim Hayder had done in *The Epic of the Martyr*, rather they are based on text, on the poetic recitations that lie at the core of the *ta'ziyah*. These recitations were recorded and circulated on cassette-tapes. One of the most famous recordings at the end of the nineteen-sixties was by Sheikh Ahmad al-Waeli, and Azzawi used that recording to create the drawings.

The scenes move from an oath of loyalty the people of Kufa pledge to Husayn, through the killing of various companions of the Imam Husayn (fig. 3.28-3.35), and then his family, through the beheading of Husayn himself, the marching of the surviving women through Kufa, the delivery of Husayn's head to Yezid in Damascus, and they end with marking the spot of *Karb wa bila*. Drawn in ink, the scenes are concentrated in the center of the page, around a ground-line. The underlying narrative organization of the series endowed the drawings with a

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[18] In 1968, Yusuf al-Khal, the poet and owner of Gallery One in Beirut, arranged for Azzawi to publish the drawings in a series produced by the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Nahhar*. However, when the newspaper wanted to publish the volume in both Arabic and Persian, in order to market it to a specifically Shi'a public, Azzawi realized that his drawings, produced as a form of political critique, were being framed in sectarian terms, he withdrew, and the drawings remain unpublished.

particular form of metonym, in which each scene acquires its sense in relation to the others. This structure of reference frees the lines on the pages from representing the episodes in the battle. Bodies are stretched to the point that they lose their human figure and come unhinged as forms. Ornamental fragments proliferate at the point where bodies lose their human form, as if standing in for the missing bodies or rendering their fatal wound. Language itself is turned into a symbol; for instance, Hussein's name is broken apart into letters so that the letters become fragments of a particular kind.

Even though the drawings are organized by the text, that organization paradoxically frees the forms on the page to recombine according to a logic of their own. Thus, in 1968, in another set of drawings, on the poetry of Mansur al-Hallaj, we see a similar iconography of beheading as that in the *The Blood of Husayn* (fig. 3.36-3.37) and a compositional structure that recalls his earlier painting and drawing. What has happened by this point is that a notion of struggle abstracted from the model of the Imam al-Husayn and combined with the textual logic of the fragment inspired by poetry. This will constitute the methodological basis for Azzawi's practice over the next decade.

In turning away from the public realm, Azzawi had developed a formal vocabulary that later would provide a base for a different kind of political speech. In October 1969, Azzawi issued a manifesto, along with number of other artists, entitled *Towards the New Vision* [*Nahwa al-Ru'iyya al-Jadeeda*] that re-conceptualized art practice. It imagined a form of politics located within the artwork itself, rather than locating the practice of art within the public sphere, as Jawad Salim had done in the nineteen-fifties when he established the Baghdad Group for Modern Art. The articulation of *The New Vision* belonged to a new kind of political space was emerging in the years 1968 and 1969, one unlike the liberal public sphere and set against the state as an arena of politics. Although the Iraqi government had been so hamstrung by factionalism among groups of ruling military officer that it did not really participate in the Six-Day War, it was held accountable for the defeat, and that failure authorized the kind of public critique that had vanished after 1963. It was in that climate of critique that, on July 17, 1968, the Ba'ath Party, despite its small numbers, had been able to ride the widely propagated slogan of revolution back into power in a bloodless coup. But for many Iraqis the rediscovery of politics occurred beyond the framework of the state. The rise to prominence of the Palestinian liberation organizations at the same time was opening up a different kind of political space, with a much broader horizon, and it was within that horizon that *The New Vision* located art practice, and with that horizon that the next ten years of Azzawi's practice would be set.

## The New Vision, 1969

The first initiative to bring artists from across the Arab world together was a conference, to be held in Cairo in January 1970. For reasons that remain unclear, the conference never took place but it occasioned the drafting of a manifesto that would do two things. One was to formulate a conceptual and political vocabulary for the practice Azzawi had been developing, and the second was to inaugurate a new space of art practice, one that was located not within the framework of the Iraqi state but in a space, set over against the Arab states, that was "Arab". It was within this space that most of the work Azzawi produced, as well as that of several other artists in Baghdad, was set; and it was within this space Azzawi developed the critique of violence that he described to the Moroccan newspaper *al-'Alm*, and that is my subject here.

The artists who had been invited to represent Iraq at the conference belonged to the first generation of artists in Iraq, those who had begun practicing in the nineteen-forties and fifties. In order to offer the perspective of the younger generation of artists, which had begun practicing in the nineteen-sixties, Azzawi drafted a statement or manifesto entitled, *Towards the New Vision* [*Nahwa al-Ru'iyya al-Jadida*], which five other artists – Hashem Samarchi, Mohammad Mehr al-Din, Rafa' al-Nasiri, Saleh al-Jumaie, and Ismail Fattah – signed.[19] In recent years, a sharp distinction had emerged between that first generation, which emphasized style or subject matter in its work and its teaching, and a second generation that was more interested in exploring different techniques and focusing on means of expression. That rift had led to a sort of uprising of students at the Institute of Fine Arts against their teachers, formalized in the establishment of an art group by Taleb Mekki and Saleh al-Jumaie in 1965 called *al-Mujadideen*, or the Innovators. The debates that ensued, in which the development of means of expression was pitted against the necessity of style, were abruptly suspended by the events of 1967, but the sense of division that it had created lingered. Though Azzawi was not a member of the *Mujadideen*, the debates they provoked shaped the artistic self-consciousness that prompted Azzawi to intervene in the Cairo conference.

In anticipation of the conference, the artists had the manifesto published in magazines and newspapers, not only in Iraq but throughout the region.[20] They also prepared a pamphlet, in which the manifesto was accompanied by their biographies and images of their work. Because it had already been printed, they decided to distribute the pamphlet even though the conference had been canceled. In 1972, four of the six original signers – Saleh al-Jumaie, Rafa al-Nasiri, Hashem Samarchi and Dia Azzawi – held an exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art under the title "Four Artists." These artists would show together repeatedly over the next decade, and they would be the nucleus of a series of initiatives, beginning with the al-Wasiti Festival in 1972, which served as the model for the First Biennale of Arab Art held in Baghdad in 1974 and the Second Biennale of Arab Art in Rabat in 1976.

In the context of my argument here, I read through the text of *The New Vision*, in order to identify the vocabulary Azzawi formulated for the practice he had been developing in the nineteen-sixties. But this vocabulary has documentary significance beyond the scope of Azzawi's practice. It points to the ways in which the conception of art practice had shifted since the founding of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art eighteen years earlier, and it points to the ways in which the relation between art and politics was reconceived following the breakdown of the public sphere in the nineteen-sixties.

When the Baghdad Group issued its manifesto in 1951, it had sought to base the practice of modern art on a particular historiography, one anchored by Yahya al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri*, but also to locate that practice in the public sphere. Thus Jawad Salim defined art as a language and the artwork as a form of speech, addressed to a public; and artists broadly did work that portrayed social and political realties, whether the slums that appeared on the outskirts of Baghdad or the demonstrations put down by the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Said. That public sphere was gradually reduced to dust in the aftermath of the 1958 revolution. The subsequent contest between the Ba'ath and the Communist party over the prospective merger of Iraq with Syria and Egypt, combined with the National Guard's brutal

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[19] The statement was reprinted in Shakir Hassan Al Said, *al-Bayanat al-faniyyah fi al-'Iraq*. Baghdad: Wizarat al-I'lam, Mudiriyat al-Funun al-'Ammah, 1973.

[20] It was also published in the journal *al-Mawaqif*, as well as in *al-'Ulum*, addressed to a regional public. "Risala min Baghdad: Nahwa al-Ru'iyya al-Jadeeda," *al-'Ulum* (Vol 15, No 2, February 1970), 63-66.

persecution of leftists in 1963, produced mass disillusionment with political parties, and, followed by a manic turn-over of cabinets, led to a withdrawal into the interiors of private life.

In those circumstances the practice of art had shifted in the direction of an art without a public, an art that neither addressed nor pointed outside itself, even though the establishment of the National Museum of Modern Art and the opening of Baghdad's first private galleries were creating a new infrastructure for the exhibition of work.[21] This art developed largely in two directions, on the one hand towards an interest in artistic material, a focus on experimenting with different techniques of artistic production, and on the other hand towards the kind of hermeneutically-sealed exploration of historical or cultural symbols that we find in Azzawi's practice, work that at once invited and foreclosed interpretation. This inscrutability was not necessarily intentional or strategic but an effect of a wide-ranging search for means of expression.

The defeat of 1967 summoned artists back to the public realm, to which they brought the different devices they had developed during the involution of the previous years, but it was a public realm of a very different kind than that which had formed in nineteen-forties and nineteen-fifties. Articulating that return to the public realm, the text of *The New Vision* arguably marks the coordinates of the peculiar kind of political action that emerged in those years, located outside the framework of the state and comprising neither the expression of an opinion or the taking of a position. Whereas Jawad Salim had initially conceived of the artwork in the republican vocabulary of the liberal tradition – as a form of speech addressed to a public –*The New Vision* defined the practice of art, not in terms of an address to a public, but in terms of the singularity of the human [*al-insan*] poised in opposition to a world that is hostile to it. In place of speech, the artwork was conceived as an operation of truth [*al-haqiqa*]. The practice of art was understood not as an act of representation, which would give form to the world, but as an act of vision [*al-ru'iyya*], which summoned another possible world. Whereas the Baghdad Group had located art practice within the restricted context of a prospective Baghdad School, or at most the Iraqi polity, which it articulated in terms of the local [*mahli*] in relation to the international [*al-'alami*], the *New Vision* situated the practice of art within a broader horizon that was regional [*al-watan*] and at times universal [*bashariyya*].

Keeping with the interest in poetry inspired by Muzaffar al-Nawwab, Azzawi, in composing the text for *The New Vision*, drew much of the vocabulary he used to describe visual art practice from a new critical discourse that was emerging on poetry. In March 1969, a group of poets had established a new journal called *Shi'r 69*, and in in the first issue they published a manifesto that sought to reconceive poetry in the post-1967 context.[22] According to the new definition of poetry outlined by *The Poetic Manifesto* [*al-bayan al-shi'ri*], poetry involved a use of language that pursues truth [*al-haqiqa*], by constructing a dream in which the invisible aspects of things in the world are elucidated, in ways that unfold a different world. Because Azzawi drew upon some of the same concepts, used to describe poetry, to reconceive the practice of visual art, I first walk through the text of *The Poetic Manifesto*, before considering the text of *The New Vision*, in order to show not only that the new vocabulary offered for art practice – as a

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[21] The museum was built by the Gulbenkian Foundation, the bequest of Calouste Gulbenkian, a Portuguese-Armenian financier who held a major stake in the Iraq Petroleum Company. The Gulbenkian Foundation also built a Studio Center for the Iraqi Artists Society which featured an exhibition space.

[22] Those poets were Fadhil Azzawi, Sami Mehdi, Khalid Ali Mustafa, and Fawzi Kareem. The manifesto was reprinted as an appendix to Fadhil al-Azzawi's book, *Al-Ruh al-Hay*, 318-334. There is some controversy surrounding those events. In addition to Fadhil Azzawi's account, one should also consider that of Sami Mahdi in *Al-Mawjah al-sakhibah: shi'r al-sittiniyat fi al-'Iraq*. (Baghdad: Dar al-Shu'un al-Thaqafiyah al-'Ammah, 1994).

vision, an act of rejection, a relation to truth – had been borrowed from poetry, but also that that vocabulary was a general vocabulary for rethinking politics at the end of the nineteen-sixties.

The definition of poetry elaborated by *The Poetic Manifesto* was explicitly based on an "assumption" about life and death. The world was recognized to be imperfect [*naqis*], and this imperfection, setting everything in a continuous movement towards death, so the manifesto claimed, structures action in a particular way. "Our actions aim towards the absolute [*al-mutlaq*], which can only be reached by falling into the trap of death, and in aiming towards the absolute, [our actions] seek to arrest the imperfect movement with one that is more replete [*akthar imtila*], and which is considered creative of culture, misery, dreams, disputes and freedom." Among these actions, poetry seems to be unique. It is identified as a region [*mantaqa*], suspended between life and death, but not bound by either, a "desert invisible to others." "The new poem is what gazes out across that perishable existence to the dream of another existence." Though conceived in spatial terms, poetry is without an interior or exterior; it is a place from which the poet speaks, in "an obscure and incomprehensible language on that which resides in all things but is other to them, on what they don't know that they are, and that constitutes their body."

This capacity of poetry to grasp what otherwise is imperceptible was the main focus of the manifesto. Anticipating that its vocabulary of visibility and invisibility might be mistaken as an influence of mystical thought, the manifesto clarified: "This existential-dialectical consciousness of the poet is not a new Sufism, as all possibility of metaphysical salvation has fallen away from the poet's consciousness. Rather at that very point it places the human [*al-insan*] in front of the cruelest facts of life: exposing the tragedy of existence in a world surrounded by millions of secrets." This act of exposure, of exposing the "tragedy of existence", it saw as an operation of truth. Again, rejecting the possibility of redemption: "We do not write poetry because it represents a kind of salvation for us. True salvation is impossible, and every search for salvation is nothing more than an empty metaphysical search. We write poetry through the yearning of the spirit for touch with the truth [*al-haqiqa*] which our being suffers and changes the color of our blood."

The manifesto emphasized that it was only by writing from within the world that the poet could arrive at this truth. The poet drew material from the everyday world "in order to break through that material to relations that are not perceptible and that make what is everyday and partial appear as only a misleading illusion [*wahim*] in the light of the complete reality of Being [*kawn*] and existence [*wujud*], and in the face of death." The manifesto modeled this transfiguration on the dream, where ordinary things are transfigured into another world. "The poet is a being that creates his worlds from the things of reality [*waqa'*]…For the trees and the earth, the desert and the sea, the night and the day in the sight of this being who uses the writing of poetry are his magic carpet into his own dream world. In the poem these things lose their realistic essence and are transformed into mere symbols and signs illuminated in a horizon buried inside the night of the journey." Thinking of poetry in terms of the dream also enabled an understanding of how the transfiguration of things in poetry offered access to truth. For it was the pursuit of truth that defined the poet. "The true poet is he who tries to reach the truth."

These concepts of the dream and truth constituted a new political terminology which set poetry over and against the received political forms of parties and ideologies. As an act of vision that transfigures the world, poetry was said to "collapse all of the daily forms of political theory and direct language and propaganda and fake consciousness [*zayif*]." The notion of a dream

enabled the understanding of the elaboration of a different world, one both within this one and that negated it. "If the dream takes the poet to invisible worlds, at the same time, it is the voice of rejection [*al-rafidh*] and challenge [*al-tahdi*] to the misery which immerses the world." By imagining a different world "he attempts to denounce the misery and weakness by transcending the corpses of thoughts and ended dreams, in the direction of a future that lives inside his vision." The manifesto explicitly addressed the relation of the "poetic vision" [*al-ru'iyya al-sha'riyya*] to "political position" [*al-mawqif al-siyasi*], and attempted to claim the rhetoric of revolution for poetry.

> Even though the poetic vision differs from the political vision, the poetic vision in the end is more revolutionary. The political position, which is daily and in phases, posits limited data. As for the poetic position, it is a position that blows apart [*nasif*] all that is fake [*zayif*] and untrue and hostile to the freedom of the human [*al-insan*], and an adventure towards the future by transcending the world as it is in the direction of a better world. The task of the poem cannot be closed off inside what is fragmentary and quotidian, whether that is political or un-political. That is because the poem is total participation in creating the climate of ultimate revolution. The poet in light of these visions provokes revolution, rebellion and struggle that with the eyes of an eagle stares into the future which others don't see. Any journey towards the truth is a journey towards more understanding and consciousness of history, the human and the world.

The revolutionary character of poetry lies in its temporality. It retains the capacity to constantly create an opening – this is what makes "the poetic vision" more revolutionary than the "political vision." Thus it can "blow apart all that is fake" about the present.

> It is the Arabic poem that changes the world by blowing apart [*nasf*] the mistakes of the past and the present, and restructuring the world inside a new poetic vision. It is the Arabic poem that speaks about the journey of the human to the truth, by rending present in the mind the essence of all things, such that the poem is a final bullet in the gun of this primitive being, free and bound, uncertain consciousness, going into the forests of the world not being able to know ever his meaning.

This concept of the human and its relation to truth, with which *The Poetic Manifesto* characterized poetry, comprised the terms of a position proposed in opposition to what is referred to as "the political position". It provided coordinates for a realm of art practice that existed over and against that of the Arab regimes. Its emphasis on discerning the invisible from the visible, and on poetry as a truth act were a response to the fake [*zayif*] nature of the contemporary political reality, the false image of the world the Arab governments had been holding up to their citizens.

The understanding of art practice Azzawi developed in *The New Vision* was based on a similar concept of the human [*al-insan*], confronted with a world that is other to it, and who, in this confrontation, pursues truth [*al-haqiqa*]. This concept of the human marked a sense of singularity produced by the general withdrawal from the public sphere that followed 1963, and it articulated a topography of subjectivity in which the interiority of the human [*dakhil al-insan*] was opposed to the external world [*al-'alam al-kharaji*]. Whatever the contingency of this concept of the human to the political experience of the nineteen-sixties, Azzawi grounded it on philosophical assumptions adopted from *The Poetic Manifesto*, by defining it in terms of "a continuity of search." Unlike *The Poetic Manifesto*, however, *The New Vision* gave this concept of the human a historical dimension by joining to it a concept of civilization, as the cumulative experience of the human in his relation to the world outside himself.

If our own period in the history of civilization [*marhalatna al-hadhariyya*] is the end result of man's [*al-insan*] previous discoveries and transcendence, in his relation to the external world [*al-'alam al-khariji*], then active existence will only be realized through living movement that rejects any ultimate goal of existence. The Thing is present in its continuous development and on-going change, such that the continuity of search is an essential characteristic of the conscious man [*al-insan al-wa'i*]. Thus the contemporary artist refrains from positing the world inert and unchangeable.  His experience of obscurity [*ghamudhuhu*] is the motivation of his interest in discovering the true kernel of the Thing [*al-jawhur al-haqiqi lil-shay*] and in situating himself in relation to the enormous challenges of the external world [*al-'alam al-khariji*].  Thus he places his ability to transcend [*tajawuz*] the limits of appearance, which nature and social relations impose upon his practice.

On the basis of these founding assumptions, *The New Vision* proceeded to locate art practice in the conflictual relation between the artist and the world – rather than in relation to a public or a lost history of painting, as the manifesto of the Baghdad Group had done in 1951.

> Primitives endowed art with magic, the Greeks made it the revelation of beauty, and the Middle Ages expected it to cement the world of belief.  Our civilization makes it a human practice practiced by one [*mumarisat insaniyya yumarisuha insan*] who lives in perpetual friction [*ihtikak*] with the world, offering through it human existence [*al-wujud al-insani*] naked before the truth [*al-haqiqa*], in that way producing a different image [*sura ukhra*] of the connection of contemporary man [*al-insan al-mu'asir*] to the world.

No longer conceived as a form of speech, the artwork is here conceptualized as a relation to truth, one that takes the form of an image of man's link to the world, an image other than that which is already on offer.

This conception of art practice, as a relation to truth that takes the form of an image of man's link to the world, presumed an involuted model of subjectivity.  For, on the one hand, the manifesto posited the world outside of man, but on the other hand, his image of this world was to formed from the inside.  "Art is a practice of taking a position in relation to the world and an operation of continuous transcendence and discovery of the interiority of man [*li-dakhil al-insan*] through change."  And yet it is this very involution, in which the world external to the subject is confronted from inside itself, that makes it possible for the artist to offer a different image.

> It is a mental refusal of what is wrong in the structure of society, and in that way it becomes an operation of creation in which its independent world [i.e. the world of creation] is offered to human existence by way of line, color and shape.  In this way, rejection [*al-rafidh*] and rebellion [*al-tamarrud*], not in their absolute form, could be two presences inherent in continuous innovation.

When Jawad Salim defined the artwork in 1951, he had pointed to line, color and shape as the components of a language with which the artists speaks.  Here, the artwork is not understood as a form of speech, but as a "mental refusal" and line, color and shape – the basic formal elements of visual art – become the elements with which an "independent world is offered to human existence."

The topography of the internal and external upon which this conception of art practice is elaborated, and the idea that the artwork brings into being an independent world, could be seen as ruins of the public sphere shattered by the Ba'ath coup in 1963 that, with the politicization that followed 1967, were rehabited as a site of refusal.  With such a rehabitation, political action takes the form of individual acts, launched as it were from the recesses of the subject.  This is evident in the fact that *The New Vision* modeled the artist on the fighter.  "The artist is a warrior [*muharib*] who refuses to relinquish his weapon when he makes himself a spokesman [*natiq*] in

the name of the world and in the name of man [*al-insan*]." The fight waged by the artist is a fight against *tazayif*, the fakeness of politics centered on the Arab states.

Although Azzawi employed some of the same vocabulary used in *The Poetic Manifesto*, he integrated that vocabulary with the concept of martyrdom he had been developing in his practice over the previous years. In *The New Vision*, the language of sacrifice or victimhood [*tadhhiyya*] is used to characterize the relation between the artist and the world. "[The artist] lives in a state of perpetual sacrifice [*bi-tadhhiyya*] in relation to his world, expressing in that way an intense desire to reject the masks of deception [*aqnat al-tazayif*]. Thus when he wants to speak, he always retains the capacity to do so." Martyrdom is no longer just a formula of tragedy or an image of the human within the artwork. As the practice of art has now been conceptualized as a truth act, so the artist himself has become modeled on the figure of the martyr. Thus, where the manifesto of the Baghdad Group had invoked Picasso as the paradigmatic artist, for his having found a way to introduce difference into modern art, to make it other to itself, *The New Vision* invoked the tenth-century mystic Mansur al-Hallaj.

> The true artist affirms is he who practices his refusal to be a prisoner of that mummified body of obsolete social values. He must rebel against the world in order for him to be on the other side, and to be able to judge it. At the kernel of the revolution he transcends all that is given, transforming himself into another Hallaj against oppression and intellectual enslavement. The artist is a critic and a revolutionary through his negation [*salbiyya*] of the world around him.
>
> The presence of the revolution confronts him with the spirituality of self-annihilation [*al-fana*] and sacrifice [*al-tadhhiyyat*] when he blows apart the errors of the past and the present, and aims to restructure the world within a new artistic vision.

Although the practice of art is here modeled on the truth act of the martyr, Azzawi's characterization of the revolutionary role of the artist, as "blow[ing] apart the errors of the past and the present, and aim[ing] to restructure the world within a new artistic vision," is drawn from *The Poetic Manifesto*. He has appropriated for the visual artwork the description it offered for the operation of the Arabic poem – only "poetic" has been replaced with "artistic".

The manifesto goes on to explain how exactly the visual artwork might "blow apart the errors of the past and the present" and "restructure the world within a new artistic vision." Like the poem, the artwork produces a world different from that of lived experience, one in which the hidden truth of that lived experience is made manifest.

> When he [the artist] realizes his own distinctive world through that one dimensional surface, he offers to the world a truth [*haqiqa*] that appears for the first time as non-existent. By virtue of his creative ability, he grants [that truth] a presence in the world of light, in order to call us out to reveal some of the hidden aspects of our lived experience, which rational forms of pictorial representation [*al-tasawwarat al-'aqliyyat*] might not succeed in unveiling.
>
> Artistic vision [*al-ru'iyya al-fanniyya*] is nothing but one of the images we use for our inner and outer world; but the artist only draws on that image in order to secure support for that world that he wants to build anew. Thus the artwork is the visible manifestation [*madharan*] of the exit of the artist's world into public existence [*al-wujud al-'alani*].

This practice of making visible the invisible, adapted from poetry, and which here is contrasted to "rational forms of pictorial representation," is described as a "vision" [*al-ru'iyya*]. This vision is one of many "images," but it is distinguished by the fact that it is not representational but the basis for a prospective world. And yet that world remains private in some fundamental sense; the artwork is the means of that world's publicization but only the visible manifestation

[*madharan*] of that world, indicating that there is some part of that world that remains imperceptible, out of reach.

There is in this residual privacy a trace of the withdrawal of the nineteen-sixties, and it is something that we don't find in *The Poetic Manifesto*. The conception of the artwork outlined by *The New Vision* incorporates a number of aspects of visual art practice during the previous years, such as an allegorical relation to history or the formulation of individual means of expression unintelligible to an uninformed viewer. In addition to modeling art practice on the concept of martyrdom, Azzawi generalized in *The New Vision* his own relation to history.

> The artist lives the unity of all ages, and he lives at the same time as a part of society. Inasmuch as he feels that it is upon him to change the past with a contemporary vision, he feels that the past addresses itself to the present, that between the past and the present there is unity [*tuwahid*] and coexistence [*tuwajid*]. If artistic vision is presence [*al-hadhur*] realized on the canvas, then this presence is the source of his concern to search for a civilizational identity. The legend and the historical sense [*al-hiss al-tarikhi*] become the means that arrive the artist to his new world.

In the nineteen-fifties, modern art was seen to be estranged from the art of other periods by a gaping centuries-long gulf, across which the modernity of modern art acquired its sense and in regard to which one could speak about a revival or an awakening. Against the background of that linear philosophy of history, the claim here, in *The New Vision*, that the artist at once inhabits the past and the present, that he sees the past in terms of the present, and that the past almost gazes at the present – appears as a contortion of time produced by the withdrawal from the public sphere in the aftermath of 1963. It was as a result of that withdrawal that Azzawi could conceive a relation to history different from that of Jawad Salim and other artists working in the nineteen-fifties, one in which "legend and the historical sense" are a "means that arrive the artist at his new world" (already anticipating here what he tells the Moroccan newspaper *al-'Alm* in 1975).

This is one example of a more general individualization of art practice during the nineteen-sixties, when debates about expression erupted among students at the Institute of Fine Art. Contesting their teachers' emphasis on style, bound up with certain notions of collectivity, these students argued for a focus on technique that would allow for individual expression. Among these students were Saleh al-Jumaie who worked with aluminum and Ibrahim al-Zayir who made compositions with broad strokes of printing ink on paper. In *The New Vision*, Azzawi sought to redeem these practices by describing them as a "private language" with which the artist creates a "vision":

> We will remain a generation that carries its spirit with all the urgency of those challenges, making its art not a means to close off individual existence or drown it in its own world but rather making its art a vision [*ru'iyya*] directed to the world, in a private language [*al-lougha al-dhamaniyya*] by which the artist speaks in his own way, rejecting any mechanical understanding of art and its role in society, and which restrains the artist within the limits of what is possible, within the limits of relations as they are now.

I translate *al-lougha al-dhamaniyya* here as "private language" in the sense that Wittgenstein spoke of a private language, in which "the words of this language refer to what can be known only to the speaker." In this sense "private" is not contrasted to "public" but names an esoteric quality of artistic production.[23] In the face of the phoniness of conventional politics, where

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[23] In his biography of Wittgenstein, which focuses in particular on the role of music in Wittgenstein's life, Alexander Waugh has suggested that Wittgenstein's arguments about public language were intended to circumscribe

politicians said one thing when the other was the case, those individual languages of expression seemed to acquire a new critical capacity.

> The operations of pulverization which social relations exert on the artist and which force him to bear the mask sometimes of fakeness [*al-tazayif*] and appeasement [*al-muhadina*] and other times of a victim [*dhahiyya*] – it is not possible for their legitimacy to be taken over and transformed without our ability to extend our vision [*absarna*] to what is behind things [*wara al-ashya*].

The notion of making the invisible visible expounded by *The Poetic Manifesto* offered a new perspective on the individual languages of expression formulated by artists during the nineteen-sixties. They now offered a starting point for "extending our vision to what is behind things". "We transform the arcana of study into a starting point for change. In order for us to find the independent canvas of transcendence, the canvas that stirs the depths. That tears through the fake [*tamazaq al-tazayif*]. That opens the river of life in our society."

The production of that canvas entailed both a break from tradition and a reclaiming of it. "That canvas can only come into existence and the new vision built through rupture [*intiqadh*]…" And thus the manifesto concluded with a number of declarative statements that outlined a relation to tradition in which "we must tear tradition apart in order to find it again" and "the past is not something dead that we study but a position that transcends time to bring about a universal human sign that possesses at the same time a formal [*al-tashkili*] aspect and a cultural one [*al-nafsi*]." Tradition was not a historiographic base nor a source of identity, but a point from which to get a critical edge on the present.

*The New Vision* did not outline a new form of art practice so much as it posited a vocabulary for forms of practice that had already been developing and located those forms of art practice in a new political context. As I mentioned earlier, the text was accompanied by photographs of work by each artist. Azzawi included photographs of three works – *Ashura* (fig. 3.38), *The Fall of the Martyr* [*Saqut al-Shahid*] (3.39), and *Crying Wolf* (3.23) – that kept with his earlier practice. Framed in the terms laid out in *The New Vision*, the symbol of the horse and the martyr appears now as a language of truth. However, as a language of truth employed by the manifesto, the moaning horse and the silhouetted martyr, have a function that is not merely semiotic; they also have the function of summoning one to a subject-position of refusal. Similarly, in this context, *Crying Wolf*, appears, like the poem by al-Nawwab that inspired it, to not just represent the dissonance between the reality of things and their appearance, but in a fundamental sense to move beyond it, by making the artwork as the terrain of a different kind of politics. That was the significance of *The New Vision* – by formulating a different vocabulary for art practice it cleared a new space for the artwork, not in the public sphere as Jawad Salim had done, nor as a site of withdrawal as it had become in the aftermath of 1963, but rather outside the political scene centered on the state. In that space, the artwork could become the site of a politics of a very different kind.

In order to understand what kind of politics the artwork offered, its emergence as the terrain of a politics located beyond that of the liberal public sphere must be seen in relation to other developments at the end of the nineteen-sixties, namely the emergence of a new kind of political action embodied in the Palestinian liberation movement. In the early nineteen-sixties, several liberation organizations had been established, either by Palestinian refugees who realized very

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the experience of music. This is why Wittgenstein understands the words of private language as consisting in "[the speaker's] immediate, private sensations" rather than say an individual code.

early that they could not count on the Arab states to reclaim the land that had been conquered by Israel in 1948 or by a diverse group of Arabs, that included Palestinians, who saw the liberation of Palestine as a principal cause of Arab nationalism. These organizations introduced an alternative mode of political action called *al-kifah al-musallah*, or armed struggle. Initiated in January 1965 by the liberation organization Fatah, it consisted of small strikes launched at Israel that had a logic more political than military, intended to rally the masses to a general war. These strikes were largely insignificant until March 1968, when in the aftermath of the Arab defeat in the June War, Fatah carried out what appeared to be a major hit against the Israeli army, in an engagement at the Jordanian village of Karama.[24] That perceived victory gave the liberation organizations a new prominence, and they began to open offices in refugee camps throughout the region and establish bases in Jordan. They drew tens of thousands of volunteers, from across the Arab world, and many who previously had belonged to political parties. It was a moment when Arabs were experimenting with a different form of politics. Disillusioned with liberal forms of politics by the collapse of the Iraqi Communist Party, many leftists in Iraq joined the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP) in Beirut, either to train in the camps or to work in the newspapers and magazines that arose around the liberation movement, as did a number of intellectuals, poets and artists in Azzawi's circle, such as Mu'yyad al-Rawi, Sharif al-Rub'ai, Anwar al-Ghisaani, Jasim al-Zubaidy and Ibrahim al-Zayr.

It was in that context that *The New Vision* sought to position art practice. By opening a discursive space that cut across the states, the Palestinian liberation movement created the conditions for conceiving of art that was Arab and not just Iraqi. This would have consequences for the practice of the artists of *The New Vision*, who would become involved in issues beyond the framework of national politics, whether the collapse of the Palestinian liberation movement or the Lebanese civil war, and who would be behind a number of initiatives, such as publication projects, festivals and the Biennale of Arab Art, that would give art practice an institutional context outside a national framework. It was in this space that Azzawi's critique of violence was located.

The first work Azzawi did in this new context focused on the subject of this new form of politics, introduced by the liberation organizations and located outside the framework of the state – the *fida'i*. In a series of five drawings, he reflected on the death of an Iraqi officer who had died fighting with the Palestinians. Entitled *Contemplations on War and Revolution*, the drawings were published in the first issue of the new poetry journal *Shi'r 69* (fig. 3.40). In the context of my argument here, the drawings mark a turning point in Azzawi's practice, between his explorations of martyrdom in the nineteen-sixties and his formulation of a critique of violence in the nineteen-seventies. On the one hand, the drawings employed pictorial techniques Azzawi had developed in his drawings on martyrdom in 1966 and 1967, and then elaborated in illustrations for al-Nawwab's collection of poetry *For the Rail and the Lemon* and the series of drawings, *The Blood of Husayn*. Figures were not modeled but rather drawn in outline, and integrated into their settings by a kind of ornamental composition. On the other hand, however, the martyred figure is no longer a metaphor for tragedy but a concrete historical experience. The lines on the page outline a contemporary experience of struggle.

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[24] In March 1968, the Israeli military was preparing for an operation to remove the guerilla presence that had established itself around Karama, which the month before had been the site of a skirmish between the Israeli and Jordanian militaries. Fatah decided to attack pre-emptively the Israelis in order to demonstrate that the Israelis are not invincible. With cover from the Jordanian military, Fatah gave the Israelis a fight, and even though the Israelis destroyed the entire village, claimed a victory.

The mode of political action introduced by the Palestinian liberation movement, and embodied in the subject of the *fida'i*, did not last long.  But as I will show, when the politics of anticolonial liberation struggle ran up against the might of the state, the concept of martyrdom that Azzawi had developed in this work during the nineteen-sixties enabled the *fida'i* to have an afterlife in the artwork.  In the following section I detail that entry of the *fida'i* into the artwork and its evolution, and consider what relation between art practice and anticolonial liberation struggle it evidences.

## The Forms of the Fida'i

Discredited by their defeat in the Six-Day War, the Arab states had been forced to cede to the Palestinian liberation organizations a wide space of operation.  And so the organizations established bases in the Jordan Valley from which they could launch attacks at Israel.  However in 1970, as the organizations expanded their operations in Jordan, they began to clash with the Jordanian military.  In September, after repeated assassination attempts, King Hussein mobilized the Jordanian military to remove the Palestinian organizations from the country, in a series of battles in Amman and the north of the country known as Black September [*Eylul al-Aswad*], or the Jordanian civil war.  Those events marked at once the ascendancy of the *fida'i*, as a subject of politics beyond the state, and the beginning of its collapse.

A couple of weeks after the battle in Amman between the Jordanian military and the Palestinian liberation organizations, the newspaper *al-Hadaf*, the mouthpiece of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, published a journal that had been kept by a *fida'i* during the siege of the Jebel Hussein refugee camp (fig. 3.41).  The newspaper claimed that the author, identified by the nom de guerre Bassim, was missing, and that he had given the journal to another *fida'i* – A. – for safe keeping after Jordanian tanks had overrun their hiding place near the town of Jerash.  In entries made between September 16, 1970 and September 23, 1970, Bassim described the confrontation between the *fida'iyyun* and the Jordanian military:  the deployment of tanks in the city to destroy the offices of the Palestinian liberations organizations located around Maxim Circle; the battle that broke out in the street and that pushed into the camp; the siege of the camp; the destruction of homes, the depletion of ammunition and food; the final storming of the camp and the execution of the young men; and his own escape to Jerash in the north.  The editors of *Al-Hadaf* presented the journal as "one of the most important documents of the struggle of the Palestinian people," and upon the request of its readership published it a second time.

In Baghdad, Azzawi saw the journal in *al-Hadaf*.  He had been horrified by the fact that an Arab state, with all the force had its disposal, had turned on the Palestinians.  He took the text and began to do a number of drawings on the basis of it, not so much as to illustrate it as to expand what he saw as its act of testimony.  The drawings traced the outlines of the *fida'i*, in its confrontation with the tanks of the Jordanian military, and in its encounters with the inhabitants of the Jebel al-Hussein refugee camp.  He is rendered in terms of with his iconic accessories – his machine gun or RPG and his signature *kaffiyeh*, the black-and-white checkered scarf worn to disguise the identity of the *fida'i* but also to cite a legacy of resistance going back to a revolt in 1936.  But the human form of the *fida'i* is traced only in fragmentary outline, with broad shoulders that dissipate into lines and blotches of ink on paper; and the *kaffiyeh* is stylized, dissolving into ribbons that create a sense of movement or evanescence.  Its forms flow in and

out from ink on the page to modeling.  In its facelessness, its anonymous singularity, the figure depicts the solitary action of the *fida'i*, bearing his gun against the tanks.

The first couple entries of the journal described the battle, and the drawings that interpret those entries largely focus on the *fida'i*.  But as the battle began to move into the neighborhood and the camps, Bassim's entries focus on the death he witnessed, and bodies began to enter Azzawi's drawings.  They lie across the picture plane at different angles to the figure of the fida'i, and are ornamented with flowers, funerary motifs for martyrs.  As the siege succeeds in suffocating the camp, a new set of iconographic forms proliferates: dangling limbs, puncture holes, lines of fire.

In the drawings the figures appear without landscape or setting, without even a ground line, as if, on the margins of the political order, they move in a very different kind of space, one ordered by its own physical principles.  The urban geography of the battle, as described in the journal, is reduced to a schema of vertical lines and squares that partition space.  They function both graphically to organize the picture plane and narratively to locate figures in a 'scene.'  Despite this geometry, the figure seems to move in a void that is generated by the *fida'i* itself, and it is in that void that the inhabitants of the camp come into view, first as faces and hands that reach up to him in distress, and then as the outline of bodies, dead bodies.

Later, Azzawi learned that Basim had in fact been an Iraqi poet named Sharif al-Ruba'i, one of the many Iraqis who joined the Palestinian liberation movement following the collapse of leftist politics in Iraq, and that he did not die until 2007.  Several of Azzawi's drawings were published with al-Ruba'i's poetry in *al-Hadaf* (fig. 3.42).  In 1972, Azzawi published the drawings, along with the text of the journal, in a book entitled, *Shāhid min hatha al-'asr: youmiyyat shahid qutl fi majzarat al-Urdun aylul 1970* (*Witness of Our Times: The Journal of a Martyr Killed in the Jordan Massacre, September 1970*).[25]

The book was itself an artifact of the moment inaugurated by *The New Vision*, not only in regard to its content but also in regard to the circumstances of its production.  Shortly after issuing *The New Vision*, its signers took over leadership of the Iraqi Artists Society – Azzawi became the secretary.  At the time he was producing the drawings, he had been working on preparations for an arts festival.  The Al-Wasiti Arts Festival in 1972 was supported by a generous budget from the Ministry of Culture.  Because the visual arts lacked any publications through which the work of artists could be made known to a wider public, the festival budget included large allocations for publishing, and a number of books, the first book-length publications on the arts, were produced:  studies of the thirteenth-century manuscript illuminator Yahya al-Wasiti, a survey of the history of art in Iraq from antiquity to the present, an introduction to modern art in Iraq.   For his part, Azzawi decided to assemble the drawings and the text of the journal into an art book (fig. 3.43).  In addition to the drawings and the journal, he gathered together additional materials documenting the Palestinian liberation struggle:  resistance and mourning songs, internal reports about the state of fighting in the different camps, excerpts from an article in the *Daily Telegraph*[26], and a list of the messages, written on white flags, that the inhabitants of the camp raised above their homes: *we have wounded*, *a corpse of a killed man*

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[25] The English translation was given in the work itself.   The Minister of Culture insisted, however, that any reference to *al-Hadaf* be removed, as the PFLP had fallen out of favor with the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad.
[26] "The Bedouin soldiers intentionally broke the fingers of little Palestinian children so that they wouldn't be able to carry weapons in the future."

*is on our roof, we need water, our children are hungry*. It was printed by Ramzi Print, in 5000 copies.

The drawings in *Witness of Our Times* were foundational to Azzawi's practice over the next decade. They marked the entry of the human figure into his work, the human figure that provided the basis of the critique of violence that I am tracing in Part Three of this dissertation. Essential to the nature of figuration in these drawings is the fact that Azzawi characterized Bassim as a witness [*shahid*], rather than as an emancipatory subject of armed struggle. He characterized him as a witness not simply because Bassim kept a journal documenting the events of Black September, but because he was a point from which a new era of violence on the part of the Arab states becomes visible, thus he is described as a witness of "our times" [*shahid min 1hatha al-'asr*]. In this section, I trace the evolution of the figure of the *fida'i*, from its entry into the artwork with *Witness of Our Times*, through its evolution in *Drawings from the Land of Sad Oranges* to *Human States*. In this evolution, the figure of the *fida'i*, as it recorded the history of the Palestinian struggle against injustice, and Azzawi's own experience in Kurdistan in 1974-1975, undergoes a gradual fragmentation, until its human form vanishes into the canvas, and the canvas becomes indiscernible fragments of a human body.

It is Bassim's account of Black September that enters the *fida'i* into the artwork. Azzawi's interpretation of Bassim as a witness to a new kind of violence was based upon the content of the journal, and here I want to begin by pointing to those moments in the journal where Bassim documents a new violence upon the part of the state. The battle began in the early morning of September 17. That night, in a long entry, Basim described and reflected upon what had happened that day. He recounts the sequence of the battle: the advance of the tanks from the edge of town to the office of the liberation organizations, and the confrontation that ensued, with intense shelling that pushed the fida'iyyun back into the Jebel Hussein neighborhood. At the entrance to the neighborhood, at Maxim Circle, something unexpected happened. The tanks turned their turrets on the homes around the circle and fire:

> At 9:15 the tanks stopped firing and began to use only guns as they finished making a ring around the offices. At that point we all withdrew.
> I think we lost about 20 dead and 30 wounded. We told each other that the battle had really begun now. For the tanks had occupied a worthless front line. In order to advance they had to engage us at every inch, and it was clear that the guys were everywhere and were very close to the blind tanks. Indeed when the tanks started to advance, they engaged us. Suddenly something happened that we hadn't take into account. The turrets of the tanks began to attack the houses arbitrarily. Brutally. Indiscriminately. The scene was terrifying; it paralyzed us. Floors collapsed and we suddenly saw among the unexpected debris the small, private things of people – but their intimacy torn and sometimes bloody, and in the middle of that hell we started to hear voices, "Save us, comrade! I'm injured, comrade. The army has killed me, comrade!"

When Basim is finally asked to return to the refugee camp, he finds the camp under siege and is again confronted with the effects of the Jordanian state's violence.

> I heard a cry in every place when they asked me to return to the camp. We expected a war in each house.
> The attack on the camp began with my arrival. The whole afternoon the tanks couldn't get beyond Maxim Circle and dropped bombs on the camp, without mercy, and like a rain of fire. Suddenly death loses its meaning. One gets a feeling that the people are sleeping, resting in the side of the road.
> Death and destruction. Dust. Gunpowder. The dried blood that looks like red mud. Yellow faces. The terror. In a few hours, all of that becomes normal, something one could live with. We sweat. We moved most of the dead and wounded to the schools and to the training centers of UNRWA.

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The third moment comes on Monday, September 21, the fifth day of the conflict, when the Jebel Hussein refugee camp is under siege. Bassim observes the Jordanian military make an identification between the *fida'iyyun* and the camp's inhabitants. Previously the *fida'iyyun* were distinguished from the camp's inhabitants. This identification indicates what Bassim describes as "an intention to annihilate":

> In the evening megaphones began to call for surrender. They were on the tanks. The radio station of the police did so as well. Something like this has not happened in history. They called on the fida'iyyun and the young men [*al-shibab*] to surrender. *Al-Shibab*: this is an usual equivalence. But it seems like the sign of an intention to annihilate that does not hide itself nor is it ashamed. The reality is that they destroyed the camps. Mercilessly. Mixing up the fida'iyyun and the youth, the resistance and the camps. Does that not have a meaning? However comrades, men from the PFLP, were everywhere. Their faces were not similar in fatigue, exhaustion, dust but also in determination. I decided today, in the span of a few moments in which things were equated that I had not considered as equal in my life: a cup of water, bullets, a piece of bread, sleep, death…comrades and the camp.

Bassim is in disbelief at the actions of the Jordanian military, but he accepts the convergence of the *fida'i* and those on its side of state violence. Ordered to transfer to the refugee camp in al-Wehdat on the other side of Amman, Bassim escapes Jebel Hussein to Jerash in the north.

Azzawi included in *Witness of Our Times* two supplementary entries composed by al-Ruba'i in which the *fida'i* speaks from beyond his martyrdom. Dated "The Day after Death," the passage tells of his capture and delivery to the "Caliph," a euphemism for King Hussein, the Jordanian head of state.

> My ammunition got me through, and everyone was killed [*istishhad*]. My shoulder cries and my blood rests on the bushes of Jerash, as I look at the homeland, at once near and far.
> Then they surrounded me, my wound healed and I get up.
> In front of my people they surrounded me, and in my eye I saw the earth turn over into the sky, my friend. The echoes of your last shots still ring in my head, as your guns glistened as you embraced the earth.
> My ammunition got me through, and everyone was killed. I will not leave this region. I saw the earth turn over on itself and spin as they took me to the seat of the Caliph. They didn't believe that I am me, and they killed me.

In the drawings, at the end of *Witness of Our Times*, the figure of the *fida'i* is rendered bound by rope and contained by a square. The death or capture of the *fida'i* was almost never represented in the visual culture of the liberation struggle. Here his captured body becomes, like the bodies of the dead that he entered into the picture, the face of a faceless violence.

Separated by three drawings from "The Day after Death" is a final text that is at once a part of the journal and outside it. It is written not in the first-person but the second, addressing the captured *fida'i*:

> Jebel Hussein, when it fell, was silent. The wind blows through the place, speaking of the sadness of your comrades, the fighters, and the sadness of the camp. The shirts of your fida'iyyun slaughtered in Jerash reveal the size of the last hit. They chose the time, and at dawn they came to you, their tanks making a noise like enemy dolphins.
> And they caught you.
> They searched for you at intersections, and they hid at turns in the road, and their dogs went sniffing the ground.
> The memory [*thakira*] of the courageous is not been forgotten nor does it die; for Palestine is the dream of yesterday and today, and the waking dream in the remembrance [*thakira*] of the courageous.

> When the dream collapsed around you, and your blood has mixed with the blood of your comrades, resting in the hearts and fists of the fighters –
>    And when the sun has been stained with the blood of the fida'iyyin, where it has glimmered on their guns, where their shirts have flapped in the wind, where mothers, sisters, wives and lovers have mourned you – our blood grows anew.

This is the voice of the poet Sharif al-Ruba'i addressing his alter ego Bassim. Even though the poet Sharif al-Ruba'i lived until 2007, the *fida'i* Bassim died in 1970. The dream, Sharif tells Bassim, has collapsed, but the memory [*thakira*] of the struggle will become the new phase of that struggle; the *fida'i* will be survived by its memory.

Critically, it was the artwork that would be the site of that memory, both al-Ruba'i's own writing and the visual art of Azzawi. Azzawi made a number of large oil paintings on the basis of the drawings in *Witness of Our Time* (fig. 3.44-3.46) which were shown at Raslan Gallery in Tripoli, in northern Lebanon, where they had a metropolitan audience involved in the Palestinian liberation movement. The paintings reproduced the simple geometric organization of space and various elements from the drawings – an arrow, a heart, the outlines of a *kaffiyeh*; but the color, the thickness of the paint layered on the canvas and the proliferation of shapes transfigure the *fida'i* into a "figure of sorrow" who is "alone" and "wanders", to cite the titles

These paintings were one of two sets Azzawi produced that year in which he developed a drawings on the basis of text, and then paintings on the basis of the drawings. The second was a set of work on the theme of the seventh-century poet Waddah al-Yaman, legendary for conducting an affair with the wife of the caliph and being buried alive (fig. 3.47-3.48). Moving across text, drawing and painting, the forms Azzawi worked with underwent several degrees of abstraction, such that the paintings could not be traced back to the text.

Azzawi's drawings in *Witness of Our Times* emerged out of the practice he had established during the nineteen-sixties, built in part on a concept of martyrdom inspired by *The Epic of the Martyr* and in part on a relation to text inspired by the poetry of Muzaffar al-Nawwab. It was the product of a method of working between image and narrative that had first posed itself when Azzawi illustrated al-Nawwab's collection of poetry, *On the Rail and the Lemon*, and that Azzawi had experimented with *The Blood of Husayn*. At the same time, the journal kept by Sharif al-Ruba'i was a text of a different kind inasmuch as it was a historical document of one of the most significant political events of the decade. The events of Black September were understood not only as the expulsion of the Palestinian liberation organizations from Jordan but as a turning point in the relation between the Arab states and the Palestinians. Because the Palestinians were seen as larger than life, "heroes not from this world," as Azzawi would later put it, and because they had become invested with the political energy diverted from liberal forms of politics, their crushing in 1970-1971 was a cataclysmic event, of proportions that are difficult for us to imagine, not only because of the intervening history but because the political landscape then was so different. The collapse of the Palestinian liberation movement marked an endpoint, and the subsequent isolation of the Palestinians haunted Azzawi's practice throughout the nineteen-nineteen-seventies. But, in what follows, I show that the *fida'i* acquired an afterlife in the artwork where it functioned as a critical device.

Before tracing further the afterlife of the *fida'i*, I pause here in order to provide a brief sketch of its life, or rather its birth out of the experience of the refugee, and its birth as a refusal of that

experience. The Palestinian liberation movement has two major genealogies.[27] One originated in the environment of the American University of Beirut in the nineteen-fifties and inherited the legacy of an earlier history of Arab nationalism. It had a pan-Arab orientation and married the liberation of Palestine to the liberation of the Arab countries from Western control. It was this strand of the movement that Azzawi and other Iraqis joined. The second genealogy originated among the population of refugees in Gaza, where an independent organization emerged first among students in Cairo and then later among diasporic populations of Palestinians in the Gulf. It was this that developed the concept of armed struggle which became central to the liberation movement as a whole and characteristic of the *fida'i*.

The concept of armed struggle grew out of spontaneous and individual acts of infiltration. The establishment of the state of Israel, through the armed conquest of Palestine in 1948, had displaced some 700,000 people into the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. Almost immediately many of these people attempted to return, either to reclaim their homes, or at least to see what had happened to them, to get things, or to take shots at the new Israeli state. Sometimes these acts of infiltration, as they came to be called, were organized by the Egyptian or Syrian military or intelligence agencies, where many sympathized with the Palestinians and were discontent with how the states had handled the Arab-Israeli war. Israel frequently retaliated against these infiltrations, and seeking to deter retaliation, the Egyptian, and by 1956 the Syrian, governments attempted to contain infiltrations by organizing them into military formations. Occasionally these military formations would be deployed to repel Israeli raids. However by 1955, Egyptian policy had changed, and Egypt began to form groups of commandos – called *fida'iyyun* – to gather intelligence inside Israel. At the same time however it tried to shift liability to Jordan by relocating operations from Gaza (which had become part of Egypt) to the West Bank (which had become part of Jordan). For its part, Syria formed an organization of what it called *maghawir*. Though the officers in these formations were Egyptian and Syrian, all the men were refugees.

It was however a slightly younger demographic that would establish the liberation movement, and it would do so outside the structures of the Egyptian and Syrian states. While the Egyptian and Syrian militaries were attempting to preempt independent Palestinian action by incorporating Palestinians into their forces, secondary students in Gaza, drawn to the social activities and sports clubs established by the Muslim Brotherhood, were being introduced to other forms of organization. The Brotherhood offered Palestinian students guidance in the absence of any leadership, and indeed it arranged for training and organized military bodies. It was within those military bodies that Khalid al-Wazir, who would be one of the principal architects of the concept of armed struggle, built a network of contacts that he called Kitabat al-Haq. Al-Wazir spoke thus about the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the early organization of the Palestinian liberation struggle:

> After 1949, as a group of youths we sought out the mujahidin who had participated in the Palestine War, to learn from their personal experience in combat…Most of them told us that they had fought in the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is in reality what deepened the ties between the youth in the [Gaza] strip and the mujahidin 'brethren'…The experience of the Brotherhood attracted us as a group of youths, especially as there were no political forces in the Strip besides the Muslim Brotherhood and the communists. But the Communists were few and had a special view of matters that did not match the

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[27] The overview I provide here of the Palestinian liberation movement is drawn almost entirely from Yazid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: the Palestinian National* Movement, 1949-1993. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

feelings of people, because at that time they were calling for coexistence [with Israel]…so they were limited to clandestine activity…[Whereas] the Brotherhood took the path of preparing and educating for armed struggle.[28]

In 1954 the Muslim Brotherhood was banned in Egypt, and the Palestinian youths began to undertake sabotage attacks on their own.  The strategy behind these attacks had been to generate an "explosive atmosphere that would increase Palestinian self-awareness."  However, it quickly became clear that the Muslim Brotherhood was only a political organization and was therefore unwilling to support, as Khalid al-Wazir put it in a letter to its leadership, "the establishment of an autonomous organization…that would promote the slogan of liberating Palestine through armed struggle."[29]  Still, the Brotherhood, which self-identified as a movement [*harakat*] as opposed to party, served as a model for al-Wazir, who with Yasser Arafat would found, to use his words, an "autonomous organization" with the goal of "liberating Palestine through armed struggle."[30]

Militating for a more active military operation, refugees in Gaza demanded conscription and arming.  The Egyptian government responded by extending the military training program for Egyptian university students to Palestinian volunteers in secondary schools in Gaza.  It was in this context that Wazir met Arafat, initiating a friendship that would develop when Wazir enrolled in Cairo University in 1956.  The circumstances surrounding Suez War that year underscored the absence of an autonomous Palestinian organization.  Palestinian students were disturbed by Egypt's ability to abruptly call a halt to the activity of the *fida'iyyun*.  Upon graduation from Cairo University, Wazir sought employment in the Gulf, but he and Arafat agreed to form a secret organization, and in 1958, in Kuwait, they established the Palestinian National Liberation Movement [*al-Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini*], or Fatah, for short.  Fatah came then to absorb other associations that had formed in camps and schools in Syria and the Gulf.[31]  In November 1959 they established a publication, *Nida al-Hayat Filistinuna*, both to serve as a platform for the organization and to propagate its existence.  Between 1959 and 1964 the membership of Fateh grew, as many activists abandoned political parties to join the Palestinian organization.  But it was no more than a disparate network until 1962, when a leadership was formed, almost entirely of refugees.

In its founding documents, Fatah articulated the purpose of the organization as a direct response to that condition of political abandonment named by the word refugee.

> Our people have lived, driven out in every country, humiliated in the lands of exile, without a homeland, without dignity, without leadership, without hope, without weapons, without direction, without support, without association, without respect, without existence…In all the long years that have passed we clung to our hopes and waited with great patience, until all hope had melted away.[32]

The revolution that Fatah called for was therefore as much about exerting the existence of Palestinians vis-à-vis other Arabs as it was about reclaiming the land that was lost with the establishment of Israel in 1948. "With revolution we announce our will [hence existence], and

[28] Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 81 [originally from interview with Salwa al-'Amad published posthumulously in *al-Safir*, April 25, 1988].
[29] Letter quoted in ibid, 84.
[30] Ibid, 90.
[31] Ibid, 87
[32] *The Structure of Revolutionary Construction* cited in ibid, 88

with revolution we put an end to this bitter surrender, this terrifying reality that the children of the Catastrophe [of 1948] experience everywhere."[33]  It was to overturn the "terrifying reality" of the refugee that Fatah developed the idea of armed struggle.

Where the formation of Fatah was a response to the experience of displacement, the other genealogy of the Palestinian liberation movement, that which emerged in Beirut, lies in the Arab Nationalist Movement.  Formed at the American University of Beirut in 1951 by two students George Habash and Hani al-Hindi, the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) had the goal of opposing pro-Western Arab governments, and sought to liberate Palestine by first transforming the governments of the individual Arab states.  Branches were established across the Arab world, as were weekly magazines.  Its members included a significant number of schoolteachers in UNRWA schools.  The ANM focused on the state, and although, with funding from wealthy donors, it recruited veteran infiltrators from the refugee camps to undertake operations, for the most part it concentrated its efforts on opposing pro-western Arab governments.

By 1963 the Palestinians had given up on the Arab states.  However in 1964, the Arab states, jolted into action by Israel's declaration that it intended to re-direct the head waters of the Jordan river, held an Arab Summit Conference at which it formed the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), to serve as a substitute for a Palestinian entity.  At first the PLO was greeted with suspicion by the Palestinians, as an attempt on the part of the states to contain the Palestinian liberation organizations, which indeed it was.  But Fatah was more open to dealing with the PLO than the ANM was.  However when, under pressure to prove itself, the PLO was outfitted with a military wing, called the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), Fatah, worried about being upstage, was forced to jump-start its program of armed struggle.

In 1964 Algeria provided Fatah with training and connected it with South Vietnam which offered exposure to other revolutionary experiences.  It established a base in Damascus, and it funded itself through popular committees in Saudi Arabia.  Before giving funds, however, wealthy Kuwaitis wanted to see results.  So Fatah purchased weapons from veteran fighters and from traders selling left-over stock from the Lebanese civil war of 1958.  On January 1, 1965 armed struggle was officially launched under the name of *al-Asifa* (The Storm), with short raids into Israel.

This was a political, not military, use of violence.  What Fatah sought to do was to aggravate the situate in such a way that would provoke a war, instigating the Arab states to act.  They called it *al-tawrit al-wa'i*, conscious entanglement, and they envisioned it as leading to *al-tafjir al-mutasalsil*, or successive detonation.  Small acts would set off a string of reactions, moving outward in "concentric rings", from the Arab masses, to the Arab governments, to the international arena.  For these operations, Arafat recruited veteran infiltrators.[34]

Fatah's preparation for armed struggle put pressure on the ANM.  In late 1963 it founded the Palestine Action Committee (PAC), which established its own mouthpiece, *Filastin*, edited by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani, as a weekly supplement to the Nasserist *al-Muharrir*.  The members of the PAC were trained at Inshas, in Egypt, and then they trained

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[33] ibid, 88

[34] Fatah absorbed other groups – the Revolutionary Front of the Ba'ath Party led by Yusif al-'Uraibi in Syria and the Palestinian Liberation Front (PLF) that had been formed in 1959  by junior Palestinian officers in the Syrian army, and that had been led by Ahmad Jibril.  The PLF had recruited from the camps, among UNRWA teachers and students.  It was hostile to any ideology and hostile to Nasser.  Recruited former members of the Reconnaissance 68 battalion.  The PLF brought Fatah an alliance with Syria, though which it got training camps, supplies, passports, not to mention recruitment.

others in Beirut.  But the ANM had come to take its cue from the Egyptian President, Gamal Abdel Nasser.  In 1956, after Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and stood up to Britain, France and Israel in a war to get the canal back, he became a beacon for the ANM.  ANM aligned its politics with him; even when Nasser indicated, in 1959, that he had no plan for liberating Palestine, the ANM wouldn't let go.  Nasser wanted to postpone any action, and the ANM continued to defer to him, less it seems because of his charm than because he was anchor in the state.  Thus the ANM sought a form of action that didn't go as far as "entanglement" [*al-tawrit*]; it sought what its spokesman, the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani described as, "above zero and below entanglement" [*fawq al-sifr wa taht al-tawrit*].[35]

A realization that time was on Israel's side led to greater sense of urgency, and at the beginning of 1966, the ANM met with the military wing of the PLO to form *Abtal al-Awda*, the Heroes of the Return, which launched attacks from the West Bank and Lebanon throughout 1966 and 1967.  For the ANM, what it called *al-amal al-fida'i* was, as for Fatah, " 'the means to save [the people] from the despair they are starting to succumb to' and to highlight the Palestinian problem in the international arena."  But it also had a strategic advantage vis-à-vis both the Arab states – it "would raise border tensions and keep the Arab governments on the alert" – and Israel – "constant raids on Israel would scare away immigrant settlers, weaken the economy, and paralyze vital installations, while readying the Palestinians Arab and international conditions for the final and decisive battle of liberation.[36]  At the same time the ANM recognized that "Palestinian guerilla action was insufficient to achieve liberation, and so it needed to overturn reactionary Arab governments and assist Arab unity in order to provide the power necessary to attain the ultimate objective of liberation."[37]  The ANM only authorized the beginning of raids – aside from the PLO's *Abtal al-Awda* – right as the June War of 1967 began.

The states were discredited by their defeat in the war, leaving the liberation organizations a wide space within which to operate; they were now permitted to do things that had not been permitted before.  Almost three months after the war, in August, Fatah resumed combat operations in the occupied territories; and in December, the ANM joined with a number of other groups into the Popular Front for the Liberation Palestine (PLFP), which it announced with an attack on the Ben Gurion International Airport in Israel.  The organizations, however, were now operating in a new context.  The revolutionary concept of *al-tawrit al-wa'i*, which had previously underwritten its notion of armed struggle, had relied upon the Arab armies.  Their failure led the liberation organizations to abandon the idea of "detonating" a revolution of the masses.  Now that was clearly no longer possible, and the organizations took advantage of the situation to secure themselves free from Arab control.  Paradoxically the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by Israel during the war offered a new opportunity for revolutionary action.  By wresting control of those territories away from Egypt and Jordan, the Israeli occupation made the territory available as a base.  That was quickly thwarted by Israeli policing and counterinsurgency measures, leading the organizations to establish themselves in the neighboring Arab states, primarily Jordan in early 1968 and in Lebanon, between April and November 1969.

In 1969, riding the high of victory at Karama, Fatah took over control of the PLO – and though seats on the PNC were shared among the different organizations – Arafat was elected chairman.  By that year, the organizations were launching hundreds of attacks each month.  Israel retaliated, to put pressure on Jordan to reign in the guerilla groups.  Israeli return fire cleared out

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[35] Sayigh, 111.
[36] Sayigh, 140
[37] Sayigh, 141

the Jordan valley, displacing 100,000 people, and went as far inward as the towns of Irbid and Salt.  As weapons began to appear in the streets of Jordanian towns, the Jordanian government, and in particular the army, became increasingly uncomfortable.  The liberation organizations set up checkpoints where Jordanian civil servants and military personnel were harassed.  Many balked at the fact that one could evade military service by joining a liberation organization.  At first the Jordanian government attempted to re-assert control over the country by asking the organizations to respect its sovereignty, by only allowing into the country individuals with permits issued by the Ministry of the Interior, staying out of the cities, notifying the army before conducting raids in the West Bank, refraining from recruiting young men subject to military service, and recognizing the Jordanian justice system.  But after repeated threats, King Husayn began reinforcing his relations with the Transjordanian community, initiating propaganda among the Jordanian military, beefing up intelligence on the liberation organizations, and establishing his own militia.  In February 1970 the Jordanian cabinet decreed that only Jordanian identification would be recognized, that weapons within city limits were banned, as were unauthorized marches, demonstrations or rallies.  That resulted in clashes between the liberation organizations and the Jordanian military, which occurred again in April, May and June.  A truce was reached in June, but after the PFLP seized a hotel in Amman taking eighty-eight hostages the clashes resumed.  By that point casualties of the conflict had reached 800-1000.  King Husayn attempted to negotiate by offering Arafat the premiership.  The possibility of a coup was increasingly floated among the army officers.  To ensure loyalty, Husayn increased the pay of soldiers.  At the beginning of September the PFLP hijacked four commercial carriers – one was destroyed in Cairo and the other three flown to the Jordanian desert – precipitating the confrontation.  Despite the Amman Agreement which brokered a cease fire, over the next ten months the army took control of the country, and routed the liberation organizations, which had started to bleed people, from their bases.  Until April 1971, the Jordanian military ferreted out the fida'iyyun from the forests in the area around Ajloun.

Having lost their staging ground in Jordan, the organizations attempted to regroup in Syria, where they had bases, but the Syrian government exercised tight control over the country, limiting the organizations' range of movement.  Thus, the liberation struggle would relocate to Lebanon, where bases had already been established and the state was weak.  When the liberation organization clashed with the Lebanese army, many Lebanese took their side.  The stand-off between the Lebanese army and the liberation organizations was resolved by a secret agreement in Cairo, between the Lebanese President Charles Hilu and Arafat, which secured the rights of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, recognized the right of the PLO to manage the camps, and allowed *fida'iyyun* to attack Israel through designated corridors.  The Cairo agreement had enabled the liberation organizations to expand their operations in Lebanon, but the events of Black September had initiated a set of debates over the future of the liberation movement.

Never resolved, those debates were put to an end by a coordinated Egyptian and Syrian attack on Israel in 1973 that triggered the October war.  The war was a game-changer, for, it introduced the prospect of a peace process, and the possibility of erecting a "national authority" on reclaimed land. From that point on, the historian Yusef Sayigh has argued, almost everything the PLO did, in Lebanon and beyond, was oriented by the goal of securing for itself the status of the sole internationally recognized representative of the Palestinian people.  By the middle of the decade, the PLO was transitioning from anticolonial liberation struggle to state diplomacy.  The organizations would continue to fight their way through the Lebanese civil war, until 1982, when they were forced to leave Beirut.  After passing an interval in Tunisia, they would return to the

scene in 1987, to take control of a popular uprising that broke out spontaneously in the occupied West Bank. But armed struggle had ceased to be a viable mode of political action in 1970, and the subjectivity it introduced dissipated in the years 1970-1973.

Amidst the disarray into which the liberation organizations fell, following their expulsion from Jordan, Israel not only stepped up its counter-insurgency operations but also moved to eliminate the leadership of the organizations inside Lebanon. As part of these operations, on July 8, 1972, the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani was killed in a car bomb planted by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad in Beirut. Kanafani had been the spokesperson of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the editor of its weekly newspaper, *Al-Hadaf*, which he had founded in 1969. But he had also been a prolific novelist and short story writer. His novels and short stories described the arc of Palestinian experience, from the disorientation in the years before 1948, to the experience of displacement in the Arab states afterwards, to the gradual emergence of the *fida'i* out of the experience of the refugee. His biography itself embodied that trajectory. Born in Akka in 1936, and raised in Jaffa, he was twelve years old during the conquest of Palestine, in 1948, when his family was forced into southern Lebanon. From there they moved to Damascus, where Kanafani worked as an art teacher in schools established for Palestinian refugees by UNRWA. In 1956 he went to teach in Kuwait, and then in 1960 to Beirut, where he worked in different newspapers associated with the Arab National Movement – *Al-Hurriyya*, *Al-Muharrar*, *Al-Anwar*, and *Al-Huwadith*. From these different cities – Damascus, Kuwait, and Beirut – Kanafani wrote the experience of Palestinian statelessness, and attempted to summon out of that experience a new subject of struggle. Following his assassination in 1972, the PFLP assembled Kanafani's writings into a four-volume edition of collected works.[38] The first volume contained his novels, the second his short stories, the third editorial pieces he had published in *al-Hurriyya* and *al-Hadaf*, and the fourth his literary studies. The first two volumes, which contained his literary work, were illustrated – the first volume by Mona al-Saudi and the second by Dia Azzawi.

      The short stories recall those who struggled and those who didn't, those who fought and those who fled, landlords who sold their land and the peasants who had only used guns to kill the hyenas that threatened their villages. They are written looking backwards, almost reaching, in an attempt to remember forms of struggle before 1948, and to interrogate the tenacity of those who struggled in the face of tragedy in the years after. They do not know always what it is that they want to say. They are stories that seem to search for themselves in the very act of telling, trying to understand or remember something that had happened that they can't quite grasp. Thus, they experiment with different narrative forms, often quite intimate – letters to friends, a kind of confessional monologue, conversations with the self, parables about the cruelty of human beings to animals – but they all possess a similar form, written from inside the experience they describe and addressed to the community of the displaced. Although the early stories struggle to elucidate a past that was not clear at the time, narrated in the mood of "I don't why…", by the mid-sixties, as the liberation movement is in full swing, the narrative becomes more certain of itself, and the stories cast the subjectivity of the *fida'i* – armed struggle – back to mandatory Palestine.

      The drawings Azzawi made on Kanafani's short stories from the nineteen-fifties and sixties employed a number of forms and devices that he had first developed on the basis of the journal kept by the *fida'i* Bassim during the siege of the Jebel Hussein refugee camp in Amman in 1970. The figures are modeled in ways that illustrate the limits of their action, and they

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[38] *Al-Athar al-Kamilah Ghassan Kanafani*. Bayrut: Dar al-Tali'ah, 1972.

appear localized in space, without context or landscape. Death is rendered by an iconology of flowers and feet. On the one hand, the vocabulary of forms developed for the *fida'i* in *Witness of Our Times* is employed here to give form to the experience of the refugee described in Kanafani's stories. At the same time, however, the stories provide additional narratives of struggle, which led to a further elaboration of those forms. The effect was to further abstract the *fida'i* from its political subjectivity. The tragedy described in Kanafani's stories seemed to undo the figurative integrity of the *fida'i*. The experience, narrated in the stories, puts pressure on its forms, which began to come apart, to breakdown into a multiplicity of lines and shapes that are neither figurative nor abstract. It is as if the *fida'i*, in its afterlife, was absorbing the history of Zionist violence, making it possible for that violence to enter the image, where it violence could be transfigured.

Here I discuss three of the stories and their drawings, in order to provide a sense of the kind of struggle described in the stories, and the effect they have on the drawings  Each story is representative of a different moment in the evolution of this struggle:  (1) remembering forms of struggle before 1948; (2) exploring the possibility of action in the present; and (3) those who did nothing. In Azzawi's drawings, as voice shifts in the different stories, from the first to the third person, so does the perspective of the picture plane, taking up the view of one of the characters, such that the figures are never constructed as they might appear from the universal view of a reader but rather are constructed from within the narrative. Sometimes we see from the view of memory itself, of the narrator looking back; in other drawings the drawing is constructed from the view of one of the characters. What I wish to show here is how the figures, bound and breaking down, are images not of the narrative but of the injustice against which the Palestinians were struggling. They are images of injustice constituted in the transfigured body of the *fida'i*.

The story "A Document from Ramleh" [*Waraqa min al-Ramleh*] was written in 1956, and it belongs to a collection of three stories entitled, "Three Documents from Palestine" [*Thalatha Awraq min Filistin*].  In it the speaker, who sells newspapers at a bus stop in Damascus, recalls something he witnessed, years earlier, before he and his mother fled to Damascus after his father had been killed in "the events" and his brother was arrested.  He had been nine years old, and he was stopped with his mother on the road that runs between Ramleh and Jerusalem, where they were forced to wait for hours under the sun.  He remembers being struck by the presence of female soldiers, who had dark skin and were cruel, and he remembers a feeling of atrocity [*asaa*] he felt when he saw one of them play with the beard of the village barber, Abu 'Uthman.  It was a feeling he said that he would never be able to interpret.  Standing at the checkpoint, he watched the soldiers shoot Abu Uthman's daughter in front of them, and then, when his wife, overwhelmed with grief, was unable to obey the commands of soldiers, shoot her too.  The narrator remarks that the memory of Abu Uthman gnawed itself "into the bones of the people"; that Abu Uthman would tell people the story as he shaved them, and that as he did, those memories created their own world inside the chests of people.  We learn that Abu Uthman was had a long history of resistance, first "when the revolution of Jebel al-Nar came to Ramleh" and then again "in the most recent Palestine war."  We are told that he had lost everything, and it seems that the murder of his daughter and his wife was retribution for his resistance.  At the end of his recollection the speaker remembers that Abu Uthman went to the military leader and blew himself up.  The story consists of a set of impressions that the narrator is struggling to order into a narrative for his own sake, to make connections between the atrocity at the checkpoint, Abu Uthman's resistance, his loss and his final act.

The drawing Azzawi made on "Document from Ramleh" pictures the scene at the check-point from the perspective of the speaker's memory (fig. 3.49). It shows Abu Uthman holding the corpse of his daughter, and to his right a pair of feet representing his murdered wife. Modeled with the wide, blocked shoulders of the *fida'i* in *Witness of Our Times*, he faces forward, a kaffiyeh wrapped around his head. The body of his daughter is traced with a minimum of lines. The juncture of the bodies proliferates shapes, initiating the dissolution of the bodies into lines on paper.

During the nineteen-fifties Kanafani also wrote stories that explored the possibility of individual action in the present, the possibility of a return. In "Until We Return" [*Illa an Na'ud*], written in Damascus in 1958, eight years after being forced from his land, an unnamed peasant returns to his farm in the Negev, in order to blow-up a storehouse built by the Zionists who had settled in the area and later forced him to leave. The storehouse had been built on a hill, where he and his wife used to sit at the end of the day, talking about the farm, sometimes inviting their neighbors to sit with them. As he walks through the desert towards his farm, he finds himself thinking about things he hasn't thought about for eight years, even though his thoughts are "like nails that don't go in" in contrast to "his feet that go into the sand." He imagines the shed as alien to the land, as something the land doesn't want to protect. To him it signifies tragedy. When he arrives at the farm, the sight of the storehouse triggers the return of a repressed memory, in the form of terrible images that flash up from his unconscious depths. They are images of their forced departure, of his wife hung from a tree by her own hair, and an image of himself, tied to a tree and forced to watch, to watch her choke to death, and to watch, when she tells him good-bye, the Zionist settlers stuff her mouth with dirt. The detonation of the shed is not narrated; all we are told is that the image of his wife merges with the sound of the explosion. It is as if what is destroyed in the explosion was not only the shed but that memory.

In his drawing (fig. 3.50), Azzawi renders that double image, of the memory of the explosion and of watching powerlessly as his wife is killed. We see the figure bound, and above him hang two feet, signifying his wife. They are adorned with flowers, which mark death. Not unlike the *fida'i*, the peasant in the story is explicitly identified as featureless, "nothing in his face that would turn a glance." Drawing from Kanafani's description, Azzawi models the figure not only with the broad shoulders and tapered body of the fida'i in *Witness of Our Times*; he renders the figure bound, and uses those bonds to model him. At once formative of the body and in excess of the body, they inaugurate a proliferation of shapes, neither figurative nor abstract, but an almost engrammatic representation of the history Kanafani writes.

Throughout his writing Kanafani contrasted ordinary figures of resistance before 1948 with those who either did nothing or who actively seemed to sell out the Palestinians. For instance, the story "The Man Who Did Not Die" [*Al-Rajul althi la yamut*], which was written in Kuwait in 1958, stages an encounter between a property-owner who sold his land to Zionist settlers and his former tenant. Mr. Ali runs into Mrs. Zainab in a taxi. She spits at him, and he touches an old wound on his neck, initiating a recollection of events that took place ten years before. The story is told first from his point of view, and then the same set of events are narrated again from hers. This narrative structure dramatizes not only a lack of convergence of perspectives, but also an absence of communication between an elite that had one relation to the land and a peasant class that had another – a persistent theme in Kanafani's writing.

Zainab had rented ten dounmat of land from Mr. Ali.  There had been hopes, on both sides, that Mr. Ali's son, Ahmad, would marry Zainab's daughter, Layla.  In order to make Layla a more suitable match for Ahmad, Zainab and her husband sent their daughter to Haifa to study, even though they needed her help on the farm.  In Haifa, Layla heard rumors that Mr. Ali was going to sell his land to Zionist settlers.  When they confront him about this, he confirms that it is true, but demurs that he hasn't much choice, that he is not "from here" and must return to his country.  He insists, though, that he is acting in their interest, making sure that they will get some money as a small security against the possibility of eviction by the land's new owner.  To Zainab the exchange of money for land was unfathomable.  They warned him that if he sells the land the peasants will kill him, and that night he is shot but does not die.  The attack leaves a wound on his neck – the wound he touched when he saw Zainab get into the taxi.  When he visits Zainab to give her the sum he promised, she lets it blow away and continues to work the land.  He notices that she is holding back tears, which he thinks are for the land, and he is taken aback by what he sees as the peasants' relation to the land, that land could cause grief.  What he does not know is that Layla had asked her brother Hamdan to break in to Mr. Ali's house to threaten him, and that the old rifle Hamdan took with him exploded into his chest, killing him.  Zainab had been crying not for the land but for the son she had lost.

The picture plane in Azzawi's drawing (fig. 3.51) is positioned from the perspective of Zainab, who beholds her daughter Layla holding Hamdan.  The torsion of Layla's body, turned over Hamdan, undoes her figurative form into an assemblage of hatching and shapes.  Hamdan's death is rendered not only by a body that dissolves, the life drained out of it, into the symbolism of flowers and feet, but also by the body's doubling, in its reflection produced by a line dividing the picture plane.  Beneath that line, Hamdan is entombed, in the black space in the bottom left-hand corner.  Hanging suspended on the right is Layla's name.  Beneath it, the first letter of Hamdan's name floats over the body, the other four letters laid out at the bottom of the drawing.

This use of writing was a technique that Azzawi had been developing in work he was doing simultaneously, on the poet Waddah al-Yaman.  Azzawi tried to bury references in the form of letters.[39]  In addition to their pictorial function, the letters were intended to arouse a certain "suspicion" about the image.

My concern here is with the relation between art practice and the breakdown of anticolonial liberation struggle.  I am arguing that the *fida'i* entered the artwork, where it was transfigured into a figural device that functioned as a critique of violence; and that process of transfiguration occurred in part by way of an abstraction of its forms, through Azzawi's illustration of the short stories of Ghassan Kanafani.  It is important to recognize that these two bodies of writing stood in a different relation to the Palestinian liberation movement.  While Bassim's journal on the siege of the Jebel al-Hussein refugee camp during Black September stood on this side of the collapse of the movement, Kanafani's writing was itself a form of art practice understood to be a part of that movement.  In describing early figures of struggle, Kanafani was attempting to locate a model for the liberation movement he was a part of creating.  His art was a compensation for an absence, with the purpose to arouse a resistance that did not yet exist.

When Fatah officially launched it program of armed struggle on January 1, 1965, Kanafani was then the editor of *Filastin*, a weekly supplement to the newspaper *al-Muharir*.  He was a member of the Arab National Movement, which constantly deferred in its decision-making

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[39] Nada Shabout has focused in particular on the trajectory of the letter in Azzawi's practice.  See *Modern Arab Art: The Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville, FL:  University of Florida Press, 2007), 109-131.

to its icon, the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Privately, however, it seems that Kanafani's own thinking was closer to Fatah's.[40] Between February 1965 and February 1968, he wrote several short vignettes that narrated the transition from peasant or refugee to a *fida'i*, even though the longest story had to do with the struggle before 1948. Kanafani integrated the stories into a kind of novella, composed of six tableaux, published under the title *Men and Guns* [*Rijal wa al-Binadiq*].

Though written just after the launch of armed struggle, the longest story in *Men and Guns*, almost half the book, has to do with the struggle before 1948. It concerns the story of Mansur, who borrows his uncle's rifle and leaves his village of Majd al-Karrum to join the resistance in Safad (fig. 3.53). In Safad, Mansur falls in with a group of men who have nicer weapons than he does, and ridicule him for his old Ottoman rifle. They explain to him the history, of how Ashkenazi immigrants moved into a historical Jewish neighborhood, where they opened big business that everyone patronized and began stock-piling weapons, unbeknownst to all, even the historical Jewish community. At one point, the men have to cross an open space under Jewish sniper fire. Half way across there is a barrel of water behind which the men duck when they come under fire (fig. 3.54). The Jewish sniper shoots at the barrel, and it begins to loose its water. Mansur uses his old rifle to provide cover for the stranded men to make it across. When Mansur returns home, he is chastised by his father, presumably for acting outside patriarchal authority. However, later, he borrows a gun from a tobacco dealer, and joins the battle at Khirbat Jiddin, where he unexpectedly he finds himself fighting alongside his father, and ultimately watching his father die.

The other stories describe the rediscovery of struggle on the other side of 1948. In one story, the narrator tells of a misadventure with his cousin Issam during a period he called *zaman al-ishtibak*, a time when there was not war but simply the struggle to survive, a struggle without virtue and without morality. It is a time, we are told repeatedly, that we cannot understand. In another story that presumably take place following the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967, the narrator recalls an interrogation by an Israeli soldier in which he is asked about his friend Salman. As he was marched with his family out of the village, the whole scenario seemed to him a scene from cinema, as if the soldier, ill-suited for his task, is simply reproducing something he saw in a movie. Keeping with the knotted narrative time characteristic of Kanafani's stories, his account of the events of 1967 is interspersed with flashbacks to his training in a camp with his friend Salman. There is a silence that reminds him of an earlier silence, in his training, when he was ordered to fetch a grenade that didn't explode; he had refused and his trainer aimed a gun at him, and in that moment all was silent. Salman had stepped forward, took the gun and fired at the grenade to explode it. Salman is subsequently kicked out of the camp, and told that he is not suitable to be a *fida'i*. Remembering Salman during his interrogation, the narrator claimed that he was innocent, and his mother thanks God that he is innocent, but he realizes that that word has lost its meaning. As the Israelis blow up their houses, he and his mother laugh to each other, and in that moment realize what Salman has done. Other stories similarly trace the subjectivity of the *fida'i*. One is about Hamid, who went deaf during an explosion. His deafness is explained in this way: after hearing so many stories of humiliation and defeat and fear, after hearing the laments of mothers and children, he stopped listening; he can't hear anything, he can only act. In another story, Umm Saad, a poor woman who toils to provide for her children in the camp, who told stories but never complained, comes to the narrator to say that her son has become a *fida'i*. Though she seems upset, as she asks

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[40] Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for a State*, 130.

rhetorically, why mothers have to lose their sons, she is not upset.  She tells the narrator that she wants to go to the camp with her son, to cook for the *fida'iyyun*, but that she has two children to care for; and if that is not possible, she wonders if she can at least visit her son.  The narrator tells her that that is not possible either because the *fida'iyyun* do not need the care of a mother.  She at least wants, she says, to go to the boss and tell him to take care of her son.  When the narrator tells her that what her son wants is to go immediately to war, she tells him that he should go to the boss and tell him to give her son Saad what he wants.

By the time Azzawi created drawings for the stories, in 1973, the program of struggle as Kanafani had imagined it in his writings had collapsed, and Kanafani had himself been killed.  This raises a question about the relation of Azzawi's drawings to anticolonial liberation struggle.  As interpretations of stories of struggle before 1970, how are the drawings situated in relation to the collapse of that struggle after 1970?

Perhaps some insight can be found in the name Azzawi gave the thirty-five drawings he made on the stories, *Drawings from the Land of Sad Oranges*.  The title references a story by Kanafani entitled, "The Land of Sad Oranges" [*Ard al-Bortugal al-Hazin*], that is in many respects autobiographical.  Composed as if a letter, in the sense that it is addressing a friend, it recalls, several years later, their sudden flight from Akka into Lebanon, how in a matter of hours they had become refugees.  "You and I, and everyone else in our generation were too young to understand the meaning of the story from beginning to end," but that suddenly became clear in a series of images that this letter to a friend describes:  in a truck loaded haphazardly with bedding, in the weapons surrendered at the Lebanese border, in the shriveled oranges.

The narrator had lived in Yaffa, but went to Akka for vacation.  It must have been vacation on the "night of the attack" [*lailat al-hajum*], he recalls, for his friend's father loaded him and his brother onto the truck, and took them with his friend's family into Lebanon.  On the way they passed orange groves, and just before reaching Ras al-Naqoura on the Lebanese border, they stopped and the women got out to buy some oranges from a peasant selling them on the side of the road.  As they got back in the truck, everyone looked at the oranges and started crying.  At the border, once he saw all the arms that the men had to surrender on the table and the trucks moving in Lebanon, he started to cry as well.  When they reached Saida in the afternoon, they had become, he says, refugees.

This is a story about despair.  He writes of a loss of faith, the faith of a child who had attended a conservative religious school, a doubt about the God in the pictures passed around by his teachers.  But what he wishes to remember is the despair he witness in his friend's father. In Lebanon, an uncle who had arrived shortly before had taken over the house of a Jewish family, whom he told to go to Palestine.  They partitioned the apartment; there was not enough room everyone to lie down.  That was the beginning of the tragedy [*masaa*], and it was followed by the beginning of family problems, for "the happy family had been left behind with the land, the buildings and the martyrs."

The father's initial despair morphed into anger and then later joy at the prospect of the Arab Liberation Army's re-conquest of Palestine; its defeat, however, was followed by a despair even more bitter.  The father had trouble even talking about Palestine, about the past tragedy; and the presence of the children was a new tragedy threatening to take over his life.  Little things infuriated him.  Because there was no food, the parents would send the children to the hills in the morning so they wouldn't ask for something to eat.  One day, somebody asked for something, and the father lost it.  Realizing that the father was searching for his gun, the mother sent the

children to the hills. However they stayed back, and overheard the father say that he wanted to kill them and kill himself. When the narrator returned at night, he saw the father lying down, the gun and the table, and the wife in the room "chewing the tears of a tragedy that has not to this day left her eyes." Next to the gun on the table was a shriveled orange. Understanding the father's murderous rage, the narrator explains to his friend that he ran away.

Azzawi made two drawings on this story (fig. 3.52), but here I would like to suggest that the land of sad oranges is the land of the stateless Palestinian, and that Azzawi's drawings belong to that land – a land that perhaps that only exists in writing and images. It is not only that the drawings give form to that experience of statelessness, by imparting to it the forms of the *fida'i*, in ways that subjectivize that experience. In moving from narrative to image, the drawings also transfigured that space of sad oranges. That act of transfiguration is evident in a particular quality of the drawings, the fact that the forms in the drawings do not move backwards, as it were, towards the text, but rather outwards, addressing themselves, not to a prospective viewer but to a justice that has been denied.

The same year his drawings were published in the *Collected Works of Ghassan Kanafani*, Azzawi was deployed on reservist duty to the north of Iraq. For nine months, he was stationed in the Harir Valley, where the Iraqi military was overseeing a number of measures designed to sabotage an autonomy agreement between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish population of the region.

When Azzawi returned to Baghdad in March 1974, he began work on *Human States* (fig. 3.1-3.8), the series of paintings and drawings that I began Part Three with. In the series, he drew on many of the forms that he had developed in *Witness of Our Times* and *Drawings from the Land of Sad Oranges*: a human figure that is fragmented by its bonds, the use of indexical signs. However, where the figure in those drawings had remained, on some level, referential, representing a particular historical experience, the figure in *Human States* had become a kind of device that not only rendered a violence that had neither a face nor a name but also, as Azzawi told the Moroccan newspaper *al-'Ilm*, functioned rhetorically to "remove the body from the dungeons of oppression."

Reviews of the exhibition published in newspapers in Baghdad commented on the relation of *Human States* to *Witness of Our Times*, as well as on the peculiar transfiguration of the human into the non-human that *Human States* instantiated. Writing in the government newspaper, *al-Jumhuryya*, the critic Hadia Hayder commented that

> Some of these paintings, in their rendering [*bi-taswiriha*] and their concept [*bi-afkariha*], remind me of the book, "Witness of Our Times," in which Azzawi translated the journal of a Palestinian martyr, with his nightmare and his symbols of life, the human being [*al-insan*], and struggle. I saw again the truncated corpses, the sharp, muted screams and the distant joy that comes with martyrdom [*shihada*], and [I saw] the suffocating nooses in the light and transparent color.
>     "Witness of Our Times" kept close to the political cause, to life and to death. However here the artist told me that he has a miniature model of these nooses, and that he knows how to hang them on the face of a white wall as the martyr hangs on the face of history.[41]

In the rest of the review, Hayder focused on the ways in which the various metrics in the paintings were the elements of a peculiar kind of realism, one that can represent an un-nameable reality.

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[41] Hadia Hayder, "Hatha al-Sarkha al-Mu'alaqa ala sadr jidar abyadh," *Al-Jumhuriyya*, March 15, 1975.

I will say that, after ten or more paintings, after I approach the doors of the cells and the secret letters, after the signs wear their true reality, and after the dove of peace mocks the stunned face and buries it in fatigue and captures for itself a souvenir image of his carnage – I will say that they are a kind of realism [*waqa'iyya*] that knows how to see the reciprocal relations between events [*ahdath*] and realities [*waqay'a*], and how to be sure that as the reality changes, so does its artistic reflection…I will add that nourishing tradition with letters and numbers will serve the new in this case and will give it dimensions that go beyond the cosmetic or accessory fashioning of the canvas.  These squares; these letters [*ahraf*], which form the basis of reality [*al-waq'a*]; these sharp lines, which attack the stunned, screaming face and attempt to suffocate it and silence the voice; these symbols which are granted colors in a way that is easy but not directly disturbing, or with less clarity – they are all a family of successful attempts that aim at binding the aesthetic feeling of the viewer with the kind of sociological work [*'amal ijtima'i*] offered by the composition [*al-tashkil*], that is, with what the artist means when he says 'human states'!

Hadia Hayder did not explain what she meant by the "reality of events" [*waq'aiyya al-ahdath*] that are depicted here by squares, letters, and a screaming face.

In *Tariq al-Sha'b*, the newspaper associated with the Iraqi Communist Party, the critic Abbas Abdel Kadhim offered a different reading of the various forms of annotation that appear in the paintings.  The numbers and letters, the rope and the metrics were, in his reading, displacements of the suppressed scream of the bound figure.  Focusing on the passage of the figure's human form into the non-human form of numbers and graphs, Abdel Kadhim observed that "the gaping mouth produces a kind of mathematical scream that reverberates in the world of ascending and descending numbers" and that "the rope tied tautly around the body is a language bound up with the peering eyes and the extent of the scream."[42]  The paintings "embody sometimes dispossession [*al-istilab*] and sometimes surrender [*al-istislam*].  Graphs and measurements render the muscular exertion and the resulting pain, which is translated into visual form by the dates on the truncated pieces of correspondence, the concerns [expressed in that correspondence] broken down into form, letter and number."  Form, letter and number are supplements that mark what cannot be said.

Like Hayder, Abdel Kadhim makes reference to a historical reality that he cannot name. He noted how the lines of horizon function to produce "a world full of emotional states [*infa'lat insaniyya*] engendered from the vanishing point of non-existence to the point of death and birth, passing through the blue zones of both the dread of total oppression [*al-idhtihad al-kulli*] and the actual perpetration of acts of such oppression, in the nooses, bullet holes and the lines of horizon, which transform into columns that scream loudly on the canvas."  How was it that Abbas Kadhim could conceive of "total oppression" [*al-idhtihad al-kulli*] as "an emotional state of human existence" [*infa'lat insaniyya*]?  Maybe it went without saying, everyone knew what they were talking about; or maybe because what Abbas Kadhim called "oppression" and Hadia Hayder the "reality of events" had no name, no face which was why the "realism" took the form of numbers, symbols and screaming face.

On March 11, 1974, the Iraqi government had abrogated the agreement it had signed with the Kurds four years earlier, and began deploying its military in the Kurdish regions.  It imposed a blockade on food and other goods, and it enforced this blockage with a network of hundreds of checkpoints and military patrols that policed the movement of commodities in and out of the area.[43]  As it took control of villages, it expropriated the crops of farmers, and burned the fields

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[42] Abbas Abdel Kadhim, "An Halaat Insaniyya:  Dhiyya al-'Azzawi," *Tariq al-Sha'b*, March 19, 1975.

[43] My account come from, *Kurdistan Review* No. 1 November 1974 (Helsinki, Finland:  Kurdish Democratic Party).

and orchards of those it suspected of sympathy with the Pesh Merga.  At the same time the Iraqi air force launched thousands of air raids, bombing civilian targets such as school, homes and hospitals.  Hundreds of thousands were displaced.

By the end of the year, almost 100,000 servicemen, plus some 30,000 reservists were deployed.  There was an information blockade.  The events only came to the attention of the international press, when the Iranian government flew journalists covering the Asian Games to the refugee camps it had built at the border to house the hundred thousand refugees streaming in from Iraq.  Within Iraq, no newspapers reported on the war, even though the causalities reached 7,000.  The war was unpopular, and many people spoke out against it.  Dissenting officers were removed from their command or transferred.  Others were put in prison, some were executed.

As he worked on the series of paintings, Azzawi was able to learn through word of mouth what was happening.  A friend of his, who was a journalist, was given information by another writer close to a government official stationed in the north.  After a year of hostilities, the war ended with the forced surrender of the Kurdish forces.  The Kurds had been supplied with arms by Iran, but once Iraq negotiated a settlement with Iran, in what is called the Algiers Accord, the Kurds were left high and dry, and facing what the KDP described in a press release as the "largest ever offensive" by the Iraqi military and air force on Pesh Merga positions and civilian targets, they were forced to surrender.  The exhibition of *Human States* opened the next week at the National Museum of Modern Art in March.

Throughout the war the KDP issued publications and press releases, in part to pull back the "information blanket" the Iraqi government had pulled over the war and to break the "conspiracy of silence" and to show that what was happening was not, as the Iraqi government claimed, "a rebellion against authority…connected with reactionary and imperialist circles" but a brutal war.  Addressed to the international community, the publications and press releases were an unequivocal appeal for humanitarian assistance.  They decried "the violat[ions of] the basic rights of the Kurds and the principles of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and documented what it called "war crimes." The publications documented air-raids and bombardments on villages, tallying the numbers of those killed in each and often naming them in its report; it documented deportations from towns and villages including Baghdad, again naming. contained names of each individual killed, and documented the air raids on each village.  It also documented the number of causalities on the side of the Iraqi military, the number of air craft it had shot down and tanks it destroyed.  It summarized military operations from day to day, tallying the dead and the wounded on both sides.  It also issued lists of those who had been executed or tortured for their opposition.

Situated on the other side of the conflict, Azzawi responded differently, deriving a critical language from the practice he had been developing.  The human figure that had entered his practice through the drawings he made for *Witness of Our Times*, and then evolved in *Drawings from the Land of Sad Oranges*, now offered a device through which the ethical impasse created by state violence, the impossibility of speech in the face of injustice, could be documented, and that injustice decried.  He called the paintings "human states" in order, as he recalled later, to name an experience of being in-between; of seeing somebody killed; watching buildings destroyed and entire areas bombed; of being in direct contact with violence, and with people don'ts speak your language, people who are at once like you and unlike you.

As Azzawi indicated to the newspaper *al-'Alm*, underlying his use of the human figure, to testify against injustice, was a concept of martyrdom, which he understood as a concept of representation – "a consciousness to record the truth".  Though Azzawi did not say this in the

interview, that record was created under the gaze of some future reckoning, and thus was a form of memory.  The concept of representation he pointed to had been introduced to the modern artwork by Kadhim Hayder in *The Epic of the Martyr*, transposed from the mourning celebrations for the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn.   In 1975, the ancient dichotomy of law and revolution, from which that tradition of remembrance was an exit, repeated itself, as it had in the aftermath of 1963.  The Kurdish movement for autonomy had sought justice either through an appeal to international law, as it did in its publications, or through armed insurrection, as it did in the Pesh Merga led by Mustafa Barzani.  Neither seeking justice from the law nor from revolution, Azzawi's practice sought justice through a concept of memory, though one that had now been transposed to the modern artwork.

The summer before the show at L'Atelier Gallery in Rabat Azzawi attended a summer art academy in Salzburg, Austria.[44]  There he had met the Moroccan artist Latifa Toujani who arranged for him and Saleh al-Jumaie, who had also been at the summer academy, to show their work at L'Atelier in the fall.  It was the first time he left Iraq.  For years, he had been denied a passport, on account of his earlier involvement in leftist politics, but this time he managed to secure a passport.  Founded by the artist Oskar Kokoschka in 1953, the Salzburg International Summer Academy of Fine Arts brought together artists from around the world for an innovative teaching program that broke with the course of study offered in national academies.  The academy was held in a castle, and in its various halls a different techniques was taught by one of the senior artists of Austria:  paintings, sculpture, architecture, etching, print-making.  Azzawi enrolled in the print-making workshop, supervised by Otto Eglau.  He experimented for the first time with print-making.  The twelve prints that continued the theme of *Human States*.  In addition to showing them in Rabat in September, he also showed them in Beirut in December and in Baghdad in January.

Azzawi's work on the subject of *Human States* culminated in three large canvases that he showed in the first Iraqi Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1976 (Fig 3.55-3.57).   Entitled, *Three States of a Single Man* [*thalatha halat li-rajul wahid*], the paintings referred to both, and at once, the abandonment of the Palestinians and the impasse of the Iraqi citizen during the Kurdistan war of 1974 and 1975.  Here, in these paintings, each conceived of as a *halaat*, where the fragmentation of the body becomes a part of the composition, the fragmentation of the figure in Human States reaches its zenith.  Years later he would describe these fragments as "the indications of a remains of a figure rather than a figure itself, which creates the atmosphere of the *dhaiyya* rather than power…an indication of a killing field, in a sense."

## From the Years of Slaughter

If *The New Vision* had located art practice on an "Arab" level, in the sense that artists in Baghdad did work on themes that exceeded an Iraqi context, such as on the Palestinian liberation movement, or addressed the Kurdistan war of 1974-1975 in broader terms, it also located art practice on an "Arab" level in institutional terms.  Shortly after issuing their statement, *The New Vision* artists took over control of the Iraqi Artists Society, where they were in the position to organize events that put artists from different parts of the Arab world into conversation.  The first such initiative was the Al-Wasiti Festival in 1972, and it was followed by the First Biennale of

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[44] The artists Rafa al-Nasiri and Saleh al-Jumaie also attended the summer academy.

Arab Art in Baghdad in 1973-1974, which coincided with an initiative to establish a Union of Arab Artists. In December 1976, the Second Biennale of Arab Art was held in Rabat. Dia Azzawi was the curator of the Second Biennale, and, in light of the siege and destruction of Tel al-Za'atar, a Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut that summer, it was supposed to be dedicated to Palestine, however only the artists from Iraq kept to the theme of the exhibition.

While many of those artists produced work on the siege and destruction of Tel al-Za'atar, the work Azzawi himself showed was about Black September six years earlier (fig. 3.58). It was an enormous painting, composed of two canvases, that he painted in Rabat, in the studio of the Moroccan artist Mohammad al-Qassimi. It is dominated by an agglutination of forms in the center, which on the right panel fit neatly together like slivers of shattered glass and on the left as if cut by design. One gets the sense that the dense multiplicity of colors is somehow a result of that shattering. Among these shapes, certain elements are recognizable as the features of a human body: hands, a head bent against the side of the work. Clouds form within the shapes and rise out into the space where this mass of forms hangs suspended. A horizon or tide makes it seem like this space is swelling. On the bottom right, a shattered face peers up and out.

What we see here is the dissolution of a human figure, to the point that that dissolution coincides with the construction of the canvas. It is as if, by a peculiar kind collapse, the figure depicted was becoming the artwork itself. It is perhaps in compensation for this figural collapse that supplementary elements appear in the painting. Marked along the top edge of the painting is a chronology: 1948. 1956. 1967. 1970. 1976. The year 1970 is crossed out, and underneath it is written "Amman". On the other panel, at the top left is scrawled the words *min sanawat al-thabah* [from the years of slaughter], and below it, submerged in black, is a line from a long poem about the *fida'i* by Muzaffar al-Nawwab, *la takhafu fa ma nahanu yaqillu fakul infijar yudha'fna* (Do not fear, we are not any less for it, because each explosion redoubles us).[45]

This painting raises a question about the relation between art practice and anticolonial liberation struggle that I would like to address by focusing on the inscription, *min sanawat al-thabah* (From the Years of Slaughter). The "years of slaughter" names a history of violence that came after the conquest of Palestine in 1948, and an injustice in excess of the loss of Palestine and the depopulation of its villages. This is an injustice that could not be redressed by the emancipatory project of the Palestinian liberation movement, formulated as it was in terms of armed struggle, because, referencing the events of 1970, it names the collapse of that movement. Azzawi's use of the word slaughter [*thabah*] should be seen in contrast to his earlier vocabulary of sacrifice [*dhahiyya*] and the root of *fida'i*, the word for redemption [*fida'*]. What is named in the painting is a death – slaughter – without sacrifice [*dhahiyya*] and without redemption [*fida'*].

The painting locates itself within the period that it names as "The Years of Slaughter." The fact that it does so indicates that it is precisely at this point, where the Palestinian liberation movement collapsed, that the practice of art came to be located in the nineteen-seventies. This is not to say that the artwork didn't do other things during this period; but rather it is simply to say that where forms of political action had failed, the artwork had a role to play. The question I pose then is, what then was the artwork capable of doing, following the failure of successive forms of political action, both liberal (acts of persuasion in the public sphere, political parties) and anticolonial (armed struggle)?

Azzawi himself clearly articulated what the artwork could do at the limit of politics. In 1978-1979, he produced a series of drawings on the massacre of the Tel al-Zaatar refugee camp.

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[45] The poem is *Min Daftar al-Sirri al-Khasusi lil-Imam al-Mughniyyin*

He was approached by Dar al-Muthallath, a publishing house in Beirut associated with the PFLP, about producing a limited edition collection of silk-screen prints on the basis of the drawings, in order to raise money for the children in the camp who survived the massacre. Eighteen prints were made (fig. 3.56-3.59), which were exhibited in Baghdad in 1979 at the gallery al-Riwaq, and then published in Beirut, along with twenty-one ink drawings (fig. 3.59-3.64), in a book entitled *The Body's Anthem* [*Al-Nasheed Al-Jasidi*]. The book included a short history of the camp, photographs from its liberation, and three poems by Mahmud Darwish, Yusef Sayigh and Tahar Ben Jelloun. In the introduction to the book, Azzawi presented the prints as a form of memory, which he set over and against both the elegy and the document:

> [The drawings] are not to mourn nor are they to be a document of a dark massacre; rather they are an expression that attempts to create a free memory that persists against oppression [*iniha ta'bir yuhawwal khalq dhakira hurra tatawasal dhid al-qhur*] until the time comes when its flame will burn forth brilliantly, a time that will summon the blood of friends and brothers, hastening the advent of those coming from the gates of martyrdom; a time when the nation will be as bread, unpolluted by blood and dirt, a space unhindered by black deceptions and nets of disguise, a beautiful time when feet will move safely and men will not sell their dreams.[46]

Azzawi described the memory he sought to create with his drawings as a memory that *persists* (*tatawasal*) *against* oppression (*dhid al-qhur*). Not a memory *of* violence and oppression per se, but a memory capable of standing against oppression. Contemporaneous with it, not recursive, yet existing apart, *free* (*hurra*).

Paradoxically it was by producing an image of the oppression that the drawings could "persist against it," that they could reach beyond it in the direction of "a beautiful time when feet will move safely and men will not sell their dreams." This is the sense of the phrase *tatawasal dhid al-qhur*, which I translate as a "persistence" of the image "against oppression." As an artistic act, the drawings established a space removed from the historical event of the massacre. In that space, neither were the dead mourned nor acts of aggression recorded. Rather this space was a kind of opening in time, within the horizon of a justice to come. The image was itself such an opening, a projection in time where the experience of oppression could by the same turn become visible and be surpassed. *Tatawasal* is this operation of the image—as a space of waiting, a state of suspension, within which it is possible to create a "free memory."

In this persistence of the image, in its eschatological stance, addressing itself to a future, we can see the operation of that concept of representation introduced by *The Epic of the Martyr* in 1965. Azzawi refused to represent the massacres and instead he chose to use the image to outstrip their violence, by creating a memory. *The Body's Anthem* maybe his most well-known work; it was widely collected, particularly by Palestinians involved in the liberation movement. It positioned itself at the limit of the liberation movement, the point at which that movement had collapsed. It was the outcome of a trajectory of art practice that I have traced in this dissertation, and I conclude my argument with a discussion of it.

When Palestinian liberation organizations were established in Lebanon in the nineteen-sixties, they inserted themselves into a conflict between the country's Christian and Muslim inhabitants that had already been one hundred years old. Although in the nineteenth-century that conflict issued from tensions between the Christian peasantry and Muslim overlords, it became, after the

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[46] Artist statement, in Dia Azzawi, *al-Nashid al-Jasadi: Qasa'id marsumah lil-Tall al-Za'atar*. (Beirut: Dar al-Muthallath, 1980).

establishment of the Lebanese state, a struggle over sovereignty. The expansion of the Palestinian liberation organizations in Lebanon aggravated that struggle over sovereignty, and their relocation to Beirut following their expulsion from Jordan in 1970, precipitated confrontations between the liberation organizations and the militia of various Christian parties. In 1975 a few violent incidents gave way to a concatenation of retaliatory attacks which took on a logic of their own.

By that time, the refugee camp Tel al-Za'atar, built in 1950, in a predominantly Christian part of the city, to house Palestinians displaced by the establishment of Israel, had come to house approximately 17,000 people. In March 1976 it came under siege, and on June 22 under full scale attack by the Christian militias. Shelling destroyed the camp's tin shack shelters, sometimes collapsing on their inhabitants, killing an estimated 400 people. Snipers shot off women as they darted across clearings under open fire to fetch water from the only available source. Food supplies ran out, and the camp was forced to live off powdered lentils, found in a warehouse. The siege lasted until August 12, when the camp was evacuated by the International Red Cross. During the evacuation, the Christian militias lined up thousands of men and executed them. The siege of the refugee camp and its massacre was seen as an earth-shattering event across the Arab world. It was the first time the Arab world witnessed violence of that scale. Large numbers of artists and poets produced work in response to the heroism of the fighters who held out against the siege and the massacre of survivors.

In 1977, Azzawi got a hold of a recording in which a Palestinian nurse described the Syrian invasion of the camp. (The Syrian army had enabled the Christian siege of the camp.) As he listened to the nurse describe the savagery of the Syrian army, what they did to bodies, he began developing a series of drawings (fig. 3.59-3.64) that portray a human figure confronted with a force of such magnitude that it cannot be seen or represented but is manifest in its effects on the body: in the look of muted horror, in the tangled mass of mostly unidentifiable fragments among which severed limbs can be discerned, in the hands that reach out from that mass of fragments, that strain against the rope binding them, that in the same gesture grasp impulsively for freedom and express the pathos of hopeless capture. The force rips through him, seizing him from within, exerting such a pressure on the body that it appears to fracture it into the lines from which the drawings are composed. This human form is shown to be nothing but the animation of his own annihilation. The coincidence of the lines of fracture in the body with the lines of composition in the drawing indicates that this human figure is itself, even prior to its pictorial inscription, only an image. The body possesses no ontological depth or density, and its human form is the mere surface upon which the operations of a faceless violence are rendered visible. Holding it, at the moment of its annihilation, the drawings transform the embattled body into a vision that functions literally as an anamorphosis, and produces an angle of vision from which it becomes possible to visualize the injustice of its death. On the brink of collapse, the body reflects back at its aggressor an image of itself, blinding it with its own dismembered reflection.

The forms of this human figure are the product of fifteen years of art practice and the sedimentation of a longer history of violence, one that began with Black September and ran through the Kurdistan war of 1974-1975. When Dar al-Muthallath proposed to Azzawi the possibility of doing a limited series of prints, he expanded his drawings into an art form that he had been developing called *al-qasida al-marsuma*, or the drawn poem, by incorporating writing from three poems by Mahmud Darwish, Yusef Sayigh and Tahar Ben Jelloun.

In 1976 Azzawi moved to London.  Soon after arriving, he traveled to Dublin, in order to see a number of illustrated manuscripts held at the library of Trinity College.  The history of manuscript illustration represented by Yahya al-Wasiti's illustrations of the *Maqamat of Hariri*, first invoked by the Baghdad Group for Modern Art as a basis for modern art, had hovered above the practice of modern artists but it was something that nobody could really see.  In the nineteen-sixties, exploring different forms of composition, Azzawi experimented with the kind of construction of space found in manuscript illustrations.  Now, he had the opportunity to see illustrated manuscripts in person, and seeing them inspired a new art form that he called *qasa'id marsuma* – poems that are drawn.

The *qasida marsuma* (sing.) is best understood as a concept of the image formed in relation to text.  Azzawi first developed it in a set of prints (fig. 3.65-3.67) on a collection of pre-Islamic poems called *al-Mu'alaqat al-Saba'*, known in English as "The Seven Golden Odes" but that translate literally as "The Hanging Seven" – hanging because they are said to have been embroidered in gold on curtains and hung inside the Ka'aba in Mecca.  The prints were exhibited at al-Riwaq Gallery in Baghdad in 1978, under the title, *Rusum lil-Mu'alaqat al-Saba'*, with the English translation "Illustrations for the Seven Golden Odes").[47]  Azzawi introduced them with a text in which he sketched out his concept of the "drawn poem."

> What is present here is neither words nor the ancient time contained in these poems, but rather the accumulation of letters and the succession of symbols on a single line of the image [min al-taswir].
>
> Poetry is not purely symbols nor is it only language.  It is the capacity to imagine [*taqat al-khayal*] and to re-remember [*'iadat al-tathakar*], such that this capacity can take different forms, and has in its possession signs that are unbound.  The relation of these drawings to the odes lies in the fact that the moment I wanted to seize hold of is that moment in which a certain picture develops of the relation of the human with his surroundings [*l-alaqat al-insan ma'a muhitihi*].  This human, which we see in the narrative [*tataba' sirdi*], is a model for love and failure, courage and vengeance, for the beautiful past like a mirage in the memory.  For this reason the forms drawn do not come together in particular phrases or in the poem as a whole but rather they are an attempt to embody that kind of relation between words as forms and symbols as a signification, and the capture of the engendering of that relation and its distinctive way of creating formal elements [*'anasar tashkiliyya*], and [they are an attempt] to transform the linguistic idea [*al-hajis al-lawghawi*] into a visual form [*shakl basri*].  For this reason there is a tension between the odes as drawings and the odes as poetry, even though the first relies upon the second.
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> The drawn ode [*al-mu'alaqat al-marsuma*] is a middle ground between seeing and linguistic memory; but this balance does not last, as the movement of the form and the scattered words, voided of their linguistic meaning, comes to create an expression that cancels the balance, and [that expression] becomes the visual substitute, composed of the elements of the drawn ode (words, forms, symbols).
>
> In this way it is possible for the odes to create its present outside the past of the poem and its linguistic details, in order to become a contemporary sign and a means of measurement.[48]

In the text, Azzawi defines poetry in a way that invites the production of images, by emphasizing a certain extensibility in poetry in excess of its use of language and its symbolism.  What defines poetry, he claims, is a capacity for imagination and memory that can be renewed in different modalities, such as in the drawing.[49]  Therefore, the relation between the drawings and the poems

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[47] *Rusum* (sing. *rasm*) is not typically translated as illustrations but paintings or drawings, generically.  The English translation of the title points to the inspiration of the work, but also to a re-signification of *rasm*.

[48] Introduction to *Rusum lil-Mu'alaqat al-Saba'* [Illustrations of the Seven Odes], at Al-Riwaq Gallery, Baghdad, 1979.

[49] Behind this understanding of poetry, again, is the poetry of Muzaffar al-Nawwab.  Al-Nawwab was famous not only because of his politics and the politics of his poetry, but because of the formal innovations he introduced.

of the *Mu'laqat al-Saba'* cannot be specified on the level of language per se; they do not correspond to any one line or another. Rather, Azzawi says, the drawings are born out of an "attempt to seize hold of" an image that arises at some point in the reading of the poem, an image of "the relation of the human with his surroundings." In this way, the *Seven Golden Odes* offer a model of the subject, and the drawings try to recover that model, not by illustrating the narrative of its struggles, but by "embodying" the peculiar relation of words written down – in this case on curtains – to the symbols they elaborate, and the meaning those symbols produce. The drawings embody the relation between words and symbols by "transform[ing] the linguistic idea into visual form." That transformation is modeled on the original act of writing, such that visual form is not representational but a marking that generates symbols, which create meaning. Thus, like writing, what is produced in the drawing abstracts away from itself; it is, Azzawi says, a "middle ground," though one constantly destabilized by the excess of form in the drawing over signification. This excess of visual form over language endows the drawings with a peculiar temporality, wherein the drawing "creates its present outside the past of the poem."

It was at the same time as Azzawi was conceiving of the artform of the *qasida marsuma* that he was working on the drawings on Tel al-Za'atar. We could say that the drawings and prints in *The Body's Anthem* emerge as "a picture of the relation between the human and its surroundings" that surged up as Azzawi listened to the recording of the Palestinian nurse in Tel al-Za'atar during the invasion. There are however important differences between this work and *The Seven Golden Odes*. For, unlike in the case of *The Seven Golden Odes*, the human figure that appears in *The Body's Anthem* is not "a model for love and failure, courage and vengeance, for the beautiful past like a mirage in the memory" but rather the figure of a historical experience. Importantly, the point here is not simply to create an image of that figure, but to transfigure it into an image of justice. Thus, the linguistic image that emerges in the testimony of the nurse finds visual form in the formal vocabulary that Azzawi had first developed in *Witness of Our Times* and that subsequently evolved in *Drawings from the Land of Sad Oranges* and *Human States* – the human figure rendered on the threshold of its fracture into fragments, the metrics and indices that annotate the violence done to the figure. Governing this image was a concept of memory that imparted to the drawings a specific temporality. Note that Azzawi attributed a temporality to *The Seven Golden Odes*; as drawings they "create [their] present outside the past of the poem" and that temporality lied in the excess of visual form over language. In this case, by virtue of the kind of text in question, not a poem but the testimony of an injustice, the temporality of the drawings lies in their capacity to extend that testimony into a future moment of reckoning.

In its construction, *The Body's Anthem* is different in another way. The writing that appears in the drawings and prints is not from the testimony of the nurse (i.e. the text that gave rise to the "picture of the relation between the human and its surroundings") but from three poems by Mahmud Darwish, Yusef Sayigh and Tahar Ben Jelloun. Azzawi never indicated that the drawings had been based on the testimony of the nurse; in some sense that testimony, overwritten by the poetry, is buried in the image.

My argument is that by the late nineteen-seventies the practice of art came to be located at the limit of the Palestinian anticolonial liberation struggle. In order to show the limits of that struggle and the capacity of the artwork to occupy a place beyond those limits, I juxtapose to *The*

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Instead of writing in high Arabic, he wrote, in his early poems, in a dialect from southern Iraq; and, for Azzawi, his poetry had an imageric quality, which Azzawi attributed to the fact that al-Nawwab had also been a painter.

*Body's Anthem* two pieces of writing from the Palestinian liberation movement. Both texts are written by Mahmud Darwish on the siege and massacre of Tel al-Za'atar, and were published in the broader discursive milieu in which Azzawi was working. The first text I want to turn to is the poem, "Ahmad al-Za'atar," one of the three poems Azzawi drew upon in *The Body's Anthem*, not to construct the human figure, but rather to provide the writing that appears in the drawings. Even though the figure in the drawings took shape within the testimony of the Palestinian nurse, the name Azzawi gave the series was taken from this poem by Darwish. The poem identifies itself as an anthem [*nasheed*], for a figure that embodies the subject of the liberation struggle, and that it names Ahmad.

> With hands of thyme [za'atar] and stone
> This anthem…for Ahmad, the one forgotten between two butterflies.

This image of something missing or missed, in the space between two things, punctuates the poem; it is the poem's leitmotif, and it functions to articulate the loss of the figure of struggle it sings. In naming the series *The Body's Anthem*, Azzawi seems to be presenting the body of the figure, formed within the testimony of the nurse, as an anthem for that lost figure of anticolonial liberation struggle.

The second text I will turn to is a kind of prose text – those prose, as Sinan Antoon has commented of this genre of Darwish's writing, "is not the most satisfactory category, but rather the most convenient…[t]hese texts are teeming with poetry, in form as well as in style and spirit, and the boundary between poetry and its others is blurred and effortlessly transcended."[50] Entitled, "Oh, Forgetting, You Are Fitting for All Names, But You Will Not Be for Tel al-Za'atar," written in the immediate aftermath of the massacre of the camp, and published in *Al-Shu'un al-Filistiniyya*, the journal Darwish edited, concerned itself not with the lost figure of anticolonial liberation struggle but with the inadmissibility of the event – its namelessness – within an arena of international recognition.

For my purposes here, I would like to suggest that the first text was written by Darwish, in his capacity as poet, and the second was written while wearing the hat of the PLO. Born in the village of al-Birweh in 1941, Darwish grew up, after a period of years as a refugee in southern Lebanon, largely in Haifa. There he became an active member of the Israeli Communist Party, which functioned as a political framework for Palestinians interested in any kind of resistance. In 1970, he left Israel, and, following a short sojourn in Cairo, moved in 1973 to Lebanon where he joined the PLO, acquiring the role of the organization's resident poet. In constructing a contrast between these two texts, one belonging to the poet and the other belonging to the liberation movement, and juxtaposing both to *The Body's Anthem*, I aim to flesh out the distinction with which Azzawi introduced those drawings, as a form of memory over against a document on the one hand and an elegy on the other. I begin with the elegy.[51]

The poem "Ahmad al-Za'atar" is haunted by a loss, or the sense that something is missing – haunted not only in the sense that it is a recurring theme, but also because and the poem is

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[50] Foreword to Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), xi.
[51] The translation is mine. I am working with the copy of the poem that was included in *al-Nashid al-Jasadi: Qasa'id marsumah lil-Tall al-Za'atar*. Beirut: Dar al-Muthallath, 1980.

written against the loss of that loss, its forgetting, which seems to occur by some non-human process.

> The clouds passed by and drove me away
> The mountains threw out their ridges and hid me

The anthem offered in the poem is an anthem to a singular figure, and the one who offers it comes "alone" [*wahdi*].

> Coming down from the ancient wound to the details
> Of the country, and the year was the separation between the sea and the cities
> Of ash, and I was alone
> Then alone…

The poem unfolds as the discovery of these details.

It begins with Ahmad's biography, a figure of the refugee born in the camps and who became a fighter.

> Oh, you who are alone?  And Ahmad
> Was the exile of the sea between two rounds
> He grows up in a camp that begets thyme [*za'tar*] and fighters

But the very emergence of this subjectivity was predicated on a certain absence of memory:

> And an arm that gets stronger in forgetting
> Memory is the trains that pass by
> And the platforms without anyone to receive them and the jasmine
> The discovery of the self was in the cars
> And the view of the sea
> And nights spent together in prison cells
> And in asking after the truth

It is not that he is constituted by that absence, or the absence of that for which he searches; he is constituted on a different terrain than that of the symbolic order.  He is constituted by the view of the sea, nights spent together, asking about the truth, the banana leaf upon which he is born.  He exists even though he has no identity.

> In everything Ahmad met with his opposite
> For twenty years he has been asking
> For twenty years he has roamed
> For twenty years his mother has been bringing into world, in a minutes on a banana leaf
> And she pulled back
> He wants an identity and so he is hit by a volcano
> The clouds left and drove me away
> The mountains threw out their ridges and hid me.

Since he has no place established in the symbolic order, the poem then offers Ahmad a place from which he can identify himself:

> I am Ahmad al-Arabi – he said
> I am the bullet the orange the memories
> I found myself next to myself

> So I distanced myself from the dew and the view of the sea
> Tel al-Zaatar the tent
> I am the country and it came
> And it reincarnated itself in me.
> I am the continuous going to the country
> I found myself filling myself…

That is, he is his own subject position.

The poem situates Ahmad's singularity in relation to his betrayal by the empty promises of Arab nationalism:

> Ahmad would find his ribs and his hands
> He was the step – the star
> From the Atlantic to the Gulf, from the Gulf to the Atlantic
> They have promised spears
> As Ahmad climbs up in order to see Haifa
> And jumps.

And then his abandonment:

> Ahmad now the hostage
> The city has left its streets
> And it came to him
> To kill him
> From the Gulf to the Atlantic, from the Atlantic to the Gulf
> They have promised the funeral and voted for the guillotine

In the midst of this failure on the part of the states to deliver on their promises, with the empty slogans of Arab unity – "from the Gulf to the Atlantic" – Ahmad makes his own body the weapon.

> I am Ahmad al-Arabi – let the siege come
> My body, it is the ramparts – let the siege come
> I am the line of fire – let the siege come
> I will be the one to block you
> I will block you
> My chest is the gate for everyone – let the siege come

Having extended to Ahmad a place in speech, the poem clarifies its own relation to his declarations, to the voice it is restoring to him.

> My song did not come to paint Ahmad dark blue in the trench
> The memories are to my back and it is the day of sun and lilies
> Oh boy, divided between two windows
> That do not return my messages
> Resist
>
> Indeed the resemblance to sand…and you are blue
> I count my ribs and the Barada escapes my hands
> The banks of the Nile leave me far behind
> I search for the limits of my fingers
> For I see all the capitals frothing
> As Ahmad rubs the hours in the trench

The poem returns again to make clear that it does not intend to create the kind of image of resistance that seen on the covers of *al-Hadaf*:

> My song did not come to paint Ahmad burned blue

If the poem is not going to paint Ahmad as the *fida'i*, then how what song does it sing of him? Because he is without identity, the poem continuously finds itself with the need to say what Ahmad is; because he is featureless, it has to identify his qualities.

> He is Ahmad the cosmic in this narrow, tin [shack]
> The ruptured one dreaming
> He is the orange bullet…the bullet-colored, leaden purple
> He is the final outbreak of noon
> On a day of freedom

The poem then shifts to address itself to Ahmad

> Oh boy dedicated to dew
> Resist!
> Oh country – the gun in my blood
> Resist!
> Now I complete in you my song
> As I go to your siege
> And now I complete in you my questions
> As I am born from your dust
> For go to my heart you find my people
> Becoming peoples in your explosion

The poem attempts to summon Ahmad back, and it will try to do so repeatedly, but it can't, so it presents itself as the fulfillment of Ahmad's act. It positions the poem as the fulfillment of armed struggle.

Yet the poem loses its nerve, it quickly questions that politics; it turns into a confession, a letting go. It is the confession of the refugee – the other refugee, who took refuge in poetry when the cities he tried to embrace rejected him.

> …Walking among the details I leaned on water
> And I fell to pieces
> Whenever quince sighed did I forgot the limits of my heart and take refuge in a siege in order to define my status, oh Ahmad al-Arabi?
> Love did not lie to me. But whenever night came
> I was absorbed by a distant ring
> And I took refuge in my bleeding in order to define my image
> Oh Ahmad al-Arabi.
> I did not wash my blood with the bread of my enemies
> But whenever my step passed over a road
> The roads near and far ran away
> Whenever I made a brother of a capital it threw my bag at me
> I sought refuge on the sidewalk of the dream and poetry
> How often I go to my dream preceded by daggers
> Oh from my dream and from Rome!
> Beautiful you are in exile
> Dead you are in Rome

And Haifa began from here
And Ahmad is the way up to Mount Carmel
And the bismillah of dew, local thyme [za'atar], and the house

Here the poem abruptly pivots, addressing in second-person plural, to some unidentified collective, a litany of injunctions that seek to preserve:

Do not steal from the swallows
Do not take from the dew
The eyes wrote its elegy
And left my heart to the echoes
Don't steal from eternity
And do not scatter it on the cross
For it is the map and the body
And it is the setting alight of the nightingale
Do not take from the pigeon
Do not send him to the job
Do not paint his blood handsome
For he is the purple that runs

As the poet identifies the "details of the country," the poem crescendos into his own anthem, or it tumbles into the subject position Ahmad had established.

…Ascending towards the meeting of the dream
The banal details take on the form of a pear
And the country separates away from the offices
And the horses from the bags
To sweat gravel.  I embrace the silence of this salt
I give a speech on the lemon to the lemon
From my open wound I light my candle for the flowers
And for the dried fish
The gravel has sweat and a mirror
The lumberjack has the heart of a dove
I forget you sometimes in order for the police to forget me
Oh my beautiful woman you cut the heart and the onion
Fresh and go to the purple.
Remind me before I forget my hands
And ascending towards the meeting of the dream
The seats are fewer and fewer beneath my trees and your shadow
The climbers vanish in your wounds like seasonal fog
And those looking on vanish
So remind me before I forget my hands!
For the butterflies my effort
And the stones are my messages to the earth
Troy is not my home
Nor is Masada my time
For I ascend on the dryness of bread and water sourced
From a horse lost on the way to the airport
And from the air of the sea I ascend
To shrapnel my body has become addicted
I ascend from the eyes of those arriving at the setting [of the sun over] the plain
I ascend from the boxes of greens and
And the strength of things I ascend
I belong to my first sky and to the poor in every alley
They chant

[They are] steadfast
        And steadfast
        And steadfast

The poem then returns to Ahmad whose body is identified with the camp, and whose body
reconstitutes the Arab world into a different geography

        The camp was the body of Ahmad
        Damascus was Ahmad's eyelids
        The Hijaz was Ahmad's shadow
        The siege is the passing of Ahmad over the hearts of millions of
        Prisoners
        The siege is Ahmad's attack
        And the sea is his final round!

But then, when the poem turns to address itself to Ahmad, Ahmad turns away. Or he is already
turned away, as the poet anticipates his own rejection, when he presents himself with those
"details of the country" that he has been uncovering.

        Oh blast of all the wind!
        Oh week of sugar!
        Oh name of the eyes and oh marble echo
        Oh Ahmad born of stone and thyme [za'atar]
        You will say: No
        You will say: No
        My skin is the cloak of every peasant who will come from the tobacco fields
        In order to eliminate the capitals
        And you say: No
        My body is the manifesto of those coming from the light industries
        And the repetition…and the epics
        Towards breaking in upon the stage
        And you say: No
        And my hands are the greetings of flowers and their bomb
        Is raised as the daily duty against the stage.
        And you say: No
        Oh body, bloody by the foothills
        And the suns to come
        Oh body which marries the waves
        Above the guillotine
        And you say: No
        And you say: No
        And you say: No!

The reason Ahmad says "no," it seems, is that his body has been transmogrified and his death
erased from the speech of the living by jasmine. Thus the poem bids Ahmad to go, go forth in
his transmogrification:

        You die next to my blood and are alive in the flour
        We visit your silence when your hands ask for us
        And when the firefly sets us alight
        The horses walked on the little birds
        So we created jasmine
        To make the face of death be absent from our words
        So go far in the clouds and in the fields

> There is no time for exile and my song…
> The crowds of death will sweep us away so go in the crowd
> So that we are sick with the simple nation and the chance of jasmine
> And go to your blood ready to spread you
> And go to my blood united with your siege
> There is no time for exile
> And for the beautiful pictures above the street walls and the funerals
> And the wishes
> The birds wrote its elegy and drove me away
> And the fields threw out their flanks and gathered me together
> So go far in my blood! And go far in the flour
> So that we are sick with the simple nation and the chance of jasmine

The poem encourages Ahmad in this transmogrification, his flight into clouds and field, into blood and flour.

> Oh Ahmad the everyday!
> Oh name of those searching on dew and the simplicity of names
> Oh name of the orange
> Oh Ahmad the ordinary!
> How did you erase this difference in pronunciation between the stone and the apple
> Between the gun and the deer!
> There is no time for exile and for my song…

What is happening here is the metaphorization of the siege or the de-terriortialization of struggle,

> We will go to the siege
> Until the ends of the capitals
> So go deep in my blood
> Go as a bud
> And go deep in my blood
> Go as rings
> And go deep in my blood
> Go as a ladder
> Oh Ahmad al-Arabi…resist!
> There is no time for exile and for my song
> We will go to the siege
> Until the sidewalk of bread and the waves
> That space of mine and the inherent space of the nation
> Death [comes] before the dream
> Or a dream dies on the banner
> Go deep in my blood and go deep in the flour
> So that we are sick with the simple nation and the chance of jasmine

The poem concludes with the paradox of a figure that has "everything" and that yet is unknown, a figure that dwelled within the poet and that now is absent, a figure whose face is mysterious but who projects his features onto the living.

> …He has the turns of autumn
> He has the wills of the orange
> He has the poem in bleeding
> He has the wrinkles of the mountains
> He has the acclaim
> He has the wedding
> He has the illustrated magazines

The consoling elegy
The posters on the wall
The flag
Progress
The brass band
The announcements
And everything everything everything
When he announces his face to those going to [see] the features of his face
Oh Ahmad the unknown!
How have you lived in us for twenty years and disappeared
And your face remains mysterious like noon
Oh Ahmad secret like fire and forests
Do I make your popular face famous in us
And read your last will?
Oh those watching!  Disperse in silence
And go away from him in order to read his will
On the dead if they have died
And in order to throw his features on the living
Oh my brother Ahmad!
You are the worshiper, the worshipped and the place of worship
When do you bear witness
When do you bear witness
When do you bear witness?

He is finally a figure who does not or at least has not yet born witness.  It is a question whether or not the poem, addressed as it is sometimes to Ahmad and sometimes to others, performs that testimonial work of bearing witness.  It struggles to understand this formless figure that had for twenty-years lived within and yet was unknown, a figure that has "disappeared" into the clouds and the fields but that is supposed to have "thrown his features on the living."

In some sense, "Ahmad al-Za'atar" is an anthem for the political subject that Ghassan Kanafani sought to summon into existence by narrating its figures of struggle in the short stories he wrote during nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties.  But it is an anthem for that political subject on the other side of the Palestinian liberation movement, following its collapse as an anticolonial struggle.  The PLO would persist for another five years in Lebanon, and then after its exile to Tunisia, make a return in 1987 to claim for itself the uprising of Palestinians in the West Bank against the Israeli occupation.  But, as Samera Esmeir has pointed out, already by 1976, in its bid to be recognized as the sole representative of the Palestinians, the PLO had transitioned from an anticolonial liberation organization into a state-like body dwelling in the order of the international.

This transition is evident in the second text by Darwish I wish to discuss.  Originally published in the journal, *Shu'un Filistiniyya*, "Oh, Forgetting, You Are Fitting for All Names, But You Will Not Be for Tel al-Za'atar" was later published as the introduction to a publication produced by the PLO on the siege and massacre of Tel al-Za'atar refugee camp.[52]  Entitled *Tariq Tel al-Za'atar* (The Way of Tel al-Za'atar), the book contained testimonies of fighters and residents compiled by Hani al-Mandas, children's drawings gathered by the artist Mona al-Saudi, photographs of the siege and execution of the men in the camp by the Christian militias, and a facts on the history of the camp.  Its cover reproduced a painting made by Dia Azzawi (fig. 3.65).

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[52] Hani al-Mandas, ed. *Tariq Tall al-Za'atar*.  Bayrut:  Markaz al-Abhath al-Filistiniyya – al-l'Ilam al-Muwahhad, Munazzamat al-Tahrir al-Filastiniyah, 1977, 11-15.

The inclusion of Darwish's text as the introduction to the book positions it as, in some way, not a reflection on the part of an individual, but a statement on behalf of an organization.

The text focuses on the namelessness of the siege, its inadmissibility to the symbolic order.

> Tel al-Zaatar slips away from us [*yaflit minna*]. This language is for the details. How do we protect the text from exploding. And other questions. The misunderstanding which does not end between heroism and its elements recurs. The hero is the last to know that he is a hero. And Tel al-Zaatar does not know Tel al-Zaatar. And we do not know, amidst all of this, what to call it…Tel al-Zaatar slips away from us...Tel al-Zaatar is many names without a name. It is a state of exhaustion, for he who bears it and he who fights. Who adjusts this context after now, and other questions, and for this reason slips away from us, and from itself. Tel al-Zaatar is bigger than Tel al-Zaatar.

It is because there is no name for Tel al-Za'atar that it "slips away." What I want to emphasize, however, is that it is within a particular arena of discourse that Tel al-Za'atar has "no name," and that is the arena of the international.

> Does the pity of an English gentleman restore her to life or to Palestine? Oh world! I reject you. What are you able to offer us! A question a Palestinian on the Pacific coast addresses, angry from the social oppression [*qahr*]. And you answer and try to gather in your chest shreds of a child from Tel al-Zaatar. In the Security Council the American envoy raises his hand to say politely: No to the right of the Palestinians to return or to a homeland or to anything other than death. But Tel al-Zaatar resists. In Canada security men and customs agents delight in searching our skin. Because they are afraid of the Olympic cycle. The news pours out: it falls, it did not fall, it will fall, it will not fall. Tel al-Zaatar resists. In Vancouver the press says that the Palestinian film is the most beautiful of the films of the world in this conference. On the following day a Palestinian woman asked a Canadian security man: Do you search everyone as you do us? He said decisively: No. Why does she tell him then that they slaughtered her father, her mother, and her sister in one instant?

Here, the symbolic order – the order of names – is identified with the international system, and Darwish protests its closure to Tel al-Za'atar, which is located outside it, in the space of "but" where it "resists". However the international here is not only an order organized by states, institutionalized in the Security Council and border control; it is also an imaginary of others, a public to which the Palestinians are addressing their claims.

Thus, the international is also a particular kind of writing that "lies", and against which the heroes of Tel al-Za'atar offer a writing of a very different kind:

> They put them in a single sentence: three thousand died in a battle. But none of them died like the other. Writing, like history, lies. Here we endure more than one violation…At the pinnacle of writing, they died in our place. They were the ones who were writing. The writing continued to lie. And in the hours of the great blood. In the hours of their blood we ask about the good of writing.

Even as Darwish protests that writing which "lies", he writes from within that writing's space, he wants that writing to give Tel al-Za'atar a name. But in place of that writing, Darwish's text points to the possibility of that other kind of writing that would be Tel al-Za'atar's own.

> …Ignorant of the remaining flowers and prohibiting criticism. Because we write on Tel al-Za'atar. Their heroism is one thing, and words on this heroism are something else. Let those who rise up from their carnage go out beyond barricades to their true identities. Let Tel al-Za'atar talk about Tel al-Za'atar. Give them themselves the right to speak. These words are theirs. We will find in their words a writing that denies writing. Let us learn the alphabet of truth and art from this simplicity. Their language is what

> changed. I feel when I am outside this text that I coming instanteously to life. That is, a writer who is able to return to his traditions after reading this blood's text, would be not a liar nor a killer. I will stop writing. I will stop writing until my blood finds another writing.

The camp's inhabitants are not distinguished from the fighters; they are collapsed into a single heroism that cannot be written. Thus, Darwish announces that he "will stop writing until [his] blood finds another writing." It would seem that it is that other kind of writing that Darwish attempts to achieve in "Ahmad al-Za'atar." In that poem, he writes not from the framework of the PLO, from a ship on its way from Cyprus to Saida, where he locates himself, looking for Tel al-Za'atar's name in "New York, London, Paris, Rome," but by "descending into the details of the country."

Darwish's text, written from within the anticolonial liberation movement and published in its publication, demonstrates the incapacity of that movement to name the siege and the subsequent massacre. Thus, Darwish acknowledges the necessity of allowing Tel al-Za'atar to write itself, which is what he attempts to do in "Ahmad al-Za'atar." It is at this limit, a limit both representational and political, that Azzawi located his drawings in *The Body's Anthem*. Unlike the PLO publication, the drawings are not addressed to a public. They do not seek recognition, a "name" for Tel al-Za'atar. Thus, they are not images that seek to represent the siege and the massacre, to capture its details. Rather they are images that address themselves to a justice to come, and make a claim to that justice, by creating a memory of injustice.

This relation to justice was internal to the concept of memory with which Azzawi, in the introductory text to *The Body's Anthem* cited above, distinguished the drawings as neither a document [*wathiqa*] nor an elegy [*'aza*]. That memory was addressed not to the past but to a future:

> until the time comes when its flame will burn forth brilliantly, a time that will summon the blood of friends and brothers, hastening the advent of those coming from the gates of martyrdom; a time when the nation will be as bread, unpolluted by blood and dirt, a space unhindered by black deceptions and nets of disguise, a beautiful time when feet will move safely and men will not sell their dreams.

The nature of this memory is not recursive, oriented towards the event, but persistent, moving towards an eschatological future, a time outside of our time. It is bound up with a particular concept of representation. The drawings on the siege of the refugee camp, rendered in terms of the agony of a singular figure, were not denunciations of a suffering to be stopped, moral claims on an imagined viewer; nor did they purport to be evidentiary, addressed to a tribunal and demonstrating a violation to be adjudicated. After all, included with the drawings in the book, *The Body's Anthem*, were photographs of the horrific grief of the siege's survivors. The drawings accomplished something beyond the photographs and thus were located outside the history of war photography; they were images of the violence itself, not of its effects but its portrait, the portrait of a violence that had no name, no face other than that of its horrified victim. The drawings functioned rhetorically; in producing an image of that violence, the drawings transfigured it in ways that opened up a relation to a justice that is neither the justice of revolution, which has now failed, nor that of the law, to which the Palestinian liberation movement was turning. Nor is it a form of divine justice. It is rather that peculiar form of justice that came to be found in the artwork, a form of justice transposed from the ritual remembrance of the Imam al-Husayn by Kadhim Hayder's series of paintings *The Epic of the Martyr* in 1965.

## Conclusion

In no small measure, the destruction of Iraq can be traced to the incapacity of the liberal political tradition to imagine life beyond its own categories. For, whatever one thinks of the reasons the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, the invasion was the culmination of a long neoconservative campaign to overthrow the regime of Saddam Husayn, based on the judgment that Iraq had become a totalitarian state and that politics there had come to an end.[53]

Some forms of politics certainly did come to an end. But might others have emerged in their place that challenge how we think about the political? In this dissertation I have examined a form of art practice that developed in response to the collapse of liberal forms of politics in 1963, and I have shown how that form of art practice instantiated in the artwork a form of rhetoric imbricated in a political topography that cannot be mapped to the liberal distinction of the public and the private. Instead, that form of rhetoric was imbricated in a topography of the political in which an act of memory, addressed to a moment of future reckoning, was distinguished from legal action on the one hand and revolutionary action on the other. Here is a concept of speech, in which speech is not about the expression of an opinion or the declaration of one's dissent, but about making a claim to justice; and a form of action that derives its sense not from meaning but from the possibility of sustaining that claim.

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[53] See George Packer, *Assassins Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006).

Fig. 0.1 Kadhim Hayder. *He is that love that irrigates deeply* [Hua tha al-hub 'amiqan yuwarique], 1964. Oil on canvas, 93 x 127 cm. National
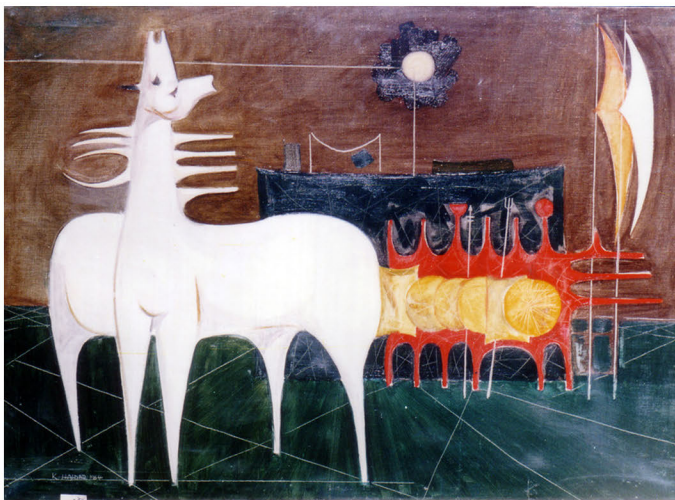


Fig. 0.2 Kadhim Hayder. *Oh abyss deeper than any abyss!* 1964. Oil on canvas, [dimensions unavailable]. National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad.



Fig. 0.3 Kadhim Hayder. *Fatigued, ten horses converse with nothing* [Arabic title lost], 1964. Oil on canvas, 91 x 127 cm. Barjeel Art Foundation, Dubai. Image courtesy of Meem Gallery.

Fig. 0.4 Kadhim Hayder, From *The Epic of the Martyr*. National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad.
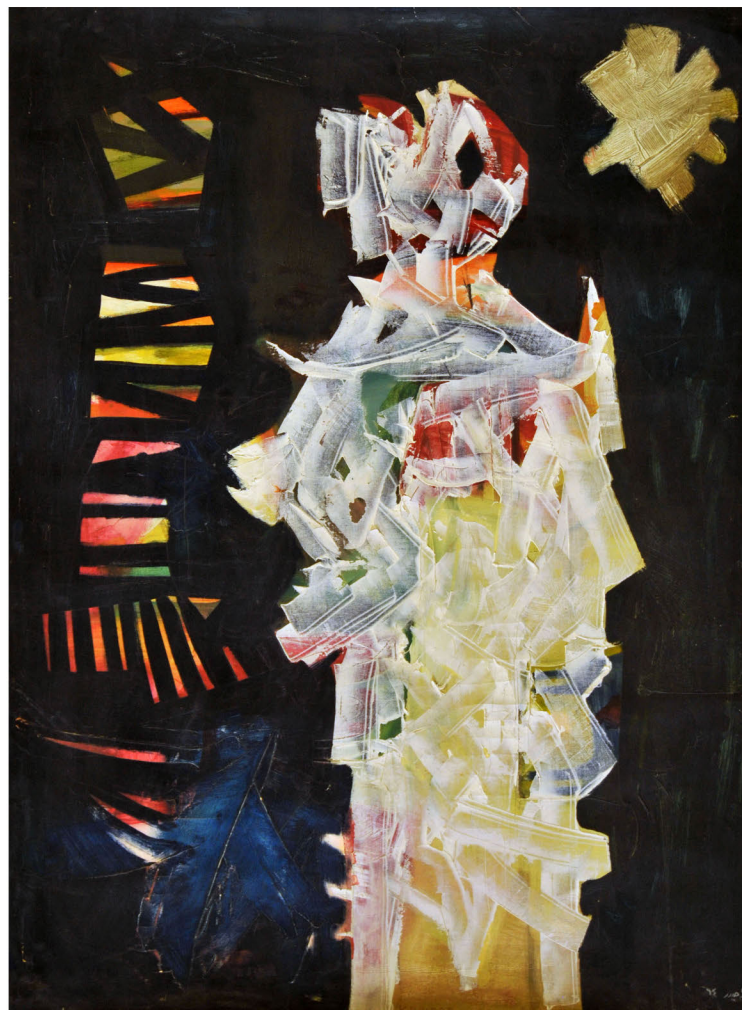


Fig. 0.5 Kadhim Hayder, from *The Epic of the Martyr*. Acrylic, oil and laquer on canvas, 100 x 75 cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad.

Fig. 0.6 Kadhim Hayder, *Ten horses raging with hatred trample on the face*, from *The Epic of the Martyr*, 1965. Oil on canvas, 94 x 68 cm. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.



Fig. 0.7 Kadhim Hayder, *An Impenetrable Shield*, from *The Epic of the Martyr*, 1965. Oil on canvas, 76 x 102 cm.

Fig. 0.8 Dia Azzawi, from *Human States* [*Halaat Insaniyya*], 1975. Watercolor on paper, XXXX. Image courtesy of artist.



Fig. 0.9 Dia Azzawi, from *Human States* [*Halaat Insaniyya*], 1975. Watercolor on paper. Image courtesy of artist.
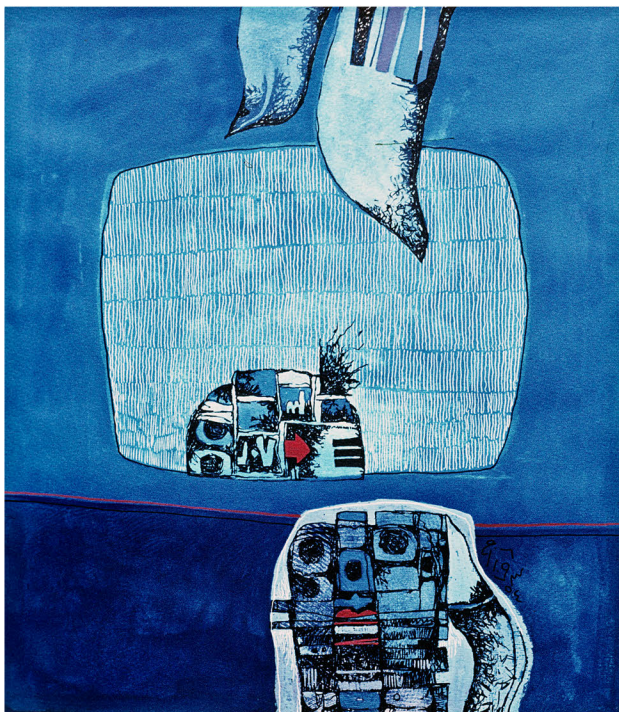


Fig. 0.10 Dia Azzawi, from *Human States* [*Halaat Insaniyya*], 1975. Watercolor on paper. Image courtesy of artist.

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Fig. 0.11  Dia Azzawi, *Ishtar, my Love*
[*Ishtar, ya Hobbi*], 1965.  Oil on canvas, .
Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.
Image courtesy of author.



Fig. 0.12  Dia Azzawi, *882nd
Night*, 1968.  Oil on canvas, 124 x
114 cm.  Kinda Foundation,
Riyadh.

Fig. 0.13 Dia Azzawi, *Ancient Symbols* [*Ramuz Qadima*], 1964. Oil on canvas, 84 x 95 cm. Private Collection, London. Image courtesy of Meem Gallery.



Fig. 0.14 Dia Azzawi, *Pretender's Mask* [*Aqna't al-Jouf*], 1966. Oil on canvas, 85 x 65 cm. Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah. Image courtesy of Meem Gallery.

Fig. 0.15 Shakir Hassan Al Said,
*The Wall*, 1980. Mixed media
on wood, 90 x 97 cm.





Fig. 0.16 Shakir Hassan Al Said,
*Writings on a Wall*, 1978. Acrylic
and oil on wood, 120 x 120 cm.

Fig. 0.17 Saleh al-Jumaie,
Domes [1 of 3], 1968.  Mixed
media on canvas, 32 x 32 cm.
Mathaf Arab Museum of
Modern Art, Doha.
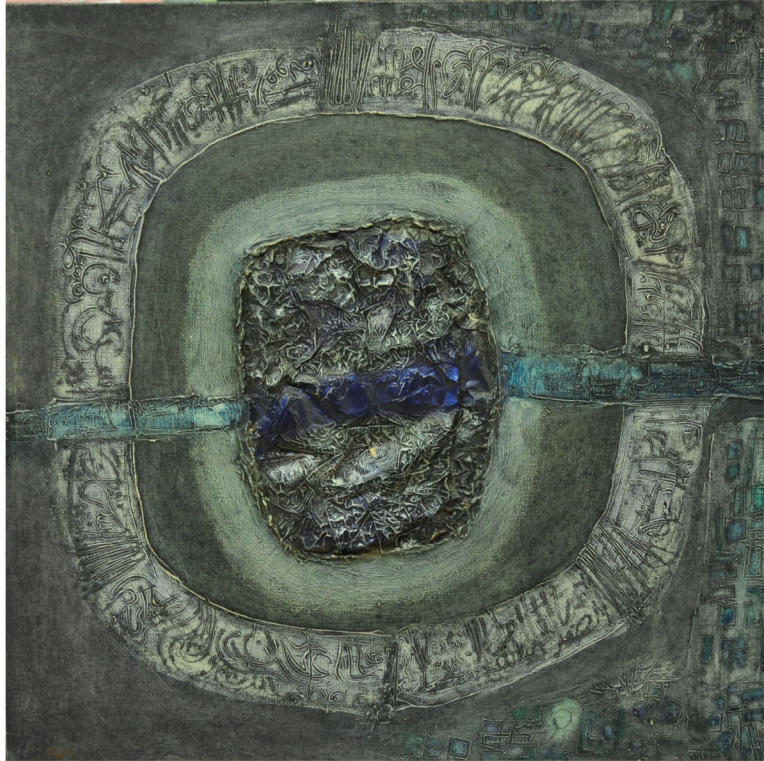




Fig. 0.18 Saleh al-Jumaie, Journey of
a Man, 1974.  Mixed media on
canvas, [demensions].  Image courte-
sy of the artist.

Fig. 1.1  Eustache de Lorey, "Le Miroir de Bagdad, " *L'Illustration*, Dec 1938. (This illustration is mislabeled. It is not the manuscript containing al-Wasiti's illustrations of the Maqamat but from from manuscrit 6094 in the Bibliothèque nationale. It is an illustration of the 38th Maqamat.)



Fig. 1.2  Eustache de Lorey, "Le Miroir de Bagdad, " *L'Illustration*, Dec 1938

Fig 1.22 Jewad Selim, *Baghdadiyyat*, 1956. Ink on canvas, .  Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.  Image courtesy of author.

Fig. 1.23 Jawad Salim, *Man and Wife* [*Rajul wa Zou-jatuhu*], 1953. Oil on canvas, 51 x 76 cm. Mathaf: Arab



Fig. 1.24 Jewad Selim, Title Un-known, 1958. Watercolor on paper. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.

Fig. 1.3  Eustache de Lorey, "Le Miroir de Bagdad, " *L'Illustration*, Dec 1938.



Fig. 1.4  Eustache de Lorey, "Le Miroir de Bagdad, " *L'Illustration*, Dec 1938.



Fig. 1.5  Eustache de Lorey, "Le Miroir de Bagdad," *L'Illustration*, Dec 1938.



Fig. 1.6  Eustache de Lorey, "Le Miroir de Bagdad," *L'Illustration*, Dec 1938.

Fig. 1.7 Abdel Qader al-Rassam, *View of the Tigris* [Manthar Dijla], 1921. Oil on canvas. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. Image courtesy of author.
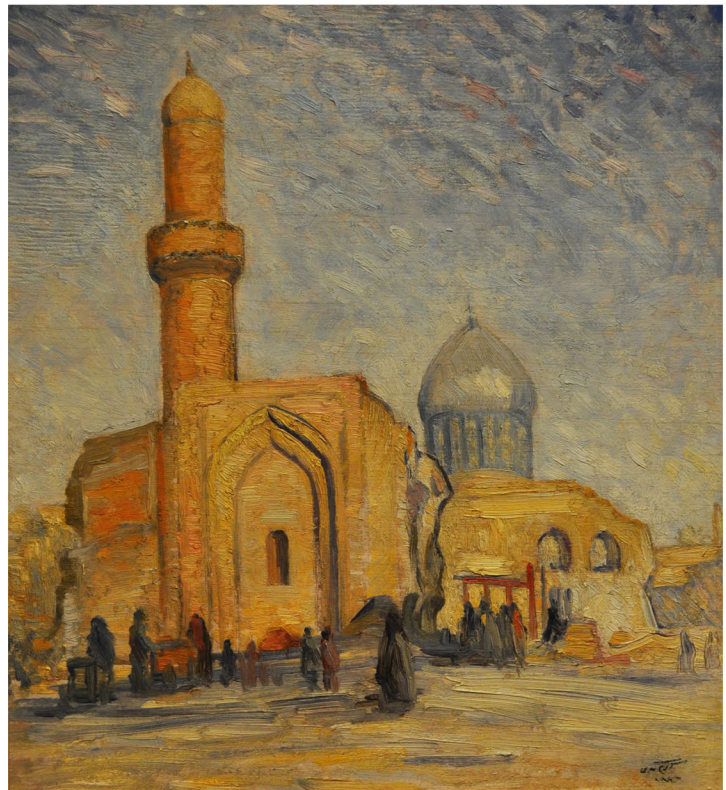


Fig. 1.8 Akram Shukri, XXXX, 1941. Oil on canvas. Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. Image courtesy of author

Fig. 1.9 Jawad Salim, Souk el-Gharb, 1938. Watercolor on paper. Private collection, Amman.

Fig. 1.10 Jawad Salim, Letter to Khaldun el-Husri, December 12, 1938. Private Collection, Amman.

Fig. 1.11 Jawad Salim, letter to Khaldun el-Husri, 1939. Private collection, Amman.
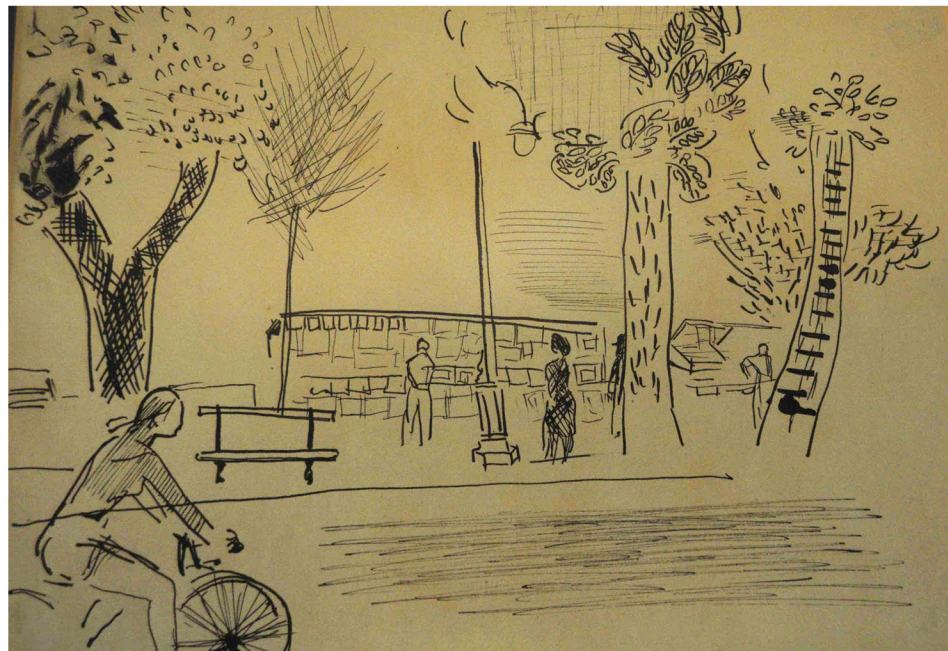


Fig. 1.12 Jawad Salim, Sketch of the Bank of the Seine, 1939. Ink on paper. Private Collection, Amman.

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Fig. 1.13 Jawad Salim, Paris sketch, 1939. Charcoal on paper.



Fig. 1.14 Jawad Salim, Rome sketch, 1940. Private collection, Amman.

Fig. 1.15 Jewad Selim, *Ladies in Waiting*, 1943. Oil on canvas. Private collection, Amman. Image courtesy of author.
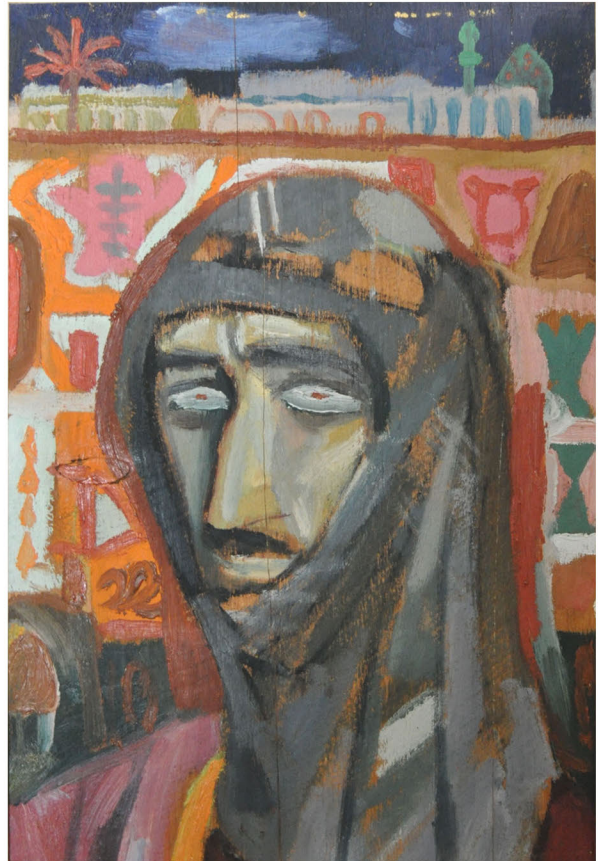


Fig. 1.16 Jewad Selim, *The Sheikh*, 1940s. Oil on canvas. Private collection, Amman. Image courtesy of author.
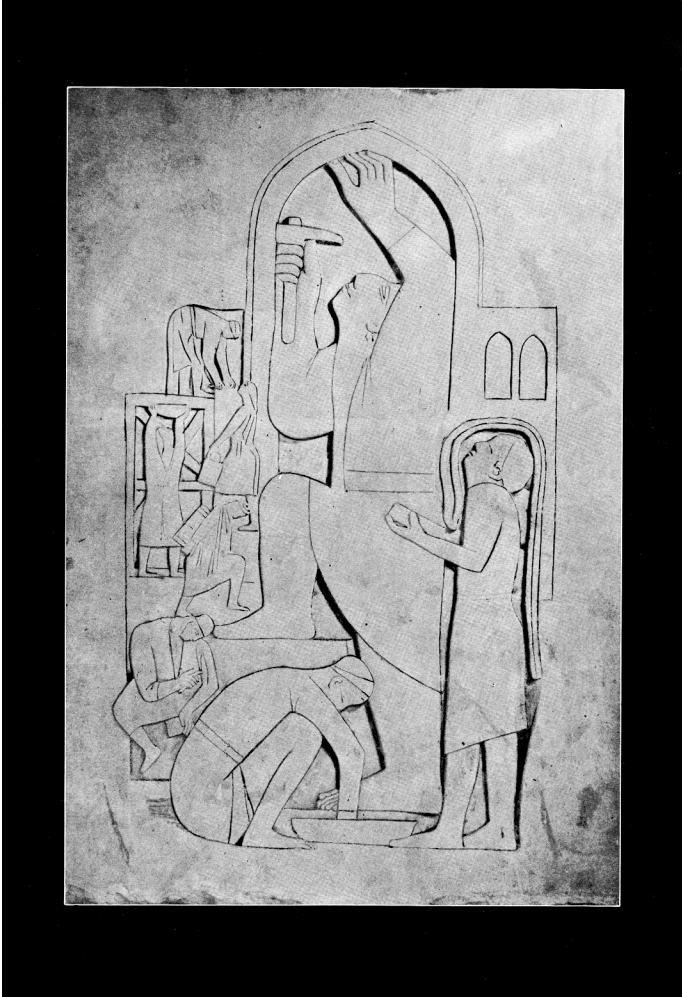
Fig. 1.17 Jawad Salim,
Master Builder [Al-Bana],
1944-1945. Etching on
stone.

Fig. 1.18 Jawad Salim, Children Playing [*Atfal yal'abun*], 1953. Oil on canvas, . Mathaf, Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. Image courtesy of author.



Fig. 1.19 Jewad Selim, *Boys with Watermelon*, 1957. Oil on canvas, . Private collection, Baghdad. Image courtesy Waddah Faris.

Fig. 1.20 Jawad Salim, *The Gardener*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 62 x 52 cm. Private Collection, Dubai. Image courtesy of Meem Gallery.

Fig. 1.21 Jawad Salim, Girl with a Bird, 1958. Oil on canvas, . Private collection, Baghdad.

Fig. 2.1 Mahmud Sabri, *Massacre in Algeria*
[*Majzara fi al-Jaz'air*], 1958.  Oil on
canvas.  National Museum of Modern Art,
Baghdad.  Image courtesy of Waddah Faris.

Fig. 2.16 Artist Unknown, *Death of Orpheus*, 1480. Engraving. Kunsthalle, Hamburg.



Fig. 2.17 Kadhim Hayder, *This is that love that irrigates deeply*, from *The Epic of the Martyr*, 1964. Oil on canvas, 93 cm x 127 cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad.

Fig. 2.2 Mahmud Sabri, [Title lost], 1957  Oil on canvas, 90 cm x 121 cm.  Doha, Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art.  Image courtesy of Meem Gallery.



Fig. 2.3 Mahmud Sabri, *Hunger*, 1952.  Ink on paper, 65.4 x 47 cm.  Doha, Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art.  Image courtesy of author.

Fig. 2.4 Kamil Chadirji, "Typical sarifa (mud and reed hut) of the 1930s and its dweller, outskirts of Baghdad, 1931," from The Photography of Kamal Chadirji
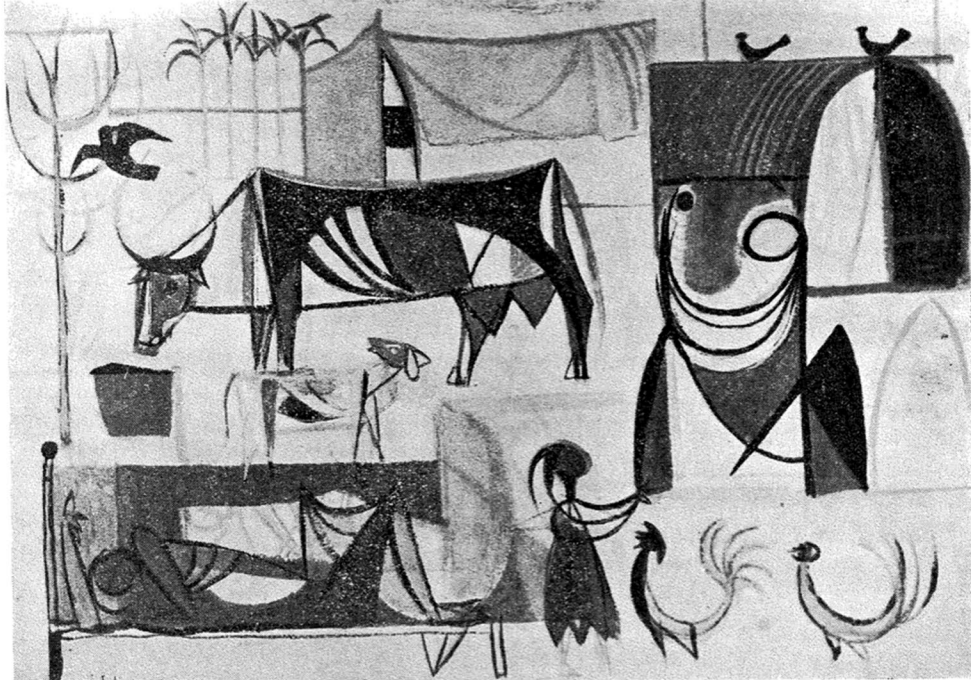
Fig. 2.5 Jewad Selim, Sarifa Dwellers, 1953. Tempera, 40 x 22 cm.
Image reproduced from *Middle East Forum*,

Fig. 2.6 Mahmud Sabri, *Sarifa Dwellers*, 1955. Gouache
on paper, 49 cm x 65 cm. Doha, Mathaf Arab Museum of
Modern Art. Image courtesy of author.

Fig. 2.7 Kadhim Hayder, 1952.  Watercolor on paper, 29.5 x 42 cm.
Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.


Fig 2.8 Kadhim Hayder, Construction Workers ['*Amal al-Bana*], late 1950s.  Oil
on canvas.  National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad.

Fig. 2.9 Kadhim Hayder. *He told us everything as it happened*, 1957. Oil on canvas, 96 x 65cm. Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah. Image courtesy of Meem Gallery.

Fig. 2.10 Kadhim Hayder. *The Struggle of the Hero* [*Masra' al-Batl*], 1958. Oil on canvas, 40 x 60 cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad. Image courtesy of Waddah Faris.
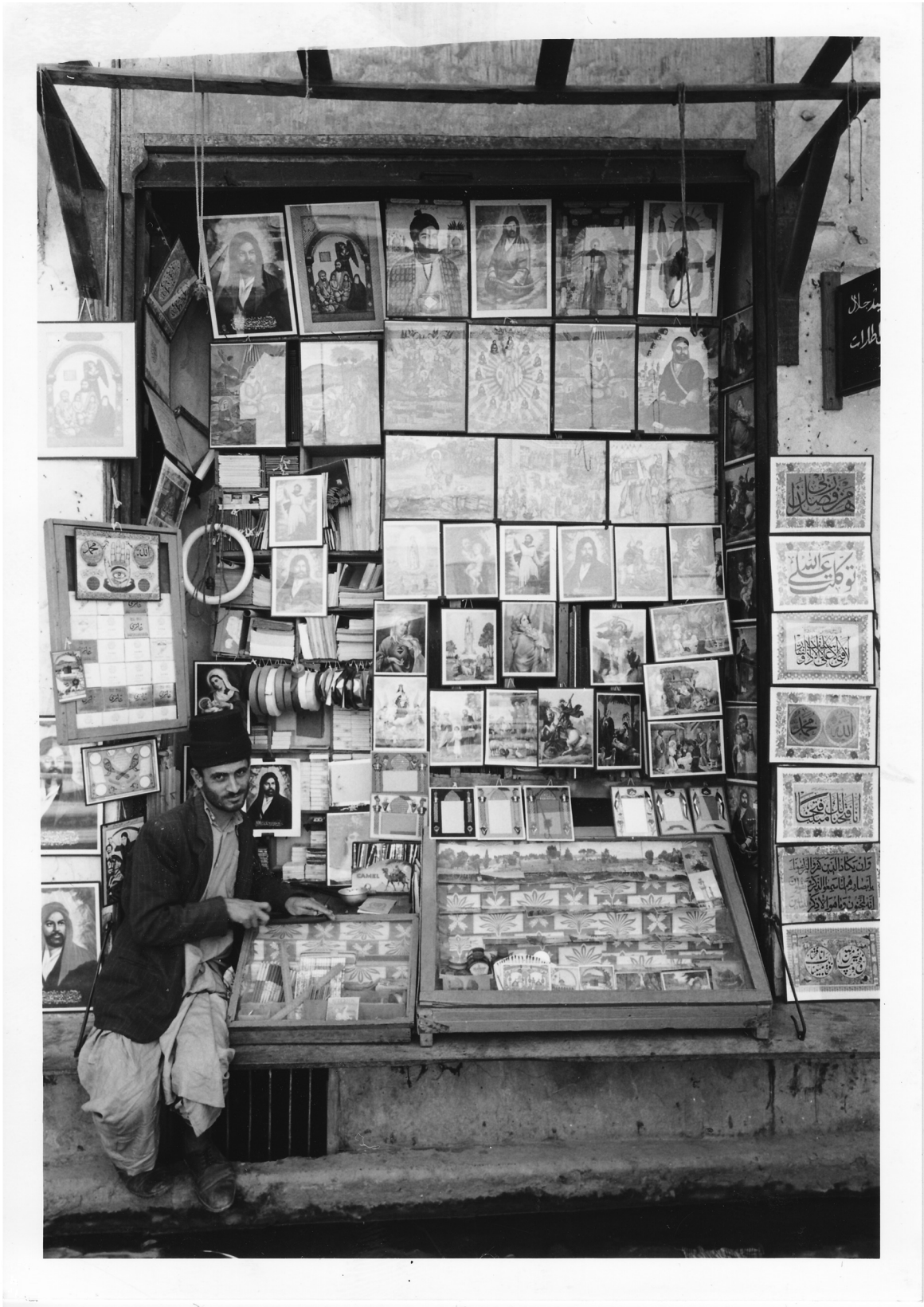
Fig. 2.11 Nadhim Ramzi, Karbala, 1962.

Fig. 2.12 Jawad Salim, Study for mural.  Private Colleciton, Amman.

Fig. 2.13 Kadhim Hayder, Animal Anatomy of a Human Being [A*l-Tashreeh al-Hayawani li al-Insan*], 1960.  Cooper etching, 38 x 50 cm.  Private collection,
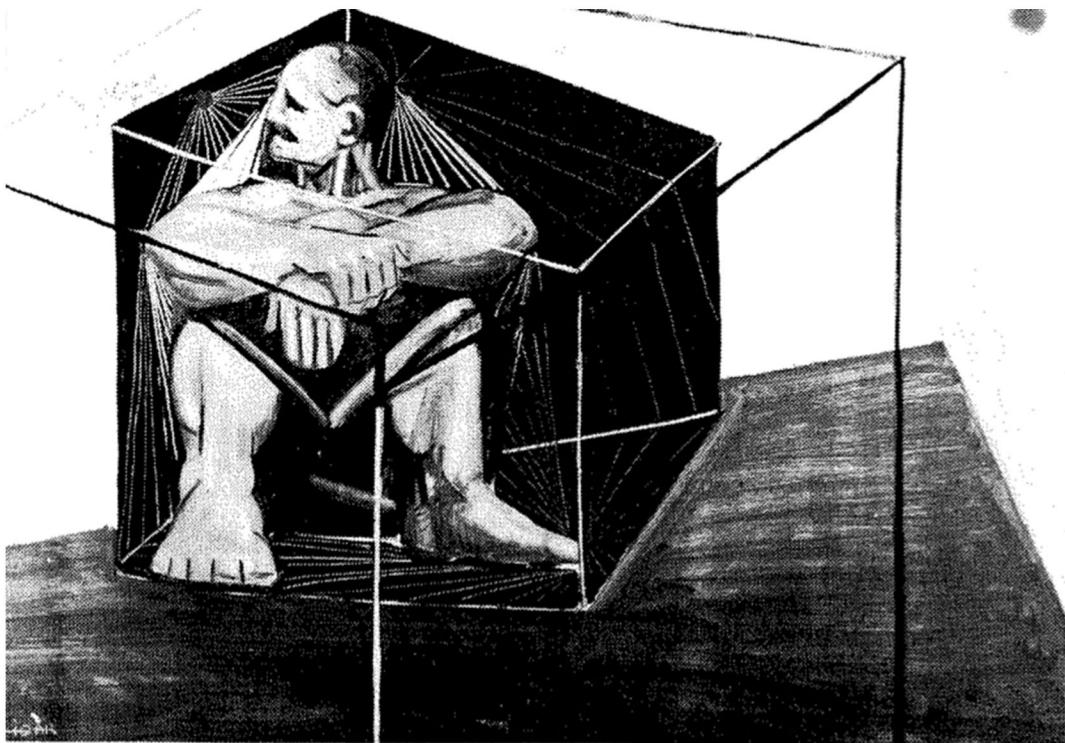


Fig. 2.14 Kadhim Hayder, *Three Cubes and a Man* [*Thalatha Mak'abaat wa Insan*], 1959.  Oil on canvas, [size].  Image taken from *Al-Amilun fi al-Naft*.

Fig. 2.15 Kadhim Hayder, *Siffeen Mountain at Night*
[*Layl ala Jabal al-Siffeen*], 1959.  Copper etching, 50 x
38 cm.  Private Collection, London.

Fig. 3.1 Dia Azzawi. *Halaat Insaniyya* [Human States], 1975. Gouache on paper, 30 x 40 cm.



Fig. 3.2 Dia Azzawi, *Halaat Insaniyya* [Human States], 1975. Watercolor on paper.



Fig. 3.3 Dia Azzawi. *Halaat Insaniyya* [Human States], 1975. Watercolor on paper.

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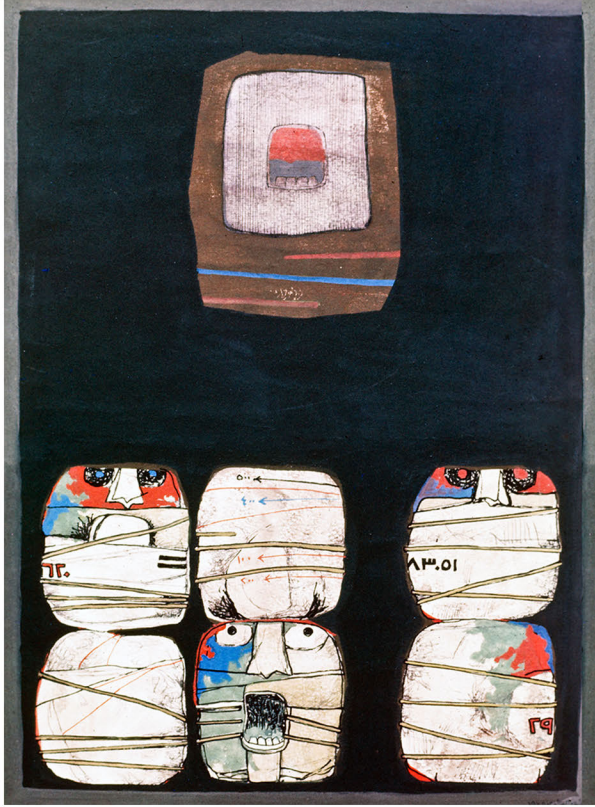
Fig. 3.4 Dia Azzawi. *Halaat Insaniyya* [Human States], 1975. Watercolor on paper.



Fig. 3.5 Dia Azzawi, *Halaat Insaniyya* [Human States], 1975. Watercolor on paper.



Fig. 3.6 Dia Azzawi. *Halaat Insaniyya* [Human States], 1975. Watercolor on paper.

Fig. 3.7 Dia Azzawi. *Halaat Insaniyya* [Human States], 1975. Watercolor on paper. National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 3.8 Dia Azzawi, *Halaat Insaniyya* [Human States], 1975. Watercolor on paper. National Museum of Modern Art, Baghad. Photo courtesy of the artist.
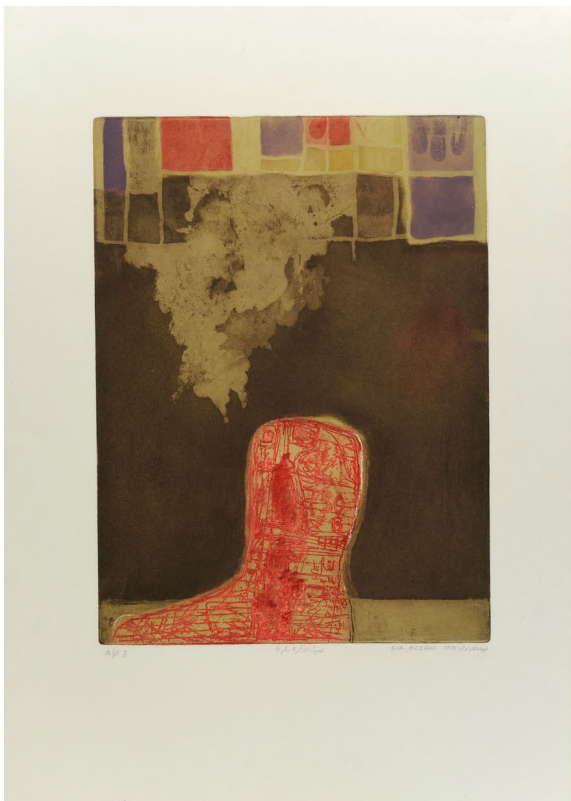


Fig. 3.9 Dia Azzawi, Halaat Insaniyya (Human States), 1975. Ethcing. 30 cm x 40 cm.

Fig. 3.10 Dia Azzawi, *Halaat Insaniyya* [Human States], 1975. Etching, 30 x 40 cm. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3.11 Dia Azzawi, *Halaat Insaniyya* [Human States], 1975. Etching, 30 x 40 cm. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3.12 Dia Azzawi, 1964. Oil on canvas, 81cm x 61 cm. Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.

Fig. 3.13 Dia Azzawi. Ancient Symbols [*Ramuz Qadima*], 1964. Oil on canvas, 84 x 95 cm. Private Collection, London.

Fig. 3.14 Dia Azzawi. *A Saying* [*Al-Hasud La Yasud*], 1964. Oil on canvas, 80 x 74 cm. Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.

Fig. 3.15 Dia Azzawi.  *Folklore Mythology*
[*min al-asatir al-sha'biyya*], 1966.  Oil on
canvas, 100 x 71 cm.  Private collection,
London.  Image courtesy of artist.



Fig. 3.16 Dia Azzawi.  *Folklore Symbol*,
1968.  Oil on canvas, XXXX.  Image
courtesy of artist.

Fig. 3.17 Dia Azzawi. *Masks of the Abyss* [*Aqnat al-Jouf*], 1966. Oil on canvas, 89 x 68.5 cm. Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

Fig. 3.18 Dia Azzawi. *Najaf*, 1966. Oil on canvas. Private collection, Baghdad. Image courtesy of the artist



Fig. 3.19 Dia Azzawi. *Visit to al-Qasim*, 1968. Oil on canvas, 99 x 83 cm. Private collection. Image courtesy of artist.
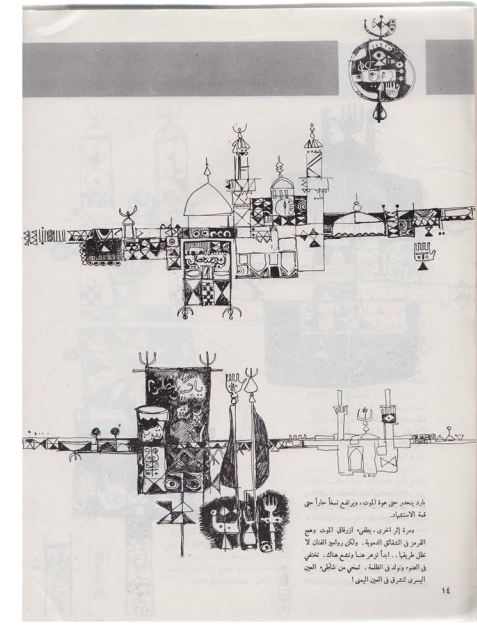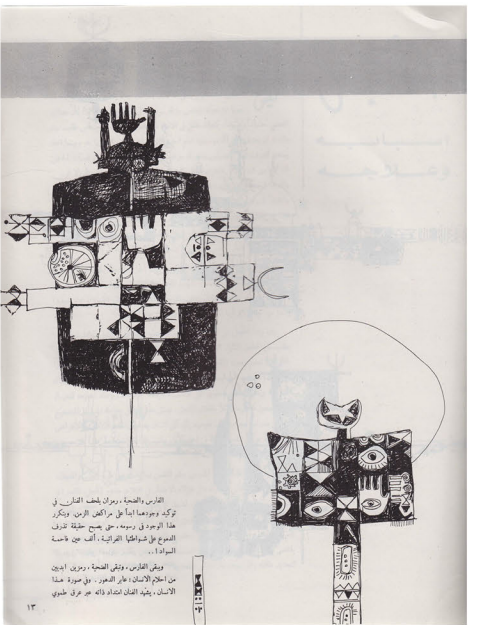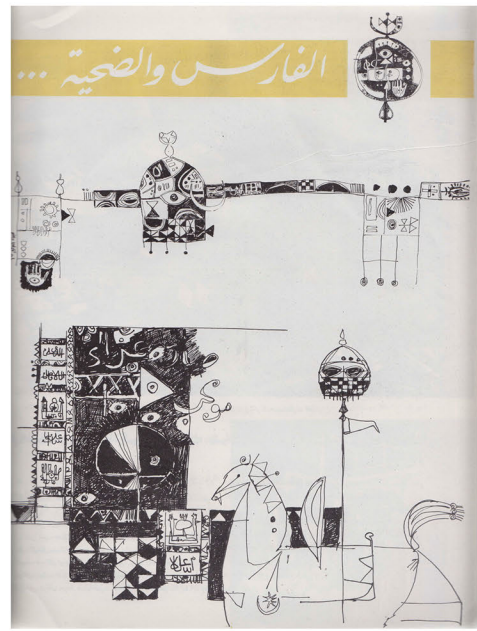
Fig. 3.20 Dia Azzawi and Nuri al-Rawi, *The Knight and the Victim* [*Al-Faris wa al-Dhahiyya*], *Al-Amilun fi al-Naft* No 69 December.

Fig. 3.21 Dia Azzawi, Illustration
for Muzaffar al-Nawwab,
Lil-Rayl wa-al-Hamad, 1968.



Fig. 3.22 Dia Azzawi, Dream, 1968.  Oil on
canvas, 100 x 82 cm.  Private collection.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3.23 Dia Azzawi, *Crying Wolf*
[tha'ib yuawi], 1968.  Oil on canvas,
84 x 108 cm.  Private Collection,
London.

Fig. 3.24 "The Epic of Gilgamesh" [*Mulhamat Gilgamesn*], *Al-Amilun fi al-Naft* No 65 November, 1965.

Fig. 3.25 Dia Azzawi. *Ishtar, My Love* [*Ishtar, ya hubbi*], 1965. Oil on canvas, 90.4 x 78 cm. Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. Image courtesy of the author.



Fig. 3.26 Dia Azzawi. *Gilgamesh*, 1966. Chinese ink and charcoal on paper, 52 x 32 cm. Image courtesy of artist.

Fig. 3.27 Dia Azzawi, *Folklore Mythology* [*min al-asatir al-sha'biyya*], 1968. Oil on canvas, 158 cm x 181 cm. Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.
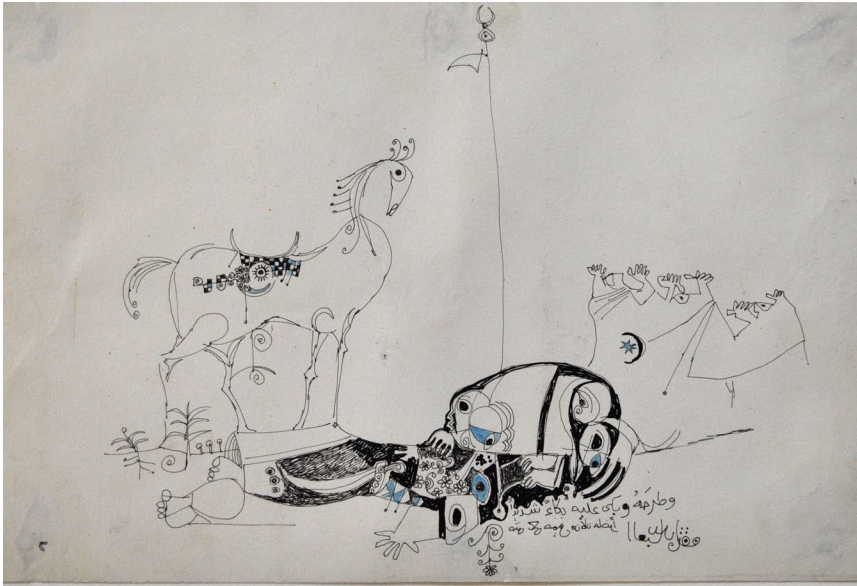
Fig. 3.28 Dia Azzawi, "The Slaying of Abbas [Maqtil 'Abbas]: They laid him down and cried," from *The Blood of Husayn* [Maqtil al-Husayn], 1968. Ink drawing on paper, 20 x 30 cm. Collection of the artist.
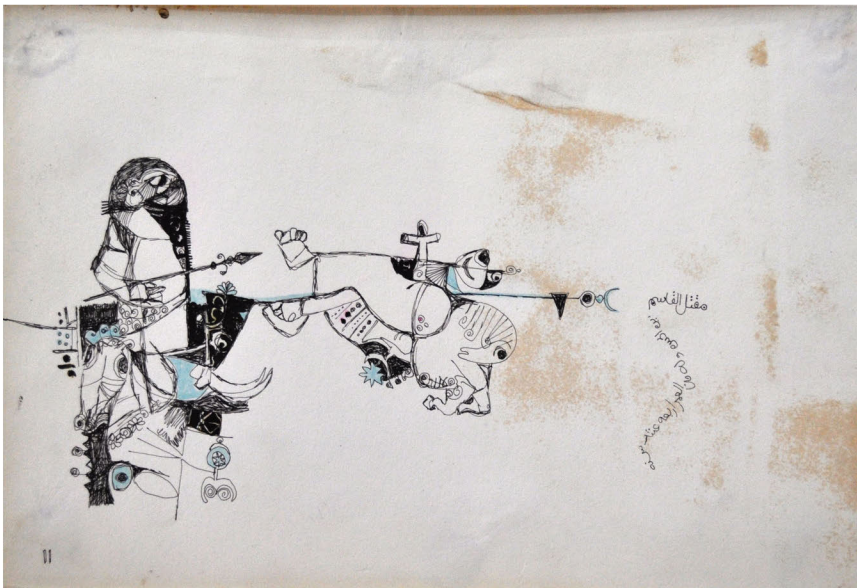


Fig. 3.29 Dia Azzawi, "The Slaying of Qasim [Maqtil Qasim]: the son of Hassan, at the age of fourteen," from *The Blood of Husayn* [Maqtil al-Husayn], 1968. Ink drawing on paper, 20 x 30 cm. Collection of the artist.
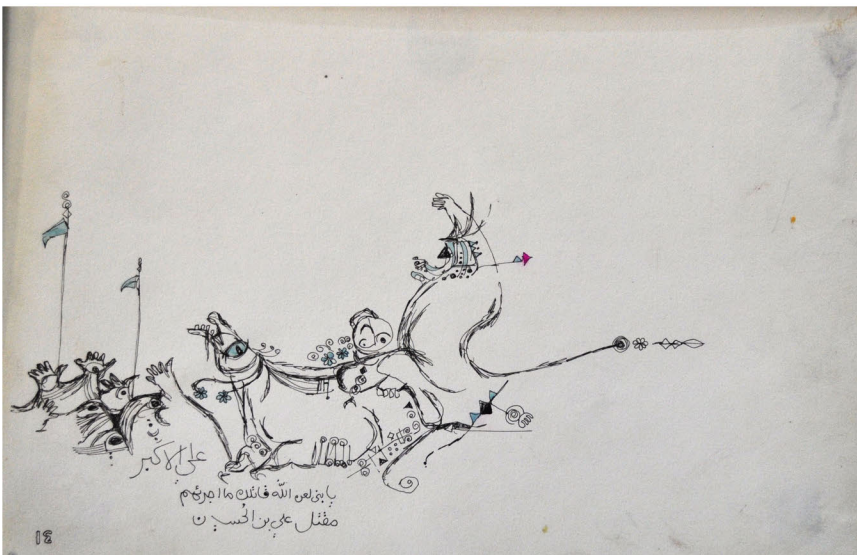


Fig. 3.30 Dia Azzawi, "The Slaying of Ali son of Husayn [Maqtil 'Ali bin al-Husayn]: Oh, my son, God curse your killer," from *The Blood of Husayn* [Maqtil al-Husayn], 1968. Ink drawing on paper, 20 x 30 cm. Collection of the artist.

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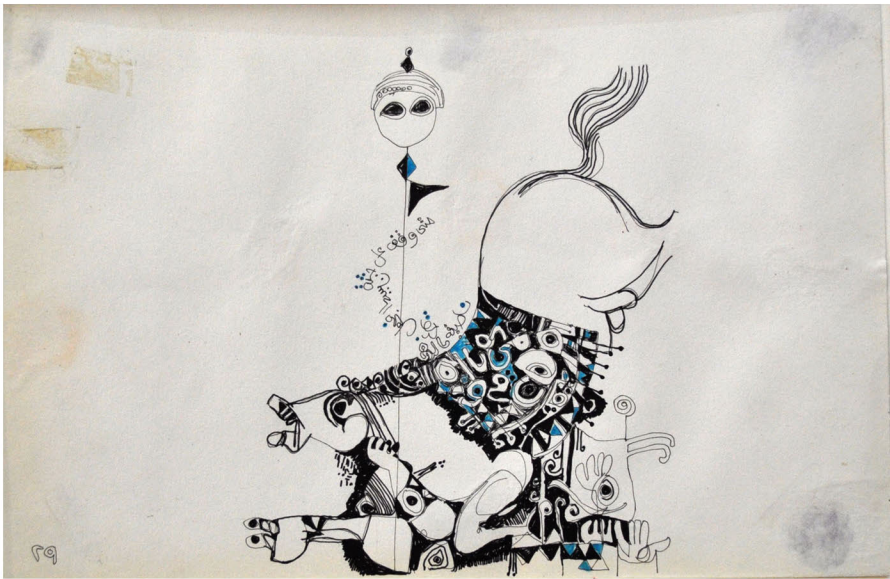
Fig. 3.31 Dia Azzawi, "When he stood on the corpse of Husayn...," from *The Blood of Husayn* [Maqtil al-Husayn], 1968. Ink drawing on paper, 20 x 30 cm. Collection of the artist.
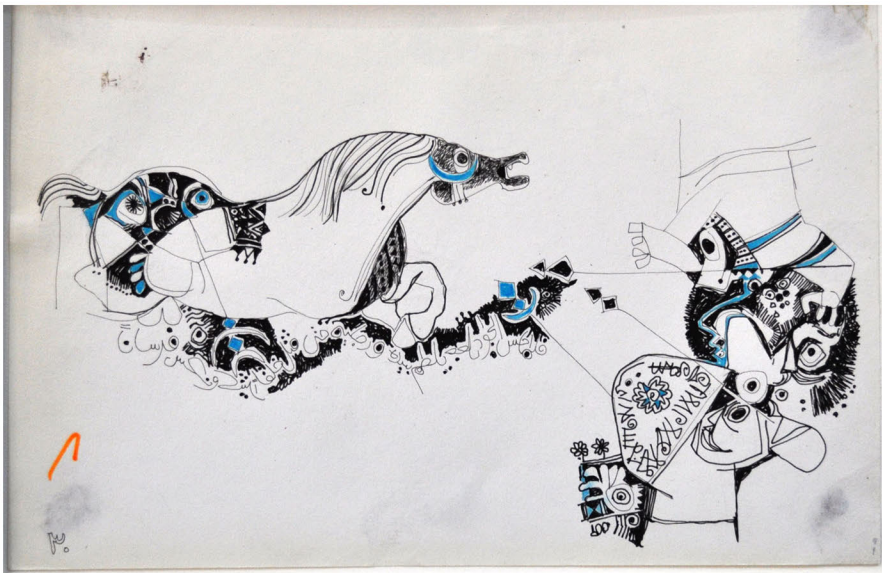


Fig. 3.32 Dia Azzawi, "When Jawad sensed [what had happened], he slapped his leegs together until he had killed ten men, without a knight," from *The Blood of Husayn* [Maqtil al-Husayn], 1968. Ink drawing on paper, 20 x 30 cm. Collection of the artist.
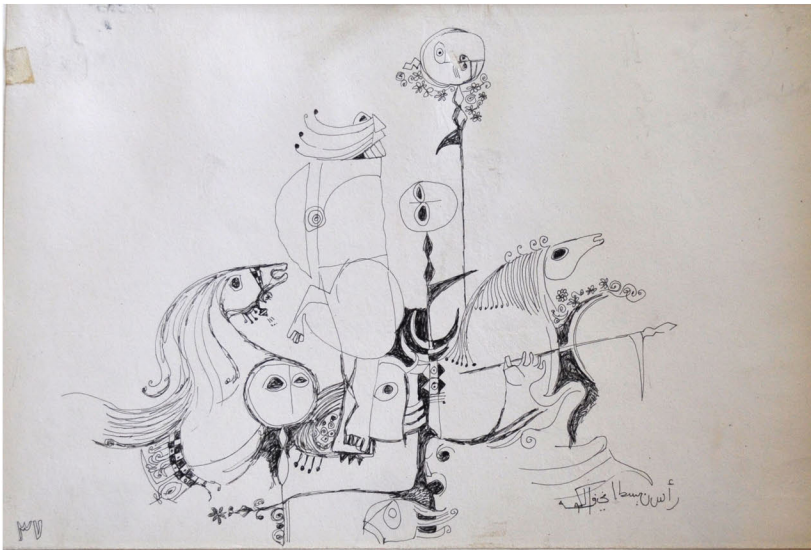
Fig. 3.33 Dia Azzawi, "The head of Husayn in Kufa," from *The Blood of Husayn* [Maqtil al-Husayn], 1968. Ink drawing on paper, 20 x 30 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig. 3.34 Dia Azzawi, "Umm Kalthum addressing the people of Kufa, telling them to avert their eyes and have shame," from *The Blood of Husayn* [Maqtil al-Husayn], 1968. Ink drawing on paper, 20 x 30 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig. 3.35 Dia Azzawi, "The head of Husayn brought before Yazid," from *The Blood of Husayn* [Maqtil al-Husayn], 1968. Ink drawing on paper, 20 x 30 cm. Collection of the artist.
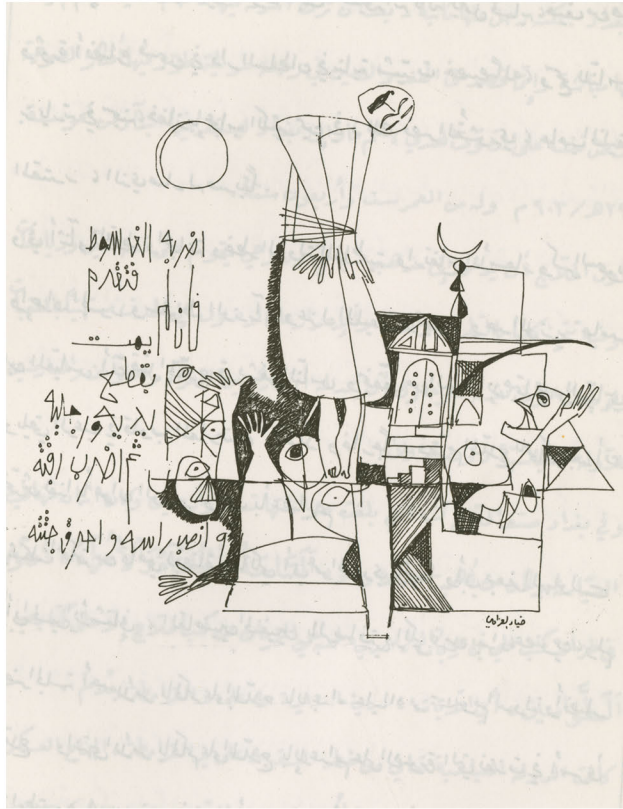
Fig. 3.36 Dia Azzawi, 1968. Reprinted in Kamel Mustafa Shaybi, Diwan al-Hallaj Abi al-Mughith al-Husayn ibn mansur ibn Mahma al-Baydawi (Baghdad, 1984).
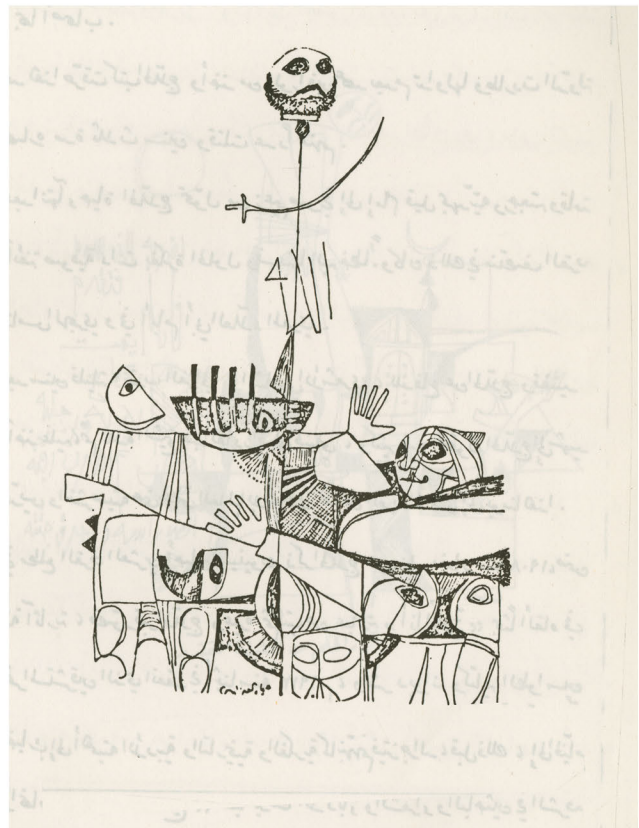


Fig. 3.37 Dia Azzawi, 1968. Reprinted in Kamel Mustafa Shaybi, Diwan al-Hallaj Abi al-Mughith al-Husayn ibn mansur ibn Mahma al-Baydawi (Baghdad, 1984).

Fig. 3.38 Dia Azzawi, *Ashura*, 1969. Oil on canvas.

Fig. 3.39 Dia Azzawi, The Fall of the Martyr [*Saqut al-shahid*], 1967. Oil on canvas. Private Collection, London.
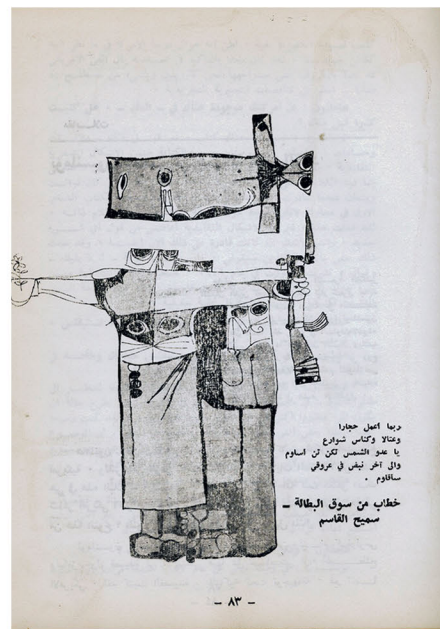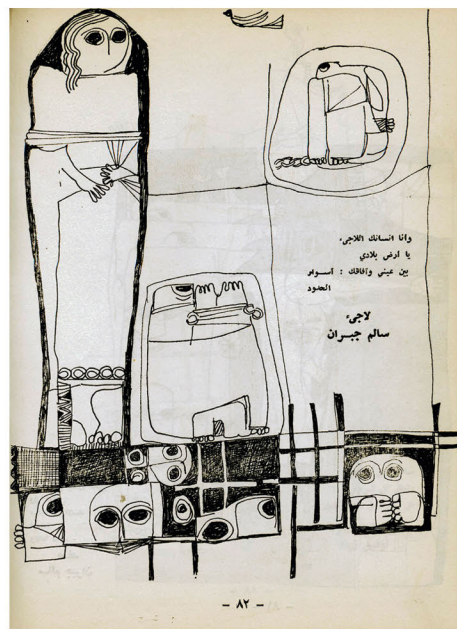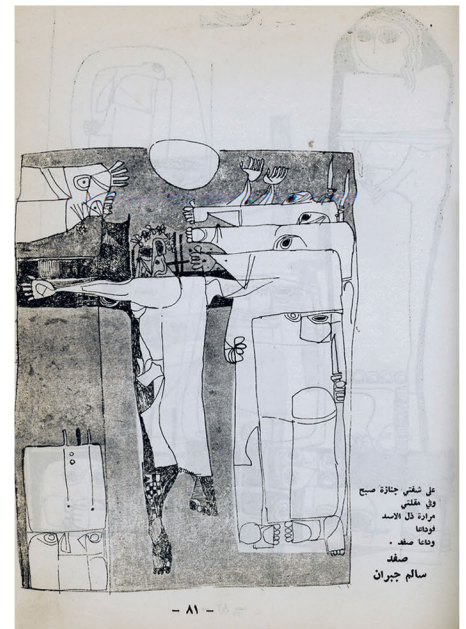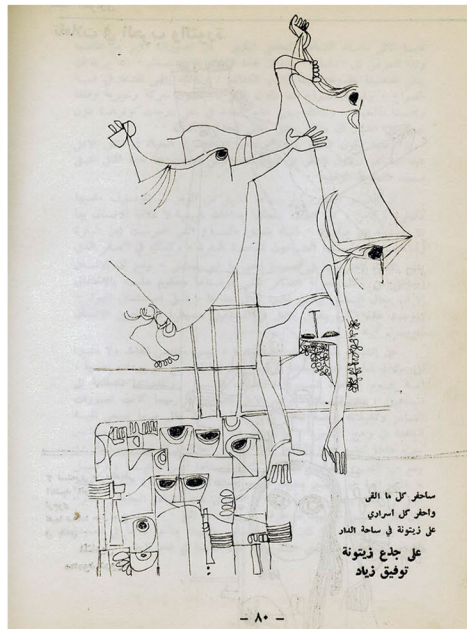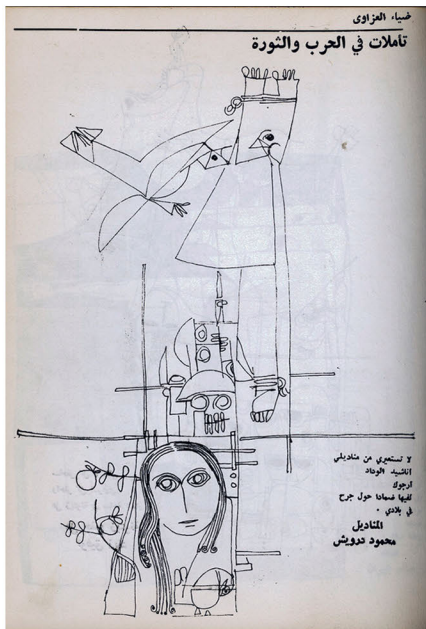
Fig. 3.40 Dia Azzawi, *Contemplations on War and Revolution* [*Ta'amulat fi al-Harb wa al-Thawra*], 1969.  Ink on paper, 20 x 30 cm.  Published in *Sh'ir 69*, 79-83.

Fig. 3.41 "A Journal of the Battle of the Jabal al-Husayn [Refugee Camp]," *al-Hadaf* October 1, 1970.
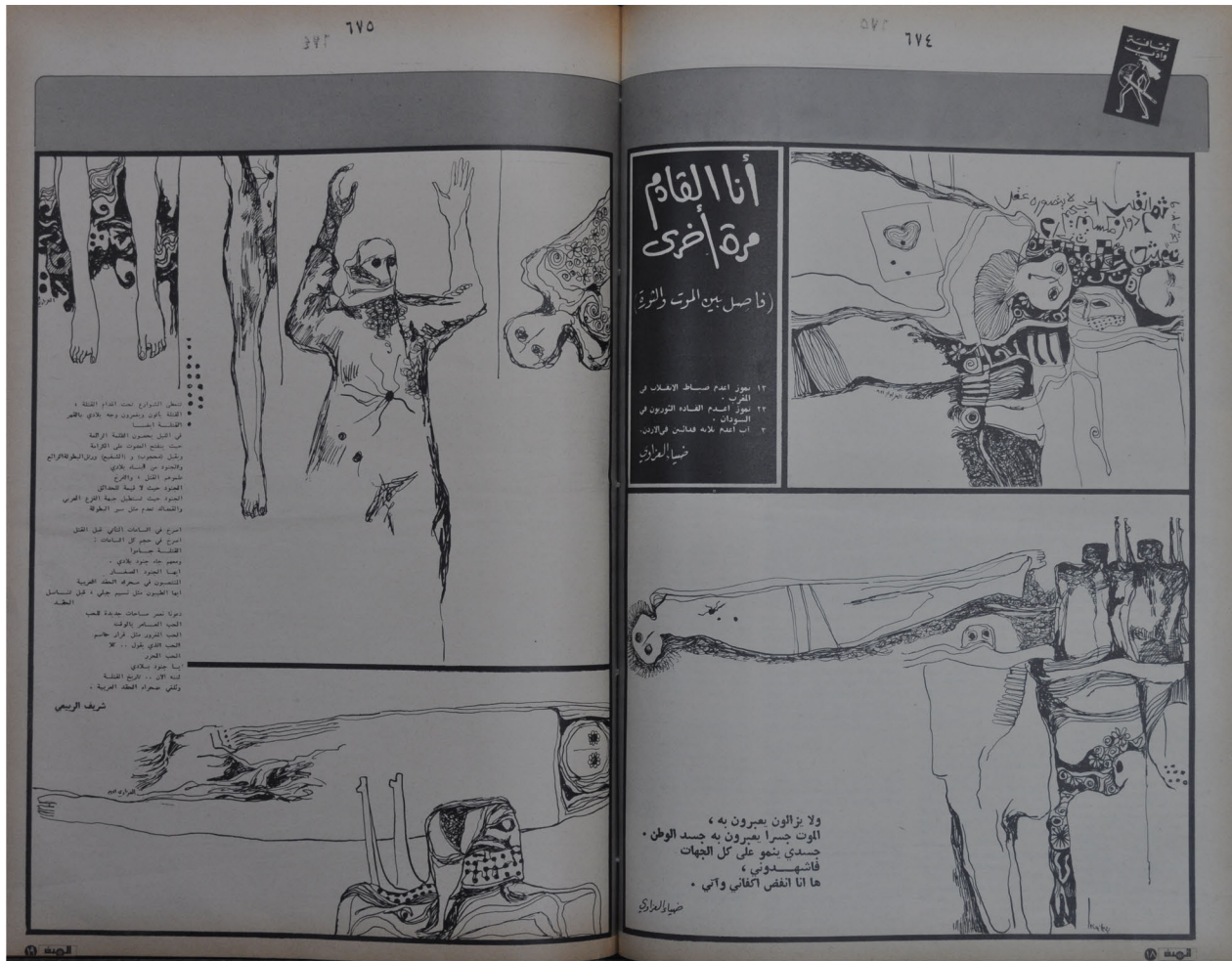
Fig. 3.42  Dia Azzawi, *Al-Hadaf*, 1971
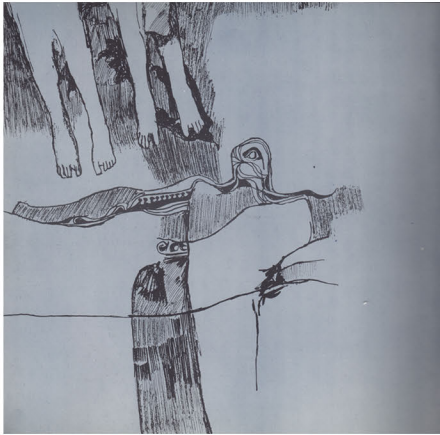
September 6, 1970          September 16, 1970



September 17, 1970
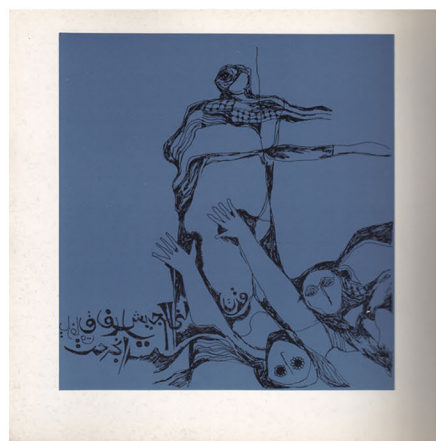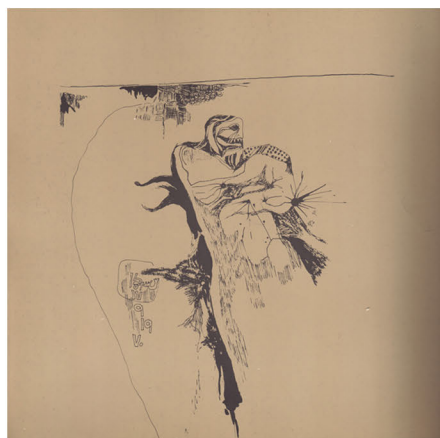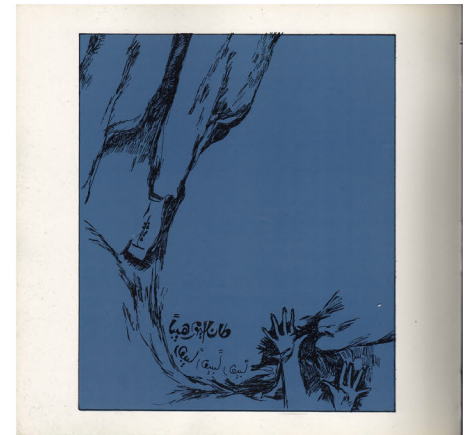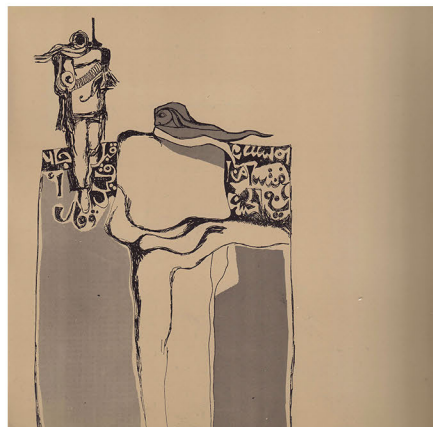


Fig. 3.43. Dia Azzawi. *Shahid min hatha al-'asr. Youmiyyat shahid qutl fi majzarat al-Urdun, aylul 1970* [A witness of our times:  The journal of a martyr killed in the Jordan massacre, September 1970] 1972, 21 x 21 cm.

September 18, 1970

فدائي ما أهاب الموت
هو الموت كم مره
برشاشي ، أنا ماشي
على أرضي ، لأرض النار
أنا حالف يمين الله
عن أعداني ما يرجع
فدائي ما بكلهم
بغير النار والمدفع
( من اغنيات المقاومة )

كان الجنود
البدو يعمدون
الى كسر
اصابع الاطفال
الفلسطينيين الصغار
حتى لا يكون
هؤلاء قادرين
على حمل
السلاح في
المستقبل .
تقرير للديلي تيلغراف
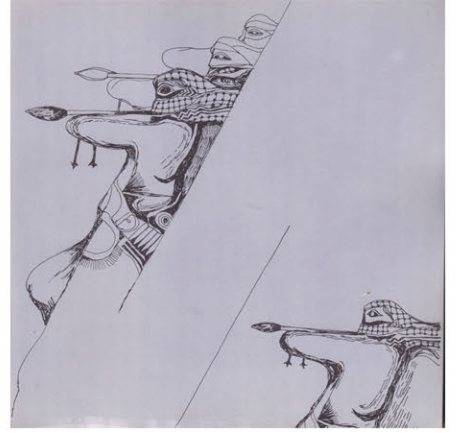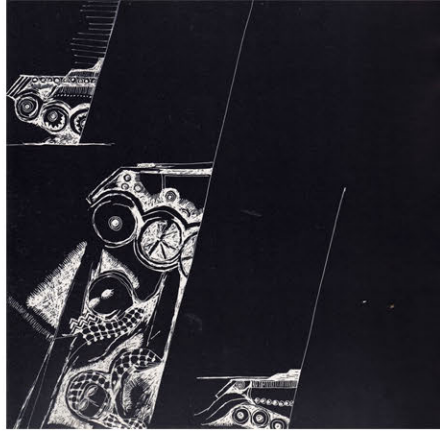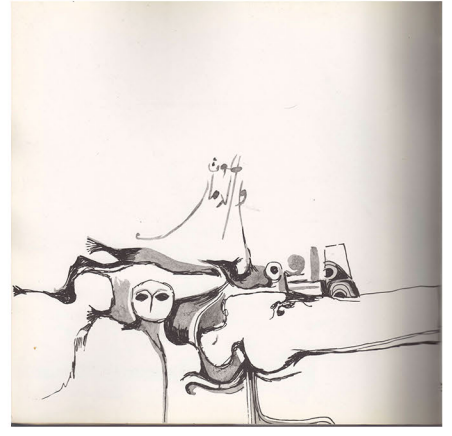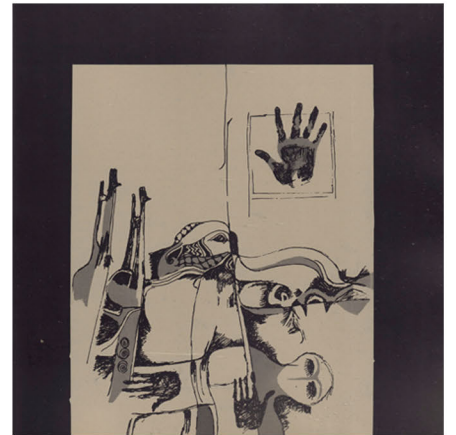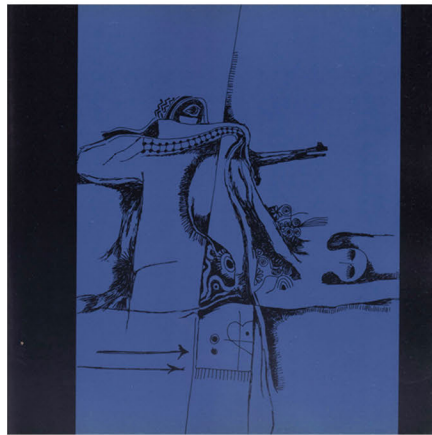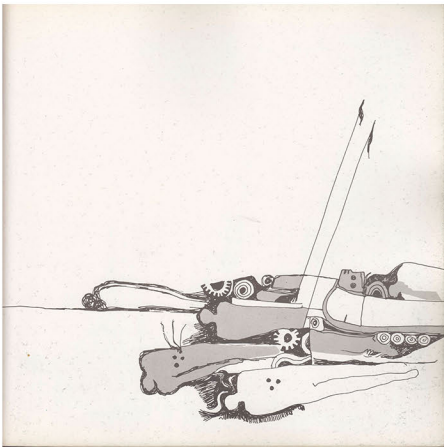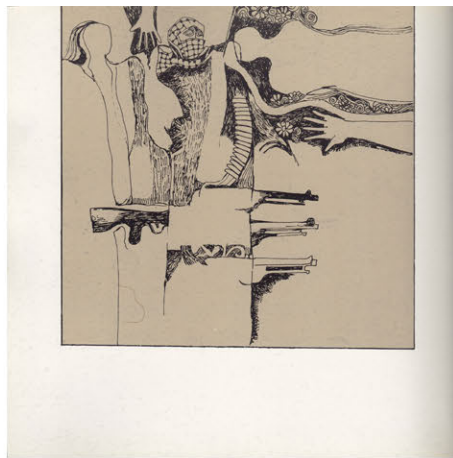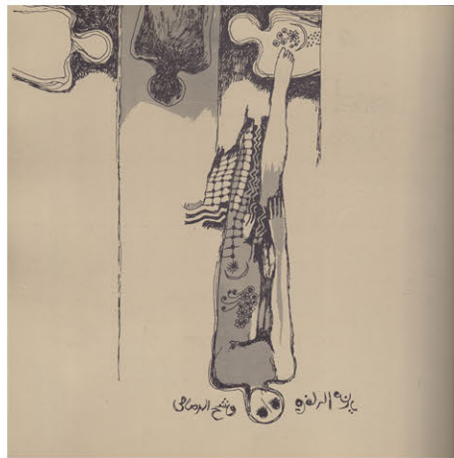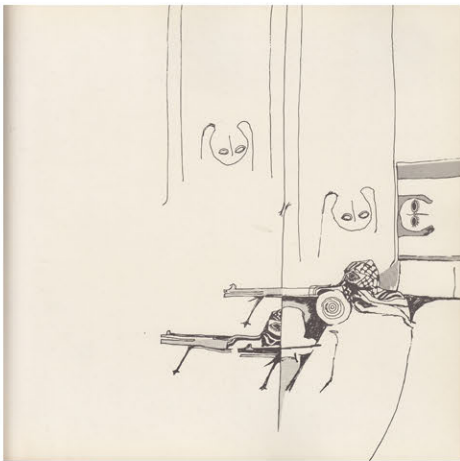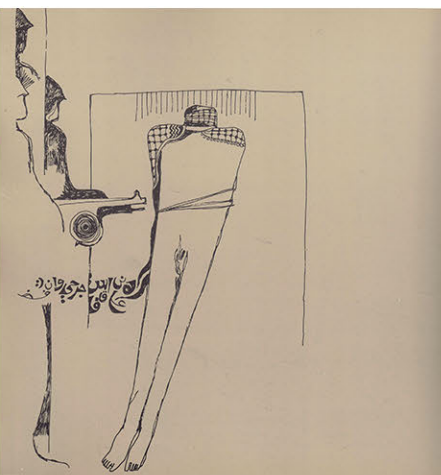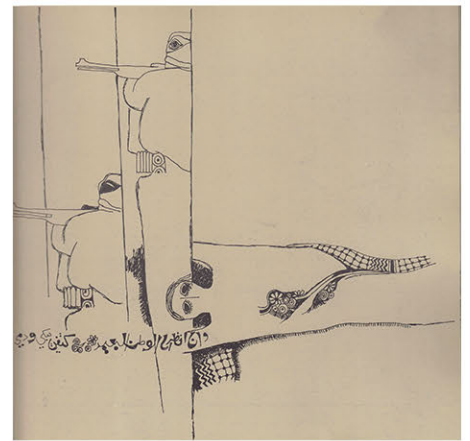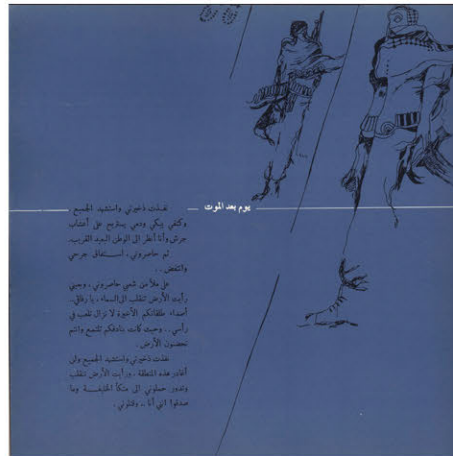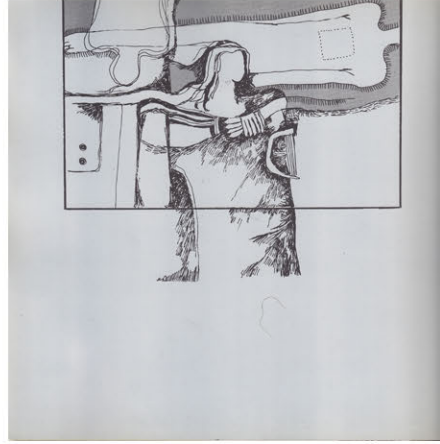
Fig. 3.44 Dia Azzawi, *Figure of Sorrow*, 1972. Oil on canvas, 100.2 x 100 cm. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. Image courtesy of the author.



Fig. 3.45 Dia Azzawi, *You are alone* [Anta Muqim fi Wahdatak], 1972. Oil on canvas, 95 x 95 cm. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. Image courtesy of the author.



Fig. 3.46 Dia Azzawi, *Lonesome Wandering* [al-Tijwal al-Mouhesh], 1972. Oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm..

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Fig. 3.47 Dia Azzawi, *Waddah al-Yaman I*, 1972. Gouach and china ink on paper, 26 cm x 26 cm. Tala Azzawi Collection, London. Image courtesy of artist.



Fig. 3.48 Dia Azzawi, *Waddah al-Yaman*, 1972. Oil on canvas, 90 cm x 90 cm. Private collection. Image courtesy of artist.
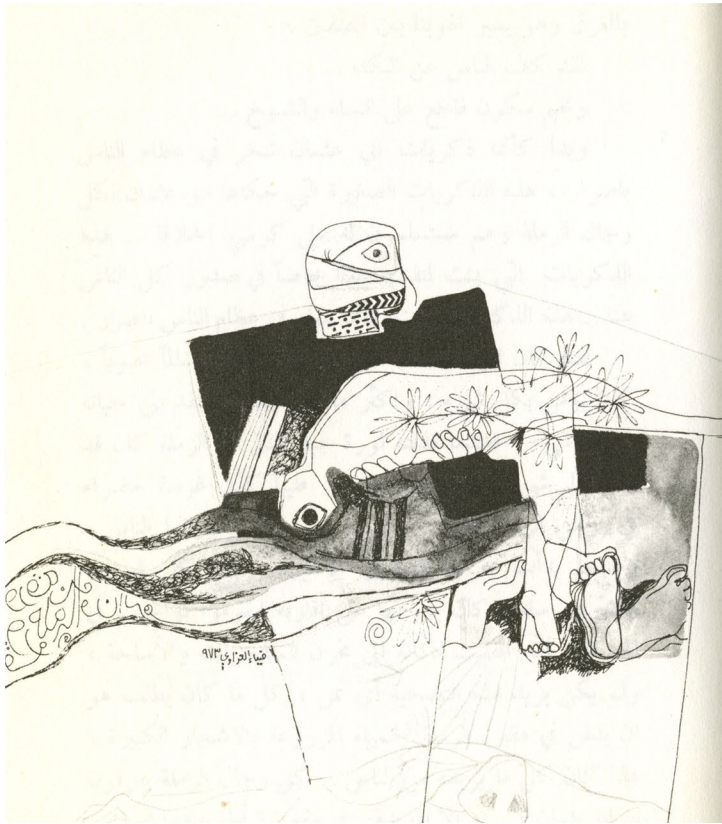
Fig. 3.49 Dia Azzawi, Document from Ramleh, *Drawings from the Land of Sad Oranges*, 1973. Ink on paper.



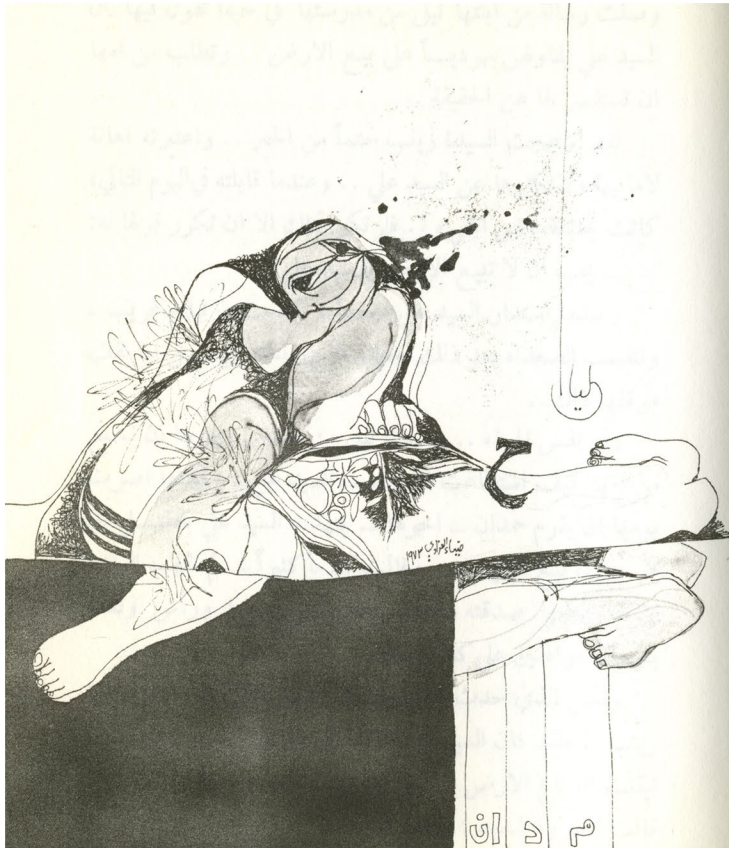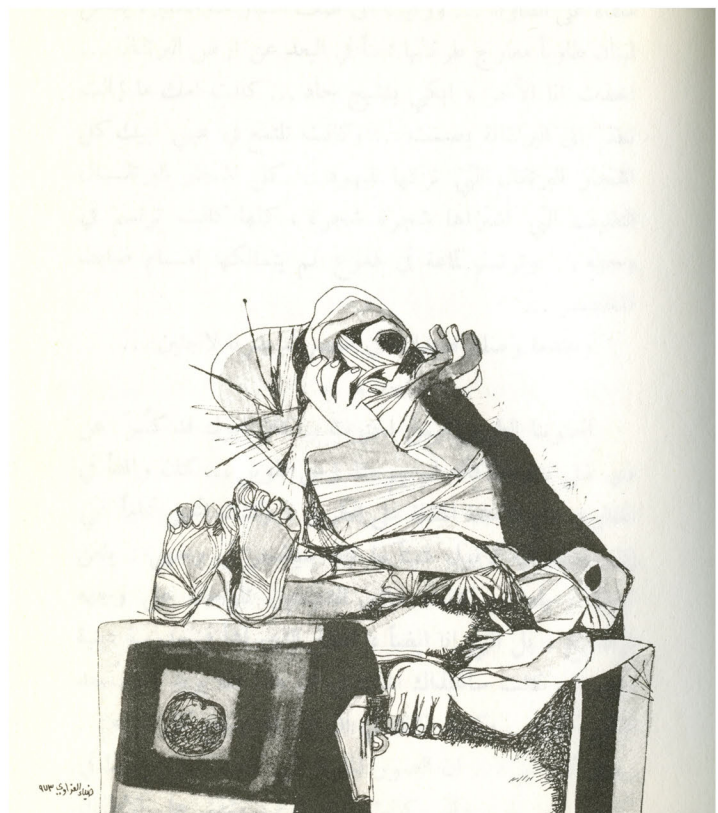Fig. 3.50 Dia Azzawi, Until We Return, *Drawings from the Land of Sad Oranges*, 1973. Ink on paper.

Fig. 3.51 Dia Azzawi, The Man Who Didn't Die, Drawings from the Land of Sad Oranges, 1973. Ink on paper.



Fig. 3.52 Dia Azzawi, The Land of Sad Oranges, Drawings from the Land of Sad Oranges, 1973. Ink on paper.
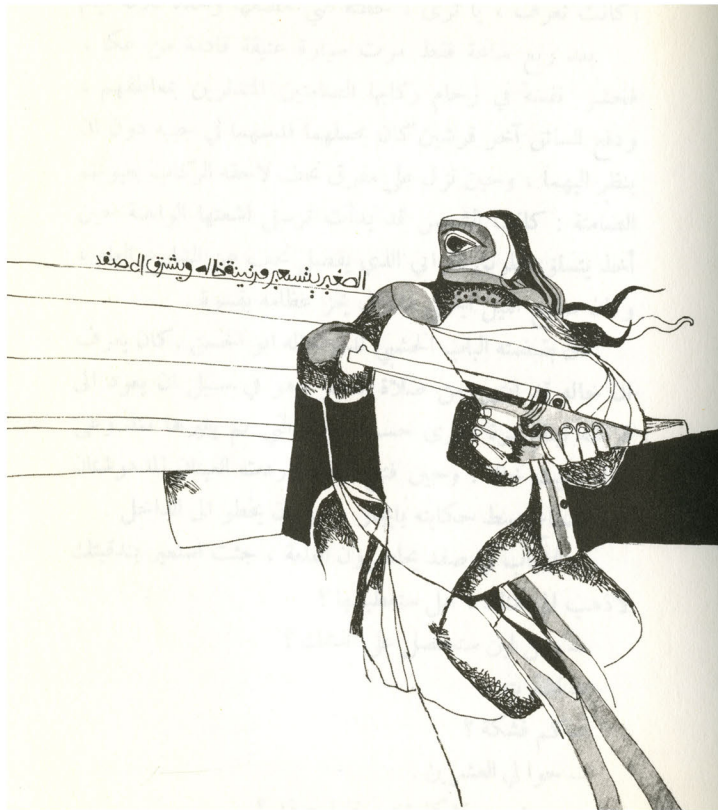
Fig. 3.53 Dia Azzawi, Men and Their Guns [Al-Rijal wa al-Binadiq], Drawings from the Land of Sad Oranges, 1973.  Ink on paper.
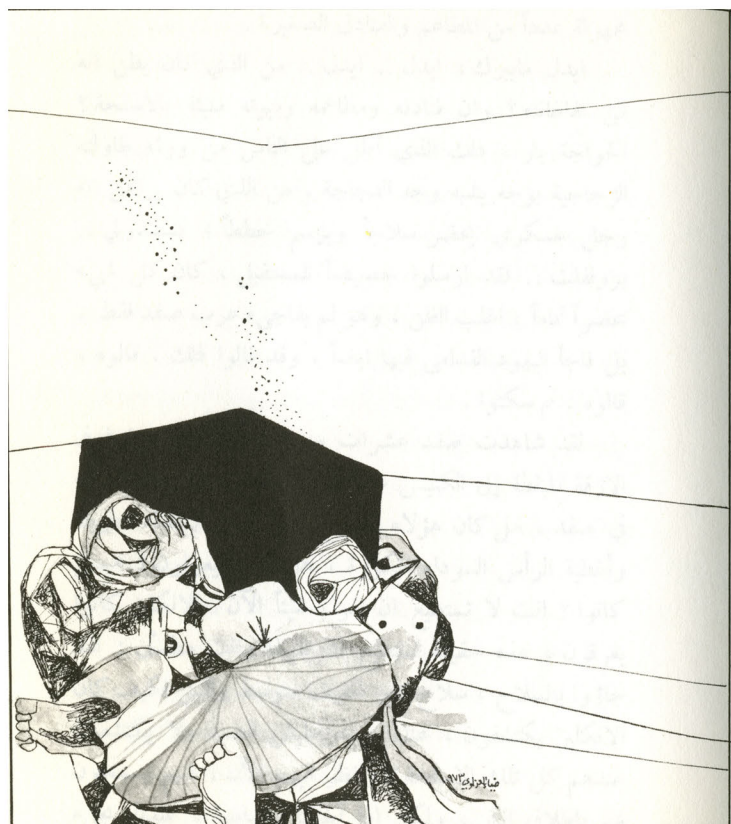


Fig. 3.54 Dia Azzawi, Men and Guns [Al-Rijal wa al-Binadiq], Drawings from the Land of Sad Oranges, 1973. Ink on paper.

Fig. 3.55 Dia Azzawi, *Three Conditions of a Single Man* [Halat Thalatha li-Rajul Wahid] (1 of 3), 1976. Oil on canvas, 149.5 x 119 cm. Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. Image courtesy of the author.





Fig. 3.56 Dia Azzawi, *Three Conditions of a Single Man* [Halat Thalatha li-Rajul Wahid] (2 of 3), 1976. Oil on canvas, 149.5 x 119 cm. Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3.57 Dia Azzawi, Three Condi-
tions for a Single Man [Thalatha Halat
li-Rajul Wahid], 1976. Oil on canvas.
Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3.58 Dia Azzawi, *From the Years of Palestinian Slaughter* [Min Sanawat al-Thabah al-Filiastini], 1976. Oil on canvas, 200 x 115 cm. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3.59 & 3.60 Dia Azzawi, *The Body's Anthem* [Al-Nasheed al-Jasi-di], 1979.  Silkscreen print, 50 x 50 cm.

Fig. 3.61 & 3.62 Dia Azzawi, The Body's Anthem [*Al-Nasheed al-Ja-sidi*], 1979. Silkscreen print, 50 x 50 cm.
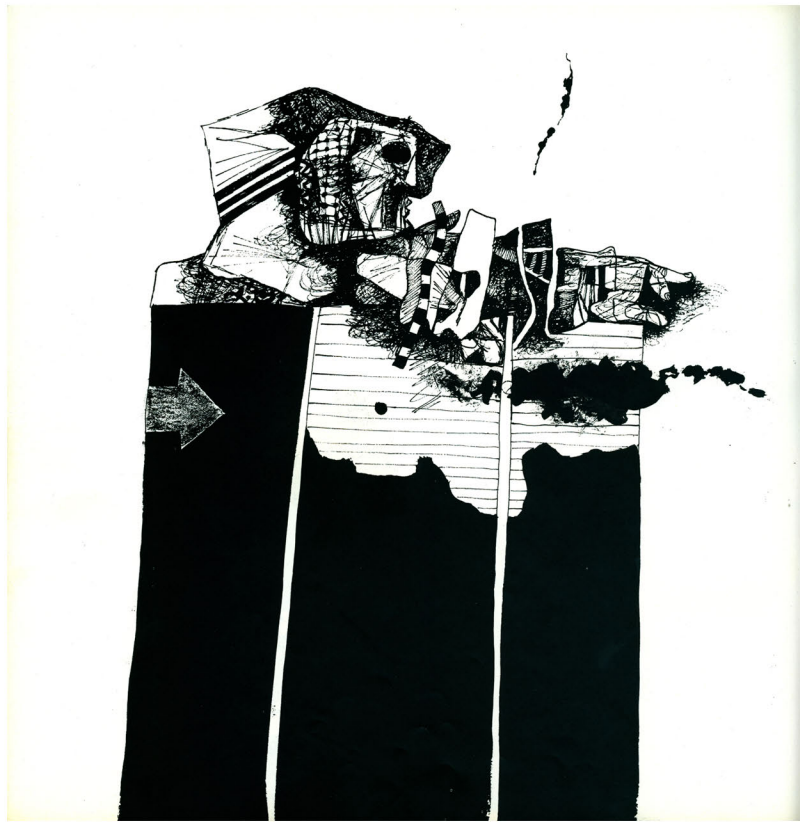
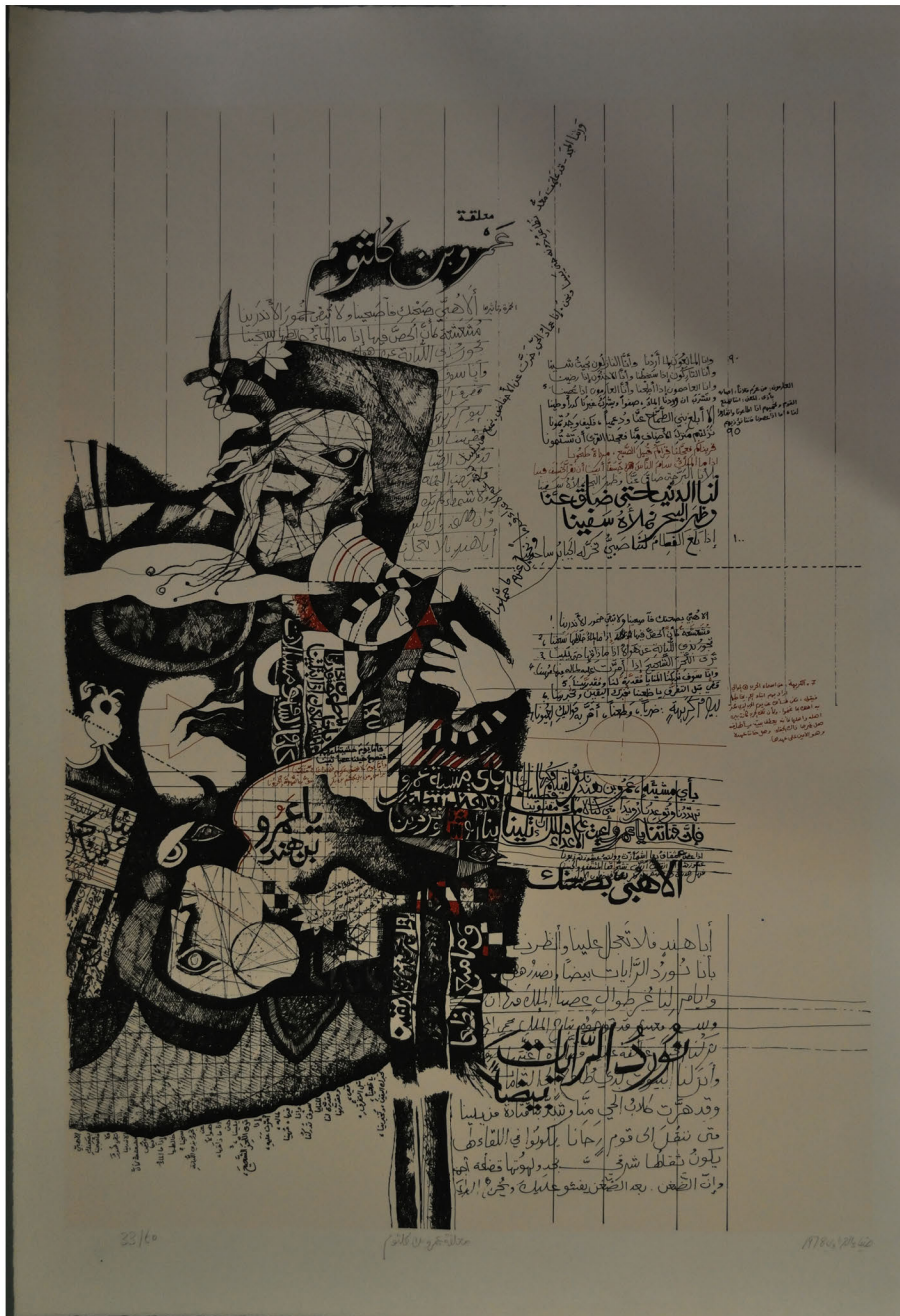Fig. 3.63 & 3.64 Dia Azzawi, *The Body's Anthem* [Al-Nasheed al-Jasidi], 1979. Ink on paper, 50 x 50 cm

Fig. 3.65 Dia Azzawi, "Amr bin Kulthum," *Illustrations for the Seven Golden Odes* [*Rusum lil-Mu'alaqat al-Saba'*], 1978. Silkscreen on paper, 104.5 cm x 72 cm. Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.

Fig. 3.66 Dia Azzawi, "Antara bin Shadad," *Illustrations for the Seven Golden Odes* [*Rusum lil-Mu'alaqat al-Saba'*], 1978. Silkscreen on paper, 104.5 cm x 72 cm. Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.

Fig. 3.67 Dia Azzawi, "Al-Harith bin Hilliza," *Illustrations for the Seven Golden Odes* [*Rusum lil-Mu'alaqat al-Saba'*], 1978.  Silkscreen on paper, 104.5 cm x 72 cm.  Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art,

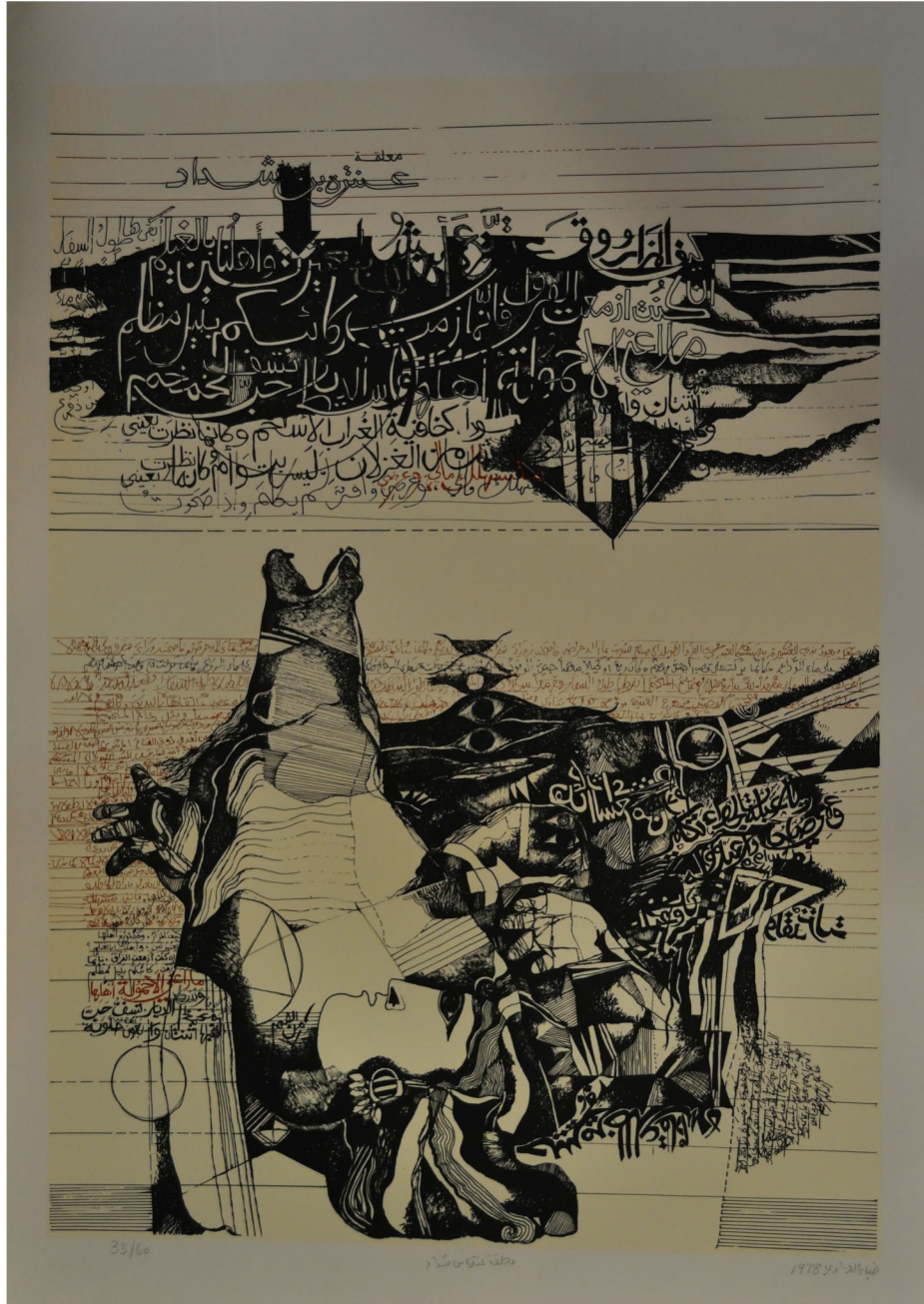Fig. 3.68 Cover of *Tariq Tel al-Zaatar*, 1977.  Design by Dia Azzawi

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