

A Z Z A W I

6th March - 7th April 1984

A L I F G A L L E R S

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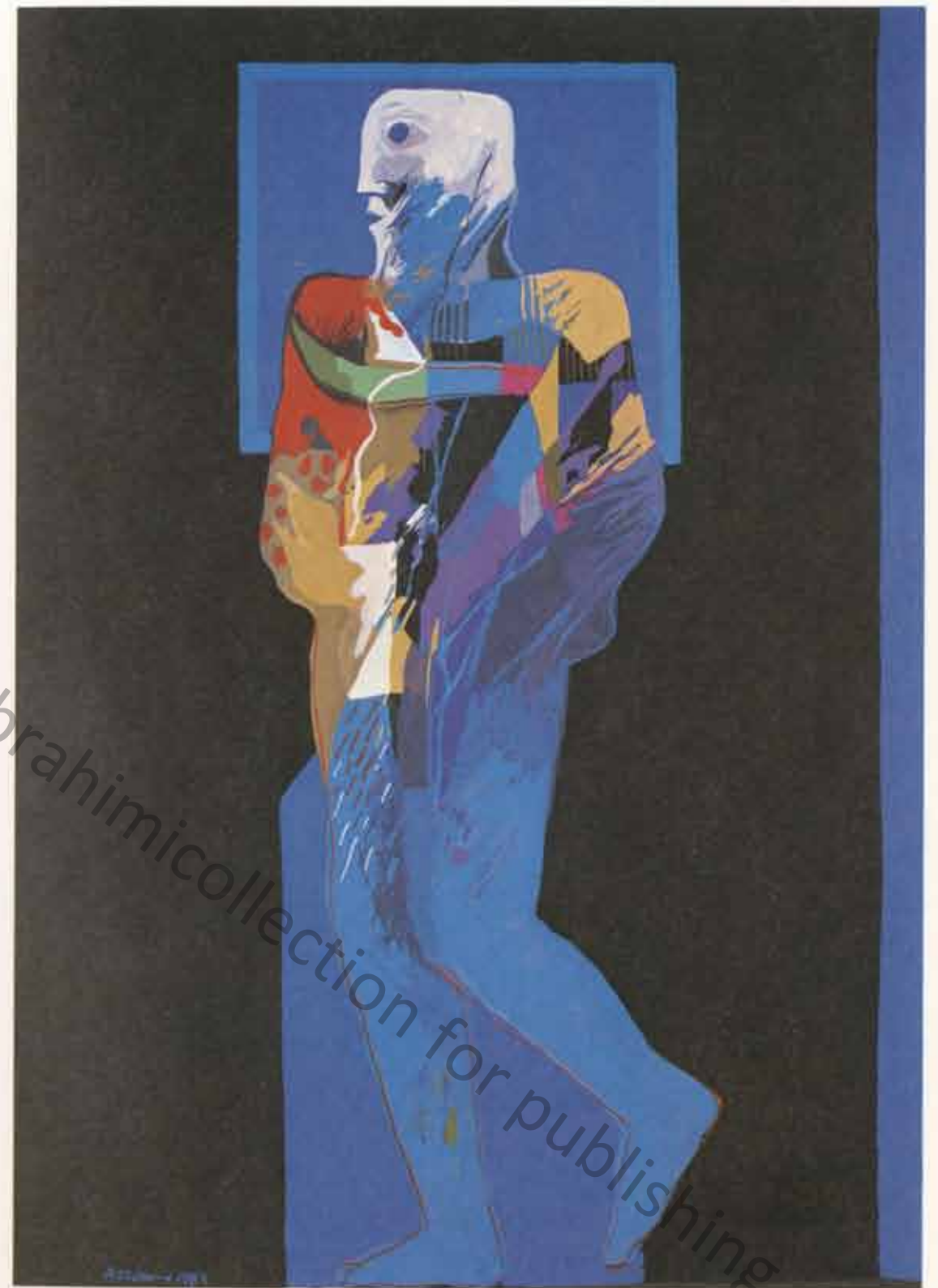
WHAT AL NIFFARI SAID TO ABDULLAH

THE NEARNESS YOU KNOW IS FAR AWAY
AND THE REMOTENESS YOU KNOW IS FAR AWAY
I KNEW YOU, AND YOU KNEW ME NOT
THAT IS REMOTENESS
YOUR HEART SAW ME WITHOUT SEEING ME
THAT IS REMOTENESS
YOU FIND ME WITHOUT FINDING ME
THAT IS REMOTENESS
YOU DESCRIBE ME WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING MY
ATTITUDES THAT IS REMOTENESS
YOU HEAR MY SPEAKING AS THOUGH IT COMES FROM
YOUR HEART YET IT IS MINE
THAT IS REMOTENESS
YOU SEE YOURSELF, THOUGH I AM CLOSER TO YOU
THAN YOUR OWN VISION AND THAT FINALLY IS
REMOTENESS

Al Niffari

*Born in Nappur near Babylon (Iraq). He is very well known as a sufi poet and writer.
He died in Basrah at the end of 10th century.*

Translation: Zelfa Howran



1. WHAT AL-NIFFARI SAID
TO ABDULLAH NO. 4
Gouache on paper
44" x 30" (112 x 76 cm)

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all the works are for sale
Prices on request



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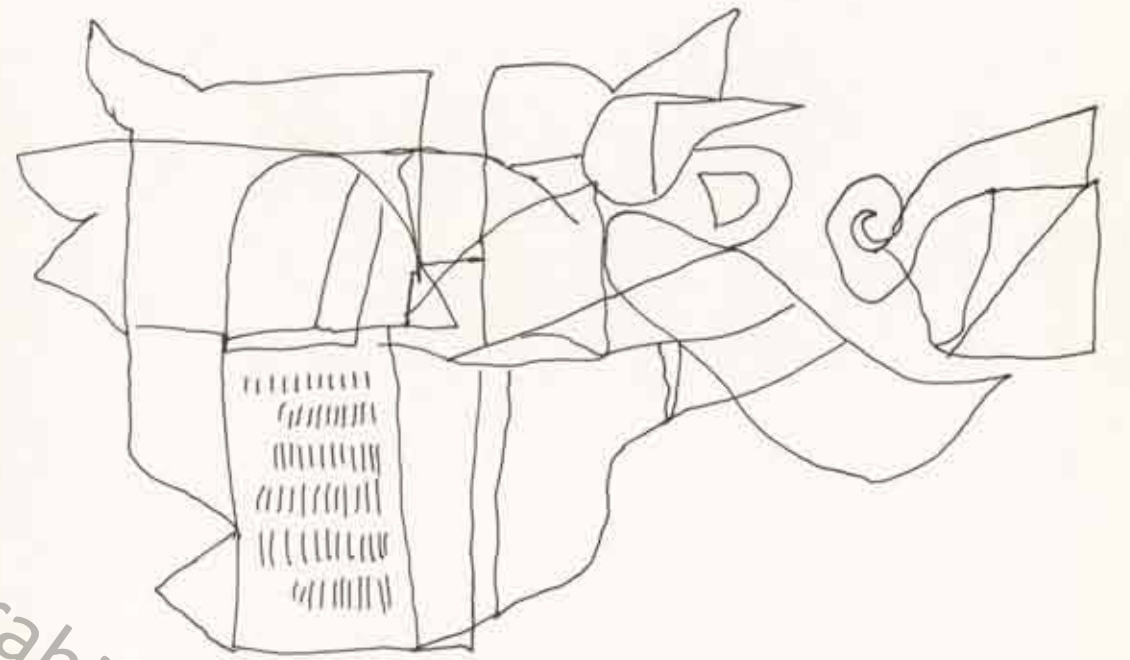
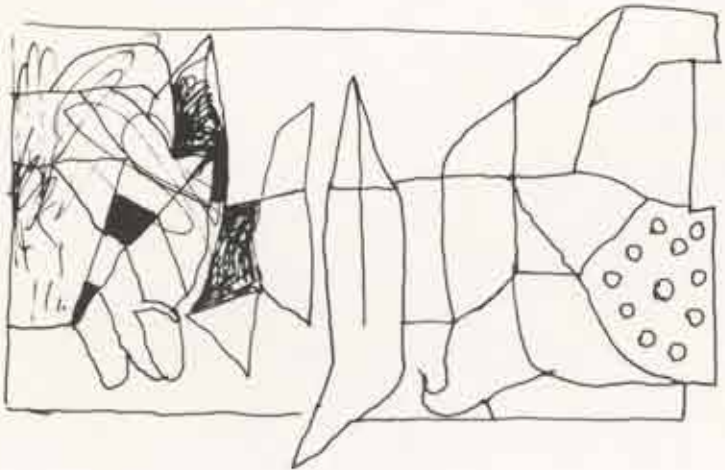
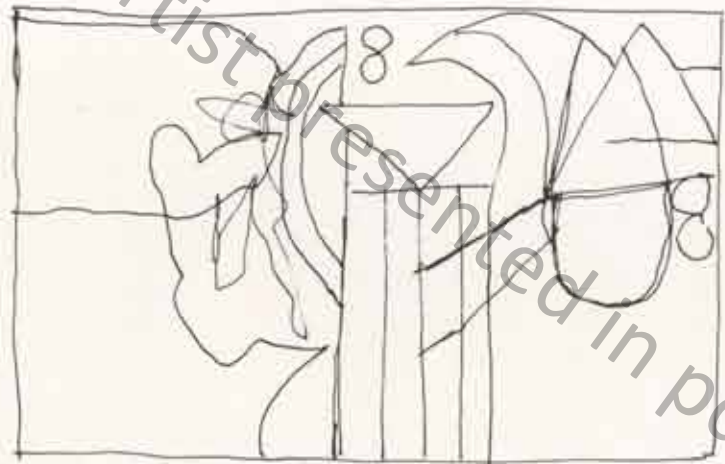
2. ORIENTAL WINDOW NO. 2 1983
Acrylic on wood
25 1/2" x 25 1/2" (64 x 65 cm)



3. THE GARDEN OF EDEN 1983
Acrylic on canvas
54" x 43 1/4" (137 x 111 cm)

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5. **IMAGENO. 3** 1985
Etching and aquatint
Paper, Somerset Satin 300 gsm
27 1/4" x 21 1/2" (70 x 54 cm)
EDITION 15
PROOFS 4
1 run from 1 plate, hand coloured
with Gouache and Crayon by the artist
after editing

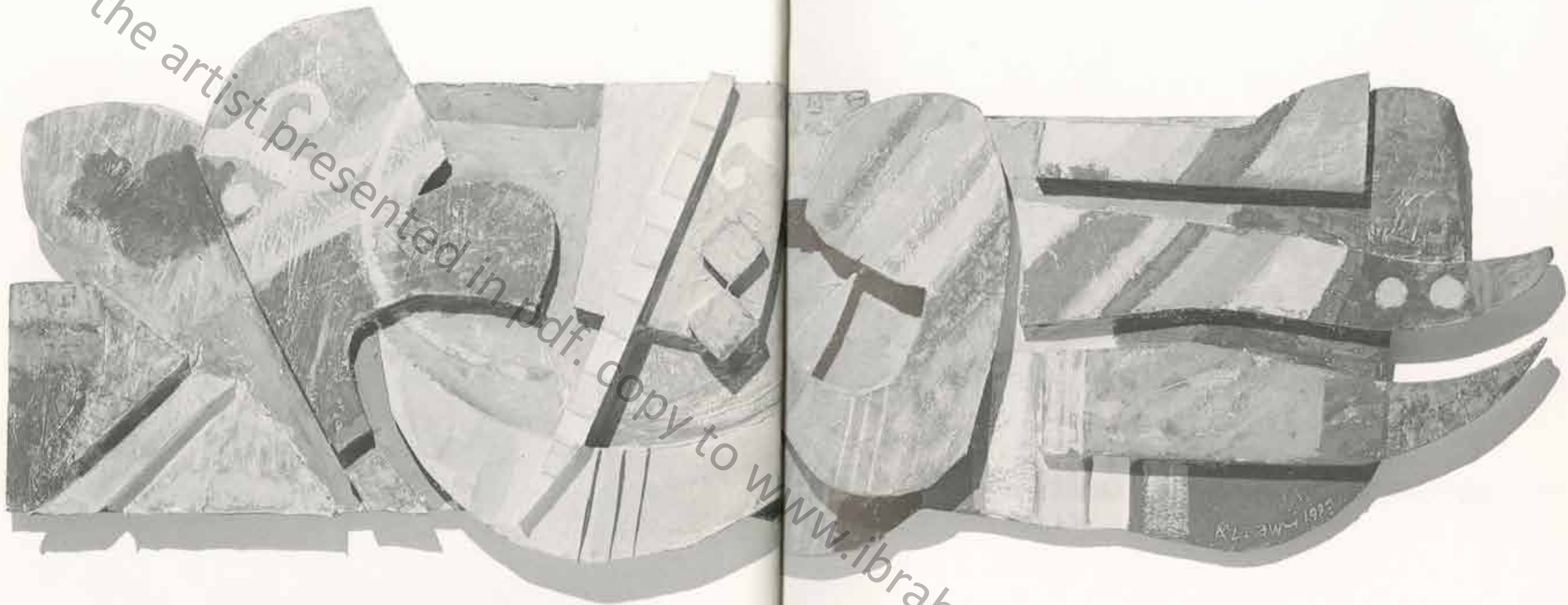


6. **ORIENTAL GARDEN NO. 3** 1983
Etching and aquatint
27 1/4" x 21 1/2" (70 x 54 cm)
Paper, Somerset Satin 500 gsm
EDITION 15
PROOFS 3
2 runs from 2 plates
1 Green
1 Yellow Ochre and Red



7. **IMAGENO. 1** 1983
Etching and aquatint
27 1/4" x 21 1/2" (70 x 54 cm)
Paper, Somerset Satin 300 gsm
EDITION 15
PROOFS 3
2 runs from 2 plates
1 Blue
1 Black, Red and Yellow Ochre

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4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCENE NO. 2 1984
Acrylic on paper
15" x 43" (32 x 111 cm)

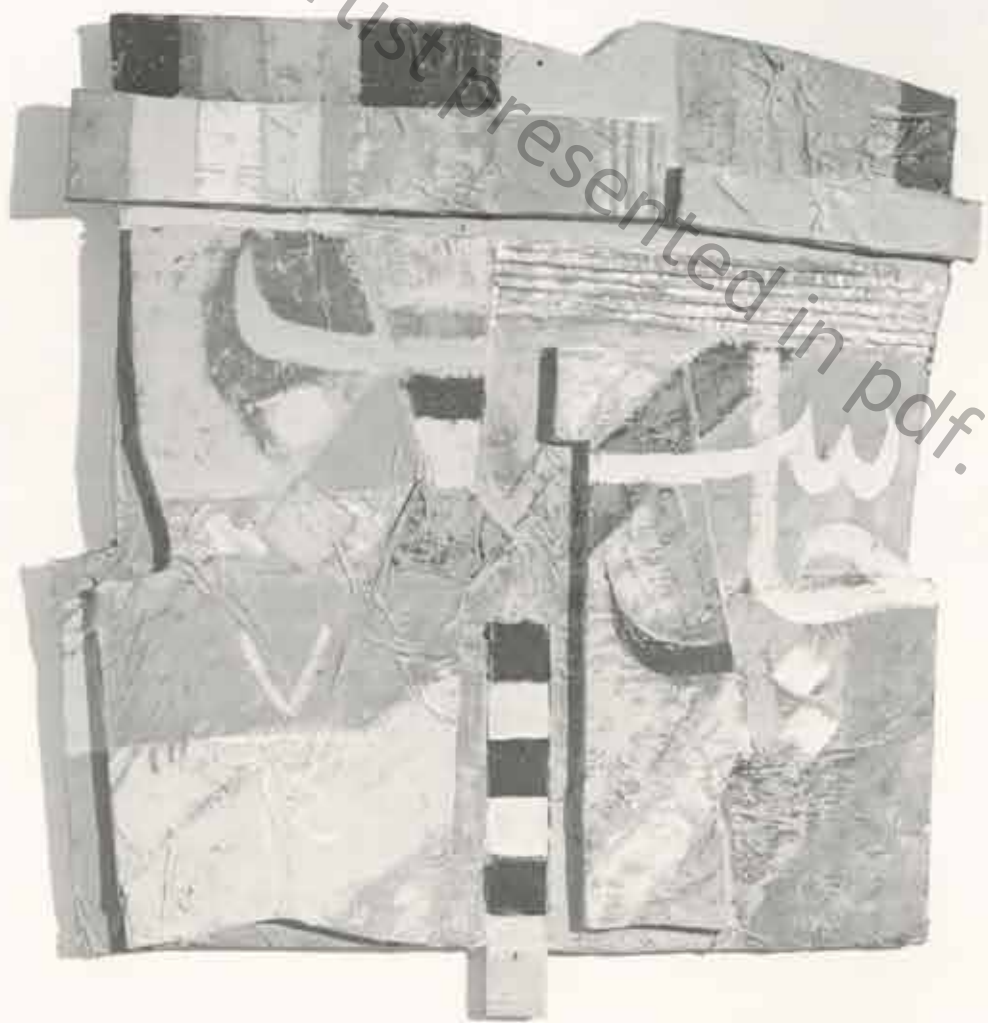


10. MOTIF OF ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY NO. 3 1983
Gouache on paper
44" x 27 1/2" (112 x 70 cm)



11. ORIENTAL WINDOW NO. 3 1983
Gouache on paper
30" x 24" (91 x 61 cm)

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8. ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SCENE NO.1 1983
Acrylic on paper
24 1/2" x 22 1/2" (57 x 62 cm)



9. WHAT AL-NIFFARI SAID TO
ABDULLAH NO.3 1983
Gouache on paper
44" x 30" (112 x 76 cm)

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EXHIBITION LIST

18. ARABIC STELE No. 1 1983
Acrylic - gold leaf on wood
49 1/2" x 28 1/2" (126 x 72 cm)

19. ARABIC MOTIF No. 2 1983
Gouache on paper
44" x 30" (112 x 76 cm)

20. A TREE AND BIRD 1983
Gouache - gold leaf on paper
44" x 15 1/2" (40 x 110 cm)

21. ORIENTAL SCENE 1983
Gouache on paper
24" x 6 1/2" (61 x 158 cm)

22. ORIENTAL FORM 1983
Gouache - gold leaf on paper
26 1/2" x 62" (68 x 158 cm)

23. ARABIC MOTIF No. 3 1983
Gouache on paper with gold leaf
44" x 30" (112 x 76 cm)

24. ARABIC STELE No. 3 1983
Acrylic on canvas
60" x 34" (152 x 86 cm)

25. ARABIC STELE No. 4 1983
Gouache and crayon with gold leaf
62" x 22 1/2" (158 x 57 cm)

26. THE VISIT 1983
Etching and aquatint
27 1/2" x 21 1/2" (70 x 54 cm)
Paper, Somerset Satin 300 gsm
EDITION 15
PROOFS 3
1 run from 1 plate, hand coloured
with Gouache by the artist after editioning

27. MEMORIES No. 1 1983
Etching and aquatint
11 1/2" x 13" (29 x 32 cm)
EDITION 5
PROOFS 3
1 run from 1 plate with surface roll

28. MEMORIES No. 2 1983
Etching and aquatint
11 1/2" x 13" (29 x 32 cm)
EDITION 5
PROOFS 3
1 run from 1 plate with surface roll, hand coloured with
Gouache by the artist after editioning

29. ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY No. 1 1983
Gouache on paper
39 1/2" x 27 1/2" (100 x 70 cm)

30. WHAT AL-NIFFARI SAID TO
ABDULLAH No. 5 1983
Gouache on paper
44" x 30" (112 x 76 cm)

31. WHAT AL-NIFFARI SAID TO
ABDULLAH No. (1983
Gouache on paper
44" x 30" (112 x 76 cm)

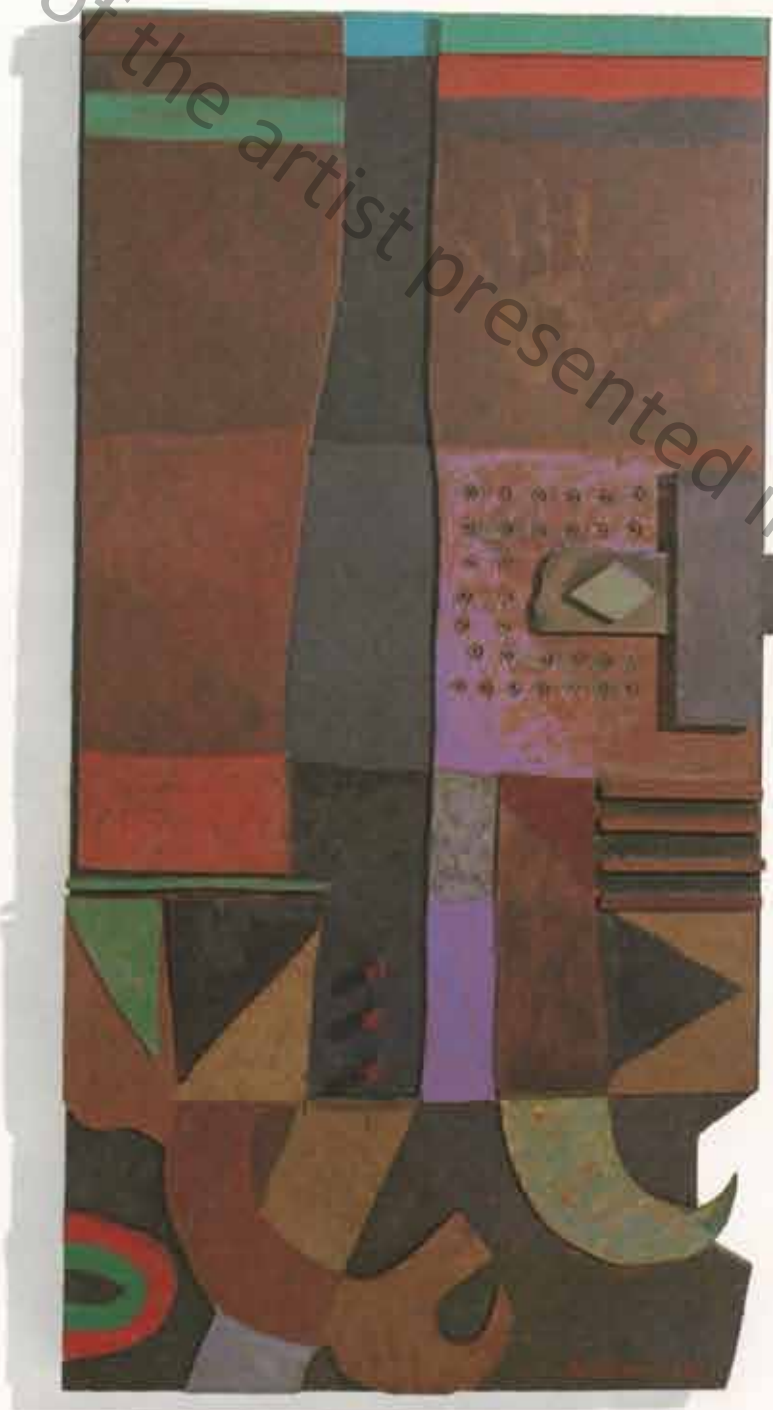
32. ORIENTAL DOOR No. 1 1983
Acrylic on canvas
51" x 40" (130 x 102 cm)

33. ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY No. 2 1983
Gouache on paper
40" x 26" (102 x 66 cm)

34. ORIENTAL DOOR No. 2 1983
Acrylic on canvas
51" x 40" (130 x 102 cm)

35. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCENE No. 3 1983
Acrylic on canvas
39 1/2" x 31 1/2" (101 x 80 cm)

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15. OLD BAGHDADI DOOR 1983
Acrylic on wood
48 1/2" x 24 1/4" (123 x 63 cm)



12. WHAT AL-NIFFARI SAID
TO ABDULLAH NO.1 1983
Acrylic on canvas with gold leaf
54" x 43 1/4" (137 x 111 cm)

13. ARABIC STELE NO.2 1983
Acrylic on canvas
59 1/2" x 45 1/4" (152 x 115 cm)

ENCOUNTERS

First encounter with the works of Azzawi in Paris.
In these paintings I see letters, pieces of writing, calligraphy, a writing that I know to be Arabic but which I cannot decipher
I sense it, this calligraphy, as part of the rhythm of the painting, punctuating it, supporting it, sometimes completing it with rage. Do these letters, these signs, have a precise meaning? Does the painting refer to the Koran, is it an evocation to Allah?
I don't know.
Though the meaning of these signs thus escapes me, I do not think it is a priori necessary to be able to read them. I can read in another way, my western sensibility can appreciate the meaning differently.
I can admire the strength of this calligraphy, recognize the sureness of the strokes, follow with wonder the multiple tangle of lines, see the harmony or see the deliberate discords that bring to the composition the gracefulness or weight it requires.
Thus, when I saw at Granada the masterly Arab calligraphy covering the walls of the Alhambra Palace, it appeared to me as a succession of unbelievably beautiful abstract designs.

Second encounter

Among the pictures displayed at the Galerie Paris in Paris, contrasting with the more serious, more austere, more ascetic works of the other artists, Azzawi's canvasses are a luxuriant oasis.
At times, some of his works seem to shine with a luminosity that is almost fluorescent.
A white bird, delicately veined like the leaf of a tree held up to the light of a window, peacefully crosses the blue of the painting. A deep blue cloud awaits it.
The work is entitled: Window.

Another encounter

I have been able to follow the latest path taken by the painter at the time of his last exhibition in Paris.
The whole collection is highly original, very evocative – having no connection with Orientalism. Out of the depths of perfumed nights arise the shapes of palaces and mosques. Yet, like a sharp reminder of today's reality, birds appear, tattered, torn, one of them falling with wings vertically outstretched, like a wounded aeroplane.
The Tower of Babylon: a mysterious Tower of Babylon on the deep black of whose shape is drawn an eye, disturbing and inquisitorial.
Blue Night: angled bizarrely in the blue of the sky, a typically Oriental crescent appears above the monumental portico of a palace on which are flowing Arabic inscriptions.
Meeting with Azzawi in London, at his studio.
Birds in a Red Sky: after a very hot day, the sky has suddenly burst into flames. Some birds fly frantically across it, seeking the velvet blackness of a distant, becalmed night.
The strength which emanates from this dyptich – a recent work painted in two parts – is created by the contrast of the expanse of black with the vivid, glowing red which answers it. The plastic language which the artist has forged for himself has here achieved a true plastic density. One quality in the collection of forms which he offers to our view is a new and intense magnificence of colour; little by little writing and letters are disappearing.
He is constantly finding new and successful arrangements for the grouping of forms, so that he includes us in his excitement.
Out of this shimmer of colours comes forth, as it were, a chant, the harsh, fervent voice of the Bedouin in the desert.
A human voice, beautiful as the voice of his friend Sadi, which whom he has a close, fraternal tie. An authentic voice which tells of the pure, harsh existence of the Bedouins, the nomads, the Iraqi peasants, of their piety, their superstitions and their highest aspirations.
And, too, Azzawi's paintings make us think of Oriental carpets – but beware: too often the Oriental carpet is seen as mere decoration, a pleasure to the eye, agreeable to tread underfoot – a simplistic, and oh-so-conventional approach towards these genuine works of art, woven with the blood and sweat of those poor nomads and peasants.
Masterpieces of patience, charged with symbols and meanings. A secret, subtle language full of a

profound poetry, which for centuries has told of the history and feelings of little-known tribes. Taken up as it has been and admired by a privileged class, we must not forget that the Oriental carpet is the purest and highest form of language of the people who live in those vast regions between the Caucasus and the Gulf.
And, for the man or woman who looks at the artist's paintings, the glow and beauty of his colours are not only invitations to visual enjoyment.
Behind the architecture of forms and colours with their rhythmic and musical resonances hides a man who speaks of his country – or, rather, sings of it.
Our eyes must listen to him.

Cornille, Paris, June 1981
Translation: Anthea G. Ridett

Cornille *Out of the Copra Group: Painter and writer: Lives in Paris*

UNFINISHED HAND

The Arab world has been gripped by the brutality of this century. We know the essence of this ravaged territory, an epoch through which the Arab painter passes, picking out the signs.
Dia Azzawi's signs are signs of light, and for there to be light, something has to be broken.
Dia Azzawi shows us history as it takes place in the bodies and souls of the Arab nations. He shows us the inexplicable, an ambiguous shaft of light piercing the invisible. Azzawi enables us to see the wounds created by time in anonymous bodies, bodies that are gagged, bound, and suspended against a sky that is black, totally black.
These are paintings tormented by the times, by the violence of the times. The eye is not there to see. It is a wound in the face, a rent carried off by the dove.
The dove is not a symbol; it is an enigma. It is letters of the alphabet tied to a body, it is a destiny, a glance. Here, letters revive the legend which is brought into the present. Crazy, overturned letters, set down to hide traces and to trouble certainties, letters distorted to give the lie to the 'Oriental dream'. There is no peaceful place in this landscape inhabited by the demands of liberty.
The signs of the world are brought together in the palm of an outstretched hand, a proud, fine hand, high in the indifferent sky. An unfinished hand. Dia Azzawi has scattered these signs over unbroken colour; in the gap in a horizon, hope.
Originating from Iraq, Azzawi today is part of a global cultural movement of break-down and renewal in the Arab world. His painting is genuinely rooted in Arab imagination and reality. It achieves universality.

Tahar Ben Jelloun
Paris 12th May 1980
Translation: Anthea G. Ridett

Ben Jelloun
Contemporary Moroccan poet and writer, published several novels and a collection of poems in French. He is a regular writer in *Le Monde*.

PAINTING POETRY

For an artist working abroad, the memory of his own country is often his main source of inspiration, colouring his work with longing and nostalgia, or informing it with a sense of perspective that is not always uncritical.

In the case of London-based, Iraqi artist Dia al Azzawi, these influences are manifest. His richly-coloured abstracts in oil or gouache recall at once his Arab and Sumerian heritage. Yet in some of them, the distraught, misshapen faces, the falling dove, the sweeping desert landscape punctuated by distorted shapes, indicate the emotions of one who looks back with both longing and distress. Azzawi's work is rooted in the turath, heritage. He is one of a pioneer breed of Arab painters who has sought, and found, a means of expressing himself in an essentially Arab genre.

This reflects the rich visual and oral heritage of the region. While Azzawi draws his images from the Sumerian and Islamic backgrounds, the inspiration for his themes comes most often from the poetry, stories and myths of the Arab literary tradition and from current political events.

The written word is almost always a central motif in Azzawi's art. In his *Seven Golden Odes*, a series of silk screens and one gouache directly inspired by the pre-Islamic al Mullaqat poems – some of his best work to date – fragments of the poems and the images they inspire are totally interlinked.

As one critic puts it: "To al Azzawi, the Assyrian, Islamic, Arab and modern elements in a canvas should be indistinguishable or simply felt and appreciated as a single entity. Just as a letter or character is part of a phrase, a word or a poetic phrase or extract should form an integral part of the various other elements in a painting."

Azzawi's painting career began during his years as an archaeology undergraduate at the Institute of Fine Arts in Iraq. The famous Iraqi sculptor Jawad Salim was then at his peak and his work had a tremendous influence on young artists. Through Salim's example, al Azzawi was able to make the connection between the ancient cultures he had been studying as an archaeologist and the modern techniques he had been perfecting in his painting classes.

"It was a great revelation to me," Azzawi explains. "There was a tremendous response from deep within me, I felt especially close to the Sumerian ideas. I loved the simple lines, the great big eyes. It was new to all of us. We had almost no awareness of this aspect of our cultural past."

An early series of paintings based on the stories from the *1001 Nights* reflects this new awareness. The works are largely figurative, drawn along clear, simple lines, against a sparse, flat background. All the figures have the same large, all-seeing eyes.

Within a short time, however, Azzawi was moving towards the abstract, as portrayed in a series of illustrations for a book on the martyrdom of Hussein. This trend was to continue.

As with many artists, writers and poets, events in the Arab world have had a strong influence on Azzawi's work. In the wake of the 1967 war, of his own period of service in the Iraqi army, and of the events in Lebanon, the canvasses become more violent and political.

In a series of about 40 gouaches, painted during the mid-1970's, Azzawi expresses the pain and anxiety experienced during the army days when fighting the Kurds. Terrible, distorted faces peer out from gloomy grey-blue or brown canvasses, while in the background, the names of dead colleagues form the words written, as if carelessly, on a brick wall.

In a book commemorating Black September, Azzawi's stark, violent and often ghoulish images serve to capture the horror and incomprehension expressed in the journal of an unknown soldier, later missing, presumed dead.

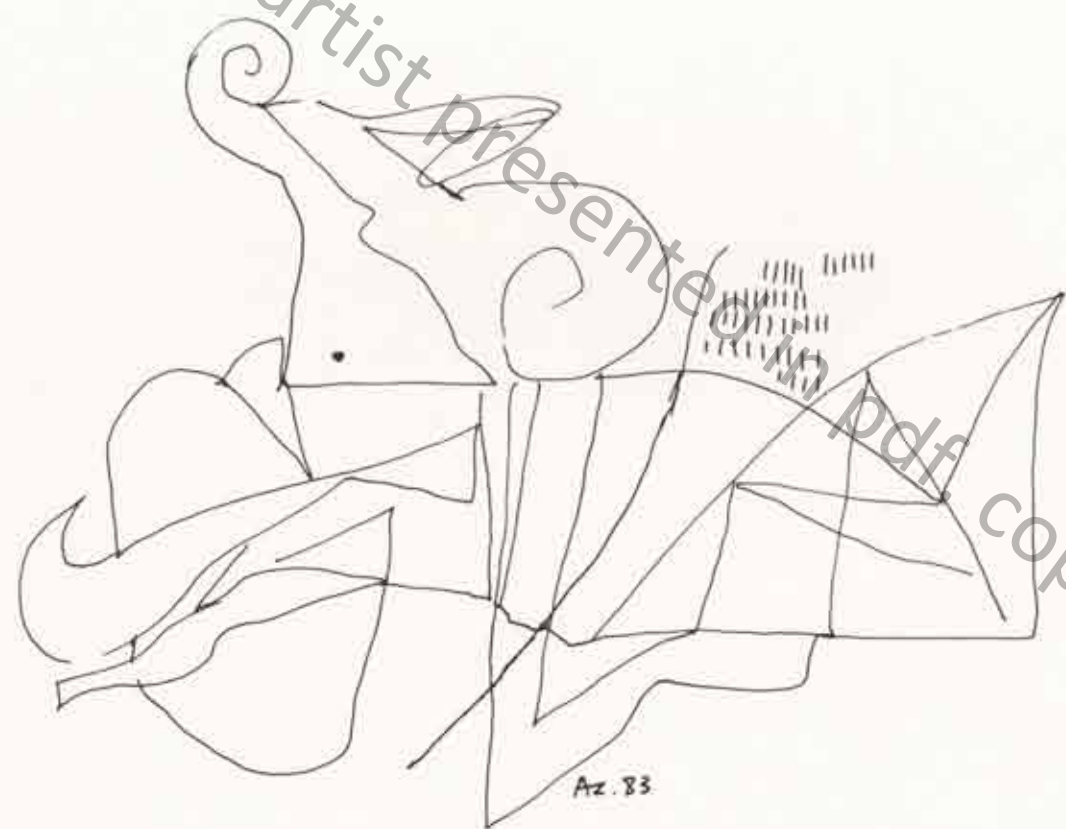
When Tel al Zaatar fell in Lebanon in 1976, Azzawi turned to the writings of Arab poets Mahmoud Darwish, Taher Ben Jalloun and Yusuf Sayegh for inspiration. The result is a moving series of silk screens, in which the words of the poems and the images jostle with each other to catch the eye.

"The poem," says Azzawi, "is very important. It gives the artist a great deal in terms of atmosphere. I wanted to paint the tragedy of Tel al Zaatar. I started, but later I turned to the poems, they gave me the inspiration I needed."

In his quieter, more reflective moments, Azzawi seems to be looking homeward in large, richly coloured canvasses, mostly gouache. These are almost totally abstract, often build around a word or phrase written in Arabic.

Since coming to London, Azzawi's colours have become more positive, and are dominated by warm reds, vibrant blues and heavy black, often in daring combination. When exhibited in London and Paris in recent years all were immediately snapped up.

Maureen Ali
London, 1982



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- 1977 Six Iraqi Artists, Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad
Contemporary Iraqi Art (II), Paris, London, Tunis
- 1978 Contemporary Arab Graphic Art, Iraqi Cultural Centre, London
Art for Palestine, Arab University, Beirut
Seven Iraqi Artists (Jumaie, Nasiri, Hussein, Ibrahim, Ramzi) Iraqi Cultural Centre, London
- 1979 Collective Exhibition, Tunis
Three Iraqi Artists (Nasiri, Ibrahim) Al-Rawaq Gallery, Baghdad
- 1980 The Influence of Arabic Calligraphic on Modern Arab Art, Iraqi Cultural Centre, London
Twelve Arab Artists, Gallery Faris, Paris
- 1982 Collective Arab Artists, Gallery Graffity, London
Collective Arab Artists, Gallery Faris, Paris
- 1983 Collective Arab Artists, Iraqi Cultural Centre, London
Collective Arab Artists, Gallery Graffity, London

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION

- 1967 The First International Triennial, India
- 1972 The Fourth International Poster Biennial, Poland
- 1974 The Fifth International Poster Biennial, Poland
- 1975 The International Gagne-Sur-Mer Exhibition
The International Summer Academy, Salzburg, Austria
- 1976 The Second Arab Art Biennial, Rabat
Venice Biennial, Venice
The Fifth International Exhibition of Drawings, Rijka, Yugoslavia
- 1979 Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil
- 1980 The Sixth International Exhibition of Drawings, Rijka, Yugoslavia
Salon de Mai, Paris
FIAC, Gallery Faris, Paris
Salon d'Automne, Espace Cardin Gallery, Paris
Salon de Mai, Paris
- 1981 Salon de Mai, Paris
The Seventh Internationale Grafik Triennale, Frechen

Limited Edition Publications

- Seven Golden Odes (Eight images, silk screen) 1979
The Body's Anthem (Sixteen images, silk screen) 1980
Homage to Baghdad (Ten images, silk screen) 1982
We Are Not Seen But, Corpses (Eight images, etching & aquatint) 1983

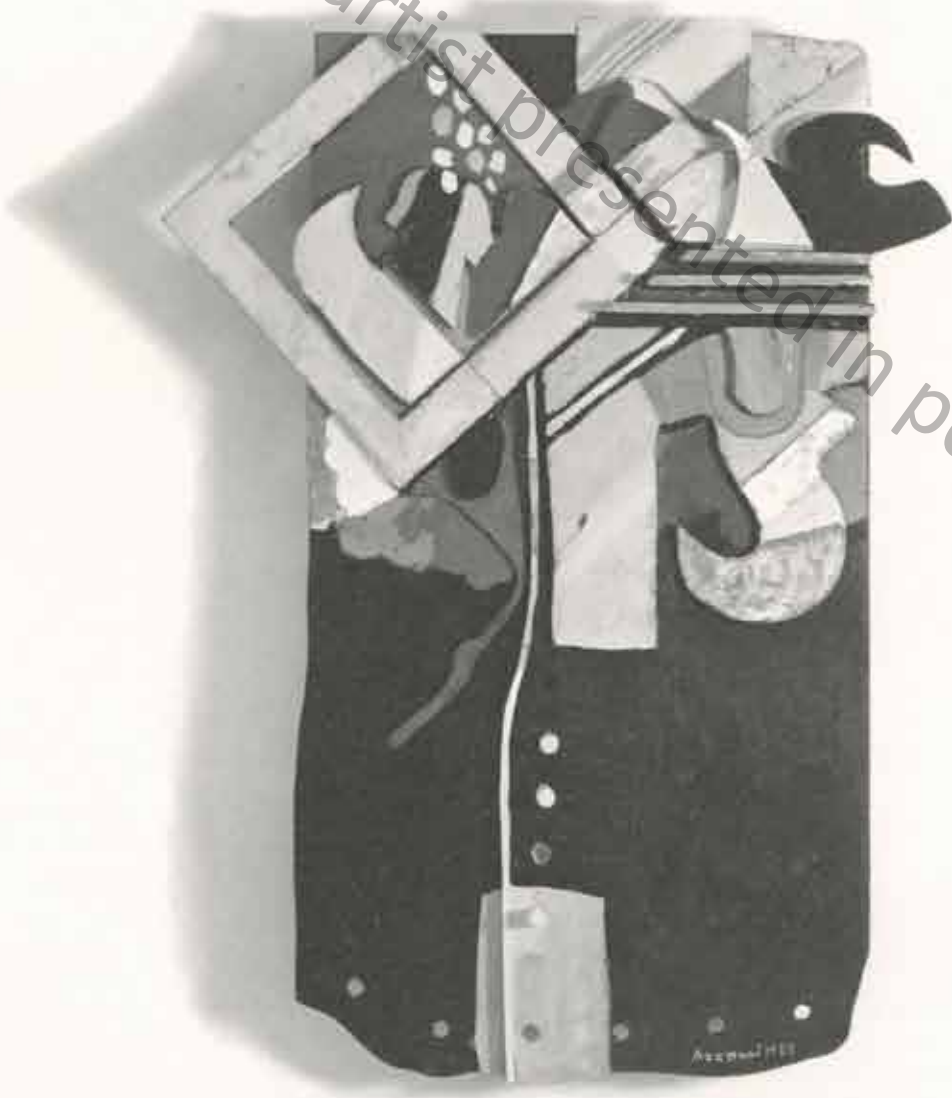
Publications

- A Witness Of Our Times, Baghdad 1972
Drawings For The Land Of Oranges, Beirut 1973
Poster Art in Iraq, Baghdad 1974
The Body's Anthem, Beirut 1980

ALIF
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20007

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17- ORIENTAL WINDOW NO. 4 1983
Acrylic on wood
36 1/2" x 26 1/4" (96 x 68 cm)

DIA AL-AZZAWI

Was born in Baghdad in 1939. In 1962 he graduated with a degree in archaeology from Baghdad University followed by a degree in Fine Arts in 1964. He has lived in London since 1976.

ONE MAN SHOWS:

- 1965 Al-Wasiti Gallery, Baghdad
- 1966 Gallery One, Beirut
- 1967 Iraqi Artists Society Gallery, Baghdad
- 1968 The National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad
- 1969 Sultan Gallery, Kuwait
Gallery One, Beirut
- 1971 The National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad
- 1973 Gallery Raslan, Tripoli, Lebanon
- 1974 Sultan Gallery, Kuwait
Contact Art Gallery, Beirut
- 1975 The National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad
- 1976 Gallery Nadhar, Casablanca
- 1977 Sultan Gallery, Kuwait
- 1978 Patrick Scott Art Gallery, London
- 1979 Gallery Al-Riwaq, Baghdad
- 1980 Gallery Faris, Paris
Gallery Centrale, Geneva
- 1981 Gallery Faris (Basel Art 12, 81)
Gallery Faris (Fiac) Paris
- 1982 Intercontinental Hall, Abu Dhabi
- 1983 The National Council for Art and Culture Gallery, Kuwait

GROUP EXHIBITION

- 1965 Gallery One, Beirut
Contemporary Iraqi Art, Sursok Museum (cc Bome, Vienne, Madrid)
- 1970 The Iraqi Poster Exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad
- 1971 Four Iraqi Artists (Jumaie, Nasiri, Ibrahim) Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad
- 1972 Three Iraqi Artists (Jumaie, Nasiri) Gallery One, Beirut
Four Iraqi Artists (Jumaie, Nasiri, Ibrahim) Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad
Five Iraqi Artists (Jumaie, Nasiri, Ibrahim, Hussein) Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad
Contemporary Arab Art, Nicosia
- 1973 Six Iraqi and Syrian Artists, Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad
The Arab Cultural Centre, Damascus
- 1974 Seven Iraqi Artists (Jumaie, Nasiri, Ibrahim, Hussein, Taleb & Samerje) Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad
- 1975 Iraqi Graphic Art Exhibition, Iraqi Cultural Centre, Beirut
Collective Graphic Art Exhibition (Jumaie, Tejani) Gallery L'Atelier, Rabat
Collective Graphic Art Exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad