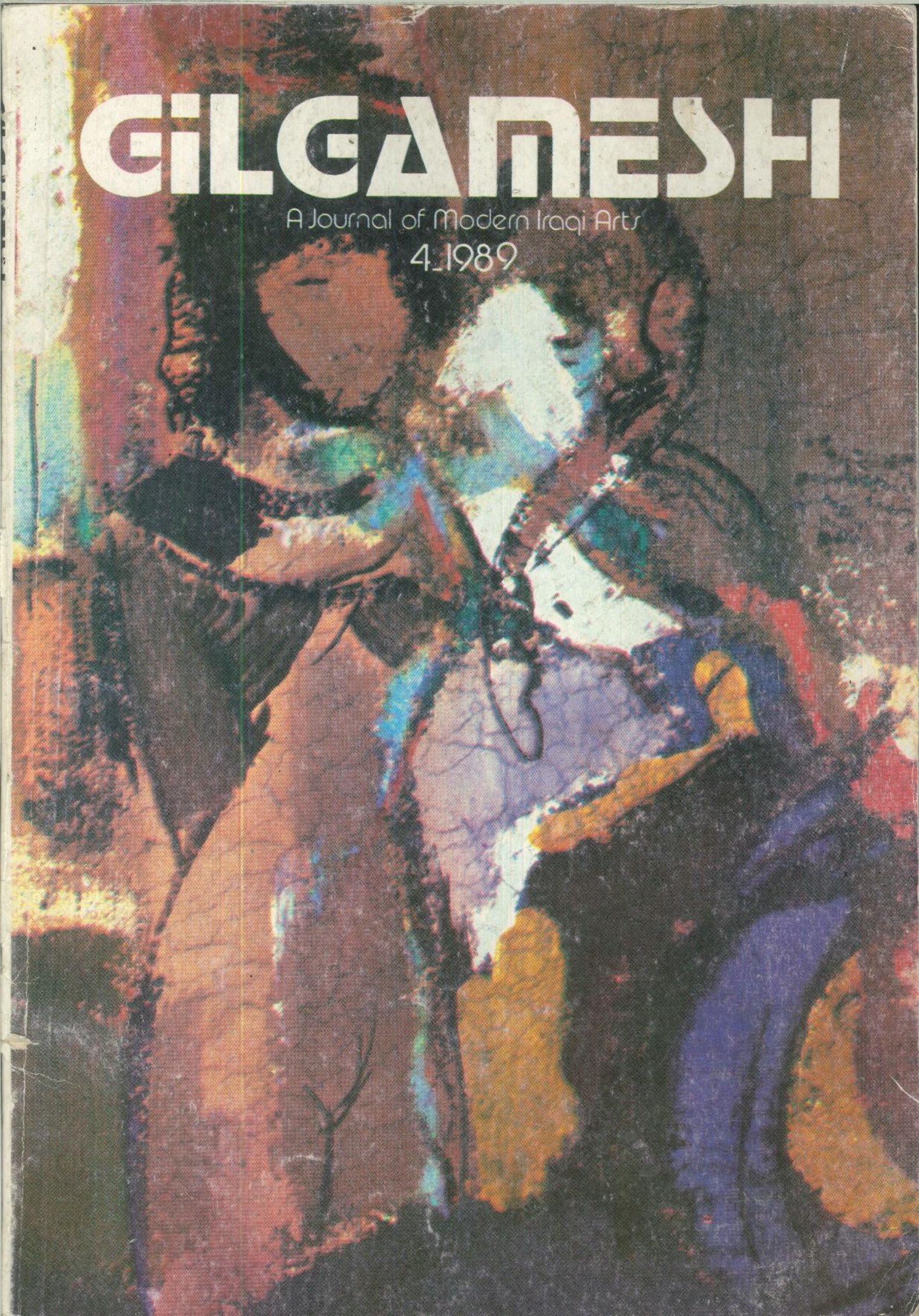


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Khalid al-Jadir: Nature and its Aesthetic Appeal

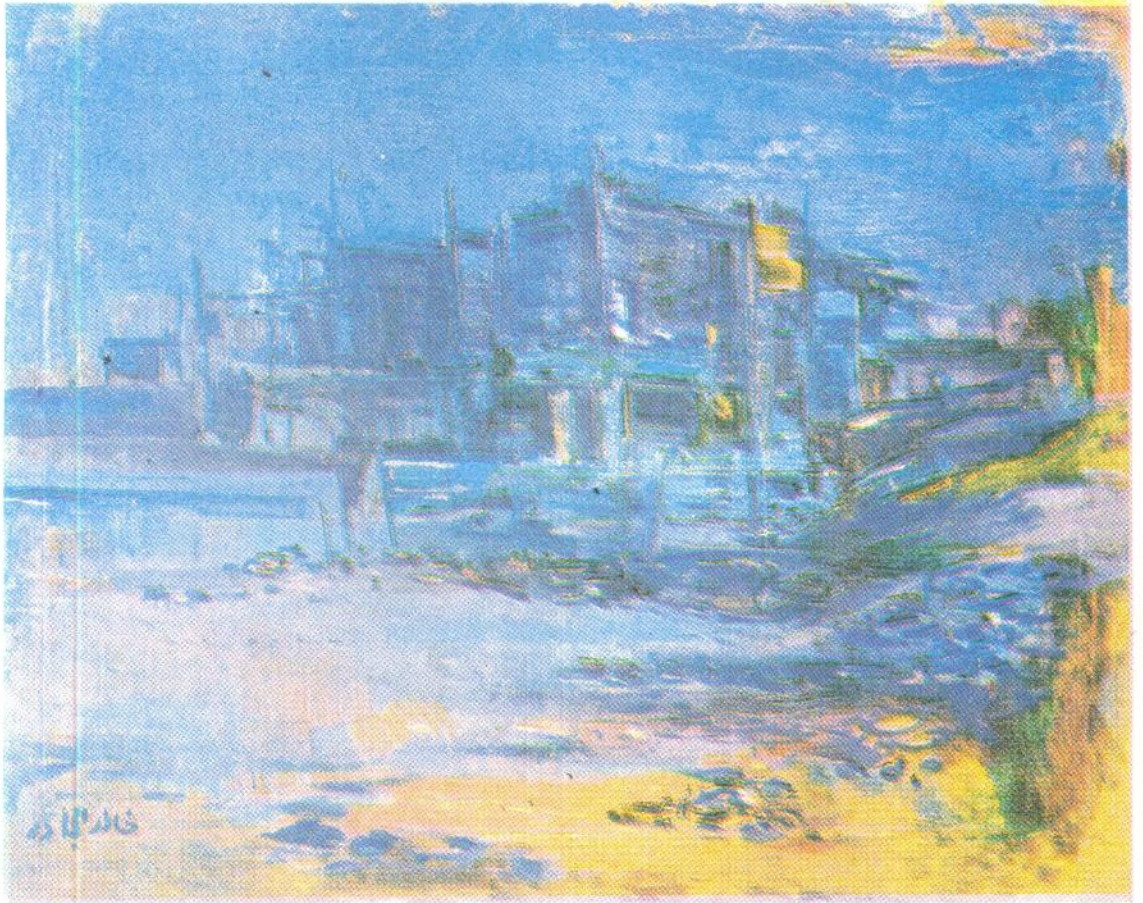
Adil Kamil

Khalid al-Jadir's experience belongs to the pioneer stage, but since the 1950s and till his latest days he did not give up the idea of innovation. In this respect he does not differ from Fa'iq Hassan or the pioneer generation. His activity mainly focused on formulating rules and laying bases. Nevertheless, al-Jadir, who was fascinated by nature, was able to be innovative. Innovation for him means being sensitive towards colours and things in general. His paintings include scenes that touch and cheer the spirit. His motive was to look for the poetic sense in painting: aesthetic themes which are almost symbolic, and a music which inspires villages, small towns, and a world of pure and virgin nature such as forests, mountains and rivers.

This fascination of his is similar to Bonnard's fascination with beautiful things. It is a fascination with nature — symbol, which reflects the artist's inner soul and his fertile imagination.

In this connection, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra the art critic said: "While artists sought a style that on the one hand keeps them in touch with their land and heritage and on the other hand acquaints them with developed styles in the world, Khalid al-Jadir proceeded in his research with an impressionistic technique which he uses in portraying people's reality and nature especially in the countryside. The strokes of his brush are big. Blue and grey are his predominant colours with which he tries to condense spacious visible things to their final expressive essence. The spacious scenes which he sees in motion he refuses to put in a specific form. His paintings are characterized by a spontaneity we rarely see in the paintings of other artists who go for the domination of the planned form. This spontaneity seems more beautiful in his exciting black sketches with their broad lines."

However, al-Jadir's creative course was influenced by his early formative years, that is, the years he studied art at the Fine Arts Institute and his study in Paris. Here Fa'iq Hassan's influence on his art should not be overlooked, at least in his study of nature. But studying at the Beaux Arts was what led the artist to study Iraqi nature and contemplate it for a long time. This encouraged him to present a panoramic view of the various geographic regions in Iraq. He painted mountains, marshes, villages and orchards without ignoring models and social life. One could say that Khalid al-Jadir did not copy anyone but himself. He adapted his artistic style to his vision. This adaptation is not only part of the exploration stage in his art. It



rather includes all his creative career. He paints nature like a player playing an instrument. He paints it with total abandon, investing in world painters' most classical traditions. His freedom bare his soul and his sadness which we read in his painting. When Jabra mentioned his "black" sketches he meant to throw light on the inner conflicts within him. But the artist was able to control them and project them in an aesthetically balanced manner.

Knowing that he studied in France we would notice the influence of Courbet and Corot, how he contemplated impressionism and post-impressionism, and made a thorough study of colours and movement. This study liberated him from the conventional concept of painting nature, which made him refrain from imitating any style other than his own.

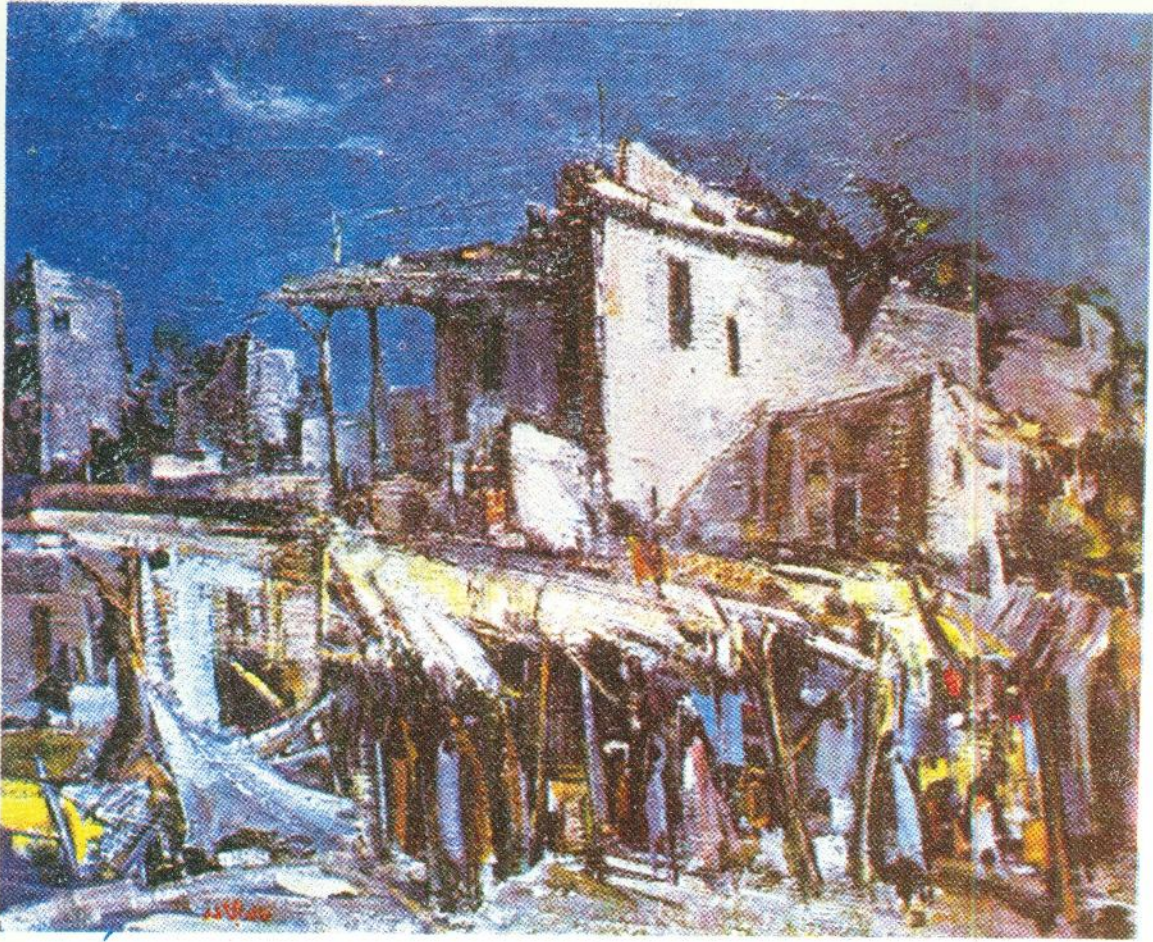
"If any well-informed viewer could infer the implicit social situation from the realistic tendency in art, the answer would be confined to the works of modern realists, and the paintings of Khalid al-Jadir would be closer to this sense, than any", says Shawkat al-Ruba'ie, an art critic, Al-Rubai'ie goes on to say:

"Al-Jadir's paintings reflect the social environment

in Iraq with its earthy and clay colours, the farmers' brown faces, and the colour of un-swept wheat. His works record with a simplified style and within what we call modern realism essential social scenes such as workers' and farmers' lives and the lives of the people in the villages of the north and in the marshes of the south," adds al-Rubai'ie.

As regards style, al-Rubai'ie says: "In his sketches (in ink, or graphite), the lines look thick and solid and his world seems spacious. There are separate, outlying and intervening areas which form his villages, planes, meadows, marshes and his old alleys. These are his peculiar worlds which accommodate thousands of images of a social life which teem with elements conveyed through the artist."

The realism pointed out by the critic in this text has been inspired by Iraq's social environment and by his long contemplations of nature. Like Najeeb Younis, al-Jadir painted quietly and he only painted the things he loved. In this sense realism represents his contemplation of aesthetic ideas. This did not cause him to venture with style. Instead he maintained his character and his style. Unlike Fa'iq Hassán, he did not ex-



periment with styles nor did he seek modernity or modernism except through realism. Hence, al-Jadir may seem a realist or a pioneer of realism in modern Iraqi painting. But this realism is felt in his experience and his originality in choosing his themes, and in the artistic style itself, for realism to him is an attempt to express the passage of time. In this respect, I recall having asked Khalid al-Jadir more than a decade ago: "why don't you write down the date by your name on the painting?" He didn't answer me then, but after a while he said that time exists in the artistic work. Here, we need to consider half a century of artistic experience which is a long time. Has the artist been afraid of time?

Today's critics could easily define years of artistic achievement. But the question of why he left out the dates on his paintings means, as I believe, that the artist lived one continuous experience, for art is time. Therefore his paintings include two facts: nature and his own self. Nature as a theme reflected itself in a poetic and musical manner just as he reflected his sense of the outside world; the world of colours and things.

We notice that artist Khalid al-Jadir's experience belong to a long uninterrupted period of time. These experiences sum up his overall aesthetic vision. Beauty in his painting did not replace the course of time. It was time itself. The artist did not seek styles or techniques in order to modernize. He did it for the aesthetic subject itself. Hence, we could say that time for him was interlocked between the subject and the self, because he summed up his aesthetic experience by the time of beauty: the bright charming nature despite the sadness that lies within. The scenes inspired by the Iraqi environment reflect the artist's fondness of visible things and phenomena. Al-Jadir was always after innovation and social-aesthetic subjects. Through his realistic paintings we get acquainted with the Iraqi reality. But al-Jadir's reality is not direct. It is a mixture of these styles which combine impressionism and expressionism, through which the artist's talent and originality are tested. Also he paints with a remarkable speed without retracing the strokes of his brush. Rather, he paints like Kadhim Haidar reproducing his inner impression, and he doesn't care about polishing his artistic work. We may not find this clear



as we see in his sketches of nature where painting freely is an attempt to catch a fleeting scene, an exterior scene, the scene which represents the artist's vision.

But who is Khalid al-Jadir? Did he sacrifice art for the jobs he worked in? The answer is in artist Nizar Selim's book. The strange thing about him is that I couldn't find the date of his birth in the sources I read. In his book "Modern Art in Iraq", Nizar Selim says: "Khalid al-Jadir was born in Baghdad. He graduated from the College of Law and the Fine Arts Institute in the same year. Then the Iraqi government sent him on a scholarship to study at the Beaux Arts in Paris. He obtained a degree in art and a Ph.D in the "History of Islamic Arts" with honours. He got the first medal twice when he was at the Beaux Arts."

Artist Nizar goes on to say: "When he was back in Baghdad he taught the history of art at the University of Baghdad. He was appointed head of the Fine Arts Institute and later head of the Fine Arts Academy when it was established in 1961. He also became chairman of UNESCO's National Committee for Arts, a member of the Higher Cultural Committee

and chairman of Iraqi Artists' Society. Moreover, he was elected the first chairman of the Iraqi Artists' Union, and secretary general to the Arab Artists General Federation."

However, all these positions did not distract the artist from his art. As for his paintings Nizar Selim says: "The repetition of colours in his vivid and time-conscious style is clear and technically strong. From Lebanon's countryside to an alley in Al-Madina Al-Minawara in Saudi Arabia, and from a church steeple to Najd fortress the colours which al-Jadir uses are the same. He wouldn't change the colours he chooses. In all his works al-Jadir proved he was a competent artist, who without undue fuss, defined his style through experience and continuous practice."

This brief analysis of artist Khalid al-Jadir's experience proves that the artist was so devoted to art that he dedicated all his life to it. Although he had theoretical researches and administrative jobs to attend to he did not neglect his art nor did he give up his continuous research. His works reveal an artist who was fond of nature and its charm. His preoccupation with art is mainly an expression of his aesthetic vision. For



the aesthetic world in his paintings chronicle the impact of the environment on man's life. By reviewing his paintings we realize the significance of the "Spiritual Map" he achieved in his life, in other words, scenes of Iraqi nature with all its historical, symbolic and aesthetic dimensions. At the same time we must not ignore his role in the educational field and his influence on modern Arab painting as well as his role at the Institute and the academy of Fine Arts. His many paintings gave the realistic tendency a modern basis during and after the pioneering stage. Al-Jadir was a founder and a pioneer who assimilated the experiences of world artists and presented his own through his experience and character. He started by contemplating the mysteries of colour and later on symbols.

Al-Jadir's devotion to his artistic world, his interest in culture, the attention he paid to his students as well as his other artistic pursuits and his delicate human sense, all of these reflect the artist's energy and his love of creative work. This love has been called by artist and critic Shakir Hassan al-Sa'eed 'Sufi Love.' Indeed al-Jadir's devotion to his art has been a Sufi

case. Hence we have to see things not just as visuals but — as in poetry — like signs or hints that refer us to mysteries within the aesthetic phenomenon. I believe that Mr Sa'eed was right when he described al-Jadir's experience as Sufi because what the late artist has left is the outcome of his contemplations of charming things: the beauty of colours, the symbols of things and spiritual atmosphere all of which were charged with poetry and music.

In short we are before a pioneering experience, an experience which drew its inspiration from beauty, and the environment. It is a distinguished and realistic experience. Therefore we shall always remember al-Jadir's paintings whenever we recall pioneering artists and modern art in Iraq, just as we remember all the pioneers in art. But we shall remember Khalid al-Jadir especially because, like Jewad Selim, he loved life in its prime; life as a source of beauty and beauty as a symbol of future. ◆

Translated by Suad Abid Ali