



Al-Tai: Securing the Lead

by Hasanain Al-Ibrahimi

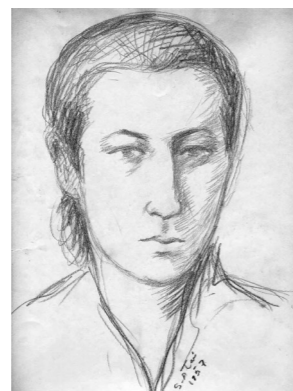
Saad Al-Tai (1935) was a native of the Al-Wardiya neighborhood in Hillah, a city founded in 1101 AD, adjacent to the Babylon ruins in central Iraq. He began his journey with painting at the age of six in 1941 in a family that nurtured this young boy's tender talent in a conservative society with strict traditions. At seventeen, under his father's care, young Tai traveled to Rome via Beirut to study art. What awareness, what parental care did Saad receive from his godfather, who rarely left the walls of his Hillah! This care alone was enough to infuse him with a creative energy that refused to wane.

In 1952, in the aftermath of World War II, Rome was reeling from the war's ravages and woes. For the first time, a young man leaped from Al-Wardiya to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Rome, where Renaissance traditions and solid classical teaching methods prevailed. His feelings of alienation were eased by the presence of a group of Iraqi artists who had arrived in Rome just days before him, thanks to a state-funded scholarship. Among them were Faraj Abbo (1921-1984) and Khalid Al-Rahhal (1926-1986). They took their exams together on the same day, with Khalid focusing on sculpture while Saad and Faraj concentrated on drawing. A few years later, Mohammed Ghani Hikmat (1929-2011) joined their group. A close friendship formed among them, helping Saad navigate the challenges and difficulties of adapting to a new environment. They shared a mutual love for art and beauty, which further strengthened their bond¹.

He first devoted himself to studying and mastering Italian, and then delved into learning the techniques and experiences of his teachers, masters of Italian classical art.

The devoted father, a sheikh from Al-

Wardiya, generously supported his son's education, helping him overcome the challenges of university life. Thanks to his father's assistance, the son completed the first stage of his studies and was accepted into the second year, where his education began to be funded by the state. All of this motivated the young man to dedicate himself to art lessons and their applications, as well as to explore Rome's museums, studios, and galleries. During vacations, he would ride his motorcycle to tour European cities, absorbing their arts and experiences and learning their secrets.



*Portrait of Mrs. Nicole,
a Friend of Artist
Mohammed Ghani
Hikmat, 1956*
Oil on Canvas with Sketch
50 x 40 cm
Signed Lower Right



Bridge in Rome, 1955
Oil on Canvas, 45 x 60 cm
Signed Lower Right

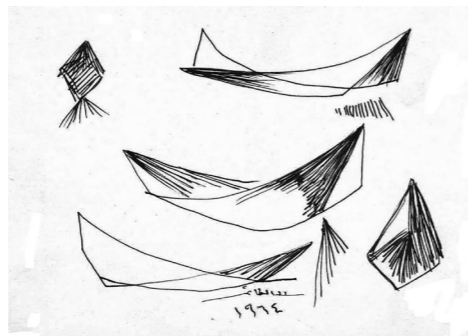
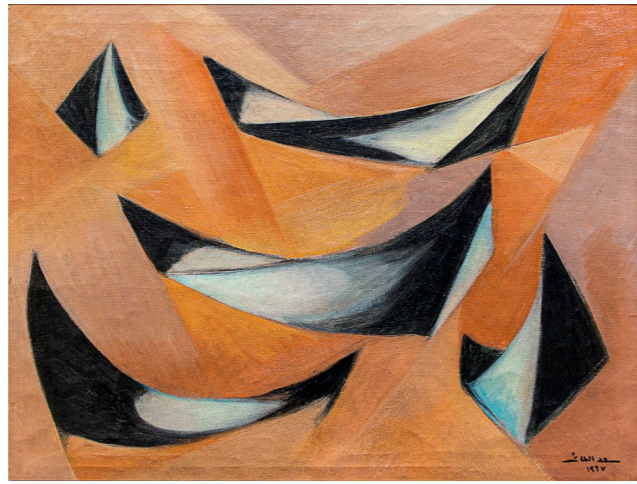
In 1955, he won an Italian landscape painting competition for foreign artists, and the following year, he participated as a painter alongside sculptor Mohammed Ghani Hikmat and sculptor Kalid Al-Rahhal in a joint art exhibition that showcased his paintings alongside the sculptures of his two experienced colleagues.

¹ An interview with the artist Saad Al-Tai conducted by the Iwan- Link Art Space team on April 7, 2025, took place alongside his retrospective solo exhibition at the Iwan- Link Art Space in Baghdad, from April 4 to 18, 2025.

In 1957, he earned his master's degree after five enriching years of study that shaped his personality, refined his talent, and significantly improved his techniques. He returned to Baghdad, where he began a professional journey in art, combining painting and teaching that continues to this day for over sixty years.

Throughout this journey, he encountered many stops, attempts, experiments, exhibitions, and activities, perhaps hundreds of paintings and thousands of sketches, hundreds of containers of oils, paints, solvents, and solutions, dozens of paintbrushes and markers, and a vast array of shapes, ideas, and visions.

Beyond his affiliation with the Impressionist group in the 1950s, he later forged his style, producing a number of exquisite and masterful abstract works that, I claim, constitute a milestone in the entire history of the art movement in Iraq.



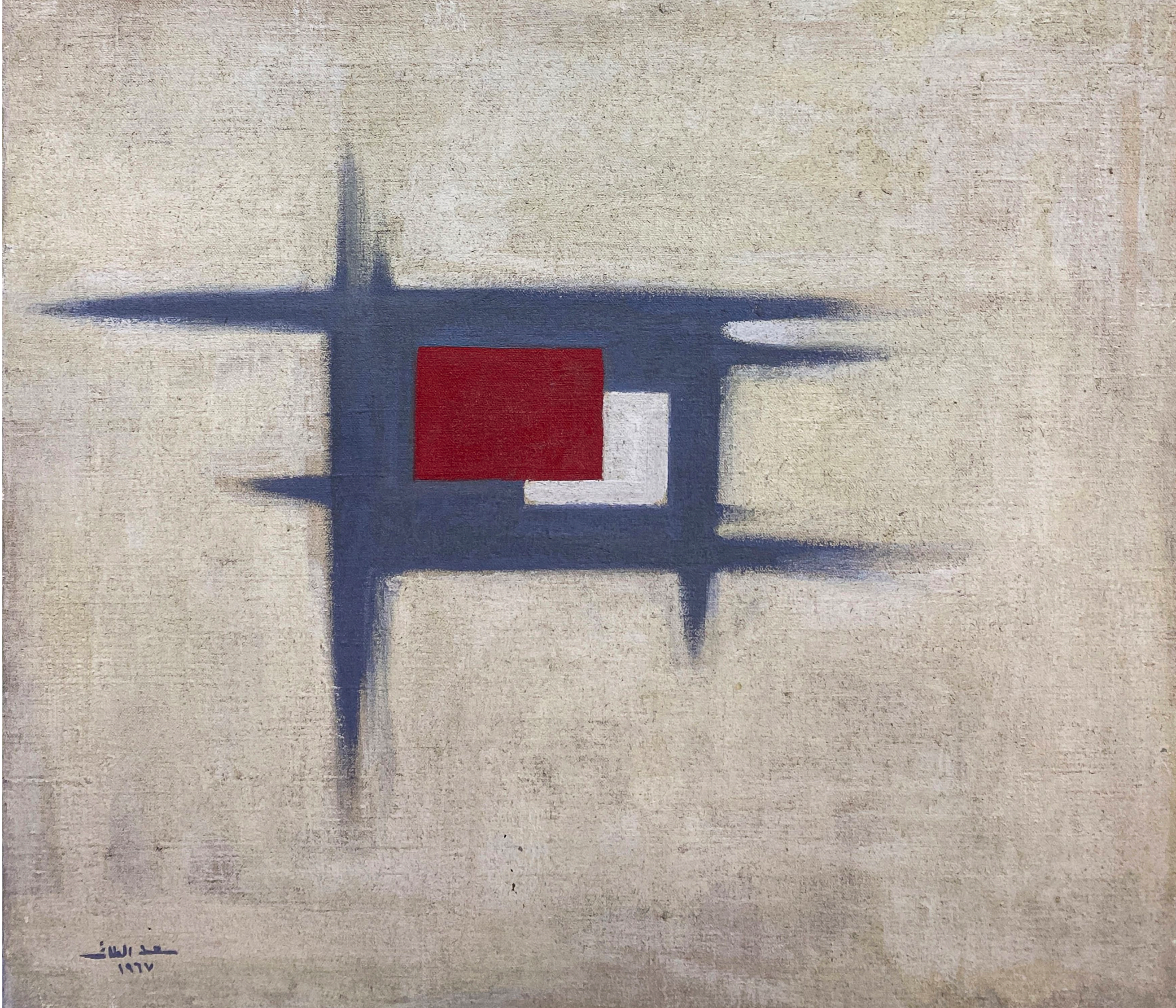
Drought, 1967
Oil on Canvas with Sketch, 60 x 80 cm
Signed Lower Right



End of the World, 1971
Oil on Canvas, 80 x 100 cm
Signed Lower Left



Desert No. 2, 1969
Oil on Canvas, 80 x 98 cm
Signed Lower Right



Impact, 1967
Oil on Canvas, 70 x 80 cm
Signed Lower Left

محمد الشافعي
١٩٦٧

Then, he began to oscillate between pure abstraction and a kind of reduced expressive figuration, and the spectra of blue and its neighbors became the favored color that often dominated his works, with a few exceptions, filling the surfaces of his works with individual and layered color mixtures without crowding or disequilibrium. This is what he settled on, seeking stability, calm, and loving tranquility and ease.

Many of his works have consistently carried a wealth of humanitarian, social, and political content, emerging as muffled cries of suffering that express the pain and tragedies of his people in their daily toil and struggle. Most of Al-Tai's works share a focus on the human being in an abstract sense, without embellishment, detail, or ornamentation, as if he were sculpting his own human icon that transcends borders, ethnicities, nationalities, grudges, and divisions. He declares his commitment to the essence of freedom and self-respect, defending it, upholding its dignity and right to a life worthy of it. His works were not provocative, but profound; they were not inciting, but rather stimulating, encouraging contemplation and reflection. They are the kind of works that leave a deep impression on human memory, an indelible mark that time cannot erase. His works are a reflection of his personality: calm yet fiery, warm yet skillful, and gentle yet meaningful.

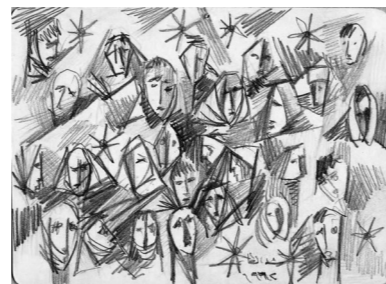
The content of his works is resounding, but with reason and discipline, bearing an unwavering resolve and unbreakable determination, whose motto is to stand resolutely for human causes, from which there is no neutrality or deviation.



Sketch, 1958
Charcoal on Paper, 12 x 16 cm



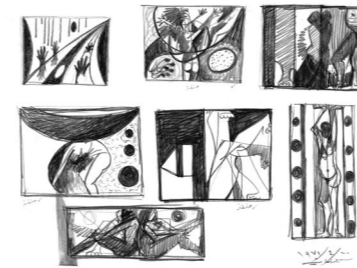
Sketch, 1958
Flowmaster on Paper, 25 x 21.5 cm



Sketch, 1962
Ink on Paper, 11 x 15 cm



Sketch, 1968
Pencil on Paper, 24 x 35 cm



Sketch, 1971
Pencil on Paper, 20 x 28 cm



Sketch, 1972
Pencil on Paper, 26 x 18 cm



Sketch, 1972
Pencil on Paper, 20 x 29 cm



Sketch, 1985
Pencil on Paper, 23 x 30 cm



Sketch, 1985
Ink on Paper, 25 x 35 cm



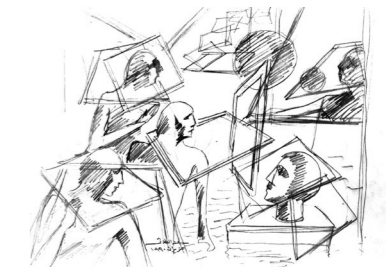
Sketch, 1985
Ink on Paper, 25 x 34 cm



Sketch, 1986
Ink on Paper, 35 x 25 cm



Sketch, 1990
Ink on Paper, 30 x 25 cm



Sketch, 1990
Pencil on Paper, 24 x 35 cm



Sketch, 1990
Ink on Paper, 11 x 25 cm



Sketch, 1990
Ink on Paper, 25 x 32 cm



Sketch, 1990
Ink on Paper, 25 x 32 cm



Sketch, 1990
Ink on Paper, 25 x 32 cm

Al-Tai's works are a manifestation of his own self, a clear representation of his calm, strong, gentle, profound, thoughtful, disciplined, polite, and generous personality. He was neither a revolutionary, biased, nor political, and he did not belong to any party or movement, despite the polarization that characterized his era and time. Through independence, for which he may have paid the price of isolation and estrangement, he suffered greatly, yet he refused to retreat or break. Al-Tai remained a flowing, generous, and bountiful river, a compassionate, dedicated, and authentic teacher.

Al-Tai settled on his style which combined more than one modernist movement, something of Rayonism (1910-1914), the movement that emerged in Russia at the hands of the Russian Cubist-Futurist Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova, and something of Futurism (1909), which emerged and developed in Italy at the hands of a number of Italian artists such as Marinetti, Boccioni, Carrà, Depero and others.

He carved it on his own, charting unique themes and compositions, developing his initial premises, and creating a distinctive identity and aesthetic characteristic that set him apart in his creative field. He formed it patiently and thoughtfully, without direct influence, imitation, or intertextuality. He explored and shaped it as a researcher and engraved it as an expert. This is evident in the works he displayed in his rich exhibitions, a product of his long experience and fertile experiments. His style became a unique fabric, unmatched by any of his contemporaries and indebted to none of his teachers. Thus, he secured the lead and achieved a rare distinction in the fields of Iraqi and Arab art.



The Accusation, 1974
Oil on Canvas, 90 x 100 cm
Signed Lower Left



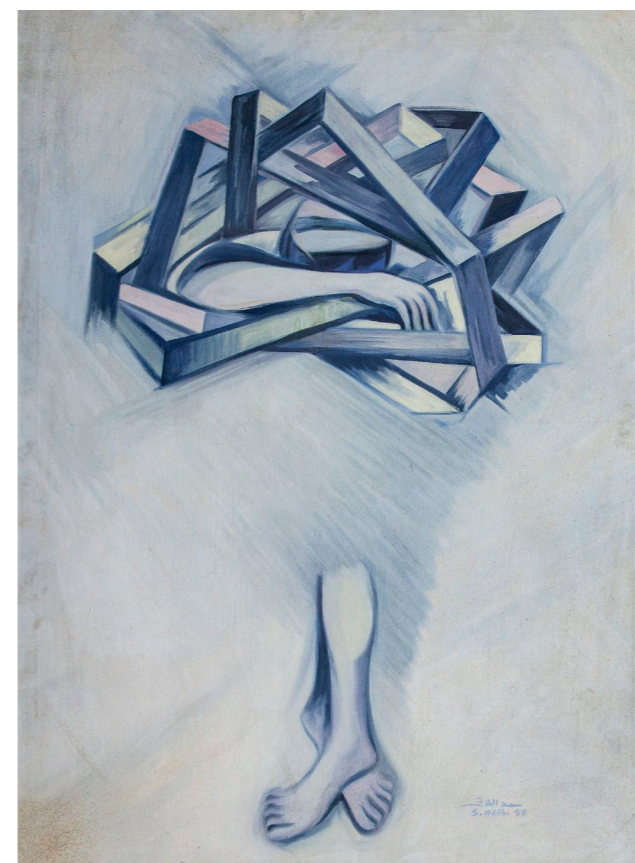
Human Subject, 1986
Oil on Canvas, 120 x 100 cm
Signed Lower Left



Three People Above the Whirlpool, 2015
Oil on Canvas, 100 x 80 cm
Signed Lower Right



A Call for Liberty, 1983
Oil on Canvas, 120 x 100 cm
Signed Lower Right



The Hope, 1988
Oil on Canvas, 135 x 100 cm
Signed Lower Right



In the Cave, 2016
Oil on Canvas, 60 x 80 cm
Signed Lower Left



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