SELECTIONS

ARTS / STYLE / CULTURE FROM THE ARAB WORLD AND BEYOND

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN GENERATIONS OF ARAB WOMEN IN ART

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ON ART, IDENTITY AND LABELS

In a special section dedicated to women artists, **Mona Khazindar**, **Nada Shabout** and **Nayla Tamraz** speak with nine talented artists about life, work, equality and identity

In the 1980s, the Guerrilla Girls began wheat-pasting provocative posters around New York. Fact-based and enlivened by a wicked sense of humour, their research highlighted inequalities between male and female artists and the sexism of the art world.

In 1985, they pointed out that while on average women in America earned two thirds of a man's salary, women artists earned only a third of their male counterparts' income. A 1988 poster on "The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist" included the line "Knowing your career might not pick up till after you're 80." Their most famous poster, in 1989, asked "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?"

Times have changed. But have they changed that much? Women are sometimes artists. Artists are sometimes women. The two facets of identity may be intimately intertwined, or entirely incidental. And yet, whether or not a female artist's work is bound up with her gender, women artists around the world still face inequality and prejudice when it comes to sales, museum acquisitions and recognition from the art world.

In the upcoming pages, three prominent curators and art historians interview nine talented female artists from the Arab world. Director general of the Institute du monde arabe **Mona Khazindar**, art historian **Nada Shabout** and professor of art history and literature **Nayla Tamraz** each speak with three artists about life, work and the gender barriers that still exist, 30 years after the Guerrilla Girls started their grass-roots campaign for equality in the art world.

Boushra Almutawakel, **Maysaloun Faraj** and **Samia Halaby** tell Khazindar, and Haya Al Hejailan, who helped in formulating the questions and liaising with the artists, about how they began their careers as artists, their thoughts on art and freedom, the role of activism in art, how they feel about labels and their relationships with the Western art world, among other topics.

Shabout talks to Iraqi artists **Rheim Alkadhi**, **Hayv Kahraman** and **Hanaa Malallah** about subjects including what it means to identify as an "Iraqi" artist, the challenges that come with making art as and about women and the politics of representation.

Tamraz engages with Lebanese artists **Etel Adnan**, **Lamia Joreige** and **Tagreed Darghouth** about issues including the dangers of a female-oriented artistic discourse in exacerbating marginalisation and whether or not "Arab artist" and "women artist" are equally reductive terms, best addressed in the frame of an intersectional feminism.

Mona Khazindar portrait, photo by Shadia Alem

Mona Khazindar

Born in the U.S. in 1959, Mona Khazindar studied comparative literature at the American University in Paris and history at the Sorbonne. She was curator of contemporary art and photography at the Institute du monde arabe (IMA) from 1986 until 2011, when she became the first woman and the first Saudi to be appointed director general, a position she held until 2014. She is currently a permanent conservator at the IMA and was co-curator of the first Saudi Pavilion at the 54th edition of the Venice Biennale.

Haya Al-Hejailan portrait

Haya Al-Hejailan

Haya Al-Hejailan recently obtained a degree in Psychology from Claremont McKenna College and is very interested in the use of different mediums of art, such as music, in therapy.

Samia Halaby in her studio, Aug. 11th

Samia Halaby

Born in Jerusalem in 1936, Samia Halaby is a Palestinian artist, scholar, art historian and activist for Palestinian rights, based in New York. Raised in Palestine and Lebanon before moving to the U.S. in 1951, she became a pioneering abstract artist. Always in search of new ways of seeing and thinking, she creates large-scale geometric paintings, as well as experimenting with drawing, printmaking and computer-based kinetic art.

Maysaloun Faraj portrait

Maysaloun Faraj

Born in the U.S. in 1955, Maysaloun Faraj was raised in America and Iraq and studied Architectural Engineering in Baghdad and art in London, where she is based today. She spent decades striving to bring Iraqi art to the attention of museums, collectors and international auction houses. Her works spans painting, sculpture and ceramics and attempts to build bridges between Eastern and Western cultures.

Boushra Almutawakel portrait, photo by Celine Nieszawer

Boushra Almutawakel

Born in Sana'a in 1969, Boushra Almutawakel studied in Yemen and in the U.S., where she worked as a photojournalist for the university newspaper. Returning to Yemen in 1994, she began working as an art photographer and founded an artists' group in Sana'a. Her work focuses on international perceptions of Arabs and Muslims, as well as the construct of gender and assumptions about gendered clothing, including the veil.

MONA KHAZINDAR AND MAYSALOUN FARAJ TALK ORIGINS, POLITICS AND SYMBOLISM

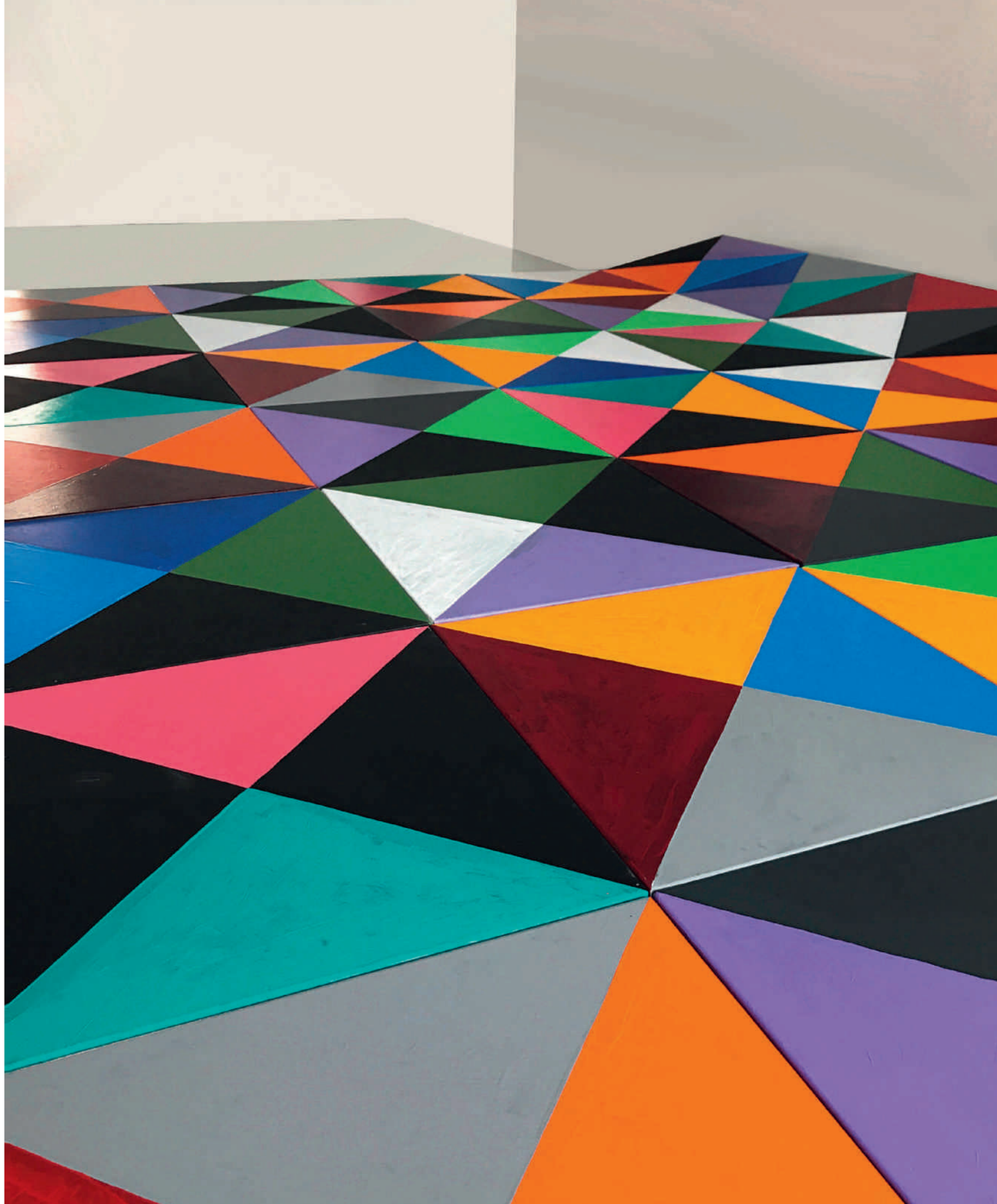
by Mona Khazindar

What is art to you?
Art for me is many things. In no particular order, it is:
courage, commitment, perseverance;
a bridge between thought and manifestation, where the need to "know" and the passion to "do" is paramount;
precision;
a striving for perfection;
a visual exploration of ideas and issues that shape our time with a range of psychological, political, aesthetic, historical, emotional and spiritual datapoints;
inspiration;
struggle;
urge; obsession
sheer ecstasy one moment, deep anxiety the next;
a stride forward;
honesty;
contemplation;
meditation;
poetry;
passion;
solitude;
an un-earthing of roots;
healing;
a journey of discovery with a visual narrative that is always in a state of flux and transformation;
prayer;
an attempt to make sense of the world as I have come to experience it;
an attempt to make sense of my being and place in the world;
a means to make a difference;
a wager against despair;
a way of affirming my humanity;
a contribution to a dialogue that stretches back thousands of years when man/woman first drew in caves;
solace;
a connection with life;
a connection with that ultimate creative force;
a gift from God; a blessing;
a colossal responsibility;
protest;
progress;
oxygen...
If I'm not making it, I'm thinking it;
Art is me and I am it.

What does art mean in our society?
In our society, particularly in current times, I believe that art is an affirmation of our humanity; a symbol of perseverance in the face of adversity. It is the light at the end of a tunnel; a much-needed light to counteract the darkness that has engulfed many a homeland. George Bernard Shaw once wrote, "You use a glass mirror to see your face, you use works of art to see your soul." Art is hope.

What are your thoughts on the following quote: "Art is meant to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comforted?"
One can control the art but not the reaction to it. Having said this, I agree that challenging and thought-provoking art can propel one out of one's comfort zone (disturb the comforted). On the other hand, I also agree that addressing challenging matters in art, with which a viewer may identify, can induce that sense of belonging or "one is not alone" (comfort the disturbed). Both reactions, in my view, pave the way for progress as one is made to think and question.

What are your thoughts on the following quote by Etel Adnan: "One paints only oneself?"
In my opinion, not only does "one paint only oneself," but "one sculpts, sings, writes, dances, photographs, videos, composes, installs only oneself." In my ceramic classes, I often observe the artists with their clay work; I believe that every one of the forms made is in fact a "self-portrait" of its maker. The materials we choose, the methods of production and the sources of art produced all reflect the interests that commands our attention. The artist, the subject and the means by which it is rendered are inseparable.



Maysaloun Faraj, *We Are A Billion Beautiful Stars* (from the series *Conversations With The Universe*), acrylic on canvas, 160 × 140 cm, September 2017

When did your interest in art begin? What prompted you to embark on a career in art?

My interest in art began from a very early age, possibly around five or six, at least as far back as I can remember. From the start, I was fortunate to have the encouragement of both my parents *(Allah yirhamhum)* at home, but also inspiring teachers throughout elementary, high-school, university, extending to my married life with the support of my husband and, in later years, my children. Friends including established artists like Neziha Selim, Faraj Abbu, Saleh al-Juma'ie and important others also took interest in and nurtured my artistic expression. From an early age, I constantly made things from almost anything I could lay my hands on; paper, wire, thread or fabric (left overs from my mother's sewing kit), paint, clay, etc. Growing up, I knew that I was destined to become an artist and the universe conspired to make this happen, *walhamdulilah!* I studied architecture (Baghdad University 1973-8) and achieved a BSc in Architecture (with flying colours!) yet I was always artistically inclined; in design, "form" always overtook "function!" I promised myself that once I completed my architectural studies (during which time I got married) and later had my family, I would pursue my heart's desire; art. True to my promise, the day my children started full-time school was the day I enrolled in London's adult education, continuing today at Putney School of Art. Eventually I was fortunate enough to have a studio, which was absolutely essential in facilitating further progress and a broad range of accomplishment. Throughout the earlier years of study, marriage and raising a young family, I never stopped making art, albeit from my kitchen, living room, bedroom or wherever there was a bit of space. It was not until 1984, however, that I took up art professionally, participating in my very first group show *Contemporary Arab Art* at the Mall Galleries in London. The rest is history!

When working/living in the West, are you ever made to feel as if you have to speak on behalf of the Arab/ Muslim world?

Given world politics today and the increasingly negative portrayal of Muslims in the media, I often find myself in situations where I am compelled to speak in defence of my religion, Islam. Some of my projects, including *Asma Allah al-Husna, AlRahman AlRahim, I'jaz, Allah Noor* and others, are direct result of this. More importantly, I try to "lead by example," showing the positive, peaceful and beautiful nature of my faith, religion and culture.

How do you feel about being labelled as a female artist or a Middle Eastern artist?

An artist is an artist, whatever their origin, faith or gender. However, I do not have a problem with being labelled a female, Middle Eastern or Muslim artist. These sensibilities inform my being and my art. Picasso could not have produced his powerful anti-war painting *Guernica* had he not been Spanish, as he is referred to in many of his biographies. Frida Kahlo, a female Mexican painter, Marc Chagall, a Russian-French artist of Belarusian Jewish origin, Amedeo Modigliani, an Italian Jewish painter and sculptor and so on. Being labelled as such does not take away from the fact that I am an artist. On the contrary, it adds to the understanding of what my art is about, the stories that I am are trying to tell.

Do you consider yourself representative of your gender and/ or culture?

I am representative of myself; female, Iraqi, Arab, Muslim, born and living in the West, deeply rooted in the East with a personal journey and a unique perspective. All this impacted my thoughts and ways and shaped who and where I am today as a person and as an artist. As the world is getting smaller, identity and culture is more complex and multi-layered. Today, I think it is difficult to be representative of other than oneself. I aspire for and celebrate "unity in diversity."

Do you consider art a way to freedom?

Given time, patience and perseverance, I believe that art, in all its forms, can affect change and empower the right to act, speak, or think as one wants. Yes, I consider art a way to freedom.

Do you consider yourself an activist?

Art can be a powerful tool for political change and social justice. In this sense, and in its broadest meaning, I consider myself an activist. Important issues close to my heart, such as the devastating war on Iraq, Iraqi widows, Iraqi orphans, migration, displacement, troubled homelands and relationships, are all at the core of my artistic expression.

An artist is an artist, whatever their origin, faith or gender

Do you think that an Arab artist should live or be connected to the West in order to attain success, exposure and recognition?

Given the upheaval and chaos, in consequence of years of conflict, war, corruption, oppression and *jehel* in many of our homelands today, including Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Libya and others, artists (as other professions) are drastically hindered. In order to flourish, grow and succeed, security, freedom and peace is critical. If this is in place, with the right support, opportunities for success are inevitable. At present, this is only possible in a handful of regions in the Arab world where we have seen a number of artists rise and make their presence on the international stage, though the majority, if not all, live in the West or are connected to it in one way or another e.g. Mona Hatoum, Marwan, Ghada Amer. Arab artists have the potential for success, exposure and recognition, but unfortunately and understandably lack the necessary support in many of our war-torn lands today.

opposite page top:
Maysaloun Faraj,
Bird Symphony
(Collection Mansouria Foundation — made during residency at Cité des Arts, Paris), acrylic and coloured pencil on paper, 150 × 190 cm, 2015

opposite page bottom:
Maysaloun Faraj,
Lightning: Allahu Khairun Hafidhan, bronze, 47 × 80 × 30 cm, 2015-2017

Which female artists do you admire?
Samia Halaby, Sonia Delaunay (painting), Mona Saudi, Barbara Hepworth (sculpture), Saloua Raouda Choucair (painting and sculpture) and Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, to name but a few.

Do you feel that some of your artwork is specifically targeted to an audience of women?
Though my work may be of a feminine sensibility, I do not feel that it specifically targets a female audience — at least I do not intend for it to do so.

...the predicament of wars, displacement, grieving mothers, stolen childhoods are all themes that run through my work...

What projects are you currently working on?
I will be taking up residency at the Mansouria Foundation, Cité des Arts Paris, from October 11 to May 11, where I will be developing a new body of work to form part of an important solo exhibition with Ayyam Gallery. This will be shown at their Dubai venues in Alserkal and DIFC, after which it will travel to Beirut. Scheduled for November 2018, the exhibition is tentatively titled *Let's Make Light,* and will comprise new paintings, ceramics and bronze, as well as selected work spanning the past ten years.

Which venue do you dream of exhibiting your work in?
I would love the opportunity to eventually exhibit my work in the Tate Modern London, MoMA, New York, and the Pompidou Centre, Paris. The dream, however, would be to take all my work back to Baghdad to be housed in a museum yet to be built once security returns, Iraq heals and regains its position as a leading art hub in the Middle East. This would be the ultimate dream come true!

Your religious, linguistic and cultural roots are omnipresent in your work. Has your experience of living in the UK since 1982 influenced your artistic work, and if so how? In what ways does Western art influence you?
I am deeply rooted in Iraq and carry the waters of Dijla and Furat in my veins. I am very much the daughter of Wadi al-Rafidain, however I was born in the U.S. and have been living in London for the past 35 years. I am quintessentially a citizen of the world and my work, as my being, is an amalgam of both East and West, past and present, tradition and contemporaneity. Living in London, a unique city vibrant with artistic stimuli, has certainly impacted my thought and empowered my vision. A stream of presentations by reputable artists is always on tap, be it in private galleries or major art institutions. Having access to so much is bound to inspire and broaden one's horizons. Tate Britain's Mark Rothko 2008/9, Henry Moore 2010, Saatchi Gallery's *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East* 2009, Tate Modern's Frida Khalo 2005, Picasso and British Art 2012, Tino Sehgal 2012, Saloua Raouda Choucair 2013, Alexandar Calder's *Performing Sculpture* 2016, Royal Academy's David Hockney 2012 are but a few I have had the privilege of visiting and experiencing first-hand, not to mention the current Fahrelnissa Zeid and Giacometti, which I look forward to seeing. This was bound to influence my art and thinking. Henry Mattise's *Cut Outs* 2014 and Sonia Delaunay's 2015, for example, made a direct impression and affected a shift in my work in terms of method, colour and form, as seen in *Flying Without Wings, Maryam* (2014) and *Bird Symphony* (2015), all made after these visits. Living in multi-cultural London, a melting pot for all kinds of people, has profoundly enriched my art and being. Moreover, this has given me a bird's-eye view of the homeland and heightened my interest in my own history, people, culture and faith. These influences weave together with my own personal journey to create the work I make, in all its forms and mediums.

Do you think that art is political? How does your work reflect the political situation in Iraq?
I believe that all good art is political as it relates, directly or indirectly, consciously or sub-consciously, to government, public affairs and the discussion of, or thinking about, relationships between power and people. The policies that govern us, positive and negative, fundamentally impact the lives of each and every one of us, wherever we are. How can art be disassociated from politics when it is a large part of what shapes our very existence? I would not have left Iraq for London had it not been for politics. This in turn permeates my art on many levels and shapes my output as an artist and a human being. Iraq, with its rich history, upheavals, heartache and past glory (albeit brief) informs my work and what I am about; the predicament of wars, displacement, grieving mothers, stolen childhoods are all themes that run through my work, together with that deep nostalgic yearning for memories of better times experienced when I was living happily there in the mid-1970s.

In your painting *Maryam* you depict a woman grieving on behalf of all mothers. This brings to mind two famous artworks, Michelangelo's *Pieta and Hocine Zaourar's photograph Madonna of Bentalha.* This painting's title, *Maryam,* is interesting, as it is the Arabic equivalent of Mary. When you chose to name this piece did you have the Virgin Mary in mind?
I would like to add to your sublime selection Picasso's *Weeping Women,* which he painted in 1937 alongside *Guernica,* in response to the Spanish Civil War (1936-9). These are as relevant today as when they were made. The

Maysaloun Faraj,
Maryam: Baghdad,
acrylic on canvas,
120×100×4 cm,
2014-2017

title *Maryam* is indeed the Arabic equivalent of Mary, which I chose for this series on Iraqi women. The Virgin Mary was first and foremost a mother who witnessed the atrocious death of her son, an agony too deep for words. It is the sorrow and grievance of every woman who has lost a beloved son to senseless conflicts, bombs and explosions ever present in our war-torn countries today. In *Maryam* there is unfathomable sadness, in her Sumerian eyes, in her posture, in her body wrap (shroud) and in the overall composition although saturated in colour; hope.

Clay is symbolic of life, as we are created from it and will return to it. It is one of the oldest forms of art, dating back to Mesopotamian times. Do you feel that working with clay keeps you connected with your roots? Or is it simply the feel of pottery and the love of its form that attracted you to this medium?

Clay is indeed symbolic of life in that, as we believe, God created mankind from it and to it we will return. In clay, I bond with cathartic earth to heal and be healed craving serenity and order through restiveness and chaos. With this I feel connected in two ways; grounded with the earth; roots, but also with that ultimate creative force, Allah (God), who chose clay as the very matter in which to create mankind. When I look at people's faces, I see clay. It is probably the most versatile and abundant building material there is. With it I can create forms to my heart's desire. Furthermore, its feel (to me) is natural and heavenly (who doesn't like playing with clay!). The thought that in the end, I will lie in it on route to my creator, instils in me a feeling of oneness with nature, goodness and calm.

To what extent do you think that your work has an anthropological value?

Though the majority of my work is non-figurative in the traditional sense, it often relates to the study of humankind in terms of relationships, through the forms I make, which at times allude to the human figure, particularly my vertical ceramics and bronze sculptures, but also the compositions I create, be it in painting or sculpture. In both mediums, I always work in twos, that is to say I create no less than two works at one time. Besides various practical reasons, I believe that Al-Wihda Lil'lah (Oneness is for God) and the rest of us were created in twos, a duality (zawjain) to support/complete one another and not to cause pain and grief to each other.

It is the sorrow and grievance of every woman who has lost a beloved son to senseless conflicts, bombs and explosions ever present in our war-torn countries today

In *Let's Make Light*, your last series of paintings, you adopted geometrical abstraction. Is it a return to your training as an architect or perhaps a combination of your bi-dimensional and your tri-dimensional practices?

Let's Make Light is an organic development and culmination of past work, as with art at any stage in its making. Throughout years of oscillating between two-dimensional painting and three-dimensional sculpture, I have aimed to explore and articulate the complex dynamics between overarching societal concerns and the highly intimate. *Let's Make Light* marks a pivotal juncture in my life as I delve into my 60s, re-visiting and re-evaluating past work, yet continuing to explore dichotomies within an uneasy world, challenging hostility and destruction with spirituality and hope/light/colour. My current visual vocabulary is reduced to basic shapes distilling my ideas into geometric abstraction where the power of the straight line, square, triangle and circle is only amplified by its extreme simplicity; an ideal realm for clarity, harmony and order. Beyond the mechanics of measured arrangement, the colour compositions invite a broader discussion about the world, drawing on Kazimir Malevich's *Suprematism,* Piet Mondrian's *De Stijl* and the Bauhaus philosophies of Gropius, Mies Van der Rohe, Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright in "Less is More" and "God is in the Detail" — indeed a return, full circle, to my architectural training. *Let's Make Light* is an attempt to make sense of a nonsensical world, seek order in chaos and ultimately, conjure up a world without divisive conflicts.

In 2000 you edited *Strokes of Genius,* a pivotal publication that documented the history of contemporary Iraqi art, and in 2002 you founded Aya Gallery. How did this experience of promoting and writing about artists impact your artistic trajectory?

Being surrounded by inspiring artwork and working closely with Iraqi artists has been a challenging and exhilarating experience, which in itself has been an art form in the making and a true source of enlightenment. It was inevitable that this impacted my own artwork and contributed massively to its development.

As an artist, you have used many mediums. What's the reason for this? You also produce bronze sculptures. How does working with a chisel and a hammer feel and mean to you, versus working with brush and paint?

I do believe that the materials we use, the methods of production, and the sources of the work reflect the interests that command our attention. In painting, I bond with colour to sing the sorrow and pain of a ravaged homeland, though it is not colour with which I paint, it is with my humanity, my soul. In clay, I bond with cathartic earth to heal and be healed, craving serenity and order through restiveness and chaos. At this stage in my oeuvre, after years of diligent work and on-going experimentation, I have just come to the realisation that besides composition and subject, for

Maysaloun Faraj, *Flying Without Wings II*, acrylic on gesso primed wood, 160 × 168 cm, 2014

me, painting is quintessentially about my passion for colour. Sculptin,g on the other hand, expresses my zeal for form, stemming from my architectural background, which is why in recent years it has almost been devoid of colour, other than the natural quality of the clay itself. With this, from each medium I gain a certain satisfaction.

If you were to choose one piece of art that is most representative of the message you try to convey and/or that is representative of your style, which would it be?

It is very difficult to choose an artwork that is most representative of the overwhelming feelings in my heart and the layers of thought and ideas that contribute to shaping a work and the message within. Having said this, the ceramic sculpture titled *Tomorrow My Heart Will Heal* would probably be the one. I first made this work in clay in 2008 as part of my solo exhibition *Boats and Burdens: Kites and Shattered Dreams 2009,* in response to the war on Iraq. The work consists of three hearts supporting each other. Each heart is inscribed with one of the 99 names of Allah *(Asma Allah al-Husna)* facilitated by rolling out a pre-made cylinder seal, which I have engraved with one of the names of Allah (mirror image) into the leather-hard clay. This method recalls the earliest form of printing invented in the land between the two rivers, Dijla and Furat, around 3500BC. Integral to this work are a number of components: the hearts, symbolising emotion and the deep pain felt when losing something as precious as a loved one or the homeland; Support, the hearts cannot stand alone and can only be put upright with the support of each other — in unity is our strength; Prayer, my solace and hope in times of distress represented in Asma Allah al-Husna; and History signified in the use of cylinder seals and the very medium of clay, as ancient as earth itself. It is worth mentioning here that when I made this work, it was purely instinctive and a raw response to the war on Iraq as I witnessed and felt it. It was not until later, upon reflection, that I was able to articulate and make sense of why I made it and why in this way. *Tomorrow My Heart Will Heal* is the first ceramic sculpture I chose to cast in bronze, a powerful, resilient and more enduring medium in comparison with clay. This in itself says much about the importance of the work and its significance.

The titles you have chosen for your work are very intriguing. It is interesting that your sculpture *Tomorrow My Heart Will Heal* depicts a heart made from bronze. This brings to mind two opposing thoughts. One is that difficult experiences are said to make one's heart harden and the other is Nietzsche's saying: "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Can you provide some background on the artistic process behind this piece and why you chose bronze as the medium?

The very interesting interpretations you present are added layers to what I have already noted in response to the previous question. In my experience, I find that with difficult experiences hearts tend to soften or become more compassionate, though characters can become stronger. I totally agree with Nietzsche in that "what doesn't break you makes you." Perhaps it is this thought, at a sub-conscious level, that drove me to choose this particular piece as my first bronze casting. Our hearts, despite the deep sorrow within, stand tall and defiant, like our date palms, like our women, like our dreams.

Another interesting title comes from your woodwork series *Flying Without Wings*. Can you expand on your word choice for this title? Can you speak more about this specific piece which seems to portray a wingless dove? Is a wingless flight positive (symbolic of perseverance)? Or negative (similar to the legend of Icarus)?

Flying Without Wings is a series of paintings, which I began in 2014 in response to the war on Gaza and the ongoing land, air and sea blockade of the Gaza Strip by Israel. It was reported that thousands of civilians, the majority of whom were children, were injured and killed as a result. In some cases, Israel issued evacuation warnings to residents only moments before a raid. One such method was the "knock on the roof" warning; firing a warning missile onto the roof of a building just before dropping a deadly bomb. With very little time between this warning and the real bomb, many people died just trying to evacuate their homes. Without going into details covering the history of the economic and political blockade of Gaza, the notion that one is issued with a so-called warning to "leave" when in actuality leaving is impossible, given the prohibition of movement in all directions, not to mention time, is outrageous. Distraught, this action conjured in me an image of a trapped bird in a cage, where the bird is allowed to flee only after its wings are severed. What chance does the bird have? How is it meant to break free? Is the bird doomed? *Flying Without Wings* was born. With deeply felt anger, it was not enough for me to paint on paper or canvas, as I felt an urgent need to slash into something in the process; wood was an apt medium as I shaped, carved, cut, sanded, pushed and pulled into it; a sense of release. Colour, in effect light, is inevitable in my painting, be it on paper, canvas or wood as I tend to "see the glass half full." The portrayal of colourful though "wingless birds," is indeed symbolic of perseverance in adversity. The difference between my "wingless birds" and the legend of Icarus is that the latter's tragic failure and downfall was the result of his own complacency and imprudence, as opposed to an exterior oppressive, tyrannical force. In my work, the bird, which somehow manages to grow wings and attempts to fly, carries with it its roots, land, culture, homes and memories, in a process reminiscent of the excruciating ripping out of one's heart. The following verses are from an Iraqi poem I love:

يلي مضيع الذهب ابسوك الذهب يلكاه

ويلي امضيع محب يمكن سنة وينساه

بس يلي مضيع وطن وين الوطن يلكاه

وين الوطن يلكاه

S

Maysaloun Faraj, *Tomorrow My Heart Will Heal,* earthstone and velvet glazes, 30 × 19 × 10 cm, 2008