The Cultural Costs of the 2003 US-Led Invasion of Iraq: A Conversation with Art Historian Nada Shabout

Isis Nusair

I first met Nada Shabout at the Middle East Studies Association conference in 2005. Shabout is an Iraqi American art historian specializing in modern Arab and Iraqi art and an associate professor of art history at the University of North Texas. At the time, I was shifting my research to focus on the gendered impact of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq and had written a piece about the gendered, racialized, and sexualized torture at Abu-Ghraib.[1] Subsequent to our meeting, Shabout and I began collaborating on a number of projects, including bringing the exhibits *Dafatir: Contemporary Iraqi Book Art* (2008) and *Open Shutters Iraq* (2010) to Denison University in Ohio. Shabout's work, both academic and activist, is important because it focuses our attention on the cultural costs of the invasion of Iraq. One of my most troubling observations when researching Iraqi women refugees has been the lack of public discourse in the United States about the impact of the war on Iraqi civilians, as well as the absence of any accountability for the destruction of Iraq following the invasion. As director of the Modern Art Iraq Archive (MAIA) project, Shabout helps document the cultural artifacts and works of art from the Iraqi Museum of Modern Art in Baghdad that have been lost, stolen, or destroyed during the war. This project stubbornly insists on keeping the memory of art alive while simultaneously opening a space for scholars to construct

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authentic narratives about Iraqi modern art. This official and public inventory of the lost artworks acts as a reminder of the cultural value of Iraqi art and hopefully will help to hasten the return of missing works to Iraq. Equally as important is the fact that this public virtual archive also serves to deter efforts to smuggle or sell Iraqi art on the black market.[2]

Isis Nusair: What impact did the changing sociopolitical and economic contexts in Iraq, especially the consecutive wars (the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the Gulf War in 1991) and United Nations-imposed sanctions from 1990 to 2003, have on the production and distribution of Iraqi art?

Nada Shabout: The collective impact of the wars, sanctions, and 2003 US-led invasion has been devastating on every level. The years of the sanctions enforced a debilitating isolation on Iraqi art and artists, thereby constraining the free flow of ideas and cultural exchanges. Despite arguments that Iraqi art benefited from the isolation and arguments that see this period as one of reevaluation and self-inspiration (the creativity of Iraqi artists under the sanctions notwithstanding), the fact remains that Iraqi art missed almost two decades of global aesthetic and intellectual developments. This period created a wide gap between artists at home and those in the diaspora who were increasingly becoming representative of contemporary Iraqi art, replacing the visual production inside of Iraq that is now considered outdated. The center of production and evaluation was thus displaced.

State patronage was eventually stopped. Funds that would have been used to sponsor art programs and exhibitions were redirected to the ongoing war effort. The sanctions also severely crippled art education in Iraq. The Fine Arts Institute and Academy both lost most of their famed faculty. Art material became scarcer with time and, despite creative solutions and alternatives, art production was restricted.

The destruction following the 2003 invasion became the decisive rupture between Iraq's progressive past, whose memories lingered throughout the years of sanctions, and its present, which does not even foresee a future. The wide range of destruction and institutional dismantling practically wiped away a century of developments. The cultural devastation of Iraq's heritage was unprecedented. It included

mega-scale thefts from museums and archeological sites, as well as burning of archives, books, and buildings.

The Iraqi Museum of Modern Art (the former Saddam Center for the Arts) was not an exception. Reports indicated that a fire started in the building on April 9 while looters ransacked and removed major works. Nothing was left from the almost eight thousand works of painting, prints, sculpture, and photography except for thirteen hundred works that had been moved earlier to the basement of the Iraqi National Museum of Antiquity. These works were subsequently severely damaged when the basement was flooded.[3]

The museum had acted as the main repository for Iraq's visual memory. The collection included personal objects from the studios of the Iraqi pioneer artists such as Jewad Selim, Faiq Hassan, and Mohammed Ghani Hikmat.[4] Key works from the looted collection started surfacing around the world in galleries and private homes. As demand for modern Iraqi work increased, forgeries appeared on the market as well, further complicating issues of authentication and provenance.

Nusair: You have been engaged with documenting and preserving the modern artistic works from the Iraqi Museum of Modern Art in Baghdad, most of which were lost and damaged in the fires and looting during the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As the MAIA site shows, very little is known about many of the works, including their current whereabouts and their original location in the museum. Please tell us how you went about this documentation.

Shabout: I began documenting the lost works from the museum immediately after my trip to Baghdad in June 2003. I had gone to Baghdad to see for myself what had happened to my city and because I was actually able to do so after twenty-three years. While in Baghdad I found out what had happened to the museum and its collection and started my investigation by speaking to artists who had remained in Iraq during the sanctions and invasion and [by] visiting galleries and studios. Iraqi artists were very aware of the devastation and many immediately visited the museum to investigate the level of damage. That reconnaissance period essentially became Phase One of the MAIA project and the most daunting and frustrating aspect of the

project.[5] I thus initiated an intensive campaign to construct a virtual archive of what once was at the museum. I collected any and all literature produced by the museum or the Ministry of Culture, which included catalogues of the permanent collection from the museum, official books on modern Iraqi art published between the 1960s and 1990s (mostly published in the 1970s and 1980s), and brochures. My assumption was that if the work of art was included in the publication, then it belonged to the museum, as official publications would generally have used the works from the institution.

I also contacted and interviewed Iraqi artists in exile and in the wider diaspora, particularly artists who at one point or another were affiliated with the museum. In Iraq, it was generally artists who would have worked at the museum, but I also approached all artists who had access and interactions with the museum: at a minimum because their work was in the collection but also because the museum was their sanctuary during the long years of sanctions. I was able to locate the photographer of the museum, who sold me hard copies of works she claimed were at the museum. I found out later, however, that this was not entirely true and what she sold me included works from galleries as well, which necessarily casts doubt on the provenance of other works supposedly in the collection of the museum. I then cross-referenced all the data that I collected to try to construct a list of works that, while never comprehensive, would at least have higher probability of being correct. Of course the data were never complete, and I had to guess about much.

For example, I had heard that the director of the museum had shot a video in the galleries of the museum in 2002. After much investigation, I found a set of these video CDs at the Lebanese University. They are videos but on a CD—old technology. The university had given a set as a gift during an architectural competition that was hosted at the museum in Baghdad. The video was not filmed in a professional manner and the CDs are not of high quality, but they give a better view and idea about the setting in the galleries, the lack of professional museum practices—where labels were missing, or at best artists' names were given, and at times titles were handwritten on a piece of paper and placed on the lower corner of the work inside the frame. It was obvious that no conservation or maintenance had taken place for a while. Nevertheless, the video confirms the works

that were in the museum. I have been able to gather many bits and pieces as well as very useful documents, although I admit that I have not been able to process them all yet.

Data through oral history has proven to be just as challenging. I have been trying to mine the memories of as many Iraqi artists as I can, not only for this project but also to be able to eventually construct a different narrative about modern Iraqi art than the current dominant one. We are blessed to have still a number of the pioneer artists—Dia Azzawi, Rafa Nasiri, Suad al-Attar, and Saadi Kabi, to name few—still with us, although we have lost key ones since 2003, particularly artist, historian, and theoretician Shakir Hassan al Said, sculptor Mohamed Ghani Hikmat, and painter Mahmoud Sabri. They have many stories to tell. The main challenge, however, has been asking the right questions. Perhaps as part of the culture of fear that Saddam Hussein had fostered in Iraq, Iraqis, including artists, are not yet free and comfortable to tell full stories. They remain cautious about what they say and have developed the habit of giving short abrupt answers without details. Moreover, after 2003 there was such a general feeling of dismay and despair that most Iraqis wanted to look forward, hoping to not think about the past for a while. I also believe that artists felt embarrassed about the looting and destruction and shied away from talking about it. Thus, trying to weave together the bits and pieces of information with all rumors and contradictions has been interesting, to say the least.

You can imagine how difficult and time consuming this was, particularly with little funding. While I applied for numerous grants, the only funding I received was from the Iraqi Academic Research Institute in Iraq.[6] The inability to secure funding for the project was a further indication of the lack of interest and concern about modern Iraqi art and its fate.

Phase Two of the project consisted of building the technological support that gave birth to MAIA. This platform allows for its growth and sustainability and began in September 2009 in collaboration with the UC Berkeley School of Information and the Alexandria Archive Institute at Berkeley, a nonprofit organization supporting research and development to enhance scholarly communications and instruction through innovative use of the web.

While the project remains in process, we decided to make the site public. We uploaded works that were authenticated as being part of the collection of the museum. Despite my best efforts, I could not decisively confirm that certain works were in the collection in 2003. It is known that Saddam Hussein had the habit of presenting some of these works as official gifts, but without the official archive of the museum, there is doubt surrounding some works.

The Modern Art Iraq Archive displays the work in an open format that invites worldwide use, including by the Iraqi national and expatriate communities, and encourages users to help identify and understand individual pieces.[7] The system was built in 2010 with a digital humanities start-up grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and using open source software developed by Omeka.[8]

One of the main objectives of the project has been to facilitate the recovery of Iraq's modern visual heritage. A result of the lack of archives for the Iraqi Museum of Modern Art is the inability of the authorities, including Interpol, to track the stolen works. Thus, MAIA's goal is to provide support for official searches. Unless concise and full information and images are provided, Interpol cannot add the stolen items of the collection to its database of stolen works of art published on their website.

Nusair: The MAIA site makes these works of art available as an open access database in order to raise public awareness of the many lost works and to encourage interested individuals to participate in helping to document the museum's original and/or lost holdings. The site has also a text archival section that makes available publications related to the art environment of the twentieth century. Why was it important to have the website include supporting text together with the images?

Shabout: My intention when I first started the project was to document the lost collection from the Iraqi Museum of Modern Art. That in itself was an overwhelming project. However, as time passed following the invasion, it became very clear that the situation in Iraq was not improving but rather much worsening with time, disinterest, and internal corruption. Humanities in general and the visual arts specifically were certainly on the bottom of any lists of concern. There were

no policies or initiatives for archiving or documentation of the intellectual output of the twentieth century. As all existing archives were either lost or compromised, any new research on twentieth-century Iraqi art was a challenge. So when Saleem al-Bahloly introduced the idea of mapping out modernity in Iraq through text, I decided to enlarge the project to include newspaper and journal articles, exhibition catalogs, and all relevant publications. Al-Bahloly is an anthropology PhD candidate at Berkeley who knew about my work and contacted me about his research, which aims to examine Iraqi modernity through the visual. He has since joined the MAIA project and has been instrumental in locating and digitizing articles on Iraqi art. I decided to have a cut-off date for works of art and text in the 1990s, which I argue is the shift from modernism to postmodernism in global art in Iraq.

This text we are discovering, however, provides significant primary source material and allows the voices of the modern Iraqi artists to be heard. Their writings outline the main concerns of their times and the role they assumed in society.

Nusair: How does Iraqi art relate to questions of modernity and diaspora?

Shabout: There were much more fluid interfaces and multi-directional flows of ideas and identities across cultures during the first half of the twentieth century in Iraq. Iraqi artists who were sent on scholarships to various cities in Europe experienced short and privileged displacements. They became mobile spaces for processing the various trends and ideas they learned. They returned to Iraq and formulated what they perceived as Iraqi modernism, which they explored in their visual creations. Very few artists settled in the West until the late 1970s. Sporadic migration of Iraqi artists started in the 1980s, but it was not until the 1990s when migration intensified that an Iraqi diasporic art community was established outside of Iraq. Moreover, a very curious phenomenon is observed where the exilic eyes of those Iraqi artists remained oriented toward Iraq, and the creative visions of the majority of Iraqi artists in exile were only marginally altered by their exile. Examples include Suad al-Attar, who has been based in London since 1976 but could hardly be thought of as a British or even

Iraqi-British artist. Despite her contribution to the global art scene in the UK, her aesthetics and artistic philosophy remain materially, intellectually, and emotionally tied to Iraq despite various influences and benefits of exile.

Nevertheless, things changed drastically after 2003. Migration and permanent relocation became a goal for many Iraqis who had lost hope for better days in Iraq. A direct consequence is that a new relationship with the diaspora and the homeland emerged. That is one of the reasons why MAIA's cut-off date is the 1990s. The text and works of art included in MAIA generally reflect the strong and mutual ties between modernity and Iraq.

It is important to note that while modern Arab art has gained much attention and interest in the West since the turn of the twenty-first century, both in museums and the market, modern Iraqi art has not fared as well as it deserves. Challenges abound. Since the looting of the Iraqi Museum of Modern Art, concerns with provenance have stopped many sales, as well as concerns for authenticity with the increase of forged Iraqi masters. The main problem of course is the absence of an official documentation or institution after the comprehensive destruction of Iraq's art infrastructure in 2003.

Nusair: How do you see Iraqi modern art relating to particular constructions of femininity and masculinity? How does it offer an alternative vision and/or feminist critique of social and political relations in the country?

Shabout: Not surprisingly, the formation of modern art in Iraq was connected to the formation of the modern state of Iraq. The national visual discourse was sympathetic to the official national agenda and at times fully aligned with its policy. Unlike today, the rhetoric of ethnicity and difference was particularly absent in favor of a coherent national collective. In the 1920s, the emotional development of "belonging" looked for common historical roots to build a national memory. Moreover, visual expression was seen as an important part of the objective intellectual Arab thought.[9] Serious art was expected as part of the political struggle to build new independent Arab nations.

Thus, gender too was to be transcended when talking about art, particularly of the pioneers. Nevertheless, Iraqi women artists were often celebrated in later national literature as a sign of Iraq's modernization and progress. During the construction of Iraq as a modern nation, women were perceived as an important contributive force. The first half of the twentieth century marked a surge in women's education followed by a marked interest and fuller participation in political life.[10] Within Iraq's modern history, women have been able to achieve much in terms of rights and authority. There are several well-known individual cases that were inspirational to Iraqi women to organize the struggle for women rights. Mobilization against Western imperialism, the fervor of Arab nationalism, and the air of revolution were responsible for the creation of a number of women's organizations. Some of these organizations were affiliated with various political parties, such as the Iraqi Communist Party's Rabitat al-Mara al-Iraqiyah (Iraqi Woman's Association) in 1959 and the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party's General Federation of Iraqi Women in 1968.[11] The strategic empowerment of Iraqi women under state-sponsored feminism continued and at times intensified under the Socialist Ba'ath Party. The Ba'ath party exercised its power through rhetoric and policies that focused on encouraging women's participation in government, industry, and society in general.[12]

Nevertheless, research on political interaction, art, and women's positions specifically have not been explored. Of interest is that women artists were visible among the second generation of Iraqi artists, considered the pioneers of Iraqi art. Women were also present in the establishment of art organizations, including the first official one—Friends of the Arts group—established in 1941. Records of the group list Nahida al-Haidari as the secretary for the group, but nothing else about her background and contributions is mentioned. Notably, however, there were no women artists leading any of the art movements throughout the twentieth century. Many are listed as participants but not highlighted as leaders.

A specifically unique situation was the role of women relatives of the most active and leading male artists in Iraq. For example, Naziha Selim (1923–2008), Jewad Selim's sister, graduated from the Fine Art

Institute in Baghdad in 1940 and then continued her studies at the Beaux Arts in Paris, graduating in 1951. A 1965 interview in *Al-Aqlam* magazine highlights her as an important participant in the modern art movement in Iraq. Naziha was part of an all-artist family; her father and four brothers are all leading artists.

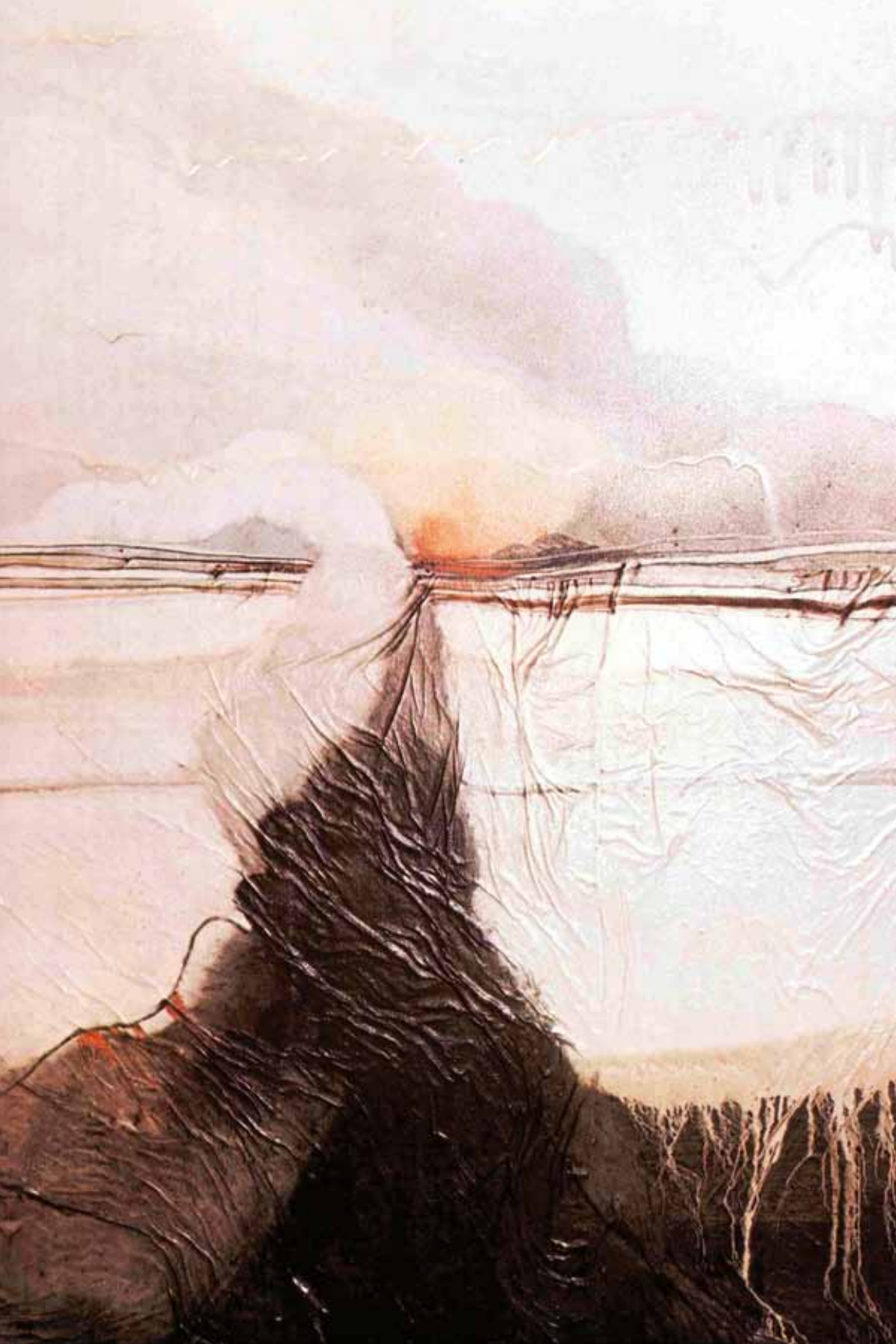
Several of the pioneer Iraqi artists who went to study art in Europe returned to Baghdad with foreign wives who were also artists. It is possible that their presence in the art scene readily facilitated women's involvement in art.

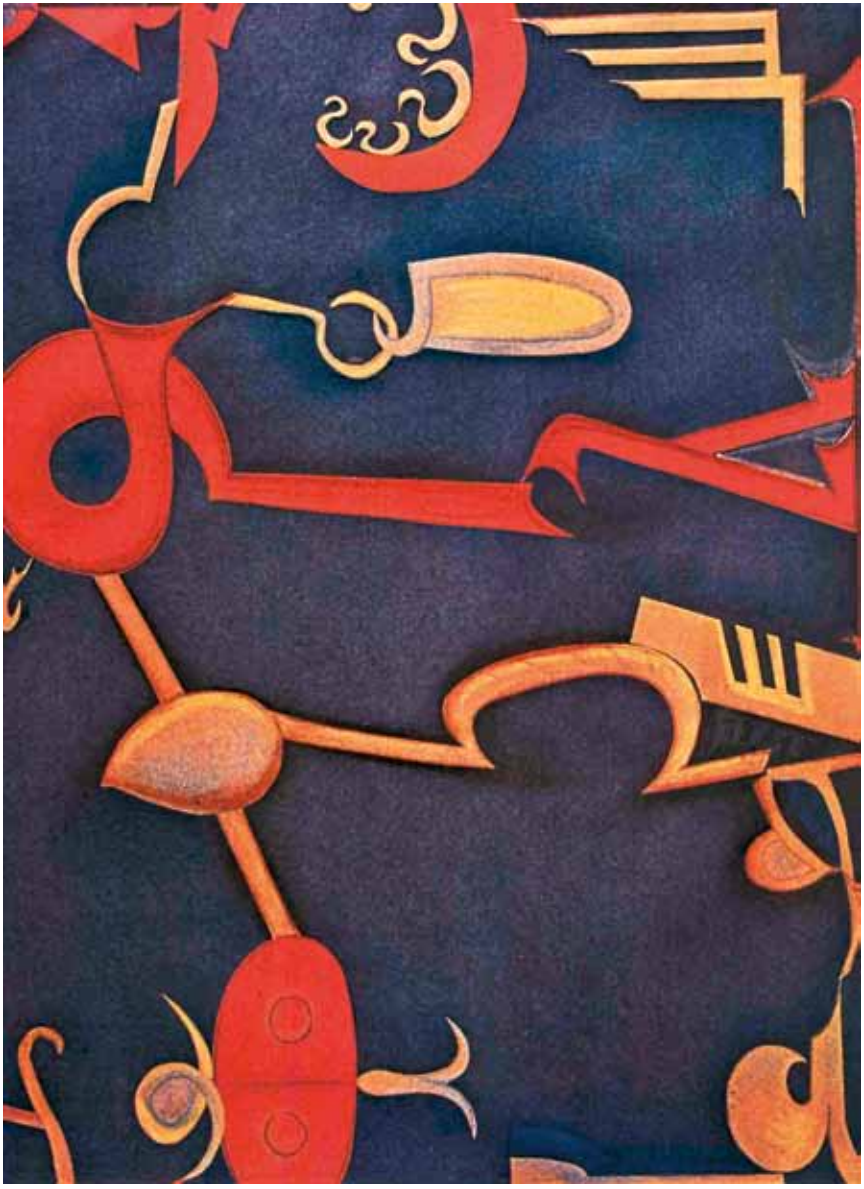
Lorna Selim (b. 1928), Jewad's British wife, is always listed as an Iraqi artist from the pioneer generation. She participated in the first exhibition of the Baghdad Modern Art Group, the leading modern art group in Iraq and the most influential on the subsequent development that was cofounded by Jewad Selim. She, along with Naziha Selim, was an active member of the group. The group membership, three years after its establishment, consisted of sixteen artists.[13] Susan al-Sheikhly, Ismail al-Sheikhly's wife, was another participating woman artist. She participated in *Al-Ruwwad* (The Pioneers) exhibition in 1965. Lisa Fatah (1941–1992), Ismail Fatah's first wife, is also considered a pioneering Iraqi woman artist who participated in several group exhibitions.

In 1952, in the *Ibn Sina* exhibition that was held at the Art Institute in Baghdad, a new woman artist made her début—Madiha Omar (1908–2005)—who participated with forty-eight paintings, introducing the contexualization of the Arabic letter in Iraqi modern art.[14] Omar has been credited with the initiation of the use of the Arabic letter in art that was to start one of the most significant experiments in modern Arab art and a long-lasting trend. A naturalized Iraqi from Syrian parents, she was an Iraqi diplomat's wife who studied and exhibited in Washington, DC, while her husband was on post there. The *Ibn Sina* exhibition included four other women artists.

Then, many Iraqi women studied art at the Iraqi institutions. The artist Layla al-Attar (1940–1993) was among the first graduates from the Iraqi Art Academy in 1965. She later became the director of the former Saddam Center for the Arts (the Iraqi Museum of Modern Art) until her death in 1993. She and her husband were killed during the US bombing of Baghdad. Layla's work was renowned not only in Iraq but throughout the Arab world; she has also been acknowledged

Betool al-Fekeiki, title unknown (1979)
Oil on canvas, in Modern Art Iraq Archive, Item #855.





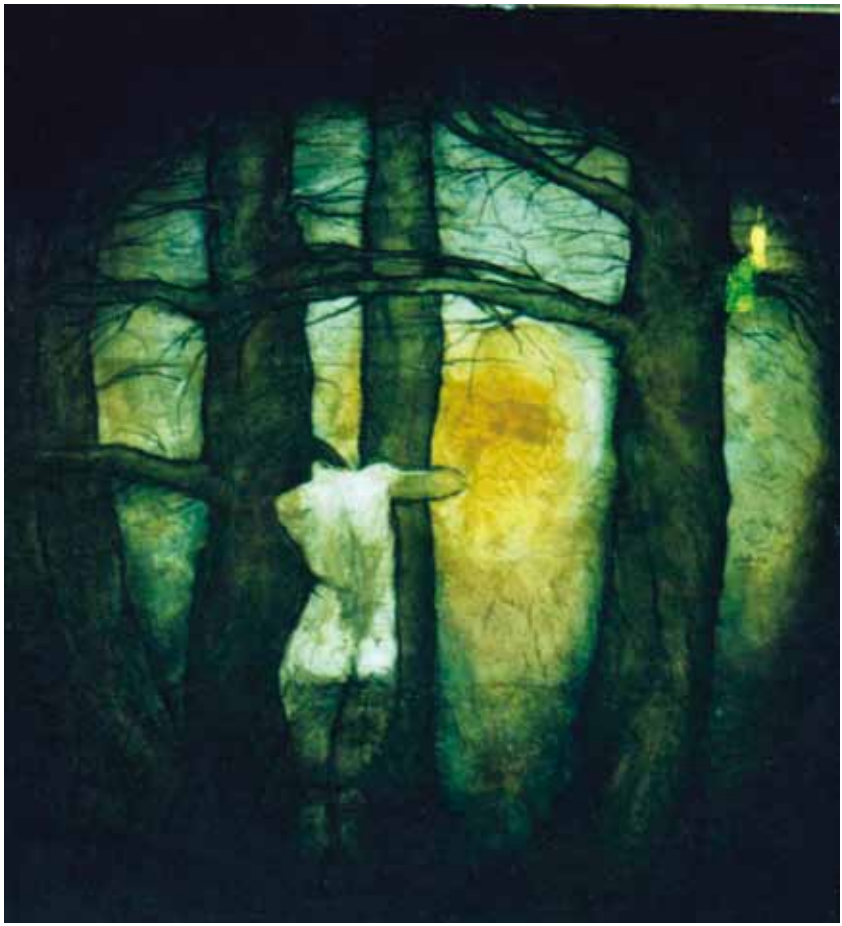
ABOVE

Madiha Omar, title unknown (date unknown)
Oil on canvas, in Modern Art Iraq Archive, Item #817.

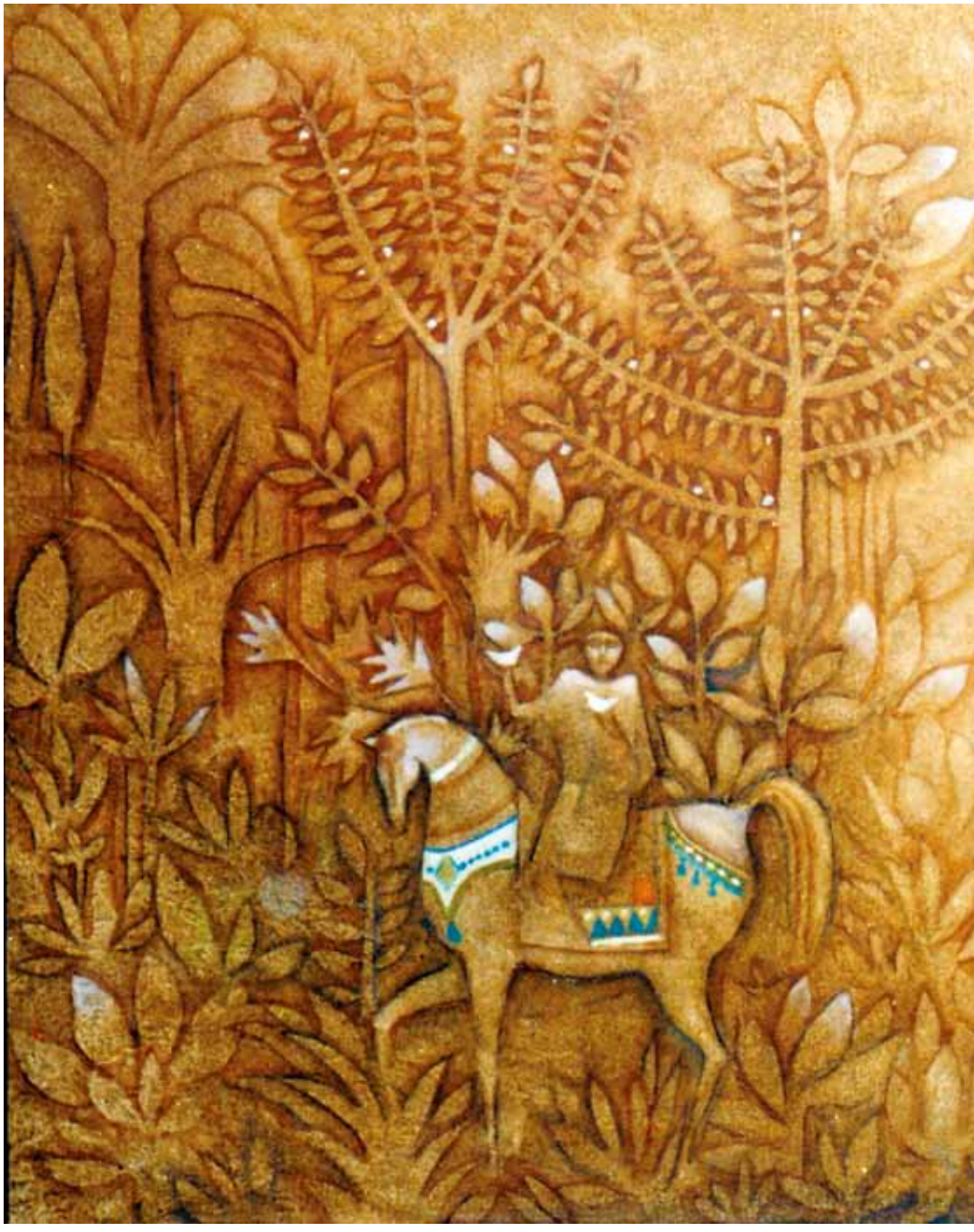
OPPOSITE

Leila al-Attar, title unknown (1980)
Oil on canvas, in Modern Art Iraq Archive, Item #878.

Leila al-Attar, title unknown (date unknown)
Oil on canvas, courtesy of the National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad, Iraq.

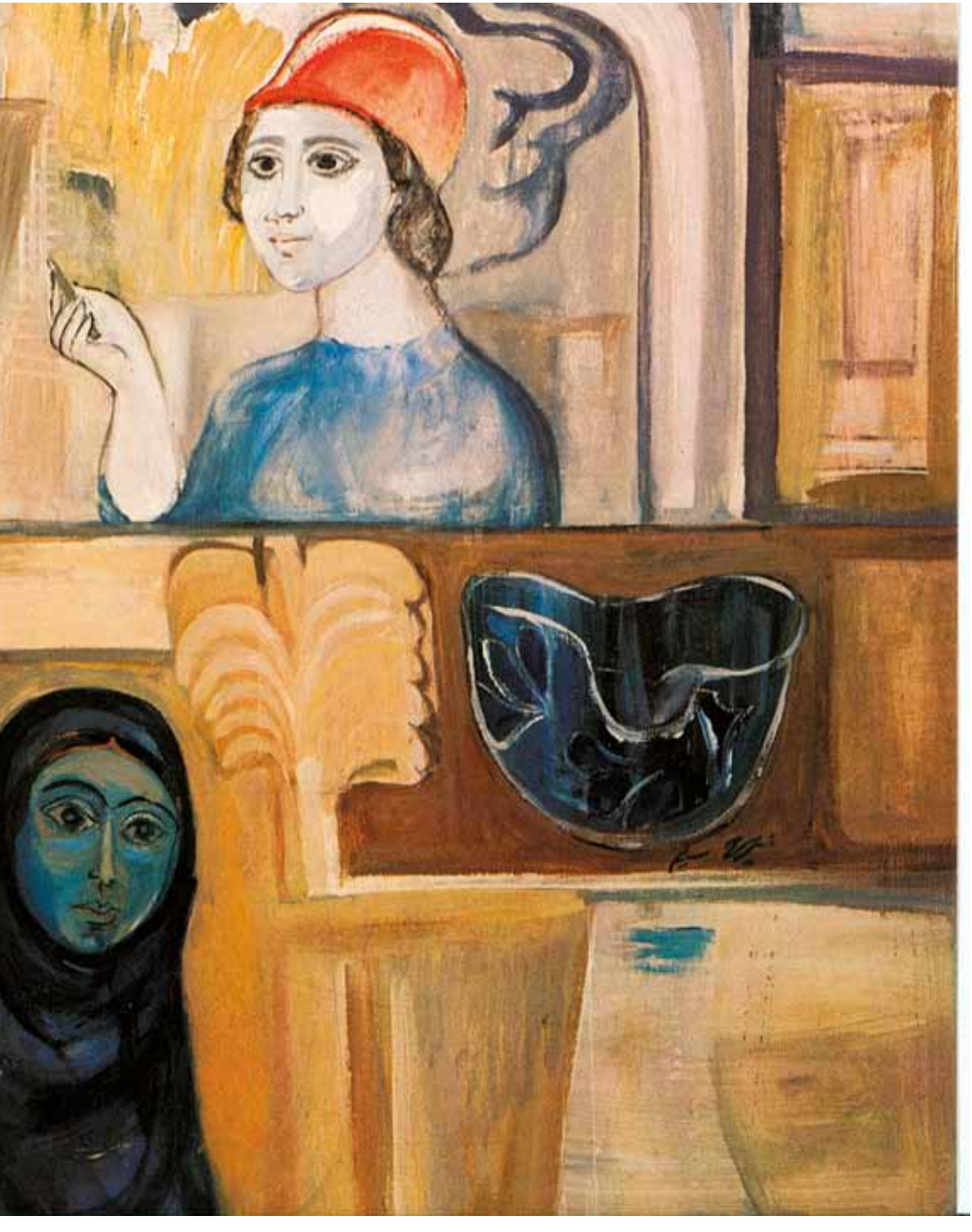


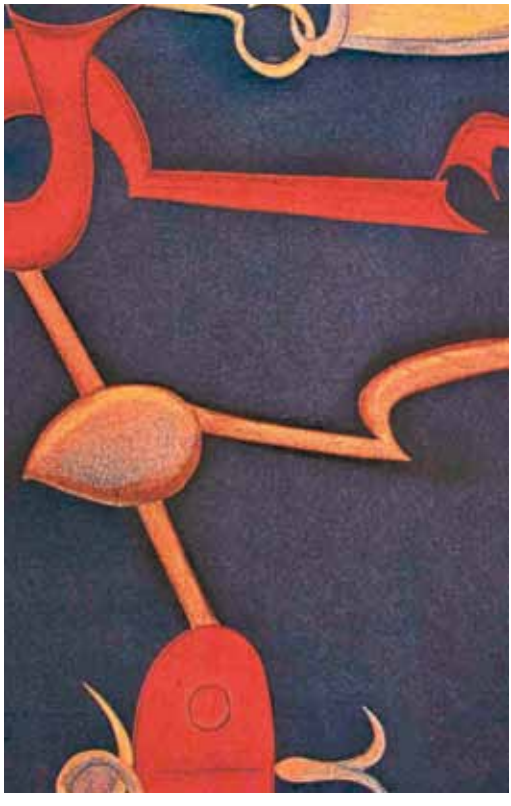
Widad al-Orfali, title unknown (date unknown)
Oil on canvas, in Modern Art Iraq Archive, Item #838.

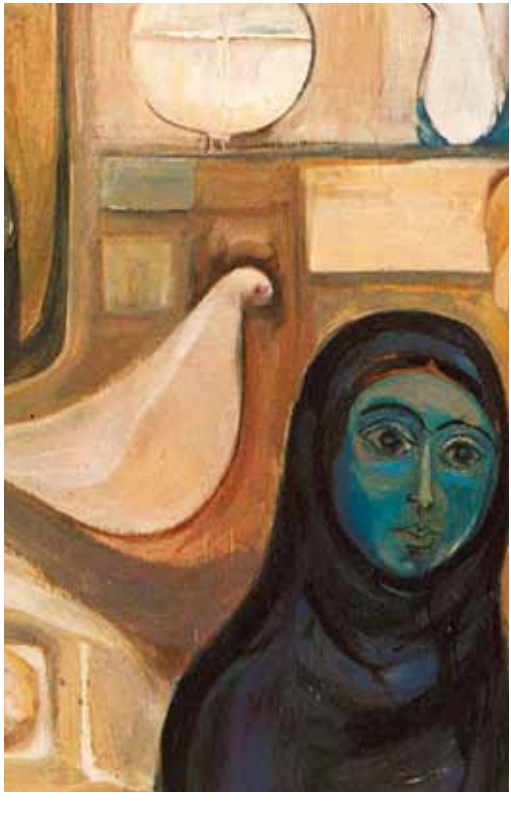


Saud al-Attar, title unknown (1942)
Oil on canvas, in Modern Art Iraq Archive, Item #385.

Naziha Selim, title unknown (date unknown)
Oil on canvas, in Modern Art Iraq Archive, Item #827.







ABOVE Hanaa Malallah, *Mesopotamia Rhythm (2011)*
Mixed media installation, 180 × 40 × 240 cm.

PREVIOUS Hanaa Malallah, *Self Portrait II (2012)*
Drawing, digital print, hoopoe birds, and pen nibs on paper in glass case, 111 × 150 cm.

Hanaa Malallah, *Mesopotamia Rhythm (2011),* detail.
Mixed media installation, 180 × 40 × 240 cm.

for her substantial contributions to the advancement of women's rights. A daring and adventurous visual artist, Layla al-Attar wrote the following about her work: "I am trying to bring into the society the role of women, the dignity of their existence, and their humanity by means of lines blended with waves of color, sincere feelings, and true wishes."[15]

Her sister, Suad al-Attar (b. 1942), is one of Iraq's most renowned artists. Painting from an early age, her work was introduced to Baghdad society and artists through exhibitions at her high school. Discovered by Jewad Selim, she was accepted by and participated in many of the exhibitions that coined Iraq's modern art iconography. She was one of the few women artists involved in many of the functions organized by the Baghdad Modern Art Group. Her work introduced an introspective dimension to visual folkloric investigations explored by her male colleagues.[16] Much of her work, which she left behind in her Baghdad house when she relocated to London, has been looted. The styles of the two sisters (Suad and Layla) present modern articulations and syntheses of Mesopotamian and Islamic aesthetics, expressed in two distinct and personal styles. Their work explores the inner feminine world in expressive surrealistic styles that mix fantasy and myth with reality.

While art institutions and milieus in Baghdad, which were generally administered by progressive policies and represented the avant-garde in Iraq, had no restrictions on women's participation and in fact encouraged their involvement, the majority of Baghdad families were still mostly conservative, and art was not necessarily valued by all. They thus did not allow their daughters to study art. For example, the artist Betool al-Fekiki (b. 1941) recalls that as a young girl in the 1950s, she and her friends would gather at one home and secretly take art classes because their families disapproved. Those were transformative decades in Iraq when artists particularly participated in creating a culture that not only appreciated art, but considered collecting Iraqi art a patriotic act.

Of particular interest is that gender did not become an issue in the arts (or otherwise) until after the 2003 invasion. To be fair, starting with the Iraq-Iran war, women's status in Iraq changed from powerful contributors in nation building to mostly "mothers of future soldiers" and eventually "mothers of martyrs." Thus, the 1970s rhetoric

OPPOSITE Hanaa Malallah, *Shroud V (2012),* detail.
Mixed media and soft sculpture on canvas, 150 x 150 cm.

espousing the equality of women and men changed in the 1980s to that of a nation of militarized men defending weak vulnerable Iraqi women. The 1990s, which witnessed the most comprehensive sanctions ever imposed on a country, called forth a new image of Iraq as a malnourished woman, weak and beaten. As expected, the wars were "fought by men in Iraq and suffered by women."[17] Moreover, the wars in 1991 and 2003 ushered in Islam as a state ideology, thus imposing additional limitations on women in the name of religion, morality, and tradition.

As bodies are vested with gendered and sexualized meanings, women's experiences of their bodies are produced through multiple social and political relationships defined by religion, class, race, sexuality, and ethnicity.[18] The body of the Iraqi woman became a site of contestation of power structures and a struggle over the meanings and constructions of masculinity and femininity, especially during the Iran-Iraq war, under the sanctions regime, and in the aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion. The Ba'ath regime's attempt to increase birth rates during the war with Iran in 1980 to 1988 limited access to contraceptives and highlighted the masculine image of the Iraqi male war hero. Yasmin al-Jawaheri and Nadje al-Ali describe the effects of the sanctions regime on Iraqi women and their increased insecurity and vulnerability in light of economic destitution, a changing social climate, and decline in educational and employment opportunities. Under the sanctions and especially in the aftermath of the US-led invasion, women's bodies became a site for marking the political, religious, and social identity of the new Iraq.[19]

These new restrictions on women's rights became accepted norms for the generation that followed and a departure point for a number of political parties in the aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. The fragmented policies of the post-2003 Iraqi government have supported a favored colonial theme, positioning women as markers of social change and simultaneously exploiting them as symbols of defiance against US occupation.

Nevertheless, artist Hanaa Malallah (b. 1958) still is not comfortable with gendering Iraqi art. She argues that art has no gender and its concern is the work and its aesthetics. She does acknowledge the increased challenges and difficulties women artists faced after 2003 to the point that she was forced into exile in London in 2007. However,

these difficulties are part of the insecurity and destruction that faces all aspects of life in Iraq in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion and its ramifications. MAIA too does not segregate Iraqi women artists but includes them in accordance to their role in forging Iraq's modern art.

Notes

1. Isis Nusair, "Gendered, Racialized and Sexualized Torture at Abu Ghraib," in *Feminism and War: Confronting U.S. Imperialism*, ed. Robin Riley, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Minnie Bruce Pratt (London: Zed Books, 2008), 179–93.
2. I interviewed Nada Shabout in person for this article in August 2011 in Dallas, Texas, and continued to correspond with her by email and on Skype with follow-up questions. The interview presented here is not a transcript of our conversations, but has been edited jointly by Shabout and myself for clarity and structure.
3. For full details about the museum, its looting and subsequent actions, see Nada Shabout, "The Iraqi Museum of Modern Art: Ethical Implications," *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals from the Practical to the Philosophical* 2, no. 4 (May 2006): 285–98; Nada Shabout, "The 'Free' Art of Occupation: Images for a 'New' Iraq," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 28, nos. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 2006): 41–55; Nada Shabout, "Preservation of Iraqi Modern Heritage in the Aftermath of the US Invasion of 2003," in *An Anthology on Ethics in the Art World*, ed. Gail Levin and Elaine A. King (New York: Allworth Press, 2006), 105–20; and Nada Shabout, "Cultural Destruction and Its Implications," in *ArteEast*, July 2006, http://www.arteeast.org/artenews/artenews-articles2006/political-art/artenews-shabout.html.
4. Jewad Selim was born in Ankara, Turkey, in 1921 and died in Baghdad in 1961. He was awarded government scholarships to study sculpture in Paris (1938–1939), in Rome (1939–1940), and in London at the Slade School of Art (1946–1949). He is considered one of the most prominent figures in the formation of the Iraqi modern art movement. In Baghdad, he became a founding member of the Institute of Fine Arts in 1949, the Baghdad Group of Modern Art in 1951, and the Society of Iraqi Plastic Artists in 1956.

   Faiq Hassan was born in Baghdad in 1914 and died in France in 1991. He is a central figure in Iraq's modern art movements. He earned his degree from the Académie Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Paris, in 1938. Shortly after his return to Baghdad, he founded the painting department at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad. He was the founder of the Société Primitive in 1940 and the Pioneers Group in 1950 and was the cofounder of the Corner Group.

   Mohammed Ghani Hikmat was born in Baghdad in 1929 and died in Jordan in 2011. He was a prolific sculptor who graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad in 1953 and from the sculpture department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome in 1959. In Iraq, he taught sculpture

at the Institute of Fine Arts, the Academy of Fine Arts, and the College of Architectural Engineering at Baghdad University.

5. For more details about MAIA, see Nada Shabout, "Recovering Iraq's Modern Heritage: Constructing and Digitally Documenting the Collection of the Former Saddam Center for the Arts," *American Academic Research Institute in Iraq Newsletter* (Spring 2006): 1–5.
6. The Iraqi Academic Research Institute in Iraq was established to promote scholarly interdisciplinary research on Iraq. Its executive director, Professor McGuire Gibson, is one of the world's leading authorities on ancient Mesopotamia. See http://www.taarii.org.
7. For a more comprehensive understanding of the scope of the Modern Art Iraq Archive, see http://artiraq.org/maia/about.
8. Omeka is a free open-source web publishing system for online digital archives. See http://omeka.org.
9. Jaleel Kamal al-Din, *"Ta'amulat fi Ma'aradh al-Ruwad"* (Contemplation in the Pioneer's Exhibition), *Al-Adab* 6/5 (1958): 87–90.
10. The Women's Grammar and High School was established in Iraq in 1899. See Jacqueline S. Ismael and Shereen T. Ismael, "Gender and State in Iraq," in *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, ed. Suad Joseph (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 186.
11. For detailed accounts of women's perceptions and roles in the Iraqi political scene, see Nadje al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 56–108.
12. Ismael and Ismael, "Gender and State in Iraq," 207.
13. Khalid al-Kassab, *Khalid al-Kassab: Thikrayat Faniyah* [Khalid al-Kassab: Art Memories], ed. May Muzaffar (London: Dar al-Hikmah, 2007), 85.
14. Incorporating the Arabic alphabet letter in art during the mid-twentieth century is a complex and multifaceted movement that aimed to secularize the traditionally sacred language of the Quran. Instead of the very regulated and structured production of calligraphy, the Arabic letter appeared in modern art in the Arab world as a means of reflecting the national sentiments and the language of the street. As an identity marker, it provided Arab artists with very flexible plastic forms to negotiate abstraction.
15. Layla al-Attar, quoted in *Iraq* (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture, 1995), 78.
16. Interview by Nada Shabout with Suad al-Attar at her exhibition at the Leighton House Gallery, London, May 20, 2006.
17. Ismael and Ismael, "Gender and State in Iraq," 202.
18. Dubravka Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
19. Yasmin Husein al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq: The Gender Impact of International Sanctions* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008); Nadje al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Nadje al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).