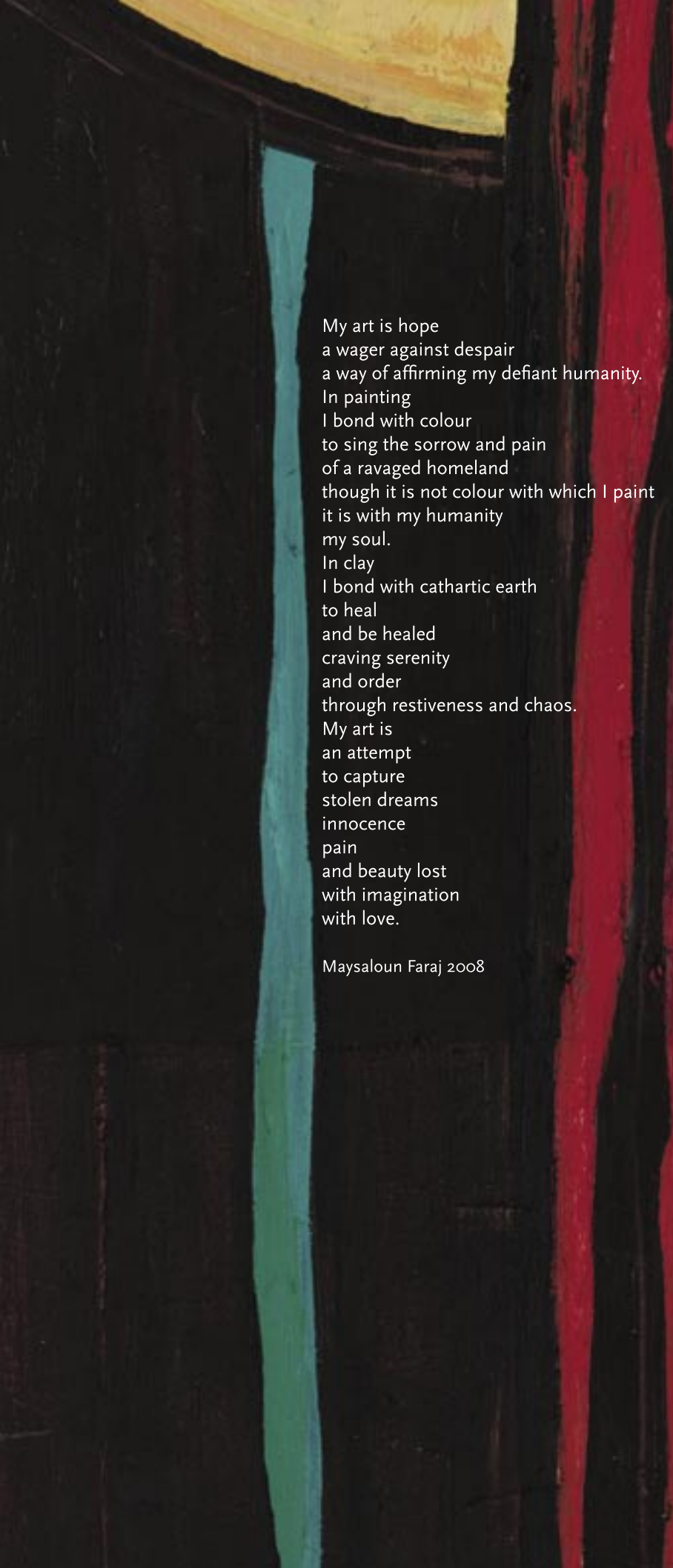


An abstract artwork featuring a teal background with a large black diagonal shape and a red heart-like shape. The text is overlaid on the teal area.

MAYSALOUN FARAJ

BOATS AND BURDENS
KITES AND SHATTERED DREAMS

2009



My art is hope
a wager against despair
a way of affirming my defiant humanity.
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.
My art is
an attempt
to capture
stolen dreams
innocence
pain
and beauty lost
with imagination
with love.

Maysaloun Faraj 2008

MAYSALOUN FARAJ

ميسلون فرج





BOATS AND BURDENS
KITES AND SHATTERED DREAMS

2009

Maysaloun with first born Amir, Baghdad 1979

• BOATS AND BURDENS: KITES AND SHATTERED DREAMS

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This publication marks the solo-exhibition *Boats and Burdens: Kites and Shattered Dreams* by Maysaloun Faraj hosted at ayagallery, London 25 March – 25 June 2009.

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 ayagallery

For the women of Iraq who despite burden upon unprecedented burden stand tall, proud and resilient, like her precious date palms, nurturing like the sweet waters of Dijla and Furat. And for her children who will reclaim the skies with their imagination, the future with their dreams.





Deceit . Earthstone, acrylic and gold 39x27x12cm 2008

• ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication marks the convening of my one-woman exhibition *Boats and Burdens: Kites and Shattered Dreams*, which is my fifteenth solo to date, the first after a long fifteen year break! My last was in 1995, just before I embarked on a life changing journey delving into the works of Iraq's noteworthy artists; *Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art*, followed by the establishment of Aya Gallery which I co-founded in London with my husband the architect Ali Mousawi in 2002.

Having dedicated much of the past years promoting important others, I decided it was now due to focus on my own art, the outcome of which has been this exhibition. A culmination of three decades of sheer inspiration, creativity and intense artistic involvement *Boats and Burdens: Kites and Shattered Dreams* is a collection of paintings and ceramics, essentially my response to the war on Iraq, her land and her people.

With this I am deeply indebted to the very special individuals: Dr Ulrike al-Khamis, HRH Dr Wijdan al-Hashemi, Sajid Rizvi and Rashad Selim for their thoughtful contributions to this catalogue, moreover their friendship, guidance and profound support throughout the years. For the same reasons and for inaugurating this exhibition I am intensely grateful to Dr Venetia Porter. I would also like to express sincere gratitude to Sadik Kwaish Alfraji not only for the meticulous care and attention he has put into the design of this catalogue but also for his patience and understanding since his involvement with *Strokes of Genius* and throughout. Despite their exceedingly busy work schedules they have all given me their valuable time and expertise and I will forever be grateful.

For his insightful photography and patience I would like to thank Heini Schneebeli and my friend and colleague the artist Laila Shawa for introducing Heini and for her moral support throughout. I am obliged to Paula Rodrigues for her advice regarding photography and visuals and I am sincerely grateful to Abeer Qubbaj for her valuable input with the Arabic translation. For his precious advice on detailed aspects of this exhibition and his sincere support in the lead up to the show, I am deeply grateful to Nadhim Neilson. I am beholden to my best friend Jana

Hassan for listening to my endless stories on art, Iraqi art and more art, with keen interest, enthusiasm and never ending patience, despite my carrying on and on for over twenty years to date! My warmest appreciation to Nadge al-Ali, Mayassah al-Sader and Noor Hussein for their valued friendship and support, indeed the wondrous Iraqi women to whom this work is dedicated and without who this exhibition would not have been.

I would like to take this opportunity to express special gratitude to my pottery teacher Elaine al-Sheikhly who since 1983 (when I first joined her class) has been for me sheer inspiration, a fountain of knowledge and a guiding light. I would also like to pay tribute to the late George Farkas for being the wonderful teacher he was and Allegra Mostyn-Owen for sparking off my ceramic project on *Asma Allah al-Husna*.

No words will ever do justice for Ali Mousawi, my husband, mentor and most astute critique; for putting up with my never ending artistic needs, from the day we met, over 35 years ago and every day since! It is only with his utter patience, love and understanding I have been able to progress and achieve. And to my loving children Amir, Athier and Aya for their continued support and for making me the very proud mother I am.

Last but not least, to my beloved mother Fatima al-Khayatt for believing in me from the day I was born and for teaching me love, beauty, resilience and patience despite hardship and pain and to my dear father Ibrahim Faraj for whom this exhibition is in loving memory, my love and deepest appreciation. From my Baba I learnt the meaning of loyalty, commitment, respect, pride, modesty and profound faith. May he be blessed in ever lasting peace, knowing in my heart that he is watching over me with pride and joy *Insha Allah*. Because of them and the amazing people in my life, I am who I am and where I am today, *wa ma tawfeeqi illa billah*.



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أم عباس و أبو عباس
Um Abbass and Abu
Abbass
Earthstone
43x19cm
2003

• MAYSALOUN FARAJ: MESSENGER OF HOPE
SAJID RIZVI

This exhibition of latest works by Maysaloun Faraj coincides with a heady phase in international appreciation of art from or about the Middle East, most definably expressed by prices achieved in the auction rooms. Coincide though it does, the exhibition is not to be mistaken for an event simply riding the crest of an ongoing surge of enthusiasm of collectors, gallerists and myriad market forces at work in the Gulf region and the West. For Maysaloun Faraj precedes by well over a decade the nascence of an international contemporary art market focused on the region, and her work commands a following that transcends cultural and political boundaries.

Boats and Burdens: Kites and Shattered Dreams builds on the poignantly poetical narrative evidenced in the artist's earlier work, paintings as well as ceramics, exhibited in the British Museum exhibitions, *Word into Art*¹ and *Iraq's Past Speaks to the Present*² and elsewhere including her own London venue, Aya Gallery. An audience newly initiated into Faraj's oeuvre may be forgiven for pausing to wonder if the paintings and sculptures are creations of the one and the same artist. *Boats and Burdens: Kites and Shattered Dreams* thus is a welcome corrective for those who, although touched by her *History in Ruins*³ piece in *Word into Art*, or *Ancient Land* in *Iraq's Past Speaks to the Present* may yet be newcomers to the full measure of Faraj's canvases and three-dimensional art.

It is not unusual for an artist from the region permanently resident in the West to continue to draw



History in Ruins

Earthstone,
oxides and raffia
25x20(x3)cm
2006
Word into Art
2006 British Museum
2008 DIFC Dubai

Collection British
Museum

on the rich legacy of the distant native lands. What sets Maysaloun apart is her art's multi-dimensional accessibility. This is not to understate the work's aesthetic force and technical finesse which, as we know only too well, are also important and potent accessories to an artist's purpose but not always essential to contemporary art. In that sense the vocabulary Maysaloun Faraj employs becomes universal without losing its depth, subliminal content and, at one level, authentic character. After all, the work we see is a dialogue and the context is her native Iraq — eternal and contemporary, fragile and indestructible even in its daily toll of carnage and ruin.

One tendency in the West is to compartmentalise any artist daring to unfurl their native colours, but there are abundant examples of artists, especially noted Jewish artists such as Chagall and Kitaj⁴ doing precisely that and enjoying the fruits of interna



Cylinder Seals

Asma Allah al-Husna
Earthstone
3x1 (d)cm
2007 ongoing

tional acclaim. Maysaloun does not go ‘ethnic,’ with her vibrant colours, magical textures, and geometric and scriptural explorations. Instead, she persuasively invites the viewer to absorb and understand her way of interpreting experiences that sadly are painfully familiar. The colours and forms are a language that she knows will take her ideas into the mind of the beholder. And she is doing this while ensconced in London, the veritable centre of world art.

The great plethora of contemporary western art has yet to show any stirrings of an artistic discourse that even remotely draws on the tragic events in Iraq or Afghanistan — two conflicts with far-reaching consequences for the West, but an Iraqi artist in the very same milieu is able to deliver a message of great moral power, one that offers an aesthetically charged alternative to political haranguing or helpless lament. It is a message of hope that seeps through images of anger, despair and frustration. Through the darkest of her painterly narratives, Maysaloun Faraj manages to ignite that precious spark, crimson, gem-like hearts, in reinterpretations of timeless forms and stories. It is no mean achievement⁵.

On another level, *Boats and Burdens: Kites and Shattered Dreams* is a culmination of a phase of tireless devotion to promotion of Iraqi art — other artists’ art. For some time now Maysaloun has been sacrificing her creative time on bringing to attention the work of other artists. It is to be hoped that this individual exhibition will be followed by another solo show of her work in a not too distant future.

London November 2008

Sajid Rizvi

Editor of Eastern Art Report, The Middle East in Europe and Saffron Books.

[1] *Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East*, curated by Venetia Porter, featured at the British Museum in 2006 and traveled to Dubai in 2008.

[2] *Iraq’s Past Speaks to the Present*, curated by Venetia Porter to coincide with *Babylon, Myth and Reality* at the British Museum in 2008.

[3] Porter, in a commentary on *History in Ruins*, a ceramic work shaped like a folding book, the pieces tied with raffia, writes, ‘On both sides is text in horizontal rows hinting at some an-

cient writing tradition: on a cylinder seal or a Mesopotamian clay tablet. The words themselves are poignant: on one side prayers and the word *Limadha* ‘Why?’ repeated. On the other, verses by the Iraqi poet and political activist Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri (d1997) from *Ya Dijlat al-Khayr* (O Blessed Tigris), which he wrote in exile in 1962, and which include words which resonate powerfully today: ‘O blessed Tigris what inflames your heart inflames me and what grieves you makes me grieve; O wanderer, play with a gentle touch... that you may soothe a volcano seething with rage and pacify a heart burning with pain.’

[4] See, for example, Chagall to Kitaj, by Avram Kampf, Barbican Art Gallery, 1991.

[5] In personal communications and an interview, Maysaloun Faraj detailed the pain and suffering of re-invoking memories of Baghdad while creating works for the current exhibition.



Letter from
a Burning City
Earthstone,
glaze and gold
27x28cm
2004

• BEACONS OF HOPE AND RESILIENCE: DATE PALMS AND DREAMS
ULRIKE AL-KHAMIS

It started with a chance encounter, a chance encounter with an exhibition entitled *Once Upon a Culture* displayed at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London during the dark winter of 1994. Intrigued by the richly and passionately rendered Iraqi marshland scenes, I enquired about the artist, as - being married to an Iraqi - everything from that country immediately draws my attention. Shortly afterwards I was on the telephone to that very artist - Maysaloun Faraj. Finding her accessible, welcoming, warm and enthusiastic, the conversation flowed easily and by the time I put the receiver down, a partnership (and friendship) was in the making. A few months later, Maysaloun invited me to join the *Strokes of Genius*¹

project which she had just begun and which we have been collaborating on together ever since.

The art of Maysaloun Faraj is a direct and - to those who know her well - carefully codified visualization of her Self and all that she stands for. At first sight, her paintings - like the artist herself, exude an attractive accessibility; they attract by merit of their warm, passionate colours, their generous and harmonious compositions. Beyond that however, lie clues to a more complex reality - visual pointers that hint at the challenges posed not only by her personal experiences but by the shattered realities of her people and the country she loves above all else. *The Weeping Palms: Stolen Childhood* series, which she initiated in



أم سعدي
Um Saadi
*Weeping Palms
Stolen Childhoods
detail*
Watercolor &
pastel on paper
17x14cm
2004

response to the war on Iraq, illustrates this approach most eloquently. Drawing on the poet Ghassan Matar's anthology *Buka Fawqa Dem al-Nakheel* (Weeping over the Blood of Palms) as a direct inspirational catalyst, Maysaloun set about visualizing both, the suffering and the passion, courage and endurance of a battered Iraqi nation.

Throughout, however, the overriding tone remains one of hope and perseverance, driven by both, profound personal faith and a belief in humanity's determination to carry on regardless. These sentiments she has subsequently continued to express fervently in her *Boats and Burdens: Kites and Shattered Dreams*.

When paintings do not suffice in venting her emotions, Maysaloun turns to ceramics, clay being the medium which gives her the most comprehensive opportunity to explore her sense of Self and the way in which it aches to react to the complex realities around her. A physically demanding activity, the transformation of raw clay into an enduring ceramic form not only provides an opportunity to physically unleash despair and frustration at the injustice, uncertainty and devastation that mars an Iraqi's life today, but offers a conduit for the hopeful expression

of eventual harmony and closure. Faraj's ceramic sculptures encapsulate both, the gnawing pain and despair at witnessing her peoples' suffering and the determination to use her art to exorcise those troubled emotions, to speak out, to make a difference and to express her solidarity with Iraq and the Iraqi people.

Above all however, the art of Maysaloun Faraj - her paintings and ceramics alike - emanates a profound belief in the resilience of the human spirit and the conviction that ultimately there is hope that adversity can be overcome and life will prevail.

Sharjah May 2008

Ulrike al-Khamis

Islamic and Middle Eastern Arts Collections Advisor for Sharjah Museums Department and co-director of the newly opened Sharjah Museum for Islamic Civilization; also Senior Advisor to INCIA.

[1] Founded by Maysaloun Faraj in 1995, the *Strokes of Genius* project included an exhibition tour (UK/USA 2000-3), website www.incia.co.uk and the book *Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art* (Saqi Books 2001) of which she is editor.



أم عامر

Um Amer
Weeping Palms
Stolen Childhoods
Watercolor on paper
17x29cm
2004

• BOATS, BURDENS AND FAITH

WIJDAN FAWAZ AL-HASHEMI



Huwa Allah Al-Melik
'He is God The King'
Asma Allah al-Husna
detail
Earthstone
9x14cm
2007

Maysaloun Faraj is full of life with that eternally young smile in her eyes. Her early ceramics reflect the *jois de vivre* that she emanates: smooth surfaces, lines that seem to go on forever, fragments of Arabic letters and words. However, time brings pain into Faraj's life. Her people who for decades have been suffering continue to suffer even more. A woman of two worlds, East and West, she is also a citizen of her two worlds. Yet there is no dichotomy in her life. In both her ceramics and paintings she takes refuge from the destruction, desolation and ravages that she feels her people and country are experiencing as well as from her own pain. Her clay surfaces lose their smoothness and the incisions in the ones that remain smooth and glazed, betray the sharp knife wounds that inflict her medium. At times gold covers parts of her work, signifying a rich heritage and optimism. However, when we seldom get a surface that is all white it is also rough yet promising.

Faraj's latest ceramic project, which forms part of this exhibition, is largely based on *Asma Allah*

*al-Husna*¹ and combines influences from the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Islam. With this she constructs 99 *cylinder seals*² each of which is inscribed with one of the names of Allah. These she further employs in the making of more complex constructions that eventually incorporate all the 99 Names. Using this ancient technique she creates modern ceramics informed not only by her faith, but also evoking a deep sense of history inspired by that of the ancient and rich civilizations of her native Iraq. In her latest ceramic work entitled *Boats and Burdens* (a selection of which has recently been acquired for the collections of the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts) Faraj incorporates the use of these cylinder seals, unleashing her response 'in clay' to the war on Iraq.

The colors that Faraj denies her ceramics she lavishes on her paintings with an optimism that covers her canvases as if to compensate for the gravity and seriousness of her three dimensional works. Like the hopefulness and youth that emanate from

Boats for Peace
Earthstone
49x46x10cm
2007



her eyes, smile and gait, her art depicts anticipation and a deep faith in a universal goodness for the present that would lead to a better future. A highly skilled potter and sensitive painter, Faraj is an Arab artist whose culture is proud to have her build its future.

Rome July 2008

HRH Princess Dr Wijdan al-Hashemi

Artist, Islamic art historian, curator and diplomat, also author of *Modern Islamic Art: Development & Continuity* (1997), *What is Islamic Art* (1998) and *The Arab Contribution to Islamic Art* (1999). Al-Hashemi was the curator

of *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World*, Barbican Centre, London (1989), is the President and founder of the Royal Society of Fine Arts (1979) and the National Gallery of Fine Arts (1980) Amman, Jordan and is currently the Jordanian Ambassador to Italy.

[1] The 99 Names of God as referred to in the holy Quran beginning with *Al-Rahman, Al-Rahim* 'The Merciful, The Compassionate'.

[2] Invented in Mesopotamia 5000 years BC; a mirror image is engraved into a stone or clay cylinder then rolled on clay surfaces to achieve relief motifs.

• **GEOMETRIES OF COMPASSION AND BEING**
RASHAD SELIM

In this latest series of paintings by Maysaloun Faraj, at least seven unique geometries: Palm, Child, Kite, Heart, Solar/Lunar (circular & spherical geometry), Tears and Blood Drops (kinetic/gravitational geometry) trace with their lines, planes, volumes and movement in a healing aesthetic that counters the terrors and disorientation of invasion, war and occupation. Easily recognizable, these symbols she deploys freely. Calligraphy, the geometry of the spirit, is present throughout as an essential layer upon which Maysaloun (architect by training) constructs the vision presented in these paintings. But, it is the geometry newly derived, emanating from a Mesopotamian and Universal understanding of what these symbols mean that is the achievement commanding attention here. Despite the horrific situation of Iraqi women, five years into occupation, these paintings are not sad or defeatist. These paintings are also about power, that of woman and Iraqi women in specific. They are therefore also about life and living, beauty and fertility, faith, love and more not less in the face of loss.

Clearly these are emotionally charged and symbolic paintings that have paradoxically both raw and refined qualities. Impassioned with a near naïve sensibility, they are made brave by the cynicism of our age steeped as it is in the fashion of the self. Amongst the clearly defined symbols in these art works is the heart; possibly the best known over-used and commercialized of symbols; all too easily considered romantic, sentimental, trivialized and exploited. This is bravery on the part of an artist as sophisticated and experienced as Maysaloun to handle so explicitly. Only a few instances of fine art success in representing this symbol stand out e.g. the brilliant American printmaker and happening artist, Jim Dine¹ (Vietnam era) appropriated the heart with a complex and tortured signature treatment. Maysaloun embraces the nature of the symbol and composes from its body her geometry of compassion with significant presence and grace, given the brutality of the Iraq situation. Modern warfare's vicious trigonometry and destructive disorder (creative disorder does exist especially in art) is confronted and the reality drowning Iraq in grief, engaged with. The missiles depicted are a (dis-



صباحه

Sabha
Kites and Shattered Dreams
Oil on canvas
150x60 cm
2008

counted) geometry whose shock waves expropriate the gravity of tears and blood. Missiles that



منيرة . Munira Kites and Shattered Dreams . Oil on canvas 45x55cm 2008

are supposedly smart and certainly expensive have a grotesque and tangible geometry of chaos, destruction and death. Their shock waves expropriate the ageless gravity of tears and blood from which Maysaloun constructs a resisting geometry of compassion. The missiles are contained; locked in shapes a child may draw. The geometries of violating projectiles in these paintings are the black banners of mourning they leave behind, defining lines of separation that cut the picture plane.

There is depth and complexity to each work that gives more at every viewing. A very strong, big heart is needed to bear the pain and suffering and survive war to bear again in joy the promise of life. These paintings do not forget the enchanted hard won blessings of the land beyond its politics that gives them birth, however ugly and distorted the reality today. The beauty of a country we once knew and still cherish comes through and in this is a reaffirmation of our promise in sense and memory an awakening from evil induced stupor. By way of her disciplined use of the symbol, these images are saved from falling hostage to the revulsions of war and conflict. There are no screaming faces or huddled forms. The setting is a garden; perhaps an urban orchard or rural *bustan*; it does not matter, for the spaces defined are quintessentially Iraqi, violated without differentiation or mercy. And again her art rescues from despair and presents us with a bequest of confidence that is urgent and firm. I see reflections and mirroring but no shadows and feel that these gardens, despite the terror have taken into themselves the vital colours drained out by Iraq's mourning in trust of and for better times.

What more can we ask of painting then that the name also be its becoming; each painting in the series is named after an Iraqi woman that Maysaloun brings together into a vast heart paying homage; healing in a shared humanity that claims the natural right of each, individually to a future. I would like to refer here to a young Iraqi woman, Mayassah al-Sader² who upon seeing the painting titled *Munira* said, "The strings that tie the kite to a child's hand, tie the spectator's heart to the painting as a whole and to the subject in particular. They are like the strings of an

Oud (Arabian Lute) playing a melody or lullaby from a distant past; each viewer will recollect their child-home melody. The painting expresses analogies by dividing the surface with a bold black line into unequal parts. This seems to signify a border separating binary milieus; night and day, dreams and reality, childhood and adulthood. Despite the lines boldness the two milieus overlap in the way old memories overlap current ones." Mayassa eloquently describes the effect of what I have termed the *Geometry of Compassion*. Of the 99 Names of Allah³ *Compassion* is the most referred to in Islam. It is present in every *Bismillah* and in these works, I believe, it finds a visual expression offering service at time of great need. Of course, this is 'only art' and paintings 'only objects'. But these have the virtuosity and sensitivity of talent reaching an inspirational peak. Each line, plane, tone and hue has significant weight and value imparting the paintings with the nuances of Maysaloun's colours that, held by her creative geometry brings forth to view a rich and subtle narrative fed by many tributaries, each named with faith in continuity.

London November 2008

Rashad Selim (Salim)

Independent Iraqi/German artist, cultural activist, researcher and writer working from London, also advisor to iNCiA.

[1] Born 1935, USA; closely associated with Pop art; wrote and illustrated books of poetry. Retrospectives of his work held at the Whitney Museum of American Art (1970) and the Museum of Modern Art, (1978) New York. Dine lives in New York and Vermont.

[2] Architect & Landscape Historian with an MA in Architectural History from the Department of Architecture, University of Texas, Austin USA.

[3] *Asma Allah al-Husna* are the 99 Names of God as referred to in the holy Quran.



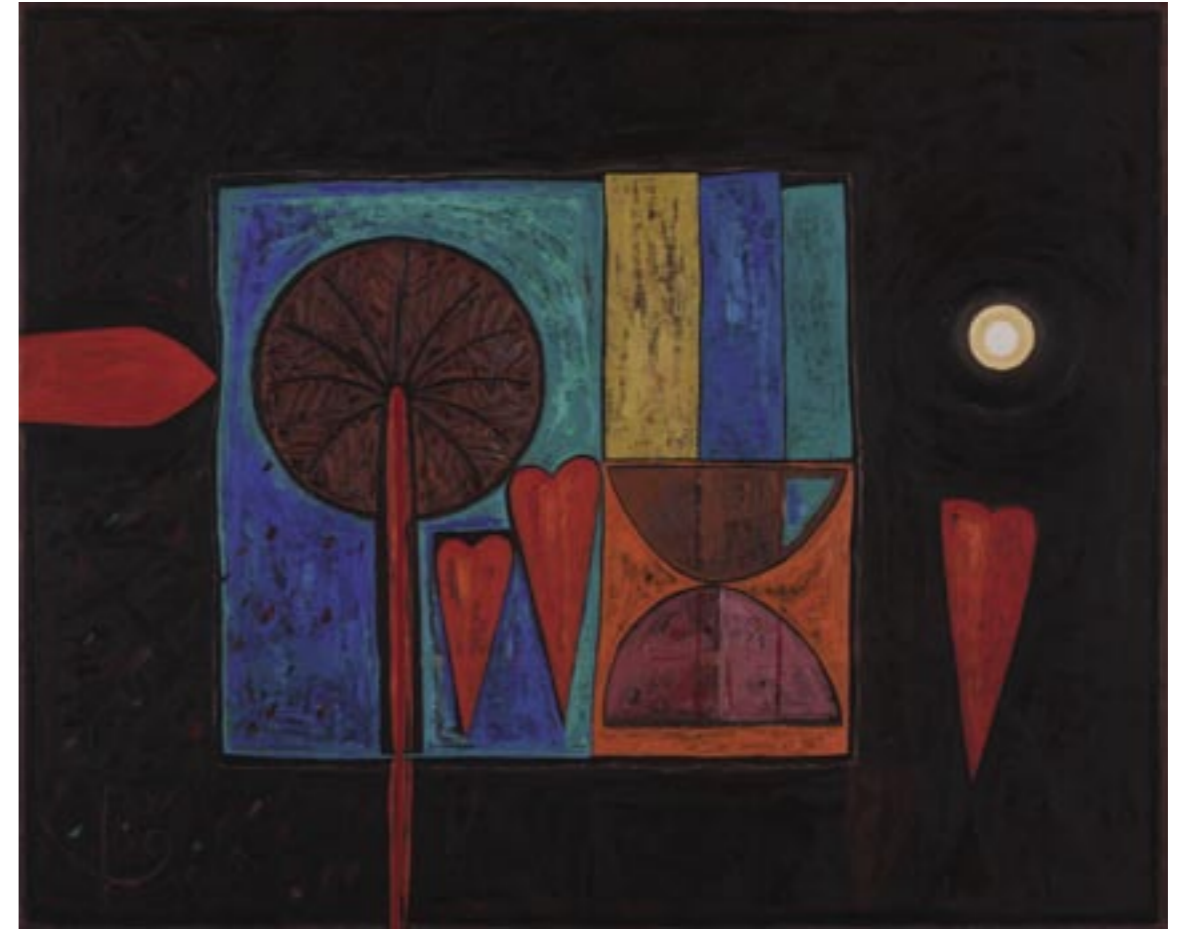
BOATS AND BURDENS
KITES AND SHATTERED DREAMS

2009

*Tomorrow... my heart will heal, and sing the rhythms
of Dijla & Furat, date palms and dreams.*



Tomorrow... my Heart will Heal . Earthstone, velvet and acrylic 30x19x10cm 2008



أميرة . Ameera *Kites and Shattered Dreams* . Oil on canvas 90x110cm 2008



Golden Boat . *Boats and Burdens* . Earthstone, glaze and gold 27x35cm 2008



أحلام . *Ahlam Kites and Shattered Dreams* . Oil on canvas 60x70cm 2008



Embrace: Al-Raz'zaq 'The Ever Providing' Asma Allah al-Husna . Earthstone and velvet 55x18cm 2008



عشتار . Ishtar Kites and Shattered Dreams . Oil on canvas 80x90cm 2008



بدریه . *Bedriya Kites and Shattered Dreams* . Oil on canvas 130x110cm 2008



نیران . *Neeran Kites and Shattered Dreams* . Oil on canvas 130x110cm 2008



Golden Bird . *Boats and Burdens* . Earthstone, glaze and gold 24x20cm 2008



سرآب . *Sarab Kites and Shattered Dreams* . Oil on canvas 90x110cm 2008



كريمة . Kerima Kites and Shattered Dreams . Oil on canvas 50x40cm 2008



خالدیه . Khalida Kites and Shattered Dreams . Oil on canvas 50x40cm 2008



Embrace: Al-Samee' 'The All Hearing' Asma Allah al-Husna . Earthstone and velvet 48x19cm 2008



طاهره . Tahira *Kites and Shattered Dreams* . Oil on canvas 60x70cm 2008



فاطمة . Fatima Kites and Shattered Dreams . Oil on canvas 45x35cm 2008

زينب . Zainab Kites and Shattered Dreams . Oil on canvas 45x35cm 2008





هالة

Hala

Kites and Shattered Dreams

Oil on canvas

80x100cm

2008



Al-Mussa'wir 'The Shaper of Beauty' Asma Allah al-Husna . Earthstone 69x21x9cm 2008



مریم . Maryam Kites and Shattered Dreams . Oil on canvas 60x70cm 2008



Ainaki Ghabeta Nakheel | 'Your Eyes are two Palm Forests' . Earthstone, glaze and gold 42x32x7cm 2008



نجمة . Nejma *Kites and Shattered Dreams* . Oil on canvas 70x90cm 2008



Munajat III . Earthstone, glaze and gold 14x40(d)cm 2008



نور . Nour Kites and Shattered Dreams . Oil on canvas 50x40cm 2008



Atfal Baghdad Yes'eloun 'The Children of Baghdad are Asking' . Earthstone, glaze and gold 9x45(d)cm 2008



Salamun Aleika 'Peace be Upon You' . Earthstone, glaze and gold 9x40(d)cm 2008



Al-Fat'tah 'The Opener' Asma Allah al-Husna . Earthstone, glaze, oxides and gold 5x27(d)cm 2007

Nothing is more powerful than beauty in a wicked world.

Amos Lee



إفتخار

Iftikhar
Kites and Shattered Dreams
Oil on canvas,
60x70cm
2008



فضيله

Fadheela
Kites and Shattered Dreams
Oil on canvas
60x70cm
2008



نجوى

Najwa
Kites and Shattered Dreams
Oil on canvas
50x60cm
2008



Munajat I
Earthstone, glaze and gold
11x46(d)cm
2008



Munajat II
Earthstone, glaze and gold
14x39(d)cm
2008



Al-Melik Al-Qud'dous
'The King, The Holy'
Asma Allah al-Husna
Earthstone, glaze and gold
12x49(d)cm
2008



Ainaki Ghabeta Nekheel II
Boats and Burdens
Earthstone, amber and gold
29x40x10cm
2008



Letters from Dijla and Furat
Earthstone, glaze and gold
32x22cm
2004



Firdaws
Kites and Shattered Dreams
Oil on canvas
45x35cm
2008



Allah Nour al-Samawat wal-Ardh
'God is the Light of the Skies and Earth'
Earthstone, glaze and gold
32x20x10cm
2008



أم علي
Um Ali
Weeping Palms Stolen Childhoods
Watercolor on paper
17x14cm
2004



أم روسه
Arroussa 'Bride'
Weeping Palms Stolen Childhoods
Watercolor on paper
17x14cm
2004



أم فارس
Um Faris
Weeping Palms Stolen Childhoods
Watercolor on paper
17x14cm
2004



Pots for Peace I
Earthstone, glaze and gold
25x25(d)cm
2008



Al-Ba'ith
'The Resurrector'
Asma Allah al-Husna
Earthstone
43x33x9cm
2008



Ain al-Hassoud
'Eye of Envy'
Earthstone, glaze and gold
30x26cm
2000

Gates of Peace : Earthstone, rough glaze and oxide 35x25x15cm 2004



Having left Iraq in 1982, a land in which I am deeply rooted and a people whom I dearly love, it was humanity and the human condition that interested and concerned me most. As an Iraqi, an Arab and a Moslem woman with an East/West upbringing, it is conflict, war, injustice, human rights, human wrongs and beauty lost that informs much of my work today.

Relationships are at the core and a narrative that is often explored within. The relationships we have with one another as human beings: man & fellow man, man & woman, parent & child, us & the 'other'. Relationships we have with nature and the environment; mother earth, her rivers (*Dijla* and *Furat* - Tigris and Euphrates), trees (the Iraqi date palm), air (contaminated with depleted uranium) and all. Relationships we have with the past (history), the present and the future. Relationships with our universe; the sun, moon, stars and skies. Relationships we have with 'ourselves'; 'our' own kind 'our' language 'our' culture 'our' heritage 'our' faith and 'our' people. And relationships we have with the invisible; the ultimate creative force. Spirituality and faith have been for me a pillar of strength particularly in recent years where inconceivable atrocities are committed in the name of freedom and democracy and in the name of religion. It is the breaking down of these relationships that troubles me most as I find this a root cause for immense chaos and suffering, loss of innocence and beauty that could have been. I often work in pairs (painting and ceramics); *Al-Wihda Lilah* (oneness is for God); we were created in 'twos' to comfort and support, not to kill and devastate.

Given the state of our world, this so called 'new world order', in between intensive bouts of art making I often find myself questioning whether art really matters? Is it necessary? Does anyone care? Where does it stand in the midst of all the violence, destruction and despair? Again and again I find the answers deep within and believe that if there is any chance for hope... if there is any chance for humanity, it will be on the hands of artists.

George Bernard Shaw once wrote "You use a glass mirror to see your face, you use works of art to see your soul". So despite that our women widow, our children suffer, our date-palms weep and wither, our art



continues, for as long as there is soul, there will always be inspiration... there will always be heart.

I look upon my art as a journey with a narrative that continues to evolve. Just as it did when I was a little girl, art continues to help me face the challenges and demands of this brief passage we call life. Through it I try to make sense of my being, my place in the world and hope that by doing so, I am able to make a difference, no matter how small. I believe it is raindrops that cause rivers to flow... I would be happy to be a raindrop... my existence would be justified. And while I desperately try to capture that beauty and innocence lost... my aching heart silently beats mournful Iraqi *Maw'wals*.

Maysaloun, London 2008

إلهام وعطاء وقلب نابض. أنظر إلى فني كسرد مرئي يتطور مع الزمن. وكما ساعدني في التغلب على محن في حياتي الماضية فان الفن لا يزال يعينني في مواجهة التحديات التي نمر بها اليوم. من خلال الفن أحاول فهم وجودي ومكاني في هذا العالم، آملة بذلك أن أحقق ولو شيئا بسيطا من التغيير للأفضل والأجمل. إن قطرات المطر هي التي تسبب تدفق الأنهار. سأكون سعيدة وراضية لو كنت قطرة من هذا المطر، فبذلك يكون فني ووجودي مبررا. إنني وخلال بحثي عن الجمال في زمن البراءة المسروقة هذا... يظل قلبي المهمووم يدق بصمت موالا عراقيا حزين.

ميسلون، لندن ٢٠٠٨



Al-Mutekeb'bir
'The Tremendous'
Asma Allah al-Husna
Earthstone and gold
18x25(d)cm
2007

منذ مغادرتي العراق عام ١٩٨٢، أرض تمتد عميقا فيها جذوري وأناش أكن لهم كل المودة والاحترام، كانت الانسانية والوضع الانساني هو ما يشغل اهتمامي ويعينني. وبكوني امرأة عراقية، عربية مسلمة، ترعرعت في بيئة شرقية وغربية، كان الصراع، الحرب، الظلم، حقوق الانسان، جور الانسان... والجمال المفقود هي المفردات التي روت وانضجت شخصيتي الفنية.

وكانت العلاقات بألوانها هي في صميم ما احاول إستكشافه والتعبير عنه. منها الاجتماعية كعلاقة الانسان بأخيه الانسان، الرجل والمرأة، الأم والطفل، نحن والآخر. ومنها علاقتنا مع الطبيعة كالأرض، الأنهار (دجلة والفرات)، الأشجار (النخلة العراقية)، الهواء والبيئة (التلوث بما فيها اليورانيوم المنضب) وكذلك علاقتنا مع الزمن (الماضي، الحاضر والمستقبل). أواصرنا بلغتنا، ثقافتنا، تراثنا، ديننا، أنفسنا وعلاقتنا مع اللامرئي، ذروة القوى الخلاقية. وجدت في الايمان مصدر قوة هائلة وسندا لا يضاهي لا سيما في السنوات الاخيرة التي ارتكبت فيها أبشع الجرائم والفظائع بأسم الحرية والديمقراطية وبأسم الدين.

ما يقلقني حقا هو تفكك وانهايار هذه العلاقات الذي أرى فيه سبب الفوضى والمعاناة وفقدان البراءة والجمال وما كان ممكنا أن يكون. في عملي الفني غالبا ما اعمل بشكل زوجي أي بعملين متوازيين في آن واحد سواء في اللوحة أو السيراميك. قد يكون السبب في ذلك هو إعتقادي بان التكامل الزوجي والقيم المثالية التي تربط بعضنا الاخر هو أمر أساسي ومهم، كما أننا خلقنا كأزواج نكمل ونسند بعضنا الاخر وليس لنندمر ونقتل "الوحدة لله".

وبالنظر الى حال العالم اليوم ضمن إطار ما يطلق عليه بالنظام العالمي الجديد، أجد نفسي، وخلال نوبات مكثفة من العمل الفني، أتساءل: هل الفن حقا مهم؟ هل هو ضروري؟ هل يهم أحدا؟ اين يقف أزاء كل هذا الدمار والعنف واليأس؟ مرة بعد اخرى أجد الجواب عميقا في نفسي وأؤمن أنه لو كان هناك أمل أو سبيل للانسانية فسيكون على أيدي فنانيها.

كتب جورج برنارد شو "إنك تستخدم المرآة للنظر الى وجهك، وتستخدم الفن لرؤية نفسك". فالبرغم من أن نساءنا وأطفالنا يتعذبون ونخيلنا حزين باكي، يبقى الفن والابداع العراقي متواصل ومستمر. وما دام هناك حياة حرة وخفاقة فهناك

• BIOGRAPHY

Of Iraqi parentage, Maysaloun Faraj was born in Hollywood, California, USA 1955; achieved a BSc Architecture from the College of Architectural Engineering, Baghdad University 1978 and pursued a career in the arts, painting and ceramics, thereafter. Since 1984 Faraj has contributed to noteworthy group exhibitions at local and international level, won numerous awards and held fifteen one-woman shows to date. Her artwork is in private collections world wide as well as important public collections including the British Museum (London, UK); National Museum for Women in the Arts (Washington, USA); Rotterdam Werldmuseum (Netherlands); National Gallery of Fine Arts (Amman, Jordan) and important others.

In 1995 Faraj founded *Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art*; a groundbreaking three-part project encompassing a traveling exhibition (UK/USA 2000-3), the iNCiA website (International Network for Contemporary Iraqi Artists www.incia.co.uk) and the book *Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art* (Saqi Books 2001) of which she is editor. In 2002 she co-founded Ayagallery in London with her husband the architect Ali Mousawi where she continues to curate and host noteworthy exhibitions making it London's premier venue dedicated to promoting quality art predominantly from Iraq but also from the Arab and Islamic world at large. In 2008 she was invited to serve as a judge to present the first Arab Art and Culture Award in the UK. Maysaloun Faraj has been living and working in London since 1982.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 - *Iraq's Past Speaks to the Present*, British Museum, London
- *Word into Art*, DIFC, Dubai, UAE
- 2006 - *Word into Art*, the British Museum, London
- *Words . Fragmented . Unbroken*, ayagallery, London
- *Occupied Space: Art for Palestine*, 27 Cork Street, London
- 2004 - *Seed, Body & Soul: Artists Against Depleted Uranium*, London
- *Transitions*, ayagallery, London
- 2003 - *Cities of Iraq: Samarra to Baghdad* (Islamic Culture in Focus), British Museum, London
- *Symbols of Harmony: Contemporary Art from the Islamic World*, Kent County Council, Maidstone, Kent, UK
- *Expressions of Hope: Iraqi Art*, ayagallery, London
- *Diversity in Harmony*, Centre for Arab American Studies, University of Michigan, Dearborn, USA
- *Before . After . Now: Visions of Iraq*, Deluxe Gallery, London
- 2002 - *Islamic World Painting Biennial*, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Iran
- *Calligraphy*, Beit al-Quran, Manama, Bahrain
- *Masterstrokes*, October Gallery, London, UK
- 2001 - *Contemporary Arab Art*, Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam, Netherlands
- 2000 - 3 - *Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art*, UK & USA tour: Brunei Gallery, London; Exeter University, Exeter; Hotbath Galleries, Bath; Grinnell College, Iowa; DePaul University, Chicago *Iraqi Art Today, Looking Out: Looking In*
- 2000 - *Arab Cultures: Young Worlds*, British Museum, London
- 1999 - *Artists for Human Rights*, Durban, South Africa
- *Dialogue of the Present*, England tour: London; Brighton; Brunell
- 1998 - *20th Anniversary: Egee Art*, Soni Gallery, London
- 1997 - *Homage to Jewad Selim*, Kufa Gallery, London
- *Art in Hammersmith*, Riverside Studios, London

- *Contemporary Women's Art*, Museum of Mankind, London
- *Breaking Down the Boundaries*, Pits Hanger Gallery, London
- 1996 - *Eastern & Icelandic Art: William Morris Centenary*, Wimbledon Library, London
- *Visions of East & West*, Sayde Interiors, London
- *Contemporary Arab Art*, Arab-British Chamber of Commerce, London
- 1995 - *Arabian Eyes*, Bait al-Sirkal, Ministry of Culture & Information, Sharja
- 1994 - *Forces of Change*, International Council for Women in the Arts and the National Museum for Women in the Arts, USA Tour: Washington; Chicago; California
- *Culture & Continuity*, Midlands Art Centre, Birmingham
- 1993 - *Iraqi Art Festival*, Gallery 4, London
- *Roots*, Imperial College, London
- 1992 - *Out of Iraq*, Camden Lock Market, London
- *Arab Womens' Art Festival*, Kufa Gallery, London
- *Summer Art Show*, Howard Gallery, London
- *Iraqi Womens' Art*, Kufa Gallery, London
- *Portobello Festival*, Argile Gallery, London
- *Contemporary Collections*, Artizana Gallery, Manchester
- 1988 - 91 - *Argile Gallery Group Shows*, London
- 1988 - *Baghdad International Biennial*, Saddam Art Centre, Baghdad
- *Autumn Exhibition*, Al-Orfeli Gallery, Baghdad
- *International Women's Week*, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- *Arab Women Artists*, Kufa Gallery, London
- *Arab Art & Calligraphy*, Egee Art Consultancy
- *126th Annual Society of Women Artists*, Westminster Central Hall, London
- 1986 - *Contemporary Arab Art*, Mall Galleries, Arab States League, London

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 - *Boats and Burdens: Kites and Shattered Dreams*, ayagallery, London
- 1995 - *Once Upon a Culture*, School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS), London
- 1994 - *Oriental Delight*, Trocodero Centre, London
- 1992 - *Sisters in Harmony*, River Gardens, London
- 1990 - *Ya Rab*, Rochan Gallery, London
- *Faith*, Argile Gallery, London
- 1989 - *Home Sweet Home*, Artists Studio, Baghdad
- 1987 - *Nostalgia*, Artists Studio, London
- 1985 - *Vibrations from my Past*, Espace 2000, Paris

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- British Museum, London, UK
- National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington, USA
- Rotterdam Werldmuseum, The Netherlands

- National Museum, Amman, Jordan
- United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland
- Centre for Arab American Studies, Michigan-Dearborn, USA
- Jeddah International Airport, Saudi Arabia
- The House of Commons, London, UK

PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

HRH Prince of Wales, the late Sir Wilfred Thesiger and private collections throughout the UK, Middle East, Europe and the USA.

PRESS & MEDIA

Extensive coverage through international news networks including Channel 4, BBC World, CNN, PBS, BBC World Service, Al-Jazeera English, Bloomberg, Rotterdam TV and prominent Arab News Networks including the MBC, Dubai and Sharja Channels as well as main Arab press & media including Al-Sharq al-Awsat, Al-Hayat, Al-Majjaleh, Al-Distour, Al-Bayan, Al-Hawadith, Alif Ba', Al-Arab, Al-Ahram, Al-Wasat, Al-Afaq Arabia, Al-Say'yad, Al-Khaleej, Gulf News, Baghdad Observer, Sayidat, Al-Shorouk and important others.

FARAJ IN PUBLICATIONS

- King, Geoffrey; *London Encounters with the Modern Middle East*, The Middle East in London, February 2009
- Porter, Venetia; *Iraq's Past Speaks to the Present* (10 Nov 08 – 15 Mar 2009), The British Museum 2008
- Smith, Niki Seth; *Art into Reality*, The London Magazine, London June/July 2008
- Porter, Venetia; *Word into Art*, The British Museum Press 2008
- Rizvi, Sajid; *Eastern Art Report*, No. 53 2007
- Porter, Venetia; *Word into Art*, The British Museum Press 2006
- *The Middle East in London*, First Issue, London 2004
- SOAS Conference; *The Middle East in London*, Stacey International 2002
- Artists for Human Rights Trust; *Human Rights Human Wrongs*, International Print Portfolio: Universal Declaration of Human Rights Commission, Durban, South Africa 1999
- Cartilidge, Sarah; *Renowned Moslem Artist*, Hello! Issue No 29, London 1994
- Cottell, Fran; *William Morris Centenary*, London Borough of Merton 1996
- Crafts Potters Association; *Maysaloun Faraj*, CPA News, Issue No 31, London 1993
- Visiting Arts; Cultural Arts Programme; *Mutualities: Britain and Islam*, London 2000
- Edwards, Camilla; *Strokes of Genius, Visiting Arts*, Issue No 37, London 1998
- Egee, Dale; *Contemporary Arab Art*, Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, the Netherlands 2002
- Faraj, Maysaloun (Editor); *Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art*, Saqi Books, London 2001
- Humoud, Lulwa al; *Master Strokes*, October Gallery, London 2002
- ILEA, *The Art of Adult Education*, Inner London Education for Adults, London 1990
- Lloyd, Fran; *Dialogue of the Present*, Womens Art Library, London 1999
- Lloyd, Fran; *Displacement & Difference*, Eastern Art Group, London 2002
- Ministry of Culture & Information; *Arabian Eyes*, Sharja, UAE 1994
- Nashashibi, Selwa Mikdadi; *Forces of Change*, ICWA & NMWA, Washington 1994
- Parmelee, Terry; *Forces of Change: Arab Art in the USA*, Washington Review, Issue No 6, USA 1994
- Rinaldi, Therese; Maysaloun Faraj, *Arts & the Islamic World*, Issue No.29, London 1996

Chalja Dem'at Um Abbass 'Precious Um Abbass's Tear'. Boats and Burdens detail. Earthstone and gold. 47x23x20cm. 2006





Baghdad
Boats and Burdens
Earthstone & black velvet
35x45x9cm
2008



MAYSALOUN FARAJ | BOATS AND BURDENS: KITES AND SHATTERED DREAMS | 2009

