

Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository

8-25-2020 1:00 PM

The Hell of a Boiling Red

George Kubresli, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Mahon, Patrick, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in
Visual Arts

© George Kubresli 2020

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd>



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kubresli, George, "The Hell of a Boiling Red" (2020). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 7284.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/7284>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact wlsadmin@uwo.ca.

Abstract

As a refugee from the ongoing Syrian war, my subject is the tragedy of that war. This thesis addresses the war, and specifically its impact on the Syrian people. Alongside an analysis of my paintings and artistic method, the calamity that Syrians experience is discussed, while I also attempt to explore the depths within the human soul to express enormous traumas that are suffered in war encounters. My analysis and its manifestations is two sided: the role of facial expressions reflecting the inner turmoil of the individual, and the role of nature in intensifying war's impact. The thesis is divided into three linked sections: the Extended Artist's Statement, which reviews my background, experience, philosophy of painting and a general analysis of my painting style, including regarding artists of interest to me. The Studio Practice Documentation, the second section, discusses the meaning of my paintings and the four series that make up my thesis, and includes representative figures of my artwork. Finally, the Constructed Interview, about the Syrian Artist, Marwan Kassab-Bachi, comprises the third section, the Writing Project.

Keywords: Art; Syria; War; Tragedy; Journey; Human; Portraiture; Faces; Nature; Thinkers; Philosophy; Watercolour; Papers.

Lay Summary

I have attempted to be very clear throughout this thesis that the war in Syria has defined my view of the world, my role in it, and who I am as an artist. This thesis chronicles my journey as a man, a survivor of the Syrian war, and as an artist. The extended artist statement begins with the war in Syria and my departure from my homeland. The experiences of my family finding our way to Canada is described, as is the impact on my work. War, it's toll on everyone and the role that *hope* plays is presented. Faces as they represent the distortions that tragedy creates are analyzed in this section. War and the role that nature plays in it is also discussed. War's effect on the human psyche and body is further discussed. Finally, war's impact on art is investigated. In the studio practice documentatio includes an explanation and detailed process of my various series: "Aching Heads", "War Portraits Rooted in Nature", "The Thinkers", "The Roads of Death". The third and final part is the research interview regarding the works of Marwan Kassab-Bachi, executed through questions and answers.

Acknowledgements

Many individuals have helped me throughout my journey to this point, both from within the university and from outside. My heartfelt thanks go to the professors and staff who have helped me: Patrick Mahon, Christine Sprengler, John Hatch, Kim Moodie, David Merritt, Sky Glabush, Kelly Wood, Christophe Migone, Kelly Jazvac, Paula Dias, Geordie Shepherd, Kim Neodurf, Julia Beltrano, Liza Eurich, Marlene Jones, Megan Edmiston, Dickson Bou, and Ruth Skinner. To those who embraced me, to those who were home to me, and those who were my source of strength and support, thank you. I am the stranger who crossed the continents to a country where I was foreign in face and mother tongue. They helped me start again after I arrived at a crossroads of despair, fatigue and loss. I do not deny that this country helped me to continue life again after we escaped the pain of war, the bodies of children, artillery bombs and aircraft sounds. It is war that is disorienting, my friends.

My first birth was in Damascus, Syria, in the Middle East and it is my hometown. My second birth was in Canada, and it is here that humane people were familial to us, because they constituted the cornerstone upon which the Apostle Peter built his message. To those who taught me that humanity is an affiliation and that love is the homeland, and that giving is the future: thank you for your love, thank you for your support and I thank God who put you in my life. Now I look forward to continuing my tiresome journey, still often riddled with suffering and misery, to build a new life and a new future.

A special thank you to my supervisor, Prof. Patrick Mahon. You offered me, in one of the harshest circumstances of my life, an attempt to eliminate the devastation caused by war in my life and coexist with a world that contradicts the world I came from. Living through the stage of my exit from my country which is at war, to ending up in a safe and peaceful country is a war itself.

You made me feel safe during a time that was ravaged by fear. You were the key to liberating the restrictions imposed by war on my language. You are a true teacher who provided all forms of support to me on the social, artistic and moral level.

Your willingness to take a chance on me, and your continued support in my reaching my goals has made much of my education possible. Your being in my present life has created new

memories and opens new horizons for my future aspirations. Thank you for allowing me to have the opportunity to learn from you.

My final acknowledgment is to my family that consists of four brothers, a beautiful sister, my parents, and myself. To say that I could not have done this without them is not an exaggeration. In each of their own ways, they went beyond expectation to help me be successful at this endeavor. They were always there for me and continue to be a source of support, love and inspiration. Any success that I experience belongs to them as well.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	i
Lay Summery	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	vi
Part 1: Extended Artist’s Statement	1
Introduction.....	1
Section A: Background.....	2
Section B: The Curses of War.....	4
Section C: The Torment of War.....	9
Section D: War and its effect on Art.....	11
Section E: Timeline.....	13
Section F: Artists of Interest.....	14
Rembrandt van Rijn, (Dutch, 1606-1669)	15
Horst Janssen, (German, 1929-1995)	16
Francisco Goya, (Spanish, 1746-1828)	17
Part 2: Studio Practice Documentation	19
Section A: Commentary.....	19
“Aching Heads” Series.....	19
“War Portraits Rooted in Nature” Series.....	20
“The Thinkers” Series.....	21
“The Roads of Death in Summer/Winter” Series.....	22
Section B: The Works.....	22
Watercolor Artworks on Papers.....	22
Papers in “Aching Heads” Series.....	23
Papers in “War Portraits Rooted in Nature” Series.....	23
Oil Painting.....	23
Prelude to my Artworks – Figures:	24
Part 3: A Research Interview Regarding the Works of	
Marwan Kassab-Bachi	35
I. Background of the Artist, Marwan Kassab-Bachi.....	35
II. A Constructed Interview.....	36
Conclusion to the Thesis Dossier	44
Bibliography	46
Curriculum Vitae	48

List of Figures

Part 1: Extended Artist's Statement

Figure 1.1: “*Self-portrait*” Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606-1669) Oil on Canvas, 65.4x 60.2 cm, 1669
<https://www.reproduction-gallery.com/oil-painting/1459759299/self-portrait-1669-by-rembrandt-van-rijn/>

Figure 1.2: “*Paranoia, Ecce homo - krank und somit hilfreich*” Horst Janssen, (German, 1929-1995) Works on paper, pastel / paper 39.2 x 20.8 cm, 1982.
<http://www.artnet.de/kuenstler/horst-janssen/paranoia-ecce-homo-krank-und-somit-hilfreich-a-rKGfEIMYitf2IPcD0TavaA2>

Figure 1.3: “*Saturn Devouring His Son*” Francisco Goya, (Spanish, 1746-1828) Oil mural transferred to canvas, 143 x 81 cm, 1819-1823.
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturn_Devouring_His_Son

Part 2: Studio Practice Documentation.

Figure 2.1: <i>Untitled</i> , “Aching Heads,” Watercolor on paper, 30 x 40 cm (11.9” x 15.9”), 2020. By George Kubresli.....	25
Figure 2.2: <i>The Syrian Mother</i> , “Aching Heads,” Watercolor on paper 15 x 20 cm (6” x 8”), 2020. By George Kubresli.....	25
Figure 2.3: <i>Self Portrait</i> , “War Portraits Rooted in Nature,” Oil on Canvas, 2020. By George Kubresli.....	26
Figure 2.4: <i>Self Portrait</i> , “War Portraits Rooted in Nature,” Watercolor on paper 23 x 30.5 cm (9” x 12”), 2020. By George Kubresli.....	26
Figure 2.5: <i>The Rural Mother</i> , “War Portraits Rooted in Nature,” Watercolor on paper 25 x 27 cm (10” x 10.5”), 2020. By George Kubresli.....	27
Figure 2.6: <i>A Countenance of Suffering Under the Sunset</i> , “War Portraits Rooted in Nature,” Watercolor on paper, 23 x 30 cm (9” x 12”), 2020. By George Kubresli.....	27
Figure 2.7: <i>Untitled</i> , “The Roads of Death in the summer,” Watercolor on paper 20x 21 cm (8” x 8.5”), 2020. By George Kubresli.....	28
Figure 2.8: <i>Untitled</i> , “The Roads of Death in the summer,” Watercolor on paper 21 x 26 cm (8.5” x 10.5”), 2020. By George Kubresli.....	28
Figure 2.9: <i>Pregnancies in the Camp</i> , “The Roads of Death in the summer” Watercolor on paper 26 x 35 cm (10.5” x 14”), 2020. By George Kubresli.....	29
Figure 2.10: <i>Child Stumbles Between Two Worlds</i> , “The Roads of Death in the winter,” Watercolor on paper 23 x 23 cm (9” x 9”), 2020. By George Kubresli.....	30
Figure 2.11: <i>Portrait of a Refugee</i> , “The Roads of Death in the winter,” Watercolor on paper, 17 x 18.5 cm (6.5” x 7.5”), 2020. By George Kubresli.....	31
Figure 2.12: <i>Four Refugees Woke up</i> , “The Roads of Death in the winter,” Watercolor on paper, 19.5 x 27 cm (7.9” x 10.9”), 2020. By George Kubresli.....	32

Figure 2.13: *Children of War*, "The Roads of Death in the winter," Watercolor on paper 38 x 29.5 cm (15.3" x 11.9"), 2020. By George Kubresli.....33

Figure 2.14: *Untitled*, "The Thinkers" is installed in the studio and assembled, Watercolor on paper, 2020. By George Kubresli.....33

Figure 2.15: Details of "The Thinkers" collection, Watercolor on paper 21x 27cm (8.6" x 10.9"), 2020. By George Kubresli.....34

Figure 2.16: Details of "The Thinkers" collection, Watercolor on paper 21x 27cm (8.6" x 10.9"), 2020. By George Kubresli.....34

Part 3: A Research Interview Regarding the Works of Marwan Kassab-Bachi

Figure 3.1: *The Leg* (1965) - Marwan Kassab-Bachi.....42

Figure 3.2: *MUNIF AL RAZZAZ* (1965) - Marwan Kassab-Bachi.....43

Figure 3.3: *Kopf Head* (2007) - Marwan Kassab-Bachi.....43

Figure 3.4: *Kopf Depression* (1986) - Marwan Kassab-Bachi.....44

Part 1: Extended Artist's Statement

Introduction

The decision to write my Master's Dossier Extended Statement in the following form is due to my relationship with art, which is rooted in me, and embedded in my soul. Drawing was and still is the journey of my life, it has made me completely believe and be absolutely certain that art should be involved in all parts of life. Art, in my opinion, adds value and aesthetic character to our existence. Thus, I have adopted art as the logic to continue with this life, in the midst of the cumbersome contradictions that life places on ones shoulders on our human journey. I have tried to use art as a tool to express my thoughts, ideas, and actions in every detail of my life.

When the war started in Syria, in 2011, my perspective about life and human beings shifted and became clearer. The war made me see the human being with a deeper understanding, as the human being's external form had previously had the greatest influence on my art and my thoughts before the war started. In the war phase of my life, I began to examine in detail the content of the human being in general, and to try to link what I have found, to the human's external form in order to reach a better and clearer understanding of human nature, which I am trying to embody today in my art. The war in Syria led me, as an artist, to draw upon a journey through human tragedy, and interactions with nature, and especially to focus on the human face, with all the distortions and devastation faces carry. This is a main topic in my research as an artist.

War sows scenes of mayhem, such as murder, death, rape, destruction, abuse and kidnapping in every part of our land. It is the ugliest and most horrific experience that a person may endure in the journey of life; it forces a person to live in conditions controlled by the logic of chaos. In war, all laws guaranteeing humans the right to live in peace, within an ethical social sphere, are crushed and tossed in a land occupied by the laws of the jungle. In this wonderland which is occupied by the logic of the jungle, cultures are destroyed, dreams and aspirations are crushed, and people are compelled to preserve their lives through any means possible. This seemed especially so in Aleppo, Syria where I, George Kubresli, 1990, was

born to a family of four children, where I used to wake up listening to the words of audio books on art, and finish my day with only a brush stroke on the surface of a painting.

By virtue of the difficult circumstances in my years of conflict within the war, that kept me from practicing drawing on a daily basis, I resorted to reading literature and strengthened my relationship with words, until the word became part of my fine art work in one way or another. So I have developed my writing for this Master's thesis in a way that shows my interest in the word, and my attempt to materialize something of the colors of my paintings by producing intense short statements of a poetic and literary nature. The reader will note that I often use masculine pronouns (he/him) throughout the Extended Statement; I have chosen to do so as a means to acknowledge that the *other* in my writing is so often also myself.

Section A: Background

I was raised in Damascus, the capital of Syria, which is one of the oldest inhabited¹ capitals in the world. Life in the capital was generally civilized and progressive. I was influenced by its overpopulated areas, especially in the ancient city of Damascusⁱ, with its ancient architecture that coexisted and contrasted with modern architecture. Nevertheless, Damascus was also surrounded by countryside, which I periodically visited, that contributed to the development and fertility of my imagination. I was dazzled by nature's union of colors.

Being in a family that was interested in science and literature provided me with much-needed emotional and practical support for nurturing my relationship with art. During my childhood, my interest in drawing was sparked by colored chalks and papers. As a child at play, I created simple drawings that were later discovered by my cousin who then provided me with art supplies, tools, and great support.

In my adolescence along with my high school years, I investigated "The Golden Age of Art," such that the Dutch artist, Rembrandt Van Rijn came to have the most prominent influence on my art thoughts and ideas. This was followed by my enrollment at the "Adham Ismail Institute of Fine Arts" from 2002 to 2005, where in 2004, I got to meet the famous Syrian

¹ "Ancient City of Damascus - UNESCO World" <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/20/>. Accessed 31 Jul. 2020.

sculptor Fayez Nahri. He recognized my early talent and enthusiasm and asked me to work in his studio until 2007. I then pursued my academic studies at Damascus University Faculty of Fine Arts from 2007 to 2013, specializing in two dimensional painting and drawing. The latter stage precipitated an integral and important milestone in my character as an artist, and defined the tools to be used in the direction of my current and future artwork as oil paint and watercolor. Despite the siege of the war, which started in 2011, and its effect on my work as an undergraduate student and an artist, my artistic activities were maintained, of course with difficulty. My works from that period were included in several group exhibitionsⁱⁱ organized between Switzerland, Lebanon and Syria, which were the result of my efforts and my friends' efforts amidst the shared restrictions imposed on us by the war.

As the economic and political situation deteriorated and became unbearable due to the ongoing war in my homeland, Syria, my family lost its only source of income. Death had become a daily threat to our lives, and we were all seized by fear. As a result, in late 2013, we faced and made the hardest decision: to flee our land. This was made possible by the financial aid from relatives and friends in order to purchase the necessary tickets to relocate in Lebanon, followed by a move to Turkey, and finally a move to the land of freedom: Canada. In Turkey, we were hoping and searching to find "human smugglers," who charge a fair amount, (which is lots of money for a family who has nothing), in exchange for facilitation, transportation, and our illegal entry across an international border, in this case Europe, by means of inflatable boats. The irony was that the human smugglers did not guarantee safe access to the European coasts, due to the large numbers of people who are doing this, but we arranged it out of desperation, while knowing that the rate of drowning and death was mounting. However, this was our only option to survive, which we were willing to resort to, until we received a phone call from my aunt informing us that she had contacted a priest who was able to sponsor our family through a church, to travel to Canada. But that would require a long and indefinite wait of over a year.

During the waiting period, our hopes were diminished in the face of difficult circumstances. Discrimination and deprivation and minimal refugee rights in Turkey undermined our

ⁱⁱ "waha – Initiative for Middle-Eastern Art - WordPress.com." <https://wahaartinitiative.wordpress.com/>. Accessed 31 Jul. 2020.

attempts at earning a living and securing a home. Hope would arrive at every contact from the priest, but no good news, until one day a call from him informed us of travel arrangements, and our final acceptance from the Canadian embassy. Words fail to describe how grateful and elated we were at the news. Canada was warm despite its cold weather: through meeting people who were friendly and supportive, we were made to feel that Canada was a home away from home. My journey to Canada truly began when I was given the opportunity to continue my academic studies. Now, I am preparing to obtain a Master's degree in Fine Art at Western University, and move on to the next chapter of my life.

A final word that I want to add here: painting, in my humble opinion, is the most expressive means of depicting the sensory and intellectual matters within the person. The presence of a person within a certain social and cultural framework may prevent him from expressing many feelings and ideas, just because they contradict the cultural and social framework of the society. I was drawn to painting because in the painting there is a white surface on which I embody the colors of my thoughts, feelings, or even my obsessions that I am often prevented from expressing. Creating this colorful limited space of thoughts and feelings (the painting) can also contribute in breaking down the concerns of other individuals or the viewers of this work and help them in expressing their inner thoughts in depth, too. In addition to this, painting as an art, has played an important and essential role throughout the ages in addressing the issues that societies suffer from, and at some point, in helping develop those societies.

Section B: The Curses of War.

Mangling thoughts on War.

I have seen, lived, and experienced the contradictions between war and peace, fear and safety, love and hatred, sacrifice and possessions, belonging and alienation. These contradictions that I have lived become essential substrates and features in my character which experienced extreme shapes of maceration and fragmentation during the war, which destroyed the logic in the way my brain works and threw my logical thoughts into "soul mazes." These imprinted features have been awarded to every human being who has gone through the tragedy, the ugliness, and the horribleness of war.

Every person regardless of his age who endured and suffered any kind of war was either pushed to kill to survive; or forced to fight to gain peace; this is true of soldiers who defend their homeland by killing, shooting, and shedding the blood of their enemies. Or they are driven to change and alter their thoughts and contradict their beliefs to protect what they believe in, these intellectual and sophisticated humans, who were arrested based upon ideas that were not their own, have disguised themselves to escape from those who wanted them crucified and murdered so they could get rid of their enlightened humanity and supportive ideas. Nevertheless, such people knew that by saving themselves they are saving the ideas they wish to spread and grow after the destruction, and in that way they are protecting their intellectual affiliations by lying to save their precious ideas.

What about Hope?

How can anyone explain the hope that most mothers carry for their children? The meaning of hope in the time of peace is totally and utterly different from its meaning in the time of war, when it is nothing but the idea of preserving the lives of children in fear of death. The persistence of this hope compels parents (mothers or fathers) to take measures that destroy and doom their life to a life of impoverishing circumstances, far from decent living conditions. Some of them desperately resort to using public parks as a form of residence to fulfill the hope of preserving the lives of their children. Some reluctantly send their children to fight the enemy, whoever it is, in the hope to end the war, and subsequently are caught in the web of death and subconsciously defend their hope by fighting death. So instead of fighting death, they fight for life and seek to preserve the lives of their children at any cost. Such parents sell their homes or lands to afford to send their kids to peaceful countries. Thus, war imposes on them the need to dispatch their children through illegal roads known as death routes to reach safe countries. These routes are either land or sea. Both entail traveling long distances and a psychological defiance of all the forces of difficulty. Through forests, the difficulty comes in the form of predators, bandits, and harsh climatic conditions imposed by nature such as snow, rain, and storms as well as severe temperatures. These climatic conditions are also faced in the path taken across seas and oceans where passengers are stuffed in unsafe inflatable boats as a means of transit. Moreover, human smugglers place more passengers than the capacity of these boats can handle to make more profit and thereby diminish the chances of the boats reaching their destinations safely. As a result, such hopes

are made deficient, stained in red, the red of war, a red of blood. Therefore, their hopes are nothing but delusions that only taste of hope.

The Burdens of the War.

Ten years of the ongoing war in my homeland cast so many burdens on me. Social and economic issues and complexities increase the impact of war on human nature and its interaction with others, on inanimate objects such as destroyed buildings, and on the ground in neighborhoods, and especially on nature in the form of diseases and famines. In spite of my relocation to different countries during the Syrian war period, I was still carrying with me the grief and pain of people who have suffered and the places that were ruined, and all the sadness, the disastrous scenes, and the havoc. It all traveled with me from one place to another, relentlessly adding more weight and trouble to my soul. I still have some loved ones back there who are continuing to transmit the whole experience to me. Hence the continuance of the Syrian war from 2011 until now has left in me with infinite amounts of psychological and mental distress in relation to human nature and all its contradictions. This permeates deep within the details of my daily life. Only death can purify me from these feelings.

The Human Distortion.

For now, I will speak only about the human. As for nature and inanimate objects, I will leave them until the day when I return home.

The suffering and complexities that the Syrian human, especially, had to and still endures incited me to passionately read the faces of the bodies and to dig deeper into their terrains until it forced me to sow their actual faces into the white cracks of my soul, and to give me a sense of peace amidst the war's distortions and contradictions. Those worn-out faces that still struggle between war and peace. Those miserable faces which are starving to ingest a ray of hope, sick faces that claim wellness, weary faces bluffing to show us their strength, aging faces assembled onto youthful bodies, they are simply the expressive faces of war.

Here comes the most important question begged from the reflection of one of those characters in the mirror, “Why can’t we curb the desire to gaze into such faces while they are filled with these obvious contradictions?”

Distractions while Painting.

As for speaking of the human distortions, they are connected to the principles and the very actions committed by those characters under extremely harsh circumstances. I see the human not as he wishes me to see him, but as I should be seeing the human inside that human.

The moment where I begin drawing a portrait relies on my wish to trust that human with all of his complexities. Here and only here, the invitation to discuss and share emerges from the human himself which drives me to draw directly, to absorb the human truth within us all and it makes the drawing process smoother and more flexible. It is precisely the outcome of my wish to mutually trust which eventually leads me to legibility. This ultimate trust and clarity shows different aspects within the human, which leads me to observe the real human character, regardless of the superficial estimation that he is a hypocrite or an honest human.

The War Curtains.

Human beings should never deal with sensation as a duty, humans must perceive and never neglect to understand their brothers, to gain the best relationships, the best art, and to live a real life.

War reveals the curtains.

War is simply the animal inside the human which called human-animal or the other face of humanity, which we must face within the human interior, and that interior is the deepest and the most supreme dark part of the human character.

Right now I am the farthest from the fakeness that the human or animal could forces upon us, seeking to portray the human with its capacity for differentiation among fakeness, hypocrisy, greed, destruction, and killing.

We should also understand very well that the human-animal is aware of its human existence, while, paradoxically, the human-animal is unaware that he is a human himself.

Faces.

So many faces I have encountered in life have shaped my character and work. Faces chased me and I chased them; exchanged roles with me, and I exchanged with them the same roles; saved them and they saved me; fed me and I fed them; guided me and I guided them; I loved them and they loved me; saddened them and they saddened me; supported them and they supported me; I am familiar with them and they are familiar with me; I don't know them and they don't know me.

One of these faces that chased me for a long time is a friend of mine and an artist, Mahmoud Magdal. He has never continued with or benefited from any job he gets; he used to refuse to continue to work the same job for more than 30 or 31 days, after getting paid, which is the duration needed to get paid that one paycheck that he needs to survive and stay alive. With that paycheck, he used to go back to his haven and sanctuary, his studio, and keep practicing drawing and painting until the money ran out. He thought that staying away from drawing for more than one month could drive him insane and that staying in the middle of drawings, paintings, colors, paintbrushes, tools, and artists' books allows the only healthy insanity that all artists should practice.

Another face of an artist friend that chased me has fought willingly to end the war, wishing to reach a place where he would meet his old friends again. So I followed back that face, also running away from that land of war, searching for another land where I can describe to him how we would live peacefully together there.

Some faces, despite the fact they don't know me and I don't know them, have shared our journey of escape from war, searching for a land that we could share without the falling of

mortar shells on our heads and on our children, our mothers, our relatives, and friends, where rain does not fall carrying the smell of the rockets' smoke, ships, and flight weapons, but rather rain and snow fall with the smell of peace.

The Concept of War.

The hardest thing in war is the daring idea to accept the concept of the war itself. It is a great dilemma on its own that I have to face every day in my life. It is very easy to accept the idea of a natural disaster that is caused by natural factors that are harmful to humans; these factors might be sometimes hellish harms, but at least they are not man-made. War is created by human aspirations and sometimes inspired by instinctive factors where humans utilize their intelligence to sabotage others.

My understanding of the concept of the war is that it is a hellish catastrophe and that man is not only able to do it but he is also able to realize it on the ground causing damages that lead the human imagination to marvel at how it was conceived and applied. War is purely human hell making.

Section C: The Torment of War

Regularity and Turkey.

My first stop was Turkey where I took most of my artworks with me, after fleeing my homeland where my memories became reality. Now I live on both sides – past and present. My asylum to Turkey with my family is the main reason for my endurance in the first period. My family provided the survival doses of hope that I consumed in my daily Turkish life. I describe these as doses because, despite everything, I had to keep order within me and clear thinking so I could make a living.

Regularity means that you have to do the same things to earn a living. It was simply a difficult thing for me to maintain and do because it does not resemble me from within. Being an artist means that you are a free soul by trade who does lots of little different and creative

things with no constraints. Regularity requires no such actions, as if asking the artist to paint with a grey color only, without using the full spectrum of colors.

Turkey was the factory where I worked just to keep messing around. My life there was like working in a commercial art factory, distorting art.

Home Nostalgia.

I was not convinced to leave without believing in the chance to return home and in the idea of escaping the burden of not going back. The escape plan failed due to nostalgia for the places, tools, close friends, and the news that I receive from my homeland.

Syria is painful memories of places, university canteens, first love, and beautiful dreams that are as intense and painful as they are fragile and far away. I am afraid to go home. I feel like I am going to be a stranger in my homeland, a portrait I left on my college walls.

What is War?

War makes people lost and homeless without a map leading them to their destination of destruction. War is the awareness that separates us from our earthly world. It makes a man a refuge at the gates of the metaphysical world, the world of the gods, in search of those who pity us, for those who repair the destruction and death that invaded our lost souls in the darkness, in the hell of a boiling red.

Deprivation.

Amidst all the screaming, a person loses his insight, loses the colors of his dreams, loses the light of hope, loses his sense of things surrounding him, a person loses the umbilical cord that links him with Mother Nature.

Section D: War and its effect on Art.

War pushes a person to think with only one idea, which is survival. It is the only idea that any man at war dwells on and aspires to achieve, unaware that there is no logic in the mentality of war except the logic of death.

Any person at war believes that the survival of his soul from death is a miracle by itself. At the same time, he is unaware that if he survived death he would not be saved from the torment of the soul, so perhaps there is no way to survive but through death.

War is a synonym for continuation, but there is no continuation except for the continuation of the torment of pain.

Death is God's mercy and gift for human beings in the world of wars. Some of the war figures I saw while reading or studying painting books have pushed me to insert a presence of nature into portraiture because these characters contain nature itself, even though they speak of pain and suffering.

War contributes to changing human beings' views of Mother Nature, which is often considered a refuge for human beings. A human can escalate sensations, cleanse as well as clarify his mind, enhance the feeling of beauty, and create hope living in nature. But the war imposed upon the person at war changes his views of nature; this impact goes even further to the extent that it makes the simple functions of nature a torment. For example, the sun becomes a torturer for a person at war and forces him to seek refuge or displacement, or pushes someone who has lost his/her residence to live in refugee camps. In these camps, the sun is one of the reasons that causes misery, where a person is exposed to many diseases such as fever, meningitis, and sunstroke, besides skin diseases due to lack of suitable living conditions in the camps.

Learning the primitive way of living in the twenty-first century in these camps can generate misery and suffering even at that beautiful time of year, summertime, the season of happiness and health before the war. The misery comes from remembering the summer as a time of traveling to explore different places, playing sports, and enjoying long meetings with

relatives and friends. However, the war stole this opportunity that gives one a smile to remember. These camps cannot protect this person from floods, heavy rains, and snow; he can only stand naked, against nature face to face, armed with the purpose of trying to stay alive.

Flying colors from my brush on heavenly white clothes are nothing but the shrapnel of death bombs coming from my home country, Syria. The heads embodied in my paintings are the madness of my color's shells, fired from the artillery of my brush mixed with colors of the gunpowder; the burning fire and the penetrating iron fragments directed at human bodies.

Every stroke of my brush has value, no less than the value of my completed work. In my thinking, painting is the freedom from caution. The artist is dealing with all the tools of the work including the ideas, feelings, brushes, colors, etc. Deep and careful reflection after each step I take in the work is very important for me and for the eye of the objective viewer who makes me realize what others will realize.

The mechanisms of demolition and construction while painting lead me to the idea that every completed work is fit to be demolished and every small stroke with my brush is suitable for construction. Painting is art and art is limitless.

Every person has unlimited energy he can use to create, that the human mind cannot imagine. This energy is locked within us and at some point, it appears in its strongest way. At every stage in the development of human thoughts, a person may believe he has approached a dead state and his imagination has stopped and closed to opening up new horizons. But every time a person believes that he has reached those obstacles that prevent his development, new external or internal factors may at once interfere to help destroy those obstacles, such as new or old feelings, unrecognized perceptions, and profound events that have accumulated throughout his history on this painful and beautiful plain at the same time.

Art begins with every obstacle the human mind has faced and ends with the intervention of feelings that destroy those obstacles and vice versa. So, our feelings or sensations may face obstacles that a sane mind comes to destroy with its intellect. But this beginning and ending is a form of renewal. So, art is a group of experiences that get in the way of the search for the

result that lies behind that series of obstacles or walls that we believe we cannot destroy. These walls, which we often do not know exist, because they are hidden deep down within us, are capable of demolishing human energy. Art is the war that makes the human warrior desire to spread love.

The war made me paint madly. This madness because of the difficulty of continuing in this life in the shadow of war, holds a drawing brush. War leads me to the war of drawing madness, and drawing leads me to the drawing of the madness of war. So now I draw the madness of war.

I am painting a terrifying world that is covered with the frost of the forest that surrounds me, and the darkness of the night that lends the highest level of black to snow-white, so the white has become loaded with the darkness of war, and the black has become loaded with the hope of the white.

War is such a change of concepts, ideas, and feelings to impose on man's concepts, ideas and feelings; loaded with the dust of earth and man's blood, and flying children's heads, and maternal bone fragments.

War and painting have become bound to me like the sticking of a mother to her fetus.

Section E: Timeline

The following is a timeline that traces the materials I use in relation to the time and place of making. I also include a listing of artists who influenced me over the period.

(Damascus, Syria, 2002 – 2013)

<u>2002 - 2010</u>	Pencil - Charcoal - Pastel - Watercolor - Oil
<u>2010</u>	Started focusing my attention on Watercolor and Oil in particular.
<u>2010 - 2013</u>	Watercolor supported by a Pencil.

(Damascus, Syria; Turkey, 2013 – 2015)

I dispensed with the pencil, and the use of a watercolor material became my single focus. The reason that I focused on watercolors in my work was due to the circumstance of war, which prevented me from using oil materials due to the difficulty in using them in tight places and difficult conditions. The use of watercolors was the solution through which I was able to continue drawing, using a compact set of materials that I carried with me on our journey from one country to another and from one place to another. As for the oil material, I was forbidden to use it due to the war conditions during the period 2013-2017.

(London, Ontario, Canada, 2017 – Present)

I started my studies at Western University, and it provided me the opportunity to work in oil after an interruption of 4 years.

Section F: Artists of Interest

I. Regarding Watercolours:

The most important artists who worked with watercolours and had a great influence on me in the beginning of my practice were the Syrian artist, Marwan Kassab Bachi, as well as the German artist, Horst Janssen. Most recently, I have admired the watercolour works of the Russian artist, Artur Fonvizin.

The watercolor works of the Syrian artist Marwan Kassab Bachi are dominated by brightness and a fragmentation of colours, which affected me the most. The fragmentation of colours is a very important contradiction in the interpretation of the artist's sensory and inner states.

As for the German artist Horst Janssen, he is closer to melancholy than the other artists I mentioned. Despite his darkness and his very careful use of colours, I can say that he was able to capture both beauty and love in his work, which predominantly refers to cruelty and violence.

The Russian artist, Artur Fonvizin, that I have followed recently, who is immersed within my feelings, is an artist who tends to dream and describe the beauty of women with super sensitivity. The issue of coloring becomes an automatic process, in addition to the process of the fragmentation of the colour. Therefore, Fonvizin is more happy and hopeful in his handling of his work than the Syrian artist Marwan Kassab Bachi.

II. Historical Artists:

I will offer a glimpse into the works of artists who have had a great influence on my vision of portraiture and the issue of tragedy, conspicuous in their approaches to dealing with these materials. From the early stages of my work until today, Rembrandt and Goya continue to influence me because their works are the works of artists who have lived bitter experiences tainted with tragedy. From such experiences they have derived the concepts, inherent in their work, that convey to us the depth of human suffering.



Figure 1.1: "*Self-portrait*"
Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606-1669)
Oil on Canvas, 65.4x 60.2 cm, 1669

<https://www.reproduction-gallery.com/oil-painting/1459759299/self-portrait-1669-by-rembrandt-van-rijn/>

Many artists throughout history have used themselves as a model to represent the stories of their works and their subjects. Rembrandt was among these artists.

Through his originality and distinguished paintings, particularly his self-portraits, he was able to depict the suffering of humanity as a whole.

This demonstration left a strong impact on me and insisted on me the use of one of my most important tools, the mirror. Through the mirror I can transfer the concepts of shadow, light and anatomy to the characters that I draw from my memory.

This is done through using myself as a model to represent these characters whilst focusing on modifying and developing them in every work.

From my point of view, despite his realistic performance in depicting the characters and faces of his stories and heroes, Rembrandt's reality is confined within a demolition framework. Therefore, I want to point out and question the importance of ugliness to Rembrandt. This is what attracted and intrigued me in the faces of his great drawings, from the inception of my work until this moment.

Additionally, Rembrandt's attachment to the issue of shadow and light, and his research in the depths of this issue, which was and remains a central concern in the work – which acknowledges the most important artists of history up to contemporary artists – influenced me as an artist.



Figure 1.2: “Paranoia, Ecce homo - krank und somit hilfreich”
Horst Janssen, (German, 1929-1995)

Works on paper, pastel / paper 39.2 x 20.8 cm, 1982.

<http://www.artnet.de/künstler/horst-janssen/paranoia-ecce-homo-krank-und-somit-hilfreich-a-rKGfEIMYitf2IPcD0TavaA2>

What excited me most about the works of German illustrator Horst Janssen is the connectivity he demonstrates between nature and human beings, in a deep and highly sensitive manner. We often find in his illustrative works the roots and originality between nature and humans. The heads in Janssen's works are interspersed with forms of natural elements. The opposite is true as well; nature and its shadow are interspersed with heads and portraits. In the nature presented by Janssen, with its shadows interspersed with heads and portraits, Janssen may deliberately show it and it may also be unconscious, that is, unintentional.

In my work, I tested the relationship that combines the depth of human suffering through war and the cultivation with nature; this appears clearly in my two groups, "War Portraits Rooted in Nature" and "Roads of Death" series.



Figure 1.3: "*Saturn Devouring His Son*"
Francisco Goya, (Spanish, 1746-1828)
Oil mural transferred to canvas, 143 x 81 cm, 1819-1823.
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturn_Devouring_His_Son

When we look to the artist Francisco Goya, we cannot help but gaze for a long time, but here I will briefly mention the most important features in Goya's works that have had a great influence on me since my beginnings in drawing, and whose influence has increased since the beginning of the war experience. We know that Goya is amongst the critical artists that depicted the depth of human suffering during the wars in Spain, particularly in his black

paintings that display humans “modified” by war. This that is what most affected me in the current stages of my work on the characters. Modification is what symbolizes in my work the magnitude of the impact the war has had on the characters within my work.

Part 2: Studio Practice Documentation.

Section A: Commentary

Preface

My relationship with colors is a need relationship. Any person is by nature always in need to express his/her thoughts of love, belonging, peace, anger, and rebellion, by using some sort of method. I resort to the space of colors to achieve what my needs require. Colors are symbols, ideas, and the emission of feelings within us, so every mixture of colors can be a fulfillment of a particular need or some needs, a need that I might achieve or not in my miserable world. The world of the human being is often about waging war against his fellow man, on nature, on thoughts, feelings, art, peace, and all of that gives value as well as meaning to life.

Introduction

Several artwork series are discussed here as an introduction to the images following, which involve further commentary.

“Aching Heads” Series.

In this series, I have heavily relied on creating the personalities of this collection with the help of the full spectrum of colors. I have tried to implicate and involve all the colors in a battle that I have waged in establishing and building these war figures and characters. The distortions that are noticed in the characters that I have painted are what characterizes my work, where I have used color fragmentation methods and a type of interference in a dense way.

The fragmentation process in this series is deliberate and intended and it explains that most of my painted work here is based on excessive reliance on awareness and consciousness. These both interfere and have a huge effect on every brushstroke that I take and every attempt I make to move from one impression to another. This process of depicting those characters in this collection has required a great deal of attention and caution. This

awareness is associated with the balance between what the subject is going to be and the type of colors I am using. Since the importance of color materials and the drawn subject to me as an artist are completely equal, it prompts me to clarify my characters in this way.

My awareness and the balance that I have tried to keep while forming this series motivated me to protect the white strikes or spots and use them to highlight the distortions in the features of the characters. The role of these white spaces was no longer to explain the mechanism of shadows and light interference across the human face in the usual manner; it has grown however to become a destructive tendency that has a cracking effect that plays a fundamental role in explaining the distortions within the characters.

“War Portraits Rooted in Nature” Series.

This series has a different implication. The human tragedy is mixed with nature to show tragic faces interspersed with nature's wrath. To draw these faces I have used high-intensity colors and fast brushstrokes, combining all the colors of nature. The combination of human tragedy and nature came as a reaction to humans losing contact with nature and depriving it of the capacity to offer its beauty.

In my research, I intentionally moved closer to depicting the features of these faces and reflecting on the anger of those features to replace the normal stable form of nature with its catastrophic form, while outlining the characters.

I enlisted the intensity of colors and stimulated their energy through the brushstrokes produced as fast as well as through wide areas. This led to a significant reduction in white areas in the faces I have created. My protection of white spaces has become riskier because of the shrinking number of these spaces. This gave these white spots an additional and an essential role in venting the anger and darkness within the drawing. The loss of one white spot may overburden the effect of the work and make it complex and unstable to the viewer, thus, the process of communicating with work and building bridges to understand the work by the recipient becomes more difficult.

In addition to determining the geography of the faces in each work, I have tested showing the nature of a volcanic climate and the eruptions that accompany it within the work by

depending on dense Scarlet red, Vermillion red transparent, Ivory black for its high blackness and hardness, Ocher green-gray because it contains a high percentage of dust, and Ultramarine blue which plays a major role in the shadows.

“The Thinkers” Series.

This series describes the contradictions that war thinkers undergo in the face of restrained freedom and when they are subjected to threats imposed by the war. The contradiction takes place when the thinker is obliged to speak in a form consistent with the beliefs of the perpetrator. His original ideas are then temporarily distorted and sacrificed under the threat of a weapon. I used papers from books in this series and situated heads above the body of the texts that consist of words that are inverted. I used the inversion as a symbol to represent and underline the contradiction that artists embodied during war.

The Threat of a weapon. As a result of being shackled, which war thinkers were subjected to, war thinkers dealt with their ideas through of curbed freedoms. The thinker has become obliged to speak in a form consistent with the threat of a weapon. In this group, paper from books, where heads were executed on the body, which consisted of inverted words to express the idea of contradiction, the words in the paintings are words that embody the opposite of their ideas, so they are inverted.

My resorting to using pre-treated and printed book paper is what motivated me to rely and reflect on the mechanism of demolishing, building, and reducing the forms of the characters of this group in particular.

I know that the printed paper material is a highly sensitive material, as a result of testing it and passing it through several stages before it becomes reusable again, until the work is either demolished or built. The sensitivity of the paper is increased through this process, as the paper is already a fragile and sensitive material and it is then processed and tested in order to make use of it. Consequently, the opportunity to treat the material and to develop the work is narrowed by means of demolishing tools such as a scalpel or a constructive tool such as a brush. Thus, caution becomes evident in the mechanism of this work that is meant to display the characters of the thinkers.

Every leaf I work on is not suitable for building or demolishing except once; otherwise, the surface of the leaf is lost and damaged permanently.

In my treatment of the head, I collect everything I want to insert in it in terms of color and value and apply it in one brushstroke, in a short period of time. This is done to process the portrait's details and to highlight its features, so that the work style is then fast and decisive, (i.e. linked to a decision, not a doubt).

In the area of the arms or the remaining parts surrounding the text, its function is to protect the text and defend it as the thoughts of the character. In the work in which the image accompanies the text here, I am in the process of linking and establishing the relationship between the text and the image through the use of a brush stroke. This is to ensure that it occurs in the appropriate place to confirm the process of connectivity: the header, text, and image become one entity.

I used the color red and all that is derived from it to show the distortions of thinkers that are often linked to the functions of the mind and brain. This motivates me to show the arteries of the head and to clarify the state of the explosion that affects the head. I use all the colors and black, in the various linking processes, around the text and image.

“The Roads of Death in Summer/Winter” Series.

In this section, I will describe my artworks, which have been split into two sections: watercolors on paper and oil colors on canvas.

Section B: The Works:

Watercolor Artworks on Papers.

Using paper as working materials to draw has always been associated with my long-past memories –good and bad. Any high caliber artist and/or emerging artist uses paper as a basic material to draw, to express his/her deep and rooted relationship with the past. The scent of paper along with the feeling of paper's roughness can suck us back to the memories of the first stages of experimenting with painting.

The process of drawing on paper involves several types and textures of papers. Paper is divided into two categories: grain weight papers (light 200gsm, medium 300gsm, and 620gsm heavy) and surface type papers (cold press, hot press, and rough).

The first type of papers in my drawings relies mainly on rough paper. It is easy to handle and control in addition to its roughness (deep texture), which maximizes color spreading. This type of paper best fits for the neat use of color, in addition to its ability to endure chaos in any work, including mine, and different emotions, with a variety of brush strokes.

Papers in “Aching Heads” Series.

In this collection of drawings, I have used rough papers with high frequency and I have been cautiously careful about utilizing watercolors on these papers and about its impact on the performance. I deliberately wanted to preserve the maximum extent of white areas and try to activate those white spots on my characters’ heads.

Papers in “War Portraits Rooted in Nature” Series.

I also used rough papers in this series but I have applied a base color layer to the paper before proceeding with the actual drawing on it. This particular mechanism or process is very crucial and important and it has two-fold benefits. It clarifies the path and outlines the method I need to pursue in the drawing and gives me the opportunity to understand the unexpected emotions that spring out of me during the process of drawing, even though they are not always justified ones, and allows me to build on them or use them to demolish what I have created later on.

The second type of paper relied on is Hot Pressed (HP) paper, which has a smooth texture ideal for detailed work, or using a pen with watercolours.

Oil Painting.

The oil substance represents the second section of my work where it supports and echoes the watercolor section previously mentioned, due to its ability to regenerate and withstand extensive demolition and construction. This material adds to the transparency of the watercolor paintings, bearing a hardness and a complex dimension about it to explain the subject of the work.

My work has two stages. The first stage involved buying canvas boards from the market where I stretched the oil colors on them to create a “Self Portrait” in the “War Portraits Rooted in Nature” series. This work shows the intensive brushstrokes and thickening color, in

addition to some transparent and white spots left on the surface of the board. The surface of the board in this work has reached its maximum ability to absorb my imaging mechanism, and has reached a very high level of saturation and ability to endure. The second stage involved establishing and preparing the painting from the base stage of fabric stretching and preparing, and then I start the painting process directly. I often apply the oil colors directly to the surface and intensify the color surfaces until they reach their climax and intensity, then I start the process of returning from that intensity, bringing doubts and complications back; offering more simple solutions supported by more decisions and increased clarity. I can say again that the oil substance in my research project takes the supporting role of the project, being subservient to watercolor on paper, and not playing the role of the main element in the project.

Prelude to my Artworks – Figures:

Inevitably, material choices were a key part of my studio job. I have worked on collecting various paper materials that are varied in terms of strength and fragility – thickness and thinness – modern bright white and old yellow with low brightness. I bought these papers from modern painting stores and old stores that have not updated their products for more than 20 years. This enabled me to link the old with the modern in my work; in every group of paperwork that I worked on, the pieces contain either modern or old paper. This is what I wanted to employ clearly in my work because the relationship between the old and the modern is the relationship between the past and the present. Therefore, it is the link between these memories that enables me to disclose pain and war, while the present is what represents the questions that I ask myself every day.

I was able to enhance these papers' material qualities through the process of applying colors to them. Some of the old papers I used offered a very ready surface, which is similar to the approaching the raw surface of the fabric of the canvas. On paper, watercolors appear bright and transparent. The aim is, firstly, to prevent the paper from shrinking when applying the colors in the early stage of the process. Secondly, it is important to reduce the brightness of the white paper that is often due to the high percentage of acrylic used in the manufacturing process. The brightness of the paper usually disturbs me because it is harsh on the eye and confuses the subject of the work.



Figure 2.1: *Untitled*, “Aching Heads”
Watercolor on paper, 30 x 40 cm (11.9” x 15.9”), 2020.
By George Kubresli



Figure 2.2: *The Syrian Mother*, “Aching Heads”
Watercolor on paper 15 x 20 cm (6” x 8”), 2020.
By George Kubresli



Figure 2.3: *Self Portrait, “War Portraits Rooted in Nature”*
Oil on Canvas, 2020. By George Kubresli

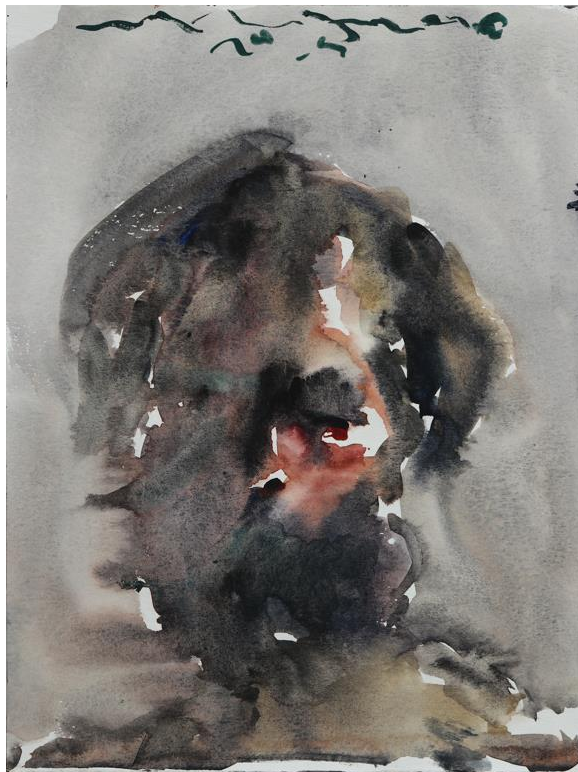


Figure 2.4: *Self Portrait, “War Portraits Rooted in Nature”*
Watercolor on paper 23 x 30.5 cm (9” x 12”), 2020.
By George Kubresli

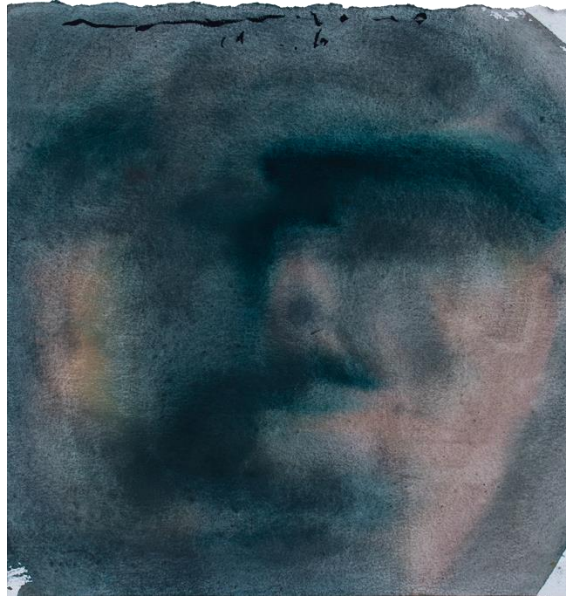


Figure 2.5: *The Rural Mother*, “War Portraits Rooted in Nature”
Watercolor on paper 25 x 27 cm (10” x 10.5”), 2020.
By George Kubresli

In this work, I touched on highlighting the features of the Syrian rural mother and merging it with material of limestones that we find in nature to become an integral part of each other. Additionally, the purpose of my interaction with watercolors here in a soft Pastel Style is to show the nature of the limestone material.



Figure 2.6: *A Countenance of Suffering Under the Sunset*,
“War Portraits Rooted in Nature”
Watercolor on paper, 23 x 30 cm (9” x 12”), 2020
By George Kubresli

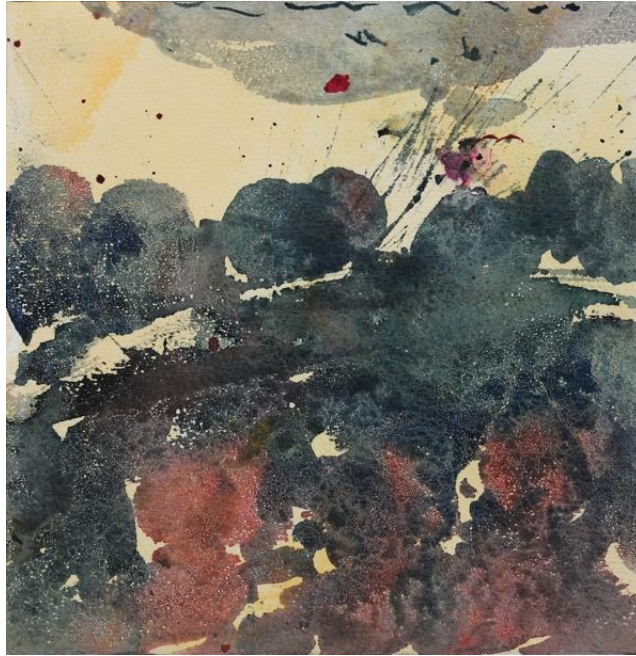


Figure 2.7: *Untitled*, “The Roads of Death in the summer”
Watercolor on paper 20x 21 cm (8” x 8.5”), 2020.
By George Kubresli



Figure 2.8: *Untitled*, “The Roads of Death in the summer”
Watercolor on paper 21 x 26 cm (8.5” x 10.5”), 2020.
By George Kubresli

The roads of death in the summer. This work speaks about the fear and terror of refugees crossing the “death path” of forests. To the left of the painting there is a group of people wearing expressions of fear, panic and shock on their faces. They stare at the path of the jungle and imagine the adversity awaiting them along this path. The shadows of the trees kill the hope of the refugees to cross. Their heads are planted in the land of the jungle to grow into a trunk of the jungle trees, so that human tragedy would seem to unite with nature.

To achieve this work, I used the radioactive yellow color in the first layers of the work to display the temperature of the scene, and then injected the Viridian Green to merge with the dominant yellow space to activate the heat and coldness of this color, as it is a neutral color. To execute the heads, I used dark red combined with Sienna Brown. This was done by using the large brush with condensed strokes, and with caution in order to preserve the puncturing holes. These holes are necessary to show the details of fear in the faces of these two characters.



Figure 2.9: *Pregnancies in the Camp*, “The Roads of Death in the summer”
Watercolor on paper 26 x 35 cm (10.5” x 14”), 2020.
By George Kubresli

A scene depicting a diagnosis of two pregnant women emerging from the camp. In this work, I focused on highlighting the movement of bodies and stumbling, so I chose the dark red to highlight the features of exhaustion on their faces and the contradiction in the presence of the two characters across the axis of the head. The contradiction is in both the state of the woman on the right and the stance of the woman on the left. On the right, we see the mother absent from the scene, while on the left, the mother turns toward us, insisting on confrontation.



Figure 2.10: *Child Stumbles Between Two Worlds,* "The Roads of Death in the winter"
Watercolor on paper 23 x 23 cm (9" x 9"), 2020. By George Kubresli

In the painting, a child stumbles between two worlds. It depicts the horror that afflicts the child the moment he utters his first breath in the land of war.

The characters of the painting are two women, one of whom is pregnant, that are present in one of the siege areas. There are many horrors falling on this region, where shells and rockets fall, and bullets are fired everywhere under its sky.

This child decides to move out of his mother's womb to the world despite the mother's unwillingness to bring her child out to the life of cruelty, tragedy and horrors contained in the war. As soon as this child gets out of his little haven inside his mother's womb, he is overwhelmed with scenes of terror and panic sweeping the Syrian land, which are embodied in the enlarged size of the child's mass.

He tries so hard to escape the war at the same moment he takes his first breath on this earth by tearing the second woman's navel to find a safe place inside her body to hide from the horror of war. In the painting, we see the cry of the mother who refuses to let her child leave her body because she sees that she cannot preserve the safety of her son except by keeping him in her womb. In hearing the cries of the mother, the second woman accepts the child and embraces him in her womb as a means of bearing the mother's pain. As a result, the child is left hanging in the second woman's body, unable to go out into the world of existence (the earth) and unable to return to the world from which he was conceived (the world beyond metaphysics).



Figure 2.11: *Portrait of a Refugee, "The Roads of Death in the winter"*
Watercolor on paper, 17 x 18.5 cm (6.5" x 7.5"), 2020.
By George Kubresli

This work portrays a refugee portrait and his suffering with the frosts of winter. Here we see that the face of this refugee has become burned due to the severe frost that disfigures his skin. In this work I used a transparent layer of Cobalt blue over the entire surface of the work. This was done to express low temperatures in the winter season. In depicting a refugee, I relied on both red and black as the primary colors to convey the pain that permeates the depths of this refugee.

I used condensed and rapid strokes accompanied by intense reactions; its purpose is to spread out sharp and thin lines that are the result of forceful brush strokes. This was done to express the vanishing of this body during the winter frost.



Figure 2.12: *Four Refugees Woke up, "The Roads of Death in the winter"*
Watercolor on paper, 19.5 x 27 cm (7.9" x 10.9"), 2020.
By George Kubresli

The painting talks about four refugees waking in a cold winter wearing shabby blue pajamas. These pajamas resemble a flowing stream of water, and the heads of children are red, as if time had stopped to capture the moment of the explosion of their heads due to the intensity of the frost; the red became an endless extension in black shades. The bodies are unintended spots that have accidentally crept into the area of the paper that I had created in transparent blue. I decided to put their tormented heads in sharp and graceful blows.



Figure 2.13: *Children of War, "The Roads of Death in the winter"*
Watercolor on paper 38 x 29.5 cm (15.3" x 11.9"), 2020.
By George Kubresli

This work embodies six children in a wide landscape, showing children oscillating between states of confusion, exhaustion, shock and astonishment that dominate the atmosphere of the painting. Children with their pink and red heads that color the sky as a dream scattered and evaporated in space with greenish black bodies. Bodies that are flexible but lost in those areas of black and dark green colors.



Figure 2.14: *Untitled, "The Thinkers"*
Watercolor on paper, 2020. By George Kubresli

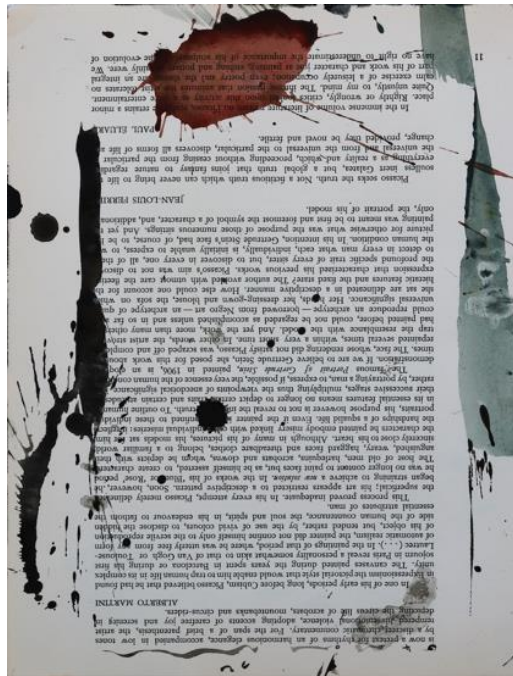


Figure 2.15: Details of “The Thinkers” collection
Watercolor on paper 21x 27cm (8.6” x 10.9”), 2020.
By George Kubresli

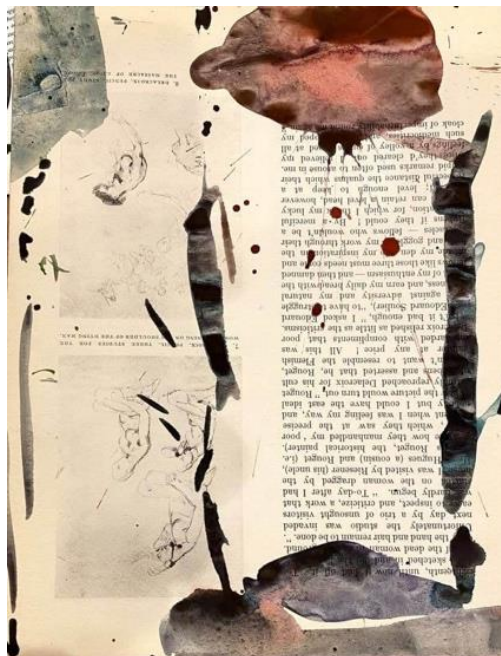
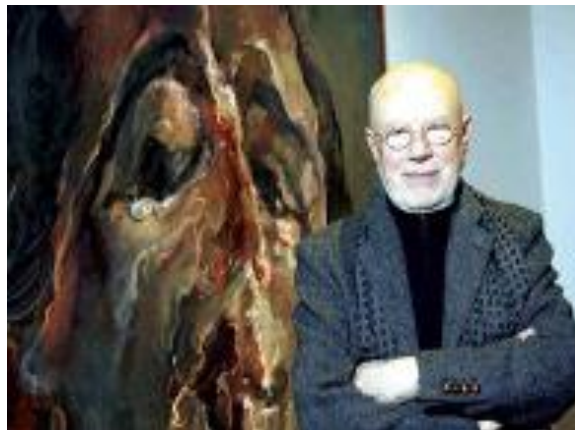


Figure 2.16: Details of “The Thinkers” collection
Watercolor on paper 21x 27cm (8.6” x 10.9”), 2020.
By George Kubresli

Part 3: A Research Interview Regarding the Works of Marwan Kassab-Bachi

As part of my MFA thesis Dossier preparation, I have been reflecting on the works of Syrian-born artist, Marwan Kassab-Bachi, and have also done some research on his works through articles and books. The following is constructed as an “interview,” where I both pose the question and also answer it, based on my own observations and those of others. This interview style has allowed me to use Arabic texts, translating them into English for my own use, to refer to texts written in English, as well as to develop my own thinking in English in an integrated way.

Note that in the following, where I begin a passage with “GK,” these are my words alone. Those passages that do not begin with “GK” are based on the writings of others and are footnoted and cited in the bibliography.



Syrian artist Marwan Kassab-Bachi.

I. Background of the Artist, Marwan Kassab-Bachi

According to *The Arab Weekly* news², Marwan Kassab Bachi is a Syrian painter, sculptor and was one of the most prominent Arab plastic artists in the Modern era; he is also one of the most widely celebrated Syrian-born artists in international exhibitions. His paintings are distinguished by his particular use of the image of the tormented human face, which portrays

² "Marwan Kassab-Bachi, an artist who challenged the" 20 Nov. 2016, <https://theArabweekly.com/marwan-kassab-bachi-artist-who-challenged-landscape-portraiture>. Accessed 18 Jul. 2020.

deep existential angst; his work seems to amalgamate both Arab and Western European stylistic influences, reflecting his sensory vision of the world, which is what he presents as an essential character of all his other works. Marwan Kassab Bachi was born in Damascus in 1934 and died in Berlin, Germany in 2016 at the age of 82. (Dabbagh)

As an artist, he had a rich and complex journey that placed him in the ranks of the most famous Arab artists of the past decades, in addition to being one of the most highly productive plastic artists among the artists of his generation.

As mentioned in *The Arab Weekly* news, In 1957 Marwan left Damascus for Germany to attend the High School of Fine Arts in Berlin. Marwan left Syria at the age of 22 and only returned as a visitor during the rest of his life. (Dabbagh)

That he was an exceptional artist was affirmed by many, and regardless of his Syrian heritage, Marwan has often been counted as a leading German artists of the twentieth century.

The Arab Weekly news, also states that apart from being an internationally important artist, Marwan's works have been acquired by some of the most important museums of the world, such as the National Museum in Berlin, the National Library in Paris, the Tate Gallery in London, and by many more institutions. (Dabbagh)

II. A Constructed Interview

Q: When did you first become aware of Marwan's work, and what attracted you to it ?

GK: I saw Marwan's work for the first time when I first began my academic studies at the University of Damascus. I was in my second year when Marwan's artworks were exhibited in the National Museum, and I was fortunate that my first encounter with Marwan Kassab's artwork was a direct experience and not through photos. At that point, I was living through the ups and downs of the artist who is trying to add something to the artistic conversation besides the standards imposed by academic study. I think that the importance of that stage is in defining the path on which the artist searches for his roots.

I remember well the experience of standing in front of a portrait (a large face that exceeds two meters in length and width). I fell into Marwan's space which is a mixture between the old and the Modern, Berlin and Damascus. The color was completely alive, and the facial expression extended beyond the frame, yet settled in its center. In that moment, I asked myself why I must dive into all that pain in order to acquire some happiness in the end. The entirety of Marwan's work made me believe that this was the way to happiness.

What fascinated me most about his work was the light of Damascus, which I thought of as spilling over onto the incompleteness of every artist's drawing in that city, Damascus.

Q: What particular qualities of Marwan's work attracted you to it ?

According to the book, *Marwan Kassab-Bachi: The Journey of Life and Art*, by Abdul Rahman Munif, Marwan takes the human body as a means of embodying all the political, social and sexual longing in the human heart. (Munif 83)

GK: This is one of the many features of his work that is a marvel for me. I believe he cracked the code for expressing various human lives without having lived through them, as opposed to artists who, when raising complex issues and experiences are forced to bring in people who have lived those same experiences in order to embody them in the painting.

When we look at Marwan's work, we notice that he used his face and body to personify the struggles of other people, and this, in my opinion, is a breakdown of the idea that the artist should deal with human struggles within the framework of his body only. I think Marwan's style was more faithful to the freedom of art.

I have great admiration for the way his works act symbolically, such as the paintings of "Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab" (1965) and "Khaddouj" (1966).

My belief in the way Marwan sought to raise his ideas lies in his search for more honest feelings and his interest in primal experiences as the central focus through which things and relationships could be seen, without trying to be flashy or falsify the truth.

Q: Tell us about some of the features that are common to both Marwan and you in dealing with the painting?

GK : One of the common features between my work and Marwan's work is found in the “Aching Heads” (2020) group in my work, and the group of “Faces” from 1973 by Marwan. I believe that Marwan’s group of “Faces” adopted an approach of highly coloring faces, and employed an intense amount of color that expresses love, morals, faith and hope in a person to show the beautiful things that may have been lost in life due to the tyranny of matters that prevent a person from preserving those lofty attributes. A person on the journey of life may be exposed to extremely harsh conditions, such as war. War does not only uproot those beautiful attributes from a person, but rather turns them into the opposite. In war, we continue to see colors on human faces, but these colors take on another expressive approach, so we begin to see those colors as imbued with oppression, cruelty, a loss of hope and absence of love. This is what Marwan achieved by splitting the colors off from the expected, showing color with its defective appearance and contradicting its basic essence. This is what I also set out to achieve in the “Aching Heads”(2020) group.

What I share most with Marwan is an extensive and prolonged commitment to the demolition and reconstruction mechanisms possible in the stages of the formation of an oil painting. I see that the extensive practice of demolition and construction in the formation process as one of the most complicated matters in making a painting, because those contradictions contain an infinite range.

Like Marwan, I engage these two processes extensively. I think this is clear and evident in his oil works and in mine; they express emotions are revealed through color accumulation, and brush work, in addition to the intensity of colour in our respective works.

Through my knowledge and my study of Marwan's work, I can say that I believe Marwan is often keen to engage in a reconstruction process after each demolition process, and that is how my work differs from Marwan’s. I tend to involve the various activities involving demolition in all the parts of the painting, to formulate the final expressive work.

Q: Are there aspects of Marwan’s work that you think have particular resonance for people from your background ?

As mentioned, in the book *Marwan Kassab-Bachi: The Journey of Life and Art*, by Abdul Rahman Munif, there is no doubt that the political and social aspects and the presence of prohibitions in the Arab region had a great impact on Marwan’s artwork. His liberal, political and social eagerness, which he hoped would be achieved in his homeland with time, was overwhelmed by the militarization of regimes and societies throughout the Arab world.

The portrayal of a severe suppression of freedom of expression, evident in Marwan’s paintings, such as his group of “Faces of political personalities”(1963-1965), exemplifies the realities of people from my background. For example, a painting by Marwan of Munif Al-Razzaz, Secretary General of the Ba’ath Party, known as Ras Al-Razzaz, “The Head of Razzaz”(1965), portrays his head in a guillotine. This work was done twenty years after the political execution, which is indicative of Marwan’s great interest and insight into political and social issues. He was an advocate of the Freedom Movements during that time. (Munif, 66-67)

GK: However, Marwan's approach to these issues does not mean that he only cared for the human issues and concerns of the Middle Eastern region, because he addressed human tragedy everywhere and this is what is embodied in his portraits painting, part of which talks about the tragedy of Western humans.

The concerns of Western humans are embodied in isolation, individualism and the distance that separates humans in the states of sadness and joy, contrary to what prevails in the east, where joy and sadness are collective.(Munif, 67)

GK: Based on the foregoing, I argue that Marwan's concerns are the concerns of people everywhere, but his work stems from an eastern source.

Q: What are the stages that can be observed in the work of Marwan, through “Landscape Faces”?

According to *Marwan: Topographies of the Soul*, by Charlotte Bank³, Marwan's exceptional paintings express his plastic arts experience, which passed through Impressionism and then Expressionism. Marwan's creative approach to illustration expresses the contradiction between free space and rigid space. This was manifested in his faces paintings. Although his paintings are similar in their dependence on the use of the face and the body, they are ever-changing in multiple scenes because of the transformed and changing terrain in the faces themselves. In his earliest works, Marwan's use of horizontal lines gave his work an abstract nature. (Bank,1-2)

In the second stage, his lines begin to describe complex details because of their tangled quality. Marwan's faces were overtaken by distress, so a group of lines and intertwined elements form intersections that express sadness and suffering inside, to the extent that the facial features fade into mere signs. The lines converge at the mouth where the questions gather as if it were a volcano about to explode. (Bank,3)

According to the article, "*From Impressionism to Expressionism*", by Khalil Sweileh⁴, about Marwan Kassab- Bashi's eponymous exhibition in Marwan's last stage, the faces constituted of lines emanate either from an intuition of color or from deep existential anxiety that is apparent in the multiplicity of different faces in his paintings.

Marwan is an artist subject to contradictory visions, and his paintings express the pain and sadness of the faces of lives that are fully lived. As for his dark colors, he expresses the depth of the tragedy of the characters in his paintings; he captures the clashes of a person caught within the journey of life, such as between death and life, presence and absence. He accomplished this through a progressive relationship with his work that relied on being influenced and influencing. This led him to reach the height of intellectual and color coherence at the same time. (Sweileh, <https://ar.qantara.de/content/n-mrd-mrwn-qsb-bshy-mn-lntby-l-ltbyry>)

Q: How did Marwan Kassab Bashi use a Conscious Figurative Style in his paintings?

³ "Marwan: Topographies of the Soul - Barjeel Art Foundation."

https://www.barjeelartfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Charlotte-Bank_Marwan-Topographies-of-the-Soul_BAF.pdf. Accessed 18 Jul. 2020.

⁴ "عن معرض مروان قصاب باشي: من الانطباعية إلى التعبيرية - قنطرة" 12 Apr. 2005, <https://ar.qantara.de/content/n-mrd-mrwn-qsb-bshy-mn-lntby-l-ltbyry.h> Accessed 18 Jul. 2020.

According to *Visual Violence in Art - Reading in the Contemporary Syrian plastic scene*⁵, by Nour Asalyieh, there is a glimpse of the Conscious Fugitive Style that Marwan used in his works; it sheds light on plastic elements that suggest a certain topic. For instance, it allows him the expression of violence in an indirect way and not as a clear fundamental topic such that the embodiment of a scene is dominated by a funereal atmosphere without resorting to the insertion of a corpse or coffin.(Asalyieh 320, 321)

Gk: In his pre-2011 phase, we see in Marwan's paintings a unique experience that talks about the merging of two cultures. Marwan Kassab-Bashi was influenced by his upbringing in Damascus and the surrounding environment and culture. On the other hand, he absorbed his artistic and intellectual approach from his second home, Berlin.

Marwan produced many works that symbolize violence. Marwan Kassab-Bashi's resorting to the image of violence stems from the conventions of societal suppression related to the moral standards in the Damascene community. (Asalyieh 320,321)

His life in a liberal city like Berlin and the impact of its values on him offered him his freedom of expression. The experience of freedom that Marwan obtained in Berlin contributed to clarifying his ideas. This is exemplified in his painting (The Leg, 1965) which contains references to sexual violence. In this painting, Marwan depicts the leg of a nude woman forcibly embracing the head of a naked man. (Asalyieh 321)

GK: In my view, Marwan is one of the most important artists who used a Conscious Figurative Style; his method of embodying these symbols offers the viewer an enormous wealth of questions that a person must address intellectually. This process then contributes to intellectual development and social openness in society.

The scenes in Marwan's paintings in which he embodied symbolism are in played out in front of a color block invaded by answers that lead to questions dealing with the essence of social issues.

⁵ ".... العنف البصري في الفن قراءة في المشهد التشكيلي السوري" <https://syrian-sfss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%86.pdf>. Accessed 18 Jul. 2020.

I see that Marwan raises these issues in a clear yet also mysterious manner, at the same time making the viewer dive into a series of answers that lead to inevitable questions. The clear and mysterious nature of Marwan's paintings is constantly renewed. We explore this every time we look carefully at his paintings. Every time we see Marwan's painting, we see clear indications and vague indications about a specific subject. Thus, Marwan's painting begins to draw us towards the deep roots of this subject.

I think Marwan is one of the artists whose paintings will be analyzed for decades due to their color and their complex manner of processing ideas.



Figure 3.1: The Leg (1965) - Marwan Kassab-Bachi ⁴

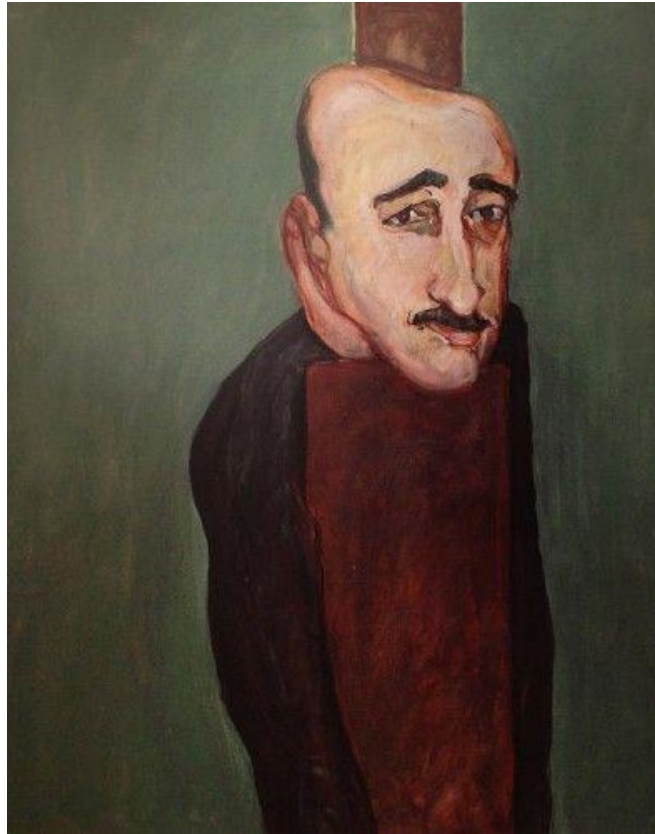


Figure 3.2: MUNIF AL RAZZAZ (1965) - Marwan Kassab-Bachi⁴



Figure 3.3: Kopf Head (2007) - Marwan Kassab-Bachi⁶

⁶ “Munif Al Razzaz.” *Barjeel Art Foundation*, 3 July 2018, www.barjeelartfoundation.org/collection/marwan-kassab-bachi-munif-al-razzaz/



Figure 3.4: Kopf Depression (1986) - Marwan Kassab-Bachi⁵

Conclusion to the Thesis Dossier:

I have attempted to be very clear throughout this thesis that the war in Syria has defined my view of the world, my role in it, and who I am as an artist. This thesis chronicles my journey as a man, a survivor of the Syrian war, and as an artist. The extended artist statement begins with the war in Syria and my departure from my homeland. The experiences of my family finding our way to Canada is described, as is the impact on my work. War, it's toll on everyone and the role that *hope* plays is presented. My portraiture work is introduced here and discussed as it relates to war. Faces as they represent the distortions that tragedy creates are analyzed in this section. War and the role that nature plays in it is also discussed. War's effect on the human psyche and body is further discussed. Finally, war's impact on art is investigated. A timeline of my professional experience is highlighted; as are the various artists who have inspired me.

In the studio practice documentation, my work is further discussed. In this section, I attempt to articulate my relationship with colour, and the role that various experiences such as love, belonging, etc. have on my work. Then there is also a discussion of my various series: “Aching Heads”, “War Portraits Rooted in Nature”, “The Thinkers”, “The Roads of Death”. Both oil and watercolours technique is addressed.

This thesis includes many figures of my artwork, accompanied by individual explanations.

The third and final part is the research interview regarding the works of Marwan Kassab-Bachi, executed through questions and answers. This is based on both research and personal reflection.

The opportunity to prepare this thesis for my Masters of Fine Arts has allowed me to synthesize my thoughts about how my life experiences have influenced my art. This challenge has offered me the opportunity to reflect on my experiences, my identity as an artist and the direction that both will take me in the future.

Bibliography

Centre, UNESCO World Heritage. "Ancient City of Damascus." *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, whc.unesco.org/en/list/20/.

Janssen, Horst. "Galerie Brockstedt." *Paranoia, Ecce Homo - Krank Und Somit Hilfreich*, 15.6.82 *Von Horst Janssen Auf Artnet*, Tajan, www.artnet.de/künstler/horst-janssen/paranoia-ecce-homo-krank-und-somit-hilfreich-a-rKGfEIMYitf2IPcD0TavaA2

"Marwan Kassab-Bachi, an Artist Who Challenged the Landscape of Portraiture: Jimmy Dabbagh." *AW*, theArabweekly.com/marwan-kassab-bachi-artist-who-challenged-landscape-portraiture#:~:text=Kassab-Bachi was born in,path led him to Berlin.

"Marwan: Topographies of the Soul - Barjeel Art Foundation." https://www.barjeelartfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Charlotte-Bank_Marwan-Topographies-of-the-Soul_BAF.pdf. Accessed 18 Jul. 2020.

Munif, Abdul Rahman. "Marwan Kassab-Bachi: The Journey of Life and Art" (Munif, Abdul Rahman. "رحلة الحياة والفن: Marwan Kassab-Bachi".)

"Munif Al Razzaz." *Barjeel Art Foundation*, 3 July 2018, www.barjeelartfoundation.org/collection/marwan-kassab-bachi-munif-al-razzaz/.

"... العنف البصري في الفن قراءة في المشهد التشكيلي السوري" <https://syrian-sfss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%86.pdf>. Accessed 18 Jul. 2020.

"عن معرض مروان قصاب باشي: من الانطباعية إلى التعبيرية - قنطرة" 12 Apr. 2005, <https://ar.qantara.de/content/n-mrd-mrwn-qsb-bshy-mn-lntby-l-ltbyry.h> Accessed 18 Jul. 2020.

Rijn, Rembrandt Van. "Self Portrait 1669 Painting By Rembrandt Van Rijn." *Reproduction Gallery*, www.reproduction-gallery.com/oil-painting/1459759299/self-portrait-1669-by-rembrandt-van-rijn/.

"Saturn Devouring His Son." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 16 June 2020, en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturn_Devouring_His_Son.

"*waha – Initiative for Middle-Eastern Art - WordPress.com.*"
<https://wahaartinitiative.wordpress.com/>. Accessed 31 Jul. 2020.

Curriculum Vitae

Education-

2013- Bachelor of Fine Arts- University of Damascus, Syria

Exhibitions-

2015-

January - *Waha*, Geneva, Switzerland.

2013-

January- *Arthum*, Beirut, Lebanon.

Related Experience

2020- 2018-

University of Western Ontario Teaching assistant, Introduction to painting
VAS-2216 B001 FW18

University of Western Ontario Teaching assistant, Introduction to painting
SA-2620 B001 FW19

2011- 2014 Summer Season

Private qualification courses for students who want to be accepted at Damascus
University-Faculty of Architecture and Faculty of Fine arts.

Awards

2018/19 & 2019/20 University of Western Ontario - *WGRS*