In The Lost Eden of Bifurcated Dreams: Dreams Deferred

To be an Iraqi artist is to, perforce, live in exile- whether at home or abroad- in a landscape of sights, and smells, and sounds, and textures that once were real, but may now exist only in dreams of an Eden that once was, may now be waiting, may come again, and may then be gone. The beauty that was Mesopotamia has been allowed to be pillaged- sent into exile itself- to rapacious collectors in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. So, too, has its artistic soul- the voices of its musicians, writers, and visual artists waft forlornly through the galleries of the West.

And yet, those voices carry resonance, bear witness, ferrying stories that must be told. Iraq rises -like the phoenix -between foreign walls and under foreign skies. And it is thus that dreams are spoken, shared…remembered.

It is to these dreams that Iraqi-born artist, Qais Al-Sindy, seeks to give a corpus. These are, he says, the voice and dreams of a deferred nation, embodied in the figures that populate the 20 canvases you see here. And yet, there is universality in these figures- we can see ourselves in the weary pose, the brooding look, the languid stance of projects shelved and aspirations bid to wait.

Al- Sindy is a prolific member of a new generation of Iraqi artists, shaped by pre-war Iraq, scourged by the recent Gulf War and its harrowing aftermaths and forced to come of age by the need to express through their art, the aspirations and imaginings of a society beggared by the hubris and mendacity of those who would rule it.

In examining what hopes and dreams still flow through the children of the Fertile Crescent, and by extension, through us all, Al-Sindy has created a haunting concert of figures, at once lyrical and compelling. Far from pleading for pity, Al-Sindy's forms have a quiet dignity. They rise from the multi-layered and multi-textured matrix, murmuring, here, this is my story, take my hand so that we may see it together.

The backgrounds of Al-Sindy's canvases return over and over again to the square- small, large, sharply delineated, softly laid out- the shape Al-Sindy calls the foundation of home, and, by extension, of country.

Like the figures, the squares are rich with color and texture. Look closely, the texture almost calls out to you to touch it, to feel the dreams within seep through your fingertips, across your skin and into your heart. Al-Sindy creates these inviting backgrounds with multiple layers that include acrylics, pastels and an oil finish, giving some areas the apt visual quality of felt- a fabric itself created through the application of transformative pressure.

And it is this texture laid upon texture that creates a multiple layered story, which, like the region that inspired it, has a legion of stories made even more multiple by infinite interpretations.

Like Chicana writer and essayist Gloria Anzaldua who speaks of the freedom within hybridity, Al-Sindy uses the work in this show to carve out a third space between the complicated lines of the fugue the West and the Middle East have engaged in for more than half a millennia. While some pieces can be read as universal, others scan across a post-colonial landscape that asks, who are we, now that the colonial gaze has been lifted? The voluptuous odalisques you see here, are reminiscent of

Delacroix (*Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*) while others seem to recall Matisse and his epiphany in Morocco- both artists part of the colonial gaze, both seeking the Other after intense conflicts that seared Europe.

In appropriating these depictions, Al-Sindy places them in a post-colonial context- post-European/post-*Pax America*, the objectified unmoored from the gaze of the objectifier- asking us to imagine what happens at that moment of liberation. Will they recover their dreams dreamt before, or are there new ones to imagine,,. for once you have been Othered, you are no longer only that which you once were.

Joining these are other pieces that also inhabit that moment of suspension. The musicians here, sinuous, poised at the moment of meeting the music, speak of the universal desire to communicate to others- but like the odalisques and the contemplative figures, they too, have multiple registers- is it Jazz, whose roots can be found along the trade routes that run from Africa to Mesopotamia, the versatile voice of the violin, child of the meeting of the Arab *rebab* and the desires of the Byzantine World or something half heard between two shores?

It is this world of dreams deferred and caught in a hyphen that Al-Sindy references both so universally and so specifically. And yet, his work is not devoid of hope. Look closely once again, and in the waiting, wanting gazes, you may see a sense that dreams deferred may yet come to fruition.

Rebecca Romani
Freelance cultural journalist
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