Who Knows What the Hoopoe Said?

In his epic poem *The Conference of the Birds*, 12th century Sufi Mystic Farid al-Din Attar writes of 22 different birds on a journey, who consult the Hoopoe bird about the secret to a fulfilling life. It is one of many literary and historic references to the Hoopoe, a native of Eurasia and Africa, that have contributed to the delicate, festively-adorned bird's reputation as a messenger from beyond, a dispenser of wisdom, a link to the mysteries that lie outside our grasp.

Iraqi artist Qais al-Sindy, whose life journey has taken him from Baghdad to Amman to southern California in recent years, is tapping into the legend of the Hoopoe in his latest work, which drenches the canvass in color and spiritual mystery.

"Our life is full of secrets and mysterious news that we often don't know how to decipher," says al-Sindy. "Those enigmatic secrets live with us and share our daily details even though we neglect them or pretend that we can forget them."

The artist sees the globe as filled with secrets, the majority of which we do not understand and cannot decode. Yet we can't resist the enticement of seeking answers and pursuing interpretations.

Here, in these paintings, al-Sindy shows figures that suffer the accumulation of secrets – some announced, but the vast majority of them still opaque. The Hoopoe is the messenger who will fly to your side to tell you the news - whether it be good or bad - or to just whisper some signs and clues, not expecting complete understanding.

In the vibrant tradition of Iraqi contemporary art, al-Sindy employs the techniques of modern expressionism while incorporating ancient regional influences. His subject is the human being, filled with longing, and the forces that frame human consciousness.

The new paintings show figures dancing, twisting, in a dizzying, groaning sharing of love and sorrow all at the same time. Al-Sindy presents familiar figures and symbols that when viewed in combination together, create new compositions, new ways of seeing. They see you, as you see them. They will stand guard even when you don't face them…much as the Hoopoe holds the wisdom, whether we can glean what he has to say, or not.

How do we reconcile ourselves with what we cannot understand? How do we reconcile ourselves with our own selfhood amid great spiritual mystery? How do we carry on, and stay safe? These are among the questions al-Sindy poses in his works.

"The Hoopoe, or whatever messenger he sends, does not necessarily divulge his secrets," says al-Sindy. "Sometimes, to avoid exposing you to unknown threats, to keep you

living in peace, he allows you to move forward without the knowledge that something could harm you."

In that, finally, the message is an uplifting one. "Overall, I am optimistic. I always await good news from the messengers my Hoopoe sends," al-Sindy says. "And he keeps telling me good news, and sometimes even sheds light on the truth of many complicated things in my life."

These are spirits from a land which lies between two immortal rivers - the Tigris and Euphrates. The Hoopoe, al-Sindy's paintings joyfully shout, will tell us that the olive branch is still green and that this little bird with a spiked crown will accompany the white dove to bring an olive branch to us here. To remind us that recession, conflicts, wars - anything bad in our lives will end soon and that goodness, bliss and happiness are coming. "We must never stop willing our dreams," al-Sindy says. His paintings are filled with beauty and music – not just sadness and longing. There is hope in the future, and, as ever, the Hoopoe will continue to reveal his secrets and give his pronouncements!

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