

The Turbulence Effect – Profile of Abed Al Kadiri

By Aida Eltorie



Identity 6, 2011, Mixed media on wood, 160x100cm - Courtesy of the artist.

Lebanese artist Abed Al Kadiri, has expanded his ability to project humanitarian conflict as seen from his youthful eyes. Born in Beirut in 1984, a graduate of a double major in Arabic Literature and Fine Arts, Al Kadiri focused on the elements of belonging to a culture that has been deprived of its own freedom. Whether civic or regional freedoms, he had studied the elements of humanitarian culture, and particularly the depiction of violence in modern art, which was Al Kadiri's thesis

for his Bachelor's degree. He questioned where it stood in relation to the turmoil happening today.

With his first solo exhibition in Beirut, Al Kadiri had responded to the mass-known torturing done in the prison of Abu Ghreib in Iraq. The criminal violation projected by ill-disciplined American army men, had stunned the artist in questioning what would it take for violence to reach such unbound measures. Coming from a military zone himself, brought up in the civic warfare of his hometown, expressing himself from a familiar background to that of Iraq, and had chosen to project the violence of 'the Other' through the presence of contemporary paintings. The works carry elements of a Picassoesque Guernica, where a sudden collapse between dimensions occur as though there had been a bombing followed by beautified obstructions of reality.

1 His colors are vivid and pasted in layers of figures carrying multi-dimensions to their form, bringing forward their distortions. Elements of crucifixions and a depiction of a cat placed in the images as a constant element of stability while the matter changes from nude tortures to portrait screams, does Al Kadiri certainly project a monumental defacement to the event that took place at the time of its making? The works were hosted in his university ² as part of his graduating exhibition in 2006, when the following week after the opening did the July War ³ break out in Lebanon shutting down the city immediately. Al Kadiri had fled the war zone, heading to Kuwait and leaving behind 17 colossal canvases, the works averaged at a size of 4-6 meter diameters while the rest were within 1.5-meter diameters. Not knowing the upheaval caused after his departure was Al Kadiri able to save his works, which were all acquired by the Farhat Museum Collection ⁴ in Lebanon. Since his departure was quite sudden, he had abandoned his higher studies, and only returned with another solo exhibition since then in 2008 at the Lebanese Artists Association. His exhibition entitled *In the Corner* was a complete counteract from what was done two years preceding. The works had exceedingly shrunk in size, and moved into 5 x 8

cm pieces, all exhibited in the corners of the space. In them were depictions of isolated figures and were actual portraiture of what the artist described as ‘friends and family’ when he was generalizing about the portraiture of his Lebanon. It was his reaction to the isolation that occurred after the July war. The country came to a halt, people were not confidently intermingling in the streets like they used to, and social barriers had cornered Lebanon into becoming a stopped interlude of life. The exhibition was on view only for one day and none of the works were for sale.

Since his arrival to Kuwait, Al Kadiri has been contributing in ways beyond his painterly practices. An art critic since 2006 for papers like *Al-Siyasah*, and *Awan* 5 where he carried a two-page section called “Tashkeel” focusing on the practice of the finer arts. It was in 2011, when Al Kadiri had expanded with his first solo exhibition called *Identity/Turbulences* and for the first time he rises in the Kuwaiti art scene questioning the notions of individual freedoms, notions of religion, armed control and its overpower. The eyes, and in some the mouth are either blinded or silenced. These works are countered against portraits of a ‘jeans culture’ standing in conflicted poses. Some of the frames depicted a car in the background, a piece of metal that had become part of our daily dependencies and ascertained as permissible objects. The identities are hidden, but they represent a popular angle of the everyday. We realize elements of disdainfulness forced further by the black brushstroke occupying the canvas’ surface that reveals the secrets of humanity’s behavioral traits – its contours, and deceived boundaries. Following this exhibition in Kuwait, Al Kadiri had another show in Beirut titled *Witnesses* towards the end of 2011. For Al Kadiri, the human being had become a witness of crime, a witness of betrayal, a witness of occupation, and a witness of torture and warfare. With the sense of betrayal, does the depiction of Jesus surrounded by his disciples occupy the center of one of the images, questioning an emblem of righteousness; another depiction of the fig leaf reminisces the Garden of Eden, and its forbiddingness, does the icon become shared across his portraiture works. Al Kadiri exposes his desire for text by writing his personal hymns of quoting famous verses across patterned sections. His master influences include poetry

readings from Mahmoud Darwish 6 and Mohammad al-Maghut 7, combined with elements of dispossession and exile, does Al Kadiri bring forth the importance of identity as a monotonous dependency.

Al Kadiri’s works have been sold in JAMM auctions, and exhibited between Kuwait, Lebanon, Bahrain and Syria. He had shown at the second MENASA Art Fair (Beirut, 2011) and the 2011 Contemporary Istanbul. His work confirms the conformity of humane culture and its crime. Uniting his Lebanese upbringing to that of his current life for the past 6 years in Kuwait, and exposing the dispossessions of the Arabic culture and its ramifications, does he become a spokesman of ideals, juxtaposed against its same realities. The harshness of humanity, its diverse characters, its beautification and brushed viciousness are all brought up with oil, acrylics, pencil, ink, and mixed media valued on the scale of cultural nostalgia.

End Notes:

1-*Al Kadiri is also inspired by Francis Bacon, Leon Golub, Chaim Soutine, and Jean-Michel Basquiat to name a few.*

2-*Lebanese University was founded in 1951, and it’s the only civic university that practices higher learning and liberal education in Lebanon.*

3-*Also known as the 2006 Lebanon War, was a 34-day military conflict between the Hezbollah paramilitary forces and Israeli military. It started on July 12th, and only ended with a UN-brokered ceasefire.*

4-*Naim Farhat is the founder of the museum and is one of the main collectors of Arab Art in the Middle East. He founded this collection in order to bring awareness to the creative disciplines brought out from the region and particularly address the oppression created out of political turmoil. www.farhatartmuseum.org.*

5-*Al Siyasa newspaper is one of Kuwait’s political liberal newspapers for over the past 5 decades. Awan Newspaper was the 10th Arabic newspaper published in Kuwait. Active for 2.5 years, it launched in November 2007 and ended May 2010. Abed Al Kadiri was in charge of the cultural section, and Awan newspaper was the only publication that dedicated two pages of culture every day.*

6-*Mahmoud Darwish was a Palestinian national poet and author who had given Palestine the metaphor “The Lost Eden.” He started with classical Arabic style which then changed to a more free verse and personal language. He lived between Egypt and Lebanon, after being banned from his return to Palestine. Born in 1941 Palestine, Darwish died in 2008 in Houston, Texas.*

7-*Mohammad al-Maghut, was a Syrian poet and writer, born in 1934 and died in 2006 – he was widely known for his free-verse poetry.*