

Boats and Burdens: an artistic tribute to Iraqi women

By Karen Dabrowska

Ameera



Boats and burdens, kites and catalogues. The paintings are shattered dreams, the first exhibition by Maysaloun Faraj in 15 years is dedicated to the women of Iraq.

"Despite burden upon unprecedented burden they stand tall, proud and resilient like Iraq's precious date palms, nurturing like the sweet water of Dijla and Furat (the Tigris and Euphrates rivers)", Maysaloun explains in the exhibition's

also for Iraq's children "who will reclaim the skies with their imagination, the future with their dreams".

Iraq-born Maysaloun, who has lived in London since 1982, works in pairs (painting and ceramics). Her fifteenth solo exhibition to-date, the first after a fifteen year break, is a collection of paintings and ceramics – her response to the war on Iraq, her land and her people.

"Iraq is a land in which I am deeply rooted and a people whom I dearly love. As an Iraqi, an Arab and a Moslem woman with an East/West upbringing, it is conflict, war, injustice, human rights and human wrongs and beauty lost that informs much of my work today", Maysaloun told The Middle East.

Each painting in the exhibition is named after an Iraqi woman. An explosion of colour dazzles from the oil on canvas works, some

as large as 80x100cm others only 17x 14cm. Palms are a constantly recurring theme as is agony and ecstasy. There is no room for sadness or defeatism – the paintings convey the power of Iraqi women their beauty and their faith despite loss and suffering, as the occupation of their country continues.

Commenting on the painting titled Munira, Mayassah Al-Sader a young Iraqi woman said: "The strings that tie the kite to the child's hand, tie the

Golden Boat (earthstone, glaze and gold)





Maysaloun Faraj:

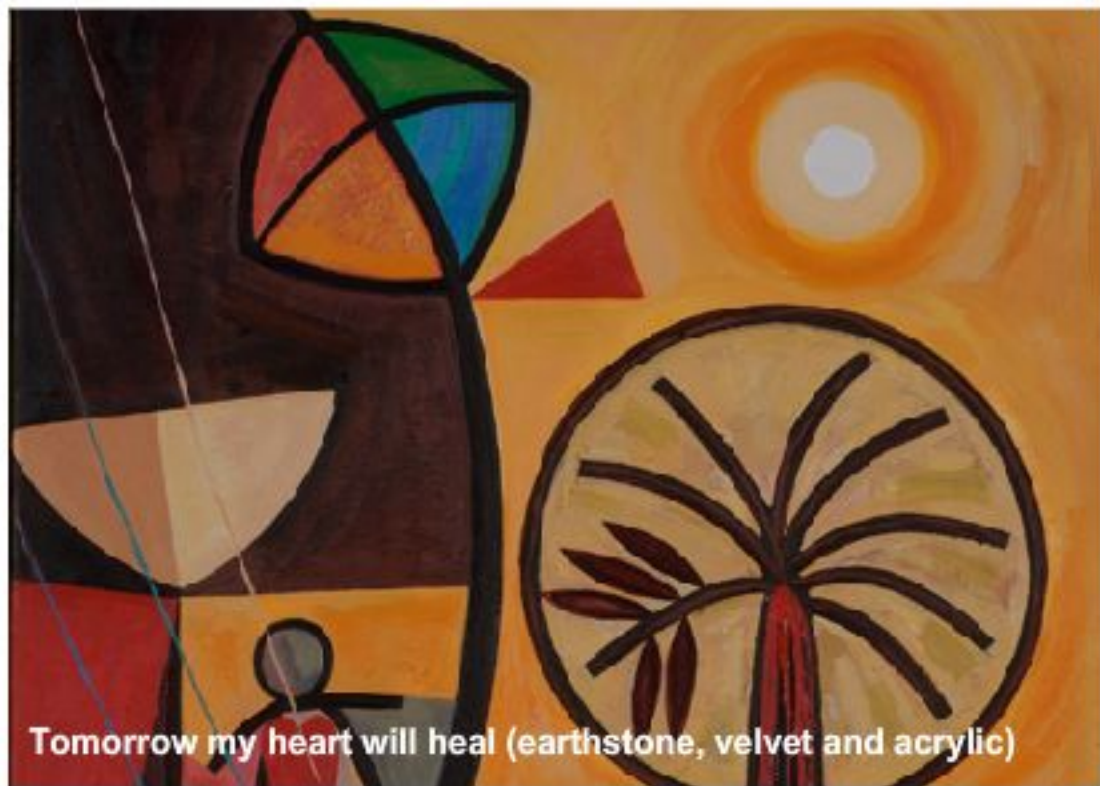
"If there is any chance for humanity, it will be on the hands of the artists".

spectator's heart to the painting as a whole and to the subject in particular. They are like the strings of an Oud (Arabian lute), playing a melody or lullaby from a distant past: each viewer will recollect their child-home melody. The paintings express analogies by dividing the surface with bold lines into unequal parts. This seems to signify a border separating binary milieus; night and day,

dreams and reality, childhood and adulthood. Despite the lines and boldness the two milieus overlap in the way old memories overlap current ones".

The earthstone, glaze and gold ceramic works also emanate a profound belief in the resilience of the human spirit and the conviction that ultimately there is hope, that adversity can be overcome and life will prevail.





Tomorrow my heart will heal (earthstone, velvet and acrylic)

When asked whether art can play any role in abating the suffering of her beloved homeland Maysaloun concludes that: "Given the state of our world, this so called 'new world order' in between bouts of art making I often find myself questioning whether art really matters? Is it necessary? Does anyone care? Where does it stand in the midst of all the violence, destruction and despair? Again and again I find

the answers deep within and believe that if there is any chance of hope... if there is any chance for humanity, it will be on the hands of artists".

Boats and Burdens: Kites and Shattered Dreams, solo exhibition by Maysaloun Faraj at London's Aya Gallery March 25th – June 25th), 15 Fulham High Street, SW6 3JH, ■

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