

Bihnam Al-Agzeer: Calligraphy Of Peace And Cultural Co-existence

By: Karen Dabrowska



Iraqi calligrapher Bihnam Al-Agzeer (60) is using his art as a flag for peace and promoting peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians.

Al-Agzeer was forced to flee from Iraq with his wife and daughter as sectarian violence targeting the Christian community in the northern city of Mosul accelerated. The family made their way through northern Iraq, Turkey and Greece and finally reached the UK where they were granted asylum.

But despite losing everything in Iraq, Al-Agzeer, a deacon in the Syrian Catholic Church, has no time for resentment and hatred.

He is using his work to promote peace, justice and co-existence and creating a dialogue between the Christian and Muslim communities. He believes art can bring prosperity to all and is fostering understanding and peaceful, lasting relationships. Christians and Muslims lived happily together in Iraq for thousands of years and there is no reason why they can't live in peace and harmony again.





His prolific works portray verses from the Bible and Quṛan and other religious scriptures sacred to both religions. His most recent exhibition at Probsthain's Bookshop opposite the British Museum has equal numbers of well known verses from Islam and Christianity including: «On no soul doth God place a burden greater than it can bear» (Baqara 286), «In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful» (Fatiha 1), "Ask and

it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you» (Matthew 7.7.), «Love your neighbour as yourself» (Mark 12.31), etc

The verses are beautifully presented in a variety of Arabic calligraphy scripts with gold and carefully selected colour combinations. The works on display are framed and sell for just over one hundred pounds and

there are also unframed, cheaper works.

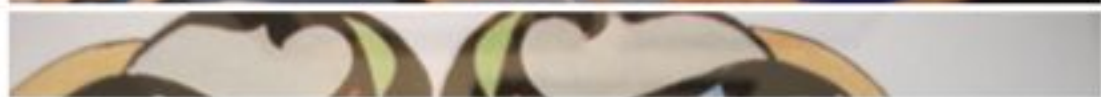
Since arriving in Britain in 2003, Al-Agzeer has taken part in a variety of exhibitions in Surrey and held his first solo exhibition displaying 40 plates at Sutton library in March 2007. With the assistance of Saad Tokatly, the representative of the Iraqi Christians in the UK, he is hoping to organise an exhibition in St

Paul's cathedral.

Bihnam Al-Agzeer was born in Mosul, graduated from the Institute of Teacher Education and worked as deputy headmaster and then headmaster of the School of Syrian Catholics in Mosul.

His fascination with art Arabesque and calligraphy led him to study at the Institute of Teacher Education under the mentorship of the





renowned calligrapher Yousif Thanoun who had the greatest influence on his work. After graduating from the institute he continued studying with Thanoun at the University of Mosul and obtained the Fellowship of Arabic Calligraphy.

In 1970 he visited the famous Iraqi calligrapher Hashim Mohamed Al-Baghdadi in Baghdad and in 1978

the Turkish master calligrapher Professor Hamid Al-Amidi in Istanbul. He also visited many calligraphy schools in the Middle East to familiarise himself with different styles, fonts and techniques, specialising in Kufic script and its many varieties: Simple, Square, Old Kufic, Moroccan Kufic, al-Muzahr, Al-Mothafar and Al-Danry. He is also familiar with the Al-Qaḥa, Al-

Diwani, Ta'aleq and Nashikh scripts. His work has been incorporated in murals, posters, book covers, calendars, brochures, postcards and greeting and business cards. Some of his works became museum pieces.

Bihnam Al-Agzeer is a founding member of the Society of Arab

Heritage in Mosul and the branch of the Society of Iraqi Calligraphers chaired by Professor Youns Thanoun. He is also a member of the Carshalton and Wellington Art Group, the Croydon Art Group and Friends of Kingston Museum.

He enjoys reading, walking and travelling.

