

**Out of Kurdish soil: the Artwork of Rebwar Rashed
and the Museum of Modern Art, Sulaimani**

Rebwar Saeed Rashed

PHD



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for the degree of Doctor of Arts**

Rebwar Saeed Rashed

University School of Art and Design

Middlesex University

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My beloved mother, who supported me unconditionally and whose wish was to see me finish this project, sadly passed away before I completed my PhD. May her soul rest in peace.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my family Nian, Zeeno and Zeneh. I hope that this work makes you proud.

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The Crossing Museum: a Museum of Contemporary Art for Kurdistan

INTRODUCTION

Professor Jon Bird

Professor of Art and Critical Theory

I haven't yet visited the Crossing Museum but I feel a close affinity with its genealogy, from concept to realisation. As Rebwar Rashed's supervisor for his practice-led Doctorate, I closely followed the progress of his studio practice and the materialisation of his goal to establish a museum of contemporary art for Kurdistan. Describing this project as "an artist's dream", Rebwar expressed the intention to co-create a museum that would bring art from all over the world to Kurdistan as well as create a platform for Kurdish and international artists to meet and engage with each other and each other's work. The Museum should be a place where people can learn about the world around them.'

Speaking from a geo-political region that has experienced a surfeit of internal conflict and global power-play, the aim of positive cultural reciprocity that recognises, accepts and benefits from encounters with the Other is indeed a noble aspiration. And, in the shadow of the varieties of institutional critique that have cast doubt upon the democratic claims of Western museums, the Museum in Sulaimany is a timely reminder of the utopian impulse that was the motor driving the museumification of culture as a significant aspect of modernity.

It is all very well to critique national museums as 'ideological state apparatuses' (and that old Althusserian chestnut still has some mileage) from the privileged position of western hegemony, it is quite another matter to comprehend the role of a museum in the creation of Kurdish national identity, both as symbolic force and as a vehicle for cultural interaction and exchange.

The modern art museum as a discursive space enacting the metaphor of art as a conversation is familiar territory. However, far too often this has not been construed as a conversation amongst equals but rather as an asymmetry between the owners and controllers of (cultural) capital and those who seek to acquire the status and prestige (and

knowledge, let's not forget that), that the aesthetic bestows. The paradigm of Western modernism as both appropriating and then re-distributing aesthetic riches, has marked the history of the museum up until the late twentieth century - an international circuit of artists, curators, dealers, collectors, critics and historians with vested interests in assigning value and regulating markets, the whole system increasingly mediated by and through major museums, galleries and international exhibitions. Writing about the spread of biennales, Carlos Basualdo argues diplomacy, politics and commerce converge in a powerful movement whose purpose seems to be the appropriation and instrumentalization of the symbolic value of art, a symptom of globalisation and the contested ground of what counts as internationalism at the cultural level. (The Unstable Institution in Paul O'Neill (ed) *Curating Subjects*, London, 2007, p45) In this process it is completely understandable why burgeoning nation states have seen a national museum as an important component in the building and celebrating of their varieties and forms of cultural expression. A result has been, if not the dismantling of canonical hierarchies, then at least a significant contribution to the de-centering of the (Western) canon of artistic modernity.

Despite justifiable criticisms, the first global exhibition of contemporary art, *Magiciens de la Terre*, Paris 1989, laid some of the groundwork for recognition of complex and divergent narratives of modernity in the visual arts, and of the relation and whereabouts of center and periphery, the regional and the metropolitan.

The terrain over which these relations are mapped and contested has shifted in the years since *Magiciens*. The terms center and periphery are in constant realignment as new cultural centers have become players in the spread of large-scale exhibitions, the expansion of museum building, the ascendancy of galleries with international outlets, the role of peripatetic curators, and the acquisitiveness of collectors traversing art fairs and megashows in the quest for cultural capital. Weighed against these factors, the ambitions of the Crossing Museum seem both modest and optimistic – to record the origins, influences and development of Kurdish art and artists and to initiate a dialogue with Europe and beyond. With an architectural design and a nascent, donated collection (the Shower of Birds) together symbolising an openness to external factors, it is to be hoped that these aims can be upheld and propagated as the museum becomes established and recognised.

Rebwar Rashed, *Out of Kurdish Soil: The Artwork of Rebwar Rashed and the Museum of Modern Art, Sulaimani*

Foreword

Professor . Kitty Zijlmans

When Rebwar Rashed asked me to write a foreword to this book, I readily accepted. This book testifies to the interconnectedness of art making, art negotiation, and art framing, which in Rebwar's case cannot be separated from each other. His work demonstrates how art practice connects to both ancient and contemporary art creation on the one hand, and leads the way to establish an emerging art infrastructure in Sulaimani, Kurdistan, on the other.

How did a Dutch contemporary art historian such as I become involved in this project? We have to go back a little.

On April 20, 2012, I was asked by Herman Divendal of AIDA Netherlands Foundation to open Rebwar and Hoshyar Saeed Rashed's exhibition in the Diversity & Art gallery in Amsterdam. When I accepted the invitation I could not have imagined what lay hidden behind the small selection of artworks exhibited. I knew both of the artists' work a little as I had come across their paintings, sculptures and ceramic works earlier through the efforts of AIDA, foundation for artists-refugees. Many artists who had to flee from their home country because of war and terror, did not immediately find an open-armed art society to welcome them in the Netherlands. On the contrary, they had to find ways to get themselves and their artworks known, not being readily accepted as artists, who have a different frame of reference. Because of the efforts of AIDA, I was able to get acquainted with the two brothers and the world they represent. After the opening Rebwar told me about his Art Doctoral research he was conducting at Middlesex University in London. When his University asked me to act as an external advisor for his doctoral thesis I was very happy to act as such. It meant learning more about Rebwar's work and art practice. This was a great opportunity for me.

There are several reasons why I am interested in Kurdish art and culture. I had learned about the dire fate of the Kurdish people and their art and culture through Susan Meiselas'

book *Kurdistan. In the Shadow of History* (2008; 1st ed. 1997), and the website www.akakurdistan.com. In the book, which covers a hundred years of photographic history, photographs taken by Susan Meiselas alternate with a diversity of Kurdish historiographic material; and the website is a place for collective memory and cultural exchange. It provides the opportunity to build a collective memory with a people who have no national archive. Secondly, a few years ago my own family was enriched with the arrival of a new sister-in-law who is Kurdish and who actually comes from Sulaimani. So Kurdistan has come a little closer to me and I am grateful to learn more about this ancient culture. Lastly, my own aim as an academic art historian interested in contemporary art and discourse is to open up the discipline of art history into a global perspective. This we framed as world art studies, the study of art as a panhuman phenomenon of all times and cultures. For me, meeting Rebwar (and Hoshyar) was opening a door to a culture I didn't know very well, especially not as an obvious part of the history of art, except I knew vaguely that where Kurdistan is nowadays was the ancient region of Mesopotamia. Opening this door for me is vital for what we are trying to accomplish within world art studies - that is the shared understanding of what art and culture mean for being human. For me, Rebwar Rashed's efforts and accomplishments as an artist and an art intermediary are exemplary in that respect.

In Sulaimani

Of vital importance to fully assess Rebwar's work in the context of his Art Doctorate was the very well prepared study trip to Sulaimani in June 2012, which the two examiners (the internal examiner Keith Piper from Middlesex University and myself) undertook. Under the kind and skilful guidance of Rebwar in Sulaimani we started by visiting Wasta Haidar's ceramic workshop where Rebwar's passion for ceramic art began. Haidar works in the ancient tradition of Kurdish (Upper-Mesopotamia) pottery-making, using local clay and old methods. Rebwar Rashed learned his skills from Haidar and elaborated them, combining ancient ways with contemporary themes and modern stylistics. From this an individual style emerged of non-utilitarian ceramics that refer back to ancient uses but simultaneously tell the story of the Kurdish people. The ceramic works are made of local clay, of Kurdish soil, and testify in material, form and narrative of an ancient and yet contemporary (but almost vanished) culture. This, the encounter with his ceramic work, Rebwar kept for the end. We

visited the (still few) art galleries in Sulaimani and paid a visit to the highly esteemed painter Ismail Khayat, who is as a father to younger generations of painters. We met other artists, and bit by bit it became clear to us what history the Kurdish artists share and what art and cultural practices mean for creating a cultural awareness of a people who under various dictatorships in the past centuries have lost almost everything. Here we saw art as the motor for culture. We also went to the Museum of Modern Art under construction and learned about its origin. And we visited the College of Fine Arts on the campus of the University of Sulaimani, a brand new campus with a high quality, well-equipped art school.

The study trip was a crash-course in how an art-world takes shape and what is needed to get it established: first, good artists who are respected and are able to teach a new generation of artists; second, a museum as a platform for art and for encounter and exchange with a collection of art that connects to the local as well as the international developments in art (the Donation); and thirdly, education: an art school. The three are intricately connected as this book shows. It introduces the reader to the art practice of a skilful, artistic ceramist, explaining in Chapters 1 and 2 how his art practice is related to the history and political situation of Kurdistan and the millennia-old cultural history of the region, and how it is a stimulus for the emerging art scene of present-day Kurdistan.

The book explains the reasons for the forms, themes and colours of Rebwar's impressive ceramic oeuvre, which we were able to see at the end of our second day in Rebwar's exhibition in Sulaimani. Chapter 3 recalls the coming into being of the Museum and the project of the Donation to acquire a collection of international artworks as a frame of reference for today's art practice. Moreover, it argues how it connects to the emergence of a much-needed art infrastructure in his hometown Sulaimani. In a compelling account of his art practice Rebwar explains how, in going back to ancient techniques of ceramic production of his native Kurdistan, i.e. ancient Upper Mesopotamia, he breathed new life into this art form, connecting old techniques with contemporary themes, motives and styles. In that respect, his research gives new insights into the art of ceramic making as well as the way an (ancient) art practice can stimulate the surfacing of an art infrastructure.

Art and the Art World

The whole project bears witness to an exploration in art practice which is inextricably connected to building the foundations of an art infrastructure, without which any art practice would fail to root. The connection of the two within one person's activities and the very awareness which this book demonstrates, makes it an eye-opener for understanding how art practice is necessary for creating a solid ground on which to build an art world. I use the term 'art world' in Howard S. Becker's sense of the interplay between the production, distribution and reception of art, which together form the basis of an art infrastructure. Without places to show art, without distributors, supply, art education, art critics, etc. no art practice can survive. The strength of Rebwar's project lies in the modest but purposeful enterprise of paving the way to something that exceeds by far the personal art production.

Next to being an accomplished and acknowledged artist, Rebwar Rashed is a true ambassador for the establishment of a cultural infrastructure in Sulaimani, Kurdistan. For this he spared no effort, and he has succeeded – as the book clearly shows. I am grateful to have been trusted to participate in this impressive project and to be introduced by Rebwar to an emerging art world that springs from a culture which is greatly worth knowing better.

Kitty Zijlmans -Director of the LUICD-

Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen, Centre for the Arts in Society, KG Moderne beeldende kunst

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Transformative Dialogues: The work of Rebwar Saeed

Dr. Jim Mooney

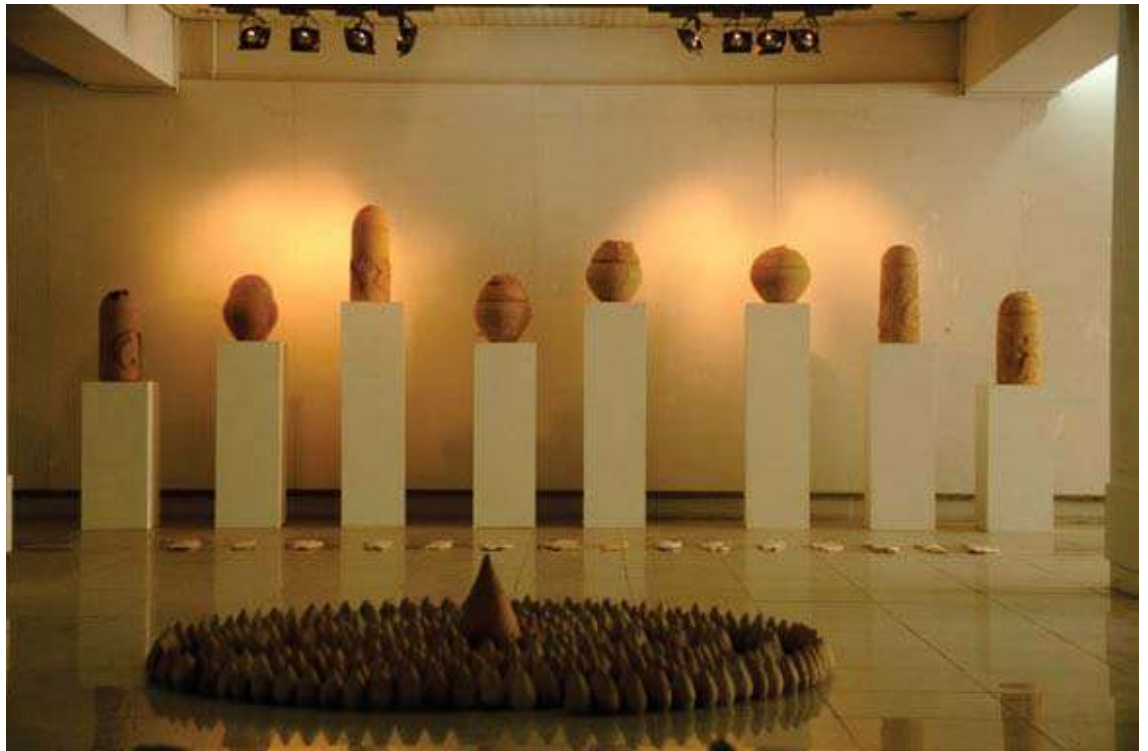
Reader in the Theory and Practice of Fine Art, Middlesex University-London

Rebwar Saeed's work is characterised by the dialogues that produce a practice of powerful and alluring cultural hybridity. This work clearly displays its cultural histories and influences, resulting in a practice of resonant beauty. These influences range from traditional Kurdistan arts and crafts, to key movements and figures in the development of western modernism such as Cubism and Picasso. Sometimes the influence is subtle, recondite, like the palette of blue taken from the traditional rugs of Kurdistan or the influence of artefacts from earlier cultures of the Kurdistan region. His work also responds to contemporary social and political concerns that include equal rights for women and the more troubling events from recent history in Kurdistan Iraq such as the poisonous gasses released on the innocent people of Sargalw in 1987 and Halabja in 1988 by Iraqi forces. An early and ongoing collaborative project, *La Pluie d'oiseaux* (started in 1991) poignantly refers to the phenomenon of birds falling from the sky, like rain, as a consequence of the murderous chemical gasses dropped in Sargalw. Saeed himself suffered injuries from this event. A more recent work, *Anfal 20* (2008), echoes the title of the 8th chapter of the Qura'an. This title was shamefully appropriated by the Iraqi regime for the operations that governed a series of attacks upon innocent Muslim civilians in the region of Kurdistan Iraq. This compelling work evokes and marks these atrocities as evidenced by the mass graves unearthed following the demise of Saddam Hussein and his brutal regime. *'Anfal 20'* comprises an installation of haunting translucent masks lit from beneath, presented in an otherwise dark space commemorating the dead of *'Anfal'*. Another work, *5000 portraits, 5000 victims*, was made in honour of the victims of the Halabja massacre.

Saeed's work is clearly *engagé*, motivated by a sense of moral and political outrage at the abuses that have befallen his homeland. It would, however, be mistaken to view this work as simple unadorned protest. The work both articulates and transcends its generative impetus. Often the work jettisons explicit political reference and delivers instead images of forlorn sadness. This sadness expresses a longing or yearning, reminiscent of Portuguese *fado*, songs of infinite sadness that nevertheless carry an affirmative beauty accessible only

through the pain of enduring loss. Fado is characterised by Saudade, a bittersweet complex of contradictory emotions, impossible to define but instantly identifiable on hearing. Recent ceramic bas reliefs by Saeed are inspired by the art of Mesopotamia, a cultural precursor of present-day Kurdistan. These mute expressions share affinities with modern choreography. Carefully calibrated gesture articulates with absolute precision the thought that eludes words. The draped body is bent and exaggerated. Deeply incised lines convey the tenor of loss. These sinuous lines carry a force akin to threnody' (songs of death) and lament and mourn the incalculable losses inflicted by the obscene events referred to by some as the Kurdish Holocaust'. [1] Linear definition, for Saeed, is more than a means to an end or a matter of aesthetic judgement; the linear carries a metaphorical and symbolic weight. A quest for clear definition is propelled by concerns for boundary, frontier, homeland and the moral/political urgency that impels the case for the establishment of a sovereign Kurdish nation state. This series of ceramic figures is redolent of an arcane alphabet or system of hieroglyphs whose code proves impossible to decipher. They invoke the distant past and yet, paradoxically, are resolutely of today. This tension is characteristic of Saeed's multi-faceted practice. It resonates with productive diametrical opposites like tradition/modernity, past/present, Kurdish/European, the culturally and historically specific and the general. With apparent ease, Saeed's work oscillates between these various poles. The cultural hybridity that ensues allows for the development of a practice that is vibrant, robust and resounds with echoes from the art of the far and recent past. Saeed's work has been transformed through the dialogue he has determinedly initiated and pursued with modern European Art and its institutions. In turn, he opens up a space for the reception of contemporary Kurdish Art in the west and the ensuing establishment of continuing transformative dialogues. His practice is suffused with a profound and lyrical humanism and conveys and promotes in a non-didactic way an ethics of compassion and care for one's fellow human being. Consequently, work of enduring appeal issues forth from the bleakest of circumstances. Not only is Saeed's work transformed by dialogue with other traditions, he also shifts mankind's capacity for unspeakable cruelty and sympathetically elevates and transforms the unjust events of recent Kurdish history into a call for the resurgence and reinstatement of the good and just.

[1] There is a mounting international pressure for the atrocities of Anfal' to be recognised as a Kurdish Holocaust.



Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Safen Esmail

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Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Safen Esmail



Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Safen Esmail



Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Safen Esmeil

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Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Safen Esmail



Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Safen Esmail



Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Rebwar Saed

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Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Rebwar Saed



Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Rebwar Saed

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Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Rebwar Saed

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Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Safen Esmail



Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Safen Esmail



Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Rebwar Saed

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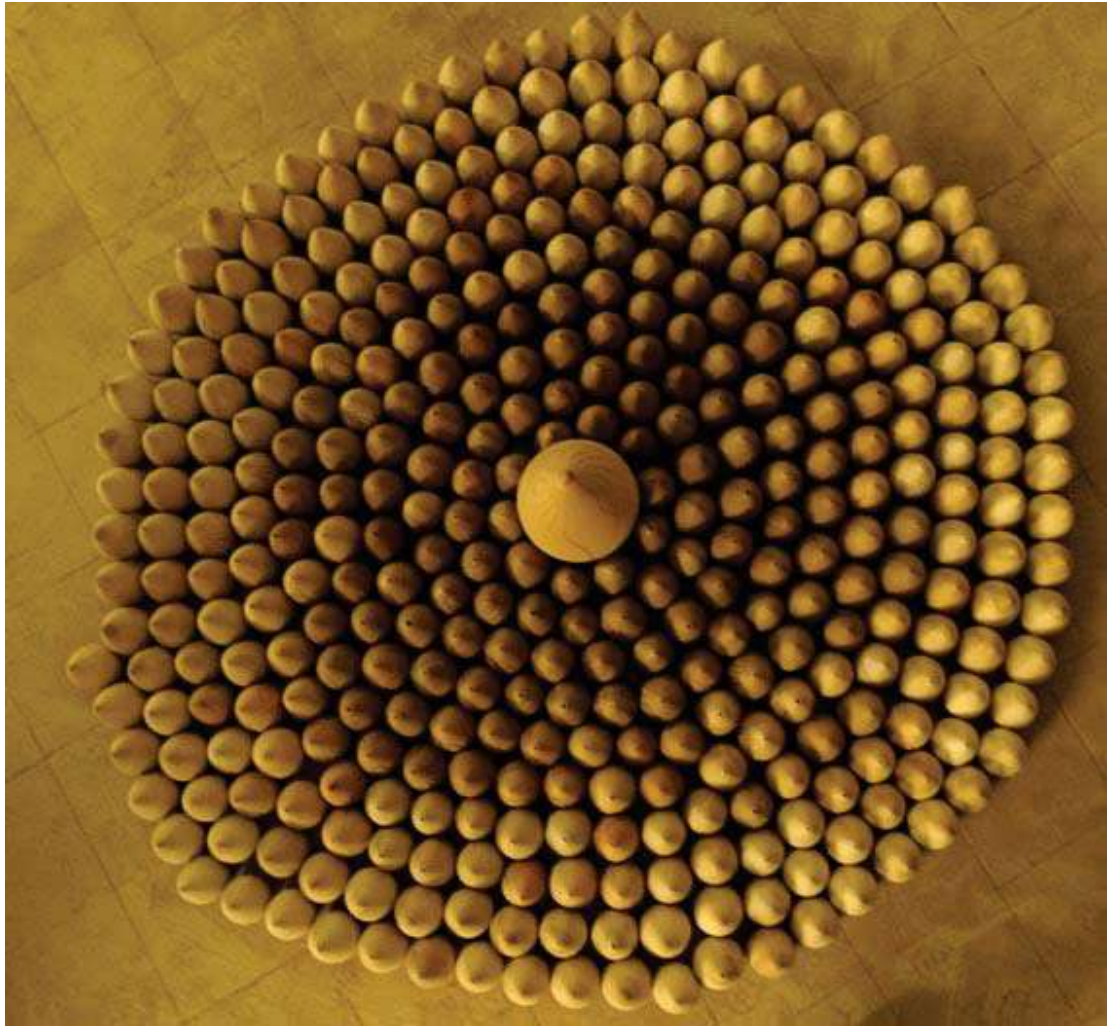
Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Rebwar Saed

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Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Rebwar Saed

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Ceramic Project, Sardam Gallery, Kurdistan Iraq, 2012, Photo by Rebwar Saed

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Ink pen drawings with digital colour, 30cmX21cm,2010,Rebwar Rashed



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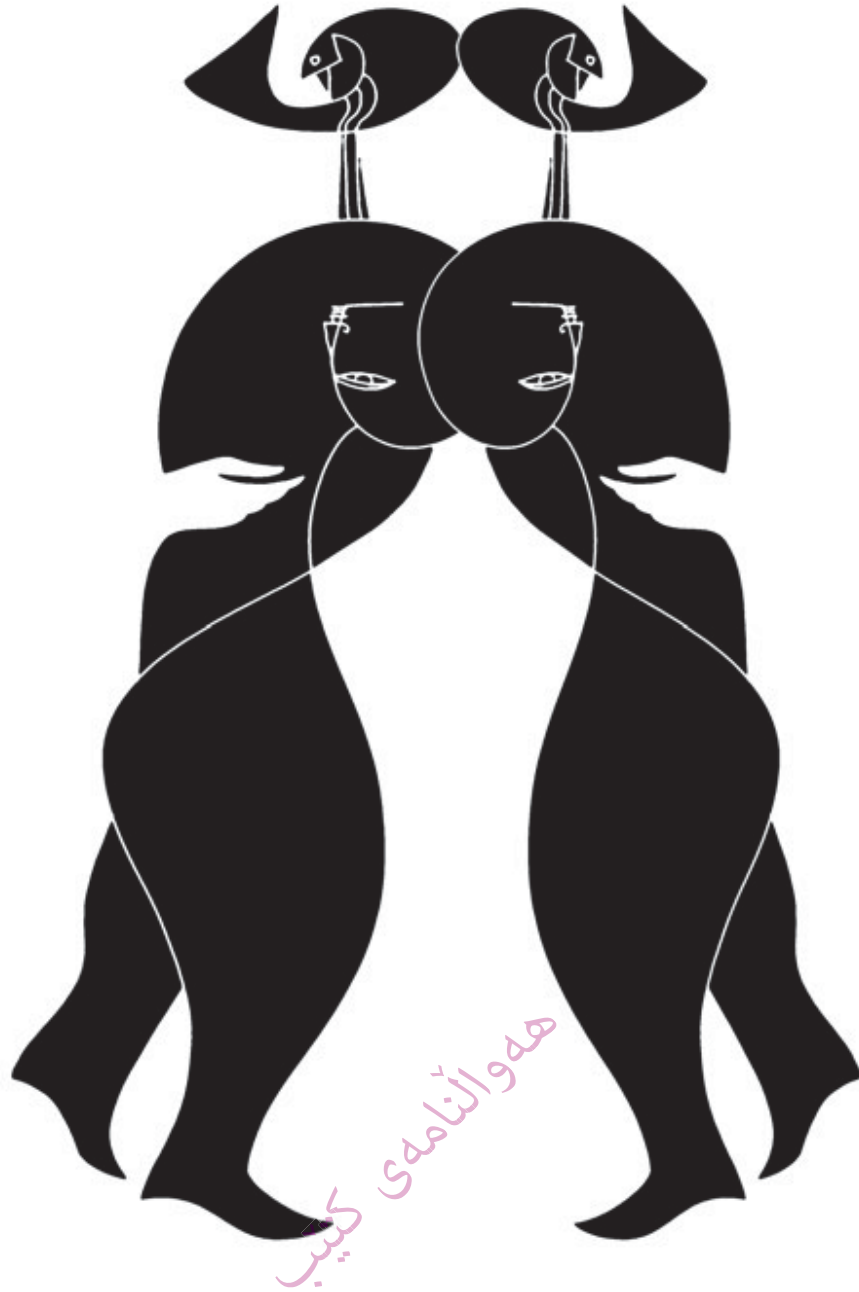
Ink pen drawings with digital colour, 30cmX21cm,2010,Rebwar Rashed



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Ink pen drawings with digital colour, 30cmX21cm,2010,Rebwar Rashed

Kurdish Political and Cultural Identity

“Out of Kurdish Soil: The Contemporary Artwork of Rebwar Rashed”

Introduction

My research project is about my artistic practice in ceramics and about my efforts to build the new Modern Art Museum in Kurdistan.

In Chapter One I will describe the context to my practice projects. Beginning with the historical context I will examine how culture and politics evolved in Kurdistan since the First World War, giving special emphasis to the development of modern art and the reciprocal influences of European art on Iraqi and Kurdish artists.

Following on I will speak about my personal history – childhood, education, involvement in the artistic life and political struggle in Kurdistan; my life as an artist-in-exile in Iran, France and the UK (the artistic projects in Europe, the USA, Japan and the Middle East, which I have been involved in, will be described in some detail); finally, my return to Kurdistan in 2004 after fourteen years in exile (taking up a post as teacher at the Fine Art College at Suleimany University and working on the realization of the Crossing Museum) - a journey which is as much an artistic journey as a geographic one.

Chapter Two will be leading on from the historical background. I will deal with the particular questions concerning my practical ceramic work in the context of contemporary developments in that field.

The work for my practical project has strong links with the history and tragedy of my country and deals with memory and life experience. I chose to work with the ceramic medium as an important material, signifying earth, land and preservation of the past. For this purpose I worked for several months during each of the four years of my study in an artisan-potter's workshop in my hometown of Suleimany. I created the ceramic pieces with local clays and using the old methods. While working with the traditional potter Wasta Haidar, I became

aware of the valuable traditions and ways of working with clay, which had been practised for centuries and passed on between generations. I included this as a vital part in my writing, referring also to research in the Archaeological and Ethnographic Museums in Kurdistan as well as in Turkey and Iran.

As a result of this complex and multi-faceted reflection, the six distinct groups of ceramic work are presented and discussed in sub-chapters under the titles 'A People in Flight', 'Pot of Life', 'Memories of Childhood', 'Diary of a Month', 'Victims', 'Collage/Fragments'. The section on Colour talks about the deep-rooted significance of colour in the cultural (especially poetry), religious and political traditions in Kurdistan and how this is reflected in the use of colour in my artwork.

Chapter Three is a case study about the Museum Project - telling the story from its beginning as a poem in 1987 until the completion of the building of the Crossing Museum in 2012. First ideas formed by international artist supporters and myself to assemble a collection of artwork for Kurdistan; the campaign to win the support of Kurdish politicians for a modern art museum in my home town of Suleimany, Kurdistan/Iraq to find a permanent home for the collection of 'The Donation'; acquisition of land in the Azadi Freedom Park to build the museum as a historically significant place of commemoration of the victims to dictatorship; official support from the Ministry of Culture of the Kurdish government and financial backing for museum building.

The historical and cultural context for the Crossing Museum is charted through a mapping of existing museums, private galleries and the Fine Art Institute and College of Art. The emblematic nature of the museum architecture, its design features, exhibition spaces and location within the city context is described in detail in the chapter on form and function of the museum. The destabilising impact of the political upheavals on the museum project in the period after 2003, which threatened to derail the building work and had a detrimental effect on the progress of the project are laid bare as well as the efforts to continue with renewed support.

The discourse on the nature of the museum, its mission and artistic and educational objectives is discussed in the final section: the Crossing Museum as a bridge between Kurdistan and the world and its significance for the cultural life of Kurdistan. Practical steps

towards a professional structure for the museum are elaborated and the various aspects of museum practice analysed. Finally, the Museum programme, initial exhibitions and events scheduling is detailed (emphasis on the history of Kurdish art of the 20th and 21st century and exhibition projects about memory by contemporary artists).

It is the overarching task of this chapter to find answers to the questions of how to bring cultures together and how a museum can become the platform to achieve this. The need to find a permanent place for the art collection, 'The Donation', which had been assembled outside of Kurdistan in solidarity between international and Kurdish artists, generated the idea of a museum. Its completion and future existence is a milestone in the cultural life of my country.

As much as I am an artist in my own right, my work for over more than thirty years has been concerned with creating a platform for artists. Taking responsibility as artist or maker of artwork and as art intermediary for other artists, is based on my credibility as an artist who understands the specific problems from the perspective of the maker. Studying Fine Art in Europe, building an Art Association with European artists and working as arts educator in educational establishments in Europe, has given me invaluable experience which I can now build on in guiding the work for the Museum.

All parts of my research project are intricately connected, as they form two essential and inseparable practices in my artistic life: being a creative artist at the same time as contributing to build the cultural foundations for modern art and art education in Kurdistan.

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CHAPTER ONE – REFLECTIONS ON KURDISH ART AND THE FRAMEWORK FOR MY PRACTICE

In this research project I want to place my own practice as an artist within the historical, social and cultural context of Kurdish art. By tracing the history and evolution of Kurdish art, I intend to demonstrate that my artistic work is firmly rooted in the artistic traditions of my country. In that sense I do not write a critical analysis of Kurdish Art, but intend to show my art practice in relation to the history of Kurdish Art. The research elements in the following chapters concern Kurdish art in the past, my personal history, the effects of exile and a critical analysis of my art practice.

1.1 Kurdish Art in its Historical Context

Under the Ottoman Empire the Kurdish tribes carried out many rebellions to find independence. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and post-World War One divisions did not bring Kurdistan its independence either. The Treaty of Lausanne of 1924¹ between the Allied Nations and the newly independent Turkey split the Kurdish lands between the countries Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria and did not take into account the need of the Kurdish people for a united homeland. So it happened, that part of my grandfather's and father's family lived in Kurdistan-Iran and part in Kurdistan-Iraq. The city of Suleimany, in which I was born and grew up, lies in the north-west of Iraq, close to the border with Iran. This imposed division, divided many families and tribes and altered the conditions for a Kurdish national and cultural identity. The four-ways split of Kurdistan appears in idiomatic and symbolic form as the number 4 in much of my early work.

¹*League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 28, pp. 12-113. The treaty of Lausanne was ratified by the Greek government on February 11, 1924, by the Turkish government on March 31, 1924, and by the governments of Great Britain, Italy and Japan on August 6, 1924.

Fifty years of brutal suppression and dictatorship in Kurdistan-Iraq meant that all aspects of life were controlled. The use of violence and force was apparent everywhere - in the media reporting of war, in the militarisation of society and family and the glorification of the leader and his various wars (war with Iran, the Kuwait war, the Gulf war and the continual war with the Kurds). In this atmosphere of tight control and censorship, artists had to resort to express their subject matter without arousing major suspicion. This was a form of resistance art, created to provide a breathing space for freedom and self expression and had to be cleverly designed to avoid confrontation with the system. Any confrontation with the government would/could lead to the arrest, torture, and disappearance of not only the artists themselves but also sometimes their entire families. For example, the colours of the Kurdish flag, namely red, green, yellow and white, were symbolically used. Sometimes black was used as a reaction against the way things were. Wearing black was either due to the large number of funerals, the young people who were tortured to death by the government, or as a means of showing discontent with the system. This disguised protest was not always successful: sometimes young men were arrested or at least stopped by soldiers on the street because of wearing black.

The emergence of nationalist ideology amongst Kurdish intellectuals during the early 1940s was the effort to preserve the cultural and political independence of the Kurdish nation within Iraq. Kurdish artists had to consider the character of their art and how to preserve its Kurdish nature. Hence the attempts by Kurdish artists to find their national identity in history and ancient culture and to reflect that within modern art. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 provided an additional impetus, in that it influenced Kurdish artists in the same way as it influenced much of Europe by breaking down classical and traditional molds. This led to a new era of artistic creation that exceeded the boundaries of traditional works of art.

Artists returning from exile brought back with them new ideas. Many of them had left the region due to the hardships of the two world wars. For example, Hissen Husni Mukryany had lived with a Syrian family for one year where he learned photography and print making. On his return in the early 1920s to Hawla in Kurdistan he opened the first Kurdish publishing house. The establishment of a publishing house was a major factor in the ready access to and distribution of images of artworks. If, in the past, artistic work could only be seen in the original (with limited access for the public), now it could be reproduced and distributed on a large scale. It brought about technical changes in the creation of art. In 1934 Mukryany

published a handbook outlining the process and technique of photography and woodcuts (see Illustration 1)²

Those who had gone to other parts of the Ottoman Empire (modern Turkey in particular), returned and shaped the artistic process. For example, the renowned Kurdish poet Piramerd, who studied law in Istanbul, managed to secure a good position in the Ottoman administration and became the mayor of Amase (a Turkish town). He was editor-in-chief of a Turkish newspaper under the pseudonym of T.S. On his return to Kurdistan in the 1940s he established a Kurdish paper called Jin. The paper became a platform for modern thinking, poetry, criticism, patriotism and the defense of women's rights. This created a more liberal atmosphere for debates and discussions about modern values, which in turn influenced artistic production.³

It should be stated at this point, that after World War I Kurdistan/Iraq was a British colony ruled by the eminent military figure of Major E.B. Soane (see Illustration 2).⁴



Illustration 1). Cover, *Photography and Printmaking*, Mukryany, 1934, Kurdistan Publisher/Iraq

² In the absence of Art Academies during that early period, Mukryany's publications on art and photography provided an important means of study.

³ Data taken from the book by Aladdin Sujadi, *History of Kurdish Literature*, 1971, Baghdad.

⁴ After the war the Ottoman Empire was divided up, and the British Mandate of Mesopotamia was established by League of Nations mandate.



(Illustration 2). Lady Adela, by Percival Richards, British photographer for the British, 1919⁵

The arrival of many Orientalists⁶ in Kurdistan (among them archeologists, diplomats, painters) in the early part of the 20th century played an important role. Even though many of them had a political agenda, they left behind an intellectual legacy that included positive influences brought from the West through familiarity with and appreciation of art. Major Soane for example, published the first Kurdish grammar book in the 1930s.⁶

⁵ Meiselas Susan, *Kurdistan in the Shadow of History*, 1997, New York, p77

⁶ Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism - Western Conceptions of the Orient*, characterises different phases of 19th and 20th century Orientalism: from romantic notions of the Orient to scholarly and scientific understanding to a managed Orientalism of the colonisers.

⁷ He spoke fluent Farsi, read the classical literature of Persian poetry and conversed in Kurdish dialects.

After World War II, William Eagleton, an American diplomat and writer, who died in 2011, published a book called Kurdish Rugs.⁷ **(APPENDIX A)**

The fourth and the most important group in artistic development were the artists of the region who absorbed the new ideas which came to them through the limited channels available and managed to create a different kind of art which represented the complexity and problems of their own times.

An artist who changed the status quo was the Kurdish artist Osman Beg⁸. Knowledge of Osman Beg's work was due to a strong aural tradition in this region of Kurdistan, where historical facts were passed on aurally from one generation to the next. Osman Beg belonged to a rich and influential family and was known in Suleimany as a quirky and strange man who used to go to the Saywan graveyard to draw portraits of the women who visited their dead loved ones. Unfortunately, none of Osman Beg's work has survived but he remains in people's memory.

Hassan Fallah was an artist in the 1920s who painted tea houses and hammams. He painted Kurdish landscapes and also used many legendary figures such as Rostam and Zohrab (legendary Persian heroes) in his work. From the work he produced only one black and white photograph remains of him painting on a wall. Most of his work was destroyed as the tea houses and hammams have not survived.

Salim Aziz, born in the early 20th century in Suleimany, is often described as Kurdistan's first artist (see Illustration 3). He had no formal education in art, but painted from experience.

⁷ Eagleton served as United States Ambassador to Yemen 1967, Tunisia 1977, Libya 1978-1979, Algeria 1979, Iraq 1980-1984 and Syria 1985-1988. He is also the author of *The Kurdish Republic of 1946* (1961). He rejoined the State Department in 2003 as a special advisor for Northern Iraq. Eagleton's book *Introduction to Kurdish Rugs* (published in 1988), drew from his experience collecting rugs in Baghdad and elsewhere in the Middle East. It remains the standard book on Kurdish pile weavings.

⁸ Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, an Arab novelist and researcher of the 20th century, speaks about him as the pioneer of Iraqi art.

One of his most famous works is called The Slaughter of Armenians, 1912' (a work bought by the Brazilian ambassador)



(Illustration 3). Salim Aziz, *Missing Time*, mixed media on paper ,1987, 26,5 x 20,6 cm, private collection

Many of Salim's murals can be seen decorating public spaces in Suleimany. His artworks have special relevance, as they represent a kind of home-grown art, rather than art brought to the Kurdish region by artists from Baghdad or Iran. Salim was the first Kurdish artist who wanted to open an exhibition in the hall of one of the schools in 1932 but was not given permission. In the end he decided to have his first exhibition in the Saywan graveyard, a place of great symbolic significance (many of the famous and popular Kurdish writers, poets and artists are buried there).

Ali Jolla, still living in Suleimany, is one of the few academic artists who studied Fine Art in Baghdad. His teacher, Jewad Salim, had studied in Europe, bringing back new artistic techniques and methods. He created a lasting legacy by establishing the Department of Fine

Art in Suleimany in 1980, where he taught for many years. One of the important new disciplines he introduced was the art of stage design through painting. He also established the College of Art in 2000. I have worked with him in the Artist Union in Suleimany and for four years (2004-2007) in the College of Art, where I was head of the Fine Art Department, comprising the disciplines of painting, sculpture and ceramics.

In 1939, 7 years after the British occupation of Iraq had ended, a school of ceramics was opened in Baghdad. A teacher, Zaid Muhammad, visited Britain, bought an oil kiln and took it back to Baghdad. The school later employed a British potter called Ian Auld (born in Brighton in 1926). Auld⁹ had trained at Brighton College of Art and then the Slade School of Fine Art. He was taught ceramics by William Newland. In 1954 he went to Baghdad and stayed for three years during which time he set up a pottery department in the Baghdad Art School as well as travelling extensively around the Middle-East.¹⁰ When Auld left the Baghdad Art School, he was replaced by Valantinus Karalambus, a Cypriot, who had studied art in London. He is considered the father of Iraqi ceramic art. He obtained the Iraqi nationality and stayed in Iraq until the Iraq-Iran war of the 1980s.

Jawad Salim, sculptor and painter in Iraq, was part of a family of artists. In 1938 he was sent by the government to study art in Paris. He moved to Rome in 1939 and toward the end of that year he returned to Baghdad where, at the age of only 20, he was appointed instructor of sculpture at the newly established School of Fine Art. He was also employed by the Iraqi Museum in the restoration of Mesopotamian artifacts. In his artwork he combined many elements of the ancient Mesopotamian culture with a style close to French Avant-guard art. In 1946 Salim went to London to study at the Slade School of Fine Art. Five years later he returned to Iraq and established the Baghdad Group for Modern Art. After the fall of the monarchy in 1958, he was commissioned by the regime of Abd al-Karim Qasim, president of Iraq, to design and execute a massive monument consisting of fourteen bronze units in Baghdad's Freedom Square. This work became the metaphor for republican Iraq's struggle for justice and freedom. Jawad was married to Lorna Hales, a British artist, who he had met at the Slade School of Fine Art. Lorna Salim returned to Iraq with Jawad Salim and taught

⁹ <http://www.galeriebesson.co.uk/auld.html>

¹⁰ On his return to England, he built a kiln in Essex and began teaching at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts. He was appointed Head of the Ceramic Department in 1974.

drawing and painting at the Women's College in Baghdad. Salim's sister Nezihah Salim went to study in Paris under Fernand Leger. After 7 years of study she also returned to Baghdad, where she continued to work in a contemporary style. A brother of Jawad Salim, Nizar Salim, an author, art critic and painter, wrote the first book on contemporary Iraqi art in 1979, which was translated into several languages.¹¹

The painter Faiq Hassan won a scholarship to study in Paris. He graduated from the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1938 and on his return to Iraq founded the painting department at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad, where he taught 3 generations of young Iraqi and Kurdish artists. His Kurdish students in turn became the art teachers in Kurdistan from 1960 onwards.

These were important milestones in the development of Fine Art and Fine Art education in Iraq. One can say that between 1938 and 1958 there was a 20-year window of opportunity for young artists from Iraq to study abroad and create a modern art movement in Iraq. During this 20-year period, artists in Kurdistan-Iraq, although coming from a different cultural background, were nevertheless influenced to a great extent by this modern art movement, which had itself an international orientation.

The national tragedy of Halabja¹² in March 1988 (**APPENDIX B**) (the aerial bombardment with mustard gas bombs by the Iraqi government of Kurdish towns, killing 5000 civilians) and Anfal (**APPENDIX C**) between February and September 1989 (over 2600 villages destroyed by the Iraqi regime when between 50,000 and 100,000 civilians ended up in mass graves) changed Kurdish art and fundamentally altered the way artists thought about things - such that the artistic image of Kurdistan was divided into two eras - before Halabja and Anfal and after. The events which had turned Kurdistan into a killing fields, were immediately reflected in art. The images of Kurdish people in their colourful clothes, amongst a landscape of high mountains and green fields, were transformed by the tragedies into a reproduction in

¹¹ Salim, Nizar, *Al Fen-al-Iraqi al-Mu'asir*, (Baghdad, Iraqi Art, 1979).

¹² Horvitz, Leslie Alan and Catherwood, Christopher, *Encyclopedia of War Crimes and Genocide*, (New York, Infobase Publishing, 2006), p195.

imagery and concept of the violence, portraying the Kurds as the ultimate victims and the Iraqi regime as perpetrators.

I have been influenced in my art by modern Iraqi artists as well as drawing a lot from my Kurdish cultural background. During the time in which I was peshmerga (partisan fighter from 1985 -1990) in the Kurdish mountains, I actively worked on establishing a printing workshop, in which I produced and published 4 volumes of Kultur¹³, comprising altogether 2000 pages of articles and translated writing on subjects related to modern art and literature. Reproductions of works by the German expressionist artist Käthe Kollwitz, which I published in those volumes, had a great impact on my own work. For example, two books of my poetry writings (published in 1985 and 1989) carried illustrations of black and white ink drawings, which were directly inspired by her art (see Illustration 4). The way Kollwitz expressed the close relationship between the political and the personal in her work, attracted me as a young artist. Her work was meant to speak to ordinary people, it appealed to workers, people who had lost loved ones and people who were involved in a struggle for human rights.

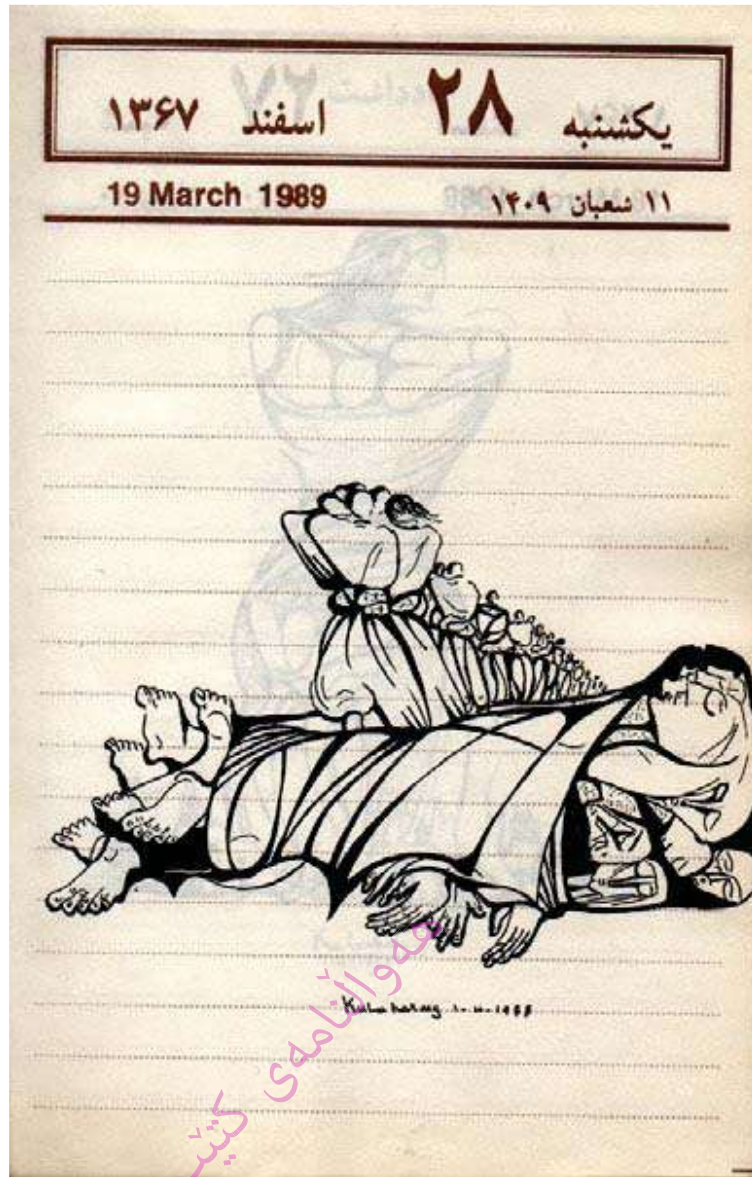
In the absence of any theoretical writing in English about issues connected with the lives of Kurdish artists in exile I am suggesting a number of websites, which provide insight and information.¹⁴

¹³ *Magazine on Modern Art and Literature*, published in Kurdish and Arabic. I was one of 5 members of its editorial team. 4 volumes, each 400 pages, were published during 1988-90.

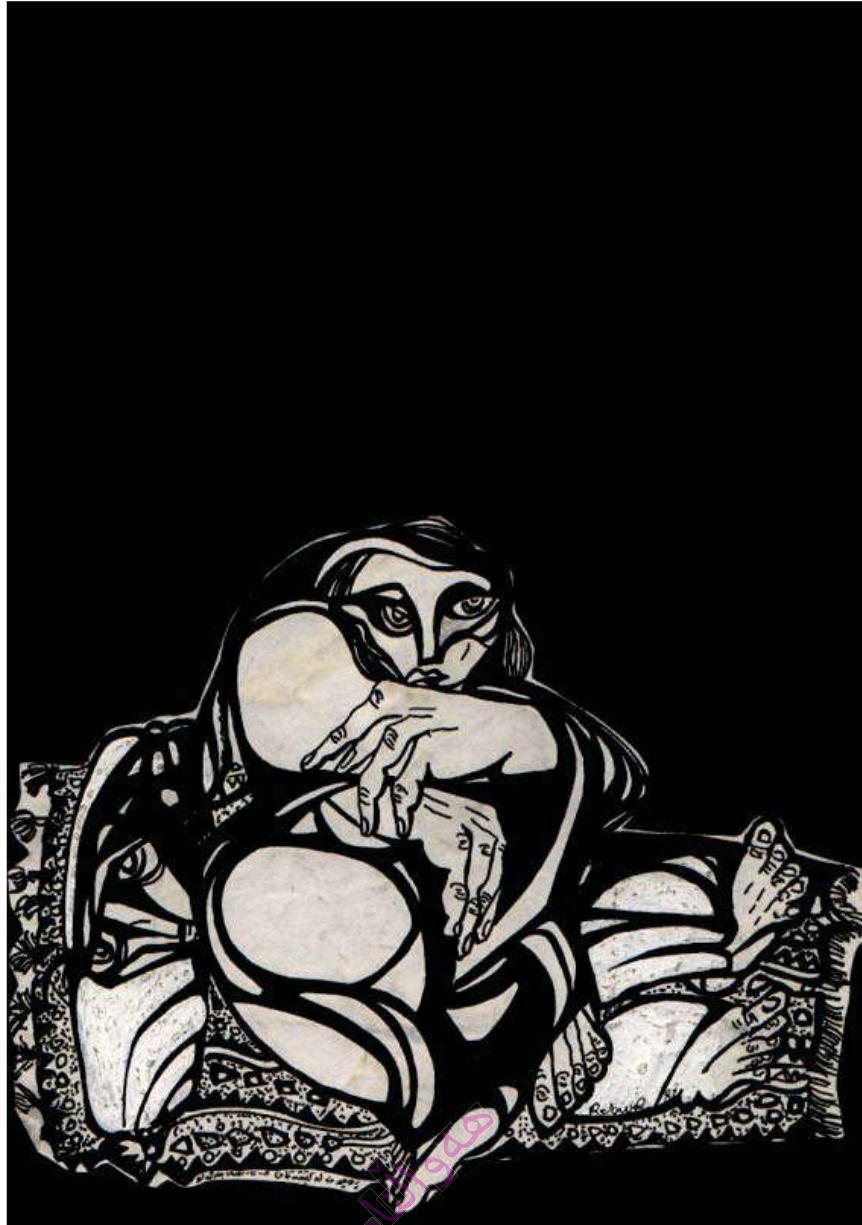
¹⁴ There is now an extensive literature, both historical and theoretical, on diaspora and exile, from Franz Fanon and Edward Said to more recent publications on cultural and national identity in the age of globalization. Some useful references pertaining to the visual arts are: Homi K.Bhaba (ed) *Nation and Narration*, London 1990; Paul Gilroy *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London 1993; Kobena Mercer (ed) *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, inIVA 2005. There is little on the Kurdish diaspora but the following websites are relevant:

<http://www.shewakaranikurd.com/>, <http://www.chomanhardi.com/>, <http://www.azad.exto.nl/>, <http://zamwagallery.com/b/>, <http://awnisami.com/>, <http://www.walidsiti.com/>, <http://www.hoshiyar.nl/>, <http://lala-art.org/>, <http://mariwan.exto.org/>

Unlike the artists in the 1930s, who were sponsored by the Iraqi government to study in Paris, London or Rome and who came back to Iraq to work and teach there, I grew up during the years of Baathist repression under Saddam Hussein. This forced me to flee abroad after years as freedom fighter. My life as artist in exile will be discussed in more detail later.



Rebwar Rashed, *Halabje*, 1986, Kulaharme, Ink on paper, 13x16 cm,



(Illustration 4). Rebwar Rashed, *Waiting*, 1986, Bergalou, Ink on paper, 21x27 cm,

Photograph by Rebwar Rashed

1.2 Personal and Professional History

Throughout my adult life, personal and professional developments have always been tightly bound together and have in many ways informed each other.

During my years at high school, I illustrated a monthly journal, which was displayed for everyone to read. It contained poetry, literature and contributions from the sciences. One of my teachers was also a journalist and took some of my illustrations to be published in a national magazine in Baghdad. Following this breakthrough, other writers and journalists frequently asked me to design illustrations. This gave me the idea to open my first exhibition on May 24, 1984 in the Kurdish town of Hawler. The governor of Hawler bought a collection of my works from this exhibition to be shown in the main library in the town, where it can be viewed to this day. After the success of the exhibition I went to Baghdad to study in the College for Traditional Woodcraft for one year. One of my artworks, a wood sculpture, was entered by my tutor for the 10th International Art Exhibition.

During my year in Baghdad, political repression against the students (especially the Kurdish students) increased and, as I refused to become affiliated to the Baath party, I had no option other than to return to Kurdistan. This coincided with the war between Iraq and Iran and I faced forced conscription as a soldier in the Iraqi army.

I decided to join the Kurdish resistance in the mountains, where artists had formed the Artists Mountain Association. There I designed political posters and illustrations to articles of Kultur magazine. After the chemical bombardment of Halabja all our area was occupied by Saddam Hussein's troops, and I along with thousands of others were forced to flee to Iran. I stayed in the Kurdish Iranian town of Saqis, where I continued to publish our magazine. Many of the Kurdish children, who had been orphaned in the bombing of Halabja and other towns, had been brought to a camp near Saqis. I worked with these children to draw and paint their memories and experiences and we later exhibited their work in the Museum for

Modern Art in Teheran.¹⁵ My artistic work was mainly concerned with showing the effect of the war on the population. The Iranian government published my artwork and it was shown in two major galleries in Tehran in 1989. With another artist friend I obtained a visa to go to Paris to open an exhibition about Halabja. This took place in the Kurdish Institute under the title Kurdish Hiroshima. Le Monde Diplomatique published an article and Channel Plus interviewed me the day after the exhibition opened.

As an artist I became a witness to the crimes committed against my people. In the way that history affected my personal life, it also affected my artistic vision. In France I began to collaborate closely with two other artists (the French artist Edith Henry and the Polish artist Karina Waschko). Together we formed the organisation 'Showering of Birds'.¹⁶ This organisation has been actively involved till now in promoting the cause of international modern art in exchange with Kurdish artists. I escaped war and violence to face another kind of violence: life in exile. Becoming an exile is a violent act of psychological displacement. It entails rupture in one's social and physical environment, in the pursuit of goals and in one's continuity and history. It is separation from the groups one belonged to and the replacement of the familiar with a new world full of uncertainties. You have to make an effort to find new groups to identify with and to engage with your environment in new ways. The initial reaction to these changes is bewilderment and shock. Separation from the familiar environment and deprivation from the support and comfort of friends and family is accompanied with the challenges of adapting to a new world.

¹⁵ The museum, designed by Le Corbusier, housed many sculptures by European artists like Henry Moore, Max Ernst and Alberto Giacometti.

¹⁶ The art association *La Pluie d'Oiseaux* was established in 1991 in Lille, France, with two other artists (Edith Henry and Karina Waschko). Its objective is to create encounters between cultures and between the different fields of arts. The association creates and distributes exhibitions and shows, organises artists' residencies, workshops and events. The association is developing The Donation that is both a collection of works of contemporary art for the museum of Suleimany and a principle of artistic exchange, with a vocation to create a dynamic for artistic encounters between Europe and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Exile turns you into a being without the normal rights of existence. It is constantly requested of you to justify your being here rather than there. You become a person whose story others do not know, want to know, or care about. Kamal Merawdali, himself a poet-in-exile, argues that exile puts you in a strange position because your existential space is turned upside down. Even though you seem to outwardly cope by walking, talking, writing, working and compromising, the dislocation of space creates a different internal order, a different play of time, and stream of sub-consciousness. Gradually you find reality is overtaken by dreams: daydreams, midnight dreams and nightmares. The past in the form of its presence there overturns the equation. It is this powerful presence of the past and the elsewhere in the reality and overwhelming nature of dreams, which destabilizes your presence here.”¹⁷

My work defines my narrative, it transforms my past and present into themes and motifs that embody, justify, and explain my presence in that delicate space called exile and my suspicious identity as a refugee whose living depends on human understanding and the good will of others.

The more I felt the violence and alienation of the outside world, its prolonged sagas of suffering, the more I felt the need to express these experiences in shorter, faster, sharper processes in my work. In other words the more violent the outside world became and the more alienated, the more momentum and urgency was in my artistic work. This is in line with the experience of other artists who have experienced similar catastrophes. Susan Sontag talks about war memories for Armenians arguing that The memory of war... like all memory is mostly local. Armenians, the majority in diaspora, keep alive the memory.¹⁸

The experience of exile also impacted on the choice of medium I worked with. Painting, digital graphics, photography and performance installation became at different times the preferred medium of expression. The particular reason for choosing to create a body of work in ceramics is to be found in my need to connect with the actual land, the physical substance of the earth in Kurdistan itself as the origin of all creative material. The ceramic medium is able to carry elements of writing, drawing, poetry and arabesque within its sculptural form. Much of my work in exile has been political, leading the critic Irene Rotas to say: ~~Rebwar,~~

¹⁷ Merawdali, Kamal, *Passage to Dawn*, (London Millenium Award, 2002), p110.

¹⁸ Sontag, Susan, , *Regarding the Pain of Others*, (Penguin Books, 2003), p32.

born in Sulaminyah, Kurdistan (Iraq) in 1962, is perhaps the most avowedly political of all the artists I have met during the period of this research project.”¹⁹

My initial work in exile (part of my BA in Fine Art, Middlesex University, 1998) was an attempt to create a language of understanding, to tell a narrative strong enough to attract attention, to find eyes interested in seeing, ears interested in listening to a story which is not pleasant, but quite disturbing. It emanates from an experience not unfamiliar to the West but incredible in its fear of loss of identity.

I did not intend to reduce my identity to a man begging for compassion and understanding as an exile. I did not want to reduce all my values to humanitarian values of compassion and sympathy. I wanted to find a language that, while trying to find a channel of communication with my sceptical audience, also reasserted my identity as a Kurd and related my story as someone who had been victimised for nothing but for being a Kurd. In July 1987, when Sergelou (the village where I was based as a peshmerga) was gassed by the Iraqi government, I witnessed the blind birds falling from the sky, smashing against houses, trees, rocks, people. That day I promised myself to bear witness. I wrote in my diary addressing the birds: “If I am not like you, a lost story, I promise to tell the moving story of all the Kurdistan birds to all humanity in order that we might understand better the voiceless screams of my grieving country.” This was the basis of my exhibition Birdshower – Balindabaran, which has been touring France for the last 20 years.²⁰

My installation 5000 Portraits (see Illustration 5) bears witness to the murder of 5000 victims of Iraq’s chemical attack against the Kurdish town of Halabja on 16 March, 1988 (5000 Portraits was completed during my BA study at Middlesex University). Writing about my exhibition, Prof. Martin Pitts says “His paintings and prints are an historical narrative of his experience. He illustrates the bitter sweet relationship of life and death, of love and hate. He illustrates in sadness and in celebration, but not with condemnation, for he is as

¹⁹ Rotas, Alexandra Irene, *A Soft Touch: Visual Artists from Refugee Populations (UK) and Representations of Asylum in Contemporary Art*, (Bath Spa University, 2006), p133, available from <http://www.alexrotas.org.uk/index.html> (accessed 01 January, 2012)

²⁰ I will chart the origin and history of the project ‘Showering of Birds’ in more detail in a subsequent discussion.

concerned for the perpetrators of the terrible genocide inflicted upon his people in 1988 as he is for his own family and close friends.”²¹



(Illustration 5). Rebwar Rashed, *5000 Portraits 5000 Victims*, 1997, Pitsjanger Gallery, London, Acrylic on MDF, 122cmX20m, 625 units, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed

Using the face as a pictorial element has always been a persistent presence in my work. The dominance of the face over other forms in my work is partly related to the artistic traditions of the ancient Mesopotamia, which gave special sacredness to heads and faces of their gods and kings and depicted them in different ways and through different materials such as pottery, ceramics, and wall painting. The remaining heads and faces would be seen

²¹ Pitts, Martin, *Rebwar. Colour and Word*, (London, catalogue published by Middlesex University, 2000), p65.

by the later generations as expressions of normal people and embodiments of blessing, goodness, fertility and hope.

The particular way in which this artwork was displayed in the gallery space of Pitshanger Gallery in London in 1997 exemplified the importance of framing the work to make it more accessible to a Western audience in a European art context. How an artwork can be interpreted in a cross-cultural context has become of greater significance to me in my art practice over the years of living in exile.

My project Colour and Word began in 1999 as an MA Fine Art project at Middlesex University (see Illustrations 6 and 7). I sent 700 A5-size mixed media artworks to poets around the world, asking them to be inspired by the images and to respond in form of writing on the original artwork. The concept of the project was to bring together colour and word as symbol for artists in exile. Around 350 responses by poets and writers from Europe, USA, China, Asia, the Middle East, Australia and Africa were collected and exhibited at Middlesex University Gallery, Brunei Gallery, Pitshanger Gallery and Riverside Studios in London. It became a touring exhibition in France, Belgium, Germany, Holland and the USA with workshops and performances.²²

In the foreword to the exhibition catalogue, Professor Jon Thompson said: "The Colour and Word project is a complex one. Rebwar is seeking to form creative alliances between himself as an artist with very particular social and political interests and writers, mostly poets - on a global scale."²³

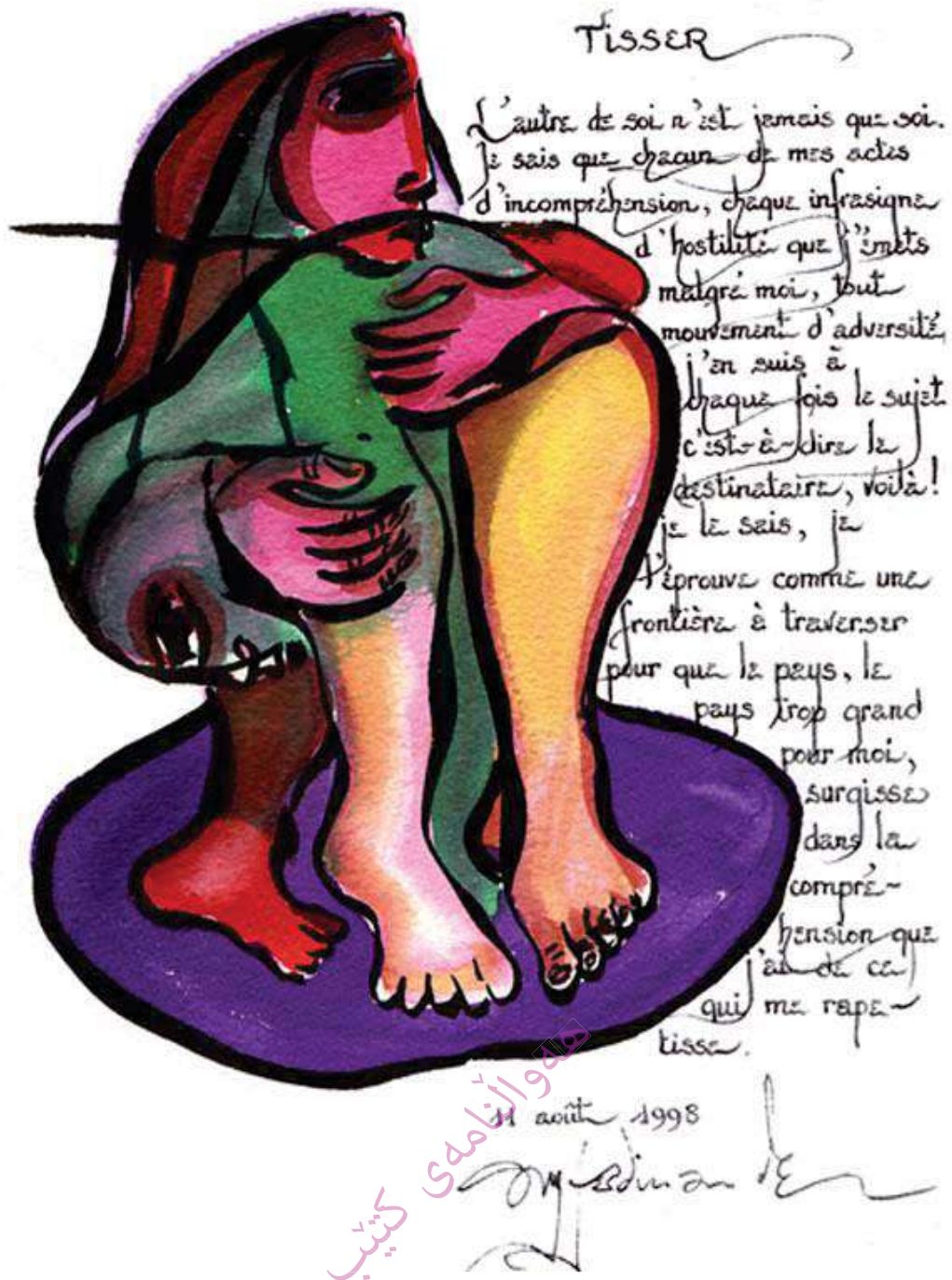
²² One outcome of this project was an MA thesis by Rebwar Siweli at Copenhagen University, Department of Philosophy. Rebwar Siweli is now head of the Philosophy Department of University of Hawler, Kurdistan Iraq. He is one of the new generation of authors on social history and philosophy.

²³ Thompson, Jon, *Rebwar. Colour and Word*, (London, catalogue published by Middlesex University, 2000), p3.



(Illustration 6). Rebwar Rashed, 2000 image 2000 word for the millennium

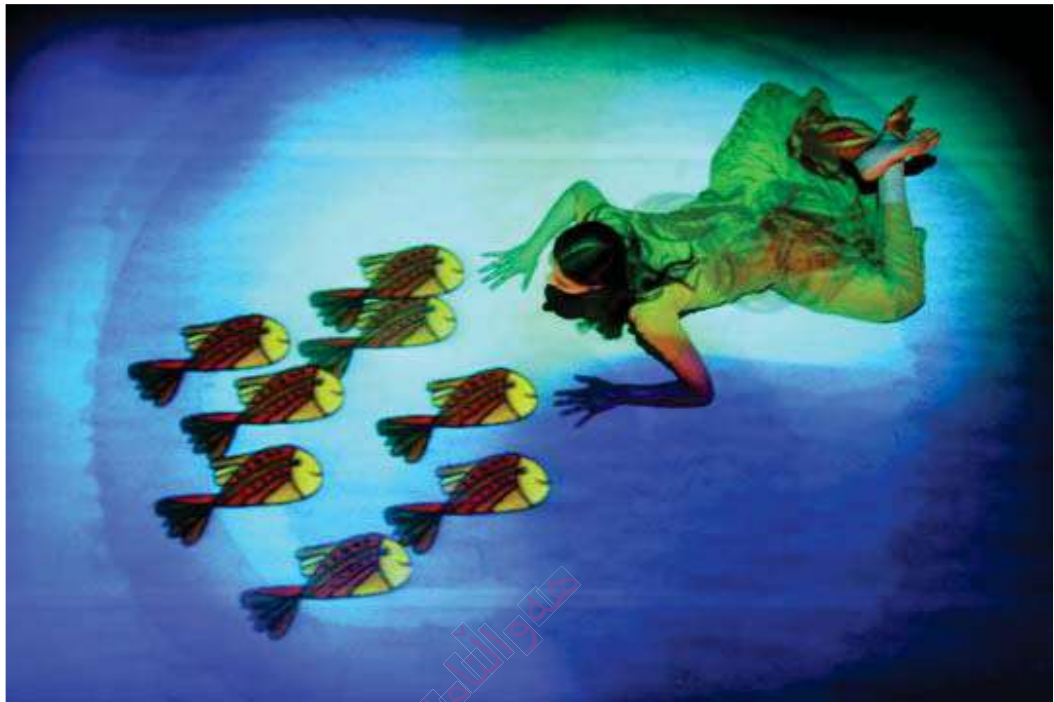
هه و النامه كتيب



(Illustration 7). Rebwar Rashed, *Colour and Word*, 1999,

Artist Collection, Mixed media 21x14 cm , Photograph by Rebwar Rashed

In 2003 a collaboration between the Italian company TPO (Teatro Prato Organisation), the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith and myself began with the creation of the 'Kurdish Garden' (see Illustrations 8 and 9). Writing in the catalogue for the theatre performance, Sarah Schofield argued that Rebwar's artwork and the stories in *The Kurdish Garden* reflect his feelings and memories of Kurdistan. Rebwar remembers how beautiful and colourful life was before the war and the colours he uses reflect Kurdish life and nature, the earth, the rivers, the rugs woven by the women and the clothes they wore, the leaves and flowers and memories of those he loved.²⁴ In the *Kurdish Garden* the audience is led into a digitally created world of astonishing sounds and images, where every movement that is made alters the visual display as the virtual garden bursts into bloom, colour and life.



(Illustration 8). Rebwar Rashed, *Kurdish Garden*, Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London, 2003. Photograph by TPO/ Teatro di Piazza o d'Occasione, <http://www.tpo.it>

²⁴ Schofield Sarah, *The Kurdish Garden*, exhibition catalogue, (Lyric Theatre, London, 2005), p 4.



(Illustration 9). Rebwar Rashed, *The Kurdish Garden*, Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London, 2003. Photograph by TPO/Teatro di Piazza o d'Occasione

'Anfal 20th Anniversary' was shown on the floor of the gallery at the Chocolate Factory, Middlesex University (see Illustration 10). One should have a feeling of visiting the graves: twenty canvases underneath the facial casts gave a sense of oneness of all the victims. I consciously used the method of repetition in this and other projects dealing with Anfal, where the work is part of the process of paying homage to the victims, a process that gives the audience a sense of calmness to remember the victims. The same form, repeated over and over again, is meant to halt, arrest and pause the viewer for a moment. Within that space of timeless repetition there is, however, difference – within the same forms are different expressions and lies a different identity. In general, as part of recreating my past experiences in the new place and time of exile, I attempted to re-use abandoned materials. The memories of war and destruction were captured in a new aesthetic recreation which transformed them into a new modality representing the positive endurance of art and the persistence of the stories of unknown victims. In a similar fashion I made use of letters and photographs of friends who lost their lives in the war.



(Illustration 10). Rebwar Rashed, *Anfal 20th Anniversary*, 2008, Chocolate Factory, London
Mixed media, 30cmx40cm, 20 units, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed

In 2009 I was invited to participate in the Kurdish Pavillion at the Biennale di Venezia (7th June - 22nd November). The event attempted not just to present the works of participating artists but also to create an environment in which the artists had the opportunity to make a clear statement on the complexities of the Kurdish context and to reflect on elaborating a cultural identity for Kurdistan (see Illustrations 11 and 12).

کتابخانه کتبی



(Illustration 11). Location: Kurdish Pavillion, part of the exhibition, Biennale di Venezia, 2008,
Photograph by Rebwar Rashed



(Illustration 12). Rebwar Rashed, *12 Months Diary*, Biennale di Venezia, 2008, Acrylic on
Canvas, 120cmx40cm, 12 units, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

This was followed in 2010 with a participation in an exhibition in Tokyo at the Kawasaki City Museum. I exhibited two projects, both a collection of paintings with the subject of my diary. In the first project - a collection of twelve works, representing one month each (the symbol of a circle) - I am inviting the visitor to look at my memories as images. The images are rolled up into scrolls to partially disclose and partially hide the image. As the scrolls touch one another, they continue their story (see Illustration 12). The second project continues the same idea, but uses 31 scrolls for each day of the month of May (Illustrations 13 and 14).



(Illustration 13). Rebwar Rashed, *Month of May Diary* (detail), Kawasaki City Museum, 2010, Acrylic on wood, 6x12cm, 31 units, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.



(Illustration 14). Rebwar Rashed, *Month of May Diary*, Kawasaki City Museum, 2010, Acrylic on wood, 6x12cm, 31 units, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

In this chapter I have mapped the history of Kurdish artists and the Kurdish diaspora and my own place within this history. Exploring some of the key themes and motifs that have influenced the development of my practice, I indicate the growing dominance of ceramics as my major form and material of expression, which is explored in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER TWO – THE CERAMIC PROJECT

The place of ceramic art in the cultural history of Kurdistan is unique - unlike any other artform ceramic art is synonymous with Kurdish society and identity. This was the first reason to engage with this art form for my study. The other reason was the physical material itself – clay – which connected me with the land. This was an important factor, as I have spent the last 22 years in exile and have an acute sense of separation from my country. The third reason to engage with ceramic art was the possibility to use this art form to express the concepts of the victim, war and memory and to give a new content to the way ceramic art has until now been used. I connected with the traditional ways of working with clay but used it as a vehicle to confer new meaning. I draw a parallel with the Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei, who used the ancient art of porcelain. A quote from the exhibition catalogue to Ai Wei Wei's recent installation in the Tate Modern Turbine Hall goes to the very essence of what both he and I want to achieve: "In the classical sense, porcelain in China is the highest art form and belongs to the Imperial Court. In fact, it's almost synonymous with Chinese culture. My work has always focused on how to bring older craftsmanship into a contemporary context and how to create or to use a new language. At the same time I try to reinterpret artifacts from Chinese traditions and manipulate items from the country's everyday modern culture".²⁵

Writing this critical reflection on my work, it is important to state that the material I have chosen to work with – clay - occupies an important place of its own. The use of clay in my work is a return to my origins, using intrinsic materials of the region. Kurdistan, also known as Upper Mesopotamia, is known as a clay civilisation. The material embodies its historical context and meaning. This provides a connection between the new art work and the past.

My research for this ceramics project has led me to visit many of the collections connected with the ancient history of Kurdistan – the Tehran Carpet Museum²⁶ in Iran, the Museum of Ethnology and Archaeology in Sanandaj, Kurdistan/Iran²⁷, the Museum of Dyarbaker in

²⁵ Ai Wei Wei, , *Sunflower Seeds*, Unilever Series, (Tate Publishing, 2010), p22.

²⁶ <http://carpetmuseum.ir/home.htm>, accessed 01 January, 2012.

²⁷ Sanandaj Archaeological Museum, Iran. A museum since 1967, closed in 1980 because of war, reopened to the public in 1990.

Turkey²⁸, the British Museum, the archive of the School of Oriental and African Studies, the Louvre, as well as museums and archives in my home town of Suleimany. I have gathered an extensive collection of images, which I use as primary material in my work.

According to the Islamic tradition, humans come from mud and when they die they return to mud. In this sense the clay used in my artwork connects me to the people who have come and gone, those who lived their lives, worked, produced, suffered and died. The words of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam (1048-1123)²⁹ express this relationship.

*This jug was love-sick like me,
Tangled in a fair girl's locks;
This handle you now see on his neck
Was his hand on the neck of the girl.*

²⁸ Diyarbaker Museum in Kurdistan/Turkey. The first museum in Diyarbaker was created in 1934 at the Senceriye (Zinciriye) Medrese (theological school) which is an extension of Ulu Cami (Grand Mosque). It moved to its new premises on Elazig Street in 1985. Artefacts starting from the Neolithic Age and including those from Old Bronz, Urartu, Assyrian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk, Akkoyunlu and Ottoman periods are displayed in chronological order. Coins from different eras, most of them coming from the Artuklu period, and local artifacts of ethnographic character are also exhibited at the museum.

²⁹ Omar Khayyám (1048–1131) was a Persian polymath, mathematician, astronomer and poet. He also wrote treatises on mechanics, geography, mineralogy, music, climatology and theology.

<http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/okhayyam/rubiayat.pdf>, accessed 01 February, 2012.

2.1 Ceramic work

When I decided to work with the ceramic medium on the practical element of my research project, I made arrangements to carry out this ceramic work in Suleimany, Kurdistan, in the summers of 2009/10/11 (3 months each time). The research was conducted both in England and in Kurdistan. Most of the research took place in the Museum of Archaeology and centered on the artefacts of Mesopotamian art. During my research I became aware of the paramount importance of the ceramic arts in the Kurdish region over many centuries. In the ceramic arts I found reflections of values in relation to gender, manifestations of mythology and symbolic expressions of people's vision for life.

The language of symbolism is dominant in my work which draws on Mesopotamian symbols (the eye, the horned animal, the fish, the hand), not as duplication but as inspiration to create a new visual language. As C.G. Jung, the Swiss analytical psychologist argued, archetypal patterns enshrined in ancient mythology are present in modern life: Those who have to learn to face death may have to relearn the old message that tells us that death is a mystery for which we must prepare ourselves in the same spirit of submission and humility as we once learned to prepare ourselves for life.³⁰

In the Archaeological Museum in Suleimany I took full advantage in viewing the ceramic objects, sculptures and images in its collections, whose history goes back many thousands of years.

The ancient objects and fragments of cuneic script, which I found at the museum, took me back in history and I felt that I was living with them and sitting with them and I had the feeling of creating a collective artwork together with unknown artists many thousands of years ago. What drew my attention was the position of women in the age of matriarchy and how in Kurdish society, up to the present day, the woman has always held a very strong position. In recent history this position of women has often strongly conflicted with a tendency to impose religious or social restrictions, imprisoning women in a patriarchal society and its rules.

The figure of the woman has been dominant throughout my work as well as that of birds and mythological animals. With the cooperation and help from the special team of the

³⁰ Jung, C.G., *Man and his Symbols*, (New York, Anchor Press Doubleday, 1988), p148.

museum I was able to copy some of these images and make casts from a number of objects. These images and objects became collaged with my own work - their meaning merged with my own drawings. Representing the objects of ancient civilizations and incorporating them in my own work guided my work.

Having made approximately 1000 sketches and outline-drawings (see Illustration 15) in London and scanned them to Photoshop, I began to organise them into different groups to use in a variety of projects. Whilst working in Suleimany, I produced 500 more sketches, which were inspired by objects I found during my research at the Archaeological Museum of Suleimany³¹. Some of the sketches represented the human figure, some a mix of animals and birds, some of animals in mythological form.



(Illustration 15). Outline drawings, Rebwar Rashed, 2009, Artist collection, Suleimany

³¹ Archeologists the world over recognised the importance of the Kurdish region as a cradle of civilisation and an area where agriculture was first developed in prehistoric times. This favoured the establishment in 1961 of a Museum for the archaeological treasures of Kurdistan (up to then artefacts and archaeological finds were collected and displayed in the Museum in Baghdad). In one part of the Museum contemporary artists were able to exhibit their work in temporary exhibitions. At present, under the aegis of UNESCO, the Archaeological Museum is being transformed in terms of the building, a new archival system and display methods corresponding to the latest developments in museum practice. Some of its employees have been dispatched to study and train in contemporary museum practice in Europe and the US.

This method of collage of my own ceramic work with the original artworks from the Archaeological Museum of Suleimany was made possible with the help of the specialist staff of the Museum in an unprecedented gesture of trust: I was allowed to use some historic artefacts in a process where I impressed on them the soft slabs of clay. These pieces were then fired and used as stamps to press into my original artwork. Firing these pieces was done with the same primitive techniques as in ancient times in the kiln of a pottery belonging to a traditional artisan-potter.

Choosing the ceramic medium allowed me to express my visual language more fully and precisely. I had already applied my painting on 3-dimensional surfaces in a number of projects (5000 Portraits for 5000 Victims’, 1997; Colour and Word’, 1999; 2000 Images and 2000 Words’, 2000) and this represented a logical continuation in terms of developing my art practice. I was able to bring into the ceramic work elements of drawing, writing, design and installation.

Creating a series of ceramic works established the connection between the material – clay – as a physical link with my country. How was that possible? The value of the material lies in its historical, social and political dimension. As Kurdish cultural identity is so strongly bound up with the ideas of land, loss of land and occupation of our land, the choice of working with the ceramic material was a natural choice. Materials like clay, earth, mud or dirt could express this connection with land, the longing for security and permanence in the face of constant upheaval, uprooting and insecurity in Kurdish society. The use of clay in my present work is an attempt to reflect on all those issues.

The challenge was to locate my art within my ancient heritage. My ceramics are connected to the earth through the use of the very material which is found in the area where Mesopotamia existed (Mesopotamia means Land between 2 rivers’) and they also connect with events in the history of the people populating this area. Clay from Chermoo symbolizes the earliest beginnings of settled existence and agricultural use of the land.³² Clay from

³² To understand the history of pottery in the region we may need to go back to 6200 B.C. The village of Charmoo, near Suleimany, is the place where the earliest evidence of agricultural activity has been discovered. This was the period of development from a hunter-gatherer civilization to a civilization based on agriculture. In this village many clay pots were found which are believed to have been used in daily life. The pots are basic and functional.

Hama (a former military camp in Suleimany, now called Victory Park, where the victims of genocide were buried in mass graves) emphasizes the vital relationship between this earth and its people, in which my personal story is a part of a collective narrative.

Materials have a memory of their own - they are themselves a witness to a history or a tragedy. The soil from a mass grave, used to make a pot, has a history of its own which embodies the tragedy of all those who lost their lives and became part of that soil. Using the clay from Charmoo connects me to an ancient history of pottery making. Instead of using readily available clay material from England, I have used clay from an ancient source in my own country. I have also chosen the old system of firing the local clay in the workshop of a potter who still uses traditional methods that have been in use for centuries. In this sense I am continuously making connections to various places and histories. I have always recycled material in my work. I believe such material preserves an energy and a connection to another story.

In the Introduction to my artwork in the exhibition catalogue of the 2009 Venice Biennale, where Kurdish artists participated for the first time in the history of the Biennale, Jim Mooney writes: "Recent ceramic bas-reliefs by Saeed are inspired by the art of Mesopotamia, a cultural precursor of present-day Kurdistan. These mute expressions share affinities with modern choreography. Carefully calibrated gesture articulates with absolute precision the thought that eludes words. The draped body is bent and exaggerated. Deeply incised lines convey the tenor of loss. These sinuous lines carry a force akin to 'threnody' (songs of death) and lament and mourn the incalculable losses inflicted by the obscene events referred to by some as the Kurdish Holocaust".³³

Other pots have also been found in the same village that date from 2000 B.C. These are radically different from the earlier pots because they are decorated and have engravings of legends and heroes of the time. Many of the images portray motherhood, which must have been an important concept, possibly related to a period of matriarchy.

³³ Mooney, Jim, *Planet Kurdistan of the 53rd International Art exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia*, exhibition catalogue, (2009), p3.

Although the quality of the clay-earth I used presented many difficulties during the process of building and firing, I persevered. To use this material was more important. With the help of an experienced potter it was possible to overcome these problems and I was able to successfully work with all kinds of clay. With the help of Wasta Haider³⁴, who guided me in the preparation of the clay and the creation of difficult forms, I began the practical exploration in clay of what I had begun as sketches and continued with added research in the Archaeological Museum. His workshop still uses centuries old techniques for building and firing. Generations of his family have been working as ceramic artisans going back to the ancient history of Mesopotamia. He is one of many generations of the same family of potters in the area with a unique bond to the craft. By working with him, I was able to connect with many of the old traditions of the ceramic arts. In the three months of 2011 I worked on three ceramic projects totalling 450 individual ceramic works.

³⁴ Wasta Haidar is one of the best known among the traditional ceramic artists in my town. I asked Haidar about his own specific views and opinions. What did ceramics mean for him? Haider brought his notebook, which contained information gathered by previous generations - for those people ceramics was their business, their craft and their daily work. Through invaluable notes they had left their heritage to us. Then he brought out a very large pot from his storage room, which was of a deep brown colour. He told me that his family had been using this pot for the past seven generations to heat the water used for cleansing and purification of the body. It had been passed on to the eldest son by the father the same way as a royal crown is inherited by the next generation. The pot was an object of symbolic value and was held in great esteem. I asked him 'As far as I know you are not the eldest son. Why do you keep this pot?' He replied that the tragedy was that in recent times this kind of traditional craftsmanship was not valued as it was in the past and all his brothers had become salaried officials of the government. Present generations had become distant from this kind of work. Now only myself and my uncle are continuing the business of popular ceramics in Suleimany. This kind of work, however, does not earn enough money to live on for our families'.

2.2 Elements of My Visual Language

In the following I want to describe how the elements of my visual language have developed out of this dialogue with the past and ancient Kurdish cultural traditions into new forms of expression.

My work in ceramics entered a new phase which can be characterised as relief or drawing on clay. The dominance of lines in my work always has a strong presence. The lines are of various depth, which adds to the relief effect.³⁵ As my work demonstrates, it is a response to and responsibility toward our history and the place we live in. This connection with the past and the place is recreated through the forms I make and the lines I engrave on these forms. The engravings in my work are deep lines to ensure the continual existence of the created figure, preventing it from fading away in time. The strong and deep lines are a response to the fear of extinction which has threatened the Kurds for thousands of years. They are also a reaction to the absence of a well-defined boundary for the Kurds, i.e. the absence of a nation state. I therefore attempt to protect our existence and prevent it from disintegration through artistic figures and images. This process of transformation of forms through the line is simultaneously a process of reinterpretation, finding its final form in the three-dimensional clay sculptures. The formal elements I use in my ceramic work are Arabesque, drawing, text and colour (in this case the colour of clay) (see Illustration 16).

³⁵ Lines have held specific significance for me ever since I was a child and was able to understand what the borders of my homeland were. To explain this simply: the town of Tawila straddled the border between Iraq and Iran. If we visited my uncle's house, half of his garden was in Iran, the other half in Iraq. More precisely, the border went through the nut-tree in his garden, which made half the nuts drop into Iranian territory, the other half into Iraqi territory. However, we regarded this border-line as an imposition and a dividing-line separating the Kurdish people.



(Illustration 16). Rebwar Rashed, *Memory*, Clay, 2008, Artist collection, Suleimany, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

Kurdish motifs in rugs and carpets, which surrounded me throughout my childhood, nourish and influence my ceramic work. My paintings do not have frames and the colours are worked right up to the edge of the canvas. My mother, who was the first generation art teacher of textiles in the border town of Tawila in a school opened by King Faisal I in 1958, taught me to copy and draw these patterns. Due to my father's occupation as post office employee, we frequently moved from town to town, which put me in touch with many different local traditions.

In the preliminary drawings and sketches for my ceramics, form is defined not only through outlines but through intersecting lines, creating shapes within shapes. It became important

to produce unbroken lines. Straight lines alternate with curved lines to create contrast; curves are exaggerated to create maximum effect. In the process of transferring the lines from paper to clay, lines are not copied in exact form, instead they are drawn more freely and sensuously (see Illustration 17).



(Illustration 17). Rebwar Rashed, *Memory*, Clay, 2008, 10 figures ,15cmx30cm, Artist collection, Suleimany, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

I have chosen not to use artificial colours for the ceramic surfaces, but to keep the colours natural and earthy. Stretching deep lines across the surface of the ceramics symbolizes an attempt to stave off death and erosion.

Fluidity of line is another aspect that deserves attention. Engraving lines in soft clay happens with the same speed as drawing on paper. Despite the fact that working in ceramics is a slow process, it was important to maintain the fast, spontaneous and expressive nature in my work.

The figures in these drawings are incomplete and their features are sometimes exaggerated. Exaggerating the size of a hand is a symbolic representation of the hand's function to hold, to hug, to work, to protect. The Kurdish saying 'The hand works as the eye fears' is elaborated in these works. The hand is the tool of creation, work, farming, pottery, building civilisations. Eyes and hands are repeated throughout my drawings; they convey the inner feelings of the figures to the viewer. From ancient history up to now the eye has importance in many cultures of the Middle East as the organ for control and casting an evil influence. It has equally been a symbol of love and harmony. In ancient Mesopotamian art, the eye has been emphasised and is a major feature of portraits. It is through the eyes that communication is established.

In relation to the use of text in my ceramic work, I need to explain that although Kurdish writing uses the Arabic alphabet (adding seven extra letters), the language is Kurdish, not Arabic. The texts used are not borrowed from other sources, but represent my own writing in the form of poetry. The way the text is engraved on the ceramics is similar to the old tradition of Cuneiform. Texts written in clay construct one part of the story, as the drawings construct another part. Neither of them is complete without the other, and both together convey the meaning. The texts are written in calligraphic manner (the rules of Arabic calligraphy have never been an obstacle to using calligraphy creatively). The Arabic alphabet and its use in calligraphy has its own style in Iran, where it is called Persian calligraphy; the Ottomans had many famous calligraphers and made calligraphy part of art and secular and religious architecture. Calligraphy also forms an important element in ceramic arts. One of the famous calligraphers in Turkey in Ottoman times, Hamid Al Amidi, was born in 1891 in the Kurdish town of Diyarbakr and the first international competition (1986) in the name of Hamid al-Amidi (1891-1982)³⁶, developed his own style of calligraphy out of which grew a school of calligraphy. The ancient art of calligraphy brought together the world of images and

³⁶ Art and Culture, *9th International Calligraphy Competition*, (Research Centre for Islamic History, Istanbul, 2012), p4.

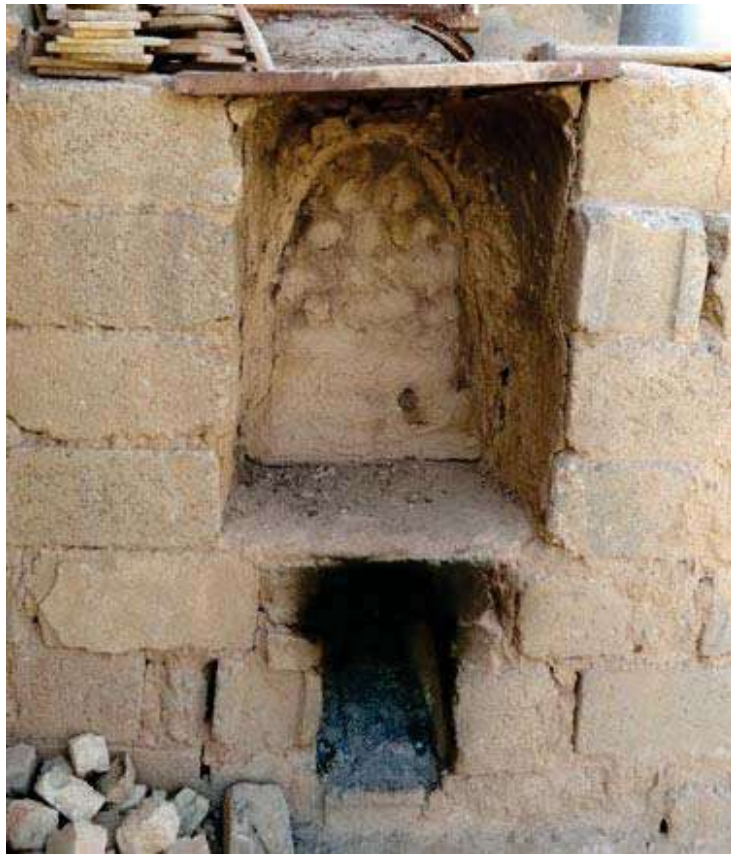
drawings – in my own work the two elements of image and word are also used simultaneously. Calligraphic handwriting is a way of describing how I use calligraphy to express my feelings and thoughts. From my first exhibition in in 1984 in Hawler (capital of Kurdistan/Iraq), called Poster-Poetry, to my Masters project ‘Colour and Word’ in 1999, the central theme has always been this unity of word and image. Arabic script is a central element in Islamic tradition, where it forms an integral part of miniatures, textiles, ceramics, jewellery and architecture.

Although my artwork in general is highly colourful, for this ceramic project I am limiting colour to natural colours of the earth (see Illustration 18). The colour of the works of art are close to the colour of wheat and the colours of the land, namely shades of ochre and brown.



(Illustration 18). Rebwar Rashed, *Memory*, 2009, Artist collection, Suleimany, Clay, 50cmX30cmx25cm , Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

This represents a return to the land and its history and to nature. It is also a move away from the portrayal of homeland through its reds, greens, and yellows (as represented in the Kurdish flag), as well as the dark and gloomy colours of the tragic period of 3 decades from the 1960's to the 1990's. This is a move back to the basics, to the earth and its core.



(Illustration 19). Traditional kiln in the workshop of Wasta Haidar
Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

The kiln is wood fired, but also has a gas pipe for alternative heating. It is bricked up for firing, leaving a small hole to enable one to observe the firing process. The kiln could stand temperatures of over 1100 degrees, but the heat had to be increased slowly.

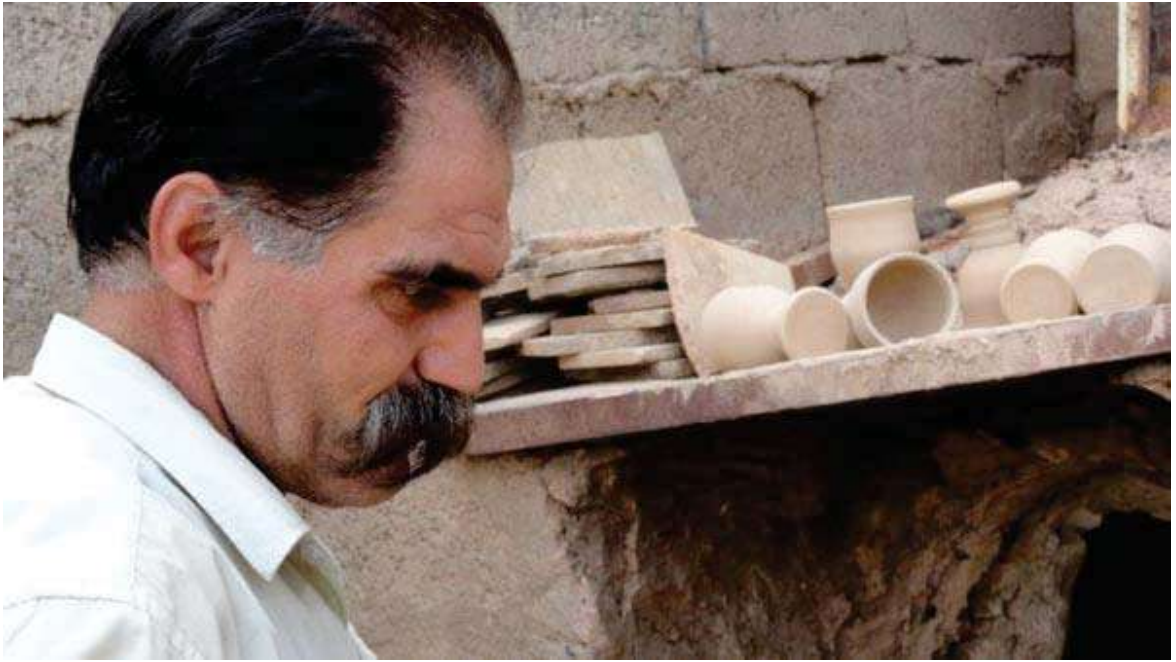
The clay used in traditional Kurdish stoneware is of a red colour and has high iron content. It is found close to the surface in the mountainous regions. Because of its pure consistency, it is possible to fire it at high temperatures (between 900 and 1100 degrees). After firing the red clay changes to a dark brown colour. The other clay used is of a grey colour which turns nearly white after firing. To remove the impurities of the clay, the potters use various filter techniques. In the summertime ceramics are left inside the kiln after firing to cool off and the following day left in the sun. In wintertime the fired pieces are kept in a warm place to dry. The red clay objects need to be submersed in water after firing, so as not to crack, whereas

the white clay objects do not need to be placed in the water. This was important for my project, as these two kinds of clay were different in structure and consistency. In the long run the use of white clay proved problematic for my project, as many of the pieces broke during firing.

Working in the studio of a traditional potter was inspirational. Even more important though was getting to know the exceptional character of the potter, who embodied centuries old traditions of his craft and who taught me more than the mere skill of working in clay. In the course of nine months' practical work at the pottery (spread over a period of three years), I was able to have many conversations with Wasta Haidar which helped me to understand the history of pottery in my country.

To illustrate this I want to relate some idiosyncracies of the potter, which will give an understanding of the man as well as the craft of pottery particular to the Kurdish region. Wasta Haider belonged to the Kaka'i religious group, whose members distinguished themselves by growing a big moustache.³⁷ He looked very much like Nietzsche, the philosopher, only he worked with mud, not ideas (see Illustration 20). His first action, when coming to work in the morning, was to kiss the door, then to humbly kiss the wheel. He said, "You must not enter the work place wearing your shoes". He did this out of a sign of respect but it was obviously to avoid the contamination with outdoor dirt. He was working barefoot, which was part of the ritual habit, in which he and all the previous generations of his family had been conducting their work with clay. When we prepared to heat the kiln it was done in a way of making a blood sacrifice - this was required to offset any bad impact of the fire on the pots. Animal blood was sprinkled over the pots so as not to make the pot the target of the fire's anger. If a pot broke the blood sacrifice was obviously not enough and the pot, too, was seen as having been sacrificed. Haidar often talked about the importance of keeping an even-balanced nature – he insisted that angry hands would break a pot.

³⁷ The Ahl-e Haqq ("People of Truth") are members of a religion founded by Sultan Sahak in the late 14th century in western Iran. The total number of members is estimated at around 1,000,000, primarily found in western Iran and Iraq, mostly ethnic Kurds. In Iraq they are called *Kaka'i*.



(Illustration 20). *Wasta Haidar*, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed, Suleimany, 2011

When Wasta Haidar was talking about the mud, he believed that clay has female and male qualities. He said that female mud is tender and you can make whatever you want from it, but you must take much care of it because even small negligence can lead to its breaking. He characterized the male mud as more obstinate, with horns and looking at you a bit angry so you need to fight with it and throw it to the ground to overpower it. This kind of mud cannot break so easily and you can handle it whichever way you like. Haidar even maintained, 'I can know from tasting the mud, which one is male or female'. His grandfather used to pride himself in making pots so thin and transparent that you could see through it. He thought that such works embodied some kind of sacredness. That is why, fifteen years before he died, he built a room three meters square, shaped the roof like a dome and made a grave for himself inside it. He placed all his ceramic works inside this tomb and three ceramic works in the window. Why had he specifically chosen these three works? According to Wasta Haidar, they were the first works produced by his grandfather as a young potter. Every day, before he started work, he would have a look at the room and say –'hope I will not die inside my bed and be a burden to other people". His outlook on life and his work ethic were one and the same – guided by principles, which he followed throughout his life.

He always told us, "Try to be happy and don't let hatred grow inside your heart. Mud needs soft hands. If your hands are hard from hatred or anger, you will break the ceramic".

When I asked Wasta Haidar about the history of firing the kiln, he told me that using wood often presented great difficulty, as the right kind of firewood was rare and expensive. To reach high enough temperatures and to sustain the heat, very strong wood was needed. He remembered a story of a man who passed by the pottery, who said that he had been a soldier fighting in the Ottoman war and had been a prisoner in Russia for five years. When he was liberated he was working for a family of potters with a ceramic oven. To fire it they were using straw they mixed with gasoil. This would heat the oven very well. That person's name was Mam Ahmed. "From that person we learned to use the gasoil and straw and hay", said Haidar.

2.4 The Ceramic Project: Artwork

In profiling the work of art itself as a research undertaking, I explore historical and contemporary practices and their affective as well as material engagement. The themes in my ceramic work will emerge in a logical and organic connection to my cultural heritage, a major form of enquiry, resulting from a complex and multi-faceted reflection. The six distinct groups of ceramic work demonstrate how the elements of my visual language have developed out of this dialogue with the ancient Kurdish cultural traditions.. Each group deals with an aspect of our cultural life - the inseparability of people and land, childhood and motherhood, the breaking of the unity between the Kurdish people.

„A People in Flight“; 2011

This group of fifteen figures (see Illustration 21) represents the forced exodus of three million Kurdish people, who in 1991 had to flee from their towns to escape the Iraqi army and air strikes. They crossed into Turkey and Iran with few belongings, on foot and horseback, to end up in refugee camps. It was not until the Kurdish uprising against the Iraqi military in 1992 and the creation of safe havens that the refugees were able to return to their homeland.



(Illustration 21). Rebwar Rashed, *A People in Flight*, 2011, Clay, Artist collection, Suleimany, 15 figures of 25x10cm. Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

Each figure in the group has symbolic character – the head as bird means flight to safety, the one-legged figure stands for the old or disabled people who despite their handicap have no choice but to walk, the figure with two heads means one person carrying another. Altogether they have the dynamic of a people marching in unison, each expressing a different aspect of the traumatic experience of forced emigration. Although the form of each figure is highly abstract, the content is very concrete - all manner of emotional states find expression in the figures – patience, endurance, shouldering burdens, hope, the desire to fly, to be weightless, tiredness, longing to be reunited, looking for a peaceful place. The connection with my own experience is contained in this piece - having to leave my country and become a refugee first in Iran, then France, finally in the UK.

The fifteen clay pieces also represent the formal journey from paper to clay. This work was created as a 3-dimensional transformation from the drawings to the clay relief. Each figure appears in relief form (see Illustration 22).

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(Illustration 22). Rebwar Rashed, *A People in Flight*, 2011, Clay, Artist collection, Suleimany, 15 figures, each approx. 25x10cm. Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

,Pot of Life"; 2011

The inspiration for the project Pot of Life' came from large pots I discovered in the Archaeological Museum in Suleimany. These pots were ancient urns with symbols and inscriptions.

During the pre-Islamic period, the bodies of deceased people were put in large urns together with their jewellery and objects (in the Islamic period this was not allowed – people were interred in graves).

I created seven pots, much smaller in size than the urns in the museum but I transferred to them the idea of these urns (see Illustration 23). From ancient times the number seven has been considered as a sacred number with different meaning at different periods of time and in different cultures.



(Illustration 23). Rebwar Rashed, *Pot of Life*, 2011, Artist collection, Suleimany, clay, approx. 25cm base, 45cm height, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

The number seven has been held in esteem since antiquity as being unique among the first ten.³⁸ It has relevance for my own life – in my family there were seven sisters and brothers. According to my Iraqi identity papers I was born in month seven and for almost twice seven times I was in exile before I returned to my country. Many old stories, songs and poems in Kurdistan quote the number seven like the Song of the Shepherd (whose only reward for seven years of hard work was one lamb). The repetition of the number seven is also contained in the image of the sun god Zarathustra, who is pictured in front of twenty-one (equalling three times seven) rays of sun. I feel that the number seven has spiritual power and significance for me.

³⁸ Reid, Constance, *From Zero to Infinity: what makes numbers interesting*, (A K Peters, 2006), p99.



(Illustration 24). Rebwar Rashed, *Pot of Life*, 2011, Artist collection, Suleimany, clay, approx. 25cm base, 45cm height, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed

Each one of my seven pots is of a different shape and has its own lid like a cap. Each one has its own specific story applied as relief on the outside and as writing on the inside (see Illustration 24). I wrote on the inside of the walls of the pot, so that when you take off the lid you see the Kurdish text or verses of poetry or calligraphic writing (I wrote these texts while working on the ceramics). Taking off the lid and looking on the inside of the pot means you have to consider the inside as well as the outside. The pots embody different characters as if they were themselves different people and my texts relate to them in that way. With some pots the clay is cut and pressed either in- or outside, suggesting an incisive event in that person's life.³⁹ It is significant, that we were seven members in our family. The upright shape

³⁹ Both my brothers were imprisoned for long periods of time for their political activity. My brother Hoshyar's death sentence was averted one month before he would have been killed

of four of the pots relate to the four brothers, whereas the dome-shaped pots stand for my three sisters. The texts are written in calligraphic manner. I did not try to copy the classic style of calligraphy but used my own style. It enabled me to easily express my feelings in this way. The ancient art of calligraphy brought together the world of images and drawings – in much of my previous work the two elements of image and word are simultaneously used. The pots bring together a personal history with stories and myths of Kurdish legend.

‘Memories of Childhood’; 2011

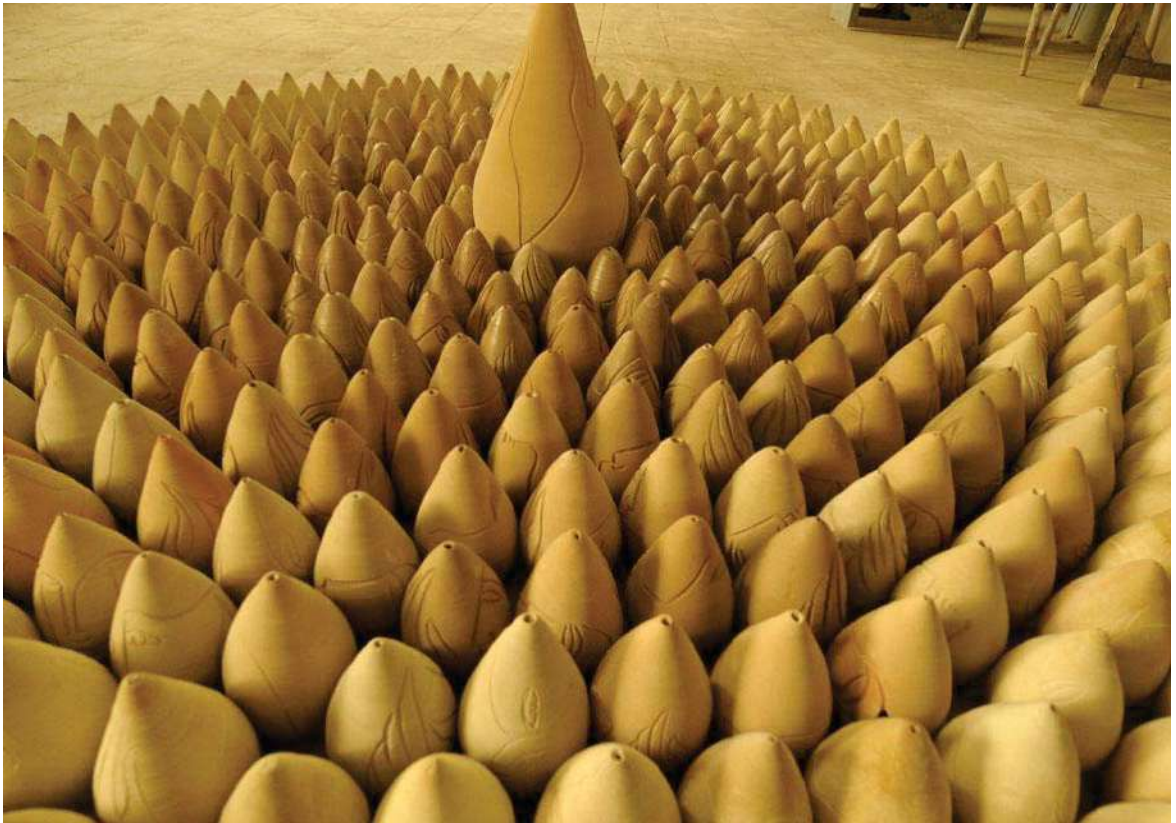
I made 365 small objects, which are similar to those we played with as children, called Mzrah. They were cone shaped hollow objects made of oak wood or other strong wood, which had a nail from a horseshoe inside and a thread wound around the outer shape.

As children we would play with these objects like a yo-yo. It was played collectively by a group of boys. We had to fix one Mzrah in a particular place and the others had to try and hit it. If on impact the outer shell broke, the owner of the stronger Mzrah could claim the nail inside the broken Mzrah. Playing this game and winning conferred strength and power. This memory was very important to me and to transfer this idea and give dimension to my childhood memory in a work of art was a particular challenge. The street being part of children’s life is very much a thing of the past and games played in groups have been replaced by digitally played games between one or two children. Many of the social relationships of my childhood have been replaced by a world of technology and the narrowing of these social relationships. One of the important points of this project is the form of Mzrah and its symbolic significance. I wanted to transform it from a material made of wood and metal to clay.

In the installation of 365 Mzrah made of clay, I decorated each individual Mzrah with a different face and figure outlines, each representing a day in the year, each day telling us a different memory. I gave each one of the Mzrahs its own character, accomplishing this in the

and he was exchanged for an Iraqi prisoner. My brother Bakhtiar survived his prison sentence, too.

way the hands communicate playfulness, and hopefulness. The drawings are deeply engraved in the body of the Mzrahs (see Illustration 25).



(Illustration 25). Rebwar Rashed, *Memories of Childhood*, 2011, 2m x 2m, Artist collection, Suleimany, Clay, 365 pieces. Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

I established a dynamic relationship with them so that the harmony of the drawings can be felt (see Illustration 26). The form and body of the Mzrah and the dynamic of the rotation and force when falling to the ground, all this was for me like the cycle of life: The way that a force becomes a driving force for continuation, for activation of man and then gradually diminishes in energy, loses continuity, finally survives only as a shell, a body living only in the memory of people. Putting all of the Mzrahis, one after the other like a spiral, which can be extended, is like the beginning of the memory, a coil which spirals outward, a spiral, which extends life's history. The spiral symbolizes the relationship between the circle and the centre through its unbroken path.



(Illustration 26). Rebwar Rashed, *Memories of Childhood*, (detail), Artist collection, 2011, Suleimany, Clay, 365 pieces. Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

In the Egyptian system of hieroglyphs the spiral denotes cosmic forms in motion, the relationship between one and many, finite and infinite numbers. In mathematics, astronomy and the natural sciences the spiral appears as an elemental shape.

Spiral motifs appear all over the world, from Neolithic cave complexes in Europe, on carvings of the Goddess from the Paleolithic era, on Celtic stone carvings such as the ones at Newgrange, in the Hindu pantheon where it appears, for example, as the Kundalini Serpent, woken up from its tightly coiled state, spiraling up from the base of the spine. In

Africa, the symbol for the Sun shows a cooking pot surrounded by three red spirals. The Aztec Feathered Serpent God, Quetzalcoatl, shared the same symbol as the Tibetan seed of life; their warrior God, Huitzipotchli, has a coat of arms featuring five spirals contained within a circle.”⁴⁰

The meaning of the spiral links with the concept of time, as a circular movement in space, a growing of numbers over time. —.for the Mayans, the winter solstice was considered the start of the year, the time just before “real” time began. The symbol that represented this concept was the snail; the spiral on its shell inspired the Mayan sign for zero.”⁴¹ The fact that the Mzrah project contains 365 pieces, laid out in form of a spiral, strongly relates to this ancient Mayan calendar, which also used the symbolism of the spiral to express the passing of time in a dynamic way.

The spiral is one of the oldest motifs in ornamental art of all cultures either in the form of a curve curling up from a given point, or spiraling into a centre. In ancient Islamic architecture, the minaret is often constructed in the form of a spiral. The most famous example of such a building is the great mosque in Samarra in Iraq.⁴² This mosque was at one time the largest mosque in the world with a minaret in the shape of a spiralling cone, 52 meters high. One can reach the top of the minaret via an external stairway.

Another aspect of this project is the likeness of the Mzrah to the shape of a female breast. As symbol for the mother, life-giving form and link with the time in history characterized as the matriarchal period, the shape of a woman's breast is like the shape of the mosque dome sitting beside the phallic minaret. The shape of the breast remains for me symbol of motherhood and life-giving, a historical link to the paramount position of the mother in Kurdish society. In the Museum of Archaeology in Suleimany I found a great many examples

⁴⁰ Nozedar, Adele, *The Element Encyclopedia of Secret Signs and Symbols. The Ultimate A-Z Guide from Alchemy to the Zodiac*, (HarperCollins Publishers, London, 2010), p146

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p146

⁴² The Great Mosque of Samarra is a 9th century mosque located in Samarra, Iraq. The mosque was commissioned in 848 by the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mutawakkil and completed in 851.

of small female clay figures, fertility symbols, some nude, some partially clothed (see Illustrations 27 and 28). This is where I connected the idea of the Mzrah with the idea of making the individual shapes in clay. Packing each clay Mzrah tightly next to the other in a spiralling form, adds to the effect of fertility (like seeds on a sunflower).



(Illustration 27). Figurine of a Woman, Ethnographic Museum, Suleimany, Photograph by Rebwat Rashed.

هه نیندای کتیب



(Illustration 28). Chagar Bazar, Clay (5,300-4,800 BC), British Museum, Room 56:
Mesopotamia, Reference Number: ME 125381

The meaning of the spiral links with the concept of time, as a circular movement in space, a growing of numbers over time. ...for the Mayans, the winter solstice was considered the start of the year, the time just before "real" time began. The symbol that represented this concept was the snail; the spiral on its shell inspired the Mayan sign for zero."⁴³ The fact that

⁴³ Nozedar, Adele, *The Element Encyclopedia of Secret Signs and Symbols. The Ultimate A-Z Guide from Alchemy to the Zodiac*, HarperCollins Publishers, London, 2010), p146

the Mzrah project contains 365 pieces, laid out in form of a spiral, strongly relates to this ancient Mayan calendar, which also used the symbolism of the spiral to express the passing of time in a dynamic way.

The concept of time has had great importance for me. For more than 20 years I have kept a diary of memories; the counting of days, weeks and years has a significance, which is both realistic and imaginary. The link to the past has given me the values for now and the hope for the future. All my projects move in the bounds of linking past, present and future.

„Diary of a Month“; 2011



(Illustration 29). Rebwar Rashed, *Diary of a Month*, Artist collection, Suleimany, 2011, clay, thirty pieces, each approximately 45x10cm , Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

The origin of this work is in the history of my family. The point of connection in my memory is a small red porcelain plate, which my mother kept for fifty years, taking it from one place to another, from one town to another, as our family - my mother, father and seven brothers and sisters - was constantly on the move. This small red plate was always in use at dinner time. Shortly before my mother died the plate broke and she wanted to throw it away. I insisted we kept the plate as a reminder of our family's history. Thirty separate figures, closely joining each other, a broken half of a plate on either end - representing a month or the memories of one month. It is in a way one month at any time.

Each figure has a different character and identity, each has its relationship with the previous and the following figure, making them appear like an inseparable whole (see Illustration 29 and 30). Hands and feet dominate the shape of the figures, hinting at the importance of holding on to each other, supporting each other and standing firmly rooted. The movement

of the figures is rhythmically connected – some looking up to the sky signalling something happening above, some looking down to the earth, others looking straight ahead to connect with the viewer. Although the plate is broken, the figures are firmly linked together. The work is not only representative of my family and what happened to us, but a metaphor for the Kurdish people as a whole.

This series of thirty-two ceramic pieces (thirty figures and two halves of a broken plate) will be presented on the floor, reflecting the traditions of sitting on the floor when we take our meals. It will also allow the viewer to gather around the piece, thereby feeling included around a joint dinner.



(Illustration 30). Rebwar Rashed, *Diary of a Month*, Detail, Artist collection, Suleimany, 2011, clay, approx. 45x10cm, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed

This relief work connects me to the year 1986, the time I was Peshmerga in the Kurdish mountains.⁴⁴ At that time I worked on a small number of sculptures in plaster, including material that was directly related to our struggles in the mountains - fragments of exploding bombs or shells, remains from the artillery of the Baath regime in the mountains (see Illustration 31).



(Illustration 31). Rebwar Rashed, Photograph by Abas Abdulrazaq, 1987, Bergalou, Kurdistan/Iraq

⁴⁴ Preceding the time living as Peshmerga in the Kurdish mountains was a period I spent in Baghdad as a student of sculpture at the Institute of Traditional Art. Two of my teachers, who had themselves studied in the US and Damascus, were very influential in connecting us with modern art and modern sculpture in particular. My time in Baghdad was cut short because of the increasing political danger I was in, which forced me to return to Kurdistan.

Two black and white photos exist from this time, themselves survivors of war. They express my life and thinking of that time together with the pages of my writings which were published in 1993 in Paris, France, in a book. Returning twenty-seven years later to these works gives me the same desire and energy to work, but with a different vision for life, politics and art.

My vision at that time was determined by oppression, injustice and self-defence and the artwork conveys the spirit of sacrifice for freedom. At that time it was not important to me what material would become the means of expression; what was important was the subject itself.

„Victims“, 2011

This group of ten figures, each approximately 40cm tall, relates to the time when the Baath regime destroyed many Kurdish villages, killed our people and buried them in mass graves. One such mass grave is found in the area of Garmyan (meaning hot area). My figures are shaped like the vessels from the region of Garmyan.

They were traditionally made by the women and used to cool water. They were vessels kept on the ground, rather than placed on a table. My aim was to use the vessels as a metaphor for the people killed in this region and to represent them as a memorial to the victims of the terror of that time.

The figures are all upright, with faces looking upwards, necks stretched, bodies without arms or legs, symbolizing that they did not have legs to run away or hands to fight and defend themselves. A contrast is created through the smooth surface of the clay on one hand and a sharp incision stretching from the head halfway down the body on the other hand. The faces seem to reach to the viewer without being able to communicate (see Illustrations 32 and 33). Their exaggerated long necks evoke the feeling that they have been incarcerated for a long time in a dark prison and are longing to reach the light. These figures are grouped closely together and placed directly on the ground.

The viewer is able to walk around the group of figures and thereby a connection is established - a lifeline between the living and the dead. A situation is created where the viewer looks down to the figures with head lowered, as one would do when visiting a cemetery.



(Illustration 32). Rebwar Rashed, *Victims*, 2011, Artist collection, Suleimany, 10 pieces, each approx. 15x40cm, clay, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.



(Illustration 33). Detail of *Victims*

„Collage/Fragments“, 2011

This group of 7 pieces was the last project I worked on. It represents a fusion of artifacts from the Museum of Archaeology in Suleimany and my intaglio relief in clay. I used various tools like knife or pencil to create the sharp lines on the surface of the flattened clay slabs. One might call this method sculptural drawing or sculpto-drawing (the term sculpto-painting was first used to describe works by Alexander Archipenko, a Ukrainian born modernist sculptor). I selected specific artifacts from the museum to combine with my drawings: pieces which had ancient cuneic writing, animal or plant symbols and typical symbolic patterns. Some artifacts were flat reliefs, others 3-dimensional. The specialist in the museum helped me to create imprints onto a special clay, where the utmost care was taken to protect and preserve the original artifact.

This clay model was then fired and I could subsequently use it like a stamp to impress onto my artwork – the still soft clay into which I had previously drawn the lines. This way of working is similar to the ancient printing process, where cylindric ceramic print models were used to transfer text onto soft clay slabs. The most famous example of a clay cylinder is the Cyrus the Great Cylinder in the British Museum.⁴⁵ In order to emphasize the connection of my work with the ancient artifacts I replicate their fragmentary shape.

All three kinds of relief are used – the bas-relief, raised relief and intaglio relief. Five of the clay fragments are lying flat, two are upright and self supporting (see Illustration 34). In selecting the artifacts at the museum I chose certain ones, where the significance and

⁴⁵ The Cyrus the Great Cylinder is the first charter of right of nations in the world. It is a baked-clay cylinder in Akkadian language with cuneiform script. This cylinder was excavated in 1879 by the Assyro-British archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam in the foundations of the Esagila (the Marduk temple of Babylon) and is kept today in the British Museum in London. In 1971, the Cyrus Cylinder was described as the world's first charter of human rights and it was translated into all six official U.N. languages. A replica of the cylinder is kept at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City in the second floor hallway, between the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council chambers.

http://www.iranchamber.com/history/cyrus/cyrus_charter.php, accessed, 01 March, 20112

meaning had a relationship with my intentions. For example, I chose the symbol of a sleeping swan, which in ancient times was used to decorate weights (see Illustration 35). When I asked the museum's curator about the significance of this symbol, he explained that the swan is a very vigilant creature and only sleeps with his head nested in the feathers of his wings when he feels secure. The inference is that the weight is safe and trustworthy for the person trading. The symbol of the sleeping swan became for me the symbol for a safe existence. In the ceramic piece the person walks with the swan on his shoulder like the bearer of a message from long ago.



(Illustration 34). Rebwar Rashed, *Collage/Fragments*, 2011, Artist collection, Suleimany, clay, each approx. 20x30cm, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed.

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سكيب



(Illustration 35). Rebwar Rashed, *Collage/Fragments*, detail

Collaging my work with the works of unknown artists brings long-forgotten ideas in touch with the present. Using the artifacts from the museum made me conscious of the fact that I was actually working with the anonymous artists of centuries ago as well as with a traditional artist, Wasta Haidar.

2.5 Colour

To see my work in its context it is important to speak about the personal and political significance of colour in Kurdistan and Kurdish art. In my ceramic work I restrict myself to the use of natural colours.

In Kurdish culture colours have acquired specific meaning, to which artists have added their own meaning and interpretation. From my own experience, when I was a peshmarga (freedom fighter) in the Kurdish mountains, the colour blue signalled danger and despair. This is because on the days when there were no clouds and the sky was blue, the Iraqi planes bombarded us on a regular basis. Cloudy and grey days, on the other hand, offered a certain amount of protection and safety.

For the Kurdish romantic poets (covering approximately the years 1900 – 1950), colour was the natural articulation of the celebration of nature, life, positive change, and nature-inspired

human joy. For the poet Goran (1903-1962), nature is endowed with colours, motions, and scenes that inspire sublime pleasure in one's surroundings. He sees human and natural beauty in all its manifestations - colours, sounds and motions. His poem Women and Beauty is an example of this romantic attitude:

*I have seen stars in the skies and
Picked flowers from spring gardens
Dew from branches has sprinkled my face
I've gazed at many mountains at twilight
Suns of Nawroz and Maytime moons
Many have wandered from night into day
Sounds of silver-foamed waterfalls
With myriad tints flickering in a mist
Ripe yellow and red fruits of the orchard
Easy birdsongs in the mountain forests
And from flute throats, violin strings
Many beautiful melodies have come
All of these are beautiful and calm
And lighten the ways life takes us on
But nature lacking a lover's smile
Will forever lack real light
Will hold no melody in its soft sound:
I don't want to hear it and feel satisfied
What glinting star or wild flower
Is cherry like her cheek, nipples, lips
What black is the colour of her eyes
Her brows, her lashes, her loose hair
What hill is as lovely as her curve
What glow eludes her vision's light
What desire, heat or expectation
Can magic-match those of love?⁴⁶*

⁴⁶ Translated from Kurdish by Merawdali, K., *Collections of Goran Poetry*. (Publishers in Kurdistan Iran, 2008), p43.

The meaning of colour has often shifted in Kurdish culture and politics. Poets had to write resistance and revolutionary poems rather than romantic ones. Because of a brutal dictatorship and censorship, artists had to refer to colour in its symbolic use. This had two advantages: first of all it protected the artist from political oppression and possible torture. Secondly, the chosen symbols were such that they were widely understood by the public. In the last 25 years in Kurdish art, red has lost its original joyful meaning and is widely used as a symbol, a reference to the martyrs or those whose blood was shed. Red became understood as a symbol of patriotism and sacrifice. Kurdish writers have constructed the meaning of red in common culture. In the 1950s the Kurdish poet Dillardar, in a poem that has become the Kurdish national anthem, writes: *“We are the children of the colour red and revolution/ look how blood-coloured our history is.”*⁴⁷ Peeramerd also uses the red colour in Association with the Kurdish national day Nawroz and the Kurdish historical struggle for freedom.

In modern Kurdish poetry some poets attach a more personal meaning to colours. In the 1990s, the Kurdish poet Choman Hardi writes⁴⁸:

Where do the colours take us?

The loving reds?

The teenageness of the greens?

The intellectual insight of blue?

Traditionally in the Kurdish culture the bride’s veil has to be red. If we look at the rugs, kilims, carpets and hats, we can see that red is a dominant colour. The meaning of colour in Kurdish art also reflects religious influences: in the Islamic tradition, the warm colours (red, orange, pink) are believed to be sexually provoking; therefore women are advised not to wear them when going out of the house. These colours attract attention and may excite

⁴⁷ Rafiq, Sabir, *Kamal Mirawdeli & Stephen Watts, Modern Kurdish Poetry, An Anthology & Introduction*, (Uppsala University, 2006), p44.

⁴⁸ Hardi, Choman, translated from Kurdish, a section of the poem: *Colours* (published in *Runaki Seberekkan*, Sweden1988), p22

men. This, however, has not affected the abundant use of red in Kurdish women's clothing, especially in the villages where the colours have kept their original meaning and place. The bright colours worn by women were in stark contrast to the difficult lives - as if they wore the bright colours to defy the harsh conditions of life and to preserve energy, happiness, and passion. The ancient tradition of Zoroastrianism was and is widespread in Kurdistan.⁴⁹ On my return to Kurdistan in 1993 after a long spell in exile, I noticed the absence of the usually bright colours worn by people. It seemed that the prolonged period of wars, from which my country had suffered (the Kurdish-Iraqi wars, 1961-1991; the Iraq-Iran war, 1979-1988; the American invasion, 2003; terrorism and sectarian conflict 2004 to date), gradually deprived the people of their bright colours and replaced them with darker and more sinister colours. For example, walking down the streets in my hometown Suleimany, one could see that the colours of mourning and hardship (black, brown, navy) were dominant, as well as khaki, which was a military colour. The downfall of the Saddam Hussein regime signalled the end of mourning and a beginning of a life which promised sustainable peace and an end to war. This has been clearly reflected in the visual artwork of Kurdish artists. Bright warm colours are central to Kurdish culture, politics and spirit. In the Kurdish New Year (Newroz) on March 21st, fires are lit and people celebrate by dancing, feasting and wearing bright colourful clothes, particularly the women. Yellow, orange and red, the colours of fire - these colours have been chosen for the Kurdish flag. In this flag, red refers to sacrifice and martyrdom, green refers to spring and revival, yellow refers to sun (lifting the darkness of oppression) and white is the colour of peace. For me the colour of the outline has always been black. Black became the colour of our clothes. It was a sign of protest to reject the paradise for which the regime was making propaganda. I remember that in the time of my youth I was always wearing black. For wearing black you had to pay a price - the army

⁴⁹ In this nature-religion fire/sun/light were considered the most sacred elements of the universe. The revered Iranian artist Mani used painting to convey his Zoroastrian religious beliefs. Mani and his followers believed in the spiritual art represented by light which in turn represents the light of good spirit against the darkness of evil. Dorraj explains that: "Mani portrayed the triumph of light over darkness as an existential reality."

Dorraj M., *From Zarathustra to Khomeini: Populism and Dissent in Iran*, (Lynne Rienner. Boulder, CO. Publication,1990), p31.

erected checkpoints in the streets to arrest and insult people who wore black. Colour was used as a symbol of resistance in language, especially in literature, where it assumed symbolic meaning through the songs and lyrics. We use the caravan to signify the continuation of our historical struggle, the falcon to represent the enemy and the eagle for freedom fighter. People could easily understand these images: the razor as a sign for repression, barbed wire to represent the prisons. In my paintings the mountains became human beings, images of strong life. The graveyards in my town became the only place to present our poems and posters and the images of struggle and resistance (especially the graveyard of Suleimany, called Saywan, in which most of the writers and poets and the famous personalities have been buried). I remember that for a long time I stayed beside the grave of a peshmerga who became a martyr in the mountain. I made drawings and wrote poems on the gravestones and friends would visit and it was like a permanent exhibition telling the stories of these events in times of struggle and tragedy. A certain kind of tree grew in the graveyard of Saywan, called Arkhawan. From this tree grows a very special flower and in Spring time the whole graveyard would be covered in this flower. The colour of Arkhawan and the tree have remained an eternal symbol of struggle in the poems and works of art.

Politics had a very strong impact on intellectuals and Marxism gave orientation to the intellectuals, artists and writers. All the areas of art – plastic arts, music and theatre looked at life from the point of view of politics.

From my first personal exhibition in Hawler, Kurdistan/Irak, in 1984 (see Illustration 36) I still have the visitors book – 100 pages were filled in 3 days with notes speaking about how much my artwork reflected the problems in society and the problems of the people. Nobody wrote about the artistic way, the technique I used. The art of the generation of this time felt the responsibility to talk about politics and be political.

Politics, cultural experiences and personal contacts are the driving forces of my work as a ceramic artist as well as my work as organiser of cultural activity in Kurdistan in the form of the Museum. In the following chapter I will describe the different stages leading up to and during the building of the Museum of Modern Art in Sulaimany.



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(Illustration 36). Ink on paper, 21X30cm-Rebwar Rashed,

CHAPTER THREE – THE MUSEUM PROJECT

"The opening, in my homeland, of a window to the world"



(Illustration 37). Architectural model of the Crossing Museum by Karwan Fatah

The Museum Project constitutes a major project in my portfolio. From its inception it has been a collaborative project with the Association Showering the Birds and architectural team working closely together. The long-term planning and development of a Museum of Modern Art for Kurdistan, has been a key aspect of the formation of my artistic identity, as well as contributing to Kurdish cultural identity. I will discuss and lay out the idea behind the Museum, its evolution, development and realization; the narrative of the museum, explaining the guiding idea for the museum, my role in its establishment and the strategy to safeguard its future. In order to justify the need for a Modern Museum for Suleimany⁵⁰, I am compiling a map of existing museums, galleries and Fine Art education institutes.

⁵⁰ Suleimany is in the heart of the Middle East. It is in the North-West of Iraq, in Kurdistan. Close to the Iranian border, the town is 355km from Baghdad. Suleimany was founded in 1784 by the Emir Ibrahim Pasha Baban. This new town called Suleimany was the capital of the Emirate of Baban until 1851. Since the beginning of the 19th century, Suleimany has become the intellectual, cultural and scientific centre of Kurdistan. Many of the writers, poets and artists who have played a role in Kurdish cultural, social and national life originated from here, which was also an important centre for the preservation and development of Kurdish

3.1 The Idea for the Museum

The poem/story in 1987 (**APPENDIX D**) of the “Showering of Birds” contains the reason for all the efforts that followed in the years of exile and the years of return to Kurdistan - culminating in the final realisation of the Museum.

Favourable Conditions

In 1991, the government of the Kurdish region of Iraq was set up in Suleimany. It was the first democratically and freely elected government in Iraq, confronted with the huge task of rebuilding the region’s economic, social and educational structure. Despite all the difficulties, artistic life and education have developed, and this renewal has brought with it a desire for venues adapted to these activities, places that match the aspirations of the people to form part of the modern world and develop real exchanges with other cultures. From within the regional community and from Kurds of the Diaspora, a project was initiated to build a Museum of Modern Art in Suleimany.

Museums are sadly lacking in this part of the world: there are no permanent venues for exhibiting contemporary art within a radius of 350 km (even Baghdad, though it may put on large exhibitions, has no permanent site for exhibitions of contemporary art). The history and location of this town make it a favourable and highly symbolic place to create a Modern Art Museum.

language. According to a census carried out in 1987, the population of the town was 364.096, whilst the region administered by Suleimany was home to 951.723 people (Suleimany, Chwarta, Penjwin, Rania, Qaladze, Dokan and Halabja). It was at this time that the region, already affected by the Iran-Iraq war, fell victim to Anfal, a genocidal attack launched by Saddam Hussein against the Kurds: towns and villages were destroyed, bombarded with chemical weapons, and people were deported, imprisoned, executed and disappeared.

The Donation

When I arrived in exile in France in March 1990, I was fortunate to meet two artists (Edith Henry and Karina Waschko) during my second exhibition in Lille. This was the beginning of a friendship and artistic partnership, creating the Association Showering of Birds'. In the years following, we began work for a collection of artwork by international artists with the view of exhibiting it in Kurdistan. This collection of artwork was called The Donation', because artists gave their work for free. **(APPENDIX D)**

From 1998 to 2002 The Donation' grew little by little, as artists from mainly European countries donated their works. In its first stages, The Donation' was based on a Utopia: artists give works for an imaginary museum in a country which does not exist (the country is, of course, Kurdistan. Without international recognition and without agreed borders, it is indeed a country, which does not de facto exist).

The idea of the *Crossing Museum* and the *Bridge of Arts* were the basis for artworks to be donated to the Museum Project.

This initial collection of about fifty works was brought together in the specific context of the early 1990's, when Saddam Hussein was still in power and Kurdistan still under his dictatorship.

In 1992, Kurdistan became an autonomous region, a safe haven under the protection of the United Nations. The situation changed greatly since it was now a question of constituting a collection for a new museum in a country in reorganization.

At that time the Showering of Birds' Association itself became more active in the cultural field, organising many exhibitions in France, Belgium, Poland, Italy, Sweden, China, and the UK and launched a second stage of the collection. In a number of exhibitions the three artist founders of the Showering of Birds' exhibited their works and invited artists from Europe and beyond to exchange their works with works by the artists of the Association in form of a donation.

This dynamic became the driving force for the collection of the Crossing Museum. The co-operation between the Fine Art Universities of Lille and Tourcoing in France, Middlesex University in London and Suleimany played a vital part.

The Donation not only increased in volume, but also evolved in its breadth and developed links and exchanges between cultures through exhibitions, conferences, meetings and workshops. The Crossing Museum⁵¹ would become the permanent home for the art collection, act as a footbridge (Bridge of Arts) between current art from Europe and the Middle East and create a bond between the cultures of different countries and forms of artistic expression.⁵²

Finding a Permanent Home for the Donation - A Museum of Modern Art for Kurdistan

In 1994 I visited my home town of Suleimany and proposed the idea of a Museum of Modern Art to the then Rector of the University, Dr. Kamal Khshnow. He suggested that the collection of artwork from France could be brought to the University and a permanent home established there.

At that time our effort to bring the collection of artwork to Kurdistan resulted in a severe blow; the collection was first exhibited in Suleimany at the Institute of Fine Arts. When it was moved to the city of Hawla (now the capital of Kurdistan), it was destroyed in the course of fighting between the political factions.⁵³ The entire collection of artwork – including a

⁵¹ This was the original name for the project of building a Museum of Modern Art in Sulaimany and would later be registered with the Kurdish government as Museum of Modern Art.

⁵² The Donation collection of artworks is now in safe storage in France, ready to be collected for transportation to Kurdistan. It is catalogued with complete data on artworks and artists. Assistance from European Funding and the French Embassy has been procured to pay for this delicate operation of a long distance move.

⁵³ It should be mentioned, that in the period from the early 1990's to around 1998, the two political parties of Kurdistan, the PDK (Party of Democratic Kurdistan) and the PUK (Patriotic Union Kurdistan) were locked in a struggle - armed and political. It resulted in the western part being ruled by the PDK, the eastern part by the PUK.

printmaking collection from Middlesex University - was lost. This collection was donated to be shown in Kurdistan in return for a collection of artwork by Kurdish artists to be brought back to the UK and exhibited at Middlesex University. In the period following this terribly damaging blow to our efforts, the Association 'Showering of Birds' evaluated the possibilities for a Museum in Suleimany. The idea of a separate building with a modern architectural design was born.

In 1993 I approached Dr. Fuad Massum, Prime Minister of the first Kurdish Cabinet, for the first time with the plans for a Museum. He agreed in principle but the practical realisation took many more years and two more Cabinets to finally agree the plans. The wife of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Hero Ibrahim, was very helpful in speeding up the decision of the Suleimany Municipal Council to support us. Dr. Barham Saleh, then Prime Minister of the Kurdish government, gave his full backing to the Museum Project.

Finding the financial backing for the project was a first priority. Dr. Kamal Mirawdeli, a specialist on questions of funding large projects, explored the possibility of funding from arts funds in the UK as well as Europe. However, we soon realised that this funding source was not going to be available to us. We tried various humanitarian organisations in Kurdistan, but their priorities lay in the areas of supporting the building of hospitals, schools and infrastructure projects. The sanctions imposed on Iraq during the 90's had had a crippling effect on Kurdistan. However, with the downfall of Saddam Hussein, the oil revenues from Iraq and in particular from Kurdistan could benefit directly the economic improvement of Kurdistan and its regions. This gave us renewed hope that the conditions to find financial backing for our Museum Project were becoming favourable.

In 2003 I returned to Kurdistan to open an exhibition of my paintings. The Minister of Culture, Mr. Fatah Zakwey, attended the opening and I was able to approach him on this occasion to arrange a meeting to discuss the Museum. At this meeting I submitted a complete proposal for the building of a Museum of Modern Art in Suleimany. He agreed the proposal and committed the Ministry of Culture to finding the necessary funds for the project.

Furthermore, the Municipal Council agreed to give us the ground for building the Museum in the area of the Azadi Freedom Park⁵⁴. **(APPENDIX E)**



(Illustration 38). Area marked out for the building of the Crossing Museum in Suleimany, 2003, Photograph by Shower the Birds' Association.

⁵⁴ After 1991 local people took back control of the memorial site of a former Iraqi military garrison and transformed it into the Azady (Freedom) Park - an area for festivals, recreational facilities (cafés, restaurant) and cultural spaces like galleries. Azadi Park is very popular and attended daily by many visitors. This park has a tragic history for the Kurdish people during the black years, when Saddam Hussein and his Baath Party tortured and killed here in all impunity. In 1963 many people were buried here alive. Starting with the independence of the area in 1991, the decision was made to turn this vast military camp (332.000m²) into a leisure park, a place of peace and beauty (with swimming pool, amphitheatre, lake and restaurant), a place of freedom in honour of all those who suffered there. In the search for a location for the museum this area was ideal. The museum is in some sense a memorial institution, because the site on which it is built, is itself a historic site and worthy of commemoration. Azadi Park is in the town center and as such very favourable for the Museum Project: the area of the Museum occupies 3.666 m square on the periphery of Azadi Park and is easily accessible by road (see Illustration 38).

In 2003 Showering the Birds' Association commissioned the architect Karwan Fatah, whose architectural practice was then in the Netherlands, to begin work on a design for the Museum (see Illustration 37). Karwan Fatah is the architect responsible for designing the artspace and its various functions, besides overseeing the structural design, for which a group of special staff (structural engineers, site architects, etc.) worked on the various aspects of the building.⁵⁵

On May 1, 2003, the Suleimany Municipal Council and the Kurdistan Regional Government (Ministries of Culture and Education) gave their support to the Museum Project and ordered its construction as part of the Azadi park (see Illustration 39). Their support symbolized the rebirth of the region and emphasized the City Council's desire for links with the modern world through art and education.



(Illustration 39). Beginning of construction work on the Crossing Museum, 2004,
Photograph by Shower the Birds' Association.

⁵⁵ The efforts made over a period of over 20 years to fight for this project, are all documented (letters to all involved parties, newspaper and magazine articles and TV reports are collated and available and open for insight and inspection).

At the same time as we received the official support from the Municipal Council, we also campaigned to gain the support of the Artist Union, the Institute of Fine Art in Suleimany and the College of Fine Art/University of Suleimany. The Ministry of Culture for the region was to be the financial backer for the project. At the beginning of the building project the Association 'Showering of Birds' (based in France), with myself as director and Edith Henry as coordinator, was signatory to the contract with the Ministry of Culture in Kurdistan.

By that time the cultural Associations La Pluie d'Oiseaux (Showering of Birds), (Roubaix, France), Art in Common (London), Kaosmos (Liège, Belgium), the architects Studio Caro (Utrecht, Netherlands), the artists Hoshyar Rasheed (Amsterdam), Rebwar Saeed (London), Olivier Touron and Edith Henry (Lille) decided to come together to carry forward the project for the Suleimany Museum of Modern Art in conjunction with the architects and artists of Suleimany, the Kurdistan Artists' Union (Suleimany), and the departments of Fine Art and Journalism of the University of Suleimany. **(APPENDIX F)**

3.2 Historical and Cultural Context for the Crossing Museum

The importance of this Kurdish region as a cradle of civilisation favoured the establishment of a Museum for the archaeological treasures of Kurdistan in 1961. Under the aegis of UNESCO the Archaeological Museum modernised in terms of its archival system and display methods. Its staff have been retrained in contemporary museum practice in Europe and the US. Archeologists from outside Kurdistan have been collaborating with local specialists in the museum. The Archaeological Museum is also used in part to provide space for contemporary artists to exhibit their work in temporary exhibitions (see Illustration 40).

In 1975 the Museum of Ethnography in Suleimany was established, exhibiting collections of Kurdish rugs, traditional costume, metalwork, pottery, textiles and jewellery. The museum is housed in one of the oldest buildings in the city (see Illustration 41).



(Illustration 40). Suleimany Museum. Photograph by Rebwar Rashed, 2009



(Illustration 41). Museum of Ethnography, Photograph by Bakhtyar Saeed, 2012

Private Galleries

At present there are a number of private art galleries in Suleimany. Salar Gallery (the private gallery of the visual artist Salar), is being run since 1994 by Kurdish artist Salar Majeed and a group of young artists (see Illustration 42). They published a magazine Payve Rang (Colour Word). This magazine has functioned as a forum for discussion on modern art in and outside of Kurdistan.



(Illustration 42). Salar Gallery, Photograph by Fayaq Hama Salh, 1994

Zamwa Gallery (see Illustration 43) is dedicated to showing art by Kurdish artists of the 20th century and contemporary art. Zamwa Gallery was founded in 1995, when Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, wife of the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, donated the house of her parents to be used as an art gallery and for art activities. Her father had been a famous literary and political figure in Kurdish society and the house had always been a centre for cultural and intellectual gatherings. Zamwa Gallery is promoting artists in Kurdistan regardless of their style and method of work. The gallery prints catalogues of artists' work and organises a continuous artistic programme.



(Illustration 43). Zamwa Gallery, Photograph by Agala Rostam, 2003

An artist-run space, Amna Suraka, was founded in 2003 (see Illustration 44). The notorious former headquarters of the secret police, a torture house where thousands of people were taken and from where many disappeared, is now a Museum for Traditional Fashion. It also houses a magnificent collection of Kurdish rugs. It has also become a popular venue for staging contemporary art exhibitions. The building was damaged badly on its exterior walls during fighting with Saddam Hussein's military and still bears the traces of that fight. Quite intentionally these scars on its walls are preserved to be a reminder of its history. Many former inmates of the prison now visit it remembering the terror they had to suffer.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ My brother Hoshyar was imprisoned there as a sixteen year old boy and escaped the death penalty only through exchange with an Iraqi soldier.



(Illustration 44). Amna Suraka, Photograph by Rebwar Rashed, 2005

Aram Gallery was opened in Suleimany in 2004, showing modern art exhibitions, installations and films. In 2004, Rostam Agala, a Kurdish painter and photographer, opened a private gallery in part of his house.

Sardam Publisher created a dedicated space for art shows, art seminars and films in 2006. This is the venue of my Ceramics Project exhibition and has been visited by the external and internal examiners, Dr. Catharina Zijlmas and Dr. Keith Piper on June 24, 2012 (see Illustration 45).

In 2009, Ismail Khayat, a famous Kurdish artist, opened a private gallery in his house and in 2011 the sculptor and Fine Art teacher Bayan Many opened his own private sculpture gallery in his sculpture studio.

Over the last decade Suleimany has become a lively centre for art production and exhibition, with artists opening their studios to the public and encouraging the public to see their work in situ.



(Illustration 45). Sardam Gallery. Exhibition of my Ceramic Project, June 2012.

Photograph by Safin Ismail.

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College of Fine Arts

The first Art College was established in Suleimany in 1978 with courses in painting, sculpture, ceramic, music and theatre. Students trained there for 5 years, graduating with a diploma.

Before 1998 students who wanted to continue their art studies in Higher Education had to enrol at the University in Baghdad. Arabic being the language of Iraq made studying in Baghdad difficult, as Kurds have their own language. In 1991 the Kurdistan region was declared a Safe Haven by the United Nations. Efforts by the Kurdish authorities to establish an autonomous and independent higher education sector began to take shape during this period.

In 1998 the College of Fine Arts (see Illustration 46) was created as part of the University of Suleimany. The ten best students graduating from the college each year had the opportunity to study art at university level in a four-year course equalling a BA qualification.



(Illustration 46). University of Suleimany, College of Fine Arts,

Photograph by Bakhtyar Saeed, 2012

Initially, the Art Department consisted of three Faculties - Painting, Sculpture, and Ceramics. It now also comprises Faculties for Music and Theatre. The Faculty of Fine Art came into being as a historical necessity for achieving several goals related to cultural identity in general and the Arts in particular.

In 2005 the MA in Fine Art was established, followed by a PhD in Fine Art in 2007. Teachers from Baghdad University were brought to teach those courses and now the first of Kurdish graduates are taking over as teachers. Many students have been given grants to study and research. My own PhD studies were granted on the understanding that I will return to teach at the Faculty of Art on completion of my studies.

The development of a strong platform for artistic creation at university level is going to be essential for the development of a Museum of Modern Art. The role of the Faculty of Art at Suleimany University is to become a forward-looking and creative hub for art education and art practice.

My teaching involvement at the Faculty of Art was from 2004-2007. As Head of the Art Department I extended the curriculum to include Design (Illustration, Digital and Graphic Design). Whereas before, students relied solely on hand-drawn design, we introduced the use of computer and digital media in every department – in painting, sculpture and the ceramic arts.

Another break with the old model of academic studies was my proposal for dissertation and research papers to be given much greater weight. This was accepted and it represented a huge break with old practice. To help students with their dissertations, the college invited specialist teachers to explain and help with structuring research papers. I also encouraged my students to participate in exhibitions outside the university and with established artists. Students took part in projects about Anfal and the holocaust of Halabja, the resulting work exhibited permanently at the Suleimany Library. Students had traditionally opted for the professional pathways of working either as artists or art teachers. My aim was to prepare them to work in areas of publishing, new media, art criticism and journalism or work as curators. This shift has already taken effect - one student who graduated from the sculpture department is now working full-time at the Museum for Archaeology. Another student has recently published a book about Kurdish artists and another on the history of photography in

Kurdistan. A number of students have become reporters and designers for TV. A further student has won international acclaim as photographer. The effort to diversify into a variety of professional pathways has led to a far greater creative input into these areas where visual communication or artistic knowledge play a big part.

3.3 A Museum of Contemporary Art: Form and Function

With an ever- increasing number of art museums and exhibition spaces, diverse views and concepts have developed concerning this subject. Key issues are the interaction between the building and the artworks, the character of the building seen and experienced from in- as well as outside, functionality and flexibility of the building and the exhibition areas. Discourse on the relationship between the artworks and the museum space has focused on such questions as: Is the exhibition hall merely an architectural frame for the artworks? Can we separate the art museum from the exhibited artworks inside? Is it the museum, which lends legitimacy to the art? How free is the architect to create architecturally expressive forms? Studying various concepts of modern art museums, these questions informed our planning.

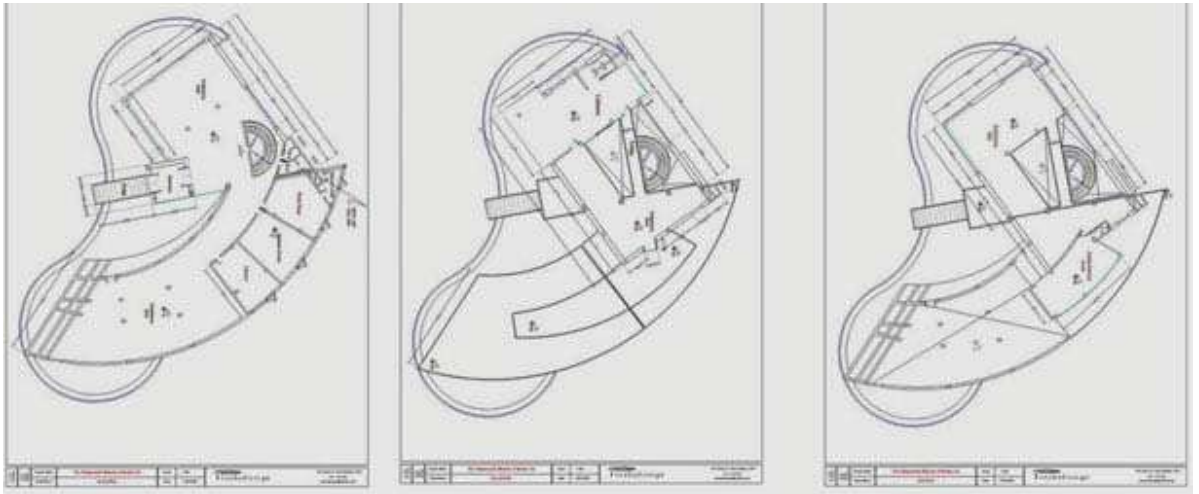
The museum is foremost understood as a protector of works of art. It preserves the artwork in a stable and safe environment. It has at the same time to be a house, which welcomes the public to view the artwork.

The architecture must serve the users as a cultural and special place where people, artworks and artists come together. A Museum of Art is one of the cultural faces of a city or even a country - it is a unique place in itself. The architecture becomes a piece of art without dominating the artworks. The physical experience of walking through a museum building should be as exciting as seeing the artwork. In no case should the work of art ever become a decorative aspect for the museum architecture. The architectural quality of the building can indirectly tell us about the art inside.

The quality of space and light are of the utmost importance for the artwork to be looked at and enjoyed in the best possible way. A clear space with high walls and top light is optimal for that purpose. Museum and artworks are inseparable. Experiencing the artistic qualities of art objects is supported by the architectural quality of the building.

The Architectural Project

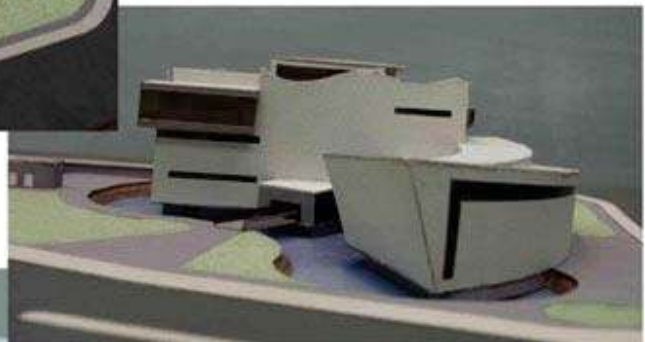
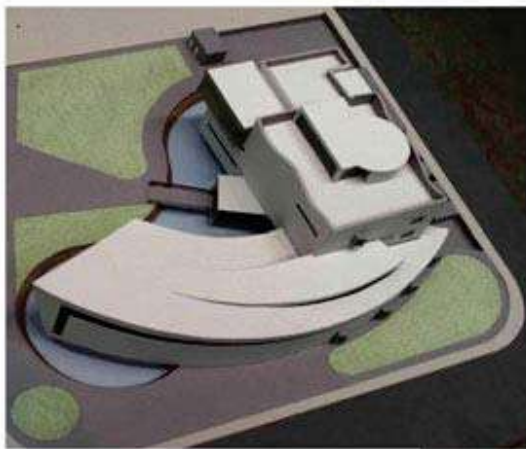
The building, currently in its final stage of construction, is emblematic of the desire for exchange and openness to the world - ideas enshrined in the founding principles of the project (see Illustration 47). The Crossing Museum opens onto an artificially created water feature and reflects aspects of regional architecture. It is linked to the surrounding environment by a bridge. Karwan T. Fatah (a graduate of the School of Architecture and the Cabinet of Architecture in the Netherlands) decided in 2003 to return to live in Suleimany where he brought together a team of architects with whom he created the design agency Prozha-Design. He is the originator and the planning director of the architectural project of the Crossing Museum.



(Illustration 47). Architectural design of the Crossing Museum by Karwan Fatah, copyright Karwan Fatah

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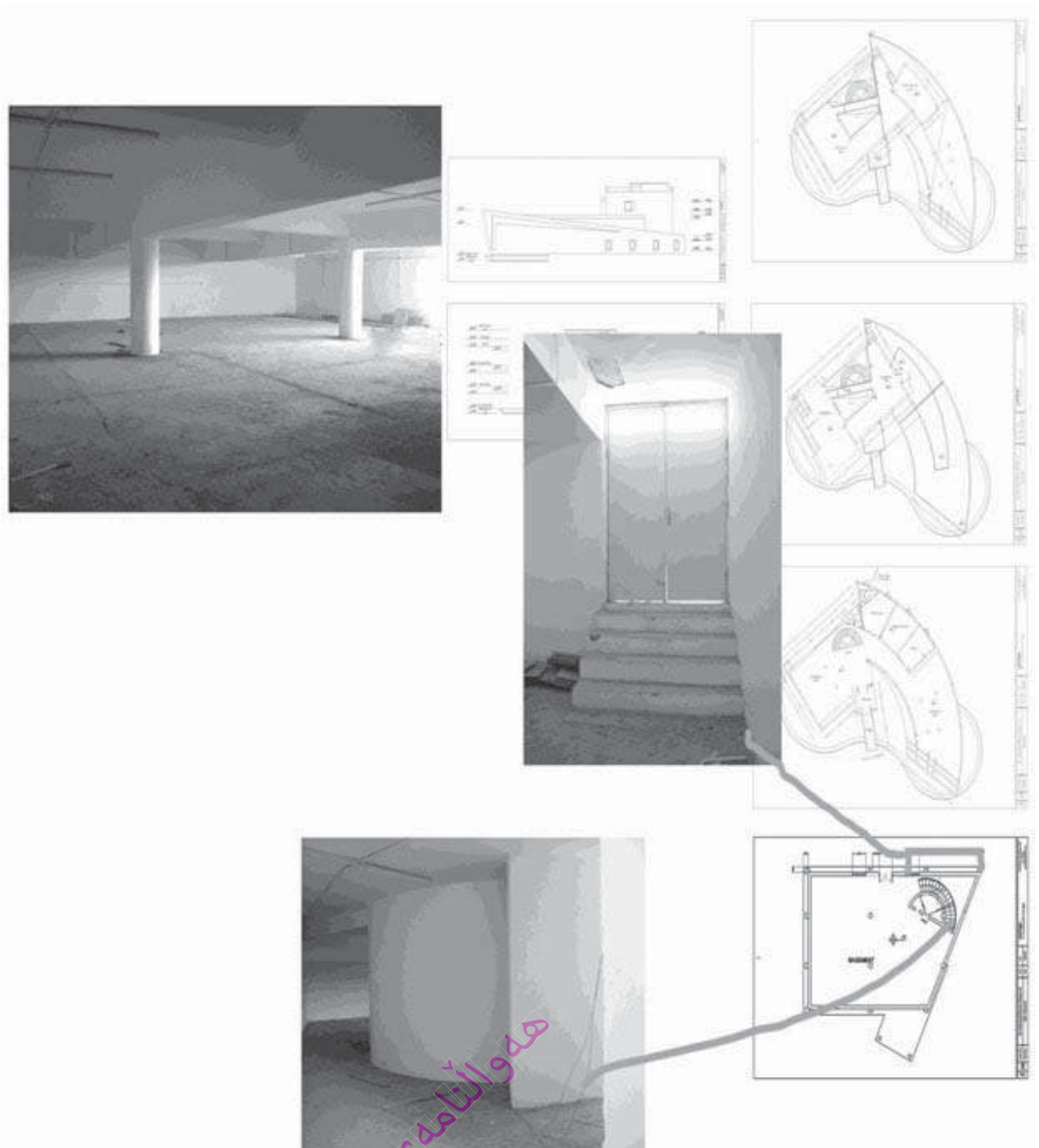
design by Karwan Fatah
Prozha Design
Sulamani 2004



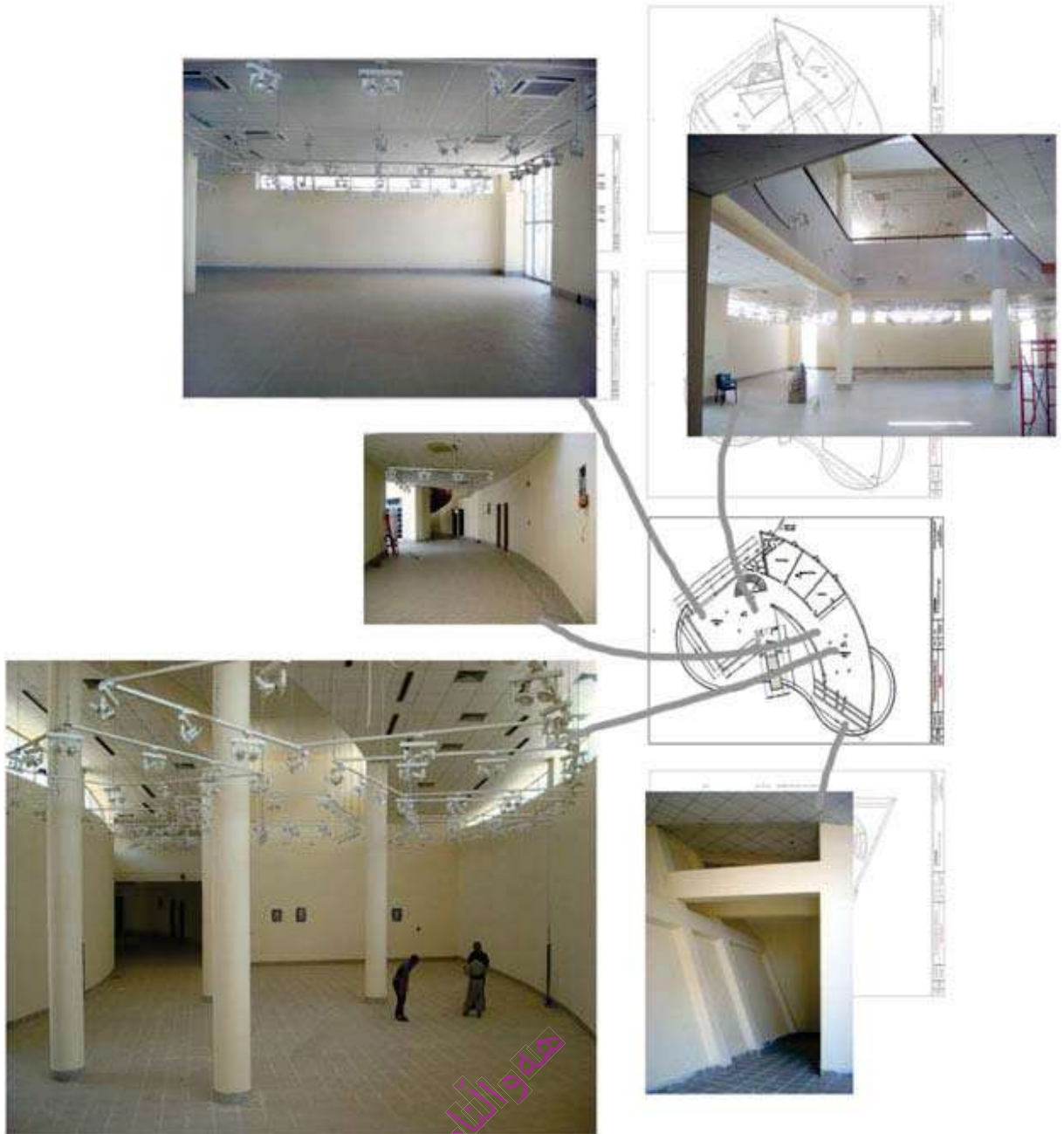
(Illustration 48). Design Modern Art Museum in Suleimany, by Karwan Fatah, Prozha Design Sulamani 2004, Photograph by Association 'Showering of Birds', 2005, copyright Karwan Fatah



(Illustration 49). Modern Art Museum in Suleimany, Photograph by Association 'Showering of Birds', 2011, ground level, first floor, copyright Karwan Fatah



(Illustration 50). Modern Art Museum in Suleimany, Photograph by Association Showering of Birds, 2011, basement , copyright Karwan Fatah

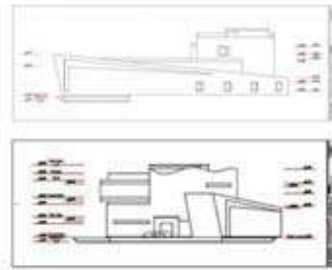


(Illustration 51). Modern Art Museum in Suleimany, Photograph by Association 'Showering of Birds', 2011, ground level, copyright Karwan Fatah



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(Illustration 52). Modern Art Museum in Suleimany, Photograph by Association 'Showering of Birds', 2011, Second Floor, copyright Karwan Fatah



(Illustration 53). Modern Art Museum in Suleimany, Photograph by Association 'Showering of Birds', 2011, Front view, copyright Karwan Fatah

The project aim was to build a modern space reflecting certain regional architectural aspects while meeting the standards of environmental conservation (see Illustrations 48-53).

According to Karwan, the building is composed of two principal parts, each one with its own characteristics – two forms that are in contact with each other symbolise the meeting of different worlds and cultures. The building opens onto a surrounding water feature and is connected by a bridge, symbolising its bond towards the world.

The main exhibition spaces will house changing exhibitions. The building is designed to function equally well for exhibitions of paintings, sculpture, ceramic work, photography, video projections and installations. A main consideration of ours has been to allow visitors enough space to move in front or around the artwork, so that the problem of crowding will not arise.

A dedicated space for showing documentary films, art films or projections has been part of the overall planning concept, as has been a space for a library, where research and study can take place. Special emphasis will be on E-books.

A museum shop will stock books related to present and past exhibitions. Merchandise related to artwork of current exhibitions will also be on sale and advertise and popularise the Museum and its exhibitions. Local artists and artisans will be encouraged to produce items of merchandise for the Museum shop, making the shop/market-place into a lively place for visitors. We will attempt to attract wider audiences from the community, such as families, pensioner groups, disabled people and prisoners and make our premises visitor-friendly by having a cafeteria, gardens and relaxation spaces - all with easy access.

The physical experience of walking into and through the various parts of the museum is itself enjoyable. The entrance to the building is welcoming and immediately opens the view to the levels above. There is a lift to all the floors - the upper floors can also be reached via a spiral staircase and a gradually ascending walkway. The roof of the building is also accessible and can be enjoyed especially in the warm summertime.

Until now electricity supply in Kurdistan (as in the whole of Iraq) is not available 24 hours a day. For this reason, generators are put in place to provide power when needed. In the very hot summer period it is necessary to have air-conditioning systems, as the outside temperature can reach up to 45 degrees (the basement temperature, where artwork is stored, has lower temperature).

The museum opens onto the area of the Azadi Park, which itself has a café, a restaurant and a continuous fun fair. The park is situated in the centre of the city and can easily be reached on foot, by bus and car.

The Music Institute, the Artist Union Building, the Women's Union Building, the TV and radio station and the Museum of Amna Suraka are all in the immediate neighborhood. This places the Crossing Museum in the midst of an important area. The very place of the museum is a commemorative area to the victims of struggle against dictatorship.

Problems Along the Way

Despite the fact that the general positive support for the museum was doubtlessly there, we did experience major problems once the planning and first building stages had been reached. The Crossing Museum should have reached completion in 2006 with the official opening taking place shortly afterwards. The reasons why the Museum is still not open today lie in the following causes: As Kurdistan was just emerging from a very difficult period of war and occupation, the priority of building a Museum of Modern Art was not generally shared by the political establishment. Schools, hospitals, housing, electricity supply, security questions were prioritised and it required intense lobbying and campaigning to persuade politicians to back our project. Inexperience on the part of myself and my collaborators did not prepare us for many difficulties connected with the complex political landscape in Kurdistan.

It was evident that we needed a group of responsible people in Kurdistan to look after the running of the construction. To that purpose we created a board of six people: Rebwar as main coordinator, Kader Mirkhan (artist and university lecturer on ceramics), Wahbi Rassoul (visual artist and teacher at the Institute of Fine Art), Sami Mumin (photographer and TV journalist), Aram Saed (journalist and translator English and French) and Edith Henry (artist and coordinator of The Showering of Birds' Association). This group facilitated the support from politicians and public persons. It represented a public face for the Museum and sought to engender a positive discussion and support in the media about the Crossing Museum.

Another major problem was that continuity in funding was lacking. The limited funds initially available for the building of the Crossing Museum had not allowed us to invite a major

professional building contractor from outside Iraq. The Museum Project required a building contractor with specialist knowledge of materials and building processes, which the contractor who carried out the construction did not have. This resulted in major construction faults, which took a long time to rectify.

Furthermore, due to a boom in the construction industry, material and labour costs had increased. Our funds could not keep up with the spiralling costs. The contractor stopped work, as we were no longer in a position to pay him. For two years construction stopped completely. The anticipated year of completion of the Crossing Museum in 2007 had to be postponed and a report on the problems was commissioned and carried out by a French architect. In a renewed approach to the government it was finally possible to agree a new budget to continue and complete the building. A large amount of the final release of government funding to complete the building came as a direct consequence of reports in the media (TV and newspapers) on the problems facing the Museum Project.

Government funding of half a million dollars to rectify the problems was secured and building work could be resumed with a different contractor. The project now stands completed.

3.4 The struggle for a Kurdish National Identity – Past and Present.

After the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from three northern provinces, Iraqi Kurdistan emerged in 1992 as an autonomous entity inside Iraq with its own local government and parliament.

This created favourable conditions for the establishment of a Museum of Modern Art. I was very aware that my country needed not only humanitarian aid but also a project for Fine Art and Fine Art Education. The Iraqi regime had denied the existence of Kurdish art and culture, as the entire system was preoccupied with destroying everything to do with Kurdish identity.

The recent fall of the dictator again gave hope to the Kurdish people. The elections in January 2005 consolidated the Kurds in their hope. Although the Second Gulf War and the current political situation in Iraq weakened the economic advancement of the country as a whole, the Kurdish area is a zone less touched by the current confrontations and remains one of the safest in Iraq. The economic advancement is still in a critical phase but in spite of the difficulties the artistic, scientific and educational life is continuing to develop.

The Crossing Museum expresses the changing Kurdish identity over the past 20 years and stresses the importance of Kurdish culture being open to a global situation. In the past holding on to its cultural identity has been a major struggle for Kurdistan in the face of constant attacks on its people, its borders and its culture.

The present opening of Kurdistan to trade, investment and travel is creating opportunities as well as new dangers to our identity and security. To give some examples of the adverse effects of open trade: import of cars has risen disproportionately to the numbers of people, but the quality of imported cars is extremely poor. Alcohol, cigarettes and cheap food imports have contributed to the deterioration of people's health. Imported medicines are often of low quality, creating ill health instead of cure. In the absence of checks and quality controls on imported goods, Kurdistan has become a dumping ground for unhealthy and dangerous imports.

On the ideological level, the American Media School in Suleimany has been at the centre of controversy over its teaching of Christian values whilst satellite TV has been flooding the country with free porn channels.

Positive developments have been government sponsorship of a large numbers of students to study abroad and facilitating the opening of branches of foreign universities in Kurdistan. Whereas ten years ago there was not a single international airport in Kurdistan, there are now three airports open to international flights (two in Hawler, one in Suleimany and a domestic airport in Kirkuk). Many high-tech companies have opened subsidiaries in Kurdistan, which has benefitted the construction and communications sector.

In the context of changing historical conditions, the work for the establishment of a Museum of Modern Art is contributing to the progressive changes happening to Kurdish identity. It is a driving force in bringing about change by opening the borders without fear of being annexed, invaded or occupied.

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3.5 Realization

Cooperation with Existing Museums

An important emphasis for the Crossing Museum will be the establishment of close links with the existing Museums of Archaeology, Ethnography and the Museum of Amna Suraka to allow a dialogue between contemporary artists and makers and their cultural history. To give an example: the Museum of Archaeology holds many sculptural objects depicting women, which relate to the period in history when society was organized along matriarchal structures. A recent exhibition, the 'Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman' by Grayson Perry at the British Museum, exemplified this relatively new approach to the art of the past - understanding history through the objects of art and craft and appreciating the role of art in the cultural life of the people.⁵⁷

What kind of Museum?

Branding is important - The name Crossing Museum was chosen to describe its essential mission. The word 'crossing' signifies creating links between cultures, building bridges for people to be able to experience the 'other side', the 'outside', the side of 'the other', opening up to cultural influences from outside and enriching one's own understanding, experience and practice.

The concretization of the Crossing Museum represents the realization of an artist's dream - to build a centre for gathering, archiving and protecting works of art by Kurdish artists. The Crossing Museum will be an invaluable resource to develop research and answer questions such as 'Does Kurdish art exist?' and 'In what form and how has Kurdish art developed?'

The Crossing Museum, devoted to the arts of today, will allow the wider population to encounter original works and provide an educational framework in a setting of peace. Through the Crossing Museum people will learn about the world around them - it will address a cultural need of the population of Suleimany and the wider area of Iraq. The

⁵⁷ www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/grayson_perry.aspx

Crossing Museum project was approved by the regional government of Kurdistan, because it symbolises the general dynamics of rebuilding.

The Crossing Museum will build a bridge between Kurdistan and Europe and encourage exchanges between artists in Kurdistan and abroad. Open to exchanges, the concept of the Crossing Museum aims to bring art from all over the world to Kurdistan as well as create a platform for Kurdish and international artists to meet and engage with each other's work. The Crossing Museum will provide facilities for Kurdish artists and artists from abroad to conduct research and engage in creative projects. Apart from having enormous significance as a symbol for artistic initiative, life and development in Kurdistan, the Crossing Museum will be an icon of the city of Suleimany. The fact that the collection of the Crossing Museum has been brought together through artists' donations of their work signifies the commitment and love for a project, which is unique.

The collection of the Crossing Museum represents a major part of the concept of the museum (**APPENDIX G**). The Donation' will represent its core collection, which is constantly added to by further donations and acquisitions. The Donation' will partly be exhibited as a permanent exhibition and partly exist as archived art objects in storage in a large basement space.

The foremost mission of the Crossing Museum is to be a window to the world. This works both ways, of course. It is about exchange of cultures and cultural heritage. The tragic history of Kurdistan has not allowed a peaceful development of the Arts and cultural activities and has prevented the country and its people from connecting with what was happening around the world.

The Crossing Museum is a partnership project between the Kurdish/French Association Showering of Birds' and the Kurdish Government, Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Culture is the sole funder of the museum, but the Association Showering of Birds' is responsible for setting up the museum structure and planning the initial museum- and exhibition program for the first three years. (**APPENDIX H**) In his widely read book Museum Careers and Training', Victor Danilov discusses the nature and requirements of different types of museum positions such as director, curator, educator, exhibition designer, registrar, conservator, fundraising manager, marketing and membership secretary, physical plant and security officer: Many basic questions about a museum normally are answered even before

an institution comes into being. They relate to the mission, governing body, collections, exhibits, education programs, physical plant, budget, support, staff, and division of work and responsibility. Such decisions usually are made by the founding group or agency, although they may change later. These organizational basics influence nearly every facet of a museum's operations, including the overall structure and staff composition and duties.⁵⁸

Danilov's books have been a helpful guide for the running of a professional museum and given us invaluable insight into the many aspects of running a museum of art.

With regard to the exhibition mission of the Crossing Museum, the publications by David Dean have been equally insightful. He speaks about the importance of learning: The museological motivation for exhibiting is to provide the objects and information necessary for learning to occur.⁵⁹ This aim meets precisely our intention to give the visitor to the Crossing Museum an enjoyable, new and different experience and at the same time create a learning experience through an encounter with art. Art has the power to lead the viewer to experiences, which would not be possible outside the museum.

We will adhere to the ICOM⁶⁰ Code of Ethics and subscribe to its worldwide museum community. This Code covers all aspects of museum management. All museum personnel will receive specialized training (some will be more collection-orientated such as curators, registrars and conservators; others like designers, builders, technicians and interpreters have a different role to play). A number of volunteer workers will be drawn from the artist and student community.

⁵⁸ Danilov, Victor J., *Museum Careers and Training, A Professional Guide*, (Greenwood Press. Westport, CT. 1994), p18.

⁵⁹ Dean, David, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice*, (Routledge, London, 1996), p2.

⁶⁰ ICOM is an international organisation that represents museums and museum professionals. ICOM defines professional standards of excellence for the global museum community. The ICOM standards include the management of a museum, the organisation of its collections, documentation standards and a professional frame of reference. The ICOM Secretariat is situated at UNESCO House, Paris, France.

The concept of management studies and the fact that senior staff within museums and galleries might have management training or qualifications, is a relatively new phenomenon in museums.⁶¹ This is a highly important point and the success of the Crossing Museum will depend largely on the training of its management personnel in the latest studies in museology and museum management. As there is presently no university department for the study of these disciplines, we are considering two options: one, to send students to universities abroad to be trained; the other is to create a chair of museology and museum management at one of the universities in Kurdistan. In the same way, archivists, curators and conservators will have to be specially trained to ensure the highest standards of work at the Crossing Museum.

The Crossing Museum will be a non-profit making institution in the service of and open to visitors from the immediate locality as well as the wider regions. Museums and galleries in Kurdistan are traditionally free of charge and it is our intention to continue this policy. Funding policy will be set up out with the government and the possibility of private funding sources will be addressed.

The Crossing Museum will have an important educational role - an educational specialist will work with teachers, artists and workshop leaders to carry out an educational program. This will be the first time such an initiative will take place in Kurdistan, where traditionally it has been the province of schools to teach art to children. By offering alternative leisure activities (workshops, lectures, talks, courses, seminars), where individuals or groups may find worthwhile experiences, the educational program will promote community interest in the museum.

Art museums are important arenas of discourse and cultural activity in contemporary society. They are widely regarded by their communities as institutions of learning and cultural knowledge.⁶² We fully subscribe to this definition of an Art museum. The Crossing

⁶¹ Fopp, Michael A., *Managing Museums and Galleries*, (Routledge, London and New York. First published in 1997, reprinted 2001),p1

⁶² Fenech, Mark, *City Museums and Park Museums*, *Art Education*, vol. 56, Issue 1, January 2003, p46.

Museum will belong first and foremost to the people of the city of Suleimany, whilst being a focus for visitors from all regions of Iraq.

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Conclusion

The search for the roots of Kurdish cultural identity have led me to identify the centuries old ceramic tradition as one of the most important artistic practices in my country. The ceramic work became the reason to explore the historic connections further.

A real difficulty in my research has been the lack of any published documentation on Kurdish art and Kurdish art history in libraries or on-line. Many historical artifacts and data have been lost in the course of centuries of destruction and cultural theft during periods of war and occupation, to which my country was subjected.

What little is preserved, can be found in the Archaeological Museum and studied and interpreted there. It has been the most important source for my research and it influenced my practical work at many stages.

The practical work in turn developed my thesis and created the basis for a deeper understanding of the connection between the Ceramic Arts and the history of Kurdistan. Each of my projects established in a different way this link between the Ceramic Art and Kurdish history. In the course of my practical and theoretical work, the assertion that Ceramic Art, more than any other art form, is synonymous with Kurdish society and identity, has been fully supported at every stage.

The Ceramic Arts have occupied a place in the history of Mesopotamia of portraying the lives of kings and heroes, rather than the individual victims of wars. In my ceramic work I have tried to address this question by creating an individual narrative involving my life in Kurdistan and in exile.

Without the collaboration of the traditional potter Wasta Haider it would have been impossible to make this deep connection with the Ceramic Arts – he became the bridge between the old and the new as he embodies the history of the Ceramic Arts in practical terms as well as in terms of ideas.

Through my project I hope to have created a precedent in overcoming the division between the traditional potter and the artist working with the ceramic medium. There may be an important role for the traditional artisan as teacher in universities in future.

My ceramic work invites a dialogue with the viewer. The ceramic projects involve the viewer in my personal history as well as the ancient history of my country and people. After four years of concentrated work on the ceramic projects, they are now in my private studio in Kurdistan. It is my plan, that they can be shown as a touring exhibition in Kurdistan and Europe.

As with the Ceramic Project, I have endeavoured to create an accurate account of the history of the Crossing Museum, from its mere idea to the physical reality of a contemporary building of architectural excellence. It will be a home for The Donation' collection as well as the future place for international and Kurdish art.

The existence of a collection of artwork from international artists proves the importance of connections between art and artists beyond national borders and the possibility of a museum to become a creative platform.

The establishment of a Museum of Modern Art represents a cultural climax. Suleimany has always been called the Capital of Culture in Kurdistan, but in reality there existed very little to deserve this name. In order for this museum to become reality, many factors had to come together – the political will, the financial backing and the people with vision for contemporary art and architecture.

Inside Kurdistan favourable conditions combined with my vision that such a project could actually become reality. My personal history and the history of my country coincided in a project, which encapsulates the aspirations of the people of Suleimany. The Crossing Museum is bigger than a local project: it represents the work and dedication by international artists who have given their artwork, their efforts and their support to the Kurdish people.

As well as safeguarding the cultural heritage of Kurdistan, the Crossing Museum will in future have the task to reach beyond the borders of Kurdistan to the international artistic community to provide a place for research and creative and educational activity.

When I arrived in France in 1990 as a Kurdish refugee I told my friends about the idea of a Museum of Modern Art. ***"The opening, in my homeland, of a window to the world"*** became reality because there existed the need and justification for it as well as energy and vision to achieve it.

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APPENDIX A

The production of Arabesques was common to cultures in the region of what is described as Asia Minor from around 900 AD. It consisted in a form of geometric lines, animals, plants and mythological images.⁶³ On a visit to the Suleimany Archaeological Museum I saw decorated pots that go back 6000 years. This was the beginning of a language of pattern, a written language, communication in form of pictorial systems.

Historians argue that Persian Arabesque is the origin of Islamic Arabesque.⁶⁴ Some Islamic historians reject this theory. The distinctive feature of Persian Arabesque is that it contains many living creatures as well as flowers and leaves. These motifs have also entered jewellery and ceramic art. They have been carved on the walls of the Persian castles. The origins of Persian Arabesque go back 2000 years. It was the pride of kings and princes to display beautiful and complex motifs on their walls and especially on their rugs. These images are based on the ancient stories of Persia such as 'Shirin and Farhad' (the equivalent to Romeo and Juliet), 'Rostam and Sohrab' and others. The stories are worldly - about love, loss, bravery and patriotism.

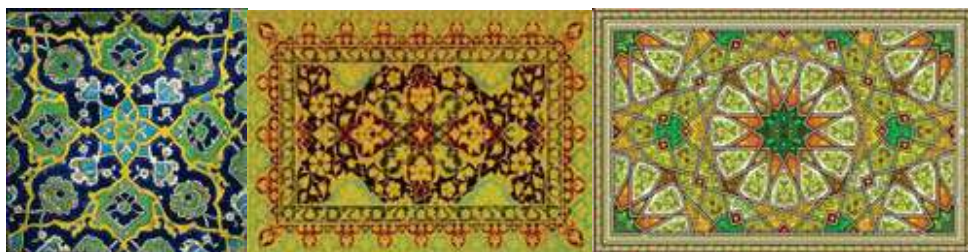
Repetition is one of the key features of Arabesque. The speciality of Arabesque is that it occupies all the empty spaces through repetition and movement. This sense of movement has special significance because it makes the eye follow the movement through the space. Another feature of Arabesque art is that each part is joined to the next part. Arabesque from the Turkish region has its own features which distinguishes it from Persian and other Arabesques.

The defining characteristics of Turkish Arabesque include equal distances between the shapes and the use of few colours as opposed to Persian Arabesque, which uses seven

⁶³ Research based on Encyclopedia Britannica.

⁶⁴ Reference based on '*Arabesque in Persian Architecture*', in Farsi language, translated into Kurdish. Kurdistan Iraq, 2003

colours. Unlike Persian Arabesque, Turkish Arabesque contains empty spaces and also uses one snail shape as opposed to the Persian which uses seven snails (this is considered a speciality of Persian Arabesque).



Turkish Arabesque

Islamic Arabesque

Persian Arabesque

Kurdish rugs have their own character. Generally speaking if one cuts a carpet or rug in two halves, one side is the mirror image of the other. The Kurdish rug, unlike rugs in neighbouring countries, differs as one side is not a reflection of the other. Kurdish rugs have a top and a bottom.⁶⁵

APPENDIX B

Halabjah, a Kurdish village in Iraq close to the Iranian border, has become virtually synonymous with chemical warfare. In 1988, during the Iran-Iraq War, approximately

⁶⁵ In his book on Kurdish rugs the historian William Egleton gives an account by Austen Henry Layard (the man who acquired for the British Museum its collection of Assyrian winged bulls from Nineveh and Nimrud in the 1840s) of a visit to a Kurdish chief near Mardin in southeast Turkey: "His tent was carpeted with those carpets of beautiful texture and rich design which are made by Kurdish women and are greatly valued in the East." In the same book he also quotes Murray Eiland: "If we were to designate a fifth major category of oriental rugs, there would be a convincing argument to suggest that Kurdish weaves are an entity in themselves". Egleton served in the United States Navy from 1944–46, and graduated from Yale University in 1948. He joined the U.S. foreign service in 1949.

5,000 Kurds were killed in gas attacks by Iraqi warplanes. Although rumors that Iraq had relied on outlawed chemical weapons had circulated previously, Halabjah was one of the first cases where their use was documented. The gassing of Kurds in Halabjah was frequently cited by the Bush administration as it made its case for a preemptive strike against Iraq in 2002 and 2003; if Saddam Hussein's regime had shown no compunction about using these weapons in 1988 against civilians, Washington argued, then it was almost certain to use them again. That gas attack had been precipitated by the capture of Kurdish territory on March 15, 1988, by Iranian forces with the aid of Kurdish separatists. Iraq retaliated by dropping chemical bombs that are thought to have consisted of several toxic agents, including cyanide and mustard gas, whose use is prohibited under the Geneva Conventions. Although Iraq acknowledged their use, Baghdad claimed that Iran had used them first. Iran called for a UN investigation of the matter; the UN inspectors concluded that both sides were culpable in the use of chemical weapons. The official in charge of the Kurdish "pacification"—Ali Hassan al-Majid—became known as Chemical Ali for ordering the chemical gas attack.

See also Iraq, Human Rights Violations in Kurdistan.

APPENDIX C

The Kurdish population of Iraq in the mid-1980s numbered some four million, or about 22 percent of the overall Iraqi people. For much of the rule of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein (1937–2006), the Kurds, a non-Arab Muslim people, were discriminated against and, at different times, subjected to policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide. In March 1988, Iraqi aircraft bombed the Kurdish city of Halabja with chemical weapons, the most dramatic (though not the only) instance of many uses of such weapons in the first phase of the Iraqi campaign against the Kurds which had begun the previous year. A series of offensives were launched against Kurdish guerrillas fighting alongside Iranian troops as part of the wider Iran-Iraq conflict (1980–1988), and entire villages were leveled. Men were separated from women and children, with the latter concentrated in internment camps. It was later estimated that some one hundred thousand men had been killed, and buried in mass graves far to the south; at least four thousand Kurdish villages were destroyed, and with them much of the fabric of Kurdish society in the areas targeted by the Iraqi military. Well aware of the genocidal (Al-Anfal) campaign (1986–1989) waged against the Kurds in northern Iraq by

Saddam Hussein (1937–2006), the U.S. government of President Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) chose not to condemn Saddam Hussein's policy for fear of alienating him and placing the continued supply of Middle East oil in jeopardy. Concomitantly, during the Iran-Iraq War between 1980 and 1988, Washington took the position that those fighting the Ayatollahs in Iran were to be supported, and this meant Saddam Hussein's Iraq—the same government that was persecuting, gassing and slaughtering the Kurds living in the north of the country. The Kurds' situation was not helped by the fact that they were themselves siding with Iran in its war with Iraq. The most common response by the United States to allegations of genocide by Iraq was for the United States to announce that a fact-finding mission or investigative team was being put together to inquire into the allegations. The United States' policies were thus dictated by realpolitik concerns, not by humanitarianism in the face of genocide and gross violations of human rights.⁶⁶

APPENDIX D

Diary entry 1987

Translation from the Kurdish of Showering of Birds' poem.

This morning when we got up, the birds had been informed too late about the chemical bombardments. Altogether, they tried to escape but where they went, nobody knows. In the past, when the hunters aimed at the birds, they would fly off. But today, life and death seem as one: the air is poisonous. As masks, the children of Sergalou put bits of dampened material over their mouths. They look at each other and laugh as if this was a new game, which had come as a gift to the village.

Little by little the swallows, the pigeons, the nightingales, who so rarely fall into a trap, drop in front of the children. Blinded, they smash against window panes, into the branches of trees. They don't know where they go. They have lost their way.

⁶⁶ Totten, Samuel and Bartrop, Paul, *Dictionary of Genocide*, Green Wood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 2008), p252.

APPENDIX E

Text of document of official declaration and ratification of the plan for the building of a Museum of Modern Art in Suleimany.

–The Council of Suleimany decided on April 1, 2004 to give the land of 3000m2 for the establishment of a Museum of Modern Art for the City of Suleimany.

The members of the Council sign this decision.”

To Minister of Culture and Youth

15/9/2005

Subject: Request for an appointment to establish a sound framework for the Contemporary Arts Museum in Suleimany.

As you are aware, the Contemporary Arts Museum in Suleimany is the result of efforts of the Association La Pluie d’Oiseaux and the Ministry of Culture of KRG. The building reaches its final stage. This creates a great hope in the heart of Kurdish and foreign artists who have contributed much to this project.

It goes without saying that the construction of the building was an extremely important step. Another equally important step is the implementation of art projects, management and strategy of the museum so that it becomes a model for future museums in the region and a bridge between Kurdistan and the outside world. A museum that will have its own identity and at the same time, will contribute to the artistic trends of the modern world and will serve civil society.

For this reason, we wish to meet with you to find the appropriate means and strategy for the development of the museum.

This museum is unique in the Middle East and beyond: it is the result of associated efforts of artists and professionals in the field of art from different cultures. It was raised through their work and the donations of more than 400 artworks. There is in art history only one similar example: the first museum of modern art in in Lodz, Poland (in 1930). This Kurdish museum will be the first museum of contemporary art created in that way. Its original story gives

strength and vitality and has a highly symbolic value. That's why we want to continue to serve this project so that it develops in this particular spirit.

The Association La Pluie d'Oiseaux puts all effort to ensure that this museum will be in compliance with the code of UNESCO (ICOM), so that it can be recognized as a museum with international standards. It will welcome art works from all countries and establish lasting collaborations with foreign museums (several museums in France already support this Kurdish museum project).

For these reasons and in accordance with the decision of the Council of Ministers signed by your excellence stating that La Pluie d'Oiseaux and the Ministry of Culture build this museum together, La Pluie d'Oiseaux offers your excellence to be actually in charge of the set up of the museum (statutes, art projects, planning, appointment and training of personnel, establishment of networks of relationships and collaboration with arts centers, cultural and museums), for 3 years (under renewable contract if necessary). Once a solid framework is formed for the future of the museum, La Pluie d'Oiseaux will retire from the management function.

We thank you for your attention to our request.

balndebaran

Pour La Pluie d'Oiseaux

APPENDIX F

The trajectory: from the story of the Showering of Birds to the final realisation of the Crossing Museum.

1987 Image of Poem and English translation.

Exile in Iranian Refugee Camp. Children exhibition in Tehran and other towns.

Exile in France. Formation of Edwarina.

1993 Creation of La Pluie d'Oiseaux. Travelling exhibition (twenty exhibitions in France,

Poland and Belgium between 1993 and 1999).

- 1994 Founding of Association of La Pluie d'Oiseaux in France and Art in Common in UK.
- 1994-99 Exhibitions in France, UK and Austria of Kurdish children's artwork –Children in the War".Workshops with English, French and Austrian children.
- 1998 *La Pluie d'Oiseaux* organise Artist residencies of Chinese artists in France (Xu Zhi Wei, Wang Qiuren, Laodan, Ling Fei, Yling, Ma Han, Li Lying), and French artists to China.
- 1999 Project Colour and Word. Rebwar invited poets and writers to be inspired by colours and designs and to add their writing. 350 design-poems in 15 languages.
- 2000 Beginning of the contemporary art collection for Kurdistan, which became The Donation La Pluie D'Oiseaux.
- 2005 Start on building work on the Crossing Museum in Suleimany.
- 2006 Three Kurdish artists' residencies in France: Narmin Mustafa, Sami Muemin and Aram Saeed (all members of the Museum team).
- 2007-08 Exhibition –*An Edifying Utopia*, The Donation La Pluie D'Oiseaux (Showering of Birds) at the Museum La Piscine in Roubaix, France.

The art collection, which has been kept in France up to now, will be taken to Kurdistan by the end of 2012. A catalogue and a website of all the donated artwork in 3 languages (Kurdish, French, English) is being prepared.

APPENDIX G

Donations from 1998 to 2002 were contributed by the following artists : Francis Beaudelot (Valenciennes)–Buhua (Beijing) –Vincent Chabaud (Toulouse/Beaumont) – Jerome Delisse (Lille) – Fabien Delvigne (Brussels) – Pierre-Alexis Deschamps (Lille) – Francis Deschodt (St Omer) – Saskia Hinrichs (Roubaix) – Edith Henry (Lille) – Ku Xu Ming (Beijing) – Christian Leclerq (Lille) – Dominique Leloir (Lille) – Didier Majewski (Béthune) – Francis Moreeuw (Ennevelin) – François Oliver (Lille) – Stefanie Seltner (Berlin) – Nadine Voillat

(Lille) – Herve Wauger (Roubaix) – Annie Hsiao-ching Wang (Taiwan) – Karina Waschko (Lille) – Yi Ling (Beijing) – Brigitte Chottin (Roubaix) – Dimitri Vazemsky (Lille) – Joel Cunin (Roubaix) – Eric Lebrun (Lille) – Maniasuki (Lille) - Franck Wallerand (Lille).

Donations from 2004 to 2011: Jean-Louis Accettone (Lille) - Jean Ampe (Tourcoing) - Belinda Annaloro (Lille) - Mahdjoub Ben Bella (Tourcoing) - Anne Benoît (La Madeleine) - Olga Boldyreff (Nantes) - Gilles Bouilly/Christophe Cardona (Toulouse) – Laetitia Bourget (Paris/Bordeaux / La Rochelle), Emmanuel Brillard (Lille) - Alain Buyse (Lille) * (silk print see below the artistes names of this part) - Christiane Calonne /Jacques Dupuich (Calonne sur la Lys)- Martine Caytan (Lille) - Christophe Cellier (Roubaix) - Jacques Cerutti (Roubaix)- Didier Cholodnicki (Carcassonne) - Le collectif BLNK (Lille / Nantes) - Benoît Coze/Bo Dongbo (Shanghai) - Pierre-Yves Cuaud (Montpellier) - Michel couturier (Bruxelles) - Christine Depuidt (Lille) - Marie-Christine Dubois (Lille) - Florence Dubus (Cambrais) - Gérard Duchêne (Lille) - Hubert Duquesnoy (Lille / Montigny)- Jacques Fhima (Israël) - Léopold Frankowiak (Lille/ Hué, Vietnam) - Roger Frézin (Lille) - Bertrand Gadenne (Lille) - Elsa Gaudefroy-Demombynes (Lille) - Nathalie Grall (Lille) - Jacqueline Gueux (Dimont) - David Gomez (Lille) - Sylvain Houcke (La Bassée) - Antony Jacob (Lille) - Jean François Laurent-Fonsegrive (Metz)- Vincent Legallois (Dunkerque)- Yann Legrand (Lille) - Linying Li (Beijing) – Ling Fei (Beijing) - Pierre Lobstein (Paris) - François Martinache (Roubaix) - Tony Masschelein (Roubaix) - Siham Menem (Lille) - Patrick Meunier (Mancieux) - Bernard Michez (Sète) - Patricio Ocampo (Lille) - Gaby On'Zekwu (Lille) - Jean Philippe Papin (Lille) - Marielle Paquet (Esquelbecq) - Jean-Gabriel Périot (Tours et Paris)- Sylvie Pothier (Fontaines) – Sylvie Plessy ((St Vaast La Vallée) - Frédérique Pol (Lille) - Richard Rapaich (Lille) - Hervé Robillard (Lille) - Marina Rosselle (Lille) - Manuel Ruiz Vida (Toulouse) - Janusz Stega (La Madeleine) - Alan Soffer (USA) - Sophie Vauprè (Lille)- Van M (Lille) - Mikael Wittassek (Düsseldorf).

Print Collection: Arden Quin Carmelo - Ardouvin Pierre -Arman - Art et Language - Baldessari John- Barry Robert - Baxter Glen - Benzaken Carole - Bloch Pierrette - Bouillon François - Buraglio Pierre - Butor Michel -Camacho Jorge - Charlier Jacques - Closky Claude - Collin-Thiébaud Gérard - Combas Robert -Dezeuze Daniel - Di Rosa Hervé - Dityvon Claude - Dodeigne Eugène - Dolla Noël - Downsborough Peter - Drahos Tom - Duchêne Gérard - Dupuy Jean - El Baz Mohamed- -Favier Philippe - Filliou Robert - Floc'h - Förg Günther- -Francken Ruth - Gerz Jochen- -Gette Paul-Armand - Guerbardot Bernard -

Guitet James - Heidsieck Bernard - Hérold Jacques- -Hubaut Joël - Jaffe Shirley -
Kermarrec Joël - Koraïchi Rachid / Laury Micha - Lascault Gilbert - Lallemand Bernard -
Leccia Ange / Le Bozec Yvan - Le Gac Jean - Leroy Eugène - Lizène Jacques - Luca
Ghérasim - M et M - Mayaux Philippe - Messagier Jean - Molnar Véra - Morellet François -
Mouraud Tania - Muntadas Antoni - Nadaud Daniel - Nannucci Maurizio - Nemours Aurélie-
-Nils-Udo - Noël Bernard - O'Loughlin Christine - Opie Julian - Pignon Édouard - Rabascall
Joan - Restany Pierre - Richard Philippe - Richon Olivier - Rondepierre Éric - Roth Dieter -
Rousse Georges - Saint Phalle Nikki - Saytour Patrick - Schmit Tomas - Séchas Alain -
Segui Antonio - Silbermann Jean-Claude - Tapiès Antoni - Taroop et Glabel - Télémaque
Hervé - Terrossian Jean - Toppel Andrea - Tischkov Leonid - Titus-Carmel Gérard - Tual
Pierre - Vautier Ben - Viallat Claude - Villeglé Jacques - Weiner Lawrence - Weiss Hugh



Exhibition catalogue, Andre Diligent, *Une utopie edificante*, La Donation La Pluie d'Oiseaux,
exposition du 20 Octobre 2007 au 13 Janvier 2008, edition La Piscine, Musee d'Art et
d'Industrie, p2



Exhibition catalogue, Andre Diligent, *Une utopie edifiante*, La Donation La Pluie d'Oiseaux, exposition du 20 Octobre 2007 au 13 Janvier 2008, edition La Piscine, Musee d'Art et d'Industrie, p145

فہرست نویس
کتب



Donation to the Modern Art Museum in Suleimany, Photograph by Association Showering of Birds, 2011, France

People for The Donation and the Museum of Contemporary Arts Suleimany

Architecture / Construction

ProzhaDesign, architectural company

Architects

Karwan Fahta - building design

Chelouti Boualem (France) - short-term expertise in 2008

Master of works, technicians Ismail and Yousef

Steering Team for the establishment of the Museum

Rebwar Saeed, Edith Henry, Sami Muemin Hama, Wahby Rasool, Abulkadr Hamerashid Ahm, Aram Saeed

Support and guidance of the Steering team in Kurdistan

Ako Ghareb Maroof, Talar Nadir, Baktyar Saeed, Sherko Bekes, The Union of Artists of Kurdistan, University of Suleimany

Support in Kurdistan

Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, supporting the Crossing Museum Project.

Fatah Zakhoy, Minister of Culture of the Kurdish Regional Government in 2004.

Ms. Akhtar Najmadeen, Minister of Higher Education. City of Suleimany .

Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq for their assistance to residencies.

The Shower of Birds (Roubaix)

Members of board between 1998 and 2012 : Catherine Aubourg, Dr. Begikhani Nazand, Roger Beugre, Thierry Denoyelle, Francois Descamps, Genevieve Doctobre, Bernard Guillon, Martine Van Biervliet, Jacques Ariche, Philippe Sauty, Maryse Thellier, Dominique Leloir.

Members of Association responsible for the Donation

Olivier Touron (photojournalist), Agnes Godard (librarian at the Department of Cultural Affairs, Lille), Hubert Duquesnoy (artist and professor), Eric Gouwy, Edith Henry (painter, who has contacted and met most of the artists donors), Bertrand Foly (actor and writer)

The artists's collective BLNK (Baptist Vanweydeveldt, Jessy Ducreux, Romeo De Freitas Carneiro, Jeremy) for the installation of the exhibition at the Museum La Piscine and for research, discussions and "unpacking" of La Donation.

Volunteers

Bertrand Foly, pillar of the Association The Showering of Birds

Karina Waschko (for the donation of works to be exchanged to initiate the formation of Donation)

Adrien Dulieu and Jean Henry (design and construction of the first presentation of works of The Donation and transportation),

Sabrina Schliwanski (research funding and support)

Jean Paul Lafitte, Dimitri Vazemsky and Elise Jouvancy, (graphic)

Morgane Olivier (expo launch of The Donation)

Nicolas Desceau (Curator) and Celine Pauvros (heritage consultant, cultural engineering) who have played an important role in 2003/2004 in advising the building design and drafting of the first documents.

Translators

Shakour Bayez, Andy, Ramat Rizgar, Isabelle Cellier, Gerard Gauthier.

Employees and former employees (2001/2012)

Employees with a significant proportion of their work on The Donation: Nicolas Ammeux (currently Director of the Cultural Centre, Maison Folie Beaulieu), Helene Bourdon, Sarah Vallin (now curator at the museum of St. Omer), Clémence Benoit, Emilie Deloison (which continues her involvement on The Donation as a volunteer)

Administrators and other positions (who occasionally worked on The Collection): Isabelle Cacheux, Marine Gubellini, Laurie Potiron, Gersende Niel, Julian Mierzejewski, Lea Richard, Clarisse Dujardin.

Organisations (excluding Kurdistan) who supported The Donation / Museum of Suleimany between 1998 and 2012:

Associations: Art in Common (London).

Kaosmos (Liege, Belgium, led by the artist Ermanno Orselli).

Chez Rita (Roubaix).

100 Lieux d'Art (Solre Le Chateau)

France Liberté (Fondation Daniel Mitterrand)

The Kurdish Institute in Paris (for exhibitions of the program of "Gateway of Arts")

The Regional Council of Nord Pas de Calais (for their support to the Association in general and particularly in artistic exchanges between the Nord Pas de Calais and the Kurdish Region of Iraq)

With the exceptional support of the Senate's parliamentary reserves mobilized by Marie-Christine Blandin.

Secours Populaire (Exhibition "Official Launch of The Donation")

The City of Roubaix, the City of Villeneuve d'Ascq

Museums: in the Northern Department, France, LAC (Dunkerque, Aude Cordonnier, curator in chief), MAM (now called the LAM, in Villeneuve d'Ascq, Nicolas Surlapierre, curator – now in Belfort), the Matisse Museum (Cateau Cambraisie, Dominique Szymusiak, curator in chief) and in Belgium, the MAC's (Grand Hornu).

La Piscine, Museum of Art and Industry of the town of Roubaix

We have a special partnership since 2006.

Bruno Gaudichon (chief curator), Sylvette Botella-Gaudichon (documentation/curator), Alain Leprince (photographer), Goranka Beslac (graphic designer), Severine Muteau (manager), Melanie Martini (administration), Dunya Mérabet (public relations).

The Accompanying Persons (2004/2009)

The Accompanying Persons play an advisory role with The Showering of Birds as part of The Donation. As such, they work on specific issues in a technical unit and they can guide or direct reflection of the technical unit based on their knowledge and experiences. They propose the names of artists who could be donors and establish the contact between these artists and Shower of Birds.

Didier Delacour (Arts Advisor to the General Council of the Pas de Calais)

Michel Cegarra (artist and director of the art department of the University of Lille)

Francine Taraska (cultural mediator, friend and support of many artists)

Marie-Joseph Pilette (director of the Center for Visual Arts of the City of Lille)

Eric Harasym (library director of Fine Arts in Lille / Tourcoing)

Françoise Objois (journalist, taking large program of art in radio and print)

Nicolas Surlapierre (curator at the Museum of Modern Art in Villeneuve d'Ascq and now in charge of museums in the city of Belfort)

Artists: Jacqueline Gueux, Gilles Fournet, Gérard Duchêne, Léopold Francowiak, Hervé Waguet (culture service of the city of Roubaix), Jean Louis Acetone and Guillaume Demay, the Association "Heure Esquisse", specializing in video

Other people / groups involved in The Donation and the Crossing Museum

Thierry De Duve (art critic, lecturer and professor of theory of modern and contemporary art. He is also a writer and exhibition organizer).

Lara Crouigneau, Association la pomme à tout faire' (contemporary visual arts, commissioned by the General Council of the Pas de Calais to lead the network of contemporary creation, which included thirty groups in 2003, some of them were setting up a collection of works).

Evelyn Dorothy Allemand (Chief Curator of the Museum of Fine Arts in Tourcoing).

Hélène Portiglia (Chief Curator of the Museum of Fine Arts in Arras).

Virginie Maes (art advisor to the Regional Council Nord - Pas de Calais).

Donato Guillani (international art networks leader - Regional Council of Nord Pas de Calais).

Martine Mathias (advisor to museums in 2006) and Françoise Dubois (Visual Arts advisor) of the DRAC Nord - Pas de Calais.

Pascaline Dron (director of the Conservative Association of North Museum).

مركز التامهي كتيب

APPENDIX H

Museum Programme

The project of the Crossing Museum was not a dream; it is the result of many years of fighting for something that was necessary to be built, because many times in the history of my country a museum of art had fallen victim to destruction.

We are planning for an inaugural opening ceremony, to which we will invite artists, art critics, journalists, politicians, supporters of the Crossing Museum and members of the public. The Donation will form the main exhibition with a catalogue printed in four languages (English, French, Kurdish and Arabic) and the museum website will be up and running.

During the first month, a special program of events will take place, where invited artists from abroad will hold seminars and educational workshops alongside exhibitions of their work to put into practice the idea of the bridge of communication.

The Plan for Three Years

Four main exhibitions per year (to tour in other cities of Kurdistan and abroad)

Four seminars in conjunction with main exhibitions (lasting several days, with regional and international participants)

Annual exhibition of work by students from the Fine Art Department of the Academy and University.

Weekly art film projections (with discussions).

Society of Friends of the museum.

First year

First main exhibition: The Donation. Following exhibitions will be decided by the team of three curators (chief curator plus three assistant curators. One of the assistant curators will be chiefly responsible for the youth aspect of exhibitions and the educational programme).

Focus of second and third exhibition:

1. History of Kurdish art in the 20th and 21st century (in Iraq and the diaspora).
2. Work of some of the principal artists of the region (local artists, who never left Kurdistan or left and returned).
3. Artwork on memory. Exodus, war, torture, genocide.

Contemporary artists from different countries. In collaboration with Amne Suraka.

Work on archives/ records

Training of students on methodology of research.

The museum must become an ART reference in the city, a place for information about Kurdish artists.

Teacher's information material for schools.

Translation of articles into Kurdish.

Publication of catalogues coinciding with the exhibitions. Brochures, newsletters.

Artist residency

Every 3 months an artist will be chosen to live and work in Suleimany.

Each artist will be given a studio space and a place to live. The artist in residence will produce a body of work, take part in educational schemes and workshops, give lectures on her/his own work and meet and work with local artists. The artist's work will offer a complementary or contradictory view on current exhibitions.

Conferences/ seminars

These will be organised as part of the main exhibitions programme. Friendly events.

Meetings with artists (in schools, university).

The big painting of 'Showering of Birds' (a painting on canvas about 1km long made in different countries by visitors of 'Showering of Birds' exhibition) could be unrolled in Azadi Park and reworked by several artists.

Artist Biography

Born in Suleimany Kurdistan / Iraq 1962

Education:

- 1994/97 Fine Art, Middlesex University, London
1997/99 MA Fine Art, Middlesex University, London

Positions held:

- 2001/2008 Chairman of Art in Common Association, London
2005/2007 Head of Fine Art Suleimany University, Iraq
1994/2012 Member of *La Pluie d'Oiseaux* Association (based in Roubaix, France)
2004/2012 Member of committee to set up Contemporary Art Museum of Suleimany, Kurdistan, Iraq

Solo Shows:

- 1984 Poetical Posters, Hawler, Kurdistan
1991 Watrelos; Atelier-Galerie ARIAP, Lille , France
1992 Kurdish Cultural Centre, London
1994 Wood Green Gallery, London
1995 Douvrin Centre cultural, France
1996 Maison de la Poésie, Beuvry, France. Centre Cultural, Marche, Belgium
1996 Gallery Space, Sadler's Wells Theatre, London
1996 Riverside Studios Gallery, London, Médiathèque de Dieppe, France
1997 Gallery Fibiti, Amsterdam
1998 *5000 Portraits-5000 Victims* – Pitshanger Gallery; Riverside Studios, London
1999 Haaksbergen Gallery & Koempoelan Gallery, Holland, Quicksilver Gallery, London, (London print Studio Prize) Kurdistan Museum
2001 My Home - Lyric Hammersmith, International Children Festival, London
2002 Medborgerhuset Norre Alle, Copenhagen
2003 Swarthmore College, Philadelphia, USA
2004 Quicksilver Gallery, London
2004 Riverside Studios, London
2005 Brunei Gallery, London

- 2007 Sardem Gallery, Suleimany
- 2008 Anfal 20th Anniversary, Chocolate Factory Space, London
- 2009 Medborgerhuset Norre Alle, Copenhagen

Colour & Word:

- 1999 Centre Culturel de Méricourt, France. Pitshanger Gallery, London
- 2000 Quicksilver Gallery, London. Maison de la Poésie, Beuvry, France
- 2001 Riverside Studios, London. Brunei Gallery, London. Faulconer Gallery, USA
- 2002 Marie de La Madeleine, France
- 2003 Médiathèque d'Hénin-Beaumont, Mairie de Lallaing, France
- 2004 Médiathèque, Béthune, Centre Social Boilly Tourcoing. Médiathèque, Loos en Gohelle, France

Group Shows:

- 1983 Suleimani Gallery, Suleimani, Kurdistan/Iraq
- 1984/89 Gallery Azadi and Gallery Hana Saura, Tehran
- 1990 Kurdish Institute in Paris
- 1992 Gallery A.C.A.P., Barcelona. Citizens Gallery, London. Florsbachtal, Germany
- 1993 Métissage et Modernité, Grenoble, France. Living Fire Festival, Gallery Kufa, London. Gallery Le sous sol, Paris. L'Atelier-Galerie ARIAP, Lille, France. Crypt Gallery, London.
- 1995 Quicksilver Gallery, London
- 1997 Lebovic Gallery, Canada
- 2000 Metropolitan Museum, Tokyo. Brunei Gallery, London
- 2001 Global Canada Cultural Exchanges, Downtown Chilliwack.
- 2002 Metropolitan Museum Tokyo, Japan. Osterley Gallery, London. My Home, Lyric, Hammersmith, London. Faulconer Gallery, Grinnell College, USA
- 2003 Leave to remain, Central Space, BBC London. Aya Gallery, London
- 2009 Kurdistan Pavilion La Biennale Art, 54th International Art Exhibition, Venice, Italy
- 2010 Kawasaki City Museum, Tokyo. Shaneder Gallery, Kurdistan, Iraq
- 2011 Runaki Festival, London. Dubai Fashion Festival
- 2012 18th JAALA International Art Exhibition, Tokyo / Metropolitan Art Museum. Diversity & Art Gallery, Amsterdam.

Group Created Shows Edwar (Edith and Rebwar)

1992 Faches-Thumesnil and Albi

Group Created Shows EdWarlna (Edith, Rebwar and Karina) The Showering of Birds

1993 Kurdish Institute in Paris ; Saint André Lez Lille, France, 11th International Theatre Festival, Jelena Gora, Poland

1994 Le Vivat, Armentières ; 4th Festival de l'oiseau, Musée d'Abbeville; Auby ; Saint André Lez Lille, France

1995 Siège du Conseil Régional Nord-Pas de Calais, Lille ; Bibliothèque de Loos-en-Gohelle ; Condé sur l'Escaut, France, Festival jeune public, Belgium
Centre Culturel Katowice, Poland

1996 Saint Nicolas, Belgium; Grande Synthe, France

1997 Liège, Soumagne, Arlon, Marche, Belgium, Maison de l'environnement, Dunkerque, Centre Jacques Prévert, Dieppe; Saint André; Citée des Sciences de La Villette, Paris, France.

1998 Médiathèque, Roubaix, France, Centre Culturel, Belgium

1999 Curo-Hall, Anderlecht, Bruxelles, Belgium

2010 Fédération des Associations Laïques, Roubaix, France

Kurdish Garden /collaboration with TPO:

2006 Lyric Hammersmith London. Theatre Royal, Bath, Bath & North East Somerset. The Lowry, Salford, Greater Manchester, / France : Nanterre, Salle des Fêtes ; Paris, Festival Escapades ; Marne la Vallée, Temps d'Images - Ferme du Buisson. Pennautier Théâtre Na loba / Belgium : Namur, International Festival "Météores et Turbulences" ; Bruxelles, Halles de Schaerbeek, Hasselt, Cultureel Centrum / Ireland: Castlebar, RoolaBoola Children's Arts Festival, Roscommon, Roscommon Arts Centre, Lollipops Children's festival. / Austria: Linz, Festival Schaxpir 2006. / Croatia: Rijeka, International Puppet Revue.

2007 Gardner Arts Centre, Brighton. East Sussex, Croydon, Clock tower David Lean Cinema Croydon. Bath, The Egg Theatre Royal. / Spain : Madrid "Rompiendo el

Cascarón" Centro Cultural de la Villa 2007. / Italy : (Roma) Ostia, Teatro Lido,
(Torino) Casa Teatro Ragazzi e Giovani. / France : Istres, Le Festival Les Elancées

- 2008 Festival Hamburg - Perth International Arts Festival 2008 - Perth, Western Australia.
(USA) Becket Massachussets, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Bahren, Manama,
pring of culture festival . (France) Bonlieu Scène Nationale Sala Paul Thiesse. (UK)
Derby, Derby Dance Centre.(UK), Woking Dance Festival. (UK) Liverpool, The Unity.
(UK) Brighton, Gardner Arts Centre. (France) Saint Genis sur Guiers, Salle des fêtes.
(Netherlands) Utrecht Culturele Zondagen Una domenica particolare. (Italy) Napoli,
Museo Madre.(UK) Lakeside, Wheee! International Children's Theatre and Dance
Festival. (Sweden) Lund, bibu,se. (Italy) San Marino, Teatro Nuovo di Dogana.
(France) Annemasse, Chateau Rouge. (Spain) Benicassim, Teatre Municipal.
(Germany) Nurnberg, Festival Panoptikum 2010, Theater Mumpitz. (Italy) Chieti,
Teatro Marruccino. (Germany) Munich, Think Big Festival for young audienc.
(Germany) Düsseldorf, Tanzhaus (Italy) Lucca, Teatro del Giglio. Pontedera, Teatro
Era. (Spain) Teatro Municipal de Ansoain. (France) Guyancourt, La Ferme de Bel
Ebat, (Austria) Wien, Dschungel Wien - halle 2. (Spain) Barcelona, Mercat de les
Flors, Manama. (Kingdom of Bahrain) Spring of Culture Festival,
- 2009 Dan Dan Dansa, (Switzerland) Genève, Théâtre de la Parfumerie. (Austria) Wien,
Dschungel, halle 2, France) Rambouillet, Théâtre le Nickel, Vélizy-Villacoublay
L'Onde.

Other Works:

1984/89 Participation in the Kurdish National Movement Editions.

1986/89 Publication of two illustrated poetry books.

1990 Group performance in La Goutte d'Or/ Paris.

1992 Formation of Artist's group Edwarina France (and Edwar).

1996 Publication of Poems and Drawings (*Des mots et des lignes pour reconstruire une patrie*) France.

1998 Formation of Association Art in Common, London.

1999 Publication of illustrated poetry book, Kurdistan.

2000 Publication of Colour and Word – London.

2005 Publication of catalogue for Halabja Project.

2006 Publication of Anfal art book.

2007 Publication of Anfal Project.

1989/2012 Publication of *colour for me, line for you* project / Kurdistan Iraq. Publication of a children's book in Sweden, France, Kurdistan.

Publishing poetry and illustration book in Kurdish, Kurdistan/Iraq

1989 - 2011 Workshops with children & adults in Iran, Iraq, France, Poland, Austria, UK and USA.

Theatre design City of Peace for the first Kurdish Musical Pantomime in London, Polish Centre.

هه‌و‌نا‌مه‌ی ک‌ت‌ی‌ب



Raku, 2007, 25cmx20cm, Rebwar Rashed

هه و النامه كتيب

Rebwar Rashed is a true ambassador for the establishment of a cultural infrastructure in Sulaimani, Kurdistan. For this he spared no effort, and he has succeeded – as the book clearly shows. I am grateful to have been trusted to participate in this impressive project and to be introduced by Rebwar to an emerging art world that springs from a culture which is greatly worth knowing better.

Professor . Kitty Zijlmans

The ambitions of the Crossing Museum seem both modest and optimistic – to record the origins, influences and development of Kurdish art and artists and to initiate a dialogue with Europe and beyond. With an architectural design and a nascent, donated collection (the Shower of Birds) together symbolising an openness to external factors, it is to be hoped that these aims can be upheld and propagated as the museum becomes established and recognised

Professor. Jon Bird

Rebwar is an exceptional individual. His commitment of the history of his people drive his creative urge As an artist and writer he tolerates our western concerns for art practice, but he retains his own unequivocal position as a Kurd whose destiny is to illustrate in pictures and h~ prose the story of the Kurdish nation - the lack of understanding and the persecution to which it is constantly subjected.It is his essentially human position which comes through his work.

Professor. Martin Pitts

Rebwar's work is clearly engagé, motivated by a sense of moral and political outrage at the abuses that have befallen his homeland. It would, however, be mistaken to view this work as simple unadorned protest. The work both articulates and transcends its generative impetus. Often the work jettisons explicit political reference and delivers instead images of forlorn sadness

Dr Jim Mooney



Many thanks to DrTaha Rasul (MARGARET CENTER) in funding to produce this book