Samia Touati

**Zaini, Jassim (1943-2012)**

Abstract

Jassim Mohamed Zaini was a leading figure in the development of the fledgling Qatari art scene in the 1960s. Zaini was one of the few artists who witnessed the significant social and economic changes which Qatar underwent during the 1950s and 1960s, especially with the discovery of oil. To document his environment, Zaini resorted to realism to create works which depicted local and Gulf scenes, events and customs. However, Zaini did not confine his creativity to a given style or technique. He engaged with various styles including abstraction, Expressionism, Cubism, Impressionism, and Surrealism to highlight aspects of his subjects and the themes of identity and cultural heritage. Zaini exhibited widely, both locally and in the Middle East and North Africa. He was awarded a certificate of honor in the Arab Artists exhibitions in 1985, the Museum award for GCC countries Riyadh in 2007, and the Qatar Gratitude reward in Science Art and Literacy, Doha. Following his death, a retrospective exhibit titled *Jassim Zaini* was held at the main activities hall at the Cultural Tower under the auspices and presence of His Excellency Dr. Hamad Bin Abdulaziz Al Kuwari, Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage, on 24 December 2013.

Main Entry

Jassim Mohamed Zaini was a leading figure in the development of the fledgling Qatari art scene in the 1960s. Zaini was one of the few artists who witnessed the significant social and economic changes which Qatar underwent during the 1950s and 1960s, especially with the discovery of oil. To document his environment, Zaini resorted to realism to create works which depicted local and Gulf scenes, events and customs. However, Zaini did not confine his creativity to a given style or technique. He engaged with various styles including abstraction, Expressionism, Cubism, Impressionism, and Surrealism to highlight aspects of his subjects and the themes of identity and cultural heritage.

Zaini’s initial encounters with the local artistic heritage of the region stemmed from his father Mohamed Zaini, who was the first to use etching on gypsum in Qatari homes and who traded Persian carpets. The richness of colors in his own house from Islamic ornaments and Arabic calligraphy sparked Zaini’s interest in art from his early childhood. Zaini’s artistic talent was noticeable in the works he contributed to students’ exhibitions, advertisements and posters during the late 1950s. The first Qatari graduate with a degree in Fine Arts in 1968, Zaini worked as the director of the Department of Tourism and Antiquities at the Ministry of Information and was the founder of al-Marsam al-Hurr, the *Free Atelier*.

In the early 1960s, Zaini was one of the first students whom the Ministry of Education sent abroad to receive academic education. Zaini’s law studies at the Cairo University (between 1962 and 1964) came to an end when his passion for art lured him away from Egypt to pursue studies at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad. Trained by influential Iraqi artists including Faiq Hassan, Hafidh al-Droubi, Ismail al-Shaikhly, Atta Sabri, Zaini was able to further develop his use of colors, composition and portraiture.

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