

MY CITY SHORE

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ART SAWA

2016

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Migrants and refugees news has lately captured the world's attention with scenes of heartbreaking tragedy. Countries within this turmoil are re-drawing their borders yet again, new walls and fortifications have been erected, landscapes are utterly changing, bridges demolished, areas quarantined; all in the hope of containing these masses on the move.

My City Shore, the latest series of works, is an attempt to put on canvas the landscape of a constantly shifting city shore, where the desperately sought after reality progressively merges with the surreal, loses its shape, and transforms into nothing but a mirage. The notion of a vibrant secure city haven is being exposed only to see what's beneath; it is fixed on a canvas only to witness its hollow prefabricated infrastructure.

This body of works formulates an invitation to question how our cityscapes can subsist, materially, socially, as well as culturally, in light of such a colossal humanitarian crisis.

'More than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015, sparking a crisis as countries struggle to cope with the influx and creating division over how best to deal with resettling people.'

BBC news- UK

'The conflict in Syria, ongoing violence in Afghanistan... abuses poverty, insecurity, war, hunger are leading people to look for new lives elsewhere. Migration is driving people to use perilous routes, by boat and overland, often in flimsy rubber dinghies or small wooden boats.'

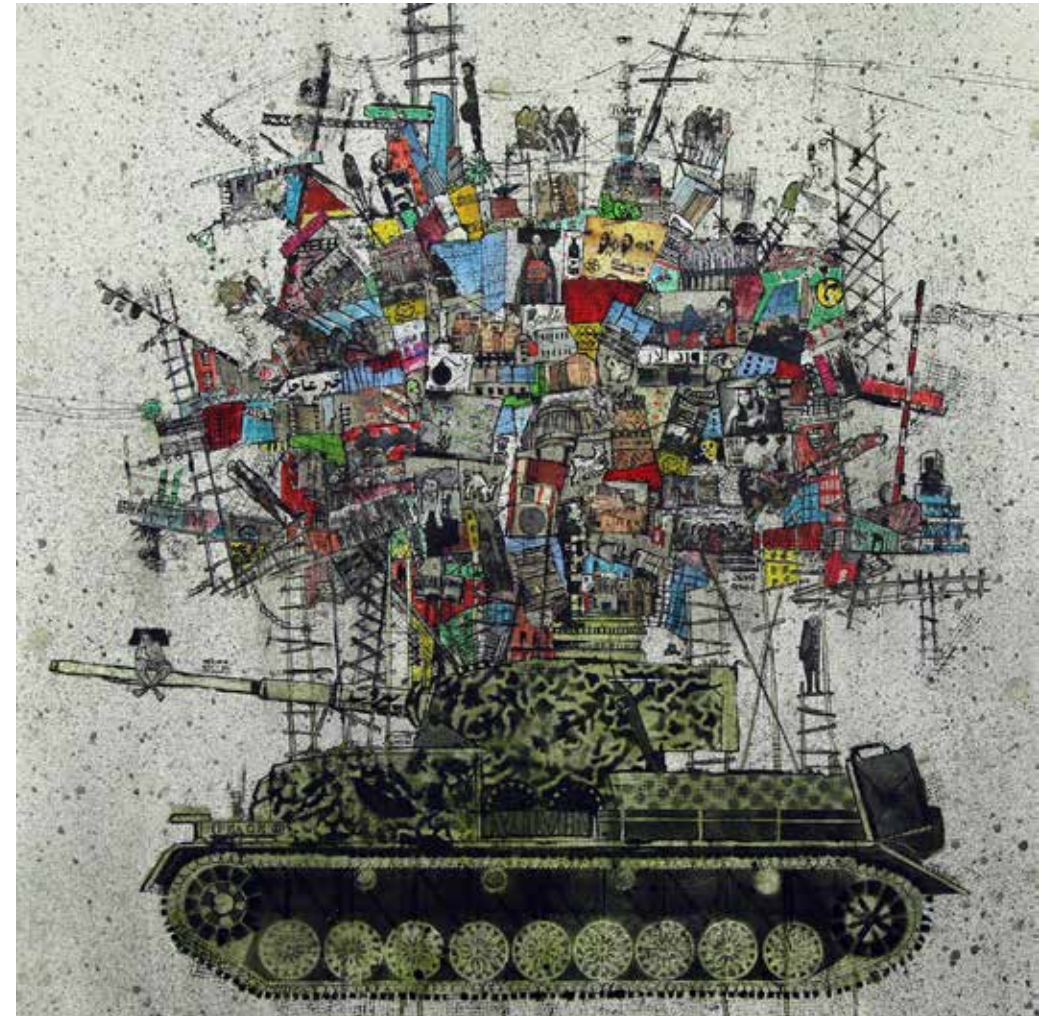
The Independent

'The movement of children and families across Europe is the largest since World War II.'

The New York Times



MY CITY NESTED OVER A TANK 1
2015
Mixed Media and collage on Canvas
100 x 100 cm



MY CITY ON A TANK 2
2015
Mixed Media and collage on Canvas
100 x 100 cm



MY CITY NESTED OVER RAOUCHE
2015
Mixed Media and collage on Canvas
100 x 100 cm



MY CITY NESTED OVER A BRIDGE
2015
Mixed Media and collage on Canvas
100 x 200 cm



MY CITY NESTED OVER THE MACHINE

2015

Mixed Media on Canvas

100 x 200 cm

CHARLIE ON A BRIDGE 1
2015
Mixed Media and collage on Canvas
60 x 180 cm

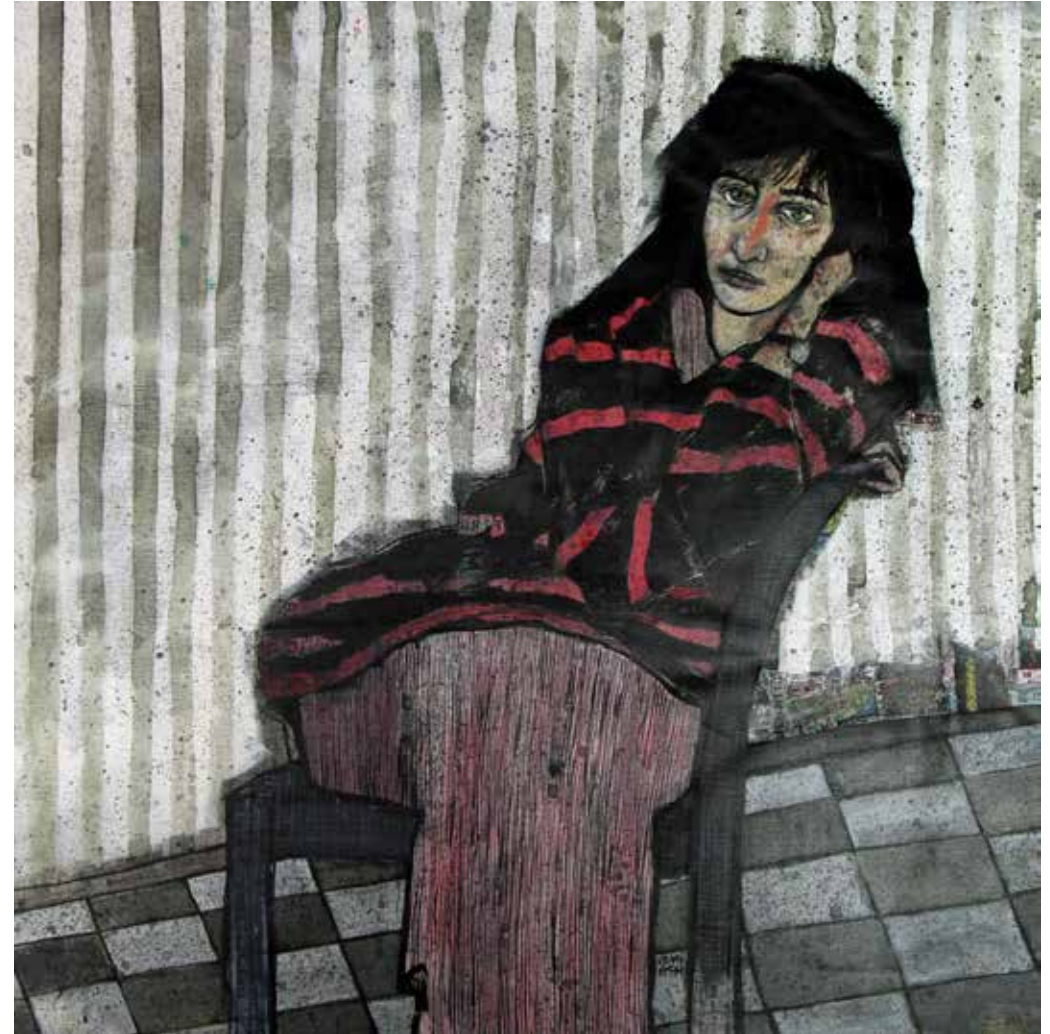


CHARLIE ON A BRIDGE 2
2015
Mixed Media and collage on Canvas
60 x 180 cm





Set of small paintings
2015
Mixed Media on wood
50 x 40 cm each



PORTRAIT IN FEBRUARY
2015
Mixed Media and collage on Canvas
100 x 100 cm



PORTRAIT IN APRIL
2015
Mixed Media on Canvas
100 x 100 cm



ZENA ASSI

Born in Lebanon, in 1974, Zena Assi lives and works between Beirut and London.

Zena graduated with honors from l'Academie Libanaise des Beaux Arts (ALBA), worked in advertising and taught in different universities. Her contemporary work on canvas draws inspiration from the relations and conflicts between the individual and his spatial environment, society and its surroundings. Her pieces are punctuated by strong visual references to her native Beirut and the predicament of its citizens. The artist uses various supports and mediums to document and explore the cultural and social changes of her country. Her work takes shape in installation, animation, sculpture, and mainly paintings on canvas and replicates the tumult, angst and cacophony that everyday life in the city is fraught with. Assi's use of pallid colors, jagged angular outlines and intricate layering, imbues inanimate objects, landscapes, and buildings with the emotional burdens of their inhabitants. Themes that are central to her vision include present-day issues related to countries in the Middle East as they battle with internal strife and civilian unrest.

Many of her pieces were repeatedly shown in different international auction houses (Christie's Dubai, Sotheby's London, and Bonhams London) and are part of various public as well as private collections.

Assi has exhibited in solo as well as collective shows across Europe, the Middle East and the United States of America including- Subtitled Apeal Royal College of Art (London UK), Artsawa gallery (Dubai UAE), Zoom Art Fair (Miami USA), Shubbak (London UK), Beirut Art Fair Biel (Beirut Lebanon), Abu Dhabi art fair (Abu Dhabi UAE), Rebirth Beirut Exhibition Center (Beirut Lebanon), Contemporary Art Platform Gallery Space (Kuwait), Overture Show of Contemporary Art (Miami USA), Journey through our heritage BEC (Beirut Lebanon) and Art13 & Art14 London Fair (London UK).

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 My City Shore, Art Sawa, Dubai UAE.
- 2014 Recent works | 2013-2014, Art Sawa Dubai, UAE.
- 2014 Framing My City, Alwane Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2013 Bug Soldiers, Art Sawa, Dubai UAE.
- 2012 Still Nature, Art Sawa, Dubai, UAE.
- 2011 Omissions selectives, Alwane Gallery, Beirut , Lebanon.
- 2010 Cityphilia, Albareh Gallery, Manama, Bahrain.
- 2010 Mass Movement, Art Sawa, Dubai, UAE.
- 2009 Public Space, Art Sawa, Dubai, UAE.
- 2009 Un peu de Beyrouth, Alwane Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2008 Cite et citadins, Alwane Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon.

COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 Start Auction, Paddle 8
- 2015 Christie's Auction, Dubai.
- 2014 Glimpses | Contemporary Arab Women Art, Art Sawa, Abu Dhabi, UAE.
- 2014 Art14 London Fair, Art Sawa, Olympia, Kensington, London.
- 2013 Abu Dhabi Art Fair, Art Sawa, Abu Dhabi, UAE.
- 2013 Syri-Arts Auction, Beirut Exhibition Center, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2013 Art13 London Fair, Art Sawa, Olympia, Kensington, London.
- 2013 Pullman Art Night, Art Sawa, Dubai, UAE.
- 2013 ArtNight special Edition- DIFC, Art Sawa, Dubai, UAE.
- 2013 Journey through our heritage, Beirut Exhibition Center, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2013 Atfal Souriyah, Mark Hachem, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2012 OverTure, Miami Art fair, Art Sawa, Miami, USA.
- 2012 Dress Code Project, Art Sawa, Contemporary Art Platform "CAP" Kuwait.

- 2012 The Lebanese Creations 1959, 2012, Espace Claude Lemand, Paris, France.
- 2012 XXXI salon d'Automne Musée Sursock , Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2011 Subtitled, Royal College of Art, London, UK.
- 2011 Acquisition, by the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE, Art Sawa.
- 2012 Menasart Fair, Art Sawa, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2012 Abu Dhabi Art Fair, Art Sawa, Abu Dhabi, UAE.
- 2011 XXX Salon d'Automne Musée Sursock - Beirut – Lebanon.
- 2011 Shubbak , London, UK.
- 2011 Menasart Fair, Art Sawa, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2011 Abu Dhabi Art Fair, Art Sawa, Abu Dhabi, UAE.
- 2011 Rebirth, Beirut Exhibition Center, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2010 XXII Biennale of Cairo, Cairo, Egypt.
- 2010 Zoom, Miami, USA.
- 2010 Contemporabilia, Dome, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2009 Prize: BMW, mini cooper's 50th anniversary, 'best design for the Middle East' Art Sawa, Dubai, UAE.
- 2009 Abu Dhabi Art Fair, Art Sawa Abu Dhabi, UAE.
- 2009 Prize: mention spéciale du jury XXIX salon d'automne Musée Sursock, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2008 Regards d'artistes II, Alwane Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2008 Creative Expressions, Art Sawa, Dubai, UAE.
- 2008 Art Paris Abu Dhabi Art Fair, Art Sawa, Abu Dhabi, UAE.
- 2008 Art Sawa Inaugural Show, Art Sawa, Dubai , UAE.
- 2008 XXVIII Salon d'Automne, Musée Sursock, Lebanon.
- 2006 Collective Exhibition, Alwane Gallery , Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2006 XXVII Salon d'Automne, Musée Sursock, Lebanon.
- 2005 XXVI Salon d'Automne, Musée Sursock , Lebanon.

Questions & Answers

1-How were you first exposed to Art?

I was born in Lebanon and was driven since my childhood to discover new landscapes, historical sites as well as museums and galleries by a father obsessed with travelling and exploring new cultures... I also grew up surrounded by my grandfather's collection of the French art magazines, it opened my eyes to painters like Goya, Cezanne, Giacometti, the impressionists, modern illustrators, the start of the photo-journalism and first trials in comics...

2-Tell us about your educational background, as well as your personal background?

I graduated with a Master degree in advertising from ALBA- Academie Libanaise des Beaux Arts. During my university years I was introduced to the skill of 'seeing' and how to look and interpret surroundings by studying architecture, cinema, history of photography, theatre, typography... and was impressed how all different artistic domains tend to connect and often complete each other.

I worked for a few years in Saatchi & Saatchi in the advertisement field and went back to university as a teacher of visual arts. The contact with students was very educational, (honestly I think that being an instructor taught me much more than being a student), it showed me the necessity of always rethinking preconceived ideas and the importance of doubting the obvious.

I try to keep the impulsive spontaneous approach of a student whether I am working on a painting, a sculpture, an installation or even an animation.

Nowadays, I spend most of my time in my studio between Beirut and London, two cities that stimulate and inspire me over and over again. Beirut is the soul of my work, its history and its people are my main subjects; London, with its museums and galleries, its bridges and culture, its musicals and parks... is a vibrant hub that I am discovering still.

3-What was your first exhibition and where?

The first piece I exhibited was part of the 'Salon d'Automne' at the Sursock Musuem in 2005. My first solo show was in 2007 at the Alwane Gallery in Beirut, Lebanon and was followed by a solo at the Artsawa Gallery in Dubai.

4-What is the inspiration behind your Work?

Everything. Nothing.

There is no specific moment of inspiration, no definite instant of enlightenment, only a state

of perpetual wonder and a permanent inspired way of seeing.

There is no grand subject for a piece of art, no noble substance for an inspiration, only a common detail and an unremarkable mediocre moment of the ordinary captured by a work of art and thus becoming unique and precious...

In short, I believe that the insipidly familiar, the boringly usual is the biggest challenge of any visual art. Myself, I am in constant astonishment in front of the commonly ordinary.

5-What are the messages you convey through your art?

Every era in time has its story to tell, and artists as potential story-tellers, are well put to convey this specific period of time in different mediums and on various supports.

Having lived most of my life in Lebanon, I have witnessed my country going through many crises on social, political, economic and especially humanitarian level. Observing all the turmoil that is still shaking the Middle East region is ground for questioning many issues and raising many voices. But I am not interested in representing the violence at its peak or shocking images with political or idealistic messages. I try to convey the more dramatic feeling of the humanitarian side, the silence after the storm, the present day issues of an average city inhabitant.

I don't aspire to convey any specific message. As an artist, I am an observer and a visual translator. I have more interest in raising multiple questions than giving one concrete answer. I would like to raise doubts in the stiff rigid minds, question the identity problem in the Middle East, the patriotism issue, the collective memory and shake all the preconceived ideas that we have inherited from our culture, background or religion.

6-How did you select the works for this exhibition?

I rarely work with a definite line of conduct and I follow an instinct to visually translate an idea with no specific final outcome in mind. But I have always been interested in depicting the changes in our modern city, its history is always omnipresent...

This series of work came straight after I moved from Lebanon to London and it translates the instability and anxiety of moving countries. It was a shaky and emotional period and for once I was witnessing the turmoil of my region from the outsider's point of view...

The collection of works for this exhibition is a direct result of all the questioning that has also risen with the refugee's crisis, its title 'My City Shore' is a reflection on how countries are re-drawing their borders, building walls, camps, re-writing laws... endlessly re-shifting their shores.



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