

Linda Abu Baker

Do you remember what you are burning?

After plenty of International Exhibitions, the Kurdish-Iraqi Artist Hiwa K showcases his art works for the first time in the Middle east at Jameel Art Center- Dubai



"Moon Calendar" where the exhibition begins at Jameel Art Center, Dubai - 11/02/2021 Linda Abu Baker

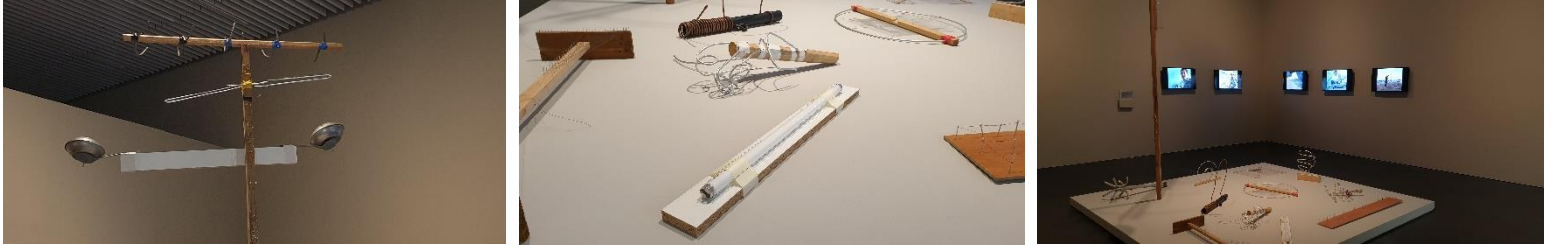
In 1990s, the artist Hiwa K began his journey as an immigrant trying to settle his roots in a destructive world. Through art, K was able to reflect and show the world what is it like to be an immigrant walking on his feet out of his city Sulaymaniyah. His struggle to overcome the past, that shaped his political, social, and religious ideologies, encouraged him to come back to Iraq and start documenting his journey after 10 years in exile.

The first place he went to, in 2007, was 'Amna Suraka' or 'the Red Security' building, where Iraqi Kurdish people were being tortured under the Ba'athist party in 1980s. "for me this place was the heart of Sulaymaniyah and once I entered, I knew exactly that my journey begins here" the artist said over a phone call. He called it *Moon Calendar*, a 12:16minute film showing Hiwa K tap dancing according to his own heart beats inside a deadly building. "I wanted a way to recall the living bodies and the ceaseless rhythm of the violence they have been through and back then I wanted something to keep me alive, so I learned how to tap".

Hiwa K approaches art in a unique way mixing between videos, audios, installations, and typical sketches and drawings. His art works reflect a collection of memoirs, stories of friends and family that spot the light on the rich history of Kurdistan, that "was long time being ignored" he said.

Since its Hiwa K's first exhibition in the middle east, we distributed his work according to his journey" said Lana Shamma, senior manager public programs; on behalf of the curator Nora Razian at Jameel Art Center, over a phone call. "We want our visitors to follow him and go deep in his stories to understand the struggle Iraq went through".

“In my work I always aim to translate; translation is very important. It fills that cultural gap between the West and Arabs and it is our turn to introduce foreigners to our culture” Hiwa said. “And by translation, I mean any way that makes my ideas visible and understandable by any culture”- “I want them to feel connected”.



"Qatees" Mixed media installation. following the story of Abbas, an electrician and antennae maker. he used to build illegal antennas to receive news from foreign channels about the Iran -Iraq war (1980-1988)- Linda Abu Baker 11/02/2021 at Jameel Art Center-Dubai.

At Jameel Art Center, visitors would pass by seven rooms, each room tells a different story. “Hiwa includes himself in most of his work. In some, he is the main character and in others he just participates with the characters” Shamma said. “We wanted that interaction to be reflected on our visitors; as we commissioned on our behalf the large scale carpet on which a top view of Baghdad is imprinted”. “I like to put myself in the position of a learner and this carpet would allow individuals to engage in workshops or meditations that probe ideas of exchanging knowledge about the place and feel connected” Hiwa said.

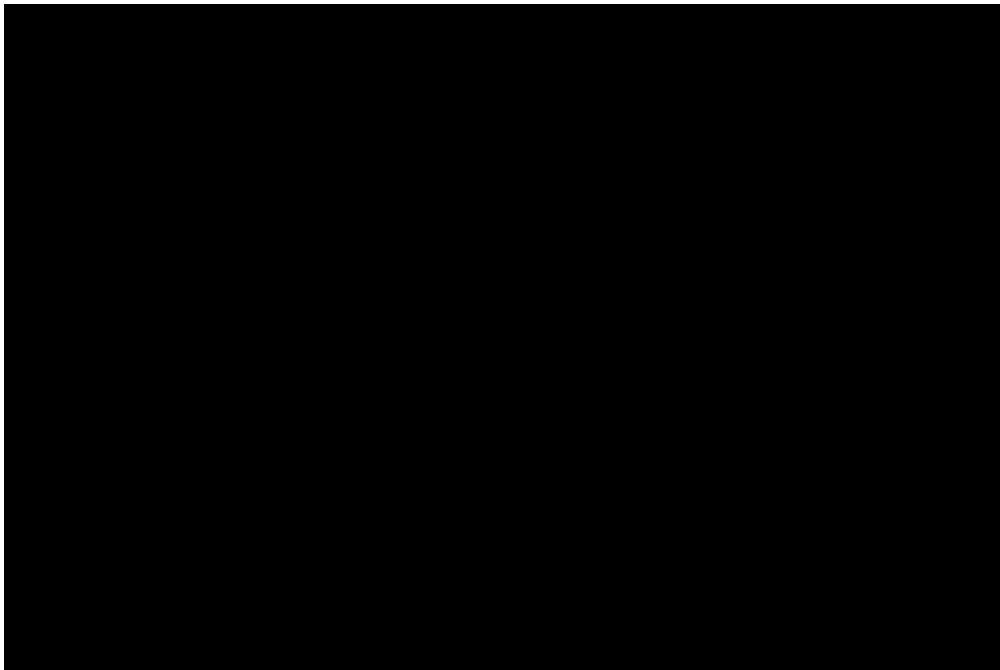


Figure 1 "Destruction in Common" and "View from Above"; 12minute film- Linda Abu Baker 11/02/2021

“We have named the exhibition (Do you remember what you are burning?) by the last work displayed in the exhibition” Shamma said, as people gathered on the streets holding their favorite book and reading it with a magnifying glass while the sun’s rays burning the content letter by letter.

As a whole, placing this project at the end, leaves the visitor with lots of unanswered questions. Especially, people who fled their countries due to wars. Will they remember the places they went to? The people they used to say hello every morning? Well, in fact as Hiwa said “I felt lost once I came back to Sulaymaniyah everything has changed” it is like a new place. Wars either destruct or rebuild and both result in a new outcome.

The exhibition is commissioned by Art Jameel in collaboration with: Hugh Lane Gallery (Dublin), The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery (Toronto) and the artist Hiwa K.



"The Bell Project" made of war metal waste and wood. It took Hiwa 8 years to finish it. "My work needs lots of research and takes lots of time" Hiwa said - Linda Abu Baker 11/02/2021

Overall, Hiwa K’s exhibition is very personal and politically centered, visitors should really understand his point of view and try to put themselves in his shoe. The exhibition contains many short films which would take quite more time to spend in the exhibition, so I would recommend visitors to expect a three-hour tour to merge with the artist and join his journey in liberating Kurdistan.