

Curatorial Statement ~ Migdalia Salas

This exhibit features selections from the work of two artists: Afarin Rahmanifar of Iran and Esam Pasha of Iraq.

The work of Afarin Rahmanifar is strongly gender-oriented and focuses upon some often controversial issues related to the perspective and condition of women in Iranian and Islamic culture, with particular emphasis on the expatriate experience. Combining painting with collage, she freely appropriates images from both traditional Persian and popular Western culture in order to address an idealized female body and the expression of femininity in works such as her *Barbie* (doll), and *Interchangeable Heads and Bodies Series*. The works also express the on-again /off-again nature of internal politics and reflects the ambiguous relationship between the opposing conservative and progressive elements of Iranian society.

Esam Pasha was born in Baghdad, Iraq and lived through the political turmoil and recent wars that have afflicted his country. His work of this period is heavily influenced by the social and political implications of this strife-ridden time. Utilizing the traditional painting medium of oil on canvas, Pasha's color-infused work is imbued with metaphor and Islamic Mihrab symbols where floating winged coffins co-mingle with partially rendered figures, as in *Dreams in a War Zone* and *A Man and His Vulture*. The combination of western painting idiom with Islamic imagery is indicative of the conflict between Pasha's nostalgia for his homeland and current expatriate status. It reflects the general impact of oppression and the vicissitudes of contemporary Iraqi life where simple survival continues to be a major concern.

In Middle Eastern Perspectives - Artists of Iran and Iraq, a voice is provided that speaks of the experience of Muslim artists, male and female, living and working during an often-dangerous period when seemingly innocent expression may evoke a sense of the exotic or even fear. However, it also speaks to the immigrant experience where often-disparate cultures intersect and the familiar meets the unfamiliar.

~ April 2010