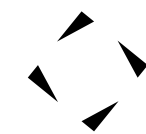


OBAIDI

ORGANS OF THE OUTLANDISH

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ORGANS OF THE OUTLANDISH



SALEH BARAKAT  
GALLERY

## Organs of the Outlandish

The trouble with Vital, accessory, and auxiliary organs begins the moment they make themselves felt. Only through the disavowal of organs as internal or external objects can the masters of their prosthetics exploit them. No figure other than the prosthetic master encapsulates the unsteady compound of anxiety and hubris, loss and compensation, narcissistic wounds, and phallic fantasies. The trouble with the magnificence of the organ happens as it quickly turns awry once it founders or reveals its exteriority. Like the fetish, the organ-turned-intruder enslaves its subject.

Mahmoud Obaidi's *Hidden Messages* trace sketched maps that situate the dispossessed landscapes previously inhabited by indigenous tribes in North America. The transformed and colonized lands threaten incorporation into their engulfing darkness.

Obaidi anxiously outlines narratives of originary dispossession and racial exploitation from the North American context that recall forms of class exploitation in the levant. Chalky outlines of tribal huts and vernacular landscapes are admixed with severed animal parts, human heads and organs. These are all incorporated into infrastructural networks, technological apparatuses and war machinery. These chalky maps threatened to be swallowed by the inky darkness of their photographic technological landscapes serve to pervert the history of capitalist dispossession and accumulation. While the uncanny organistic figurations tell the story of civilizations turned abject at the same time as subjects are exploited as objects in the machinery of progress, the indexical imprints of infrastructural landscapes turned monumental at the level of the canvas reveal the barbarism of colonial histories.

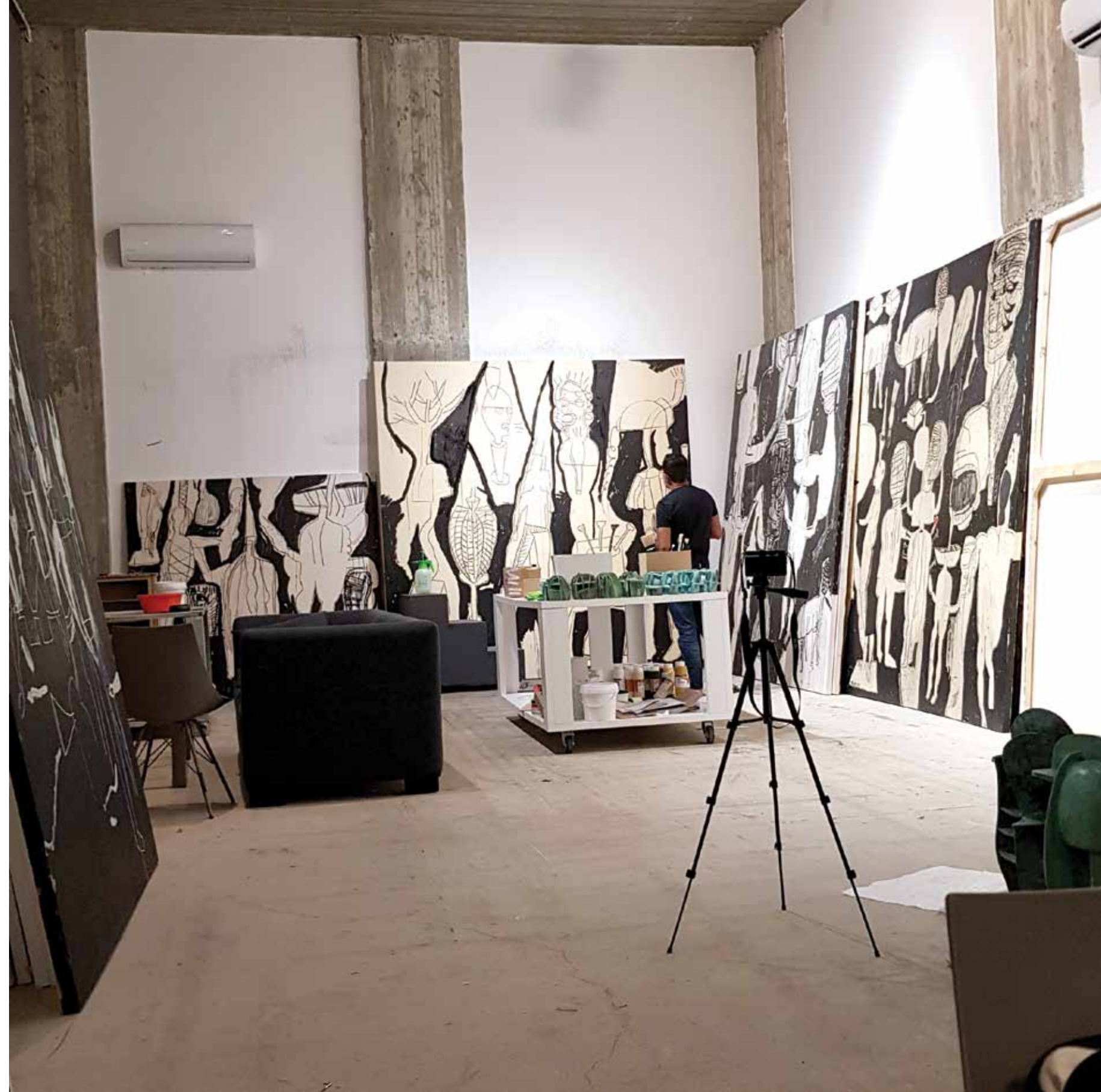
Like several origin myths in the autogenetic history of capitalism, Obaidi's work structures its own as a rebirth and a death at once. It is a death necessary to rebirth as a technological subject, a colonized and colonizing centaur, part man part object, part animal, part machine and part organ. The metaphor of rebirth returns in the fantasy of the cloacal. Intestinal links conjoin abject orifices with technological landscapes and bodies. At the level of the unconscious, it allows his man-machine conjunction to appear as a return to a pre-oedipal state – a release from all sexual, and racial difference from any division or lack. The technological fantasy of origin that fuels the fascism and capitalist barbarism Obaidi objectifies, is redoubled with the primitivist fantasy that furnishes a twofold release from lack, freed from human castration. This sets the space for purely phallic enjoyment of the headless exploiting capitalist structure.

Above the abyssal black of the canvas's tabula rasa, Obaidi plunges into the ditch of a primal past in *Make War Not Love*. These works reveal inklings of primal scenes that are short-circuited. Human body parts drop in and out in favor of phallic organs, orifices, accessory organs, prostheses, tanks, weapons and machines. Crossings of the unnatural in the human and in technology reveals their their disjunctive suturing. They are

all forced together in an organicistic hybrid that confuses the creative and the destructive. What results is an un-corporated body of objects at once exalted and violated technologically. Obaidi's *Make War Not Love* works take up the violent narrative of the colonizing intruder trans-mutated onto the register of externalized organs. The intruder enters by force through surprise or ruse, without the right and without having first been admitted. Consonant to the intruder, the stranger is strange because they do not belong, they are seemingly outsiders, trespassing in the space of another. The stranger is itself an intruder, a foreign subject or thing who, if like the colonizer, is then unexpected and unwelcome. The intrusion of the stranger never ceases to be a disturbance until the moment it disavows its foreignness and becomes naturalized. Mahmoud Obaidi's works deal with the strangeness of the intruder before the disavowal of colonization. The experience of the intrusion of the stranger as a foreigner stands against the violent disavowed histories of foreign colonization. Through painterly marks against drawn traces, Obaidi presents the theme of the intruder by rendering it strange again. The dispossessed colonizer and the possessing colonized appear as extruded organs and foreign body parts – objects that can only be felt once they falter.

Ultimately, the extruded parts and organs extrapolate the human toward the inorganic and technological in the context of military-industrial capitalism. Life is rendered beyond its mere death and incorporates its own destruction. In this sense, the subject-less outlandish organs and bodies appear more vital than humans. Just as capitalism fragments laborers, colonization subsumes bodies and shatters them. Each part becomes an empty fetish and techno-colonial phallic prostheses such that the phallus's totalizing logic wins over the objects' individuated fetishistic logic.

Andrea Comair  
Beirut, 2022





Born in Iraq and living in exile, Mahmoud Obaidi has built an œuvre characterized by themes of displacement, longing for home, and the loss of one's identity, made of poignant and thought-provoking works that simultaneously denounce cruelty and constitute a vehicle to cure his own trauma. In his latest show at Saleh Barakat gallery, meaning lies in what the artwork conceals. There is no ready key to pierce to mystery of what we're looking at, no evident iconography, few familiar forms and structures. Whatever substance we think we can grasp is unsettled, fragmentary, and instinctively moving in a way that transcends the artist's biography. Here, the large-scale paintings on show speak not only of his people, but also of many others struck by tragedy, now, then, and a long, long, time ago.

The series of paintings *Make War not Love* display an obscure symbolism, and little identifiable referents. Filled with quasi-humans, they bring to mind the primal, visceral, stylization present in prehistoric cave paintings, the first expressions of the human experience of violence. In nightmare situations where human meets machine, silhouettes float awkwardly. Dismembered and anonymous, they connect to nefarious mechanisms, neither medieval nor futuristic. Eyes and mouths challenge us menacingly or with a look of horror. Allusions to death, fragmentation, and sadism abound, with little hope of redemption. The counterculture slogan, *Make Love not War*, turned on its head, is rendered obsolete. But was it ever the rallying call of all but a few?

Then, *Hidden Messages* series force looking between the labyrinth of lines, patterns, shapes and dots that obscure scenes of horror. The works are overwhelmingly black, a color that's always a violent, provocative, radical choice – think Goya's Black Paintings, Malevich's Black Square. After disorientation subsides, one can discern people engaged in struggles with no issue against monsters and beasts, or stuck in claustrophobic labyrinths. Some scenes bring to mind European medieval conceptions of hell. Incongruous machinery returns menacingly. An imposing triptych representing parts of a locomotive and wagons suggests a one-way ticket to a certain death.

The echoes of familiar spaces and objects emerge intermittently. There is a town or a village, as if from behind a screen, suggesting a native land long left behind. There are also the corner of an American flag, hanging near a faceless individual, and the flattened Starbucks mermaid turned upside down, melting within the layers of paint. There is, presumably, a link to be made between casualties and perpetrators, i.e., global capitalism.

Obaidi speaks of violence where words have failed to express pain and suffering. In this show, he asks fundamental questions surrounding the representation of violence and its limits, and the taboos around showing death, by demanding of viewers to dig beneath their first glance and participate in his investigation into the most spectacular manifestations of human cruelty: mass killings and genocides. He suggests, instead of exhibiting. He avoids the outright disgusting and the abject, making violence less visible while still forcefully evoking it, as well as suggesting post-violence scenes of loss and dehumanization. The overwhelming tragic works spur an ethical reflection around justice and revenge, reparation and acceptance, beyond the simple denunciation of repugnant historical events.

Marie Tomb  
Beirut, 2022

*“What you see here is the beginning of a lifelong investigation of the far reaching catastrophic effects of deep seeded ideology; that of one Promised Land harking to another, and then getting lost in its own reflection.” - Mahmoud Obaidi*



Mixed media on canvas | 180 x 200 cm | 2019





Mixed media on canvas | 270 x 270 cm | 2019





Mixed media on canvas | 180 x 200 cm | 2019







Mixed media on canvas | 270 x 405 cm | 2019



*“An ideology found at the heart of Exodus 23:30 that inspired the massacring of entire civilizations, and still goes on till this very day: “I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land.” - Mahmoud Obaidi*







Mixed media on canvas | 270 x 405 cm | 2019













Mixed media on canvas | 270 x 810 cm | 2017



Mixed media on canvas | 140 x 160 cm | 2019











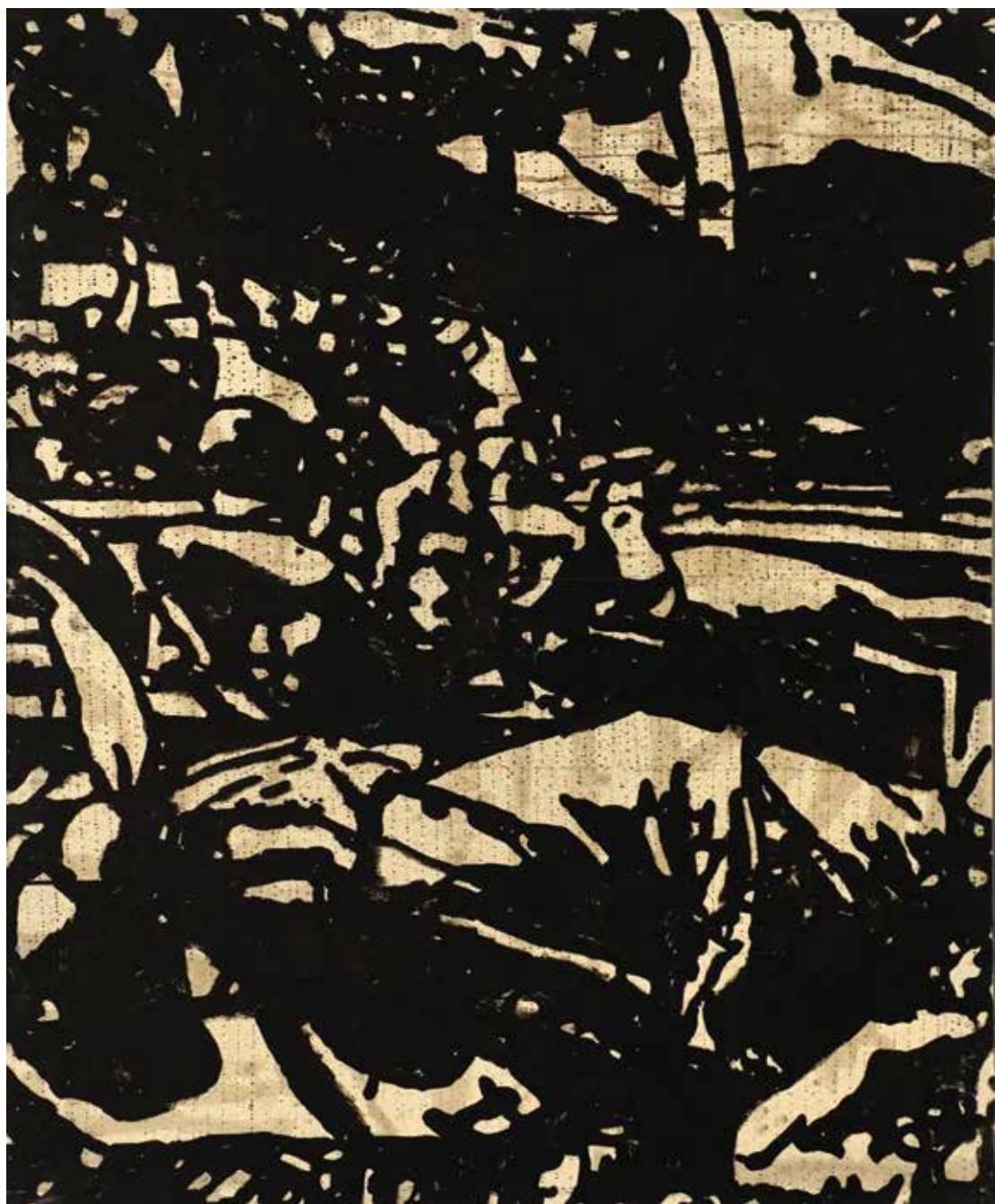
Mixed media on canvas | 100 x 100 cm - each | 2019





Mixed media on canvas | 100 x 120 cm - each | 2021

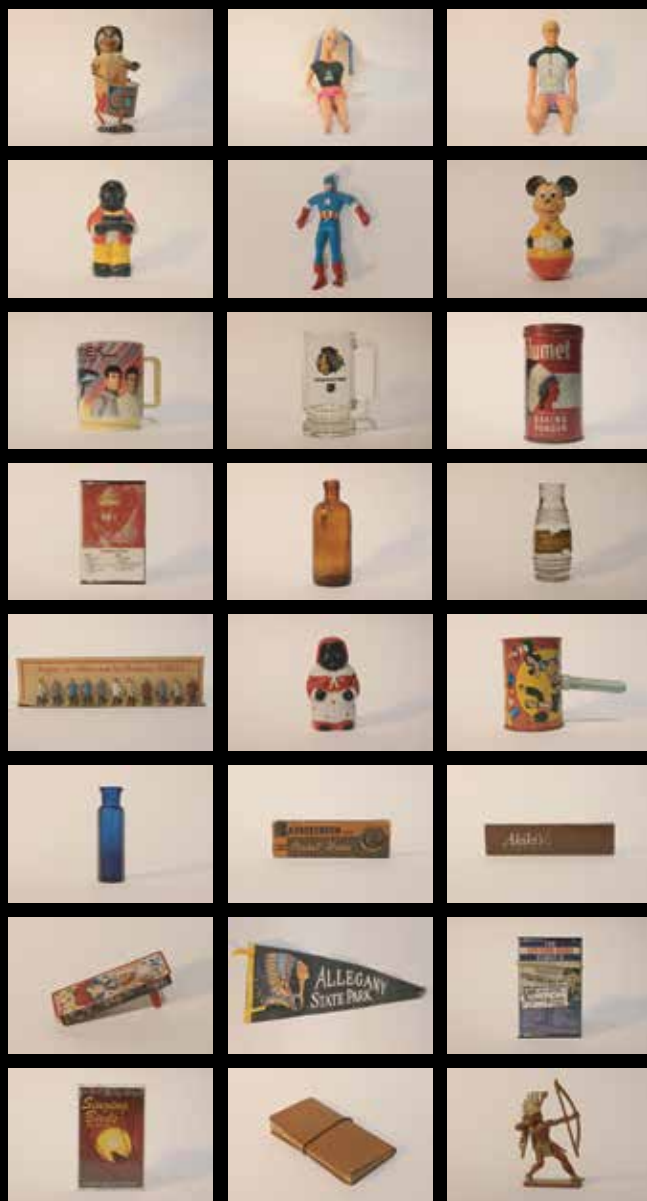




Mixed media on canvas | 120 x 100 cm - each | 2020







When people entered Auguste Rodin's temporary gallery space, Place de l'Alma, during Paris' Exposition Universelle at the turn of the previous century, they saw a defaced vertical slab of gypsum; for the night prior the artist had taken the chisel to it. His life's work, that started as a homage to Michelangelo's Gates of Paradise, and that spun stand alone works like the Thinker or the Kiss, which by the way had not made it into the final work, ended up rearranged into something unrecognizable, when the artist, recognized at the last minute, that all that he did up to his Balzac, was no longer worthy of his art.

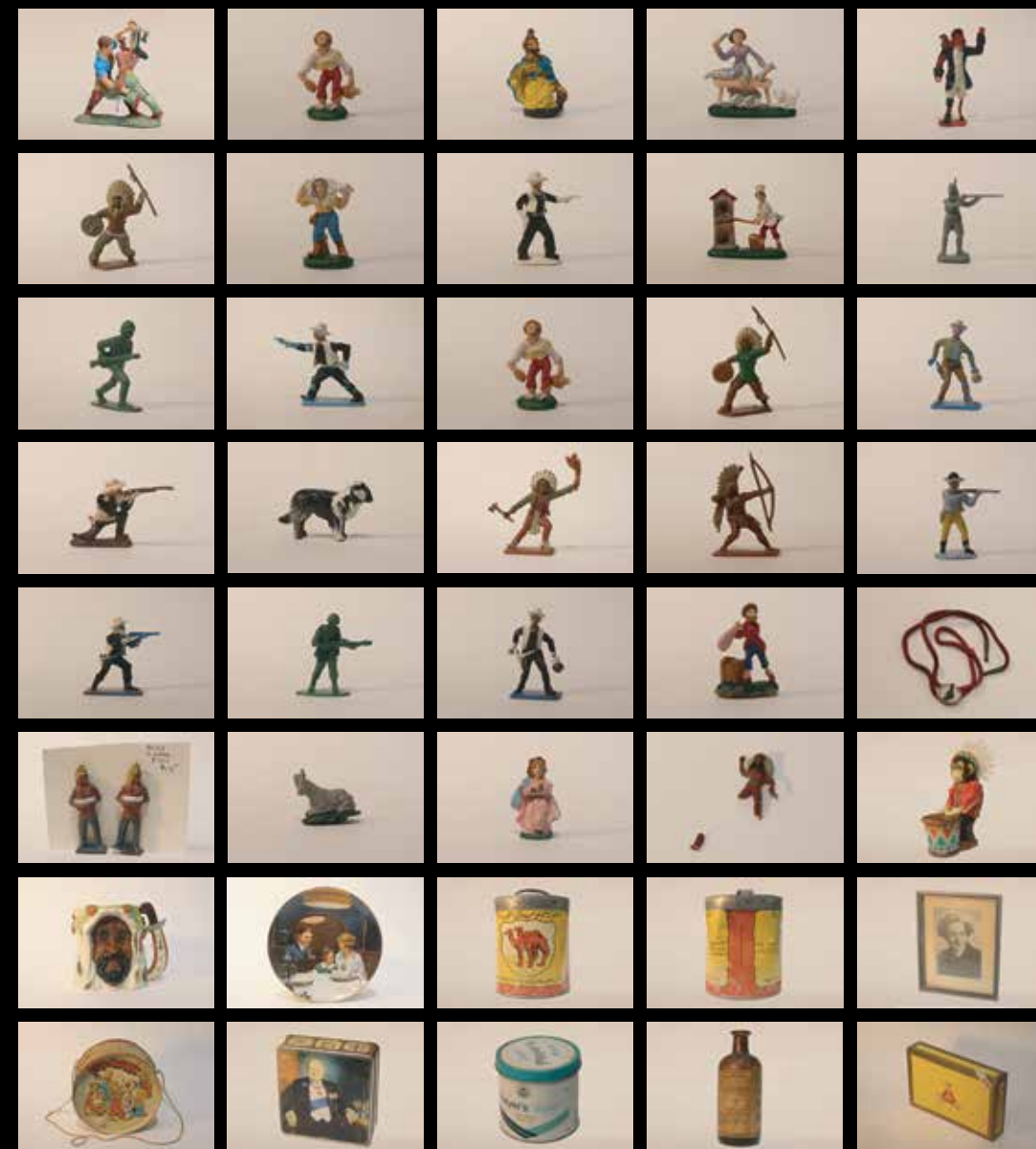
There are seminal moments in some artists' lives when they realize they need to leave the past behind, and go to the heart of the matter. For my part, this happened in a summer's day of 2017 in Venice. I had just finished installing my work, along with other fellow artists, and took a stroll in the city, and came up on merchant stalls where something caught my eye. A small, seeming meaningless toy figurine. But that little toy put all my life's work into perspective, not to mention the serendipity of my taking part in that collective exhibition at the Grenada national pavilion.

A cowboy fighting locked in a mortal embrace with an 'Indian', as they used to call them in 'Westerns', this small toy figurine I bought that day in Venice, will be the first thing you see as you enter my show, for I realized that day that I needed to address in my art the issue of the American genocide in order to come to terms with all that has happened in my personal life, as well as the narrative of my country of origin, the region's history, and that of my country of adoption, and the American continent, from North to South.

- Mahmoud Obaidi

THE

TOY



MAKE WAR

NOT LOVE



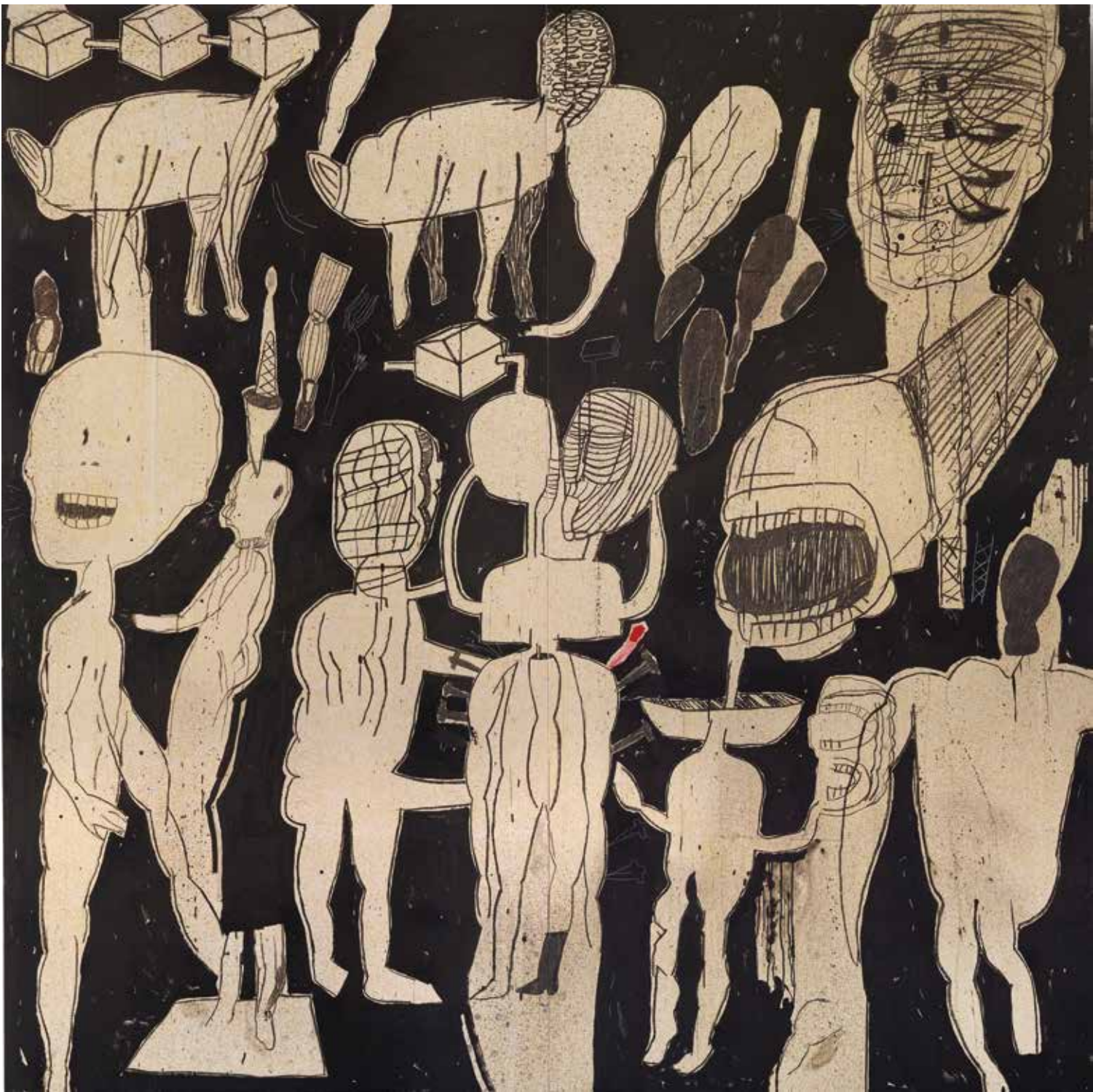




Mixed media on canvas | 270 x 270 cm | 2019

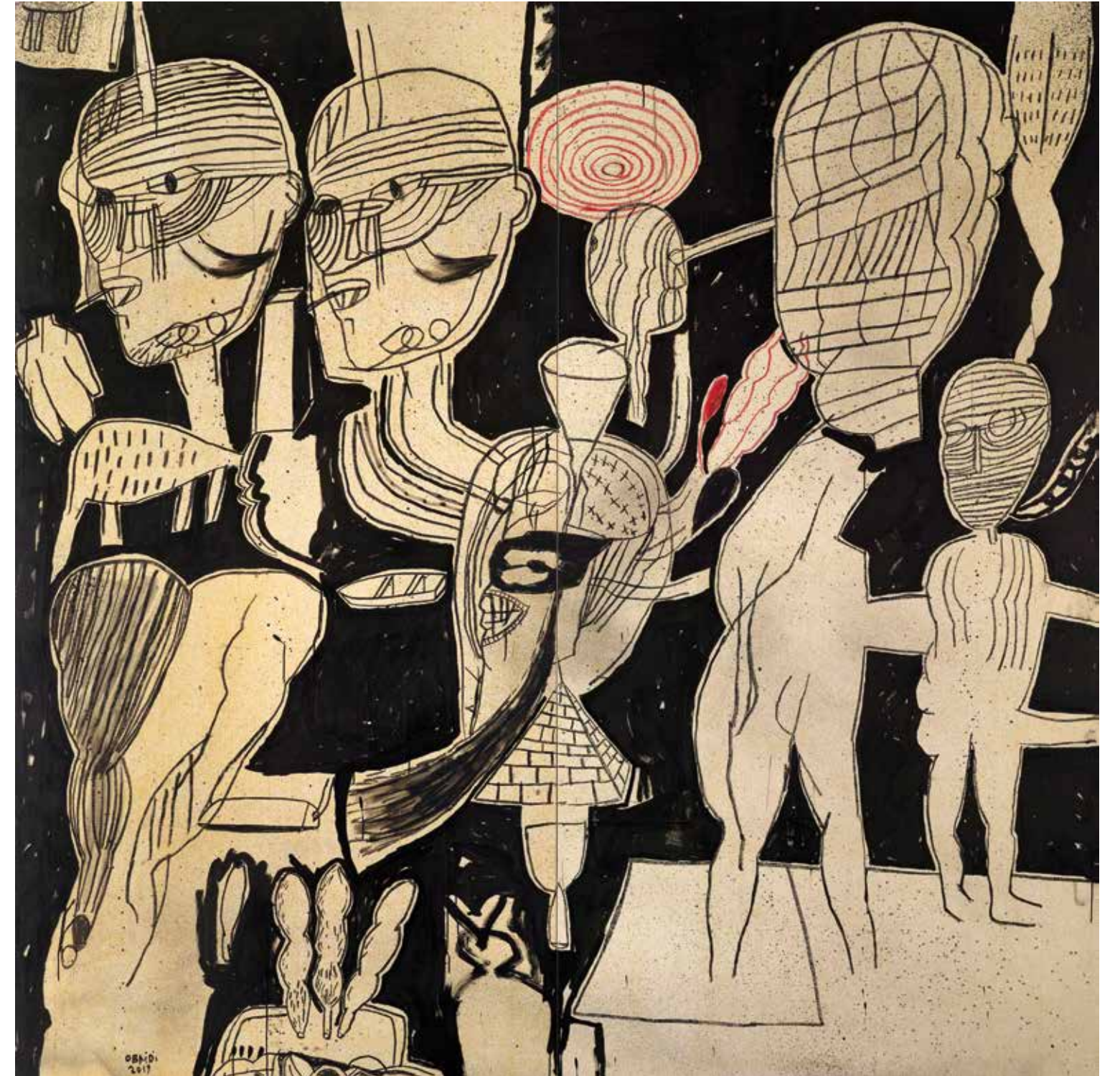






Mixed media on canvas | 270 x 270 cm | 2019





Mixed media on canvas | 270 x 270 cm | 2019



Mixed media on canvas | 270 x 270 cm | 2019











Mixed media on canvas | 200 x 250 cm | 2022









Mixed media on canvas | 200 x 250 cm | 2022



Mixed media on canvas | 180x200 cm | 2022





Mixed media on canvas | 180x200 cm | 2022





Mixed media on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2021





حينما قدمت لمحمود العبيدي في معرض النخبة الذي أقيم على صالة جمعية الفنون التشكيلية سنة ١٩٨٨، كنت أحاول من خلال تقديمي ذاك ان (أحدس) رؤيته الفنية بعد ان تسنى لي الاطلاع على بعض انجازاته ،في اطار ما أدعوه ،بل ما (اشخصه) في الفن العراقي بالنزعة الخلقية أو (النزعة الانسانية التي تجعل من الانسان ممثلا من حيث وجوده التأملي لكل المخلوقات الاخرى باعتباره اكثر الظواهر الخلقية تعبيراً عن كمالها الخليقي) وقد كتبت في حينه في دليل العرض ما يلي: (أن شخصوه هي شخصو{ما بعد – الانسانية}، لانها لم تعد لتخص الانسان فهي تتجاوزه نحو الحيوان وكل العالم والمخلوق ولكنها تبقى انسانية مع ذلك في معناها وهذا ما تفصح عنه طريقته في معاملة اللوحة ).

وقد صدق حدسي فيما بعد وأنا اتأمل أعماله الجديدة لكي أقدم فيها الان لمعرضه الشخصي ،وذلك أي سأكتشف اكثر فاكثر ،انه لم يكن ليتخذ من (نزعته) في اختزال عناصر اللوحة التشكيلية في (حدود لحظة الفعل) سوى كونها مدخلا اسلوبيا عاما من اجل الوصول الى (أهمية) الخط باعتباره عنصرا تقنيا له دوره الاساس في (تحديد)الشكل **Form** .فكأنه، تشبثه به (يجئ) كوازع انساني من اجل انجاز شمولية الوعي الخليقي في عمله الفني.... في أثره التشكيلي وستستحيل في المحاولة البينية [(بين) ظهور الشكل (أزاء) اللا شكل ] الى ما يشبه (البحث عن الدلالة): دلالة الوجود الخليقي في الفكر والفن ،فيما هو كتحديد خارجي للمساحات الشكلية **Outline of Forms** فهو أثناء معاملته اياه في لوحاته يبدأ به (كتحديد) لكي ينته به الى مساحات لونية محيطة بمساحات اخرى (محدودة) .وباختصار فان الخط line لدى محمود العبيدي هو تحديد خارجي للشكل استحال في آخر الامر الى مساحة شكلية. وسنرى ان فعل هذا ( التحول ) سيحقق كذلك لديه في مجال التلوين ايضا. فالالوان بالنسبة له تبدو (مختزلة) الى حد استحالتها الى مجرد (درجات) لونية Tones وثمة امر آخر تتمرحل فيه رؤيته الفنية (وهي في حالة تحققها كفعل) اي كعلاقة بين الدوال ستؤدي الى ظهور الدلالة . ذلك ان الموضوع **Composition** المرسوم سابقا وفق مبدأ الرؤية البصرية،لا التأمل الذهني: [التمثيل **Representation** وليس (التعليق) الظاهرتي (من ظاهراتيه **Phenomenology**)] اقول: أن هذا الموضوع المرسوم، سيعامل من ثم (كبحث **Research**) ذي مدلول ثقافي او ذهني وفق مبدأ (التصوير). فالجسد المرسوم في اللوحة سينألف من مظهره (العام) المحور **Deform** واجزاء اخرى تفصيلية له. فهي جميعا اي المظهر العام والمظاهر الخاصة التفصيلية (تتجمع) الآن في كيان جديد وكأنها بحث في معنى الانسان الانساني من خلال جسده التشكيلي. فهذه المرأة المستلقية في بعض لوحاته تستلقي ايضا (او ثانية) بواسطة (تهديها) او (كنفيها) .

اذن نحن أزاء (مدلول) كلي لجسد المرأة ترفده (عينات) أو شرائح جزئية منه ، و حين نشاهدهما معا: الجسد العام واجزاءه، من خلال كيان جديد تقدمه اللوحة .فهو (بنية) جديدة للجسد لا يقع في مجال (المرئي) أو (اللامرئي) بل في مجال ما هو (مؤلف والا - مؤلف) معا. وهذا هو بالضبط ما نوه به محمود في تنظيره الذي يثبته في دليل معرض النخبة المار الذكر: [...]الثور على أشكال جديدة قابلة (بدورها) للتأويل (أي) لدى المتلقي[.

اذن فان رؤيته الان هي رؤية (باحث) لا متأمل ولا ملهم. او قل انها تختزل الالهام الى تأمل فبحث. وهو بذلك يحاول ان يسهم بخيال المثقف في تصحيح احساس المحقق. انه يتخذ من هذا (التنسيق) لعالم اللوحة معيارا لاستبدال المنظور التقليدي للنص (باعتباره مجرد وسيلة جاهزة للاستهلاك ) بمنظور جديد يسمح بظهور (نص) لا مرجعية له سوى (وعي) الانسان المبدع ملقيا ام متلقيا. انها وظيفة جاهزة للانتاج وليس للاستهلاك... انها وظيفة يمارسها قارئ النص المتمتع بوعيه الابداعي لا التقليدي في معاملة الاثر الفني... وهكذا من جديد يتضح لنا ان (شفرة) **Code** محمود العبيدي تعتمد على هذا (الحضور) المستمر للعلاقة بين الكل والاجزاء.

ومن جديد سوف نكتشف محورا ثالثا في خطاب محمود العبيدي التشكيلي انها تلك العلاقة الحميمة الناشبة من بين فضاء خارجي يغلف اللوحة وفضاء داخلي (او حيز) يتضمنه السطح التصويري فيها وهي علاقة ذات مدلول خطي ايضا .بمعنى اخر فان الخط لتحديد خارجي للشكل **Outline** كما سبق ان لاحظناه يستحيل لديه شكل هو الان (الحد الفاصل) بين فضائين وهو اي الفنان لكي يؤكد هذا المعنى الفلسفي للخط وللمعنى الذي بسببه سندعوه بالبعد الواحد فسوف يرسم اطار داخل اللوحة يقع دون اطارها الخشبي محيطا بموضوعها المرسوم مع انه جزء منه فكأنه بذلك يمهّد لحدود اللوحة الاربعة (اي طولها وعرضها) مؤكدا اهمية الحاشية هذا العالم البيني ما بين العالم كمحيط والعمل الفني وهو في حالة كونه اثرا ما. ان (لعبة) الاطر تلك في لغة العبيدي تظل اذن (دالا) اخر من دوال منظومته... إنها لعبة الولادة والاحتضار معا... اي الوجود (الحدي) للخط لا كتحديد للشكل، بل كبعد فحسب.

والان ما الذي يدعو محمود العبيدي الى اختيار (ذخيرته) في الخطاب من مفهوم الخط، لا اللون ولا الدرجة اللونية؟؟ وهل لرؤيته الفنية كمتأمل خليقي ما يجعل منها نظرية معرفية؟؟ الواقع ان اهتمامه ذاك مع احتفاظه بكل مقومات العناصر الشكلية من لون ودرجة لونية وشكل الخ.... يستطاع تأويله لحساب ما يتأمل (هو) فيه معنى الوجود باعتباره وجودا مشتركا بين شتى المخلوقات او اننا نستطيع الان نفهم مقولته بالصورة التي يحاول ان يوضحها لغويا انه يقول: [حينما ابصر (نملة) او اي مخلوق اخر يتشبث بالارض اذ هو يجري هنا وهناك فكانما احس وكأن تلك النملة تتعارض واياي وجوديا... ان نملة معينة بالذات يبصرها محمود هي ايضا محمود. وبالمقابل فان محمود هو ايضا تلك النملة... طالما ان ثمة مجالا يتكون ما بينهما (كمفصل) من مفاصل اخرى (تتقاطع) فيها ذوات خليقية اخرى.

وهكذا فنحن (أزاء) فلان هو الانسان وهو الحيوان والنبات والجماد، كما اننا ازاء (فلان اخر) لانسان وحيوان وجماد اخر ومثل هذه المقولة توضح لنا دونما ريب نزعته ورؤيته معا بما يشبه زن يعبر عن معنى (التناسخ) بين المخلوقات لولا ان ما يعنيه ان يصح ان يكون معنى للثقاف .

وعلى كل حال فان ما يبحث فيه محمود العبيدي بصيغة الغناء عن الذات في الاخر (او بالذات في الانث وليس الهو) ذلك ان (ظاهرية) (التنصيص) في فنه يغذيها باستمرار ظهور (لخطة الفعل) **Action** بمظهر الغنى وهي في حالة كونها (خطابا) ربما ليس هو خطاب الاثر الفني نفسه ، بعد ان احكم تنسيقه في جوهر النص **Texture**.

شاكر حسن آل سعيد، ١٩٩١



ORGANS OF THE OUTLANDISH

SALEH BARAKAT GALLERY

















## OBAIDI

What you see here is the beginning of a  
living investigation of the far-reaching  
cosmological effects of despotic ideology:  
that of one 'Premord' Land, looking to  
wither, and then getting lost in its own  
reflection. Mohamed Obaidi





FRAGMENTS

QATAR MUSEUMS













Mosquito Effect | Bronze and corten steel | 885x412x220 cm | 2016



Hangover | Bronze and Corten steel | 885x412x220 cm | 2016



Operation Iraqi Freedom Family | Recycled American weapons & Humvees used in Iraq mixed with bronze | 180x150x140 cm | 2016



Ford 71 | Bronze and Corten steel | 405x190x225 cm | 2016













Untitled | Bronze and Corten steel | 885x250x100 cm | 2016



Farewell Kiss I | Bronze | 93x93x20 cm | 2016



Georges in a Box | Dirt and Fiberglass | 110x110x20 cm | 2016



Farewell Kiss IV | Bronze | 80x80x30 cm | 2016







# Mahmoud Obaidi

Mahmoud Obaidi (b. 1966, Baghdad) is an Iraqi-Canadian artist whose work has been exhibited in museums and galleries around the world. After leaving Iraq in 1991, he obtained his masters of Fine Arts at the University of Guelph in Canada, & completed diplomas in new media and film from Toronto & Los Angeles, respectively. His work has been exhibited extensively at MOMA PS1, NYC; British Museum, London; Venice Biennale, Venice; Qatar Museums Gallery, Doha; MATHAF, Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; Saatchi Gallery, London; The National Museum of Bahrain, Bahrain; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; The National Gallery of Fine Arts, Amman; Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Texas & Musée d'Art Contemporain de Baie-Saint-Paul, Quebec, among others. Curated more than 40 shows in different spaces around the world including Saatchi Gallery and Nabu Museum. Architect of Fire Station artist in residency; Doha, Qatar & Nabu Museum, Lebanon.

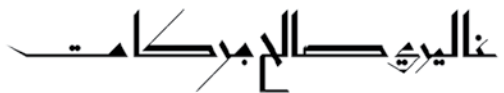
## Selected Group and Solo Exhibitions

- 2019 MOMA PS1 compact home project, New York, USA.
- 2017 British Museum group show (compact home), London, UK.
- 2017 57th Venice Biennale Grenada pavilion.
- 2016 Fragments: An Exhibition by Mahmoud Obaidi, Qatar Museums Gallery, Katara, Doha, Qatar.  
Fair Skies, Project Space, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar.  
Baghdad Manifesto, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK.
- 2015 The Imposter, 56th Venice Biennale, Venice.
- 2014 The Replacement, Meem Gallery, Dubai and Contemporary Art Platform, Kuwait City.
- 2013 Contemporary Arab Art: How Do You Sleep at Night?, Meem Gallery, Dubai, UAE.  
Fair Skies – 25 Years of Arab Creativity, National Museum of Bahrain, Manama.  
The Cubes – Hajj: The Journey Through Art, Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar.  
Dress Code, Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE.  
Confusionism, Katara Art Centre, Doha, Qatar.
- 2012 Fair Skies – 25 years of Arab Creativity, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France.
- 2011 200 Gigabytes of My Memory – Art in Iraq Today, Meem Gallery, Dubai, and Beirut Exhibition Center, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2010 Fair Skies, Agial Art Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon.  
My Homeland, Art Sawa Gallery, Dubai.  
Beyond the War: Contemporary Iraqi Artists of the Diaspora, LTHM Gallery, New York, USA.
- 2009 Turtles – Iraqi Artists in Exile, Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston, Texas, USA.  
Modernism and Iraq, Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, New York, USA.
- 2006 Golden Leaves Book, Gallery Jouy, Switzerland, and T Cazacrou Foundation, Frankfurt.
- 2005 Dafatir: Contemporary Iraqi Book Art, University of North Texas Art Gallery, Denton and other locations (travelling exhibition).  
Improvisation: Seven Iraqi Artists, Bissan Gallery, Doha, Al-Riwaq Gallery, Manama, and 4 Walls Gallery, Amman, Jordan.  
Paris – Baghdad: Iraqi Artists, Musée du Montparnasse, Paris, France.
- 2003 Iraqi Art Now: Looking Out, Looking In, De Paul Art Museum, Chicago, USA.
- 2002 The Ramona Project, 4 Walls Gallery, Amman.
- 1998 The Dome Project, Zavitz Gallery, Toronto.  
The Dome Project, Public Art, India.
- 1994 Obaidi, Darat Al Funun, Amman.
- 1990 Cats' Factory, Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad, Iraq.





SALEH BARAKAT GALLERY



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Saleh Barakat Gallery Beirut | Justinian St. | Clemenceau

Beirut | Lebanon

info@salehbarakatgallery.com

www.salehbarakatgallery.com

📷 @salehbarakatgallery

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