

## From a Woman's perspective

Lahib Jaddo explores her past with "Bound and Released"

BY MELISSA PANTANO  
The Battalion

When Iraqi-born Lahib Jaddo left her home in Lebanon to live in America, she brought with her memories of her tormented past and the strength to start a new life free of restrictions. From this realization of new-found freedom she was inspired to produce "Bound and Released." The exhibit, shown solely at Texas A&M, is on display through Feb. 1 in the MSC Visual Arts Gallery.

Jaddo said her art is directly influenced by past experiences she has endured.

"Each painting is a story," she said. "They all deal with either the issues of personal or cultural freedom."

Jaddo, who grew up in a traditional Iraqi family, said the religious restrictions were too much for her to handle. She said the gender bias of the Muslim religion did not appeal to her.

"The Muslim religion caters to men," Jaddo said. "Women are not allowed to participate, but only 'belong' to men."

Jaddo used this experience as inspiration for her paintings. The exhibit's paintings date from 1994 to this year.

The older works depict women against realistic backgrounds, such as cities or cemeteries, while newer paintings feature women against abstract backgrounds.

Jaddo said the backgrounds represent her cultural cleansing experience.

"The women in the older paintings are in turmoil between the Western culture and the traditional Muslim culture," Jaddo said, "while in the newer paintings, the women are free."

The merging of Muslim and Western culture is a recurring theme in Jaddo's paintings. Models are dressed in traditional clothing.

Jaddo said the cultural influence represents her struggle between two worlds.

"These cultural entities are constant companions to the main figure," Jaddo said, "just as anyone must function in the world with one's own individual traits and histories. The costumes are also an excuse to paint bright colors."

Jaddo's newer style is "photorealism." First, she paints the backgrounds, then she transfers realistic images from photographs onto the canvas so the subjects seem to jump out at the viewer.

All of the paintings are of women. Jaddo said that is so because she can relate to women.

"I am a woman, so I can only identify with a woman," Jaddo said. "I can't paint men, because I don't know what they feel."

The oldest of the paintings, "Khadra," which means "dance of life" portrays Jaddo's sister in a Lebanese cemetery. Jaddo said the painting represents personal victory over turmoil.

"She is finding joy in life, even though there is a lot going on around her," Jaddo said.



CHAD ADAMS/THE BATTALION

Another painting, "Doubt I," deals with Jaddo's struggle with religion while growing up. She said the struggle stemmed from the contradiction of religion which existed in her life.

"I was raised in a Middle Eastern home, but I attended Christian schools," Jaddo said. "So there was a kind of schizophrenia between the two. This contradiction made me begin to doubt my religion, because I was praying every morning at school as a Christian, and at home that wasn't allowed."

One of the newer paintings, "Ready with my Bundles," is of a young girl holding a cloth in her hand. Next to the girl is a self-portrait of the artist carrying many sacks.

Jaddo said the inspiration for the painting came from a childhood memory of times with her grandmother.

"I remember that my grandmother never had any suitcases," she said. "She would just fold up the corners in a piece of cloth, and she would carry things around that way. The young girl has no emotional baggage, while the older woman is weighed down with all she has been through."

Laurie Kidd, a member of the MSC Visual Arts Committee and a sophomore bioengineering major, said this show provides cultural enrichment for A&M students.

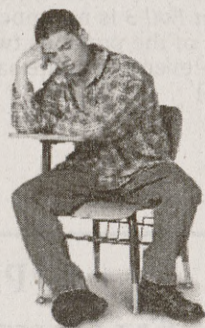
"This is a strong show," she said. "It means a lot to us, because it is a strong theme about women and freedom. It speaks to each one of us individually."

Jaddo, who has been painting for 15 years, has a master's degree of fine arts and currently teaches architecture at Texas Tech University.



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"Al Minya" (above) and "Sakina I" (above right) are two of Jaddo's works for the "Bound and Released" exhibit, now on display at the MSC Visual Arts Gallery



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