

**Syrian Voices**

**Art – Theory for Syria**  
**By Róza El-Hassan**

**Bloody Peace**  
**By Shadi Alshhadeh**





Varvara Stepanova 'Future is our only goal', 1921

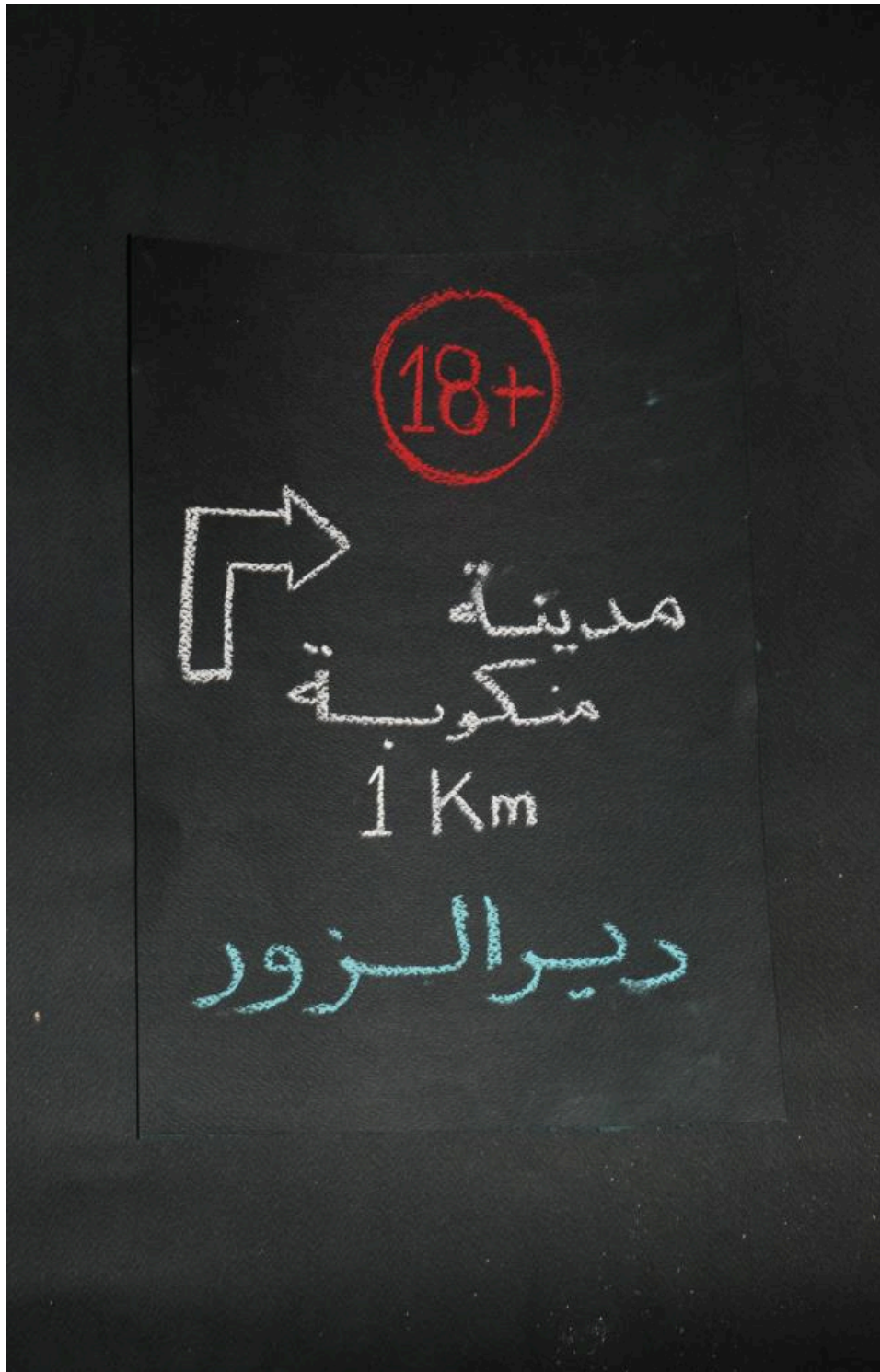


by Ben Vautier, artist born 1936



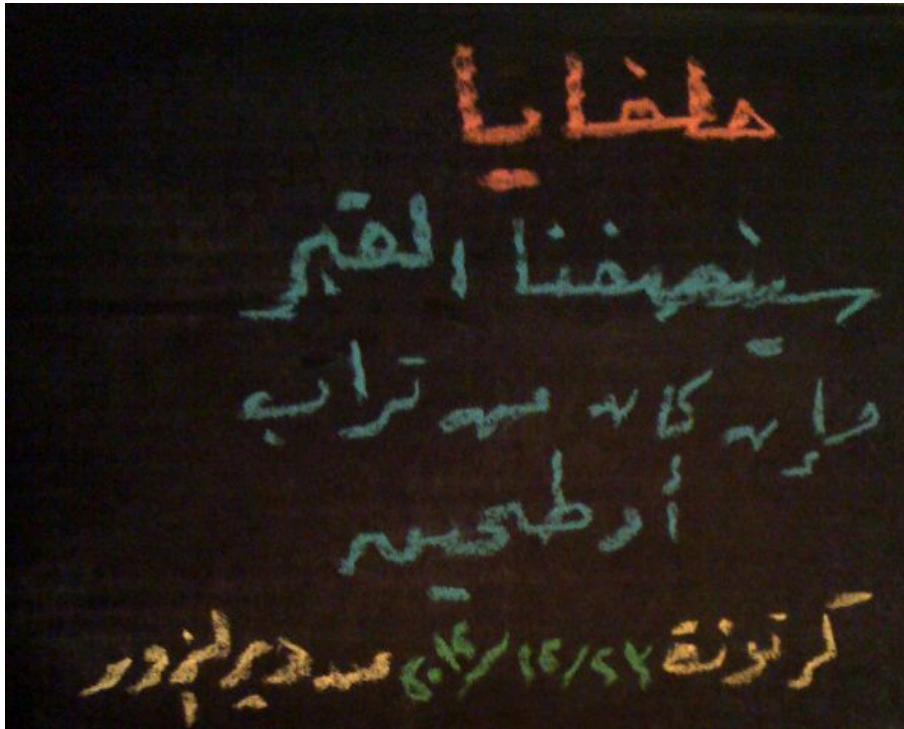
Ben Vautier



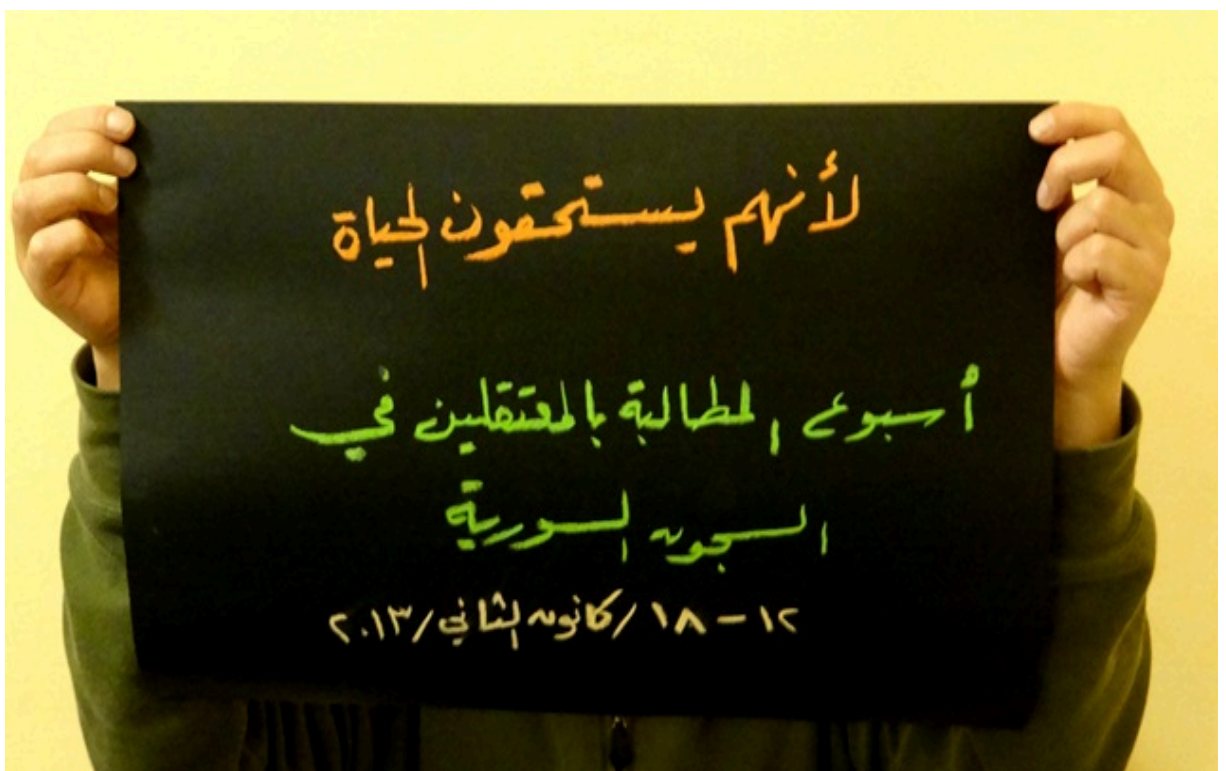


- Kartoneh from Deir El Zor
- Turn right and after one kilometer you arrive to the city of Deir
- El Zor. +18 is for graphic scenes

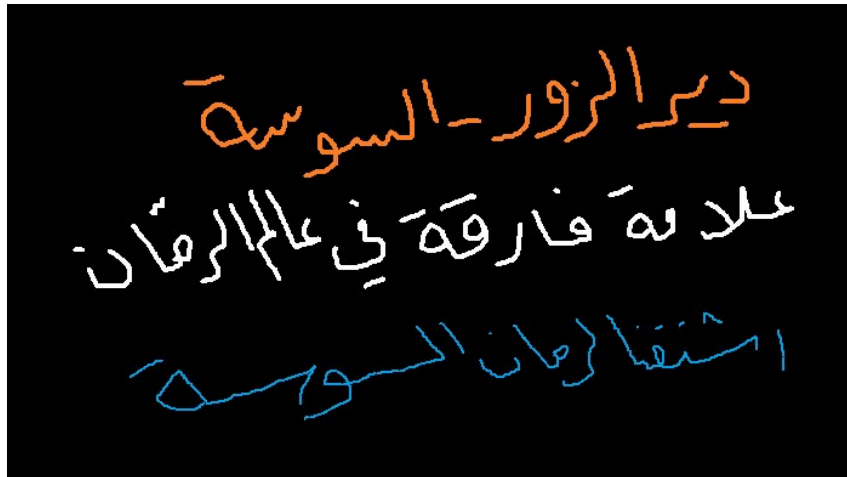
Kartoneh fro Deir EL Zor, Syria



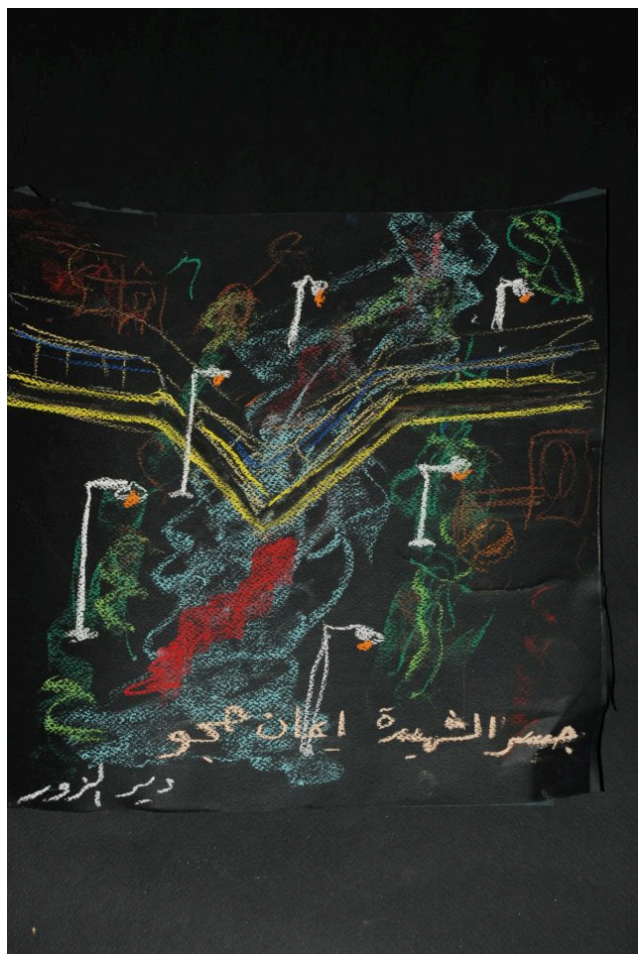
Halfaya, justice will be inflour- December 23 Dayer Elzour. our crave,weather its ade of dust or flour  
december 23 Deir El Zor



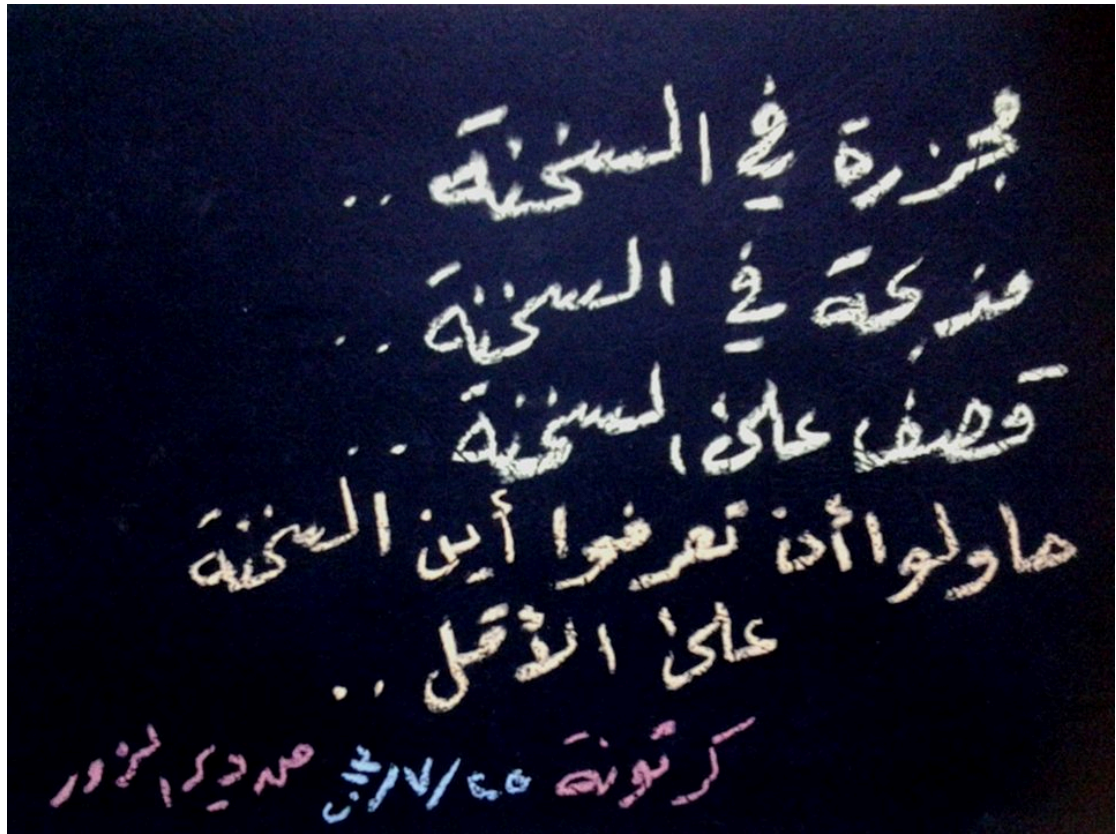
because they deserve life - the week of demanding detained people from Syrians prisons  
Halfaya, justice will be inflour- December 23 Dayer Elzour. our crave, weather its ade of dust or flour  
december 23 Deir El Zor



Dayer Elzour will remain a sign of difference in the world of pomegrate







Kartoneh from Deir El Zor, Kartoon pain, 2013





Pigeon by anonymous photographer Lens Binnishi, Binnish city, Northern Syria, Idlib Region 2013



The word “Steadfast” in Arabic, collective body-art action, Binnish city, Northern Syria , From website: Coordinators of the revolution in the city of Binnish 2012



Liberty Statue made in Homs, 2012



Sculpturer makes objects of empty rocket shells and bullets  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jP\\_takNr-as](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jP_takNr-as)



Graffiti by Crazy Nano, Daraa, Southern Syria, 2012





Faculty of Art, lecture room in Aleppo University after the massacre caused by rocket in January 2013





Flash-mob – sit in protest action by students at Damascus university in solidarity with the sieged cities, beginning of 2012



Ali Ferzat, Syrian Caricaturist, January 2013



Four Brides of Peace, Damascus. Autumn 2012 - Arrested during the action and released after 48 days. The protest action is embedded into damascene urban mediterranean culture and feminism.



A few days after the action: street-seller in Damascus, 2012





Photo by Rebell Colors Daraa, Daraa city, Southern Syria, July 2013

### **Art-theory and Syria - Strategies of Avantgarde during the Syrian Revolution**

During the analysis of contemporary Syrian art of the revolution we can analyse the local culture, so painfully close to all the Syrian's heart, but we can place the Syrian events also in a global historical context through art.

My thesis is, that syrian art questions the validity of several basic postmodern and post historical theory.

Through art-historical analysis of the art of Syrian revolution we can realize - we can get to know more - about the deep historical dimension of the events and also about the global process of trunning point and transition without one exclusive main-stream ideology ( as we experience during earlier revolutions: there used to be always one exclusive and rigid ideology or utopian theory of social change, which is not the case now).

It is a commonplace, that the art of the biggest revolution in 20th century, the October Revolutuion in Russia was the Russian avantgarde. Since this is a letter to art- historians I do not need to introduce the role of Sergei Eisenstein, Malevich, EL Lissitzky and others.

While investigating our own historical moment, I realize, that current Syrian art- production has suspiciously so much in common with early avantgarde and this is mainly unconcious. The form of expression is subversive although it it not a concious decision by the artist or activist to create art, which refers to avantgarde, but rather an unconcious reappearance of all avantgarde forms in collective behaviour.

Illustrating my thesis I would like to add a reproduction of a work by Varvara Stepanova, the revolutionary artist wrote in 1921 on the painting " The future is our only goal".

I could bring you dozens of similar paintings and demo-signs from Syria in these years.

Later in the nineteen-thirties the avantgarde and abstract modernism was banned by Stalin, many of the best artists lost their lives by the stalinist regime or went in exile.

In the west the avantgardist attitude, its radical desire for freedom and its abstract forms became an isolated phenomenon in the rather elitarian space of contemporary art.

Gestures of the avantgarde were separated from their social message and reduced to objects of hermeneutic studies or to events in a mental space. - with all the good and bad aspects of all these microcosmos in a private and contemplative space.

Although being separated in the museum's space, the history of avant-garde is a long and rich history. We would need a book to find the place of recent Syrian expression on the wide palette of all what followed the early avant-garde on the field of action, language and conceptual art.

A recently published book with a very interesting methodological approach is *Aktion- Konzept- Sprache* from the Mumok collection in Vienna.

Artist tried to revitalize it again and again, and connect it to social content in the transavantgarde, and not too long time ago in Eastern Europe ( the region where I was born ) most successfully in the retroavantgarde ((this happened also on a geographic borderregion of the former communist, socialist realm, in former yugoslavia, a border region of exsoviet influence like Syria))-

Still the main artistic attitude was postmodern and posthistorical. Its message was : "Do not expect anymore big changes" as Francis Fukuyama said: "The end of history."

While observing Syrian art of the revolution, we realize , that it is in many aspects a counterargument to this posthistorical thesis.

Those village people in most isolated Northern Syria , silenced by military dictatorship since 40 years has probably not read the book, which is lying on my table titled " Glossarium der Russischen Avantgarde", they had no chance to visit an installation work by Ben Vautier in a Modern Art Museum in Paris to see his dark chalkboards with handwritten messages, they never listened probably to Joseph Beuys appeals on social sculpture.

Still they use the same tools and forms of expression as the avantgarde: in the villages of Northern Syria (in the most isolated region ) people use all technical equipment ( as the avantgarde preferred to work with film , photo and new media ) , they use also text boxes, caricature, performance, actions, painting and graffiti.

This element , the urban graffiti is a more recent US american phenomenon , furthermore syrian revolutionairs used to portrait themselves on the net as japanese Manga figures with syrian flag, but we can still say, the syrian art has a lot in common with the immediate simplicity of early avantgarde roots.

The reason for this similarities is not a broad post-avantgardist modern art- education in all syrian villages and suburbs, since it is not relevant, if the blogger from Deir El Zor, who places his messages always on blackboard on form of handwritten text knows Ben Vautier. It is not relevant, if the rural community in Binnish an agricultural small place knew, that Beuys appealed for social plastic, when twenty people from Binnish they lay on the ground on the ruins of their houses to form in a body-art action the word steadfast, and take a photo of the event. It is not relevant, if the painter from Kafranbel knows "Neue Malerei" and Martin Kippenberger.

The reason for the similarities is a broad revolutionary movement, which takes also form on an aesthetical level: The freedom of expression and speech instead of forced silence is one of the arguments syrian oppositionals repeat since the beginning again and again.

Unfortunately the argument of artistic freedom and radical autonomy as formulated for example in Malevich 's Suprematist manifesto was in early socialist revolution transformed very quickly into the a discourse of merely economic marxist nature and about the functional distribution of material goods . This was one of the reasons why the aesthetical revolution of the early avantgarde remained a rather isolated and later by Stalin even a prohibited phenomenon.

One more reason, why avantgardist technique and form became unexpectedly popular in our days might be, that the visual language has changed fifty years after the appearance of television for the poor but definitely not illiterate people.



Thirty years ago even a slow film montage, was hard to follow for many viewers, not to speak about Eisenstein's fast montage, which must have looked that times like to the average like something beyond rational perception, while today faster montage or morphology of images is perceived as completely normal.

Young people's brain is structured by a mixture of written text and visual digital image repetitions all over the world. It would deserve a further study, how post-avantgarde language is culturally absorbed globally in other regions with strong social discontent. It is defiantly present.

Avantgardist gestures of performance and action are used even by populist politician successfully to release social tension, and violence as we see on the example of Antonas Mockus in Bogota, Columbia currently the most dangerous country after Syria and Iraq.

While art- historians and curators still speak about low visitor numbers of modern museums and the problems of the elitarian isolated space of contemporary art, the art of Syrian revolution creates a broad presence of avantgardist techniques to transfer its message to a broad public, to the world.

Our knowledge on earlier revolutionary avantgarde from the beginning of the 20 th century shows us, provides us a formal tool to analyse the events and to see, that all what happens now is a special turning-point of history.

We can create great theories about Syria, but it is beyond any imagination and beyond any rationality, what happened there. Probably the story is so simple, there was a country under deep dictatorship and for a moment the people have hope to get rid of this dictatorship.

Still the intensive presence of art and social change in a closely connected alliance give those events a special, universal character.

A horrible crime happens in a village and children start to draw it immediately. Why? They make drawings, they capture the events in a precise way even before being asked by adults.

Usually adult invent workshops for children to deal with their trauma, but in Syria children start to make drawings immediately during the crimes to create a sharp eyewitness evidences to report it to the world. How can they be so conscious during this terrible struggle? Why are their drawings so precise? What kind of change and transition is going on in these times?

I would like to finish the text with the image of three bottles. First two bottles are intellectual and mental property of the Fluxus movement and were made around 1965 and 1968 and in the 70-s.



Tamás Szentjóby, *Cooling Water*, 1965

"Bare existence is under constant pressure, under the pressure of reality," says Szentjóby, to continue thus: "Of course, the impact of *Cooling Water* – I hope – is due not only to the information it conveys about the tragic, but also to the automatic and destined change it embodies. It turns the approach in a direction that seems insignificant under the graver pressures of everyday life, but I still do believe that this destined change, this, so to say,

abatement, decreasing intensity or cooling, is tragic as it is.” Szentjőby talking in 1971:

<http://exindex.hu/print.php?l=en&page=3&id=773>

The work was made in Hungary after the loss of 1956 revolution and before the forced emigration of the artist to Switzerland in 1976.

The second bottle is made by fluxus artist Georg Brecht around 1968. It is not depicted here.

The third bottle was part of an event Daraya. One of the cities, which suffered most in Syria. The following text was written in September 2012 . A few weeks after the massacre, but month before the final big shellings of Daraya, destroying the whole city.

/Text by Róza El-Hassan copyright the author and Syrian Voices 2012/



Water, Daraya - from the following article 'Bloody Peace'

## **Bloody peace**

By Shadi Alshhadeh copyright author and Syrian Voices



### **The start of movement:**

It was not a novel of Darayya, that small town near of Damascus (8km south west), the awareness and civil activities. In 2003, they started their challenge with the Syrian regime by what known as (Darayya's youth) .there were some active young men arrested after organizing groups to clean the town ,distribute calendars with statement against bribery, peaceful silent demonstrations because of the occupation of Iraq ,calling to boycott the Americans goods ,and other activities that were uncommon at that time in Syria. Before that in 2000, Abdul-Akram Al-Saqa (a religious principal) with some of his students had constructed a local library for reading and culture .it's name was (Sobol Al-Salam "means in English ways of peace")but the national securities had closed it after had become popular.

### **Revolution of Darayya:**

With the successes of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt ,darayya's youth started discussing with other youth from Al-Tal and Qameshly (other Syrian towns ) the factions , reasons and Circumstances that led to falling of top of pyramid in both revolutions and concentrated on the privacy of Syrian situation, and they continued Periodic meetings with women engage. And some activities had started to perform activating the role of individuals and makes him appreciate the importance of his role in make the change and reduce his faith on his abilities such as campaigns of boycott cell phones, paper recycle, cleaning Barada river...etc, our youth worked to call for this activities and involved in them. They were aware of the regime's brutish and his bloody history dealing with any political moves, so their strategies were constrain on reorganize citizens to make peaceful protest with little of civil resistance, claiming for freedom and democracy. Also, they had their own activities on internet and facebook pages. Some of them had arrested while they were staging a sit-in in front of interior ministry at 16-3-2011, one of arrested actives was a pregnant woman in her 6<sup>th</sup> moth. At the same time , since 18-3-2011 (the day that the Syrian revolution was announced to be started in Daraa) the Darayyan's started their Campaign of writing statements against regime on local schools walls .then, the protests moves exploded in Daray'a ,Homs and Douma which push 100's youth to demonstrate first time in Friday the 25<sup>th</sup> march 2011. Since that, the consultations and organizing had been starting to have the first coordination in Darayya chosen by election. It Consisting of five persons , directing the movements and activating it to distribute awareness of peaceful revolution and its values and objectives, constructed her own media office to cover all events could happen in Darayya, it also edited and printed first privet political ,cultural , tactical newspaper (Enab Baladi \_ means local grips from our vine) ,and other activities varied to consist of lots of necessary

economical, social, medical , cultural fields. It also secures and coordinates aides (In-kind and financial) to reach arrester's and martyr's families, and contributes of offering the medical field of treatment , rescues and aids for injured in wounded, and finally notates and documents all revolution events and all what happened



**Other peaceful activities :**

In addition to demonstrating and distributing protest papers and statements on walls , Darayya's youth coordinate with other peaceful groups outdoor such as freedom days youth to rename Darayya's streets to be named of martyrs of revolution and calling and involving the public strikes.

**The first Darayya's martyrs:**

They have fallen in the great Friday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2011. They were Ammar Mahmoud , Walid Kholani , Almo'taz Bellah Alshaar . Their death made all Darayya mourn three days, and more than 50000 mourners.

**Revolution detained:**

Thousands of Darayyans have been detained since the beginning of the revolution , as a try to reduce and end its movement. There were no exceptions . the regime detained national figures ,academicians , member of coordination of Darayya most of them still in jails , and also children ,young girls and pupils.

**Women roles in dignity Revolution in Darayya :**

Women in Darayya shared men in everything including revaluating. First of all , they were near their men staging a sit-in in front of interior ministry in 16-3-2011 and one of them arrested. Then, They share men all peaceful movement specially dangerous demonstrations in Fridays which faced with cursing , shooting ,and even call them to the Air Force Intelligence and forced them to sign pledges not to go out to demonstrate against régime .Darayya's women involved the revolution and worked to support peaceful movement by presents gifts and flowers in holy events for Detainees families ,freedom candles , distribute Awareness papers , calling to sit-in , they also wrote signs and gave aid and even rescued some youth to not get arrested .This link is for one of Darayya's women demonstrations:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bP2h0e8NWqs>





**Giath Matar :**

Giath matar was one of Darayya's activists killed by regime forces during arrest because of torture.



He participated organizing freedom demonstrations in Darayya 2011. He was known and famous because he was present flowers and water for security and military forces during demonstrations. he was arrested 6-9-2011 by trap made by Syrians forces ,they arrested Mae'n Shorbajy who was brother of Yahya Shorbajy one of Syrian activists and forced him to call his brother and told him that he had been wounded .so, Yahya with Giath went directly to the specific place to found the security forces waiting them. In Saturday the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2011 Giath's body was sent back to his family and they immediately prepared his funeral which attended by thousands and one of them was killed that day during it. After that a great Consolation was made for him attended by many foreign Ambassadors. Giath Matar has a son that he didn't see since he was killed before his son birthday, his son was named after him "also Giath matar".

Giath Matar's mother wrote : "I will pay my life to discover your secret .. you are a life secret .. a holy secret .. I believe that god reward your truthful. Was real honest. I can't understand what made Sameeh Shkair sing for you. And what made 50 French persons put your photo on their instruments and create a symphony called the bulbul for Giath Matar and send me Condolences ...and what made Asala (well known Syrian singer) and Malas twins no to forget you when they said to the regime (you presented your bomb ,and we presented Giath Matar) ...I am very proud of you. Proud that I had hold you 9 months and I did stayed for your comfort ... lets trill for the bridegroom Giath .. my son .. I am writing by my tears I believe you feel of me. Miss you .. miss your most pure and beautiful smile at all universe .



#### **Roses and water:**

This idea applied few weeks ago ,when lots of military forces and local securities surrounded Darayya specifically the place of demonstrates . Darayya's young men presented water bottles with flowers and papers written on them "we are all Syrians...why are you killing us ". Darayya's youth including a young man called "Islam" put this thing in the red line separating between them and armies. Islam holding the responsibility of reaches the message, he started a conversation with them and told them about goals of peaceful revolution to stop killing and start new civilian country .finally the soldiers Responded to him. Yehya (another man) is not sure if the soldiers drank this water or not. But he is sure that most of demonstrators could go back safe to their homes that day.

Next Friday , Islam Aldabag consist on override the redline and present the water and rose directly to affect solders whom came to kill and to force meet him closely .he disappeared with his roses , and he still arrested in a cell of Air Force Intelligence prison.







**If the Municipal does not do its job, youth are here:**



In New cultural initiative and renewed, Darayya's activists invited people to campaign called "If the Municipal does not do its job, youth are hear" in order to clean the town and made it better after it suffered of Willful neglect. Most of Darayya's citizens and shops owners involved in The first phase of the campaign (30-31 July -1 August) side by side to free army's elements. The Campaign was quite welcome by inhabitants and significant reaction from shopkeepers who have assisted young people. As some of them volunteered to provide some of the necessary tools and the necessary mechanisms for collecting garbage and rinse the streets (Turks, agricultural vehicle, and water tanks). It seemed satisfaction and pleasure on the faces of inhabitants who reassured about the future of the city in the presence of the likes of these young.

**The horrible Massacre of Darayya:**



It was the biggest Massacre happened in Syria since the revolution has gut start. Death smell was everywhere because of 673 persons (and maybe more) had been killed by regime forces with little international attention and Condemnation except some British word described it as (Inhumanity). Syrian human rites announced that hundred bodies have been founded in Darayya next to Damascus (Syrian capital) when the forces or regime had stormed it after Violent clashes with opposition forces since last Tuesday. Between those dead

"9 persons founded near Omar Bn Al Khatab mosque in Darayya".

According to Syrian human right they were 320 dead since Tuesday, in addition to 34 persons killed the last Saturday.

More than that, inhabitants found 14 additional bodies had been field executed founded in a building basement, they killed by regime forces too.

The Observatory added that about 200 of martyr's name were documented including women ,children , youths



men , and Rebel fighters from the Brigades in the town that saw Heavy shelling and violent clashes and executions field after intrusion .many photos and videos Broadcasted by media for murders pieces including children and women wear tradition clothes Claiming that they were " Terrorist gangs".

#### **Darayya 's peace and sharing life:**

The Darayya's youth protected many public facilities and government institutions from sabotage by a human wall created by the demonstrators themselves .this was one of the most important ideas that tried to establish the principle of non-violence between security forces and demonstrators and published it between demonstrators themselves. firing tires and throwing stones at security disputable in activists' discussions, it has been one considers such acts as a provocation to the soldiers . people of Darya participated in the funeral and condolence martyrs of other regions and send material aid to the people of the affected areas and receive displaced residents of Homs, to promote civil peace between regions .not forgotten that since the beginning of the revolution Darayya's churches bells rang to mourn the martyrs of the demonstrations.

**One of Darayya's martyrs:**



Ahmad Adnan Ranko ...maybe no body recognizes this name but if you walked in the streets and lanes of Darayyya, you will smell his smell everywhere. He was a martyr wrote by his hands revolution phrases on the walls of Darya and chanted demanding freedom and injustice in all Darayya's Neighborhoods and entrances ...he is a martyr who mourned dozens of martyrs ..he was Martyr who reject violence and murder by words he said to someone asked him to take up arms (my voice and my writings are my gun) .Ahmed was a student at the Faculty of Economics Second Year Engaged in the revolutionary movement since the outbreak of the revolution and participated in most demonstrations against Syrian regime .he contributed to the various forms of the revolutionary movement (squirt – the distribution of leaflets – visit the people of the martyrs and detainees, etc.). Ahmed has been killed in 24/08/2012 after being hit by shrapnel And his body left Syria, but his name and his spirit will remain forever anniversary.

Salute to the pure soul ... The hero martyr Ahmed Andnan Rnko .





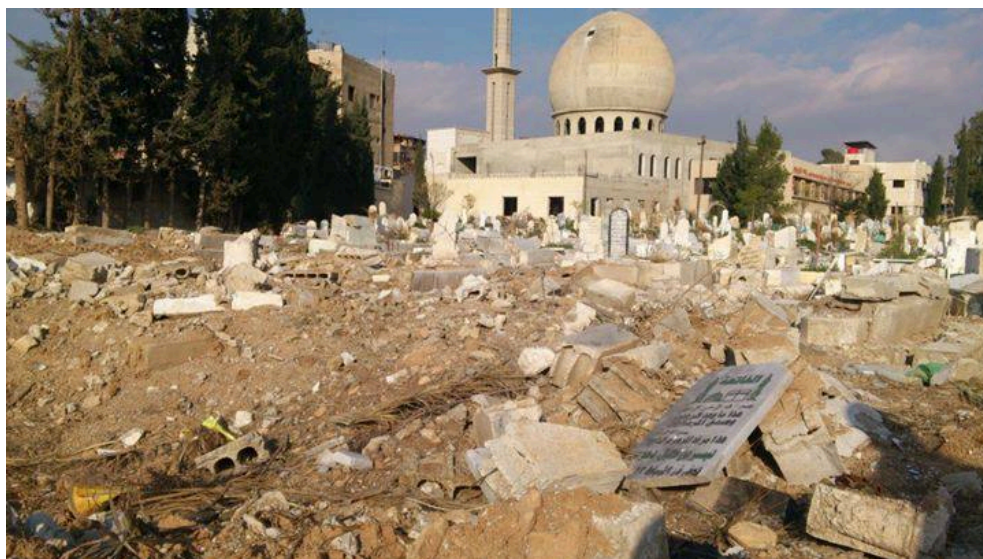
#### **Darayya's children:**

Children of Darrya Waited the same fate of Houle 's children, their parents could not make them feel no fear because that everyone knows (children and parents) that the regime they came out against it is death creator. Perhaps this girl who raised a banner inscribed with "they killed hula 's children, Homs is not far of Darayya, O Lord, upholding the revolution before my turn is com",

Summed up all what could be said.

this banner was raised weeks ago, today as we are talking, I am sorry but I can not assure to you if this little girl is still alive or not, but probably not, since hundreds of children were killed in one of the biggest massacres that happened in Syria.

2012 Augusr- September



one year after writing the arti2013 even the cemetry shelled in Daraya