

Syrian Voices

What is so special in the art of Syria? How can people stand the third year of a terrible fate without breaking?

And how can artists produce works showing so much energy and even brightness in times of darkness and losses?

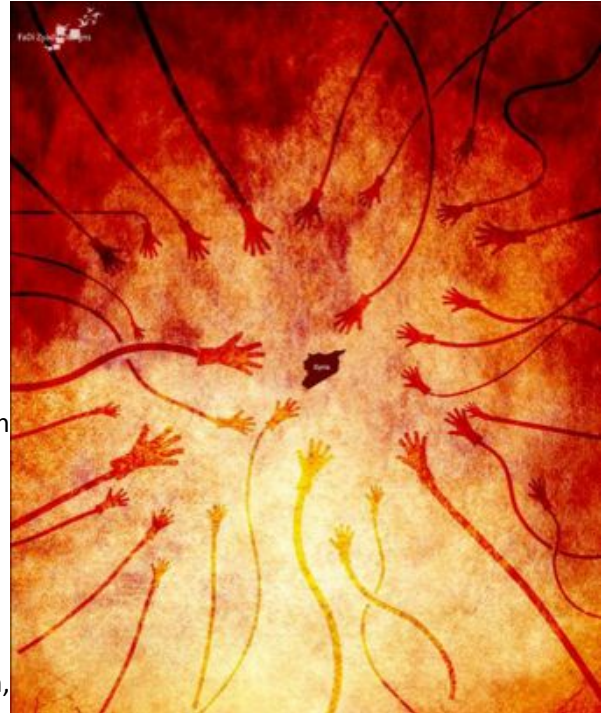
What can we learn from Syrian artists? How can their works show a mental attitude of survival in times of crisis?

We have all seen media images of the total destruction of the country.

What not so many people know is the peaceful poetry of Syrian contemporary art, its depth and wisdom, which is enigmatic, secretive.

The exhibition shows the brightness, confidence and often enigmatic wisdom of Syrian artists in times of crisis.

Since the world is full of threatening problems: overpopulation, migration, ecological problems, this brightness and wisdom of the Jasmine flowers, the symbol of Damascus is needed, its message is part of the message of the Syrian revolution.



Syrian Revolutionary Art - Between Painting and Design

Fadi Zyada, Wissam Al Jazeery and Yara Al Nagm , Khaled Abdulwhahed, Khaled Dawa, Sulafa Hidgazi, Bissane Al Sharif, Shadi Alshhadeh, and others are artists, just to mention a few, mainly young artist born after 1985, some of them a bit older.

Their work is devoted to the Syrian revolution. They often use the tool of computerized graphic design to distribute in form of prints, posters and on the internet. This is a generation, where the passage of painting, drawing and computer design is open, fluid. Khaled Dawa is even using wet clay animation combined with digital photography.

There's hardly any other generation of young artists using and mixing elements and media in such a free way as Syrian revolutionary artists. Everything we thought about the alienation of the image through technical devices is no longer valid. These young people use digital painting in the most immediate way to express their emotions. Many of them studied graphic design, book-illustration or film- animation.

We could introduce all the artists one by one, and we could introduce also their older masters, like Yousuf Abdelke – a great engraver, printmaker and painter, who did not leave Syria and was detained in July 2013 and released a month later. Mohan Dehne, the professor from Damascus Art Academy, emigrated fifteen years ago to the Netherlands, but still had an impact on the younger generation.

Khaled Abdulwahed, gave up his career in Dubai as artistic director of a big US company to return to

Damascus. And a member of our curatorial team, Róza El-Hassan is second generation Syrian, whose life was changed by the events of 2011.

Syrian places- Syrian Cities- Continuity project

What can we show in times of war and what can't we show? How can we tell our story? Shadi Alshhadeh's concept for the exhibition shows the most minimal and distanced way to tell about our values. Our history, our presence and culture. He decided not to show a documentary and keeps the greatest possible distance from the war and the media images. This distance marks our pain and our dignity. The Continuity project is in progress, we present a text and the first few paintings in the exhibition.

New meanings of Pop-Art and digital painting

Artists of this generation use narrative elements that are easily accessible for the public, since the human message should be transferred fast and easily to the universal viewer, regardless of nationality and culture: they always focus on the message instead of formal concerns. The origin of this medium is the political poster, the appeal. Still, even in times of deep darkness it is often playful, youthful and bright. The surface is much more eclectic than the political posters we know from the beginning of the century's leftist movements. They give themselves the freedom to use any element without any ideological or formal restriction, and the outcome is still so Syrian. It has a distinguishable style.

The tragedy and depth of the images is the real background, the broken lives and their truth.

Fadi Zayda places a simple montage on the desktop, a cityscape in ruins, a black and white family picture and a puddle of blood in front of the destroyed street. Title is history.

The montage could have been created in the sixties, in the seventies, or in post-war Germany.

Similarly to many artists' work we don't necessarily see any differences or special context, because there are no necessary ethnographic differences between Syrian families and European families. The images are the mirrors of truth.

Nothing is heavy or overloaded, since these mirrors are light and bright mirrors even while reflecting the saddest personal tragedy. We are all bloggers, the images we see are pieces of art and urgent daily messages.

One of the central elements in the show for me is a little boy drinking light out of a puddle in the shape of Syria. The motif of the little boy drinking from a puddle exists as a documentary photo, and can be found in several art-works.

Above him is the starlit sky.

How can you make such an image? The effects: light, glance, neon, and stars, are they taken from a baroque painting or a science-fiction made in the US, or from esoteric magazines? Or from advertisement to sell the stars of heaven?

What hits me is that these elements fit here. All these tools borrowed from post-modernism gain a new and completely different quality. Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons and Glen Brown would be surprised that pop-art celebrates ethereal spiritual truths.

All the effects that are used in advertisements to build up big lies and fake shiny surfaces to increase consumption appear in this case as the most simple and adequate forms of expression.

The composition of the painting shows a monumental simplicity. We lost a hundred thousand friends and relatives to violence, they died for freedom, and we cannot return to our homes. Fadi Zayda, the young artist witnessed horrible massacres in Northern Syria.

There's no pathos and glimmer in this image, the stars are so close, they are all we have, this is a rational image of darkness and light.

Artists' biographies:

Roza El-Hassan is a conceptual artist and curator and theoretician born in 1966, who uses drawings and objects. Her drawings are dense and simple. She is using minimal elements of enigmatic expression and strength. Her works were shown three times in the Venice Biennial, in the Drawing Center in New York, and recently in 2012, in a retrospective in Kunstmuseum Basel. The exhibitions feature a series of small drawings and objects, as well as some of her best drawings between 1999 and 2013 on humanitarian issues.

Roza El-Hassan creates careful metaphors in situations when language and documentary end, when we arrive to the sensations of the unspoken. Still, she uses the simplest and most accessible elements: Yasmeen flowers symbolizing the cities of Syria, on a switched-off computer screen. They also symbolize women's fate, love and non-violent attitudes, mourning and beauty, and something that is full of secrets. They symbolize Damascus and the martyrs. The computer screens, the drinking glass, and all our daily objects are so close to us that we often do not realize them anymore, in the same way we often do not realize what is most important in our lives.

She wrote her doctorate thesis in Budapest about social design.

Heba Hroub is a young Syrian artist born in 1991 in Damascus, graduated from the Damascus University in 2012, the faculty of fine art and she studied art at the Adham Ismael Academy. Hroub participated in several exhibitions in Damascus. The revolution in Syria have crushed Heba's soul at some point but she quickly turned that into an inner energy that she transformed to the outside world as brilliant art work. Today, Hroub volunteers in Zaytoon with other groups of Syrians, trying to make refugee children smile again. Heba often creates gesture paintings and portraits, and for this show she painted a series of Syrian City paintings using the finest miniature painting tradition.

Myriam Al-obied is a young Syrian artist born in 1988 in Dayer El-Zour, the city by the Euphrates river, in the eastern part of Syria. She graduated from the faculty of fine art from the Damascus University in 2012. Al-obied participated in several exhibitions in Syria, and she often volunteered for various activities with Syrian children. Myriam usually works with animation. For the Syrian City Paintings 'Continuity', she creates works on paper.

Hanaa Al-Ukla was born in 1990, graduated from the faculty of fine art from the Damascus University in 2012 – her major was visual communication. Al-Ukla participated in several exhibitions. Al-Ukla volunteered in the Syrian Trust for Development and recently she volunteered for many activities with Syrian children. Her paintings and photo-montages show the values and the freedom of paintings. She is one of the younger Syrian artists, who can use digital tools in a way painters used a brush to express their most intimate and deepest sentiments throughout the centuries. Young Syrian artists like Hanaa give a new meaning and new values to digital art and photography. The glossy photo-paper is fresh like a wet piece of gouache or oil painting. Hers is a young generation

using immaterial media as well as brush and canvas with a high level of artistic virtuosity and human depth, demanding more humanity in the world.

Sami AlRifai's work in this show is a painting created on a sheet of newspaper. In the picture we can see the dense, strong and dark form of the famous Crack de Chevalier, the world's biggest crusader's fortress, which is or was incredibly well perceived. The strength and darkness of the fortress and its image represents the deep mental force of the artists and the people of Syria in the darkest times. Still, the statement happens without any pathos, on a piece of daily newspaper and in simplest manner of realism. The image is part of curator Shadi Alshadeh's city paintings 'Continuity' concept: the Syrian city paintings, made by contemporary artists who often work in abstract modernist ways, show realistic images of the ancient historical heritage which was damaged or destroyed in Syria.

Fadi Zyada was born in 1989, he is a young Syrian from the city of Idleb, a city that witnessed horrible massacres committed by the Assad's forces during the Syrian revolution; thousands of videos and pictures came out of this city to show the world what was happening in there, all these pictures have helped Fadi discover his talent when he started to see pictures, then imagine the same pictures in some other way so he worked on pictures to make his own design which he could imagine to upload it again on the social media to give the world the chance to see the same pictures but in a different way. Fadi is a master of combining the popular visual language of the rural parts of Northern Syria with digital art and photography. He gives a new message and content to the inherited forms of pop-art.

Wissam Al Jazairi is a young Syrian artist who was born in Damascus in 1990. He began studying digital arts in 2008 at the University of New Bulgaria, and graduated in 2011. He started political drawing following the outbreak of Syrian Revolution in 2011, and participated in several exhibitions to support the peaceful movement in Syria. He is one of the very well known Syrian bloggers and visual activists.

Yara Al Nagem also uses ink and gouache, as well as digital tools for her posters and compositions when she paints red and fresh cactus fruits in the shape of the country. We can read in Arabic, "Patience has an end". Like many Syrian artists she uses elements from everyday life: a cactus fruit, a bag, a key, a petrol station's tap with a heart. She deconstructs the rigid pathos of power relations with female humor and irony. While Shadi Alshadeh created a community space in Cairo, Yara Al Nagem creates a community space in various forms in Istanbul. She volunteered for a local Syrian radio. Her design is just a small part of all her community projects and the smile she is putting on other people's face like a magician.

-----Translation of the text on the: "Patience has an end"



Mohan Dehne used to be a professor in Damascus at the art university when he left Syria, while most of the other artists still live in Syria and in the region. Mohan is one of the few artist in the

show who left Syria fifteen years ago. His works are showing the melancholic distance and a highly sophisticated critical view of the events.

In the work titled *Time* we see a middle-aged couple. There's no ethnic hint. It might be related to the lost notion of normality and bourgeois culture in Syrian middle class. The couple is placed in the floating spot of memories. It could be your parents, or an uncle and aunt. Why do they look so suspiciously normal and familiar to us? Where did they live? And when was the photo taken? Black and white... family albums, memories from the seventies, they could have been taken in Damascus or Amsterdam or Lausanne. At the same time it is the first contemplation of time of our personal life's through the eyes of a great photographer.

Mohan Dehne has another work, the series *Wall 1* and *Wall 2* in the exhibition. This is one of his main works. It shows an enigmatic space of abstraction in blue, white and red colors.

Diala Birsly is a young Syrian artist who started to work with cartoon and animation early in 2001. She was born in 1980, she has participated in many exhibitions and worked on exhibitions for the Iraqi refugees. Her works are of elementary simplicity, showing the events of Syria and everything that happened to her friends and other artists without any false manner, like telling a story in the simplest way. The drawing about the hunger strike of an imprisoned Syrian woman was widely distributed in the activists' network. The spoon with the knot and the face of the woman on the drawing is one of the most well-known icons of the revolution. The drawing of the camera refers to our beloved friends and colleges, the documentary filmmakers whom we lost. We don't have words to describe it.

Amr Fahed creates strong political and structuralist images about the demonstrations in Syria. He consciously uses elements of early conceptual art from the sixties and seventies: black and white photography, structuralism deconstruction of the image and repetitive elements. Since the painting and sculpting department of Damascus Art academy was under governmental control, Amr and many others were trained in the commercial world and became artists during the revolution.

Curator: **Shadi Alshhadeh** is a cyber activist, human rights activist, sociologist, writer and curator of contemporary Syrian art. He collected with Heba Hroub and Roza El-Hassan the material for the exhibition from artist's studios in the remotest places in Syria, from places of exile covering Dubai, Istanbul and many other cities. Never tired, he is one of the most active cultural workers, who sacrificed all he had to work for others and took a high personal risk. He is the founder and director of Zaytoon. For him, art plays an important role in the social transition of Syria.

With many thanks to Dr. Marie Christine Gaillout- Mattheu, Lausanne and to Zaytoon in Damascus, Cairo (Egypt), Mersin (Turkey).

For more information on Syrian Voices and Zaytoon please contact: Shadi Alshhadeh juristishere@gmail.com or Roza El-Hassan rozaelhassan@gmail.com

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Picture – Appendix

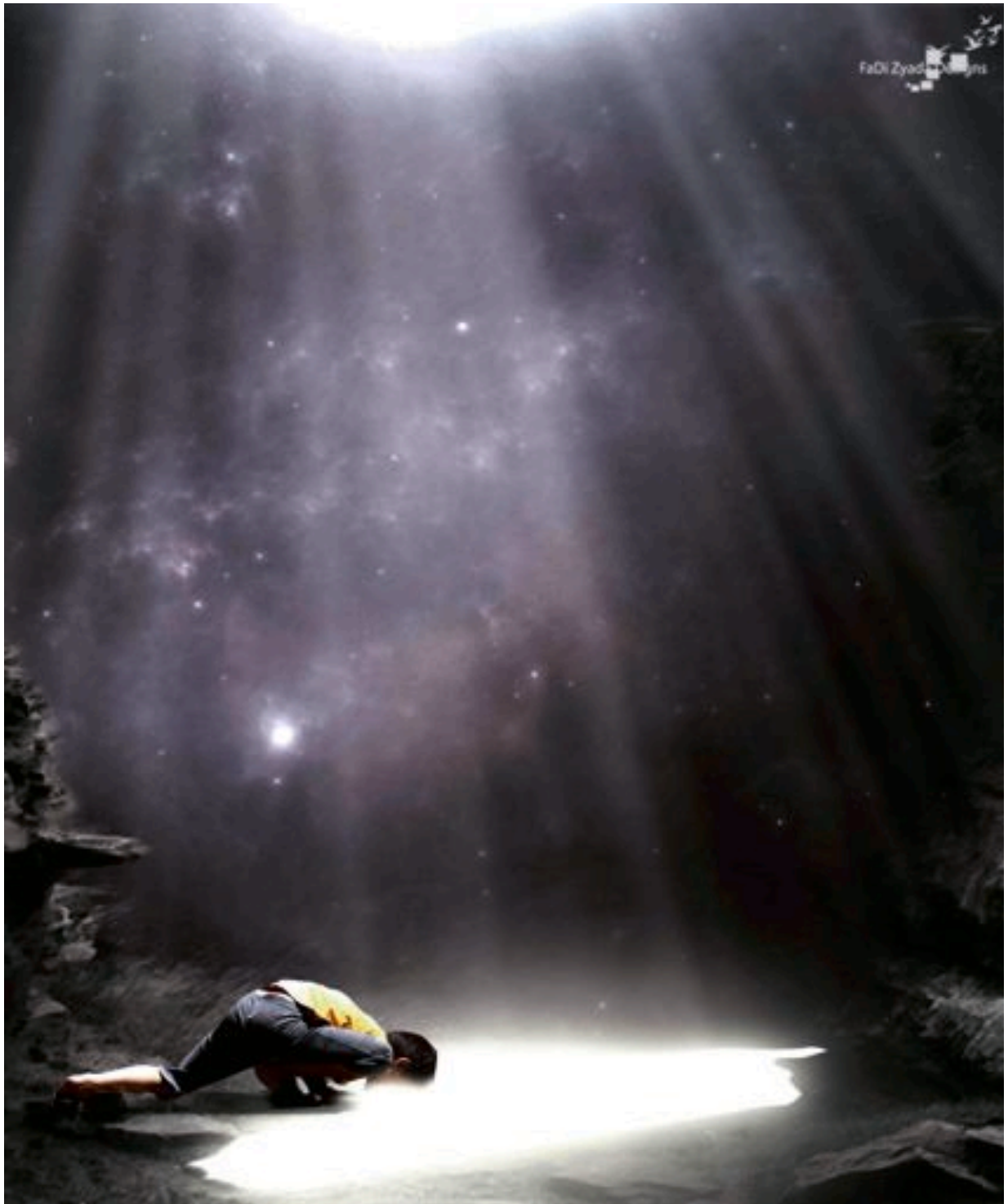
Amr Fahed



Fadi Zyada







Wissam Al Jazairi



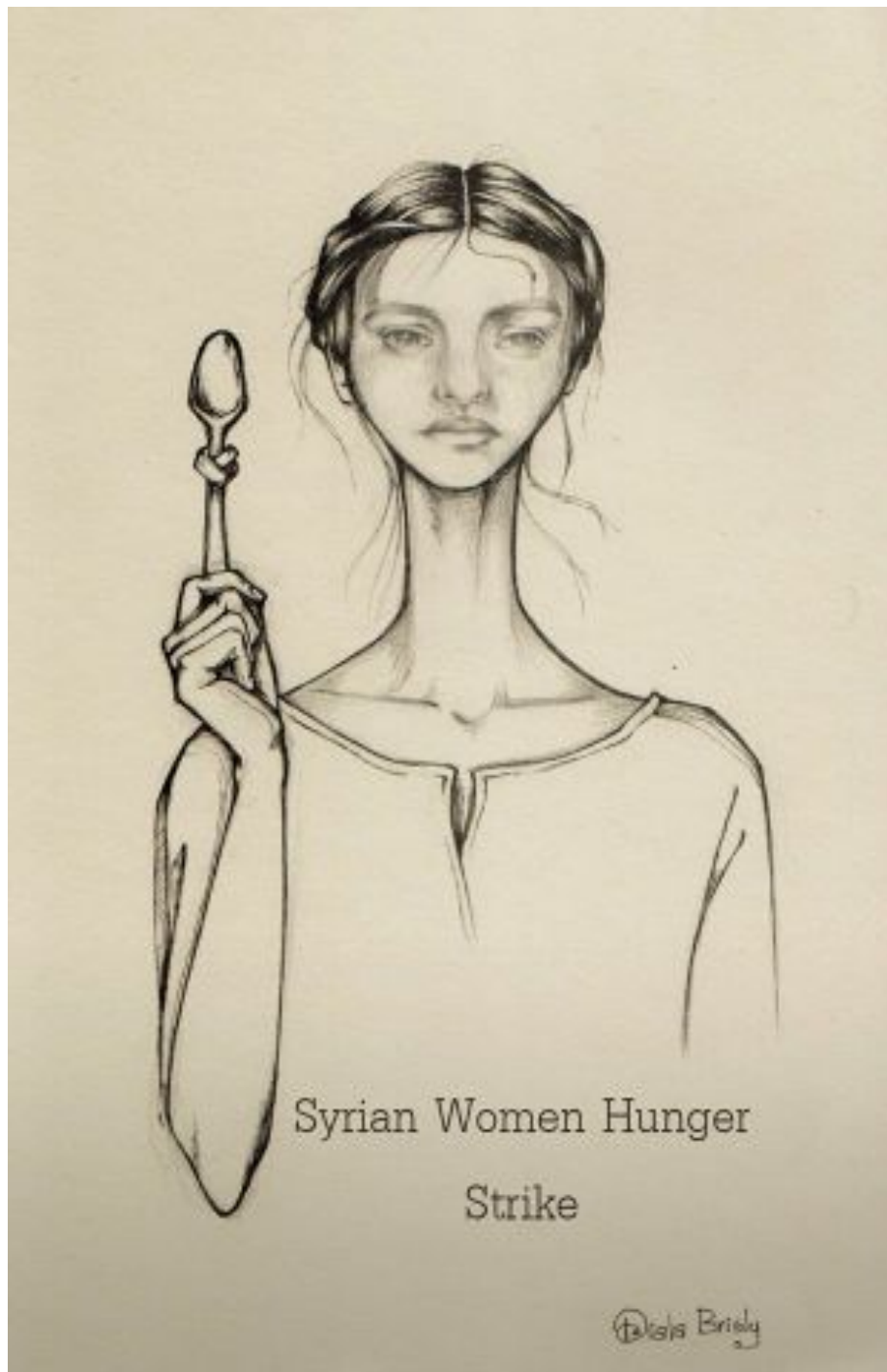
Wissam Al Jazairy and Lens Homsy



Hana Alukla, digital painting, made in Homs



Diala Brisly



Leave our journalist and
leave us



Drake Brisky



Daraa (Arabic: درعا, Levantine Arabic: [ˈdarʕa]), also Darʿā, Daraʿa, Deraa, Dera, and Derʿā ("fortress", compare Dura-Europos), is a city in southwestern Syria, just north of the border with Jordan. It is the capital of Daraa Governorate, historically part of the ancient Hauran region. The city is located about 90 kilometres (56 mi) south of Damascus on the Damascus-Amman highway, and is used as a stopping station for travelers.

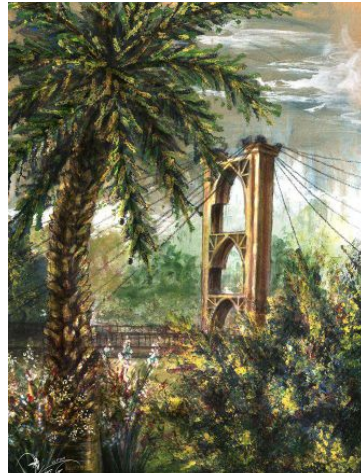
Same motive: Omari mosque by Wissam, Minaret destroyed in 2013



wissam al jazairi

We Will Stay Here
Omari Mosque

Myriam Al-Obied, painting on destroyed suspension bridge – made for Continuity – paintings on destroyed cultural heritage Syrian city projects.



Deir ez-Zor, also spelled Dayr al-Zawr, Der Ezzor, Deir Azzor, and other variants Syriac: ܕܝܪ ܙܘܪ, Armenianձոր, Ter Zor, is the 6th largest city in Syria and the largest in the eastern part of Syria. Located 450 km (280 mi) to the northeast from the capital Damascus on the shores of Euphrates River, Deir ez-Zor is the capital of the Deir ez-Zor Governorate. According to the 2004 official census, 211,857 people are residing in the city.

The city is also famous for the Deir ez-Zor suspension bridge which spans the Euphrates and was completed in 1927. The Deir ez-Zor Museum keeps thousands of antiquities collected from nearby archeological sites in Northern Mesopotamia. Main campuses of Al-Furat University and Al-Jazeera University are also located there. Many other polytechnic schools and professional institutes provides tertiary education are based in the city as well. The local daily newspaper Al Furat and few other publications are published there and circulated in neighboring Al-Hasakah and Raqqah governorates.

Sami Rifai for Continuity City paintings project: painting of Crack de Chevelier, famous Crusader fortress, tempera painting on found newspaper.



Yara Al Nagem, Eid Gift. . 2013 August after chemical attack in Damascus. Motive are candies for children given for Eid feast





Yara
alrajem

The first exhibition of Syrian Voices took place in a hospital in Laussane, as a site specific project with kind support of Dr. Galliou-Matthieu. It was a first place where we could show the young artists work , which appears aoften in from of blogs as an exhibition.



Yara Al Nagem, exhibtion view in the hospital in Lausanne

Mohan Dehne





Roza El-Hassan

Share. 2013 June video work counting the days in Syria since the beginning of revolution



Sukun, Break, 2013 Aug 21

