

Sculptures tell story of war whose atrocities linger in the lives of millions in Middle East

SHARJAH, EMIRATE OF SHARJAH, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, August 11, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Inspired by Mesopotamian civilization, the sculptor Muatasim Alkubaisy's artworks reconstruct the plights and calamities that Middle Eastern states, particularly his home country of Iraq, have endured in modern times.

The artist draws on the history of the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers, on whose shores the Mesopotamian civilization thrived, to create sculptures with space for "fear, chaos and hope" all at the same time.

Among his sculptures now on display at the University of Sharjah's College of Fine Arts and Design, where he is a senior tutor, are works featuring bodies with spaces on their way to the unknown.

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Muatasim Alkubais



Rodents surmount a U.S. Humvee in the sculpture called "Occupation": "The mice have different meanings," says Alkubaisy. "They could symbolize occupation or the enemy. In any case, this is not a beloved creature."

His gallery in downtown Sharjah is a journey through hard times. It is Alkubaisy's "permanent" exhibition, frequented by visitors, sculpture enthusiasts, and Emirati aesthetes with an interest in possessing bronze sculptures to adorn their mansions.

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There is an atmosphere of incarceration in the gallery. When asked why the curious bodies with

bloated noses, arms and abdomens look so weird, he points to the history of his homeland and the larger Middle East.

“The bodies, the horses, the chairs, the faceless and cramped heads, and the mice you see are inquisitive,” he says. “They are there for us to learn things from them, and through them we delve into the mystery of meanings they convey.”

Some depict refugees and displaced people stacked in boats. Some are huddled in cubes. Viewers may envisage some form of hell, or rather a hellish hypothetical world.

“It is true, you may be taken aback by what you see. But once you become aware of the daily reality of the situation of my country and probably other countries in the region, you enter into a smooth dialogue with my statues,” Alkubaisy says.

Most of Alkubaisy’s artworks are symbolic of tyranny, but they at the same time speak for victims of wars, sanctions, and strongman leaders who act and govern with impunity.

Though tyrannical in shape, the sculptures whisper the voices of multitudes of victims who have borne the brunt of cataclysmic and catastrophic events in the region.

“They [sculptures] are symbols. They express nothing when taken out of their historical context and the reality of daily life. One has to read the sculptural text of the artworks to divulge their secrets,” says Alkubaisy.



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Instead of a human-headed winged bull, the sculptural hallmark of Assyria, Alkubaisy’s bull in the sculpture named “Opium” has the trunk and head of a human body, plus arms that it uses to push a baby stroller.

His thought-provoking "Scarecrow" depicts the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2021. It mimics the Statue of Liberty in New York, but the message and voice are totally different.

The rays in the halo topping the head of the Statue of Liberty are replicated, but the rays are more like thorns. Unlike Lady Liberty's seven rays, which evoke the sun enlightening the globe's seven continents, Alkubaisy's nine rays are in the shape of horns forecasting destruction and ruin.

While the Statue of Liberty is said to depict the Roman goddess of freedom holding a torch above her head with her right arm, the left arm in Alkubaisy's statue squeezes hard on a ball. The statue is faceless with a miniature head indicating rash thinking, and its legs without feet imply a quagmire.

"I changed rays into horns because the latter give malignant figurative meaning in different civilizations in the Orient, including Mesopotamia," Alkubaisy explains. "The 'Scarecrow' is full of symbolic meanings of a hegemonic power which wreaks destruction in the wake of its invasions."

Sculptures of creatures, most prominently mice, are reproduced in shapes that far exceed their reality. However, the sculptor tries to preserve the way their bodies move in nature.

"You do not need a lot of effort to get to the meaning. Mice, like other rodents, are destructive to harvests. Who, they represent and the message they drive home, I hope it is clear."

Chairs, on the other hand, symbolize power, or rather abuse of power. Seated figures in curious hegemonic positions convey that the motionless chair and the motile body occupying it have become one.

"I rely on bronze, a metal commonly used by Mesopotamian sculptors in Ur, Babylon and Nineveh," Alkubaisy says.

Most outstanding is a bronze artwork titled "Mesopotamia", or the land between the rivers. Five distorted figures are on their feet on what looks like a coffin containing a corpse. A strongman with his hands in his pockets is in the forefront, and the other four figures, with a variety of body postures, are on guard to protect the strongman and obey orders. What is so striking is what looks like a skull in the background.

"This is how I see the reality in the region. That is how things have been in my homeland," says Alkubaisy.

He adds: "Not all details of individuals, creatures or things in my sculptures are there, but I think they create a lexicon as massive as the plight and wars they attempt to unravel."

One bronze sculpture, “Belated Victories”, is symbolic of the outcome of wars in Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries. A big-bellied military figure with a peaked cap and hands rolled behind his back—the body language signifying glee and indifference to tragedy in the region—stands victoriously on top of a knocked-out tank.

Alkubaisy, who was born and educated in Iraq, does not hide his resentment of the U.S.-led invasion of his homeland in a bronze carving showing a U.S. Humvee surmounted by three rodents. Titled “Occupation”, the artwork signifies “apprehension of war and the destruction it brings in its wake,” says Alkubaisy. “The mice have different meanings, they could symbolize occupation or the enemy. In any case, this is not a beloved creature.”

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