



Jawad Salim.



Faiq Hassan.

Jawad Salim and Faiq Hassan

and the birth of modern art in Iraq

Buland al-Haidari

It is almost impossible for any enthusiast to understand the beginning of the modern art movement in Iraq without taking into account the works of two of its early leaders whose respective conceptions, explorations, and efforts function as a summary index of the development of that movement as an entity distinct from its counterparts in other Arab countries. They set for a myriad of their disciples, students and friends two parallel but distinct courses to follow. Faiq Hassan himself, in one of his letters, comments on the depth of his relationship to Jawad Salim, 'Among others I remember Jawad Salim whom I continued to meet until his death, with the result that we left clear and important marks on contemporary Iraqi art, as the two of us endeavoured to explore the questions of art. For after completing our studies abroad, we found ourselves in a position to develop answers and to set the course for the younger generation to follow, in the light of our examples. At the death of this irreplaceable colleague, I found myself once again alone.'

In fact while each colleague was able to complement the efforts of the other, each, with his own divergent point of view, was vying in his own right for the leadership of modern Iraqi art, aiding it in its labours and ensuring its birth. Thus no reference can be made to the influence of the one on the course and development of this art, without reference to that of the other. More specifically, their parallel efforts but divergent styles led to the foundation of two groups; in 1950, *Alruwad*, henceforth referred to as The Pioneers, and in 1951, *Baghdad l'il fan'l Hadith*, henceforth referred to as The Baghdad Group for Modern Art. In this way they succeeded in strengthening the wings of modernism.

The aim of The Pioneers focused on such qualities as skill, primitive expressiveness, and originality, in the use of lines, colours, and light, qualities exemplified by Faiq Hassan who kept in his mind's eye the paintings of Courbet, Delacroix and the Impressionists. On the other hand, members of the second group, The Baghdad Group for Modern Art, sought to realize themselves by an inquiry into the nature of art and by their capacity to arrive at fruitful answers in that inquiry. Consequently, they affirmed the role of the intellectual in painting, and represented the Iraqi milieu with a new way of looking at reality, following Picasso in believing that the intellect needs to function like all our other faculties. Thus did Jawad Salim, prodded by such intellectualism, endeavour in his own way to search for new values, while Faiq Hassan sought to affirm individual as well as traditional values and to establish a recognition of their canons. The first was trying to invent, the second, to develop. Jawad's lot was to change from time to time from one style to another, 'trying to forget what I have learned,' as he put it, while Faiq managed to maintain his intense awareness and acute memory which recalled everything he learned theoretically and practically, neither forgetting a thing nor, for a moment, neglecting to display his distinguished practical skill which amply proves his mastery.

Whereas Jawad conceived more in terms of shape and volume than colour, being both a sculptor and a painter, Faiq was fascinated by colour, to the extent that he could not see his figures and shapes except in terms of colour, 'for it is not enough that you transfer your form from reality but you must body forth your conception of it in terms of colour.' Jawad sought to lead the observer to contemplative perusal, through a myriad of minor symbols which represent mental

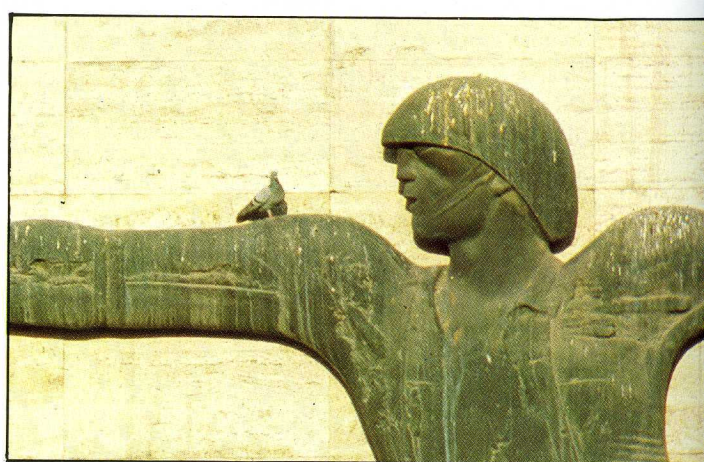


Portrait of Zenab (the artist's daughter) by Jawad Salim. Plaster.

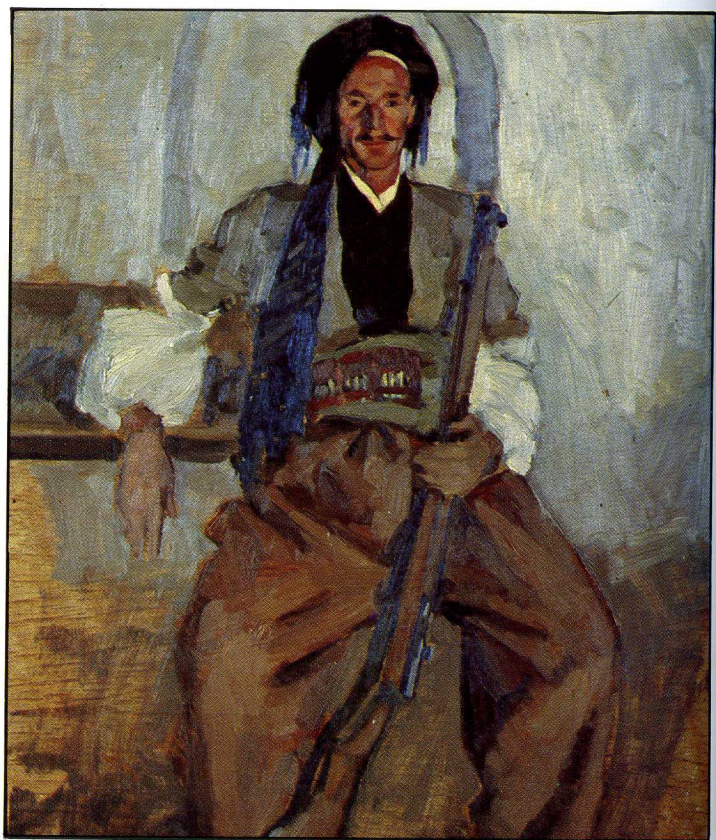
concepts mixed with decorative designs, in a manner which is a distillation of their traditional usage, whereas Faiq sought to submerge the beholder in the atmosphere of an artistic work designed with remarkable precision, an aesthetic submersion in which surface and depth unite in one swift and direct emotional response, by virtue of the cohesiveness of the parts of a given painting and of their dependence on the central dynamic point of its subject. Jawad, in his search for his identity, worried about everything he did, as he pressed for innovation and modernity, and as he investigated the accomplishments of various cultures and the possibility of uniting them in his own works, while Faiq found ample security in a combination of practical knowledge, deft hand, sharp eye, and clear purpose, 'for I know my own problem better than others, without exaggerating my capacities,' he said, adding 'and I am still true to myself without any fear.' Such confidence and such truth to the self were, on the other hand, the very source of worry and fear disturbing Jawad's tranquillity.

In spite of the fact that Faiq Hassan was Jawad's senior by about seven years, and in spite of the existence of other artists, like Akram Shukri, Hafith Al Durubi, and Ata Sabri, who were closer to Faiq in age, modes of expression, and technical skill, it was in Jawad Salim that he found the artist who was wont to celebrate his experimentation, observe his transformations, and define his attitude, to the extent that the task of studying his creative works has required a detached analysis of each of his stylistic phases which form a summary chronicle of his personal development. The study of Faiq Hassan, on the other hand, has had to take increasingly into consideration his accumulation of experiences, skills and concomitant artistic values, for each of his paintings refers back to and follows a preceding one. Thus his creative efforts have been directed by his patient desire to realize his identity, as he developed his technique and varied his subjects, preserving his peculiar skills, in order to apply them anew. Even at times when he is impelled by his experimental drive to try cubism or abstractionism, he develops his geometric figures by applying whatever he has learned from his previous works, such as light values, mass arrangement, and colour harmony. Thus the various artistic values unite in one aesthetic concept, by virtue of 'the general store of the axioms and conventional rules of art,' as Herbert Spencer put it, and by virtue of the inevitable progress which follows as a result of evolutionary preferences and the continuous tension between tradition and individual choice.

Thus developed our modern art, fostered by Faiq Hassan, the assured master and by Jawad Salim, the student who faced a test every day. It was an art nurtured by the treasures of the Iraqi Museum, the treasures of the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian cultures of Mesopotamia, and by the great artistic works of our Arabic Islamic heritage. It was inspired by the art movements of Europe and by its adventurous artists, as it sought to develop for itself a distinctive style by combining elements derived from its heritage, from its present culture, and from its social and geographic conditions. As this art consciously sought to derive its originality from its past heritage, so it consciously tried to break away from that very heritage, in order to encounter the currents of artistic modernity elsewhere in the world, especially Europe. European art itself was in turn trying to



Part of the Liberation Monument. Jawad Salim. (Top)
Preliminary sketch for the Liberation Monument. (Below)



Faiq Hassan. Portrait of a Kurdish man.



rejuvenate itself and overcome its crises by deriving its inspiration from the arts of the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as from prehistoric cave paintings, African masks, Islamic decorations, and Arabic calligraphy, and by employing such elements according to a modern outlook.

The post war milieu

Much of this happened during the gloomy years following the Second World War, when the whole world, tired and exhausted, lay licking its wounds. The poetry, the literature, and the art, which infiltrated into our midst, reflected a great gloom, a language full of emotional tension, and divergent styles all trying to find some happiness in the retreat to a kind of individual self-satisfaction or in the overcoming of private crisis. During that time we listened with great anxiety, and read in our daily papers the declarations of thinkers and scientists whose expectations and predictions offered no ray of hope for the world of the future. Einstein warned the world and all humanity of the impending disaster which might result from America's possession of the atomic bomb, a weapon it might not hesitate to use for a thousand and one reasons, 'for there are those who are least sensitive to the plight of humanity.' Harold Urie voiced his terrifying appeals to awaken the world from its error, saying, 'I write to frighten you; I myself am frightened; all the scientists I know are frightened.' And Aldous Huxley spoke of the criminals who 'pave the way to Hell.'

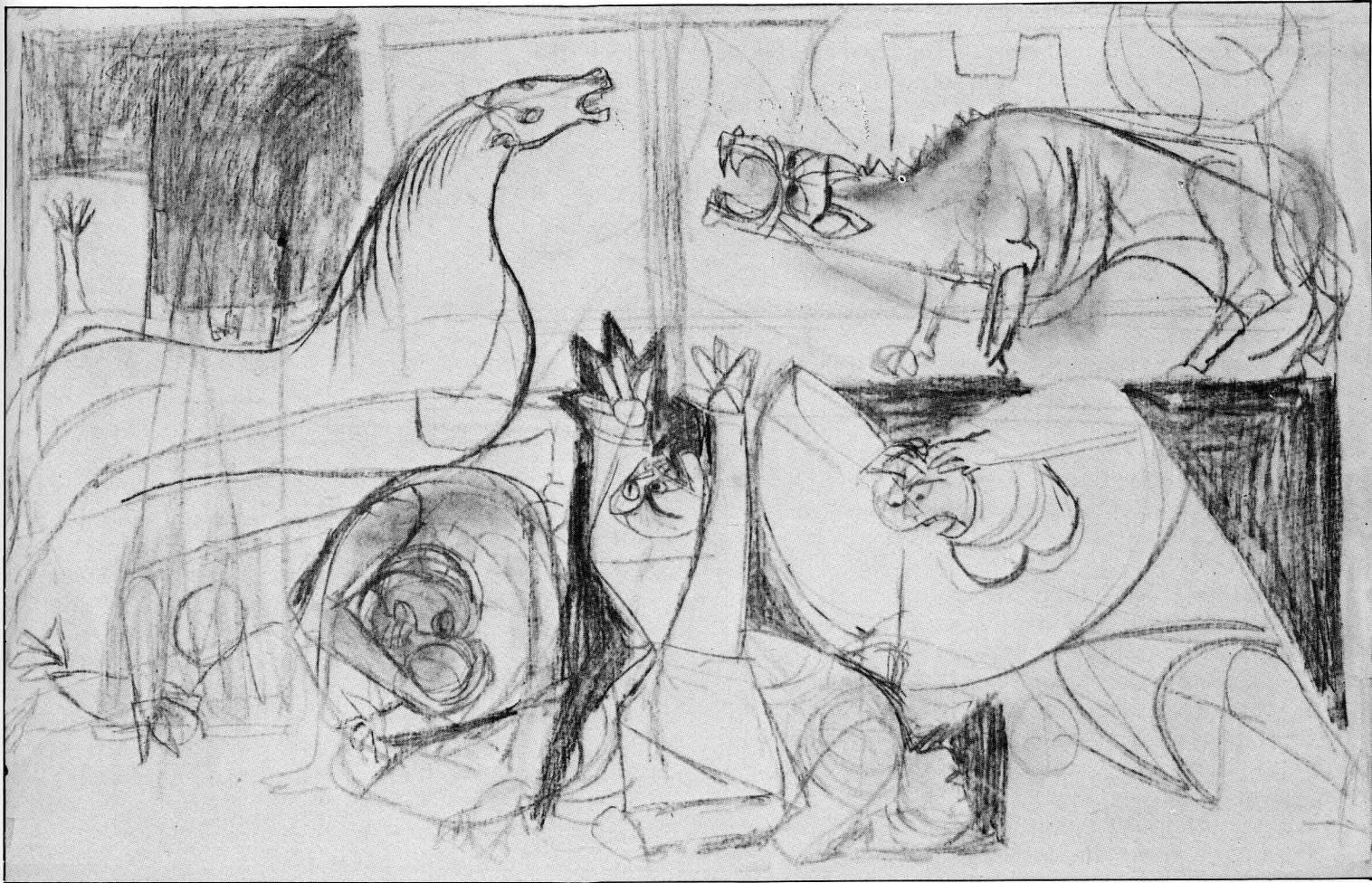
It was then that we sat day and night attentive to the voices of newscasters and commentators informing us from moment to moment about the latest news covering the extent of the disaster inflicted by the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and about the scientists' predictions of pains to come, in addition to the hundred thousand casualties already sustained. At the same time there were those of us who angrily followed reports circulating here and there about some local merchant who mixed wheat flour with wood shavings and ground date stones and sold the mixture as bread to the people. There were those of us who maintained our optimism, and those of us who masochistically recited the disasters, in preparation for a poem, a painting, or a short story.

Indeed while all of this was taking place, a group of cultivated men, painters, men of letters, and poets, endeavoured to develop the particulars of a new language on which they depended for expressing their reality and their awareness of its problems, both in the context of their specific environment and of their time, in a way difficult for their old language to do. Meanwhile, they were being beckoned by contemporary European artists who vaguely regarded art as a fertile virgin ground, providing the utmost potential for their capabilities and for their adventurisms which disregarded all rules and bounds. This was the incentive goading many of our artists and men of letters to revolt against the prevailing conventions through shades of expressions ranging from the pessimism of Nietzschean revolt to the optimism of Rousseauesque revolution. Such a course was a reversal of the initial desire of such artists to follow in the footsteps of their amateurish predecessors of whom they had heard or some of whose works they had seen; predecessors who, like Abd Al Qadir Al Rassam, Salih

Zaki, Asim Hafith, Haj Muhammed Salim, Fathi Safwat, and Shawkat Al Rassam, adhered to the literal imitation of nature. Such common bent led inevitably to the formation of cohesive blocks and groups, each polarized and led by one distinguished Iraqi artist; The Pioneers led by Faiq Hassan, The Baghdad Group for Modern Art, by Jawad Salim, and *Al Intibaiyeen* (the Impressionists), by Hafith Al Durubi. In actuality, however, the art movement in the fifties comprised solely the first two groups, in addition to a sprinkling of individual artists who preferred to preserve their individuality but nonetheless still worked in one way or another within the framework of these two groups. Such a looseness was typical, for given the variety of their experiences and the diversity of their developments, there was no unifying program even among the members of a given group.

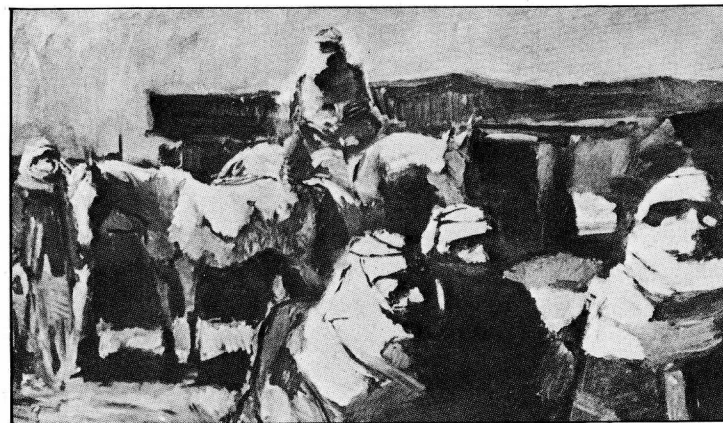
One should mention here the role played by some foreign artists, hurled into Baghdad as soldiers by the war. We used to see them entering our café with their painting tools, in order to sketch with short lines and pale colours some scene from our daily life. Polish artists such as Matuchik, Jabski, and Sigmund painted with a new look. We saw, for example, a painting by the English artist Kenneth Wood comprising scenes of Baghdad, in a daring impressionistic construct which defied the bounds of realism, combining *Al-Hamraa* Cinema and *Al-Mirjan* Mosque with other scenes, all within the framework of a certain inspiration which captures much of the character of our Arab country. There ensued among other artists many a long discussion which began with an ironic question and ended with a heated debate, as they tried to reach an accommodation with such a representation which consisted of reality as it is, as the artist sees it, and as he would like it to be. Such a representation antagonized some of these artists, while it engrossed others who endeavoured to adapt it, in order to forge a new style which would lend the colour, the line, and the shape of a new meaning. While the papers were busily headlining in large letters the world events, we listened from time to time to one of our young critics saying of these foreign artists: 'How much I have laughed at such scenes of Baghdad. They may have been in Baghdad, but they certainly did not see it, for they fixed on their noses the glasses of the French schools of the nineteenth century. This is the worst mistake an artist may commit, that is, to look through glasses borrowed from someone else, a mistake committed only by a second-rate artist.' Meanwhile another would opine that the paintings of Matuchik 'delighted me, for they adumbrated a philosophy hard to fathom without study and penetration, and they revealed his deep absorption of our Iraqi life and atmosphere'. However, one should not stop with the derision of the first nor the wonderment of the second, although the first was more exact in criticizing the superficiality of their treatment of the Iraqi scene.

This however does not negate their patent influence on Faiq Hussan and Jawad Salim, as the latter acknowledged in his diary of 1944: 'In this brief period of time, many people came to Baghdad, which unlike Europe, encouraged their productivity and offered to the artists among them a new world of vision, in the shadow of its artistic domes. These artists were not students of the Beaux Arts in Paris nor the Slade School in London, but they were men with new ideas, men who mixed in their artistic works the distillation of



Drawing by Jawad Salim.

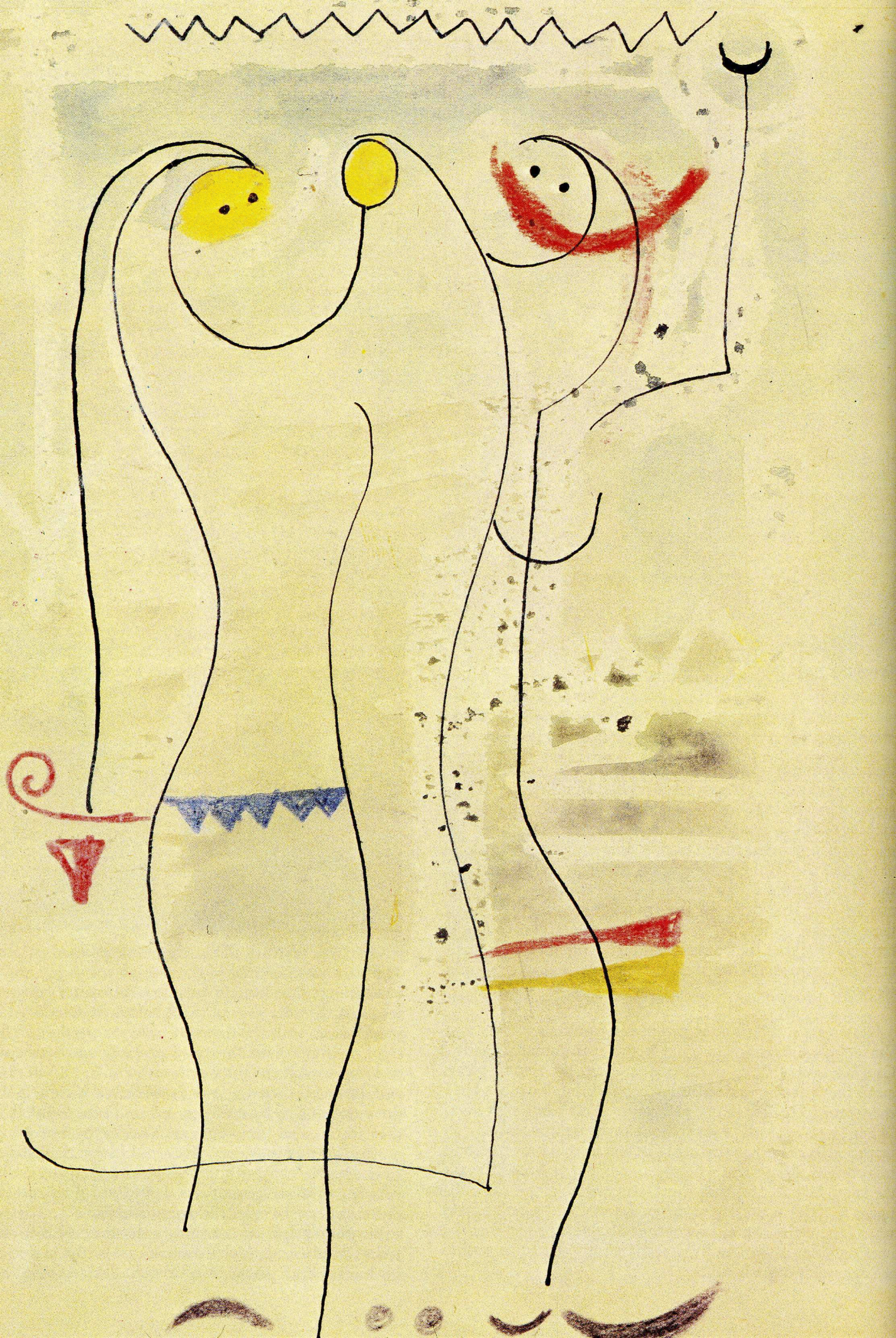
Faiq Hassan. *Arab Family*. Oil. ▶



their contemplations and studies with their world of feeling and imagination....These foreigners had an influence on this group of local artists, an influence which was not merely the exchange of new programmes, for they were all united by one instinctive bent, a bent purely human, namely, the love of life and the struggle for natural order....The love of life and of the simple things which help us to forget death.' It may be true that none of the Iraqi artists inherited from these foreign colleagues a distinguishable style, but it is certainly true that they at least inquired together with them in all seriousness, 'What should we paint, and why should we paint?'

Picasso says, 'What concerns us is Cézanne's anxiety and Van Gogh's sufferings, in other words, the human tragedy.' Gauguin says, 'When my wooden shoes hit a solid pavement, they produce a deep and strong sound. That is what I endeavour to realize in my paintings.' And Van Gogh says, 'When I paint the sun, I want to make the beholders feel it as it turns in its orbit, emanating light and heat in powerful and tremendous waves; and when I paint a field of wheat, I want the beholders to feel that the essence within the ear continues to drive it until it matures, bursts, and scatters; and when I paint the apple, I want the beholders to feel that the juice outside its skin and the seeds within it labour within the dynamics of its fertility.'

One may say that all these men were in search of the way to find what is eternal in these transient things and what is everlasting in the human soul. It was on such a quest that the Iraqi artist endeavoured to transform his feelings into the work of art, and to free his paintings from the still lives, the rigid portraits with the smeared faces and artificial poses, seeking instead, in the common people, and in the village and the markets of the town, sources for his art. In wartime, the emotions of men cluster around centres of feeling, so that fear, hope, despair, and anxiety become sources of motivation for the artist. Thus did Jawad Salim and others frequent the cafés and stand in street corners with their painting tools in spite of the clamour of the passers-by and the mockery of the children, and thus did they brave atmospheres full of alcohol, smoke and sham laughter. Jawad tried to express his interactions with the sensibility of his society with provocative scenes, dark colours, and titles



bearing the tinge of protest, as in 'Prostitutes in Summer,' or in 'Prostitutes in Waiting,' while Faiq resorted to nature, its people, and its simplicity. In this manner, the colours, the lines, and the arrangements of masses were transformed so as to provide a wide range for expression.

In like manner, artistic daring became rather a moral value behind which lurked a variety of intense feelings. It was not, as some had supposed, a borrowed daring, nor an imitation of what had been happening in Europe. For the adaptation that took place in Iraqi art was profoundly linked to its expressiveness, its rich symbolism, its spiritual meaning, and the originality of our artists' queries concerning the values of art, its position vis-à-vis its society, its humanity, and its identity, as well as their queries concerning truthfulness, imitation, directness, and adaptation. Thus had Faiq endeavoured to 'let my artistic works be very true to my own identity and to let my identity be a true mirror for society and humanity.' Likewise Jawad asserted that in any time or place, 'each successful and important work of art is a mirror reflecting the reality in which it lives.' A third, Hafith Al Durubi, voiced his worries about the influence of the European artist on him, saying, 'Even though I try continually to paint Iraqi subjects, having been born in a purely Iraq environment, I am still mindful, when I pick up the brush and the paint, of the work of the European artist.' Ismail Al-Sheikkli attacked those who tried 'to paint their tableaux and pictures following the models of the cubist,

surrealist, and abstract schools... thus imitating Picasso and others, in order to be modernistic.' This was being reiterated by Ata Sabri. In the meantime, Mahumed Sabri was practising an art 'which realistically depicted the raging struggles, thus revealing the world in its evolution forward.'

The more original to such artists seemed the inquiry, search, debate, and discussion centering on the question of identity, the more feeble and distorted seemed all past relationships. Even the association called *Asidiqaa Al Fan* (The Friends of Art), which was shortly established after the outbreak of the Second World War, and which sought to enlarge its circle so as to include all artists as well as sympathizers, became soon burdened, ossified, and fragmented, due to the incompatibility of its members, particularly the discrepancy between the first generation, represented by Abd Al Qadir Al Rassam, and the second generation, represented by Jawad Salim, Faiq Hassan, Hafith Al Durubi and Ata Sabri. Clearly, another step had to be taken.

The Pioneers

Dr. Khalid Al Qassab, as one of The Pioneers, states in his memoirs: 'There existed at first a handful of artists, and never an exhibition in Baghdad, in many a year. This artistic void was felt by The Pioneers who were roused to break the silence with their artistic activity which had to find an outlet sooner or later... therefore, they proposed to organize their efforts within a certain identifying framework, at first to be

Faiq Hassan. *The End*. Oil. ▼



◀ Jawad Salim. Watercolour with wax crayon, 15 × 20cm. 1953. Previously unpublished.

called the Primitive Society, but was later more appropriately named The Pioneers. Thus in 1950 this name came into being, and accordingly Dr. Khalid Al Qassab, one of the members, offered his house for the first exhibition.⁷

If the questioning concerning identity did continue, somewhat with persistence, it was a questioning which limited itself to the limits of the individuality of each member, without inquiring into the nature of that identity, its intellectual implications, or its artistic meaning. They were simply a group of friends who gathered to paint in a way characterized by sensuous expressiveness, by differences in technical skill, by a variety of outlooks, and by vestiges of a multi-faceted social commitment. Some were doctors who studied together, some were art students headed by their teacher, while some joined out of personal friendship. Yet their vagueness does not and should not negate the importance of the common bonds which brought them together. For even though they did not champion an art movement defined by a manifesto, or specific programme, or a set of particular academic rules, they did, by virtue of their attitude towards art, as a form of social awareness, establish the proper beginning in the search for their individual stylistic identities.

It may be true that they did not resort to nature mainly out of sympathy to her, following the example of Constable and others who heeded Rousseau's admonitions on the necessity of 'the return to nature', nor did they necessarily do so in order to explore the changing conditions of light in nature, as did the Impressionists: in fact, it is certain that they did resort to nature because some of them lacked studios for work, and because they were not accustomed to carry their painting tools into the streets in order to paint some social scene. There were also those who hid their technical weaknesses in regard to painting people and their inability to render intended likeness, by resorting to the representation of nature, which can be done with less skill than the representation of persons. In other words, they lacked the abilities abundant in artists like Faiq Hassan, Hafith Al Durubi, Zayd Muhammed Salih, or Ata Sabri. If all of this be true, then it is also true that the nature which they painted in Jadiria and other places for the exercise of their artistic energies became seemingly one of the distinguishing characteristics of their work which they enthusiastically pursued, clustering around Faiq Hassan whose technical skill made him their mentor. Those who felt that they were equal to him in stature, or those who merely imagined it, were far from the wish to join The Pioneers group. Some championed the idea of modernism and innovation, with all the excitement and adventurous pursuit, thus signalling the birth of The Baghdad Group for Modern Art, at the hands of Jawad Salim who separated himself from The Pioneers, and at the hands of Shakir Hassan Al Sa'id, a group with a more homogeneous and a better developed outlook. Others remained faithful to Impressionism, drawing upon the rich experience of its great leaders for inspiration.

The Pioneers soon scattered in different directions, no doubt due to the lack of a programme to unify their differing aspirations, to confirm their inclinations towards one clear aim, or to go beyond Faiq Hassan's assessment of their achievements in terms of their technical improvement, and their grasp of the rules of perspective, the problems of

colour mixing, and the arrangement of masses. Some preferred to forsake art, and refrained even from visiting the exhibitions, contenting themselves with occasional ruminations over that stage of their life. Some pranced as hoary masters. Some were amateurs, who like Dr. Qutaiba Al Shaikh Nuri and Dr. Khalid Al Qassab, painted with professional zeal. Meanwhile, many members met to form new groups with greater commitment to certain artistic values and social concepts, after they got tired of pruning the trees of Jadiria or their backyards, or tired of painting the faces of relatives and friends. We should cite here the name of Ismail Al Shaikkli who was the most ardently committed to the aims of The Pioneers, in terms of the representation of nature, the abridgement of colours, together with the use of their suggestive qualities, and the reliance on the simplicity of composition. We should likewise cite with admiration the names of other artists who, with their subsequent works, left behind their early beginnings as Pioneers. They were linked by a new bent and a new experience in which nature was no longer the cornerstone nor the hallmark.

They were challenged to emulate Jawad Salim's ambition in searching for new ways to express what affirmed that very challenging ambition. Yet nature continued to an extent to nourish their sense of colour, namely, the mingling of lights through their multiple reflections, and the distribution of colour spots which absorb the white and which remind the beholder of the snows of Constable, and deepen his awareness of the strong link of nature's phenomena and of life's activities to the earth. This, together with the changes and development of their subjects and styles, is still evident in many of the works of Faiq Hassan, Nuri Al Rawi, Ismail Al Sheikkli, Khalid Al Qassab, and Zaid Salih Zaki. In addition, they used the lines to enable the colours to interpenetrate the forms, and remove the rigid boundaries of objects, through the harmony of adjoining colours, the blending of shadows, and the prismatic use of colours. The result was mainly a romantic aesthetic pleasure, with a margin for mental concepts and conceptual symbols. Thus they succeeded in narrowing the gap between the perception of the particular and the conception of the general, in order to transform the tableau in its totality, to use Susan Langer's words, to 'a symbol expressing the picture of emotion.'

The Baghdad Group for Modern Art

If the encounter between Jawad Salim and Faiq Hassan, with their artistic and personal bonds, their divergence of aims, and their supporting disciples, strengthened the two wings of the artistic movement in Iraq, then the encounter between Jawad Salim and Shakir Hassan formed an axis for a new artistic vision. Shakir Hassan himself does not remember how it happened that he became 'acquainted with Jawad Salim...perhaps by accident, certainly at my own initiative, he being a well-known artist, I, at the beginning of my career. Or it may have happened, because we two had in the poet Buland Al Haidari a mutual friend who loved Jawad and had faith in his artistic and humanistic mission. I do remember well, however, the admiration I felt for this unusual man, while listening to him lecture on primitive art, in 1942, at the Institute for Fine Arts.' Shakir Hassan also knew that he found, in this artist's sensitivity, his depth of feeling for whatever affirmed his bond to his soil, country,

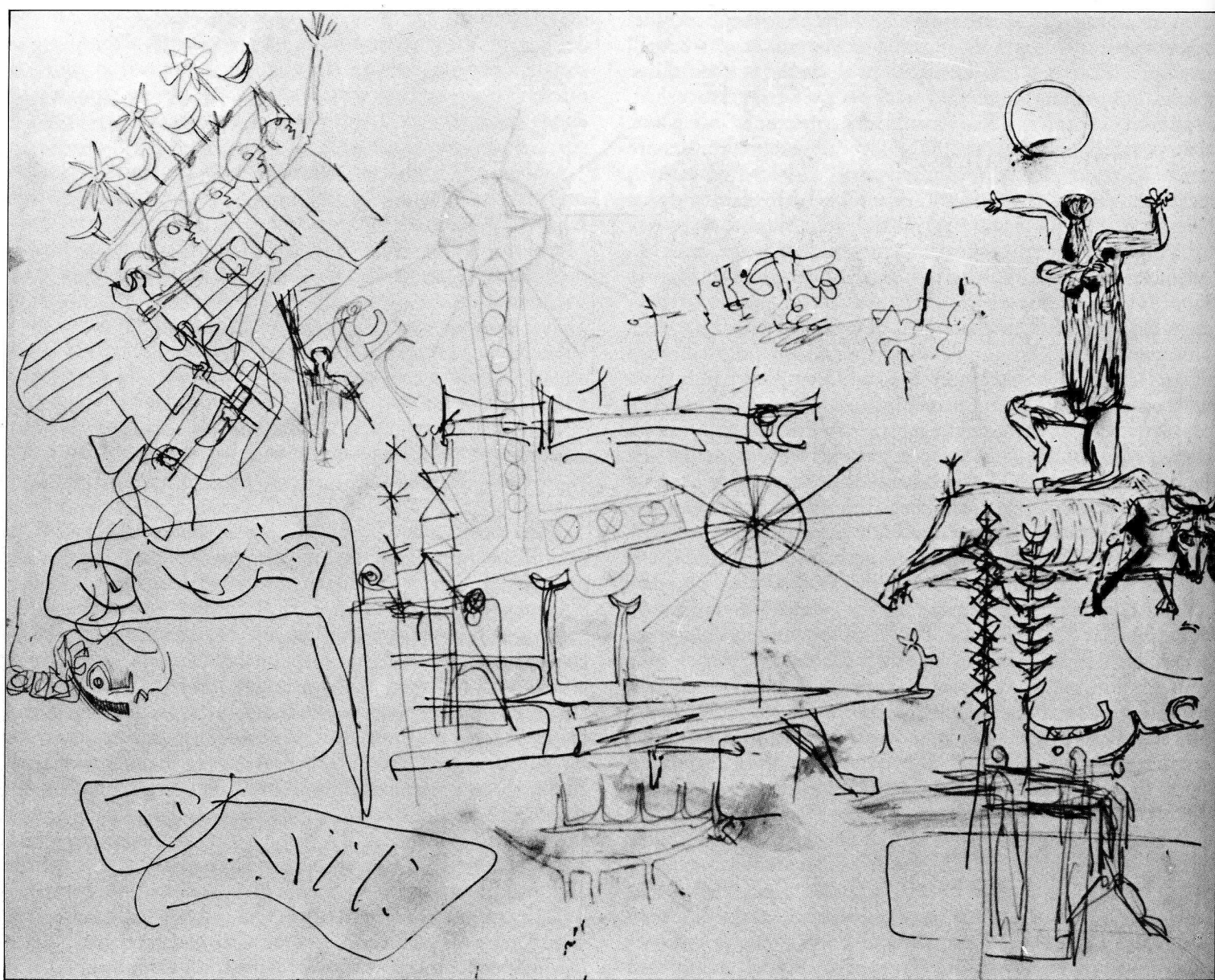
and cultural heritage, and in his breadth of perception, the incentives to explore with him the modern concepts which are vital to Iraqi art. For 'he never dwelt on the surface of his works, but penetrated them, not as a superficial gesture, but as an inner experience and a profound contemplation. Thus as a human being, he was able to fathom his humanity, and this is what enabled him to clarify and express his cultural awareness.' In fact, this was the factor which enabled them both to realize their aim of founding The Baghdad Group for Modern Art upon Jawad's return from London in 1949. At that time he brought with him the influences of Henry Moore, Picasso, Marino Marini, and Nash, and proceeded to re-acquaint himself with what he had learned at the Iraqi Museum of Antiquities, through his painstaking study of the great works of Babylon, Akkad, and Assyria, and to draw upon Islamic art, with its domes and crescents. He also proceeded to affirm his relationship and friendship with a choice of young poets, architects, and musicians, led by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra. They all shared the same enthusiasm, in pursuit of what would aid them in representing their milieu and their cultural heritage, through an artistic skill related both to the achievements of that heritage and of the great adventurers of the time, whose innovations in music, poetry, plastic art, and science formed the subject of continuous discussion and heated debate. Consequently, they influenced and helped each other, through useful lessons and through emulation, to develop their capacities, in spite of the differences of their fields of artistic endeavour. Shakir Hassan admits that his group 'drew for aid upon the triumphs of the leading new Iraqi poets, for as they developed their revolutionary measure for continuing the evolution of Arabic poetry, we painters and sculptors were dreaming of developing a similar measure, together with national methods, centering on saturating a universal work of art with local colour. This is what we tried to accomplish throughout the period in which we worked together shoulder to shoulder.'

At the first exhibition of 1951, the nature of The Baghdad Group for Modern Art was outlined by Jawad Salim's extemporaneous remarks and by the manifesto read by Shakir Hassan, and it was furthermore clearly delineated by their works. 'In this exhibition,' it was remarked, 'we are seeking to relate, albeit in a limited way, the universal language of painting to the work of humanity, working as Iraqis by deriving our inspiration from what is worthy of feeling in our native scenery and environment...we are seeking to give expression to the problems of the time, the fear and trembling, the great conflict in most things, the human massacres, the fall from God, as well as the new theories and the changes they made in our view of things.' Reading the manifesto, Shakir Hassan added, 'A new direction and a modern awakening in painting will undertake to solve the problem by travelling on the same road whose early stages were covered by the Arab artists of the thirteenth century. The new generation will discover that what their ancestors started is now beginning to find its way, in spite of the darkness and the danger. And they will shoulder the responsibilities placed on them by their traditional and indigenous culture.' He went on to say, 'This first exhibition of modern art, which combines the experience of various modern schools, such as impressionism, expressionism, surrealism, cubism, and abstractionism, is the first

manifestation, following the Second World War, of the deliberate attempt to find a way to forge a unique personality for our culture. If we do not succeed in fulfilling ourselves in art, as well as in the other intellectual endeavours, we will not find in ourselves the means to survive a murderous war.'

During the following years, other supporters joined the original exhibitors who included distinguished artists like Khalid Al Rahhal, Muhammed Ghani Hikmet, and Tariq Mathlum. At the same time, the paintings began to reveal a distinct Iraqi stamp, coupled with the particular style of the individual artist, especially in the works of Jawad Salim, Shakir Hassan, and Lorna Salim. 'These artists never overlooked their intellectual and stylistic link to the prevailing artistic trends in the world, while at the same time persisting in the desire to create forms that would lend Iraqi art a special character and a distinct personality,' wrote Jabra Ibrahim Jabra in the second manifesto which confirmed the predictions of the first.

With these aims in mind, Jawad Salim proceeded to establish a homogeneity between his subjects and his expression, in order to distance himself from the styles of preceding artists. He therefore simplified and abridged his colours and lines, intensifying their expressiveness, and he emphasized the dramatic relationship between his spots of colour and his shapes. As a result, all that was left from Matisse were his clear colours and his sense for ornament, from Picasso, his drama and the intensity of his response to his subjects, and from Klee and Miro, their spontaneity. These elements he mixed in a single painting with elements which affirmed its local, traditional, and stylistic lineage. He accomplished this by being alert to the motions and poses of his persons, and by employing half and a quarter arches, either as specific forms or as masses of colour, side by side with squares, triangles, and circles, and in conjunction with local and traditional designs and symbols, such as the arches, domes, windows, balustrades, and palm trees, which, by virtue of their stylistic simplicity, harmonize with the general atmosphere of the subject. He proceeded to treat a mixture of media in a variety of applications, including book covers, jewellery, and mosaic murals, all characterized by a set of clear and coherent personal qualities, a distinguished technical skill, and a continuous effort to grasp the antithesis inherent in the symbols he used in his creative work in which one polarity points directly to the specific denotation, while the other points to the distant but intended conceptual reference. Thus, in general, Jawad Salim's works represent the familiar modality of forms with an emphasis on the partial modification made necessary by the need to underscore the conceptual symbol. In fact, this is what defines his artistic personality and at the same time accounts for his comprehensiveness, and this is what explains his seeming lack of a developing personal style, except for the continuous dialogue between his acute sensitivity for things, situations, and facts, and his profound grasp of the possibility of expressing thereby intellectual concepts. He became, thus, the model for many a young Iraqi artist who used his forms, symbols, and colours, or who sought to imitate him, or who understood his essential quality and succeeded in expanding, developing, and formulating his experiments into artistic values important in modern Iraqi



Drawing by Jawad Salim.

art.

Likewise did Shakir Hassan endeavour to liberate himself from Cézanne's influence and to go beyond his attachment to the Impressionists and to impressionism 'which charmed me and made me feel at home', and, consequently, found himself submerged in the religious and social atmosphere of his environment. He started to derive his inspiration from the folk tales and legends stored in his memory, and to draw for his modern style upon the elements familiar in the decorative designs and the primitive colours of folk art. He also utilized the rhythmic repetition of arches, which at that time was used in Iraqi architecture, painting, sculpture, and even in poetry, with a different meaning. He went beyond mere decorative neutrality, transforming the design into a representational reality charged with dramatic expressiveness and characterized by an intellectual depth to be fathomed not by the analysis of symbols, but by the precise tracing of the movements of lines and colours, the interlocking of geometric designs, and the movements of persons and their interrelationships. In this way, the functional elements of his picture cohere in such a way that the surface appears

like a thick wall saturated with shapes and colours, leaving neither hole nor gap, a living reminder of that primary horror of the void which has afflicted the decorative designs and the paintings of every Arab artist.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that the emphasis placed here on the role of Jawad Salim and Faiq Hassan and on their influence on the birth and growth of the modern art movement in Iraq, as well as the emphasis placed on the activities of their supporters within the two groups, The Pioneers and The Baghdad Group for Modern Art, does not and should not negate the role of the other artists. Hafith Al Durubi, Akram Skukri, Ata Sabri, and Jamil Hammudi, accompanied and supported this movement, with their own experimentations and explorations, in pursuit of their own individual styles, but these artists, with the exception of Jamil Hammudi who with his 'letters' signalled the beginning of the use of calligraphy in modern Arabic art, left no issue. For unlike Faiq Hassan and Jawad Salim, they offered no programmes and attracted no followers.

Translated by Husain Haddawy