ثقافة السلام

Culture of Peace

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CULTURE OF PEACE
الثقافة السلام
الطبعة الأولى، أغسطس 2014

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Африканский союз-Миссия ООН в Дарфур (УАМД)

تصميم الكتاب: آري سانتوسو

التمييزات المستخدمة وطريقة عرض المواد في هذا المنشور لا تعني التعبير عن أي رأي على الإطلاق من جانب اليوناميد بشأن الحالة القانونية لأي دولة، إقليم، مدينة أو منطقة، أو سلطاتها، أو بشأن تعيين حدودها أو تخومها.

بالإمكان استخدام المواد الواردة في هذا المنشور بحرية أو إعادة طباعتها، شريطة ذكر المصدر كمصدر.
ثقافة السلام

Culture of Peace

Interviews by Ala Mayyahi
Introduction by Kirk L. Kroeker
اللي أهل دارفور
for the people of Darfur
Culture of Peace, a book consisting of interviews conducted by Ms. Ala Mayyahi and previously published in Voices of Darfur, UNAMID’s magazine, not only presents many photographs of Darfuri artists and their art, but also includes conversations that focus on how Darfur’s arts are playing an important role in the peace process. Much as Darfur’s sports events and community gatherings bring people together in a spirit of harmony and camaraderie, Darfur’s arts have a long tradition of building community ties by channeling the anguish and hope of the people living here.

While there are many positive signs of recovery and peace emerging across Darfur, the region’s many years of conflict have resulted in hundreds of thousands of people still enduring the hardships of life in temporary camps. The peace process moves steadily forward, but tensions in the region continue to emerge from fierce competition over natural resources, generations-old tribal feuds and clashes between Government forces and armed movements.

Caught in these ongoing fights are innocent civilians, the men, women and children of Darfur. Not a single person living in this region has been untouched in some way by the conflict here. While the situation on the ground has improved in many ways since the beginning of the clashes more than one decade ago, violence in some parts of Darfur has escalated, leaving thousands dead and hundreds of thousands displaced.

In addition to hostilities generated by limited natural resources and age-old blood feuds, modern weapons and armed movements have played a major role in shaping the current situation. Destroyed medical clinics, dilapidated schools, looted homes and entire communities burned to the ground remain lasting vestiges of the violence that has plagued this corner of the world, leaving in its wake extreme unemployment, families without their fathers or mothers, an abundance of street children and a people struggling to come to lasting vestiges of the violence that has plagued this corner of the world, which has left hundreds of thousands displaced.

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“I want to tell all Darfuri they should behave like Darfur’s tribal elders in the old times. They lived together peacefully, caring for each other and in harmony with one another.”

Music Therapy - Mua’wiya Musa

“If there were peace, artists in Darfur would be able to produce more art, and that would illustrate how many artists there actually are in Darfur. It would also show that we are in fact a civilized people, not warmongers.”

Darfur Dances - Elfadhil Khatir

“This deeply rooted art in Darfur’s societies can effectively contribute to promoting peace among tribes. New group dances could be designed by mixing movements from different tribes.”

Darfur’s Contours - Sayida Omar Adam

“All symbols in my paintings can be found within the heart of my Darfuri heritage. They are strongly connected to the social and psychological nature of our society.”

Harmonizing Darfur - Omar Ihsas

“One of my favorite songs includes the words ‘Dignity is their symbol...carried home on their chests.’ I wrote the lyrics with the Darfuri people in mind.”

Through the Lens - Mohamed Noureldin

“I hope all of us, as Darfuris, show the world our generosity, bravery and love for life by living together peacefully.”
Despite the language and cultural differences among communities in Darfur, there are certain cross-tribal commonalities that run through the region, making it easy for Darfuris—even from very different tribes—to identify the meaning of symbolic designs on paintings, pottery and other art objects. In much the same way that Darfur's art objects resonate culturally across tribal boundaries, the music created here by different tribal groups has common traits. Darfuri music typically combines African rhythms with Arabic melody patterns into a unique harmony that is possible only because of the protracted historic existence of both Africans and Arabs in the region.

In the following interview, Mr. Gibreel Abdulaziz—a teacher, a scholar, and a historian—talks about the history and development of art in Darfur, and details how Darfuri art reflects the unique social ties that have existed over the years between different communities in the region. Recently, Mr. Abdulaziz published a 700-page book on the history of El Fasher. The book documents notable Darfuri figures, including artists and intellectuals.

Mr. Abdulaziz was born in El Fasher, North Darfur, in 1945, and has witnessed, first-hand, many changes in his hometown. After finishing high school in El Fasher, Mr. Abdulaziz studied education in the Baght El Ridha Central Teachers College, and continued his studies at Khartoum University, where he graduated with a degree in history, English and education.

Following his academic pursuits, Mr. Abdulaziz returned to his hometown, where he worked in politics and civil society. His long career has included several prestigious positions, including Chief of State Council, Minister of Education and Minister of Social and Culture Affairs, all in North Darfur.
Academic and historian Gibreel Abdulaziz is pictured in his house in Khartoum, Sudan. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
The first civilizations that appeared in Darfur were in the Palaeolithic era. Civilization in the area arose in the form of agriculture, husbandry, fishing and trading with Egypt through the path named the "Forty Road," which referred to the 40-day duration of the trip, as well as through trading with the Waday Sultanate (modern-day Chad), Libya and southern Sudan, where the hunting of elephants, lions and deer took place. In addition, exchange of leather, ivory, honey and ebony were among the active trades in that period.

Some inscriptions from these ancient civilizations still exist on cave walls and rocks in many areas in Darfur, such as in Jebel Marra and Jebel Si. These engravings depict animals, tools, and the fishing and agricultural activities carried out in that era. The same form of civilization appeared in other African countries, such as Nigeria, Ghana, Niger and Senegal.

Were there some clear forms of art during that era in Darfur?

The first art forms were some handicrafts made of palm fronds and wool, also aesthetic pieces of drawing, and inscriptions on wood and leather, even on metal items such as swords and spear shafts. There was also group dancing, in the shape of expressive body movements. Such activities appeared after the Stone Age and continued to develop and vary with time. Some remains of these art pieces still exist and are maintained in local museums, such as the Al Dinar museum in El Fasher, and in the Nyala and El Geneina museums. Other similar ancient remains can be found in Mellit, Kurum, Um Kadada, Kabkahiya, and El Daen, and are maintained by the administration offices of these localities.

What about paper and colour? When were they used in Darfur?

People of Darfur lived in similar social and economic situations during the three main Sultanates—Al Dajou, Tunjar and Fure—which existed from the 19th century up to the modern era. As people lived together in peace, affection and brotherhood without social classification, cultural performances were common, including music and dance as folkloric creative activities for entertainment.

Although each tribe had its own traditional group dance, neighbouring tribes used to invite each other for their auspicious occasions, such as weddings, and all attendees would participate in the traditional dances, regardless of the dance's origin. Also, people from the invited tribes would stay for several days under the hospitality of the hosting tribe. The celebration activities mostly included group dances and horse and camel races, in which all would join joyfully.

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The hands of academic and historian Gibreel Abdulaziz are pictured as he prepares to write in his home in Khartoum, Sudan. Mr. Abdulaziz recently published a 700-page book on the history of El Fasher, documenting notable Darfuri figures, including artists and intellectuals. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
In the 19th century, academic education for fine arts started to emerge in Sudan, and similarly in Chad, Egypt, Libya, Central Africa, Nigeria and Cameroon. People from Darfur mixed with these neighboring nations through trade and scholarship. So academic study had a significant impact on fine art in Darfur, as it did in other parts of Sudan, where the art of Arabic calligraphy, for example, was common, as were drawing and engraving on stone and leather. New painting styles, including abstract styles, also began to appear locally.

El Fasher, where almost all the 170 Darfuri tribes exist, was the most important city in terms of development of arts in Darfur, including theatre arts. For example, the first theatre play was produced in El Fasher in 1927. It was first titled “The Barmakids Calamity,” and then became known as “Abbasa,” after one of the play’s main characters. That play inspired many others to produce plays on the same subject. It was produced in a primary school established in 1917—the first school in El Fasher.

In 1942, Shakespeare’s plays were performed by various students in El Fasher. These plays included Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice, King Lear and Julius Caesar. Until the 1970s, theatre arts were more active in El Fasher than they were in the following years. About 68 long plays were presented by large groups. Some local plays were written by well-known Sudanese writers and were staged in primary and secondary schools in Darfur. Generally, plays in Darfur have been conducted in annual school activities.

Many good fine artists come from El Fasher. These artists include Adam Isa, who graduated from the well-known institution Bakht Al Ridha. He was considered at one time the best in Sudan, and was selected by a publishing house in Khartoum, in 1947, for illustrating literacy books produced for children and grown-ups across the country. Some of his sons and grandsons today are fine artists too.

So did musical performance develop earlier than other arts? What about musical instruments?

Performance arts and other art types developed simultaneously in Darfur throughout the years. The difference is that performance arts are tribal in their nature and done collectively, while works of fine art are done individually. As for musical instruments, drums made of wood and leather were among the first instruments played in Darfur. Some other instruments were played locally, such as the oboe and the kita, which sounds like a whistle. There was also the kurbi, which is similar to the modern Arabic flute.

These instruments have existed since the Nubian civilization, while string instruments such as the oud and guitar, came to Darfur in the 1940s. In 1940, two brothers from Khartoum, Buric and Ismael Abdul Mu’ien, came to El Fasher to teach people how to play the oud.

Were there any specific factors that contributed to the development and proliferation of fine arts in Darfur?

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Academic and historian Gibreel Abdulaziz is pictured in his house in Khartoum, Sudan, with his family. Mr. Abdulaziz’s long career has involved several prestigious positions, including Chief of State Council, Minister of Education and Minister of Social and Culture Affairs, all in North Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

أُلتقطت صورة للأكاديمي والمؤرخ جبريل عبد العزيز مع عائلته بينما يرتاح في منزله في الخرطوم، السودان. وقد ضمنت مسيرة السيد عبد العزيز الطويلة عدة مواقع مرموقة، بما في ذلك رئيس مجلس الولاية التشريعي، وزيراً للترفيه وزيراً لشؤون الإجتماعية والثقافية، وكانت كلها في شمال دارفور. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
How much of an influence does the natural environment of Darfur have on the artists here?

There is a clear and direct link between nature and fine arts in Darfur. For example, in the area of Al Sabna in South Darfur, where there are lots of huge trees and large animals, we find that artists in that area depict these elements of the natural environment in their paintings. But in the desert areas, painters reflect components found in the nature there, such as sand and birds and sometimes caves and desert plants.

During the Sultans era, was there a period that is considered better than others in terms of art improvement?

The period of Sultan Ali Dinar is characterized by an abundance of calligraphers and pieces of art with attractive inscriptions, whether clothes, spearheads, swords or brass instruments. The Sultan’s palace was decorated with many designs and creative inscriptions. He was the first one to have an artificial pond within his palace premises. Fish were brought for the pond from the Arabian Sea in pottery. And he established a zoo in El Fasher. It contained tigers, lions, elephants, deer and a variety of birds, and it became a tourist attraction for the people of Darfur.

The 1960s was rich artistically in many countries around the world. Was it the same in Darfur in that period?

Yes. In the 60s, a significant breakthrough emerged in the field of arts, literature and theatre. Male and female writers participated in the improvement of society. There was a recovery and clear interest in art production in Sudan, generally. Also, there were festivals, such as the notable festival in 1962, attended by all states of Sudan. In addition, there were singing and drama shows held every Thursday in the National Theatre, which were followed by people from all over the country.

What has been the role of women in art development in Darfur’s history?

Women have always participated in the arts through their work as teachers for art in schools and institutes. Some have had important input in theatre, and others, such as the Hakamat, in the musical arts. Also, there have been notable female Darfuri poets. Some types of art are done and improved by women alone. These arts include drawing with henna and inscription on fabric. In general, Darfuri women have participated in several art activities, especially those women who have had a university education in art, which boosts their ability and creativity in various activities, including participation in local and national festivals.

In your opinion, how can art and cultural activities in Darfur contribute effectively to social development while keeping a balance between tradition and contemporary society?

Festivals and cultural activities can be very effective in perpetuating art, where new works of creative artists gain exposure. The balance between contemporary society and tradition can be maintained through promoting the heritage among people in general and among artists in particular, as well as openness to art works from around the world so artists here can gain experience and familiarity with new methods. Today, TV satellites and the Internet are the most important means for disseminating and exposing people to knowledge in all fields, including culture and arts. These means are available to many Darfuri artists and intellectuals, giving them a chance to see the developments of arts elsewhere.

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Academic and historian Gibreel Abdulaziz is pictured in his house in Khartoum, Sudan. Mr. Abdulaziz currently works as a consultant for the Government of Sudan on matters of culture and history. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Designing Darfuri Thobes

Salwa Mukhtar Saleh

To display more than 50 Sudanese thobes made of fine fabrics and designed in both contemporary and traditional styles, Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh, a Darfuri fashion designer, held an exhibition in early May in the Cultural Centre in El Fasher, North Darfur. During the seven days of the exhibition, the show’s visitors were able to view a variety of new and old styles, all designed by Dr. Saleh.

In addition to being a designer, Dr. Saleh is an academic holding a Masters in educational media and a Doctorate in educational development. She has lectured at El Fasher University since 1995, and is a high-profile woman in her hometown, El Fasher, maintaining ties with her family and community.

In an interview, Dr. Saleh talks about her exhibition, the second such show she has put on, and about the cultural and social factors that have contributed to the modern-day Sudanese thobe.
Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh shows a thobe she designed. Dr. Saleh draws on traditional and modern styles to make her thobe designs. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Can you tell us about your start in designing thobes and how you learned to paint on fabric?

It goes back to my early age, as I grew up in a family that always appreciated art. Since my childhood, I’ve been used to seeing female family members making nice arrangements and colouring, which gave me a keen sense for art.

For learning, it was by natural talent first, as well as the desire to improve my art skills. Then my academic education helped me greatly to refine my skills. I studied industrial design at the University of Sudan for Science and Technology. There I learned colouring principles and engineering drawing. I also took courses in human anatomy in the Medicine College, carpentry and blacksmithing in the Engineering College, and packaging in the College of Commerce.

All these subjects are art-related and contributed significantly to mastering the skills needed for working on different materials, including fabrics and clothing.

How long did it take to prepare for this exhibition, and what was the biggest challenge you faced?

It took me nearly six months. Managing time was the only challenge I faced, but it put me under enormous pressure, as addition I have administrative and academic responsibilities at the University of El Fasher, in addition to my commitments with the family and the community.

How is this exhibition different from the first one?

The first exhibition, held in May 2011, consisted of 42 thobes that were displayed through models. In this one, I had 52 thobes in new designs exhibited on walls and manikins. Also, the first one was a show for a few hours. This exhibition lasted for seven days, which provided a better opportunity for a larger audience to see my collection.

You presented both contemporary and traditional designs. Which style is more liked by Darfuri women?

All the designs were liked by women who came to the exhibition, as I combined both contemporary and traditional styles using fabrics with inlaid accessories and various colours and patterns.

Are thobes different from one area to another in Sudan, in terms of designs and the way of wearing the thobe?

No. The thobe is the only element in our culture shared by all women in Sudan, in all the states and tribes, and at all levels and ages.
A close-up of several thobes from Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh’s collection exhibited at the El Fasher Cultural Centre, North Darfur, on 10 May 2012. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.

Designing Darfuri Thobes - Salwa Mukhtar Saleh
Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh holds up an intricately crafted thobe designed by her. She uses a fusion of traditional and contemporary influences in her thobe designs. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
A Sudanese woman in a traditional thobe made of chiffon and inlaid with shiny material, called glitter in Arabic, and small crystals. The thobe is designed by Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh. Photo by Kirk L. Kroeker, UNAMID.
A Sudanese woman in a traditional thobe made of chiffon and embellished with sequins. The thobe is designed by Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
A Sudanese woman shows a shoe and handbag designed by Dr. Salwa Mukhtair Saleh. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
A Sudanese woman shows a thobe and handbag designed by Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh. Photo by Albert González Far-ran, UNAMID.

سيدة سودانية تعرض ثوبا وحقيبة يد من تصميم الدكتورة سلوى مختار صالح. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، يوناميد.
But the Sudanese thobe is different from the Islamic dress code for women in the Arab countries, so what are the historic or social factors that contributed to shaping the local thobe?

The Sudanese thobe was originally inspired by the African dress back in the mid-19th century, in 1858. We see women in some African countries, such as Mauritania, Chad and Nigeria, wearing a thobe but the designs and colours differ from one country to another as the culture differs as well.

Also, in the beginning, the Sudanese thobe was made of locally manufactured cotton yarn (those fabrics are called Alferdah, Alguenjeh and Alzuraq), but with time, and as imported fabrics were brought to the local markets, women started using, and preferring, those imported fabrics because of their good quality.

Does the family encourage your work in this line?

Yes. Actually I find great encouragement from my family and others in our society, which gives me moral support to continue working in this art field.

What would you like to achieve in the future?

I hope my project of designing thobes will expand to establish a workshop for training women and to increase production capacity to export the Sudanese thobes abroad.

Being also a lecturer at the University of El Fasher, and a wife and a mother, how do you manage your time?

I usually complete my office and academic work during working hours at the university, and I give what’s left of my time to my family, to my art work and to social commitments.
Ahmed Adam, a young Darfuri painter who focuses on telling the many stories of the region through visual media, was born in 1986 in North Darfur, and currently lives in his hometown, El Fasher.

Small pieces of paper, walls and school fences were Mr. Adam’s first media. Pencil and watercolour were his first tools. With these items he sketched the scenes of his childhood and the faces that caught his eye. He eventually started using pastel, charcoal, acrylic and oil.

In his teenage years, Mr. Adam decided to formalise his interest in art and attended Sudan University, where he graduated in 2003 with a major in Drawing and Art Education. After graduation, he worked as a teacher at a primary school and continued to refine his art.

While he does some teaching today, he has taken an interest in business and now runs an advertising shop in El Fasher, producing signage and billboards for local merchants. The business has not taken him away from his art. He continues to draw and paint today, favouring watercolour and paper in a unique style for which he has become known in Darfur.

In an interview, Mr. Adam talks about his art and role of the artist in Darfur.
To what extent are the Sudanese arts affected by other African arts, in terms of colors and styles?

In the old history, art in Sudan came through mixing and trading with neighbouring nations. Other African countries preceded Sudan in the arts because art had been emerging in ancient civilizations in other areas. So of course art in Sudan was affected by these adjacent sources, and it was boosted mostly when Christianity came in to the country. Architecture was the most-used art form at that time. Then drawing and sculpture followed to decorate church interiors and exteriors.

In recent history, Sudanese painting styles have clearly differed from Egyptian and African. For example, impressionism or realism is the common style locally rather than the more abstract styles, while the latter is widely used in the bordering countries.

Speaking of recent history, how are Darfuri artists affected by the conflict here?

We all are affected by the conflict in one way or another. The conflict has had a great impact on artists, as with many other groups, morally and financially. As artists, we feel sad to see our people go through such a terrible struggle.

Do you think this kind of suffering stimulates the artist's work or hinders it?

It depends. Suffering from lack of financial resources would definitely hinder the artist's work, especially when artists can't afford the required tools for their art. But emotional or psychological suffering pushes the artist to express his or her inner anguish.

Because art and other cultural activities can serve a transformative social function, how do you see the role of Darfuri artists in contributing to the development in Darfur?

Unfortunately, Darfuri fine artists cannot yet play an effective role in this regard due to situations which stand as restrictions sometimes. But if artists have a larger space of freedom, they would be more capable of contributing, through their arts and activities, to solving Darfur problems.

So in this respect, do you think artists are not making their voices heard in politics and social life?

Not to a great enough extent. By nature, most artists are sensitive to all kind of violence. As for me, I express in painting my sympathy for women suffering from social or family violence. Many other artists have done the same. We also promote messages of peace and coexistence, in line with the peace efforts taking place in the region, including the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur.

Painting Darfur - Ahmed Adam
Ahmed Adam is pictured in front of one of the paintings hung in his studio in El Fasher, North Darfur. Mr. Adam’s work focuses mostly on women and children. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
A watercolour painting created by El Fasher artist Ahmed Adam.
Darfuri artist Ahmed Adam stands beside one of his favourite watercolour paintings. The piece is titled "Rural Woman." Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Painter Ahmed Adam pictures a Darfuri fortune-teller using shells, locally called el wadah.
Artist Ahmed Adam uses calligraphy and an abstract background to create this painting.

لوحة للفنان أحمد آدم تشمل الخط العربي مع خلفية تجريدية.
A watercolour painting created by El Fasher artist Ahmed Adam.
Darfuri artist Ahmed Adam focuses on nature in many of his works.

تركز الفنان أحمد آدم على الطبيعة في العديد من لوحاته.
And how do you see the possibility of the Doha Document achieving peace in Darfur?

I am quite optimistic that peace can be achieved in the near future. The Doha Document is good and can bring peace to us, even if the holdout movements haven’t joined the process. The challenge is in the implementation of its provisions throughout the region.

In terms of your own painting, how do you typically start a painting? Do you decide the details from the beginning or does the design evolve as you work?

It is hard actually to identify all the details of a painting right from the beginning. I first outline the subject from a specific angle. Only then can I have a better idea about what details I want to add. And that’s the part that takes the major time and effort.

What are the subjects that drive you to paint?

Landscape has always inspired me to draw. But I also like portraying people in particular situations, for example women making baskets, or a mother feeding her child. I also focus on local rituals and group activities, such as dances and harvesting. These paintings are mostly liked by elderly people.

How can people here see your work and buy it?

I do exhibitions from time to time. Since graduation from college, I have held five major exhibitions, in Khartoum and in Darfur. The last one was in 2011 in El Fasher. People like to attend art exhibitions and buy the paintings, and I try to put reasonable prices on them, varying between 50 and 150 Sudanese pounds. But my paintings sell more quickly in Khartoum and for slightly higher prices.

On a final note, what message would you like to deliver to Darfuris?

I would like to call on people of Darfur, from all groups, to unite and overcome the past wounds and work together to achieve lasting peace. In the past, the people of Darfur had kindness and compassion for each other, and we can be the same now, especially the young people as they now have greater awareness about the importance of living in peace as a society.

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Born in North Darfur in 1957, Dr. Mohamed Rashid has been living most of his life in El Fasher, the town where he grew up, and now teaches graduate students at the local university. While Dr. Rashid has explored all types of artistic media over the years, including painting and fabric design, he favours working with clay.

His love of pottery and his experience with the art dates to his university days in Khartoum. In 1985, Dr. Rashid was granted a scholarship to the University of Sudan, where he obtained a degree in fine arts with a concentration in ceramics. He continued on to receive a Ph.D. in education.

Dr. Rashid has displayed his art in several exhibitions across Sudan, including in El Fasher, Khartoum, Nyala and Um Kadada. He says that nature landscape has been his main source for inspiration, and making pottery with colourful glazes has been his passion since he first began to work in the medium.

In an interview, Dr. Rashid talks about the tools and techniques of making handcrafted ceramics, and about his love for a craft that may soon become a lost art.

наял 1957 года, доктор Мохамед Рашид прожил большую часть своей жизни в Эль-Фашере, городе, где он вырос, и сейчас преподает аспирантам в местном университете. В то время как доктор Рашид исследовал все виды художественных медиа на протяжении многих лет, включая живопись и дизайн ткани, он предпочитает работать с глиной.

Его любовь к гончарству и его опыт работы с этой искусством начался в университете в Хартуме. В 1985 году доктор Рашид был награжден стипендией на учебу в Университет Судана, где он получил степень по изящным искусствам, специализируясь в гончарном деле. Он продолжил дальше и получил степень доктора философии в образовании.

Доктор Рашид выставил свои работы на несколько выставок по всей Судану, включая Эль-Фашер, Хартум, Ньяла и Ум-Кадада. Он говорит, что природный ландшафт был его основным источником вдохновения, и создание гончарского искусства с использованием цветных глазурей стало его страстью начиная с того момента, как он впервые начал работать в этом жанре.

В интервью, доктор Рашид говорит о инструментах и методах создания камерной гончарной работы, а также о его любви к искусству, которое может стать утраченным в скором времени.
You've experimented with more than one art, but you clearly favour ceramics. What drives you most to this medium?

Working with clay and shaping it while it's still tender. The glazes fascinate me when they come out of the oven shiny. That moment gives me joy. But I feel sad when some of them get cracked. Making ceramic is a long and tiring process. Some pieces take 15 days to be completed. When a piece gets broken, that means all the effort made for it is wasted. But the beautiful pieces pay for the tiresome moments, and this motivates me to continue to make more.

Can you give us a general idea of the process involved in making a piece of ceramic pottery?

In general, there are several basic steps to making any ceramic piece: preparing the clay, shaping the clay either by using a wheel or casts, drying the piece in a shady place, softening it from outside, baking it in the oven, then adding colours and baking it again as a final step.

Can you find the required tools and pigments easily in Darfur?

For the clay, yes. We get the clay from the valleys and lowlands. It is called locally al hafeir, which exists in El Fasher and in Golo, west of El Fasher. This kind of clay is a reddish colour and is good for vertical cylindrical pieces to be shaped by the wheel.

There is another kind of clay that is white. This kind is found in the mountain areas such as Kutum and Kabkabia. It's more solid, sticky, and easy to mix with water. It's used mostly for shaping pieces by casts.

For colours, we get the glazes, which contain chemicals, from Egypt. They can't be found locally due to lack of demand in the market. As for cold colours, which don't contain chemicals, they are available in the local markets.

As for the ovens, the brick type is found and made locally, but the electrical ones that provide high temperatures, between 1,100 and 1,150 degrees Celsius, can't be found easily in Darfur. I usually take my pieces to Khartoum to bake them in such ovens in cooperation with some artists there.

You mentioned preparing the clay. How is that done?

It has to be compiled first in large barrels to mix it well with water, and it stays in the barrels for one week. After that, we refine it in special containers and leave it until most of the water evaporates. But the clay should stay moist a bit. Then we keep it in plastic bags until it gets more solid. Only then the clay is ready for shaping. This clay is best for the wheel, but if we want to shape it in casts, then the clay should be more liquid.
Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Rashid at work in his studio, shaping clay into what will eventually become one of his ceramic pieces to be shown and possibly sold at an art exhibition. Photo by Sojoud Elgarraei, UNAMID.
The ceramic pottery of Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Rashid, a professor at El Fasher University, North Darfur. Photo by Sojoud Elgarai, UNAMID.
In his studio, Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Rashid works on one of his pieces of pottery. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.
Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Rashid at work in his studio, shaping clay into what will eventually become one of his ceramic pieces to be shown and possibly sold at an art exhibition. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

الدكتور محمد أحمد رشيد أثناء عمله في مشرفة وهو يعمل على تشكيل الطين لتحويله إلى ما سيُصبح في النهاية مخزنة للعرض وربما البيع في أحد المعارض الفنية. تصوير حامد عبد السلام، اليوناميد.
Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Rashid at work in his studio. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.
الدكتور محمد أحمد راشيد أثناء عمله في مشغله. تصوير سجود القرّاي، اليوناميد.
After all this effort, do your pieces sell well at exhibitions?
My prices are affordable for anyone, and I sell through exhibitions and in shops as well. They sell best for certain occasions and holidays.

And what are the pieces that are the most popular among your clients?
This kind of ceramic art is not popular in Darfur. If I make them, they won’t sell at all.

So how is your pottery craft related to the Darfuri culture, and what is the history of it here?
Yes, and also due to the conflict in our region. People have been unable to continue making ceramics. Thousands of Darfuris have left their home areas and are living in camps, away from sources for pottery material.

Is that because of the global influx of plastic commodities that have been replacing ceramics as an inexpensive alternative?

Some pottery stays in good shape for thousands of years. Some pieces are kept in museums as highly valuable evidence of ancient civilizations. What make them so strong throughout the years?

Thinking about the longevity of pottery, what would you like to achieve in your art? What sort of lasting impact would you like to make?
I would like to establish an institution for teaching the craft of pottery. It’s a good income-generating craft for women and for young people too. In the end, I hope this craft will become more popular and will replace the plastic pieces that are filling the markets.
Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Rashid at work in his studio, preparing glaze for his pottery. Photo by Hamid Abdul-salam, UNAMID.
If you ever have the chance to talk to foreign artists, what would you tell them about Darfur?

I would tell them that Darfur is a place where people’s art never dies. And due to the nature and lifestyle here, Darfuris are skilled in artful, handmade crafts that are decorated with beautiful detail. We still have the original crafts of baskets, leather and carpets. If artists have the chance to visit Darfur from abroad, they would see that Darfuris are still producing art despite all hardships.
Ms. Samiha Abdul Muni‘em, born in El Fasher in 1990, comes from a family that appreciates art. Her father is an architect and her uncle, Mr. Abdul Qader Abu Baker, is a well-known local artist.

Ms. Muni‘em studied Theatre Arts in Khartoum at the University of Sudan, where she graduated in 2011. By the time she left the university system, she had already achieved a respectable portfolio of productions. Today, she is continuing her pursuit of becoming a renowned Darfuri theatre director.

In an interview, Ms. Muni‘em talks about her hope for the future of Darfur and how she shapes her plays against a backdrop of critical social issues. In the interview, Ms. Muni‘em shares her thoughts about her previous productions and her current work, and discusses the impact of theatre drama on the peace process.
Tell us about the plays you have directed and produced so far. What were they about and where did you present them?

I have produced three plays after graduating from the University of Sudan. The first one was titled “Between Civilization and Barbarism.” In it, I addressed some issues in Darfur, such as tribal conflict, street children, education and violence against women. It was presented in El Fasher for the first time in the cultural centre, then in the Adhma Avenue on the occasion of National Independence Day. I also presented it in Al Salam camp for displaced people in North Darfur, where large audience attended. Actually, the number of attendees in the camp was more than I expected.

The second play was titled “Retouch” or “Last Touch.” In this one, I addressed general humanitarian issues, such as starvation in Somalia, poverty in camps and respect for diversity. It was presented in the cultural centre in El Fasher and had good attendance.

The third one, called “Something,” mainly addressed coexistence among Darfuris in the conflict aftermath. It was played at the inauguration ceremony of El Fasher Library, last July, and it was great pleasure for me that it was seen by UNAMID staff. This play will be part of my new play, which is under preparations currently.

And what is your new play about?

Actually, I would like to keep that as a surprise to the audience. At the moment, I can only say that the title is “A-Sh-A-L,” which are only letters, as a part of my new play, which is under preparations currently.

Did you use one cast of actors or different actors in each of your drama performances?

I have dealt so far with one group, called “Ashwaq Al Salam.” It’s a group of young artists and they work with me voluntarily.

Knowing that all your plays are silent, what is behind that choice, especially considering that words and dialogue can be powerful tools in performing arts?

It is a choice I made after some thinking about how language is an issue in Darfur. As you know, there is more than one language used locally. Some people speak their own language only, and they wouldn’t understand my plays due to the language differences. This is something I want to avoid because I want my plays to reach all Darfuris from different areas. Also, silent plays can be presented to foreign audiences from other nationalities, like the audience from UNAMID. I could tell they understood my play and really liked it, considering the loud applause they gave after the show. So a silent play can be an international expression, just like music.
Theatre Director Samiha Abdul Muni’em poses with members of the drama group “Ashwaq Al Salam.” Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Members of the drama group “Ashwaq Al Salam” perform during the commemoration of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers at the UNAMID headquarters in El Fasher, North Darfur. Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Theatre Director Samiha Abdul Muni'em directs members of the drama group “Ashwaq Al Salam” during a rehearsal. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

المخرجة المسرحية سمية عبد المنعم توجه أعضاء الفرقة المسرحية أشواق السلام خلال الارتداء. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
Theatre Director Samiha Abdul Muni'em (centre) poses with members of the drama group “Ashwaq Al Salam,” which translates as “longing for peace.” Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

So what other ways, instead of language, do you rely on to deliver a story in your plays?

Two things, basically: Sound effects, including music, and the body movements of actors, including dancing, as well as facial expressions.

And what about script writing? Since all kind of plays, even silent ones, need to be written to include the details in sequential scenes, have you relied on a particular writer?

Not yet. I’ve written my own plays, but I would definitely like to deal with a good writer once the opportunity arises. For now, I can’t afford it financially.

Speaking of finance, do you sell tickets for your plays to cover the costs of your rehearsals and performances?

No, I present them for free because most Darfuris are going through financial difficulties, and they wouldn’t be able to afford the tickets. I want people to attend my shows easily so they can draw large audiences. But I was paid previously on two occasions. The first fund was 1,000 Sudanese pounds given by the committee of Adhma Avenue for presenting my first play there. The money was collected from the residents of that area, and I distributed it fully among the cast of 13 members. At another time, I received 500 Sudanese pounds as support from the Ministry of Planning and Public Utilities, and that was for my second play. For the third play, my father covered the cost on his own, since I still have no income.
Did your family support or oppose your study and work in this line?

Fortunately, my family supports me, especially my father. It would have been much tougher on me without their support, as it gives me confidence and strength. My father was concerned in the beginning that I might face some social rejection for working in theatre, but he fully encouraged me and still supports me financially and morally to build up my career.

As a female, do you face challenges of some kind while working in theatre in Darfur?

Only to some extent. People are not used to seeing females work in the performing arts. Some people tell me they find it strange that I'm doing in theatre in Darfur. Why do you do it with whatever is available. On some days, we stopped rehearsing due to power outages, but the next day we continued, and that's the important thing. Determination and enthusiasm make challenges looks smaller and easier. I guess.

In your opinion, is the major challenge to improving theatre in Darfur finding sufficient funds, or is it social acceptance or other factors? And which factor is most important for a good play, funds or freedom of expression?

Both are as much important. Without freedom of expression a play would still be incomplete and without money you can't produce any play, even if you have all the freedom. For improving theatre in Darfur, we need all that. We need funds and social acceptance and a safe environment too. We might get there gradually. We addressed the Ministry of Culture about our material needs, but the Ministry lacks funds currently. I'd like to mention that, despite this situation, we often get moral support from the Secretary General of the Ministry, Mr. Ibrahim Sa’ad. He follows up on our plays, on me and the acting cast in the “Ashwaq Al Salam” group, and always encourages us to continue doing plays. He is like the godfather of this group. I extend all my respect and gratitude to him.

And where do you usually do the rehearsals?

So far in the El Fasher Cultural Centre. They give us a hall for this purpose and we appreciate it, although the place lacks the required equipment. Unfortunately, the place was ruined due to the heavy rains recently. The new play will be rehearsed and presented in the Youth Union, which is a place where El Fasher youth gather to share their art, thoughts and opinions.

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A member of the theatre group “Alshrook” performs at the new Cultural Center Library in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

أعضاء من الفرقة المسرحية الشروق يؤدون عرضاً في المكتبة الجديدة للمركز الثقافي في الفاشر، شمال دارفور. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
Members of the drama group “Ashwaq Al Salam” perform during the commemoration of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers at the UNAMID headquarters in El Fasher, North Darfur. Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Is there an easy way for Darfuri theatre artists to get information about productions outside Sudan?

For me, I attend festivals in Khartoum, like the “Khartoum Theater Days” in which several groups from different countries participate to present their plays. They come from Arab countries, Europe and Africa. I learn a lot through watching these foreign shows. I also attend training workshops in Khartoum, organized by the University of Sudan and other institutions that bring in foreign artists. At the last workshop I attended in July, we presented a play in the German Cultural Centre and we applied new directing and acting methods and techniques that were taught in the workshop.

Theatre is one of the oldest arts. In Darfur, what is the background on theatrical expression and how was theatre first introduced to the region?

Well, in Sudan, the plays were affected by performing arts in some other Arab countries, such as Egypt and Syria. That was in the middle of the twentieth century. At that time, there was an institution, called “Bakht Al Ridha,” that presented some plays that addressed women’s rights and the importance of education. As for Darfur, people here are into singing more than plays. They express their concerns, thoughts and issues through songs. Theatre groups are not very numerous in Darfur. But they are working hard to continue on, and present their plays on their issues and situations inside and outside the camps. There are many traditional groups that perform through dancing and singing. They use their own language, depending on their tribal origin.

In your opinion, how can theatre contribute effectively to the social development in Darfur?

Theatre can do a lot in this regard. I have always believed that drama artists and journalists can make the biggest impact on society through their messages because they deal with people and events and history, and they go into the little details behind the scenes and all that. Theatre in Darfur can raise awareness on social issues, such as the importance of education. As for Darfur, the people here are interested in the arts and in their traditions, and they go into the little details behind the scenes and all that. Theatre in Darfur can raise awareness on social issues, such as the importance of education and we applied new directing and acting methods and techniques that were taught in the workshop.

Many believe that peace is going to be achieved through the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. Do you think so?

Yes, I think the Doha Document is good and can bring peace to Darfuris, provided that it will be implemented properly and fairly in all its provisions and among all Darfuris.

In the end, what message would you like to deliver to the people of Darfur?

I would like to ask Darfuris to unite at this important stage, to repel violent acts, to care for each other, to live in peace together, and to deliver peace to the next generation.
Buhery Youssef has been drawing since he was a young boy, inspired by Darfur’s people and the animals and objects that populate the region’s stark and rugged environments. Today, at 33 years old, Mr. Youssef has developed a reputation as one of the most talented artists in the region, not only in Sudan but also in the bordering Arabic and African counties. His talent has earned him several major accolades, including a growing collection of gold medals from regional art contests.

In many of his paintings, he carefully depicts the fragile lives of vulnerable Darfuris. In others, he portrays, in bright colour, the local traditions that underpin life in the villages that together form the backbone of western Sudan. In all of Mr. Youssef’s work, regardless of the specific objects he depicts, subtle cues indicate his unique point of view in rejecting violence, encouraging compassion for those in need and remaining cautiously optimistic for a better future for Darfur.

In addition to painting regularly, Mr. Youssef, who resides in his hometown of El Geneina, West Darfur, runs his own gallery for traditional art, and leases out another gallery for cultural activities. During his development into a professional artist who regularly exhibits in art shows around the region, he has had the opportunity to meet other accomplished artists, to share ideas and discuss ways to cultivate a love of art in Darfur. In an interview, Mr. Youssef talks about this evolving dialogue and about his work as an artist in Darfur.
Artist Buhery Mohammed Youssef shows a painting in his studio in El Geneina, West Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

الفنان بحيري محمد يوسف يعرض لوحة له في مشغله في الجنيينة، غرب دارفور. تصوير البرتغالي جوناثان غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
As you started drawing since childhood, is there one drawing you did in those days that you remember more than the others?

Yes, It was a drawing of a man. I remember it very well not because of the subject of the drawing but because of the story behind it.

Would you like to tell us that story?

I was in my first year in primary school, and the teacher drew a man for us, but I didn't like it so I told her that the drawing was wrong. She got upset with me and asked me to draw a better one, so I did and when she saw it she was so surprised that I could draw so well at that age that she showed it to the principal and all the teachers.

Today, even when I consider the awards I've won during my career, I think about that drawing and how my teacher liked it.

Could you tell us about the art awards you've won?

The first one was an award in fine arts for creative students in 2007 in El Gazeera State. The painting was of a peace dove. Also, as a student, I won the first and second gold medal in Northern Dungula in 2008. I had another gold medal for a painting in which I expressed that the strength of our country comes only through unity. I've also won a gold medal from North Darfur and another one from Egypt.

Other than winning awards, what has influenced you to improve and continue your work as an artist?

First, my family support, which has always been a great privilege to me. And second, seeing good paintings of other Darfuri artists and having the opportunity to know them and interact with them. I have learned a lot from them. All that pushed me to continue painting.

Can you tell us a bit about other Darfuri artists you grew up with? Were they able to continue in their pursuit of art despite the hardship of the conflict here?

Unfortunately, many artists I've known in West Darfur stopped painting. The economic situation has not been conducive to sales, and social support has been lacking. Also, there hasn't been enough support from Government institutions or enough cultural programmes set up to support artists.

Do you dedicate a certain time during the day for drawing or do you draw at any time when you are in the right mood for it?

I usually draw in the evening more than in the morning. There are other times that are best to me for developing my art and for exploring nature and seeing the beauty in it that can motivate me to draw with a clear soul. Also, I think as artists it is important to observe ugly things around us so we can cultivate our analytical thinking and shape our values about life. The philosophers who have studied aesthetics tie art and morality together.

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الفنان محمد يوسف يعرض لوحاته المعلقة في ممشطه في الجنيسة، غرب دارفور. تصوير: البرت غونزاليس فران.
A painting created by El Geneina artist Buhery Mohammed Youssef, whose art focuses mostly on nature and local traditions.

لوحة للفنان بحيري محمد يوسف، من الجنينة، والذي يركز فنه في الغالب على الطبيعة والتقاليد المحلية.
Do you always paint with an expressionist style or do you do abstract as well?

I don't do abstract painting. This kind of painting is not so common in Darfur because it is not much liked by the people here, so artists have developed other painting styles that are locally accepted.

How would you describe your style of painting and what you're trying to accomplish in each work?

I mostly use a primitivism style of painting, and in some paintings I use both primitivism and expressionism. What I try to accomplish through my work is promoting old Darfuri culture and the social traditions that were used by the older generations. I also try to draw attention to the natural world around us. I typically rely on materials and colours that are made from natural sources, such as tar and natural glue.

And how would you characterise your art in the history of art in Darfur and abroad?

My style, in terms of art history, is not so commonly used in Darfur. It's much more likely to be found abroad. Yet in Darfur's history there are many renowned painters who have relied on this style. I had the honour to learn from some of them.

Is nature your main source of inspiration?

Children draw as part of play, but having real talent for drawing is something else. Drawing properly requires basic, and of course the skill that develops with practice.

Since children start drawing at an early age, do you think drawing is an instinctual activity that human beings have naturally?

Yes, I think so.

Do you think the price of a painting depend on the name of the artist, like in most other countries?

In Darfur, the price of a painting depends a lot on its quality and whether someone likes it, regardless of the fame of the artist.

Actually, the price of a painting here depends a lot on its quality and whether someone likes it, regardless of the fame of the artist. However, the price is different for paintings that are made by famous artists as opposed to those that are made by unknown artists.

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And how would you characterise your art in the history of art in Darfur and abroad?
A painting by Darfuri artist Buhery Mohamed Youssif. Nature interspersed with local customs are recurrent motifs in his art.
The intersection between nature and Darfur traditions, as depicted in this work, are the primary motifs of El Geneina artist Buhery Mohammad Youssef’s paintings.
Van Gogh and some other classic artists in history are exceptional cases. In general, academic study and overall education are quite important for an artist in producing good art. Without education, their work and opinions about art would be shallow; and would be lacking more sophisticated principles of evaluation.

Is there a centre in El Geneina that supports local artists and exhibits their art for free?

Unfortunately, there isn’t any centre in El Geneina where artists can exhibit their art. The same can be said of the situation across Darfur. There might be few centres here and there, but Darfuri artists need much support than that.

Do you have ideas about how to really help local artists?

There must be more centres designed to support artists in each state. The centres could provide a hall as a gallery for displaying paintings and other kinds of fine art. This would be useful not only for the artists but also for beginners and university students. Exhibitions in such galleries could be changed every week or every two weeks so new artists could display their work. Also, the centres could provide a platform for educators to talk about art to students and beginners.

Besides painting, do you do other kinds of activities related to art?

Yes, I design logos and three dimensional signs. I also do commercial interiors and do workshops as well. I designed logos for various cultural festivals in El Geneina and Andoka. As for workshops, I participated with the United Nations Development Programme and with the United Nations Children’s Fund in workshops on condemning violence against women. Another workshop was for raising awareness on art, and another one on combating HIV/AIDS in cooperation with the “Rashid Diyab” centre.

In your opinion, do Darfuri artists play an important role in promoting peace?

Yes, many of them have such roles because they raise awareness among the people of Darfur about peace concepts in different art forms, including traditional art, and through various cultural activities that promote peace among Darfuris. But peace needs financial support as well as moral support; hopefully all this will be achieved soon and Darfur will be back to being a peaceful area once again.

What message would like to deliver to Darfuris?

I would like to tell all Darfuris to reject war and discrimination and to be like they were in the past, living in peaceful coexistence with each other in our beloved land.
A painting created by El Geneina artist Buhery Mohammed Youssif, whose art focuses mostly on nature and local traditions.

لوحة للفنان محمد يوسف بحيري من الجنينة، والذي يتركز فنه في الغالب على الطبيعة والتراث المحلي.
**Henna** is one of the most popular personal art forms in Darfur. Local women use henna mainly for beautification, especially in preparation for weddings or similar auspicious occasions, such as the Eid holidays. Henna artists, locally called hannana, are not difficult to find in Darfur, but there are a few who have a reputation in the area as being among the best in their profession.

Ms. Fatima Mohamed, known to her friends and clients as Tata, is one of the most popular henna artists in Darfur. Her reputation extends to Khartoum and even outside Sudan to places such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, where she frequently travels to serve her clients.

Born in 1979 in El Fasher, North Darfur, Ms. Tata spent her childhood years in her hometown. Afterward, she moved with her parents to Khartoum, where she finished high school, then returned to El Fasher. In 1997, Ms. Tata went again to Khartoum and studied accounting at the university level for two years, but her passion for the art of henna was already taking her away from finance.

Currently, she is dedicated full-time to henna. She says her talent is in such high demand that she is able to support her parents and her 10 siblings. In an interview, Ms. Tata talks about her craft, its artistic and social aspects, and what it means to the people of Darfur.
Could you give us an idea of the origins of the henna art?

Henna is a plant that grows widely in Sudan, including in Darfur. It has a strong smell. A red paste is made of its dry leaves when mixed with water. After pouring the paste in the bag, tying the bag and making a small hole in one of its corners, we apply the paste to the skin. Then when the bag is squeezed, the henna paste leaks out and allows you to draw with it. A certain kind of oil has to be applied to the skin before the henna is applied, and the skin has to be washed with water after one or two hours of applying the henna. This is the process for the red henna.

As for the black henna, a certain colouring material was used previously, up until 15 years ago, but not anymore since the Ministry of Health announced a warning that using that material could have a negative health effect. Currently, we use a colouring locally called beqhen. It's available in pharmacies and in beauty salons.

Historically, did the art of henna come to Darfur from neighbouring countries, or is it originally a local art?

Actually, henna art started in Sudan and in India in ancient times, and then it spread to other countries over the years. So you can say it’s a pure original art in Sudan.

How long does a henna drawing usually last?

It stays for two to three weeks, and it can be washed out either with water or with cola liquid, or with some lotions that are used for hair straightening.

How did you get started with this art?

In my childhood, I used to draw pictures of nature. I used to love drawing, which gave me the necessary basic skills for henna, which I did for the first time in primary school. I'm self-taught in this art because there was no one to teach me. I started with my relatives, doing my own henna designs on their hands. I remember they used to express words of admiration for my work, which I did nicely and neatly, and that encouraged me to continue.

And when did you start taking fees for it as your profession?

Since high school. At that time, my fees varied from one client to another, according to their financial ability, but I was happy to earn some money anyway, even if it was very little.

Do you usually design your own patterns or do you take them from some other source?

I design all my patterns, and I have a big collection of varied patterns to match all kinds of tastes.
In El Fasher, North Darfur, acclaimed henna artist Fatima Mohamed, known to her friends and clients as Tata, is pictured in her home. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Ephemeral Craft - Fatima Mohamed

Fatima Mohamed prepares the henna ingredients for a client. After preparing the henna mixture and pouring the paste in a bag, the henna is applied to the skin where it must stay for one to two hours to set in. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

الفنانة فاطمة تُعد مكونات الحناء لأحد زبائنها، وبعد الفراغ من إعداد خليط الحناء، تُوضع الحناء على الجسد حيث تبقى لساعة أو ساعتين لتستقر في الجلد، تم تصوير الفنانة في الجزائر.
Henna artist Fatima Mohamed prepares the henna ingredients for a client. After preparing the henna mixture and pouring the paste in a bag, the henna is applied to the skin where it must stay for one to two hours to set in. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

الحنانة فاطمة تعد مكونات الحناء لأحد زبائنتها. وبعد الفراغ من إعداد خليط الحناء وضعه في كيس، توضع الحناء على الجسد حيث تستغرق ساعة أو ساعتين للصق فيه. تصوير آلبرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
In El Fasher, North Darfur, acclaimed henna artist Fatima Mohamed is pictured in her home, putting henna on a bride’s friend before a wedding. Olivier Chassot, UNAMID.

الحـاـنـة المـعـروـفـة فـاطـمـة محمد تـتـقـطـت لهـا الصـورـة في بـيـتـها في الفاشر، شمال دارفور، تصوير أوليفييه شاسو، اليوناميد.
Where do you get your inspiration?

Anything in my surrounding can be an inspiration to me, whether tree leaves, flowers or some geometric shapes. In the end, I use my imagination as my main source of inspiration to create new patterns.

Do you need to change your style from time to time to keep up with fashion trends?

Yes, of course. Some old designs fall out of demand, so I add to them new details and change them a bit according to new fashion, because henna drawing is part of the overall appearance.

You have clients in Khartoum and even outside Sudan. How did you achieve that?

In 2002, I worked in a Khartoum beauty salon, where I used to do henna for many clients. It seems they loved my work, so I developed a good reputation. In 2005, owners of beauty salons in Dubai started coming to Khartoum for business, looking for good henna artists to contract them for work in their shops. One of them came to the salon I used to work in and liked my work very much and gave me an offer to work in her salon. I accepted the offer because it was a good opportunity. I went to Dubai and worked there for two years. During that time, I met several clients who liked my work. I still receive requests and invitations from my clients in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

Do the henna patterns have names and do they have meanings that are related in a way to Darfur’s culture?

Generally, they don’t have names. We identify them by shapes; some of them are flowery like roses or tulips, while others look like lace fabric. I show them to clients in photos so they can make their selections. Socially, in Darfur, there are some patterns that are for married women only, and it wouldn’t be appropriate for unmarried women to use these patterns because they are very ornamental and considered highly attractive.

Also, girls are not allowed to apply henna before age 10. After that, they are allowed to have simple henna drawings until adulthood. In the Gulf, local and foreign women can use any pattern they like, including highly attractive patterns. And even little girls there, accompanied by their mothers, sometimes go to beauty salons for henna drawings.

ما هي مصادر الإلهام بالنسبة لك؟

كل الأشياء التي يدور حولي يمكن أن تكون إلهاماً بالنسبة لي، سواء كانت أوراق الأشجار أو أزهار الأشجار الهندسية. وفي النهاية، أستخدم خيالي كمصادر رئيسية لإلهامي.

هل تحتاجين لتغيير النقوش من حين لآخر لمواكبة التغيرات؟

نعم بالطبع، يقل الطلب على بعض النقوش القديمة ولذلك أضيف بعض التفاصيل الجديدة وأجري بعض التغييرات الطفيفة حتى تتساوي النقوش القديمة وتتفق مع التغيرات الواعدة.

لديك زبونات في الخرطوم وحتى خارج السودان، كيف حققتي هذا النجاح؟

في العام 2002، عملت في صالون للجمال في الخرطوم حيث كنت آتقن الحنة للعديد من الزبونات، وبهذا أثبتت قدرتي في التخصص. على المقابلة، بدأت مالكات صالونات الجمال في دبى في التوافد إلى الخرطوم بحثاً عن نقوش الحنة الجيدة. حضرت إحداهن إلى صالوناتي في الخرطوم، وأعجبت بذلك، وطلبت مني أن أعمل في صالونها، فقد كانت فكرة جيدة بالنسبة لي حيث أحببت أن أكون في مكان يرحب بي. و длин العام، دخلت كزبونة، وبدأت تقدم بعض النقوش الجذابة إلى الزبونات، وأقبلت على طلباتهن ودعواتهن.

هل هناك مسميات لنقوش الحنة وحل لها دلالات ذات صلة بالثقافة الدارفورية؟

نعم، ليست هناك مسميات، ولكن أعتبرها نماذج عامة. بعضها يشبه شكل مثل الأدوات أو الأزهار، وهكذا، يضيف شبه جغرافي للشمال. ينتقل بعض النقوش جنوبًا إلى الشمال، ويتم تطبيقها بوعوداً على النقوش الإبرازية. بإمكان هناك بعض النقوش التي تتعارض مع المتطلبات، والتي تكون من غير غير المتطلبات، ولكن هنا، في الشرق، فإن النقوش هي أكثر جاذبية.

Ephemeral Craft - Fatima Mohamed
Is there any difference between the patterns used in Darfur and those used in Khartoum?

Darfur designs are the same as in Khartoum and in all Sudan. But the Sudanese henna designs are different from the Indian, as Indian designs typically consist of very small ornaments. We use them here sometimes and we call them Indian ornaments. The Sudanese henna designs have their own character and shapes. They're more liked locally and abroad. Henna is very different from western tattoos, which can be drawings of animals, such as tigers, falcons or scorpions, or geometric shapes. Sudanese henna drawings come only in black or red, while tattoos can be various colours.

In Darfur, are there some ceremonies or traditional rituals where henna drawings are expected?

Only for marriage do we have special henna ceremonies. In the marriage process, a special day is set aside for henna. For these ceremonies, we use what is called the jerek, which is a tray that consists of henna and other materials, such as silk threads, wooden containers for local scents, called mebkher, and a rosary of large black and red beads, called Sibhat El Yusur, which is meant to bring blessings.

During this ceremony, the grandmother applies henna to the bride, shaping only a small straight line on her forehead. At that moment, the invited women start singing certain songs, praising the bride's beauty and wishing her happiness. Then the party starts.

The henna drawing is applied to the bride on another day. The drawing on her feet is done a week prior to the wedding, while the drawing on her hands is done on the morning of the wedding. Other than weddings, women usually apply henna at any time without special ceremonies.

Do you charge high rates because of your reputation for being one of the best henna artists in Sudan?

Not at all. My prices are quite reasonable. I take into consideration the financial situation of my clients when I charge them. Sometimes I give discounts to regular clients. At other times, I might not charge a client at all if she can't afford it.

Has your business in Darfur slowed since the conflict started?

Yes, very much so compared to the years before the war. That was one of the reasons for me to travel and work in Dubai. Currently, the local demand is a bit better, but it’s still down from what it once was. Many of my clients have left Darfur and have settled in Khartoum or in other countries because of the difficult situation there.

هل هناك إختلاف بين النقوش المستخدمة في دارفور وتلك المستخدمة في الخرطوم؟

النقش المستخدمة في دارفور هي نفس النقوش المستخدمة في الخرطوم وفي كل أرجاء السودان. ولكن نجد تفاصيل تكوين الحناء في السودان عن تلك التي في الهند حيث تظهر النقوش الهندية عادة بتصرف الإخاء الصفحي. لذا نجد نقوش البترول المصرية وأشكالها الخاصة والتي تأتي من استياساً على الموضوح المخي ونجد نقوش البنصر من الخرطوم أبيض. لكن النقوش السودانية فذاماً وأشكالها الخاصة والتي تأتي من استياساً على النقوش الهندية فذاماً وأشكالها الخاصة والتي تأتي من استياساً على القبعة الصفراء. النقوش الخرطومية فذاماً وأشكالها الخاصة والتي تأتي من استياساً على القبعة الصفراء.

هل هناك بعض المناسبات أو الطقوس التقليدية في دارفور تمارس فيها نقوش حنة معينة؟

لا بأس أن نستعرض نقوش حنة خاصة في مناسبات الزواج. في مراسم الزواج، يتم تخصيص يوم محدد للحنة. في مثل هذه الامور نستخدم ما نسمى بالجرتق وهو صينية تكون من الحنة وغيرها من المواد مثل خيوط الحرير وأوعية خشبية للتنفس تعرف بالبكر ونسخة الجرز الأحمر والأشوك تعرف بشبه النسر والتي يعتقد أنها نزلت النور.

خلال هذه المراسم نقوم بوضع الحنة للعروس في خط مستقيم على جبهتها في تلك الأثناء، تبدأ النساء بعض الأغاني الخاصة التي تمنح جمال العروس تجليد النسر، ونرتدي لما علمنا، ومن ثم نبدأ الحفل.

هناك تغطية أجواء عالية كونه واحدة من أفضل رسامات الحنة في السودان؟

لا على الإطلاق. أعتبروا مكاسبة للغاية. أخذ في الامور الطريقة إلى لون من الزفاف، ففي أروع من الزفاف، نحن نرسم الحنة على يدنا في صورة يوم زفاف ببسيطة مناسبات الزفاف. عادة تضع النساء الحنة في أي وقت دون أن مراسم خاصة.

هل تراجع عدد عملك منذ نشوب الصراع؟

نعم، تراجع كثيراً مقارنة بالسنوات التي سبقت الصراع وكان هذا أحد أسبابي سبتي لإني أعمل هناك الآن. ابتسمت الطبي المخلص إني كنت بخير دون المسائل السابق. أكثر من زرتني غارات دارفور وألم في الخرطوم والأضاح الأخرى وذلك بسبب الوضع الصعبة هنا.
In El Fasher, North Darfur, a client of noted henna artist Ms. Fatima Mohmaed waits for the henna process to complete for a piece Ms. Mohamed just applied to her hand and arm. The process normally takes one to two hours. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

Ephemeral Craft - Fatima Mohamed
Are you ever asked how you justify doing your work while the people of Darfur are still going through hard times due to the conflict?

Actually, I am proud of my work because it helps lift up the spirits of Darfuri women. My art boosts their morale and makes them feel better. Thus, I see my work as being helpful in difficult times because it helps the women here face life’s hardships with a positive attitude.

So you see henna art as a positive social force in Darfur?

As a henna artist doing this work for many years now, I’ve met a large number of Darfuri women from different tribes. They meet with each other while I’m doing henna. I usually do my work in a welcoming and sociable atmosphere that encourages women to talk to one another in a friendly manner. Sometimes they become good friends. I’ve found that even women coming from different tribes that had not been interacting with each other because of a dispute have become friends again after meeting while I’m doing my henna work. Through my henna work, many Darfuri families have become friends with each other, regardless of their tribal origin.

So you believe henna can contribute in a way to social development and stability in Darfur?

Yes, of course. For example, some messages promoting peace or women’s empowerment can be designed in an artful way and used among many Darfuri women when they participate in related events during the year. In this way they could contribute to spreading effective concepts in line with the present peace process and efforts to rebuild Darfur.

What is your ambition in the henna art field?

I would like to establish my own salon in El Fasher, dedicated only to henna drawing.

Is there a special message you would like to deliver to Darfuris?

I want to tell all Darfuris they should behave like Darfur’s tribal elders in the old times. They lived together peacefully, eating for each other and in harmony with one another.

In El Fasher, North Darfur, acclaimed henna artist Fatima Mohamed is pictured in her home, putting henna on a bride’s friend before a wedding. Olivier Chassot, UNAMID.

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Born in 1975 in El Fasher, North Darfur, Mr. Mua’wiya Musa is a Darfuri musician. Although his academic studies were not in music—they focused instead on Arabic calligraphy—he is passionate about music and occupies a significant amount of his spare time.

Mr. Musa’s love for music did not stop him from completing his education. He finished high school in El Fasher, then studied in the Social Development Institute in the College of Fine Arts at the University of El Fasher. Today, he dedicates time each day to composing and playing music.

In this conflict-torn region of the world, Mr. Musa says, music plays a critical role as a survival tool that can help people cope with life’s hardships. In this sense, this El Fasher musician considers the music here to be a kind of ad hoc therapy, useful for helping struggling Darfuris not merely endure, but also look to a future filled with peace, and prevail in the end against the forces of conflict.

In an interview, Mr. Musa talks about the music he creates, about the influence of music on the peace process and about this living art form in Darfur.
Mr. Muawiya Musa is pictured in the sound studio at his home in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

الفنان معاوية موسى في استوديو الصوت في منزله في الفلاشير، شمال دارفور. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، يوناميد.
What were your first experiences with music and how did you get started?

First, in high school, I started learning to play the accordion. At that time, the school had cultural assemblies through which students would present their art, such as drama, poetry and music. I used to watch all those activities, and it was then that I knew I had passion for music. I decided to learn to play the accordion because the instrument was available in my school for student activities. I started practicing by myself in the school music room, and my friends encouraged me. I used to spend long hours practicing until my shoulders and arms would hurt. That was my start with music.

Then I started playing the accordion outdoors in my neighbourhood along with my friends, who played other instruments. These sessions enhanced my playing skills and helped me become good at playing the accordion. Later, I joined a band called “Darfur Arts,” which used to get requests by families to perform in some of their occasions.

After that, I played in a band with my high school friends. We called the band “Abaad,” and we performed in the El Fasher Cultural Centre. But that band didn’t last for long. By that time, in addition to being able to play the accordion, I could also play the organ. I had one of my own, so I started performing by myself at different occasions, such as social and cultural events, and I gained a good reputation in El Fasher. People started requesting me to perform for their events.

What is the instrument that you play mainly now?

Currently, I play mainly on the electronic keyboard, which can create the sounds of other instruments through its stored digital memory. I also play the guitar and the oud, which is similar to the guitar, but it’s designed mainly for Middle Eastern music.

Do you only play, or do you compose your own songs as well?

Actually, I compose and do music mixing as well as using a digital recording system.

What type of music do you usually compose, classic or contemporary?

I like contemporary music, so most of my music pieces are contemporary, but they have the special flavour of the Sudanese style.

Most artists get inspired by one or more famous artists. What about you? Is there a famous musician, local or international, who has inspired you to play?

There isn’t one particular artist or musician that I like most, but there are a lot of music works that interest me, Western and Middle Eastern.

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Mr. Mu'awiya Musa is pictured in the sound studio at his home in El Fasher North Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

الفنان معاوي موسى في استوديو الصوت بمنزله في الفاشر، شمال دارفور. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
The hands of Mr. Mua’wiya Musa, a popular El Fasher musician, as he plays in his sound studio at home. Mr. Musa, a composer, supports his work with a day job in graphic design, a field in which he received a university degree. Photo byAlbert González Farran, UNAMID.

يد الفنان معاوية موسى أثناء عزفه في استوديو الصوت بمنزله. السيد موسى هو مؤلف موسيقي يدعم عمله من خلال وظيفة نهارية في مجال الرسامي، وهو حاصل على شهادة جامعية في هذا المجال. تصوير البرت غونزالس فران، اليوناميد.

Music Therapy - Mua’wiya Musa
Do you compose songs, or only musical scores?

I compose songs only upon request and when I like the lyrics. So far, I've composed more than 20 songs that have been written by friends. These songs treated different subjects: emotional, patriotic, religious as well as subjects for children. Some of these songs were broadcast on local radio stations.

Do you have a band that you perform with currently?

For now, I play on my own, and that’s because the difficult situation here has affected all cultural activities in Darfur. But I compensate for the absence of a band with digital instruments generated by my keyboard, which also can produce beats as though a whole band is playing.

Where do you record your music? In a studio?

I have a home studio where I record all my music. I plug the keyboard into my computer and I use applications for digital recording. Currently, in El Fasher, there isn’t an audio-recording studio that is available to musicians. Probably, I’m the only one in town who uses the system of digital audio recording.

This computer recording technique requires advanced skills. How did you learn the specific computer applications required for this process? Did you teach yourself?

I learned it later on after I took some music courses in Khartoum at the Um Durman Youth Centre in 2004. I got some work there as a musician, and that allowed me to attend studios for audio recording. I learned how to operate recording and mixing systems.

Have you had the opportunity to distribute some of your music in the markets to promote your work?

Some of the songs I’ve composed have been distributed in the local market. These songs were funded by some singers and distributed on CD and cassette. The latest music I composed was for a UNAMID multimedia project that featured a theatre group. The video clip was used for International Youth Day. My music helped to enhance that project.

Are you dedicated as a musician, full-time, or do you do other work at same time to support your music?

I work in graphic design. It’s a job that helps me support myself.

Music Therapy - Mua’wiya Musa
In El Fasher, North Darfur, Mr. Mua’wiya Musa is pictured in the sound studio at his home. Mr. Musa is a composer who supports his work with a day job in graphic design, a field in which he received a university degree.

Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Mr. Mua‘wiya Musa, a popular El Fasher musician, listens to a track he recorded in his sound studio at home. Mr. Musa supports his work in music with a day job in graphic design, a field in which he received a university degree. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Does the conflict here in Darfur affect your music?

Of course. Creative work needs to be done with a specific mentality and with a certain mood, but the financial and social difficulties in Darfur can easily disturb an artist’s inner world. If my living circumstances were better, my music productivity certainly would have been much better.

What about other Darfuri musicians? Do you know if they suffer as well from the situation here?

Most musicians suffer from the ongoing conflict and the resulting difficult living situation in the same way other artists and other Darfuris do. If there were peace, artists in Darfur would be able to produce more art, and that would illustrate how many artists there actually are in Darfur. It would also show that we are in fact a civilized people, not warmongers.

Are young Darfuri musicians influence by western music or do they tend to keep to their local styles and traditional forms of music?

Western culture has dominated all developing nations, including Sudan and the region of Darfur. So many contemporary Darfuri songs are made in a western style, and played by western musical instruments such as the guitar and drums. But even these songs have a Darfuri flavour.

Do you think using foreign styles enriches Darfuri music?

I think we should keep the music patterns and beats that are typically Darfuri even when embracing foreign music styles. This way, we can enrich our local music without obliterating its identity.

Tell us about the main features of Darfuri music in terms of rhythms and patterns. Are they different from music in other areas in Sudan, such as the Khartoum area and Blue Nile?

There is a saying that goes “dancing is the nation’s mirror.” I say that dancing is about beat, and beat is all about feeling life. I will give you an example here: the Baqara tribe has its own fast beat in its music, which is inspired by the fast speed of the cattle. Some desert tribes, in contrast, use slow beats, reflecting the slow movements of the camels and the harsh monotonous environment in which they live. So Darfuri beats differ even from one tribe to another.

As for singing patterns, there are many of them, such as the Dobet, the Hadjap, the Sunjuk. These are developed from tribes of Arabic origin. There are also the African singing patterns. In general, Darfuri music has its own character, which distinguishes it from the music created in other areas of Sudan. Still, we can say that Sudanese music all has a similar flavour.
Is Sudanese music closer to African music than it is to Arabic music?

Sudanese music comes in between. It has both an African and an Arabic feel. For example, the seventh scale is used widely in Arabic music, and also in some Sudanese tribes. And there is the fifth scale, which is used widely across Africa. It’s used in Sudan as well. This fifth scale is actually used worldwide, and the famous singer Bob Marley used it in many of his songs.

In terms of local music, what do you think of the songs of the Hakamat? And do you think their value is more social or artistic?

Women performed the Hakamat songs long before the conflict in Darfur, when they encouraged noble moral values among tribe members. These values included generosity and courage. The Hakamat songs have continued during the conflict, although many of the Hakamas now are chanting for peace. Musically, I see in these songs high creativity and intelligence. The Hakamas write the lyrics and the accompanying melodies, and they also sing the songs they create.

How in your opinion can the Darfuri musicians contribute to advancing peace and reconciliation in the region?

Unfortunately, the difficult living situation here undermines musicians’ ability to play a more effective social role. Thus, their role in advancing peace and reconciliation is limited, which is a sad situation to me.

Have you participated in activities to promote peace in Darfur?

Yes, I participated in the Fourth Cultural Festival in 1998, and in 2007 in the Arab Youth Festival in Khartoum, where I won the gold medal in solo piano. Also, I’ve been composing music for peace in Darfur, but this music hasn’t been broadcast or published yet.

What would you like to tell the people of Darfur?

I would like to tell them to embrace noble human values and change a war culture into a peace culture so that we can have an opportunity to show the world our art.

Mr. Mua’wiya Musa is pictured in the sound studio at his home. Mr. Musa is a composer who supports his work with a day job in graphic design, a field in which he received a university degree. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Born in 1986 in Tarni, a small village in North Darfur's Tawila locality, Mr. Elfadhil Khatir is one of a small group of Darfuri academics conducting research on Darfur's cultural performances to develop a deeper understanding of their historical development and social impact.

Mr. Khatir studied in the Darfur school system before traveling to Khartoum, where he narrowed his focus to music and drama in Sudan University. Shortly after graduating, Mr. Khatir, whose Bachelor's degree thesis focused on the variety of rhythm and song types in Darfur, received an offer of a teaching position at the University of El Fasher in the College of Education.

In an interview, the young lecturer talks about the unique focus of his scholarship and teaching, including the traditional dances in Darfur, their various forms and their relation to the social lives of Darfuris.
Would you tell us about the traditional dances in Darfur and when they first appeared here?

Darfur's traditional dances are an ancient form of art. They are part of the Darfuri legacy and tied deeply to the lives of Darfuris. They are all done by groups of people, and they're usually accompanied by rhythms and songs that reflect emotions related to different circumstances and events, whether celebratory or tragic.

There are so many traditional dances in Darfur. There is a certain dance for each occasion. For example, there is a dance for weddings, another for harvests, a dance for war, one for circumcision, and so on. Each tribe in Darfur has its own traditional dances, which vary from one tribe to another. The wide variety of these dances is due to elements including tradition, social environment and even weather.

Historically, these dances have appeared since the first people existed in this area. So we can say that the traditional dances we see today among Darfur's tribes are rooted in the rhythmic body movements that were done in ancient times.

Would you explain why these traditional performances are so different from one tribe to another although these tribes all live in one region?

The difference we see between dances among Darfuri tribes is because the tribes themselves are originally from different areas. So tribes of African origin dance differently from the tribes of Arabic origin. Even the African tribes differ in their dances from one to another, because some of them come from different African countries that have their own general dance styles. For example, traditional dancing in Chad is different from dances in Central African Republic, and the traditional dancing in Morocco differs from dances in Egypt. Darfuri tribes come from all these various areas.

Have some of these dances changed with time in terms of body movements and the accompanying rhythms?

There has been some change, but mostly in the music that accompanies the dances. The change occurs naturally when new musical instruments appear with time, adding new elements to the music and the rhythms of the local dances. But the dancing movements remain generally the same.

Is it possible to quantify the specific number of the traditional dances in Darfur?

It's difficult to identify a specific number that includes all types of traditional dances in Darfur. In the case of the Fur tribe, there are at least 32 traditional dances, each for a unique occasion. So if there are 200 tribes in Darfur, with each one having at least 10 unique dances, on average, we can surmise that there are some 2,000 traditional dances in the region altogether. But the actual number could be much larger. Some sources indicate there are some 500 tribes in Darfur using 600 distinct dialects. If this is true, then the number of the traditional dances in Darfur could be more than 5,000.

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Historically, these dances have appeared since the first people existed in this area. So we can say that the traditional dances we see today among Darfur's tribes are rooted in the rhythmic body movements that were done in ancient times.

Would you explain why these traditional performances are so different from one tribe to another although these tribes all live in one region?

The difference we see between dances among Darfuri tribes is because the tribes themselves are originally from different areas. So tribes of African origin dance differently from the tribes of Arabic origin. Even the African tribes differ in their dances from one to another, because some of them come from different African countries that have their own general dance styles. For example, traditional dancing in Chad is different from dances in Central African Republic, and the traditional dancing in Morocco differs from dances in Egypt. Darfuri tribes come from all these various areas.

Have some of these dances changed with time in terms of body movements and the accompanying rhythms?

There has been some change, but mostly in the music that accompanies the dances. The change occurs naturally when new musical instruments appear with time, adding new elements to the music and the rhythms of the local dances. But the dancing movements remain generally the same.

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Mr. Elfadhil Khatir is one of a small group of Darfuri academics who conducts research on Darfur’s cultural performances to develop a deeper understanding of their historical development and social impact. Photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran, UNAMID.

السيد الفضل خاطر هو أحد الأكاديميين الدارفوريين الذين أجروا بحوثًا في العروض الثقافية في دارفور. هذه الأبحاث تهدف إلى فهم أفضل للتطور التاريخي والأثر الاجتماعي لهذه العروض. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
In El Fasher, North Darfur, Mr. Elfadil Khatir, a lecturer at the University of El Fasher, teaches traditional Darfuri dance to his students. Mr. Khatir is one of a small group of Darfuri academics who conducts research on Darfur’s cultural performances to develop a deeper understanding of their historical development and social impact.

Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.
Does each dance have a specific song that goes with it, or can different songs be used for different dances?

Actually, a dance doesn’t have to have the same song played with it each time. A different song can go with a dance when it is performed for a different occasion, but it should reflect the dance’s rhythm. The lyrics should also match with the occasion or the atmosphere when the dance is performed.

In Darfur, we have rich legacy of songs for a wide range of occasions. For example, the Nafeer occasion is a social activity or the atmosphere when the dance is performed.

Some of them require a specific number of dancers. These dances can’t be done with a fewer number of dancers than tradition requires. For example, the Rishat dance is done on the occasions of receiving sultans and kings, and requires a specific number of dancers. But there are dances that can be done by any number of people, such as the Hijory, which is for happy occasions attended by large groups.

Do dancers need to have a significant amount of training to perform in these dances, or should they be a specific age?

Only some of the dances require lots of training, such as the dances for war. These dances involve complicated movements that can’t be learned quickly. Some other dances are quite easy, such as those for weddings or harvests.

As for the age of dancers, there are some issues with certain dances. We have dances that could be dangerous. In dances for war, the dancers carry sharp weapons called Kurbaj. The dancers should not touch each other during the performance. If one dancer touches another, the consequences could be disastrous. Thus, the dancers should have a high level of skill in performing this dance. This skill comes only with practice and age. So young men, naturally, haven’t had enough time to practice that dance and are not encouraged to perform it.

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In the El Fasher Cultural Centre in North Darfur, a member of the Sarafi drama group performs a traditional Darfuri dance under the guidance of Mr. Elfadhil Khatir, a lecturer at El Fasher University. Photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran, UNAMID.
In El Fasher, North Darfur, Mr. Elfadhl Khatir plays his violin while teaching traditional Darfuri dance to his students at El Fasher University. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Are there Darfuri dances for women only?

There are women’s dances, such as those for wedding and henna occasions. These dances are done inside homes where only women can watch. There are other dances where both men and women can participate. But most of Darfuri traditional dances are done by men, probably because the society here is conservative. Men's dances are usually performed outdoors where anyone, including men, women and children, can watch.

What about costumes? Does each dance have a certain outfit associated with it?

Costumes usually match the movements in a certain dance. For example, dancers wear long trousers for a dance called Juju, while in other styles the dancers wear suits. And in many dances, the outfit is the Galabiya and Imma, the traditional body and head attire commonly worn in Sudan.

Are traditional war dances still practised in some areas?

Only to a certain extent because of the traditions in Darfur and due to some conflicts that still happen among some tribes. So there are still some war dances that are carried out with songs that urge people to defend their lands in case of disputes with other tribes. Some other dances are done to urge people to defend their honour.

Generally, war dances are not popular in Darfur any longer, and people are not affected by them due to the overall willingness among Darfuris to work toward peace and peaceful coexistence.

In general, are the traditional dances still practiced widely in Darfur's cities and villages in comparison with the past years?

Unfortunately, many traditional dances are not practiced as often as in the past, before the conflict. The reason for this is that lots of people were displaced due to the conflict and have been going through tough times. So many tribal communities have had to abandon their dances, as they don’t have the luxury of free time to practice. Many families and entire communities are struggling merely to stay alive. But there are many areas where traditional dances are still performed, especially the areas that have good security around the main cities with sizeable populations.

هل هناك رقصات خاصة بالنساء في دارفور؟

هناك رقصات خاصة بالنساء كتلك المتعلقة بالأعراس وحفلات العيد. تؤدي هذه الرقصات داخل البيوت وهي حكر على النساء، هناك بعض الرقصات التي تشارك فيها الرجال والنساء على حد سواء، معظم الرقصات الشعبية في دارفور فدوزها الرجال وقد يعود ذلك إلى أن المجتمع ينتمي للمحافظة. عادة ما تؤدي رقصات الرجال في خارج المنزل وأبدأ الجميع مشاهدة العروض بين فقه الرجال والنساء والأطفال.

ماذا عن الأزياء، هل لكل رقصة زي خاص بها؟

تتوقف الأزياء مع حركات كل رقصة، فهناك سبيل المثال، يرتدي الراقصون سراويل طويلة عند أداء رقصة الجوجو بينما يرتدي الراقصون بدلات عند أداء أداء بعض الرقصات. يرتدي الراقصون الحبال والعمامة وهي الأزياء التقليدية التي يرتديها الرجال في السودان.

هل لازالت رقصات الحرب التقليدية تمارس في بعض المناطق؟

إذا حدث ما، وذلك بسبب التقاليد السائدة في دارفور وسبب النزاعات القائمة بين الفئات، لاتزال بعض القبائل تؤدي رقصات حرب محلية، بعض الألغاز التي تنتج الناس للذود عن ملاذهم في حال النزاع مع قبيلة أخرى.

بعض الرقصات تنتج الناس على الدفاع عن شرقهم، في الغالب لم تعد رقصات الحرب سائدة في دارفور ولم يعد آخر دارفور يتأثر بها بسبب الرغبة العامة في تحقيق السلام والتعايش السلمي.

بصورة عامة، هل تؤدي الرقصات التقليدية في مدن وقرى دارفور؟

على نطاق واسع، لم تؤدي الرقصات التقليدية في مدن وقرى دارفور بسبب العوامل المذكورة.
In El Fasher, North Darfur, Mr. Elfadhil Khatir (centre) offers guidance on traditional Darfuri dance styles to members of the Sarafi drama group at the El Fasher Cultural Centre. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.
Do you think new group dances could be designed by Darfur’s young people to help promote peace and reconciliation?

Definitely. This deeply rooted art in Darfur’s societies can effectively contribute to promoting peace and reconciliation among tribes. New group dances could be designed by mixing movements from different tribes. These dances could involve symbolic movements expressing unity and brotherhood among these groups. Such a project could indeed be implemented by the musicians and dancers here to reflect the need of the young people in Darfur to have a better life. A better life can’t be achieved through war, but rather through social peace and prosperity.

Artistically, traditional dances could be transformed into new, contemporary styles to promote peace and social development. Such dances could be performed during happy occasions that are typically attended by large audience.

Finally, what is the message you would like to send to all Darfuris?

I would like to tell them that social unity, not dispersion and division, is the basis of good life. So let’s unite to have one country for all of us, regardless of race, religion or colour.
As one of the few female artists in Darfur, Ms. Sayida Omar Adam has made her mark with bold, colourful canvases that she says reveal her hopes for a bright future. Detailed patterns and traditional symbolism combine with depictions of men and women together into what she says is an expression of her firm belief in equal participation for women in various aspects of a Darfur's life.

Born in 1979, Ms. Adam grew up in El Fasher, North Darfur, as the daughter of parents who supported her interest in and appreciation for art. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in painting, with a special focus on colour, from the College of Fine and Applied Arts at Sudan University.

In an interview, Ms. Adam talks about the artistic process, what inspires her and the different tools and techniques she uses to imbue her work with the depth of insight demanded by her personal creative vision.
Artist Ms. Sayida Omar Adam is pictured in her studio at home in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

الفنانة سيدة عمر آدم في مشغلها بمنزلها في الفاشر، شمال دارفور. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
Tell us a bit about when your love for art first started to flower. When did you decide to be a painter?

When I was a child, my father used to refereee football matches; he would often take me to the stadium at El Fasher University (then called Dar Al Baydha). I would sit atop the podium and enjoy the wide expanse of nature in front of me. It made me want to draw it.

Later, my father worked in blacksmithing, making chairs and window frames. He would add artistic metal details to his pieces using his own hands rather than depending on pre-moulded casts. This captured my attention. My mother also made leather artifacts with colourful engravings and lines. She would use wooden pieces to spread colours on the leather surface; this fascinated me as well. Since that time, I have always been drawn to any mode of artistic expression.

The first time I drew something was in primary school. I used to fill the pages of all my exercise books with drawings, a fact that got me into trouble with some of my teachers. However, there were others who loved art and recognized my talent. They encouraged me. Soon, the school management started asking me to make illustrations for study materials.

Since I was still a little girl, I didn't know that I could study painting later in life, so I wanted to be a doctor, like most children in Sudan. In the fifth grade, I discovered a college in Khartoum that teaches the arts, and I decided to specialize in painting.

How did your family react when you told them that you wanted to study painting in Khartoum?

Studying in Khartoum wasn’t a problem because I had relatives there. As for specializing in painting, it wasn’t a surprise to them as they were well-versed with my passion; I was either drawing or designing something most of the time, instead of playing with my siblings. Today, I feel deeply grateful to them for supporting me in studying painting because it greatly boosted my skills and my confidence in my own abilities.

Was there a particular artist whose work you liked and who inspired you to draw?

In terms of classic international artists, I like Van Gogh paintings for their bold and diversified colour schemes as well as strong brush strokes. I admire other artists who are not well-known. For example, my cousin, who was a teacher when I was 14 years old, often made pieces for her house. I liked her work a lot even though she wasn’t a professional painter. She used to give me colours and tools to draw; this gave me a big impetus to continue with art.

Tell us about the exhibitions you have held so far.

I participated in three exhibitions jointly with other artists. Two of these were in Khartoum—one was held at my University to showcase the works of graduates; the other was held at the opening of Finance 2010. The third exhibition was in El Fasher in 2012 at the Culture House. I also had an individual exhibition in 2009 at the Kosti National School, White Nile.

I would like to organize another individual exhibition, but I cannot afford the expenses currently. At present, I am showing my paintings on my Facebook page, which is, in my opinion, a good alternative forum to display artwork for any artist.

Tell me a bit about your Facebook page, which is a good alternative for new artists...

Ahmed is one of the few artists in Sudan who has a Facebook page for his work. It is a good platform for artists to display their work, and it has been a source of inspiration for many young artists. Ahmed uses his page to showcase his paintings and drawings, as well as his thoughts and ideas on art. He also uses it to connect with other artists and art enthusiasts in Sudan and around the world.

That’s great to hear! How do you feel about the response you’ve received from your followers?

Ahmed is pleased with the positive response he has received from his followers. They appreciate his dedication to his craft and his willingness to share his work and thoughts with others. They also enjoy the diverse range of art that he showcases on his page, from traditional to modern. Ahmed is grateful for the support of his followers and hopes to continue sharing his art with them.

How do you think social media has impacted the art world?

Social media has had a significant impact on the art world. It has provided artists with a platform to showcase their work and connect with others, regardless of location. It has also helped to promote new artists and give them exposure to a wider audience. Ahmed believes that social media is a powerful tool for artists to promote their work and connect with other artists and art enthusiasts.

Do you have any advice for young artists who are just starting out in their careers?

Ahmed would like to share some advice for young artists just starting out in their careers. He suggests that artists should focus on developing their skills and gaining experience, as well as building a strong online presence through social media. He also recommends that artists network with other artists and art enthusiasts, both locally and online, to learn from their experiences and get feedback on their work.

What’s next for you? Are you planning any upcoming exhibitions or projects?

Ahmed is currently working on a new series of paintings that he plans to showcase in a solo exhibition later this year. He is also considering collaborating with other artists on a collective project that will be presented at a local art gallery. Ahmed is excited about the possibilities ahead and looks forward to sharing his art with others.

How do you think technology has changed the way artists work and connect with others?

Ahmed believes that technology has had a significant impact on the art world, enabling artists to connect with others and share their work in ways that were not possible before. He notes that social media has been particularly transformative, allowing artists to reach a wider audience and connect with other artists and art enthusiasts from all over the world.

What’s your favorite art medium to work with and why?

Ahmed enjoys working with a variety of art mediums, including acrylics, oils, and mixed media. He finds that each medium offers unique possibilities and challenges, allowing him to express himself in different ways. He also appreciates the flexibility of mixed media, which allows him to combine different materials and techniques to create a unique piece of art.

What’s your favorite piece of art and why?

Ahmed is proud of his latest piece, a large-scale painting that he has been working on for several months. He finds it particularly rewarding to see the piece come together and enjoy the process of creating something new. He hopes to find an opportunity to exhibit this piece in the future.
A painting created by Ms. Sayida Omar Adam, an El Fasher artist who says she focuses heavily on the cultural heritage of Darfur in her work and makes a special point of including images of women in her art.

لوحة للفنانة الفاشرية سيدة عمر آدم، والتي أبانت بأنها تركز كثيراً على التراث الثقافي لدارفور في عملها وتحرص على أن يشمل عملها تصور المرأة.
Artist Ms. Sayida Omar Adam is pictured in her studio at home in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

الفنانة سيدة عمر آدم في مشغلها في الشمال، شمال دارفور. تصوير ألبرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
You use symbolic shapes in your paintings. Are these related to your Darfuri heritage?

All symbols in my paintings can be found within the heart of my Darfuri heritage. They are strongly connected to the social and psychological nature of our society. Our local culture has always been a major source of inspiration for me, in terms of content, form and color. For instance, the incense burner, which appears in several of my pictures, is used in perfuming the house, a common practice among married women in Darfur. Women usually clean and brush the house to create a pleasant atmosphere for their husbands when they return from work in the farm or in the city. This tradition reflects how Darfuri women nurture their relationship with their husbands.

Another shape I draw often is palm fronds. The fronds signify peace in Sudan and are similar to the olive branch in other countries. One more recurrent theme is the falcon, found everywhere in Darfur, this bird stands for courage and bravery, often considered to be the distinguishing traits of Darfuri men.

Figures of men and women are also present together in many of your paintings; what do you hope to express through this?

My intention is not to highlight romance, but rather to express the importance of participation of women in all aspects of life. Men and women are partners in establishing families, laying the foundations of a good society as well as facing various life situations.

Darfuri women have proved to be strong and capable in managing issues of the house and taking care of children, especially in these difficult, conflict-ridden times. Yet, society often views women as weak and incomplete. Thus, I give women ample space in my work to emphasize her strength and importance.

What tools do you use and how do they affect the final look of a painting?

I use more than one tool in creating a painting—knives and brushes, sometimes my fingers, or a piece of cloth or even plastic; anything I might find around me. Each tool gives a certain density and different texture to a work. I incorporate multiple textures in a painting to give it depth. As for backgrounds, I use either canvas or wooden boards. In terms of paints, I mostly prefer oil-based and acrylic colors, especially for large paintings.

And what about your use of colours in expressing a subject?

I mostly like warm hues such as red and orange and their various shades. Of course, each color gives a certain meaning and has a psychological affect both in terms of the artist and the receiver. For example, I use blue to denote the sky and a divine protective influence when I draw a Darfuri woman in a faraway, empty land carrying a pile of wood on her head.

I use yellow to signify the earth, stability and belonging, while green implies fertility. Generally, I like using color as it is, but I do mix and match occasionally to have a variety of new tones.
How would you describe your style in general and have you reached the artistic level you have desired?

My paintings combine abstract styles and primitivism. This is not easy as it requires a high level of skill in different tools and techniques, and a solid foundation in drawing. Rich mental reserves are necessary to capture elements of nature and the environment around us. I love this style because it is imbued with meaning and uniqueness.

My achievements so far reflect only a small part of my ambitions as an artist. Art is an ongoing process of search and improvement; once that stops, the artist is finished. I feel I have huge amount of energy to produce good art and to depict beauty in my paintings, whether in the form of a bird, a child, a road, a tent or in the single leaf of a tree. Like all other artists who resonate with their homeland, I feel I have enough energy to bring peace to Darfur.

كيف تصفين أسلوبك بشكل عام وهل وصلت إلى المستوى الفني الذي تطمحين اليه؟

إنّ لوحاتي تجمع ما بين الأسلوب التجريدي والبدائي وهو أمر ليس سهلاً حيث يتطلب مستوى عالي من المهارة في مختلف الأدوات والأساليب. كما يتطلب أساساً جيداً في الرسم، ومعرفة دمثى على لحور عناصر الطبيعة والبيئة من حولنا. أحب هذا الأسلوب لأنه مشبع بالتفرد والمغزى.

كل إنجازاتي إلى الوقت الحاضر لا تعكس إلا جزءاً يسيراً من طموحي كفنانة. الفن عملية مستمرة من البحث والتطور ولهذا الفنان حين يتوقف، ينتهي الفناني. أشعر بأنني آثرت الحياة والرسام الحلال في نفسي، فأنا في صورة طائر، أو طفل، أو طريق، أو حيلة، أو في صورة ورقة واحدة من الشجرة، وكيفية الفنانيين المثقفين، يوظفون أشعر بأنني آثرت الحياة والفنان في نفسي.
In El Fasher, North Darfur, artist Ms. Sayida Omar Adam uses various implements, such as the palette knife shown here, to create different textures in her paintings. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
How can Darfuri artists participate in bringing peace to Darfur?

Darfuri artists can help the cause of peace immensely by creating works of art that attract people from different spectrums, and by conducting art activities that support messages of peace. From my personal observation, people in Darfur are eager to appreciate good art and long for social and cultural activities. A few months ago, an art exhibition, accompanied by music, was held for several artists in El Naqaa Square in the El Fasher city market. Lots of people attended; even children, accompanied by parents, came to watch. People gathered in an atmosphere of peace and joy; it was as if the conflict didn’t exist. This reflects what artists can currently achieve in Darfur.

Are there relatively few women painters in Darfur? Or do they lack recognition despite large numbers?

There are very few women painters in Darfur. Art demands dedication and boldness along with societal acceptance. However, there are lots of women who work in related industries, such as making baskets, pottery and leather items. Such products sell well locally because they find utility in daily life and, thus, provide extra income to those who make them.

If we compare the fine arts in Khartoum with those in Darfur, will we find stark differences between the two?

Art in Darfur is original and very expressive because the Darfuri artist lives within a rich natural environment. In Khartoum, the quantity of art production is larger and artists have more means to display and sell their work compared to Darfuri artists.

Looking at the current situation with regard to art in Darfur, how would you describe its development?

Art in Darfur is like a dying child. It was born recently but is not getting adequate care, which is necessary for it to flourish.

If peace is achieved in Darfur, what will be the next priority for artists?

They will need moral and material support, such as showrooms and exhibition halls for raising community awareness about the importance of the arts. Also, we should have a large piece of public art in every city representing the tragedies of the conflict to serve as a reminder not resort to violence ever again.

Besides painting, do you dabble in any other form of art?

Currently, I design Sudanese thobes and do henna drawings as well. This supplements my income. But, first and foremost, I am a painter.

Is there anything you would like to tell the people of Darfur?

I would like to say that we have had enough tears. It is time we looked with hope and aspiration toward the future.
Harmonizing Darfur

Omar Ihsas

Born in 1958 in Nyala, South Darfur, Mr. Omar Ahmed Mustafa, one of Darfur’s most renowned singers, moved to Khartoum at age 23 to study music at Sudan’s High Institute for Music and Drama. He first developed a reputation as a singer during an audition for the South Khartoum Club for Music and Arts, where he sang one of his own compositions. The song, called Ihsas (meaning “feeling” in Arabic), eventually resulted in his chosen stage name.

Mr. Ihsas’ coupling of local beats and melodies with lyrics about peace helped paved the way to a national following in Sudan and international success in the United Kingdom, China, the United States and Canada. Now a well-known international celebrity, Mr. Ihsas says he remains dedicated to Darfur and its struggle for peace. His songs reflect the challenges faced by Darfuris; his concerts, held in cities as well as remote camps for internally displaced people, reverberate with nostalgia for a bygone era when people in this conflict-torn region lived in harmony.

In an interview, Mr. Ihsas speaks about his career, the challenges he has faced and his belief in the pivotal role that music plays in the Darfur peace process.

In an interview, Mr. Ihsas speaks about his career, the challenges he has faced and his belief in the pivotal role that music plays in the Darfur peace process.
How were the initial years of your career in Khartoum? Did you face a great deal of competition in Khartoum because it is the hub of artistic activity in Sudan?

I started my career in music in my late teens, and success did not come easy, especially given the high goals I set for myself. Actually, the challenges I faced started in Darfur, and then in Khartoum. I also faced challenges when I began using Darfuri rhythms, which were resisted by some media institutions, and when I started performing abroad. But with persistence, faith and hope, I’ve been able to move forward.

Now that you’ve gained popularity as a singer, does it make your work easier?

Well, my work is more difficult now because obtaining success is the hardest part; it requires dedicated effort and time, whether for composing songs, writing lyrics or performing concerts. These challenges are in addition to other challenges we’re all facing as Sudanese artists today.

Tell us a bit about these other challenges you’re facing.

They’re related to the difficult situation the country is going through in general, such as the economic crises and the security issues. These are global challenges, and they’re affecting people’s lives one way or another. As artists, it’s become costly to participate in activities abroad, largely because the festivals’ sponsors are no longer paying for travel costs, which have risen in recent years. The media stations stopped funding songs because they can’t afford to pay the artists, including the lyrics writers and the composers. Security-wise, internally, no large festivals are being held any longer because of the austerity measures. All this adds pressure on the artist. Even TV and radio stations have stopped funding activities because they can’t afford to pay the artists, such as Zedan Ibrahim, Abu Arky Al Bahiti and Al Khabiy.

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Starting out, were you inspired by any specific singers or musicians?

Yes, in my travels to various areas in Sudan, I was inspired by some singers, such as Zedan Ibrahim, Abu Arky Al Bahiti and Al Khabiy. Then, after I started composing songs, I got inspired by Bob Marley because of the way he used the bass guitar, which is a primary instrument for boosting the beat. So I learned how to play the bass to use it in my music, because the beat is key in my songs. So it was important to me to be able to use the bass effectively. Also, during my studies in Khartoum, I had the opportunity to meet and interact with some good musicians who were another source of inspiration and contributed to my music education in general.

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Sudanese singer Mr. Omar Ihsas pauses for a photograph prior to a concert in Khartoum. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
A singer performs during an Omar Ihsas concert in Khartoum. Mr. Ihsas’ songs encourage the youth of Darfur to participate in the peace process.

Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
In Khartoum, Sudan, members of Mr. Omar Ihsas’ band prepare for a music concert. Mr. Ihsas, who says music can be an effective tool in bringing about social change, promotes peace in his compositions. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Mr. Omar Ihsas sings during a concert in Khartoum, Sudan. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

الفنان عمر إحساس يغني في حفل موسيقي في الخرطوم. تصوير البرتغالي آليز فران، اليوناميد.
Can we say that Khartoum was the main place for Darfuri musicians to learn music? And how did Darfuri songs evolve over the years with the influence of Arabic and African music?

In my generation, only Khartoum and Juba had academic institutions for music. But if we want to talk about the earlier years, in the 1950s, a few Darfuris learned how to play the lute from some government employees who visited Darfur and happened to play that instrument. Those Darfuris used to sing in simple tunes while playing the lute. In the 1960s, other musical instruments, such as the violin and the bongos, were used to accompany Darfuri songs. It’s worth mentioning here that in that period there were some famous musicians, such as Abdul Hameed Al Shenqity, from El Fasher, who died just a few months ago, and the artist Abdul Kwoka, from Zalingei, who used to sing and play music, and now lives in Khartoum.

Afterward, Darfuri songs started evolving, influenced by Khartoum artists, and gradually started forming their own character in terms of melody, beat and even lyrics, as some non-Arabic tribes started singing in their own languages. Today, the Darfuri music identity reflects both Arabic and African styles. Some Darfuri tunes are affected by Arabic melodies, but all our rhythms are African. For example, some tribes in the Baggara area make a unique type of maqamat music. Maqamat is a typical Arabic type of music, but the Baggara tribes add African beats to this style. The African beat is a common element in our music.

You have lived in Khartoum for many years and you travel extensively. Has staying away from Darfur weakened your ties to Darfur?

Geographical distance has never affected my ties to Darfur. Nor has my busy schedule ever detracted from my commitment to promoting peace in the region. One of my favorite songs includes the words “Dignity is their symbol...carried home on their chests.” I wrote the lyrics with the Darfuri people in mind.

You’ve performed in concerts organized by UNAMID to promote peace in Darfur. Have you promoted peace in other concerts? And how do you see young people accepting these songs?

I promote peace constantly, in all my concerts. People who come to my concerts, especially young people, highly appreciate these peace songs. By the way, peace songs require lots of effort because they need exciting tunes and lively beats, along with moving lyrics and elevating performances, to convey the messages effectively to the audience.

In 2011, you produced and performed a song at the opening of a conference to address Darfur’s water issues. Large funds were pledged by some participants, and yet the people of Darfur still suffer because of water scarcity. Does this discourage you from performing for similar events?

Of course it disappoints me to see people still suffering from issues related to water. There were high hopes that the conference would help improve the situation and speed up solutions with regard to water. However, this hasn’t discouraged me from performing songs that support improving the lives of Darfuris, whether in similar conferences or on other occasions.

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Noted Darfuri singer, Mr. Omar Ihsas, interacts with fellow musicians at a performance in Khartoum, Sudan. Mr. Ihsas’ songs encourage the youth of Darfur to participate in the peace process. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Some believe that the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) can really achieve peace if signed by all parties. Do you agree?

Yes. I think the DDPD is a serious step toward achieving peace in Darfur, that is, all stakeholders take it seriously. A focused implementation of its provisions can encourage all non-signatory armed movements to sign the document.

Do you think that new songs based on key elements of the DDPD, such as peace, internal dialogue, justice and human rights could be written? Could such songs play a role in encouraging non-signatories to join the peace process?

This is a definite possibility. Such songs could be circulated widely on various media, such as cassette tapes and CDs, as well as via television and radio channels. I recall how, in one of my meetings with Dr. Eltigani Seisi, Chair of the Darfur Regional Authority, we talked about how important it is to perform such songs prior to conferences and workshops on issues related to the DDPD, reconciliation and peace. Such songs motivate people positively and open up their minds to relevant issues.

Women’s rights, social justice or renouncing violence—what issue would you promote in a song?

Although I am a firm advocate for women’s rights, I would choose to sing about renouncing violence because it is inextricably related to the other issues. If everyone rejects violence, women will be in a better position with regard to their rights; also, it will become easier to achieve social justice. Peace dictates respect for each other’s rights, whether man or woman.

Would you say that songs in Darfur have more impact than other types of art, such as theatre and poetry, or are they equally effective?

Each form of art has its own importance, but a song can be more effective because of the case with which it captures the popular imagination and gets disseminated. Moreover, music can relate to other forms of artistic expression. For example, a song can be part of a play, and a poem can be set to a tune. In general, both poetry and theatre are important because these art forms resonate with the people of Darfur, especially if they are presented in a language they understand.

We have a history of traditional proverbs, considered the most effective literary form in Darfur. A short proverb consists of two simple parts can actually be instrumental in resolving disputes in a civil forum.

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Some experts say music makes people feel better about themselves. Do you think music really has the power to alleviate aggressiveness or a tendency toward violence?

Music undoubtedly can elicit an emotional response in people. It has been used as part of psychological treatment to treat mental disorders. Some marriage counselors advise married couples to listen to music and learn the salsa because such activities have a positive impact on stress and enable couples to reconnect. Also, playing, singing or listening to music elevates one’s mood. Music is a great stress-relief tool; this is why most musicians look younger than their age.

What do you miss the most about the years you spent in Nyala?

I miss the evenings when my friends and I would gather with others from different tribes. Members of each tribe would sing and perform traditional dances. There was complete harmony, a naturally friendly atmosphere that reflected the highest degree of social peace. As advocates of peace, this is what all of us seek today.

What message would you like give to the Darfuri youth?

I believe that the youth of Darfur are the ones responsible for the region’s future. Let us prove to our elders that we can coexist despite our differences. Let us show the world that we are capable of establishing peace. Also, I would like to exhort Darfuris living in Khartoum to establish cultural and social associations through which we can work to strengthen ties between tribes and seek solutions for internal disputes in Darfur. We constitute the intellectual Darfuri community in the capital and we must play a positive role in Darfur’s future.
Mr. Omar Ihsas sings during a concert in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Originally from El Fasher, North Darfur, Mr. Mohamed Noureldin studied graphic design at the College of Fine and Applied Arts in Khartoum, graduating with a Bachelor's degree in 1986, and later obtaining a Master's degree in photojournalism. Mr. Noureldin, who currently works for Reuters, has become one of Sudan's most well-known and well-respected photographers. Throughout his career, he has won national and international awards, achieving widespread recognition through what he characterises humbly as dedication and hard work.

While his base of operations in Khartoum might be geographically distant from Darfur, he says that living in the Sudanese capital has not diminished his connection to the region of his birth and the struggles and concerns of the people living here. He frequently travels to Darfur on assignment and for photography-related humanitarian projects.

In an interview, Mr. Noureldin talks about his approach to his work and expresses his thoughts about the differences and similarities between art photography and photojournalism.
Could you expand a bit on the importance of the human element in news photography?

The human element in news photos adds aesthetic value to a photo and makes it stay in people's minds. It is the human component in a photo story that attracts the audience and stimulates public acceptance and compassion toward the subject.

Such photos can serve as a bridge between nations. For example, many iconic photos on starvation in Africa display a mother and her child suffering in dry, and surroundings. This is an example of the human element. This is an example of humanizing a photo story.

But a good photo doesn't necessarily have to be about suffering. Documentary photos of difficult areas should depict all aspects of life, including moments of joy. People can experience happiness and laugh even in tough circumstances. This often helps them endure difficulties more effectively. Therefore, positive messages can be communicated by showing human resilience in news photography.

How did you become interested in photography?

My interest in photography was kindled in college. I was studying graphic design, but in the second year of my Bachelor's degree, I found myself drawn to photography. I wanted to tell stories and express my thoughts through photos. At first, I started with photography as an art form, backed up by my familiarity with various types of artistic photography and other subjects, including aesthetics.

I started mixing different art forms in my photos and developed a personal style of artistic expression without following any specific trend. I applied my artistic touch to various kinds of photos, which I included in most of my graduation projects. After I graduated, I began working for newspapers as a news photographer and, eventually, as an art director. To date, I have been working as a photographer while also undertaking graphic design projects. Both fields are the pillars that shape my professional identity.

Today you do both news and artistic photography. Which one do you relate to more?

I relate to both equally. I started with visual art, after which I worked in photojournalism. But I make sure that my news photos incorporate the human element, which is an important aesthetic value in professional news photography. I stressed this aspect of photography in my Master's degree thesis, which was titled "Photojournalism: Between Professional and Creative Value."

Could you expand a bit on the importance of the human element in news photography?

The human element in news photos adds aesthetic value to a photo and makes it stay in people's minds. Actually, most international photo agencies take this element into account when they pick a photo and makes it stay in people's minds. Actually, most international photo agencies take this element into account when they pick a photo.

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How has your work for Reuters added to your experience?

I’ve been working for Reuters since 2005. To me, Reuters is like an open window and a platform through which many of Sudan’s issues can be showcased to the world. As for professional experience, my involvement with Reuters has definitely contributed to enhancing my skills as a photographer. A large number of photographers from across the globe work for Reuters; the competition between us is intense. The agency is selective, choosing only 24 of the best pictures every day. This always motivates me to deliver my best work in order to achieve recognition among other international photographers.

You have designed many artistic posters that include an amalgamation of photos and poetic text, such as the one that says “We call you, you who are forgotten... We retain your name in this world.” Do such words serve a purely design-oriented purpose or is there a deeper message contained within them?

Actually, my work relies on philosophy expressed aesthetically. The storytelling you mentioned, for example, is one of 14 photos designed to express the life of an ordinary person, who faces stress, chaos and negativity. This person could be insignificant, but can play an effective role in the course of life. By being active and positive, one can start life anew. My message here is to show the importance of the ordinary forgotten people, because they can be active players in their own lives, rather than lead a passive existence.

Similarly, my other photos are also structured in groups. Each group tells a story or articulates an opinion about a subject. I favour conveying meanings indirectly through symbolic photos and text. Also, I merge multiple photos to create one main picture that states my creative idea.

To me, the camera is a tool, among others, to express my vision or philosophy. Photography can be an expressive art, one that serves as a conduit for the photographer’s opinions and vision regarding life. Any art that depicts merely the aesthetic without an underlying philosophy is incomplete, because the purpose of art is to communicate.

Through the Lens – Mohamed Noureldin

كيف أضاف لك العمل مع وكالة روتيز خبرة كمصور؟

أعمل مع روتيز في السودان منذ 2005. هذه الوكالة هي النافذة التي نفتخر فيها للعالم، ومع التحدي الع.findById عديد من مصورين من كل الزوايا ووسائل عديدة من الصور، مما ساهم في تغطية خبرة مصري من الصحافة العالمية من خلال رؤية عميقة وشاملة لجانب عالمية. يختار الوكالة أحسن 24 صورة بشكل يومي، وهذا ما يدفعني دائماً أن أقدم أفضل ما عندي في عمل ليكون الإطار جيداً بين نافذة المصورين العالميين.

صممت عدة بوسترات فنية تشمل صوراً فوتوغرافية وعبارات شعرية. ظل الوسائط الذي يذكره عبارة «نستدعيك أيها المنسي.. نستعيدك» هل استخدمت تلك الصور لعرض رسالتين جمالية أم لإيصال رسائل أعمق للجمهور؟

بالحقيقة كل التصورات فيها رؤية فلسفية أكبر عنها من خلال التشكيل الجمالي، فعلى هذا القدر هو واحد صممه عنا لوحة فوتوغرافية تشتمل جمل صورية تحكي عن الإنسان العادي الذي يستشهد، بما يثير حقوله ورق عالمه من ضوحه وجماله وسحته. ذلك يكون هذا الإنسان كمنجمة على رأسه، الذي يكتب أن ينادي بها مهماً في مجراه الواقع ويبدأ في تغيير الواقع معه الواقع الأفضل، وهكذا يكون الإنسان إيجابياً وفياً يمكنه أن يبدأ حياة جديدة، والرسالة هنا أن أبرز أهمية الناس العاديين الذين يمكنهم أن يكونوا كأعلى في حياتهم بدلاً من منتفعين.

14 ف��片组代表了他的一生，他看到了普通人的生活，这些人可能微不足道，但能够有效改变生活。因为人类参与生活，然后开始新生活。我的信息是，展示普通人的重要性，因为他们可以是积极参与者，而不是被动的存在。
Mr. Mohamed Noureldin stands in front of one of his first conceptual pieces in his studio in Khartoum, Sudan. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Through the Lens - Mohamed Noureldin
Tell us about some of the awards you have won for your photographs.

I have won both international and national awards in photography. I received my first international award in 1995 at a contest organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in Tokyo, Japan, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the UN. The contest, conducted under the theme “Living Together,” received thousands of photographic entries from more than 24 countries. This award is of great value to me, not only because it was my first award but also because of the importance of its theme—coexistence.

Coexistence can happen in Africa only through educating our children. Proper education teaches them respect for diversity and enables them to get along peacefully with those who are different; this is how they can create a better future. I illustrated this concept by picturing a young boy and girl standing together under a large book used as an umbrella. This photograph greatly resembled the UNESCO logo.

Another award I won was in 2010 at the African Film Festival in Spain. My selected photos were part of 14 sequenced photographs I produced to reveal the loss of humanity and the right of every person not just to be alive but also to lead a decent life. Also, I have been the recipient of national awards, such as the award for Best Photographer of the Year, in 1995, from the National Council of the Sudanese Press and Publications. I value these awards immensely.

Could you tell us a bit about your photography related to humanitarian work?

As a photographer, I have covered numerous humanitarian projects for UN agencies, such as the United Nations Children’s Fund and the World Food Programme. I have done photo coverage for Doctors Without Borders. And I have worked with the World Bank on a book on development.

Has your stay in Khartoum detached you from Darfur emotionally?

Not at all. Although I’m settled in Khartoum, I often go to Darfur for work. I provide photo coverage for a range of events in Darfur, with Reuters, UNAMID or one of the UN agencies. I am intimately acquainted with Darfur’s issues and profoundly sympathetic with the people of Darfur for the difficult times they are going through.
A photograph by award-winning Darfuri photographer Mr. Mohamed Noureldin. He says he tries to focus on the human element in his work, both in his news photography and in his art photos, to engage audiences and inspire compassion.
A photograph by award-winning Darfuri photographer Mr. Mohamed Noureldin.

صور المصور الدارفوري السيد محمد نور الدين

الائز عالم جوالز
How has the ongoing conflict affected your life or your work?

Like all sincere Darfuris, I’m sad to see our land torn by conflict, and I long for peace and stability. Moreover, I find myself divided between two critical lines when I am on a photographic assignment in Darfur. On the one hand, I feel deeply touched by the suffering of Darfuris and the large number of displaced. On the other, my job requires me to be neutral when I take photos because I usually represent a neutral third party, such as a news agency or an organisation.

Do you think Darfuri photojournalists can contribute to advancing peace in Darfur?

In general, there are only a few photographers in Darfur and, unfortunately, most of them lack the professional requirements for photojournalism. It is important that news photography delivers an event neutrally. However, many photographers solely serve their employer’s policy, focusing on the officials of the institution in their photos rather than the actual event. So, sadly, we don’t see Darfuri photographers playing an effective role in addressing Darfur’s issues or in contributing to advancing peace. On a different note, news photographers also face challenges, such as the difficulty in accessing an event’s location for security or logistical reasons, especially in remote, rugged areas.

Would it be possible to establish a centre for teaching and supporting photography in Darfur, similar to the Sudan Photography Network in Khartoum?

Yes, I think it would be a successful venture and would interest many young Darfuris. Photography is an art form as well as an income-generating craft. So I believe a photography centre would be well received among young Darfuris. But such a centre needs support from either a government institution or another such organization to cover costs and keep it going.

What are your thoughts about digital cameras versus traditional film?

Digital cameras are a technological revolution. However, the foundations of this revolution were laid by the older cameras. Digital cameras are much faster than the older ones, and provide more photos in less time. They can take photos in low light, unlike older cameras, because they are designed to work in all circumstances. Additionally, they provide greater storage space. But the older cameras give you more control over the subject, with a personal touch, in terms of light and shade.

Do you still use the older types of cameras on occasion?

Yes, I shoot some of my art photography projects with older camera models that use different film sizes. I also use a darkroom for developing film.

What message would you like to send to the people of Darfur?

I hope all of us, as Darfuris, show the world our generosity, bravery and love for life by living together peacefully.

An example of Mr. Mohamed Noureldin’s photographic artwork. The piece here is part of a group of 14 images that Mr. Noureldin created to depict a book of poems published by Professor Ali Almak. The poem presented here translates as “The wall stretched out its tongue / I see that it is certainly for me / And I turn my face to him / As for my soul, it was groping in the chamber and the space.”

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مد الجدار لسانه
أراه لا يرب
إلي يقصد
وربا إلى الشيخ الذي أولاه
ظهره.
والله وجهي اجتهت
أما روحي
فقد كانت
تتمس الحجرة والمكان