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COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION SECTION
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CULTURE OF PEACE
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Interviews by Ala Mayyahi
Introduction by Kirk L. Kroeker

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تفاقم السلام

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للهي أهل دارفور
for the people of Darfur
CULTURE OF PEACE: A BOOK CONCERNING INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY MS. ALA MAYYAH AND PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED IN UNAMID’S MAGAZINE, LOOKS NOT ONLY PRESENTS MANY PHOTOGRAPHS OF DARFURI ARTISTS AND THEIR ART, BUT ALSO INCLUDES CONVERSATIONS THAT FOCUS ON HOW DARFURI ARTISTS ARE PLAYING AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS. MUCH AS DARFUR’S SPORTS EVENTS AND COMMUNITY Gatheringsbring People Together in a Spirit of Harmony and Co-ordination, Darfur’s Arts Have a Long Tradition of Building Community Ties by Channelling the Anguish and Hope of the People Living There.

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, presenting a challenge for the people of Darfur. The conflict, the sources of which are varied and complex, emerged in 2003, 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, displaced schools, broken 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 terms with a sadness that runs so deeply here it might be considered synonymous with Darfur’s culture.

Peace in Darfur remains an inborn shared by everybody— including Sudan, the international community and, above all, the long-suffering people of Darfur. UNAMID continues to work on its mandate-driven objectives of protecting civilians, facilitating humanitarian assistance and supporting the peace process. As this work continues, and in the context of Darfur’s arts, we continue their work to build a culture of peace, to bring communities together, to reclaim a social fabric that has been unraveling for more than a decade.

We produced this book to give voice to the creative brainwash of Darfur with the recognition that Darfuri artists are playing a key role in moving the peace process forward. Ms. Mayyahi’s interviews draw out the deep, bold beliefs of these artists, who discuss with her how the conflict has affected their work. In each of these interviews, the artists echo a common refrain, calling on the people of Darfur to celebrate their differences and unite in solidarity to embrace peace.
Darfur's Art - Gibreel Abdulaziz

Darfur's Pottery - Mohamed Rashid

Peace Performance - Samhia Abdul Muni'em

Darfur's Many Colors - Buhery Youssif

Ephemeral Craft - Fatima Mohamed

Music Therapy - Mu'awiya Musa

Darfur's Contours - Sayida Omar Adam

Harnessing Darfur - Omar Inhas

Through the Lens - Mohamed Noureldin
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 at 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.
Darfur's Art - Gibreel Abdulaziz

First, could you tell us a bit about the early civilizations in Darfur?

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 "Fertile Band," which referred to the 40-day duration of the trip, as well as through trading with the Wadi Salmum (modern-day Chari), Libya and western Sudan, where the hunting of elephants, leopards and deer took place. In addition, exchange of leather, ivory, honey and honeycombs were among the active trades in that period.

Some inscriptions from these ancient civilizations exist on walls and rocks in many areas in Darfur, such as in Jebel Marra and Jebel St. 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 fine art forms were some Baghdad crafts made of palm fronds and wood, 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 art pieces still exist and are maintained by the administration offices of these localities.

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

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

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

These instruments have existed since the Nahhat civilization, while string instruments such as the uud and guitar, came to Darfur in the 1940s. In 1940, two brothers from Khartoum, Bani and Ismael Abdul Seif, came to El Fasher to teach people how to play the uud.

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

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 missed 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 dressing and engaging on stones and bathe. Now 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. Almost 66 long plays were produced 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 kita, which sounds like a whistle. There was also the kurbi, which is similar to the modern Arabic flute.

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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 بمنزله في الخرطوم، السودان. وقد ضمنت مسيرة السيد عبد العزيز الطويلة عدة مواقع مرموقة، بما في ذلك رئيس مجلس الولاية التشريعي وزيراً للتربية وزيراً للشؤون الإنسانية والثقافية، وكان ذلك في شمال دارفور.

تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
During the Sudanese era, was there a period that is considered better than others in terms of art improvement?

During the Sudan, Art Darfur is characterized by an abundance of calligraphers and poets, who exhibited their art in various settings. They decorated walls, doors, and windows with calligraphy and inscriptions, creating a rich tapestry of artistic expression. However, the evolution of art in Darfur is most evident in the contemporary era, where modern artists are introducing new techniques and ideas to their work. This blend of tradition and innovation is what makes art in Darfur unique and dynamic.

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

Many women in Darfur have contributed significantly to the development of art. They have participated in writing, painting, and sculpture, to name a few. Women have always been active in the arts, whether through their work as artisans or as participants in art competitions. Today, women are equally recognized in the art world and have made significant contributions to the cultural life of the region.

How much of an influence does the natural environment of Darfur have on the artists here?

The natural environment of Darfur plays a significant role in the art created by its residents. The landscapes and flora of the region provide inspiration to artists, who often depict these elements in their work. The vast desert, the rugged mountains, and the colorful vegetation all contribute to the unique aesthetic of Darfur art.

What contributions did the Sultan Ali Dinar make to the arts?

The Sultan Ali Dinar was known for his support of the arts. He was a patron of several artists and poets, and he commissioned works of art for his palace. He encouraged the development of traditional arts, such as calligraphy, sculpture, and painting, and he supported the creation of new art forms. The period of Sultan Ali Dinar is characterized by an abundance of creativity and innovation in the arts, which laid the foundation for the rich cultural heritage that Darfur enjoys today.
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.
Can you tell us about your start in designing thobes and how you learned to paint on fabric?

It goes back to me 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.

As for learning, it was by tutorial lessons taken first, as well as the desire to improve my art skills. Then my academic education helped me greatly refine my skills. I took industrial design at the University of Sudan for Sciences and Technology. Then I learned colouring principles and engineering drawing. I also took courses in human anatomy at the Mednine College, carpentry and blacksmithing in the Engineering College, and packaging in the College of Commerce.

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 I had other responsibilities.

How is this exhibition different from the first one?

The first exhibition, held in May 2011, consisted of 42 thobes shown 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.

Which style is more liked by Darfuri women? Are thobes different from one area to another in Sudan, in terms of designs and the way of wearing them?

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Do Darfuri women make nice arrangements and colouring to enhance the traditional dress? Can you tell us about your start in designing thobes and how you learned to paint on fabric?

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As for learning, it was by tutorial lessons taken first, as well as the desire to improve my art skills. Then my academic education helped me greatly refine my skills. I took industrial design at the University of Sudan for Sciences and Technology. Then I learned colouring principles and engineering drawing. I also took courses in human anatomy at the Mednine College, carpentry and blacksmithing in the Engineering College, and packaging in the College of Commerce.

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 I also had other responsibilities.

How is this exhibition different from the first one?

The first exhibition, held in May 2011, consisted of 42 thobes shown 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.

Which style is more liked by Darfuri women? Are thobes different from one area to another in Sudan, in terms of designs and the way of wearing them?

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.

Do Darfuri women make nice arrangements and colouring to enhance the traditional dress? Can you tell us about your start in designing thobes and how you learned to paint on fabric?
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 El-garrai, UNAMID.

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.

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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.

DESIGNING DARFURI THOBES - SALWA MUKHTAR SALEH
A Sudanese woman shows a thobe and handbag designed by Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

‌سيدة سودانية تعرض ثوباً وحقيبة يد من تصميم الدكتورة سلوى مختار صالح. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
Two Sudanese women model traditional thobes and other items designed by Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

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 cultures differ as well.

Also, in the beginning, the Sudanese thobe was made of locally manufactured cotton yarn (these 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 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 colours 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.
A watercolour painting created by Darfuri artist Ahmed Adam.

 لوحة بـ ألوان مائية للفنان الفاشري أحمد آدم.

Darfuri artist Ahmed Adam stands beside one of his favourite watercolour paintings. The piece is titled "Rural Woman." Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

الفنان أحمد يقف بجانب إحدى لوحاته المفضلة المرسمة بـ ألوان مائية. اللوحة بإسم "أم ريفية"، تصوير إمرأة بـ البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
Painter Ahmed Adam pictures a Darfuri fortune-teller using shells, locally called el wadah.

لوحة للفنان أحمد آدم يصور فيها إمرأة دارفورية تستخدم الصدف لقراءة الودع.

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.

A Darfuri artist Ahmed Adam focuses on nature in many of his works.
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.
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.
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 that you use after firing is another thing you enjoy. Seeing the finished product makes me happy. But I was sad when some of them got cremated. 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 to complete 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?

In Darfur, you can find the required tools and pigments easily. For the clay, yes. We get the clay from the valleys and lowlands. It is called locally al hafeir, which exists in El Fasher 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. The clay for making a wheel or casts should be more liquid. This clay is best for the wheel, but if we want to shape it in forms, then the clay should be more solid.

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

For colours, we get the glasses, 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 the market. As for cold colours, which don't contain chemicals, they are available in the local markets.

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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 Elgar, UNAMID.
The ceramic pottery of Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Rashid, a professor at El Fasher University, North Darfur. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.

Darfur's Pottery - Mohamed Rashid

In his studio, Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Rashid works on one of his pieces of pottery. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.

الкерاميك所做的陶器作品，由摩哈末·艾哈迈德·拉希德教授完成。照片由索约德·艾尔加拉伊提供，联合国安全部队。
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.
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. People buy them as gifts or for their own use.

What about large wall pieces. Do you make them as well?

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?

Pottery has existed in Darfur for a long time, and Darfuris use pottery in their various daily activities and for certain necessities. They use ceramics for saving food and water. Women use ceramic boxes for their accessories, and the elderly use pottery containers for plants, which is a common practice locally. Pottery is one of the most popular art crafts in Darfur, but unfortunately there are fewer practitioners in recent years.

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

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. Also, this situation has created new requirements for fetching water and wood, which has substituted the plastic pieces that are filling the markets.

And what about the history of making pottery? What is the history of it here?

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.

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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.
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.

دكتور محمد أحمد رشيدي يفحص قطعة فخار من صنعه في مدينة الفاشر بشمال دارفور. تصوير آلبرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
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.” It was presented in El Fasher for the first time in the cultural centre, then in the Admira 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 “Recruit” 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 audience.

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, 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.

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

I have used one cast of actors in all my plays because I believe that one 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 play 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.

Now, tell us about the originality of the stories in your plays and the reasons behind your choice of topics.

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Did you choose to make your plays silent in order to make them more understandable to all Darfuris?

Yes, I believe that 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.

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 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 play 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.

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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.

Äعضاء الفرقة المسرحية أشواق السلام يؤدون عرضا بمناسبة اليوم الدولي لحفظة السلام التابعين للأمم المتحدة، في المقر الرئيسي لليوناميد في الفاشر، شمال دارفور. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.

Theatre Director Samiha Abdul Muniem directs members of the drama group “Ashwaq Al Salam” during a rehearsal. Photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran, UNAMID.

المخرجة المسرحية سميحة عبد المنيعم توجه أعضاء الفرقة المسرحية أشواق السلام خلال الدرس. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
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 since 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 field?

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 the 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 these plays. Still, I can’t consider that real social pressure. I mean, I was able to present all my shows successfully. I’m optimistic that, over time, our society will have more acceptance of women in theatre, especially that there are now some local TV series with many actresses, and the people are accepting that because these shows are presented with a high degree of consideration of the local culture and the common morals.

On the other hand, I face other kind of challenges while preparing for a play. For example, I don’t have all the required tools within my reach, such as a place properly equipped for theatre rehearsals. We need a stage, wireless microphones, lighting units, partitions, sometimes mirrors or mirrors, but I don’t have all that space yet. If I want to make a play, I have to do it with what 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 look 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 needed tools, but the Ministry lacks funds currently. I’ll like to mention that, despite this situation, we often got 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 preparing and for rehearsing due to power outages, but the next day we continued, and that’s the important thing. Determination and enthusiasm make challenges look smaller and easier, I guess.

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

For me, I attend festivals in Khartoum, like the “Khartoum Theater Days,” where I also attend training workshops in Khartoum, organized by the University of Khartoum and others 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 “Bablik Al ‘Allab,” 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 rejection acts such as forced marriage and violence against women. Theatre groups can also address current issues such as child widows and the importance of coexistence and peace.

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 Darfur, 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.

Peace Performance - Samiha Abdul Muniem

FIRST PUBLISHED IN NOVEMBER 2012
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 deploys, 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.
As you started drawing since childhood, is there one drawing you did in those days that you remember more than 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 2008 in Northern Darfur. 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 for 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 artist 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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Artist Buhery Mohammed Youssef shows his paintings, hung in his studio in El Geneina, West Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran.

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، والذّي يتركز فنه في الغالب على الطبيعة والتقاليد المحلية.

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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?

In terms of art history, my style 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?

Mostly yes and also traditions and some activities in our culture, and sometimes other art can inspire me. Even a primitive drawing or a simple design done by an artisan can inspire me. At other times, I have been inspired by the sophisticated work of international artists and designers.

In Darfur, does the price of a painting depend on the name of the artist, like in most other countries?

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

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

Children draw as part of play, but having real talent for drawing is something else. Drawing properly requires base, and of course the skill that develops with practice.
A painting by Darfuri artist Buherry Mohammad Yousef. Nature intertwined with local customs are recurrent motifs in his art.

The intersection between nature and Darfuri traditions, as depicted in this work, are the primary motifs of Buherry Mohammad Yousef’s paintings.
Some famous artists in history never studied art, but they still produce outstanding work. Does that mean the academic study of art is not important as long as the artist has real talent?

Van Gogh and some other classic artists in history are exception 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 some epistemological 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 five centres here and there, but Darfurian artists need more 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 centre 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 paintings, do you do other kind 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 Andalka. 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 Dadya" 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 Darfurians. 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.
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.

فن متجدد
فاطمة محمد

Ephemeral Craft
Fatima Mohamed
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 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, I worked voluntarily on the weekends. I made money as a hobby, 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.
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 Farías, UNAMID.
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.

Ephemeral Craft - Fatima Mohamed

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 من حولي إلهام بالنسبة لي، سواء كانت أوراق الأشجار أو الأزهار أو بعض الأشكال الهندسية. في النهاية، أستخدم خيالي كالمصدر الرئيسي للإلهام لتصميم نماذج جديدة.

لتغير طريقة عملك من فترة إلى أخرى لتعلق بتوجهات الموضة؟

نعم بالطبع، يقل الطلب على بعض نماذج القديمة ولذلك أضيف إلينا بعض التفاصيل الجديدة وأجري بعض التغييرات الطفيفة حسب التوجهات المثيرة للاهتمام التي أظهرها الموضة في بعض الأحيان. وأُنتهِي باستخدام نماذج أخرى تتفق مع هذه التغييرات.

لديك زبونات في الخُرطوم وحتى خارج السودان. كيف حققت هذا النجاح؟

عندما كنت في صالون للتجميل في الخُرطوم، كنت أقدم لعدد كبير من الزبونات نقوش الحنة. ومنذ ذلك الحين، بدأت مالكات صالونات التجميل في الخُرطوم التي كانت تأتي إلى الخُرطوم كنت أقدم هنالك نقوش حنة لعمل في صالوناتها. وعندما بدأت مالكات صالونات التجميل في الصالون الذي كنت أعمل فيه أن يعجبها عملتي وشعرت بأنني يمكنني تقديم SERVICES للعمل بطرق مختلفة، أقعدت بمطهرات الصالونات التجارية، وأقبلت العملاء الغربيين والمحليين للعمل في صالونات التجميل.

هلّ هناك مسميات لنقوش الحنة وهل لها دِلالات ذات صلة بالثقافة الدارفورية؟

عموماً، ليست هنالك مُسميات، ولكن نميّز بينها حسب الشكل. بعضها زهري الشكل مثل الورد أو الزُنبق وهنالك نقوش أخرى تشبه قماش الدانتيل. أحتفظ بصور من هذه النقوش وأقوم بعرضها على الزبونات للإختيار. إجتماعياً، هناك بعض النقوش التي تعتبر حكراً على المرأة المتزوجة، ومن غير اللائق أن تُستخدم من قبل النساء غير المتزوجات، كذلك، ليس من المحسن إتباع نقوش حنة من قبل الفتيات الذين تتراوح أعمارهن بين العاشرة والستين. ولكن، هناك شروط يجب أن تتبع عند إتباع نقوش حنة، مثل عدم التأرجح بالعظام، وعدم إتباع النقوش التي أصبحت معتادة في الجزء الجنوب الشرقي من دارفور. ومن ثم، ممارسة إتباع النقوش التي تتماشى مع سلوك المرأة والثقافة المحلية.
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 higher, 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 here.

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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 hơn. Thus, I say 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 may talk 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 or women’s empowerment can become friends.

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 artistic way and applied as henna drawings. Slogans such as “we love peace,” “peaceful coexistence” or “support women’s rights” would be highly accepted and used among many Darfuri women when they participate in social 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 to henna art. And I would like to deliver to Darfurians a message of hope and support for the people of Darfur. So you see henna art as a positive social force in Darfur?

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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 pursued music over other interests and occupied significant amounts 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, while he works in a field in which he earned his degree, he dedicates time each day to composing and playing music.

In this conflict-ridden 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.
Music Therapy - Mua’wiya Musa

Darfur, photograph by Bert González Farran, UNAMID. El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

Mr. Mua’wiya Musa is pictured in the music studio at his home in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

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, and I used to watch all these 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 neighborhood 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 request 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 for 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 I can also play the organ to perform for their events.

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

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Mr. Mua’wiya 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 بمنزله في الفاشر، شمال داارفور. تصوير البرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.

Music Therapy - Mua’wiya Musa
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 musical 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 composed for the absence of a band with digital instruments generated by my keyboard, which also can produce beats as well.

Where do you record your music? In a studio?

I have a home studio where I recorded 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 recording. Studio that is available to musicians. Probably, I'm the only one recording. Currently, in El Fasher, there isn't an audio-recording studio.

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 Un Darum Youth Centre in 2004. I got some work there as a musician, and that allowed me to attend studies 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?

Where do you record your music? In a studio?

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

Do you have a band that you perform with currently?

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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 by recording in his sound studio at home. He is a graduate of 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 enhance 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 influenced 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 on the Khorriato 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. Darfuri beats differ even from one tribe to another.

As for singing patterns, there are many of them, such as the Dobei, the Dobei, the Dobei. These are developed from tribes of Arabic origin. These 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 Balassau music all has a similar flavour.

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In Sudanese music closer in to Arabic music than it is to European 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 usual 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 Hakamat now are changing for peace. Musically, I was in these songs high creativity and intelligence. The Hakamat were 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 under minimizes 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 use 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.
Darfur Dances - Elfadel Khatir

The traditional dances in Darfur could be more than 5,000. The local tribes of Darfur using 600 distinct dialects. If this is true, then the number of traditional dances in the region altogether. But the actual number could remain generally the same.

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 and the accompanying rhythms.

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 we consider the traditional dances in Darfur could be more than 5,000.

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 and the accompanying rhythms.

Would you explain why these traditional performances are an ancient form of art? Traditionally, these performances are an ancient form of art. They are a part of the Darfuri legacy and tied deeply to the lives of Darfuris.

Would you tell us about the traditional dances in Darfur and when they first appeared here? 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 and the accompanying rhythms.

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Some dances require a specific number of dancers. Those dances can’t be done with a fewer number of dancers than traditional requires. For example, the Rishat dance is done on the occasions of receiving guests 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 History, 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?

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What about musicians? Are songs and beats usually done by a music group that performs alongside the dancer?

Yes, but not for all dances. In some dances, the dancers do the singing and make the rhythm themselves by clapping or beating the ground with their feet.

Is there a general indication about how many performers are required for the traditional dances here?

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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 consequence 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.
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 González Farran, UNAMID.

في المركز الثقافي في الفاشر بشمال دارفور، إحـدى أفـراد فـرقـة الـسـرافي المـسـرحـيـة تـؤدي رـقـصـة تقـليـدية دارفـوريـة تحـت توجـيه السيد الفضل خـاطـر المحـاضـر في جامعة الفاشر. تـصـويـر الـبرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.

Darfur Dances - Elfadel Khatir

In El Fasher, North Darfur, Mr. Elfadhil Khatir plays his violin while teaching traditional Darfuri dance to his students at El Fasher University. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

في الـفـاشـر، شـمـال دارـفور، السيد الفضل خاطر يعزف على كمانه بينما يعلم طلابه الرقص التفليدي الدارفوري في جـامـعـة الـفـاشـر. تـصـويـر الـبرت غونزاليس فران، اليوناميد.
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.

In general, are the traditional dances still practised 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 large numbers of people were displaced due to the conflict and have been living in 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.
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 audiences.

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 a good life. So let’s unite to have one country for all of us, regardless of race, religion or colour.
A
d 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 Fash-
er, North Darfur, as the daughter of parents who
supported her interest in and appreciation for art.
She holds a Bachelors 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 ar-
tistic process, what inspires her and the different
tools and techniques she uses to imbue her work
with the depth of insight demanded by her per-
sonal creative vision.
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 referee football matches, and he would often take me to the stadium at El Fasher University (then called Dar Al Itlab). I would sit on the stands and enjoy the excitement of nature on display 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 coloured 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 all the pages of 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. I was too young to understand the implications of founding a career. As for specializing in painting, it wasn't a surprise to them as they were already 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.

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

Studying in Khartoum wasn't a problem because I had relatives and friends there. As for specializing in painting, it wasn't a surprise to them as they were well-reared with me as they were well-reared with me. 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 because of their bold and diversified colour schemes as well as strong brush strokes. I admire other artists who are not well-known. For example, my cousins, who was a teacher when I was 13 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.

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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 صور للمرأة.
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 sunrise burns, which appears in several of my paintings, is used in performing the house, a common practice among married women in Darfur. Women usually clean and perfume 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 friends. The hands 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?

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 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 colours, especially for large paintings.

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 textures 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 colours, especially for large paintings.

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

I mostly use warm hues such as red and orange and their various shades. Of course, each color gives a certain meaning and has a psychological effect both in terms of the artist and the viewer. For example, 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.

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How would you describe your style in general and have you reached the artistic level you have desired?

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.

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 a 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.
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.

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In your opinion, in what way can Darfur artists contribute to bringing peace to Darfur?
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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 pave 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.
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 banned by some media institutions. At that time, Darfuri rhythms were resisted by some media institutions, and I faced challenges when I began using Darfuri rhythms. However, with persistence and faith, 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 maintaining 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 easier to participate in activities abroad, largely because the festivals' sponsors are no longer paying for travel expenses, which have risen in recent years. The artists, or his or her country, must now bear these costs. 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 stopped funding songs because they can't afford to pay the singers, such as Zedan Ibrahim, Abu Arky Al Bakhit and Al Kabily.

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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.
Can we say that Khartoum was the main place for Darfuri musicians to learn music? And how did Darfur 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 Darfurians learned how to play the lute from some governmental employees who worked in Darfur and happened to play that instrument. Those Darfurians used to sing in simple tunes while playing the lute. In the 1960s, other musical instruments, such as the violin and the lute, were used to accompany Darfurian 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 Abdo Kewota, from Zalumti, who used to sing and play music, and later lived in Khartoum.

Afterward, Darfurian songs started evolving, influenced by Khatroumi 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 Darfurian music identity reflects both Arabic and African styles. Some Darfurian tunes are affected by Arabic melodies, but all our rhythms are African. For example, some rhythms 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 emotional connections to the land of your birth?

Geographical distance has never affected my ties to Darfur. Nor has my busy schedule ever detracted from my commitment to promoting peace in this 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.

“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 emotional connections to the land of your birth. However, this hasn’t discouraged me from performing for similar events.”

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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 cassettes 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 denouncing violence—which issue would you promote in a song?

Although I am a firm advocate for women’s rights, I would choose to sing about nonviolence because it is inevitably related to the other issues. If everyone respects violence, women will be in a better position with regard to their rights; also, it will become easier to achieve social justice. Peace does impact 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 ease 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 drama 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 by many the most effective literary form in Darfur. A short proverb consisting of two simple parts can actually be instrumental in resolving a dispute between two tribes if used at the right time within a reconciliation gathering, such as in aKelly western June of Darfur’s traditional justice mechanism for working out legal disputes in a civil forum.

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, if all stakeholders take it seriously. A focused implementation of its provisions can encourage all signatory armed movements to sign the document.

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We have a history of traditional proverbs, considered by many the most effective literary form in Darfur. A short proverb consisting of two simple parts can actually be instrumental in resolving a dispute between two tribes if used at the right time within a reconciliation gathering, such as in aKelly western June of Darfur’s traditional justice mechanism for working out legal disputes in a civil forum.

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, if all stakeholders take it seriously. A focused implementation of its provisions can encourage all 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 cassettes 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 denouncing violence—which issue would you promote in a song?

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

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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 we seek today.

What message would you like to give to the Darfuri youth?

I believe that the youth of Darfur are the ones responsible for the region's future. So 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.
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 there. 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.
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 started with visual art, after which I worked in photojournalism. I began working for newspapers as a news photographer and, eventually, as an art director. To this day, I have been working as a photographer while also undertaking graphic design projects. Both fields are the pillars that shape my professional identity.

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 to be published in their news agencies. The human component is a great stimulant to the audience and makes it stay in people's minds. Actually, most international photo agencies take this element into account when they pick a photo to publish in their news agencies.

What is the best photo you have taken this year? This month? This week?

I don't have one that I can pin down. But a good photo doesn't necessarily have to be about suffering, war, and death. Such photos can serve as a bridge between nations. For example, there are many iconic photos on starvation in Africa displaying a mother and her child in a photo story. Such photos can serve as a bridge between nations.

What is the best photo you have ever taken?

It is the human component in a photo story that attracts the audience and stimulates public acceptance and compassion toward the subject.

You have worked in both news and artistic photography. Which do you relate to more?

I relate to both equally. I started with visual art, after which I worked in photojournalism. I strove to make sure that my news photos incorporated 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."

Do you think there is a difference between professional and creative photography?

I have been working as a photographer while also undertaking graphic design projects. Both fields are the pillars that shape my professional identity. I have been working as a photographer while also undertaking graphic design projects. Both fields are the pillars that shape my professional identity.

Mr. Mohamed Noureldin is a Sudanese photographer who has won numerous national and international awards for his photography. Currently based in Khartoum, Sudan, Mr. Noureldin has extensively covered Sudanese and African news stories. He has worked for Reuters and other international news agencies. His photographs have appeared in numerous publications around the world. He is currently working on a project that explores the impact of photography on human rights and social change. His work has been exhibited in several international festivals and galleries. He is currently working on a project that explores the impact of photography on human rights and social change. His work has been exhibited in several international festivals and galleries.

Mr. Mohamed Noureldin stands in front of one of his award-winning photos in his studio in Khartoum, Sudan. Mr. Noureldin, who has won numerous national and international awards for his photography, currently works for Reuters. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.
Through the Lens - Mohamed Noureldin

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 the world'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 memories of you.” 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 amalgamation of photos and poetic text, such as the one that says “We call you, you who are forgotten… We retain memories of you.”

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Through the Lens - Mohamed Noureldin

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.

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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.
Tell us about some of the awards you have won for your photography?

I have won both international and national awards in photography. I received my first international award in 1995 as a competitor 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. The award of great value to me, not only because it was my first award but also because of the importance of its theme—coexistence.

Consciousness can happen in Africa only through educating our children. Proper education teaches them respect for diversity and enables them to gear up peacefully with those who are different; this is how they can craft 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 phone was part of 14 sequential 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 several 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 programs for UN agencies, such as the United Nations Children’s Fund and the World Food Programme. I have done photo work 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 am 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.

صورة للمصور الدارفوري السيد محمد نور الدين. يقول إنه ي atención على العنصر البشري في مقتله، سواء كان في صوره الصحافة أو صوره الفنية، لإثارة الإعجاب وخلق التحية.

Through the Lens - Mohamed Noureldin
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 and shade.

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

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

Through the Lens - Mohamed Noureldin

Mad al-jibār lilsānā
Arah lāribb
Ayya līlī biyādī mawṣūla

أراج لا يريب
إلي يبصع
ورأا الى الشيخ الذي أولاها
ظهره.
واليه يوجهي اعهست
أما وروحى
فقد كانت
تنلمس الخجرا والمكن

كيف أثر الصراع في دارفور على حياتك أو عملك؟

لكن الأمر الأدازي نحى الكونين السانتي ترني يُنية أستا ذر الله

لأمر الأدازي نحى الكونين السانتي ترني يُنية أستا ذر الله

هل لازلت تستخدم أحياناً الأنواع القديمة من الكاميرات؟

نعم، أستكمل بعض مشاريعي الفنية باستخدام كاميرات من النوع القديم.

كيف ترى كاميرات الديجيتل مقارنة بالكاميرات التقليدية؟

كم يان يشتمت بل كاميرات الديجيتل أسرع من الكاميرا القديمة وتوفر أكثراً من الصور.

What do you think in the future of photography in Darfur?

I hope that it will be a successful venture and would interest young Darfuris.

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. 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.

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 eras are much faster than the older ones, and provide more photos.