My Beautiful Enemy
Qassim Alsaedy & Farhad Foroutanian

Mesopotamia and Persia, Iraq and Iran – Two civilizations, two fertile countries in a brittle environment – The historical Garden of Eden and the basis of civilization in the ancient world. But also the area where many wars were fought, from the antiquity to the present. The recent war between Iraq and Iran (1980-1988) left deep traces in their lives and works.

The artists Qassim Alsaedy (Iraq) and Farhad Foroutanian (Iran) both lived through the last gruesome conflict. Both artists, now living in exile in the Netherlands, took the initiative for this exhibition to reflect on this dark historical event, which marked the recent history of their homelands and their personal lives. Neither Farhad nor Qassim ever chose being each other’s enemies. To the contrary, these two artists made a statement with ‘My beautiful Enemy’ to confirm their friendship.
Farhad Foroutanian

Farhad Foroutanian (Teheran 1957) studied one and a half year at the theatre academy, before he went to the art academy of Tehran in 1975. At that time the Iranian capital was famous for its hybrid and international oriented art scene. Artists worked in many styles, from pop – art till the traditional miniature painting, a tradition of more than thousand years, in which Foroutanian was trained.

After his education Foroutanian found a job as a political cartoonist at a newspaper. During that time, in 1978, the revolution came, which overthrew the regime of the Pahlavi Shah Dynasty. For many Iranian intellectuals and also for Foroutanian in the beginning the revolution came as liberation: The censorship of the Shah was abolished and the revolution created a lot of energy and creativity. A lot of new newspapers were founded. But this outburst of newfound freedom didn't last for long; in the middle of 1979 it became clear that the returned Ayatollah Khomeini became the new ruler and founded the new Islamic Republic. Censorship returned on a large and villain scale and, in case of the cartoonists, it became clear that they could work as long as they declared their loyalty to the message and the new ideology of the Islamic Republic.

The artistic climate became more and more restrictive. In the mid eighties Foroutanian fled his homeland. In 1986 he arrived with his family in the Netherlands. Since that time Foroutanian manifested himself in several ways, as an independent artist, as a cartoonist and as actor/theatre maker (most of the time together with his wife, the actress Nasrin Ghasemzadeh).

In his mostly small scaled paintings and drawings Foroutanian shows often a lonely figure of a man, often just a silhouette or a shadow that tries to deal with an alienating or even surrealistic environment. This melancholically figure, sometimes represented as a motionless observer, sometimes involved in actions, which are obviously useless or failing, represents the loneliness of the existence of an exile.

Foroutanian: “If you live in exile you can feel at home anywhere. The situation and location in which an artist is operating, determines his way of looking at the world. If he feels himself at home nowhere, it becomes very bizarre what the artist produces. The artist in exile is always looking for the lost identity. How can you find yourself in this strange situation? That is what the concept of exile is the most important theme in Foroutanian’s work. How can you find yourself in this strange situation? That is what the artistic climate became more and more restrictive. In the mid eighties Foroutanian fled his homeland. In 1986 he arrived with his family in the Netherlands. Since that time Foroutanian manifested himself in several ways, as an independent artist, as a cartoonist and as actor/theatre maker (most of the time together with his wife, the actress Nasrin Ghasemzadeh). In his mostly small scaled paintings and drawings Foroutanian shows often a lonely figure of a man, often just a silhouette or a shadow that tries to deal with an alienating or even surrealistic environment. This melancholically figure, sometimes represented as a motionless observer, sometimes involved in actions, which are obviously useless or failing, represents the loneliness of the existence of an exile.

Foroutanian: “If you live in exile you can feel at home anywhere. The situation and location in which an artist is operating, determines his way of looking at the world. If he feels himself at home nowhere, it becomes very bizarre what the artist produces. The artist in exile is always looking for the lost identity. How can you find yourself in this strange situation? That is what the concept of exile is the most important theme in Foroutanian’s work. How can you find yourself in this strange situation? That is what the

Qassim Alsaedy

Qassim Alsaedy (Baghdad 1949) studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad during the seventies. One of his teachers was Shakir Hassan al-Said, one of the leading artists of Iraq and perhaps one of the most influential artists of the Muslim world of twentieth century. During his student years in the seventies Alsaedy came in conflict with the regime of the Ba’th party. He was arrested and spent nine months in the notorious al-Qasr an-Nihayyah, the Palace of the End, the precursor of the Abu Ghraib prison.

After this imprisonment it was extremely difficult for Alsaedy to settle himself as an artist in Iraq. Alsaedy: ‘Artists who didn’t join the Ba’th party of the Iraqi army are out of the picture’. For Alsaedy it meant he had to go in exile. He lived alternately in Lebanon and in the eighties in Iraqi Kurdistan, where he lived with the Pashmarga (Kurdish rebels). When the regime in Baghdad fell in 2003 he could see the marks carved by other prisoners in the walls as a sign of life and hope.

Later in, in Kurdistan, Alsaedy saw the burned landscapes after the bombardments of the Iraqi army. Alsaedy: “Huge fields became totally black. Houses, trees, grass, everything was black. But look, when you see the burned grass, late in the season, you could see some little green points, because the life and the beauty is stronger than the evilness. Life was coming through. So you saw black, but there was some green coming up. For example I show you this painting, which is extremely black, but it is to deep in my heart. Maybe you can see it hardly but when you look very sensitive you see some little traces of life. You see the life is still there. It shines through the blackness. The life is coming back’.

Another important element in Alsaedy’s mixed media objects is his use of rusted nails or empty gun cartridges. For Alsaedy the nails and the cartridges symbolize the pain, the human suffering and the ugliness of war. But also these elements will rust away and leave just an empty trace of their presence. Life will going on and the sufferings of the war will be one a part of history.

Alsaedy creates his ceramic object together with the artist Brigitte Reuter. Reuter creates the basic form, while Alsaedy brings on the marks and the first colours. Together they finish the process by baking and glazing the object.

Since Alsaedy came to the Netherlands he participated in many exhibitions, both solo and group. His most important was their exhibition at the Museum Flehite Amersfoort (2006) and Museum Gouda (2012). He regularly exhibits in the Gallery of Frank Welkenhuysen in Utrecht.

Diversity&Art made ‘My Beautiful Enemy’ possible

Ideas

Qassim Alsaedy and Farhad Foroutanian

Artists

Qassim Alsaedy and Farhad Foroutanian

Concept

Liesbeth Schimmel-Briksman

Felix Schnee

Prefatory words

Liesbeth Schimmel-Briksman

Herman Doornik

Text

Felix Schnee

Photo of the artists

Hani Ghosemsheikh

Lay-Out

Joseph Mateau, Amsterdam

Print

Shaker, Rotterdam

About the works:

Farhad Foroutanian

The works are from 2013, new 2022+ and made in acrylic on canvas.

Photos by the artist.

Qassim Alsaedy

The small works are from 2013 / 2023, very in size 25x25cm on wood panel or copper, one work 70x70cm on canvas, 2009, all limited edition.

Photos by Ep de Ruiter.

Exhibition

20 April – 20 May 2013

www.diversityandart.com