

# NOBODY'S LISTENING

## ARTWORK LIST

Nobody's Listening is a ground breaking Virtual Reality experience and immersive exhibition programme that commemorates the Yazidi genocide initiated by ISIS in the summer of 2014 in northern Iraq.

Six years on, the genocide is still ongoing. Nearly 3,000 Yazidi women and children remain missing or in captivity, and not a single ISIS fighter has been brought to justice for the crime of genocide. Using cutting-edge Virtual Reality technology, photography and art, the exhibition explores the consequences of the genocidal campaign by ISIS – its devastating effect on persecuted communities and their cultural heritage.

Above all, Nobody's Listening pays tribute to the courage, determination and agency of the survivors, and gives them a space where they can be heard by people around the world. Together they are one voice, calling for international recognition and justice.

# ARTISTS

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## *Photography*

HALA

FARHAD AL-KAKE

SALWA

THIKRAN

## *Artworks*

IVANA WALEED

THABIT MIKHAEL

NAHRIN MALKI

SALAM NOH

JULIET HASSAN

FALAH AL-RASAM

SADIQ KHEDAR

SAHER SHAKER

SUHALIA DAKHIL TALO

BADRAN ALI

KHEDER DAHAM

JAMIL SORO

HANA HASSAN

## *Sculpture*

FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE

ARAZ SULAIMAN

PIERS SECUNDA

For more information about the project go to:  
[www.nobodys-listening.com](http://www.nobodys-listening.com)



# IVANA WALEED (b. 1996, Germany)

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Ivana is a young Yazidi artist from the village of Tel Qasab, near Sinjar in northern Iraq. She endured many months of brutality and suffering in ISIS captivity, but she does not refer to herself as a “survivor” because she does not consider herself a victim. By escaping her captors, she says she has beaten ISIS, and she now works tirelessly to bring perpetrators to justice.

Ivana remembers a simple but happy village life with her parents and many siblings before the genocide of the Yazidi community by ISIS began in August 2014: “We didn’t have many opportunities, but we were still happy and tried to use the opportunities we had.” She pursued her education in the knowledge that her options were limited without a degree: “Women especially didn’t have many opportunities; they usually do the housework. That’s why I wanted to be a doctor – I wanted to be a role model to other women.” Now living as a refugee in Germany, her ambition to work as a doctor remains.

The special-quota project of the German federal state of Baden-Württemberg, which settled 1,100 Yazidi women and children, gave Ivana what she calls a “golden chance” to start a new life. “I am very proud of the people working on this project,” she says, “because they have saved the lives of others. If these people had stayed in Iraq, I don’t know what would have happened to them.” The challenge of adapting to a radically different culture in Germany was significant, especially the need to learn a new language. Everything Ivana once had in Iraq was suddenly lost, and she had to begin again from zero. Yet she says that the German people have been welcoming and supportive, and that she does not consider the country to be her second home, but rather her “first home.”

One of the support initiatives of the Baden-Württemberg project is art therapy, where participants draw and then discuss their art works and related

emotions. Ivana’s untitled painting of a faceless woman was the product of just two such meetings in 2019. She reveals that she had wanted to draw a face for this woman, but ultimately felt unable: “When I stand in front of this picture, I think it is me, and when other women stand in front of it they should think the same, because this woman represents every one of us. If she had a face it would determine whether she is sad or happy, but nobody could be sure; each woman who looks at the painting should make her own decision as to what she sees and what name the painting should have.”

Ivana is hopeful that more Yazidis may receive the support from which she has benefited, and she insists that there is “no chance for the community without people supporting us from outside.” She is thankful for the ongoing support from organizations such as UNITAD but says there is still much work to do: “Half of our people are living in wrecked houses, half of them in tents. This is not the way of life we wanted for ourselves. Supporting oppressed people in our societies is really important.”

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“I’m thankful for this [special-quota] project and I hope that there will be more projects like this, not just in Germany but in other places too.”

– *Ivana Waleed*

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Untitled  
650 x 500 mm  
Acrylic on paper



# HALA (b. 1996, Iraq)

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Hala is from a Yazidi village community in the Sinjar district of the Nineveh Governorate in northern Iraq. She now lives in an Iraqi IDP camp with her siblings, having lost her parents in the genocide perpetrated by ISIS in the region from 2014 onwards. Hala herself was held captive and has lived in the camp ever since she was released, almost three years ago now. Like the rest of her community, she is concerned about the nearly 3,000 Yazidis who remain unaccounted for: “They are saying there is no ISIS on the ground now, but if this is true, where are our missing and kidnapped people?” Hala recalls that her life in Sinjar before the genocide was “beautiful and simple”, and she explains that she and her friends all went to school with dreams and ambitions: “I wanted to become a doctor – my dream now is to deliver the survivors’ messages to the international community, regardless of their community or background. I want to speak out – the Yazidis have suffered 74 genocidal attacks, and this is because we did not dare to speak. I choose to speak up and share my story with others, and to help those who are not able or allowed to speak, or who have been silenced. I now want to study law to be able to do this.”

Along with so many others, Hala endured unimaginable suffering at the hands of ISIS aggressors, and she is adamant that these perpetrators must be brought to justice, both domestically and internationally: “We need and want our rights; we need to not be forgotten, and this is done by taking ISIS to court. We want justice, and ISIS was not only from Iraq, they were from countries all over the world. I want the ones who came to Iraq to be put on trial in their home countries.” Hala also explains that, nearly six years on, the survivors are still denied opportunities to grieve and process their suffering: “They killed our fathers and our brothers. If we could bury them properly and visit them on religious occasions, maybe it would help us. At least we would know that they have a resting place, and we would have a grave to visit. We could feel comfortable and at peace. Without that, it is really difficult to move on.”

At a young age, Hala is emphatic on the need for real change and concerted action in her country: “We need a committee to be created that can look for our missing people, especially in the al-Hol camp [in northern Syria]. We need the international community to stand beside us – we need to feel that we are not alone and that people are thinking about us.” She is at pains to describe the complex feelings of loss that she and her people have experienced: “We lost literally everything we had. It is like travelling to another country with only the clothes you have on. You have nothing else with you. If you ask me what help we need, I don’t even know where to start – we need psychological, physical, financial, educational, and social support.” Life in the IDP camp is difficult for Hala and her family, and she asserts that more help is needed than what has been provided so far: “It is a life of an orphan. No education, no work – we are basically waiting for outside aid and it doesn’t always come. Not everyone has a chance to work and provide for themselves.” Out of Hala’s suffering and indignation emerges a resolute pride in her community and heritage: “No matter how much the Yazidis have been through, they become more closely connected with their identity and support each other even more. I am proud of that and I hope it continues.” For the next generation of Yazidis, Hala emphasizes the importance of sharing collective memories: “They will hear about the Yazidi genocide, as I did when I was growing up. They must listen to these stories and never forget.”



Photo Credit - Alice Aedy

“They are saying there is no ISIS on the ground now, but if this is true, where are our missing and kidnapped people? We need a committee to be created that can look for our missing people, especially in the al-Hol camp [in northern Syria].” - *Hala*



# THABIT MIKHAEL (b. 1963, Iraq)

Thabit Mikhael is an Assyrian sculptor and painter from Qaraqosh, also known as Bakhdida, in northern Iraq. He graduated as an artist from Baghdad University, and was producing sculptures for local churches that had been attacked by terrorists even before ISIS targeted his community in 2014. The Assyrians have some of the most ancient cultural roots in the region, and Thabit explains that he fell in love with art because of his historic surroundings: “The main reasons I wanted to be an artist were the circumstances around us. There are Assyrian artefacts everywhere in Nineveh, there are statues and sculptures all around us.”

At the end of June 2014, after ISIS had captured nearby Mosul, there was a mortar attack on the town, serving as an early warning to the Assyrian community that they might be forced to flee their homes. Thabit describes a time of great fear and anguish in the time between that initial attack and the arrival of ISIS in his hometown. Eventually around 50 of the ca. 40,000 population of Bakhdida and a neighbouring town stayed behind, their fates unknown. Thabit says that many families and old people to escape: “Fortunately we could flee and the disaster was not as bad as what happened to the Yazidis in Sinjar.”

Thabit was able to flee to Ankawa, the predominantly Christian suburb of Erbil. Months after Bakhdida was liberated in October 2016, he returned to the town and participated in a project to clean ISIS graffiti from the walls and replace it with Assyrian language and hopeful, beautiful artworks. Thabit’s own artworks are closely linked with Assyrian identity. His painting *A Girl from Nineveh* depicts a young woman in the traditional clothes of the Bakhdida community with the face of Lamassu, the protective deity of the Assyrians, in the background. The work now bears the scars of ISIS desecration, as images of women’s faces in particular were targeted, and indeed all the statues in Thabit’s house were destroyed. Islamic State adhered



“A Girl from Nineveh”  
730 x 740 mm  
Oil on Canvas



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to the Islamic tradition of aniconism - the avoidance of images of sentient beings. Though there is no explicit reference in the Qur'an that forbids the representation of living forms, the practice stems from the group's strict prohibition of idolatry.

Syriac Letters celebrates Assyrian identity and the Syriac alphabet, as Thabit proudly explains: "This language is taken from the first alphabet in the world, the same root created the first language in the world. My ancestors created cuneiform, then the Akkadian language, until we reached the alphabet that is created in this language." After fleeing his home, Thabit produced *The Destruction of ISIS*, a powerful and emblematic image of an ISIS banner torn from its fastenings.

Thabit says that the most important step for local authorities to take now is to counter the radicalism of the various factions surrounding his community, and to stop designating the Nineveh plains as disputed areas. He also pleads for support for the Assyrian diaspora, "for our people all around the world to return to our homeland." He calls on governments around the world to help the Assyrian people to strengthen their community and to safeguard their very existence.

"We need support to strengthen our community, strengthen our existence in our homeland, and to give us opportunities for our people to come back to our homeland."

– *Thabit Mikhael*

"Syriac Letters"  
740 x 730 cm  
Acrylic on Canvas





THABIT MIKHAEL

"The Destruction of ISIS"

740 x 730 cm

Acrylic on Canvas





# FARHAD AL-KAKE (Iraq)

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Farhad al-Kake is a religious leader of the Kaka'i, the Iraqi name for the Yarsan people from western Iran and eastern Iraq. Yarsanism is an ancient syncretic religion whose followers in Iraq, previously in their millions, now number around 200,000. Farhad was born in Kirkuk in northern Iraq and is from the village of Chamchamal, which lies between the towns of Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah, but two of his sisters were born in Iran as his family fled the Iran-Iraq War during the 1980s. Farhad graduated from the Police Academy and studied accountancy in Erbil before completing a postgraduate degree in the UK. He is now a university teacher looking to amplify minority voices – particularly those of the Kaka'i people, a community that has long suffered persecution from Islamic extremists.

Farhad explains that “many years of persecution have made us secretive about our religion.” An example of this is the little-known sacred music that is played by the Kaka'i on instruments such as the tanbur, behind closed doors. The holy texts of the religion are written in Kurdish, and their influence may be seen as far afield as Azerbaijan and parts of India. The Kaka'i believe that theirs is the oldest religion in the world, but that all religions come from the same source. Among the central tenets of the religion is a belief in reincarnation, and Farhad explains that for this reason “anything we learn in this life will continue to live forever; we are not scared of dying.” It is a tolerant and respectful faith that promotes respect for all living things: “If you want to be a good Yarsan you have to help with the environment: animals, trees, and people as well,” Farhad says. “You have to respect the rights of everything around you.”

The beliefs and customs of the Kaka'i have historically made them targets of Islamic extremism and oppression. Significantly, the Yarsan religion values equality between men and women, with young girls encouraged to participate in playing music and other

cultural activities. Meanwhile, Kaka'i men like Farhad are identifiable by a prodigious moustache, which is a prerequisite for participation in religious rites. Such traditions further expose the Kaka'i to harassment and discrimination, and in recent years ISIS have specifically targeted the community, threatening to kill those who refused to convert to Islam. Villages have been occupied and Yarsani shrines and cultural artefacts have been destroyed and desecrated. Farhad points out that despite the territorial defeat of ISIS, the Kaka'i are still targeted for assassinations and abductions in the present day: “The authorities said ISIS did not exist any more but this was a big lie. The same things are still happening to our people.” Farhad himself suffered great personal loss as eight of his family members were killed by ISIS attacks as recently as July 2020.

Farhad thinks that the continued persecution of the Kaka'i by Islamic extremists is attributable to two principal factors: the important role of music in the religion, and the respect that Yarsanism shows all humans equally as well as the environment. “Other people should follow us because we are a hundred percent peaceful people,” says Farhad. “We need protection, nothing more than that.” He calls on the UN and international community to grant official recognition to the Kaka'i religion: “We have the same rights as other people. We need to be given our basic human right to be safe.”



*Photo Credit - Hailey Sadler*

“It is a shame that the UN in the twenty-first century do not recognise us as a religion”

– *Farhad Al-Kake*



# NAHRIN MALKI (Sweden)

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Nahrin Malki is an Assyrian professional artist and painter currently living in Sweden. Born in Syria, she fled to the Netherlands almost two decades ago, when the Assad regime began to attack the Assyrian community, which has some of the most ancient cultural roots in the region. Indeed, the Assyrian plight in Iraq and Syria is similar to the Yazidi experience, with tens of thousands of people driven out of their ancestral lands.

Nahrin grew up in a secure and liberal family environment where art and learning were encouraged. She was always drawing as a child, even copying stickers for friends who could not afford them, yet she felt trapped and unable to express herself under a regime which suppressed artistic freedoms and creativity. It was in the Netherlands that she was finally able to realize her artistic potential, studying at the AKI Kunstacademie in Enschede: “The Dutch system gave me the freedom to express myself and I immediately felt comfortable; they focused on humanitarian aspects in art and gave meaning to my work”, Nahrin explains.

Her main objective now is to connect the Assyrian people with their heritage and collective experience, through the central theme of suffering in her artwork. The Assyrian diaspora share collective memories of pain, and such communities need help to rehabilitate their lands and repatriate their people. Nahrin wants to remind the international community that Assyrian culture “is very rich and can enrich international culture – our civilization gave a lot to the world.” She works for the recognition of her people as an official ethnic minority in Iraq and Syria, and for the protection of their basic right to practise their religion: “The only solution we can come up with is that they give us a safe haven, with autonomy to protect ourselves, because we do not feel safe among the other groups”, says Nahrin.

In her artwork Nahrin combines diverse techniques and materials to move away from the rigidity of traditional art. While black is a dominant colour throughout, she

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“Assyrian culture is very rich and can enrich international culture – our civilization gave a lot to the world.”

– *Nahrin Malki*

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“Sales of Women”  
72 x 55 cm  
Mixed Media on paper



experiments with other colour palettes and says: “I do not pick the colours – the colours tend to pick me.” In her painting “A Scream” Nahrin shows the contrast between what she calls the feminist movement in Europe, where women can be naked, and the Middle East, where women are forced to cover up. “Nineveh” is based on a real-life image, depicting a woman carrying a cross, as when the Assyrians were driven from their villages. Other women are shown covered and confined in captivity, while the hands opposite them reach out for help. Another composition based on a real image is “Sales of Women”, which shows four Yazidi women taken by ISIS and sold as chattel abroad. Here the women are compared to animals, represented by the carcasses hanging above them. Poignantly, the women’s price tags display lower values than those of the animals.

For Nahrin, the restitution of Assyrian culture is a priority: “We have been forgotten about. We want to rebuild our schools that can teach our language and culture, and we want our books and historical artefacts returned to us. Churches in particular are cultural centres of our history since we do not have a country.” She explains that through her artwork and advocacy, she wants to help all persecuted minorities, and not just the Assyrians: “I want to talk about and represent other people who are being killed and brutalized. At the end of the day I am also human, and we are all brothers and sisters in humanity. As an Assyrian I can feel the pain of other people around the world who are suffering.”

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“We are all brothers and sisters in humanity. As an Assyrian I can feel the pain of other people around the world who are suffering.”

– *Nahrin Malki*

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“A Scream”  
50 x 72 cm  
Mixed Media on paper



“Nineveh”  
50 x 72 cm  
Mixed Media on paper



# FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE

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Turner Prize Nominee's, Forensic Architecture are an independent research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London. Their interdisciplinary team of investigators includes architects, scholars, artists, filmmakers, software developers, investigative journalists, archaeologists, lawyers, and scientists. Their evidence is presented in political and legal forums, truth commissions, courts, and human rights reports.

They also undertake historical and theoretical examinations of the history and present status of forensic practices in articulating notions of public truth. In 2018 Forensic Architecture (FA), in collaboration with Yazda, the international representative body for the Yazidi community, set out to train researchers in DIY surveying, mapping and documentation techniques, to support the investigation of the genocide perpetrated by ISIL.

They trained Yazda's documentation team, based in Dohuk, Iraq, in techniques for evidence-gathering, and in ways of recording the material condition of the ruins of Yazidi buildings, as well as other sites that were part of the violence committed by ISIL against the Yazidi people. Training was conducted in Turkey, and followed by ongoing fieldwork in northern Iraq, and analysis both in Iraq and in their studio in London.



“Maps of Defiance” (2018)



# SALAM NOH (France)

Salam is from the village of Ba'adre in the Nineveh plains of northern Iraq, close to the sacred Yazidi site of Lalish. He now lives in France with his wife and their son who was born in April 2020. Salam grew up as one of eleven siblings and was studying Arabic at the nearby University of Duhok when ISIS launched its attack on Sinjar. He is keen one day to finish his studies and perhaps work as a teacher and translator because of his love for languages, but his principal vocation is art. Although he and some of his brothers made pencil drawings while living in Iraq, there was little support for their interests: "Nobody appreciated my art or why I was painting", says Salam.

After the attack began in August 2014, Salam and his family knew they would never again feel safe in Iraq. With the genocide still ongoing in February 2016, they left Ba'adre and began the perilous journey to safety. After numerous failed attempts over land and sea the family reached Greece, and another nine months in a refugee camp would follow before Salam's parents and family members began to be accepted, although not all together, by a UNHCR relocation programme. "When we were finally reunited in France," Salam says, "we all started crying and we did not know how to express our thanks to France." It was difficult to begin a new life, but in France he soon found friends and a love for the traditional crêpe.

Yet it was in Greece that Salam and his brothers had first found support for their artwork, when a volunteer in the camp brought them the materials to begin painting with acrylics and oil. By October 2016 Salam's brother Ismail had his first seven paintings exhibited in Vienna, Austria, and Salam then had his own works exhibited in Zurich, Switzerland, in early 2017. Salam, Ismail, and their brother Jason now run the website Brotherly Art, displaying all their artworks online and at exhibitions worldwide, and donating a share of their profits to refugees and displaced people in need. For his painting "The Darkness is Covering Me" Salam collaborated with his brother Sahir, who wrote an

accompanying poem. In doing so, the brothers wanted to convey a sense of unity and help the audience to understand the message of the painting by means of the written word. The painting uses rich and dramatic symbolism to tell a narrative of a male figure (Salam's brother) who is separated from his abducted girlfriend. Salam's interests in abstract and surrealist art, and particularly the work of Salvador Dali, are clearly manifested in this fascinating work.

Without permission to travel during their first year in France, the brothers used social media to reach out to others and get feedback on their work, while their paintings were shown by friends and contacts across Europe and in the United States. Salam is committed to pursuing a professional career as an artist because his art allows him to continue to tell the story of the Yazidis, and to raise awareness and support for his people. Asked why he thinks it is important to have artists within the Yazidi community, Salam responds: "To keep the message and story alive, to keep reminding people the genocide is happening even if the media doesn't pay attention, and to generate powerful emotions and empathy through painting Yazidi stories."

Salam also stresses the importance of doing more to help those people who have yet to reach safety: "We thank everyone who has helped the Yazidis, and all the European governments that have helped. But at the same time, we still need more. Many Yazidis have lost people in their family. They lost their studies and their jobs and their villages. Some are still living in a tent in camps during the harsh winter and very hot summers. Please open your door to help those persecuted. These people have lost everything, and they just want to have a new, simple life." For many victims, the clock of painful separation and dwindling hope – portrayed so movingly in Salam's painting – continues to tick.

## The Darkness Is Covering Me

Poem by Sahir Noh

The darkness is covering me like a blanket...

Alone sitting in this room,

So dark.

So alone.

Crying my heart out

While waiting,

Waiting for your return...

Waiting for the light in our eyes shall brighten the sky again...

Waiting for the lights to go out and the day turns into night.

Still I'm waiting for a touch from your hands to keep me alive...

There I'm sitting near the window

Looking for a shadow

Or to another shooting star

So I can make a wish once more...

Which is to hug you once more.



"The Darkness is Covering Me"

600 × 500 mm

Oil on canvas

“Please open your door to help those persecuted. These people have lost everything, and they just want to have a new, simple life.”

– Salam Noh



# FALAH AL-RASAM (Iraq)

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Falah is a Yazidi artist currently living in an IDP camp in Iraqi Kurdistan. He has lived in the camp by ISIS in the summer of 2014, a moment which marked the beginning of the latest genocide in his community's long history of persecution and suffering. In the difficult conditions of the camp he has fashioned a new career for himself as an artist, adopting the pseudonym Falah Al-Rasam (the Painter). He has now sold several paintings and grown an online following for his artwork, even though he produced primarily written works before the terrible upheavals of 2014. "At that time I wrote poetry and stories about Yazidis," says Falah, "but I prefer doing art, I see myself in art more than writing."

In Sinjar in 2014, an anxious period awaiting an attack by ISIS culminated in the offensive of 3 August. Falah, his parents, and his five siblings were able to escape the following day, all together in one vehicle passing through checkpoints as ISIS militants fought Syrian-Kurdish forces near the border town of Rabia. While some of his family members have since moved to the Duhok region, Falah continues to live in the IDP camp, but a chance encounter in 2018 with an American woman living in his family's village allowed him to realise his artistic potential. She brought paints and art supplies from Duhok and encouraged Falah to try his hand at oil painting, a skill he has quickly developed. Like his fellow Yazidi artists, Falah comments on the lack of opportunities in Sinjar before the crisis: "People didn't care about art; actually, I didn't care about art before 2014. Resources were very poor, and my vision to be an artist was poor."

Falah's literary background and experience in writing poetry and short stories inspires his art. He has read widely from French, English, and Arabic literature, and he is inspired by religious and philosophical works and authors such as Kahlil Gibran: "They taught me to understand life in a philosophical way, to understand life more", says Falah. He now wants to deliver a message to the world through his artwork: "I have a strong desire to do something positive. Sometimes I look at the paintings

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"We want the President of Iraq to give us our right to live in peace and put those people who hurt Yazidis in jail."

— *Falah Al-Rasam*

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"Yazidi Fighter"  
650 x 900 mm  
Oil on canvas



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and feel very happy that I have done that.” His own favourite painting depicts a famous photo of Yazidi female fighter carrying a weapon, in Sinjar in 2014. The woman is shown on a road leading to Yazidi villages, standing ready to defend her community. Falah painted this subject from a photograph and comments that the picture as a whole reflects those dark times.

Another untitled painting shows a young Yazidi girl in an IDP camp. Falah took photographs of her in 2019, just after she had been released following four years in captivity with her mother and siblings, and with her father still missing. In this work he has focused on the child’s innocent but emotional expression, hoping to convey to the world the stark reality of what has happened to such victims. Above all, Falah wants to secure the right for his people to live peacefully: “We want other nations and religions to live in peace and we want others to do that for us.” His message to the UN and other authorities is that the Yazidis need real deeds and not just promises, and that there should be greater transparency when it comes to international aid: “We want them to put the money in safe hands without corruption, and we want them to be careful about where the money is going.”

“I want the next generation of Yazidis to be more educated and do the right things for their people and be good leaders, so they can avoid future attacks.”

– *Falah Al-Rasam*

“Yazidi Girl”  
650 x 900 mm  
Oil on canvas





# SALWA (b. 1998, Iraq)

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Salwa is an Iraqi Yazidi survivor of the genocide by ISIS that began in the vicinity of Mount Sinjar in August 2014. She now lives with her family in an IDP camp, where she says she has a good life thanks to NGO support. Salwa talks fondly about her life before the attack: “Before 2014 we had a simple life, we were really happy and content; I went to school, everyone I knew went to school, I spent time with my friends or working when I wasn’t in school.” At that time she dreamed of being a doctor, but her ambition now is to become a lawyer: “In captivity I suffered a lot and experienced many things and saw so much injustice; I realised that if I was ever released I would try to become a lawyer to defend my community.”

Salwa lost out on the key final years of her schooling, however, and is now told that she is too old to complete her education. This is the situation for many survivors and former captives, who are advised to seek education outside the camps in cities like Mosul. “After what happened to us Mosul is one of the worst places you can send us,” Salwa explains, “so they have to find a better solution. We need safety to complete our education.” She adds that while some NGOs in Iraq have tried to help the Yazidi community, all the help they have received thus far has been temporary, and there is a need for more long-lasting, sustainable support.

Salwa campaigns for the excavation of Yazidi mass graves, which remains incomplete almost six years on. She wants more to be done to find the missing members of her community, and to return former captives who cannot afford to pay for safe passage back to the region. Practical and financial help is needed for people to re-build their homes, and Salwa says that those returning also need to be protected by an alliance of international and Yazidi security forces. In addition, she wants 03 August to become a national day of remembrance to commemorate the Yazidi genocide. Asked what her message for UNITAD and the UN

would be, Salwa comments that she would welcome an opportunity to talk: “I would tell them to really support the families who still have relatives missing, and I would tell them about the mass graves. It has been six years and we still do not know what happened to our loved ones. In the camps life is difficult and people are worried that their tents will be set on fire; it’s too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer, and people are really scared. I would ask them to find a solution for my community.”

Another problem for survivors that Salwa highlights is that of mental health. She says that the Coronavirus outbreak is a particularly sensitive time for residents of the camps, whose mental health is already imperilled. It is important that trainings and events, which have helped Salwa and others before, resume quickly when the current health crisis has passed. Salwa’s personal ambition is to write a book about her experiences before and after the attack by ISIS.

“The authorities must find a solution. We (survivors) need safety to complete our education.”

— *Salwa*



Photo Credit - Hailey Sadler



# JULIET HASSAN (b. 1997, Iraq)

Juliet has been living in an Iraqi IDP camp since 2015. After the initial ISIS attack on her home region of Sinjar in August 2014, she and her family fled to the Syrian border and then to Duhok, and her father and youngest sister were subsequently taken in as refugees in Germany. Juliet was not permitted to join them as she was over 18 years of age.

Juliet remembers a pleasant and simple life in Sinjar before the genocide, attending school and going on picnics with friends and family. Even on the eve of 03 August she did not believe the rumours that ISIS would attack. “That night we heard and saw the bombs,” says Juliet, “and in the early morning we prepared ourselves with two cars to go to Mount Sinjar.” Among large crowds of Yazidis fleeing their villages and ascending the mountain, the cars broke down and Juliet and her family had to continue on foot, leaving food and water supplies behind. “My father was very sick,” she explains, “so we had to stay somewhere close by, not at the top of the mountain. We stayed in the same place for a week and received water and simple food from local farmers.”

Juliet has always wanted to become a translator and to be good at languages. Since living in the camp, she has worked with NGOs and produced some paintings to help people understand Yazidi history and culture: “Art is something very important in my life,” she says. Juliet has quickly developed her skills at drawing with charcoal by following the example of other artists. Her tender and warm-hearted drawing *Peace* depicts a young couple with a baby, foregrounding the theme of family. Juliet maintains that while ISIS tries to destroy the basic social element of the family, they will always be unsuccessful “because family members will stay together in peace whatever they try.”

*Yazidi girl in traditional clothes* depicts one of Juliet’s friends wearing a Yazidi headdress, the *komek u rashek*. Promoting awareness and preservation of such customs

is a crucial part of protecting Yazidi cultural heritage, one of Juliet’s principal aims in her work. She hopes to remind people in her community of their traditions, and when she searched to no avail for adequate pictures of this typical attire, her friend provided a photograph of herself dressed for a special occasion.

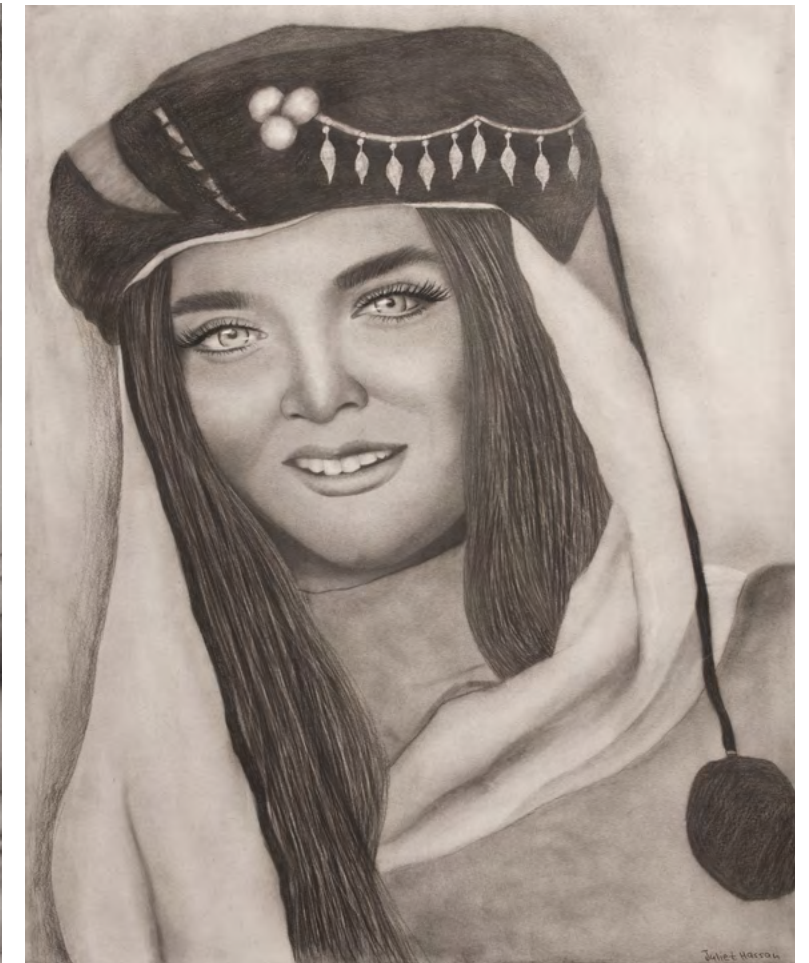
Juliet is fighting for her Yazidi community to be treated equally, and for her people to live in peace within Iraq, just as it is possible in other countries. “I want the UN and international community to support those families who suffered a lot,” she explains, “and to encourage talented people to achieve their goals.” Above all she hopes for a society in which people of all backgrounds can live in peace, without racism and persecution.

“I want the UN and international community to support those families who suffered a lot, and to encourage talented people to achieve their goals.”

– *Juliet Hassan*



“Untitled”  
297 x 420 mm  
Charcoal on paper



“Yazidi girl in traditional clothes”  
297 x 420 mm  
Charcoal on paper



# ARAZ SULAIMAN (b. 1989, Germany)

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Araz is a 31-year-old Yazidi sculptor and painter from Iraqi Kurdistan. For three years now he has been living in Germany, after he and his younger sister were able to escape life in IDP camps via Turkey and Greece. He is formally trained in art having studied and taught at the Duhok Academy before he left Iraq in 2017, and he has had his work exhibited in Iraq and Germany. Before the ISIS genocide of the Yazidis began in 2014, Araz was in Duhok, northern Iraq. His free time was spent on art and exhibitions, and he worked with an NGO to provide psychological help to children. He and his family were terrified on 03 August as the ISIS offensive on Sinjar began. Although none of his family members were captured, the women and children in his community were still sent away from Duhok into Kurdistan because of fears for their safety. “I was not afraid for my life”, Araz recalls. “I was afraid for the children of who are fleeing and their families.” Later that day, as Yazidis escaping the violence in Sinjar began to arrive in Duhok, people helped whomever they could: “It was not based on families, it was based on trying to help all Yazidis who were fleeing ISIS,” says Araz.

His artwork entitled *The Mountains of Sinjar: North and East* is a sculptural painting that breaks the two-dimensional format and is at once haunting and uplifting. Its distinct and physically separated two halves symbolize the experiences of being in and escaping from captivity. The dark half of the work represents the people who were captured, while the white side expresses the freedom and purity of those to the north of Mount Sinjar who were able to escape. A woman is shown emerging from a dark nightmare, and the white colour of her figure, symbolic in Yazidi culture, emphasizes that she comes out of this ordeal as a clean and pure human being. The gap between the two halves of

the work is representative of the physical barrier that the Sinjar mountains formed between areas under ISIS occupation and a safe haven for displaced Yazidis. As important as the thematic content is the material used in this composition. Araz found the fabric used to cover the painting when he saw it among the possessions of a woman who had died, and he decided that he wanted to re-use the material to ensure it would not go to waste.

Araz talks about the Yazidis’ long history of suffering and persecution, explaining how the older members of his community have long told him about other historical genocides and how “especially with the excuse of religion we Yazidis have been murdered and marginalized.” For this reason, his principal message to those in power is that there should be no hierarchies of religion: “You have to treat people the same, as a humanitarian. No religion should be treated as being above another.” Araz emphasizes the purity of spirit of the Yazidi religion, which does not seek to coerce anybody or do harm to anyone, and he hopes that people around the world will understand this. He wants his art to deliver the message that he stands as one with those members of his community that were captured and killed, and his objective at all times is to articulate the pain and the needs of those people.

“You have to treat people the same, as a humanitarian. No religion should be treated as being above another.”

– *Araz Sulaiman*



“The Mountains of Sinjar”

1200 x 2600 mm

Mixed media



# THIKRAN (b. 1998, Germany)

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According to the UN, the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) systematically subjected hundreds of Yazidi boys to violent separation from their families. They were forcibly transferred, indoctrinated, and recruited in military training camps. Some became fighters on the battlefield, while others remained on ISIS bases to perform their commanders' duties as required. Those boys that have been rescued are suffering with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and are having significant difficulties reintegrating into their community. There is still very little to no effective trauma treatment being provided to help them in Iraq.

When the genocide began in 2014 Thikran, a Yazidi boy aged 16, was living with his family in the village of Kocho, just south of Mount Sinjar in Iraq. According to a 2019 article in *TIME Magazine*, he was kept alongside his mother and sister on account of his age as the men and older boys from his village were rounded up and executed by ISIS. They were then taken to an ISIS stronghold in Tel Afar, where he was forcibly converted to Islam and trained as a child soldier.

After his rescue Thikran lived for some time in the northern city of Dohuk, before moving with his mother and 13-year-old sister to Germany as part of a programme for survivors of genocide funded by the German government. Thikran is pleased that the German state is helping his mother, who is in poor health, and says that "here there is humanity and justice." Acknowledging his Yazidi heritage, he is proud to be an Iraqi above all else and says he does not care what religion people are. Yet after everything he has been through, he finds it hard to foresee returning to his homeland for good: "We lost our families, villages, everything... so it is hard to live there."

Thikran has harboured scholarly ambitions from an early age and remembers wanting to become an engineer to help people in his community. He is now learning German and taking an online degree in



*Photo Credit: Newsha Tavakolian / Magnum Photos*

“They (children) need more care because we saw many horrible things, and our minds are now tired because of ISIS. Governments and the United Nations must do more to help children.” – *Thikran*



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English and Business Administration, as he hopes to carve out a better future for himself and his family. A long-time fascination with FC Bayern Munich notwithstanding, he recognizes the daunting challenge for Yazidi survivors to integrate in a new society, and says he needs time to learn a new culture and make new experiences. Thikran is adamant that the Yazidi people “just want to live,” and that justice for atrocities committed against all Iraqis regardless of their religion must now be delivered: “I don’t want to talk about my past, about what happened in captivity. I want to talk about justice for the genocide and what needs to happen today. I want the President of Iraq to help not just the Yazidi community but to bring justice for all Iraqis. So many atrocities have taken place.”

Thikran is keen to push for global recognition of the genocide perpetrated by ISIS, his former captors. Above all, he wants to live in a world that overcomes differences between people and religions: “We must put humanity first.”

“I want to see a world where there are no differences between people or religions. We must put humanity first.”

– *Thikran*



*Photo Credit: Newsha Tavakolian / Magnum Photos*



# SADIQ KHEDAR (b. 1995, Iraq)

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Sadiq is a young Yazidi artist from the Sinjar region of northern Iraq. For the past six years since the ISIS attack on his homeland began, he has been living in an IDP camp in Iraqi Kurdistan. While some of his friends and relatives have since returned to Sinjar province, Sadiq is unable to go back as his house was destroyed in the fighting when ISIS drove the Yazidi people out of their ancestral lands. Life in the camp is hard for Sadiq and his siblings – two brothers and one sister – with Sadiq working at the Ministry of Education to support his family financially. The Coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the family’s hardships, as Sadiq has lost what little income he had.

Sadiq explains that isolation is a particular problem in the camp: “Now everyone is scattered around, there is no-one from my village in this camp. Some of the people I know are living in other camps or outside Iraq, but my family and I have been alone here for six years now.” He misses living among his own people before the genocide, but even now in the camp he thinks being reunited with some his community could make a world of difference: “Life would be better than it is right now. At least we could see each other, talk to each other; if one of us needs something the others could help them.”

Sadiq has always been interested in drawing and art, although like many fellow Iraqis he points out that there was little to no support for artistic expression where he grew up. He was inspired in part by Falah Al-Rasam (“the painter”) who taught him English in Sinjar, and whose works are also displayed in the Nobody’s Listening exhibition. Sadiq’s painting *Fleeing from Death* documents the most dramatic event of his life. The work depicts Yazidi families, with young children among them, on Mount Sinjar in the wake of the devastating attack on their communities by ISIS that began on 03 August 2014. Sadiq himself spent one week on the mountain and explains that he painted this picture in response to

his sadness at seeing so many people, young and old, fleeing from danger without food, water, or even shoes. He painted what he saw with his own eyes, in order not to forget.

Sadiq hopes that his work can deliver a strong message to the world on behalf of his people. He wants the Yazidi community in Iraq to be recognized and to have the same rights as all other citizens: “I will tell you an example: now we are displaced people, and if we want to return to our home villages, we have to pay and lose our right to return to Kurdistan.” Sadiq hopes that the UN and international community can support Iraqi authorities to rebuild Sinjar and protect it from further attacks, and he asks the Iraqi authorities “to protect the Yazidi area well, not like before.” He is passionate about the role of art in the documentation of history and urges talented artists to continue developing their skills and to document events that they live through, just as he has done.

“I hope that the UN and strong countries can support the Iraqi authorities to rebuild Sinjar and protect it from further attacks. We need them to guard the Yazidi area well, not like before.” – *Sadiq Khedar*



“Fleeing from Death”  
650 x 500 mm  
Oil on canvas



# SAHER SHAKER “Saher Art” (b. 1996, Iraq)

Saher is a young Yazidi Iraqi artist working by the name Saher Art. Since the ISIS attack on the Yazidi population in the Sinjar region of northern Iraq in August 2014, Saher and his family have been displaced and living in an IDP camp. He recalls a difficult start to life, as his family were considered enemies of the Ba’athist regime before 2003 and Saher’s family members, although well educated, could not be hired in government positions. “When the Ba’ath party fell, after that my family members were able to get jobs”, Saher explains. Before the 2014 attack he lived with his parents and six siblings in the village of Khana Sor, north of Mount Sinjar, and he says that the people felt safe and happy. Saher’s own dream was to become a nurse because he saw that there was a lack of medical staff and he wanted to help people in the medical field. In the days leading up to the ISIS offensive on Sinjar in August 2014, everyone was afraid of an imminent attack and the possibility of losing loved ones. “During 3 August, some friends in the villages to the south of the mountain called to warn us that ISIS had begun attacking the villages,” Saher says. He and his family wanted to find a safe refuge, and there was nowhere to go except the mountain, where they would stay for eight days before fleeing to Duhok. On the mountain, children and elderly people were dying of dehydration and hunger, and news also reached those who had fled that people were being killed in the villages below. Saher says that life in the camp today is difficult particularly in terms of mental health: “When you are living in the camp you feel like you are always having psychological problems. There are 8-10 people in one tent, and you have no place to comfortably paint or to relax. It has been six years and we are still living in the camps, so we are tired of being alive.”

Art has at least been one effective outlet for Saher, who has been painting since 2015. He says he wanted to express the things he has seen and the suffering of his people through his paintings, and among the most impactful of these is his work entitled *The Temple of*

*Betrayal*. It depicts the day ISIS invaded Sinjar and began its campaign of genocide against the Yazidi people. ISIS logos and flags can be seen on the walls and rooves of traditional buildings in an imaginary village that represents all Yazidi settlements in the Sinjar region. Saher explains that the dark colouring of Mount Sinjar in the background represents the grief of his community, against a blood-red sky symbolising the horror of that day. Meanwhile, the white details in the distant mountains represent innocent Yazidi souls for whom there was no safe zone except on Mount Sinjar. Saher wants the painting to commemorate what he calls the betrayal by neighbouring communities who left his people at the mercy of ISIS.

Saher has previously been victim to artistic censorship, having had numerous paintings confiscated, and he points out that there is no freedom for expression for artists in Iraq. This compounds the problem of insufficient financial and practical support. He also calls for international protection for the Yazidi community, with an emphasis on enabling displaced Yazidis safely to return to their home region. A priority for Saher is mental health: “There are important causes of these mental issues. If there were job opportunities people would be occupied with their work; people live in utter poverty with no jobs, so life becomes increasingly difficult for them.”

“If there were job opportunities people would be occupied with their work; people live in utter poverty with no jobs, so life becomes difficult for them.”

— *Saher Shaker*



“The Temple of Betrayal”

795 x 596 mm

Oil on canvas



# SUHALIA DAKHIL TALO (b. 2000, Iraq)

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Suhalia is a young Yazidi artist currently living in Australia. As the ISIS attack on Sinjar began on 3 August, Suhalia and her large family attempted to flee the area in a single car that soon broke down. Forced to walk, she and her family were quickly rounded up by ISIS fighters, and Suhalia's ordeal began. Aged just fourteen at the time, she was separated from her relatives and taken to Mosul, where she was kept in sexual enslavement for three years. She was told that her family had been killed, and she began to make artworks of their images to bring their memories back to life. Although these pictures were immediately destroyed by her captors, she carried on drawing. The ISIS guards would take anything with which she could make images and on occasion even tie her hands to the prison bars.

Unable to paint the faces of the people she loved, she regularly attempted suicide to escape the pain. In response, the guards rubbed salt into her wounds to prevent her making further attempts. Suhalia was bought and sold as chattel between ISIS fighters on eight occasions. When international forces started to bomb ISIS positions in Mosul in 2017, Suhalia attempted to escape under the cover of their fire. She saw numerous friends killed in the blasts during these dangerous attempts, with which she persisted for two weeks. On 9 July 2017 she finally managed to escape, making her way to her uncle's house and eventually to back to the rest of her family.

Suhalia is now twenty years old and has continued to make art to remember what she endured. Her drawings allow her to bring back the memories of the people she has lost in her life. Her untitled painting of a silenced Yazidi girl is based on the many she was imprisoned with who were beaten and tortured. It is a metaphor representing every powerless and voiceless survivor of ISIS violence. Suhalia wants to use her work to spread a message about what happened to her, and what more needs to be done.

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The work is also a metaphor,  
representing every powerless and  
voiceless survivor.

– *Suhalia Dakhil Talo*

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Untitled  
420 x 297 mm  
Oil on Canvas





# BADRAN ALI (b. 1971, Germany)

Badran is a Yazidi artist from the Al-Hasakah Governorate in north-east Syria. He now lives in Germany having fled the civil war in Syria with his children in 2013. For many years Badran had worked as a primary school teacher in his homeland, and he turned to art at the late age of around thirty. In childhood there were simply no opportunities to pursue this interest, and no money for materials. But when as a young family man he was able to spend his own money, he began learning to draw by attending evening classes at the Al-Hasakah Institute of Art. “I painted everything in my surroundings,” he says, “including the pain that people around me felt, a pain that you could not articulate but which you could draw.”

When the ISIS genocide of the Yazidi community in Sinjar began in August 2014, Badran could only look on in horror from afar. He explains how these terrifying developments influenced his work: “It turned dark in front of my eyes, and I was afraid of what I was drawing because the world turned dark. I had the feeling that nobody was supporting the Yazidis, there was so much betrayal. I tried to put darker and darker colours in my work.” At that time, Badran showed his paintings to people in Germany to explain the ongoing situation in Iraq and Syria to them. While news coverage and explicit photographs often caused undue suffering and traumatization, Badran wanted to omit the triggering moments from his work to focus on an emotional response and give space for discussion.

His painting *Gestohlene Frauen* (“Stolen Women”), which he began at the end of that year, shows captured and chained Yazidi women on the darker left-hand side. The right-hand side of the work, in fiery orange and red, symbolizes Yazidis helping each other to be free. “The red side is for hope,” says Badran, “and it shows not just one day but every day; still today people are coming back and being freed.” The red chains emphasize the proximity of captivity and freedom, of dark and light, in a fluid relationship. Crucially for

Badran, both the dark and the bright side of the work represent ongoing processes, as women are still being captured and freeing themselves today.

Badran now hopes to continue his career as a teacher in Germany. He is happy to see the help given to the Yazidi people by the state of Baden-Württemberg, among others, as he knows they need practical and psychological help. Yet he insists that there is plenty of work still to be done: “The first priority is to free the women who are still in slavery and captivity. Secondly, they need psychological and medical support, and thirdly, they need financial support. These people are not only suffering in Iraq and Syria but also here in Germany.” Badran calls on all governments to provide continued psychosocial support and reparations for his people because their suffering is ongoing.

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“All governments must continue to provide psychosocial support and reparations for these people, because they continue to suffer.”

— *Badran Ali*

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“Stolen Women”  
600 x 600 mm  
Oil on canvas



# PIERS SECUNDA (b. 1976, London)

Piers Secunda is a British painter and sculptor whose research-heavy practice examines the deliberate destruction of culture. While at art college in London in the 1990s, Piers scarcely could have imagined that he would one day be so intimately involved with the history and traditions of places as distant and dangerous as Kabul or Mosul. Yet these are among the destinations to which a long-time interest in the contexts and consequences of cultural desecration has led him. Piers recalls witnessing on television the destruction by the Taliban in 2001 of the Buddhas of Bamyan in Afghanistan, just months before the 11 September attacks in New York: “It felt like a domino rally was starting; since then we’ve lived in a different dynamic of society. We now have a different outlook and a different degree of self-awareness in terms of cause and effect.” Piers’s focus on such cause and effect, in a geopolitical sense, dovetails with his endeavour to express, as an artist, the personal, emotional experience of visiting places that have suffered in this way. More recently, those places have been the many religious and cultural sites attacked by ISIS over the last few years, where in some cases the damage is ongoing, as Piers reminds us: “Destruction of culture happens on many levels; it can be a single devastating moment, or it can occur incrementally like water dropping on a stone.”

The central idea underpinning Piers’s artistic work is that a flat surface restricts too much for his liking what painting can be: “The complexities of our modern world are too great to be illustrated on a two-dimensional surface,” he explains. “I decided I could not be restricted by the parameters of a surface, and began casting, carving, and manipulating the structural integrity of paint to make things that can expand in any direction.” This is enabled by the use of the correct materials, which Piers can exploit to his ends as part of a modernist practise he sees as “directly referential to geopolitics and happenings in the world.” He feels an emotional obligation to attempt to express what it feels like to visit sacred and historic sites that have been left in ruins. In Mosul, for example, he took with

permission from a local priest a small cardboard box containing charcoal from a burnt-out building, and used this very charcoal, reduced to ink, to produce his work *Mosul Museum Ruins*. The work *ISIS bullet-hole painting (Assyrian horse)*, meanwhile, is made predominantly from plaster casts of Assyrian reliefs. Three fragments together illustrate the destruction of these beautiful symbols of Assyrian culture by ISIS bullets, as if in an animation. “I wanted to show in some respects the tragedy of the erasure of these important cultural objects”, Piers explains.

Today Piers is particularly astute on the role of the artist in international advocacy: “Artists have the capacity to express in clear terms the needs of humanity, and as messengers, artists are capable in ways politicians may not be. They are capable of producing a message with a compelling delivery behind it – and it is important that it is passed on.” He has previously been asked to organise a collaborative event to help foster relations between the Iraqi ambassador to the UK and the Kurdish Regional Government, and he is proud that his work has had this tangible diplomatic effect – another aspect of his career he would not have foreseen all those years ago in art college.

“I wanted to show in some respects  
the tragedy of the erasure of these  
important cultural objects”,

– *Piers Secunda*



“Assyrian reliefs”  
Mixed sizes  
Hardened industrial paint



# KHEDER DAHAM (b. 1972, France)

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Kheder Daham is a Yazidi Iraqi artist born in the village of Bara at the foot of Mount Sinjar. When Kheder was still very young he and his family crossed the nearby border into Syria, and he returned to live in his home country only in 2013. Like many Yazidis he has a large family, with twelve brothers and three sisters. On that fateful day in August 2014 when ISIS launched its targeted offensive on Sinjar and the Yazidi people, it was for his family that Kheder left the relative safety of the Duhok region, where he was living because of fears of just such an attack. He rescued his brother close to Sinjar city and took him back north beyond the Tigris river and towards Duhok Governorate. Kheder explains that the rest of his family who lived in Sinjar were fortunate that they had enough time to flee by car and escape the region, since many other inhabitants were forced at short notice to flee up the mountain, often on foot.

After some time spent living in an IDP camp, Kheder was granted a French visa and transferred to France, where he now lives and produces his art. He explains that it was in Syria that he gained the sensibilities to be an artist: “In Syria we lived in a beautiful area and I learnt for myself. I saw trees and I tried to draw them, for example. The only person who supported me was my father, who gave me the supplies I needed. I was always learning by myself, I taught myself.” His painting entitled *Stop the Genocide of the Yazidis* shows the suffering of a mother and her young children, and Kheder adds that it represents a scream for justice. He is aware of its similarities to Norwegian artist Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, but says he was not thinking about that work directly while painting. For Kheder, the important theme he wishes to foreground is ongoing suffering in the form of a *cri de coeur* on behalf of the Yazidi community: the symbolic spires of the holy temple of Lalish can be seen in the background.

Kheder speaks passionately about what now needs to be done for his community and others that have suffered: “Yazidis, Christians, and minorities in Sinjar and the Nineveh Plains can only be free when they have a voice to speak for themselves, otherwise the genocide continues. They need security and protection.” He is adamant that guilt for the genocide lies with local authorities as well as the perpetrators because his people were abandoned in their moment of need. Kheder calls on the international community to secure the region and help the Yazidi people to be autonomous, while also delivering justice to those who failed to keep them safe. His artistic message is one of support and recognition for the Yazidis, and he dreams of building an enormous monument, “like the Statue of Liberty”, either near Sinjar or even in France, to commemorate the suffering of those who have experienced genocide

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“The UN must help deliver  
justice for the genocide  
committed against my people.”

– *Kheder Daham*

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“Stop the Genocide of the Yazidis”  
350 x 450 mm  
Coffee and acrylic on canvas





# JAMIL SORO (Germany, b. 1972)

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Jamil is a Yazidi artist from the town of Afrin in northern Syria. He has lived in Germany since before the 2014 genocide perpetrated by ISIS, having fled persecution in Syria ten years earlier via Lebanon and Greece. From an early age he has wanted to depict Yazidi culture and suffering, and to show the world what it means to be a Yazidi. Even in his home region in Syria, where relatively many Yazidis lived, it was a frightening experience to be outcast and treated with suspicion. “Every time we said we were Yazidis,” says Jamil, “people took distance from us, went away from us.” Long before the genocide, many Yazidis were forced to hide their identities to protect themselves: “We wanted to say who we are, but we were afraid what would happen, afraid that they would not treat us as fellow humans.” Observing the events of 2014 from Germany, he felt helpless: “It is impossible to describe how much pain I felt; it was impossible for us to do anything,” he says.

In Syria Jamil practised his art from the age of six and later studied while also working in industry. He formally learnt his craft at the Institute of Fine Art in Aleppo and says he has practised every day since. To Jamil, the Yazidi culture is a compelling and worthy subject for his art. “Yazidi people are everything that is beautiful,” he says. “We have faith in humanity and humans. Whenever something bad happened to us, we were only defending ourselves, it was never an attack from us.” Jamil’s untitled painting of a Yazidi woman with a dandelion is intended to give hope to all those who view it – he stresses that each person may decide for themselves which of their hopes or wishes they would like to see represented by the work. The painting entitled *Children of God* shows a Yazidi woman in traditional and symbolic white dress, the colour of God. “Even when people do not wear white it is still part of our culture,” Jamil explains.

The principal message that Jamil wants to convey with his work relates to the theme of shared humanity: “We want the people of the world to be humanitarian, to

see that we are not non-believers and we do not want to do any harm. I want people to learn more about Yazidis.” Furthermore, Jamil wants international stakeholders and those in positions of authority to provide specific help to his people, and to identify them as a community of equal value to all others: “They should see that we are also humans, and we want to be treated as humans. We all have eyes and noses; we are all human.”

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“Every time we said we were  
Yazidis, people took distance  
from us, went away from us. We  
wanted to say who we are, but we  
were afraid what would happen,  
afraid that they would not treat us  
as fellow humans.”

– *Jamil Soro*

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“Yazidi girl in traditional robes”  
950 x 1000 mm  
Oil on canvas



# HANA HASSAN (Iraq)

Hana was 18 at the time of the attacks. Originally from the Yazidi town of Kocho, her family had moved to Sinjar and where she was attending high school, at that time. Early in the morning on the 3rd August her relatives in Kocho phoned, saying that they had heard reports of ISIS making their way to Sinjar and that they should leave as soon as possible.

Hana's family decided to make their way up Mount Sinjar but with no car they had to make their journey by foot. It was the most difficult day in her life. As she climbed she saw people who had left in a panic without food or water, and many were dying of hunger by the side of the road. Some people who did not even have time to get their shoes or who had lost them on the way had wrapped their feet in clothes through which you could see blood. She stayed on the mountain for seven days, eating spare food from the shepherds who lived on the mountain and drinking water that came from natural springs. When coalition forces made a safe corridor for the Yazidis to escape she firstly made her way to Syria, and then to Zahok. She is currently living in a makeshift community outside the IDP camp in Khanik. She paints about the genocide in order to document her experiences and to let her children know what happened to her. This painting is about the stories she was told of how ISIS burned women in cages.

Every time she paints, she goes back to the events she witnessed on the mountain, the people she saw die and the suffering of people who had lost everything. With her work she chooses to express the fragility of life, both in terms of the genocide and of women more specifically. Every day, Hana sees women in her community trying to put their lives back together having lost their homes, their husbands and children.

Despite her circumstances, Hana has started painting about hope and has started doing oil paintings about the women in her community, going to school and rebuilding their lives. Every 3 August she still paints to remember the people of her community who were lost.



“Burning Women”  
397 x 310 mm  
Acrylic on paper



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**RYAN X. D'SOUZA**  
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