

Afaf Zurayk

Interviewed by Nadine Touma

I walked in a space that expressed a body through which i painted an image that carried me to the spirit and soul of this genuine woman, Afaf Zurayk.

A child, a woman, a student, a teacher, a painter, a poet, an art critique, a daughter, a friend and an aunt. Together, we brushed over different events of her life and these are some of the paintings that we came up with. I hope that words are expressive, colorful and three dimensional enough to express moments of feelings and thoughts, and to interpret the resplendence of life and its littleness, its brightness and its darkness.

Painting 1

**DREAM DOORS MIXED
LETTER ON PAPER 8"x
8.5**

Description: A white rounded space, with no doors, sunlight, trees and a woman with red finger nails. Angular and circular spaces that curve in and out around the sketchy figure. Trees become hands, hands become trees. Keyholes, a separation of self that merges in space. Ink, watercolor and crayons expressing a lightness of touch.

Interpretation:

Yenekomichian's building in Beirut. Afaf spent a very happy and full of love, childhood and youth in that house. She felt surrounded with light. The

red finger nails are an expression of her watching her mother's friends smoking and taking pieces of tobacco out of their mouth with the delicacy of a feminine touch. At AUB where she got her BA. She belonged mentally and spiritually, she had a lot of friends from different cultures which enriched her experience.

Lebanon was prosperous and open. She was happy but in our talk she expressed a discomfort with her physical appearance and her body, a struggle between the inner and the outer self that dragged itself in her until another struggle of the Lebanese war came, so we see her figure dominating and at the same time sketchy, present but not invasive. An insider and an outsider, like all of us. A feeling that almost every Lebanese feels after the war. Now, pensive, contemplative, she pours past out on paper with a subtlety of colors and media, and an extravagance of meaning. She finally feels resolved and comfortable with herself, accepting and forgiving. A painting that expresses a Lebanese state that crosses all the boundaries of time, culture and space.

Painting 2

**RECOLLECTIONS
MIXED LETTER ON
PAPER 8.5" X 8.**

Description: "... An oval face is almost imperceptible beneath a blizzard of multicolored gestural strokes in chalk and oil

pastels and black ink (Wilson, Washington Post.)" The colors are sharp and dark. Sudden strokes of light appear like a flash, emerging from a somber mood.

Interpretation: *It was after Afaf finished painting her series, and did not look at them for a while, that she noticed the presence of the oval staring faces behind a thick layer of color. She worked on her painting late at night, early in the morning. In a whirling moment of Brahms Music extasy, she swung her hands and exposed a truth of the morning, and a violence of being. Why these medias i asked? Because i was living in my basement and painting there, i couldn't use anything with a harmful smell. The erect feeling i got from these paintings was alleviated with the subliminal faces. Were the paintings trying to say something back to Afaf? It is true she said that she forgets herself when she is painting, and forgets the painting when she finishes them. When she is ready she comes back to them. She feels, sees, touches, smells, understands and is surprised.*

The third painting is ours. It has to do with the sweet conversation that Afaf and i had about her coming back, her womanhood and what she would like to tell our readers, especially our female readers. Afaf decided to exhibit these series in Lebanon after a lengthy absence. She felt that these series spoke

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to the people that could feel them and embrace them sadly but willingly. And that is what she felt when the viewers expressed themselves. I am happy, they got through.

Regarding women's issues, Afaf believes that there is no separation of the sexes and that females and males should work together in making our world a better place to live in. She spoke of the oppression of men, and the pressures that work against them and choke them. No Separation.

After breaking out of the mold that she was in, and becoming untroubled with her body, Afaf latest series is of nudes depicting her fascination with the human body. She is very happy with the paintings and hopes to have them in Lebanon. As for her final Painting message, it is her niece's poem, The Bus.

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thinking of what he did wrong,
He never did remember
the words of his song.

Shireen Tawil
(who is 13 years old and
Afaf Zurayk's niece)

Dream Doors

As a child I lived in a
house with no doors.
Thoughts, drenched in
sunlight, wandered
through its spaces.
They lived in the
round.
They dreamt.

In time the sunset
erected doors.
Visions recoiled from
touch as angles replaced
circles.

The house, organizing
itself into neat thoughts,
closed in on itself.

I drew keyholes
And
One eyed men.

Morning grew softly.
Petalled nuances drew
from recesses, doors
breathed, and bodies
joined trees to give
shape to light.
Like a bowl, the house
embraced its thoughts.

Paintings became
passages
And
I became a dream.

Afaf Zurayk

The Bus (excerpt)

The old man sat, his eyes
twinkling on a stone.
He grunted and let out a
moan.

His hair had grown
white, and his beard had
grown long
He was tired and failed
at his song.

Then suddenly, out of
nowhere
As if God answered his
prayer
Came a bus
So the old man rose and
waited for it to pause
But it just roared on by
like a tiger

So the old man sat
warily down
And his smile plunged
into a frown
And so there he sat