
Baghdad Kept on Working: Painting and Propaganda during the British Occupation of Iraq, 1941–45

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In early February 1943, a date that saw tens of thousands of Polish soldiers congregating in Iraq to train for war, a Polish painter named Józef Jarema published a robust endorsement of the formalist approach to his craft. Having studied in Paris in the late 1920s, he was a committed modernist who embraced color as the primary formal element of his compositions. “Every academicism is a kind of corpse,” he wrote in Polish, “even the Parisian one,” before proceeding to champion the artistic task of creating a “parallel world” of vivid emotions and sensations.¹ In many ways, this testimony seems perfectly at home in the 1940s, a decade in which commitments to mass politics were reversed in favor of protective specialization around art and its autonomy. As other scholars have observed, the prioritization of transcendent aesthetic value over the historical position of the artist as producer is a hallmark of a liberal defense of modern arts—an alleged bulwark against philistinism and political prejudice.² The surprise here is the place where Jarema made his declarations. He wrote his essay in Iraq for publication in *Kurier Polski w Bagdadzie* (Polish courier in Baghdad), a Polish-language newspaper established in December 1942. The occasion was an *Exhibition of Paintings by Polish Soldiers-Artists*, a major propaganda initiative of two hundred works of art, due to open soon at the British Institute in Baghdad.

Upon arriving in Iraq in late 1942, a number of artists and writers attached to the Polish Army in the East for the Polish government in exile in London (later renamed the Polish II Corps), some of whom spent time as prisoners in secret camps in the USSR, undertook intensive propaganda efforts to generate support for Polish sovereignty. The creation of a newspaper to serve a population of displaced Polish persons was one initiative, but outreach to Iraqis was another. The artists in the group who enjoyed prewar recognition as modern painters set out to establish contact with their Iraqi counterparts, visiting cafés, holding lectures, and organizing exhibitions. Because at least two other Polish soldier-artists in Baghdad possessed Parisian credentials similar to Jarema’s, their discussion of art tended to accord a universal authority to their colorist approach to painting. As far as Jarema was concerned, the relative consistency of their

style—sometimes described as pointillist or Divisionist and other times as postimpressionist—offered reason for optimism regarding Allied willingness to adopt the cause of a free Polish Republic as a plank in its liberal platform. As Jarema took care to report in his article, the Polish artists found common ground with the Iraqi artists who possessed at least some French training and who thrilled to the “game of colorful contrasts” as well.³ The ease of the transfer struck Jarema as proof that displaced Polish artists would serve as stewards of a free and true cultural spirit and, moreover, do so at a time that artists in occupied Paris could not.

Almost all accounts of the trajectory of modern art in Iraq reference the Polish influence on Iraqi artists during the war years. Iraqi artists attested to the significance of the encounter before the end of the war itself. By September 1943, Jewad Selim, a brilliant artist who went on to become one of Iraq’s most studied modernists, described to a friend how the Polish artists had “revived our relationship to Paris” and sparked new appreciation for the meaning and use of color.⁴ And Jamil Hamoudi, a student of Selim’s at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad, wrote a short account of the “new generation” of artists in the country that credits the Poles with modeling how to “live for art alone.”⁵ Soon, reviews of exhibitions mounted by Iraqi artists began to note the prevalence of work in a postimpressionist mode.⁶ In July 1945, Selim gave an interview in Baghdad that cited his interactions with the Polish artists as the most important event of his artistic life to date, in part because their postimpressionist training inclined them to appreciate the arts of the East as a source of compositional theory, which sparked Selim’s own interest in historical Iraqi arts.⁷ Most subsequent analyses have followed the template established by the initial testimonies by giving credit to foreign visitors for directing attention to painterly techniques—that is, the “how” of painting in addition to the “what”—and defining the problem of how Iraqi heritage might inform modern art.⁸

Historians of twentieth-century art will be just as familiar with claims to membership in charmed artist communities as we are with stories about transcendent aesthetic values; the narrative of a utopian “open city” welcoming all comers who prioritize art above other concerns is a mainstay of School of Paris propaganda during and after the war.⁹ To find it in the writing of Polish and Iraqi artists is to confront the success of the effort to equate an individual version of artistic autonomy with a collective ideal of a free and flourishing society, which would bolster a version of a liberal art world to come. Yet, it should not be forgotten that the British military chose to reoccupy Iraq in this period and, indeed, forcefully align its peoples with the strategic interests of the Allies. In the summer of 1941, nearly the whole of the military front sometimes dubbed the Near East—a tactical corridor connecting Cairo to Baghdad via Beirut and Damascus and onward to South Asia—experienced reoccupation by British militaries or Free French ones (the latter with British help), thereby shoring up oil, air fields, and provisions for ships against the Germans.¹⁰ Following these operations in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, new wartime movements of people and supplies in the region spurred an unusual confluence of displaced artists in Baghdad who, for a variety of reasons, advocated fervently for the threatened values of freedom and

experimentalism. Little attention has been paid to the motivations for Polish and Iraqi declarations of artistic friendship in this context, or to their appeal to membership in a wartime diaspora of Paris-aligned artists. Which is to say, when it comes to the history of artists and critics who consolidated discourses of art for art's sake around the heroic ideals of progressive Modernism, what has still to be told is how these discourses connect intimately to late-colonial interests in war.¹¹

It is not my aim in this article to dispute the evidence of Iraqi artists' high regard for the universal values they perceived in the Polish artists' paintings, which is abundant. My interests relate to historical and ideological queries: how a late-colonial community of soldiers, refugees, mobile intellectuals, and local artists came to model a version of modern art construed as free inquiry into form, or "art alone," and how it operated in a space of uncertainty regarding the fate of a shared artistic enterprise in a world where centers had not held. As I hope to demonstrate, Allied propaganda in support of the necessity of war played a decisive role in structuring affinities between artists in a shared space that was neither officially a war zone nor a home front. In my research for this article, I made use of the papers of Belgian poet and art dealer E. L. T. Mesens in the collection of the Getty Research Institute, which contains myriad letters to and from artist collaborators in exile and military service in cities in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East under Allied control. Equally, I worked with more dispersed and fragmentary archives pertaining to Iraqi artists Selim and Hamoudi and Polish painters Jarema and Józef Czapski. What follows, then, is a plot for future research on the resignification of modern painting that took place amid the colonial entanglements at the crux of the war enterprise.

1. E. L. T. Mesens and War Propaganda

First, it is important to consider what can be learned from the activities of Mesens—a representative figure because of his self-appointed role as an arbiter of important European trends—in this period. In 1938, Mesens moved to London from Belgium to take up a position directing the London Gallery, from which he promoted surrealist art and literature in particular as a most modern pursuit. Mesens had no trouble recognizing the growing connection between surrealist thought and anti-fascist resistance movements. He and his collaborators used the gallery's publication, *London Bulletin*, to publish the text of a manifesto from 1938 by principal French surrealist poet André Breton, Mexican painter Diego Rivera, and exiled communist theorist Leon Trotsky outlining a commitment to independent art as a political project meant to hasten a revolution, adding a note promising a manifesto by the British section of the project in a future issue.¹² However, by late 1939, following money troubles and the destruction of at least a portion of the gallery's collections in air raids, he halted most activities.¹³ There is little indication that Mesens took any subsequent steps to spur his small and disorganized group of English surrealists to action as a collective.¹⁴

Whereas Mesens exhibited minimal interest in direct organizing, he did answer calls to duty in the realm of British propagandizing. Beginning in 1943, he contributed to the BBC's content for Radio Belgique broadcasts into German-occupied Belgium. He also entertained at least one special commission to produce a musical piece for the British Foreign Office. The commission would have entailed writing French lyrics for a preset tune for use in fostering a sense of common cause between French and British servicemen, as was thought necessary for success in major upcoming battles.¹⁵ Mesens received a text of suggested themes on the topic of struggle between Allied freedom and Axis repression. Typewritten sentences convey a set of shareable causes—"Liberation is coming. Stand together and work together. Be prepared to strike when the signal is given—to strike against the Nazi oppressors"—and conclude by enumerating a triad of core freedoms that represent the Allied cause: "freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of action" (fig. 1). Mesens met with a representative from the Political Intelligence Department, only to ultimately refuse the request on the grounds of its uninspired relationship to art as a tool for the cause. Declaring the language and music of the song to be stilted and academic in composition, Mesens attempted to goad the Foreign Office into realizing art's capacity to elicit real emotion. The appropriate way to generate a sense of inspiration, Mesens asserts in his response, is to evoke a popular spirit of spontaneous exultation.¹⁶

A final arena for Mesens's propaganda efforts had to do with publication schemes to protect the experimental version of French culture he upheld as a civilizational benchmark. Throughout the war, Mesens endeavored to use the London Gallery imprimatur to produce and circulate anthologies of French literature by surrealist-affiliated authors. One letter, sent in July 1943 to literary critic Herbert Read, identifies a growing reading public of "French reading refugees" in England, desirous of access to new French-language work.¹⁷ Notably, Mesens's list of preferred contributors reflects a network of activity sustained by French flight to colonial and semicolonial locations. There is Breton's poem "Fata Morgana," which he composed in Marseille while en route to the Caribbean and later the United States, as well as "new and very good things" coming from the Americas by Benjamin Peret and André Masson, from Aimé Césaire in Martinique, and from Georges Henein in Cairo.¹⁸ By the time of Mesens's literary plotting in 1943, Breton had already laid claim to Césaire's poetry, introducing him in the first issue of the New York journal *VVV* (spring 1942) as a friend and a "magnetic and black" figure who, from his home in Martinique, had managed to break with old French mores so as to write "the poems we need."¹⁹ Tellingly, although Mesens identifies Césaire's incandescent poem "High Noon" for inclusion in his volume, he is unconcerned with its political specificity as a response to France's wartime colonial domination over Martinique. Instead, Mesens directs attention to establishing a shared field of innovatory work, the existence of which is to be offered as a promise of transcendent talent in spite of suffocating war conditions.

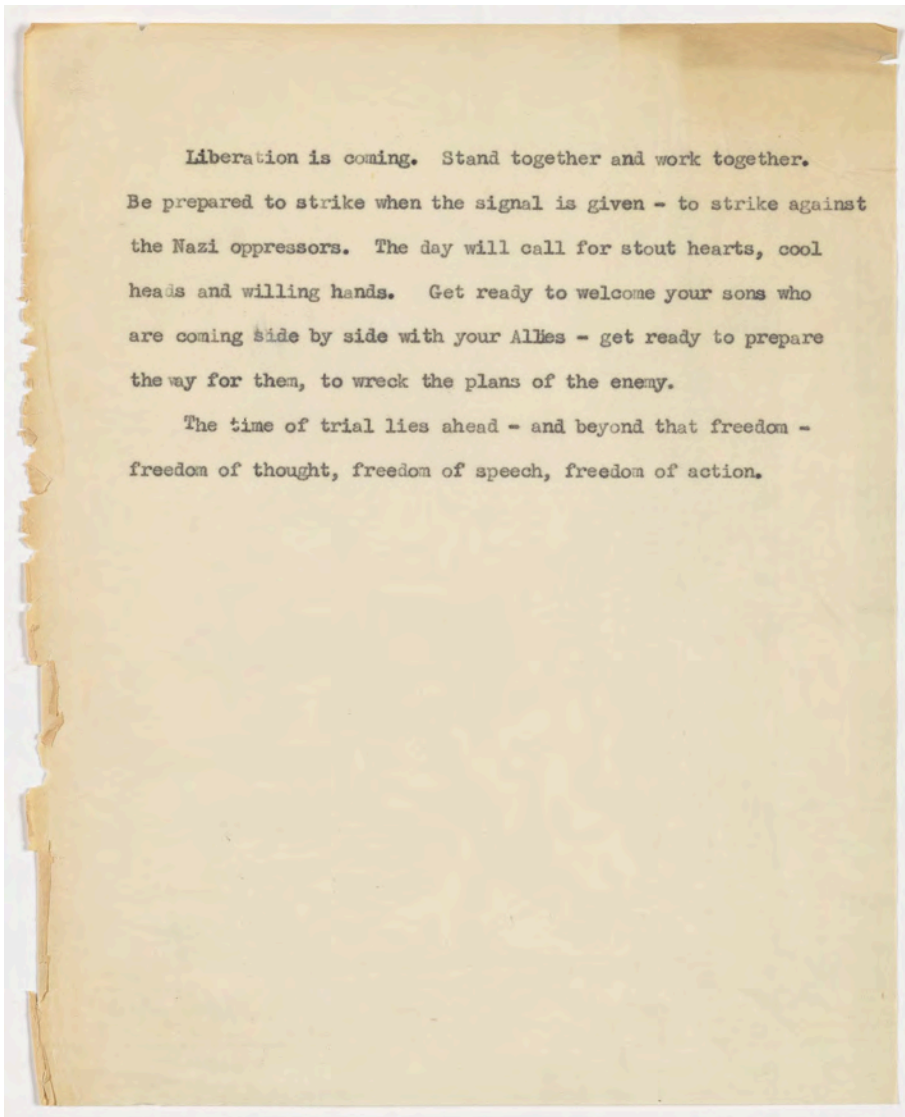


FIG. 1. — Suggested themes for lyrics sent from F. C. Dowling, Political Intelligence Department of the British Foreign Office, to E. L. T. Mesens as part of a proposed song commission, 26 January 1944. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 920094, box 5, folder 3.

2. Techniques of British Occupation in Iraq

In Iraq, Allied propaganda operated in a complementary yet distinct fashion. Over the preceding period of nominal independence from 1932 to 1941, Iraqi officials had expanded education in the name of cultivating a culture of enlightened Arabic thought based upon national commitment. Britain's guiding strategy as the colonial authority came to emphasize a relationship of influence rather than direct control, which depended upon British affiliates serving as advisers to native government officials (all subtended, as historian Sara Pursley has argued, through what remained a very direct use of corporeal violence in other realms—from hanging and *corvée* labor to collective

punishments in the form of air bombardment).²⁰ The contradictory effects of the parallel development strategy manifested at such institutions as the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, established in 1926 around the archaeological collection of Gertrude Bell. Run as a condominium model that placed British experts among Iraqi national employees, the museum supported a network of spies—among them Bell herself and later antiquities adviser Seton Lloyd—at the same time that it presented increased opportunities to Iraqi artists. In 1934, the Iraq Museum gained an art studio at the initiative of newly appointed director of antiquities, Sati‘ al-Husri. Having already established a fellowship program to support artist training in Europe in his previous role as minister of education, al-Husri tasked the studio’s artists with enlivening archaeological finds by creating mural-scaled tableaux of historical events.²¹

In April 1941, Rashid al-Kaylani, a former prime minister who had attempted to use the office to free Iraq from colonial influence, led a coup that rejected Prime Minister Nuri al-Said’s policy of compliance with British demands for wartime censorship, curfews, and rationing, and challenged the legitimacy of the Hashemite monarchy. The British military responded by waging quick yet merciless war on the Iraqi military using both colonial battalions from India and aerial bombing. As the national government collapsed, perceptions of social unity disintegrated. Riots broke out targeting Iraqi Jews as external to national interests, and makeshift alliances of nationalist military, police, and urban subjects went door to door in poorer Jewish neighborhoods in Baghdad attacking persons and seizing property.²² These events, known in the local Iraqi dialect as the *farhud* (meaning dispossession), revealed how violent and exclusionary strands of nationalism had dovetailed with a cause of ostensible liberation.

The crisis ended only with the entrance of British troops into the city. British authorities restored Crown Prince Abd al-Ilah (the uncle of the toddler King Faisal II) to the role of Regent and rededicated efforts to prop up the offices of the monarchy as an authority. Rather than attempt an expensive full-military occupation, colonial strategists again turned to systems of influence, albeit now with ever-wider outreach.²³ By 1944, no fewer than one hundred people were working in the publicity department of the British embassy in Iraq. High-ranking employees hosted parties and cinema nights for educated Iraqis whom they hoped to cultivate as friends.²⁴ The same network brought Edward Bawden, an English artist with an official war commission, into contact with Iraqi artists, even as he declined to engage with their work.²⁵ Bawden’s sketches from Iraq offer a pictorial record of attempts in the era to establish a social meaning for the Hashemite monarchy. One of his most striking watercolors features a trademark British initiative: a cinema boat that plied the Euphrates taking films to rural populations, complete with bunting and ceremonial gun salute. Bawden makes sure to depict on the outdoor screen an image from its standard cinematic fare: the Regent Abd al-Ilah, the “star” of British propaganda, appears as if in a newsreel, wearing a British uniform, engaging in conversation and holding a porcelain teacup (fig. 2).

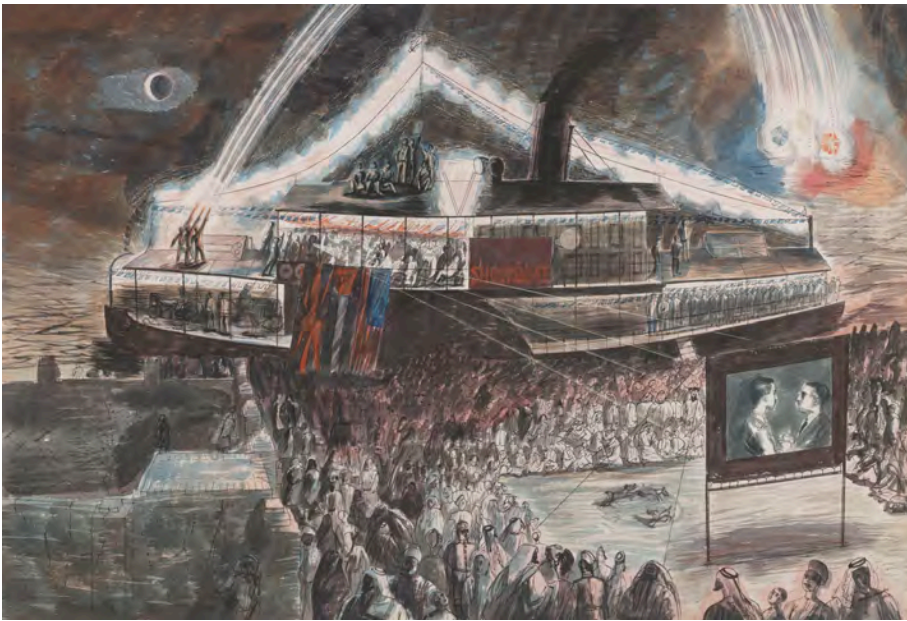


FIG. 2. — Edward Bawden (British, 1903–89). *The Showboat at Baghdad*, 1944, watercolor on paper, 66 × 100.5 cm. London, Government Art Collection. Image © Crown copyright: UK Government Art Collection.

British information officers took a light hand when it came to influencing Iraqi artists, always preferring to play a role of consultant. For instance, English artist Kenneth Wood, whose military service included employment in Baghdad from 1943 to 1946, was assigned to improve color-printing capacities in the city and set up a lithography studio that offered training to a first generation of Iraqi graphic designers.²⁶ Wood impressed his Iraqi friends with his technical acumen in studio art as well as in applied work. Over time, he developed a distinctive semisurrealist method of watercolor composition to capture the city's phantasmagoric night life, and would cap his time in Baghdad by writing up his philosophies and methods for Hamoudi to publish in Arabic.²⁷ The same period saw Lloyd move into action to secure art supplies for the Iraqi artists he favored.²⁸

3. *Jewad Selim's Return to Baghdad*

This late-colonial matrix provided an important armature for Selim's career as representative of a new generation in Iraq. Born to a painter father with training from an Ottoman military academy, Selim and his siblings—brothers Suad and Nizar, and sister Naziha—all pursued creative professions, and did so across multiple fields, including painting and sculpture, caricature, music, and stage productions. In 1938, Selim received a fellowship to study in Paris. Arriving in Europe at the age of nineteen, he sought to acquire training as a sculptor and managed to gain admittance to the *École des Beaux-Arts*, only to be forced home by declarations of war in 1939. The following summer, Selim attempted to restart his studies in Rome, only to return once again to

Iraq.²⁹ Resigned by 1941 to waiting out the hostilities from Baghdad, Selim took positions as an instructor of sculpture at the Institute of Fine Arts and as an artist in the painting workshop of the Iraq Museum.

Selim's initial artistic activities upon his second return reflect a sense of unease, which he appears to have explored by plumbing the crisis tropes established by earlier European artists. Inaugurating a sketchbook bearing the title, in Italian, "Contemplations of My Spirit," he filled its pages with quotations and drawings that give an impression of Romantic malcontent.³⁰ Early text entries include a stanza of poetry by Paul Verlaine expressing the melancholia sparked by an absent lover, which Selim copied in French: "Oh, sad, sad was my soul because, because—for a woman's sake it was."³¹ Selim's drawings, meanwhile, riff on a corpus of nineteenth-century imagery. In one, he echoes the slumping physicality of a sketch by French sculptor Auguste Rodin intended to illustrate Charles Baudelaire's volume of poetry *Les Fleurs du mal* (fig. 3). Rodin's drawing associates bodily humility with problems of sin and transference. Selim's drawing assigns the pose to a new ambivalent figure, likely captioned (in French) "the creative man," who experiences disappointment in the very world he has created (fig. 4).³²

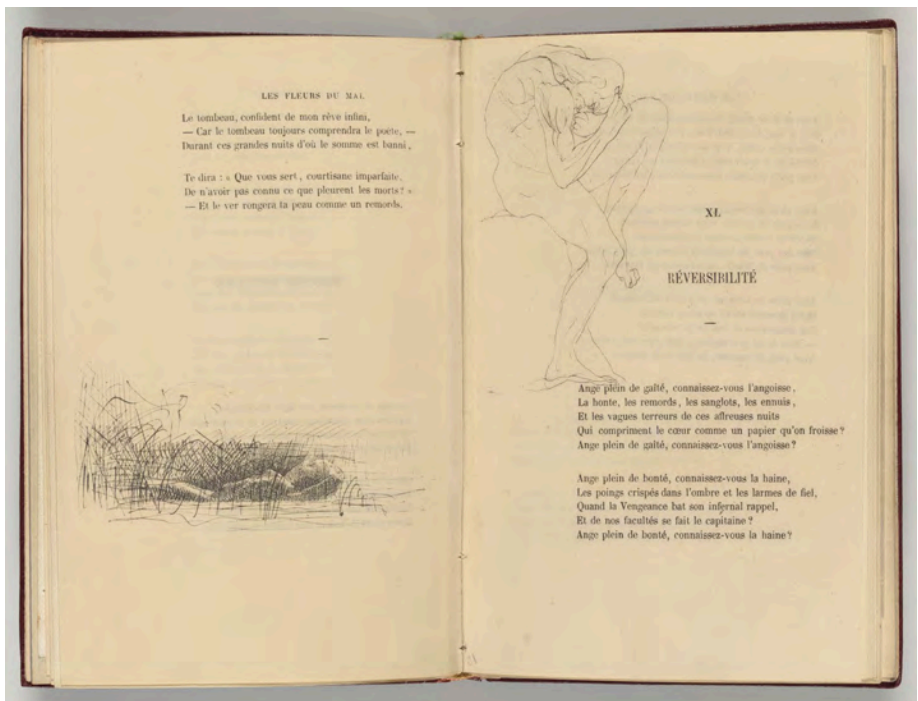


FIG. 3. — Auguste Rodin (French, 1840–1917). Illustration in Charles Baudelaire, *Vingt-sept poèmes des Fleurs du mal* (Paris: Société des Amis du Livre Moderne, 1918). New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection. The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1968, 68.632.1. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.



FIG. 4. — **Jewad Selim (Iraqi, 1919–61).** Drawing likely captioned “L’homme créateur,” 1940s, in Selim’s sketchbook “Contemplations of My Spirit,” now lost. From Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Jawād Salīm wa-Nuṣb al-Ḥurriyya* (Baghdad: General Directorate of Culture, 1974), 171.

That Selim would make such extensive use of Romantic models is intriguing, given his exposure to an array of modernist trends in Europe.³³ To an extent, Selim’s return to themes of anomie would seem to revive the Romantic modernist Iraqi aesthetics of the previous decade, which, as literary scholar Haytham Bahooora has identified, tended to explore the inner life of urban subjects—the middle-class civil worker, the Baudelarian libertine, the bourgeois intellectual, and the sex worker—as ciphers of shifting ethical regimes.³⁴ While Selim was in France, he expanded the genre to include the pressures of mass media, exchanging descriptions of Hollywood films and concerts with friends and with his sister, Naziha, who was then exploring kindred themes of cinematic feminine typecasting (the happy beauty, the damsel in distress, and so on) in her own projects.³⁵ But to Selim’s friend and biographer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Selim’s Romantic approach to

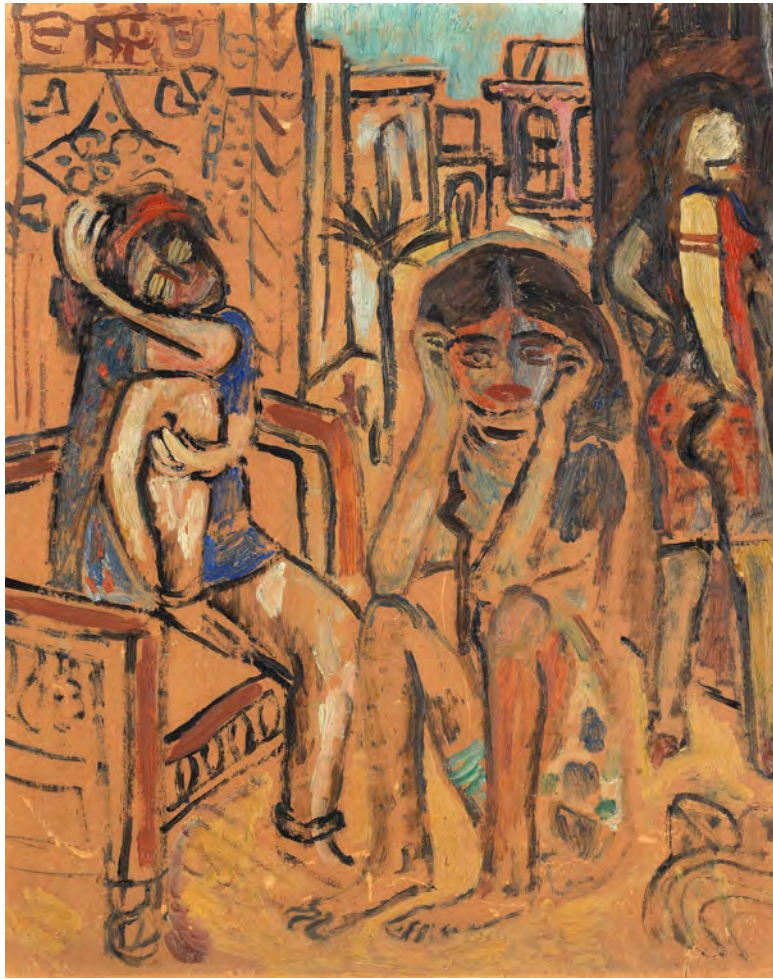


FIG. 5. — Jewad Selim (Iraqi, 1919–61). *Nisā' fī al-Intizār* (Women waiting), 1943, oil on board, 45 × 35 cm. Private collection. Image: Wikimedia Commons.

malady during the war years entailed more than simply continuing a modern tradition of alienated observers. Jabra identifies an increasing recognition of the war itself as the source of affliction, including in its extractive economic dimensions.³⁶ Selim's oeuvre features several paintings depicting sex workers waiting for clients in the streets of Baghdad, created with a bright palette of brushy marks, as well as drawings of scenes of lust and debauchery sourced from an array of literary sources, both Arabic and foreign (fig. 5).³⁷ These images can all be read in a context of the British occupation of Iraq wherein barracks outside the city held thousands of soldiers, outbreaks of malaria were frequent, and trainees came to the city to patronize bars and brothels.³⁸

Given the melancholy of Selim's practice at the start of the British reoccupation, it is striking to consider how thoroughly the cultural propaganda of the time required his presence. When the *Exhibition of Paintings by Polish Soldiers-Artists* opened in 1943 under the sponsorship of ministers, commanders, and advisers, the officialism of the

proceedings gained some relief from the presence of invited Iraqi artists, who greeted the Polish artists as peers.³⁹ Selim offered remarks in Arabic on behalf of the group and is reported to have expressed excitement about hosting an exhibition of European art in Baghdad for the first time as well as support for Polish goals.⁴⁰ Soon thereafter, Selim and colleague Faiq Hassan received invitations to exhibit work in Alexandria and Cairo as part of an initiative by the Friends of Art society in Egypt, an organization that enjoyed the patronage of the Egyptian monarchy.⁴¹ The plan to feature Iraqi painters among the expanding community of Allied artists must have promised to add legitimacy to propaganda claims about common cause.⁴² At home, meanwhile, Selim frequented the parties thrown by the head public relations officer of the British Embassy and sold him paintings at an exhibition of the Iraqi Artists Association.⁴³ By 1944, a pivotal year when British acts of friendship in Iraq became oriented toward postwar alliances, Selim not only began to work with Lloyd to cultivate opportunities for solo exhibitions but also accepted invitations to deliver lectures on art to British soldiers.⁴⁴

4. Polish Artists Take Refuge in Iraq

The Polish painters entered this cultural space beginning in the autumn of 1942 and stayed through most of 1943. They brought with them recollections of interwar Paris and a defining interest in light and color, as distinct from the moody palette of surrealist modernism. As Selim later observed, their memory of the French capital differed in spirit from the dark painting he witnessed during his stay at the time of the Second World War.⁴⁵ Not only had Czapski, Jarema, and Edward Matuszczak sought entry to postimpressionist circles but they had also been prepared for their mission by a beloved teacher, Józef Pankiewicz, who had preceded them in Paris and embraced Divisionist color strategies.⁴⁶ Their group held French painter Pierre Bonnard in particularly high esteem for his ability to amplify color and composition simultaneously and sought entry to his circles. Upon returning to Warsaw, they developed a reputation as “Kapists”—the Polish acronym for the “Paris Committee” they had formed to support their studies—who located the mission of painting in the search for compositional realities that are independent of denotative subject matter.⁴⁷ They were not abstractionists, but they took the academic genres of still life, portrait, and landscape as pretexts to pursue the artistic end of building form in color. So committed were Jarema and Matuszczak to keeping focus on daubs of color that their Baghdad landscape paintings bore little immediate resemblance to the relatively clear light conditions on the banks of the Tigris (fig. 6).

The Kapists’ presence in Baghdad, nearly twenty years after their stint in Paris, was a complicated consequence of Nazi Germany’s attack on the USSR in August 1941.⁴⁸ The earlier German invasion of Poland in September 1939 divided the country between the Third Reich and the USSR on terms secretly negotiated between those powers, precipitating deportations of hundreds of thousands of Poles to the Soviet interior and filling undisclosed camps with prisoners of war (among them Czapski). Once Germany reversed agreements in 1941 and Joseph Stalin faced an urgent need to grow military



FIG. 6. — **Edward Matuszczak (Polish, 1906–65).** Landscape from Baghdad, 1943, oil on canvas, 44.5 × 51.5 cm. Alexandria, Egypt, Museum of Fine Arts. By permission of the Fine Art Sector, Ministry of Culture, Egypt.

power, the USSR entered the fold of the Grand Alliance. An agreement with the Polish government-in-exile, signed in London, restored diplomatic ties and provided for the release of prisoners. Over a series of months, a Polish fighting force was assembled and moved through central Asia. In April 1942, however, commander Wladyslaw Anders decided to move these groups out of the USSR and away from its whims, evacuating more than one hundred thousand people by crossing through British-controlled Iran. A large contingent of volunteer fighters headed to Iraq to prepare to rejoin the war, including Polish soldiers already affiliated with other units in the region (among them, Jarema), forming a Polish Army in the East that would train in coordination with the British military.

In exile, the Polish government pursued a survival strategy based on deepening connections to an Allied vision of common victory. Jarema may have been one of the first to promote his ties to Parisian prestige as an asset—he formulated a strategy to this effect in 1941 while still stationed in Egypt, prior to the release of Polish prisoners in the USSR or the reunion of Kapists in Baghdad.⁴⁹ At least one interview from Egypt introduces him as a postimpressionist and describes his exhibition as a “show of faith” in the continuation of great traditions of painting.⁵⁰ As Jarema explained to local journalists, to exhibit painting of this kind was to signal resistance against the new barbarism of the day. Crucially, by equating a “great tradition” with a style of composition recognizable in daubs of color, Jarema established a marker for tracking

both Polish artistic accomplishments and the imprint of their values on other artists.⁵¹ Once in Baghdad, he espoused the views of an “extreme impressionist,” advocating for an exclusive focus on the application of color to a surface and eliminating the use of black paint.⁵² So committed was he to elevating his version of serious painting that he drew skeptical commentary from other Poles. One article, which imputes a combative character to the Polish opposition to academicism, describes the exhibited work as “a little closed off to those indifferent to it” and at odds with common taste.⁵³

Czapski, who was appointed to head the Public Relations and Information Department for Anders, made a more affective personal case for recuperating a spirit of Parisian freedom. As other scholars detail, Czapski had survived two years in Soviet prisons in part by taking up intellectual work—namely, plumbing his memory of French literature to deliver brilliant lectures on Marcel Proust to fellow prisoners—as a buttress against despair.⁵⁴ Upon his release, he readily credited “French art” with “help[ing] us live through those few years in the USSR” and continued to lecture on French culture as part of diplomatic tours to Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine.⁵⁵ Once in Baghdad, Czapski joined his Polish colleagues in calling on the Iraqi artists to deliver a message of cultivation and possibility. French was the lingua franca for these encounters. From his diary entries, it is possible to detect a private despair over his grim responsibilities and a hint of contempt toward interlocutors with whom he was unable to communicate in any depth due to their possession of only elementary French-language skills.⁵⁶

The Iraqi painters, for their part, rose to the invitation to mutuality with grace; at one gathering, artist Atta Sabri spoke about being “brothers in art.”⁵⁷ They shared their studios with the Polish visitors, doing their best to create conditions for the displaced painters to continue advancing their work.⁵⁸ Such actions accorded with the statements of support that their British-backed prime minister, al-Said, had extended to Polish refugees in January following his declaration of war on Germany, which credited Iraqi traditions of hospitality as impetus for the welcome.⁵⁹ Once the *Exhibition of Paintings by Polish Soldiers-Artists* opened on 15 February 1943, it, in turn, offered a venue for further expression of familial feeling. Artist Matuszczak exhibited a portrait painting he had made of the mother of Iraqi artist Hassan.⁶⁰ And, not only did the Iraqi state and municipality purchase Polish art but Selim also saw fit to make a personal purchase of a painting from Jarema as another expression of brotherhood.⁶¹

From the Polish side of the cause, both Jarema and Czapski issued interpretations of the critical stakes of the exhibition, which was set to tour other cities under British influence to which soldiers and refugees had gone: Cairo, Alexandria, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. Each artist addressed the fact of displaced inspiration, from the former Parisian center to elsewhere, as a defining uncertainty of the age. In this regard, their discussions of the fate of Western culture jibe with that of American critics who sensed opportunity to claim guardianship of it. As Serge Guilbaut reports in his classic study *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* of 1983, critic Harold Rosenberg responded to the occupation of Paris by opining in the *Partisan Review*'s December 1940 issue, “No

one can predict which city or nation will be the center of this new phase,” emphasizing the need to recover and protect the world-historical importance of Paris against mere national interests.⁶² Jarema, for his part, used his promotional article in *Kurier Polski w Bagdadzie* of February 1943 to outline the possibility of new communities of authority to be forged laterally between artists at different points in the world. By way of illustration, he boasts that the Polish soldier-artists exerted an “agitating” force on Baghdad’s stagnant academic scene. For Jarema, the Paris connection—strengthened by its loss—provided the basis for interpersonal affinities in their newly deterritorialized art world. He claims that painters across the world belong to the “Paris team,” defined as the generation of artists who studied art in Paris over the years 1920–39. They exist as if a large family scattered all over the world, ready to be activated in sudden and intimate fashion thanks to shared concepts, culture, and terminology.⁶³

Czapski’s commentary comes in the form of a lecture he delivered in English for the opening, later printed in Polish in *Kurier Polski w Bagdadzie*.⁶⁴ It too takes stock of the reordered cultural authority of the time, but proceeds by reference to historical arts as models of emotional power equivalent to modernist composition. Specifically, Czapski praises the Sumerian art in the Iraq Museum for its formal achievement, proceeding to describe the development of art as a pendulum swinging between realism and abstraction, always inspired to change by new encounters with other traditions. The lecture makes a point that Jarema seems to avoid for the most part, which is that reproductive technologies such as photography allow artists to access a full cache of world arts. Unlike Jarema, Czapski had been practicing his own version of a worldly response to multiple arts while stationed in the region; diary entries reveal that he sketched in museums and sites in Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, and elsewhere, some of whose artworks he had first admired in exhibition catalogs accessed in Paris (fig. 7). His textual notes detail strong in-person responses to certain historical works, such as the synagogue murals from Dura Europos in the National Museum of Damascus (in fact, Czapski records that he sees in the murals a riposte to Jarema’s color theories).⁶⁵ Czapski’s contributions to the major Polish exhibitions in Iraq also diverged from the Kapist ideals in terms of medium. Although he had attempted to work with the oil paints Jarema brought him as a means to revive the progression of Polish painterly modernism, Czapski found paints difficult to maintain in practice, and instead exhibited relatively pale ink-and-wash sketches of quotidian scenes.⁶⁶

Ultimately, Czapski’s lecture posits a different version of the loss of a Parisian center. Raising, as others had, the question of constituting a new capital for artists, he asserts, “None of us can prophesize where on the globe the next great painting will arise. Paris was the center of the world for artists recently, as was Rome in the 16th century. Will Paris, after its last tragedy, after the fall of France, continue to be the capital of artists after the war?”⁶⁷ But, whereas Rosenberg indicts fellow intellectuals for their collective failure to protect Paris from the taint of political obligations, Czapski appeals to fellow artists to maintain a generous relationship to the world and its potential to form capital centers. Indeed, he proposes that the best versions of national art will

5. *Studying a World History for Modern Art*

A key issue remains to be clarified. Apart from statements asserting that an exchange of style took place, what evidence do we have of Polish influence on Iraqi artists? Surviving physical works from this period are, admittedly, few. Although a guide from 1943 to a newly created Iraqi national collection reveals the presence of more than a dozen recently acquired works by Polish and other European artists, these appear to be lost to either neglect or, as in the aftermath of the catastrophic American invasion of Iraq in 2003, active looting. Also unknown are the whereabouts of the Iraqi paintings, of which nearly fifty—oil paintings, watercolors, caricatures, and drawings in pencil and charcoal—are listed in the same guide. Loss has been ongoing. In 2010, Selim's sketchbook, which featured drawings and sayings he copied from Bonnard, among other likely direct responses to Polish outreach, was destroyed when a car bomb hit the Jabra family home.

Nevertheless, two issues of a handwritten magazine produced by Hamoudi between 1942 and 1944 have survived that offer insight into artists' changing treatments of color, postimpressionist composition, and stylistic politics. Such magazines were a common avocation of Arab students who saw themselves as tastemakers in the tradition of anthologies, translations, and critical commentary.⁶⁹ Hamoudi's magazine took the title *'Ashtarūt*, one of many possible names for goddesses of regeneration and rebirth in ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, and oriented its contents toward a readership of other artists and art students. Its pages feature commentary on art trends, essays on cultural phenomena (both translated and original), reviews of local exhibitions, and "gallery" sections of sample works (some originals, some clipped from publications, and others copied by hand from a source).

Certain items in *'Ashtarūt* reveal that Allied narratives of threats to artistic freedom had saturated the Iraqi scene by routes other than the Polish artists. For instance, in February 1944, Hamoudi opted to translate part of an article from the British magazine *Lilliput* titled "Where Are the Surrealists Now?," detailing the sorry fates of surrealists in occupied Paris by naming artists who went underground or, worse, began collaborating with the Vichy government.⁷⁰ *Lilliput*, which billed itself on its cover as "the pocket magazine for everyone," specialized in irreverent content aimed at preserving British resolve to resist authoritarianism. It could have come to Iraq in any number of ways, via a newsstand catering to the British military or on the person of an individual visitor. In its appearance in *'Ashtarūt* as a translated excerpt, the article provided Iraqi readers with an introduction to the surrealist movement overall as well as a briefing on imperiled artistic freedom as a wartime cause célèbre. Hamoudi makes the decision to illustrate the piece with a surrealist drawing from 1933 by Pablo Picasso that he copied from a different magazine (fig. 8).⁷¹ The drawing replaces the photographic portraits of eccentric artists in their studios that accompany the original article, thereby directing attention to the question of what surrealism is and how to recognize it, in addition to the question of where one is free to practice it.



FIG. 8. — Jamil Hamoudi (Iraqi, 1924–2003). Pen drawing in *‘Ashtarūt*, no. 4 (February 1944): n.p., captioned: “Image: Zephyr, by the great artist Picasso.” Beirut, Nami Jafet Memorial Library, American University of Beirut, Archives and Special Collections, Jamil Hamoudi Collection, 1917–2012, box 36. Image: Ishtar Hamoudi / American University of Beirut / Library Archives.

Less obvious in *‘Ashtarūt* is the resonance of the specific painterly trajectories espoused by Jarema and his cohort, which, as their exhibition text describes, begin from a wide set of pointillist progenitors, from John Constable to Eugène Delacroix, and culminate in French modernism.⁷² One notes, for instance, that the cover design for the same issue from February 1944 presents evidence of a wholly other relationship to impressionism and its lessons. Keyed to an excerpted essay by Egyptian-Lebanese



FIG. 9. — Cover of *‘Ashtarūt*, no. 4 (February 1944). Beirut, Nami Jafet Memorial Library, American University of Beirut, Archives and Special Collections, Jamil Hamoudi Collection, 1917–2012, box 36. Image: Ishtar Hamoudi / American University of Beirut / Library Archives.

intellectual Bishr Fares, an experimental poet and playwright who had been advocating for Symbolist modernist aesthetics since the 1930s, a quotation on the cover highlights Fares’s metaphysical reading of color in an intermedial field of arts: “Nature is a color that addresses us through its light vibrations, an intermittent and volatile address”⁷³ (fig. 9). This insight is attributed, on the cover and in the essay itself, to “the Impressionists,” referring to the European painting movement, yet Fares grants corresponding insights to dancers and others who work with mobile forms of perception. In turn, Hamoudi’s cover design features color patches—dashes of watercolor tone—swirling within an ornate frame. The resulting depiction of color impressions is tied to theories of matter and imagination more than any one painterly lineage. Further, it reflects a robust space of cultural commentary in the broader Arab press, where scholars had long commented on modern art movements.

Many scholars have assessed the Polish impact in Iraq by reference to a revival of interest in historical Arab arts and, in particular, thirteenth-century manuscript illustrations by Yahya al-Wasiti, in large part because they became a central reference for national art initiatives of the 1950s and 1970s. Anthropologist Saleem Al-Bahloly emphasizes the discursive quality of Polish artistic practice as an influence, suggesting that it allowed Iraqi artists to position their own painting in a space of active cultural renewal.⁷⁴ A similar view emerges in Selim’s own testimonies from the time, which

express admiration for how Polish artists framed the artistic task as an intellectual endeavor. A letter he wrote to a friend in September 1943 containing his first of two epistolary assessments of the Polish artists' influence echoes many of the by-then official talking points about affinity, including excitement about their mutual Parisian referent.⁷⁵ But it also credits the heightening of his attunement to color as a compositional element to their late-night debates in the city's cafes. In order to provide his friend with an example of instructive past achievements, Selim highlights al-Wasiti's nonnaturalistic use of color to illustrate a flock of camels as achieving a rhythmic pattern of its own. The example allows Selim to clarify that he derives motivation from Czapski's enthusiasm for the arts of the region. In Selim's retelling, their Polish interlocutor had revealed how French painters had enriched their practice by reference to arts of the East, studying images "from the Land of the Rising Sun to Africa." Czapski challenged the Iraqi artists to treat the historical arts of their own region as an "inexhaustible" resource for the present.⁷⁶

Whereas Czapski's spellbinding discussions of art history undoubtedly mediated Selim's engagement with al-Wasiti, it is important to recognize that the Iraqi artists responded to the Polish message of enfolded traditions by undertaking cross-cultural studies of form that range beyond art with Baghdadi origins. On this count, *'Ashtarūt* again provides evidence of the relatively capacious approach of the time. An issue compiled in late 1943 includes a special section on Islamic art accompanied by an image program meant to augment readers' familiarity with its genres and achievements. There are two texts. One is a treatment of Islamic art excerpted from a volume on medieval art by popular French author Élie Faure, heavily edited and translated into Arabic by Selim.⁷⁷ The second is a short original essay by Hamoudi discussing the range of artistic genres found at Islamic sites and a tentative assessment of possibilities for sculpture (his chosen *métier*) within the tradition.⁷⁸ The image program, as was common for *'Ashtarūt*, consists of drawings copied by hand from textbook illustrations.⁷⁹ Remarkably, given the contemporaneous discussions of color, these image specimens are rendered in black outline and are devoid of tinted wash: wall painting from Fatimid Cairo, tracery ornament from an Abbasid palace in Baghdad, a drawing of a decorated pottery shard positioned on the page as if it had been clipped from an archaeology report, and a portrait of a "Persian" prince (erroneously attributed to Bihzad) (figs. 10, 11).⁸⁰ Culled from many different sites in the Islamic world, they accord with the grayscale norms of pedagogical reproductions of the time.

Selim's contemporaries have noted his profound appreciation for Faure's writing, and both texts in the folio feature versions of Faure's characterization of Islam as a "dream" that expands endlessly, finding form in different settings and constellations of resources.⁸¹ Nevertheless, the images selected for *'Ashtarūt* are at odds with Faure's emphasis on the capacity of the desert to dissolve form and invert points of view, as they favor academic genres such as portraits over the arabesque surface designs touted by Faure. Indeed, the image of the seated "Persian" prince, a figurative image rendered in elegant outline, has been pulled from a different section of Faure's book

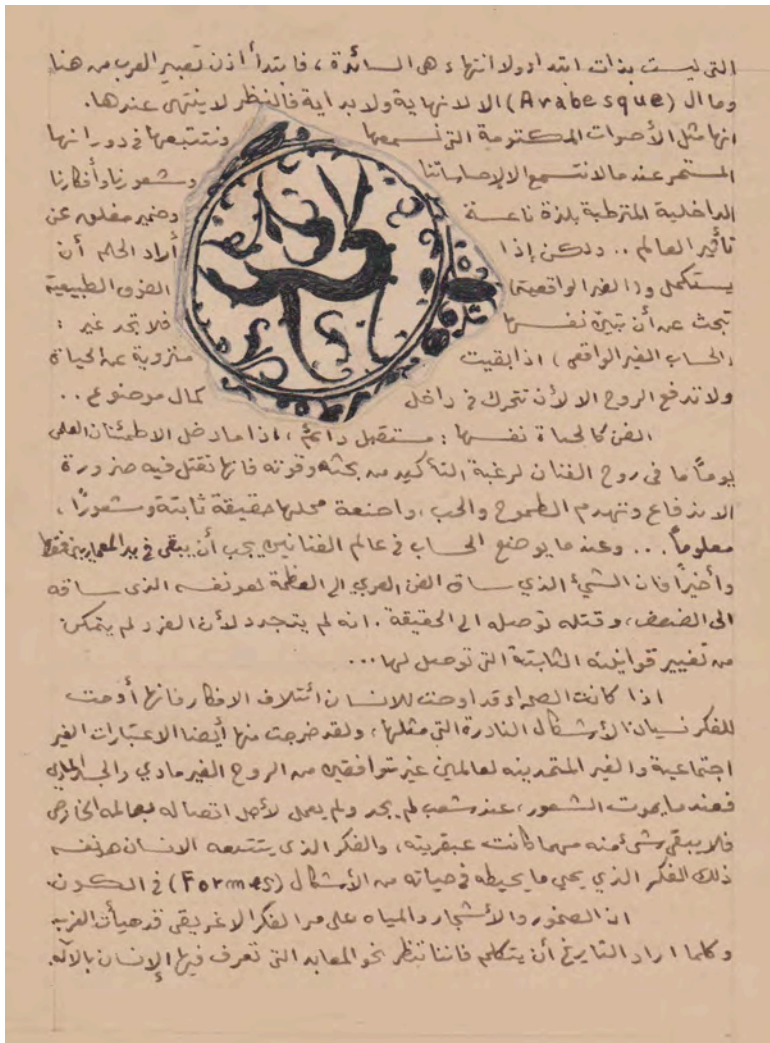


FIG. 10. — Unsigned illustration of designs on a pottery shard in the article “Al-Fann al-Islāmī” (Islamic art), translation of an excerpt from a French text by Élie Faure, in ‘*Ashtarūt*, no. 3 (1943): 45. Beirut, Nami Jafet Memorial Library, American University of Beirut, Archives and Special Collections, Jamil Hamoudi Collection, 1917–2012, box 36. Image: Ishtar Hamoudi / American University of Beirut / Library Archives.

and belongs to a separate argument about Persian aesthetics. These transpositions, in which images were plucked from historical narratives for insertion into albums, suggest that Iraqi artists pursued a parallel project of study meant to bring Islamic image examples into a shared fine-art frame in Baghdad, with its portraits, landscapes, and still lives. Contributors to ‘*Ashtarūt*’ documented forms as outlines in ways that enhanced utility for new composition. Their attempt could even extend to enlarging and projecting historical examples, as Selim describes having done in the case of al-Wasiti.⁸² The insights they sought were neither limited to color nor beholden to European



FIG. 11. — Unsigned illustration (likely by Jamil Hamoudi [Iraqi, 1924–2003]) in “Al-Fann al-Islāmi,” *‘Ashtarūt*, no. 3 (1943): 47, captioned: “The Painter Prince, by the famous Persian painter Bihzad.” Beirut, Nami Jafet Memorial Library, American University of Beirut, Archives and Special Collections, Jamil Hamoudi Collection, 1917–2012, box 36. Image: Ishtar Hamoudi / American University of Beirut / Library Archives.

modalities of appropriation. Rather, they engaged with the immanence of form and its availability to artists in the present.⁸³

6. Baghdad, an Open City

Selim wrote a second epistolary characterization of the Polish encounter in November 1944, his most frequently cited.⁸⁴ By then, the Polish II Corps had left Baghdad for action in Italy, and the French Second Armored Division and the U.S. Fourth Infantry Division had liberated Paris. In fact, Jarema carried ideas about community between artists to Rome, where he founded an international art club for the purpose of

promoting revived universalism in peacetime.⁸⁵ Over the same period, Selim began to place new emphases on the meaning of the community of displaced artists in Baghdad. Struck by reports that Picasso had been recovered from hiding in Paris, upon which the Spanish artist made proud claims that he had not stopped working during his four years out of the public eye, Selim comments on how Picasso receded from vision at precisely the time Iraqi artists struggled into recognition.⁸⁶ “During those four years, when Paris and Europe ceased to make beautiful work, Baghdad kept on working,” he observes. Even though Baghdad had few resources with which to support modern work, its artists kept on working to surmount the difficulties, build institutions, and revive the materials of their traditions.

Selim’s phrasing chimes with many of the propaganda narratives I have been tracking, insofar as he names a city, Baghdad, as a protagonist and as a synecdoche of the fate of modern art. More typically, of course, that protagonist is Paris. Writing on a date when travel to Europe for study again seemed possible, Selim characterizes the preceding years as a mission of world-historical importance. Artists had come to Baghdad as a city that remained open to foreigners and there helped to preserve modern art on behalf of occupied Europe. He mentions this key displacement twice, stating about ambitious artists, “If Europe had put a stop to their production, then Baghdad welcomed their work.”⁸⁷ What the openness of Baghdad enabled was recognition of a bond between artists who had continued to labor in the name of art alone, “bound by sincere humanity and love of life and efforts in the path of natural order—love of life and the simple things that could make us forget death.”⁸⁸ Crucially, Selim borrows his heightened language of forgetting death from Faure, his favorite art historian.⁸⁹ The sentence in question, the final line of Faure’s fourth volume of *Histoire de l’art*, defines art as a creative act that justifies itself simply in its joyful performance.⁹⁰ Faure likens art to the activity of play, which sociology had shown to be restorative precisely because it has no obvious use and thus differs from the otherwise alienated labor of modern life. Selim, writing in 1944, transferred the insight to the artistic activity on offer in Baghdad during the war years. As a practice of pure art for the sake of art, it provided an experience of rehumanization on behalf of all humanity.

7. Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth and Cultural Freedom

As the war appeared to come to a close, references to cultural freedom—conceived as independence from political influence—began to proliferate in the art worlds associated with the Allied forces. In Cairo, in May 1945, the group of artists and writers known as Art and Liberty presented the fifth exhibition of independent art they had staged since convening for the first time in 1940.⁹¹ Their exhibition title, *Le séance continue* (The séance continues), named an imperative to continue organizing beyond the seeming restoration of peace, precisely because so many people remained in thrall to military might. The catalog is studded with references to related initiatives of independent art within the same network of free writers and artists that Mesens

embraced from London: *Al-Tatawwur* (Evolution) in Cairo, *Tropiques* (Tropics) in Martinique, VVV in New York, *La Mandrágora* (The Mandrake) in Chile, and others.⁹² Importantly for my argument, despite lip service to art's subversive possibilities, the Cairo exhibition still upheld the status of the British military and colonial administration as a cultural partner. For instance, its roster of exhibiting artists included Wood, the English soldier-turned-public-relations-officer then working in Baghdad.⁹³

In Iraq, in September 1945, Hamoudi finally succeeded in securing access to a printing press and launched a cultural journal he called *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* (Modern thought). Carrying the subtitle "a magazine of art and free culture," it too invoked the anticipatory postwar category of cultural freedom.⁹⁴ The aspiration of the editors was to match the level of Egypt's and Lebanon's cultural magazines, and they followed a little-magazine model devoted to anthologizing material for readers without deference to group affiliation or special interest.⁹⁵ Hamoudi's opening editorial characterizes the modern thinker as a reader who seeks enlightenment by freeing the individual self from all restraints, thinking beyond one's own personal identity without any religious or social bigotry, and seeking knowledge without ulterior motive.⁹⁶

It is at this point that Mesen's correspondence from London picks up news of initiatives in the region. When Simon Watson Taylor, a poet and former secretary of the English surrealist group, found himself taking off to Cairo in late 1945 on a military contract with the Entertainments National Service Association, he sent word to Mesens about the journey. Watson Taylor met with Henein, picked up a copy of the catalog to *Le séance continue*, and revived contacts for future journal exchanges.⁹⁷ Next, once his troupe moved onward to Baghdad in early 1946, Watson Taylor managed to bear witness to formations of independent culture in Iraq. Scouting for audiences for his own surrealist publications in the works, he met the coeditors of *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* and delivered news of avant-garde activities. Watson Taylor's visit is documented in subsequent issues of the magazine in a variety of ways, including translations of some of his poetry and a three-part discussion of the surrealist movement.⁹⁸ Later, once Watson Taylor returned to London and sent copies of his own much-delayed journal, titled *Free Unions*, he briefed Hamoudi on surrealist initiatives underway in Romania and Belgium and promised the impending restoration of Paris as a center in a postwar art world (figs. 12a, b). This information, too, went into print in *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth*.⁹⁹

In late 1947, Hamoudi received a fellowship of his own to study in Paris. By then, he had begun to conceive of his magazine as a document of the vital contemporaneity of Baghdad during the preceding war years. Carrying issues of *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* with him to Europe, he gave copies to the Belgian editors of the journal *Le Petit Cobra* (none of whom read Arabic), who dutifully published a notice attesting to a diversity of modern thought in Iraq.¹⁰⁰ As Hamoudi later recounted it, upon arriving in Paris, he initially sought affiliation with Breton's group, only to grow disillusioned with its apparent nihilism and turned to the artist collective Cobra and its tenets of spontaneity, before ultimately seeking entry to the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles (Salon of New Realities).¹⁰¹

35, WARREN SQUARE,
Chelsea,
London, S.W.1.

Tuesday November 5th.
1946

My Dear Jamil,

I was delighted to receive through Sam a copy of your "Al Fikr al-Hadith" even though - alas - I can't read a word of it. And what is worse, I have an Arabic-speaking friend in London, but was pleased and encouraged to see that, despite all your incredible difficulties in Iraq, you were still able to write out the review. I assure you that in some ways I prize the poem of mine you published in your previous number above anything else I have published.

I have sent a number of copies of my surrealist review "Free nations" to Sam for distribution in Baghdad. I hope you will accept one of these as a complimentary copy to return for the copy of your review. Please let me know how you find "Free Nations" and whether you agree - especially - with the introduction (which I wrote) and the essay by the French surrealist Guillaume Peret. I hope you may find the political attitude by a lack of some interest, too.

Finally, I shall be glad if you will pass on my friendly wishes to all my friends in Baghdad - Ali, Abdur-Rah, Sa'idi, Ahmad Sa'idi, Ahmad Isma'el and others whose names I no longer remember! I wrote recently to Sam and to Isaac Ghoras.

You may like to know that there is an extremely active and valuable surrealist group in Damascus, which publishes a large amount of literature and has several very gifted adherents. Should you wish to get in touch with them I suggest you write to either Izzat or Samir Lutfi, at Damascus, P.O. Box 1012. There is also an active group of young surrealists in Beirut, working separately from the Beirut Surrealist Group (who are becoming very conservative) who established into an international surrealist journal with contributions from all countries; an idea which might interest you in Baghdad. You should write to Louis Bonus, at 27 Ave. de Copenhague, Brussels-Surrealist.

I have just returned from Paris, where I was able

to see Andre Breton several times. He tells me the surrealists intend to hold a new international exhibition in Paris in May. At the moment they are all searching feverishly for ideas for the presentation. Apart from Breton I saw Marcel Schwob, Guillaume Peret, the Cuban painter Alfredo Las, Cesar Dominguez, Viktor Jankner, Jacques Vrold and Marcel Jean. These are the surrealists now in Paris. Guillaume Peret is expected in France soon, and Charles Dole, a young Franco-American surrealist poet, but there is no real activity in France as yet; only a lot of argument and discussion!

With best wishes,
yours sincerely,
Simon Watson Taylor

FIGS. 12A, 12B. — Simon Watson Taylor (British, 1923–2005). Letter to Jamil Hamoudi, 5 November 1946. Beirut, Nami Jafet Memorial Library, American University of Beirut, Archives and Special Collections, Jamil Hamoudi Collection, 1917–2012, box 17, file 2. Image: Ishtar Hamoudi / American University of Beirut / Library Archives.

By then he believed that surrealism had reached its end as a movement and that postimpressionism would turn more abstract and concrete.

Closing Thoughts

How might we understand the alliances forged in wartime Baghdad under the propitious eye of British empire? Some of the vocabulary I have highlighted in this article, such as *brotherhood* and *family*, may call to mind literary theorist Leela Gandhi's reading of instances of elected affinity between European intellectuals and the victims of their own expansionist cultures.¹⁰² Gandhi is interested in attending to nonplayers in a drama of imperialism as a possible internal critique of empire in the earlier twentieth century. Yet, as the details of artistic exchange in Iraq make apparent, the late-colonial conditions of the war years—the violence of policed national borders coexisting with an imperial imagination of endless dominion—bestowed an artificial, highly externalized quality on acts of friendship. As Polish newspapers published news about artists passing time together in cafés or studios, they rendered everyday exchanges into epics of European cultural survival. Allied propaganda in its many guises had the effect of converting elective affinities into displays of support for military campaigns.

The discursive machinations of the 1940s were not secret. Artists on the Near Eastern front perceived elements of duplicity in the promises of freedom they helped to mobilize. As early as April 1946, Hamoudi offered the observation in *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadith* that Iraqi artists derived much motivation from Polish art yet little from British art, proposing as a partial explanation that “we are not inclined to the English because we feel from them the attitude of a colonizer toward the colonized.”¹⁰³ For Czapski,

it was the Yalta Conference of 1945 ceding Poland to Soviet interests that terminated all lingering belief in the Allied propaganda. In a later publication, Czapski rued how Polish volunteer soldiers took inspiration from Romantic national poetry to convince themselves that universal war would deliver freedom for all, for all time. Their imagination accorded all too readily with the cynical slogans of the Allied press, then trumpeting a message about war “for the liberty of peoples.”¹⁰⁴ But equally it rested upon willingness to ignore the truth of internal barbarity. Czapski shares that the British military had imposed press controls on his Polish Information Office, which prevented them from writing about Soviet atrocities.¹⁰⁵ The gag order was thought necessary to maintain the willingness of Allied soldiers to fight beside one another in a battle framed in moral terms.

Across a vast archipelago of colonies and bases in the Near East, stories of art for art’s sake were narrated time and time again. Allied propaganda gave everyone a role to play in sustaining a tradition that was at once directly attributed to Europe as a bastion of artistic freedom yet construed as a matter of universal concern. What I find most instructive about how Polish and Iraqi artists kept on working in Baghdad is that they explored ways to claim the moral authority of an obviously fabricated conceit of Paris as an open city ruled by art alone. Yet, the myth could not hold. After all, as the colonial conditions of their exchanges make clear, there were no innocent positions then, and there are none now. The Allied countries that fought Nazism in Europe also conducted military campaigns with impunity in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. As Nigerian curator and theorist Okwui Enwezor argued in an essay of 2016, drawing on the wartime analysis of Césaire, it is necessary to understand the terrible killing fields of the war, and the industrial-scale annihilation of the Holocaust, in the same frame as the colonial development of technologies of race, bureaucracy, and violence.¹⁰⁶ In turn, if we can bear witness to how the late-colonial world orchestrated ideas of transcendent aesthetic value, then we might escape from the too-easy moral oppositions we inherit from its war propaganda. To speak, as some Modernist art critics have, of pure art emerging from preceding collectivist dreams in heroic fashion, is to invite continued violence against the impure, the out of place, and the unfree. By contrast, a history of global modernism that orients itself to humanity must be open to registering the intersubjective vulnerabilities that bind us within the commingled history of our brutal present.

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Notes

This article originated as an attempt to think through a challenge Nada Shabout extended to art historians in 2009, which is to treat Iraqi artists who studied in European academies as participants in modern Western art. I drafted the article in 2017 during my postdoctoral fellowship at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles and finished it in 2022 while in residence at New York University Abu Dhabi in

the Humanities Research Fellowship for the Study of the Arab World program. Both proved to be fitting settings for assessing the entanglements of art and military interests in a so-called liberal age. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Polish, French, and Arabic are by the author, albeit with a great deal of help from colleagues. I wish to credit Julia Kulon for her expert work in locating, translating, and interpreting Polish materials and Sara Sukhun for her careful help reviewing published Arabic materials pertaining to Jewad Selim that enabled me to reconstruct the sequence of his diary and sketchbook entries. I am grateful to Aglaya Glebova and Przemysław Strożek for conversations around texts and word choices and to Eric Karpeles for help with access to the diaries of Józef Czapski. Finally, I am indebted to Ishtar Hamoudi for sending me scans of materials from her father's personal archive in Baghdad. The peerless Jamil Hamoudi Collection may now be accessed at the Archives and Special Collections of Nami Jafet Memorial Library, American University of Beirut.

1. Józef Jarema, "Oblicze Sztuki Polskiej," *Kurier Polski w Bagdadzie*, 9 February 1943; and Józef Jarema, "Istota współczesnego malarstwa," *Kurier Polski w Bagdadzie*, 10 February 1943.

2. We might recall here Clement Greenberg's famous characterization of the defining shift in American painting in this decade: "Someday it will have to be told how 'anti-Stalinism,' which started out more or less as 'Trotskyism,' turned into art for art's sake, and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come." Clement Greenberg, "The Late Thirties in New York," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 230. See Francis Francina's indispensable tracking of such shifts in Greenberg's narrativization and their circumstances in Francis Francina, "Institutions, Culture, and America's 'Cold War Years': The Making of Greenberg's 'Modernist Painting,'" *Oxford Art Journal* 26, no. 1 (2003): 69–97, esp. 92.

3. Jarema, "Oblicze Sztuki Polskiej."

4. Jewad Selim, letter to Khaldun al-Husri, copied into 23 September 1943 diary entry, in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Al-Rihla al-Thāmina: Dirāsāt Naqdiyya* (Saida: Maktabat al-ʿAṣriyya, 1967), 159. Two notes regarding Selim's diary warrant mention here. First, when Selim died suddenly in 1961, a diary and an early sketchbook passed into the possession of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, a Palestinian literary critic who moved to Baghdad in 1948 and became a principal chronicler of Iraqi modern arts. Jabra published selected entries in two venues: the journal *Ḥiwār*, in February 1964, and a book of collected writings, *Al-Rihla al-Thāmina*, in 1967 (hereafter *RT*). Even though the same entries appear in both publications, the versions in *Ḥiwār* are slightly more abridged than those in *RT* (although, in one instance, *Ḥiwār* contains text not included in *RT*). I cite page numbers from *RT*. Second, the date of this particular diary entry, and consequently of the letter, is uncertain. When Jabra published the text *Ḥiwār*, it carried a 23 September 1943 date; however, in *RT*, it is dated to 23 July 1943.

Contextual references seem consistent with a September date, which I use here.

5. "Ya'ish lil-fann wa-lil-fann faqat." Jamil Hamoudi, "Mushkilat al-Jil al-Jadid," *ʿAshtarūt*, no. 3 (1943): 15. As I detail later in this article, *ʿAshtarūt* was a handwritten journal that Hamoudi produced while attending the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad.

6. Siham Ahmad, "Al-Ma'raḍ al-Sanawī al-Thālath li-Aṣḍiqā' al-Fann," *ʿAshtarūt* (February 1944): n.p.

7. Jewad Selim, interviewed in Jamil Hamoudi, "Khams Daqā'iq ma'a al-Naḥḥāt al-ʿIrāqi," *Al-Jawhara*, no. 2 (31 July 1945): 17.

8. In the 1980s, a number of Iraq artists commented on the era retrospectively. Buland al-Haidari, a contemporary of Selim, emphasized the "how" of painting in "Jawād Salim wa Fā'iq Ḥassan," *Funūn ʿArabiyya*, no. 2 (January 1981): 108–9. Artist Shakir Hassan Al Said, who had studied with Selim and Faiq Hassan, drew on testimony by Hassan in a 1983 study of Iraqi art movements to emphasize the "indirect," discursive quality of the Polish impact on Iraqi attitudes. See Al Said, *Fuṣūl min Tārīkh al-Ḥaraka al-Tashkiliyya fī al-ʿIrāq*, vol. 1 (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and Information, 1983), 100–101. Subsequent discussions of the Polish influence in American and European scholarship include Silvia Naef, *À la recherche d'une modernité arabe: L'évolution des arts plastiques en Égypte, au Liban et en Irak* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1996), esp. 219–29; Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 28; Saleem Al-Bahloly, "History Regained: A Modern Artist in Baghdad Encounters a Lost Tradition of Painting," *Muqarnas*, no. 35 (2018): 229–72; Amin Alsaden, "Alternative Salons: Cultivating Art and Architecture in the Domestic Spaces of Post–World War II Baghdad," in *The Art of the Salon in the Arab Region: Politics of Taste Making*, ed. Nadia von Maltzahn and Monique Bellan (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2018), 165–206; and Sarah Johnson, "Battle Ground: Environmental

Determinism and the Politics of Painting the Iraq Landscape,” *Journal of Contemporary Iraq & The Arab World* 15, nos. 1–2 (2021): 41–65.

9. Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), esp. 49–59; and Natalie Adamson, *Painting, Politics and the Struggle for the École de Paris, 1944–1964* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 73–114.

10. Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 75–104; and Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 353–56. Egypt, too, underwent a sharp recolonial turn in February 1942, when Britain forced the installation of a pro-British prime minister.

11. By my phrasing of “has to be told,” I mean to invoke Greenberg’s 1961 assertion cited in note 2 above—itsself an additive revision to an essay about the politics of abstract in the 1930s that he had first published in 1957—that the oft-overlooked political stakes of the rallying cause of “art for art’s sake” still awaited historical recognition. I use a capital *M* to denote the ideological version of Modernism, popularized in Greenberg’s writings, which became prevalent in the Cold War decades.

12. See note on the English translation in André Breton and Diego Rivera, “Towards an Independent Revolutionary Art,” *London Bulletin*, no. 7 (December 1938–January 1939): 29–32. Trotsky, who had fled to Mexico in this period, contributed to the text but was left uncredited for security reasons.

13. Diana Naylor, “E. L. T. Mesens: His Contribution to the Dada and Surrealist Movement in Belgium and England as Artist, Poet, and Dealer” (PhD diss., University College London, 1980), 196.

14. See Denis-J. Jean, “Was There an English Surrealist Group in the Forties? Two Unpublished Letters,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 21, no. 1 (February 1975): 85.

15. Letter from F. C. Dowling to E. L. T. Mesens, 26 January 1944, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (GRI), Papers of E. L. T. Mesens, 1917–1976, 920094, box 5, folder 3.

16. Letter from E. L. T. Mesens to F. C. Dowling, 5 February 1944, GRI, Papers of E. L. T. Mesens, box 5, folder 3.

17. Letter from E. L. T. Mesens to Herbert Read, 3 July 1943, GRI, Papers of E. L. T. Mesens, box 5, folder 2.

18. Letter from E. L. T. Mesens to Herbert Read, 3 July 1943.

19. André Breton, “Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Else,” *VVV*, no. 1 (June 1942), republished in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 284. See also Martinican poet and critic Suzanne Césaire’s discussion of the liberating appeal of French surrealist poetry at a time when France itself suffered world historical disaster: Suzanne Césaire, “1943: Le surréalisme et nous,” *Tropiques*, nos. 8–9 (October 1943): 14–18.

20. Sara Pursley, *Familiar Futures: Time, Selfhood, and Sovereignty in Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 33–34.

21. Sarah Johnson, “Impure Time: Archaeology, Hafidh Druby (1914–1991), and the Persistence of Representational Painting in Mid-Twentieth-Century Iraq (1940–1980),” *Arab Studies Journal* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 31–62.

22. Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 100–140.

23. Stefanie K. Wichhart, “Selling Democracy during the Second British Occupation of Iraq, 1941–5,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no. 3 (July 2013): 509–36.

24. Alaric Jacob, *A Traveller’s War: A Journey to the Wars in Africa, India and Russia* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1944), 131–33. Also see Jewad Selim, diary entry, 15 January 1944, in *RT*, 163–64.

25. See Bawden’s much later interview with the Imperial War Museum, “Bawden, Edward (Oral History),” 1980, audio recording, 4622, reel 3, 27:03, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80004582>. Bawden is mentioned in passing in Jewad Selim, diary entry, 20 April 1944, *RT*, 168.

26. Dia Azzawi, *Fann al-Muṣāqāt fī al-‘Irāq* (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, 1974), 25.

27. Kenneth Wood, “Al-Fann Tanāquḍ Gharib,” *Al-Fikr al-Hadith*, no. 3 (December 1945): 90–92.

28. On Lloyd’s role in procurement, see Freya Stark, *East Is West* (London: John Murray, 1945), 165; and Johnson, “Battle Ground,” 42. On the shortage of supplies, see Nizar Selim, *L’art contemporain en Iraq*, vol. 1 (Lausanne: Iraqi Ministry of Information, 1977), 58–59.

29. The precise dates of Selim's enrollments are reported variously in the literature; I follow Adnan Raouf, "Nizār Salim: Rafīq al-Ṣibā," *Al-Aqlām*, no. 4–5 (April–May 1983): 126.
30. Jabra mentions that this sketchbook title is recorded in Italian and that Selim specifies a French translation on the next page but doesn't give either original, only a rough Arabic translation: "ta'ammulāt rūḥi." Partial summaries and selected reproductions from the sketchbook may be found in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Jawād Salīm wa-Nuṣb al-Ḥurriyya* (Baghdad: General Directorate of Culture, 1974), 168–74. Jabra notes that the majority of texts and captions in the sketchbook are in European languages, as if a symptom of Selim's desire to work in a cosmopolitan space of modernist experience.
31. Jabra, *Nuṣb al-Ḥurriyya*, 167. This is the opening stanza of "Ariettes oubliées VII" in Verlaine's 1874 poetry collection *Romances sans paroles*: "O triste, triste était mon âme. À cause, à cause d'une femme." In this instance, Jabra has transcribed the stanza in the original French.
32. Jabra, *Nuṣb al-Ḥurriyya*, 171.
33. For instance, we know Selim brought home a copy of the "Manifesto of Surrealism" by Breton (1924) and loaned it to students. See Jamil Hamoudi, "Suryāliyya 'Irāqiyya?" *Al-Aqlām*, no. 8 (August 1988): 147.
34. Haytham Bahoora, "The Figure of the Prostitute, *Tajdid*, and Masculinity in Anticolonial Literature of Iraq," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 2015): 43.
35. For Selim's letters to friends, see reproductions in May Muzaffar, "Jawād Salim. Awraq Maṭwiyya min Ḥayātihi," *Al-Aqlām* 20, no. 2 (February 1985): 23–32. For Nazīha's drawings and writing, see the facsimile of her handwritten cultural journal, "Majallat 'al-Khayāl,' al-'Adād al-Thāni," *Makou: Free Zone of Creativity*, no. 1 (15 July 2020): 100–17.
36. Jabra, *Nuṣb al-Ḥurriyya*, 39.
37. Notably, even Selim's selection of scenes from the Qur'an pertain to lust and desire, as seen in reproduction in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, "Mir'āt Wajhi (Rusūm)," *Ḥiwār* (February 1964): 120.
38. For a British artist-turned-serviceman's depiction of brothels in Baghdad, see the sketchbook of James Boswell, 1942–43, London, Tate Britain, TGA 8224/16.
39. "Pierwsza wystawa sztuki europejskiej w Bagdadzie," *Kurier Polski w Bagdadzie*, 16 February 1943.
40. "Pierwsza wystawa sztuki europejskiej w Bagdadzie." See also the summary of Arab press responses, "Prasa Iracka o Naszej Wystawie," *Kurier Polski w Bagdadzie*, 18 February 1943.
41. Jewad Selim, letter to al-Husri, diary entry, 23 September 1943, in *RT*, 161.
42. I have been unable to confirm whether Selim and Hassan made good on the invitation from Egypt, but my reading of its significance is informed by the fact that the Friends of Art society collaborated with the British military to produce a January 1944 exhibition titled *United Nations Art Exhibition*.
43. Jewad Selim, diary entry, 13 May 1944, in *RT*, 169.
44. Jewad Selim, diary entry, 29 May 1944, in *RT*, 170.
45. Selim, letter to al-Husri, diary entry, 23 September 1943, in *RT*, 159.
46. Jarema, "Oblicze Sztuki Polskiej."
47. Jarema, "Oblicze Sztuki Polskiej"; and Jan Bielatowicz, "Koncert Malarski," *Kurier Polski w Bagdadzie*, 23 February 1943.
48. See the chronology described in "Artists in Arms: Arts & Culture on the Trail of Anders' Army, 1941–1945," a web feature produced by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Warsaw, <http://artistsinarms.pl/en>. See also Józef Czapski, *Inhuman Land: Searching for the Truth in Soviet Russia, 1941–1942*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones (New York: New York Review of Books, 2018), 355–66.
49. See Jan Sienkiewicz, *Artysta Andersa: Continuità e novità* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Kucharski, 2013), 52.
50. "La Peinture: Jarema et Richard," *La semaine égyptienne*, September 1941, 19–21.
51. "Echa Wystawy Bejruckiej," *Orzeł Biały*, 20 February 1944.
52. "Extreme impressionist" is Czapski's phrase in Józef Czapski, "Józef Jarema," *Kultura*, no. 326 (November 1974): 130–34. Translation by Julia Kulon.
53. "Echa Wystawy Bejruckiej." See also the reference to "malcontents" in Bielatowicz, "Koncert Malarski."
54. See Józef Czapski, *Lost Time: Lectures on Proust in a Soviet Prison Camp*, trans. Eric Karpeles (New York: New York Review of Books, 2018).
55. Czapski, *Lost Time*, 8. The observation appears in a text of 1944 Czapski intended as an introduction to a volume of transcripts of these lectures, included in the 2018 volume in English translation.
56. Józef Czapski, diary entry, 29 November 1942, in Józef Czapski, *Dziennik wojenny: (22 III 1942 – 31 III 1944)*, ed. Mikołaj Nowak-Rogozinski and

Janusz S. Nowak (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Próby, 2022), 195–96. Hereafter *DW*.

57. Józef Czapski, diary entry, 29 November 1942, in *DW*, 196. Translation by Julia Kulon.

58. Jarema, "Oblicze Sztuki Polskiej."

59. The January 30 declaration is reproduced in "Oświadczenie premiera Iraku Noury Saïd dla 'Orła Białego'" *Orzeł Biały*, 14 February 1943.

60. *Exhibition of Paintings by Polish Soldiers-Artists*, exh. cat. (Baghdad: British Institute, 1943), 15.

61. "Obrazy Zakupione na Wystawie Polskiej," *Kurier Polski w Bagdadzie*, 24 February 1943.

62. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, 51–52.

63. Jarema, "Oblicze Sztuki Polskiej." See also the introduction to the exhibition catalog by Jarema and [K. J.] Kantak, which describes a shared concern for producing a "new sensation of reality." Józef Jarema and [K. J.] Kantak, introduction to *Exhibition of Paintings by Polish Soldiers-Artists*, 6.

64. Józef Czapski, "Źródła Sztuki Nowoczesnej," *Kurier Polski w Bagdadzie*, 16 February 1943. Quotations from this source are from a translation by Julia Kulon.

65. Józef Czapski, diary entry, 21 January 1943, in *DW*, 223–24.

66. Praise for these sketches may be found in Tadeusz Wittlin, "Malarze polscy w Bagdadzie," *Orzeł Biały*, 18 February 1943.

67. Czapski, "Źródła Sztuki Nowoczesnej."

68. Czapski, "Źródła Sztuki Nowoczesnej."

The majority of Polish refugees who made their way to Iraq were Christian. In the case of Czapski, historian Timothy Snyder has characterized his views as pacifist and Christian in the mold of Leo Tolstoy, believing that heaven could be brought to earth if men did not resist evil with force. Timothy Snyder, introduction to *Inhuman Land*, by Czapski, xii.

69. These are 'Ashtarūt, no. 3, n.d. (probably autumn 1943) and no. 4, February 1944. These may be consulted in the Jamil Hamoudi Collection, 1917–2012, series X, box 36, Nami Jafet Memorial Library Archives and Special Collections, American University of Beirut.

70. Ruthven Todd, "Where Are the Surrealists Now?," *Lilliput* (October 1943): 319–30. Excerpted and translated in 'Ashtarūt as "Ayna al-Suriyalistiyyun al-Ān?," 'Ashtarūt no. 4 (February 1944): n.p.

71. Pablo Picasso, *Zephyr*, 1933, pen-and-wash drawing, current location unknown. The

drawing appeared in reproduction in 1937 as an illustration to John Piper, "Aspects of Modern Drawing," *Signature*, no. 7 (November 1937): 35, at which time it was credited as being in the personal collection of Mrs. Stephen Spender.

72. *Exhibition of Paintings by Polish Soldiers-Artists*, 4. Presumably, Constable was added in part to bring British artists into the narrative, given the alliances of the time.

73. Bishr Fares, "Min Maḥraq al-Ṭarīq," 'Ashtarūt (February 1944): n.p. The text appears to be an excerpt from a 1938 essay that Fares published in the Egyptian journal *Al-Muḥaṭṭaf*, which he edited.

74. Al-Bahloly, "History Regained," 254.

75. Selim, letter to al-Husri, diary entry, 23 September 1943, in *RT*, 159–62.

76. Selim, letter to al-Husri, diary entry, 23 September 1943, in *RT*, 161. Selim credits discussions with Czapski for these insights; similar sentiments may also be found in Czapski's lecture text, "Źródła Sztuki Nowoczesnej."

77. "Al-Fann al-Islāmi," 'Ashtarūt, no. 3 (1943): 41–45. The translated text, identified only as a "translation from the French," is an excerpt from Élie Faure, *Histoire de l'Art: L'art médiéval* (Paris: G. Crés, 1921), 211–17.

78. Jamil Hamoudi, "Lamḥa 'an al-Fann al-Islāmi," 'Ashtarūt, no. 3 (1943): 53–55.

79. Initial inspection of the selected images suggests that, in addition to the Faure volumes, Hamoudi and Selim took samples from studies of Islamic art published in Egypt, including Ahmad Taymur Pasha, *Al-Taṣwīr 'ind al-'Arab*, ed. Z. M. Hassan (Cairo: Maṭb'at Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-al-Tarjama wa-al-Naṣh, 1942); and Zakī Muhammad Hasan, *Kunūz al-Fāṭimiyīn* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriya, 1937).

80. Both the so-called Persian drawing—actually a fifteenth-century Ottoman copy of a drawing by Venetian artist Gentile Bellini in the Ottoman court—and its erroneous attribution appear in Faure, *L'art médiéval*, 231.

81. Nizar Selim, *L'art contemporain en Iraq*, 60; and Jabra, *Nuṣb al-Ḥurriya*, 176. For discussion of the spread of Islam as an "infinite dream" expressing itself in different buildings and ornamental schema, see Faure, *L'art médiéval*, 212–13, 222.

82. Selim, letter to al-Husri, diary entry, 23 September 1943, in *RT*, 161.

83. Art historian Nada Shabouth has drawn on Iraqi artists' vocabulary of "istihām al-turāth," or "inspiration from tradition" to describe this

dynamic of opening art to inspiration. See Shabout, *Modern Arab Art*, 28–29.

84. Jewad Selim, letter to Khaldun al-Husri, copied into diary entry, 16 November 1944, in *RT*, 172–73. Cited in Nizar Selim, *L'art contemporain en Iraq*, 60–61; Al-Haidari, "Jawād Salim wa Fa'iq Hassan," 108; and Al Said, *Fuṣūl*, 100.

85. See the text of the Art Club's constitution, translated in *Art Club: 1945–1965*, ed. Gabriele Simongini, exh. cat. (Pietrasanta: Franche Tirature, 2014), 102–3.

86. Selim, letter to al-Husri, diary entry, 16 November 1944, in *RT*, 172. On Picasso's statements, see the summary in Alfred Barr, "Picasso 1940–1944—a Digest with Notes," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 12, no. 3 (1945): 6.

87. Selim, letter to al-Husri, diary entry, 16 November 1944, in *RT*, 173.

88. Selim, letter to al-Husri, diary entry, 16 November 1944, in *RT*, 173.

89. Jabra, *Nuṣb al-Ḥurriya*, 176.

90. Jabra, *Nuṣb al-Ḥurriya*, 176. The sentence is "Nous constatons qu'il multiplie notre ferveur à vivre et nous fait oublier la mort," in Élie Faure, *Histoire de l'art: L'esprit des formes* (Paris: G. Crès, 1927), 452. Jabra shares that Selim copies Faure's description of art and play into his sketchbook as well.

91. The most detailed account of Art and Liberty is Sam Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017).

92. Front matter in *La séance continue*, exh. cat. (Cairo: Masses, 1945), 1. The network comprised surrealist-aligned intellectuals, many of whom signed the 1938 manifesto "Towards an Independent Revolutionary Art" written by Breton, Rivera, and Trotsky as a conjoined antifascist, anti-Stalinist text.

93. Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 190.

94. In Arabic, *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth*: Majallat al-Fann wa al-Thaqāfa al-Hurr.

95. Ahmed Joudar, "The Culture of Orient and Occident Must Be Together in the Character, Imagination, and Ideas of the Writer': A Conversation with Naim Kattan," *Canadian Literature*, no. 239 (2019): 179.

96. Jamil Hamoudi, "Risālat al-Mufakkir," *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* 1, no. 1 (October 1945): 1.

97. Letter from Simon Watson Taylor to E. L. T. Mesens, 28 December 1945, GRI, Papers of E. L. T. Mesens, box 5, folder 7.

98. Simon Watson Taylor, "Ṣura," *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* 2, no. 7 (April 1946): 49; Naim Kattan, "Al-Suriyālizm," *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* 2, nos. 5–6 (April 1946): 44–46; Naim Kattan, "Al-Suriyālizm (2)," *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* 2, no. 7 (1946): 14–16; and Naim Kattan, "Al-Suriyālizm (tatimma)," *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* 2, nos. 8–9 (1946): 32–38.

99. The Arabic translation of Simon Watson Taylor's letter to Hamoudi was published in *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* 2, no. 10 (1947): 44–46.

100. "Irak," *Le Petit Cobra*, no. 3 (Spring 1950): n.p.

101. Hamoudi, "Suryāliyya 'Irāqiyya?," 147–48. I discuss Hamoudi's subsequent abstract painting, including his participation in several iterations of the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles—widely understood as a showcase for geometric abstraction more than gestural varieties—in Anneka Lenssen, "Abstraction of the Many? Finding Plenitude in Arab Painting," in *Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s–1980s*, ed. Suheyda Takesh and Lynn Gumpert (New York: Grey Art Gallery, 2019), 122.

102. Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

103. Jamil Hamoudi, "Al-Fann al-'Irāqī al-Mu'asir," *Al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* 2, nos. 5–6 (April 1946): 28.

104. Czapski, *Inhuman Land*, 361. This comment appears in the preface to a German edition (reprinted in English translation in *Inhuman Land*) published in 1967, to which Czapski had added new descriptions of his time in Iraq.

105. Czapski, *Inhuman Land*, 371.

106. Okwui Enwezor, "The Judgment of Art: Postwar and Artistic Worldliness," in *Postwar: Art between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945–1965*, ed. Okwui Enwezor, Katy Siegel, and Ulrich Wilmes (Munich: Prestel, 2016).