

ZOLLA/LIEBERMAN GALLERY INC.

BASSIM AL SHAKER

biography

Bassim Al Shaker is an Iraqi artist and United States citizen. Bassim was born and raised in Baghdad, Iraq, during a period of political conflict and humanitarian torment. He graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Baghdad College of Fine Arts, where the primary focus of his studies was on cultivating his drawing and painting skills using an academic technique. His style is the culmination of a background in academic drawing and painting techniques and a pursuit of exploration in creating contemporary art.

Prior to beginning his undergraduate studies in Baghdad, Al Shaker operated a barbershop, where he practiced sketches in between cutting clients' hair. One night, several members of a group of militant nationalists, known as the Mahdi Army, entered Bassim's barbershop and found his drawings of Venus de Milo. Due to their cultural intolerance of nudity, the men returned the next day and blindfolded, beat, and tortured the artist as they forced him through a busy neighborhood in Baghdad. Bassim spent weeks recovering in a hospital; meanwhile, the men were arrested and placed in jail on an unrelated charge. Upon their release years later, they blamed Bassim for their arrest and vowed to seek revenge when they found him.

Al Shaker spent the next several years completing his undergraduate degree and subsequently teaching in Baghdad as well as at a series of workshops in Beirut, Paris, and Venice. In 2013 Bassim was selected to represent Iraq by displaying his paintings in the Iraqi pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale festival. Despite his successes as an artist, Bassim could no longer return to Baghdad after the release of the Mahdi Army members from jail. He even spent a month in hiding when he attempted to return to the city between his travels.

Fortunately, Al Shaker was selected to partake in an artist-in-residence program sponsored by the Arizona State University Art Museum in Tempe, Arizona. He moved to Phoenix in 2013, where he was able to begin the legal immigration process. Bassim rebuilt his career by establishing himself in the Phoenix art community, teaching college classes, and opening galleries in the Phoenix Art District. Bassim is continuing to work toward his goal of further self-discovery and development of his artistic style during his completion of the Master of Fine Arts program in the Painting and Drawing Department of the Art Institute of Chicago.