



*Dina al-Adeeb
tells of the
making behind
her latest project,
Sacred Spaces*

So we hear you've been around...

[Laughs] Yes, in a good and bad way, I suppose. I was born in Baghdad, lived in Kuwait, then moved to San Francisco where I studied international relations. The last was quite a big jump. Now I live in Cairo.

Why did you come back to the Arab world?

I worked on a project in Karbala and Najaf after the invasion in 2003. When I came back to the US, though, all 250 rolls of film were stolen... I was devastated, but after a while I realised this was supposed to happen, I was meant to come back to the region and work on the project again, fall in love and move back. And that's how the installation Sacred Spaces was born.

Why did you want to make this project?

I was trying to understand what was happening in Iraq, like most Iraqis I suppose. I felt a struggle trying to understand all the hopes that people had after the invasion and the sad reality. To see how it manifested, we needed to look deeper into our history. So I decided to take the plunge and I looked deeply into war, trauma and memory.

Who did you talk to for the film?

I spent a day in a female insane asylum interviewing the patients. They were not necessary diagnosed as mentally disabled, but most of them went through such horrific experiences that they're mental health suffered greatly. I also interviewed artists, musician, writers, teachers, doctors... everyone!

So is this a project about the Shia of Iraq?

My project is not about the Shia sects, Ashouraa or Karbala; it's about Iraq. The story of Ashouraa is similar to what's happening in Iraq today, how people are dealing with the trauma of their lives.

What's your biggest inspiration?

That's a hard one! To be honest, inspiration for me goes up and down: when I came back from Iraq I'm completely depressed and cannot think, but I have to work to show people and make them understand.

What's the most beautiful place in the world?

Maybe before I would have said Iraq, but now there are so many different places that exist in my psyche! Wherever this perfect place exists, though, it has to be somewhere near water.

What do you believe in?

I believe in passion, not only in a romantic sense but in passion for life, for the everyday struggles and victories. Without passion, life is dead.

Favourite thing to do after you finish a project?

Find a spot for myself and just sit, try to absorb what I worked on. During the project itself, I rarely have time to truly take it all in.

What do you think of Egyptian contemporary art?

The scene here has been drastically shaped by the European and international art scenes, so there's a lot of work that caters for the European curators. I think Egyptian artists have become very sought after, so a lot of curators and galleries come to Cairo to meet them. Egyptian artists have become the representatives of the entire region!

What about Iraqi art?

Unfortunately, I don't know much about true Iraqi art because Iraqi art in San Francisco looks different from Iraqi art in Holland or Jordan. I think we are all dealing with the same trauma, but in different ways.

What are you working on now?

I want to put together an exhibition that focuses on Iraqi artists, one that will tour around the world; like I said, show all the different types of dealing with trauma. I also want to put together a book about the current Diaspora, one that will include writers, intellectuals, musician and underground artists.