

# In pictures: Uncovering the art from Syria's war

Creative pieces based on the popular uprising have resulted in an online archive that hosts 28,000 works

[Jehanne Bergé](#)

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In 2013 Sana Yazigi, a Syrian graphic designer from Damascus, launched the online archive The Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution, consisting of works created by Syrian artists during the uprising. Main picture: *Al-Maadamiya, Dying To Eat* by Imran Faour (2013), captures

the forced starvation of the besieged city's residents. Pictured here: Mohamad Omran's 2013 drawing *From al-Bayda To Ras al-Nabeh*: in April 2011, government security forces and the pro-government Shabiha militia entered Bayda, arrested the male citizens and humiliated them.



"From the early days of the revolution," Yazigi says, "I was amazed to witness an incredible outpouring of artworks. I didn't want them all to disappear, to be forgotten. I wanted to keep a record. There was a sense of urgency, a need to document what was going on." Pictured: Youssef Abdelke's 2012 drawing *A Martyr From Dara* - in February 2011, 21 children were arrested for drawing anti-Assad slogans on a school wall.





“When I moved to Beirut in 2012,” Yazigi says, “I began writing, recording and collecting [stories of the Syrian people]. When I saw the sheer amount of material being created, I surrounded myself with a team to gather it all together.” Pictured: The 2016 mural *3 Years* by unknown artists on a wall in Jobar, Damascus - rights groups say hundreds of people died in the suburb in a chemical attack in 2013.





The website documents paintings, music, graffiti, videos and cartoons among others, constituting an exceptional wartime archive. "Little by little, a list of works was drawn up," says Yazigi. "We were all running from the regime at the time, working anonymously in an atmosphere of mistrust and fear. Many of the artists were anonymous too. We'd discover their works on blogs and on Facebook. We documented everything we came across to add to the archives." Pictured: *Hope*, painted on a wall in Daraya in 2014.





“Over time, I emerged from anonymity and started contacting the artists,” says Yazigi. “Most were enthusiastic about the project. Even today, we are still discovering works which were never made public at the time, for fear of reprisals.” Pictured: Untitled photograph by Ahmad al-Khalil from 2013 - despite government crackdowns, the inhabitants of Manbij continued to demonstrate.

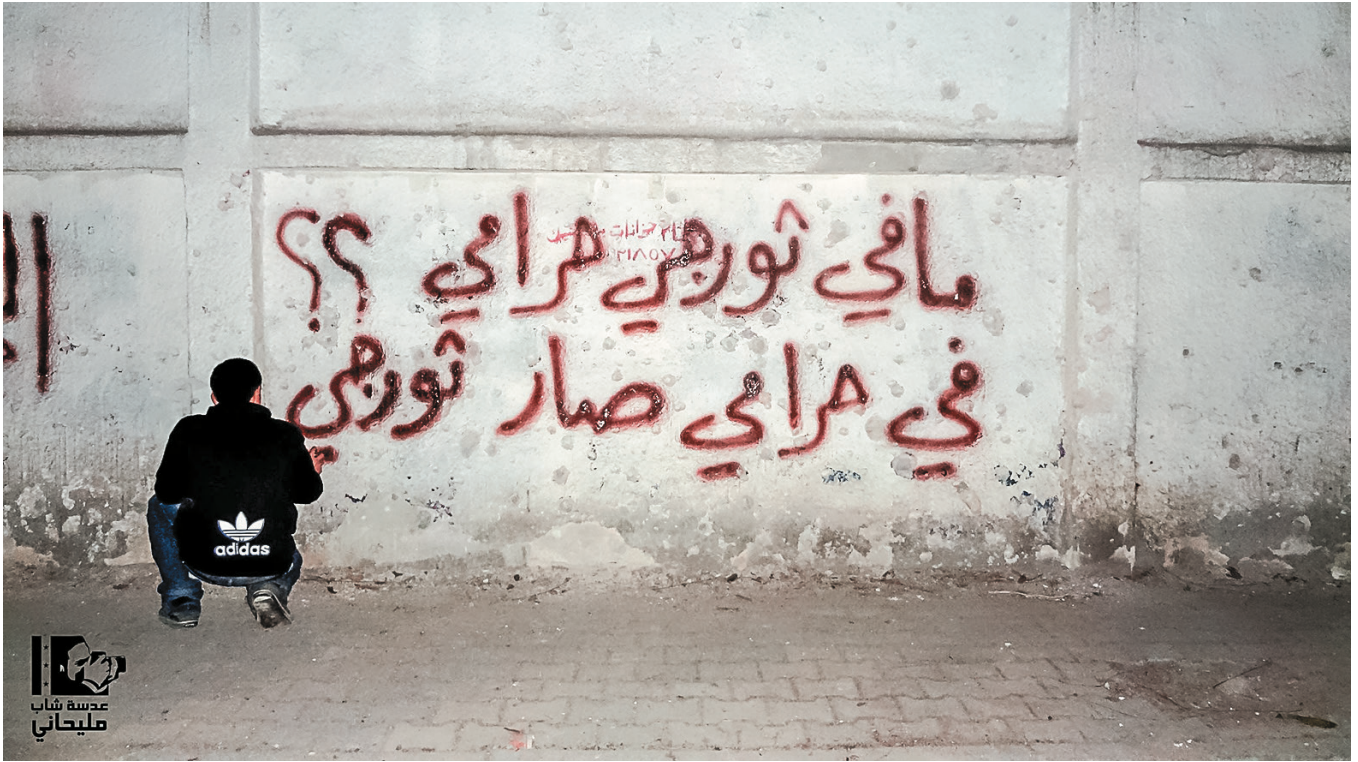




The Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution continues to grow. The site's second in-house production, MAP, links archive material to locations across Syria, connecting documents with dates, categories, keywords and authors. The website's user-friendly second version introduces the Syrian people, giving voice to the dreams and tragedies of the revolution.

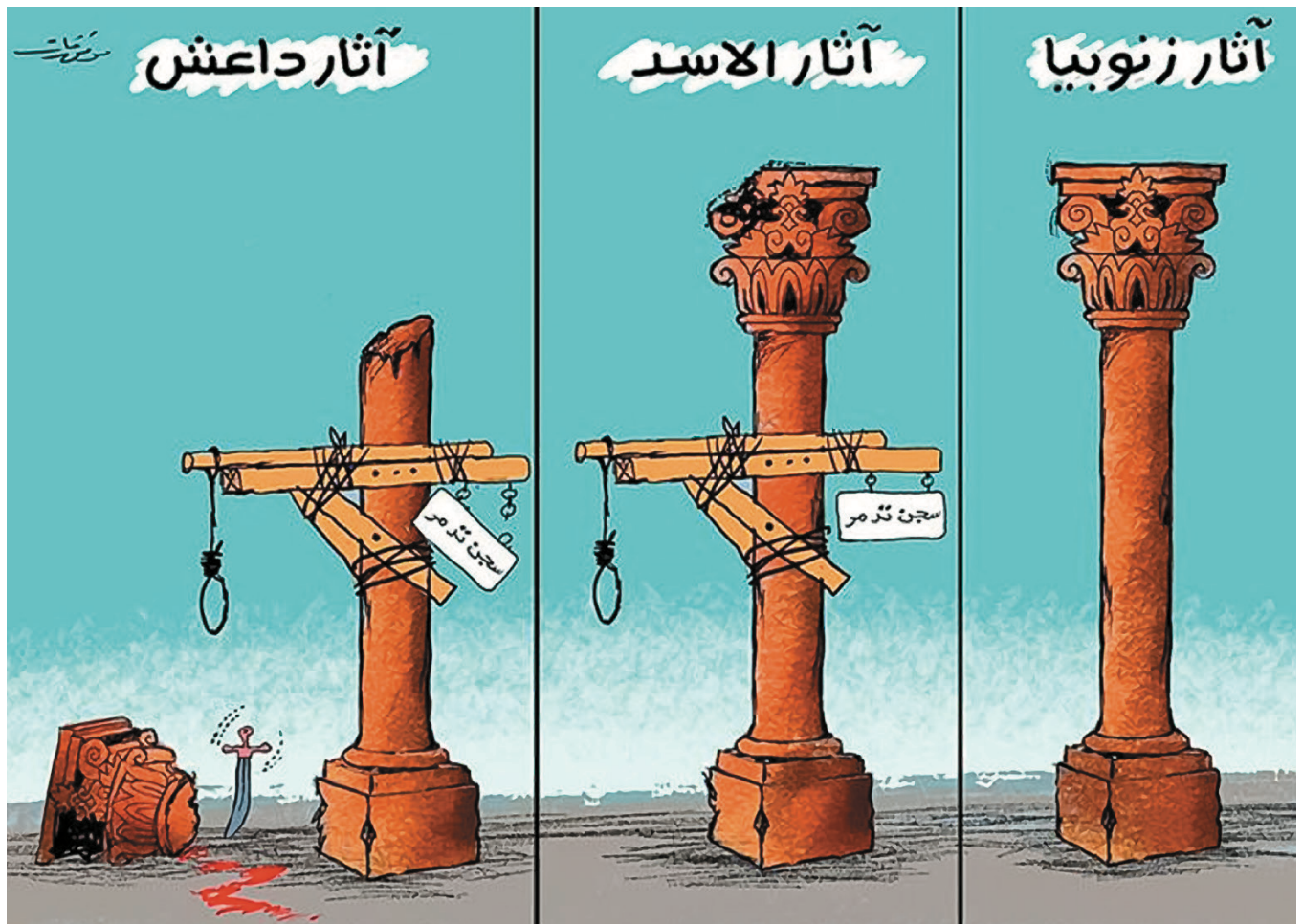
Pictured: *Stamp Of The Syrian Revolution* by Ammar al-Beik from 2012 - in December of that year, the Free Syrian Army took al-Muhasan, which was subsequently captured by IS and targeted by air strikes.





One initiative, Idlib Walls, archives all the graffiti from the city of Saraqib found online. More than 360 artworks are presented on a timeline which is periodically updated. Pictured: An activist scrawls, “There are no thieving revolutionaries... only thieves who have become revolutionary” - in al-Malihah in 2013 as it faces a humanitarian crisis.





Yazigi says she will continue her mission. “Ultimately, we’d like to see our archive enter the national archives, because once the war is over, the history of the revolution must be given back to the people of Syria. The archive is part of our collective memory. The revolution has brought about clear social and historical changes”. Pictured: Mwafaq Katt’s cartoon *Palmyra* from 2015. The first marches in Palmyra took place in April 2011 at the funeral of a soldier, executed for refusing to fire on a protest.





In addition to the websites, there is also a book and a travelling exhibition. *The Story of a Place, the Story of a People, 2011-2015* is a collection of words and images retracing the uprising in each of 50 locations. The text describes the early days of the revolutionary movement,



as well as the dynamic forces that would see it spread. Pictured: Rami Abbas's drawing *No Mercy* from 2014 - in July 2012, the funeral for demonstrators killed at Yarmouk refugee camp was marked by unprecedented protests in Damascus.

*All illustrations are from [The Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution](#), reproduced with kind permission of Sana Yazigi.*

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