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# Katya Traboulsi: I am incomplete without art

Contemporary artist Katya Traboulsi on how the Lebanese civil war brought her closer to art

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When the Lebanese civil war broke out, I was 15. Almost everyone and everything was affected - except art. Art gave me... my need for freedom.

Art is an expression. It is freedom. It is the only field where you are not told that you have the right, or you don't have the right, to do this or that. There is no good, there is no bad. The only essence of art is feeling.

And I paint what I feel.

My art has always been an accident. When I start painting, I have a preconceived idea about what to paint or how to work with a new technique. However, when I finish my work, it ends up as something else. Sometimes, this is frustrating because it didn't quite turn out the way I wanted it to, and with the same intensity of emotion.

But then again, sometimes, when it comes out nicely and quite differently from what I imagined, it becomes this perfect accident in front of my eyes.

I was first influenced by my grandmother. She painted realistic art. Her paintings were very beautiful. Watching her, my love for art grew. My parents were appreciative of my art.

The very first form of recognition I received was when I won a painting competition in school. I was six. I painted this quaint house with a white roof. I won another art competition when I was 12, for a painting of a tree with lots of dots in different colours.

I have always been fond of bright colours. Sometimes, I work on hues of blue. Blue is very relaxing. When I need to feel energised, I switch to red.

As a little girl, I remember painting all the time. I drew objects and worked with crayons, acrylic and oil paints. I even bought art books.

When I turned 18, I wanted to go to Paris to study. My father was against it. He said, "Why go to Paris, when you can study here in Lebanon?" So I studied at the Lebanon School of Arts and took Interior Designing.

I still wanted to take my interest in art very seriously and to make it my full-time profession... I continued painting. I visited art galleries all the time and talked to people in the business. I met Lebanese artists and showed them my work. They were generous with their advice.

When I am painting, I tend to concentrate on the positive things. In introspect I take notice of the things I have and be appreciative of them. There are two types of art: the art where you paint what you see, and the other art, where

you paint what you feel. The latter is what I do. I create something new with what I feel.

I am more into abstract painting. It is very difficult to do a good abstract art.

What makes a good abstract art? It is the harmony of colours. In abstract art, there is no composition, no subject. The only emotion it evokes is the feeling of how that piece of art makes you feel when you look at it. It won't make sense at first but the power of the colours must make you feel good about it. You have to like it, without knowing why. Art should talk to you.

I started organising painting exhibitions in 1987. I didn't start as a full-time artist. Right after finishing my degree, I went into business. I had a printing press in Lebanon. The business lasted 10 years. Then, we moved to Dubai.

That was 14 years ago. I worked as a production manager for an advertising agency for a year. Then I decided to do an exhibition in Dubai, and it was very encouraging. Since then, I have been organising exhibitions in Dubai and Lebanon.

What is it like to pursue art as a profession? It's not very easy. It can either be frustrating or fulfilling. As an artist, there is a silent communication between you and the people. Sometimes you get a beautiful response and they understand what you are doing and at other times they don't.

One of my greatest achievements was doing an exhibition in Lebanon in 1993. I had 35 paintings, all of which were sold. It felt amazing to be able to do something like that.

Now, this exhibition of my students' works is another achievement. It is the result of a whole year's work. We have been conducting art lessons in my studio since September. These young Lebanese talents are very promising. I hope they continue their art. They have a lot of talent, and a beautiful power in art.

And yes, me being into teaching was also some sort of accident. I was asked to teach kids at a French school in Sharjah. I gave it a try and I found that I enjoyed it a lot. Then I decided to teach art in my studio. It is amazing because I could communicate the passion that I have and get results from it.

It is easy to teach kids, especially those with potential. They have their own style. I never touch their work. I'm there to guide them. What I want is for them to express themselves through art.

Art is a wonderful way of expression. It develops our creativity and personality, and strengthens our confidence levels. It helps us exist. I wouldn't be complete without my art.

