

# Tagreed Darghouth memorialises lost Beirut with mournful art



The Lebanese painter [Tagreed Darghouth](#) remembers it all. It's been three years since her former base of Beirut was rocked by a horrific explosion at the city's port on August 4. The atrocity ended more than 200 lives, destroyed homes and businesses, and, in an ongoing state of economic and political decline, broke people's hearts once again.

Tagreed, who currently lives and works in Dubai, was at a shopping mall in the Achrafieh district when the explosion erupted. "I thought there was a bombing operation. I had no idea what was happening," she told *The New Arab*. "It's hard to describe this exact moment: Cars were wailing, glass was on the ground, people were covered in blood. I just couldn't grasp the situation."

Her studio was located in the popular Mar Mikhael neighbourhood, which was near the port. Ironically, on the day of the explosion, Tagreed and a helper cleaned her studio, turning it afresh for her return to the space in September.

In the aftermath of the blast, the studio was sadly littered with shards of glass and other debris. It was this catastrophe that finally pushed Tagreed

to the grim realisation that she had to leave Beirut.

To make matters worse, the painter's father died a few months after the blast. She produced a group of flower paintings, inspired by Vincent van Gogh's floral compositions, in his honour.

It was also because of this tragedy that Tagreed had an urge. She set aside a project she was previously working on, and, instead, started creating a poignant series of moody paintings about the blast. "I just felt a shift," she said. "It was important to talk about it, even though the pain was still raw."



*Tagreed Darghouth's The Explosion paintings at Abu Dhabi Art 2021*

A recurring motif in her paintings is the destroyed silos in the port, executed boldly with quick, thick, and swirly brushstrokes or ragged dabs of intense acrylic paint.

Sometimes surrounded by invasive smoke or set against a vivid pink, green, or orange sky, [the silos](#) almost look monstrous – a no-go zone. However, Tagreed did go near the silos, proving to be a surreal sight. "It's a like scene out of a Hollywood film. . . A place out of time," she recalled. "When I see it, it still shocks me."

She also painted the silos on small Beirut postcards, covering pleasant views with dark imagery and breaking the illusion of Lebanon being 'the

Switzerland of the Middle East.' Until this day, in the eyes of many Lebanese, the country is plagued by corruption, fuelled by a negligent political class.

Indeed, three years have passed since the explosion, and there has been no legitimate investigation into the deadly event. Needless to say, Tagreed's feelings of "defeat" haven't changed about the politics of her country. "Lebanon's image is not that picturesque idea that is in our head," she said. "In my opinion, it's a big lie to tie Lebanon with those ideas that are not true, given its past that is full of wars. [That's the real image of Lebanon.](#)"

Upon entering Tagreed's sun-filled studio in Dubai, there are intriguing items of war on display: green helmets, toy soldiers – even the greens in her paintings are reminiscent of military uniforms. "I like my work to reflect what's happening in the world, not just Lebanon," she added. Tagreed herself is a child of war.

She was born in Saida, Lebanon in 1979, four years into the [Lebanese civil war](#). Tagreed started drawing in her childhood, and although she doesn't hail from an artistic family, they showed support by providing her with drawing material. She ended up studying painting in Lebanon and France.



*Tagreed's studio in Dubai, filled with canvases, paint bottles, and trinkets [photo credit: Rawaa Talass]*

In the early 2000s, she attended a couple of workshops at [Darat Al Funun](#)

in Amman, where she was mentored by one of Syria's prominent artists, the late Marwan Kassab-Bachi. "He left a mark on my work and way of thinking. . . He was probably the most important person in my career," she said. Today, she is represented by Saleh Barakat Gallery (Beirut) and Tabari Art Space (Dubai).

## RELATED

### Culture

#### Naima Morelli

Some of her biggest influences are masters of expressionism, such as the American painter Joan Mitchell, the German artist Georg Baselitz, and the British portraitist Lucian Freud. Tagreed's layered paintings are at times politically charged and are almost never aesthetically flat. She's an artist with an edge, making images of skulls, weapons, and tanks. She doesn't shy away from the harshness of reality. "I don't want to make a pretty picture," she said. "Whatever passion I have, I throw it on the canvas."

***Rawaa Talass is a freelance journalist focusing on art and culture emerging from the Middle East. Her work has been published in Art Dubai, Arab News, Al Arabiya English, Artsy, The Art Newspaper, Kayhan Life, Dubai Collection, and The National.***

***Follow her on Twitter: [@byrawaatalass](https://twitter.com/byrawaatalass)***