



Born: 23 May 1974 in Gaza

Studio location: Essa's studio is located within his home in Gaza.

Years of experience: 15

Formal education: Essa completed his BA in Fine Arts at Al Najah University in Nablus, Palestine, in 1999. He holds an MA from the Faculty of Fine Arts at Helwan University in Cairo. These courses had a great influence on Essa; "While you're studying, you have access to so much experience and knowledge from your teachers, and their criticism and advice can help so much."



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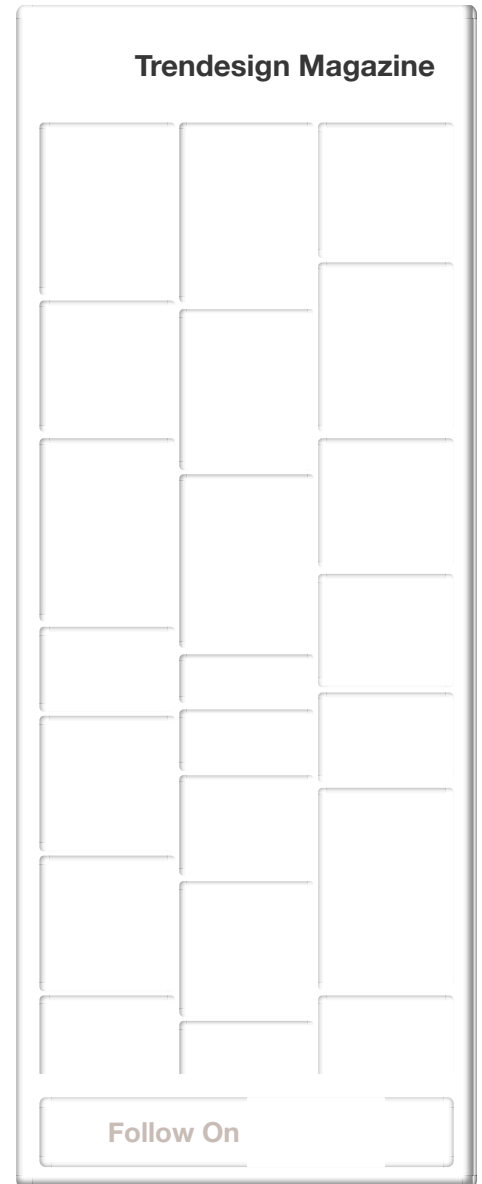
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Artistic development: Essa is a big believer in the power of perseverance when it comes to artistic growth. "The best way to refine talent is through study, collection and practice – this is how you gain experience."

Type of art: "I'm influenced by the school of realism, but I try to cultivate a distinctive style that is unique to me."

First exhibition: Essa's first solo show was at the AM Qattan Foundation in Ramallah, a charity that works to further the development of culture and education in Palestine and the Arab world.





Style: Essa is most known for his portraits of voluptuous women. In recent years, these have become increasingly overtaken with the colour blue, reminiscent of Picasso's works during his "Blue Period." The women who inhabit these recent, monochromatic paintings are all strikingly similar – are they a group of sisters, or reiterations of the same woman in different states of being? They stare impassively out, their chin-length hair, straight noses, narrow eyes and full, red lips showing little in the way of emotions. Their sombre clothing, bare feet and languorous stances seem to give a sense of ennui, trapped in some kind of dream world against featureless backgrounds.

Themes: "Most of the ideas in my work revolve around the different states of women. In these paintings I'm trying to achieve a balance between form and content, so that the paintings will always have an aesthetic dimension that draws the viewer in. An image of a woman contains a sensory manifestation, one of beauty. I am in touch with this beauty through the lines and curves. The colour blue, in many gradations and with rich overtones of clarity, depth and hope, emphasises the beauty of the picture and the beauty of meaning."

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Artistic process: “How I begin a painting depends on my state of mind, my hopes and dreams. This doesn’t mean that there is no particular theme; my themes are mostly realistic, and taken from my memories.”

Art in Palestine/Gaza: Despite the current political situation in Gaza, Essa maintains that the art scene there is in fact flourishing. “Gaza is witnessing a series of exhibitions and artistic collaborations that carry in their content important messages, thus helping to foster understanding of the Palestinian

reality and further artistic expression. This is all in spite of the lack of official support or sponsorship for the arts." Essa does not allow himself to be confined by the reality of life in Gaza however, instead he breaks free by way of his imagination, which he pours into his paintings. "My experience has evolved as a search for beauty through line and form, colour and composition."



Latest exhibition: Essa's latest exhibition, *Mysticism of Blues*, took place at [Foresight 32 Art Gallery](#) in Amman. Running from February 9 to 29, it was his first solo show outside of Palestine – though due to visa constraints he was unable to attend in person.

Hopes for the future: Essa is enigmatic about what the future holds for

him. "I have begun some experiments, and I'm trying to develop them and incorporate them into my aesthetic vision.

Advice for young artists: Words that we could all perhaps take to heart:

"Be patient, persevere, and always try your best!"



Photography: Courtesy of Foresight 32 Art Gallery and the artist

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: MARION EELE

Having grown up in Wales, Zimbabwe and Washington DC, Marion has