

Delair Shaker

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New Structures - Delair Shaker

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Since moving back to his native Iraq and Jordan, Delair Shaker's work took a sudden turn. His mixed media compositions no longer vibrate with seductive colors and layered echoes of his formal education, underscored by a war émigré's narrative; but rather with somber meditations of a determined man, now a father himself, coming home without being able to find what he had once left behind.

In his new body of work, Shaker wrestles with questions that so many displaced thinkers, writers and artists have dealt with before him. How does one learn to come home? What happens when the bridges and the roads leading home have been destroyed or reshaped? How does one fit into the new, hostile and war ravaged topography? What is one to do when a home is no longer a home, but a place of eroded memories, usurped by oppressing powers, disbalanced by their time? How does one resolve devotion, honor and survival with the splitting angst of loss?

In his new paintings, sculptures and drawings, Shaker uses collages to organize a public forum which invite the viewer into private reconciliations of narrative structures and symbolic imagery. Here, Shaker scaffolds fluid conversations, rather than fixed visual codes

found in his previous work, and a sad revelation that it is often harder to come home than it is to leave it.

Leaning heavily on Constructivism, which was also born of conflict, Shaker begins to build a home he remembers, layering in with what he sees now and what he hopes to rebuild. Time lines converge in intricate interplay of fragility and impermanence. The appearance of burnt fabric, along with industrial building materials such as found nails, wood, wire, steel and paint, become metaphors for cultural diffusion, militarized democracy and a struggle for new identity.

Using line and form, arranged in Dorothea Rockburne's minimalist vocabulary, Shaker "testifies to the profound cleavage" (Gabo & Pevsner's "The Realistic Manifesto", 1920) between what once was and what it is now. Delicate, topical strata of subdivided, integrated and flattened geometric shapes are superimposed onto subdued yellow, brown, orange and neutrally beige backgrounds. On them, isolated objects with distinct, industrial impersonality are weaved with snippets of photographs that offer glimpses into some private memory.

It is within these structures that the conversation takes place. Here, one is invited to sit in on an afternoon tête-à-tête between the artist and his memories as he designs a new home on the ruins of a destroyed one, while the fading sun illuminates the rubble, dust and billowing smoke still settling around him. All of a sudden, one begins to see an idea for a new building, with its bricks, ladders, keys, windows and roof, dovetailing the peeling paint, implosions of dark stains and references to time past.

For the first time, Shaker uses line as an irreducible and explicit medium, in order to lead the eye around the composition, while indicating and insisting in a decisive and forceful manner. Some paintings relate Solomon LeWitt's meditative cross hatchings, open modular forms and progressions. Here, one is called upon to witness the thought process of a man who has

made up his mind to build without heeding the obscure and unreliable background of reality, which threatens to split apart and swallow everything whole. He is Ayn Rand's Howard Roark – a single minded builder and an unwilling hero of his time.

As a result, Delair Shaker's new structures become quiet promulgations for a future to be built on the smoldering ruins of the past, while paying homage to the dazzle of tragedy and romanticism, which seep into one's memory with time.

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