

Women Through The Eyes of Iraqi Artist Afifa Aleiby

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As soon as we begin our virtual conversation, Afifa Aleiby’s evocative paintings —hanging on the wall behind her — become noticeable.

“I’ve made my home a museum,” she told Arab News from the Netherlands.

The Iraqi artist was speaking ahead of her anticipated debut at the 2021 edition of Art Dubai with a solo presentation of her recent figurative works, often dominated by female forms, showcased by her representative, London-based Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery.

Art Inspiration For Today: First Love by Afifa Aleiby (Iraqi), oil on canvas, genre: Contemporary Art, Modernism, 1994 [#ArtInspirationForToday](#) [#FirstLove](#) [#AfifaAleiby](#)
pic.twitter.com/HYkX7bSJI8

— Tara Hutton (@pohoartist) [September 5, 2020](#)

Aleiby has lived outside of her home country for more than three decades, which is why participating, though not attending in person due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, in this prominent regional fair is a significant moment in her long career.

“It’s a new experience for me and it makes me happy,” she said. “In addition, Dubai is an international place and galleries from all around the world will gather at this meeting point.”

Born in the southern city of Basra in 1953, Aleiby comes from a family that nurtured her artistic practice, which was regarded as quite unconventional at the time.

“For some families, it was socially unacceptable for their children to study art,” she explained. “My family was interested in books, theater, cinema and music — I grew up in that environment. As the youngest child in my family, there were no barriers ahead of me. Whatever I desired, it became true.”

It was eventually the art of painting that captivated Aleiby, who pursued her studies at Baghdad’s renowned Institute of Fine Arts, where she became a protege of Iraqi pioneers Shakir Hassan Al-Said and Rafie Al-Nasseri.

Her journey has since taken her to Aden, Moscow and Florence, an artistic capital that informed her sense of aesthetics after living there for more than a decade.

Beautiful figurative paintings by Afifa Aleiby (b.1953 Iraqi). Aleiby’s paintings bring together different influences from Renaissance painting to religious icons and social realism [#painting #iraq #art](https://t.co/xKtvkce5PF) I love <https://t.co/xKtvkce5PF> [pic.twitter.com/OfK55XV6tp](https://t.co/xKtvkce5PF)

— Alan Lennon (@lennonart1) [April 25, 2020](#)

Describing the streets of Italy as a museum in itself, she was particularly inspired by iconic Renaissance painting, as well as the theme of surrealism. As seen at Art Dubai, her colorful paintings depict graceful, wide-eyed figures that are often lost in thought, far away from the real world. In serene yet sometimes melancholic compositions, women dominate Aleiby’s canvases.

“In the history of art, the most important element has been the woman... she gives life,” she said. “There is a tenderness in the way a woman moves, sits, talks and uses her hands. These are all important factors for me and they enrich my painting.”

This article has been adapted from its original source.