



Brief resume: Exhibitions

- 2009 Iraqi Australian Organisation, Fairfield (Sydney)
- 2008 Casula Powerhouse, Sydney
- 2007 Casula Powerhouse, Sydney
Liverpool Museum, Sydney
- 2006 Paddington, Sydney
Blacktown, Sydney
Merrylands Council, Sydney
- 2005 Blacktown, Sydney
- 1992-2005 Jordan, countless exhibitions
- 1988 Bagdad, Iraq
- 1987 Bagdad, Iraq

Apart from exhibitions in Australia, Haider has also exhibited in the USA, Spain, Jordan and Saudi Arabia

Brief resume: Memberships

- Iraqi Artists Forming Assembly
- Liverpool Art Society

HEALING THROUGH ART

Iraqi-born painter HAIDER ABADI escaped from war torn Iraq and came to Australia where he found inner peace. He spoke with REBECCA HINCHEY about how his life experiences influence his art.

Bold, bright splashes of yellow and blue ignite the canvas. Even in this abstract style the iconic Australian image can't be missed: the anti-establishment hero Ned Kelly. For artist Haider Abadi, it's a celebration of a new home, a new life, and a new freedom.

Haider's work has transformed since arriving in Australia four years ago. Gone are the shackled images, contorted in pain. Absent too, the distorted bodies and deep painful shades of purple, blue and red. "Art for me is like an expression of the internal world. Whenever I read or see something, what I feel about it will be revealed in my work," Haider says.

Thousands of kilometres from the terror of Iraq, Haider's art displays a release from pain and a contentment with life. Sometimes he hears the news and the memories return, along with the painful

images, but this is rare. Warm curves, swirling notes, and harmonious lines dominate his Australian work.

As an artist in Saddam Hussein's palace and later in exile in Jordan, Haider's paintings had reflected the oppression and war that permeated the region.

"There are some tragedies, some grief in my works," he explains.

"In 1991, I had a very bad experience. The Americans bombed a place of refuge for people to be protected from the war. Children and women, their bodies melt from the heat.

"After the incident we went there. It was terrible and horrendous, bodies melting and sticking to one another.

"After this I drew a series of pictures," he says.

Haider's expression through art began while playing on the banks of the Al Farat

River, south of the city of Bagdad. In the late 1960s, government workers would pour black oil into the river to kill the mosquitoes. Placing paper in the water the young child would watch as it formed a face or a pattern.

That early influence continued through to his university days and propelled him to the top of the class.

"When I finish my paintings I throw water on them. Through the fluids you get an unintentional result, beyond imagination. Sixty percent is my effort and forty percent is coincidence. It's like a risk or adventure, you might get a good painting or not," he says.

That risk was a feature of his life. As the standout student he was selected to paint for Iraq's then ruler in one of the many palaces scattered throughout Iraq.

"I was against Saddam Hussein but



Haider is a STARTTS client who was born in Iraq in 1966. His works have been exhibited at countless venues across Australia including the Arabic Embassy in Canberra, the Australian Iraqi Centre in Fairfield and at the STARTTS Refugee Week Art Exhibition. In 2008 he won first prize from the Liverpool Art Society. In the same year he created an artwork for STARTTS (see back cover). That painting symbolises the caring provided by STARTTS staff for their clients, from the cradle to the grave. It shows the many different cultures and religions of the people who come to STARTTS and the dark pasts that they are trying to leave behind. Contact: haider.abadi@yahoo.com.au

"I couldn't reject him or I will be killed," Haider states simply.

For two years he worked for the dictator, forced to create countless images of the madman. While he worked his people in the south rebelled against their ruler.

In 1992, Haider escaped to Jordan, continuing to paint the horror of the past. His reputation grew, and his work was exhibited in Austria.

Yet Haider remained distressed, particularly as he now had a wife and three children. With the attention came the knowledge that he was in the sights of the Iraqi regime.

"In my media I reveal a lot about what was going on, the torture and that. I would have been executed," he explains.

That fear has gone now and the terror that it created inside Haider has disappeared.

His countless exhibitions in Australia have been a witness to the rebirth of Haider, a witness to the pain of his past and the hope of his future.

His art has played the central role in banishing the inner demons and healing the spirit. It is who he is.

"If I don't draw I can't live. I feel I live through painting," he says. ■



Dead Aid

Reviewed by Samira Hassan

Author: Dambisa Moyo

Publisher: Penguin Books



Dambisa Moyo is a native Zambian. She has a degree from Harvard and a Doctorate from Oxford, and she has worked for the World Bank and at Goldman Sachs. *Dead Aid* is her first book.

Dead Aid is a controversial new exploration of the aid industry in Africa. It has been hailed by Kofi Annan as "a compelling case for a new approach in Africa. Her message is that 'Africa's time is now'. It is time for Africans to assume full control over their economic and political destiny. Africans should grasp the many means and opportunities available to them for improving the quality of life."

Coming at a time where there is a growing criticism of the aid industry and its failed outcomes, *Dead Aid* will certainly add to the current debate. But Moyo goes a step further and contends that aid to Africa has not only failed in its targeted solutions, but has actively contributed to poverty and the failure of African nations to become economically viable and successful. Africa has become aid-dependant and addicted, to the detriment of responsible governance and economic growth.

Moyo also criticizes "glamour aid" and the rise of moral campaigners, especially in the movie and music industry. "Scarcely does one see Africa's elected officials or those African policy makers charged with the development portfolio offer an opinion on what should be done, or what might actually work... This very important responsibility has, for all intents and purposes and to the bewilderment and chagrin of many Africans, been left to musicians who reside outside Africa." (p.27).

The main argument of *Dead Aid* is that aid is the fundamental cause of poverty in Africa, because it removes incentives among policymakers and within society. It makes governments less accountable to their citizens and has led to civil wars and corruption. Aid has propped up dictatorships and sheltered governments from often disastrous governance decisions.

The solution? Moyo advocates stopping aid funding over the course of five years. *Dead Aid* argues that Africa should rather look to international bond markets, foreign direct investment (the Chinese, in particular); pushing for free trade and encouraging microfinance innovations, such as the group borrowing pioneered by the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh.

The book is written simply and it is easy to understand, yet coming at it as a layperson, I found myself wishing that there was more detail or explanation of Moyo's assertions. For instance, much is made of the fact that aid has not worked in Africa, but there is really not much detail as to why this is so, beyond laying the blame on corruption, and inadequate distribution policies. If this is the case, surely a consideration of how these might be

tackled is warranted. And if aid were cut off, what would the likely outcomes be?

More simply, a clear definition of aid would have been helpful. Other than giving a brief criticism, Moyo does not target humanitarian or charitable aid, but rather focuses on bilateral and multilateral aid, defined as "the sum total of concessional loans and grants" (p.9). Unfortunately as a non economist, I am unsure of precisely what that actually means. Does this include health and education aid? Local development grants? None of this is made clear.

On the question of governance I was also confused. Moyo describes in some detail the corrupt regimes that have been propped up by aid but she assures us blithely that cutting aid will somehow assure good governance. Why would this be so? There are many examples of repressive and corrupt governments in countries not dependant on aid. Furthermore, she states that cutting off aid would also somehow lead to fewer wars and military coups. Why? Surely most wars and military coups are about resources and mineral wealth?

Moyo is an obvious admirer of China and its "new multi-pronged assault on Africa" (p. 104). A whole chapter of the book is devoted to China and the benefits of Chinese investment. For Moyo any concern about the Chinese and the possible repercussions of such investment is merely seen as western hypocrisy. Humanitarian and environmental concerns are also brushed aside. She asserts that:

"Many Africans scoff at the notion that westerners should be outraged by Chinese implicit support for Africa's corrupt and rogue leaders. It is, after all, under the auspices of Western aid, goodwill and transparency that Africa's most notorious plunderers and despots have risen and thrived". (p.108).

That may well be so, but I am strangely unconvinced that corrupt leaders supported by investment are better for Africa than those supported by aid.

And if the aim is to benefit Africa, then surely serious consideration must be given to Chinese business practices such as not hiring locals and underbidding local business.

There is no doubt that developmental aid to Africa has been mismanaged and squandered. Moyo tells us that over one trillion dollars of aid has been given to Africa since World War One, yet sub-Saharan Africa remains the poorest region in the world, with little to show in terms of economic growth. There is obviously a need to tackle the problem, and find viable long term solutions. Whether you agree or disagree with Moyo, her book is an important step in furthering a very important dialogue.