FORGOTTEN VICTIMS

Women in a Middle Eastern War

Arzu Yontar
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“Jahmah said to the Holy Prophet, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I desire to go on a military expedition and I have come to consult you.’ He asked him if he had a mother, and when he replied that he had, He said, ‘Stay with her because Paradise lies beneath her feet.’” (Coleman)

The Middle East has often been a hot spot in the world because of the religious, political and geographical objectives and conflicting goals of different groups of people in the region and the location of the valuable natural resource, oil. Conflict in this geographical area increased after World War II, especially, with the ongoing struggle between the Israelis and the Palestinians, which began in the mid-20th century. Then, the American-Iraq war or Second Persian Gulf War, which began in 2003 increased hostilities and ended in 2011. However in 2014 the United States military re-entered Iraq when Iraq erupted into a civil war between the Sunni and the Shia. Now Iraq also deals with the emergence of ISIL or ISIS. ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) is a particularly violent and extremist group that considers Muslims who do not agree with its extremist ideology as infidels or apostates. More than a dozen nations have been involved militarily with the Iraqi Civil War. Also during this time period, the Arab Spring occurred, which refers to the democratic uprisings that arose independently and spread across the Arab world in 2011. The movement originated in Tunisia in December 2010 and quickly took hold in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. These countries are all still suffering with conflicts, but in Syria and Yemen the people are experiencing war at an extreme level. Many Middle Eastern people, including women and their children, have fled from their countries as war refugees. Two million of these refugees have gone to Turkey, and over a million of them have gone to Europe. This sudden influx of war refugees has created a refugee crisis in Europe, sometimes resulting in inadequate housing and poor living conditions and prejudice against these
mostly Muslim war refugees. This refugee crisis has contributed to the rise of right wing nationalists in several European nations.

As a Muslim woman artist from Turkey, I am very sensitive to and aware of what is currently happening in the Middle East and I am especially concerned about the women and children living in that part of the world. It is because of the physical geographic link between Turkey and the Middle East, and my strong emotional connection, that I am interested in depicting, the lives of these Muslim women today, who attempt to survive in a war zone. These women have been dying or suffering every day over many years, and few people around the world know of their suffering or talk about these innocent victims subjected to the horrors of a modern war. Modern war uses conventional weapons that are able to cause indiscriminate destruction of entire blocks of houses in cities with precision and speed. This increase in the destructiveness of modern weapons has been tremendous since World War II.

Before I begin to write about my installation piece I would like to start with a few quotes from the artist Alfredo Jaar, who also works on social and political issues, and has had a tremendous effect upon me and the approach I used for my work.

Alfredo Jaar said in an interview with Paula Wallace at SCAD (Savannah College of Arts and Design) in 2014:

"Art is about receiving the generosity of people that you encounter in your investigation. So, it is so natural for the artist to also be generous and capture that and decide, okay! I would like to dignify you, and to explain to the world what is happening with you and with this situation. It is an exchange of generosity."
Also at the end of the same interview he explains what is the most important challenge for the artist:

"The challenge for the artist is how do you translate these lived experiences into a work of art. I want the work to inform you, but also touch you, to move you, to illuminate you. So, how do you do that? When you manage to create this balance you create a sublime experience for the audience and they feel with information, but with also knowledge, with empathy, and with joy."

I have created an installation piece by combining evanescent materials such as paper, ink, soap, and wood to reflect on the lives of these women who are quickly disappearing from our mediated sight and whose memory evades our collective consciousness. The purpose of my thesis is to give these nameless Middle Eastern women a presence in our modern world, I want to make their lives known. I am using the relationship between scale, materials, and what they connote to create the emotional and physical connection between the women victims of the Middle Eastern wars and the viewer.

The three parts of my thesis exhibition consist of,

- Intaglio prints of landscapes from Middle Eastern war zones
- Woodcut portraits of Middle Eastern women
- A clear acrylic oval pool as an installation with soap sculptures of Muslim women standing, each six inches tall.

The first part of the thesis show will have three, nine inch by twenty four inch, etchings and landscapes of the Middle Eastern war zone. Etching and aquatint printmaking techniques were used to recreate these war landscapes. Etching is a traditional printmaking process of using strong acid or mordant to cut into the unprotected parts of a metal surface to create a design that is incised in the metal. Aquatint is another intaglio print making technique similar to etching. Similar to the way the landscapes of war are torn apart by bombs, etching and aquatint create a relationship by a scarring of the zinc plate using etching needles and acid beds. Also, these
landscapes are collage pieces, referencing how there are many different countries in the Middle East that are being affected by wars. A part of Turkey, which is my home country, is part of the Middle East. Turkey has been instrumental in offering sanctuary to refugees from these wars and has also experienced terrorist activity in some of its cities. It is hard for me to see these Middle Eastern nations as individual countries and focus on them one by one because they seem like a seamless amalgam of cultures, languages, and religions. Some groups extend over several nations. Due to the complex blend and interactive nature of the cultures, I picked four to five different pieces of war scenes from each Middle Eastern country and created one landscape to show the whole disaster of the Middle Eastern area in one piece. Each landscape shows parts of cities after bombings and aerial attacks. People, buildings, cars, furniture, toys, and guns are repeating elements that I found within each of the scenes that reflected the damaged and broken lives of the people forced to live through the atrocities of a modern war.

Middle East War Lands Cape Series I: Aquatint and etching on Rives paper, 2015
Middle East War Lands Cape Series II: Aquatint and etching on Rives paper, 2016

Middle East War Lands Cape Series III: Aquatint and etching on Rives paper, 2016
Mike Hoyt conveys the broken lives of Iraqi people after the invasion in his book *Reporting Iraq*:

I remember, literally the first day, driving into Safwan (Iraq), which is the first town on the border when you cross over. It’s where they signed to surrender in 1991. And I went in there thinking that this is probably going to be something like what I saw in Afghanistan, which was cheering crowds and people throwing their turbans off, and everybody happy to see the American forces. And that wasn’t the case at all. To me, it looked like we’d pried the doors off of a mental institution, and there were a bunch of people standing around with their jaws hanging open. Some people were absolutely horrified, people were crying, some people were cheering, some people were—you could tell how afraid they were. Some people, you could sense that there was emotion that they didn’t want to express, so they didn’t. There was a lot of uncertainty. (Hoyt 1)

The second part of the thesis exhibition combines three life size wood cut print portraits of three representative Middle Eastern women. These three objects represent every woman who has died or is still suffering because of the war. Each is placed on a wood carved six foot tall sculptural stand. These stands are as important as the portraits, because they represent the physical and spiritual bodies of the women that have kept them alive or have been severely damaged or devastated by their experiences. Each stand has two parts. The first part is the wood, which is the base of the stand. I carved only some parts of a Muslim woman as she is in a prayer position. It shows only the feet and the knees of each woman. For the second part of the stands, I used rebar, a steel rod with ridges for use in reinforced concrete, to reference the buildings and houses demolished by war. A house is an important part of a woman’s life and has special significance. It can be as significant as her family because the house is the place where a family lives and where the family can “be safe.” A house is the physical embodiment of the love that women feel for their families. Material choices were very crucial for me, because each material has a significant role in connecting with Middle Eastern women. Both wood and rebar were chosen because they are as strong as the women of the Middle East, but when I use these materials in my work, I intend to reference the damage done to these women, their families, and their lives. These strong materials would normally provide the protection that women wanted to
give their families in their homes, but both the homes and the women's protection are now damaged and weakened, and sometimes destroyed. This part was a challenge for me, because, with this project I learned how to carve a wood sculpture, how to bend a metal, and how to do welding.


Middle Eastern Women Portraits Series Bases: Wood and rebar, 2016
In his book *A Woman in the Crossfire: Diaries of the Syrian Revolution*, Yazbek suggests:

Each Friday more Syrians go out than the Friday before and more blood is spilled. The number of refugees exceeds ten thousand and today the army is trying to stem their exodus to Turkey after besieging the villages that lead there. Apparently the regime has decided to surround them and even prevent them from leaving their homes. But coming back is out of the question because there is such awful news about those who do come back getting killed and having their families tortured. (Yazbek 157)

I also wanted to add stories of Middle Eastern women with their own voices to these portraits. Although the installation pieces are 3D objects, I want them to be able to communicate to the viewer that the subjects, which are Middle Eastern women, are human beings, just like us, with voices and stories. For that reason, I interviewed refugees from the Middle East. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to use these interviews as a part of the installation at the show. However, I still would like to say something about this part because it had such a strong effect upon me that it effected the creation of the entire project.

Interviewing the people affected by the wars was the most difficult part of this project. It was difficult not only to find people from Syria, Yemen, Palestine, and Iraq who would talk to me about the war and ask them to share their experiences, but also it was difficult to listen to their sad and horrifying stories. At first, I had to hunt for these people, and then convince them to talk to me. I do not know any of their names, or where they are living in America now because they were
so afraid to talk to me or give me any information about themselves. What they said to me, here in America, could be a reason for their loved ones, to be hurt by the regime or people in Syria, Palestine, and Yemen. I don’t know their names, which city they came from, or where they live in America now. The only thing that I know about them is the country where they came from. Their stories, filled with pain, and sadness, created in me also a sadness and pain that was used to create the installation piece. Hopefully my goal for the future is to find a way to share these recorded stories with others through future installation pieces.

For the third part of the thesis show, a twenty eight inch by forty six inch clear acrylic oval pool was created. The bottom of the pool was filled with soap sculptures of Muslim women, each standing, six inches tall. The soap sculptures were all handmade. For this project, I learned how to make natural soap, so that I could make my own soap sculptures, using olive oil, lye and distilled water to make them. When selecting the material for making soap I wanted to use something found throughout the Middle East. Most Middle Eastern countries are around the Mediterranean Sea and the olive tree is possibly the most important plant in the Mediterranean countries. The olive has a very special place in the Muslim’s diet, because of a special ayah in the Quran about it and olive oil is considered a cure for many sicknesses. Therefore, we use large quantities of olive and olive oil in our diet because of its healing characteristics. This whole installation is my prayer for the Middle Eastern people, especially the women and children. This is a memorial, a commemoration and a testament to their lives, so that they are not forgotten. By using olive oil I wanted to add my wish and prayer to heal their pain and suffering.

During the exhibition, one gallon of a liquid, a cola drink (soap dissolves quickly in a cola drink), will be added into the pool each day. The cola will represent the oil and gasoline found in the Middle East, since some of the causes for these Middle Eastern wars were the desires to seize power by controlling oil. This liquid, (representative of oil) will allow the soap sculptures,
(representative of the healing nature of women) to melt and disappear into the liquid, just as the women who suffer and die, disappear as if they had never existed.

Salute: Soap, cola, acrylic sky domes, and rebar, 2016

Day by Day Different Stages of Salute

This is a memorial to commemorate and to show respect for the lost lives of the women whose lives were destroyed in modern Middle Eastern wars and to remember and reflect upon their lives. These women had existed. They were innocent people, who had lives and loved others and now many are gone and no longer living in this world. They are the forgotten victims, women in a Middle Eastern War.
FORGOTTEN VICTIMS: Women in a Middle Eastern War, 2016, exhibition view:
“I am happy every day, to be alive in this world. And to have the privilege I do have, but it is not shared by most of the human beings on this planet. I want to change the world. I have never been afraid of saying this. It sounds naïve, but I have no problem with that. And, so we try to change the world one person at the time, one project at the time.” (Jaar)
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


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SHOW CARD

FORGOTTEN VICTIMS:
WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EASTERN WAR

ARZU YON'TAR

MASTERS OF FINE ART THESIS EXHIBITION

SAMUEL DORSKY MUSEUM OF FINE ART
1 HAWK DRIVE, NEW PALM, NY 12560

OPENING RECEPTION
FRIDAY, MAY 13, 2016
7:30PM-9:30PM

EXHIBITION HOURS
MAY 13- MAY 17, 8AM-5PM

AYONTA20@GMAIL.COM
Arzu Yontar
ayonta20@gmail.com | www.artarzu.com

Education
2015 MFA, State University of New York (SUNY), Printmaking (Graduation is in May 2016), New Paltz, NY
2013 BFA, Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), Painting, Atlanta, GA.
\hspace{1cm} \text{Minor in Art History, Atlanta, GA}
2011 Associate's Degree, Northampton Community College, Painting,
\hspace{1cm} \text{Bethlehem, PA}
1993 Associate's Degree, Dumlupinar University, Ceramics, Kutahya, Turkey

Awards
2014-15 SUNY New Paltz MFA Scholarship
2011 Savannah College of Art and Design, Art of Prevention Contest, Atlanta, GA
\hspace{1cm} \text{First place in the Fine Art Exhibition Award at Northampton Community College, Bethlehem, PA}
\hspace{1cm} \text{Honorable Mention and a Certificate of Recognition for Participation in Service Learning Activities, Northampton Community College, Bethlehem, PA}
2010 Patrick J. Kraus Endowment Drawing Competition with an Honorable Mention, Northampton Community College, Bethlehem, PA

Solo and Group Exhibitions
2015 Enhanced Matters, SUNY New Paltz FAB Rotunda, New Paltz, NY
\hspace{1cm} \text{Field Notes, Glyndor Gallery Collaboration with Matthew Friday, Wave Hill, Bronx, NY}
\hspace{1cm} \text{Improper Articles, The Greenpoint Gallery, Brooklyn NY}
2014 SUNY New Paltz FAB Exhibition, New Paltz, NY
\hspace{1cm} \text{SUNY New Paltz Printmaking Exhibition, Bacchus Restaurant, New Paltz, NY}
2013 Turkish Coffee Hour, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
Cultural Collisions, Further Art, Atlanta, GA
A Touch of Whimsy, Artmatch Gallery, Atlanta, GA
Open Studio Exhibition, SCAD, Atlanta, GA
dk Gallery Discovers Student Artists, dk Gallery, Marietta, GA
Eight Painting Exhibition, Thomas Dean Gallery, Atlanta, GA
Red, Underground Atlanta, Atlanta, GA
Moxie Interactive Showcase, Atlanta, GA

2012
Open Studio Exhibition, Savannah College of Art and Design, Atlanta, GA
Sidewalk Art Show Exhibition, Atlanta, GA
Spring Cultural Exchange Day by Turkish Cultural Association, International, and Middle East Institution, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA

2011
Savannah College of Art and Design Art of Prevention Contest, Atlanta, GA
First place in the Fine Art Exhibition Award at Northampton College, Bethlehem, PA
Student Group Exhibition-Northampton Community College Communication Hall, Bethlehem, PA
Honorable Mention and a Certificate of Recognition for Participation in Service Learning Activities, Northampton Community College, Bethlehem, PA
Tulu’, LaDuca Gallery, Easton, PA

2010
Students’ Group Show, Northampton Community College Communication Hall, Bethlehem, PA

2008
Hat ve Tezhibin Birlestigi Yer, Saat Kulesi Sanat Evi, Kayseri, Turkey

2006
Ilk, Keith’s Art Gallery, Welland, Ontario, Canada

Work Experiences

2015
Graduate Assistant (Continuous), Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, New Paltz, NY

- Installation and de-installation the art exhibitions at the museum and gallery Spaces
- Facilitate communication between artists and curators
- Frame construction and repair, matting, framing, and storing the art works
- Made an inventory of the museum and gallery collections
- Layout and production od labels
- Professional lighting arrangement
  Internship in College Art Studio Teaching (Continuous),
  Media Intervention, SUNY New Paltz, NY
  College Art Studio Teaching, Introduction to Printmaking,
  SUNY New Paltz, New Paltz, NY
  Student Art Alliance Visiting Artist Lecture Series Coordinator (Continuous),
  SUNY New Paltz, New Paltz, NY

2014  Graduate Assistant, Printmaking Department, SUNY New Paltz,
      New Paltz, NY
      Internship in College Art Studio Teaching, Basic Printmaking,
      SUNY New Paltz, New Paltz, NY

2012-13  Work Study, Savannah College of Art and Design, Atlanta, GA
2010-11  Work Study, Northampton Community College, Bethlehem, PA
1998-02  Stained Glass Artist, Kop-Insertek Stained Glass, Istanbul, Turkey
1995-98  Graphic Designer, IPEK Printing Company, Ankara, Turkey
1993-95  Stained Glass Artist, Istanbul Glass, Kayseri, Turkey
1991-93  Ceramic, Kutahya Porcelain, Kutahya, Turkey