



B A H R A M
HELPLESSNESS AND HAPPINESS ARE SO CLOSE
H A J O U

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Foreword

The human being in the center. More precisely: the entirety of being human, with a focus on challenges and shortcomings in (inter)human or even political discourse. Subtle and yet relentlessly direct. In striking and energetic compositions that instantly triggered interpretations, memories and consternation in me. Trepidation and melancholy were followed by acceptance, compassion and many sensations more – an emblem of human existence.

The figurative-abstract compositions of Bahram Hajou immediately drew me under their spell, when a collector friend showed me three works of the German Syrian painter. With expressive passion Bahram Hajou breaks through to the human essence. So powerful and charged with tension that it was impossible for me to focus „neutrally“ on technical-formal aspects. At least not without wanting to connect emotionally and enter a dialogue. In doing so, the images not only made me feel the coldness, anger, or pain of the figures, but also struck me at my core due to their abstract facelessness: a moment of my own unmasking, embedded in a philosophical discourse about being human.

In the summer of 2021, I had the honor of visiting Bahram Hajou in Münster - in his studio at home and in his light-flooded studio in the Kulturgelände Haverkamp. A dinner with his wife Fatma, Syrian meze and rabbits in the garden full of fruit trees - getting to know Bahram Hajou. An artist who describes his technique as „technique-less“. An artist for whom people are the greatest inspiration and who wants to encourage (self-)reflection. An artist, a visionary, a human being.

Whether dysfunctional relationships, the oppression of women or the battle of the sexes: Bahram Hajou's large-format works are created in a multi-layered process that reflects the depth of content immanent in the images. In the first step, Bahram Hajou lays

the canvas on the floor and mixes acrylic paints with powder pigments on the canvas itself. With rags and brushes he spreads blobs of color and scatters sand or ash into the color areas. Bahram Hajou then hangs the canvas on the wall, rotates it several times and looks for inspiration. In dialogue with the structures and islands of color, the image gradually emerges in layers. He sketches figures or heads with charcoal pencil, then gives them shape, sometimes translucent, sometimes pasty, or even paints over parts of them.

The statements are as complex as the layers of material and color themselves, sometimes even hidden behind them. Inadequacies and grievances are simultaneously unmasked and painted over. His pictorial worlds are of universal expressiveness in an internationally understandable (pictorial) language.

Bahram Hajou is a citizen of the world. Born in Syria in 1952, he moved to Iraq in the early 1970s to study first civil engineering and then art. In 1974 he fled to Berlin because of the war and has lived in Münster since the mid-1970s. Here, Bahram Hajou studied archaeology and then completed his studies in sports and art at the College of Education. Since his studies at the renowned Düsseldorf Art Academy, he has devoted himself exclusively to art.

Bahram Hajou's paintings have been exhibited in over 100 galleries and museums around the world. I am proud that he and his works have found their way to Munich and I am happy to be able to show his paintings at the Benjamin Eck Gallery. Bahram Hajou: a painter, a citizen of the world, a human being.

Benjamin Eck, Galerist

BAHRAM HAJOU

Preliminary Remarks

To present Bahram is a multi-facetted challenge and pleasure, strongly determined by the specific quality and complexity of Bahram's life and work. And it is of course a pleasure and a challenge to do this as a personal account and in reflection of my way to look at the world, at the arts and artists, reflections depending on my own cultural roots and aspirations.

Bahram's biography and the evolution of his work do not reflect the influences of just one region or of one of the cultures of the world, though dominant influences of Western civilisation should not be denied or underestimated. The course of his life and work prove him, however, to be a true internationalist, or, to use the German term created and used in earlier centuries, to be a *Weltbürger*, a citizen, at home in the multitude and variety of a more and more fragmented and at the same time united and often claustrophobic world – a *Weltbürger*, an artist in the middle of a new world in progress, whatever the risks, pitfalls, and promises of globalisation and of culture and arts in a globalising world might be.

There is no doubt that Bahram, at the right time and by whatever coincidences, has reached a ripeness in his art and personality that corresponds perfectly to the challenges and dangers globalisation is confronting us with as human beings and as human kind as a whole, across the borders of countries or cultures and beyond vital economic needs – and it is not the least challenge for an artist like Bahram to insist on visions and new horizons, to allow for pains and honest struggles in human relations, to make loneliness and despair a source for reconciliation and inner freedom and for a peaceful life in the world around us. Bahram's life and work rose to this challenge.

Latest achievements of Western cultural theory and the dialogue between an artist and his audience

With reference to Terry Eagleton I should like to summarize some gains and achievements of Western cultural theory, not unimportant for the nurturing of dialogues between cultures, between artists and their audiences.

1. Cultural theory has "disabused us of the idea that there is a single correct way to interpret a work of art" (Terry Eagleton: *After Theory* 2004, p.95).
2. It has "persuaded us that there are many things involved in the making of a work of art besides the author. Works of art have a kind of 'unconscious', which is not under the control of their producers. We have come to understand that one of those producers is the reader, viewer or listener – that the recipient of a work of art is a co-creator of it, without whom it would not exist" (ibid., p.96).
3. One of the most controversial gains has been "the link between culture and power. As social life fell increasingly under the rule of utility, culture was on hand to remind us that there were things which had value but no price." In a market dominated civilisation "culture has acted as a precious remembrance of utopia" (ibid., p.97).
4. It has been "exploring issues which were of a vital concern to humanity as a whole" – not just pragmatic ones, not just parochial ones (ibid., p.98).

The city where Bahram lives and works

Where does Bahram live and work? The place where most of his life and work has happened during the past thirty years is a city in the Western part of Germany, somewhere in the middle of Cologne and Hamburg. The history of this city started with the foundation of a monastery more than thousand years ago. The name was derived from this

foundation: Monasterium, Münster. Compared to the urban strongholds of the world this is a provincial place with about 250.000 inhabitants, giving however home to one of the biggest universities in Germany with about 60.000 students and with an almost complete classical spectrum of study and research fields. Münster and the neighbourhood city of Osnabrück were the places where the treaty for The Peace of Westphalia was reached in 1648, marking the emergence of a modern state system in Europe and bringing an end to long-running wars. For an artist like Bahram it is of course vital that Münster is an open minded, multicultural city with a heterogeneous and dynamic cultural, intellectual and political life and with a number of renowned galleries and museums. Much of this free atmosphere, and of course much more, you would experience when you entered Bahram's studio.

Bahram's Studio

Abounding with light and classical music, large canvases and smaller, even tiny ones, only a few paintings on the walls, most of them hiding their faces, with and without signature, date, or figures of seize. A hilarious mixture of dedicated arrangements and chaos - exactly the way we are expecting a studio to be, at least since the invention of photography gave us an idea of what studios are like. And at the same time quite different for those visiting this place: A marvellous smell of Arabian coffee, exhibition posters, few only, one showing Bahram's portrait of Arthur Rubinstein. Huge speakers up on the walls, directed towards the great, white wall with a newly fixed canvas - just as if the intensity of the music inundated it with colours and figures, with an atmosphere of harmony and an all disturbing power - new colours and arising figures or landscapes painted upon earlier works; colours, figures, and atmosphere on new canvases without any idea of how often they will experience a renewal, without knowing how provisional those pictures are that seem to be completed - transitory, in detail or in total, searching for a new expression, nourished by

the past and hiding it well at the same time: Vitality, strength, and existential risks expressed in every corner. Talks. Emotions. Dialogues. Assurance. Questioning. Not an office and not a solemn place. Neither ghetto nor public space. A mixture of vibrant passions. Most things concealed somewhere, but nevertheless present, including those of days passed - pictures, drawings, letters, postcards, music, and, of course, catalogues. Relics past and present, ultimately at hand and well hidden, they contribute to the strength and sensibility the absorbing intensity and inspiring endurance Bahram's work relies on, day by day.

A long way to go

It took Bahram a long way to arrive at this studio. No blueprint for life, but lots of coincidences and chances. And at the same time a continuous search for conditions and situations that promised him the freedom and independency to pursue what he was striving at - to work as an artist. This route was not his real destination, but it brought him to a haven he was looking for to become the artist he aspired to be. Tentative, provisional, his search being dominated by doubts, despairs and strong convictions.

Was it the "right" choice to leave his heimat and family, his Kurdish social and cultural setting, the familiar landscape, the people and culture of his childhood and youth? - The Syria of the early 1970s, arriving at Baghdad and ending his study at the famous Fine Arts Academy in the turmoil of a war before it had really started. From there to Prague, a highly instable place at this time, strongly affected by world politics. From there to the German Democratic Republic, to East Berlin. And from there to West Berlin.

This route of transition brought him to Münster where he started to study archaeology in 1976 and Fine Arts in 1977. After he received his diploma he studied Free Painting at the Münster branch of the Düsseldorf Arts Academy. He finished his studies in 1987 with a thesis on the life and work of Vincent Van Gogh and in 1988 became master disciple of Professor Norbert Tadeuzsch. In 1989 he took

another important step to come closer to his life's dream and decided to start a career as a freelance artist.

On the road, he was passing countries and cultures in times of cold and less cold wars, of ethnic marginalization and integration, meeting trustworthy people he was able to convince of his search for a way of life as an artist. A young internationalist on his way to new homes in times of xenophobia, of new waves of nationalism in times of a bitterly cold war. A Kurd who did not want to be perceived just as a Kurd. A Syrian who did not want to be perceived just as a Syrian. But how to protect oneself against such external classifications? How to transform all this into a new identity? How to develop a self-image, which would not neglect these roots and sources, but integrate them? Not in harmony. As tension and struggle. In despair and with perspectives. And full of hope to reach a new identity. How and when might it happen that this new identity as an artist were accepted in private and in public life?

This process of reinventing oneself relies on personal experiences often full of pain, often perceived as a chain of defeats and losses. And this process relies on new insights. On more knowledge about oneself and the world as a whole. And on the rediscovery of worlds passed – of people, landscapes, and cultures. And recollections. Not least on the recollection of the vital presence also of Western European culture in his parents' home in Syria, on the melting of different cultural sources in one home, at one place. So Bahram lived up to a classical dilemma: there is hardly any great artist who had forgotten or denied his/her cultural roots and who at the same time had allowed these roots to become an idle niche or even a prison.

It was a long way Bahram had to go, a way he is still going and searching for – in a world where a new dimension of international exchange and a thrilling speed of new forms of a global dialogue of cultures is developing.

The exhibitions

Much of the achievements of an artist may be reflected, for better or for worse, in a listing of his exhibitions. The continuity and variety of exhibitions are an important public proof for an artist and his evolution.

In times of digitalisation and virtualisation, of new media and state of the art communication and information technologies classical exhibitions may even gain momentum as a kind of anti-dote. They slow down the speed of and for our perception we have become used to. They offer a face-to-face experience in a real public space. They enable immediate talks and discourses. They allow for distance and for closeness, for shared emotions and personal retreat in a public room. And they allow each and everyone of us to return again and again, to concentrate on one specific painting or aspect within a variety of others. And they offer a possibility for decisions – artistically and economically.

Bahram's list of exhibitions starts with the year 1983 and sums up to a number of more than 75 solo and collective exhibitions and to an almost incredible continuity – national and international, smaller and bigger events, collective and solo exhibitions, open or with a thematic focus.

Of the recent international exhibitions those at Riyadh in 2006, Dubai, Damascus, Puebla (Mexico), and Paris in 2007 should be mentioned, of the earlier years those in London, Budapest, Graz, New York, and Paris.

It should also be noted that works of Bahram are publicly present not only by continuous exhibitions. A number of his paintings are the property of public institutions and private companies, displaying his works permanently at places where people come and go, day by day.

Avoiding Traps and Seductions: Biography, Markets, and Marketing

It is not just an academic question, if a reader, a listener, or someone looking at a work of art should really know something about an artist's biography. Or whether she or he may even claim a right for this knowledge to satisfy his or her curiosity in a way that the work of art reveals what the biographical knowledge suggests.

Reflecting the relationship of biography and a single work or even the oeuvre of an artist is particularly delicate and intriguing in times where the borderline between the private and the public is fading away, is almost brought to extinction. These are the times when the private is seen as the really promising field to play the marketing and market game with artists, past or present, and with their works. And these are times where short-term success may often depend to a great deal on the exploitation or even invention

of biographical details. Be it gender, ethnicity, colour, or creed.

For Bahram as an artist with his given culturally complex, multilayered, and not invented biography these times are challenging times - on art markets as well as with respect to the exploitation of biographical details and his interest to preserve the biographical identity in its full diversity and its contradictions for his creative process – ever and ever again, from one painting to the next. Indeed an interesting and rewarding challenge for Bahram, intertwined with the delicate task to resist superficial market promises and seductions and concentrate on his authentic artistic development.

How could an artist be able to cope with the challenge not to see single works or his whole oeuvre narrowly reduced to his biography, to a promising public acclaim and to an instant economic success? For Bahram there doesn't seem to be an alternative to a constant, tormenting and liberating struggle for



his internal and external freedom, he relies on as a creative and ambitious artist. This struggle seems to be the very shelter he needs for the creation of his distinctive, authentic works and to protect himself against the exploitation of the surface or of details of his biography, to whatever phase of his life and work these may belong to.

Bahrams oeuvre and the phases of his artistic development

The continuity and internationality of Bahram's exhibitions are depending in content and quality on the continuity and the ambition to develop his work, connected with a search and strive for freedom and honesty in personal life. A glance at the main phases of his artistic development may illustrate this.

The early years, starting in 1989 with his decision to work as a freelance artist and with his explicit decision against other professional careers he could have pursued, e.g. as teacher: his work in this phase, a phase which lasted almost ten years, was strongly dominated by recollections related to his Kurdish-Syrian past and by his existential situation to be an immigrant. His perception of the world around him, living among and together with Germans, made him aware of people with a similar fate and history. He painted marginalized people and was looking for sujets and evidences of sub-cultural solidarity and strength, either defined by ethnicity or by a merging of different ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds, e.g. symbolised in a young punk lady with a head scarf. And he went to the places where homeless people found their "public homes", giving them a place in his work. It proved to be decisive for Bahram's personal and artistic arrival in a new political, social and cultural milieu that he had the opportunity to share a studio with two German artists in these years, artists of different age and artistic standing.

The phase from 1998 to 2001. An important starting

point for this phase was the decision for a new studio. It is the place depicted above. This studio gave Bahram the opportunity to find new ways for his expression on big formats and, at the same time, to throw new looks at his earlier works. So his new working conditions were a result of and a means for his work. A new phase could be started for new expressions and for an examination of those of his earlier phase. Bahram started to re-paint his works, to integrate old paintings into new ones, to preserve traces of his earlier works, dominated by his new aspirations and expressions. Moving rapidly forward, but keeping the essence of his earlier work alive, is a crucial feature of this phase.

The phase from 2001-2003. In these years Bahram created abstract paintings. It was a phase in which his work turned away from faces and human beings, in a way imagining what was going to happen.

The phase starting in 2003/2004. This phase indicates a return to strong figurative expressions, mixed with partially abstract elements. Many of the paintings are dominated by colourful and by black and white contrasts, depicting towers, void landscapes and isolated human beings. Many of these are pictures of separation and loneliness, of open and vulnerable souls, and of the experience of being left alone and without any significance for the person you love. Many of these are an anticipation of what would finally happen – separation. Bahram was left by the person he loved.

The universal language Bahram develops in this phase is a courageous, honest language full of energy – to express, without fears and taboos, deeply felt existential pains and needs, thus reflecting a situation, which can happen again and again to people in love. This phase has not yet come to an end, but changes in the artistic expression are of such a subtle quality that throws a powerful light at the end of this phase and at the beginning of a new one: e.g., among two human beings, clearly separated from each other, the woman emerges as a strong, self-reliant and no longer vulnerable figure, in a black suit, bigger than the man - both looking

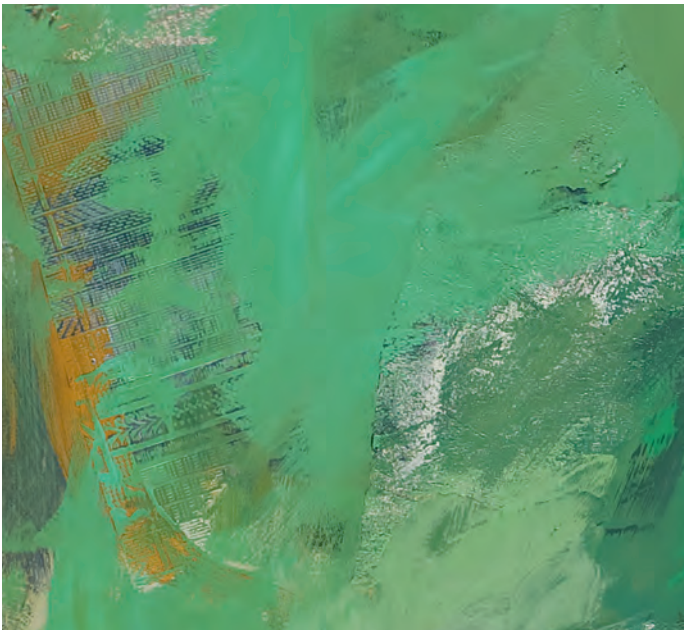
separately but reconciled for horizons they were not able to see before, neither separately nor together.

A new phase emerging in 2007/2008. To see a new phase develop, parallel to the end of the preceding one, is a fascinating experience and in my view strongly connected with the dimension the search for horizons will gain in Bahram's future work. To discover horizons, to offer horizons in works of art is a sign of hope and can stimulate visions. Among Bahram's latest works (e.g. Antenna to Heaven, 2008) we find landscapes, disturbing and powerful, with an incredible expression of darkness and light, with an uproar of energy hinting at horizons and perspectives that lead you beyond the miseries of life and the often too miserable state of human kind as a whole – horizons and perspectives we can detect as co-creators of Bahram's paintings.

A look at Bahram's ways to work and at specific artistic aspects of his oeuvre

Working process and techniques

The techniques an artist applies are mirroring his approaches to his work as a whole and to every single painting.



Bahram's expressionist art depends on his spontaneity and on his craftsmanship, applying techniques only in accordance with the dialogue he

is able to initiate with the emerging work of art.



His great canvasses, well prepared by himself, are put on the floor, colours are dispersed without any regard concerning composition, layout or the structure of space. Acryl colours serve as the basis for a first intuitive approach, followed by sand, ashes and pigment powder to give spice to the canvas. Charcoal drawing and brush elements are added. Parts of the canvas stay untouched. These "raw" parts become their signature in the continuation of the working process and they stimulate Bahram's intuition, when he is surrounding the canvas. He continues the process of his work at those points of his painting, which capture and attract him

most. This is a crucial phase for the development of a dialogue between the artist and his emerging work of art, between him and the canvas. Bahram starts to read his creation, to discover new ways, to see windows thrown open for a spontaneous dialogue. This is Bahram's way to overcome his horror vacui, his fear and anxiety when he faces a void canvas.

In a next phase in the working process Bahram fixes the canvas to the wall, again and again, in varying positions, ready to discover something new and elaborating on it. This is the moment, after roughly two-thirds of the working process, when Bahram is able to see in which way the painting will develop – and where he will develop. His trust in his unspoiled expressiveness, his enduring power and strength to give room to spontaneity and coincidences, and his sound, elaborated and disciplined craftsmanship – all this contributes to the creation of Bahram's unique works of art.

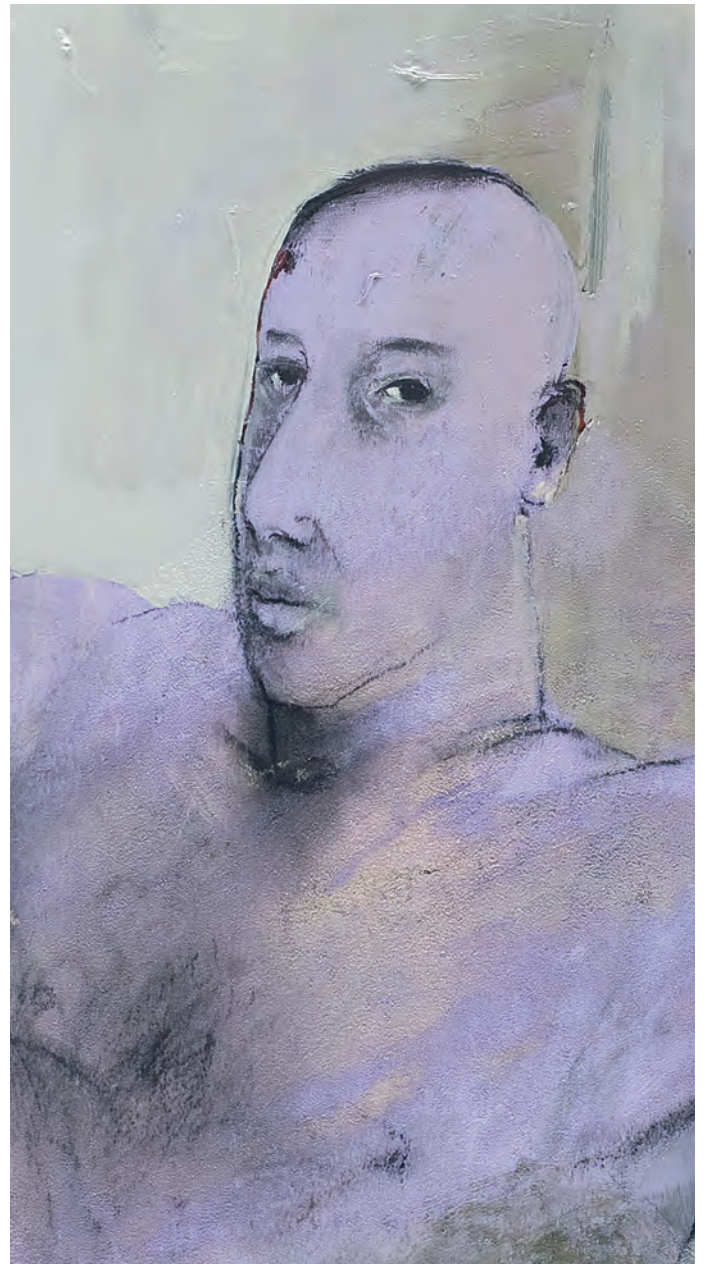
And only a small part of what is characteristic for his working techniques and process can be adequately put into words – at least by me.

Some specific aspects may illustrate Bahram's ingenuity to invent his own artistic cosmos and the ways we are invited to participate.

Eyes and Faces

Looking at eyes is confronting oneself by a confrontation with some one else - in life as in the arts. What happens with me, when I look at eyes depicted by Bahram? Are they judging what they see – me? Where and what are they looking at? What stories do they tell to me? What stories should I tell them? Were they really painted or were they on the canvas before the picture emerged? Or did they find their place in the "raw" space of the canvas at the moment when Bahram started his dialogue with the emerging painting? Isn't there a pensive expression and impression in the way these eyes convey to me something of the inescapable riddle of life? The

eyes we are confronted with in Bahram's art seem to contain much of the riddle of his paintings, because they allow for a unique experience: to slow down and to be stimulated, to escape the dynamics of time and to preserve time, to grasp the importance of moments of revelation, and to experience the simultaneity of the passing of time and of recollection.



Being open for an eye-to-eye, for a face-to-face situation among human beings means to be able to create a genuine public sphere for dialogue and to overcome isolation, loneliness and claustrophobic fears. The eyes depicted by Bahram may remind us, in a variety of forms, of this capacity human beings have.

Figures, Bodies, and Space

Another and quite different way Bahram's pictures are confronting us with ourselves is by making his figures indiscernible, by letting groups of people appear as outlined shadows and by completely concentrating our attention on the intensity of the expression. To achieve this, Bahram has expanded his formats and created a space structure, which enables him to give expression to a central theme: that the human being as the centre of his art is confronted with the danger of oblivion or even extinction – massive, expressive bodies and figures "lost in space". And at the same time we are invited to share his unconquered pleasure in being existent, his absorbing intensity and his aspiring endurance manifested in his bodies and figures. Space, bodies and figures also seem to pose questions: Where to find rest and shelter? Where is our visionary strength in all the ups and downs of the world and of our lives? How can we reach a new discernible profile and how can outlined, anonymised groups of people regain a real, interpersonal coherence?

Landscapes

Through all phases of his work Bahram has been dedicated to the painting of landscapes. Landscapes are objects of personal recollections and they are a metaphor for a continuity of changes induced by the forces of nature and by men. The way they are depicted by Bahram, landscapes symbolise losses and hopes at the same time. Vanishing villages, a hardly discernible church tower, dark rivers or mountains and colourful areas full of hope, though without people or houses, not even in outlines, show again his mastery of creating a space for contradictory artistic expressions and for a deep longing for hope and reconciliation. The landscapes emerging in his latest works have a stronger visionary quality.

Their stimulating colours and overwhelming figurative elements give room for a discovery of horizons.



Artistic contexts of Bahram's Work

When I look at Bahram's works I see fascinating, disturbing and elevating paintings – and I don't see influences.

Nothing what I know from discussions with Bahram on artists of high esteem and importance for him can distract me from the spell of his works. And no knowledge about the classical period of German expressionist artists and their paintings I have adored in Munich or Amsterdam or elsewhere makes me look for similarities or analogies in the face of Bahram's works.

His work stands for a style of his own, for a new expressionism, and this is exactly what makes him part of a long, renowned tradition, enriched and

brought forward by artists like him, in a different age and with his specific cultural roots and influences, both oriental and western.

His own standing and achievement, the rich and promising perspectives of his work and his modesty can explain why Bahram does not hesitate to express his full esteem and adoration for a number of artists, past and present.

Among these artists and groups, which Bahram adorns and respects most for their artistic achievements, for their strength and intensity, for their honesty and courage to do what they felt obliged to do, often risking their lives, are expressionist artists like Beckmann, Pechstein, Kirchner, Mueller, or Nolde, and the Blaue Reiter and Brücke groups. Among artists of a later generation Bahram expresses high esteem for Baselitz, Kiefer, Richter, Penck, Lüppertz, and Tadeuzsch.

History, including the history of the Fine Arts, is going to be perceived and written differently in times of a radically globalising world. Transcultural and multicultural aspects have reached a new

importance and are going to establish new standards and perspectives, no longer dominated by single nations or by once hegemonic regions of the world. Bahram's life and work is, humbly speaking, a small but fascinating facet in these processes and should be reflected as such – across nations and civilisations, with authentic, genuine personal standards and expressions, nurtured by resources from different cultures, and as part of a worldwide collective humane artistic tradition and heritage.

Dr. Dieter M. Keiner





Untitled | 2019 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 200 cm x 160 cm



Untitled | 2018 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 145 x125 cm



Untitled | 2014 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 120 x 100 cm



Untitled | 2019 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 200 cm x 160 cm



Untitled | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Untitled | 2018 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 160 cm x 200 cm



Untitled | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Untitled | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Untitled | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Untitled | 2010 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 x 200 cm



Untitled | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 x 120 cm



Two Men | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 200 cm x 160 cm



Torso | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x120 cm



Untitled | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 200 cm x 160 cm



Untitled | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Squatting | 2022 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



the three | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Untitled | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 200 cm x 160 cm





Untitled | 2021 | Diptychon, Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm
(140 cm x 240 cm)



Studio scene | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 150 cm x 200 cm



Lady sitting | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Couple | 2008 | mixed media/Canvas | 200 cm x 160 cm



Untitled | 2017 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 190 x140 cm



Die Drei | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Couple | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Couple | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Torso | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Kopf | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Die Drei | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 120 cm x 140 cm



Head | 2022 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Duumvirat | 2019 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 200 x 160 cm



Untitled | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 160 cm x 200 cm



Timeless | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Untitled | 2015 | mm/canvas | 210x150 cm



Untitled | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 140 cm x 120 cm



Untitled | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 200 cm x 150 cm



Schramm c



Untitled | 2021 | Diptychon, Mixed Media/Canvas | 200 cm x 170 cm | 200 cm x 150 cm
(200 cm x 320 cm)



Untitled | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 200 cm x 150 cm



Untitled | 2020 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 200 cm x 150 cm



Studio Scene | 2021 | Mixed Media/Canvas | 200 cm x 150 cm

Helplessness and happiness are so close

The haunting imagery of the painter Bahram Hajou

They are expressive and can verge on the painful. Bahram Hajou's paintings challenge the observer. It is not possible to merely find them aesthetically pleasing or superficially beautiful and then, after a hurried glance, carry on as usual. In the almost 40 years of his work to date, the painter has cultivated his own style, which is immediately recognisable and cannot be compared to any role models.

Bahram Hajou persistently refuses to participate in seductive fashions and banal trends, ignores commercial temptations and popular ambitions. For him as an artist pleasing is not a category. He is not willing to curry favour, he wants to remain true to himself, to continue to pursue his themes and to develop his techniques.

The artist is a traveller between worlds; he is someone who has retained his subtle perception and is able to use the medium of his sensitivity creatively. His works are interesting and exciting for the art market precisely because they were not created for it. Bahram Hajou is unique - he is a Titan.

His pictorial language is as intense as his motifs are personal. They almost always allow deep insights into the artist's rich inner life. They are open, authentic and intimate, because they express pain and horror, aggression and violence, lust and desire so immediately and directly. In many of his paintings, helplessness and happiness lie so close together.

In the first years after studying at the Kunstakademie Muenster, Bahram Hajou often painted purely abstractly. Dark and powerful colours dominate his works, his painting style is impulsive and expressive. He relies entirely on his inspiration and waits to see what appears on the canvas. Even at this time he knows how to apply black with a determined gesture and thus set unmistakable accents.

His first works are reminiscent of the joy of experimentation and the spirit of discovery of Informel.

However, the stronger and more often he works figuratively, the more his characteristic imagery unfolds and the more his focus is directed towards feelings, interpersonal relationships and conflicts. Dark sections of landscape and confusing cityscapes emerge, which are anything but picturesque, idyllic and tranquil. They express wild, furious and impetuous emotions. The paintings are charged like a potentiometer. After this phase his inimitable pictures of relationships emerge, which could be ingenious translations and records of 'systemic constellations'.

In these paintings, body postures and positions bear witness to the inability to talk to each other, to trust and to love each other. You can feel how arduous it is for those depicted to communicate with and understand each other. One of them gives the other the cold shoulder, bends over crushed or overwhelmed, sinks into loneliness and melancholy.

The individuals are usually shown naked and bare, vulnerable and defenceless. The truth expressed in these works of art is unadorned and unvarnished. It is always individual and specific, but at the same time universal and timeless. People struggle desperately for a successful life, for harmony and love. They fail because of their inadequacies, their cravings for power and their selfishness. This work is nourished by a humane hope which opposes an existentialist or even nihilistic contemplation of life.

In haunting self-portraits he makes himself the subject, exploring in his own gaze, physiognomy and gestures his personality, identity, origin and history. Later, protagonists with precisely his likeness, profile and striking face will appear in many of his paintings.

In particular where his paintings deal with tensions and conflicts, power and impotence, they are like an examination of conscience. As an alter ego they seem to want to question the artist again and again about the extent to which he himself is entangled,

guilty or has become an accomplice by not taking action.

In his paintings, Bahram Hajou deals with violence and its many faces. Open and covert violence among people, the oppression and rape of women, the struggle of the sexes in relationships and time and time again the violence that people inflict on each other.

His eloquent paintings are subtle and profound. Their message is usually encrypted and often hidden under several layers of paint. Bahram Hajou is a master of overpainting. The past is painted over in white, as if in this way it could become a distant memory.

Many of his paintings are lamentations - painful and angry at the same time, sincere and full of compassion. The scenes are sketched on the canvas with a charcoal pencil. For such themes, the artist prefers large formats. The paint is applied impulsively to the rough, untreated canvas. Finally, contours are gone over again with charcoal or pitch black tar. These paintings are built up in layers. They are the result of a process, whose course can be followed. At the same time, these works are of an overwhelming aesthetic. Bahram Hajou paints against forgetting and the suppression of memories. The observer is required to work through the interrelationships layer by layer like a detective. Some of the evidence that would allow an interpretation is well hidden.

All paints have their own character. 'I use my own paints,' says the artist. 'Acrylic paints are mixed with powder pigments. Each colour has its own meaning to me.' By adding white, the luminosity of the pure colours is broken. They look like casein paints. The result is a palette of individual tones and shades. Sometimes applied thinly and translucently as if he were painting with watercolours, sometimes thick and paste-like as if he wanted to apply a stamp to his painting.

Time and time again Bahram Hajou uses the colours white, light blue, yellow and orange. These preferred colours are his trademark. With tar he

sets accents. They act as exclamation marks that immediately catch the viewer's eye and direct his or her gaze.

Bahram Hajou's path to painting was a winding one. From 1976 onwards he studied Sports and Art at the Pädagogische Hochschule Muenster. After a brief period of teaching at a comprehensive school, he devoted himself to fine arts from the early 1990s onwards. He studied at the Kunstakademie Muenster and after graduating became a master student of Prof Norbert Tadeusz.

Bahram Hajou sees himself as a citizen of the world. He is at home in France, Jordan and Lebanon. He exhibits in Poland, Hungary, the USA and many other countries of the world. The language of his paintings is understood all over the world and in every culture. As an artist, Bahram Hajou is like a seismograph; he perceives subliminal tensions, conflicts and human feelings and with his untamed creativity transforms them into great art.

Dr Jörg Bockow
2 January 2018

Sketches



Sketch_01 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_04 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_06 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_07 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_10 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_12 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_13 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_15 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_17 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_18 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_19 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_20 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm



Sketch_21 | 2022 | acrylic on sketch paper | 59,4 cm x 42 cm

Bahram Hajou

born in 1952

1978-84 studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Münster
lives and works in Münster

Exhibitions

- 1983 Museum Bochum (Germany)
1984 Kulturzentrum Arnheim (The Netherlands)
1985 Pfarrzentrum Münster (Germany)
1986 Schloss Villa Winkel, Ochtrup (Germany)
1986 Design Zander, Emsdetten (Germany)
1987 Museum Bochum (Haus Kemnade) (Germany)
1990 1. Price,
 Quadrat (Josef Albers-Museum),
 Bottrop (Germany)
1990 Le Centre Culturel Regional Wallon,
 Liège (Belgium)
1991 Stadttheater, Münster (Germany)
1991 Galerie AAI, Wien (Austria)
1992 Künstler Haus, Graz (Austria)
1993 World Circuit Arts, Kufa Gallery, London (U.K.)
1993 Galerie Artforum, Wien (Austria)
1993 Galerie Frankenstein, Berlin,(Germany)
1993 Helderse Kunstliga, Den Helder (the Netherlands)
1993 Wohnpark am Tibusplatz, Münster (Germany)
1994 VHS Münster (Germany)
1994 Kunsthaus Pinx, Bochum (Germany)
1994 Internationale Kunstausstellung,
 Budapest (Hungary)
1995 Galerie Artopia, New York (USA)
1996 Kunsthalle der Dominikaner Kirche,
 Osnabrück (Germany)
1997 Hessische Landesvertretung, Bonn (Germany)
1997 Stadttheater Brandenburg (Germany)
1997 Arco Budapest (Hungary)
1997 Breitbach Gallery, Unna (Germany)
1998 AKAD art, Stuttgart (Germany)
1998 Art Frankfurt/Main (Germany)
1998 Art Düsseldorf (Germany)
1999 Gy Crété Galerie, Paris (France)
1999 Regierungspräsident, Münster (Germany)
1999 Rathaus, Wiesbaden (Germany)
1999 Galerie König, Münster (Germany)
1999 Kultur und Skulpturenpark, Katzow (Germany)
1999 Galerie Kunsthaus Pinx, Bochum (Germany)
1999 Kreishaus Gütersloh (Germany)
1999 Zentrum Asept in Königslutter (Germany)
2000 Kunst Uta Dingethal, Merklingsen (Germany)
2000 Galerie König, Münster (Germany)
2000 Kunstwerkstatt, Cloppenburg (Germany)
2000 Foyer Rathaus, Wiesbaden (Germany)
2000 Foyer Bezirksregierung Münster (Germany)
2000 Skulpturenpark Katzow (Germany)
2001 Kunsthalle Ahlen (Germany)
2001 OFD Münster (Germany)
2001 Neue Galerie im Artforum, Offenburg (Germany)
2001 Kunsthalle Offenburg (Germany)
2001 Kulturspeicher Oldenburg (Germany)
2002 Staatliches Museum Wien (Austria)
2002 Galerie Kunstfabrik, Düsseldorf (Germany)
2002 Wissenschaftspark Gelsenkirchen (Germany)
2002 BRH Bonn (Germany)
2003 Galerie Blau , Palma d. Mallorca (Spain)
2003 Museum Krakau (Poland)
2003 Kulturspeicher Oldenburg (Germany)
2004 Stadthalle Kamen (Germany)
2004 Kunstraume Norbert Bauer,
 Velbert-Langenberg (Germany)
2004 Kunstmesse Osnabrück - Impulse (Germany)
2004 Haus der Kamener Stadt Geschichte,
 Kamen (Germany)
2005 Galerie Kreuziger, Worbswede (Germany)
2005 Galerie Zeugma, Cologne, (Germany)
2005 Atassi Gallery, Dubai (U.A.E.)
2006 Kunsthalle Faust, Hannover (Germany)
2006 Galerie Holbein, Hannover (Germany)
2006 Galerie Carolyn Heinz, Hamburg (Germany)
2006 Kunstkompakt 4, Gladbeck (Germany)
2007 Galerie Zeugma, Cologne (Germany)
2007 Galerie Green Art, Dubai (U.A.E.)
2007 Galerie Michael Nolte, Münster (Germany)
2007 art club kunstverein,
 Burgwedel/Isernhagen (Germany)
2008 Hewar Art Gallery - Total Arts Gallery in the
 courtyard - Dubai (U.A.E.)
2008 Kunstkompakt 5, Gladbeck (Germany)
2008 Galerie Zeugma, Cologne (Germany)
2008 Kunsthandel Antonia v. Fraunberg,
 Düsseldorf (Germany)
2008 1. Price
 Mediterrane Artbiennale in Trogir,
 Croatia (Symposion)
2009 Artfestival Amman, Jordan (Symposion)
2009 Artfestival Patra, Greece (Symposion)
2009 Karim Gallery, Amman (Jordan)

- 2010 Aida Cherfan Fine Art Gallery, Beirut (Libanon)
- 2010 Galerie Kula, Museum Split (Kroatien)
- 2012 Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum
Bratislava (Tzechoslowakia)
- 2013 Galerie Ludwig Trossaert, Antwerpen (Belgium)
- 2013 Galerie GNG Gilles Naudine, Paris (France)
- 2013 White Box Gallery, New York (USA)
- 2014 Art House Wien, (Austria)
- 2014 Henry Matisse Price,
Château Musée Grimaldi, (France)
- 2014 Galerie Ludwig Trossaert, Antwerp (Belgium)
- 2015 Galerie GNG, Paris, (France)
- 2015 Kunsthaus Langenberg e.V. Alldie Kunst
(Norbrt Bauer), Düsseldorf (Germany)
- 2015 Office Kleine Galerie (Art against violence)
Wien (Austria)
- 2015 Art Élysées, Petit Palace Paris (France)
- 2015 Art Fair, Istanbul contemporary, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2016 Foyer des Stadttheaters Münster/Germany
- 2016 Galerie Karsi Sanat'ta, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2016 Galerie Ludwig Trossaert, Antwerpen (Belgium)
- 2016 Sollefteå konst förening, (Sweden)
- 2016 Überkopf Kunstbegegnen, Münster (Germany)
- 2016 Palagio Contemporaneo, (Italy)
- 2017 Kulturzentrum in Manama (Bahrain)
- 2017 Art Karlsruhe (Germany)
- 2017 Karim Gallery, Amman (Jordan)
- 2017 Artfair Beirut (Liban)
- 2018 Artfair Beirut (Liban)
- 2018 The Fire Station, Doha, (Qatar)
- 2019 GNG, Paris (France)
- 2019 International contemporary art fair, Paris (France)
- 2019 Im Dialog, Akademie Franz Hitze Haus,
Münster (Germany)
- 2019 Artfair Beirut, (Karim Gallery), Beirut (Liban)
- 2019 Gallery Bab, National Cultural Centre Cairo Opera
House, (Egypt)
- 2020 Art Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe (Germany)
- 2020 Galeria Pryzmat, Krakow (Poland)
- 2021 Artfair Kairo, Kairo, Ägypten





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