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# Rushdi Anwar

HIS KURDISH UPBRINGING AND EXPOSURE TO THE PERILS OF WAR HAS HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT ON THE ART OF RUSHDI ANWAR.

**I HAVE BEEN** seeking freedom all my life; suffering the reality of non-fulfilment and the denial of my existence for many years. I was too young when my home town was attacked by chemical weapons that had red apples' fragrance. For this reason I was determined to get out and look for other boundaries, to seek freedom.

It has been a painful journey. I had to leave my occupied homeland, with trembling steps through minefields towards the impossible, unknown tomorrow. In Australia as a free human being I love my exile – it is my home and my home is my exile.

I was born in Halabja, Kurdistan, and I immigrated to Australia in 1998. I lost 14 of my relatives when Iraqi forces attacked my home town of Halabja on March 16, 1988, with chemical weapons. More than 5,000 people died as an immediate result of the chemical attack and it is estimated that a further 7,000 people were injured or

suffered long term illness. The victims were Kurdish civilians.

This chemical massacre clearly affected my art practice – my early expressionistic work as well as my recent works. Also, other tragedies affected and formed my works, such as the Kurdish Genocide in 1988. Iraqi military operations known as al-Anfal (the Spoils) were part of a campaign of genocide. About 182,000 people were killed, most of them alive in mass graves.

I grew up in a place that was constantly a space of violence, of conflict. When I was a child it was Kurdish freedom fighters with the Iraqi government, then at the same time it was the Iraqi-Iranian war, then the Iraqi army against Kurdish freedom fighters, then the Halabja attack and Al-Anfal, and then the first Gulf War. Turmoil was just constant.

The reason for leaving that country was uncertainty and instability, socially and

politically. Life was just shaky, and you lived your life day to day, and everything was unsettled. You didn't know what was going to come tomorrow, in all aspects of life. It hurt to leave but I had no choice.

My work recognises the physical and theoretical role of materiality which investigates a diversity of media and forms – which materials best signify a range of readings relating to change, social and political unrest, being, beauty and renewal. Although informed by my Kurdish heritage, I aim to extend my understanding of other societies and places experiencing similar disruptions and renewal in order to reflect on the human condition. My work's objective is to highlight the human condition, how when under difficult situations humanity seeks hope, renewal, light. My works address conception associations within spaces of violence. I work with impermanent materials to address the issues of human conditions in conflict zones and post-war turmoil.

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My work signifies ideas of transformation – when objects become damaged or decayed, beauty arises.



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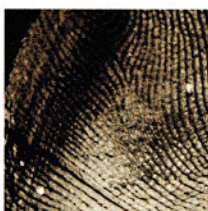
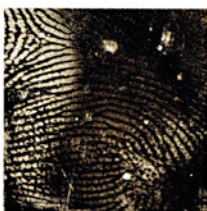
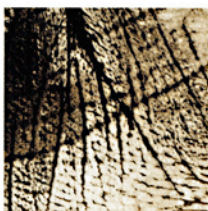
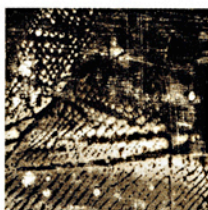
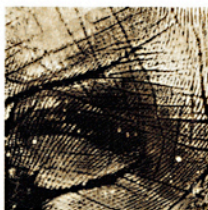
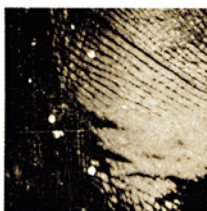
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I want to explore what we share rather than what divides us. For example, I utilise nails, rust, smoke, ash, charcoal, wood, earth, ink, paper, plaster, books, photographs and common domestic objects to highlight spaces of violence and trauma, and also identity.

The image of smoke is often a part of my work, whether photographed or painted or etched. It references the dense haze and lack of clarity that has come to symbolise the [Iraqi] regime, as well as the turbulent history that has characterised Kurdistan in recent times. The application of smoke also creates darkness both physically and metaphorically, while the use of sandpaper references acts of erasure and abolishment. The etched horizontal lines also echo the creases and scratches of age that are characteristic of old photographs; highly significant items in a place that has witnessed the destruction of many memories. I use a variety of diverse outputs: sculpture, found objects, painting, photography, printmaking and installation.

My work signifies ideas of transformation – when objects become damaged or decayed, beauty arises. Hopefully my works enable a contemplation of the past, the present, and the relationships between the two. Against this background they are primarily concerned with form and surface and how materials interact to become objects. ■

[www.rushdi.com.au](http://www.rushdi.com.au)



08

- 01 Scars of land, 2012, rust and charcoal on Thai Saa paper handmade by artist, 240 x 180cm
- 02 Darkness in silent space (installation view), 2013, dimensions variable
- 03 'Irahi' Expel (installation view), 2013, burned chair and black pigment, dimensions variable
- 04 Hanging issues (installation view), 2012, photo print imbued in handmade Saa paper, 60 panels each 82 x 60cm
- 05 Chalks and black board (installation view), 2013, Casula Powerhouse Art Centre, chalks, white powder, wooden board, dimensions variable
- 06 Remapping a Square of Rusty Nails (installation detail), 2013, rusty nails, block of wood and table, dimensions variable
- 07 Untitled (installation view), 2012, rusty nails, dimensions variable
- 08 Ambiguous Identity (installation view), 2013, digital print, mixed media, dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist