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## Ghada Jamal: the Painter of the Lebanese's Suffering and Hope

by Margaux Seigneur

[in March 2022](#) • [Art](#) • [Art on 56th](#) • [Beirut](#) • [Belonging](#) • [Civil War](#) • [economic crisis](#) • [English](#) • [Ghada Jamal](#) • [Lebanon](#) • [painting](#) • [The Second Voice](#) • [War](#)**Margaux Seigneur**

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Margaux obtained her bachelor's degree in political sciences from the European School of Political and Social Sciences in Lille. She is now working as a journalist for different organisations such as UNICEF, Rights of Equality, Agenda Culturel etc. After living in Turkey and in the UK she is currently travelling in the Middle East to investigate women's rights. Her area of expertise revolves around the place of women in politics, gender equality, refugees' rights, freedom of expression as well as Turkish's politics.



Ghada Jamal and [TNGO Investigative Journalism Director Margaux Seigneur](#) during the interview in the gallery "Art on 56th".

**Source:** Noha Wadi Moharram

*The interview is part of the TNGO Investigative Journalism **Women's Stories** column, an endeavor to highlight the stories of outstanding women in the areas covered by our journalists. In this article, the Director of TNGO's Division of Investigative Journalism "The Second Voice," Margaux Seigneur, talks with Lebanese artist Ghada Jamal during her exhibition "Belonging for 1990-2022" depicting the suffering and hopes of Lebanon.*

In the middle of the frenetic Gemmayzeh Street, near the port of Beirut, stands a majestic artistic temple; [Art on 56th](#). Wrapped in a definite elegance, the charm of this building lets the hope of Lebanese art shine through. The artists wander, the paintings and drawings parade on the white walls, as for the pedestrians; they stop to contemplate the show.

Like an archipelago containing a comforting tenderness, Art on 56th is a harrage of Beirut's magnificent chaos, promising a spotlight on Middle Eastern artists. We owe this gracious tribute to contemporary art to its founder [Noha Wadi Moharram](#).

It is naturally in this art gallery that I am meeting with Ghada Jamal. Returned from the United States on the occasion of her exhibition; "Belonging for 1990-2022," her comeback is extremely symbolic. While [the explosion of the port](#) caused the devastation of a large part of the city of Beirut, it is now the whole country that is bruised by an unprecedented economic crisis. For Ghada, who is used to depict the suffering of her native country, the emotion is palpable.

# The Hand which Draws the Flowing Blood



The gallery by night (source: artong6th.com)

Indeed, the artist paints what she knows, what she has always lived in sum. The desolation of the civil war, the suffering of wars, the mourning of a nation after the Qana massacre, the bloody yet optimistic emotion of the Arab spring, the national wound of the port explosion, etc. Her art aims to bring to light the trauma of an entire community in its most bruised and tragic periods.

Witnessing a bloody relentlessness against her country, I wonder how the dramatic events, marking out Ghada's existence, have impacted her conception of art in general.

“ I started painting when I was 26, 27 years old. By that time, my country was only at war. It was so strong, so powerful and it impacted so many people that it was impossible to simply describe it. War was becoming my life. I was hearing it, living with it and so I had to cope with it. There was no other possible alternative. ”

Ghada pauses to reflect. She suddenly starts again with a mischievous smile;

“ I am not good with words. So I had to find a new language. I needed my work to be understood by everyone. I wanted more than just describing. My work had to be felt by the communities who were touched by the conflict. Painting and drawing certainly were and still are a way to find a balance between war and humanity. It answers the question of who we are, as humans, in the middle of the devastation caused by conflicts. ”

“ Art could tell something that words couldn't. I wanted to paint aggressiveness and so I did. ”

# The Ambitious Project of Depicting the Suffering



WAR SERIES/ Oil on paper/ 2006 by Ghada Juma. (Source: ghadajuma.com)

While Ghada does not cease to paint the gaping wound of humanity, how not to question the difficulty of this task. How to consider the distance between the artist, the human, and the Lebanese whose existence has been marked by death?

"I do very well under pressure." She answers while laughing:

"I need to be completely overwhelmed and pressured by a flood of emotion to paint and to draw."

“*While war kills people, it also kills the very essence of humanity.*”

Facing the denial of mankind, Ghada had to stand up not only to protest but also to defend her existence as a human being. When there was only death around, bombs falling from the sky and crashing down everything, her paintbrushes were the only way to draw what survived.

"During a hard time, when you are becoming nothing, you have to validate yourself so that you can exist. It is like a therapy that would play the role of validation; validation for your existence but also validation for your feelings. Because I only experienced suffering, I had to change the balance in order to cope with my existence."

“*This is a basic technique of survival which led me to claim that I belong here!*”

## A Future Deprived of its Hope?

In your drawing series "[Obscured fear](#)", Ghada puts a light on the common fear among the population due to the civil war. With all the recent dramatic events which tragically impacted Lebanon, the belief in a brighter future still lingers.

" Well, I believe that the civil war is still here in the shadow, in the memories, in the houses, etc. We will never forget it. And so yes, I believe people are still afraid and will always be. The spirit of the civil war is still in the head of every single inhabitant.



Right Behind You (33cm X 27cm) by Ghada Jamal. (Source: [ghadajamal.com](http://ghadajamal.com))

“*The idea that everything can collapse is latent in the atmosphere and it weighs on the air we breathe. It is like civil war is negotiable. It is on the table like a flashing neon above our head.*”

“*So yes, I believe in this common fear which is not only a personal terror. You can overcome your personal terror but the macro fear is latent and can obstruct everything else. But I am not a pessimist person! Yes, you have to believe in a bright future for the new generation. Personally, I put my hope in art. Art and landscapes will remain. They will teach people how to remember. It gives the means to contemplate your heritage and confront yourself with the present and the future. There will still be pieces of art that will shed light on what happened. And so it will never be forgotten.*”

# Engaging the Dialogue with Beirut



The series, "Al-Mawakh" (2014) (acrylic on canvas) (artwork by Ghada Jamal (Beirut/Art on 30th))

Ghada wrote: **"I paint to repaint over again until I find refuge between its traces and remains"**. When she painted Beirut after the blast, was it an attempt to pay tribute to the beauty of the chaos or an attempt to re-build the ruins?

*"The reality is that what happened was an unsaid, undeclared, and unreported war. No one knew what was happening and all the sudden we were under attack. In a split second, everything got destroyed and people were marked for eternity.*

*Buildings became debris, destruction, and detritus. People were broken, injured, and traumatized. The ruins became part of our identity and will remain as such. So I wanted not only to pay tribute to the beauty of the ruins, the beauty of the spaces, and of the places but also re-build them to honor the people who rebuilt everything. I wanted full color!*

*This series was all about the beauty of the people who have suffered so much but survived it. This is what Lebanese people are; strong and resilient. Those paintings were about the beauty of the people of Beirut who build again and again despite all. This is their home, where they belong, where I belong. Beirut is Beirut only thanks to the will of its people. Such injured people still standing up."*

## The Timeless Narrative of Hope

Through her art and her determination to *overstep* the trauma with color, Ghada Jamal provides people with hope. Not only does she have an unprecedented talent to depict hope but also she transmits it to make sure that it survives time. Hope itself transcends the places and builds a connection with the past, the present, and the future. That might explain the ultimate desire of Ghada to draw and paint landscape; a timeless narrative in which hope will remain engraved.

Ghada Jamal's art vouches for a long-suffering community that holds out hope and determination for its future. With acrylic, oil, charcoal, ink, and gouache, Ghada is depicting humanity surviving, remaining, and enduring despite all odds. Every single one of her pieces addresses the response to destruction and devastation. Therefore, Ghada puts herself as the reminder of the very right of the people of Lebanon and the people of the world; living with dignity. Carried by the communities of people who live and re-invent themselves, Ghada participates to transmit the essence of existence.

The constant perseverance of hope is what makes **Lebanon** such a proud country and is what makes Ghada's art reflect so well this spontaneous surge of humanity. Despite the apparent destruction of a country, people are existing, resisting and so they are belonging.