

## Introduction by Bernard Hoffert

One of the most exciting aspects of the recent creative output from the Middle East is the celebration of traditional culture. The international dominance of Western art has made it difficult for alternate cultural perspectives to find a voice. Indian art managed to break through with a celebration of traditional culture and imagery in successive Venice Biennales and the same is now happening with the Arab world. References to a culture which dates from the foundation point of civilisation is emerging to inform, to excite and to stimulate international debate through art. Zahidah Zeytoun Millie is in the midst of this discussion.

Her images draw on the historic traditions of her Syrian past, the mythology and symbolism of foundation myths and the legends of Astarte Syria, the great fertility and mother goddess. She explores the philosophy of the mystic poets, Rumi and Omar al Khayyam, whose *rubaiyat* introduced mystic poetry to the West when translated into English in the nineteenth century. This content is expressed in the rich vivid colours evocative of the intense light of her homeland, but particularly in her use of ceramics, which places her art directly in the vast historic flow of clay production, which dates back to time itself.

Using the evocative and sensuous shapes of hand built pots, with their integral link to the land, she builds a bridge between past and present, tradition and modernity, historic and contemporary image making; she expresses the past in a way that is relevant for today. In the end, all art is an expression of the artist, a portrait of the maker, her goals, intentions, feelings and ideas and it is this aspect of these works which marks them as unique. Not only are they constructed from the touch of a particular individual, shaping and marking the medium to express her ideals, but they capture her own image in the colours, the lines, the shapes, the forms which express her ideas and emotions. These works, both paintings and pots, are a celebration of creative art, echoing the past in the present through the identity of an individual artist, and as such they make a unique contribution to contemporary art.

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