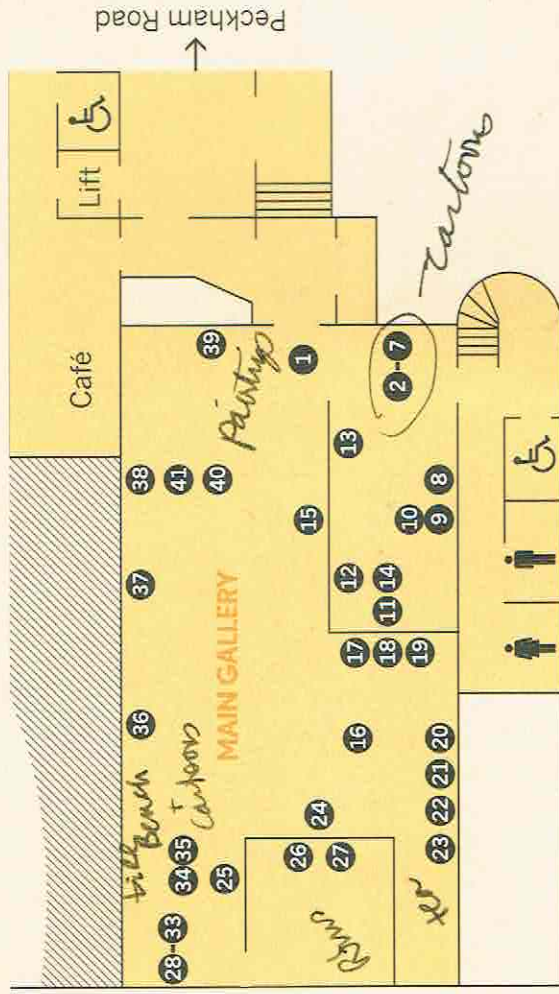
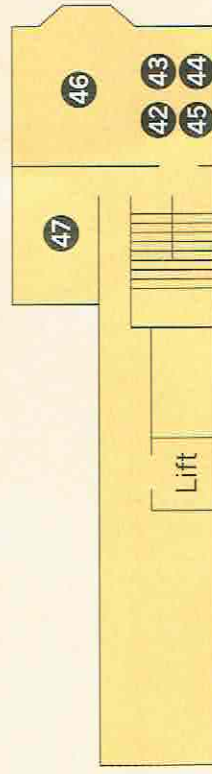


GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR GALLERIES



SLG

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WELCOME TO IRAQ

15 MAR - 1 JUN 2014
MAIN & FIRST FLOOR GALLERIES
ADMISSION FREE
EXHIBITION GUIDE

The South London Gallery presents a restaging of the group exhibition, *Welcome to Iraq*, originally shown as part of the National Pavilion of Iraq in the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. Commissioned by Ruya Foundation for Contemporary Culture in Iraq (RUYA), established in 2012 to promote culture in Iraq, the exhibition was curated by Jonathan Watkins, Director of Ikon Gallery, Birmingham.

Welcome to Iraq brings together works in a variety of media by eleven contemporary artists, almost all of whom live and work in Iraq. Works were selected to highlight the depth and breadth of artistic practice in Iraq, but also to expose a shared emphasis on the nature of everyday life there, exemplified by a determination 'to make do and get by' and an inventiveness borne out of necessity in extraordinary historical circumstances.

Following extensive studio visits across Iraq, curator Jonathan Watkins selected clusters of works by photographer and filmmaker Jamal Penjweny, political cartoonist Abdul Raheem Yassir, painters Bassim Al-Shaker, Cheeman Ismaeel and Kadhim Nwiri, and sculptors Furat al Jamil, WAMI (Yaseen Wami, Hashim Taeef) and Akeel Khreef. Film and video is also included, with recent works by Ali Samiaa and Hareth Alhomaam both looking in different ways at communication between the sexes.

Visitors are invited to relax and reflect on the exhibition in the comfort of recreated domestic spaces which echo the references to everyday life which appear in many of the works. Sofas covered with traditional Iraqi throws and coffee tables laden with books and comics about Iraq, presented in collaboration with the Iraq National Library and Archive, can be enjoyed along with refreshments of Iraqi tea and biscuits.

Abdul Raheem Yassir (b. 1951, Qadisiyah, Iraq) is widely regarded as one of the best political cartoonists now working in Iraq, responding to the absurdity of his circumstances with ironic humour and poignancy. His style is smart in the way it suggests innocence, knowing in its directness. In one of his line drawings, he takes on Iraq's inexperienced police force. Officers are shown diligently frisking a man, apparently unaware of the huge revolver in his hand.

Female artist **Furat al Jamil** (b. 1965, Mainz, Germany; lives and works in Baghdad, Iraq) is a filmmaker, but has been selected to show one of her rare sculptures. A suspended honeycomb frame drips its contents into a broken antique pot, in order to convey sweet melancholy, a sadness that she feels about her homeland in its current state whilst inspiring hope in the possibility of healing and new life.

- 1. Furat al Jamil**
Honey Pot, 2005/13, ceramic pot, honey comb frame and cotton twine, dimensions variable
- 2-7. Abdul Raheem Yassir**
Miscellaneous cartoons (Untitled 4, 7, 13, 5, 6, 8), 2003-13, ink on paper, 21 x 29.7cm each. Courtesy of Sandrine Vaugeois, Dr Eszter von Lovenberg, Daniel Bathany, Philip Dejacques and the artist
- 8. Bassim Al-Shaker**
Marshes 3, 2013, oil on canvas, 60 x 80cm
- 9. Bassim Al-Shaker**
Basket Maker, 2011, oil on canvas, 50 x 70cm. Courtesy of Al-Nakhla Gallery
- 10. Bassim Al-Shaker**
Woodcutters, 2011, oil on canvas, 60 x 80cm. Courtesy of Al-Nakhla Gallery
- 11. Bassim Al-Shaker**
Marshes 1, 2012, oil on canvas, 80 x 100cm
- 12. Bassim Al-Shaker**
Date Sellers, 2011, oil on canvas, 60 x 80cm. Courtesy of Al-Nakhla Gallery
- 13. Bassim Al-Shaker**
Marshes 2, 2010, oil on canvas, 59.5 x 80cm. Courtesy of Al-Nakhla Gallery
- 14. Hareth Alhomaam**
Buzz, 2012, video 14" 17"
- 15. Kadhim Nwiri**
Untitled (7), 2013, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 120 x 150cm
- 16. Cheeman Ismaeel**
Warmth of an Eternal Embrace, 2010, acrylic on oil heater, 54 x 48 x 25cm
- 17. Cheeman Ismaeel**
Memories of Prison, 2010, acrylic on lunch box, 31 x 20 x 20cm
- 18. Cheeman Ismaeel**
Clock, 2010, acrylic on wall clock, 30cm diameter
- 19. Cheeman Ismaeel**
Our Little Screen, 2010, acrylic on a television, 34 x 40 x 44cm
- 20. Cheeman Ismaeel**
Last Meeting, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 100cm
- 21-23. WAMI (Yaseen Wami, Hashim Taeef)**
Untitled (round mask and face), 2013, cardboard and mixed media, dimensions variable
- 24. Jamal Penjweny**
Saddam is Here, 2010, series of 8 photographs, dimensions variable
- 25. Kadhim Nwiri**
Untitled, 2011, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 120 x 150cm
- 26. Jamal Penjweny**
Another Life, 2010, video, 16' 15"
- 27. Jamal Penjweny**
There the gun, 2012, video, 9' 15"
- 28-33. Abdul Raheem Yassir**
Miscellaneous cartoons (Untitled 3, 12, 10, 14, 9, 2), 2003-13, ink on paper, 21 x 29.7cm each. Courtesy of Daniel Bathany, Dr Eszter von Lovenberg and the artist
- 34. Akeel Khreef**
1, 2012, woollen rug on metal generator frame, 90 x 60 x 40cm. Courtesy of Shwan Ibrahim Taha
- 35. Akeel Khreef**
2, 2012, bicycle parts, 59.5 x 104.5 x 47.3cm
- 36. Kadhim Nwiri**
Untitled, 2011, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 120 x 168cm. Private collection
- 37. Kadhim Nwiri**
Untitled, 2011, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 120 x 170cm
- 38. Kadhim Nwiri**
Untitled, 2011, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 150 x 150cm. Private collection
- 39. Kadhim Nwiri**
Untitled, 2011, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 120 x 168cm. Private collection
- 40. Ali Samiaa**
The Love of Butterflies, 2010, video, 20' 00". Courtesy of Al Sumaria TV
- 41. WAMI (Yaseen Wami, Hashim Taeef)**
Untitled, 2013, cardboard and mixed media, dimensions variable
- 42-45. Abdul Raheem Yassir**
Miscellaneous cartoons (Untitled 15, 16, 11, 1), 2003-13, ink on paper, 21 x 29.7cm each. Courtesy of Pierre Le Coz, William Whitsell and Steven Guernieur
- 46-47. WAMI (Yaseen Wami, Hashim Taeef)**
Untitled (various works), 2013, cardboard and mixed media, dimensions variable
- All works courtesy of the artists

Jamal Penjiweny (b. 1981, Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan) has garnered attention with his extraordinary series *Saddam is Here*, featuring Iraqis in everyday places – on the street, in hotel rooms, in shops – holding a photo of the former dictator over their own faces, demonstrating the lasting impact of his brutal regime. The show also features two video works by Penjiweny which document illegal trading on the border between Iraq and Iran, where the artist was born. *Another Life* is a short film which follows several days in the lives of Iraqis who smuggle alcohol from Iraq into Iran. With the grainy appeal of covert mobile phone footage and straightforward editing, there is no melodrama in the depiction of these scenes. However, in the final moments, this low-key atmosphere is shattered when, instead of rolling credits, a short text explains how two of the men just introduced to us were killed by customs police a few days after filming. The other film, *There the gun*, investigates the illegal weapons trade in Iraq and how easily traders can access guns. The casual atmosphere in which the trading takes place is punctuated by interviews with prisoners convicted of murder, who matter-of-factly describe the crimes they have committed.

Taking Iraq's lack of ecological awareness in his sights, **Akeel Khreef's** (b. 1979, Baghdad, Iraq) sculptural pieces are made out of material taken

from discarded objects. Bits and pieces of a broken generator and an old bicycle, for example, are used to make chairs, in gestures of recycling that touch on an urgent need for raised consciousness with respect to the environment and limited natural resources.

Hareth Alhomaam's (b. 1987, Baghdad, Iraq) short film, *Buzz*, exemplifies the stilted, mediated nature of communications between the sexes in modern Iraq in spite of the advent of social media. We follow the short story of a young man and a young woman as they navigate daily life in Baghdad with family and friends.

Filmmaker **Ali Samiaa** (b. 1980, Baghdad, Iraq) presents a new film, *The Love of Butterflies*. It tells a story in which dramatic tension is derived from a balance struck between marital infidelity and family commitment, between a firm moral stance and sympathy.

Cheeman Ismaeel (b. 1966, Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan) is a painter who applies her decorative style not only to canvases but also to household objects, such as a television, a clock, an oil heater and a lunchbox. The proposition is refreshingly personal and unpretentious, blurring the line conventionally drawn between fine art and more domestic concerns.

One of the youngest artists in the exhibition, **Bassim Al-Shaker** (b. 1986, Baghdad, Iraq), is stylistically one of its most traditional. Eschewing any sign of avant-gardism he paints scenes of the southern marshlands, suggesting a lifestyle there of unbroken tradition. The recent reality is very different, of course, this being a place that suffered terribly during Saddam's dictatorship.

The canvases of **Kadhim Nwir** (b. 1967, Qadisiyah, Iraq), on the other hand, are more abstract and reflect urban life through a combination of distressed colour and graffiti-like drawing. Stencilled letters and numbers sometimes convey clear messages – "IRAQ", "2003" – or they embody a meaning known only to the artist, superimposed on layers of vague pictorial references. Such expressive and complex mark-making, in light of difficult circumstances, reads as a kind of existential self-awareness.

WAMI is an artistic partnership quite rare in Iraq. **Yassen Wami** (b. 1973, Basra, Iraq) and **Hashim Taeheh** (b. 1948, Basra, Iraq) work together to make installations of furniture from new and used cardboard. The basic materials and minimalist style they prefer are entirely at odds with a popular taste in Iraq for gilded home furnishings. Their ethos of "making do and getting by" – articulated with great wit – is a far cry from incongruous aspiration.

www.southlondongallery.org/welcometoiraq

A catalogue (£20) is available in the shop alongside *Welcome to Iraq* t-shirts and canvas bags.

Please note

Photography is permitted.

The biscuits may contain nuts.

Visitors are welcome to read the books but the works are fragile; please do not touch.

ACCOMPANYING EVENTS

Exhibition Talk

Wed 19 Mar, 7pm, Free

Curator Jonathan Watkins gives an introduction to the exhibition.

Exhibition Tours

Sat, 1pm, & Last Fridays, 7pm, Free

Join the SLG's gallery assistants for informal drop-in tours.

The Sunday Spot

Sun 30 Mar & Sun 27 Apr, 2–4pm, Free

These drop-in artist-led workshops for children aged 3–12 years and their parents/guardians explore the exhibition's themes.

Live Event

Wed 16 Apr, 5–9pm, Free

An evening of readings and music is accompanied by traditional Iraqi cuisine.