

Sony Bolis - Batteh d Kaldayee

► East and the Arabic speakers' countries.

"I loved the United States since I was a kid. I grew up with Superman magazines, Bonanza and Batman. There were comic stories about the U.S. So I loved Davey Crockett. I

also loved American history. I dreamed that one day I would live in the US. Especially when I was a kid, I loved the music of the United States."

FATUHI SPOKE OUT AGAINST the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq following Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. "The sanctions isolated intellectuals. Sanctions never affected the regime. In fact, the current Iraqi chaos is a consequence of the '90s sanctions."

One day, after immigrating to the U.S. (on November 4th 1995), Fatuhi met a guitarist who special-

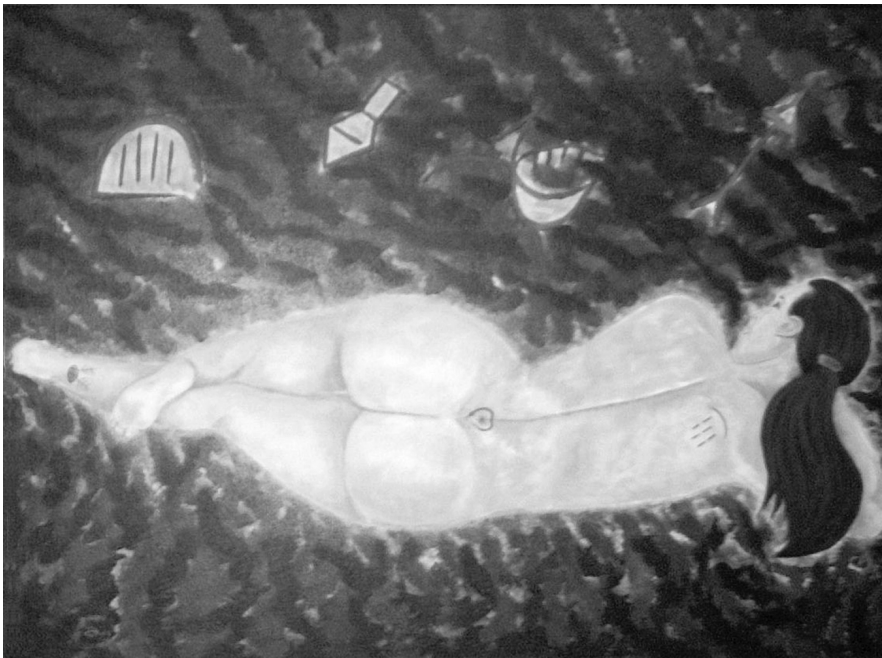
ized in country music. "He saw I knew every country musician and I had memorized a lot of songs. And, with surprise, he said, 'Country music is too American, and you are from Iraq!' But you don't need to be German or Spanish or Japanese to appreciate music."

In the same way, "Visual Art is a common language. When it comes to art, there is no Chaldean, no

American, no Japanese. Art is for all humanity. In the end we are all just human beings who are trying to express our interests and experiences. Music and visual art are universal.

"You know Noam Chomsky, the linguist? He said the deep structure of every culture is similar. I agree because in the end we share the same basics. I didn't create the borders of Iraq and you ►

Ishtar Spells 2006 by Amer Fatuhi



Lavan Ammori & Mark George are visual artists and directors of Mesopotamia Gallery.

LAVON AMMORI

"I am a first generation Chaldean/American artist. My parents emigrated here in the '70s. I studied at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. I studied painting mostly. I just finished my bachelors of Fine Arts. I'm looking to get my masters and continue art studies. I am researching



and working on a book on Chaldean artists. "I am an artist showing my work here. I came here about a year ago. I have a few works here from when I was in school. One is a three-dimensional sort of book-art called 'Basilica.' I used a variety of processes to create the piece. I based it off the Basilica church form. I was interested in the idea of entering a sacred space in a church. I was studying the Roman churches in school and how they are designed to project a certain message about God and Jesus' life, about how the architecture is all designed to project a religious

message. I decided to use that same form – but instead of using God and Jesus I decided to use women sort of as my own experience. It is this idea of women in my experience – relating to my mother and my sister of my generation.

Lavon also displayed a new art work entitled "Freedom, 2006" that she jointly planned and achieved with artist Amer Fatuhi.

"I have never been to Iraq. It is sort of bizarre because I have a nostalgia for a place I've never visited, because of my family's roots there. It is a place I have never known personally, but I know that it is being so totally changed because of the current situation. I have heard stories about all the wonderful people I heard about while growing up who are being incredibly transformed and devastated by what is going on there. Unfortunately it's something that is ongoing and has been happening for several years."

To read about Lavon's project (Celebrating Contemporary Iraqi Chaldean Art) or to see her art works, visit Lavon Amorri at www.chaldeanart.com

MARK GEORGE

"I was born in Baghdad. I started drawing in school, and the teachers were amazed by my painting even in the second grade. I immigrated when I was 20. I came here to study architecture at the University of Michigan but did not finish my degree. I was in college when Saddam came into

power. My family is now in Syria, because everyone left Iraq.

"We have some very unique works here. You can see a wide variety of ideas and art forms: painting, sculptures, glass, ceramics.

"I like Ferndale. It's a lovely city. I've heard they want to expand the downtown, and that would be great as it's a bit small.

"I am married, with four kids. I'm a busy dad, trust me!"

Susan Jadan is a painter and part-time artist at the Gallery.

SUSAN JADAN

"I went to Eastern Michigan University, where I got a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts with an emphasis on painting. I am of



Middle Eastern descent, I am Chaldean. My parents were born there and I was born here.

"I've painted people, landscapes, animals. I am really big into the Detroit

architecture right now. I did a collage of the Ambassador Bridge, the fist, the people mover, with wheels and records to depict Motown. I tried to show all the great aspects of Detroit. I was born and grew up here, and just love it.

"People should come here because the gallery is gorgeous, and it teaches you about things you wouldn't otherwise know about. The Chaldean community is getting really big, but if you aren't from this area you may not know about our people. Coming here and looking at everything, they draw and paint and show the life-styles of how it is in Iraq. It's really nice – you get to learn something that you don't know much about.

"Everything you see on TV isn't how it really is. Here, you can learn more than what you can see on TV.

"I was born here but visited Iraq when I was six, in 1986. It was gorgeous. Everyone was so friendly and knew who you are and who you are related to. It's scarier now. My uncle and step-dad were there recently, and said it has changed so drastically. Now you have to keep to yourself more because you're worried about what may happen.

Unfortunately, Masaoood Yaldo, a well-known Chaldean artist and an art director at Mesopotamia art gallery and the prominent Ceramist Sony Bolis couldn't attend the interview. To learn about them or to see their art works, visit www.chaldeanart.com. ■

