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“Art is not a novel,
it is about
passions.

Art is love.”

SO SAYS Amer Hanna Fatuhi, visual artist, art critic, historian, and founder of an undiscovered Ferndale treasure, the Mesopotamia Learning Studio & Art Gallery (800 Livernois, just south of Marshall).

The Gallery's tag line is “Art, History & Beyond.” It would seem that a good way to move beyond conventional political rhetoric about Iraq is to study the art and history of the people. Our very own Mesopotamia Gallery provides a rare and special opportunity to do just that.

Amer Fatuhi, founder of the Mesopotamia Gallery



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And, because ancient Mesopotamia is considered “the cradle of civilization,” those of us of non-Chaldean descent might learn something about ourselves as well.

The 7,300-year-old Chaldean civilization is responsible for introducing a writing system, modern concepts of law and order, calculus, digital music, engineering and architectural design, astronomy and so much more. Thus, Mesopotamia is called “The Land of the Firsts.”

Ferndale's Mesopotamia Gallery itself is also a first, as the only Chaldean art gallery in Metro Detroit.

FATUHI OPENED THE GALLERY in order to educate fellow Chaldeans about art. He said, “Do you know that in the Tri-County area we have about 200,000 Chaldeans? Most of them are very successful, but when it comes to art we have problems. So the intention is to educate and familiarize them with the importance of art.”

Fatuhi first launched the gallery in 1999. At that time it was known as Dimensions Art Gallery. But construction along Livernois killed his business and he had to shut down.

“But I love Ferndale! You can see me at the Woodward Avenue Brewery, Buffalo Wild Wings, Danny's Irish Pub, Starving Artist, or Maria's

— many places about town. I really am in love with Ferndale. So I thought, “Well, let me give it another shot. I know the economy of Michigan is no good. I also know that a lot of people who used to support art are now questioning it with the bad economy. It's a tough time. But I believe in art, because art for me is the lung that I can breathe with.”

“And let me tell the truth — it is all I know how to do right.”

Fatuhi lives in Madison Heights, but often spends nights at the Gallery when he is just too involved with a particular painting to leave.

THE 40-PLUS-YEAR-OLD Fatuhi has led a most interesting life. He was born in Baghdad / Iraq in a

conservative Roman Catholic family, but fled in the mid '90s. “I had been given three death sentences by the Saddam regime for refusing to paint a portrait for the former dictator, refusing the fund that was given during the '90s to the Iraqi artists and writers to obtain their voice, and for protesting against violence and against abusing and mistreating the Iraqi intellectuals. Although I am a native Iraqi “Chaldean Babylonian,” Saddam's regime deprived me in 1996 of my citizenship!”

Fatuhi's life in Iraq as a young man was a mix of “joy and bitterness.”

“In Iraq, in the late '70s and beginning of '80s you could not tell the difference between Iraqis or any other European or American people. The world was moving in the same heartbeat. With the unrest and the hippie movement — we had it in Iraq, too. In the art community we lived like bohemians. Men



top: Mark George, “Hubba”
bottom: Masaoood Yaldo, “Civilization.”

and women all lived and worked in the same studios. We lived in the same way as all artists of the world. We had the freedom to live, the freedom to work, the freedom to decide what to do.

“IN 1979 WHEN Saddam took over, everything began changing. The Iraqi-Iranian war started. The Directory of Art took over the art zone.” The Saddam regime and the one prior removed Chaldean artists' data from the art history books.

“When I was in my homeland, I was the head of the art magazine *Funoon / Arts*. I was running the visual arts department and the designing art department. It was the number one magazine in the Middle ▶



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