

Artwork

Garden

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In early 2002 I was approached by the editor of the journal *College Literature* to produce a painting for the cover of its special issue on Algeria. The conceptual framework of the issue was conceived in the immediate aftermath of September 11th, and intended to offer an examination on Islam and terrorism, with a special focus on Algeria, through critical essays by distinguished scholars such as Salwa Ali Benzahra, Abdelkader Djemai, Mustapha Marrouchi, Jacques Derrida and H el ene Cixous. To facilitate my conception of the painting I was given the manuscript and was asked to pay a special attention to a poem by an Algerian poet by the name of Rachida. After about three months *Garden* was born, in an unheated barn during the peak of Canadian winter.

When I first received the assignment I was quite overwhelmed by the demand of the project. How can one capture in paint the complexity of the civil war that is mutilating the Algerian social body? How can one approach the issue with a critical terminology of tragic experience, individual identity, and the human condition? How does one translate and do justice to the letters of Rachida, who has had to endure the sufferings and tragic reality of the streets of Algiers?



Garden (2002),
Oil on canvas
24" x 18"
By Izmer Ahmad

Rachida narrates her tragic experience with courage. In response to the intense care for the self that is woven in the lyrics of her testimony, I conjured a specter of a male pouring a bucket of rose petals, exhausted and carefully observing his balance. The image simultaneously gestures an act of nurturing as well as honoring and/or mourning. The physical evidence—the painterly trace that sculpts his body—identifies the weight to which that life or spirit is inextricably bound. This weight finds itself in the arched geology of the back and immediately diffused by the broadly-brushed sparse clothing. The middle-aged man is vulnerable, open to violence and violation just as Rachida is; the rose petals remember the other similar narratives, the ones we never see or hear about.

Garden was done out of a love for the subject of beauty that is barred and denied in the repulsive horror. It is meant as a voice of resistance, which seeks to whisper insistently into the ears and faces of the world. It wishes to engage through imagination and poetics the current debate about the world we live in: a world that resembles with each passing day a wired cage where neither entry nor exit is possible.