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MASTER OF LUSTRE

Alan Caiger-Smith vessels

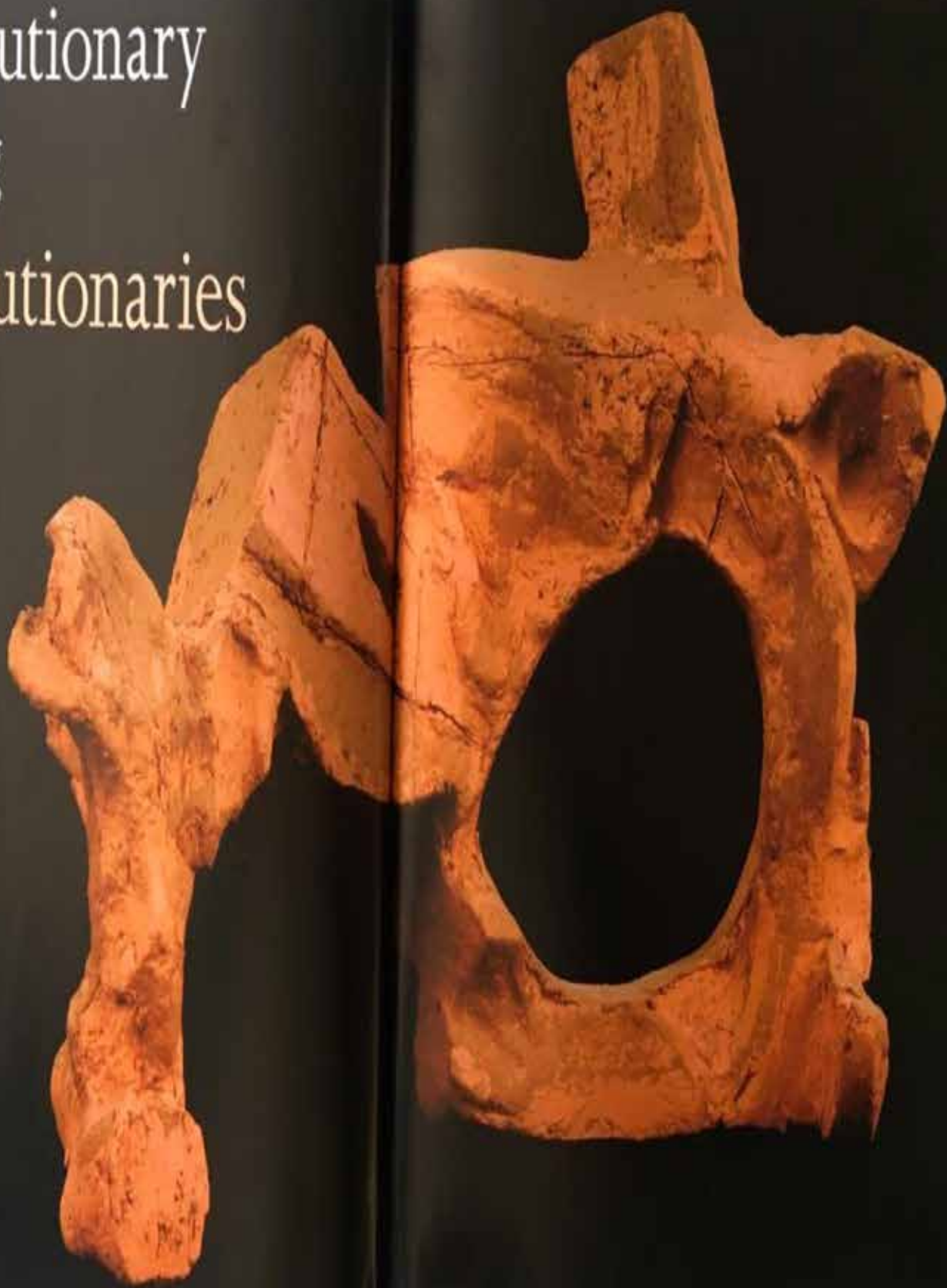


MASTERCLASS
With Aneta Regel

CONTROVERSIAL CERAMICS
Subversion through clay

Revolutionary among revolutionaries

'Destruction is well known to me,' says Waleed Qaisi, a ceramic artist who has witnessed war and returned to art. Based in Iraq, his works are now held in collections across the world. Adam Welch explores his approach to clay



MAIN IMAGE *On one thing of a time*, boneware with slip, 2009, H30cm

Waleed R Qaisi is a courageous pioneer of ceramics living in Iraq. Through war and cultural upheaval, Waleed is guided by his steadfastness to art, individuation and authenticity. Implicit in his work is that the critical-self is the autonomous-self. Amid the general ethos of Iraqi art in lockstep with tradition and custom, Waleed is a beacon of light, a pathfinder whose artistic trajectory parallels those of the finest in the international ceramics community. A revolutionary in an era of revolution, his fight is to understand his being-in-the-world, a consummate artist traversing the spectrum of formal innovation and technical investigation.

Contextualising, evaluating and situating Waleed within the canon and under the lens of Western society infringes on ethnocentricity; however, there is no other precedent among the decorative pottery tradition of the Arabs. Embodying the contemporary ceramists' dictum, 'there are no rules, only concepts,' Waleed's work crosses genres from abstract expressionism to postmodernism, traversing two vastly complex artistic stratagems – primordial impulse and assemblage. Fascinated and emboldened by process, and unencumbered by correctness, his work is a testament to his accomplishments, a document of national and international ceramic importance.

'Fascinated and emboldened by process and unencumbered by correctness, his work is a testament to his accomplishments, a document of national and international ceramic importance'

Like much of his work, Waleed's *Learn to question* (2008) and *Untitled* (2009) are quintessentially abstract expressionism. These artistic endeavours represent the idea that material is meaning and meaning is material, a notion aptly described by American art critic Harold Rosenberg in his essay 'American Action Painting'. According to Rosenberg, 'the painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter.' Waleed's *Do one thing at a time* (2009) manifests this existentialist intent; it is a record of the encounter between Waleed, clay and the exact instant of creation. *Do one thing at a time* has a rigid formlessness and quiet elegance that capture both gesture and presence of the hand through materiality. Narrative, function, ornamentation and figuration are expunged to ensure nothing hinders the viewer's experience. It is a deeply reflective piece, a portrait of the artist at work, permanently captured in ceramic. Rosenberg characterises this impulse, 'the new American painting is not "pure" art, since the extrusion of the object was not for the sake of the aesthetic.

The apples weren't brushed off the table in order to make room for perfect relations of space and colour. They had to go so that nothing would get in the way of the act of painting.' Waleed's intentions parallel this sentiment.

Modernism in art was the emphasis on material, and nothing is more material than clay. Prepared and formed by hand, clay does not necessarily require any intermediary tools to facilitate creation. Waleed's steady progression through modernism into the postmodern encompasses the development of more philosophically complex work to convey his emotional and psychological concerns. Beginning in 2010 with his installation *Inside outside* and continuing through to the more recent *Diminishing* (2015), Waleed has produced exciting multimedia pieces. Installation is the ideal platform to compel a broader conversation. Waleed employs a multilayered approach to question meaning, language, cultural constructions and communication, through the juxtaposition of dissimilar objects and materials.

Perhaps the most intriguing piece is *Clay with cartoon* (2014). It is the most succinct expression of Waleed's past and foreshadows his future. *Clay with cartoon* is a deliberate break from his expressionist past, ushering in personal expression that reflects life experience and what it means to live-in-the-world. The work embodies frustration as it strives to understand existence, embracing joy and sorrow, irony and directness, tragedy and hope. *Clay with cartoon* relates to the displacement analogous with contemporary life, highlighting today's transcultural challenges. More to the conceptual point, it formulates an expression of his true self. Rosenberg argues that the artist can demarcate his being and assert his presence because, 'the act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence. The new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life.' Finding an identity through material, as Waleed has done, establishes one's existence. Moving beyond artistic expression enables him to negotiate meaning and values in order to create a world, in the literal and metaphorical sense, grounded in the lifeworld with the rest of us.

The world is not striving to be what we think it should be, perfect or imperfect, nor does it submit to any laws that we may try to impose. The world does not strive to be anything; it just is. Waleed's art rejects absolute knowledge; nevertheless, it believes in its ability to express value and truth. These 'truths' are how he negotiates the world; his creations form a kind of conceptual map, a blueprint of point and counterpoint, so that the viewer can also understand these verities. Waleed is a revolutionary among revolutionaries, armed with his hands and imagination. ■

Adam Welch is Director of Greenwich House Pottery in New York City and a lecturer at Princeton University; for more on Waleed's work go to wqaisi.com





ART AND WAR

- 1963: Waleed Qaisi was born in Baghdad
- 1983: he had his first exhibition at the Taher Gallery in Baghdad; its theme was 'Presenting beauty through ugliness'
- 1985: he graduated in Fine Art Ceramics; post graduation he had to enrol in compulsory military service
- 1986-88: he participated in an international art festival in Baghdad, where he built a traditional Sumerian Iraqi kiln
- 1990: after serving in the second Gulf War, he left for Jordan, where he established a ceramics factory with a partner, and a ceramic studio
- 2001: he moved to Qatar to teach ceramic art
- 1985-present: Waleed has had solo exhibitions in Iraq, Jordan, Qatar and London and has taken part in exhibitions and biennials in several countries, where his work is also held in public collections



FROM TOP LEFT, CLOCKWISE: *Diminishing*, earthenware ceramic, canvas, acrylic, charcoal, 2015, H100cm; *Unstilled*, earthenware ceramic, 2009, H20cm; Waleed Qaisi, *Clay with cartoon*, earthenware clay, 2015, H15cm; *Learn to question*, stoneware glaze, 2008, H23cm; **OPPOSITE:** *Baghdad falling*, 2003



WALEED R. QAISI

Ceramic against ceramic

"You do not choose to be an artist and I do not think you learn to be an artist." – Robert Rauschenberg

There's a time for the creative person when he finds himself in front of different choices that have a major effect in forming his ideas and moral philosophy beside his spiritual and artistic vision, so he begins to ask himself these questions:

Why do I choose this style in presentation?

Why do I prefer this material to fulfill my creativity?

Why do I attack the surface of the work with lines and additives?

Why do I commit to the shape of a pot?

All these questions and more are struggling inside me while I am working or thinking through the crowded things and shapes around me... At first these questions were so difficult for me to answer. However, when I reviewed my artistic journey to realise the reasons behind my choices during this period, I found that by practising continuous

work and discovering the shapes of things, breaking them and attacking the surface after shaping it with lines and additives, has lead me towards extravagance. This has inspired me for free existence, because I believe that dynamic things create a space between meditation and action and shake up creative action.

I still remember when I studied fine art in Baghdad – I had no experience in ceramics – my professor taught me the skills and techniques of this art. However, at that time I was convinced that no matter how important skills and techniques are, they are not the real and the final scale for creativity. Therefore my love and belief in materials made me, despite my naïve experience at that time, think deeply and work hard to develop my artistic articles to create new art works, stimulating curiosity and inquiry about why they look out of the ordinary – ceramic against ceramic.

When I remember what was said to me about right and wrong, I realise that it is pointless, because I think that



continuous searching and doing lead to the idea. Therefore my judgment on the art work no longer depends on artistic skills but on other important aspects since art goes beyond skill to reflect the deepness and the complexity of experience. Reality is stable but not realised as imaginative, hence it is realised through reality.

The art work invites me from an unknown area and harmonizes between emotional and stable conscious behaviours, because this distance between the art work and myself is disturbed sometimes, hence the shape is dislocated and it stays in this state.

"If you do not change your mind when you look at a picture that you have never seen before, its either you are stubborn and stupid or the picture is not as good as it should be." – Robert Rauschenberg

When the artist makes many ceramic works without having deep experience and smart curiosity, his work can not have the art shape, creativity and sensitive feeling which art would include. Without all these, the work would lose its influence and become just a pot like thousands of others...

My work is a visual text which lives within the transferable culture, therefore each creative process is a continuous struggle with

ILLUSTRATION -

opposite page

- "Singular meaning" - fired clay - slips
w 60 x h 27 x d 12 cm - 2009

below

- "Negative time" - ceramic - stoneware - glaze
w 40 x h 27 x d 23 cm - 2009



ILLUSTRATIONS -

below

- "Learn to question" - ceramic - stoneware - glaze
w 25 x h 60 x d 30 cm - 2008

opposite page

- "Throwing thing" - ceramic -
w 87 x h 20 x d 39 cm - 2009



the past; as a result it is a continuous struggle with the memory and upon it a creation obsession is built from one aspect.

My starting point is searching for the question because I trust it more than the answer, that is why my art work is a continuation of my memory: it does not grow from a pre-planned mind but from instant decision by making a huge number of art pieces through a long period of time, which allows a slow growth of change to happen normally and spontaneously.

- We have to believe that time is the only element that awakens inquiries.

- We have to eliminate -certainty -.

- We have to search for our own concept.

"We came to this world not to build it but to build a real parallel one." Picasso.

Through this open understanding, I worked on to achieve a self-growth in my work through the relationship with myself on the one hand and with the other on the other hand.

A concept... at a relationships area and visual... a scene

able for deliberation... and suspicious and comprehensive narcissist... and conscious of his desire... for the abandoned.

Once... he created a space for its essence Another time he created a meaning to which has no meaning... by the meaning of dazzlement.



Artist's statement:

"The boundaries between the art work and reality must be more fragile whenever it is possible." – Alan Kapro. I do not express my work by words but I make it as an extension to myself. I am always seeking to create – invisible – space for the art work by using the maximum variety of mediums and grasping all elements of perception in order to stimulate deep perception towards the place and the energy it carries that makes it able to cancel the separation limits between the mind and the art work. It is a live action which is extended through visual, sensitive, intellectual and complex memory. I try to alter the traditional stereotype about ceramic concept through my works and by using all research means for building, recreation and through realizing the importance of the material.

Creating art generates an atmosphere of questioning, happiness and pleasure to the mind.

What do I do with my clarinet world?

What do I do with my surfaces scattered in space?

Red... white... and transparent water contains all things.

What do you think while you are looking out of the window?

When you move further you see better.

Waleed R. Qaisi I was born and raised in Baghdad, started my art path as a fan of art at youth art centres in 1980. Then I pursued my art education and graduated from the ceramics department at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1985. I presented my art vision to the art scene in Iraq through group exhibitions and earned many awards 1983-1993, then I left Iraq to work in Jordan in the industrial field to establish ceramics factories for art and functional works and held my first solo exhibition in 1996 and 1999 in Amman. Also I taught art at secondary school. My ceramic sculptures are based against sculpture (destruction) which is reflections of the war that I have witnessed. In 2001 I moved to Qatar to instruct and teach at the art centre. I participated in many international group exhibitions in USA, Germany, Spain, France, China, Australia, Greece, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, San Dominican, Qatar, UAE, England and solo exhibitions in Qatar, London (2001-2010). Also I have completed projects during art residencies in Denmark entitled "my journey", Japan (Beauty and magic), Italy (what do you see through windows?), Spain (figures). My collections are in museums of Iraq, Jordan, Sharja, Egypt, China, Japan, Denmark, Qatar, Croatia, USA-TX, London and Germany.

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Waleed R Qaisi

Article by Ali al-Najjar

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1990S WHEN I FIRST CAME into contact with the creations of the Iraqi ceramist Waleed R Qaisi, I felt that his works were not the familiar types that other contemporary young artists were producing. The structures and the formations and the colours were both unique and austere. The experience was a strong indicator of the factors of mobility and individualism that characterise his ability and mark him as a free spirit flying away from the flock. As I have earlier pre-

at the same time, exhausted by the transient excessive holding disabilities.

The definition of experience for Qaisi was a clear concept of having the room to manoeuvre his way into the unfamiliar, to which he was no alien. He borrowed functioning areas of materials that were unfamiliar and emerging and, to a certain extent, similar. Despite the fact that clay is at the heart of his work, he is always looking for the unfamiliar performance that would turn it to a diverse looking metal that



Throwing Thing. 2009. Ceramic.
87 x 20 x 39 cm.

ceramics product, never abandoned him. The artistic sensuality, which is the major defect of the Iraqi ceramics products, is forever accompanied by literal, decorative and antique details that are enriching but,



Negative Time. 2009. Stoneware and glaze. 40 x 27 x 23 cm.

dicted, his sense of adventure, which somewhat led him away from the high sensory nature of the typical Iraqi

is not far from its transformational inner nature as long as its mass or delusional image is kept intact, whether he uses iron, lead, liquid lead or even wood. Delusion is the intention of the artist and his ultimate quest and, in this sense, the alienation in the work is never surprising, rather it becomes the essence of the artistic process. It is also the main requirement for the maintenance of its intentions by manufacturing the synthetic structures favoured by the artist over many of the customs and practices of various ceramic work that is available in the midst of the fine

porcelain market in general.

Qaisi's obsession with sculpture was not the result of an experimental chance and his multiple experiments might have caused many ramifications if he allowed himself to be led by their surprising consequences. As it is, his passion comes from an old and demanding dream that is inseparable from an historic legacy that haunted and dominated his most intimate thoughts, a legacy that continues to affect the best Iraqi artists whether they are painters, sculptors or ceramists. The combining or mixing between these properties in most of the work produced by those artists is witness to the effect of the suggestive powers of the legacy. To some people, this is a matter of geographic or historic identity and to others it is a way to experiment with current practices that engulf the consecutive

encloses spirits that would speak, if only asked. Mexican Mayan archaeologists, as well as the African Zulu have passed their original ritualistic use and turned into free spirits travelling the times with their untold secrets.

That is why a capable artist will not only represent the regular shapes of humans or animals with his sculptures but will often, particularly in the ancient

land of Africa and Mexico, make use of organic additives to cover the surfaces of some ceramics. Despite the fact that the art of ceramics had built its glory on the needs of consumers, the spiritual and creative needs were an added passion that became an integral part of the artistic process.

As most of his contemporaries, Qaisi had several experimental options, including going to extremes in the adoption of the traditional clay form but he

The Artist and his Passion for Research in Different Clays



Organic. 2010. Ceramic. 40 x 20 x 18 cm.

time lines to which both history and geography have succumbed. Qaisi's work and ceramic sculptures are manifestations for the deeply intertwined links that tie his local roots and tastes to the global cultural origin and its secret ballots.

Clay is the secret of creation and the clay work in Sumeria embodies the secrets of the soul and the body and releases the secret regions of imagination from the darkness to the light. And despite the fact that these creations hide behind their universal, worldly and beyond-lives, their hollowness

chose the crust surface to become his favourite field of experiences for ceramics, just as he has chosen clay as a compliant mass between these two. He started by separating the body from the form and the function and then he dismantled the surface and feel and even the colours and re-established



Block Dialogue. 2010. Fired clay, acrylic, perspex and fabric.

them all again as he envisaged them into cylindrical or cubic, closed or open or any other artistic possibilities. Although he insisted on distancing himself from indulging in the traditional form of ceramics, he adopted its external formal accessories which derived their roots from the organic heritage of the African clay. He searches within the wonder of these forms in order to draft an emigrant ceramics parallel, surprising in its discoveries for other contemporary composition.

Upholding the neglected is often practiced by the artist as an act reckoned to cumulate tradition and to restore the respect long lost to our alienated civilisation. And as alienation is the passion of all artists who are continuously striving to renew their means and methods, it is also the passion of this generation of humans who have been moulded after the current commercial culture. In this sense, alienation should be our alter ego that is always part of our identity. Within this overall understanding of the strange and alienating heritage (apparently) and the con-

own extravagances. This often tempted other ceramics artists who felt that his approach was a diversion from the typical methods. Then he finished some of his new work in a neutral colour scheme, perhaps in an attempt to approach the neutral nature of the clay material but, also, in a diversity of opposite variations that show his knowledge of abstraction and his awareness of the performance of material

The act of destruction is evident in the ceramics of Qaisi (a metaphoric ceramics), the opposite of his coherent sculptures, with their multiple units and lines. Perhaps it is a concern about the familiarity of its forms but, at the same time, he tends to destroy the ends and glue them back again, not to their original shape but rather to a shape that is enhanced by the act of destruction, accumulation, installation and scattering. The passion for destruction and fragmentation is the artist's stylistic manoeuvring within the strict sense of concern that exists when he masks his concern by creating a fantasy that is in itself a form of uncertainty.



What is Waiting There. 2008.
Mixed media, ceramic, perspex, acrylic
and paper.

attached to sculpture and structural configuration.

In most of the flat work produced by Qaisi over the past decade, he actually spills water on to the smooth surface within the mass. In the beginning he was showing its sensitivity and smooth texture and then he was trying to scar its surface but, in all cases, he did not hide its emotional essence in an approach that best represented his strong artistic executions. At that time he was also fond of coloured metal which attacked the purity of the mud and created its



Baghdad Falling 2003. 2005. Mixed media, fired clay, glaze, acrylic and fabric.
100 x 29 x 30 cm.

temporary (or immediate), the artist maintains his creations detached from the ceramics region and

Looking at the works of this artist perhaps brings us to consider the work of Picasso. It was Picasso who said "only the legend remains" in the sense that the impossible has become an art no matter what is left of its effects. If Picasso's sculptures were meant to organize chaos, then Qaisi's works are meant to represent chaotic organization, since they were built on the dismantling of form and not its construction. It is true that they are new building constructions that are unmistakable but, beyond the structure, the central mass is the first block of the establishment of ceramics, whether vessels or sculptures. As Qaisi has relinquished this requirement in the execution of his works of art, he has also waived the principle of its local colours which I agree that, if adopted, would be contrary to a mechanical cognitive act and would turn them to heaps of colours that depart from the

region's stylistic trends. It seems that the artist realized this since he started his unfamiliar works and continued to pilot a different colour scheme that was equal in its practical consequences.

What we lack in the work of Arab potters, including Iraqis, is sculptural ceramics. Certainly, high functionality is important to the performance of the clay material and its abilities. As the importance of decorative art remains active in the works of the Arab potters, the ceramics effect was missed as their main concern was decoration with flourishes and lustre. And since we preferred bronze, stone and wood, we neglected ceramics techniques including the possibilities of technical thermal ceramics. Though we might be doing this to preserve the glazes from the geology of the area and time, thinking of ways of embellishment and glazing resulted in surfaces close to the colour and nature of the clay used. Works of art are some of the means of contemporary artistic creation and some of Qaisi's works approach this trend but I think that he has the potential to gain

vision evoked by other metallic materials. Despite the weirdness of implementation and the output of these recent actions, what distinguishes them is the loss of the insinuation of its association with the raw material that was possible through other different processes to give impressive and varied results. What remains is the artist's search for his own vision which is subject to change through the passage of time, experimentation and sequencing. And if I were looking for the essence of ceramics in the ceramics itself, it does not mean that I do not see in Qaisi's attempts reasons for scrutiny, I am simply trying to restore the illusions of ceramics, which are slipping through our hands for the sake of experimentation only. This certainly does not mean that the artist is not aware of it but the euphoria of novelty and strangeness is what motivates him to produce his unusual work. Perhaps we see his creative momentum of a recovery that does not eliminate the contemporary archaeological requirement absolutely, but employs the study of the first natural area



*Error in the Information. 2008. Fired clay, acrylic and pencil.
120 x 20 x 40 cm.*

better results, which promises that he will be flying away from the flock. Perhaps in such works we will find some of the legacy of our history and through research and innovation in the virgin mud materials he uses we will see the pristine nature and formations that reflect their plasticity.

The second observation concerning the work of Qaisi is to understand the ambiguous adaptation of the clay sculpture as he departs away from the sensitivity of the performance of this material in some of his sculptures to ceramics in favour of approaches to other materials such as rock (and certainly the method of heat treatment after that). He loses the sensitivity of performance to the benefit of rigidity that is sometimes crude, sometimes addressing the layer of thick glass with its dim colour and which is as close as possible in the final results to the

open on the prospects for the future.

Finally, what distinguishes the experience of Waleed R. Qaisi, is the experimental range that goes beyond his ceramics and he is a ceramist with distinction. He has a surplus of creativity that often refuses to compromise other gains at the expense of self-motivated fancy which will always be easily manipulated as long he remains faithful to it.



*Model. 2008. Ceramic.
17 x 41 x 13 cm.*

Ali al-Najjar is a painter and art critic who lives in Sweden.



Wednesday
16.03.2016

'I believe a little bit of nervousness and uncertainty should be there for you to go a long way.' Bollywood ►



An artist who aims to stimulate the mind and the emotions of an observer through his artwork.

Stimulation through art

COVER STORY
PG 2&3



Using art to stimulate thinking

LLEWELLYN FLORES
DOHA



Waleed R Qaisi

THE message of an artwork may not get conveyed so easily. To an untrained eye, meaning can even escape entirely. "It's not easy," said Waleed R Qaisi, in an interview during his recent exhibition at the Fire Station Gallery titled 'Expansion to the Horizon with a Desire to Improvise'. "The artist cannot convey everything. It's like a message that people cannot always easily understand."

But that which cannot be easily perceived, can often be discerned by the heart. "Some people may not understand but do they like it?" he asked hypothetically.



ically.

At the exhibition, Qaisi used different materials, clay and common things like plastic, paper, strings, wood and even paint brushes. His aim was to stimulate the mind and the emotions of an observer on seeing materials mixed in unusual ways and placed in unlikely positions. He says, "Art should stimulate thinking."

One of the moving installations at the exhibition was a chair hanging from a wall, on the edge of which was a ball, seemingly about to fall off. Half the ball was covered with clay which left traces of it along the path which

it seemed to have traversed. One can put oneself in the ball's position and ask, 'Is the edge of the chair my limit? What will happen if I go beyond? Will it be the end of the (im)print I leave behind?'

Perhaps Adam Welch, Greenwich House Pottery NY Director and Princeton University lecturer, described best how Qaisi presents his art when he wrote, "Waleed employs a multilayered approach to question meaning, language, cultural constructions, and communication, through the juxtaposition of dissimilar objects and materials," in the *Ceramic Review* published

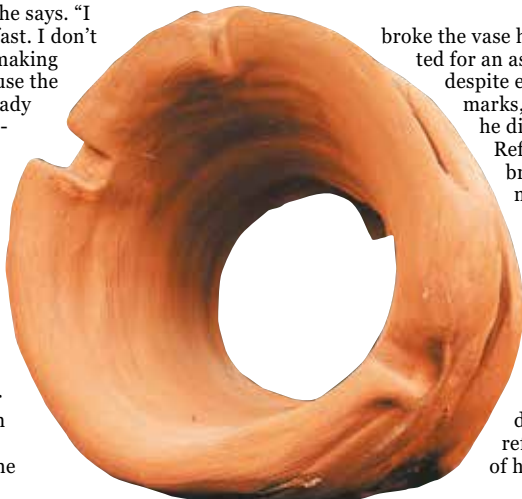
Qaisi has never easily accepted the norm but has often questioned it. He questioned restrictions and traditions. He attributes this critical streak to having read much in his youth. This character trait was carried over to how he views art that led him to consider himself a 'rebel' in art.

in January 2016.

The artist born in Baghdad, Iraq, has participated in many exhibitions all over the world — the UK, US, Asia and the Middle East and several solo exhibitions in the UK and in the Gulf region. His style and art works have been featured in several ceramic magazines like the *Ceramic Review*, *Ceramics - Arts and Perceptions*, *New Ceramics* and *Ceramics Monthly*.

Qaisi has never easily accepted the norm but has often questioned it. He questioned restrictions and traditions. He attributes this critical streak to having read much in his youth. This character trait was carried over to how he views art that led him to consider himself a 'rebel' in art. He does not plan before working on clay. "When I start, I don't think about anything," he says. "I work very fast. I don't believe in making plans because the plan is already here (pointing to the back of his head.) I want to fly and be free."

It did not mean he never questioned his methods or style. When he was still a student, he



broke the vase he submitted for an assignment, despite earning high marks, because he didn't like it. Reforming the broken pieces made him appreciate the work more. "At that time, I didn't know why," he said. Qaisi still deforms and reforms many of his works.

"I suffered in the beginning because other artists didn't understand me," he recalled. "But now some of them understand."

"In 1996 or '97, in Jordan, I saw Peter Voulkos and thought 'Wow. He's like me.' Voulkos was an American artist of Greek descent known for his Abstract Expressionist ceramic sculptures, which crossed the traditional divide between ceramic crafts and fine art. "I was not good in English at the time but I went to the Internet to search for his work and I liked him. He became an inspiration." Seeing Peter's works made Qaisi very happy. "To see someone doing the same thing I was doing, I felt that at least I was not crazy."

One of the messages Qaisi con-

veys in his works is that nothing is permanent and, that we can rebuild from that which has been destroyed or ruined. World renowned ceramist Peter Callas has this to say about Qaisi: "His geographic and cultural austerity has inspired him to create works that haunt one's soul and challenges the limitations of ideology and material. He gets high marks for going into our conscious in an impressive way."

Qaisi is currently a teacher at Youth Creative Art Centre Doha. He teaches students from age 15 of different nationalities. "I like teaching. Sometimes it inspires me, especially when working with adults," he said. Many children, some with autism, and artists, have benefitted from Qaisi's moulding at the centre. "As a teacher, Waleed has taught me a lot (about) the essence of art. He was the one who encouraged me to express myself without fear. I would say other than the techniques, this was a big lesson he gave me. I feel blessed and grateful that I started my journey as an artist with him as my mentor," said Vibha Nanda. Vibha has since been travelling around the world exhibiting and selling her paintings and sculptures.

"He is an open book. Keen to give you and teach you all he knows," said Jacinthe Lamontagne-Lecomte, a multi-media artist and sculptor whose works have been exhibited since 2011 in Doha and in France. "Waleed Qaisi is a ceramist as well as a wonderful painter, and a magnificent art teacher. I have been following his advice for several years now, in clay first and in painting."

Qaisi believes "all people are artists." But it is up to the teacher how to find that gift and catalyse it. He steers away from the stereotypes of ceramics — a material for making functional items such as plates and vases. "This is good but art is different. I teach my students how to think through the clay — think about why you're putting a line, try to see the invisible."

The ceramist considers clay his first love. "Clay is like poetry to me. It's like a pretty woman. It can sometimes be frightening because it's so easy and yet so difficult. It is easy because it is a flexible material, you can play with it. It is difficult because it has space inside which decides its strength, form and its beauty — opposite of the sculpture. If the ceramist cannot have this deep feeling with the clay, he cannot create art."