

## Lulu Baasiri

«Between 'role' as artist and 'status' as woman, she (the woman artist) experiences a provoking undercurrent of tension engendered by the polarized forces of freedom and (traditional) restriction that exist in her life»<sup>(1)</sup>.

This «provoking undercurrent of tension» is quite strong in Lulu Baasiri.

Miss Lulu Baasiri held an exhibit in December 1990, in Dar Al-Nadwa in Beirut. It was her third solo exhibit and featured thirty paintings. We found Miss Baasiri's art and character to be an inspiration as far as female artists of our generation are concerned.

Lulu Baasiri's **role as artist** is criticized:

«The paintings are academic, why did the artist forget to discuss the war?»

«Just because I did not include blood in my paintings does not mean that I lack realism and have not experienced the horror» she replies. «In fact, I remained in my apartment when everybody else sought refuge in underground shelters. But my intentions are to keep the war, its ugliness, its corruption and its death out of my art» she explains.

Hence, her paintings stay away from typical modernism or folklore, and away from typical nostalgia or agony. They are neat and simple colorful portraits of families and arabesque settings. The flower pots, the arabesque furniture, instruments and tapestry, the bathrobes hanging on bamboo sticks all seems to emphasize «home».

Yes, home! which brings us to her **status as woman**. Lulu Baasiri's status as woman has much to say. On one hand it is daring and willful, and on the other hand, it is a cause of frustration forcing the artist into seclusion.

She is single and lives alone with her sister in a Beirut apartment, much to the displeasure of her parents, who would prefer she lived at home like all single girls are expected to. She explains that the privacy of living on her own is a necessary part of her work.



Her parents objected her decision to become an artist. They insisted that it was not a financially rewarding career. They advised her to choose a hard line profession and to paint **on the side**, which outraged her. Determined as she is, Lulu Baasiri insisted and persisted in becoming a painter.

Her status as a woman artist, vis-a-vis society in general, has been an additional source of frustration for her. She has repeatedly experienced Helen Khal's reported attitude of people towards women artists: «**They (women) don't have to worry about earning a living; most of them are supported by husband or family, have servants to do their housework, and can afford the luxury of being artist without any of the hardships**»<sup>(2)</sup>.

For Lulu Baasiri, this is not the case. She has made painting a fulltime profession and career. She gave up a promising career as Art Editor for leading local magazines after nine years of experience. She continues to refuse offers «you cannot refuse» as she puts it. She is



*Still Life With Au'd 1989 60 × 83,5 cm Mixed Media*

stubborn when it comes to her work and will uphold it against any social and financial odds.

She works in her apartment and has maintained a daily working schedule for four years. Hence, she finishes her cleaning and cooking (herself) before getting to work, to make sure that nothing distracts her or interrupts her. «Even my family and friends are careful not to visit or call when I am painting».

Consequently, she is outraged when people under-rate her line of work. «Imagine» she says, «I am often asked 'what do you do in life?' I say Painting; 'We mean what do you do next to painting?' again I reply 'Painting, it is my profession,' 'Oh, really?!' and they get that confused look on their faces...»

«Another thing people are concerned about all the time is why I am not married». She seems to feel that her singularity not only intrigues people but affects her role as an artist. She noted that married artists' use of their husbands' connections for exposure and recognition, makes it difficult for a single artist to move as freely.

«Herein lies the contradiction in her dual function, a contradiction which remains an unconscious irritant and is often a trying obstacle in the fulfillment of her professional role»<sup>(1)</sup>. Lulu Baasiri's conflicts are verbalized in what she constantly refers to as «the dirt» that envelops society, especially a war society. She has chosen to stay away from the stress of wheeling and dealing with peo-

ple, first by giving up a career in the media, and second by being very selective of her friends and acquaintances. She does not like to socialize too much and prefers to invest her time, effort and energy in painting. Do not misunderstand Lulu Baasiri, painting is not an escape from society. On the contrary, limited interaction with society would seem as her way of defining and preserving the identity of her style.

**... It may be precisely the presence of this conflict that generates the creative energy of the woman artist... In technique, women artists generally are more meticulous, more patient, in their attention to detail and finish of work. They are aware of and have a respect for the physical properties of the medium and seek to investigate all its possibilities...<sup>(4)</sup>**

Looking at Lulu Baasiri's paintings, we notice the clarity of the portraits, the symmetry of the shadows, the interplay of mirror images and the maturity of colors. Everything is organized and in its place. There is no reference to ugliness, only beauty.

Maybe, this is Lulu Baasiri's personal revolt against the chaos that plagues her society ●

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- (1) Helen Khal. *The Woman Artist in Lebanon*, Beirut: Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, 1987, p. 21.
  - (2) *Ibid.*, p. 30.
  - (3) *Ibid.*
  - (4) *Ibid.*, p. 34.