

THE STORY OF GAMAL ALI

OUT OF THE LAND
OF
LA-LA LA LA LEE

FROM THE LAND OF THE PHARAOHS
TO THE LAND OF THE MAPLE LEAF

REUBEN TOM KEE
HILL & GULLY PUBLICATIONS



Out of the Land of LaLaLA – LaLaLEE - The Story of Gamal Ali

Dedicated to

Mom & Dad
Mohammed, Sarah, Harger, Miriam
&

*All those who have shared and participated
in the wondrous events of my life*

When I walk I see the life in flowers, trees and in water.
The light and shadows are dancing. The colours and
movement create music in life. All you need is to open your
eyes and your heart to see it. This symphony never ends.
It is there. Can you hear it?

© Gamal Abdel Rahman

*Traditions are valuable in the grooming of
one's persona but it can create tension,
conflict and even suffering in the individual.*

*Abstraction is in itself a canvas
upon which layers of emotion, colour and vision
create a reality that knows no boundary.*

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THE STORY OF GAMAL ALI (ABDEL RAHMAN)
OUT OF THE LAND OF LA-LA LA ↻ LA-LA LEE

Note on the title: LaLaLA LaLaLEE is an expression to denote the rambling comments that we sometimes would like to ignore – as in the nagging of a parent or close one!

FROM THE LAND OF THE PHARAOHS
TO THE LAND OF THE MAPLE LEAF

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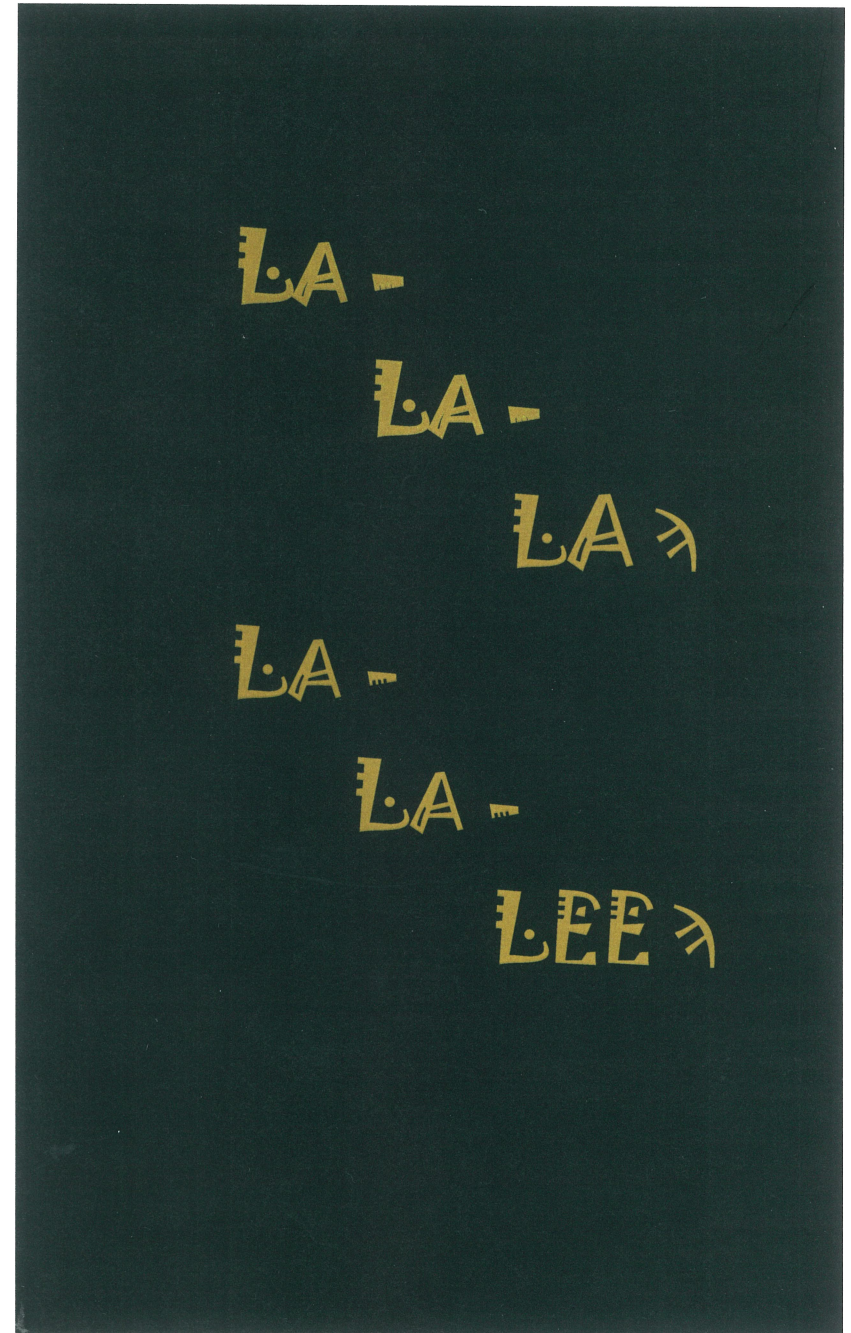
Artist website:
<https://gamalrahman.wordpress.com/>

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OTTAWA CANADA



Note on the Collaboration

Artist: Gamal Abdel Rahman

Author: Reuben Tom Kee

Artist meets Author. They discuss their life events and accomplishments. The story of Gamal Abdel Rahman intrigues Tom Kee who urges him on to produce an introductory volume outlining his life story and showcasing a selection of his works.

From the outset, the author detects in Rahman a constricting sensibility - very dry and almost rigid - in his account of his accomplishments. Gradually through a series of meetings, the author encourages Rahman to let down his guard and reveal his true self – an individual full of joy, wishing to fully immerse his soul in artistic freedom and freeing himself from the restraining inclinations of his native Egypt.

It was a renewed sense of liberation that prompted Gamal's creative output since 1999. He felt relief from the formality of his training and the customs of his native land and now has adopted the independence of self-expression that he found in Ottawa, Canada.

The author's fascination to bring to fruition this book has satisfied the aspiration of Gamal Ali to put on paper, for posterity, his legacy and future gift to his four children: *Mohammed, Sarah, Harger and Miriam.*

Ottawa, Canada

June 2015

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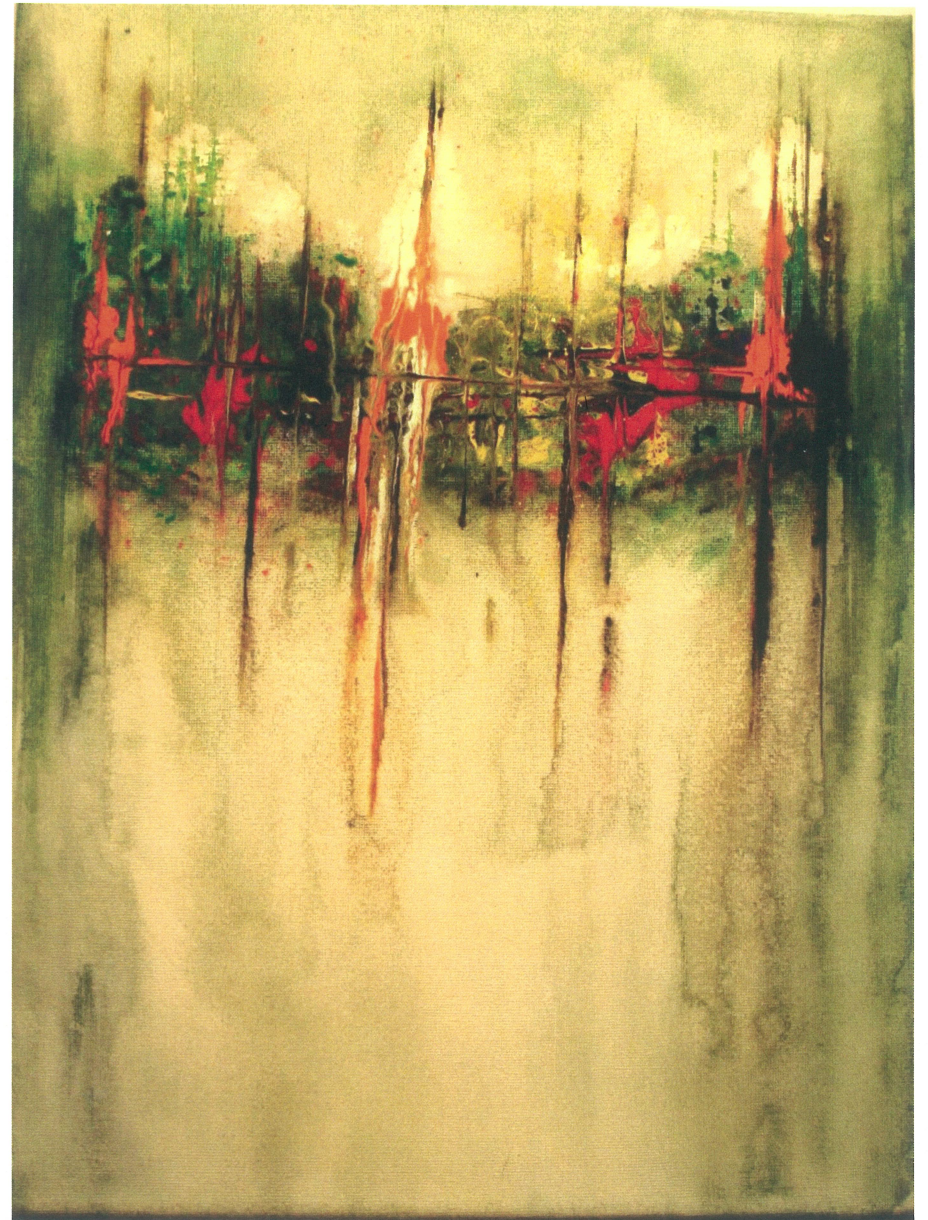
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The owner was a young Vietnamese lady, V. who was ready to pass the torch. The owner's boyfriend attempted to sour the deal by speaking rudely whenever he saw Gamal... to discourage him from buying. His enthusiasm waned and the indecency indirectly struck him down. It brought about a two-week breakdown in the negotiations - an interminable delay. Here again he was tossed into a deferment.

Gamal made the decision to pursue the process of purchasing the shop. Perhaps he thought, a new leaf was sprouting. This could be his salvation. Maybe 1999 would be the start of his new life that he had been so furiously pursuing.

He would have to start from the bottom again, so to speak, but his ethic of hard work and ambition would hold him steadfast. He would have to conserve his funds by creating his own signage and hopefully hanging on to an aging clientele. With Connoisseur's linkage to parliamentarians he had a semi-regular stable of clients that found *a new head* in Ed Broadbent. It seemed ironic as a passing of the torch... from Trudeau to Broadbent.

Upon purchase of the studio, Gamal invited the former owner to remain to service the existing clientele. He saw that this was necessary for a smooth transition, as he knew well that clients are often very loyal to their stylists. He also felt that the existing clients did not show much liking to him, preferring to keep their interaction with V. The decision was a wise one and, despite his feelings of uselessness, it actually resulted in a fruitful collaboration for thirteen years with V.

As the years passed, Gamal added another facet to his shop. He educated himself in hairstyling and began to harvest a female

clientele. Word of mouth was his best advertising and slowly but surely he was transforming a former ultra-modest barbershop to a full-fledged salon. And the increase in new clientele was on a dramatic rise.

Beginning in 2009, when his family moved to Egypt for the children's education, it was necessary for Gamal to make semi-annual visits to maintain contact as well as his parenting obligations. Upon a return to Canada, in 2013, he was astonished when certain clients stopped by to offer their condolences regarding the impending closure of the studio. Gamal was quite surprised, and asked how they had come to that conclusion.

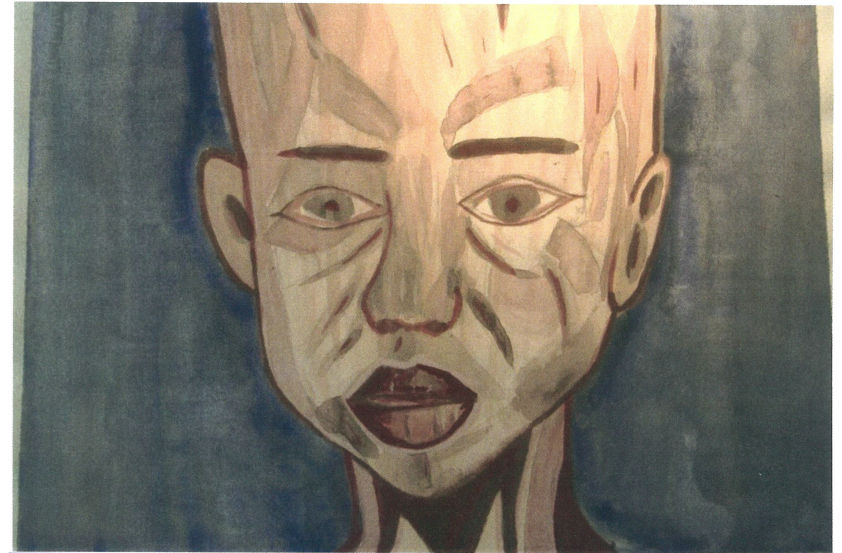
Oh, they said, your stylist told us that, and that is why we have not come by as we usually do. She asked us to come to her new studio but we decided not to. It did not seem right.

It was then that Gamal realized the second betrayal in his dogged career as a hair stylist. All this while, he had assumed his working partner just decided to move away with her boyfriend. Instead she had lured all her clients and even the new clients of the business to her new employ. *An act of no mercy!*

Watching Gamal listen to his customer's needs and subtly reiterating and executing their wishes, demonstrates the psychology of the man's ability to hear and to deliver.



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viii - dealing with a curse

He could not help think that an ancient curse may have befallen him. Was he receiving punishment for deserting his homeland, and for cursing the pharaohs? Gloomy clouds hung over his head on this bright sunny day in Ottawa. He needed to sleep this off. He had exhausted himself.

What then? What next? He wandered aimlessly around the downtown core and happened by chance on a barber shop: *The Connoisseur*. This had been already a 40-year old establishment with a clientele reputed to include *Pierre Elliott Trudeau*, diplomats and other parliamentarians. Of course, while the existing clientele was aware of that fact, the shop maintained a low profile - with half the front windows painted in black to maintain a certain privacy for such profiled clients. As fate would have it, the business was for sale.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Reuben Tom Kee has much to draw from the vivid recollections of his life experiences. He was born in La Brea on the sunny Caribbean island of Trinidad.

His first solo voyage was at the age of twelve when his parents flew him to Hong Kong to expose him to his native culture and language which is Cantonese.

That was the harbinger of a future travel bug – he has since visited over 118 cities in 12 countries.

He lives in Ottawa, Canada. He has two sons, Alexander and Christopher, the greatest loves of his life. This is his sixth book.

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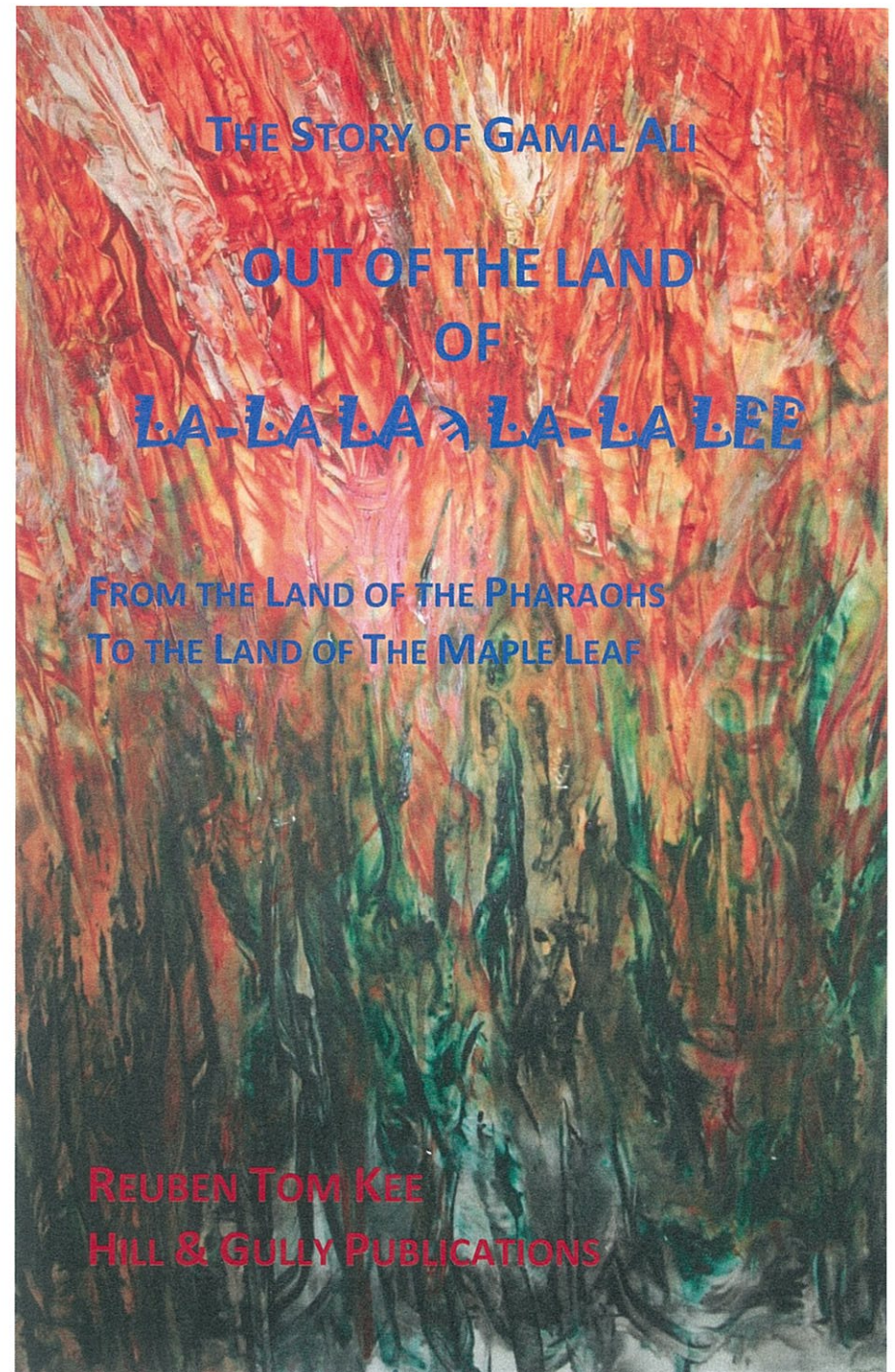
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vii – the betrayal

Then, in 1999, came the unfortunate health condition of his father in Egypt. Gamal had to return home to do what he could as a dutiful son. His father had suffered a heart attack. Gamal stayed with his father for one month and his father's condition improved so that he could leave. Once he saw all was in order, Gamal could no longer wait to return to Ottawa and *his shop – now his true home*.

On his return to Ottawa, the morning was bright and sunshine was everywhere. He got ready to go to Jados and a new day of work. But then a friend called and he got information that Atif was now the owner of the shop. He went to the shop and saw Atif waving to him all smiling and cheerful. Atif saw the quizzical look on Gamal's face. He explained that Sefaw had sold him the business. He tried to appease Gamal by praising and thanking him for all he had done for the business and for his own training.

Gamal was in shock and stood rooted to the ground. Raw emotions engulfed him and rendered him immobile. He was like an obelisk planted in the ground, blood drained from his face and body. He felt a cold chill run over his being <=> He was cold like the granite that would have so graciously formed the obelisk.

Atif generously offered Gamal a position to stay. Gamal regained his composure and advised Atif that he would like to go home and recoup. Atif could surely imagine the effect of this betrayal and agreed that that might be a good idea for Gamal to come back whenever he felt the strength.

Gamal lifted his heavy feet and walked out the door. He was still in disbelief but he knew he would not be returning. Anger

and sadness overwhelmed him and he found the nearest public bench to sit and just recover. The image of money passing from the hands of Atif to Sefaw and ending in a handshake tormented him. What was most painful was the fact that Sefaw did not once attempt to contact him to notify him of the impending sale.

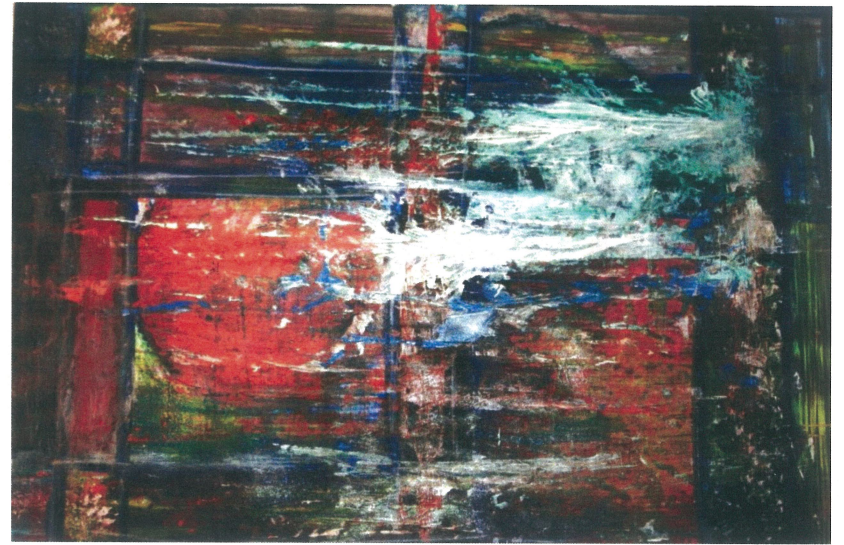
The questions swarmed his mind like a plague of locusts. Could he not have given Gamal a right of refusal? Who built up the existing clientele...who improved the reputation of the shop... who was it that loyally and faithfully ensured that Sefaw got his share of the profits? It was *Gamal...* it was *stupid Gamal...* it was *naïve Gamal* who so sincerely respected Sefaw and his original work in establishing the shop.

The tears flowed and, short of wailing loudly - *for there was wailing his heart* - Gamal could have been mourning at a funeral... *his own!*





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Barbershop. It was a small venture with no more than one or two clients a day.

Gamal presented himself and Sefaw hired him on the spot with nary a test cut, because of the news of Nofel's redeemed haircut. So, in fact, without Gamal's knowledge, his work had already undergone scrutiny.

Sefaw handed him a key to the premises on day one, no questions asked. He demonstrated a level of trust that was most appreciated. Gamal was still not very well versed in the English language. He survived with the use of gestures to interpret the needs of the client. A lot of smiles added much effect to his positive and helpful attitude.

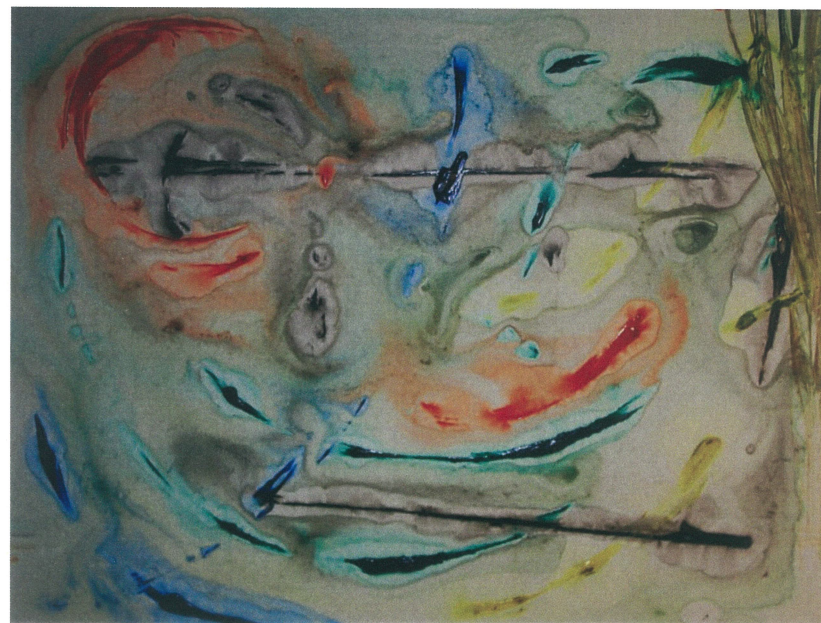


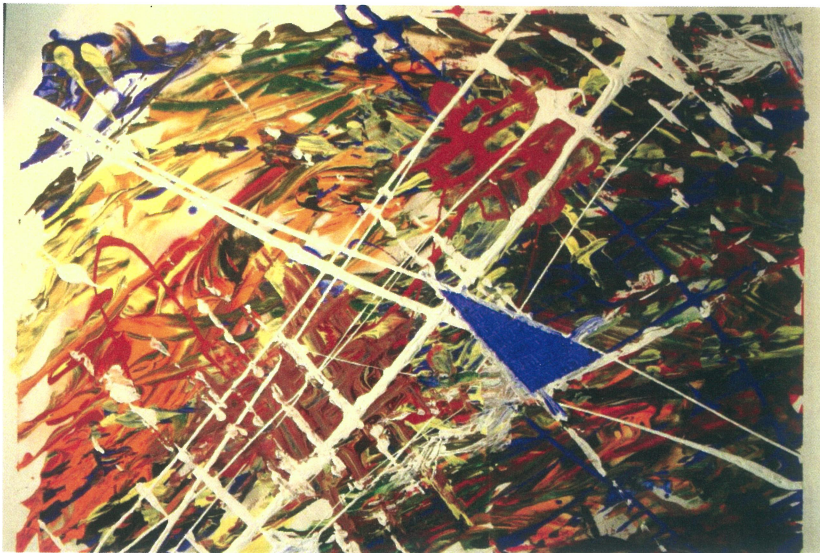
Gamal proceeded to build up clientele through word of mouth about his barbering skills and friendly manner. Sefaw meanwhile

frequented less and less the shop, as his government job gradually became time consuming.

As the business grew and word spread, it brought one named Atif, an Egyptian pizza delivery boy who wanted to learn the trade. Ever anxious to help one of his own, Gamal offered him an apprentice position while Atif would engage in some formal hairstyling and barbering courses. The business had now grown to average fifty clients a day.

It was a great departure from the world of architecture and engineering but Gamal had found a niche. He was establishing a reputation for the salon and for himself. He had an apprentice in Atif and his world seemed poised to soar upward.





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vi – chance and good fortune



Chance had a hand in his next phase. The architect scene did not pan out as he would have liked. As Chance would have it, his room-mate came home one day most disappointed with his haircut. Gamal offered to help since his own lineage included the barber streak – back to his father and grandfather. Through this one act of rectifying that hair disaster, he was destined to receive a referral to a reputable barber. Nofel told his friend Saïd, who then told his barber about this new immigrant.

The shop belonged to Sefaw, a Libyan who was also by training a computer engineer. The barbershop was an aside for Sefaw, as a weekend hobby business, with the trade name of *Jados*

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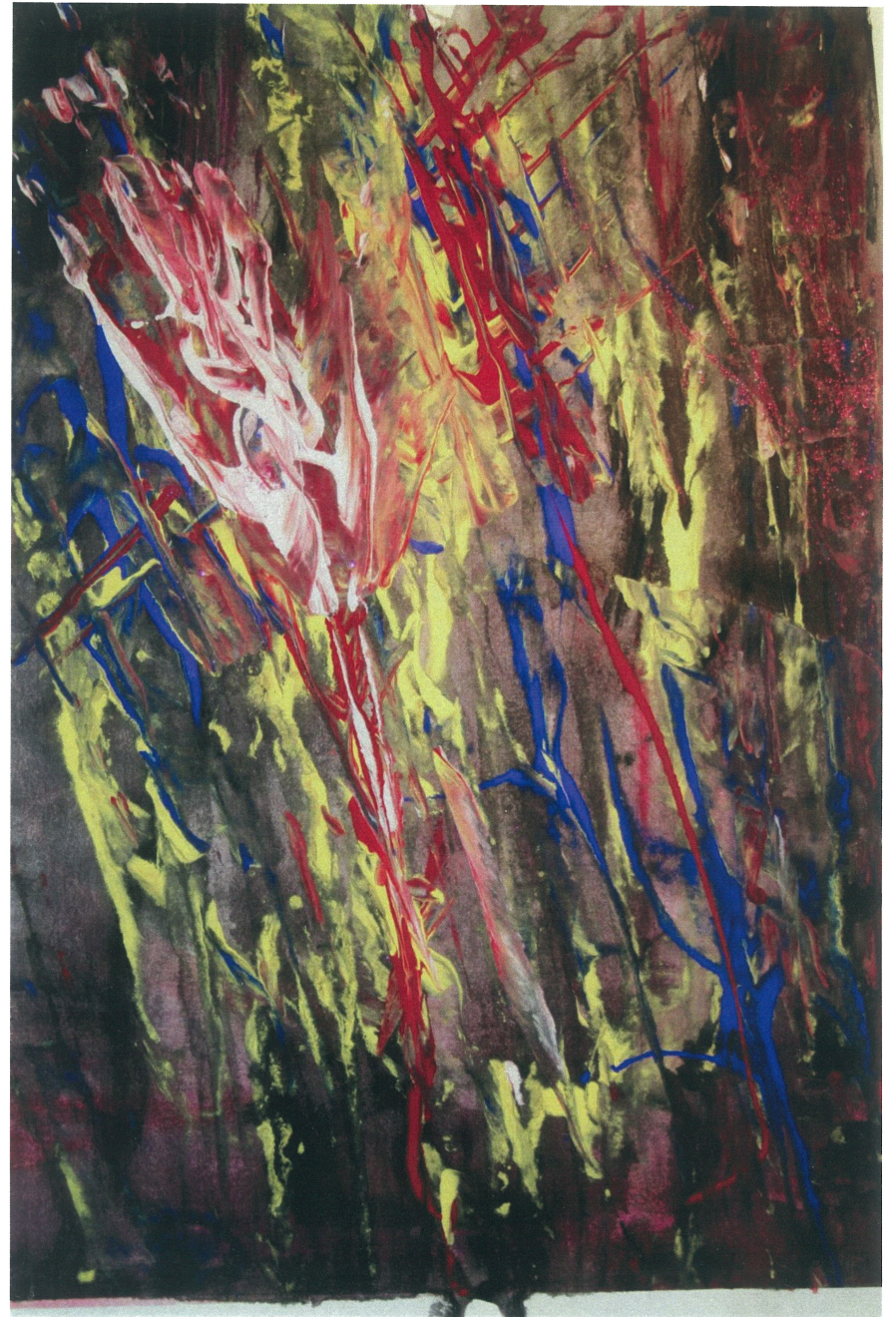


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He fulfilled his duties as a father and provider. As they grew older, he imported the Egyptian curriculum so he could teach them alongside their Canadian education. He organized his summer camp curriculum that involved outings during the day, supervised by their mother, while he was at work. When he returned after his day's work he would teach them in various subjects of the Egyptian curriculum – the requisites of Mathematics, Geometry, French and Arabic language classes, Religion, Painting and Calligraphy. He taught the different styles of calligraphy with the ultimate challenge to create their own style to define the letters of the alphabet. He did not exclude physical training in sports such as swimming, karate and tennis.

His first born, Mohammad, was very intelligent, scoring A's in the Canadian curriculum with the minimum of study. His girls did well also but Gamal saw that the ease of success in Ottawa would make them lose a competitive edge. He realized he needed to push them more. He recalled how much motivation was required back in Egypt to succeed in the limited spots available to students. If one's grades were not topping 95 or more, one had



literally no chance of acceptance into university. He decided that all his children would go to Egypt and develop a more competitive attitude towards their success. And so, since 2009, the children and their mother have been

living in Egypt while he continues his paternal duties of providing for their education and livelihood.



v – winds of change

In 1995, the calling came. The winds of change were blowing and stirring up a storm. He felt a need to stretch himself to a further challenge and a new land. He had a nagging desire for seeking out another success. He had created a wish that he could not really define. *He just had to do it. He had to face new challenges. He had to make something more of himself than what he had already accomplished in life. In his subconscious, it may have been his desire to find his inner soul. There was a void that needed to be filled. But still he could not define his true desire!*

Canada represented a land for renewed challenges – a land of peace and of hope for the respect of human rights and, above all, the hope for self-determination and peace-of-mind. He respected his traditions and the great history of his culture but something was missing.

Out of personal frustration, Gamal felt that he must leave all that behind and *get out of there*, with all due respect to the ancient pharaohs. He felt like he was saying to his ancestors: ***Stay in your pyramids, keep yourself in there - I am out of here.*** It was his only way at resolving his personal struggle.

He enquired about immigrating to Canada. He would have to venture alone in search of a new beginning, and then he would arrange for his wife and son to come and join him.

Even as he was preparing, family, friends and associates called him *crazy Gamal* for thinking of a move to Canada and abandoning his successful career he already had in the Middle East. Gamal should have realized the omen.

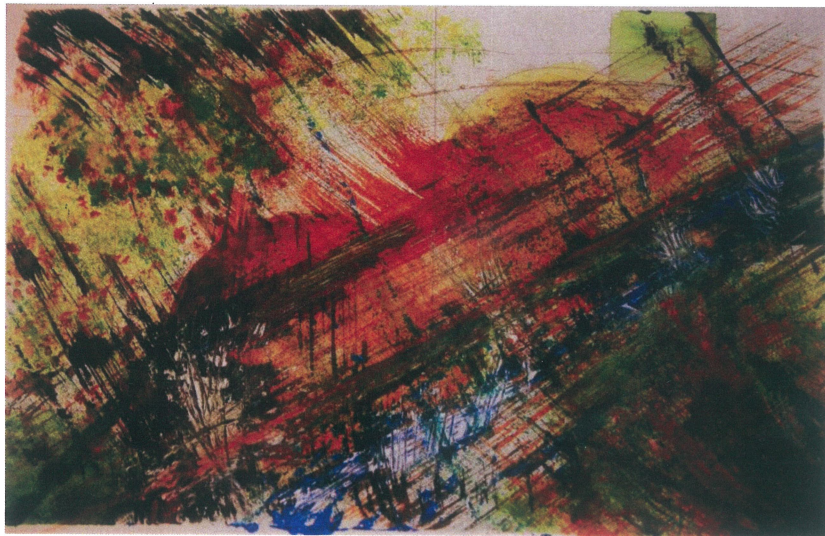
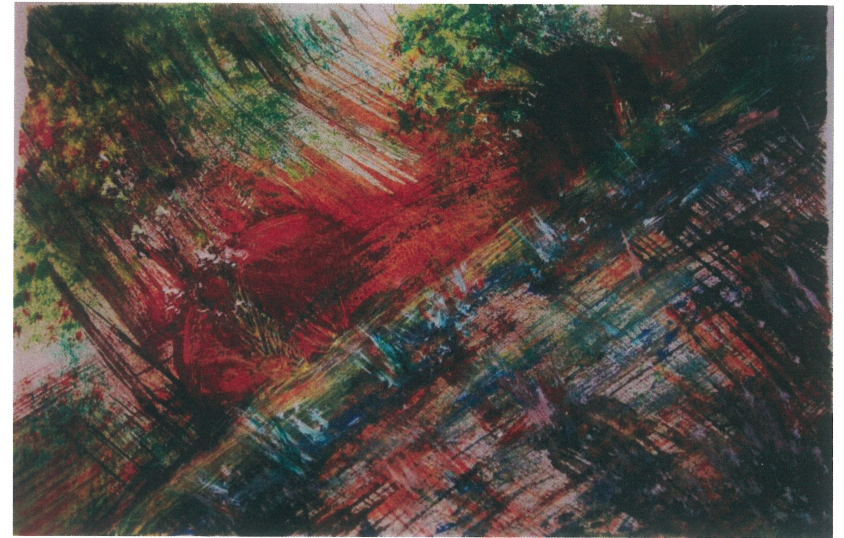
When he arrived in Ottawa, he befriended a student *Ahmad Farouk* who introduced him to *Nofel*, a student economist at the University of Ottawa. He arranged to board with this student and silently Gamal gave himself three months to settle or he would return home to Egypt.

One of the first things he did was to enquire about pursuing a PHD in Architecture at Carleton University. Regrettably, as a new arrival, he had no access to government funding and could not receive any bursaries. To add further to this setback was the information he received from some of the local architects that this was a period of restraint and the lack of projects meant no one was hiring.

He had made the bold move to Canada, knowing no one and was not very conversant in the English language. The reality of the situation hit hard and he was literally shell-shocked. Within weeks, the excitement of the journey was now sour and he felt the depression taking hold of him. The prospect of a return, even though self-imposed, was gloomy... not to mention the inherent shame of failure.

This downturn, and looming sense of defeat, gave him a renewed energy. He resolved he would stay in Ottawa and make a go of it. He did not want to give up that easily. Within a month he organized himself, found his own place and brought his wife and son to Canada. *He was determined to make something of this!*

The reunion of the family bolstered his resolve as he now had to fulfill the reality of providing for them. The years passed and Gamal eventually fathered three daughters – Sarah (1996), Harger (1998) and Miriam (2006). These were joyous years.



iii – good paths

He enrolled in El Minia Secondary Military School where he honed his leadership skills, and eventually completed his Bachelor in Architecture at El Minia University in 1983. The following year he joined the Egyptian Army as an officer in the Engineering Office - and was one of a team of three leaders as a site engineer in the construction of a self-contained city of *Genava*, built as the Army residence.

In 1987, he found himself as an architect, designer, and site engineer with a small firm, El Yasin, specialising in residential projects in El Ehsa, Saudi Arabia. The smallness of the firm dictated that he be proficient in all facets and disciplines involved in design and construction. This phase increased his overall skills and was an important factor in further developing his leadership and operational skills. He covered the gamut of A – Z of the construction world.

iv – respect and upward mobility

By 1991, he had achieved a respectable status working in an elite group of architects. He partnered with two other principals – *Ashoraf Abo El Eune*, Architect, and *Soher Abo El Eune*, Interior Designer. They obtained contracts for projects for the private residences of an elite clientele plus a major contract for the construction of the *Abo Corkas Primary School* near his hometown of El Minia.

Another important work for their young company was the renovations of the campus of RCA Malawi, an Egyptian institute

of agricultural research, for which it had received the foreign financial aid of the American government.

Gamal married, at the age of 30, more out of the societal expectations than for his own desire. In 1994 he celebrated the birth of his son, but that auspicious occasion was not without its underlying tone of sadness and risk. Mohammad's twin brother was lost while still a fetus, and at delivery time, the umbilical cord wrapped itself around Mohammad's neck. Mohammad was successfully delivered by Caesarean ... *Thanks be to God*. It was a blow to have lost a son but Gamal accepted that as fate... *as the word of God*.



OUT OF THE LAND

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i – from the beginning

To start from the beginning, Gamal Abdel Rahman was born on January 5, 1961 in El Minia, a city in the province of the same name. He was the son of Fawzia and Ali Abdel Rahman, a second generation barber. He was the eldest of six siblings including three sisters, Shahenaz, Amal and Sabren and two brothers, Halim and Ehabe.

Their family name of Abdel is Arabic for *servant of God*. Gamal Ali and Halim were the two mischievous siblings of the family, creating minor havoc when father Ali was at work in his shop. When father would return amidst the complaints of the neighbours and, the rare chidings of their mother, these *two devils* would make *like angels*, decrying the unfounded grumbles.

Gamal was nevertheless almost petrified of his strict father and he would desperately try to avoid bothering him. On the other hand, he enjoyed the nurturing and loving embraces of his mother. In Shahenaz, the eldest of the sisters, he found his second mother – kind and caring she was. With Amal, they were

close in age and so forged a *buddy bond* while baby Sabren in turn received the loving attention of her eldest brother, Gamal Ali.

Gamal was ever the rambunctious one, playing and running all over with his soccer ball. He loved to go to his father's shop and spend time there but still always in a playful attitude. His entire education was satisfied in El Minia – from kindergarten to primary to secondary and finally to university.

Ever since he was a young boy, he had a keen interest in drawing. He was astounded to see how his 7th grade Geometry teacher, Said Saleh, was able to execute free hand drawings of circles, straight lines in the most perfect fashion. At the age of 12, he undertook a private home project to create a maquette of a villa. He did this entirely on his own. He impressed himself and his teachers to the extent that he decided then and there: ***I am going to be an architect!*** It gave him the confidence and resolve to make that decision on his own.

ii – the formation

In his formative high school years, he found guidance and inspiration through his Painting teacher, Mr. Wahid. He was a short skinny man who, because of his life experiences, proved to be a fountain of knowledge. Underneath the expectations of traditional societal values lay lurking the secret urge for creative expression.

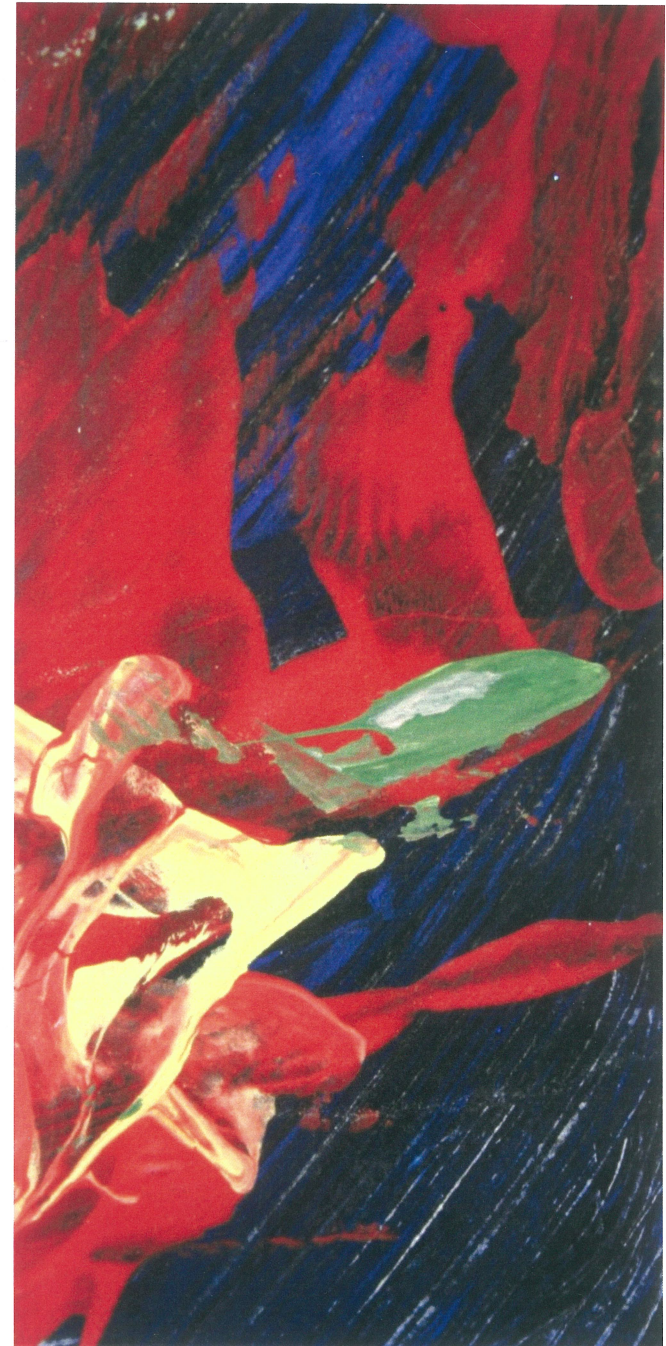
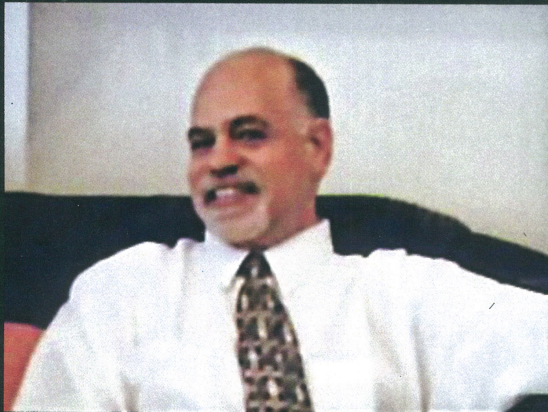
Upon graduation, he had to come face to face with making a choice – to delve further into art education, or to do what was more socially preferred – to pursue studies in architecture. The latter was by far a choice of a safer and more promising route for his future.

About Gamal Abdel Rahman

Gamal Abdel Rahman's credentials include B.S.C. in Architecture and M.S.C. in Interior Design. He is an accomplished Architect, Builder, Interior Designer, entrepreneur Hairstylist, Artist, and Photographer.

Gamal was born in El Minia, Egypt. His sense of adventure brought him to Canada and eventually as owner of *The Connoisseur Hair Studio*. He is a third generation hair stylist. His expertise and his flair for hair will bring out the *Inner You*.

Gamal has a passion for the arts in particular - Painting, Calligraphy & Photography. Gamal began to explore nature using his inner eye to reveal the beauty hidden in flowers, trees and the rhythm of water. He shares his passion through his camera lens and his use of acrylic paint.



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ix – the nurtured and nurturer

Even as he struggles to keep a dual life – one in Canada and the other in Egypt – and practise his three disciplines of training – architect, artist and hairstylist - Gamal still finds the energy to maintain his fatherly coaching skills by keeping weekly contact via skype with his beloved children. He feels the obligation to see his children to success. He has told them that he would hold himself accountable for any failures.

Initially, Mohammed went through the shock of the higher and stricter standards of the Egyptian curriculum. He would decry his misfortune and Gamal challenged him to *do something about it and not cry about it*.

All the children have been encouraged to exercise their academic as well as creative abilities. Mohammed has excelled, maintaining his standing at the top of his class, and has held two exhibitions of his art work. Sarah has won a second place award in a provincial art competition. Harger's creative talents shadow Gamal's and he refers to her *as his soul mate*, while young Miriam *is his miracle kid*. She inspires her father to no end!

He is ever so impressed that young Miriam who left Ottawa at the age of three, can still recall her times in Canada with great degree of nostalgia, and all this further reinforced through her elder siblings' help.

He recalls how, as a young boy, he coached his younger brothers and sisters, helping them to focus their energies on their studies. He repeats the same with his own children and has since begun to pass the torch. His eldest - Mohammed, Sarah and Harger - have received their commission from Dad to exercise

their coaching abilities to the youngest, Miriam. Mohammed has the responsibility to inform Miriam on the Canadian ways of life as well as Science & Mathematics, Sarah takes on the role of English, French & Arabic language teacher, and Harger, the duties of Art & Religion.

Gamal places great emphasis on the concepts of the nurtured and the nurturer. He emphasizes the need of each individual to fulfill these roles to their greatest ability. He engages his offspring (the eldest three now in young adulthood) to assume the torch and carry on.

x – looking towards the future

As his current phase took root, and with bread and butter covered, another element arose in Gamal's subconscious. Now that his salon business was stabilising, his passion for drawing began to rise and take form. He began to practise his art in colouration – choosing a favourite subject of Nature. His first works were a prelude to developing his form of personal expression. The movement of water and the serenity of landscapes attracted him, and provided an inherent source of calm to his disposition. He indulged in the outlet of his creativity. He played with the attributes of flowers, he practised photography... all in search of his artistic soul.

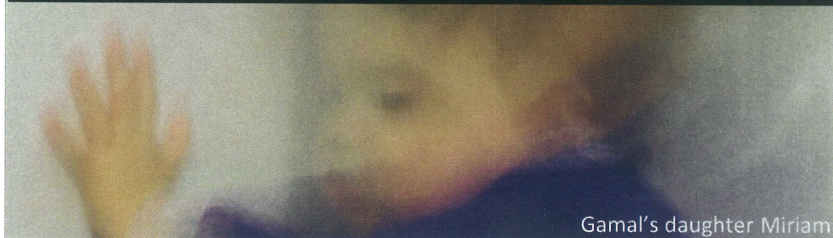
But as he practised the various art forms, one medium stood above the others – abstract painting. *Abstraction is in itself a canvas upon which layers of emotion, colour and vision create a reality that knows no boundary*. Here he found his personal niche – a way to express himself fully without the restriction of shape or form.

Gamal notes that his creativity achieves greatest heights when he is *in love* – highlighting the artist’s emotional needs. Struggle it may be, self-imposed solitude it may be, but in the end it is for the greater value to his own maturity and fulfillment as a parent, artist and compassionate being, as well as to the benefit of his own children. A deep bond exists - as maturity develops over the course of time – between himself, his work and his family!

Over the years Gamal has created over 150 works. He is still in his development phase of maturity as a painter but each and every work has been a source of pride and a stepping stone in his development. Each tableau, no matter the result, is *his baby* and he has yet to find the courage to part with any of them. It would be rare for him to sell. He may make a gift to someone special but even then the cord remains attached. An American collector practically coerced him into making a sale of two of his works - an event of which he still has bittersweet memories. *Today, he would gladly repurchase them.*

With his revived love of art, he has taken one step further - to create an art studio environment within his salon. “It’s good for everyone - artists and clients like. Bringing art to the people, and stretching our boundaries is worth it. People come for their hair, now they can stay for the art.” says Rahman.

Gamal Ali is still a young parent-artist and he awaits the day to come when his works achieve adolescence and, in irony, say to him... ***We are out of here!***



Gamal's daughter Miriam

The Story of Gamal Ali



Out of the Land of LaLaLA – LaLaLEE - The Story of Gamal Ali

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Master

Assistant

Apprentice

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Note: The format of this book follows the ancient technique of bookbinding of the Ming dynasty (1366-1644) in China. Text was printed on one side of large sheets and then folded in half. The pages were held between two boards and then bound with cord on the raw sides to create the final form.

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