







## INTERVIEW WITH IXONE SADABA

Sadaba is an award winning photography, installation and performance artist based in London. Her work focuses on areas of political upheaval and violence, particularly the position and identity of women. Her latest exhibition 'Gulala' explores the history of Kurdish women in war, presenting a series of photographs taken at the infamous Amna Suraka prison in Iraqi Kurdistan, used by Saddam Hussein to torture Kurds. The marks and fingerprints are all that remain of the women and children imprisoned there – none survived.

'Gulala' is at the Tasneem Gallery in Barcelona until 13 March

*The images from the Gulala series are incredibly arresting. There is both a sense of peace and the evidence of abhorrent violence. Why did you choose to document Amna Suraka, as opposed to any other site?*

During my visit in Iraq I was staying in Halabja, the city of Iraqi Kurdistan where one of the most notorious chemical attacks took place in 1988, so most of my experience there was related to the recent Kurdish history. Therefore, Amna Sakura happens to be a significant location in contemporary history, as it was a main torture and extermination centre during the Anfal campaign (1986-1988) against the Kurds. Furthermore, the events that took place in Amna Sakura, a jail that has been left untouched, work as a paradigm of the many atrocities that happen everyday in our world. Everyday we hear about these kind of atrocities in the news, but it is difficult as a spectator to get a closer, more human sense of the events. One that is not spectacular, one that is as fragile and perishable and at the same time infinite, as any private moment is.

*Can you explain what it was like being in the prison cells?*

Amna Sakura is quite an interesting building itself. They began building it in 1979 and took 16 years to be finished. It is an enormous empty concrete container in which the only testimony of what happened inside is the layers of traces on the walls.

As I said, despite having become a museum, Amna Suraka is an actual jail of the Ba'ath regime that has remained untouched. Every time there is a human trace, a layer of history, there is also a human presence. Being in the prison cells is inhabiting that present moment. It is a frightening experience of unvarnished and indefinite truth.

*What is your opinion of its reincarnation as a museum?*



Firstly I have to say that it is not the kind of museum we would imagine. And I think this is the interesting part of it. When I say that it remains untouched, I mean it to the extent that it is a bare concrete skeleton without windows. I entered the building alone, walked and experienced alone the whole place for several hours, which allowed me to confront the overwhelming emptiness and silence. So more than a museum, it is a place where the presence and traces of recent history have been fully respected. Amna Sakura is meaningful testimony to the Kurdish collective memory and identity, as well as its recent recognition as a place of genocide.

*You speak about the use of newsprint in terms of its fragility. Considering the media coverage of the continued Peshmerga resistance, was this another inference?*

When I talk about fragility I am referring to the layers of traces of the human body. I am also referring to those intimate moments that happened inside the cells, and finally, to the highly perishable newsprint outcome of the project. It represents how something infinite, vast, immense and strong as a human being can, sometimes, only be approached through such fragile traces. What I consider to be the unavoidable role of women in war is in many ways present in this work and definitely, that powerful contrast is the core of this work.

*Was there a specific reason for shooting in black and white? I immediately draw a parallel with the site's name 'Red Security' and the connotations of red in general: blood, anger, war...*

There is definitely a contrast between the red and the black & white in this story. Amna Sakura is a red building; it has the color of blood. But I chose black and white as I felt it to be more silent, less noisy, more like a text. But even if the pictures are monochrome, the newsprint paper has a yellowish tone that is actually very close to the tone of the walls, the yellow will also increase with time – I find this visual presence of time in the prints to be really meaningful.

*The title of the series relates to both the opium poppy as a symbol of war and the Kurdish women's name,*