

Syrian artist's vision of love amid devastation of war goes viral

By Tim Hume, for CNN

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(CNN) -- An image juxtaposing a famous painting of lovers and the ruins of a building in Syria has gone viral, becoming a powerful symbol of the country's devastation from civil war.

"Freedom Graffiti," by Syrian artist-in-exile Tammam

"Freedom Graffiti," by Syrian artist Tammam Azzam, features Klimt's "The Kiss" superimposed over a destroyed Syrian building.

Azzam, digitally superimposes Austrian painter Gustav Klimt's masterpiece "The Kiss" -- a gilded image of lovers embracing -- over a bullet-ridden wall in Syria.

Syria's civil war is now approaching its second anniversary. The United Nations estimated last month that the death toll in the conflict [had surpassed 60,000](#).

Azzam's image has gone viral since it was put online last week, attracting more than 35,000 "likes" and 25,000 "shares" on Facebook since Friday.

While the artwork is a purely digital creation, Azzam, who fled to Dubai with his wife and daughter seven months into the conflict, told CNN he hoped to return to his homeland one day to create a physical version of the work.

"When I can return to Syria I have vowed to paint 'The Kiss' onto Syria's infrastructure," said the 33-year-old artist. "I cannot say if it will be the same wall though, as who knows if it will still be standing."

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Azzam said he began creating digital art as a form of protest shortly after leaving his country -- where his parents remain -- because he did not want to fight in the army.

The work was part of a series, "The Syrian Museum," that was exhibited in a collection at Dubai's [Ayyam Gallery](#), which represents Azzam, last year. The works referenced other European Masters such as Goya, Picasso and Da Vinci, he said, juxtaposing "some of the greatest achievements of humanity with the devastation in my country."

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