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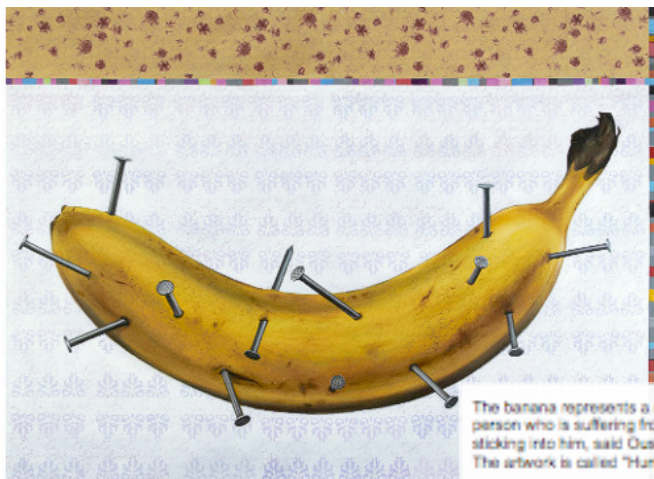
# Syrian pop artist depicts suffering with 'black comedy'

By **Catriona Davies**, CNN  
September 27, 2012 -- Updated 1547 GMT (2347 HKT)

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OUSSAMA DIAB, RIYAH GALLERY

The banana represents a sensitive person who is suffering from the nails sticking into him, said Oussama Diab. The artwork is called "Human Being."

## Human Being

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### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Oussama Diab is a Palestinian artist living in Damascus

His exhibition "In The Name of Freedom" opened this week in Dubai

Paintings were all created in Syria during the civil war

**(CNN)** -- As bloody unrest has raged around him, artist Oussama Diab has been formulating his own response to Syria's civil war -- through art.

Diab, a 35-year-old painter born of Palestinian parents in Damascus and still living in Syria's capital, has a new exhibition of works he has created this year.

His exhibition "In the Name of Freedom" opened September 17 in Dubai. Diab says he was unable to get a visa to travel to the United Arab Emirates, so he had to remain in Syria.

In a telephone interview Diab said his new works "are inspired by what's going on across the Arab world, politics is in everything."

"My artwork reflects not only what is happening in Syria but what has happened in all the Arab world. One of the artist's duties is to follow the problems, the worries, the suffering and present it in his work.

## I am always living in worry and I have fears living here.

Oussama Diab, artist

"The fact of living inside the situation makes me able to show it better. I can talk about all the suffering that has happened here and also on the other side of the world," he added.

Diab said he had lost someone close to him in the conflict that has divided Syria since March 2011, but would not give any more details.

"I am always living in worry and I have fears living here," he said. "Without referring to who is doing it, all the bloodshed is not easy to handle, so it affects your mood."

While Diab's work does not directly reference to the civil war in Syria,

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### Depicting suffering with 'black comedy'

September 27, 2012 -- Updated 1547 GMT (2347 HKT)



As bloody unrest has raged around him, artist Oussama Diab has been formulating his own response to Syria's civil war -- through art.

### Fight intolerance, graffiti a minaret

September 20, 2012 -- Updated 1738 GMT (0138 HKT)



Fine Arabic calligraphy and street art may seem worlds apart, but for artist eL Seed, they're one and the same thing.

### What happened to Tel Aviv's tent city?

September 13, 2012 -- Updated 1121 GMT (1921 HKT)



Last year, half a million Israelis took to the streets in the largest social justice movement in the country's history. Has anything changed since?

### An Israeli star singing Iranian songs

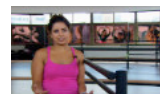
September 13, 2012 -- Updated 1311 GMT (2111 HKT)



Rita Johanzoruz performed during her country's 50th anniversary celebrations. She now goes back to her Iranian roots, singing in Farsi.

### Can the Ramallah boom last?

September 10, 2012 -- Updated 1235 GMT (2035 HKT)



Palestinian has grown rapidly in the past few years. Ramallah is experiencing booming consumer economy. But is this growth sustainable?

### A rebirth of Berber culture in Libya

September 3, 2012 -- Updated 1258 GMT (2058 HKT)

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the themes of war and dreams of a better future are featured in his pictures.

One shows a child with a gun superimposed over a barcode. He said it showed how children are the victims of those who deal in weapons for their own ends.

Another work shows a woman with her head replaced by balloons, which Diab said represented the nice ideas in her head.

Diab has been represented by Ayyam Gallery, which has branches in Damascus, Dubai and Beirut since 2007 when he was one of 10 winners of a competition to find emerging artists. His first solo show was in 2009.

Diab's work is described by the gallery as pop art and graffiti-inspired paintings against nondescript backgrounds, giving a symbolic interpretation of current events.

[Also on Inside the Middle East: Syrian artists fight Assad regime with satire](#)

## One of the artist's duties is to follow the problems, the worries, the suffering and present it in his work

Oussama Diab, artist

Among the works is "Human Being" showing a banana with nails driven into it. Diab said the banana represents a person suffering from the pain of the nails. Another work shows an altered version of Michaelangelo's "Pieta" sculpture in which Jesus Christ wears a keffiyeh, intended to show him as a Palestinian martyr.

"Like Charlie Chaplain, I'm representing a black comedy so it makes you smile and it gives you grief at the same time," Diab said of his work.

Much of his work reflects his identity as a Palestinian who has never been to his homeland.

"My work is based on the idea of country," he said. "All countries around the world should be sacred. I hate the situation in Syria because Syria should be sacred as well. I don't want the country to be ruined.

"Because I live without a country, it makes me feel closer to people who are suffering here. I feel their suffering and it affects me too. It makes me closer to understanding their pain."

Diab's said he feels his identity split between his Palestinian heritage and his parents' adopted country.

"I never had the chance to live in Palestine, so I feel like the country is an illusion," he said. "My parents didn't come to a strange country, but one where they could speak the same language. The idea of country is sacred to me. Syria is my second country, but I would love to be in my other country."

[Also on Inside the Middle East: Images of Tahrir: Egypt's revolutionary art](#)

Diab visited Dubai for the opening of the Ayyam Gallery a few years ago, but said he has not been able to get a visa to visit since.

Sally Othman, gallery manager of Ayyam Damascus, said artists in the city were continuing to work during the unrest, but there are fewer exhibitions.

"The gallery is running as normal because we have our artists based here, but as far as exhibitions, it's hard these days because people are not going out," she said. "We had two workshops with four actors working live in the gallery before Ramadan and we are going to do something similar soon."

"In the Name of Freedom" runs at Ayyam Gallery, DIFC, Dubai, until October 30.

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Brutally suppressed for over 40 years, Libya's Amazigh are slowly resurrecting their culture, but can they win a stake in the new Libya?

### Artists fight Assad regime with satire

August 27, 2012 -- Updated 1331 GMT (2131 HKT)



A creative and non-violent form of opposition has taken hold in Syria, as artists respond to the crisis with newfound boldness, despite the danger.

### Hurdles for flight phobia boy

August 20, 2012 -- Updated 1556 GMT (2356 HKT)



A British boy and his father are about to embark on the journey of a lifetime, traveling across the Middle East and Europe by land and sea.

### Tourists take Islamic 'pray-cations'

August 14, 2012 -- Updated 1428 GMT (2228 HKT)



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August 10, 2012 -- Updated 0947 GMT (1747 HKT)



The tumultuous months since January 2011 have confronted Egyptians with uncertainty, triumph and despair on an almost daily basis.

### 'Bars for Ramadan' list sparks protest

July 25, 2012 -- Updated 1148 GMT (1948 HKT)



An English-language magazine in Dubai has been accused of disrespecting Islam by recommending places to drink during Ramadan.

### Arab sportswomen finally in the picture

August 2, 2012 -- Updated 1256 GMT (2056 HKT)



Celebrating female athletes from the Arab world, a photo exhibition called "Hey-Ya (Let's Go!): Arab Women in Sport," has opened in London.

### Tires become sign of peace

June 29, 2012 -- Updated 1421 GMT (2221 HKT)



If one image conjures up the Lebanon's political climate better than any other, it's the burning tire. Now painted tires promote peace and unity.

### Saudi women slam dunk sports taboo

July 5, 2012 -- Updated 1011 GMT (1811 HKT)



A group of women basketball players in Saudi Arabia has been defying stereotypes as one of the few female sports teams in the kingdom.

### Red desert to Red Sea:

June 27, 2012 -- Updated 1446 GMT (2246 HKT)

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Can jumping spiders still hunt in space? It may sound like science fiction, but this experiment is reality, thanks to an Egyptian teen.

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In two thirds of Middle Eastern countries, there are more women than men in university. But that doesn't translate into equality at work.

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May 25, 2012 -- Updated 1030 GMT (1830 HKT)



Haifaa Al Mansour has just directed one of the first feature films ever made in Saudi Arabia. But she can't watch it there, because cinemas are banned.

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The sight of a tourist wearing skimpy shorts in a Dubai mall has prompted two Emirati women to campaign for visitors to dress modestly.

Young upstarts plot art revolution

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The Young Collectors Auction in Dubai included a number of young artists who could be stars of the future.

Auctions celebrate Islamic art

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CNN.com

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