



Even as a child, Tammam Azzam knew that painting was his destiny. But he never imagined that his career would take off so swiftly. Today, at the age of just 28, Azzam's paintings attract collectors from around the world, while critics have praised his original expressionist style.

Azzam's work is strongly influenced by the rugged lava plateaus that surround his native Suweida: combining dark colours with shades of grey, the paintings are inspired by the sharp peaks and deep valleys that dominate the harsh landscape

he was familiar with as a child. "Azzam's paintings depict Suweida," Syrian painter Safwan Dahoul commented. "It's as if he is painting the view from his window there."

Achieving success wasn't always easy though. When he moved to Damascus at the age of 18 to attend the Faculty of Fine Arts at Damascus University, he had a hard time acclimatising to metropolitan life at first. Everything changed in 2001 however, when he took a few months off to participate in a workshop organised by the Syrian painter Marwan Kassab Bashi in Jordan. "Attending the workshop wasn't a

choice, I had to go and see Marwan," says Azzam, who remembers the month in Amman as a turning point in his career. "It wasn't just about art, but about how to see life and how to express what we see in our work."

Although his graduation project at Damascus University Faculty of Fine Arts focused on portraits, Azzam has since found his niche in abstract expressionism. His paintings often depict such ordinary items as chairs and trees, in shades of black, white, brown and some green.

In an introduction to one of Azzam's

The Colours of the Earth

Words Nadia Muhanna
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Known for his abstract paintings in shades of black and white, young Syrian painter Tammam Azzam has conquered the Arab art scene.

exhibitions in 2005, Bashi wrote: “German abstract painter Hann Trier once told me that Arabs are the best at using green colours. They live near the desert, so they have a permanent longing for green, the symbol of life.” In the case of Azzam, this couldn’t be closer to truth. In his work, he depicts his quest for life in the green of the trees and contrasts this with the earthy colours of the arid landscapes that surround them.

With a successful exhibition at the prestigious Atassi Gallery under his belt and a new show soon to be opened at the

Ayyam Gallery in Damascus, Azzam’s career is moving from strength to strength. Moreover, art collectors from all over the world are turning their attention to his works. But fame and recognition are not important to this modest up-and-coming artist: “I don’t paint for people or society, I don’t think about others’ opinion of my works,” Azzam said. “I paint for myself, because I love it, that’s all.”

Painting, however, doesn’t put food on the table. Therefore, Azzam has tried his hand at many jobs. He designed TV sets for several Syrian drama series, designed

some 50 books and worked as the in-house designer for the French and German cultural centres in Damascus, the Ayyam Gallery and several UN projects.

Azzam is one of the few Syrians able to make a living solely from his artistic talent. He has achieved what many young Syrians can only dream of: he has a job he feels passionate about, a beautiful house and a young family. In his view, the recipe for success is actually very simple: “Don’t wait for the ideal circumstances; just keep on working and you’ll finally get where you want to.”

