



ASU Center for the Study of
Religion and Conflict
Arizona State University

October 21–25, 2024
Gallery exhibit

The Brush is Mightier: One Man's Mission to Rescue Art from the Taliban

**Dr. Mohammad
Yusof Asefi**

Artist-in-Residence

Dr. M. Yusof Asefi
AZ 2023



“Under the Taliban’s occupation of Afghanistan, I was silenced, unable to express my art freely.

But since coming to the United States and joining the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict, I have regained my voice.”

Dr. Mohammad Asefi

Amid the horrors of war, survival needs often eclipse all else. But for Dr. Mohammad Yousof Asefi, a practicing physician and nationally recognized artist, saving Afghanistan's art was as critical as saving lives.

Under the Taliban's iron-fisted rule, Asefi risked his life to protect his country's cultural heritage – a mission he continues as artist-in-residence at the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict at Arizona State University.

In 1996, when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan and banned art depicting living beings, Asefi risked his life to protect the Afghan National Gallery's paintings.

He used watercolors to temporarily conceal human and animal figures in over 120 works. Despite the risk of death, he remained determined to save his country's artistic treasures.

“In times of oppression, artists have wielded their creativity as a powerful form of resistance. Art becomes a sacred act, challenging injustice, igniting hope and illuminating the resilience of the human spirit,” said Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict Director, John Carlson.

After the Taliban fell in 2001, Asefi helped restore the altered paintings and opened a public gallery in Kabul. When the Taliban returned to power in 2021, he fled to the United States with his family, continuing his work at ASU.

Tom Mallon, a donor to the center's visiting scholars fund, described Asefi as “the bravest man I've ever met.”

“Dr. Asefi's presence on campus gives students a chance not only to see an accomplished artist at work but also to be inspired by a man who fought for the liberty essential to every artist and every citizen of the world.”

Asefi's journey highlights the enduring power of art in resisting oppression and understanding the human experience.

Excerpted from “The brush is mightier: One man's mission to rescue art from the Taliban” originally published via ASU News on October 14, 2024
Read the full article at <https://ow.ly/pJGm50TPqQL>

Exhibited works





Grand Canyon

43" x 55"

A view of the Grand Canon in Arizona.

Impressionism
Oil paint + brush



Fall Nature – Paghmaan, Kabul

42" x 81"

Scenic view of nature in the Paghman district of Kabul city.

Impressionism
Oil paint + brush



Nature – Prescott

26" x 32"

Nature of Prescott, Arizona.

Realism
Oil paint + brush



Climate Change

48" x 36"

A collection of natural disasters caused by climate change.

Abstract
Oil paint + palette knife



Helpless

31" x 49"

A child's father was killed during the Civil War, forcing him to support his family at a young age.

Realism + collage

Oil paint + brush



Oppression

35.5" x 45.5"

The Taliban's oppression of Afghan women denied them education and basic human rights.

Realism

Oil paint + brush



Nature – Snow

33.5" x 45"

Nature in Afghanistan.

Impressionism

Oil paint + palette knife



Hopeless

36" x 42"

Women cry outside a school on the first day Afghan girls were denied entry under the Taliban regime.

Impressionism

Oil paint + brush



Nature

11" x 14"

Combination of realism and abstract depiction of nature.

*Realism + abstract
Oil paint + brush*



Restricted

37" x 42.5"

A girl is confined to a tent, forbidden from going outside or participating in any activities, awaiting her marriage.

*Realism + abstract
Oil paint + palette knife*



Old City of Kabul – Koche Kaah Froshi

17.5" x 33"

Historic are of Kabul, known for its wide variety of pets and animals.

*Impressionism
Oil paint + brush*



Fall Nature

20" x 16"

Woman walking along path among fall foliage.

*Impressionism
Oil paint + palette knife*



Mercy

28" x 12"

An Afghan girl praying to god for mercy from the oppression and tyranny of Dictats.

*Expressionism
Oil paint + brush*



Burnt Kabul

48" x 36"

Abstract painting of Kabul on fire.

*Abstract
Oil paint + palette knife*



Buzkashi

30" x 42"

Buzkashi is a popular traditional sport in Afghanistan, known for its intensity and excitement.

*Impressionism
Oil paint + brush*



Carina Nebula

30" x 40"

Inspired by recently published NASA images taken by the James Webb Space Telescope.

*Realism
Oil paint + brush*



Nature – Takhaar

42” x 36”

Abstract painting of nature from the Afghan province of Takhaar.

*Realism + abstract
Oil paint + palette knife*



Escape from Death

43” x 31”

A child escaping from an explosion saves himself from Death.

*Realism + collage
Oil paint + brush*

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John Carlson, Director
Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict



Nature – Fall

42" x 48.5"

Fall in nature.

*Impressionism
Oil paint + palette knife*



Excitement

38" x 31.5"

Depicting the excitement and intensity of a Buzkashi player and his horse engaged in the sport.

*Impressionism
Oil paint + palette knife*



Nature – Arizona

22.5" x 24"

Desert nature of Arizona.

*Impressionism
Oil paint + palette knife*



Grand Canyon

16" x 20"

Storm clouds in the Grand Canyon.

*Impressionism
Oil paint + brush*



Cowboy

27" x 33"

An injured cowboy escapes to seek refuge from his enemies.

Realism

Oil paint + palette knife



Nature – Afghanistan

8" x 10"

Trees and mountains.

Impressionism

Oil paint + palette knife



Nature

12" x 24"

Landscape with mountains, hills and trees.

Impressionism

Oil paint + palette knife

Feeling inspired by Dr. Asefi?

Share your own creativity with us!

Use #InspiredByAsefi and tag the Center on social media or email us at csrc@asu.edu.

**Special thanks to the following
for their contributions to help
make this event a success.**

Mohammad Najim Asefi

Abdul Mosawer Asefi

Melvin Jones

**The School of Historical,
Philosophical and Religious Studies**

The School of Art

**Donate to the Center for the
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asufoundation.org/CA126053.html

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