

Horizon 101: Reflections and Paintings by Jala Makhzoumi

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‘Somewhere between Calabria and Corfu the blue really begins ... once you strike out from the flat and desolate Calabrian mainland towards the sea, you are aware of ... the horizon beginning to stain at the rim of the world ...’ the British author Lawrence Durrell wrote in 1945. Landscape architect Jala Makhzoumi’s *Horizon 101*, a diary of personal reflections in words and watercolour paintings, captures precisely the essence of the Mediterranean landscape that Durrell described. *Horizon 101* is a beautifully presented book written in Arabic and English; a story told through pictures and words that complement each other.

This book takes the reader on a journey of the horizon landscape as viewed from the author’s window in her one-bedroom apartment (apartment 101) on the campus of the American University of Beirut from July 2006 to June 2007. It is an expression of a recent formative life experience: the 2006 war on Lebanon and the suffering inflicted on the civilian population of South Lebanon that she encountered when she volunteered her landscape architectural expertise in post-war reconstruction. Yet the paintings and text are full of life and hope – a representation of resilience, the power of survival and re-growth encapsulated in landscape.

The author’s almost daily engagement with the horizon landscape through the window became her means of relief from the overwhelming situation she was trapped within. *Horizon 101* is Jala Makhzoumi’s ‘personal story of displacement and longing, an act of reflection and healing’, but it is also a story of the poignancy of landscape and the profound meanings and strength that can be found in observing the everyday landscape.

Horizons are longings, yearnings for freedom. The series of paintings begins with an open view of the horizon of sea and sky, then the format changes to a vertical view of the horizon through fences, conveying a sense of separation and imprisonment. Here, the aesthetics of the ordinary landscape are not confined to pictures of the intense Mediterranean blue but are as powerful in the bold compositions of barbed wire fences, scaffolds and activities screened through this view. Responding to changes in light at different times of the day, the landscape shifts in mood. The horizon is viewed in snapshots of momentary events narrating the passage of time in space, defining both immediate space, close, delineated by fencing, and the seascape disappearing into the openness of the horizon.

Landscape is never static, and the framing of the vignettes in this book in accordance with a calendar diary is a straightforward way of depicting the sense of time and the dynamics of landscape change; it is simple yet effective.

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