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GREENWICH VILLAGE

Nabil Kanso

Through Aug. 24. Institute of Arab and Islamic Art, 22 Christopher Street, Manhattan; institueaia.org.



Nabil Kanso's "Bursting Echoes," 1986, oil on linen, in the show "Endless Night." via Nabil Kanso and Institute of Arab and Islamic Art

How do artists protest war in their work? [Nabil Kanso](#) (1940-2019) was born in Beirut and surrounded by conflict in the Middle East in his early years. Later, protests against the Vietnam War coincided with his studies at New York University in the late 1960s. Kanso went on to exhibit widely and even owned galleries in New York and Atlanta, but confronting war became an integral element of his energetic, Neo-Expressionistic paintings and ink drawings, as you can see in "Endless Night" at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Art, curated by Mohammed Rashid al-Thani.

Large oil canvases like "Bursting Echoes" (1986) and "Soaring Load" (1988), with their twisting, surrealistic compositions and deep, saturated hues, recall the murals of [Los Tres Grandes](#) — the three Mexican muralists, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, and José Clemente Orozco. Kanso's are ambitious, explosive paintings that carefully mix allegory with human and animal figures.

Ink drawings from Kanso's series "[Leaves From the Theater of War](#)" (1980-1992) also recall an earlier model of protest art: [Goya's "The Disasters of War" \(1810-1820\)](#) etchings, which documented the destruction in Spain caused by Napoleonic wars. In Kanso's fuzzily sketched drawings, made at the height of the Lebanese civil war, there are gallows humor and lots of scatological references. The topicality of the work is also obvious. The geographical coordinates might change but the fact that war devastates the poor and often profits the rich is sadly timeless.