

Luciane Buchanan stars in season two of 'Sweet Tooth,' now on Netflix.



Weekend Lifestyle, Art & Culture

ARAB-AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Nabil Kanso — 'He was painting to communicate a message of peace'

The Lebanese-American master's son discusses his late father's work and legacy

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The final installment in our series focusing on contemporary Arab-American artists in honor of Arab-American Heritage Month.

It's been 48 years since the Lebanese Civil War broke out. The 15-year catastrophe split families apart and sent thousands to their graves. Although the conflict ended in 1990, its effects are still palpable in Lebanese society today. One artist who boldly captured it all on apocalyptic large-scale canvases was the Lebanese-American master Nabil Kanso, who died in 2019.

"He's one of the few artists that painted throughout the duration of the war and afterwards as well," Daniel Kanso, the artist's son and co-founder of the Estate of Nabil Kanso, says.

Following Kanso's death from cancer, the estate was founded in Atlanta, where the artist lived and worked for nearly four decades until his passing.

"It was really a promise that we made to him," Daniel tells Arab News. "He built the bones of the foundation during his life. He was always very meticulous in writing, cataloging and preserving his works, because he knew that a day would come when the world would be ready to embrace the work. He made a lot of sacrifices to do that. He put every penny and ounce of blood, sweat and tears into his work. Growing up with that, it's hard not to feel a responsibility to be faithful to it."

Nabil Kanso was born in 1940 to a Druze family and was raised in west Beirut. For his 16th birthday, he was gifted a camera. As political tensions rose in the late Fifties, he was told by a soldier: "A camera is more dangerous than a gun." He sketched instead. While there were no modern museums in the country at the time, Lebanon's ancient ruins offered cultural inspiration for him. The Sixties were an exciting time for the young man; he travelled to the UK and Europe and educated himself on masters of war painting, including Picasso and Goya.

Kanso's life in the United States began in New York in 1966. "Once he gets there, it really becomes his vocation to dedicate himself to art," said Daniel. His first space in New York was a five-story townhouse, where a non-commercial, artist-run gallery was born. Though it proved unsustainable, it was frequented by art critics from Art News, the world's oldest art magazine, and professionals including Alfred Barr, the first director of the Museum of Modern Art.

Kanso was radically doing things his own way. At a time when pop art and minimalism were in vogue, curators were not always accepting of his style of neo-expressionist canvases that took over entire walls. He didn't sell his work at galleries or auction houses. "He wanted the work to do something larger and to have larger meaning," explains

From top) Nabil Kanso; Kanso in front of his 1982 work 'Blazing Vortices'; Kanso's 'Burning of the Wells,' part of his 'Kuwait' series. Images supplied



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Daniel. "He was painting to communicate a message of peace, pacifism, and humanism."

Kanso was concerned by the political chaos of the Cold War era — which included the Lebanese Civil War, the Vietnam War, and unrest in Latin America — and by the Gulf Wars of the 90s and the 2000s. He was also inspired by literature and history.

"He wanted to activate you. He wanted you to be forced to confront what was happening and be surrounded by it," says Daniel. "Art can't save the world, but it can reveal something deeper about us and connect us."



Kanso's work was, at times, deemed too intense for the public. "He was ahead of his time," notes Daniel. In the mid-80s, in the racialized deep South state of Georgia, he put on a show of paintings depicting a black man with a white woman, based on Shakespeare's "Othello." Some of the images were taken down and the media was there to cover the controversy. "It was really traumatic for him to see that," Daniel says.

While the American art scene has now embraced artists of Arab background, that was not the case during Kanso's time, when anti-Arab sentiment was strong. "An immigrant with a thick accent and darker skin expressing an unvarnished and direct opinion was challenging to the establishment," says Daniel.

Beyond the fiery passion of his father's work, Daniel remembers a gentle, family-oriented man, who was a "bridge builder." Several estate projects are underway, including retrospectives in the US. Daniel and his sister Lilly are trying to raise awareness about their father's remarkable life.

"This was an artist who lived and died for his work," says Daniel. "We can see the hunger, as people learn more about the work. You'll see this artist a lot more."

Screen Scene

NEW TO WATCH AT HOME



The Matchmaker

Starring: Husam Alharthy, Reem Al-Habib, Nour Alkhadra
Where: Netflix
IT worker Tarek becomes

obsessed with the stunning new intern at his company. He heads to a desert resort (the film was mostly shot in AlUla) that promises its resident matchmaker will find men their perfect bride. It's not what it seems.



The Light We Carry

Starring: Oprah Winfrey, Michelle Obama
Where: Netflix

Feature-length special in which Oprah interviews former US first lady Michelle Obama about the life lessons that shaped her book "The Light We Carry: Overcoming in Uncertain Times," which was published late last year and quickly topped bestseller charts.



Sweet Tooth

Starring: Nonso Anozie, Christian Convery, Adeel Akhtar
Where: Netflix

The second season of this award-winning adaptation of a DC comic set in a world where a virus has killed most of the human population in an event known as the Great Crumble, which led to the emergence of part-animal, part-human babies.



A Tourist's Guide To Love

Starring: Rachael Leigh Cook, Scott Ly
Where: Netflix

Rom-com movie directed by Steven K. Tsuchida. After a breakup, travel exec Amanda Riley accepts an 'undercover' assignment to learn about Vietnam's tourist industry. She finds adventure there, but also unexpected romance.



AKA

Starring: Eric Cantona, Alban Lenoir, Sveva Aliviti, Kevin Layne, Aude Le Pape
Where: Netflix

Action thriller about a special-ops agent who has to infiltrate a dangerous crime syndicate. He finds himself forming an unexpected bond with the crime boss' young son — a situation that poses a moral dilemma.

REVIEW

Apple TV+ thriller 'Ghosted' may haunt you for all the wrong reasons

Matt Ross London

The new Apple TV+ romantic thriller "Ghosted" wants you to know just how self-aware this movie is. After all, it has global action megastar Chris Evans (Marvel's Captain America) as — get this — a humble farmer with needy attachment issues; i.e. a character who is about as far from Captain America as you can get. So what we have here is an action film, where the lead character is awful at action. Which is funny, right? Because he's famously good at being in action films, yeah?



Chris Evans and Ana de Armas as Cole and Sadie in 'Ghosted.' Apple TV+

All this is spelled out in the first half hour. Evans plays Cole, a handsome homebody with a tendency to scare women away by coming on a little strong. When he meets Sadie (Ana de Armas), the pair hit it off and Cole wonders if maybe, this time, he can play it cool. But when she doesn't text him back immediately, Cole goes ahead and ramps up the creepiness by following her on a work trip to London, where he learns that she is, in fact, a CIA agent, and he is now a hapless civilian caught up in a world of high-octane stunts and world-ending superweapon-

A story like this inevitably hinges on believable chemistry. All the neat set pieces in the world can't cover up the lack of 'rom' in this rom-action movie.

ons. Which is funny because, as you'll remember, Chris Evans is famously good at being in action films, right? Right!

What really hamstrings "Ghosted" — aside from the bizarrely repetitive direction by usually reliable Dexter Fletcher,

and his use of the same 'stop-the-music' gag about three times too many — is the fact that any story like this inevitably hinges on believable chemistry between the two stars. And, sadly, Evans and de Armas — as good-looking a couple as they undoubtedly are — are about as convincing as the leads in a mediocre high-school play. All the neat set pieces in the world can't cover up the lack of any kind of 'rom' in this rom-action movie. It says a lot when a flurry of (very funny) cameos are the best thing about a film. Audiences might want to give "Ghosted" a swipe left.