

## **The Power of the Artist: Amin Amir's Cartoons - Merely a Mirror of Somali Politics, or More?**

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In the culture of the Somalis, for as far back as anyone can trace their history, word art has been the prime choice when it comes to cultural expression. Visual art has been important, in that everyday objects have been produced with an eye for beauty as well as utility – as in the world generally – but it has very much played a side role compared to word art, among which poetry is the highest valued form. Only in recent time have visual artists began to make a mark on society.

One of these artists is Amin Amir, who nowadays lives in exile in Canada. Over the past ten years or so, he has come to the fore as the most prominent Somali artist, in part through his very political work, in part thanks to the internet. As an artist, he is incredibly prolific, using varied genres. He has, however, become best known as a cartoonist, through his own website where he publishes a new picture every day.

Amin Amir builds on a deep knowledge of Somali politics and all the actors on that scene. As he is constantly referring to these actors and, with few exceptions, using the Somali language in any texts present, his prime audience is constituted by Somalis. Because of the war which has already raged for over 20 year, this audience is now literally worldwide. Working well outside the war zone but using many sources of information on Somalia, he is able to capture political events as they unfold, and represent them to people with a particular twist. In his visual work, he offers a voice to those without.

At the same time his site has become a complex nave with links to many actors on the Somali scene generally.

In my paper, I will concentrate the way he chronicles events during the winter/spring of 2010-2011, looking in particular for any changes in direction. His stated aim is to be an actor, not only a mirror. Therefore I will also try to gauge his impact, to see if/how his work is reflecting back on Somali society.