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A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF
CONTEMPORARY IRAQI ART
USING SIX CASE STUDIES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School
of The Ohio State University

By

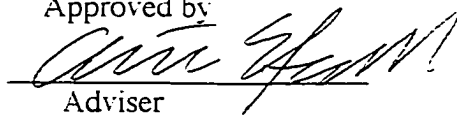
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1999

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Iraqi art, like most contemporary art movements in the Middle East in particular and the Third World in general, has flourished outside of the Western mainstream art system. Therefore, its major developments have remained invisible to Western art critics, art historians and art professionals. By introducing artworks from another culture, this study seeks a new appreciation of art movements that have not yet been recognized by the mainstream canon. In doing so, this study promotes a global artistic awareness as well as understanding of current non-Western art trends and art theories.

Briefly, the study investigates the eclectic and diverse approaches of Iraqi artists and examines their artistic endeavors to define their artistic identity. Among the central questions raised by this study are: What is meant by contemporary Iraqi art? and, How do we define it in relation to its social and cultural context?

Chapter One of this study deals with the background of the study, examining the broad context of the problem and defining the purpose and the significance of the study.

Chapter Two discusses the relevant literature and provides an exhaustive review of the formation of modern art in Iraq as well as in some influential Arab and Islamic countries. The chapter also discusses how Eastern and Western influences contribute to Iraqi art.

Chapter Three is primarily concerned with methodology and theory and focusses on the double-coding theory developed by post-modern art critic Charles Jencks. The chapter provides bases and criteria for description and critical analyses.

The remaining chapters are devoted to the case studies. Each chapter includes both description and a critical analysis of each artist, focusing on the artist's education, training and role in Iraqi art movements, and it provides critical views by art critics. It also includes interviews with the artists providing new insights about their art and experience. Chapter Ten includes comparisons of the artists and conclusions. Finally, the study has implications for art educators concerning contemporary art from another culture.

Dedicated to my parents

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CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Problem

Many postmodern critics, in particular Charles Jencks (1987; 1993), observe that at the end of the 1970's a large number of contemporary Western artists and architects returned to classical art, borrowing decorative motifs, symbols, elements, and techniques from Greece, Italy, Egypt, and other cultures. These artists and architects also looked at folk art and popular culture in search of new artistic languages. Jencks describes such developments in contemporary Western art as "Free-Style Classicism" or "New Classicism." He articulates a dramatic shift from the international style¹ and its aesthetics in modern architecture, as well as a shift from modern materials such as steel and concrete to more natural and local materials. Classical ornamental motifs are combined with modern elements and techniques to create new architecture that is closely related to local cultures and traditions. Jencks (1972) posits that with the birth of this new hybrid architecture we are experiencing the death of modern architecture. This dramatic shift from an elitist high art based on geometry, abstraction, and good taste to more popular art forms and styles marks a critical development in contemporary art.

¹ According to Hart (1985), "the international style rejects ornament of any sort. It also denied the traditional concept of building as a mass. Finally, it prompted the use of such 'natural' materials as stone or woods" (p. 963). Hart adds that international style buildings are often constructed with cheap, light construction materials such as cardboard and cellophane.

To study such developments in contemporary art and architecture Jencks has developed a theory called "double-coding" (see Chapter Three). Its major objective is to examine contemporary art and art objects which combine ornamental motifs with other modern styles and techniques. In their response to Jencks's double-coding theory, art educators Efland, Freedman and Stuhr (1996) contend that the reason artists use double-coding is to express conflicting meanings, irony, and ambiguity.

On the other hand, artists and architects in other cultures have also begun to focus on their cultures and traditions and have moved beyond the Modernists' supposedly universal aesthetics and canons. In the Middle East, the center of the world's earliest civilizations, new political and social realities have contributed remarkably to the development of contemporary art in Iraq and in other Arab and Islamic countries. Arab art critics note that after World War II, when Western colonialism was declining, "People in the region began to turn toward their roots, dig into their heritage, and take a new pride in their nationalism and newly found political independence" (Wijdan Ali, p. 138). Ali also notes that contemporary artists in many Islamic countries increasingly became interested in their cultural histories, seeking vernacular roots and artistic values.

During the third stage of their development, a period of cultural awakening and reorientation, artists dug into their own history and exposed the ancient civilizations that had once flourished in their countries. Egyptians probed pharaonic and Coptic art; Iraqis drew on Sumerian and Babylonian traditions; the Sudanese investigated their African and Coptic legacies; the North Africans returned to their African and Berber roots; Jordanians explored their Nabataean past; the Turks investigated their Byzantine and Seljuk patrimony; and the Iranians examined the pre-Islamic periods under the Achaemenids and Sassanians. (p. 140)

Such a development also took place in Iraq in the 1950's and 1960's, when Iraqi artists began a new inquiry into their own artistic cultural heritage, folk art, and popular culture. Today a large number of Iraqi artists and architects borrow elements from various cultural sources and times, basing their works on unique combinations of motifs and symbols as well as techniques. One can see in the same artwork elements from Arab and Islamic culture and also Western or other cultural elements.

These developments raise several questions: What is the main objective for such juxtapositions of various contrasting elements representing different cultures and times? Do these Iraqi artists intend to imitate Western artists or do they seek their own artistic vocabulary? Also, what is the significance of their artistic endeavor for art education and art movements in Iraq?

Over the past years Iraqi artists, art groups, and art critics have responded to these issues in various ways. Although Iraqi art critics have not been able to provide a satisfactory interpretation of such developments in Iraqi art, some Iraqi and Arab art critics (Al-Hydra 1981; Jabra 1972; Muzaffar 1989) define this move by Iraqi artists as an attempt to promote a distinctive artistic identity. Naturally, art groups and individuals artists view this issue based on their individual experience. For example, Ismail al-Shaykhli, a leading Iraqi artist, was asked whether there was any particular style characteristic of the artists of Iraq, and whether Iraqi art has a school of its own, especially with reference to the Middle East. Al-Shaykhli answered that:

It is difficult to be precise on this point. All that we can be sure is that there is what we may call an Iraqi feature in the art of modern Iraq. It is not a school, but an element and foundation. Iraqi artists took their inspiration from the history of Iraq, or the Iraqi environment. When an artist turns his eyes towards the soil of his land, to his country and his people, and chooses his subject matter from his homeland, he is bound to have his own artistic identity as years pass by. The Iraqi artist, however, is not isolated in international art. Most of our painters studied abroad in Rome, Paris, and London with their hearts set on creating Iraqi art, but not an Iraqi school, although the former may develop into the latter. The works of these painters influenced not only the younger generation in Iraq but the whole direction of art throughout the Arab world. (Kishtainy, p. 46)

Well-known Palestinian novelist and art critic Jabra (1972), who was a member of the Baghdad Group founded in 1951, argues that "a number of Iraqi artists have insisted that only regional, social, and, if necessary, political themes, could give their work a national character that might prove to be one more phase of continuation tradition" (n.p.).

Other artists may disagree with such views on the ground that classical traditions are old-fashioned, and some may even consider them as something reactionary, and

therefore irrelevant to the modern age. Thus, it would be a mistake to assume that all Iraqi artists or art groups are interested in the classical traditions. There are artists and groups who work in line with the international styles and others who seek more regional styles and techniques. The tensions as well as contradictions between these two major trends in Iraqi art are dynamic and promote conflict, oppositions, and dialogue within the art movement. The resulting variety of methods and approaches is why Iraqi art attracts the attention of many Arab and foreign observers. Commenting as a guest of the Baghdad International Festival of Arts in 1986, American Mary E. King (1987) writes that

Iraqi artists work in a coruscating variety of approaches. One sees abstractionism, expressionism, geometrics, striping, colorism, realism, minimalism, photorealism, and three-dimensional canvass. The cacophony of Baghdad's art movement is like the battering of metal in the city's old copper market. Pluralistic, it uses a variety of forms, techniques, and technologies. (p. 5)

Jordanian art critic Wijdan Ali (1997) writes that in this respect "[t]he Iraqi modern art movement has a widespread reputation in the Arab world of being the most advanced among Arab modern art movements" (p. 54).

This study addresses these shifts in the art of Iraq, seeking a new interpretation of their characteristics as well as exploring their importance to art education in Iraq. But such a study needs new criteria and theoretical perspectives for description as well as for interpretation of the new themes, motifs, and symbols incorporated by Iraqi artists. In the next chapters this study expands along these lines, considering a wide range of the views, opinions, and ideas held by art educators in Iraq and other cultures.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study will be the first doctoral research ever to be conducted on contemporary art and artists in Iraq. The study will address and explore current issues in art and art education in Iraq, and will accomplish this through a case study focusing on six Iraqi artists of the 1950's and 1960's and the context in which they worked. Because such research is

not common in most Iraqi and Arab universities, this study will serve as a major reference on contemporary Iraqi art. Moreover, it may inspire a new direction in art education in Iraq.

There are other important objectives as well. American as well as European institutions and libraries lack studies and research on contemporary art from the Middle East. This study will provide much needed reference materials. Finally, by introducing artworks and art trends from another culture, this study promotes a multicultural education which is open to new artistic approaches, art movements, and art theories.

Limitations of the Study

As was stated above, this dissertation concentrates on six Iraqi artists of the 1950's and 1960's; Diya al-Azawwi, Ismail Fattah, Salih al-Jumai'i, Shakir Hasan al-Said, Madihah Umar, and Jawad Salim. It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a chronological description of the traditional arts in Iraq, and in any case, the focus here is current issues and trends in art education in Iraq.

Why these two periods and these six artists? There are a number of reasons for this choice. Iraqi and Arab art critics agree that the 1950's and 1960's are an important period because during these decades there were serious efforts to promote a national art and art education programs in Iraq. However, these very significant and interesting developments have not yet been studied.

As far as more recent art is concerned, the Gulf War of 1991 has been devastating to art movements and artists in Iraq. Large numbers of Iraqi artists left home and there is no information on where they now reside; others who remained home are inaccessible due to the political situation in Iraq. As for the particular six artists chosen, while there are many outstanding Iraqi artists, art groups, and approaches, the six artists listed above are widely recognized and acclaimed by both Iraqi and Arab art critics.

Method and Procedure

It has been agreed by many art educators that no one single approach to understanding art can be definitive. Thus, this study combines multiple approaches and methods. I will be relying primarily on the following materials and perspectives:

A. A literature review of Iraqi, Arab-Islamic, and Western art theories and aesthetics.

This review is a survey shaped by the purposes of this study, not a historically exhaustive account.

B. The case study method, limited to specific current issues in art and art education in Iraq. According to Stake (1988) “the principle difference between case studies and other research studies is that the focus of attention is the case, not the whole population of cases” (p. 256). For example, the major focus of this study is the use of classical elements in these artists' works. I find the case study method appropriate because I believe that the study of the art work in its sociocultural context is important, and this method enables me to draw on interviews and direct observations of these six artists. Interviews and observation are particularly important in art education for scholars interested in the traditional arts which fall outside of so-called high art, because traditional arts such as crafts and other decorative arts are excluded from traditional art history, requiring that the researcher resort to non-traditional methods of study.

I also believe that art is intimately related to a particular way of life of a culture or group. Profound knowledge of such culture or groups is necessary to study their art forms and material culture in general. Recent studies in art education emphasize the importance of the context of the artwork. In this respect American art educator Terry Barrett (1994) argues that:

Most critics no longer believe that they can interpret, let alone judge, art from a society other than their own without considerable anthropological knowledge of those societies. Most critics believe that artworks possess characteristics and

meanings based on their sociocultural contexts, and acknowledge that artworks have been interpreted differently in various times and places. (p. 121)

In this respect, postmodern theory views art as a cultural product that should be viewed through the interests of the peoples and cultures who create it or use it. In short, this study is most interested in the social and cultural functions and importance of art to Iraqi society and culture.

C. I employ a method of art criticism which draws on recent theories of art for describing, interpreting, and evaluating works of art.

D. History, and more particularly art history, is used here as a means of studying the individual stylistic changes and development of the six artists. Art history is essential for the study of art, but at the same time I agree with recent criticisms of traditional art history as representing the interests and views of certain groups while ignoring those of others. This creates a need for rethinking traditional art history and its canons, canons that denied and excluded the art of women and of non-Western cultures. Obviously, such a task is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and readers are asked to keep in mind that the particular historical interpretations or assumptions used in this study do not necessarily express the researcher's opinions or views on certain issues.

Definition of Terms

Double-coding: a term used by the postmodern critic Charles Jencks to refer to the use of eclectic combinations of modern styles with classical ornamental motifs or techniques in postmodern art and architecture as a means to express ambiguity and conflict in the art work.

High art: The term used by Western modernists to emphasize the universal qualities, uniqueness, and purity of Western modern art, and in particular Abstract Expressionism.

Low art: The term refers to decorative or applied arts and crafts, which are considered "minor" arts according to the modernist definition.

Turath (heritage): The revival of the past artistic and cultural traditions. When employed in a more general sense; it refers to the cultural heritage of Mesopotamian and Arab-Islamic civilizations.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY IRAQI ART: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

This chapter consists of two parts. Part One provides a brief general description of the formation of modern art in the Middle East, in particular in certain influential countries such as Turkey and Egypt. The guiding theme of this section is the question of how Western art was introduced to the Arab and Islamic world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this time much of the Arab world was part of the Ottoman Empire, which established cultural and political ties with the West. With the advance of Western colonialism in the Middle East and North Africa, modern art was introduced as a universal model to non-Western cultures. The adoption of Western art and training led many Arab and Muslim artists to break away from their artistic traditions. In the postcolonial era, with the rise of religious, nationalist, and intellectual movements, Arab and Muslim countries began to reconstruct their cultural identities. Artists, architects, writers, poets, and intellectuals became more aware of their own cultural heritage and values. In art we begin to see a gradual shift from the international style to regional styles, with vernacular, revivalist features and traditions. Part One consists of three sections: Islam and representation; the development of modern art in some Islamic and Arab countries; and the search for national style.

Part Two of this chapter traces the development of Iraqi art in relation to these political, social, and cultural transformations. Like other Arab and Muslim artists, Iraqi artists also took a new look at their classical traditions, their folk art, and their popular culture since the 1950's. Iraqi artists experimented with eclectic styles and approaches, juxtaposing and synthesizing modern and classical motifs and elements in their artworks. New art groups, art forms, and theories emerged as a result. This chapter explores the following questions: how and why did Iraqi artists return to their artistic traditions? How did they use and reimagine them? What kinds of styles, methods, and techniques did they apply when appropriating past traditions? In order to help answer these questions I will present a wide range of opinions by art professionals and art educators concerning issues in art and art education in Iraq, framed in a postmodern theoretical context. I will also highlight such themes as race, religion, and region in approaching the dynamic situation of art and art education in Iraq in the 1950's and 1960's. Since Iraq is a part of the Arab and Islamic world, the chapter examines Iraqi art in relation to that of certain influential Arab and Islamic countries, as well as in relation to Western influences.

A note on the term "modern"

Modern art was born in the West and introduced to other cultures in the course of European colonialism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When we approach modern art in Iraq in particular and in the Middle East in general, we must first consider whether this term "modern" can be applied to the current art forms of non-Western cultures. The term modern as used by Western art historians and art critics includes the Western artistic developments and trends from roughly the 1860's to 1970 (Atkins). But in traditional Western art history and art criticism the artistic traditions of other cultures, as well as women's arts, were excluded because they were seen as "low art" in comparison to "high art," the latter culminating in Abstract Expressionism.

The problem with Modernism lies in its notions of the scientific paradigm and of progress. Western culture was introduced as a universal and superior model that stands against the variety of all other cultures and places. In this view, art also was held to universal standards, being judged or interpreted according to its physical qualities such as shape, color, texture, and so on. This theory was developed by the critic and aesthetician Clive Bell, who also coined the term “significant form” to refer to a combination of formal elements that can evoke an aesthetic emotion. Further, Modernism was associated with colonialism and with cultural, economic, and political domination in the nineteenth century. In short, Modernism, as McEvilley (1992) argues, emphasizes universality, sameness, and a tendency to judge the arts of other cultures according to unvarying standards. In this respect McEvilley (1992) states that:

In the discourse about contemporary art, “post-Modern” is often used to describe certain formal developments and esthetic shifts, without reference to the larger sphere of political, social and economic history. But the view of art history that is passing, with its teleological emphasis on linear sequence of formal change, was merely an aspect of the Modernist myth which justified colonialism. Stated very briefly: Modern art, with its imperative of formal evolution--and above all, abstract art, with its claim that it transcended social forces--was an emblem of the master-soul of Euro-Modernism, provided an extreme array of evolution-like developments that were taken to guarantee that history engaged, under Western leadership, in an adventure of progress. (p. 86).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Western cultural and artistic values were introduced to the Arab and Islamic world as universal and absolute, regardless of whether they fit the historical and cultural contexts into which they were transplanted. A question arises here: how to evaluate or study modern art in Islamic Arab countries whose cultural context and values differed significantly from those of Western art and aesthetics. Such issues have not really received serious attention by Arab and Muslim art educators, most of whom adopted Modernist criteria and applied them to their own art forms. Today, there is a need to reevaluate and reconsider many of the modernist values and traditions introduced to Arab and Islamic cultures. Arab and Muslim art educators need to examine the relevance and usefulness of these values and art forms for their culture and society. In

other words, they must synthesize their own criteria, taking into account their experience and cultural heritage. This does not mean rejecting international and intercultural dialogue, but rather refusing the universal cultural hegemony asserted by Modernism. One may realize that in its early stage this study is challenged by issues such as universalism, internationalism, nationalism, and cultural identity. These issues and others will underline the description as well as the analysis of the current ideas, concepts, and artistic trends, and art theories in the field of art education in Iraq, as well as in some other Arab and Muslim countries.

Part One, Section 1: Islam and Representation

I would like to make some comments on the Islamic attitude towards art because there exist some misconceptions on this subject. Many scholars, Western and Muslim alike, believe Islam forbids art and that this Islamic attitude may have had a negative effect on the development of contemporary art in Arab and Islamic countries. There have been many studies conducted on Islam and representation, and the main objective of most of them was to determine if there is any Islamic doctrine that prohibits the representation of living beings. Well-known art historian Grabar (1973; 1983) states that “ Neither the Quran nor very early Muslim practice in Arabia itself indicates the existence of Muslim doctrine on representation of living forms” (p. 93). In his book The Formation of Islamic Art Grabar (1973) explains that God in the Quran is often portrayed as the creator of the universe. God is the ultimate creator, bringing the world into existence from nothing. Grabar argues that God is described in very artistic terms such as *Khaliq*, meaning creator or maker. The word *musawwir* (fashioner) is another Quranic word used for God and describes anyone who makes an image such as pictures, sculptures, or illustrations. The following Quranic passage views God as a fashioner and the author of *khaliq* ((meaning creation):

He is Allah, the Creator,
the Originator

The Fashioner.
The Most Beautiful names;
Whatever is in
The heavens and on earth,
Doth declare
His Praises and Glory:
And he is the Exalted
In Might, the Wise. (S. 59. A 20-22)

Grabar (1973) thinks that the concept of “God as the single Creator did not lend itself to obvious translation into visual form” (p. 81). Also, artists, by creating images, may compete with the absolute power of God as the only creator.

Islamic art historian Richard Ettinghausen (1977) also believes that the “Quran gives no direct support for such an assumption” (p. 12) about Quranic hostility toward representation. Ettinghausen adds that the Islamic stance on the question of representation might have been influenced by older traditions or certain historical conditions. Several other ethnic groups speaking Semitic languages have held similar beliefs about fashioning any “graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (p. 13).

Since the Quran does not have any a definitive doctrine against representation of living beings, many art scholars have studied the *Hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed). According to art historian Arnold (1965) the

Prophet Mohammed does not appear to have objected to the figures of men or animals on woven stuffs with which his house in Medina was decorated, so long as they did not distract his attention while engaged in prayer, and so long as they were in their proper place, being either sat upon in cushions or trampled underfoot in carpet. (p. 7)

This is also confirmed by another study by al-Tawil (1993), who reports on the authority of al-Bukhari that:

In the early years of the Hijra, the Prophet Mohammed is reported to have abandoned a silk dress that was adorned with colorful motifs and design. He complained that the design distracted his prayer. Asma, the wife of the Prophet,

bought a curtain that bore figurative images and hung it on her door. The Prophet did not mind, but was not happy with it. Later, when Asma made the curtain into pillows, Mohammed did not hesitate to recline on them. (p. 95)

The contemporary Muslim scholars I have consulted (Bahanesi, 1983; Salim, 1977; Alawi, 1988; Ali, 1989) do not support the claim that Islam includes doctrines against art. For example, in his book Iraqi Contemporary Art the Iraqi artist and writer Nazar Salim (1977) maintains that “nothing in the holy Quran prohibits the portrayal of living creatures. What is prohibited is the portrayal of God and creation in the form of idols” (p. 21). Jordanian art critic Wijdan Ali (1989) also believes that the Islamic attitude was directed against idolatry or images that divert attention from prayer. Ali adds that “The ban was intended to deter converts to the new religion from reverting to atheism and the worship of idols” (p. xi).

For a better understanding of Islamic art, a deeper understanding of Islamic religion and culture is required. Grabar (1976) explains that “Artists of early Islam made a rational, conscious attempt to find stylistic devices that would somehow illustrate or at least suggest a uniquely Muslim view of the universe—a universe in which divine creation alone is permanent and real” (p. 110). So rejection of the mimetic representation of living beings does not mean that Islamic representation is inferior. When Muslim artists avoided the mimetic representation of nature or the art object, this does not mean that Muslim artists did not see nature clearly or that they lacked the technical abilities to depict beings realistically. In other words, Muslim artists did not need to follow traditional Western rules of perspective because copying living beings or objects was not the objective of Islamic art. Art historian Grabar (1976) argues that “Muslim art succeeded in achieving something remarkably contemporary” (p. 102). What Grabar means is that a similar attitude can be found in Western Modern art when Western artists began to break away from the academic rules that dominated Western art since the Renaissance. Western artists’ contact with art forms of other cultures, including Islamic art, were among the major

factors that aided Western artists in abandoning the mimetic representation of the reality. These artists found a richness, expressiveness, and inspiration in the artistic traditions of Africa, Islam, the Far East and other cultures.

The Development of Modern Art in Some Islamic and Arab countries

Turkey was the first Islamic country to experience Western traditional and modern art because it was the center of the Ottoman Empire; as such its geographical position as a land that bridges Europe and the Islamic world was attractive to European expansion. Bisharat (1989) points out that:

Turkey has no rival in the Middle East and North Africa to its claim to be the region's earliest leader in Western art forms and the first country in the region to found an academy of fine arts along European lines. This is not surprising. Modern Turkey is heir to the heartland of the Ottoman Empire and its cultural traditions. The Empire's capital, Istanbul, long monopolized the region's contact with the West before the nineteenth century. (p. 271)

The official Ottoman interest was another significant factor leading to the adoption of Western art and culture in Ottoman Turkey. The Ottoman reforms and efforts to modernize the empire along Western forms and models brought Islamic culture into direct contact with Western culture. For example, the foundation of art institutions such as Istanbul's Academy of Fine Arts, which was founded in 1883, shaped significantly the development of modern art in Turkey during the Ottoman period. Most of these art institutions taught art according to Western principles and techniques. In addition, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a large number of European artists visited Turkey. According to Ali (1977), some European artists were invited to the Ottoman court. One of these artists was the Italian Gentile Bellini, who made a portrait of Sultan Mehmet II (1451-1481). Sultan Abdulaziz (1861-1876) visited Europe in 1867, and he was very interested in European art.

This official Ottoman interest in Western art led to the introduction of Western art to Istanbul and other major cities of the Empire such as Cairo. The growing economic,

cultural, and political ties between the West and the Ottoman Empire during this time also contributed to the diffusion of traditional Western art. This led to a gradual shift away from traditional art forms such as the Ottoman miniature, Arabic calligraphy, and arabesque. Ali also points out that Ottoman military schools also played a large part in introducing Western artistic techniques and principles. These schools, such as the Imperial Land Engineering School (founded in 1793), introduced technical drawings and layouts for military purposes. In fact, several Iraqi officers were trained in these schools.

The new fascination with Western culture and art in the Islamic world was not without problems. The abandonment of the Arabic script as an official form for writing Turkish was one manifestation of the strong Western influence. In addressing the development of modern art in modern Turkey Bisharat (1989) states that

The first year of the Turkish Republic which followed the treaty of Lausanne (1923) later became known as the Ataturk Revolution. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk led the new Republic. The revolutionary 'reform' he introduced was the banning of the Arabic script for writing Turkish in 1928 and its replacement with a new hybrid Latin alphabet. He introduced this as a measure to speed literacy; the reform drove a final wedge between modern Turkey and the culture of Ottoman Empire. Between traditional art forms, the calligraphy of the Koran played a predominant role and the western art forms espoused by the Republic's leaders. (p. 273)

Turkey was not the only Islamic country to be exposed to broad Western cultural influence. Other countries such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq were exposed to Western culture and art, either through the Ottoman reforms or through direct contact. Direct contact occurred particularly in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine, because these countries held a unique position on the Mediterranean coast and they established ties with the West before Iraq did. Add to this the fact that Western Christian missionaries were very active in these countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and played some part in disseminating modern Western culture.

Egypt was considered the first Arab country to adopt modern art. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, although very brief, was noteworthy because it exposed Egypt to at least some limited Western influence. Napoleon brought with him a large

number of artists and scientists, some of whom remained in Egypt when Napoleon's mission was over, and Egypt was targeted by a large number of Orientalist artists. According to Robinson (1982), Napoleon's invasion of Egypt came ninety-four years before the translation of The Thousand and One Nights, known in the West as The Arabian Nights. Robinson believes that the European imagination of the East as something exotic and mysterious was fed by The Arabian Nights and other folk stories which "offered that sumptuous array of caliphs, viziers, slaves, genies, lamp and fabulous happenings which has furnished a large part of the store of words and images Europeans use to embrace the Islamic world" (p. 18).

In addition, Muhammad Ali's (1805-1848) the Khedive Ismail (1862-1879), the rulers of Egypt, made efforts to modernize Egypt and they supported the adoption of Western culture and technology to build a new and strong Egypt that could play a significant role in the region. The Egyptian ruling class showed an interest in art, and the foundation of the School of Fine Art in Cairo on May 12, 1908, by Prince Yusuf Kamal, was an example of this interest (Karouk 1988). This art school was the first in the Arab world (Alawi 1988, al-Sharouni, 1984), and a large number of Egyptian and Arab artists, such as Raghib Ayyad, Yusuf Kamil, and Egypt's great artist Mahmud Mukhtar, graduated from it. European art teachers were hired to teach courses in painting, drawing, and sculpture based on Western methods and techniques.

Another important development that has to be considered in approaching modern Arab art is the European colonial adventures in North Africa and the Middle East. For example, Algeria was occupied by France from 1830 to 1962, while Tunisia, which was part of the Ottoman Empire in 1881, was considered a French Protectorate until 1955. Morocco also became a French Protectorate around 1912, although Spain maintained a presence on its northern coast. Palestine and Iraq were invaded by Britain in 1917, while Lebanon fell under French mandate in 1919 and Syria in 1920. These countries

experienced direct Western influence in all fields, including art. With the advance of Western colonialism in North Africa, hundreds of settlers and Orientalist artists flooded to the region, particularly in North Africa. French artist Eugene Delacroix, Matisse, and Paul Klee were among the many who visited North Africa.

Porterfield (1994) notes the association of Orientalism and ethnography, writing that:

The creation and application of ethnography goes to the core of Delacroix's pictures and the Orientalist enterprise. It was in 1831, the year of Delacroix's departure for Algiers, that the term ethnography was coined—meaning a study of the distinction between human races by the understanding of idioms, physiognomies, and social status. It was seen as a step toward the gradual diffusion of European civilization. (p. 60)

Literary critic Edward Said (1978) believes that Orientalism emerged as a result of the Western desire to dominate the Orient. For Said “the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experience; now it was disappearing; in a sense it had happened, its time was over” (p. 41). Said views Orientalism “as a Western style for dominating, restricting, and having authority over the Orient” (p. 3). The question may arise here of whether one agrees or disagrees with Said’s interpretation. How did Orientalism contribute to the Islamic culture in North Africa? As we know, Orientalist artists were driven by historical and ethnographic curiosity, as well as a romantic escapism that led them to search for an exotic and primitive world. A close look at Orientalist art shows that it was limited to traditional daily tableaux such as the bazaar, the harem, scenes with slaves, and so on. In fact, Orientalist artists portrayed Arab and Berber women almost exclusively as harem figures, emphasizing their sexuality with no regard to the actual values of Arab-Islamic and other traditions of the region (Allelouloula, 1986). Orientalist artists went to the region as “disinterested artists” whose works and experience did not interact with the local artistic and cultural heritage, nor did they contribute to the dialogue between East and West” (Porterfield, 1994).

The political and cultural intervention in the region extended to the introduction of French culture, language, and art as superior forms. Several cultural and art institutions were founded whose main objective was to introduce Western art and aesthetics. For example, the Tunisian Salon was founded in 1894 to introduce Western art. According to Louati (1989) "the Salon was an annual art exhibition created to satisfy a cultural need felt by the country's foreign inhabitants" (p. 261). The College of Fine Art in Algeria, which was established in 1920, eventually became a branch of the well-known Paris art school Les Academies des Beaux Arts. This art school was set up to introduce Western art schools and principles. These and similar projects had as their major objective the education of the native people so that they would adopt Western culture and art. Even after independence, the influence of Western culture persisted.

In response, national efforts and policies have been undertaken to maintain cultural identity and integrity. In this situation, traditional arts and crafts came under attack as artificial boundaries were drawn between high culture and low culture and some people and organizations, such as the Moroccan Association of Decorative Art, turned against local artistic traditions. Al-Haydari (1981) points out that the Moroccan Association of Decorative Art stated that "our creative artists are convinced that the imported artistic norms will continue to be the dominate element in our culture in so far as it is the declared intention of Western artists to direct artistic development along universally recognized patterns" (p. 14) Al-Haydari adds that

Many modern Arab artists subscribe to this point of view, and many of them consider the search for classical Arab techniques or the utilization of folk and other primitive methods as a real danger to the Arab artist. Such a trend, they feel, would amount to the Arab artist subscribing to the Western artist's pertinacious search for gimmicks. The Moroccan Association of Decorative Art considers folkloric art as a backward form which imperialism sought to perpetuate. The Association feels that any artistic production which ignored folklore would automatically transcend the parochial frameworks. In this way the Association condemns folk art to a position of inadequacy and irrelevance to the modern age. (p. 14)

It is very hard to believe that a country like Morocco, which is very rich in its folk art and unique artistic traditions, would adopt such a modernist attitude. Modern art in Morocco and other countries of North Africa was born under the shadow of the West. In its early decades modern art in that region had nothing to do with the native traditions belonging to various ethnic and religious groups such as the Africans, Berbers, Arabs, Phoenicians, and others.

The Search for National Style

With the rise of religious, nationalistic, and intellectual movements in the Arab world in the nineteenth century, Arab national awakenings began. Religious and secular nationalistic movements called for an Arab-Islamic cultural revival in the face of the growing Western influence, which was perceived as a threat to Arab cultural identity. According to Tibi (1997), “The cultural transformation in Arab countries in particular and the Third World in general was based on a process of acculturation. According to this theory the development of nationalism and the idea of the nation in the Third World came as a result of imitative adaptation of Western culture and thought by the Western-educated colonial intellectuals who according to this theory are the ‘carriers of nationalism.’ Arab nationalism as sought by Syro-Lebanese intellectuals is a romantic concept or idea” (p. 48). Arab nationalism was developed by al-Hussari, who was influenced by German romantic nationalism and the unification process in Italy and Germany in modern times. Generally speaking, Arab nationalism is based on a notion of Arab unity and on the belief that Arabs share a common history and language. Ibrahim (1987) explains that:

Islam as a religion and culture was an essential factor in the expansion of the Arab nation, whose population lives in the areas stretching from the [Persian] Gulf to the [Atlantic] Ocean. But the definition of who is an Arab today is first a cultural definition, not a religious one. An Arab is anyone who speaks Arabic, adopts Arabic culture, intuitively feels it, and is also conscious of belonging to a particular human group as the Arab nation. Among the leaders of the Arab nationalist movement are those who are not Muslim. In other words, religion is not a condition either for being an Arab or for Arabism. At its outset, the Arab nationalist

movement attempted to stress the cultural and the secular identity of the Arab nationalism over other identity. (p. 62)

The tensions and ideological differences between the religious movements and the nationalist movements in the Arab world are still a major aspect of Arab contemporary social and political structures. Thus, it would be impossible to approach contemporary artistic as well as literary trends in the Arab world without taking into consideration the impact of religion, ethnicity, region, class, and nationalism. So the question becomes, how do such religious and political ideologies contribute to modern Arab Art? Arab intellectuals, writers, and poets have been motivated by the national movements in their countries. Art historians such as Oleg Grabar (1973) observe the impact of nationalism on art, not only in the Arab world but also in other contemporary societies and cultures:

A number of particular necessities as well as fascination with the West have transformed the environment of the Muslim world to the point where the identity or identities of a civilization attached to any specific revelation was felt to be threatened. A logic found more than once in history (Protestantism and nationalist movements of the nineteenth century, among others) requires that in these circumstances artists, architects, governments, and patrons look into a more or less clearly defined past for principles, possibly even forms, that would help maintain the integrity of the culture without requiring several copies of ancient monuments. The objective of maintaining cultural identity when tempted by Western art from a civilization with universal pretensions is comparable to Muslim objectives in the seventh and eighth centuries. Are the solutions of these early centuries still valid, in practice or in principle? (p. 212)

In the Arab world, Egyptian artists were the first to search for a national style; motivated by the rise of Egyptian nationalism, they inquired into Egypt's past artistic heritage. In her study Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style, Liliane Karnouk (1988) states that "national identity is essentially the character developed by people affected by common environmental and historical situations over the course of centuries" (p. 1). Karnouk explains that Egypt was subject to foreign occupation for a long time and that art responded to the new political change in Egypt:

It took more than one hundred years for Egyptians to adapt to these notions to fit their own interest. In the development of modern art and nationalism, both artists and politicians responded to the change of identity produced when the idea of

belonging to an autonomous ethnicity (be it Coptic or Islamic and so on) evolved into that of nationality: a unified Egyptian nation. (p. 1)

The search for this new national style was led by Mahmud Mukhtar (1891-1934).

Mukhtar was the first art student to be admitted to the School of Fine Arts, which was founded by Prince Yusuf Kamal in 1908 (Sharouni, 1984), and he also studied sculpture in Paris. Mukhtar was a nationalist artist and is believed to be the first European-trained artist to draw on the Egyptian Revolution in., which was led by Saad Zaghloul.

According to al-Sharouni (1984)

In 1919 came the Egyptian Revolution. Inspired by this, Mukhtar expressed his feelings in a statue of a young woman carrying a sword, very reminiscent of Joan of Arc. It was highly praised by his Paris teachers—but one of the most important moments in Mukhtar's life occurred when he looked at his own work and realized that it had no connection whatever with Egyptian culture. He destroyed it and immediately set to work on another that would be more in keeping with his theme. (p. 28)

Mukhtar was able to create a style that combined both Egyptian classical and Western modern artistic traditions and techniques. In his famous sculpture *The Egyptian Renaissance*, which is considered the first public monument to be sculptured in Egypt in modern times, Mukhtar achieved what many believe to be a modern Egyptian style. Karnouk describes the new artistic trend in Egypt as a birth of Neo-Pharaonism, which is “marked by a reformulation of ancient Egyptian style.... Its greatest representative was the sculpture Mahmud Mukhtar, the first major figure in modern Egyptian art” (p. 5). Mukhtar produced many public and private sculptures, such as *Fellaha Lifting a Jug* (in limestone), *The Khamsin, Winds*, the monument of Sa'ad Zaghlul in Alexandria, and others.

Mukhtar also drew on an Arab heroic folk heritage. For example, when the Egyptian reformer Kasim Amin (1863-1908) called for women's emancipation in Egypt and other Islamic countries, Mukhtar supported Amin, making a statue of Khawala Bint al-Azour, the Arab heroine from the pre-Islamic period. This search for a national style, which was initiated by Mukhtar, was continued and enhanced by the outstanding Egyptian

architect Hasan Fathi (1902), who has received international recognition for works that present a unique Arab and Egyptian artistic identity. Fathi draws on traditional Egyptian village architecture and makes use of local materials such as mud. In his famous work *New Gurna*, which was constructed in the village of Gurna in 1945, Fathi borrowed traditional decorative elements and applied traditional techniques. Fathi's works are simple and include features that relate to the traditions of the local inhabitants (see Figure 1). In his book The Language of Post-Modern Architecture, critic Charles Jencks (1991) praises Fathi's works in the following terms:

Gurna New Town, 1945-47. A rediscovery of the vernacular. This mud-brick village, with its tight protected streets and traditional forms, is an instant recreation of villages that have existed for 2000 years. An example of self-building, the town is not only far cheaper than any Modern counterpart could be, but also more varied and delightful. (p. 79)

Artists in other Arab countries sought a similar approach and increasingly became interested in their local traditions and artistic heritage. For example, in the mid-1940's the Iraqi woman artist Madihah Umar (b. 1908) and Jamil Hammudi introduced Arabic characters to modern Arab art for the first time. Today there are many Arab artists in North Africa, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, and other Arab countries who use Arabic script in their artworks. Many Arab artists have been fascinated with the Arabic script and they have rediscovered new artistic values and developed their own artistic vocabulary. This trend seems quite promising, although many Arab artists have failed to utilize the artistic and aesthetic qualities of the Arab character in their works as fully as they might.

The Arab world has extraordinary cultural diversity, being composed of ethnic and religious groups such as the Berbers in North Africa, the Copts, the Phoenician, Jews, Kurds, Turkamons, Assyrians, and others, which has encouraged a variety of traditional folk arts and traditions in varying regions of the Arab world. In addition, major political and national crises and conflicts, such as the Algerian war for independence and the Arab-Israeli conflict, had their own impact on intellectual life. For instance, many Arab artists

refer to the Palestinian question, producing works that draw attention to the sufferings of the Palestinian people, and some Palestinian artists have begun to borrow elements and motifs from their cultural heritage to promote their own cultural identity.

In short, contemporary Arab art, like contemporary Arab life itself, reveals multitudinous contradictions and conflicts, echoing oppositions between past and present, East and West, regionalism, internationalism, and more. Out of such realities contemporary Arab artists have developed their own artistic language, in which their artworks respond strongly to national and global issues.

Part Two

Introduction

Many historians view Iraq as comparable to Egypt in terms of its cultural history and achievements. Art historian Hart (1985) states that “Roughly parallel with the civilization of Egypt, another, in some ways equally great, historic culture was developing in the region of the Near East known as Mesopotamia, from the Greek word meaning ‘land between the rivers’” (p. 102). According to Nyrop (1979), historians consider present-day Iraq as the site of the Mesopotamian civilization, and several other civilizations, such as Sumeria, Akkadia, Babylonia, and Assyria, also flourished in the area of modern Iraq. These ancient civilizations offered the world writing, the wheel, and other significant achievements in art, architecture, pottery, and crafts.

In AD 750 Baghdad became the capital of the Islamic Empire during the Abbasid Caliphate. The Abbasids created an age of creativity, cultural and scientific growth, and made contributions in all fields, such as new Arab-Islamic forms of painting.

Unfortunately, the Mongol invasion of 1258 ended this renaissance. The well-known art historian Ettinghaus (1977) holds that:

the great turning in the history of Islamic painting is the Mongol invasion of the Near East, culminating in the conquest of Baghdad and the murder of the last reigning Abbasid caliph. It was a disaster unparalleled in Arab history. Even though cities were not actually reduced to ruins nor were their inhabitants killed, living conditions changed dramatically. Indeed, this cataclysm seems to have destroyed the social and economic climate that had made the flowering of the art of manuscript painting possible, particularly in the cities of Iraq. (p. 135).

One may question whether urban areas were treated so gently as this account suggests.

Metz (1990) describes the Mongol impact on Baghdad as follows:

In 1258 he [Hulagu Khan, 1217-65] seized Baghdad and killed the last Abbasid caliph. While in Baghdad, Hulagu made a pyramid of the skulls of Baghdad scholars, religious leaders, and poets, and he deliberately destroyed what remained of Iraq's canal headworks. The material and artistic production of centuries was swept away. (p. 25)

After the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate Iraq was ruled by the Mongols, Timurids, Safavids, and the Ottomans, and thus was exposed to a variety of cultural influences. The succession of foreign invasions, wars, adverse weather, floods and other problems led to the destruction and disappearance of most ancient Iraqi monuments.

Modern influence on Iraqi culture and society began at the end of Ottoman rule (A.D. 1534-1917). The Ottoman inaugurated several reforms to modernize the country, in particular during the reign of Midget Pasha (1869-1872), who was appointed as Ottoman governor of Baghdad. Shortly after he took authority in 1869, he began his modernizing reforms by reorganizing the administrative, educational, judicial, commercial, and military systems to resemble more closely Western models.

Midget Pasha established a secular education system in Iraq to replace the old religious educational system. He also made efforts to settle the tribes and establish social order in the country. During his reign several architectural projects were launched, especially in Baghdad. In his article "Contemporary Architecture in Baghdad: Its Roots and Translation," Egyptian architect Hasan Fathi (1987) states that during Midget Pasha's short reign, Western architecture styles and modern Western furniture were gradually adopted. The Ottoman authorities permitted German companies to execute several projects in Iraq such as the railway (begun in 1915) to link Baghdad with Europe. Western modern influence increased after the British invasion of Iraq in 1917. Faysal I (1885-1933), who was the son of Husayn Ibn Ali, Sharif of Mecca, assisted tremendously in the Arab revolt against the Ottomans, becoming the King of Syria on March 8, 1920, with the support of Arab nationalists. However, the French invasion of Syria on July 24, 1920, ended the short Hashimite rule in Syria. With the help of the British, Faysal became the King of Iraq in 1921.¹

¹ According to Metz (1990), "At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, under Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant, Iraq was formally made a Class A mandate entrusted to

Under British-mandate a modern Iraqi state and society began to develop slowly. Some believe that the monarchy lacked legitimacy because it was instituted by the British. Faysal's monarchy was confronted by many social and political challenges and was unable to overcome the tribal, religious, and social conflicts. Add to this the fact that Iraqi nationalists viewed the monarchy as a creation of the British to serve its interests in Iraq and the region. However, one must admit that the monarchy continued to modernize the country and to improve social, cultural and economic life. Reforms were introduced, and a new education system and a free press and political life began to develop. In the early 1930's the Iraqi government, encouraged by the Hashimite family, supported art and art education. This interest in art and art education, unusual in the Arab world, was intended to meet the cultural and social needs of the country and came out of the personal interest of the royal family members. According to Ali (1997), King Faysal II was an accomplished artist himself, and participated in the Artists Society's 1957 exhibition. The monarchy was overthrown in a bloody coup led by Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim in July 14, 1958.² The King and many of his family members were killed and Iraq entered a new phase of its political history.

A Note on Ethnic and Religious Diversity in Iraq

According to a study conducted by the Federal Research Division in 1988, "the government estimates that 76 percent of the people are Arab; 19 percent are Kurds, while Turkomans, Assyrians, Armenians and other relatively small groups make up the rest" (p.

Britain. This award was completed on April 25, 1920, at the San Remo Conference in Italy. Palestine also was placed under British mandate, and Syria was placed under French mandate. Faisal, who had been proclaimed king of Syria, was ejected by the French in July of the same year" (p. 32).

² This coup is known in Iraq as the Revolution of July 14. The term "revolution" is used by Iraqi media to denote the coup of July 17-30, 1968, as well.

81). According to the same source 95 percent of Iraqis are Muslims, either Shiites or Sunnis, while the remaining 5 percent are Christians or Jews,³ or follow some other religion. There are also other religious groups, such as the Yazidis who live in the Sinjir Mountain area west of Mosul, and the Mandeans in the south. The majority of Arabs, Kurds (who occupy the mountain area in northern Iraq), and Turkomans are Muslims. Iraqi society is diverse ethnically and religiously, although Iraqi regimes in general have failed to recognize this diversity and have ignored the growing needs, demands, and rights of these groups. However, this does not mean that Iraq as a society fails to recognize its cultural diversity. As an Iraqi citizen who strongly supports democracy and pluralism as the only choice for Iraq, I find Iraqi society to be among the very few in the Arab world in particular and the Middle East in general where cultural differences are respected. Our society does not really practice religious or racial hatred and discrimination. In our culture it is inappropriate to refer to people in public according to their race, and such practices in the Middle East can be viewed as racism or actions that contradict Islamic values.

Art Education in the 1920's and 1930's

The official interest in art and art education in Iraq began in the 1930's, especially after Iraq became an independent country in 1932. A number of factors contributed to the growth of art education in Iraq at that time. First, "within less than ten years of Iraq's independence from foreign domination, in the wake of World War I, the national government decided to send, from 1929 to 1939, a batch of talented young men to study at art institutions in France and Italy. They were to study art academically so that they might lay down the bases of a modern artistic movement in Iraq when they came back" (Shakir Hasan al-Said, 1990, p. 7).

³ There is no reliable information regarding the Jewish population in Iraq at the present. According to some sources, "about 120,000 Iraqi Jews emigrated to Israel between 1948 and 1952" (Metz 1999, p. 48).

Second, during this period Iraq experienced the rise of pan-Arabism, a movement developed by Syro-Lebanese Western-educated intellectuals. Sati al-Husri (1882-1968), who was in charge of education in Iraq, is considered the father of pan-Arabism, promoting the national unification of all Arabs on the basis of their common history and language. In addition to his role in education, Husri founded the Iraqi Museum of Antiquities, where he hired many Iraqi artists to work restoring old statues. He also encouraged artists to study Iraqi and Arab-Islamic art.

Third, in the 1930's, Iraq experienced new social and cultural developments, especially after the discovery of oil in Kirkuk in 1927. According to Metz (1990) the government oil revenue increased to US \$112 million. The government acted on its plans to modernize the country by introducing new projects and services to improve education and the economy. The foundation of such establishments as the Music Institute in 1936 reflected the desire of the government and the elitists in art and art education.

Fourth, retired Iraqi officers who trained at the military school in Istanbul during the last part of Ottoman rule played a major role in introducing Western artistic techniques and ideas, since these Iraqi officers were taught how to draw and paint in a Western style (Muzaffar, 1989 ; Ali, 1997; al-Said, 1987) . Through these officers, oil painting was introduced to Iraq.

One such figure was Abd al-Qadir Rassam (1882-1952), who demonstrated great skills in painting and was a leading artist of the time. In approaching his painting, art critics tend to focus on his mastery of painting according to Western artistic principles that he learned in Turkey. For example, Salim (1977) describes Rassam as follows:

Abd al-Qadir Rassam was born in Baghdad and studied art in Adana in Turkey while he was an army cadet in the Military Academy. He took lessons in art at the hands of art masters in Turkey, mixed with prominent painters, and was influenced by their traditional styles. He was well known for painting landscapes composed with human figures and animals. He also produced many scenes of the old military life and its camps and squadrons with an extreme sensitivity in his works: *Shepherds at Sunrise*, *Horsemen Returning from their Training at Sunset*, *Camp Inspection*, etc. (p. 41)

I examined Rassam's work at the Museum of Pioneer Artists in Baghdad several times in 1989 and concluded that he did indeed remain loyal to the painting methods and techniques that he learned in Turkey and Europe.

Another key artist of that period was Muhammed Salih Zaki (1888-1973), who studied at the War Academy in Adana as well as at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul (Salim, 1977; Ali, 1997). In 1938 he traveled to Europe to experience modern art there. After he returned home he became an art teacher; he published brochures on painting for both students and amateurs (Salim, 1977). Asim Hafiz (b. 1886) is another pioneer artist who also received military training in Turkey. He traveled to France to study art from 1928-31, also becoming an art teacher on his return. Hafiz, like most of his contemporaries, was interested in traditional subjects. According to Ali (1997) he was "appointed later as art teacher in public school and wrote the first art handbook in Iraq called *durus al-fann li'l-tatbiq ala'l-tabi'a* (Painting Lessons to Apply to Nature)" (p. 47). Still another noteworthy artist of that time was Hajj Muhammed Salim. He was also interested in traditional Western subjects such as landscape, still-life, and portraits, which had become popular in Iraq during that time.

It is obvious that the works of these Iraqi officers had nothing to do with traditional Ottoman miniature painting or Islamic art in general. This was the first diffusion of traditional European styles of painting in Iraq. Elite members of society began to collect landscapes, portraits, and still-life paintings, and it became a popular custom to hang portrait paintings and photos of family members in the living room (a practice that still continues). Such paintings were executed in a very classical style, with emphases on formal qualities and techniques. Needless to say, the artists of that period did not address social or political issues.

By adopting and learning Western artistic techniques and rules, these artists abandoned their local artistic traditions. However, their contribution is, nevertheless,

appreciated by many art critics today. Art critic Muzaffar (1989) asserts that "Their classical paintings are considered the nucleus for the development of modern art in Iraq. The work of this group of artists enriched the contemporary cultural life of Iraq, searching for new meaning to conform to the social changes that were taking place after the establishment of the new state by King Faysal in 1922" (p. 159).

Art and Art Education in Iraq in the 1940's

During these two decades Iraq was increasingly exposed to Western influence due to growing economic and political ties with the West. In addition, like most countries in the Middle East, Iraq was affected by World War II. Political developments in Iraq led Britain to occupy Iraq in 1941 for the second time, to end the Iraqi military coup led by Rashid Ali Gaylani. In the midst of these events a group of Polish artists arrived in Baghdad (Jabra, 1972). The information about these Polish artists is very sketchy, and Iraqi art critics have disputed the question of their role and their influence on Iraqi artists during that period. Iraqi's leading artist Jawad Salim says of these Polish artists that "We used to see them entering our cafe with their painting tools, in order to sketch with short lines and pale colors some scenes from our daily life. Polish artists such as Matuchik, Jabaski, and Sigmund painted with a new look" (al-Haydari, 1985, p. 14). Interestingly, Jawad Salim noted that these Polish artists were students of Bonnard.

According to al-Haydari (1985) and Muzaffar (1989), these artists focused Iraqi artists' attention on color quality and new techniques.

This group (two of them were former students of Bonnard) opened the eyes of Iraqi artists, particularly Jawad Salim and Faiq Hasan, to the significance of painting what one actually sees in nature and not what one is supposed to paint. According to Faiq Hasan, only after meeting the Polish artists did he notice that the light in Baghdad was not translucent, as he used to think, but full of dust. (Muzaffar, 1989, p. 159)

Similarly, Ali (1997) contends that

[a]lthough Iraqi art historians such as Shakir Hasan al-Said dismiss the influence of the Polish artists on their modern art, they seem to have played a significant role in introducing Iraqi painters to modern concepts of art in the 1940s. Al-Said himself acknowledges that Polish artists were responsible for breaking the links with academic styles, and it was only at the 1943 annual show of the Society of the Friends of Art that current European art styles became apparent in some of the works exhibited. Pointillism, which was introduced by the Polish artists, appeared in the works of Faiq Hasan, Akrim Shukri, and Jawad Salim, three pioneers in Iraqi modern art. This role of the Polish contribution is hard to ignore. (p. 48)

However, Al-Said's negative evaluation seems more appropriate since no other information to support the claim of Polish influence has been revealed. Those who have emphasized this Polish influence have never provided any evidence on how this Polish influence occurred and when. In a 1979 interview the leading Iraqi artist Ismail al-Shaykhli in 1979, he also dismissed this putative influence:

I don't believe that the Polish artists had a direct influence on Iraqi art. They did not stay in Baghdad for more than a few months during which they maintained some friendship with Iraqi artists as artists do everywhere. There was naturally the expected exchange of views and experiences, but it is a mistake to say that they created Iraqi art. I can also say that Jawad Salim had a close friendship with British artist Kenneth Wood, who was with the British Army, but that does not mean that Jawad Salim had also fallen under the influence of Kenneth Wood. Jawad Salim had his own originality on an international basis. (p. 46)

I consider Shaykhli's argument as decisive for the following reasons. Shaykhli is a Pioneer artist and he was born in Baghdad in 1924. This means he would have been aware of any Polish artistic presence in Baghdad during that time, because he was 21 years old. These Polish artists stayed only few months in Baghdad and it seems unreasonable to think they influenced Iraqi artists in such a short time; influence in art may take years, decades or even more. Artists such as Akram Shukri and Faiq Hasan, whom Iraqi art critics believe to have been influenced most by these Polish artists, had already been to Europe to study art before the arrival of the Polish artists. For example, Akram Shukri studied painting in England in 1931, while Hasan graduated from the Beaux Arts in Paris in 1938 (see Jabra, 1972). Finally, in a taped interview with Shakir Hasan al-Said in February 2, 1973, Faiq Hasan said that he was aware of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism while he was

studying in France (al-Said, 1983). In short, the absence of other possible references such as art works, slides, books, or articles seems to support al-Said's and Shaykhli's opinion on this issue.

The Institute of Fine Arts

The Institute of Fine Arts was founded in 1940 and has played a major role in art and art education in Iraq. Until 1962, when the Academy of Fine Arts was established, the Institute of Fine Arts was the only art institution in the country. The Institute of Fine Arts was an extension of the Music Institute, which was founded by the Ministry of Education in Iraq in 1936. In 1940 and 1941 the Music Institute expanded to include new departments for painting, sculpture, and drama, and it has played a major role in art and art education in the country. Faiq Hasan was in charge of both the painting and sculpture departments and he was the only art teacher when the Institute began in 1940. But when Jawad Salim returned from Europe after 1940, he became the chair of the Sculpture Department. The art curriculum at the Institute of Fine Arts is based on Western artistic principles and techniques, with teachers emphasizing the formal elements in teaching art. Art courses in figure painting and drawing, still life, compositions, printmaking, sculpture, ceramics, and art history have all been offered, and during the 1950's the Institute expanded to include departments for printmaking and for decoration and Arabic calligraphy.

The Role of Poetry

Early attempts by Iraqi poets to break away from traditional poetry date back to 1890, when Iraqi poets led by Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi (1863-1936) and Ma'ruf al-Rusafi (1875-1945) attempted to break away from the forms and styles of pre-Islamic Arabic and medieval Arabic poetry such as the panegyric (*madih*), the stair (*hija*),

and lyric (*ghazal*). These poets energetically defended women's rights and fought to improve their social position. Iraqi intellectuals were motivated by women's progress in the West and by new ideas taking root in Egypt that were nurtured by the well-known thinkers and activists Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, and also by Qasim Amin's discourses on women's role in society. In 1909, the poet Maruf al-Rusafi wrote a poem titled "The Woman in the Orient" which advocated women's rights. Al-Qaysi (1958) observes that al-Rusafi criticized the East for oppressing women : "The people of the East forced women to wear veils and only allowed them to go out muffled, saying that women are good for nothing but taking care of children and intercourse. Being children of slaves, the Easterners have become slaves themselves and accommodate themselves willingly to every tyranny" (p. 143). The poet Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi also fought for women's rights and education, thereby throwing himself into direct conflict with the religious extremists, who considered him an infidel. Al-Qaysi notes that al-Zahawi put his life at great risk when he published an article entitled "Defense of Women" in one of Cairo's weeklies, *al-Mu'ayyad*, in 1908. In it al-Zahawi called for women's emancipation and equality, asserting that "Just as a bird cannot fly with one wing, so society cannot rise without the participation of the two sexes, and education of the woman, for the woman is the symbol of culture" (1958, p. 143). The religious extremists in Egypt as well as in Iraq considered al-Zahawi's call for women's emancipation a critical threat to Islamic tradition, and there was an angry reaction against him. In his book Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond, Zeidan (1995) points out that al-Zahawi lost his job as a professor at the Law School and was put under house arrest (p. 23). Al-Zahawi and al-Rusafi not only defended women in their poems; they also wrote newspaper articles and raised the issue in intellectual circles. They were truly the initiators of feminist thought in modern Iraq.

In the 1940's a new trend in modern poetry in Iraq began to emerge. The new trend, known as *shi'r hurr*, was championed by the Iraqi poets Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Nazik al-Malika. Their new poetry differs from earlier poetry in both its themes and its structures. Literary critics commend al-Sayyab and al-Malika for their contributions to modern Arab poetry. Moreh (1976) writes that:

At the end of the same year (1947) two young Iraqi poets, both graduates of the Teachers' Training College, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-64) and Nazik al-Malika (born 1923), succeeded in creating accomplished lyric poems, based on what seemed a new and revolutionary technique which was also called *shi'r hurr*. The successes of these poems induced other poets to follow them, and the new method soon spread into all Arab countries, pushing aside the *qasida* and atrophic verses, especially among leftist poets. As a result, each of the two poets claimed to have been the first to write by this method and thereby to have caused the revolution in Arabic poetry. (p. 198)

Like Iraqi artists in the 1950's who were influenced by Western artists such as Matisse, Paul Klee, Picasso and Henry Moore, Iraqi poets were also influenced by Western poets, in particular T. S. Eliot. Al-Sayyab wrote to another Iraqi poet regarding the necessity of learning from Western poetry:

Have you read what T.S. Eliot wrote about the individual talent; and about heritage and its association with poetry? We should keep some association between the old and the new. We should keep some of the old features in what we call new. Our poetry should not be a disfigured thing in Arab or semi-guise. We should make utmost use of our poetic traditions and at the same time take advantage of what was accomplished by the Westerners, particularly these speaking English, in the realm of poetry. (p. 77)

Al-Sayyab was born in 1923 in the village of Jaikour in Basrah province, and Jaikour became a unique symbol in his works. In most of his poetry, al-Sayyab remained nostalgic about Jaikour, using references to Jaikour to express his love and yearning for Iraq. Al-Sayyab also is believed to be the first Iraqi poet to use Mesopotamian motifs, myths, and symbols in modern poetry, which had a serious impact on Iraqi poets and artists. His creative and expressive employment of the ancient symbols in a very modern form seems to have influenced Iraqi artists, in particular Jawad Salim and Shakir Hasan al-

Said, who began in the 1950's to borrow Mesopotamian symbols for their works. Baram (1991), examining the new developments in Iraqi poetry, holds that:

As in art and theater, poetry also witnessed the first appearance of Mesopotamian motifs in the 1950's. It was Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1923-64), the most prominent modern poet in Iraq—indeed, in the entire Arab world, to cite a widely-held view—who began in 1956 to introduce figures from Mesopotamian mythology into his poetry; the subsequent phase of his work was referred to by literary critics as his "Tammuz period" for the god Tammuz and the goddess Ishtar who became its central images at that time. In the mid 1960's, under al-Sayyab's influence, or at least, following in his footsteps, Mesopotamian themes emerged in the poetry of Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayyati (1926-), a future member of the leading trio of modern Iraqi poets. The third is Nazik al-Mallaika (who did not employ Mesopotamian themes in her poetry). Some major critics would make it a quartet by adding the name of the Kurd Buland al-Haydari. Al-Haydari (1926-) and another prominent poet, Shadhil Taqa (1928-74), also incorporated Mesopotamian mythology into their works, though in a far less conspicuous way than al-Sayyab and al-Bayyati. (p. 87)

Al-Sayyab did not limit himself to Mesopotamian mythology and symbols, drawing also on the resources of the Greek, Hebraic, Christian, and Islamic traditions. For example, al-Sayyab, as well as Al-Bayyati, used Christian symbols such as the figure of Christ and crucifixion. For al-Sayyab, both religion and poetry may have something in common: "just as the division between the end and means in religion disappeared, so did such divisions in poetry. When we believe in religion, we do not seek an earthly benefit. Likewise when we read poetry, we do not seek material benefit. But, we know that religion has a noble end and so does poetry" (Al-Samarri 1978, p. 76). Moreh (1976) argues that in his use of religious symbols, al-Sayyab was influenced by Eliot, who disparaged the Western world for lacking spiritual sensitivity. Moreh adds that Iraqi poets drew on Christian and Biblical symbols, not as an expression of a religious experience, but to emphasize certain issues or moods of significance to Iraqi culture and society. Moreh explains that "the main purpose of these symbols was to embody the psychological mood of the poet who feels persecuted, and alien to his society. His efforts to reform it were in vain, and therefore most of the symbols used were tragic" (p. 247). The adaptation of Christian symbols by Iraqi poets is as important as their use of Islamic

themes or symbols, such as the Martyr (*shaheed*, referring to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the son of Ali and the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad), which are deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition in Iraq. Both Christ and Husayn stood against injustice and sacrificed their lives for their people. Al-Sayyab's use of the symbol of Christ is comparable to Jawad Salim's use of the symbol of the Martyr in the Freedom Monument. Al-Sayyab did not study in Europe, but his great intellectual curiosity, as well as his graduation from the Teacher Training College with a major in English, led him to study modern Western poetry.

It is obvious that Iraqi poets and artists of the time attempted to close the distance between past and present, old and new, and East and West in their works. This explains why, from an early stage, Iraqi poets tried to create a new language and new forms by combining and contrasting elements and motifs. In their search for new themes and techniques, Iraqi poets, like artists, were confronted by such issues as internationalism and regionalism. Poets searched for ways to bring their poetry into harmony with other international trends; facing this challenge, al-Sayyab asked poignantly, "Does a writer have to be 'internationalist' before being nationalist or should he begin with his country and nation which can lead him on the road to humanity?" (Al-Samarri, p. 76).

Iraqi artists of the 1950's were inspired by these currents in poetry, and some Iraqi artists such as Jawad Salim and Shakir Hasan al-Said joined the debate over this topic. Artist and art critic al-Said (1986), a member of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, explains how artists benefited from poets in their search for a new artistic identity:

This modest spot was the scene of endless debates and argument between the pioneers of modern poetry such as Buland al-Haydari, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Abdul Wahab al-Bayyati. But it was Buland who raised this new trend in Arabic literature to the level of critical consciousness of arts. As a friend of Jawad Salim and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Buland developed a sense of appreciation and criticism of art which enabled him to take part vigorously in moving forward any attempt in renovating paintings, styles and schools in Iraq. Jawad Salim used to listen to him carefully and modify his opinions accordingly when necessary. As there were attempts to break the traditional structure of Arabic poetry there was also an endeavor to bring about new styles and concepts in painting and this led to a

breakthrough towards a genuine art renovation. The Baghdad Group, in its attempts to break free from the influence of European art, and benefited from poets who were trying to develop their revolutionary measures in structure of Arabic poetry. We, the painter and sculptor, were also hoping to establish our own measures. And this was centered on trying to give prominence to "localism" through an artistic work of worldwide value. (p. 85)

Iraqi poets and artists shared concerns about the national, as opposed to the global, and at this time Iraqi artists began to illustrate poems by Iraqi poets. For example, Jawad Salim, Shakir Hasan al-Said, and Khalid al-Rahal illustrated Hussies Miradi's collection The Quiet Ropes Swing, and in the same period Hakim Hasan al-Said produced new drawings based on The One Thousand and One Nights. This interest in poetry and literature flourished again in the 1960's when artist Diya al-Azzawi was involved seriously in poetry and literature. Al-Azzawi, al-Jumaili and other artists began to draw on poetry in their endeavors to explore new social and political issues.

Art Groups

In response to this development, new art groups were organized in the 1950's: *Alruad*, which is often referred to as "The Pioneer Group," was founded in 1950; *Jama'at Baghdad lil fann al-Hadith*, now referred to as The Baghdad Group for Modern Art, was founded in 1951; and in 1954 there appeared *al-Intibaiyeen*, now referred to as "The Impressionists Group." These organizations were very active and played a critical role in the Iraqi art movement in the 1950's. They emerged in response to the new social and cultural needs of their society, and they sought different approaches and ideas to respond to them, thus contributing significantly to the evolution of art in Iraq. In the following discussion I will examine these art groups, focusing on their objectives and major accomplishments.

The Primitive Group (The Pioneers)

This group was founded in 1950 by Faiq Hasan (1914-1994). According to Salim (1977), at first the group called itself “Societe Primitive (P.S.),” which was a French designation. The group also included many artists, such as Nuri al-Rawi, Ismail al-Shaykhli, Khalid al-Qassab, Mahmud Sabri Zaid Salih, and others. The Pioneers held their first exhibition in 1950 in the house of one of their members, Dr. Khalid al-Qassab. They continued to hold their exhibitions privately until 1962. Their reasons for not exhibiting publicly are not clear. The aim of this group was to adopt a modern style and techniques (Salim, 1997). The Pioneers were interested in outdoor painting in the countryside around Baghdad and they also used to travel to the mountains in Northern Iraq to paint nature. Unlike the Baghdad Group, the Pioneers did not publish a manifesto nor did they make any effort to intellectualize their approach.

This was because Faiq Hasan, the leader of the group, was not an intellectual and is described as having had, in some ways, naive views on art. Faiq Hasan came from a poor family in Baghdad; in his youth he demonstrated excellent skills at painting and was able to attract the attention of authorities who recognized his gifts and offered him a scholarship to study art in France in 1938. Hasan’s contribution to the Iraqi art movement is recognized, although there are many who believe that his role was not as remarkable as was that of Jawad Salim. It is true that Salim was a great artist but this does not mean that Hasan's role was secondary. Al-Haydari (1985), who used to be very close to the two artists, argues that:

It is almost impossible for any enthusiast to understand the beginning of the modern art movement in Iraq without taking into account the works of two of its early leaders whose respective conceptions, explorations, and efforts function as a summary index of the development of that movement as an entity distinct from its counterparts in other Arab countries. (p. 10)

Hasan founded the Painting Department at the Academy of Fine Art in 1939-1940, and Salim (1977) describes Hasan as “the ‘master’ or ‘teacher’ in the contemporary art movement, for it was under his guidance that many painters graduated” (YEAR?). I was

a student of Hasan's from 1973-1977 and benefited from him, in particular, in studying color. Hasan was very sensitive to color and he was among the few Iraqi artists whose color experience was strongly influenced by the surrounding environment. Faiq was fascinated by the beauty of the landscape in Iraq. He used to travel north and south in search of beauty. He painted almost everything, but his favorite subjects were village women, Bedouins, and horses. Al-Rawi (1981) addresses Hasan's major accomplishments in his article "Faiq Hasan," and he asserts that:

He endeavored to adapt the style of painting he learnt in Paris to a new Iraqi environment; he tried to be more sensitive to nature around him. The images and colors of the first paintings he produced during that period were derived in part from the colors of the sun and the landscapes with their palm trees under the hot clouds of summer, which change from a lush vibrant green to a bluish-gray resembling the color of sand. This earthy color, in fact, proudly dominates all the rest. (p. 65)

Led by Faiq Hasan, the Pioneers were interested in the practice of outdoor painting, focusing on the beauty of the Iraqi landscape in villages, desert, and countryside. They placed tremendous importance on technique, on a primitive expressiveness, and on originality (al-Haydari, 1985). Impressionism had a visible influence on the group's members, especially on Faiq Hasan. Hasan's role in this group was comparable to that of Jawad Salim for the Baghdad Group for Modern Art; both artists inspired other members and helped them to achieve their objectives.

Besides Faiq Hasan, Ismail al-Shaykhli is another important key artist in the Pioneers. Al-Shaykhli was influenced strongly by Faiq Hasan yet developed his own artistic vocabulary. His works are simple in their structure and composition, and his paintings feature traditional subjects and motifs. Like Faiq Hasan, Al-Shaykhli was fascinated by the village; in particular, he was captivated with the cloaked Iraqi village women, who are often composed in massive groups that are repeated over and over to the extent that al-Shaykhli's paintings might look the same to viewers. Al-Shaykhli used brilliant colors, reflecting the colorful local rugs, the crafts, and the bright light which is

itself a characteristic of Iraqi nature. His paintings are diffused with a poetic and lyrical quality, emphasizing various aspects of the Iraqi scenery.

Like Ismail al-Shaykhli, Nouri al-Rawi is another member of the Pioneers who is also captivated with the village, but in his case the village is his home town of Rawa. Rawi's dreamlike paintings are poetic and symbolic at the same time. Drawing heavily on memories from his childhood, al-Rawi explores the secret world of the village, which always appears in his works as a dream.

Another important member of the Pioneers is Mahmud Sabri, who is believed to be the first Iraqi artist to emphasize the significance of ideology. He drew on national and political themes in the early 1950's at a time when most Iraqi artists were still fixated on traditional subjects and native scenery. In his famous painting *The Algerian Epic*, Sabri expressed the struggle of the Algerian people against the French. Sabri left Iraq in the early 1970's and moved to Eastern Europe, but he and others contributed significantly to the Pioneers and promoted the bases for the art movement in the early 1950's.

The Baghdad Group for Modern Art

Jawad Salim started this group in 1951, and in its first year the group consisted of only nine members; Jawad Salim, Shakir Hasan al-Said, Lorna Salim, Muhammed al-Hasani, Oahtan Awni, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Nizar al-Jawdat, Richard Ganda, and Mahmud Sabri. According to Salim (1977) three years later the group consisted of nineteen members, mainly painters and sculptors. Iraqi art critics agree that the Baghdad Group's primary goal was to promote a national style. For example, Bakri (1981) points out that Salim's main objective in forming this group "was to create such forms as would characterize Iraqi art and give it a special personality" (p. 87). The Baghdad group emphasized the role of the intellectual artist. Its three key members--Salim, al-Said, and Jabra--maintained close relations and collaborated fruitfully with Iraqi poets and writers.

The Baghdad Group's quest for a national artistic style was motivated by many factors. According to some sources, they may have been inspired by the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, who drew heavily on Mexican art. Others point to the impact of those foreign architects who visited Iraq in the 1950's and 1960's. In the 1950's Baghdad became a cultural center in the Arab world, and internationally famous architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius were invited to Baghdad (Yamada, 1985). These highly visible architects encouraged Iraqi architects to focus on their own cultural heritage, even lecturing on this issue. Hasan Fathi (1987) reports that Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, and Walter Gropius "appreciated the wealth of the Islamic architectural heritage of Iraq and advocated that Iraqi architects should reject western models and stand to develop their own vocabulary" (p. 72). Fathi observes that there was "a strong sense of nationalist pride resulting in an attempt to create symbolically identifiable local architecture that is based on and inspired by local roots" (p. 72), although Iraqi artists were ahead of Iraqi architects in their adoption of local symbols and motifs.

The Baghdad Group issued its first manifesto, which was also the first critical art document of the 1950's. In this manifesto, the group defines its artistic objectives, opening a window on what values, beliefs and concerns were important for Iraqi artists in the 1950's and what kind of challenges and difficulties they faced. The document also emphasizes emphatically the importance of cultural heritage, folk art, and the audience. All these issues were new in Iraq at that time and for this reason, the document has historical significance:

At a time when Western civilization is using the most modern approach to express artistically its aspiration for freedom, our people do not realize the importance of painting as a standard of judgment when a country is in the process of awakening to real freedom.

A new trend in painting can help to resolve this problem by creating a renaissance in modern terms which takes its root from the artists of the thirteenth century. The modern generation will then be able to appreciate and understand that what was done by their ancestors in the past is, in spite of the difficulties, in a state of evaluation today under the impulse of contemporary culture and civilization. The artist then has to ask himself how this can best be brought about.

There will be several possibilities with which he must experiment before he finds the one to which he can devote his whole mind, vision, and hands.

The public will at first be shocked, but gradually it will be able to see the revelation of this secret and how the artistic message continues to exist. And then finally the ditch separating the artist from the public will have been filled in.

We have approached this problem logically. First, there were two things to consider: the means and the end. But in art the end becomes the means, and in one sense, a modernistic style is near to the core of what we are trying to achieve. The convention that the creative idea is separate from style is a relic of early nineteenth century Romanticism, and we feel under no obligation to adhere to it if it damages the coherency of a work of art. On the other hand, our efforts will be in vain unless they show evidence of innovation and creativity.

What we are exhibiting today is an example of many different trends of modern art—impressionistic, expressionistic, surrealist, cubism and abstract art—and is the first of its kind to take place since the second World War. It is striving hard to define a creative identity for our country. For, unless in art, as in all other intellectual disciplines, we can succeed in self-realization, we cannot resolve simply by adopting a modern style; we have to find a way of introducing new elements into our own styles. One of the greatest artists, Picasso, passed through several stages, each of which helped him to find his roots, before reaching his present eminent position. It was not by chance that he studied Andalusian primitive art, subsequently African art, and then the writing of a post-impressionistic poet along the road which led to what was later known as cubism.

We, standing at the crossroads, have to decide what are the elements of our civilization which we should integrate in our current work. In other words, we have to combine our experience of Western art with our local “genius loci.” For it is this “genius,” of which most of us are completely ignorant today, which will transcend those other values currently in the world.

Therefore, we proclaim today the birth of a new school of painting which stems from the twin roots of our civilization, with all its beliefs and fashions, and this unique ethos of the East.

We shall reconstruct what has collapsed since the thirteenth century al-Wasiti or Ar-Rafidian school; we shall reforge the links in the chain, broken when Baghdad fell into the hands of the Mongols, for the benefit of our people and the peoples of the world. (Salim, 1977, pp. 99-101)

In their efforts to create a national style, the members of the Baghdad Group championed Mesopotamian and Islamic artistic traditions and incorporated symbols, themes and motifs from folk art and popular culture. In particular, they were inspired by the works of the thirteenth-century artist al-Wasiti, who developed a distinctive style that featured striking Arabic and Islamic elements. In his article “Al-Wasiti: Iraqi Illustrator From the Thirteenth Century,” Shakir Hasan al-Said (1980) states that:

Following the accomplishment of the ancient civilizations integrated within Iraq, the Mesopotamian artists derived a pleasure from developing their own distinctive style. It was this artistic legacy that provided the soil in which al-Wasiti’s own

accomplishments grew and blossomed, To this rich heritage, he brought his own novel interior world. (p. 49)

Al-Wasiti illustrated the Maqamat of al-Hariri (see Figure 2). The Maqamat are folk tales written in early twelfth century about the exciting adventures of Abu Zayd al-Saraji. As Grabar (1974) puts it, "al-Wasiti sought to transfer into visual terms a perfectly valid psychological or intellectual interpretation of the Hariri text" (p. 98). The importance of al-Wasiti lies in his ability to convey the social realities of his time—the architecture, the fashions, and the human relationships themselves—in striking visual language. No other painting from this period provides such a vivid and detailed depiction of life in Baghdad in the thirteenth century. Jabra I. Jabra (1972) writes that:

Manuscript illumination was for centuries the visual counterpart of poetry: influenced by Mongol and Persian art, it also had roots in Middle Eastern paganism and Byzantine art. Although the general impression is that such Islamic art was mostly Persian, the Arabs, when they employed human or animal figures, gave it an expressive power of line and composition quite different from its highly ornate Persian counterpart. The endless books on medicine, physics, botany and other sciences that were illustrated by Iraqi and Syrian artists in the last three centuries of the Abbasid period and later are now a veritable storehouse of Arab "painting." Most important are the magnificent illustrations of the famous story book called Maqamat al-Hariri done in Baghdad by Yehya al-Wasiti (A.D. 1237), which together with a few story books illustrated by other artists, have been a source of inspiration for modern art in Iraq. (p. 6)

Besides these influences on the manuscript illumination of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries one can also see strong Seljuk, Mongolian, Indian, and Chinese influences as well. The significance of the Chinese influence on Islamic pictorial art lies in its unique link between calligraphy and illustration, which became the most distinctive characteristic of Islamic painting.

In addition to the art of al-Wasiti, the Baghdad Group also drew inspiration from Mesopotamian ancient art. This is evident in Jawad Salim's *Monument of Liberty* (Nasb al-hurriya); likewise, Israeli writer Baram (1991) states that Salim's *Freedom Monument* "features numerous other influences of Mesopotamian art" (p. 70). Similarly, King (1987)

writes that “The most unusual and exciting of the influences on Iraqi art is the country’s ancient past. The search for yore is also the story of the art movement’s infancy in the 1940’s and 1950’s and is what has led today’s Iraqi painters and sculpturers to become champions and preservers, recovering and exalting ancient histories unrivaled on the planet except perhaps for Egypt, China and India” (p. 6).

In addition to the Mesopotamian and Islamic influences there are also echoes of Picasso, Matisse, Henry Moore, and Paul Klee in the works of the Baghdad Group. By combining elements and techniques from a variety of cultures and sources, the Baghdad Group promoted a new eclectic language, stylistic verity, and values, themes and techniques that borrowed from modernism as well as classical art. Furthermore, their exploration of folk arts and crafts can be seen as an innovative endeavor to bridge the distance between high art and low art since, unlike other groups of the 1950’s, the Baghdad Group intellectualized folk and decorative art.

The Impressionists

The artist Hafid al-Drubi organized this group in 1954, and looking back on it in 1976 he explained his motivation by noting that French Impressionism had Eastern roots, probably referring to the contributions of various cultures in the Far East, Middle East and Africa to modern Western art.⁴ “The European Impressionism in France was influenced by the Orient. If we started off from there, we might go back to the main source, that is the Orient where we live” (al-Said, 1990, p. 11). The Impressionists found Iraqi nature was different from the landscapes of Europe which they had experienced during their studies overseas. The Iraqi natural landscape is distinguished by its endless horizons and open fields and by its bright lights and strong reflections. As a leader of the new group Drubi expressed their struggles against their European training: “Even though I try continually to

⁴ Al-Drubi may have been alluding to the eighteenth century wood cuts which became

paint Iraqi subjects, having been born in a purely Iraqi environment, I am mindful, when I pick up the brush and the paint, of the work of the European artist" (al-Haydari, 1985, p. 17). In comparison to the Baghdad Group, the Impressionists failed to intellectualize their approach. Their aim was vague and I do not believe that they promoted what can be described as an "Iraqi Impressionists school" for the simple reason that they adopted a variety of styles that had nothing to do with Impressionism.

Contemporary Art, 1958-1968

Iraqi art critic Adil Kamil defines the 1960's more thematically as the period between 1958-1968. Both dates marked critical political changes in Iraq. As was mentioned earlier, in 1958 the Hashimite monarchy was overthrown in a military coup led by Brigadier General Abd al-Karim Qasim. Qasim, who had no particular ideology, allowed the Communists to take an active role in government and the political life of the country. The ties with the West which had been established under the monarchy were ended under Qasim's rule, and Iraq began to move toward the Soviet Union and other socialist and Communist countries. The tensions and struggles between Qasim, the Communist Party (ICP), and the Arab nationalists became more violent and bloody. Intellectuals and artists in Iraq were torn by the violence and political struggles for power.

However, Qasim did introduce several economic and social reforms, the most important one being the agrarian reform which ended the deeply-rooted feudal system in Iraq. Major cities, especially Baghdad, witnessed migration from the countryside and massive urban development.

Large numbers of Iraqi artists and students were sent to socialist and Communist countries to study art. Increasingly, Iraqi intellectuals as well as artists became more involved in leftist intellectual and political ideologies and movements in Europe, Latin

popular in Paris and influenced some Impressionist artists such as Edouard Manet.

America, and other cultures. The works of leftist and progressive poets and writers such as Pablo Neruda, Federico Garcia Lorca, Nazim Hikmet and others became popular in Iraq. In art the influence of social realism became evident in the works of many Iraqi artists.

In February 8, 1963, Qasim's regime was itself overthrown by another coup executed by the Bathists and nationalist army officers. This coup lasted only nine months and was ended by another coup led by Arif, who declared the Ba'th Party illegal. Arif was killed in Basrah in April 1966 in a helicopter crash and was replaced by his brother, Major General Abd al-Rahman Arif, who was also toppled by a coup in July 17, 1968, a coup which brought the Bath party to power again .

The art movement in the 1960's continued to grow under the shadow of these new realities. One of the most noteworthy events in the 1960's was the Gulbenkian Foundation's establishment of the National Museum of Art in 1962. In the same year the Academy of Fine Arts was set up as the first art college in the country. During this period many private galleries were opened also, such as the Aya Gallery belonging to the architect Rifa't Chadirji and the Wasiti Gallery, which was supported by the architects Henry Zevoda, Mohammed Makky, and Said Ali Madloun and was opened in 1966. In addition, the British, French, Soviet, and other cultural centers also organized and sponsored artistic exhibitions and cultural activities by both foreign and Iraqi artists.

As in the 1950's, in the 1960's new art groups sprang up, but with different objectives and visions. Of the new art groups, the Innovationists, founded in 1965, lasted only until 1968. The Innovationists included the artists Salim Dabbagh, Salih al-Jumai'i, Subhi Charchalli, Ali Taaleb, Faiq Husayn, Talib Makki, Nidal Kadimand, and Taher Jamial. The group Al-Zawya, which emerged after the defeat of the Arabs by Israel in 1967, held one exhibition in which the political themes from this defeat were expressed in the art work. However, this group did not continue because of their lack of a clear

objective and direction. In addition, the group, which consisted of Faiq Hasan, Ismail, Muhammed Ghani, Valentinos Karalambos, Kazim Haydar and Ghazy al-Saudi, did not share any common artistic interest and lacked uniformity in their approaches and styles. Another group, called al-Ruyah al-Jadidah (the New Vision), appeared in 1969.

Art critics place importance on the Innovationists and the New Vision groups because they played a major role in the art movement in Iraq. The Innovationists held four exhibitions, in 1965, 1966, 1967, and 1968, the last being held at the Iraqi Society in 1968. The members of these two groups were more progressive, younger, and enthusiastic. Tensions arose between the new artists and the previous generations of artists, most of whom were recognized artists and teachers at the Institute of Fine Art and Academy of Fine Arts. The New Vision issued a manifesto in which the group attempted to introduce their fresh ideas as follows:

All artistic heritages are incorporated in forming a new style of art. It will be used in order to understand the new trend. We must speak the language of new life with its symbols and people. We must have an understanding and questioning spirit which can shatter outmoded ideas until, at our journey's end, we are able to arrive at a "New Vision." We are a generation which stands for progress and creativeness and a refusal to accept outdated ideas. (Salim, p. 84).

The new art groups called for new themes, techniques and concepts, and their very existence expressed dissatisfaction with the academic subjects and themes that still dominated Iraqi art. These artists rejected the imitation of the antique; returning after their studies abroad, their major objective was to inject into the art movement new, fresh ideas and techniques. The sixties introduced new techniques such as monotype, aluminum, and collage, and adoption of other techniques continued until the end of the decade.

The most recent criticism against New Vision is presented by Wijdan Ali, who seems in favor of the approach of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art. Ali writes that:

Their declaration called for freedom and revolution and proclaimed that "revolution and art [were] linked to the development of humanity." They opposed the revival of cultural heritage, stating that "as long as we act freely toward it, our [artistic legacy] will not become a dictatorial force that imprisons us. We considered it our duty to use [our heritage] to conquer the world. We speak a new language with

symbols, that belongs to a new life and a new man." ... The group's exaggerated, sweeping, and emotional statement can be considered a reflection of the official climate in Iraq after the revolution. They introduced a new art trend that drew on mythology, calligraphy, and religious iconography, in abstract and expressionistic canvases, and appeared to be an extension of the Baghdad Group of Modern Art. (p. 52)

But regardless of the differences in the objectives and approaches of these groups, they all contributed to art and art education in Iraq. By competing with each other and by introducing new ideas and themes these groups formed an important part of the dynamic Iraqi art movement.

Arabic script

Calligraphy, the art of beautiful writing, is considered a noble art, one of the highest and purest forms of Islamic art, with both spiritual and mystical values. Writing is essential to Islamic art, with a wealth of calligraphic styles and techniques, and it is hard to imagine any Islamic monuments or art objects without writing. But, as Rosenthal (1971) asks, "How did writing happen to occupy this particular place in Muslim civilization? It is hardly a satisfactory answer to say that since all forms of pictorial representation were greatly curbed in Islam, art took refuge in calligraphy. There must have been something to suggest that writing was a suitable outlet for artistic creativity" (p. 5). Khatibi and Sijelmassi (1996) remark that "[t]he Japanese describe a person as 'having beautiful handwriting' when they mean he is graceful and handsome. The Arab calligraphers considered their art to be the geometry of the soul expressed through the body, a metaphor that can be taken literally and concretely with the design of its inspiring spirit" (p. 14).

The Arabic script existed before Islam. It is believed that, as a member of the Semitic family of scripts, it was derived from the Nabatean script and dates back to the third century. The well-known Arab historian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) noted that social, cultural and economic conditions contributed to the development of Arabic script, and that

calligraphy reached its peak in Baghdad during the Abbasid age (750-1258 CE) because “it was the home of Islam and center of the Arab dynasty” (p. 384).

Ibn Khaldun highly admired two of the outstanding calligraphers of Baghdad, Ibn Muqla (272/886-328/940), who used to be described as “the Prophet” in the field of writing, and his student Ibn al-Bawwab (d.413/1022: see Figure 3). Ibn Muqla was the first master to create general principles for Arabic calligraphy, establishing its codes and dot system. At the hand of Ibn Muqla’s student Ibn Bawwab Arabic calligraphy reached perfection. According to Safadi (1988), Ibn Muqla created the basic standards of six of the major cursive scripts known as the Aqlam al-Sitta: Naskh, Thuluth, Rihan, Muhaqqaq, Tauqi, and Ruqah. Historically, *Kufic*, which was named after the city of Kufa in Iraq, and *naskhi* were the oldest Arabic calligraphic forms, the forms from which all others derived. They evolved together, influencing each other. Kufic is characterized by its unique geometrical construction and design and it appears closer to drawing than does *naskhi*; *naskhi*, on the other hand, is a cursive script with less graphic or drawing-like qualities. The earliest Quranic scripts were written with *Kufic*, as were most Islamic monuments.

Beside Arabs, other states such as the Mamluk, Seljuk, Safavid, and Ottoman also shaped Islamic calligraphy by inventing and refining scripts and techniques. After the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century we see more regional qualities in Islamic calligraphy and in Islamic art in general. For example, the Persians invented Taliq and Nastaliq, and these two scripts spread to other parts of the Islamic world, in particular Turkey, Pakistan, and Afghanistan (Safadi, 1988). The Ottomans, who excelled in all calligraphy, invented Diwani script from the Taliq script in the fifteenth century and used it for official documents. The Maghribi script became a dominant form in North Africa and it combined and synthesized Kufic and Naskhi scripts (see Figure 4).

The Use of Arabic Script in Contemporary Art

Many Iraqi, Arab, and Muslim artists use the Arabic script in their works. Arab art critics agree that Iraqi artists were the first to use Arabic script in modern Arab art, doing so in the 1940's. Madihah Umar and Jamil Hammudi were the first Iraqi artists to incorporate letters in their paintings. Artist Jamil Hammudi explains that:

[t]he very moment at which the idea came to me to seek inspiration in the Arabic letter in art was a kind of supplication and prayer for a soul intimidated by the emptiness which dominated European life. Fear from being lost in a culture which did not relate to my intellectual and national experience produced within me a revolt against the materialistic values which were the outcome of a civilization based on tools, machinery, and cheap materials. I turned to spiritual values which emphasize the originality of the ties of civilization and culture with my existence. I did not find an expedient more suitable and sacred than the Arabic letter, to which I resorted to satisfy my thirst for expression and creativeness. I will cling with all my being to the history of my country and produce, in the field of innovation, what any modern artists would aspire to do. (Salim, 1977, p. 206).

Similarly, Pioneer Iraqi woman artist Madihah Umar, whom I interviewed in New York in 1995, said that Arabic script can be used to express social, political and cultural issues.

Both these artists believe that the function of script is not limited to decoration and ornamentation, but rather is open to broader applications.

Other artists suggest different reasons for their integration of Arabic calligraphy into their artworks. In 1993 Iraqi artist Hashim al-Tawil, whose works depend heavily on the incorporation of Arabic script, responded to a series of questions about this tactic.

Q. When using Arabic characters in your painting, what are the characteristics of Arabic characters that intrigue you?

A. In my painting, I use different kinds of inscriptions. Arabic is a major source which is sometimes combined with other inscriptions. In general, I do not employ individual characters, but rather what seem to be textual compositions. In certain cases, replicas of old manuscripts are rendered and interwoven with other motifs in the composition. Whether the text is legible or deliberately mutilated, my

intention appeals to me as a visual source to composition. It is the inscription that I primarily adopted and manipulated in my works.

Q. Do you think Arabic calligraphy has a unique artistic quality? Can you describe that quality?

A. Arabic calligraphy is an art in itself. Arabic alphabets and characters, unlike any other characters, have tremendous flexibility and plasticity. These characters respond beautifully to formal artistic compositions, creating meanwhile a renewed sense of aesthetics that is found in the rendering of the line drawings.

In spite of the attraction that the Arabic script exercises over many contemporary Iraqi, Arab, and Muslim artists, there are still those who believe that calligraphy, like other traditional arts, has no value for contemporary art. As we know, those who support the international style in art vehemently reject ornamentation and consider crafts a form of low art that lacks expressive qualities. Iraqi poet and art critic Buland al-Haydari(1981) argues that

[t]he question arose as to how the modern Arab artist uses this decorative art in order to express his views or vision, and how far could a form of craftsmanship so dependent on loud color and design be turned into a suitable medium for the expression of his response to vital social problems and profound personal tension. The Arab artist indeed felt that he was seeking a medium more expressive than European Impressionism and the various schools which preceded or followed it. If, as had been the case, the ancient arts had developed into a suitable medium of communication between the artist and the people at large, how could the modern artist breath new life into forms which had become meaningless with the passage of time, and turn them again into living medium expression ? How could the modern artist shape the forms of the ancient arts into something commensurate with his own feelings and his own particular vision? (p. 17)

In fact, many artists have failed to incorporate the Arabic script in their works. Due to their art training with its powerful Western perspective many artists are not really aware of the importance of their own classical tradition. Some artists believe that their classical traditions are useless and no longer relevant for art, while others have not been trained in how to use these elements. In short, Arab art critics believe that, unlike the West, where artistic traditions have continued their historical development unbroken until the present,

artistic development in Iraq has been interrupted by many foreign invasions, wars, and social crises and conflicts. The Lebanese critic Samir Sayegh (1981) argues that Arab artists have been hampered from utilizing the classical traditions creatively for the following reason :

The Arab artist has, to date, failed to interpret satisfactorily the Eastern character in a way that would give him the connection with and pride in his identity. If he could, this would generate a feeling in him that he is equal to others in creative ability. Perhaps the Arab artist has forgotten how to interpret the spirit of the East. The artistic heritage of the past is not buried or scattered in the capitals of the Western world: it has just been estranged from creative imagination. This distinguished and deeply private intricate art requires a special kind of creative imagination. It is for that reason that one could interpret the artistic trends that claim to be revivals of the old artistic heritage as trends which are more reactions than inner, positive beliefs. One can even go further and state that they are simply utterances relating to the political, national and social struggle that the East faced with colonialists. (p. 103)

I agree with Sayegh that many Arab artists have failed to interpret Eastern artistic traditions in a profound and satisfying manner. However, I attribute this more to the nature of their art education and a lack of training in Arabic calligraphy. Courses in calligraphy are, unfortunately, absent from most art schools in the Arab world. Arabs used to appreciate calligraphy and considered it essential to their culture. Officially, Abbasid rulers encouraged calligraphers and hired the most talented ones in their courts. Abu Hayyan's reports that "al-Ma'moun, looking at a beautiful written official document, said: 'How wonderful is the calamust! How it weaves the fine cloth of royal power, embroiders the ornamental borders of the garment of the ruling dynasty, and keeps up the standards of the caliphate'" (Rosenthal, 1971, p. 39). Along the same lines, Abbas is quoted as saying "Handwriting is the tongue of the hand. Style is the tongue of the intellect. The intellect is the tongue of good actions and qualities. And good actions and qualities are the perfection of man" (Rosenthal, 1971, p, 34). However, today we do not see the same interest in mastering the Arabic script and this is a major reason why Arab calligraphy has lost the prestigious position that it used to hold in traditional Arabic culture.

As I mentioned earlier, writing was used in traditional Islamic art not only for ornamentation, but also to deliver important spiritual messages, and it was sought as an artistic outlet to express emotion. Art historian Oleg Grabar defines the function of writing in Islamic art as follows: "Writing is indeed an intermediary, which is judged by how well it expresses the quality of its maker and affects the sensitivity of its user. Writing has an ethical component in the very special way of medieval Islamic ethics, whereby the intent behind the act is what validates that act" (p. 91).

When examining the use of Arabic script in contemporary Iraqi art, we should also consider the significance of writing itself in contemporary Iraqi culture. For example, Iraqi art critic Muzaffar (1988) posits that the use of Arabic script in Iraqi art is a new artistic endeavor meant to close the gap between high art and low art. The magnificence of the language had to parallel the magnificence of the writing. The Arabic letter has great artistic potential and it may be no accident that the word *khat* in Arabic means both writing and drawing. Muzaffar adds that:

Arabic writing, therefore, is essentially based on drawing and numerous styles developed in the art of calligraphy reveal more than one aspect of the artistic and expressive capacity of this character. Its plasticity as well as elasticity, which enabled it to assume representative forms of infinite nature, have well been associated with intellectual as well as spiritual connections. Yet calligraphy as a craft is purely based on geometric concepts, a fact which makes it belong to the art of design rather than painting, if things are to be judged from a painterly point of view. (pp. 7-8)

Today Iraqi artists, like other Arab and Muslim artists, use Arabic scripts in various ways. For example, Shakir Hasan al-Said draws on folk art and popular culture and tries to incorporate letters to express social, political and cultural issues. Letters and calligraphic signs in his abstract painting also have religious and spiritual importance. His fascination with letters led him in the 1970's to develop a theory called "The One-Dimension." Diya al-Al-Azzawi is another Iraqi artist who employs Arabic script in his artwork. Since al-Azzawi draws on both classical and modern Arab literature and, in particular, on poetry, Arabic script plays a pivotal role in his paintings, and he explores the graphic as well as the

poetic qualities of the letter. Rafa al-Nasiri is another Iraqi artist who is known for his calligraphic painting, and particularly for his abstract treatment. Al-Nasiri emphasizes the movement and the musical and artistic qualities of letters. However, he uses Arabic script as a decorative as well as an aesthetic element so as to promote a distinctive artistic identity.

Other Iraqi artists such as Salih al-Jumai'i, Issam al-Said, and Muhammed Ali Shakir also incorporate Arabic letters into their compositions. Some of these artists restrict themselves to individual characters, others are interested in verses or texts, and still others, such as Shakir Hasan al-Said, use wall graphics and signs. But a transformation or modification is needed so that artists can free themselves from the restrictive rules and techniques of classical calligraphy as a craft that is based on rules and measurements, and then a movement toward contemporary painting and drawing, which are free of such restrictions and rules.

Given their training, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority of Iraqi and Islamic artists misuse these elements and are unable to incorporate them in convincing methods and styles. It is not enough to make use of classical motifs and symbols without defining the purpose as well as the needs or importance of such motifs and symbols. Given this state of confusion about the use and the value of Arabic script, we need a theory that can explicate the multiple cultural layers of meaning and traffic that show up when Arabic script and other classical and decorative elements in contemporary art express social issues and cultural identities, a theory that is open to both Eastern and Western formal structures. I argue that there exists a theoretical hole in art education, criticism, and art history with respect to such new developments in Iraqi art and in art more generally in the Islamic world. Thus, in Chapter Three of this dissertation, I will provide a theoretical framework that is more adequate to these developments in contemporary Iraqi art.

Summary and Conclusions

In Part One of this chapter I provided a brief overview of the emergence of modern art in certain key Islamic countries such as Turkey and Egypt. I prefaced this section by noting that most recent studies dismiss the claim that there is an Islamic attitude against the representation of living beings, and if there is such an attitude, it has no significant impact on the development of modern art in the Islamic world.

Modern art was born in the West around the period when the industrial revolution took off; thus modern art evolved in the atmosphere of Enlightenment philosophy and its myth of progress. Hence, modern art was introduced as a superior form during the contact between the West and the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Modern art was introduced to this area informally, as European artists flooded to Istanbul and other places in the Muslim world like Cairo and North Africa, diffusing Western art in these Islamic cultures. It was also introduced more formally, as governments and ruling elites sent students abroad for education, and also sponsored Western-style art institutions at home. The Ottoman military schools also played a major role in the spread of Western art by offering courses in technical drawing for military purposes. Due to these influences and training, Ottoman artists began to move away from traditional Islamic art, and gradually Western art and its techniques became their dominant mode of expression.

It should be remembered, though, that some European artists responded in creative and sensitive ways to the Arab-Islamic culture of North Africa. For example, modernist masters such as Klee and Matisse, who visited North Africa, have influenced many Iraqi and Arab modern artists. These artists rediscovered artistic values in traditional Islamic art and incorporated them into their modern style.

With a growing national and religious awakening in Egypt and other Arab countries, an awakening which emphasized the importance of traditions and history in reconstructing a new Arab-Islamic cultural identity, there emerged a new artistic sensibility,

as well as a growing regionalism in art in some Arab countries. Thus race, religion, region and nation are critical elements in any approach to contemporary Arab-Islamic contemporary art movements. Ethnic and religious diversity in the Arab world is embodied in traditional arts, crafts, and material culture more broadly, which have become a major source for contemporary Arab art.

In Part Two, I traced the growth of modern and contemporary Iraqi art, which follows much the same parabola as traced above for the area more generally. Here, too, modern art came with Iraqi officers who received their military training in Istanbul at the end of the nineteenth century, some of whom became art teachers and promoted foundations for art and art education in Iraq. Much like the Turkish government, the new state of Iraq also sent artists to the West for training, so that Iraqi art before World II was oriented toward European artistic trends and concepts.

The 1950's are very important to my work, as Iraqi artists and intellectuals turned toward their own national history and culture, reviving mythological motifs, symbols, and older techniques while searching for a contemporary Iraqi identity. I have argued that these artists were especially inspired by the new approach in modern Iraqi poetry, which reflects both East and West, mixing symbols and images from folk art, legends, and stories.

This process of borrowing, reviving, and synthesizing intensified during the 1960's in Iraq, as artists responded to the many military coups, regional wars, and the Six Day War in Palestine. Major shifts in styles and approaches took place, as artists tried to develop more contemporary vocabulary and techniques, and artwork with strong political themes and social and cultural concerns dominated the whole decade.

In short, the Iraqi art movements of the 1950's and 1960's were especially responsive to national, cultural, and political issues. The resulting inquiry into the employment and function of classical art, folk art, and popular culture has been extremely exciting and fruitful, but has also led to some misappropriations and misuse in

contemporary Iraqi art of classical motifs, especially in the case of calligraphy, arabesque, and some motifs from Mesopotamian art. Chapter Three addresses this situation and suggests a theoretical analysis for examining these stylistic and thematic approaches in Iraqi art.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND THEORY

Introduction

This chapter provides the theoretical basis for the description and interpretation of contemporary Iraqi art. The chapter is grounded in post-modern theory, focusing on double-coding theory as developed by the post-modern critic Charles Jencks. This theory examines how and why contemporary artists combine classical motifs with other modern codes. Jencks provides a new critical method for approaching this artistic development in both Western and non-Western art. His theory examines the artwork as a form of cultural production by examining it in relation to its surrounding cultural context. The theory also questions universal and formalist criteria to study art and deems the separation between so-called "high art" and "low art" as superficial and destructive of popular culture. The theory provides another alternative for judging art, calling for pluralism and eclecticism.

A Shift in Art Theory

The current shift in art and art education from universal and elitist concepts and approaches toward eclectic art forms and theories marks a new era. As Clark (1996) points out, the new critical development seeks to expand the established artistic canons by recognizing non-western canons and other artistic traditions. Art educators Efland, Freedman and Stuhr (1996), who address post-modernism in art and art education, hold that one outstanding aspect of post-modernism "is the importance of local tradition and

values in art” (p. 39). This entails a move from universal and formalist approaches which emphasize commonality and similarity (Clark, 1996) to new approaches which stress cultural difference as a key element.

The formalist approach in art and art education is under attack because, by stressing the form, it ignores the content of the artwork. Adams (1996) states that:

Formalism is the approach to art that stresses the significance of form over content as the source of a work’s subjective appeal. Roger Fry (1866-1934), the most influential formalist critic in England, maintained the position that art has little or no meaningful connection with either the artist who makes it or the culture to which it belongs. (p. 16).

Formalism was developed in the 1920's by the British critics Clive Bell and Roger Fry, who emphasized formal aspects such as line, color, shape, space, and texture; they called these elements collectively "the significant form." According to this theory, “if a thing has significance or expressive form, it is to be called art. The term 'expressive intent' is often used in this connection, but again there are problems in an actual definition” (p. 160). The emphasis on expressive form raises the question of what constitutes art. McEvilly (1992) holds that there are many objects or things that have expressive form but cannot be labeled or viewed as art, for instance fabric designs, which are beautiful but cannot be considered artwork; on the other hand, there are things that lack a significant form but still can be regarded as artwork, such as Duchamp’s snow shovel or Warhol’s Brillo Box.

Formalism dominated art studies in the West, in particular in the United States, after World War II, and was reflected in the writing of the well-known American art critic Clement Greenberg (Atkins, 1990). According to Barrett (1994), Greenberg championed Abstract Expressionism as represented by Mark Rothko, William De Kooning, and Jackson Pollock. Barrett adds that :

the Abstract Expressionists championed the existential idea of individual freedom, and committed themselves to psychic self-expression through abstraction. Shape, size, structure, scale and composition were of utmost importance, and styles evolved out of enthusiasm for particular properties of paint. (p. 114)

In my view, the shortcoming of formalism lies in its inability to consider the art object beyond its formal qualities, which are not universal as the modernists think. In contrast, post-modern theories offer another alternative by emphasizing the cultural context and the meaning that the art object holds in this context as a crucial element in any interpretation of art. For example, how is it possible to appreciate Arabic calligraphy as a non-Western artistic tradition without some understanding of the significance of this practice to Islamic culture? The Iranian scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1976) argues that Islamic art remains a neglected field. He adds that major Islamic art forms such as calligraphy are still considered by Western art schools as "decorative" or "minor." In order to appreciate the significance of such art, one must examine how it functions in the culture, societies or groups who create it.

This explains why this study places such great importance on culture, not denying the importance of the formal elements of the art work, but rather approaching them in relation to other extrinsic conditions whether they be social, political or economic. From this perspective, the themes, symbols, medium, and techniques of the art work are related to the surrounding cultural conditions and they are influenced as well by other factors such as the artist's race, gender, sex, and age. Thus this study provides a wealth of information about the artists, their education, training and other relevant activities that they are involved in, includes interviews in which the artists express their opinions about their artwork and their artistic development, and provides a plethora of evaluations by art critics and art historians who are familiar with these artists.

Double-Coding Theory

In reviewing the literature for this study and designing a suitable methodology, I find double coding theory as developed by the post-modern critic Charles Jencks especially

applicable to the contemporary art forms of non-Western cultures, and he includes many non-Western exemplars in his writings. Jencks's double-coding theory tackles the issues raised by this study, such as the relation between classical traditions and modern art, the visual dialogue between Eastern and Western arts, the role of art in the post-modern condition, contextualism, pluralism and other important issues.

Charles Jencks studied literature and architecture at Harvard from 1957-1965 and received a Ph.D. degree in architecture from London University. He was the first critic to apply the term "post-modernism" to architecture (Atkins, 1990). In addressing the current condition of post-modern architecture Klotz (1992) notes that "Charles Jencks has emphasized stylistic pluralism as the essential feature of post-modern architecture. From this insight he draws the conclusion that the individual architect must embrace a 'radical eclecticism'--must submit to any change of style that the client desires" (p. 243). In his book Post-Modern Architecture Jencks observes that many architects are "moving beyond modern architecture in a tentative way, either adapting a mixture of modernist styles, or mixing these with previous modes" (p. 87). As a result a new hybrid architecture has emerged. In order to study new styles, techniques and themes in architecture, Jencks has developed what he calls double-coding theory. Rose (1991) writes that Jencks used the term double-coding as early as 1975. He uses it in 1977 in his book The Language of Post-Modern Architecture:

To define post-modern architecture as the more positive "dual" or "double coding" of modernism with other codes or styles, and to use the term "double-coding" to emphasize the way in which post-modern architecture is to be understood as a form of architecture which seeks to communicate messages to its uses and observers through a variety of styles and devices. (p. 102).

In his article "The Rise of Architecture," Jencks (1975) argues that modern architecture has failed to communicate because it is under-coded. In other words, the code of modern architecture has been constructed on the basis of what he describes as good taste, purity, geometry and formalism, all of them obsolete values which represent criteria

for a high modern art style. In this post-modern age, cities have confronted urban problems, complexities, and the challenges of diverse populations from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In his article "Post-Modern Discontinuity," Jencks (1978) contends that instead of searching for a utopian approach, architecture should be involved in social realities. In other words, contemporary architecture should meet the needs of contemporary societies. Jencks (1978, 1991, 1993) has elaborated elsewhere on this theme, calling for pluralism and contextualism in post-modern architecture.

To illustrate, I would contend that contemporary buildings or visual art in diverse cultures such as the United States would be more meaningful if they were reflective of cultural pluralism and diversity. For instance, Chinese or Asian Americans may relate to and appreciate a new public building in Chinatown if it bears some elements or symbols from their own cultural heritage. Seen from this perspective architecture, like other art forms, can communicate through messages. Jencks offers the term "toilet bowl" as a good example of how an art object can function differently in different cultures. He explains that since the "toilet bowl" was constructed in a beautiful sculptural form, it can be attractive to the functionalist architect who will "admire it for being a direct response to requirements and because it constitutes a word or phrase in a new, unambiguous language. He probably would even believe that its function is transparent, or obvious to everyone" (p. 10). But Jencks notices that toilet bowls have been used by different cultures in various ways. For instance, he finds that in south Italy, growers used it as a cleaning tank for grapes; people in Northern Greece used it as a fire place; Africans used it to take showers; and finally, it was used by Marcel Duchamp as an artwork! According to Jencks, from a semiotic perspective, the toilet bowl may constitute a sign that communicates with different people through different languages or codes.

Jencks places great significance on the role of communication in post-modern art and architecture, seeing art as a language that should communicate with people through its

various codes. Thus, double-coding as a post-modern device offers new possibilities for exploring classical styles and reinventing and integrating them with modern styles in a contemporary context. This process of reinterpretation is crucial; if artists and architects merely imitate or mindlessly appropriate classical monuments and motifs, their works will not speak to the present.

For instance, some Iraqi, Arab, and Muslim artists insert writing and other traditional motifs into their works. But the intended function of these elements is not always clear or justified. Lebanese critic Samir Syegh (1981) states that: "We find the present position is a total contradiction of the art of the past. At the same time, most of our contemporary artists are attempting to return to the past and recapture its temper, in the hope that through this approach they will produce art which is distinguished from Western art" (p. 108). But how has this goal been achieved? Syegh, like many Iraqi and Arab critics, notes that artists over the recent decades have returned to the past in search of roots and inspiration. He adds that:

Many artists have done this with Arabic calligraphy, for example; they have also used aesthetic elements in their works that are in contradiction with the Eastern artistic heritage. The inconsistency here is that the return to the past has been only superficial, a carrying over of the outward details of the heritage. It has not been a return to a particular understanding of the world but rather to the artistic details. (p. 108)

In actuality, traditional elements like calligraphy have been misused by many artists. Artists as well as critics often misinterpret these elements and have not scrutinized their function in and significance for contemporary art. When Arab artists use themes and signs of the past, are they doing so to express present-day social and cultural issues? Or do they want to promote some relation with the past, and why? Do they seek conflict or ambiguity by combining these elements with modern codes and techniques? How do these elements function in contemporary contexts? These questions have emerged as traditional elements

and motifs have come out of the exile imposed by Modernism. Syegh adds that this "return to heritage" has been "superficial" and he remarks that :

By emulating the mere style and form of their artistic heritage, Eastern artists neglected to examine and inspect this heritage in a way which would have enabled them to derive some real benefit from it by way of creative inspiration. The only way to bridge the gap between the art of the East and the West, the past and the present, is by looking at the meaning, aims, and incentives underlying each. (p. 110)

Likewise, Afif Bahansi (1980), a leading Arab art historian who emphasizes the relevance of tradition for contemporary Arab art, also points out the pitfalls in this move:

We believe that Arab art is retracing its roots and this tendency requires a great deal of delving into the elements of Arab art, its philosophy, styles and development to elevate the artistic vision from an Arab aesthetic view. This tendency does not mean going back to old artistic traditions and copying or repeating them.... Going back to the roots must be coupled with modernization and this is the main norm for measuring the legitimacy of the modern Arab art movement. (al-Said, 1987, pp. 16-17)

Bahansi also calls for reflection, reinterpretation and creative use of elements from the past.

The use of Western motifs and themes by Iraqi, Arab and Muslim artists causes similar confusions. Artists borrow from the Western art repertoire without considering the relevance of such borrowings for their local context, which of course leads to superficiality, as Sayegh argues. For example, Robinson (1982), in his short analysis of contemporary art in Arab and Islamic countries, maintains that Islamic values have been rejected in contemporary Arab art. On Robinson's view, contemporary Arab art "owed more to European fashions than to traditions of Arab art and also flouted religious preferences, including most confidently, for example, the female nude within its repertoire" (p. 163). Another Arab art scholar, Wijdan Ali (1997), recommends that Arab artists find a middle ground between East and West through use of the Arabic script because "through its principles, artists can continue to be creative without severing themselves from either the past or the present. Thus, the Calligraphic School of Art is a combination of both Eastern and Modern Western techniques, provided it abides by a certain Islamic aesthetic that

prevents it reaching a degree of vulgarity and ugliness” (p. 186). Ali’s suggestion is interesting, but can reliance on the Arabic script be considered absolutely the only alternative for Iraqi or Arab artists? We cannot imagine that all contemporary Chinese artists promote Chinese identity through an exclusive use of Chinese characters in their works, and it would be similarly impossible for all Iraqi and Arab artists to limit their art to only the Arabic script, no matter how important that script is

Arab and Iraqi art critics are very concerned with the question of artistic identity, while remaining unable to define such an identity. I believe that this stems from the difficulty of defining art in general. According to George Dickie, art is undefinable. In his well-known "Institutional Theory" Dickie argues that “A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) a set of the aspects which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by a person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social, institutional world (the artworld)” (Battin, Fisher, Moore and Slivers, 1989, p. 8). According to Dickie, the artworld is an institution (consisting of established practices as prescribed by members of the artworld: museums, curator, patrons, art dealers, art critics, art collectors) that could become more formalized. Institutional analysis considers objects to be artwork. In this theory, artworks do not necessarily have to have aesthetic qualities. Classification of objects as “art” is determined by the meaning they hold in their context and in relation to the art world.

From this perspective I find the notion of double-coding useful for analyzing and evaluating classical motifs and symbols in contemporary art. The theory is also attractive because it allows appreciation and understanding of folk art and popular culture and defines their relevancy and importance to contemporary art, rejecting the high/low culture distinction in the process. I will first briefly review how some Western architects and artists illustrate the double-coding method in their works. In his book Post-Modernism: The New Classicism in Art and Architecture, Jencks (1987) observes that since the end of

the 1970's the majority of post-modern artists and architects have been interested in classical motifs and signs, incorporating them in their art works to communicate with the diverse peoples whom modern architecture has ignored. Architects Robert Venturi and Charles Moore, who are known for their use of the double-coding method, bring together classical styles and ornaments and modern techniques. According to Jencks these two architects opposed the notion of the International style in favor of a hybrid style; their works reject such notions as "pure elements" and "good aesthetics." Jencks concludes that Venturi's and Moore's ideas and works promote pluralism. Moore's Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans,¹ built in 1979, is a good example of the hybrid method as suggested by Jencks' double-coding theory. Why and to what ends do such post-modern architects use contradictory elements and methods? Rose (1991) quotes architect Venturi on this issue:

Architects can no longer afford to be intimidated by the puritanically moral language of orthodox Modern architecture. I like elements which are hybrid rather than "pure," compromising rather than "clean," distorted rather than "straightforward," ambiguous rather than "articulated," perverse as well as impersonal, boring as well as "interesting," conventional rather than "designed," accommodating rather than excluding, redundant rather than simple, vestigial as well as innovating, inconsistent and equivocal rather than direct and clear. I value messy vitality over obvious unity. I include the non sequitur and proclaim the duality. (p. 105)

One should note that Jencks' double -coding theory is not limited to Western art and architecture but is applicable as well to the works of non-Western architects such as the Japanese architects Kisho Kurokawa and Arata Isozaki and the Egyptian architect Hasan Fathi and others. Jencks very much appreciates how these Japanese architects achieve a unique balance between traditional and modern elements, producing "work in several different styles, and single buildings which use various aesthetic systems in a semiotic way. Also they have been able to incorporate a traditional language without necessarily being coy or ironic. Why they, unlike Westerners, have succeeded in being both modern

¹ According to Jencks (1987) Piazza d'Italia was designed in 1976 and built in 1979 to meet the cultural needs of the Italian community in a city dominated by other ethnic groups. Moore incorporated classical forms such as columns and decorative elements from traditional Italian architecture.

and traditional without compromising either language remains something of a mystery" (Jencks, 1972, p. 87).

During my stay in Japan from 1989-1991, I enjoyed the works of many Japanese artists and architects whose works brought together both Japan's rich cultural heritage and Western traditions, successfully integrating high-tech, up-to-date methods and techniques without losing their cultural identity. For instance, Arata Isozaki's work Country Club-Oita has very suggestive cultural implications. To Trachtenberg and Hyman (1986), the Fujimi Country Club-Oita is a calligraphic building because the tube-like form on its roof indicates the hand movement in Japanese calligraphy.

The question may arise, does double coding seek harmony, conflict, or integration when combining old and modern motifs? According to Jencks double-coding seeks irony and ambiguity, as well as contradictions. Jencks (1993) believes that irony and ambiguity are significant concepts in modern literature which are then applied to post modern painting and architecture. At this point I would like to suggest that double-coding may not be used in the same way by non-Western artists; since double-coding rejects the notion of an international style and universal aesthetics, it should be understood that double-coding means different applications and interpretations for different people and cultures. When contemporary Western artists return to Greek and Roman classical traditions and myths, they are more interested in anthropomorphism, focusing on the human body as a central aspect of Western classical art. On the other hand, calligraphy remains a major source for contemporary Arab and Muslim artists who seek vernacular roots or regional qualities. Along somewhat different lines, Iraqi artists and architects do not seek an ironic effect when using classical motifs in their artwork; rather, their objective is to seek local character and inspiration.

Artists and architects must develop their own vocabulary. For example, when I visited Egypt in 1991, I was very interested in the works of the Egyptian architect Hasan Fathi, who has been recognized internationally for his outstanding works. Fathi's buildings are strongly inspired by Islamic traditional architecture and traditional Egyptian houses (see Figure 6). Fathi asserts that "culture is the result of the interaction of the intelligence of man and his environment, in satisfying his needs both spiritual and physical" (Damluji, 1985, p. 43). Fathi's buildings provide an excellent example of the use of traditional and local materials such as stones and mud in post-modern architecture in non-Western cultures.. His works are strikingly simple, beautiful and contemporary, while drawing on centuries-old decorative motifs. A similar approach is taken by Iraqi architects such as Rifat Chadirji, Mohammed Makiya, and Awni, who also rely on local elements and materials in their buildings. Their buildings promote the basis for a new national contemporary architecture in Iraq. Rifat Chadirji is among the few Iraqi architects who calls for a regional architecture in Iraq that is also open to international developments.

Chadirji has written several studies and books on contemporary architecture in Iraq. I find his ideas applicable to visual art as well as architecture since artists and architects in Iraq are equally concerned about such issues as regionalism and internationalism and define their approaches according to these two movements. Chadirji claims that architecture in Iraq is affected by a severe cultural gap:

A cultural gap is generated when there is a disparity in the developments of interacting cultures. Iraq suffers from the disadvantage of not having experienced the Renaissance, which flourished in western Europe, at all. It has also been subjected to numerous invasions (of which two were particularly devastating) over the past few centuries. As a result, this country lost the cultural status it once possessed. It was only a matter of time before Iraq was to interact with West. It is this interaction which is taking place now and, for the reasons mentioned above, Iraq is experiencing in direct consequence a severe cultural gap.

This gap cannot be bridged by a policy of narrow regionalism,² vernacularism, or nationalism because of the characteristics of the

² Rifat Chadirji is an outstanding Iraqi architect. He calls for regionalized international architecture. In his works Chadirji used a double-coding method by combining traditional motifs and techniques based on Arab-Islamic architecture with other modern motifs. One

internationalization of modern culture. There is no alternative therefore but to bring the cultural development of Iraq into harmony with the process of internationalization, while at the same time maintaining the country's traditional characteristics and qualities.

The narrow and naive internationalism of the twenties should be also rejected as a means of bridging this gap. There are cultural reasons for this. Each nation will develop its own way of interacting with internationalist art and science. Present-day creeds, faiths, prejudice, traditions and natural characteristics of each nation will adapt international patterns to suit their own purposes. However, not all nations are equally able or willing to absorb the effects of international culture.

Naive internationalism and the aspiration to any single universal style of architecture should also be rejected as objectives, because both are incompatible with cultural diversity which is itself a necessary human attribute. (pp. 40-42)

Chadirji advocates a more open vision of architecture that allows Iraqi architects to create their own styles, vocabulary, and method of construction. Similarly, his reflections on double-coding are very valuable because in practice he has created outstanding buildings with unmistakably Eastern and Western qualities.

Double-coding theory's emphasis on architecture does not mean that this theory is not applicable to other visual art forms. For example, in his book Post Modernism: In Art and Architecture Jencks defines five major trends in the new classicism in art, each with its own stylistic qualities and themes, which he labels metaphysical classicism, narrative classicism, allegorical classicism, realist Classicism, and classical Sensibility. He provides an extensive review and analysis of how Western artists embodied a wider Free-Style classicism, covering figures from Carlo Maria Maria Mariani, Geerand Grouste, Malcom Morley, David Hockney, R. B. Kitaj, Robert Longo, and Martha Mayer to realist classicists such as Philip Pearlstein and Richard Eastes. All these artists seek to reinterpret and recontextualize classical motifs. Of course, their approach differs from that of Eastern artists because the human body remains a central theme in their artworks and they focus on the values and issues of their own culture.

of his well-known works is the Post Office Building in Baghdad. Chadirji wrote several articles and books about Iraqi and Arab architecture.

What is relevant more generally about the double-coding theory is its insistence that art be defined as a cultural production, and the artist, therefore, as a cultural producer (Clark, 1996; Efland, Freedman and Stuhr, 1996). This is evident in post-modern art in the West where artworks become a commentary on the transformations of Western society. I see post-modern art as deeply reflecting existing confusions about culture and man's anxiety in this age. I believe that the return of post-modern artists to the past should not lead to the misconception that these artists seek pure aesthetic and original ideas nor should their objective should be understood as a revivalism of a lost past, but rather they strive to enrich and expand their artistic inquiry so as to enhance the human dimension of their art. Post-modernists tend to dismiss the concept of originality, maintaining that post-modernism is simply based on juxtaposition, eclecticism and populism. Jencks (1987 see the common denominator of post-modern art as its assault on the notion of stable categories such as high art, good taste, classicism, or Modernism (p. 22). In spite of his consistent attack on Modernism, Jencks does not see his double-coding as a rejection of it. He believes that by calling for the necessity of eclectic approaches, double-coding allows modernism to continue.

With the ground prepared, we can now turn to the specific principles of Jencks's double-coding theory. The description that follows is based on the discussions found in Rose (1991) and in Efland, Freedman and Stuhr (1996).

1. The status of the art object in the post-modern situation--its integration or combination of classical and modern codes and symbols--introduces a new hybrid style. The juxtaposition of various tastes, elements and techniques leads to an eclecticism in which the art object no longer embodies traditional harmonious representation or perfect proportions as in Renaissance arts and architecture. Instead the art object may feature a dissonant beauty, conflict, ambiguity or irony.

2. Pluralism: the theory validates the variety of approaches, styles and ideas of post-modern art, rejecting the privileging of a single style or taste. Jencks explains that “In architecture, the stylistic counterpart of pluralism is radical eclecticism--the mixing of different languages to engage different taste cultures and define different functions according to their appropriate mood” (p. 283).

3. Urban contextualism or Urban Urbanism: according to this doctrine art and new buildings “should fit into and extend the urban context” (Jencks 1993, p. 285). Post-modern criticism foregrounds the urban concerns in planning for new cities, and such planning should meet the current cultural, social, and political needs of communities.

4. Anthropomorphism: the human body is used as a decorative motif, integrated with other motifs or symbols to promote new meanings.

5. Recognition of a historical continuum: establishing a relation between the past and the present by reinterpreting past traditions in new artwork and buildings. Jencks (1987) points out that since it underscores the presence of the past, “contrary to common belief Post-Modernism is neither anti-Modernist nor reactionary” (p. 11). Rather, by combining the elements of the past with modern elements, post-modernism allows both traditions to continue. Of course, this does not translate into simple imitation of past artworks or styles.

6. The return of “content” in painting: Post-modern artists incorporate a variety of stories, themes, and narratives to promote pluralism or multiple meaning in their works.

7. Double-coding to promote irony, ambiguity and contradiction: the objective of using the past is not to create continuity with it but to express new issues and cultural conditions, such as anxieties over the political and social problems that science and technology cannot resolve.

8. Multivalence: combining or integrating several codes or elements to achieve what Jencks calls “another quality.” In this respect post-modern art is about juxtaposition

of various codes and elements in the artwork. Jencks asserts that multivalence in art works and buildings connects them to the rest of the environment, enabling associations and references to many social and cultural issues and activities.

9. Rhetorical figures: the engagement in stylistic elaboration to achieve “eclectic quotation” in artwork and buildings.

10. The return to the absent center: a post-modern ideal of preserving past traditions and values and benefiting from them in contemporary art and architecture. Efland, Freedman and Stuhr (1996) interpret this as a “desire for communal space and a celebration of what we have in common” (p. 35).

Justification of the Use of Double-Coding Theory

As has been established earlier, Modernist theories are inapplicable to the arts of other cultures. I also have found no contemporary Iraqi, Arab, or Islamic theory that is appropriate for studying contemporary art in Iraq. However, double-coding offers the following relevant criteria for the analysis and description of Iraqi artworks.

First, double-coding as a post-modern theory approaches art as a form of cultural production rather than a set of physical qualities. Thus, double-coding turns more attention to the interrelationship of culture and art, seeing the artwork as manifesting a particular culture. This is appropriate given this study's concern with elements and forms such as calligraphy, arabesque and other classical and decorative motifs, all of which have significance in Arabic culture, as they appear in contemporary Iraqi art.

Second, double-coding allows multiple readings of the art work, based on the viewer's experience as well as age, religion, race, sex and gender, all of which are important factors in interpreting the art work.

Third, double-coding emphasizes the importance of cultural difference and otherness and it calls for recognition of the art forms of other cultures.

Fourth, double-coding, like other post-modern theories, advocates democratization and celebrates multiculturalism in art, in a critical shift from modernist theories that focused on the interests and values of the dominant group. These orientations are appropriate for a discussion of art education in Iraq because it is a diverse society.

With the principles and perspective of double-coding in mind, I will be pursuing the following questions in the remainder of this study:

1. Do these six artists promote a single style, do they promote what can be defined as an Iraqi national style, or do they promote six individual styles?
2. Are traditional Mesopotamian, Arabian, and Islamic traditions evident in their art works? What are other influences might their artworks reveal?
3. What is the significance of these six Iraqi artists for art education in Iraq?
4. How do these artists respond to national and global issues and events?

CHAPTER 4

DIYAAL-AZZAWI

Introduction

This chapter addresses the artworks of Iraqi artist Diya al-Azzawi. Diya al-Azzawi was born in Baghdad in 1939. He graduated from the University of Baghdad in 1962 with a BA in archaeology. In addition, he studied art at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad and received a diploma in Fine Arts in 1964. Included in this chapter are a description and critical analysis of the artist's work, focusing on his themes, techniques and major accomplishments, and an examination of internal and external influences on his work. The involvement of the artist in classical and modern literature, in particular poetry, is also addressed.

The New Vision

Al-Azzawi was very active in the 1960's. For example, he formed a group called the New Vision in 1969. The New Vision issued a manifesto in the same year written by al-Azzawi himself:

All artistic heritages are incorporated in forming a new style of art. They will be used in order to understand the new artistic trend. We must speak the language of the new life with its symbols and people. We must have an understanding and questioning spirit which can shatter outmoded ideas until our journey's end, when we are able to arrive at "The New Vision." We are a generation who stands for progress and creativity and a refusal to accept outdated ideas. (Salim, 1977, p. 184)

Al-Azzawi and his group sought a new approach, different from that of the Baghdad Group. In her recent book Islamic Art: Development and Continuity, Ali (1997) disagrees, arguing that :

The New Vision (al-Ru'ya al-Jadida) was formed in 1969 by Diya al-Azzawi, Rafa al-Nassiri, Salih al-Jumai'i, and other young artists. Their declaration called for freedom and revolution and proclaimed that "revolution¹ and art [were linked] to the development of humanity." They opposed the revival of cultural heritage, stating that "as long as we act freely toward it, our [artistic legacy] will not become a dictatorial force that imprisons us. We consider it our duty to use [our heritage] to conquer the world. We will speak a new language with symbols, that belongs to a new life and new man." The critic says that "The group's exaggerated, sweeping, and emotional statement can be considered a reflection of the official climate in Iraq after the revolution. They introduced a new art trend that drew on mythology, calligraphy, and religious iconography, in abstract and expressionistic canvases, and appeared to be an extension of the Baghdad Group of Modern Art. (p. 52)

I do not think that al-Azzawi and his group attempted to reject their cultural heritage, but to approach it in an innovative way, attempting to liberate tradition from antiquity. In order to become familiar with the artist's view on this issue and others, in June, 1995, I mailed a questionnaire to Diya al-Azzawi which included questions concerning his biography, the cultural context and style of his art, and his role in art groups. Al-Azzawi answered the questionnaire within a few weeks. His answers revealed much about his art and experience. In addition, he also explained aspects of the Iraqi art movement, with which he has been involved since the 1960's (see Appendix C).

Questionnaire

Q: Would you please tell us briefly about yourself and your education?

A: I was born in Baghdad; I was raised in the Fadil area, one of the most popular areas in Baghdad. I completed my elementary education in the same area. Then I completed middle school in Adhamiya and high school in al-Markaziya. I studied

¹ Referring to the coup of July 17, 1968 .

archaeology at the College of Letters, and during the second year I began my art studies at the Fine Arts, the evening division.

Q: Did your family encourage you to study art?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Who was your teacher? Were you influenced by him or other teachers?

A: In the College of Letters I diligently attended the college's studio. At that time there was an artist, Hafiz al-Drubi, with whom I had a friendship. But in the Institute there was another artist, Faiq Hasan, who kept a distance from me, and my relationship remained official with him even after my graduation. He had a strong influence on my art at the beginning.

Q: What kind of methods did your teacher use?

A: There was nothing to remember, except the presence of the teacher in the studio to arrange the model or appropriate subject, this was in the Institute. But in the Studio of the College of Letters, the climate was much better. In particular the artist Hafiz al-Drubi was known for the social climate of his classes, which were attended by people with various interests. During painting he intervened a little, but he was encouraging and stimulated us to work.

Q: Did the city of your birth have any impact on your work?

A: It is Baghdad. Its impact came in various ways; some of them are visual, as artistic units composed visual scenery of the city, and other influences are representative of its heritage when it was the center of the world's civilization. For example my interest in the *One Thousand and One Nights* is to pay homage to that heritage.

Q: Is there anything in your city of birth or country that motivates you to be an artist?

A: It is the creative historical achievement that appears in the daily scenery in every corner of my country.

Q: Have you ever used symbols or signs from your city of birth or region?

A: Yes, that was in my works that belong to the 1970's, and there still is a need that arises from time to time.

Q: Do you borrow any artistic Islamic-Arabic elements such as Arabic calligraphy?

A: Yes, at the beginning I attempted to bring together the Islamic heritage and Iraqi ancient civilization, because there is no difference between al-Hallaj and Gilgamesh,² or between the crescent and Arabic letter, or between the Sumerian letters and the symbol of the sun. The letter has more authority and presence than other elements. This was a result of my interest in the creative Arabic text and basically in the ancient and modern poetic material.

Q: Do you think traditions are considered old-fashioned today? By whom? Why or why not?

A: This is an expression of the proponents of so-called "international art." I am not concerned with these definitions, because I find that the creative value is in the characteristics that stand on cultural and social traditions, and my capability to acquaint myself with other cultures does not mean that I do not differ in my concept concerning many elements of daily life, and that watching the American CNN and

² According to some sources Gilgamesh was the king who ruled the city of Uruk in southern Mesopotamia around 2700-2500. The central theme of the epic is the search for eternal life. The heroic epic has inspired many Iraqi artists and playwrights. Al-Hallaj, Husayn ibn Mansur (244-309/857-922) was a Persian mystic who was executed in 922. Al-Hallaj is known for his mystic poetry. Al-Hallaj declared that, "I am the truth" or "I am the Absolute," declarations which caused serious conflict in the Islamic tradition. Thus his execution may reflect the deepening fear of the growing Sufi movement which was seen as a dangerous challenge by the religious authorities. According to Robinson (1982) the "Sufi claim to be able to achieve knowledge of God through direct personal experience brought them into conflict with the *ulama* [plural of the Arabic *alim*, meaning learned man] men learned in the Islamic science. As far as the *ulama* were concerned, knowledge of God came through the study of the Quran, the Hadith, the Sharia and theology, with aid of the weighty tools of Islamic scholarship which they had developed" (p. 31). Of course there is no direct connection between Gilgamesh and al-Hallaj but there are many Iraqi intellectuals who draw connections between such dramatic events in Iraqi history. From their perspective events like the tragedy of al-Husayn or al-Hallaj or even literary works such as Gilgamesh are about humanity and justice, interpretations which are relevant in a

its newscast does not make me forget to watch the British BBC, and both of them do not deny my Arab knowledge and cultural formation! The notion of fast food and the spread of products in a variety of names due to the differences in languages bears no significance to artistic and cultural activities. There are still some artists such as William de Kooning, the American who is known for his American traditions, and Anselm Kiefer, who is very fascinated by German history, and Palladino, who is known for his Italian tendency. The value of tradition does not lie within itself but in the way in which it represents the age.

Q: How did you develop your style?

A: My orientation toward the Iraqi cultural heritage dates back to the beginning of my study of the science of archeology at the University of Baghdad and then to my long years in this field, which made me very close to the most important artistic achievements of the historical level of human civilization. I was impressed by those works through their uniqueness and distinction from other surrounding civilizations. When I began to draw from the knowledge of archaeology and culture on the one hand and practically, from the study of art on the other, I came to realize the necessity of a distinction on a personal level. This is what made me seek out the nearest artistic sources to me personally, which was the history of Iraq.

Q: What is Iraqi national style? Is it authentic? If yes, how would you describe it?

A : There is no national style for Iraqi art; there have been formative attempts in the 1950's that were tied to the international art movement in years past, but their accomplishments were not contemporary in comparison to what was occurring internationally, especially for those who were influenced by the French or Italian school. At the same time, and with the exceptions of Jawad Salim, Shakir Hasan al-Said, Muhammed, and Kazim Haydar, most of these attempts were

country that lacks these principles today

ornamentation for conservative academic composition. The search for style was isolated from the general concept of art. Later on the movement spread out as a concept and technique, and the slogan of the Baghdad Group ["Toward Iraqi Art"], which was impressive in the 1950's, was very soon exceeded by the artists of the mid-1960's through artistic achievements and a presence on an Iraqi and Arab level. This was the most significant artistic transformation that enriched Iraqi experience. At the same time it made the cultural and artistic concept open and concerned with the dialogue of cultures, which has an educational and human dimension.

Q: What characteristics does contemporary Iraqi art have?

A: What has distinguished the art movement from the beginning was its interest in problems tied to the social and political system. That is to say, its characteristics have been developed through various inquiries. The most important for me are those inquiries into the civilized cultural heritage of Iraq without being isolated from the international art world. This has brought an aggravation of the situation caused by the continuing inquiry into codes of thoughts and signs that have helped in achieving artistic identity, not through the folk meanings but through a part of international research and interaction with different cultures and civilizations. I find many things in common in the visual investigations of two artists, the American Adolph Gottlieb in the 1940's and Jawad Salim in the early 1950's. Both of them approached mythology as a heritage to achieve truly contemporary identities.

Q: Do you belong to any art group or art organization?

A: Yes, for some time during the 1970's, there was a kind of belonging to an art group that was in the process of formation, but this was ended after I left Iraq.

Q: Why should an artist belong to a certain group or organization?

A: I do not think this is necessary unless it is a factor to develop artistic knowledge and provide better conditions.

Q: Did your group issue any manifesto, and why?

A: Yes, because it was an attempt to emphasize our artistic presence; at this time there was a plan to hold an art conference in Cairo and we thought to issue an art manifesto. It was an introduction to artistic thoughts, and composing some of them was in contrast to what was widely common for the previous generation.

Q: Who wrote the manifesto?

A: Personally, I wrote it.

I learned from the artist's answers that the training he received in the Iraqi Museum for Archaeology had a tremendous impact on his art experience. Al-Azzawi did not study abroad but rather received his artistic training in Iraqi art institutions, which is important to keep in mind when approaching his art and development. Most Iraqi artists who studied abroad were influenced by the art movements and the artistic traditions of the countries they studied in. I believe that al-Azzawi benefited remarkably from being trained at home, simply because he found himself in a very rich cultural context that could offer him everything he was looking for, from the colorful Iraqi rugs and carpets to magnificent Mesopotamian and Arab-Islamic artistic traditions. In his early career al-Azzawi was inspired by the Mesopotamian and Arab-Islamic cultural heritage, and he has been able to utilize this rich cultural heritage in conjunction with modern art.

Painting and Poetry

Al-Azzawi, more than any other Iraqi artist, has been involved in literature since the mid-1960's. He produced many paintings, drawings, silk screens, etchings, and lithographs based on literary texts and poems by famous Iraqi and Arab writers and poets. For example, he published a book entitled Evidence from the Present Age, based on memoirs and diaries of the tragic events that took place in Jordan in September 1970 between the Palestinian fighters and the Jordanian armed forces. In the same year he held

a one man show that included paintings and drawings based on the literary work known as Waddah al-Yemen and His Beloved.

In 1973 al-Azzawi published another book, entitled The Land of Oranges, based on stories by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani. The book included drawings and illustrations by the artist. In 1976 al-Azzawi was shocked by the horrible massacre at the Palestinian refugee camp of Tel al-Zaatar in Lebanon. In response to, as well in protest against, this bloody event, he executed a silk screen series based on poems by three renowned Arab poets: "Left to the Olive Mountain," by the Iraqi poet Yusuf al-Saigh; "Ahmed al-Zaatar," by the Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish; and "Death Came Laughing to Tel al-Zaatar," by the Moroccan poet Tahir Ben Jalloun. These drawings and illustrations were published in 1976 in a book entitled The Body Anthem which included 16 images, all silk-screened. Al-Azzawi combines painting and poetry, moving freely between past and present and East and West. During that period he devoted his painting to politics and poetry. The Islamic World Review (1982) quotes al-Azzawi as saying that, "It gives the artist a great deal in terms of atmosphere. I wanted to paint the tragedy of Tel al - Zaatar. I started, but later I turned to the poems, they gave me the inspiration I need" (p. 64).

In the 1960's and 1970's al-Azzawi attempted to express the miseries of Palestinian refugees. He protested against the massacres at the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon in 1983. The drawings and etchings that he produced were based on the text by French writer Jean Genet. Whittet (1984) writes that:

We Are Not Seen but Corpses is al-Azzawi's harrowing series of eight etchings and a lithograph that shades the euphoria of the Baghdad moods. Its theme is the massacre of the refugees in the Sabra and Shatila Camps in Lebanon in 1983 that shocked the whole world. Celebrated French writer Jean Genet visited the camps before the blood had dried and described its impact through his text, published with al-Azzawi's prints, conveys only a shadow of the actual horror. The words pale beside the artist's brutal fragmentation of human bodies--men, women and children--their all too temporary shelter shattered about them. Inevitably the stark, macabre, and sign-laden prints recall Picasso's similar revulsion in his grotesque memorial *Guernica* painted for the Basque town bombed in the Spanish civil war.

As well as the prints al-Azzawi painted a large picture on the theme of the massacres. (p. 38)

Poetry and painting have deep roots in Arab culture; they grew together and influenced each other. By combining painting and poetry al-Azzawi seeks an artistic vocabulary that brings him closer to his history, culture, and people.

In 1978 al-Azzawi became more interested in pre-Islamic Arabic classical poetry. Among his works are illustrations of The Golden Odes, known as *Mu'allaqat*. These works included 8 prints (silk-screened). These famous poems were written by celebrated Arab poets: Imr'u al-Qays, Tarafa Ibn al-Abed, Zuhayr Ibn Abi Salma, Antara Ibn Shadad, Laid Ibn Rabia, Amr Ibn Kulthum, and al-Harith Ibn Hillizah. They portrayed in remarkable ways the various aspects of Arab traditional culture in the pre-Islamic period known as *Jahiliyyah*, a culture which put a premium on heroism, war, love, honor, loyalty, generosity, courage, justice, and hospitality. These poems are based on unique combinations of sounds, visual images, and imaginative fancies, all of which inspired the artist deeply. Al-Azzawi selected extracts from each poem for each one of his prints (see Figure 22). In these prints al-Azzawi incorporated Arabic script, Islamic decorative motifs, symbols and signs such as doves, horses, crescents, palms of the hand, and geometric patterns such as triangles and circles. Iraqi and Arab art critics were extremely appreciative of al-Azzawi's works and regarded them as a new artistic approach in Arab contemporary art. Iraqi art critic May Muzaffar (1986) describes how the artist has explored the poetic qualities of these poems:

The extracts of the poems on each print seemed deeply integrated with composition. Written to match al-Azzawi's style, the inscribed text harmoniously serves the aesthetics of other details in the composition, which in effect an attractive work of art was reflected. In his highly artistic attempt, he succeeds in presenting a subjective view of man's struggle throughout history. (pp. 16-17)

Although al-Azzawi's view is that visual art and poetry may share many things, he knows that each form has its own rules and codes too. Thus, the artwork is not a visual

explanation or an illustration of the literary piece but a reflection on the images and themes of the poems in relation to their times and places. In other words, I believe that al-Azzawi is more concerned with the visual qualities of the poems that he selected. Look, for instance, at the highly visual nature of the poem below, one of the seven Golden Odes, written by the most celebrated pre-Islamic Arab poet, Imru' al-Qays: Ode:

Often I've been off with morn, the birds yet asleep in their nests, my horse short-haired, outstripping the wild game, huge-bodied, char-ing, fleet-fleeing, head-foremost, headlong, all
together the march of rugged boulder hurled from on high by the torrent, a gay bay, sliding the saddle-felt from his back's thwart just as a smooth pebble slides off the rain cascading,
Fiery he is, for all his leanness, and when his
ardor boils in him, how he roars - a bubbling cauldron, isn't it! Sweetly he flows, when the mares floundering wearily lick up the dust where their hooves drag in the trampled . (Nashashibi, 1997, p. 30)

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The artist explains his main objective in using classical poems in his painting:

Neither words nor nostalgia which envelops these poems is present here but the accumulation of letters and the flow of symbols. Poetry is not only symbols or language. It is the power of imagination and recollection. In the diversity of this power and its numerous significations lies the relationship between these drawings and the Muallaqat. The moment I wanted to grasp is the moment in which a certain image of the relationship between man and his environment grows. (Yusuf, 1988, p. 9)

In addition to classical poetry, al-Azzawi was inspired by popular poetry, especially a poem entitled "Rael Wa Hamed" written by the renowned Iraqi poet Muzaffar al-Nawab. Nawab's poetry is very popular in Iraq and other Arab countries . In his poetry, Nawab condemns dictatorial regimes and protests against their abuses and oppression of people. Al-Azzawi's involvement in such popular literature bridges the gap between high art and popular culture, and in so doing, the artist attempts to make his art available to a larger audience. He seeks a language that anyone can understand, and I believe this is what makes his art very popular. As a result, his works have been reviewed by many art magazines abroad. For example. The Islamic World Review (1982) reports that:

Al-Azzawi's work is rooted in the *turath*, heritage. He is one of a pioneer breed of Arab painters who has sought, and found, a means of expressing himself in an essentially Arab genre. This reflects the rich visual and oral heritage of the region. While al-Azzawi draws his images from the Sumerian and Islamic background, the inspiration for his themes comes most often from the poetry, stories, and myths of the Arab literary tradition and from current political events. (p. 64)

Like Jawad Salim and Shakir Hasan al-Said, al-Azzawi was inspired by The Thousand and One Nights and other folk stories.

During the past four decades al-Azzawi has established very close relationships with many leading Arab poets and writers. For example, in the 1980's al-Azzawi became interested in making drawings and lithographs for the journals of well-known Arab and Iraqi poets and writers such as al-Sayyab and Talal Haidar, Muhammed al-Fayturi, Fadwa Toaqan, Mahmud Darwish, Adonis, and Halim Barakat, the author of the very popular novel Crane. This novel is a unique reflection of childhood memories and it describes in a poetic language the early exposure of the child to the outside world. The novel also deals with many social and political issues including migration, and it expresses the emotional attachment of immigrants to their homelands. A combination of personal reflection about life and nature, the novel interweaves reality and dream in very dramatic form:

Long have I considered my father a crane. Are you a crane too? What do you consider yourself? What language do you speak with yourself, with trees, the clouds, the rain, and the waters? Is your language a kin to the waters' language? And when you soar above the earth, what is your kinship to the wind? What do you survey, and what do you look for? Do you consider the sky your tent? Do you read the alphabet of the stars? (trans. Husayn Haddawy).

Al-Azzawi reflects on the novel in eight hand-colored lithograph images (38x55 cm. each; the author has two copies of these lithographs). In these lithographs al-Azzawi explores the beautiful world recreated in the novel, incorporating symbols and motifs that have some connection with human faces, birds, and abstract landscape featuring Mediterranean color and beauty (see Figure).

Al-Azzawi has also illustrated the poetry of al-Jawahirir, who is ranked among Iraq's greatest poets and is also the most celebrated Arab classical poet in modern times.

In his poetry he expresses his political views and concerns, which resulted in his exile, and he died in exile. “You Are My Thought, You Are My Hymn ” is one of many of his poems that al-Azzawi was inspired by:

You are my thought, you are my hymn.
You harmonize my song and my lute.
O, many nights I have spent watching the stars
with a bewildered and enchanted eye.
You are my awaited morning.
Your dawn is the gist of my poems.
O, youth of the world the elegance of the new world,
pearls from every sea
gathered in a unique necklace
I am like the hope that finds the water
and quenches the thirsty one with roses.
Years ago I dreamt
and was inspired by my nomadic imagination
of a fire from the east erasing
the darkness from the lying people.
What an immortal day is yours,
one for which you have paid a high price
On these shoulders lies
the burden of achieving a happy tomorrow.
Where were we fifty years ago?
Look where you stand today! (Nashashibi, 1997, p. 34).

In *al-Jawahiri Verses* (1989) al-Azzawi attempts to visualize the issues and qualities expressed by this poem, including its political aspects. In this hand-colored lithograph al-Azzawi shows his ability to combine painting and poetry.

Themes and Techniques

In addition to decorative abstract paintings, al-Azzawi incorporates figures in his paintings (see Figure 23). These figures are often decorated with Arabic letters and other decorative motifs, but the influence of Mesopotamian art in his figurative art is also strongly apparent. The artist says of this, “There was a tremendous response from deep within me; I felt especially close to the Sumerian idea. I love the simple lines, the great big eyes. It was new to all of us. We had almost no awareness of this aspect of our cultural

past”³ (al-Azzawi, 1990). In his drawings and paintings al-Azzawi amalgamates motifs, symbols and words from Mesopotamian and Arab Islamic arts and folk traditions.

When I visited the artist in November 1985 in London I discovered that there had been a shift in his style. He introduced new materials and techniques (see Figure 24). Colors became richer and brighter, with red, blue and black dominating in his paintings. I noted that al-Azzawi's artworks had become three-dimensional, and his paintings relied entirely on Arabic script and decorative geometry. In his most recent works, al-Azzawi employs motifs from traditional Arab-Islamic architecture. *Oriental Window No.1* in 1983 (see Figure 25) and *Old Baghdadi Door* (see Figure 26) show the abiding influence of local traditions on al-Azzawi's work. These paintings and others are rooted in Eastern traditions and spiritual values. We feel in his works Eastern sensibilities and qualities no matter how contemporary his works appear from a Western perspective. One should realize that al-Azzawi's skills as an excellent professional graphic artist contribute to his painting. On both the artistic and technical levels, al-Azzawi has promoted himself as an intellectual, creative artist, and skillful draftsman.

The Audience

A large number of Iraqi, Arab and Muslim artists reside abroad, but most of these artists continue to draw on symbols, signs and motifs from their own culture such as Arabic calligraphy . Almost all Iraqi artists who study abroad have been confronted in one

³ Azzawi 's interest in ancient Iraqi art, particularly Sumerian, began while he was studying archaeology at the University of Baghdad and also studying at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad. Like Jawad Salim, Azzawi also began his serious artistic inquiry into ancient Iraq art at the Iraqi Museum in Baghdad. What the artist is trying to express is that while Iraq is rich in its artistic heritage, Iraqi artists during that time were still not aware of the Iraqi artistic and cultural heritage simply because most artists were trained in Western art and aesthetics and had very little exposure to their own artistic traditions. When Azzawi and others began to study Iraqi ancient art, they were surprised by the richness, expressiveness and dynamism of Iraqi art. From their point of view what they rediscovered seemed new to them, simply because they did not know very much about their own heritage.

way or another by the problem of how to communicate with their foreign audiences. .

When I was in Japan from 1989-1991, I had a similar experience with Japanese art and calligraphy, since many Japanese artists use calligraphy in their painting. I could not read it, but I enjoyed its artistic quality, musical movement and brushstrokes. I am not ready to state that the comprehension of the calligraphy in any contemporary art work contributes to its reading or the perception of the artwork. However, al-Azzawi has been able to communicate with many people from different cultural backgrounds through his artworks, and people still respond to his works and feel in them different values and sensibilities that make them special and attractive. Of course Arab or Muslim viewers who can read Arabic may attempt to make some particular connection with artworks that represent their culture. However, this does not mean that other people from different cultural backgrounds cannot appreciate them also. The following examples show that al-Azzawi's artworks attract international audiences too. Cornell (1981), a Western viewer, describes his first encounter with al-Azzawi's artworks in Paris:

In these paintings I see letters, pieces of writing, calligraphy, writings that I know to be Arabic but which I can not decipher.

I sense it, this calligraphy, as part of the rhythm of the painting, punctuating it, supporting it, sometimes completing it with rage. Do these letters, these signs, have a precise meaning? Does the painting refer to the Koran, is it an evocation of Allah?

Though the meaning of these sign thus escapes me, I do not think it is a priori necessary to be able to read them, I can read in another way; my western sensibility can appreciate the meaning differently.

I can admire the strength of this calligraphy, recognize the sureness of the strokes, follow with wonder the multiple tangle of lines, see the harmony or see the deliberate discords that bring to the composition the gracefulness or weight it requires.

Thus, when I saw at Granada the masterly Arab calligraphy covering the walls of the Alhambra Place, it appeared to me as a succession of unbelievably beautiful abstract designs. (al-Azzawi, 1984)

To examine how a non-Arab student audience responds to contemporary painting based on Arabic script and other regional elements, I made a slide presentation in May of 1996 at the Ohio State University about contemporary Arab art, especially that of al-Azzawi

(see Figures 9, 10, 11). After my presentation I asked the participants to write their comments on the artwork that they saw. Interestingly, they responded more to the paintings that included Arab writing and calligraphy. For instance, Amy Arnold, one of the participants, wrote:

Arab art seems to focus around religious themes. The themes are expressed through religious words written in elegant calligraphy mixed with color washes and detailed designs. I believe the Arab art would have been more meaningful to me, if I could read Arabic or understand Arabic letter forms. (Appendix C)

Wendy Beaton, another participant, responded to the same work as follows :

I think that the contemporary Arab art that you showed us was very interesting. I have never really been exposed to Arab art before, so this was a wonderful opportunity for me. I really enjoyed seeing how many Arab artists incorporate the Arabic letters in their art. The use of repetition and bright colors to express their art was very well done. (Appendix E)

Bret Heising was intrigued by the calligraphic elements in the artworks of al-Azzawi and other Iraqi and Arab artists:

Arab art is much more abstract than Western art. There is a lot more use of language itself as art. For example American signs are extremely drab whereas the Arab art uses the written language in a very beautiful way. I enjoyed looking at the smooth aspects of the written art. (Appendix F)

As these remarks suggest, the beauty and ambiguity of Arabic characters attract viewers whether they can read them or not, so their use by al-Azzawi and other artists as well is not limited to their literary or linguistic implications, but rather is foremost artistic, as the Arabic characters are integrated with the painting and become its striking forces and features as well (see Figure 12).

Conclusion and Summary

Diya al-Azzawi has contributed remarkably to Iraqi art since the 1960's, the period in which he emerged as one of the rebellious new generation of artists who sought to overturn the traditional trends in Iraq. Since the early phases of his career al-Azzawi has been very much influenced by the Iraqi, ancient Islamic, and pre-Islamic artistic heritage,

perhaps because of his academic training as an archaeologist at the University of Baghdad and the Iraqi Museum. Al-Azzawi's approach can be described as eclectic, mixing themes and techniques ranging from Arabic script, Islamic decorative geometry and pre-Islamic motifs, in particular Assyrian and Sumerian, to modern techniques and themes. His works are often inspired by folk and mainstream literature, modern poems and novels, as well as political events in the Middle East.

In addition to his career as an artist al-Azzawi has contributed to art and art education through his writings. He has published several books, including a book on the poster art movement in Iraq, as well as many articles addressing issues in Iraqi and Arab art.

CHAPTER 5

ISMAIL FATTAH

Ismail Fattah was born in Basra, Iraq, in 1934. He graduated from the Institute of Arts in Baghdad with a Diploma of Painting in 1956 and a Diploma of Sculpture in 1958. In addition he studied art in Italy and was awarded a Diploma of Ceramics from San Giacomo Academy in Rome in 1963; he also received a Diploma in Sculpture from the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome in 1964. He was extremely active in the Iraqi art movement after he finished his studies in Italy.

Fattah has held ten one-man shows during the period 1962-1988, in such venues as Rome, Baghdad, Beirut, London and Amman. He participated in major international exhibitions and received several outstanding international awards, including the First Prize for Arab Artists in Italy in 1962, the First Prize for Sculpture for Foreign Artists in Italy (Via Margutta Annual Exhibition) in 1963, and several prizes at home. Currently, Fattah is a professor of Ceramics at the College of Fine Arts at the University of Baghdad.

Painting

Fattah started his career as a painter in the early sixties. Like most young artists Fattah was influenced by the master Faiq Hasan. Fattah himself admits this during a conversation with the artist Rafia al-Nasri, published in Gilgamesh magazine in 1987: "All the painters, myself included, were influenced by Faiq Hasan and not Jawed Salim. Jawed

had his own line based on the ideas and concepts of the Baghdad Modern Art Group, so he did not really influence painters that much” (Muzaffar, 1987, p. 11).

After he completed his studies at the Fine Arts Institute in Baghdad, Fattah went to Italy to study art. He arrived in Italy at a very critical period in the history of contemporary Italian art. The 1960's was a transitional period in which Western art moved from formalism to new art directions and trends. The artist expressed his first reaction to his initial encounter with Italian culture and life:

I suffered a great shock when I first went to Italy...call it a cultural shock!! I could not do anything during the initial year. I came to realize that we were really isolated in Iraq. Our world was Faiq Hasan and little else. I had to adjust to grasp this much bigger world. I realized that our concepts were rather shaky and not really based on anything solid. It was only in Italy that I was able to reorient my concepts and way of thinking. Thus, I began to understand Jawed Salim after Italy.

He adds:

In the beginning I was painting under the influence of Faiq Hasan, even after that first year in Italy. Then I was influenced by the Expressionists such as Nolde, Beckman and Kokochka. Meeting my wife at the time had a great effect in the development of my artistic career. I later become influenced by Italian Neo-Realism, Gotuzzo, etc., while special tendencies and traits began. White as a color began to fascinate me, while all other colors diminished and faded. I mixed white with black and little else. (Muzaffar, p. 12).

Fattah returned home in the mid-1960's to start a successful career. During this period the artist was most interested in abstract painting, using economy in color and relying mostly on black and white. Fattah held an important one-man show of his painting and sculpture in 1965 at the National Museum of Modern Art in Baghdad. According to al-Nasri (1987) and Kamil (1986), the exhibition, in which he introduced new techniques and themes, was a major artistic event of the 1960's. Art critic Adil Kamil (1986) confirms that “the artist introduced artworks that were unfamiliar to the art community: there were white works, others pink and blue in which shapes transformed into abstractions, or into much more reduction, but in general they articulated discoveries that were still unusual. These were discoveries that challenged the widespread works of landscapes and the traditional

scenery of popular life. The artist attempted in this experimentation to invent a kind of new vision" (p. 69). The critic adds that Fattah's new art works were based on unfamiliar themes and aesthetics which revealed some Western influences. The exhibition, however, did not meet the expectations or the tastes of the audience, which was accustomed to traditional landscape paintings. According to Fattah, "The outcome was really negative. People even spat on the painting" (p. 12).

However, in the early 1970's Fattah developed new figurative paintings that were related neither to Faiq Hasan's formalist figurative paintings nor to Arab-Islamic artistic traditions. In his sculpture Fattah remains influenced by British modern sculpture while in his painting there is an influence from German Neo-Expressionism. In his new figurative painting he has expressed dissatisfaction with the traditional figurative movement in Iraq, which has been based on the Western modernist tradition.

In both Fattah's painting and sculpture, people are central themes, and his works are often based on a single figure or group of figures who appear naked, silent and threatened by strange forces. Figures of men and women are composed together in unique relationships. We feel strong emotions and drama in his art works, which feature various conditions such as love, joy, sorrow, death, and birth. He derives symbols and signs such as hearts, breasts, faces, and masks, from the human body to represent man's anxiety, fear, and sexuality, and thereby promote his artistic vocabulary. *Various Forms* (see Figure 13), a mixed media work on paper dated 1988, is a good example of his figurative works. One can easily identify the symbols and images in this painting: masks, reclining heads, human hearts and breasts are painted against a black background. The painting expresses emotions, conflict, and fragmentation. The woman's breasts express a kind of eroticism which remains a major characteristic of Fattah's work, and the human heart painted in green is often repeated in Fattah's painting and sculpture. The reclining head symbolizes birth and death. The artist uses economy in color; his palette is limited to black,

pure green and orange. Mixed media techniques are applied in this painting, which is executed in ink, acrylic and gouache on paper. Paper is a suitable medium for these wash techniques. Fattah does not work from sketches nor does he plan his paintings in advance; rather, his method is heavily dependent on memories and fresh images. He haphazardly applies paint to his figures, moves around the work, delivers wild and undirected washes and strokes on the paper, and employs messy techniques such as dripping and throwing paint on the paper. In such a seemingly aimless procedure accidental gestures are expected and sometimes hard to control. However, Fattah knows how to manipulate them spontaneously and creatively. Iraqi poet and art critic May Muzaffar (1987) asserts that "Ismail Fattah's artistic career is simply a reflection of his own character. He is restless, highly strung, enthusiastic, dynamic and elusive. His nature, free and spontaneous, is very well represented in his freely composed figures" (p. 8).

Before I left home in 1989, I met the artist almost every day and gained some insights into his artistic development. We both worked on the Board of the Iraqi Artistic Society for many years and we were involved in many artistic activities together. Fattah's art and experience are a challenge for anyone, and it has been my experience that his paintings and sculpture fall somewhere between the category of rich Iraqi ancient sculpture and current twentieth-century sculpture. His works add strength and vitality to the Iraqi art scene.

In 1988 Ismail Fattah held a one-man show at Kufa Gallery in London. This exhibition included paintings and drawings in which he used mixed media techniques. In introducing Fattah's painting to the British audience, Joyce (1988) writes:

Altogether too many Arab artists, well-known and well-considered in their own countries, allow their "Arabism" to overcome their individual way of seeing and knowing, while others, who have studied art in some other land, end up as pallid imitators of their foreign teachers.

On both counts Ismail Fattah is exceptional. After his diploma work at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad, he studied art in Rome. He is now among the foremost Iraqi artists, but his figurations, of which the works in the present

exhibition are typical, have an authority and international imagery peculiarly his own.

His themes are few and elementary—a man and woman in an intimate relationship; figure studies; portraits; and a curious form of still life painting in which portraiture, torso details, facial elements and simple symbols like the human heart, which might equally be a Valentine card, are set out in the picture space like a full page in a photograph album, yet by their juxtaposition each component, which could stand as a miniature painting on its own, sets up an extremely satisfying emotional and intellectual complex.

These complexities he handles in three ways, peculiarly his own. In the first, he forgoes the advantage of many colors by using one monochromatically, leaving large areas of unpainted white paper to suggest the texturing usually provided by many colors.

In the second, he treats his subjects sculpturally, not of course merely making sketches to serve as blueprints for sculpture, but composing his images to suggest, so to say, what is being seen “round the corner.”

The third kind are portraits, human visages with massive complexities of color, overlain with seemingly undirected black lines at haphazard, which on closer and detailed examination are perceived to have been selected and placed with great care, to achieve detailed and subtle effects. In all three kinds of painting he brings deep skill of eye and hand to serve an acutely sensitive mind. (Fattah, 1988)

In his most recent paintings figures appear masked, concealing their identities behind false faces. These masks are often black or may include some other color such as green. His recent works are closely related to the social and political atmosphere in Iraq in particular and the Middle East in general. *Women II* (see Figure 14) is mixed media on paper, 102 x 70 cm. The artist uses black and acrylic. A dark brown ink is applied in messy scribbles and lines and fresh brushstrokes provoke exciting movement in the painting, showing a terrifying woman. Like William de Kooning, Fattah exaggerates the breasts and facial expressions of his female figures. They are distorted and terrified by unknown forces.

Generally speaking, Fattah's paintings are characterized by their expressive language, gestures, and eroticism. They draw on social and cultural issues, complexities and the artist's individual experience as well.

Sculpture

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every Friday to the archaeology museum and guide them in form and line” (King, 1987, p. 12).

Fattah also hired many sculpture students to work with him on his public works, helping them to improve their skills and techniques and to prepare themselves to be professional sculptors. Fattah is a unique personality, treating his students as friends; this is why he has been able to mentor his students and train them to be professional artists.

As mentioned earlier, Fattah's works belong to both Eastern and Western traditions. Muzaffar (1987) notes that both Moore and Armitage have had visible influence on Fattah's works and helped him to develop his own artistic identity. Yet his individual character as a sculptor was not finally realized until he became acquainted with Henry Moore and modern English sculpture. “Henry Moore made me realize certain essential facts,” said the artist. He further stated that his early sculpture obviously carried the influence of Kenneth Armitage (p. 8).

Armitage himself was influenced by Moore and Egyptian sculpture. His work entitled *The Arm*, created in 1967-1968 and made of polyester and glass fiber, reveals a strong Egyptian influence. It brings to mind the massive Egyptian arm that impressed me during my first visit to the British Museum in London in 1986. Early Armitage works had a tremendous impact on Fattah's works in terms of techniques and themes as well. In addition, his composition, treatment of the surface, frontality, and modes of expression left a strong signature on Fattah's work.

In addition to the Western influence on his works, there is a Mesopotamian influence on his sculpture, in particular a Sumerian influence. Those who know Fattah remember his appreciation of Sumerian sculpture. King (1987) writes that “the Sumerians were superior to the Greeks in their understanding of form and motion;” and Ismail maintains that “the Greeks and Romans achieved motion in their statues by making athletic

figures reaching, running, or throwing. But the Sumerians had, centuries earlier, achieved motion from within--inside the form--not from moving limbs" (p. 13).

Art critic Jabra (1974) argues that Fattah's sculpture displays more Western contemporary influences than Sumerian influences:

He knows his bronzes owe more to modern sculpture than to Sumer or Assyria. To him this is a technical point which is no cause for worry as long as he can express his Iraqi themes in a manner related to the present. In his style, which has its emphatic qualities derived from contemporary sculpture, his confidence may lie in the fact that sculpture in our time derives from a vast mixture of cultures, mostly medieval or ancient, especially that of the Middle East, anyway. (p. 71)

Fattah has been able to develop an eclectic style which helps him to communicate his messages to wide audiences not only in Iraq but in other cultures too. Muzaffar (1987) states that "Ismail Fattah has always been concerned with man and his cause; therefore he relied on figurative expression in reflecting the human condition, which is emphatically portrayed in a certain state of anxiety and resilience" (p. 8).

Sitting Man (see Figure 15) features a man looking through a square while facing us in a frontal position. The figure is removed from the ground, resisting gravity and losing its relation to the physical world, connected to the ground only through its feet. The work promotes a negative sensibility and a strange feeling. The square may symbolize a political prisoner or the relation of man to this complex world. *Family* is another bronze cast by Ismail Fattah (see Figure 16). This work consists of five figures. Three of them are linked together in a standing position; the fourth figure is standing separately, while the fifth one is a fragment of a woman's breasts. This work, like the previous one, shows that the artist is concerned with anxiety and conflict in contemporary life. Herbert Read (1998), who examines the pressure of the new age on contemporary sculpture, writes that "The artist unconsciously projects the anxiety of his age, but he would have no creative energy if he were completely filled with despair. Every artist acts on the assumption expressed by William Blake: "Energy is Eternal Delight" (p. 225). In short, Fattah's works are deeply

imbricated in the complexities of our times, addressing the position of man in his new reality. We feel a sense of tragedy and anguish in most of his works, which reflects the social and political reality in the Middle East.

During the 1986 Baghdad International Festival of Arts, Ismail Fattah introduced a new sculpture (see Figure 17) which was actually a combination of painting and sculpture. The work included three standing figures with a reclining head. Two of the three figures are connected by a square and a rectangle. These life-sized figures are executed in plaster. The artist painted his figures in lively shades of blue, yellow, red, and black. Painted sculpture is more familiar in the West; artists such as George Segal, Manuel Neri, and German George Baselitz and others often paint their sculptures. Color adds a painted quality to the sculpture and may contribute to a more powerful communication with the viewers. This work received wide attention during the Festival. Art critic Muzaffar (1987) was highly appreciative of this work and wrote that:

These works, which stood out among the others in the international exhibit, were attractive enough to catch the attention of nearly all visitors regardless of their cultural background. The statues were simply expressive, provocative and omnipotent. This attractive element that is inherent in the art work and that has no specific definition is perhaps the hidden force in the art work which makes its presence alive. It is but this penetration into reality and the beauty of expression that make art look true and vital. (p. 7)

Fattah's sculpture speaks a new artistic language. He has mastered his technique, emphasizing external vitality and textured surface qualities. He seeks to create expressive forms that reflect the sensibilities of the new age.

Public Works

Since the late 1960's Ismail Fattah has produced many public sculptures. Many public buildings and squares in Baghdad are adorned with his sculptures, although many of these public works are different from his figurative art discussed earlier. Not all these works represent the artist's true artistic ability because they were executed to meet certain

conditions set by state authorities; indeed, this has been the weakest part of his experience as a leading artist in Iraq. Fattah attributes his involvement in such works to financial difficulties. However, the artist told me several times in Baghdad that he regards these artworks as not representative of his artistic style and experience as a creative artist. These public works include the following:

1. Ma'arouf al-Rasfi (poet), Baghdad, Bronze (3.5 meters)
2. Ancient Arabic Medicine, Baghdad, Bronze and Marble (8 x 2 meters)
3. Re-Insurance (the Ministry of Trade) Baghdad, Bronze (4 x 3 meters)
4. Al-Farabi, al-Zawara Park, Baghdad
5. Al-Wasiti, National Arts Center, Baghdad
6. Abou Nawas (poet), Abou Nawas Street, Baghdad
7. Al-Kazimi (poet), al Kazimiya, Baghdad, bronze
8. The Headquarters of National Arab
9. Tigris and Euphrates, Haifa Street, Baghdad, (5 meters).
10. *Martyr Monument*

The *Martyr Monument* (*Nasab al-Shahid*)

The *Martyr Monument* is the largest contemporary public monument in Iraq. This monument is a remarkable artistic achievement, honoring Iraqi soldiers killed during the war between Iraq and Iran and other national wars as well (see Figures 18, 19). The *Martyr Monument* stands in its own right as a masterpiece. Recent public monuments in Iraq have served as propaganda, which is why they have failed to communicate with the people. Some of these monuments tried to forge links with Iraq's artistic heritage, but in a way that was superficial and lacked creativity and imagination. In short, most artists have not been successful in creating truly public art, which is one reason why one should credit Fattah for being able to escape such restrictions in his work.

The *Martyr Monument* sought to emphasize the following issues:

- (a) The immortalization of the martyr to keep alive such ideals as virtue and truth.
- (b) Inspiration from the Islamic Arab heritage, since martyrdom has always been an outstanding feature of ancient and modern Iraqi and Arab history.
- (c) A fresh approach to the form of the structure and its complementary elements which give it its originality. (Ur, 1981, p. 34)

The structure consists of a 40-meter high dome split into two halves, comprising 190 meters in total diameter covering a circular space of 562, 500 square meters (see Figures 35, 36). The *Monument* consists of two parts. The upper level includes a dome, a fountain, and the Iraqi national flag. The ground level includes the museum and the relief. The dome is covered with blue glazed ceramic tiles, although the original plan indicated the dome should be gilded with gold. "The Golden Dome: this is the chief symbol of the spirit of the martyr. Its forms and proportions are adopted from the Iraqi domes, and the partition and the aperture reflect the open and spiritual link with the Divine" (Ur 1981, p. 34). According to Fattah, before he began designing the monument he studied Iraqi domes, in particular in Baghdad, to link it to the Iraqi and Islamic artistic heritage. Since this monument differs from Fattah's previous works, which are figurative and have nothing to do with Islamic art, the inquiry was fruitful and helped the artist to focus on the dome as a characteristic Islamic architectural element. In a conversation between Fattah and artist Rafia Nasri published in *Gilgamesh* in 1987, Fattah responds to Nasri's inquiry about how Fattah got the idea of the dome:

Nasri: The dome has Iraqi or rather Bagdadhi features.

Fattah: Yes, the dome is Iraqi. I kept on researching the dome. I read special research on domes. It shows that the dome is originally Iraqi. Even the Andalusian Arch is originally in the Sumerian seals. I did not want to do figure work for *the Martyr Monument*. Thus the idea of the dome took shape. I saw that Baghdad and its great space could have a big dome. The Pantheon has the biggest dome, 32 meters high. This is just what I wanted. (p. 15)

Some observers such as Baram (1991) find some similarities between the *Martyr Monument* and Iraqi pre-Islamic architecture; "a pre-Islamic connection is not missing either: the open space was chosen because in the past many famous monuments such as

ziggurats, obelisks, pyramids and the Spiral Minaret of Samara were constructed in this manner" (p. 78). Fattah said that British sculptor Armitage admired the design of the monument. Indeed, the monument is unique in its delicate design and construction. The viewer enjoys the poetic space surrounding the monument and feels freedom when walking around it.

Critical Analysis

As was discussed in previous chapters, post-modernism calls for the revival of past traditions and emphasizes their significance for both art and architecture. Classical traditions can be modified and interpreted within the context of contemporary art and architecture. Large numbers of artists and architects in the Third World have been increasingly inspired by their cultural heritage and folk art. Fattah is one of a number of gifted non-Western sculptors who relate their experience and art to their culture and history, as has been demonstrated by most of Fattah's work, in particular the *Martyr Monument*. The *Martyr Monument* bridges present and past and promotes artistic continuity and integration and harmony between these traditions. Seen from this perspective, it can be considered the first post-modern art work in Iraq for the following reasons. First, the theme and techniques integrate both classical and modern artistic elements. Second, the *Monument* bridges the distinction between high art and low art by combining techniques and codes from both spheres. Local materials, color, and motifs join with modern elements, making it a celebration of simultaneously belonging to the present and the past. The beautiful blue dome is split into two halves, and these halves have spiritual resonance since they signify the ascension of the *uruj* (the spirit) to heaven. The fountain also contributes to this theme because water stands for purity and sacrifice in Islamic tradition. Third, post-modern artists and architects seek an eclectic language and incorporate various styles and signs to communicate with a wide audience. In this respect, *the Martyr*

Monument capitalizes on these elements to communicate with diverse people in Iraq. Ordinary people in Iraq treat the *Monument* as one of the holy shrines in Iraq. Others enjoy its structure and form and consider it a remarkable work of art, especially visiting foreigners, who appreciate its beauty and simplicity. Finally, the *Monument* adds beauty to the environment and provides viewers with much pleasure. The unique architectural design, composition, and blue color of the dome impart a feeling of poetic space, musical movement, and rhythm. It has always had a special meaning for me.

Summary and Conclusions

Fattah studied art in Baghdad and studied sculpture and ceramics in Italy. He held his first one-man exhibition in 1965 after returning home. This exhibition is considered by Iraqi art critics to be among the very successful shows held in that year. Fattah started his career as an abstract painter, and today he is considered among the foremost artists in Iraq and perhaps in the Arab world for his work as a sculptor whose artworks blend themes and techniques from both Eastern and Western cultures. Fattah believes that his sculpture is inspired by the dynamism and richness of Iraqi ancient sculpture, in particular the Sumerian art, although the Western influence is more visible in his sculpture than the Sumerian. As a painter and sculptor Fattah's artworks are centered on a small number of recurring themes, of which his favorite theme is that of man and woman, their human and sexual relations. He addresses the human condition in his works, ruminating on complexities of life in this age. Love, anxiety, fear, and silence are characteristic emotions of Fattah's figurative works, which are distinguished by their fresh themes and ideas.

Fattah has also produced several public works in Baghdad, including the *Martyr Monument*, which is considered the finest public monument in Iraq. The *Martyr Monument*, designed to honor the Iraqi dead in the Iraq-Iran war, is the largest public work in Iraq and it has received national and international recognition because of the

uniqueness of its theme and design. In the words of Muzaffar (1987), "It is like a piece of music the beauty of which can only be identified through expressing spiritually and physically its powerful impact" (p. 10). As a sculptor and painter Fattah remains a dynamic figure whose artworks add power and creativity to contemporary art in Iraq.

CHAPTER 6

SALIH AL-JUMAI'I

Al-Jumai'i was born in 1939 in Iraq, and he studied art at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad from 1959 to 1962. He also studied painting at the California College of Art and Crafts from 1965 to 1966 and from 1977 to 1978 and graduated with a BFA. Since 1979 al-Jumai'i has lived in San Francisco with his family.

Since al-Jumai'i left Iraq in 1979, many tragedies have befallen his native country; the Iraq-Iran War, the Gulf War, and their ongoing repercussions have devastated Iraqi society. Life became so miserable for Iraqi artists in the post-war era that most left their homeland to search for a new life. Since I left Japan in 1992 to start my graduate study at the Ohio State University I have attempted to contact many Iraqi artists who live in the United States and other Western countries, but most of them have been overwhelmed by their new realities, economic challenges, and an unfamiliar art market with new rules. Most of them have been forced to give up art and take up other professions in order to survive.

In 1995 I traveled to San Francisco with my wife to meet with artist Salih al-Jumai'i, whom I had not seen for sixteen years. It was a very beautiful windy day in August 1995 when my wife and I arrived in the San Francisco Bay area. We were received warmly by Salih, his wife Jean and their children. Since I did not have a close relationship with Salih when we were in Iraq, my visit helped me to get to know him better. As an artist and as a researcher I wanted to experience how Iraqi artists feel being

far from home. How do they relate now to their culture and people? It is really difficult to describe the conditions and feelings of many Iraqi artists who live abroad today. Some artists have never returned home since leaving; others have no communication with their families.

It was my first impression that Salih had an interesting personality. He spoke simply when talking about his experience as an artist, and avoided being formal and ceremonial or even intellectual. I felt a sense of sincerity and truth in his efforts to talk about his art and the Iraqi art movement.

Al-Jumai'i believes that he is a part of the generation of the 1960's. This generation of artists engaged in new projects and concepts, formed art groups, issued an art manifesto, and introduced innovative ideas and techniques. The first day we did not talk about art; we talked more generally. We wanted to explore San Francisco, so we visited the San Francisco Museum of Contemporary Art. The second day, August 23, I had a chance to interview Salih about his art, experiences, role in the Iraqi art movement, and life in the United States. At the artist's request the interview was conducted in English.

Q: What is your definition of your style?

A: The way you execute your artwork could vary from time to time or from period to period.

Q: So you have no definition for style?

A: Well, it is the way you execute your artwork, so it could be categorized or described as your style by a critic or writer or by someone who studies your work, but for me I just do my artwork without thinking of style.

Q: How do you describe your style?

A: I said I do not describe my style or give it a special characterization; it changes from period to period and from materials to materials. Definitely each material has its own limits. Depending on how much you can extend your ability with this material or what

you can do with that material, it will develop your own style. You develop your own individual techniques and ability and execute your ideas based on those materials, and you come up with something unique, and this describes your style.

Q: Tell me about your artistic development .

A: My work in printing gave me a special vision and I wanted to execute some works and paintings with some kind of texture and relief. I was eager to use all kinds of materials, I wanted to experience all kinds of materials that I could put my hands on.

Q: Such as what?

A: Paper, aluminum, canvas, wood, mud, anything that will give me the satisfaction to get at what is inside of me. This was after finishing my studies in the Institute of Fine Arts and Academic Studies.

Q: When did you finish your studies?

A: In the Fine Arts Institute in 1962, and even during that period I started to experiment with different materials like oil, pastels, and water color, beside soil; that led me to use aluminum on canvas, textures and different materials on canvas, but continuation of work is what really develops your style, continuation of your ideas and executing them, regardless of the materials, regardless of the size; you know, it is what really develops your style.

Q: What is Iraqi national style? How do you describe it?

A: I do not know. I mean, in each country, of course, the environment imposes certain elements and certain symbols. The background of people, their traditions, their culture, their education and what is happening in their life are reflected in their art works. This might lead to a defined style in general for art. Artists may be influenced by each other. Each one has a different way of thinking and different executions. But in general they may be dealing with the same problems or themes and the same issues that are facing

them. I think the outsider could see what is happening in the movement better than the insider who is involved in the work.

Q: Can you elaborate more on this issue?

A: Well, the artists do the work, I mean, in general, like writers, poets, painters, sculptors-- they work. The movement created by the inside people may attract the attention of the outsider¹ or critic who has no relationship with production. He can observe this movement and study what is happening there. Then he may be able to see things that the inside artists themselves cannot see. Then he might be able to describe or define an Iraqi style.

Q: Do you mean it is easier for an outsider to approach Iraqi art than Iraqi artists themselves or critics?

A: Well, I could say that because the Iraqi critic could say, well, I know this is so-and-so's artwork because he has been in the movement for a period. But I think a foreigner or scholar after he studies the art movement and artworks may be able to define the Iraqi style.

Q: What scholar?

A: Any scholar who wants to study Arab art in general, then he goes to Egypt and studies Egyptian art or he may go to Morocco and Tunisia or he may come to Iraq to observe the movement. Then he may say there is a definition of an Iraqi style or there is a definition of an Egyptian style. Of course the Egyptian would be influenced by Pharaonic art and by Arabic calligraphy as an Arab tradition. The Iraqis also would be

¹ The artist's point of view is that certain regional elements in art that may reveal a particular artistic personality or themes that artists themselves are not aware of can easily be recognized or identified by an outside observer. On the question of a so-called Iraqi style or art school al-Jumai'i disagrees with this assumption. However, al-Jumai'i admits that there is a dynamic Iraqi art movement and that Iraqi artists like himself adopt a variety of styles and approaches. Al-Jumai'i's opinion on this issue is similar to that of Diya al-Azzawi, who also disagrees with such assumptions (see chapter 4).

influenced by Arabic calligraphy and by Sumerian and Babylonian artistic traditions.

You see, there are many factors that can contribute to the style.

Q: This question needs to be backed up with some Arabic. I would like you to be specific. Do you think that there is a distinguishable Iraqi artistic personality? Do you agree with that or disagree?

A: No, I do not know.

Q: Please speak Arabic.

A: I did not speak Arabic for a long time. I have been outside of the country for sixteen years. Since then there have been many events that have taken place in the country. I have been distant from them. I have remained distant from them. I have been isolated from what is happening. I have seldom received news about Iraqi artists, except some of the artists who lived away from home, such as Diya al-Azzawi and Rafia al-Nassri. I cannot say that there is an identity for Iraqi art but I could say there is an Iraqi art movement that is energized by the impetus and wishes of artists who make artworks. They should make artworks that deserved to be called artwork. We can say in the future that the new generation is the continuation of the previous and that the art movement has flourished and has never stopped, although I think we did not have a transition in art in Iraq.

Q: What do you mean?

A: I mean there were no artists making a living as artists because of religious influences and the isolation. Iraq suffered during the Ottoman rule which isolated us from the rest of the world. The main concern for people was to survive and this was more important than luxurious things. I would say that there is a distinguishable Iraqi art movement but I could not say there is a distinguishable Iraqi school or style. We live in the age of fast communications in which anything that happens will reach us in a matter of seconds.

Whether this thing is audio or visual we will be informed about it. Anything that happens anywhere appears on television in two or three minutes.

Q: So what is the impact of this issue on the Iraqi art movement?

A: Naturally, the influence would be international.

Q: More than regional?

A: Naturally, not only Iraq will be influenced but this includes the advanced world in America and Europe. Because of mass communication, they have started to communicate with the traditions and cultures that were not familiar to them. The cameramen and journalists have started to document old cultures, traditions and old civilizations, and people began to watch them on television whether as music, or painting, or ancient archaeology. This international influence, this is the new international climate, the age of fast communication, and you cannot isolate a country from another.

Q: Did the city of your birth have any impact on you or your work?

A: I do not think so. I was born in Suwaira, which is a small town located south of Baghdad, although my grandfather was from Baghdad and he established his life there. I remember my city, but I left it when I was eleven years old and came to Baghdad. The only thing I remember from my city is my relatives. I was even not interested in art at this time. My main goal was to go to junior high school. But when I came to Baghdad, I started looking at magazines and books and saw some artworks, especially in Hilal magazine, and there was always a section about international artists. I was influenced by that.

Q: Do you mean you were motivated?

A: Yeah. I mean it gave me the inspiration.... Well, I realized I would like to do this, something like this, so when I started drawing I found out that I could do that, so I continued drawing in every empty space in my books.

Q: How do you relate to your city or country in your work?

A: To my city --I answered that. To my country --then when I moved to Baghdad, you know, I was closer to the museums, to old cultural things, to the Fine Arts Institutes. And then I started discovering the beauty of old culture, the beauty of calligraphy, the beauty in the mosque, the beauty in the brick works and arabesque, all these things started motivating me. You walk by any street or old *souq* [market] in the city and there is the beauty of the architecture, the beauty of craftsmanship, and I thought really they motivated me and made me think of being an artist to do something.

A: So how this does influence your art work?

Q: During my study in art history we used to spend a lot of time in the Iraqi Museum, to study ancient Iraqi art. That period had a great influence on me; I liked the texture of the Sumerian work and the cuneiform writing and also the writing on the Assyrian reliefs, and also the bricks, the Babylonian glazed bricks. These works, original ancient Iraqi works, those people created something so great in that time, so what can I do now? I wanted do something, but I didn't have the knowledge, so I started studying, I started learning as much as I could from my teachers. Then the discussion always goes back to style. I remember one teacher, Mr. Lazisky, who came from Yugoslavia; at that time he was teaching us murals. He said, "forget about the word 'style,' do what you would like to do--go and find the artist that you like so much and try to copy him and keep copying him until you develop your own style."

Q: Who was this artist?

A: Lazisky, he taught at the Fine Arts Institute for a while, about six or seven years. That made me realize that I should stop searching for style; the important thing was to go and do something, go work, put your ideas on paper. Then Faiq Hasan was my classical portrait teacher. I owe to him all my knowledge of color. During his demonstrations, he used to ask us to come around him to see what he was doing, and

he used to talk during these demonstrations. He talked on anatomy and on color: why you should do this, why you should not do that. He used to demonstrate how to mix the colors. He provided us with some knowledge of what we really should do.

Q: Have you ever used symbols or signs from your city?

A: I do not recall. The only thing is the calligraphy; sometimes I used cuneiform which is Babylonian. So I often used to visit Babylon to see the cuneiform writings. I was really motivated by what I saw in Babylon. When you go there, I mean, you will see how great these things were. I used some of the cuneiform writing as well as figures that I saw on the walls. I borrowed some themes from Babylonian and Assyrian art during the 1960's and 1970's.

Q: What kind of materials did you use?

A: I used different materials, but most of the time, I used aluminum because it was easy to manipulate (see Figures 21, 22).

Q: Would you explain why you used the aluminum and how you got this idea? Because aluminum was not a popular medium in Iraq.

A: I was the first to use it.

Q: Why?

A: Because I was working in printing, so I took a couple of them [pieces of aluminum], I started experimenting on them and burning them, I found them very easy to crack. Well, aluminum is easy to handle, to beat; it is a more flexible material and I could do a lot of things with it by hammering it, writing on it, or shaping it the way I wanted. I can mount it on canvas or on wood; it is very light weight, so that gave me a lot of motivation. It gave me the satisfaction of really showing what I want to show, so I started experimenting on aluminum. I remember the first show in 1967, I think it was the *Majdaden* (Innovationists) show, the second one, and I remember one critic, an

Iraqi critic, said, "Your work is very daring." And I wondered if there was more daring [involved] for the person who buys it .

Q: Who was he?

A: He was Jabra, so I said, "Well, I haven't sold anything for a long period." After seven years all the works were sold, because I kept [to] what I really believe. People started to see the beauty of it; that was really what it's about, the sincerity of the work, the sincerity of the execution, and that's a very important part .

Critical Analysis

The interview with the artist al-Jumai'i was very helpful. I realized that there had been a significant change in the artist's style, as well as in his techniques. Al-Jumai'i's previous artworks were based on aluminum and were characterized by their rich techniques and texture. His most recent works, however, are executed on paper, and in these works he incorporates Arabic script.

Although al-Jumai'i is recognized as an artist in Iraq there has been very little written about his art there, for several reasons. First, because he emigrated to the United States in 1979, Iraqi art critics have not been aware of his artworks since then. In addition, I realized that al-Jumai'i has been not as active as a professional artist as he used to be when he was in Iraq. Like other Iraqi artists abroad, al-Jumai'i has found it very hard to survive by marketing his artworks so he had to take a job to support his family. I also felt that al-Jumai'i lives as an isolated artist and has almost lost contact with many Iraqi artists at home and abroad.

During the interview I also became aware that several factors have shaped his experience, such as his social and cultural context, training, and job. Al-Jumai'i established his artistic career in the mid-1960's. The 1960's was a transitional period in many ways in Iraq, witnessing the emergence of a generation of artists who attempted to

free art from being a vehicle to satisfy the tastes and needs of wealthy people. At the same time, artists were challenged by the political and social shifts and crises in Iraq such as the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958 and the consequent strengthening of ties between the Iraqi government and the Soviet Union, China and other Communist countries in eastern Europe. Many young Iraqi artists who were sent to these countries to study art returned home with new artistic interests and experiences. In the 1960's the conflict between the new and old patterns and values of culture and society was reflected in art and intellectual life. New art forms, poetry, and plays flourished in the country. Artists expressed dissatisfaction with traditional academic styles, asserting that art should communicate a message to the public, a message which had been ignored due to the influence of modernism. During this period, a new movement in graphic art emerged in Iraq, resulting in posters expressing social and political themes which appeared on city walls.

In addition, one of the most important developments of that period was the practice of hiring foreign artists to teach at Iraqi art institutions, such as the Yugoslavian artist Lazisky and the Polish painter and printmaker Roman Artimovisky. According to artist Raffia al-Nassiri:

It was not until 1959/1960 that the management of the Institute of Fine Arts decided to benefit from foreign expertise and introduce graphic courses and mural work in an attempt to expand the scope of painting courses. A contract was signed with the well-known Polish painter and print maker Roman Artimovisky to teach graphic art as a subsidiary lesson to painting. Artimovisky established a small atelier with quite an old printing machine for etching and another one for lithograph, together with some other principal materials such as limestone. All those materials were imported. (n.d., p. 3).

Lazisky, Artimovisky, and his wife Sofia Artimovisky energized the artistic climate in Iraq during that period, in part because, as al-Jumai'i mentioned, they introduced new techniques, particularly in printmaking. But their impact was not limited to the technical. Artimovisky, whose works were based on Abstract Impressionism, had a strong influence on the young artists of that period, in particular Raffia al-Nasri.

In addition, during this period there was an increasing number of international and national shows and artistic activities such as art conferences and workshops. Al-Jumai'i's exhibition in 1964 and the exhibition of Kazim Haydar² (which was based on the tragedy of al-Husayn, the grandson of Prophet Muhammed) were considered noteworthy artistic events of that era (Muzaffar, 1989). These two exhibitions and others as well came as a result of the new artistic inquiries into the cultural heritage, folk art, and classical and modern literature. During this period there also emerged a new group of collectors who, as Al-Jumai'i pointed out, helped aid artists who were heavily dependent on government support. New art groups formed, and like so many artists of his generation al-Jumai'i took an active role in the groups of the 1960's--in fact, he was one of the key founders of a group called the Innovationists, which was very active in the 1960's. The Innovationists held four exhibitions, in 1965, 1966, 1967 and 1968 (this last held at the Iraqi Society). According to al-Jumai'i, his group did not seek to construct one unifying theory, but simply to depart from formalism and create something new. The group members were bound by personal ties as well as shared views on art. The Innovationists, writes Shakir Hasan al-Said, believed that

art is not a process of creation, i. e., composition. It is a search or observation, it is a viewpoint of the world, a viewpoint which, above all, presumes that it created the world, and the role of man, the artist in particular, is to demonstrate his view towards it-- to manifest his observation. Hence the observer is not adopting a negative or passive stance, but one which is both positive and contemplative. (Salim, 1977, p. 173)

Through these art groups and gatherings Iraqi artists attempted to bring their artwork closer to the public. They promoted collective efforts and endeavors to voice their

² Kazim Haydar was born in Baghdad in 1932 and died in 1986. In 1965 Haydar held an exhibition with forty paintings based on the martyrdom of al-Husayn. Al-Husayn was killed with his family by the Umayyad army of 4,000 in the most tragic event in Islamic history. Al-Husayn's death was on the 10th of Muharram (October 10, 680). The martyrdom of al-Husayn became a unique symbol, particularly for the Shiite community in Iraq and other countries such as Iran. Iraqi art critics believe that Haydar's exhibition was one of the few that were held in the 1960's, a period which witnessed political violence and tension in Iraq.

opinions as active members of the new society. Al-Jumai'i said that "we were at the beginning of a movement in my generation in the 1970's and we wanted to do something, and that was the important part; each one was dealing with the problems of the times" (personal communication, June 1998).

Themes, Issues and Techniques

In his one-man show in 1964 at the British Center in Baghdad, al-Jumai'i exhibited paintings and drawings in oil and oil pastel. During this time he became interested in the poetry of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, who expressed so poignantly the realm of human suffering. Al-Jumai'i says that the death of al-Sayyab in 1964 had a profound impact on him. His interest in al-Sayyab's poetry led him to literature and Arabic calligraphy.

Two years later, after the sudden death of his young brother in 1966 in Leningrad in the former Soviet Union, the artist's vision changed dramatically. In our phone conversation in June of 1998, Salih said he was overwhelmed by this event. Death became a major theme in his art during that period, as he sought refuge in painting as a means of salvation and healing. In these works the figures appear distorted and fragmented. The viewer senses tragedy, agony, and ambiguity. Colors are faded and muddled, evoking a feeling of antiquity and remote times. While it is true that al-Jumai'i's techniques belong to contemporary art, his themes announce a nostalgia for history. Salim (1977) writes that:

Al-Jumai'i derives his deformed modern human beings from the ruins of history, from a very distinct time and from Sumer and Assyria. He bestowed on them a continuity of human tragedy and threw form and letter into the labyrinth of cold aluminum.

His introduction of Arabic writing is decorative and illuminating or has a cuneiform inspiration according to his subconscious handling of the painting and the subjects. (p. 196)

Al-Jumai'i's experimentation with aluminum has received the special attention of Iraqi and some other Arab art critics because of the delicacy of manipulation and exploration of the materials (see Figures 23, 24). Critics have considered it a refreshing

attempt to introduce new materials. The coldness of the metal itself makes one feel this technological age, while at the same time the rough and textured surfaces, writings and signs take one back to antiquity. Jabra (1974) writes that :

Salih al-Jumai'i, for example, is very particular about his medium, which is usually a mixture of metal (mostly aluminum) and acrylic, and through it he continues an old concern with the darkness of the soul--from the sorrows of tragic love to the horrors of the genocide to which the Palestinians have been subjected for thirty years.

The artist's roots, however, are in the archeological sites of ancient Iraqi cultures; but his contemporary awareness feeds these roots and brings about in his work a haunting mixture of the beautiful and the agonized. His non-figurative almost monochromatic structures are very rarely completely abstract, just as his figurative compositions seem to aspire to the condition of the abstract; both are tense, time-laden, and haunting. (p. 60)

To sum up, al-Jumai'i employed various techniques and signs in his works in a way that can be identified as a double-coding method, combining ornamental elements from classical art and interpreting them in the context of contemporary art. By deploying diverse techniques and materials as well as symbols from folk art and popular culture al-Jumai'i makes his art readable and accessible to diverse audiences.

The Use of Arabic Script

Arabic script has become a major element in al-Jumai'i paintings, in particular in his most recent artworks in which he abandons aluminum as a dominant medium. Personally, I prefer his earlier works because of the freshness of themes as well as techniques that made him a very popular artist during that time. I did not hide my reaction, telling him that I found his previous artworks more successful than his recent works--I mean successful in terms of techniques, themes and treatments. His most recent paintings lack the validity and contemporaneity that are evident in his previous works in favor of traditional imagery. This raises again the issue of the use of traditional motifs as well as techniques in contemporary art (as was discussed in Chapters Two and Three above). My position is

that the use of such elements must be justified, and also be integrated with contemporary techniques and reinterpretations.

However, there is a shift in techniques as well as themes in al-Jumai'i's painting. Perhaps he felt the need to try another medium, which is legitimate for artists, who are always exploring other possibilities. Also, in al-Jumai'i's most recent calligraphic paintings and drawings Arabic script occupies a great deal of the pictorial space. Sometimes the Arabic script is combined with the human figures, but these figures seem to be imposed; in other words they do not fit the compositions nor do they seem to have any other significance. However, the reconstruction of the calligraphic composition is based on textual references: poems or diaries or memories from remote times and abandoned places. As in his previous paintings, in his most recent works too al-Jumai'i promotes a singular relation with antiquity, to the extent that the calligraphic signs do not belong to the present reality since they are totally connected to a distant past. One may feel a sense of sorrow, sadness and perhaps nostalgia for something hidden and inaccessible.

Al-Jumai'i's compositions are simple although his recent works are decorative and filled with calligraphic details and signs. It is obvious that al-Jumai'i is deeply inspired by *kufic* script, which is more geometric than other calligraphic types (see Figure 25). As was discussed in Chapter Two, kufic is widely used in Quranic scripts and in architectural decoration as well. It is obvious that al-Jumai'i employs the letter as a unique ornamental motif. Letters are interwoven so the letter sometimes remains solitary and is only recognized in relation to the calligraphic composition as whole. Sometimes the letter also is recognized in its own right as a significant diacritical sign. Like Umar, al-Jumai'i is also interested in single letters such as (n), (b), (y, i), (s), and (q). For example, al-Jumai'i focuses on the letter (s) as a solitary letter. The work is simple in its structure and design as well, with few details and decoration. The letter is presented twice in the center of the picture; the upper one is painted with bright color, the lower one with dark. The letter

reveals two contrasting values, such as darkness and brightness, or day and night. So the letter may have symbolic meaning in the painting and this adds another quality to the letter as a graphic sign. The composition is structured in vertical and horizontal patterns and appears drawn into opposition against the surrounding space, losing any particular shape. The dominant solitary letter is often emphasized in its size and proportions and decorated with kufic script which is modified to avoid the restricted rules and static geometry. The composition consists of a succession of repeated calligraphic patterns constructed in very abstract form so the viewer finds it hard to read the writing and this again justifies the role of calligraphy in his painting as a decorative element to provide the viewer with pleasure and beauty. In these paintings blue and gray are dominant colors. The blue evokes a mystical quality in his painting and reminds the viewers of blue mosque domes in Iraq and other Muslim countries. These calligraphic paintings reveal striking regional qualities and sensibilities, and Western influence is absent in them. The artist's intent is to explore the beauty and visual qualities of the letters as visual signs. Muzaffar (1988) affirms that "Like al-Azzawi, Salih al-Jumai'i uses long texts and meaningful words in his aluminum and acrylic paintings. Though the writing is difficult to read, al-Jumai'i made use of inscribed lines to match the deep folding times [themes] of his texture" (p. 11).

Summary and Conclusions

Salih al-Jumai'i emerged as a professional artist in the 1960's, a period which was characterized by political violence and tension in Iraq. He was a very active artist and he joined other artists in founding a group called the Innovationists. The objective of this group was to expand the artistic inquiry in Iraqi art by creating new eclectic styles and approaches to enrich Iraqi art and keep it open to dynamic changes.

Al-Jumai'i is for known for introducing new techniques as well as themes. His fascination and experimentation with aluminum was fruitful and led to remarkable artistic

achievements. He also introduced new mixed media techniques at a time when oil was the dominant medium. Al-Jumai'i applies delicate and fresh techniques to express his themes, applying aluminum with other materials as well by adding washes and dyes to texture the cold metal, thereby giving it a warm human touch and rich textures.

The artist left Iraq to live in the United States in 1979. When I interviewed him in August 1995 I realized dramatic changes had occurred in his style and techniques. Al-Jumai'i's most recent paintings have shifted towards Arabic script, which has become a major element in his paintings. His works are now mostly executed on paper and have become more flat and decorative.

CHAPTER 7

MADIHAH UMAR

Introduction

This chapter considers the works of Madihah Umar, focusing on her contribution to Iraqi art, in particular her involvement in the calligraphic painting movement in Iraq in the early 1940's. The chapter examines the theoretical and practical approach of Umar towards the Arabic letter as a delicate plastic element in her artworks. The chapter also defines the unique relation between letters and language on the one hand and between Arabic letters and the art of calligraphy on the other. Umar, who strongly believes that she and other Iraqi artists have taken their ideas from their cultural surroundings, celebrates the Arabic letter as the most distinguished symbol in Arabic and Islamic culture. In short, the chapter seeks a new interpretation of Umar's artworks in relation to Iraqi culture and society, explicating how and why she has come to believe that Arabic letters have great potentialities for contemporary art.

Recent studies in art education (Clark, 1996) emphasize the importance of women's labors in art and art education. Women artists have been excluded from the mainstream art establishment in the West, and in other cultures women still fight for freedom and equality in all fields, including art. According to Clark one objective of feminist studies in art education is achieve a recognition of women within this particular profession. Another objective is to "add lost women and their accomplishments to the existing Western canon"

(p. 35). There is a need in Iraq and other Arab countries to recognize the achievements of women in art as well. In recent decades the number of women artists in these countries has increased and women artists take a very active part in the art movements in their countries. Iraq is among the very few countries in the Middle East where women artists have played a major role in building a strong foundation for art and art education. For this reason, this study acknowledges the achievements of Iraqi women artists such as Madihah Umar.

Background

There are two reasons why Umar's contribution to the Iraqi art movement is significant. First is her pioneering artistic inquiry into the Arabic letter, which has led to fruitful accomplishments on the individual and the collective level as well, by introducing letters to modern painting in the 1940s. Umar has attempted to free the letters from being used merely as decorative elements to fill the space, as in traditional art. She also realized in the early 1940s that calligraphers and even painters interested in Arabic letters followed the traditional method by simply copying out words or verses from the Qur'an and other religious texts. This practice still exists in Iraq and, I believe, in other Arab and Muslim countries. Although calligraphy is not so popular as it used to be, it has not disappeared completely in the popular culture, though confronted and perhaps threatened by modernization in all countries, including Iraq. Umar's fascination with the Arabic letter could be interpreted as a dissatisfaction with the then-prevailing academic styles. It should be pointed out that most Iraqi and Arab artists who were contemporaries of Umar in the 1930s, the 1940s, and even the 1950s were more committed to Western art and when they went to study art abroad they quickly adopted Western artistic techniques, vocabulary, and modes of expression. Umar chose the opposite when she decided at an early stage of her career to experiment with Arabic letters.

Since Umar has spent a great deal of her life in the West, her art and life have remained invisible to the younger generation of Iraqi artists and art critics. Perhaps some mystery surrounds her as an artist, to the extent that the Lebanese journalist Sharbal Dagher wrote of her, "A lady from another age has been unfortunately far from us, and it is as though she has just emerged from a classical play" (n.p.). Art history in Iraq tells us little about Umar, just that she introduced Arabic letters to modern painting in the 1940s, the first artist in Iraq and perhaps in the Arab world to do so. It is difficult to trace Umar's artistic development, due to her travels and distance from home, and perhaps these are also the reasons why Umar has produced few artworks from 1949 till the present. Umar is still alive but due to her age she does not provide all the information one might wish about her artwork, although when I interviewed her in New York in 1995 she still remembered some important details and events that were significant to her. However, this is not to say that Umar is not an important artist. On the contrary, Umar has been given attention in recent art studies which are exploring the use of Arabic script in contemporary painting.

Umar was born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1908 and lived in Damascus until she was nine years old, when she enrolled in a British elementary school in Beirut. Umar still remembers her early childhood in Aleppo, Damascus, and Beirut. She said, "I came in contact with art since I was a child through the art production which came from India, Pakistan and Afghanistan and these countries are rich with their artistic tradition." Umar added that her grandfather had many friends in these countries and when they came to visit him they often brought with them beautiful ceramics and pictures as gifts, and she still remembers that their living room was decorated with many beautiful art objects and antiques. She said that she was attracted and inspired by their beauty and designs, in particular their "Mohamadi color" (a shade of blue). It was obvious that Umar enjoyed a very happy childhood with her wealthy family, and her early education and experience were valuable for her art. Umar said that in Damascus she was surrounded by beauty,

history and a rich cultural context. In the mosques, houses and landscapes of Damascus, Umar found herself very close to beauty in art and nature. At an early stage, Umar was fascinated by Arabic calligraphy, arabesque, and other elements of decoration. Umar broadened her exposure to traditional Islamic art and architecture when she went to the Sultaniye High School in Istanbul. There again she found herself surrounded by beauty, art, and historical monuments, and she discovered an interest in the processes of art production in the Middle Ages in Istanbul. Around 1929 Umar left Istanbul for Baghdad, a city which, like Istanbul, was also filled with domes and minarets rising against a blue sky. In these great cities Umar had her first art courses. She was fortunate in the breadth of her experiences, and this may explain why Umar has remained loyal to this artistic heritage regardless of her actual location.

Early Involvement in Arabic Script

The significance of Madihah Umar's contribution in Iraqi art lies in her outstanding effort in introducing the Arabic script to modern Iraqi painting in the 1940's, which is greatly appreciated by Arab and Iraqi art critics. But how did Umar become interested in the Arabic letter? She said that her interest was first piqued when she was in the United States in the mid-1940's, when she read a thesis about Arabic characters entitled Arabic Calligraphy in the Countries of North Africa by Nabia Abbott. In her thesis Abbott discussed the origin and historical evolution of Arabic characters, as well as the symbolic importance of each letter. However, it is not clear when Umar first used Arabic letters in her own painting. Some critics, such as May Muzaffar (1988), believe that:

Exploring the historical background of this phenomenon would lead us to the fact that the first attempt recorded among the Arab Islamic artists was made by Madihah Umar, an Iraqi artist who was studying in Washington, U.S. A. She exhibited there in 1945 a painting including an Arabic letter. The value of this work, which was reexhibited in Baghdad 1981, is purely historical. (p. 8)

However, Muzaffar does not provide any details about that artwork and exactly where and when it was exhibited in the United States and Iraq. Umar herself told me that she showed her calligraphic paintings to Islamic art historian Richard Ettinghausen, who encouraged her to pursue her inquiry into the Arabic letter because it was so new.

Umar continued her reading and research on Arabic script in libraries and museums in the United States, focusing on how each letter developed through history. By 1949 Umar was ready to present her experimentation with Arabic script when she held her first solo exhibition in 1949 at the Georgetown Public Library in Washington, D.C. (unfortunately the Library records only cultural and artistic events that were held in the Library after the 1970's). From the sketchy information available we can surmise that this was the first exhibition ever held by an Iraqi woman artist. Umar said that her exhibition received unusual attention from the American audience and some art critics, and Florence Berriman of the Washington Sunday Star wrote that, "If there is anything new under the sun it is the art work of Madihah Umar" (personal communication, 1995).

However, before Iraqi artists began to use the Arabic letter in their paintings, Arabic characters attracted some European artists, in particular Paul Klee, whose works reveal a powerful Islamic artistic influence. Klee, Matisse, and other Western artists drew the attention of Arab artists to certain elements in their own culture. Al-Haydari (1981) emphasizes the role played by these European modernist artists in directing Iraqi and Arab artists toward their native artistic tradition, in particular toward Arabic calligraphy: "In short a whole group of Arab artists found in this Western attempt to draw on the East for inspiration a greater incentive for them to reexamine their own ancient culture and reassess the elements of genius in it and utilize them in a new creative effort" (p. 15).

So who was the first Iraqi artist to use Arabic characters in modern painting? There has been a dispute on this point. According to Shakir Hasan al-Said (1971) Umar used letters in her painting in the 1940s but this became known in Iraq only in the early 1950s.

On the other hand, al-Said says that Jamil Hammudi incorporated Arabic letters in 1947 while he was still studying in Paris, as part of his project to create a modern style of painting that reflected the East's spirituality combined with modern Western artistic techniques.

When I interviewed Umar I alluded to this issue by asking her, "Do you think that you were the first Iraqi artist to use the letter in Iraqi modern painting?" "I think so," she replied, adding that her contemporaries in calligraphy were copying the Qur'an's words and verses, but her approach was quite different. Umar believes that letters have been used for centuries as elements to fill the space in architecture and in other art objects and she wanted to liberate them from this function. (One may disagree about whether Arabic calligraphy was used exclusively for decorative purposes in Islamic art and never also carried religious and social meanings.) Speaking to this question of priority, Ali (1997) states that:

Hammudi claims to have initiated the application of Arabic calligraphy in modern Arab art as early in 1943. In 1986 he claimed that two calligraphic paintings of his had been done in 1945. However, the Iraqi art historian and critic Jabra Ibrahim Jabra,¹ as well as the painter and art historian Shakir Hasan al-Said, a contemporary of Hammudi, both confirm that the artist had not worked on calligraphy until he went to Paris in 1947. (p. 152)

When I asked about Hammudi's claim that he used Arabic letters in his painting around 1945, Umar answered that:

If I exhibited in 1949, this does not mean I started the idea in 1949. I started choosing certain things by experimenting on designs and worked on the letters one by one until they reached their final forms; you know these things can happen in one day or in one week or one month or in one year; this takes a long-time life process. But what I can prove that I did is to say that I gave my first one-man show in 1949; before that I exhibited one or two here and there, but I did not include them. What I claimed and stand for is the first one-man show on Arabic calligraphy in 1949. (personal interview)

Shakir Hasan al-Said provides new evidence that Iraqi calligrapher, painter and decorator Niazi Mawlawi Baghdadi is considered the earliest Iraqi artist to work in line with

¹ Jabra Ibrahim Jabra is a Palestinian novelist and critic.

modern art in the nineteenth century. In his book Chapters from the History of Plastic Art Movement in Iraq, Shakir Hasan al-Said (1988) argues that Baghdadi's drawings bridge the traditional miniature art of the East and the Western art style. Most of Baghdadi's works are now held at the National Gallery in Baghdad, not the Museum of Pioneer Artists, perhaps because Baghdadi is considered by the art authorities in Iraq to be a calligrapher, not a painter. In the Islamic tradition it is difficult to draw the distinction between a calligrapher and a painter, just as it is also hard to make a clear division between artists and artisans. The present distinction between calligraphy and painting emerged as a result of the diffusion of Western modern art and culture, in which calligraphy is seen as a decorative or low art. The art of classical calligraphy in Iraq came to an end in 1973 with the death of Hashim al-Khattat, "Hashim the Calligrapher," who mastered Arabic calligraphy and gave rise to this delicate art in Iraq in the twentieth century. However, Hashim al-Khattat was not interested in modern art, adhering to the traditional rules and techniques of Arabic calligraphy.

On the other hand, Niazi Mawlawi combined calligraphy with modern art in a method which is unusual if we look at the standards of Iraqi art and culture in the nineteenth century, when they were almost isolated from modern cultural and industrial development in the West. Baghdadi promoted a dialogue between these two forms, representing two civilizations. Figure 26 shows one of Baghdadi's dialectical calligraphic drawings. As a calligraphic composition this drawing is completely different from the type of calligraphic works that were popular in Iraq in the nineteenth century. The composition is very simple, yet it reveals an excellent modern treatment of composition, movement, space and time. Baghdadi managed to escape the static rules of calligraphy, giving a new life and dynamic and elegance to his letters. Unfortunately, previous art studies in Iraq were prejudiced against him, and that is why there was nothing written about him.

Baghdadi seems to receive somewhat more attention after being included in al-Said's book on contemporary art in Iraq . In recognition of Baghdadi's achievement, Ali (1997) writes:

In spite of the strict rules he followed in his calligraphic pieces, Baghdadi displayed modern graphic tendencies by utilizing the spatial and plastic qualities of Arabic letters, which might be considered one of the earliest experiments in Op Art. He was a sufi, or Muslim mystic, of the Mawlawi order, an artist ahead of his time. His precise drawing demonstrates a great mastery of techniques, and his calligraphic experiments indicate a bold vision that was achieved by other Iraqi and Arab artists only in the second half of the twentieth century. (p. 46)

The example of Baghdadi shows that neither art history nor art criticism in Iraq is reliable in dealing with events whose actors are still alive. Thus, any further efforts to write the history of art in Iraq must deal carefully with issues of accuracy and connoisseurship. Baghdadi, Umar, and other pioneer artists deserve proper credit for their accomplishments and activities. What's more, each of them builds on what was achieved by the previous generation of artists. For example, Shakir Hasan al-Said said that he became aware of the importance of the Arabic letter in modern painting only after he saw Umar's exhibition in 1952. Al-Said has added to what Umar initiated by emphasizing the human and mystic dimensions of Arabic letters and by bringing Iraqi artists and critics to realize the importance of the Arabic script through his theory of "The One-Dimension" (see chapter 8).

A New Approach Toward Arabic Script

Umar believes that Arabic letters should be given greater respect and appreciation. arguing that limiting writing to filling in space means that the writing becomes secondary and bears no special significance to the artwork or the art object. So contemporary artists need to recognize letters as unique signs, which means going beyond their formal qualities. The letter has its own inner life and dimension, and it must be treated artistically according to what it represents or stands for. By rejecting the use of letters as decorative elements for

empty space, I do not think that Umar means to imply that letters are irrelevant to ornamentation, since her art works are ornamental too--no one can ignore the fact that letters are used by Umar as a means of decoration too.

It is hard to understand why Umar and many Iraqi artists try to distinguish their art from ornamentation, while at the same time their artworks may be described as decorative through their use of geometric motifs, letters, and other elements. Although modernism condemns traditional arts and ornamentation, ornamentation has not been abandoned by Western modernist artists. In this respect Grabar (1992) holds that "the colorful patterns of Matisse's representations of dancers, the oval elongation of Modigliani's portraits, or Andy Warhol's serially repeated cans of Campbell soup may, at some level of perception and understanding, be called ornamental " (p. 9). These Western artists and others drew on decorative abstract geometric patterns in their artworks, which are based on repetition, modification, and simplification of forms. In addition, many post-modern artists also use ornamentation, selecting certain elements from classical art and popular art to achieve ambiguity and irony, or to attract the attention of the viewers on some issues (see Chapter 3). So there does not seem to be any inherent problem with the decorative use of letters in and of itself; rather, success in contemporary art depends on the artist's vision and treatment of the subject matters, themes and materials. Again, it should be remembered that ornamentation is the core of Islamic traditional art, yet this emphasis on ornamentation did not prevent Muslim artists from reflecting on spiritual, social, or cultural values. Hanson (1995) argues that "ornamentation is not an unnecessary component added superficially to the work of art after its completion, it is the core of spiritualizing enhancement of Islamic artistic creation and the Muslim environment" (p. 3).

Now let me examine Umar's conceptions of letters. Umar realized in the 1940s that Arabic letters have unique, beautiful shapes and are highly adaptable to contemporary art. Umar places importance on the letter itself as an abstract design; letters have developed

and been modified to reach their final shapes. But Umar also views letters as ideas and in this respect she makes a connection between the letter as a visual form and the letter as inner life and the letter as a value. In approaching letters, Umar emphasizes the following: letter as personality, letter as design, and, letter as idea.

Letter as Personality

Umar is interested in the letter by itself as a design. She also told me that she is not interested in words or verses where letters are joined together to give a special meaning. Rather, she is intrigued by the basic expression of the letter as a visual sign, which may evoke emotional and artistic values and qualities, so that each letter stands in its own right as a distinctive personality. Umar explains that:

I take each letter, not the word, not the verse by itself. I believe that the letter has personality--has something to contribute to art--on what does it depend? It depends on the artist, on his imagination and how he treats [it] and what he thinks--it is inspiration.... The letter by itself, I believe that each letter contributes to the design and the meaning--what interests me is the design of the letter itself. Take for instance the letter *ayn*....what is *ayn*? It is a design;...it has a strong personality; I am interested in its symbolic design.

Just as each person has his own personality, so too each letter has its own individuality. Umar sees the letter *ayn* as a good example for illustrating her view of letters (Figures 27, 28). She believes that *ayn* in the Arabic literary tradition represents two different things: the first one a spring of water and the second one the eye, which means that this letter represents two crucial elements essential for life,--the eye by which we see and the water which without we could not live. By contrast she is interested in the musical and phonetic qualities of the letter *lam*. It is true that letters in Arabic literature have mystical and religious significations; for instance, *alif* is the first letter in the word Allah (God) and it is the first letter in the Arabic alphabet. In addition to their mythological and spiritual connotations, letters may have other qualities in Arabic classical poetry, functioning for example as erotic symbols as Rosenthal (1971) argues; "even a love union could be

symbolized by the shape of a letter, in this case the ligature of the letters lam and alif, written, as they are closely entwined: "I saw you in my dream embracing me/ Like as the *lam* of the scribe embraces the *alif*" (p. 56).

By emphasizing the intellectual role of the letter in addition to its visual and graphic qualities, Umar departs from formalism, connecting letters and their cultural surroundings and positing a special relationship with each. While she was talking to me, suddenly she looked at one of her paintings hung on the wall, featuring her favorite letter *ayn* repeated several times and constructed so that it appears to be dancing, and she said to me, "Don't you think that these letters talk to each other?" Although Umar's theorization of the pictography of letters is very brief and abstract, in general one senses her desire to establish that letters are important in our lives because we use them every day, we see them on walls, television, and other places, so we should acknowledge them.

Figure 29 shows a calligraphic drawing by Umar based on the letter *ayn*. The letter is painted in different positions facing itself in a circular composition moving around a central point. The letter appears to be dancing in a mysterious space. Different viewers may interpret this drawing differently, especially non-Arabic speakers, since they do not know what the letter stands for in its original context. For instance, I asked a Polish person to look at a reproduction of this drawing and describe what she saw. She wrote down the following descriptors: octopus, waves, clouds, intestines, bubbles, insect eggs, flowers, and cookies. Clearly Arabic letters may be read in varying ways, depending on many factors that contribute to the viewer's understanding or interpretation, such as cultural background, age, gender, sex, and emotional state.

Letter as Design

Umar sees letters as unique signs that are beautiful, composed, and designed; to her the letter remains a pure sign. As she put it:

I mastered Arabic calligraphy, which represents abstract meanings and which is symbolic in its essence and which should not be regarded as mere geometrical dimension and forms. From the standpoint of artistic design, I think such a view does harm to the individuality of each letter, divests it of its freedom of expression and hinders its ability of being used as an artistic design. In fact, every letter makes an abstract image. Moreover, it has that obvious individualistic quality which helps in making perfect forms with a particular meaning or idea, or in representing a new or an old event. (Salim, 1977, p. 208)

According to Umar, each letter stands for something in reality, a position that is also influenced by literary interpretation. However, Umar is not interested in all twenty-eight letters of the alphabet but instead devotes herself to only a few, such as *alif*, *ayn*, *lam*.

Yusuf (1989) writes that:

Madiah Umar restricted herself to the use of certain letters: the *Ayn*, the *Mim*, the *Yaa* and the *Lam* among others. And there is no relationship of this restriction to any ideational or social background as much as it is the personality of each letter which is entirely different from the personalities of other letters. For these letters were sufficient for her to evolve in their relationship elements of the personality of each of them. She aims at emphasizing the strength and various possibilities of change in each letter. (n.p.)

For Umar these letters are attractive not only because of their design quality but also because they have some hidden values. In fact, Umar is not the only artist to evince an interest in certain letters; other artists, such as Jamil Hammudi, Shakir Hasan al-Said, Rafa al-Nasiri, and Diya al-Azzawi are also not concerned with words and phrases.

If we look closely at Umar's artworks we see some kufic influence. Her early works show that the artist was very intrigued by the geometric design of kufic style, as many Iraqi and Arab artists have been. For instance, the calligraphic paintings of the Arab artist Kamal Boullata are also based on the kufic style, utilizing the proportions and design of these letters in building very modern abstract calligraphic compositions. Umar's style differs from that of Kamal Boullata in being less geometrical; also, the letters are designed individually rather than being joined together. Such a method, in which the calligrapher or illustrator designs and measures each letter separately, is also known in classical Arabic calligraphy. According to the Arab aesthetician Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, this method was known as *tafriq* [division], which means "preventing the letters from encroaching one upon

the other and from getting mixed up one with the other, so as to keep the body of each letter separate from that of the other while achieving harmony through the excellency of their shapes" (p. 28). By separating letters from each other, Umar wants to focus the attention of the viewer on the letter itself: its movement, rhythm, symbolism, and design. The letter remains solitary in most of her paintings, and her selection of it is a personal choice having to do with her own individuality.

Letter as Idea

Although Umar is very interested in the letter as a geometric sign and has found Arabic characters very suitable for her abstract painting, she is also confident that letters are perfect tools for expressing ideas and issues. Umar tries to make connections between letters and the intellect and between letters and the social and cultural context. She seems very inspired by Arab and Islamic literature in which writing occupied a prominent position in both literature and art. Letters are tools to manifest meaning and to reveal hidden intelligence.

As in the past, in the present also the letter is still a sign that can carry a message. Umar told me that contemporary artists can use letters to express many issues, "whether they are psychological or social or just imaginative design. You can use the letter, not the word, not the repetition of the words, not verses. This was not my aim at all. The letter has been used for centuries like this, but what I have introduced to Arabic art is that the letter has a personality and we should understand it. This does not mean every artist has to use the letter the same way" (interview, August 8, 1995). Umar's idea gains significance when we think of art beyond its physical qualities. Seen from this perspective, letters can contribute remarkably to painting because they enhance the communication process between the viewer and the artwork.

Madiah Umar and Jawad Salim

Umar places much importance on the cultural surroundings and their impact on art. In the 1950s she turned Iraqi artists' attention to certain issues that they were not aware of. Umar said that she called on Iraqi artists, including Jawad Salim, to embrace their culture and their artistic heritage. She said that:

When I came back from England back in 1933 and later also Jawad Salim was imitating good academic art. I used to see him making and copying good portraits by copying the works of some Western artists. I told him, "Look Jawad, that is beautiful, you know how to use your brush, but please look around you, to the surroundings and take your subject," and he did it and began to use symbols and motifs from the surroundings and he did it during that period. He did it by using symbols.

Umar explained that she used to know Jawad Salim and his family very closely, and that Jawad's sister Naziha Salim was her student at this time. Umar appreciates Salim's artworks but disagrees with those Iraqi and Arab art critics who see Jawad Salim as the only noteworthy figure in Iraqi art. In her view Jawad Salim is one among many outstanding artists who made Iraqi art what it is today.

Umar and the Question of Style and the Use of Traditions

When I interviewed Umar, I wanted to find out why Iraqi artists such as herself are interested in traditional imagery and why they think traditional motifs and symbols are important to their artworks. She responded, "You see, an artist's life is an experimental life and he has to go through anything or every thing that has to do with art. We cannot say to an artist, "Do not look to this symbol and do not look to that one, look at that one--,' no, but the artist should have the chance and the effort to go through the background to learn something ---we learn from the past, we have to add to the present and we have to add to the future." Umar views art history not as a knowledge of the artistic process, or as changes in styles and artistic moods, but as also involving the use of tools and materials. We need to learn from the past how artists used materials and how they

were able to develop their techniques. Umar said that in early days her knowledge about brushes was very limited:

The previous methods that were used by the artists are a contribution to me; they are an addition to my knowledge; I learn them and I add now this kind of brush I have been using-- very wide--, I never used them because they never existed. Some brushes' shapes never changed twenty or thirty years ago; now they do, so somebody was being creative and made an addition at least in tools; if there were no tools, can you express anything? Well, tools came to us, but who brings them, who brings them into being, who gave the idea? It is the creative mind of man. We need to know what kind of brush we need. We have to know about history, to know is to practice it, to see the result, to improve or reject we have to try, so each artist must know about his past; it is like building houses, if you do not have the "foundation" you cannot build the house. Each historical knowledge of ideas, tools, of colors, all these things are donations of the past to the present's artists and they need to know about them; take what you want and reject what you do not want and nobody says no. We have to know about art, it is our history and artists are the makers of history and how [can]the artist make history if he does not learn about it?

In short, Umar believes that contemporary artists should learn from their artistic heritage.

In doing so they will promote continuity with previous art trends and in this way contribute to them.

Style

Pioneer Iraqi artists were more dedicated to promoting a national style than is the younger generation of Iraqi artists. When I interviewed Umar in 1995 I asked her whether she believes that there is an Iraqi style. Umar answered, "This is a very difficult question to answer, but briefly I can say that styles in each country have become similar to each other for various reasons; artists, like others, come in contact with each other, not like before when people stuck together so when it came to art you could say there is a Japanese art this way and Chinese art that way." She gave her own artworks as an example of how Eastern and Western influences can mingle in Iraqi art. Then she noted that when she was studying art in Washington, D.C., in the United States, "There was a discussion between them [art teachers and students] as to how they would judge it [her art]; it was not Eastern

and it was not Oriental, so my teacher said to the class, 'She took the best from each side- she took the color from the West and she used the design of the East'."

It is very hard to examine the development of Umar's painting because her early artworks are not available even in such museums as the Museum of Pioneer Artists in Baghdad, which is the main museum that houses the artworks of Iraqi artists. I visited this museum in 1989, but unfortunately it has only four of her works. This is indeed a serious problem because most of the artworks of the pioneer Iraqi artists are either lost or sold to private collections outside of Iraq. Even private collections in Iraq are inaccessible, and add to this the fact that there is no official record in Iraq to refer to. Umar herself does not remember what happened to her early artworks.

However, we can say, generally speaking, that social and cultural conditions have a profound impact on the artist's subject matter, style, use of medium, and themes. As was mentioned earlier, Umar lived in Damascus, Beirut, Istanbul, and Baghdad, cities which boasted rich Arab and Islamic heritages, which remained major sources for Umar's artworks. Umar also employs very modern techniques to design and compose her calligraphic signs. Her calligraphic paintings are flat and based on kufic letters designed vertically and horizontally and sometimes combined with arabesque and other decorative elements (See Figure). Umar utilizes these graphic and plastic qualities, seeking calligraphic abstraction that attracts our attention. In conclusion, Umar's artworks are significant because of their historical importance and because of their relevance to society and culture.

Summary and Conclusion

The importance of Umar lies in her introduction of Arabic script to modern art in Iraq. She is said to be the first modern Iraqi modern artist to use letters in paintings, although this claim has been disputed. Her experimentation with Arabic

letters started sometime around 1944, and she held her first solo exhibition in 1949 at the Georgetown Public Library in Washington, D.C., in the first exhibition by an Iraqi artist in the United States.

Umar's artistic treatments of Arabic letters became known in Iraq in the early 1950s, and led to nationwide interest in the Arabic script in Iraq and other Arab Muslim countries. Umar argues that letters have been used for centuries as decorative patterns to fill space, but that the function of letters should expand to other purposes in contemporary art. Umar uses letters as a graphic sign to create a new abstraction, and her early works were based on kufic style and ornamentation. She is very interested in the design and the shape of the letter, as well as what she sees as each letter's personality, although she is not equally interested in each letter of the Arabic alphabet. Although she pays attention to the physical qualities of the letter, she firmly believes that letters can be used to express an idea, whether it is psychological or social or imaginative. Umar has played a major role in art and art education in Iraq, and she is noteworthy not least for being one of the few women Iraqi artists who emerged in the art movement as a professional artist and art educator.

CHAPTER 8

SHAKIR HASAN AL-SAID

This chapter will introduce the artworks of Shakir Hasan al-Said, a leader in the Iraqi art movement, tracing his artistic development, accomplishments, and ideas. Beginning in early 1951, al-Said contributed significantly to the Iraqi art movement through his art, writing, and teaching. He also has been involved in art groups in Iraq and was a founding member of the Baghdad Group in 1951. Al-Said's role as a creative artist, critic, art historian, and art educator has been recognized by many artists and art critics in Iraq and other Arab countries as well. For half a century Al-Said has sought a distinctive Iraqi artistic identity. The issue of what constitutes such an identity, as well as other issues surrounding his work and his reflections on it, will be considered here in the light of modern and post-modern theories.

Background

Al-Said was born in Samawa in southern Iraq in 1925. He graduated from the College of Education and Social Sciences in 1948 and later he received a diploma in painting from the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad in 1955. He studied art at the Higher School of Design in Paris from 1955-1959. I became aware of al-Said's dynamic role in the Iraqi art movement in 1968 when I enrolled in the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad, where he was my art teacher for several years. I found his ideas fresh and his continued

efforts to lead the art movement in Iraq remarkable. I was impressed by both his sincerity and his love for humanity.

Samawa, his birth place, is a rural area. This rural culture had a tremendous impact on his art, in particular that of the late 1940's and early 1950's. After he finished his study at the Teachers' College in 1948, he worked as a teacher at Ba'qouba, Iraq's most beautiful rural area. He used to travel between Baghdad and Ba'qouba, passing through rich green land distinguished by its open fields and beautiful landscape. He still recalls these days:

The history of art is very long. Why should I not start from a reasonable point? I decided to begin with Impressionism and began to paint as an Impressionist... I was justifying overlooking the Renaissance period on the grounds that I was ignoring the past in favor of the present, in whose construction I was involved. It was a kind of "individual renaissance" which would liberate my personal civilization from the backwardness of ages. And as an artist, rather a painter, I decided to rediscover Islamic local art. (al-Said, 1986)

The daily traveling between Baghdad and Ba'qouba brought al-Said into direct contact with the peasants, to see first-hand their misery and suffering. Recalling his early encounters with peasants, the artist wrote in 1952:

On my way from school, I used to see scores of faces, brown faces, painful and toiling faces. How close they were to my heart! They pressed me and I passed them again and again. They suffered and I felt their suffering. The peasants with their loose belts were pricked by thorns. They were so close to my heart! On the way home, I would stare into the sleepy eyes of the cattle. Can I say they were part of those people too? I loved them too because they had a world of their own. Their steps which are encumbered with the yoke would sound various dialects. Each touch of a back saddle edge was like the cut of a dagger into their bodies.

All of them were passing on the sand and gravel of the road just as I was doing. Sometimes, it seemed to me that we were conversing. The roaring of waves, the tapping of rain, the rustling poplar trees were whispers to my ears.

"We are going to work," some members of the flock said

"We are going to plough the soil," some peasant said.

"Don't you want to buy some of those apples?" a child hawker said.

"Don't you want to buy for my eyes' sake?" a woman said

"All of you are my fellow citizens," I replied. (Yusuf, 1987, p. 8)

It was indeed a rich period for the young al-Said, a period of self-realization, hope, and eagerness to learn about life and art. His figurative paintings of that period were not

political but were based on his individual experience and human sympathy rather than representing a particular ideology. In other words, he was concerned with the human condition and social relations.

His figurative paintings were a departure from formalism and academic styles and tendencies. His works were characterized by their flat decorative compositions, bright color, and primitive configuration. He derived symbols and signs from local rugs and carpets and from popular culture more generally, and the artist incorporated domes, triangles, circles, arches, and palm trees to impart a regional character. Early paintings like *The Return to the Village* (1951), *The Wedding Party* (1951), *Three Cooks* (1953), *Zain al-Abideen* (1954), *Women* (1954), *Peasant Family* (1958) and *Peasants and Moon* (1959) provide excellent examples of the artist's involvement in his social and cultural context and local folk traditions. Al-Said explains that:

I believe that I have become clearer and easier to understand. For instance, in the fifties, while I was doing research on folk art I painted subjects that looked at first sight to be purely folk themes but with a few touches they became modern. My painting "Zain al-Abideen," for example, will appear to the public at first sight in its conventional religious and folk forms. But the public will soon realize that Zain al-Abideen has none of his historical features other than his chains. (Yusuf, 1987, p. 15)

The Return to the Village (1951; see Figure 30) is a painting executed in a very simple and primitive style, featuring a group of villagers and their animals as they are returning to the village that they abandoned. It is a familiar problem in Iraq. Many people leave their lands and villages and go to cities in search of a better life. This has led to social and economic problems in the country, in particular after 1958, when the dramatic urban developments in major cities were very attractive. Villages and green lands were abandoned and dried up. The message of this painting is simple and clear; it is a call for people to return to their villages and farms. It may also express the artist's dissatisfaction with the city, where relations and life were more complex. The artist has expressed profoundly the simple life and relations in the village. Rooster and moon symbols coexist

in al-Said's paintings and drawings from this period, and these paintings evoke a nostalgic feeling for the village. Their suggestiveness, primitive style, and colors bring the viewer closer to local artistic traditions.

Arab-Islamic Influence

In the 1950's al-Said began a serious study of the Arab-Islamic tradition, being inspired by al-Wasiti, and especially by al-Wasiti's illustration of al-Hariri's *Maqamat*. Drawings of the 1950's based on *The Thousand and One Nights* (see Figure 31) reveal al-Wasiti's influence in terms of his treatment of the composition and the use of ornament and letters as well. Al-Said's drawings of the *Arabian Nights* are representative of folk tradition and mythology, and they are characterized by their decorative composition, lyricism, poetic qualities, and their sense of humor as well. Poet and art critic Muzaffar (1986) highly appreciates these drawings, emphasizing their artistic and folk qualities. He mentions that al-Said's interest in *The Thousand and One Nights* began in 1954 and was a part of the artist's effort to promote national identity in Iraqi art:

In his fabulous unpublished series of illustrated works, Shakir Hasan realized a competent parallel of text and form. The freely conceived images of the fanciful episodes recounted in the *Arabian Nights* are reflected in an intricate linear work (ink on paper), where both calligraphy and image interplay to create a sharp sense of magic feeling. Shakir Hasan is not a calligrapher; he is a painter who subjected the Arabic character to match his own stylized figures and abstract motifs. Shaker Hasan chose very few characters, motivated by mainly popular conceptions, but he had a remarkable sense of imagination as well as a deep understanding of their spirit, a spirit that seems inherent in the character. (p. 15)

The Use of Arabic Script

Shakir Hasan al-Said is among the few artists and art critics who truly have contributed to the calligraphic painting movement in Iraq and perhaps in the Arab and Islamic world. Al-Said attempts to establish a dialogue between painting and Arabic script. By creatively building on the mystical and aesthetic qualities of the letter al-Said provided depth and sensitivity to the artistic inquiry into the letter as the unique symbol of Islamic

civilization. The interest of al-Said in Arabic letters dates back to the 1950's. The artist says that:

I used letters for the first time in the fifties (about 1953) to add a local touch to the painting, but I wasn't using them enough. I became aware of the importance of using letters in Iraqi art through artist Madihah Umar's works in 1952. It was during the art exhibition which was held at the Fine Arts Institute on the occasion of the Avicenna festival. Some of my paintings were also on display at the same exhibition. While I was in Paris between 1955-1959, I further developed letter inspiration and experimented with technique. But when I came to Baghdad and started a meditative tendency in art I made letters an essential inspiration in the work of art. (Yusuf, 1987, p. 17)

Since the 1950's, al-Said has gone through many intellectual changes until finally he took refuge in mysticism. At first he pursued Marxism, surrealism, and existentialism. But after he returned from Paris in 1959, there occurred a dramatic transformation that redirected his entire existence. As he tells it (Al-Said 1986):

In the period preceding my stay in Paris for study (1948-1955) I became convinced that the reality of science is not to be gained wholly from the pages of books, but should rather be obtained by experiment. Therefore, I became deeply involved in my personal adventures and in my relations and artistic experiments. I also became a heavy smoker and drinker and had a number of affairs. In a word, I tried to rediscover myself through involvement in life and to find myself through others.

However, after a while I discovered that my attempts had gone astray and I was on the verge of falling into the trap of living a superficial and meaningless life. In 1958 I was reawakened after a bout of self-indulgence. I managed to regain control of my will, and thus I rejected cigarettes, alcohol and women and succeeded in reconstructing my personality from within. (p. 84)

Since then al-Said's works, both written and artistic, show the strong influence of mysticism. Al-Said seeks art as the path which leads him to God and this is reflected in his writings, in which he elaborates on *wahdat al-wujud* [Unity of Reality], an Islamic doctrine based on the belief that "There is no God But God." Touched by a profound spirituality, al-Said finds pleasure in the contemplative life, and art to him becomes a reflection of that inner life. In his abstract paintings al-Said often uses religious signs and words that have some spiritual connotations. Many view al-Said more as a critic or

theorist, and while I would not wish to deny the significance of his intellectual role in the art movement, it is important for this study to recognize him as an artist first.

Al-Said's 1970 exhibition, entitled *Meditations and Ascensions*, was among the outstanding artistic events of the time (see Figure 32). It marked a new phase in his vision, a departure from the figurative to the abstract. Al-Said had made abstract works since the early 1960's, but these artworks incorporated new themes and techniques; he experimented with new media, graffiti, letters and other signs. He also used collage and anti-collage methods by peeling off parts of the surfaces of the paper and intentionally making injuries and cuts in the surface.

One Dimension

Shakir Hasan al-Said formed a gathering in 1971 called "The One Dimension" which brought together artists who were interested in or inspired by Arabic letters. This endeavor constituted an attempt to explore the regional cultural context. Although the use of letters in modern Iraqi art dates back to the 1940's, such usage was limited to decorative purposes and it was not grounded in any theory. Before "The One Dimension" came into being in 1971, artists had approached the letter individually. Seen from this perspective, "The One Dimension" established collective awareness of the importance of Arabic writing and calligraphy for contemporary art. The artists published a book entitled *The One Dimension, or Art Inspired by Letters*, which included theories, articles, writings and comments by Iraqi and Arab artists and architects focused on the letter and its role in Arab-Islamic art and culture:

Letters are used for conveying a language. The modern artist started using them in his designs both symbolically and decoratively. It is a way of departure in plastic art inspired by a spiritual and mental ideal derived from the artistic achievements of contemporary Arab civilization.

Letters are used with a feeling of movement and direction and so have a dimension. They are not used simply to convey the written word. Their appearance as a form means they exist because of the line, in other words, the eternal two dimensions. The letters of the alphabet were used as a starting point

and have subsequently evolved in painting with the formal line. (Salim, 1977, p. 203)

However, one should not confuse “The One Dimension” as an artistic group and the “one dimension” as an intellectual approach developed by Shakir Hasan al-Said. The artists who participated in the exhibition did not necessarily follow al-Said's ideas about the letter, nor they did share a distinctive style as contemporaries. For these reasons, and unlike other art groups and art associations in Iraq, “The One -Dimension” did not continue. The artist explains why this group did not endure:

I used the term *The One-Dimension* to stand for an important theme in the artistic work. That was in 1966. I mentioned the term in three articles I published then. Instead of considering painting a three-dimensional world, *The One-Dimension* is a reading of painting.

The One-Dimension Group --I prefer “Gathering”-- was inspired by Arabic letters. But the use of letters would not be representative of the deeper sense of the *one dimension* unless it contrasted with it sometimes. Hence we realized why a group with such an abbreviated slogan could not last. Such a slogan requires a deeper comparison of the sense of the artistic work and its relation to the environment. (Yusuf, 1978, p. 16)

Critical Analysis

These artistic developments reflect the dissatisfaction of Iraqi artists and intellectuals with Western modernist ideas, ideas that led to discontinuity in their artistic traditions. Modern art and architecture failed to communicate with the people of their cultures. Confronted by the notion of one universal model of art for all societies, Iraqi artists have tried since the 1950's to establish a new artistic language based on the local culture and heritage. The “One Dimension,” regardless of its theoretical nature, is part of this endeavor toward cultural self-realization or self-rediscovery in the art.

The concept of the One Dimension, like most of al-Said's ideas, remains controversial because of its abstract language. There are many artists and critics who complain that al-Said intentionally seeks vagueness in his writings, and they are divided

about the worth of his doctrines; some view them as very intellectual attempts to address serious issues, while others consider them gibberish. Yusuf (1987) asserts that :

Carrying on a dialogue with Shakir Hasan al-Said is not an easy assignment. Acutely, he doesn't try to make it any easier. That's why most of the interviews he has given, so far, have not succeeded in getting his ideas across to the public. Besides, those interviews only increase the ambiguity and vagueness that surround his work, for when he talks, al-Said is preoccupied with the theory of research rather than with the research itself. (p. 12)

In 1994 I asked al-Said to consider whether there is any connection between his writing about art and his art works themselves. He replied:

You are asking me, is there any relationship between my artwork and critical methodology? The answer is no, not at all. Certainly, you know that every artist has his own vision or artistic perspective, and of course it is unlike the ideology, because it brings together a connection between the thought and existence (or between the ideology and the utopia). In general, every artist starts his artistic "consciousness" by discovering his own vocabulary and means from a zero point. He is different from the "scientist" because he is "not an accumulator" nor is he "inspired." As far as he is concerned he must have a methodology that he feels along his journey. Say that the work of any artist cannot be judged if we do not examine chronologically his development from the start to the end. Thus, the relationship between my artwork and my critical methodology is a relationship of "continuous examination" every aware artist should achieve. In other words, every artist is a creative "builder" or evaluator "critic" Concerning me individually as a practitioner of "criticism" in addition to painting, I do not criticize myself only, but I try to evaluate the works of others, too. Thus, I have to be "objective" in such criticism for the other and not for the self (subjective); however, my artistic vision in painting should have some link with my vision in criticism, but not with the nature of methodology but with the vision. Undoubtedly, my vision as a painter is different from my vision as a critic, for the constructive "act" in painting is not the analytic "act" in criticism. (Appendix B)

Generally speaking, the concept of the "one-dimension" relates to the problem of dimensions in the visual arts, in particular in drawing and painting as two-dimensional arts based on length and width. But al-Said insists that there is another dimension and he calls it *ba'd ghaybi* (the invisible dimension). One may find some similarity between al-Said's one -dimension and Surrealism because both draw on the unconscious. To distinguish his approach from Surrealism, al-Said explains:

The surrealist vision is essentially a humanistic vision because it considers that the true nature of the human entity cannot be observed through the senses. It considers that the real nature of things can only be associated with those feelings stemming from man's subconsciousness and this inner being, also that the

alienation of the surrealist is not a breaking away from humanity in a positive sense, but who [the surrealist] considers that the conventional way of looking at things is a barrier to the vision of the true face of human existence, and this true face lies in the subconscious. The contemplative vision regards positive human sensation as being the true reality because it is there in space and in time. Nevertheless this sensation can be a worthwhile one if it can move into a state of non-existence while in contemplation of the universe.

A thing which shocks may be the definition of surrealism, while that of one-dimension is a thing which is under contemplation. The contemplative vision is that of the human being which [sic] feels his unity with the universe through his humanity and when he uses non-existence as a new way in which to become part of all creation. His "ego" is not a positive force in a negative world, but a negative force in the positiveness of the world.

So the surface of a canvas with its infinite possibilities, expressing the "ego," can easily accommodate the positive force of the letters of the alphabet and absorb them into the realm of the painting. Consequently, the use of the letters of the alphabet as an art form is nothing more than a version of the contemplative vision, because it tries to perceive simultaneously the unity of the two worlds in which we live, the world of thought through language and the plastic world of observation. (Salim, 1977, p. 118)

Al-Said maintains that the one dimension is more than the use of the letter in the visual art but is also an approach theorizing the meaning of existence, and in this respect, the artist should not be limited to the pictorial surface of the artwork or the wall but should go beyond that to reach what the artist calls the "*ma wara'i*" (what is behind). Thus, the one dimension is metaphysical and bears no relation to real dimensions. In the one dimension, al-Said seeks to examine spatial relations in the visible and invisible visual world. Ali (1997) sent a letter to al-Said in Iraq in 1994, asking him to explain the concept of the one dimension. In response he received the following text:

The "one-dimension": it is a vision, attitude and method at once. As [a vision] it represents my relation to this world or to the other. And from this perspective, the one-dimension is a matter that is concerned with the question of *ab'ad* [dimensions]. How do I deal with the dimensions in the pictorial surface? And why have I chosen to be interested in [the one-dimension] in its relation to the two dimensional or pictorial surface? These questions, or these two questions, represent the position of the plastic artist or the painter, in particular in addressing the question of *ba'd ghaybi* (the invisible dimension) and *ba'd huddari* [the present dimension] in art. The question is whether it is enough for me to paint using two dimensions on a two-dimensional surface and let this be the present dimension in painting, or should I try to use what is *gayba* [illusion], which is the third dimensional in figurative painting and one dimension in post-abstract painting, as in my case? Thus, my position concerning the one-dimension is that of a man who does not paint to represent the visible only, but also paints to represent the invisible as part of the expression or realization and search for the truth. Finally, the one-

dimension is a method to be used if you were tied to “three dimensions” in the visual world. I have to rediscover [the one-dimension] as a means to access the invisible; thus, the intellectual and aesthetic necessities lie in such rediscovery/discovery: the rediscovery/beauty/thought which are preexisting. By past existence, I mean *azali* (eternal), what has been veiled by the relativity of the human attitude toward the world. And so beauty and thought have had their own existence ever since eternity (*azal*) and they will continue to remain in such existence forever. There is no beautiful and ugly because such distinctions are a relative matter yet there are the absolute beauty and the thought which are unlimited by any limitations, and the approach toward that requires that they be discovered as much as being conditioned by the ambition of the researcher or what he has been able to attain of knowledge, then and now in a particular time and place.

As for the letter with regard to its symbolic [or semiotic] value and aesthetic value. The value of the letter is to add techniques to the atmosphere of the picture [within the inquiry into the meaning of the one-dimension]. And as you know, the letter belongs to the world of language. On the other hand, the treatment of the pictorial surface belongs to the world of wall or earth or the surface of paper..., etc. Thus, my exceeding of the surface [two dimensions] by calligraphic collage and by writing letters on a line which is basically one-dimensional. Herein lies its aesthetic and textual [calligraphic] value. (p. 168; see Appendix B).

It is not easy to see how al-Said's explication of his ideas contributes to a better understanding of his art. In this connection I would note only that recent art theories highlight the role of the viewer in interpreting the meaning of the artwork, and argue that viewers have a right to develop their own judgments of them, judgments that are not necessary identical to the artist's. I will elaborate more on these issues in the following chapters.

The Problem of Surface

Driven by his contemplative vision, al-Said became passionately fond of old walls in the early 1970's. He was preoccupied by the notion that the wall has something mysterious inherent in it, to the point that he began to make continuous observations of the old walls in Baghdad. I remember that when I was still a student at the Fine Arts Institute in Baghdad, al-Said would take his students on field visits to the abandoned and decaying walls in Baghdad.

Walls in Baghdad, as well as in other Iraqi cities, are a reflection of the moods of the popular culture. These walls are marked by the passage of times, weather, and people.

They bear graffiti, signs, political slogans, and other marks. The artist himself says, "At the third stage of my career I changed over to wall-painting. My interest in introducing letters into the painting led me to consider the painting as part of the architectural plan of the city" (Yusuf, 1978, p. 12). Since the 1970's the wall's fissures (*suquq*) have become an icon in al-Said's abstract paintings.

To give the effect of a wall, al-Said has used non-artistic materials such as cement, sand and other local construction materials. His surfaces are characterized by their thick textured crusts, gestures, and scribbles which actually derive from street graffiti. For example, in the *Hadhar Mural* (Figure 33), al-Said uses mixed media on wood. This painting, like most paintings that al-Said produced during that period, shows the artist's interest in the qualities of the surface. While creating the impression of an old wall, this painting also features graphic signs, scribbles, and decorative geometry, mostly triangles and accidental marks here and there. The painting also is characterized by its flatness and simplicity.

In the 1980's al-Said made a series of paintings based on his observations of walls. Most of these paintings are constructed with thick textured crusts, rich earth colors and gestural marks. Words like God, Muhammed, freedom, and Arabia have religious and political implications in the paintings. These wall paintings show the artist's use of popular culture as a new source of inspiration. Art critic Jabra (1974) describes al-Said's walls as follows: "The scribble on an old derelict wall, with hints of graffiti and the patina of time and oblivion, becomes a means of exciting a state of mind akin to an intense vision. He has called this kind of painting one dimensionist, meaning by the 'one dimension' that which connects man with God" (p. 23).

In addition to spiritual and religious themes, al-Said draws on social and political issues and events. During the 1980's he responded to the tragic war between Iraq and Iran. Both countries suffered heavy casualties, with many people killed, wounded and

missing. Figure 34 shows one of three works al-Said exhibited at the Baghdad International Festival. In this painting, the artist uses dark colors to illustrate the popular mood and climate during this bloody war, and incorporates signs and graffiti derived from the walls of a city on the front lines, Basrah in southern Iraq. Slogans such as “Long live Basrah” and “Glory for our martyrs” are included in this painting. These were familiar war slogans and traditions that one could see in everyday life during the war. In this painting, the surface has been injured like a wounded fighter or the wounded city itself. Basrah was under fire or threat every day during the war. In 1986, I visited Basrah, the city where I spent my childhood. I found the city devastated. The shadow of war was hovering over the city, visible in the ghostly buildings and shops that had been destroyed. In his painting al-Said expressed his sympathy for Basrah and its people.

Western Influences

In addition to Arab-Islamic influences, al-Said drew on other sources in his early career such as the art of Paul Klee and Paul Cezanne, the art of Mexico, and most recently, the art of the Spanish artist Antoni Tapies. However, in the late 1940's and 1950's Paul Klee had the strongest impact on al-Said's paintings. Klee was himself inspired by Islamic art and mysticism, and many Arab and Iraqi art critics firmly believe that Paul Klee motivated many prominent Arab artists to focus on their own traditions, such as arabesque and calligraphy. Al-Said does not deny such influences; rather, he underlines them, saying that:

Accordingly, I could consider Paul Klee and Paul Cezanne among the artists by whom I was influenced early in my artistic career. The first was inspired by Arabic letters and the second discovered abstract art in nature. And both of them were influenced by Islamic Arab thought or ancient Iraqi thought. This means I was influenced by our arts through them. (Yusuf, 1978, p. 17)

Paul Klee's traces were visible in al-Said's works during the late 1950's and 1960's; for example, *The Crescent and Star* (Figure 35) reveals Klee's influence. As was mentioned

in the previous chapter, Klee was inspired by Islamic art and philosophy and admired Arab culture and art.

However, since the 1970's al-Said's works no longer show Klee's influence. His wall painting brings him closer to the Spanish artist Antoni Tapies, who is renowned for his wall paintings, his extremely thick surfaces, and his profound interest in Eastern art and philosophy. This has been addressed by Khatibi and Sijelmassi (1996), who discuss al-Said, along with a few other outstanding Arab artists inspired by Arabic script. They address the topic of Islamic calligraphy and how it remains a major resource for contemporary artists in the Islamic world:

As an artist of the painted letter, of the letter as drawn object, Hasan had developed a mystical and symbolic microtheory which presents painting--and his own in particular--as a workshop, a seat of civilization, an *aide-memoire* in which signs construct the artistic identity of the Arab intellectual. In his search for what he calls the "*uni-dimensional*," Hasan sees language as an open field in which all known aspects of contemporary Arab civilization are in operation. In his opinion, "In a picture one can only achieve a logical complement if the letter loses all links with language." But how does this happen? By decomposition and the destruction of meaning? By dislocation of the consonantal line? The shattering and violent juxtaposition of letters? Nothing is ruled out here; everything is possible. What the artist proposes is a transformation of calligraphy, writing and language into pure sign, into graphic line, in the midst of many other symbols --street graffiti, ideas borrowed here and there from Islamic imagery or from unknown sources. He liberates letters in order to cast them into the great adventure of abstract art, as elements of a new abstraction, or, more exactly, he integrates the violence of the act of doing within abstraction. Here we are no longer dealing with calligraphy, but with an extended spatial world in which the painted letter, whether recognizable or not, refers back to itself. The artist remembers himself, and his action bespeaks that remembering, that torn and lacerated nostalgia. One finds a similar melancholic quest in Tapies - a search for roots. In the case of Shakir Hasan, there is no sense of sacrifice: where calligraphy ends, painting begins (p. 228).

Franzke (1992) argues that Tapies has influenced many contemporary artists around the world, most recently the German artist Anselm Kiefer. Franzke addresses Tapies' adventures into Eastern philosophy, noting that "Tapies's profound identification with Llull, explicitly expressed in a number of the artist's works, complements his affinity with Far Eastern philosophies, such as *Tao* and *Zen*, in which he recognizes basically comparable phenomena. His studies along these lines, which let to a meditative immersion

in the complex spirituality of Far Eastern wisdom and religiosity and in the art forms to which they gave rise, began at a decisive phase of the young artist's vocation" (p. 17).

Tapies and al-Said find a common ground intellectually and artistically. Both artists are inspired by mysticism and Eastern traditions. Both emphasize the role of intellectualism in painting. While al-Said draws on Islamic mysticism and Arabic calligraphy, Tapies has found in Far Eastern calligraphy richness and fruitful artistic values (see Figure 36). These two artists are concerned with the conditions of human existence in their art, and their art is a reflection of their deep and contemplative inner power.

Finally, through a half century of restless artistic and intellectual search, al-Said has promoted himself as the leading Iraqi artist. I have found in his art and writings great love and care for humanity, no matter how vague or controversial the expression of his ideas may be. These ideas, and particularly his ideas on the letter, which still receive attention in the Arab world, have contributed substantively to contemporary art in Iraq

Summary and Conclusions

Shakir Hasan al-Said joined Jawad Salim in founding the Baghdad Group for Modern Art in 1951. As an artistic and talented writer al-Said has contributed remarkably to this group in particular and Iraqi art in general. The Baghdad Group's first manifesto was written by al-Said. Al-Said continually stressed the important connection between art and culture, and the need to establish contemporary art that embodies spiritual, cultural and social values.

Al-Said demonstrates his further concern with this issue by writing and lecturing on the necessity of art in contemporary Iraqi society. In many ways al-Said has enriched the artistic inquiry into Islamic artistic traditions by calling upon artists to rediscover their own traditions and history. Al-Said's ideas about art are intriguing because they seek a new understanding of art, and they promote bases for art education and art criticism because

they question traditional concepts of art, especially those which limit consideration of art to its formal qualities.

During his career al-Said developed the idea of "The One-Dimension." The main objective of this theory was to provide conceptual support for the use of Arabic script in contemporary painting. The theory emphasizes the mystical, aesthetic and plastic potentialities of the letter as a pure sign. In spite of its abstractness the notion has become popular in Iraq and has also received considerable attention in artistic circles in other Arab countries. The One-Dimension marked a dramatic departure from al-Said's previous decorative and naive style to a new calligraphic abstract painting style.

In his painting al-Said establishes a dialogue between Eastern and Western elements, motifs and techniques. His sensitive images address serious questions concerning human conditions and existence. To al-Said art becomes a true reflection on the inner meaning of life, and that is why he believes that the symbolic depth of art lies in its unique mode of providing pleasure, beauty, and human dimension in our lives.

CHAPTER 9

JAWAD SALIM

Introduction

Jawad Salim is considered by many Iraqi art critics and art historians to be an avant-garde artist and the spiritual father of Iraqi contemporary art. His activities and experiences in the 1940's and 1950's have a particular importance for the Iraqi art movement. In the early 1950's Salim founded the Baghdad Group for Modern Art and focused Iraqi artists' attention on their cultural context. This chapter is devoted to Jawad Salim's art and accomplishments, focusing on his role as a leading artist. This chapter examines Salim's artistic experience as a painter and sculptor, addressing his eclectic methods and providing description and interpretation of his major artworks.

Background

Jawad Salim was born in Ankara, Turkey, in 1919. He enjoyed a pleasant childhood in which he was often exposed to art and art education. Family values, education, and a rich cultural atmosphere were of particular importance in shaping his experiences. Salim was raised in a family of artists: his father Haj Mohammed Salim was an artist; his brothers Saud and Nazar and sister Naziha were well-known artists. Naziha Salim was my painting teacher at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad from 1968-1973.

To define Jawad Salim, one must take into consideration the profound impact of Iraqi culture and history on his vision and art. Western culture and art left powerful

influences on this artist, who studied art in three European countries during World War II. Salim won a scholarship to France to study sculpture in 1938, but his study was interrupted by the war, which forced him to leave Paris for Rome in 1939. When he reached Rome, war broke out in Italy and he was forced to leave Rome, returning to Baghdad in 1940, where he taught sculpture at the Institute of Fine Arts and worked at the Iraqi Museum of Antiquities. At the end of World War II Salim went to London to study sculpture from 1946-49 at the Slade School of Fine Arts, where Henry Moore was teaching. While studying at Slade Salim met Lorna, a British art student who used to study art at Slade. In 1950 Salim and Lorna married and later had two daughters, Zainab and Miriam (Chadirji, 1991).

The importance of Salim lies in his attempts both to intellectualize Iraqi art and to bring it closer to Iraqi people and their culture. As an intellectual artist, Salim enjoyed a short, busy life, making art, reading poetry, and playing music.

Jawad Salim and the Baghdad Group for Modern Art

Shortly after his return from England in 1951, Salim founded the Baghdad Group for Modern Art. In April 1951 Salim delivered a speech during the Baghdad Group's first exhibition, in which he criticized the public's taste and called for a new understanding and appreciation of art:

Where do Baghdadis stand in relation to the artist? Will they find him on Rashid Street? In the public gardens? Take the house: the first thing you notice as you enter is the furniture, expensive and compacted in everywhere. Taste is not important. The furniture is comfortable and the latest model from Beirut. (Oh, how beautiful!) Then you turn your eyes and find pocket romances and the Monday magazine instead of books. You raise your eyes to the walls; what do you see? If they are not bare, then they are decorated with a big picture of the grandfather, and an even bigger one of the head of the household in his youth. When the taste is more elevated, and the head of the household starts to feel the need for "art," then you will find a calendar for the Cadillac company decorated with a pretty girl.... This is the public's taste. (al-Khalil, 1991, p. 78.)

Salim's speech reveals much about how people in Iraq reacted to modern art in the 1950's. In fact, leading artists in the 1950's were challenged in many ways in their attempts to establish a new art movement. Iraq, as was pointed out earlier, lacked a tradition of modern art before World War II, and in the 1950's the new artistic forerunners themselves were battling artistic illiteracy and vulgarity. This was bitterly expressed in Salim's speech: "They want us to paint an apple and write the word 'apple' underneath," he said, "or to paint a sunset on the Tigris and call it 'Sunset'!" (Nazar Salim, 1977, p. 101). Salim addressed the ambiguity and complexity of modern art head-on :

Modern art is in fact the art of our era. Its complexity stems from the complexity of the times in which we live. It tries to express many things; disturbance, fear, imbalance in many areas, massacres and the estrangement of perspective, many things. For example, look at one of the canvases in the exhibition called "A Dog Barking on a Cold Night." See in your imagination the loneliness of the night, the darkness, the cold and then the barking of a dog; this subject is modern, vivid and part of our life. But how can one express these things in a way which will give them an artistic impact? Of course one uses line and color, but to depict this subject photographically would be ridiculous.

Should some ask why domes of mosques are covered with blue tiles, it is because a mosque is a symbol of the spirituality of heaven and no other color than blue can express that.

An artist may be one with his environment and sincere in his expression of it, but he must also know what form his expression should take. (1977, p. 101)

This speech was the first public lecture ever to be made by the members of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art. Their objective was to raise public artistic awareness and to introduce modern art in Iraq. The general public, as well as elitists, were uncertain and confused by modern art. Thus, the Baghdad Group was surely the first art group in Iraq to educate the public about art through public lectures, exhibitions, and writing articles and manifestos.

Painting and Drawing

Salim found his energies divided between painting and sculpture, and believing that this was wasting time, he finally decided to concentrate on one of these forms. It was a difficult decision. In May 1944, Salim wrote:

For the first time in my life I, who had never been a pessimist, was filled with despair. I despaired of the future. I do not want to be a victim of my work. I want to live like other people because I shall die like them. I began to think seriously of my case. The more one ages the more realistic he becomes. I do not want to be like Rossetti dividing his ability between poetry and painting, not knowing which one he masters more. Rossetti lived in an endless state of prosperity and calm. For me, in this era called the 20th century, to dissipate my energy between painting and sculpture is definitely going to lead nowhere. I think of freeing myself from painting one day since I have no doubt it is not the think [sic] I live for. (Gilgamesh, 1987, p. 52)

On October 3, 1945, Salim wrote:

A picture I drew of Hussein, an office boy, gave me a serious idea, that is, I cannot be a painter. This is because I see nothing while my brush does something else. I have come to the conclusion that I cannot see colors as properly as is required of a first-class painter, and I do not want to be mediocre. I think of form and size more than colors. There is besides something strange about me: that I make most effort to give shape to the simplest pieces in sculpture while all the painting is simple to me, whether according to my old or new understanding as far as the paintings I did are concerned. (Gilgamesh, 1987, p. 54)

Salim's concern about his ability as a painter was legitimate and familiar. It happens in all times to many artists. In fact, there is no question about Salim's talent as a painter; he produced many beautiful drawings and paintings. However, his paintings and drawings vary considerably in style and techniques as well as in quality. There are still those Iraqi art critics who believe that the artist is a genius ahead of his time and accordingly still highly value everything that Salim made. But the fact is that some of his drawings and paintings lack the quality and seriousness shown in his sculpture. According to Jabra, Salim faced financial difficulties and so he had to turn out portraits and landscape paintings. These works were not serious and it was obvious that Salim himself was aware of that problem; he used to say, "Paint and Eat," referring to these paintings (Jabra, 1974, p. 49).

Baghdadiyat

Salim was especially known for his paintings and drawings titled *Baghdadiyat* (Of Baghdad), which are decorative works featuring aspects of Iraqi popular life and folk traditions. These flat works incorporate arabesque geometry, traditional architectural decorations, and folk motifs. *Baghdadiyat* includes several paintings and drawings such as *Caliph's Amusement*, *Two Kids Eating Watermelon*, *Street Musicians*, *Siesta*, *A Peasant Woman*, *The Bride and Bridegroom*, *Afternoon Tea*, *The Horse and His Owner*, *Lady of the Gardener*, *Girl with a Bird* and others. These works draw on folk stories and popular life. Like an ethnographer, Salim was driven by excitement and enthusiasm to explore popular life, and by observation and interaction with life and people Salim built a strong relationship with his surroundings. He discovered beauty and richness in crafts and material culture in general. His fascination with the city led him to promote himself as an urban artist; he viewed Baghdad as a lively and beautiful city, a city replete with narrow alleys, palm trees, blue domes, arches, crescents, *shnasheel* (windows), coffee shops, bazaars, crafts, and so on.

Ali (1997) states that "Salim intellectualized folk motifs as symbols to denote an Iraqi artistic identity" (p. 145). Salim produced many beautiful paintings that portrayed folk life in Iraq, but some of his paintings lack a definite message. Consider, for example, his painting *Caliph's Amusement*. The question arises here, what does Salim want to express in his painting? This painting does not represent anything more than a group of female and male musicians amusing the Caliph! However, in the same period Salim produced some excellent paintings, too. His most celebrated drawing, *The Murdered Tree* (see Figure 37), is a watercolor showing two merciless people chopping down a tree. The artist's sister Naziha told Shakir Hassan al-Said (1991) that this drawing was based on a real incident; "One day Jawad came home very angry and his face turned red because of pain. 'What is the matter?' my mother said to him. 'They mercilessly chopped off the tree

as if [one of them] were pulling out a woman's hair,' he answered" (al-Said, 1991, p. 53). According to the artist's sister, what made Salim upset was the fact that this event occurred on Tree Day, a day when people are supposed to celebrate trees and nature.

In addition to painting, Salim produced many drawings from imagination as well as observation. These drawings differ in their style and techniques. For example, Salim's drawing "Koufa" reviews Islamic decorative geometry --squares, triangles, domes, minarets, crescents, arches, windows and doors--and promotes a distinctive regional identity. Salim also drew on tales from The Thousand and One Nights, executing drawings in a Western style with emphasis on eroticism, movement, and composition.

The artist also made drawings from observation in the places that he visited, such as Park Avenue, N.Y., and the Cluny Museum in Paris. These drawings bear no relation to Salim's regional style as embodied in *Baghdadiat*. Yet they are expressive, energetic and demonstrate Salim's mastery of modern Western artistic techniques. Al-Haidari (1985) notes that:

Jawad Salim proceeded to establish a homogeneity between his subject and his expression, in order to distance himself from the styles of preceding artists. He therefore simplified and abridged his colors and lines, intensifying their expressiveness, and he emphasized the dramatic relationship between his spots of color and his shapes. As a result, all that was left from Matisse were his clear colors and his sense for ornament, from Picasso, his drama and the intensity of his response to his subjects, and from Klee and Miro, their spontaneity. These elements he mixed in a single painting with elements which affirmed its local, traditional, and stylistic lineage. (p. 19)

Sculpture

Salim is considered the father of contemporary Iraqi sculpture. As founder of the Department of Sculpture at the Institute of Fine Arts in 1940 and the first teacher of all of today's well-known Iraqi sculptors, Salim was a crucial figure in establishing a solid and dynamic sculpture movement. Iraq and Egypt were the first Arab countries to produce modern sculptures. Historically, both these countries enjoyed rich sculptural traditions

traceable back before Islam and both countries were fortunate to have talented sculptors such as Mohammed Mukhtar and Jawad Salim.

Salim sought to create a distinctive Iraqi style by emphasizing the uniqueness of the Mesopotamian and Arab-Islamic cultural heritage. He learned from Iraqi ancient sculptures particular techniques and methods and borrowed their mythological motifs and symbols, such as the ox and the sun, which he used in a new language to comment on political and social issues. He also stressed the importance of modern art, attempting to achieve an eclectic equation between classical and modern artistic traditions.

In his book Modern Sculpture: A Concise History, Herbert Read (1985) defines eclecticism as “an attitude in art that permits a free choice and combination of styles other than one's own” (p. 43). Salim, like many Iraqi artists, borrowed many elements and motifs from various artistic traditions and amalgamated these qualities in his own artworks. While working on the Freedom Monument in Florence from 1958-1959 Salim realized that he was challenged by the accusation of eclecticism. Jabra (1987) points out that “he had doubts concerning his work: did his sculptures have a unity of style, or were they actually 'eclectic'?” (p. 10). The eclecticism of Salim's approach, as well as his influences, relate to the following; ancient Mesopotamian art, Arab-Islamic traditions, and modern Western art.

To understand how eclecticism functions in Salim's style, one must take into account the artist's own concept of eclecticism. On October 3, 1945, Salim wrote an interesting description of his relief *The Master Builder* and how he developed the idea for this work. Most importantly this diary, like all Salim's diaries, is rich in details and involves a critique of the artist's own work. Writing diaries is not a common practice among Iraqi artists; many important Iraqi artists have died leaving nothing except their artwork. But Salim's diaries give us a view not only of his art but also of the Iraqi art movement in general before 1960. *Master Builder* (See Figure 38) was completed between 1944-1945; when I

enrolled in the Art Institute of Fine Art in 1973 this work was still there. It was my first direct experience with Salim's works. This stone bas-relief remains "painterly" in that it lacks depth, and its strong emphasis on line quality and movement brings this relief closer to painting than to sculpture. On October 3, 1945 the artist wrote :

A few days ago. I finished the execution of the *Master Builder* in which, I hope, I have achieved the thing I looked for.

The idea of doing such work took shape in my mind some years ago. The moment of inspiration came when I saw Taha, the only builder in Iraq involved in doing decorations. He used to work carefully and calmly at the Abbasid Palace. I liked him and admired his way of working and the historical and artistic glory of things he tried to restore.

This scene brought many ideas and images to my mind, so I made direct contacts with master builders and apprentices during the building of my new house. When I was young, I admired the master builder while he was working swiftly, laying one brick on top of the other very carefully. Apprentices used to gather around him while he related some stories he imagined, some events concerning his occupation and his love for his work. (p. 53)

Salim's description of the *Master Builder* provides an excellent example of the artist's method of observation, his attention to detail and information about his own subject matter. It also explains the artist's involvement and interaction with his own cultural context. The *Master Builder* reflects Salim's early artistic and political awareness and response to the surrounding social reality.

In 1946, a year after he completed the *Master Builder*, Salim went to London, at a critical period in the history of modern sculpture. Before the war, modernist artists such as Paul Gauguin, Matisse, Picasso, Henry Moore and others explored other cultures in their search for new values, ideas and inspiration that could help them to break away from academic traditions and formalism. It was natural for the enthusiastic Salim to learn how and why European modernists were influenced by non-Western traditions and primitive cultures.

When Salim arrived in London, Henry Moore had reached a crucial stage in his artistic development, holding a preeminent position in Western modern sculpture. According to Herbert Read (1985), Moore, whose massive sculptures were distinguished

by their vitality, “has been obsessed from the beginning with two or three archetypal themes --the reclining figure, the mother and child, and the family” (p. 83). Read also observes that Moore was influenced by Picasso and Jean Arp and drew on non-Western traditions such as “the art of Babylon, and Sumer, of Egypt and the Aegean, of Mexico and Peru, of Africa and Oceania” (p. 83).

Moore’s sculptures are closely related to the natural and organic world, and they were produced to be a part of their natural settings. Moore’s treatment of subject matter, space and movement had a powerful influence on Salim’s early sculpture in the 1950’s. Like Moore, Salim was obsessed with the figure of the mother and child and made several sculptures, and paintings as well, on the theme of motherhood (See Figure 39). The artist’s unusual relation with his mother may heightened his fascination with this theme (al-Said, 1991). The artist was also very interested in nature, especially animals, and he sculpted several pieces featuring animals such as horses and oxen as well as some mythological animals (Figure 40).

The Unknown Political Prisoner (See Figure 41) brought Salim his first international recognition when it won an international award in London in 1953. It was chosen from among eighty pieces out of 2000 international entries from 56 different countries, and it was displayed at the Tate Gallery in London. The Unknown Political Prisoner Competition was sponsored by the Institute of Contemporary Art in London (ICA). Eminent sculptors such as Alexander Calder, Naum Gabo and others participated in this international competition.

Salim’s *The Unknown Political Prisoner* is a small work constructed of plaster, based on a simple abstract construction. Its importance lies in its suggestive power and symbolism. Salim employed his favored symbols, the crescent and the sun, signifying freedom and hope for unknown political prisoners not only in Iraq but elsewhere. *The Unknown Political Prisoner* differs from all Salim’s other figurative and non-figurative

sculptures in its simplicity as well as its contemporary techniques and theme. In *The Unknown Political Prisoner* Salim established strong ties with current trends in international modern sculpture.

Jawad Salim and al-Wasiti

Salim found a treasure trove of inspiration in Mesopotamian and Arab-Islamic folk art. Here he was motivated by Yahya al-Wasiti (A.D. 1237), whose influence is evident in Salim's painting and drawing. Salim believed that al-Wasiti had been able to develop a distinctively Arab artistic character. Al-Wasiti's illustrations of *Maqamatal-Hariri* remained a major source for Salim's study of Islamic art. From Jabra (1974) we learn that Salim's first encounter with al-Wasiti's works occurred accidentally in 1941, when he found a book that included a few of al-Wasiti's works at the home of his friend, the artist Ata Sabri. Since then, al-Wasiti's influence worked like magic on Salim's consciousness until his death. Jabra further notes that Salim wrote with anger to one of his friends who claimed that Iraq is colorless:

My brother, life is full of colors. Even in the mud of the street there are millions of colors. Look at Yahia al-Wasiti, one of the greatest artists who has appeared in Iraq. The Iraq which you claimed is colorless is the country of palm trees. He immortalized Iraq with his features and colors. Do you remember his picture from the Maqamat of al-Hariri? It is a picture featuring a group of camels. You know very well the camels of Iraq: their color is no more than the color of dust. This great genius has portrayed each camel in a color that blended with the color of the camel next to it. (Jabra, 1974, p. 23)

Al-Wasiti's poetic style, rich coloration, and use of both ornament and Arabic script attracted Salim as they also did Shakir Hasan al-Said, who was likewise searching for a new artistic vocabulary that would reconnect him with his cultural heritage. Many Iraqi art critics still place much importance on al-Wasiti and his significance to contemporary Iraqi art.

Freedom Monument

In 1958 Salim was commissioned by the Iraqi government to design a monument for the revolution. Government officials decided that the monument was to be erected in *Sahatal-Tahrir* (Liberation Square), situated in the center of downtown Baghdad. Bakri (1981) states that Salim "was given complete freedom in the choice of the subject and style to portray the Iraqi Revolution" (p. 87). This is confirmed by Jabra (1987), who states that Salim "was given full freedom to choose his theme and to fashion it in the form he wanted--and the government would finance its execution" (p. 8). However, Bakri's and Jabra's statements contradict recent assertions by Chadirji (1991), who was in charge of the project. Chadirji says that after the design of the monument was approved by the government and Salim traveled to Florence to work on the monument, he learned that the movement requested that a picture of the President, Brigadier General Abdul-Karim Qasim, be included in the monument. Salim was very upset and resisted this idea. Chadirji's recent study reveals important new information about the initial idea of the monument, Chadirji's role in *Freedom Monument*, the government's intervention, and the artist's role. Chadirji reveals that after his idea and design for the monument were approved by the government, he went to Salim's house to discuss the idea of the monument with him and asked him to join in this project:

On the same evening I visited Jawad Salim I presented the initial designs of the 14th of July Monument and I told him, "This is a fifty meters long and ten meters high *lafita* (banner). Are you able to fill it up with a bronze sculpture?" After he meditated a little he said with joy that this is the greatest opportunity in his life and this work will link us with the Assyrians, and it will be the biggest work in Iraq for a long time. Then I informed him that the subject of the composition is the Revolution of 14th July and I asked him to prepare for me an idea about the possibility of filling the panel.

After two days I visited Jawad for the second time to inquire about his idea, but he told me that he did not have a clear idea that he could present. Therefore I said to him that it is important that the relief should be divided into three parts: pre-revolution, the day of the revolution, and after the revolution, on the condition that the army should be represented the day of the revolution at the center of the monument. On the other hand, the pre-revolution should symbolize the preparation for it and the post-revolution should symbolize the expected prosperity, industry

and agriculture. Salim approved the idea and said: "I have now a theme to work on." (p. 99)

According to Chadirji, he developed the idea of the monument from the banners bearing slogans in support of the revolution which declared "Let's make a banner, which will remain hoisted for ever!" (Jabra, 1987, p. 9). The architectural frieze, 50 by 10 meters, derives from ancient Mesopotamian gates.

Chadirji explains that he asked Salim to emphasize the army's role in the revolution in order to get the approval of the military authority, without which the whole project would have been rejected. Salim had many problems in Florence and he was sick. So Chadirji traveled to Florence to assist him. He observed that Salim suffered from severe ill health and stress and worked under extremely hard conditions. He was frustrated by uncertainty and stress, as well as the government's intention to include Qasim's picture in the Monument. Another study by Jabra (1974) also confirms that "his uncertainty and psychological stress disturbed him deeply, as they had done once or twice before, until he broke down completely. As a result he was unable to continue his work and had to spend three months in a sanitarium in Florence. With the help of doctors and the encouragement of his friends, especially Rifat Chadirji and Mohammed Ghani, he recovered his mental stability and emotional control, and in no time he went back to his work with high spirits and added joy and confidence" (Jabar, 1974, p. 10).

Description of the Monument

Nasab al-Hurriyya consists of fourteen separate bronze castings and includes twenty-five human and animal figures (See Figure 42). The monument can be divided into three groups, with each group composed of several figures (See Figures 43, 44, 45). The first group starts from the right end of the panel and extends to the figure of the political prisoner. This group includes a horse bolting in terror, which symbolizes the people's

participation in the revolution. The horse is a potent symbol in Arab culture and history, especially in classical poetry where it symbolizes nobility, power and Arab glory. Jabra (1974) points out that the horse and three figures gathering around symbolize the demonstrations that took place in Baghdad in support of the political events of July 14, 1958. Hundreds of demonstrators and supporters gathered in front of the British embassy and destroyed the statues of the British General Maude. They also smashed the statue of King Faisal near the radio and television broadcasting station in Salihia, a neighborhood of Baghdad. The destruction of these statues demonstrated people's anger and indignation against British colonial rule.

Next to the two strong female and male demonstrators there is a child; it is the only figure cast in three dimensions. The child appears with his feet cut off and is positioned below the six geometric bronze banners. Next to the child are two crying women, who represent martyrdom and motherhood, one of whom is weeping over her martyred son. Beside her are two more women who appear in small size to show their sympathy and sorrow with the bereaved women. Martyrdom is deeply rooted in Iraqi culture and history and can be traced back to Mesopotamian and Arab-Islamic cultural history. Next to the weeping women there is another woman holding her child with love and affection embodying motherhood, Salim's favorite theme.

The second group is located in the center of the monument and consists of four casts. At the center is a soldier with muscular arms destroying the prison bars, liberating the political prisoners and marking a new era of freedom for the Iraqi people. The soldier is approached by a woman carrying a torch as a representation of freedom.

The third group includes a woman and a dove, representing peace and fertility, with two other women carrying palm leaves and seeds represent Iraq's greatest rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates. Diversity in Iraq is represented by the two strong male peasants signifying Arabs and Kurds, the two major ethnic groups in Iraq. Together they hold a

spade with their muscular hands while looking to the future with confidence and determination. Behind these men, an ox appears in the left top corner with its head in a frontal position. The last figure in the panel is also frontal, and is a worker holding a heavy hammer. The peasants and the worker represent industry and agriculture.

Critical Analysis

In *Freedom Monument* Salim incorporated many themes and symbols such as motherhood, martyrdom, dove, horse, ox, sun, and palm leaves, all of which are deeply rooted in Iraqi culture and history. Energized by its historical symbols and motifs, *Freedom Monument* promotes historical continuity, drawing on ancient and contemporary artistic traditions, themes and symbols.

Freedom Monument is influenced by the heroic Assyrian reliefs which portray the endless struggle between the Assyrians and their enemies. The Assyrian reliefs also are famous for their dramatic hunting scenes, full of action. Assyrian artists expressed sympathy with the wounded lions suffering pain and death at the hands of the merciless Assyrian kings and their fighters. A great example of these works is the *Dying Lioness*, c. 650 B.C., a work that Salim particularly admired. In *Dying Lioness* and in most Assyrian reliefs one realizes how Assyrian artists expressed the pain and suffering of the wounded beast. Like the Assyrian sculptors, Salim also exaggerated his figures' arm and leg muscles to emphasize their strength and determination.

One of the symbols in the *Freedom Monument* is the sun rising at the center of the Monument, a symbolic representation of freedom. The sun is an important symbol in Mesopotamian sculpture. In the expressive Akkadian bronze relief the *Stele of King Naram Sin* (2300-2200 B.C.) the sun signifies the victory achieved by the king against his enemies. Salim also borrowed this symbol for his design for the emblem of the Republic of Iraq in 1958.

The ox stands for agriculture in Mesopotamian art. Al-Haidari (1981) asserts that the ox in the Freedom Monument also has something to do with Picasso's ox in *Guernica*:

...the ox at the end of the panel symbolizes fertility and prosperity, just as it symbolizes in its sturdy appearance stability and fortitude. One cannot overlook also the importance of the ox in the life and general welfare of our villages. At the same time the ox in Jawad Salim's panel could have some of the symbolism attaching to the ox in Picasso's famous painting *Guernica*. One critic has seen in the sturdy, defiant appearance of the ox in Picasso's painting a symbol of the courage and steadfastness of the Spanish people. Jawad Salim's panel, very much like Arabic writing, should be followed from right to left. It is found to offer the viewer in epitome a survey of the Arab past and present as well as a picture of the widening screen of the Arab future. (p. 17)

Al-Haidri's argument seems appropriate. Picasso's two-dimensional ox does appear to have some similarities with Salim's three-dimensional ox. They occupy similar positions in the respective works, are frontally posed, and play a like role in the events.

One can adduce further similarities between the two works. For example, the movement of the horse in *Guernica* symbolizes death, terror, and the destruction of the Basque town of Guernica. In addition, the figure of a woman holding her murdered child is another theme that brings these two works closer to each other. There is also a similarity between the crying women in the *Freedom Monument* and the horrified women in *Guernica*; both women are victims of violence. The oil lamp in *Guernica* and the sun in *Freedom Monument* occupy similar positions in both works, although they may have different implications and representations--still, both of them are symbols of energy. Generally speaking, in these two works both Picasso and Salim drew on their local folk traditions.

Al-Samarai (1987) approaches *Freedom Monument* from a literary perspective. He finds that Jawad Salim and the Iraqi poet al-Sayyab have a common ground in terms of their pioneering role in the art and literary movement in Iraq as well as in their use of symbols, signs and motifs. The critic argues that "The symbols in Salim's painting and sculptures and in many of al-Sayyab's poems were based on a focal idea which give their

works 'suggestive power'" (p. 77). The critic states that both Salim and al-Sayyab derived their symbols from Mesopotamian cultural history and human reality. For example, al-Sayyab borrowed symbols such as *Ishtar*, *The Wild Pig*, and *Tammuz* from ancient Iraqi literature. He also drew on themes related to the present such as the *Blind Prostitute*, *Jaikor*, *Bawaib* and others. Al-Samari adds that "Salim's work has diverse aspects. Firstly, it is an absolute value indicating a sharp mind and fertile imagination. Secondly, it relates to ancient Iraqi and Arab art. Thirdly, it is a value associated with a steady psychological search within a nation to assert and firmly establish itself in the world" (p. 77).

Another important factor in *Freedom Monument* is the connection between the artist's tragic death and his work, adding more dramatic dimensions and symbolism to the monument. Weakened by stress, fear, and illness, Salim suffered a heart attack while supervising the installation of his bronze casts on the frieze. He died on January 23, 1961, at age 41, before celebrating the completion of his most famous work.

Summary and Conclusions

Although Jawad Salim lived a short life, Iraqi art critics considered him the spiritual father of Iraq art because of his dynamic role and accomplishments in both sculpture and painting. Salim studied art in Rome, Paris and London at the Slade School of Art from 1946-1949. Salim stressed the necessity of bringing together the best of ancient culture and art and modern art. In other words, he sought equation, balance and interaction between Eastern and Western artistic elements and aesthetics. When Salim founded the Baghdad Group for Modern Art in 1951, his objective was to create what Iraqi art critics described as a distinctive Iraq style that is closely related to Iraqi art, culture and history.

Salim was very fascinated by Iraqi ancient art, folk art and popular culture, as is evident in his painting and sculpture. In them the influence of Islamic art and in particular

that of al-Wasiti is strongly visible. But his sculpture and painting also reveal the influence of Henry Moore and Picasso and other European modernists. Thus, Salim sought an eclectic approach that allowed him to combine various elements and motifs from the past and present and from the East and the West.

Salim created very beautiful sculptures such as the well-known works *The Master Builder*, *The Political Prisoner*, and finally *Nasb al-Hurriyya* [the *Freedom Monument*], a 50-meter long frieze in which he reflected on Iraqi culture and history. in celebration of the Iraqi Revolution¹ of July 14 in 1958. Unfortunately, Salim died while he was still working on the monument. His sudden and tragic death shocked the Iraqi art community and cultural circles in Iraq. The importance of Salim lies in his influence on many Iraqi artists, in particular those who are interested in traditions and folk art.

¹ This was a military coup that ended the monarchy.

CHAPTER 10

COMPARISON OF THE ARTISTS, IMPLICATIONS FOR ART EDUCATION, CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

To examine and define the Eastern influence on these six artists, one needs to compare these artists closely, observing both their differences and their responses to their culture and history, asking such questions as: What kind of values and characteristics do they address in their works? What kind of themes, techniques and materials do they use? Put another way, we can ask whether these six artists promote a single style, what can be defined as an Iraqi national style, or six individual styles.

Style

Before addressing this last question let me make a few comments on what the term style means. Schapiro (1994) writes that "by style is visually meant the content form-- and sometimes the content element, qualities, and expression--in the art of an individual or group. The term is also applied to the whole activity of an individual or society, and in speaking of life style or the style of a civilization" (p. 5). He adds that style

is above all, a system of forms with quality and meaningful expression through which the personality of the artist and the broad outlook of a group are visible. It is also a vehicle of expression within the group, communicating and fixing certain values of religious, social and moral life through the emotional suggestiveness of forms. It is, besides, a common ground against which innovation and the individuality of a particular work may be measured. (p. 51)

He adds that art historians as well as art critics look first at certain values and characteristics that distinguish, say, Islamic art from Buddhist art. Thus, style includes the physical qualities of the form and certain techniques or materials applied by the artist or group of artists. In the case of style one needs to examine what Barret (1992) describes as "family resemblance" within the art works to delineate distinguishing qualities or characteristics of a personal style or the style of a period.

Still, it is difficult to define style in post-modern art because of a tendency toward the dematerialization of the art object. Artworks do not necessarily have physical qualities such as color, shape, or line; rather, an artwork could be an idea or performance or earthwork. Thus, post-modern theories question the traditional definitions of art history, and such traditional issues as originality. In this respect Rees and Borzello (1988) write that:

In discrediting the old art history, words like connoisseurship, quality, style and genius have become taboo, utterable by the new art historians only with scorn or mirth. Such terms, they assert, serve only to obscure whole (old) world assumptions about what is art. The presence of new art history is signaled by a different set of words--ideology, patriarchy, class, methodology, and other terms which betray their origins in the social sciences. Behind them lies a new way of thinking, one which sees art as intimately linked to the society which produced and consumes it, rather than something mysterious which happens as a result of the artist's genius. (p. 5)

From this perspective what is important in examining the works of these six Iraqi artists is to trace how their artworks relate to their social, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts, as well as to the artists' physical environments.

This study has demonstrated that no single style unifies these six artists; although they are contemporaries and familiar with each other's work, they cannot be considered a single group or representatives of a trend. Each has developed his or her own stylistic vocabulary, ideas, and techniques. The artworks of these artists combine Eastern and Western elements; sometimes these elements harmonize with each other, while other times

they clash. Each of these six artists has responded in a distinctive way to this cultural confluence.

For example, the encounter between Eastern and Western elements in Jawad Salim's works is highly apparent. Salim sought what many Iraqi and Arab art critics think is a uniquely Eastern personality. By combining a variety of Eastern motifs and symbols from various sources, Salim achieved an eclectic style open to various cultural influences. One can see in a single artwork of his a panoply of symbols, motifs and signs borrowed from ancient Iraqi art and from Arab-Islamic art combined with other modern motifs. Salim creatively integrated these elements and reinterpreted them by exploring their visual and aesthetic potentialities. Decoration, which is rooted in Islamic art and other Eastern artistic traditions, is significant to his work. This study has identified the following characteristics in his work: decorative geometry, abstraction, repetition, symbolism, exaggeration, and eclecticism. Salim borrowed from sources ranging from ancient Mesopotamian art-- in particular Assyrian sculpture--and Islamic art to local folk art and Western art, in juxtapositions revealing unity as well as conflict.

In addition, Salim was strongly influenced in his drawings and paintings by al-Wasiti. In his fantastic illustration known as *Assemblies (Maqamat)* Al-Wasiti drew on social issues and created imaginative works featuring unmistakably Eastern sensibilities and values. Al-Wasiti's use of color, his method of composition, and his tremendous ability to visualize the literary text seem to have had a great impact on Jawad Salim's decorative works and also on his characterizations of humans, animals and nature. There is a tendency toward abstraction and figuration as well in his works. Seen from this perspective Salim avoided the third dimension in his paintings, which are extremely flat and decorative. Salim's colors are symbolic, suggestive and bright, drawing inspiration from the primitive colors of Iraqi folk art and crafts.

Like Salim, Shakir Hasan al-Said is another leading artist who was also fascinated with local folk art and popular culture; his early works of the 1950's look primitive and simple in their composition and color. In his early paintings al-Said was interested in rural life and social relations. Like Salim, al-Said also derived values and meanings from folk stories such as The One Thousand and Nights. But al-Said, more than Salim, emphasizes spiritual and mystical values, seeking refuge in art as a means to approach God. To al-Said art is a mystical contemplation, and this is evident in his use of religious symbols and themes. Arabic letters seen in his artworks function as intermediaries between God and man and between the artwork itself and the viewer.

Any comparison of these two artists has to recognize that Salim's career was too short, ending in a tragic death in 1961, while al-Said (b. 1925) is still alive and his art has continued to evolve up to the present day. In spite of his short life Salim sent a powerful message through his art and secured for himself a secure position in contemporary art in Iraq and the Middle East. As a leader of a young art movement Salim motivated other artists and led them to rediscover new artistic values. Al-Haidari (1981), who knew Salim well, writes that:

He became, thus, the model for many a young Iraqi artist who used his forms, symbols, and colors, or who sought to imitate him, or to understand his essential quality and succeed in expanding, developing, and formulating his experiments into artistic values important in modern Iraqi art. (p. 20)

Jawad Salim's untimely death did not prevent the Iraqi art movement from moving ahead. Shakir Hasan al-Said took a leading role and in the 1970's he created the theory of the One-Dimension, which injected the art movement with new ideas and concepts that questioned traditional trends and styles. Before the 1970's the Arabic letter was treated as a purely decorative element with no other artistic significance, but al-Said's theory opened up new intellectual grounds for reinterpreting the Arabic letter as a significant element in Islamic art. In practice, al-Said treated the Arabic letter as a unique visual sign with both spiritual and aesthetic qualities. In the process, he departed from his flat and primitive

works of the 1950's to an abstraction in which the Arabic letter remains as a dominant graphic sign. He also introduced new materials which were not previously considered artistic, such as cement and sand, to create paintings inspired by deteriorating walls and streets. As an art critic, al-Said brought in fresh ideas and a new method of interpreting art as a cultural production, emphasizing the role of the art work in its social and cultural context. In his critical method signs and images, including letters, cracks in walls, and scribbles, are reconstructed to provide new meanings. As al-Said establishes a new foundation for the artistic use of the Arabic letter, he also promotes himself as a visionary artist who seeks mystical and spiritual values in a world dominated by materialism and violence. To sum up, Salim and al-Said worked in different styles. Salim's is more decorative, based on figuration and ornamentation, while Said's paintings are characterized by abstraction and signs.

Jawad Salim and Ismail Fattah are the only sculptors among these six artists, although they are also considered painters. The former founded the sculpture movement in Iraq and the latter has emerged as the undisputed foremost sculptor in Iraq and in the Arab world as well. Although Ismail Fattah was a student of Salim and appreciated very much his role as a pioneer sculptor, in fact there is little common ground between these two artists in terms of styles and techniques in either their painting or their sculpting.

Fattah's works are more contemporary and international in their themes, techniques, and imagery, showing no Islamic influence (with the exception of his *Martyr's Monument*). His painting and sculpture are based on figuration in which the human remains a central theme. As a painter, Fattah explores the relation between man and woman, and his painting promotes eroticism, ambiguity, and emotion. Fattah is noted for his mixed media techniques, for applying delicate brush strokes, for employing human elements such as hearts, women's breasts, portraits, and masks juxtaposed against each other, and for treating his painted figures sculpturally by exaggerating form and

proportions. Fattah uses various elements of the human body as decorative elements, and they carry the same significance as the Arabic letter in the works of al-Said or al-Azzawi.

Fattah's compositions are simple in their construction and, since he utilizes a "messy techniques" style, they lack the organization, design, and flatness of, for example, al-Azzawi's paintings. Like his sculptures, the subjects of his paintings are always presented in a frontal position and confront us with wonder and mystery. Iraqi art critic Muzaffar (1987) argues that Fattah "has been concerned with and his cause; therefore he relied on figurative expression in reflecting the human condition which he emphatically portrays in a certain state of anxiety and restlessness" (p. 8).

These six artists all make use of folk culture, but in varying ways. For example, al-Azzawi, whose art is strongly based in folk artistic themes and symbols, has bridged the distance between high art and low art. He shows how folk arts and crafts can still provide a rich source for contemporary art, as he reinterprets folk symbols and narratives to express another reality. He bridges past and present to the extent that a single artwork may have some Assyrian elements, some Islamic motifs, and also employ Western techniques. Maureen Ali (1982) maintains that "to al-Azzawi, the Assyrian, Islamic, Arab and modern elements in a canvas should be indistinguishable or simply felt and appreciated as a single entity. Just as a letter or character is part of a phrase, a word or a poetic phrase or extract should form an integral part of other elements in painting" (n.p.). In his eclectic style, Azzawi emphasizes simplicity and movement in line as well as color. He sees himself as strongly influenced by Sumerian art, and his figures sometimes have Sumerian and Assyrian facial features. At the same time, these figures may be decorated with Arabic calligraphy and other geometric patterns. In short, al-Azzawi emphasizes the following qualities in his painting and drawing: movement and simplicity in line; flatness and lack of three-dimensionality: decoration; bright color; exaggeration of the human body; and repetition. As his more recent work shifts from smooth and flat surfaces to richer, three-

dimensional, decorative and textural painting, he also places more importance on the letter as a major graphic element.

Like al-Azzawi, Madihah Umar also is fascinated with the Arabic letter and she considered herself the first artist in Iraq to use Arabic script in Iraqi modern art. From an early stage she used Arabic letters as decorative elements in her abstract painting, focussing on individual letters through their basic shapes and movement. This means, as she explained to me in 1995, that each letter, like each person, has its own identity and reveals particular qualities that are beautiful to look at. Wijdan Ali (1997) describes Umar's use of letters as follows:

Umar's style wavered between realism and abstraction. She used Arabic characters as the main components of her semi-abstract paintings, transforming them from simple shapes into animated and meaningful figures that embodied certain concepts. By reducing her letters to their basic shapes, she liberated them from the confines of words and transformed them into intellectual and expressive images. Umar saw in her letters perfect forms with dynamic properties that embodied abstract and symbolic meanings as well as particular ideas. (p. 152).

Based on my personal observation, I believe that the Arabic script in Umar's artworks does not derive its visual power or quality from a reading of it as a letter, but is given a visual significance based on graphic sensibilities and qualities, movement, and the construction of the letter as a sign. Her early paintings are very interesting, revealing some surrealist and cubic influence, yet Eastern influences as well. Unfortunately, Umar has produced very few works since the 1940's, for reasons that are not clear.

Umar limited her use of letters to a few individual letters such as ayn, and for her each sign has its own particular personality and represents something in reality. She was not interested in words or phrases as is al-Jumai'i, whose compositions are based on groups of words. Al-Jumai'i is the only artist in this group and perhaps in Iraq to find an inspiration in aluminum as a medium. In his most recent works al-Jumai'i has abandoned aluminum, working mostly on paper, and his composition is based on Arabic script, kufic in particular. Inspired by cuneiform writing, al-Jumai'i expands his artistic inquiry into the

ancient past, borrowing both techniques and historical motifs. He integrates human figures with Arabic script and decorative motifs, and his works promote a feeling of antiquity and nostalgia. However, letters are used not in traditional fashion but with modern techniques, based on design, composition and utilization of the space.

In conclusion, it is obvious that these artists share no one style. Although all are influenced by both Eastern and Western artistic traditions, have sought eclectic styles, and utilized a variety of media and techniques, it is difficult to say that these artists have created what can be described as an Iraqi style or an art school, not least because the very definitions of these terms are not agreed upon by the members of the Iraqi art world, including some of the artists themselves. For example, in response to the above question al-Azzawi dismisses the notion of an Iraqi style in contemporary art as sought by the Baghdad Group for Modern Art in the 1950's. He believes that Iraqi artists in later decades moved beyond this idea, searching for a broader meaning to the idea of national art. As an artist myself, I believe that the new generation of artists is not really concerned with the agenda of the Baghdad Group, not because it is unimportant, but Iraqi artists find themselves in a new reality that is quite different from that of the 1950's. This is confirmed by Iraqi critic May Mudaffar (1989), who writes that:

By the end of the seventies the experience of Iraqi artists expanded into various methods and styles and revealed that large numbers of graduates from the different art schools had kept supplying the movement with energy and dynamism. The eighties that witnessed the tragedy of the Gulf War with Iran were supposed to hinder the progress of art, yet it appears that artists obsessed with death multiplied their work as if with creativity they wanted to make up for the loss of life. Besides the established names, a new generation of artists were born whose works show challenge and cynicism, reminiscent of the German Expressionists. (p. 168)

At most, one might say that their art features strong regional qualities, but not an Iraqi style or a school.

Let us now turn to the cultural significance of these art works. This study regards art as a form of cultural activity, and thus rejected formalism, particularly when studying the art of non-Western cultures. Considering art as a form of cultural production means the

art must have some relationship to and interact with its particular society, rather than existing as a disinterested aesthetic activity. I believe I have established that the creations of these six artists responded energetically to their local cultural contexts, borrowing elements and drawing on cultural issues and values. The artists explored and reinterpreted spiritual and mystical values, folk and mythological stories, political and social themes, and concepts such as motherhood. In their own way, each of these artists emphasizes elements that are common to local culture and regional traditions, values particularity in his or her experience, and celebrates art as a unique cultural phenomenon. By inquiring anew into the folk and popular culture which had been abandoned previously they promote new art forms and aesthetics and challenge traditional canons of art. Their experiments and reflections on them are valuable to both national and international art education because they enhance the multicultural concept.

The Use of Arabic Script

Iraqi artists have explored the artistic possibilities and qualities of Arabic script creatively to promote a new visual language, as well as sometimes theorizing about their reasons and goals for drawing on Arabic script in their art. These artists stress the social and cultural values of Arabic letters as the most distinctive visual sign or element in Islamic artistic traditions. For example, although Madihah Umar uses Arabic letters primarily as decorative elements, she maintains that the use of such letters can express social issues.

Most notably, the visionary artist Shakir Hasan al-Said created the theory called the One-Dimension to explore the mystical and artistic values of Arabic script and thereby establish a new understanding of it. Al-Said, who believes that Arabic script is a unique symbol of Arab and Islamic civilization, asserts that “in our inspiration coming from the letter, we keep alive a realization of contemporary Arabic tradition through borrowing from that mainstream of our culture; the role we play is to lay the foundation of a contemporary

school of Arab art where the main source of inspiration is the letter of the alphabet" (Al-Haidari, 1980, pp. 21-22). Muzaffar (1988) points out that al-Said's belief that letters have divine and mystical qualities is derived from Sufism. For example, he holds that "the letter (*Alef*)¹ is the beginning of the creation; it is also a one dimensional line that moves upward toward the absolute" (p. 10). Al-Said uses Arabic script as a means of mediation and a manifestation of the inner dimension. Al-Said's presentation is abstract, so that a particular letter may be modified or transformed into a graphic form or a mark or a brushstroke.

Al-Azzawi also explores the plastic and visual qualities of the letter but he emphasizes its literary and decorative potential, employing Arabic script to reflect on poetry. In his painting letters are composed as a single visual unit or as a group. Design and color are significant in al-Azzawi's composition; he favors the geometric as well as bright colors in his paintings. Al-Haidri (1981) explains the major difference between these artists in their use of Arabic script:

Diya al-Azzawi takes a completely different view from that of Shakir Hussein. He does not look for a new abstract concept in Arab art. Al-Azzawi refuses to particularize or "atomize," and feels, on the contrary, that the essence of art is to combine various identities into a single identity or various elements into single whole. To al-Azzawi the Assyrian, Islamic, Arab and modern elements in a canvas should be indistinguishable or simply felt and appreciated as a single entity. (p. 25)

Salih al-Jumaili's current paintings also depend heavily on the Arabic script, but his inspirations and execution differ, since he is also influenced by the cuneiform writing system and he emphasizes textuality and history. His recent works, executed on paper, are flat and feature human figures combined with Arabic script, but these figures appear

¹ According to Khatibi and Sijelmassi (1996) the origin of Arabic as revealed in the Quran can be described as a miracle. For example, the letter *alef* as the first letter of alphabet has a mystical significance. These writers hold that Allah created the angels according to the number of letters, so that they should glorify him with an infinite recitation of the Quran. Allah said to them: "Praise Me ! I am Allah, and these is none other but I." The letters prostrated themselves before him, and the first to do so was the alef, whereupon Allah said "You have prostrated yourself to glorify My Majesty. I appoint you to be the first letter of

superficial and do not seem to fit the calligraphic composition. By this I mean that there is no visual connection between the human motifs and the calligraphic signs and elements.

While Arabic script occupies a prominent position in the works of the above-mentioned artists, it remains secondary or even absent in Jawad Salim's and Ismail Fattah's artworks. For example, Salim may use Arabic script to fill in space rather than to express an idea. With this exception, these six artists share some characteristics in their approach to Arabic script. They use letters as a means of visual communication, to promote a fresh artistic vocabulary, and to express religious and social themes, exploring the human dimension in art. They also employ Arabic script as a means of decoration or a design element by focusing on its graphic qualities.

Influence

The influence of these artists on contemporary Iraqi and Arab art is undeniable. The Jordanian art critic Wijdan Ali expresses the view of many Arab art scholars when he asserts that the "Iraqi art movement has a widespread reputation in the Arab world of being the most advanced among Arab modern art movements" (p. 54). Many Iraqi and Arab art critics also note that these artists have brought local traditions to the attention of other Iraqi and Arab artists. In addition, their use of Arabic script has had an impact on the works of many Iraqi and Arab artists. Iraqi sculptors, in particular Jawad Salim and Ismail Fattah, have inspired many other Arab sculptors. Speaking as an artist who participated in many major Arab art exhibitions, I concur with the general assessment that the influence of these artists in particular and Iraqi art in general is visible in art trends in North Africa and in other countries in the eastern part of the Arab world such as Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the Gulf States.

There are several reasons for this influence. First, a large number of Arab art students received training in Iraqi art institutions. Second, in recent decades and in particular during the 1970's Baghdad became a cultural center where major Arab and international exhibitions and art conferences were held, providing opportunities for Iraqi and Arab artists to be directly exposed to the art trends in Iraq. This direct contact was very fruitful, resulting in many further artistic and cultural conferences, symposia, and activities that focused on such issues as the role of art in contemporary Arab societies.

Art Education

One of the most momentous features of Western art theory's move from modernism to post-modernism is the expansion of the established canons to include the art forms of non-Western cultures. This shift involves loosening the traditional adherence to universal criteria for viewing art, criteria which insist, among other things, on highlighting principles of design as bases for interpretation and analysis. Of course, the shortcoming is that this modernist approach denies the weight of the artwork's cultural context, which is arguably as important as its physical qualities. Efland, Freedman and Stuhr (1996) question the modernist universal claim of formalism and argue that:

Modernism has tended to include universalist concepts of art and culture, among which is a reliance on formalistic and expressionistic elements and principles of design as a basis for art. Interpretation based on these elements might help a viewer make determination in a Western sense; it would not reveal what the artifact meant in its culture of origin. (p. 39)

This study has illuminated how insistence on formal criteria not only fails to account for the importance of an artwork within a particular culture, it also cannot acknowledge the way in which beauty and aesthetic standards differ from culture to culture. Islamic artistic traditions stand on their own and must be evaluated based on their significance and function for Muslim society and its cultural interests. When elements of this tradition are appropriated by contemporary artists they may or may not necessarily

retain their original meaning or function if the contemporary artwork is to have some relevance to its own time.

This is not to say that Iraqi art should be viewed simply as an extension of the traditional art of the region. It is true that Iraqi artists and in particular these six artists draw heavily on traditional imagery, but they reinterpret these images and themes, using them to reflect on current issues and present-day social realities. In this respect, I do not see the appearance of traditional imagery in Iraqi art as a revival, as many critics think. But we could say that these artists have discovered something valuable in these elements, whether it is symbolic, artistic, or aesthetic. After all, Western modernist artists such as Paul Klee, Matisse, George Mathieu, Mark Tobey, Antoni Tàpies and others have been inspired by such traditional aspects of Eastern cultures as Arabic calligraphy, suggesting that there is something in these elements themselves that attracts artists of many different cultural backgrounds.

In addressing the role of both traditional and contemporary art in Iraq this study found that the following factors shape the artwork as well as its relationship to its cultural context: the artist's race, religion, sex, age, and geographical location. But generally speaking, the works of contemporary Iraqi artists feature many striking Eastern sensibilities and qualities, which are combined in unique ways with Western styles and forms. This syncretism has become the most distinguishing characteristic of contemporary Iraqi art and gives it a leading role in contemporary art movements in the Middle East.

The study also finds that this shift in Iraqi art from traditional and modernist styles to pluralistic and eclectic trends has been ignored by art education in Iraq because art education is still limited to traditional methods and perspectives such as formalism and modernism. The irony is that while the art curriculum in Iraqi art institutions is based on Western art and aesthetics, little attention is given to Islamic art, and contemporary Arab and Islamic art movements, including Iraqi art itself, are excluded from this curriculum. It

is even more ironic to observe art education in the West shift towards popular culture and the art of non-Western cultures, while art education in Iraq and other Arab and Muslim countries, still loyal to modernity, does not recognize the worth of their own traditions.

This study suggests that art education in Iraq would be best served by responding to these recent advances in global art and art education, and that the following are critical for the reform of art education in Iraq. First is the introduction of non-Western art forms and aesthetics in the art curriculum. This should include courses on folk and traditional arts and crafts as well as courses on contemporary art trends and movements in the Arab and Islamic world. In addition, the artists discussed above have contributed to art and art education in Iraq not only as professional artists but as art educators too. For example, Shakir Hasan al-Said has been very active and innovative as an art critic and art historian, and his writings about Iraqi art remain a major reliable reference for contemporary art in Iraq because of his profound analysis of and involvement in the art movement since the 1940's. Other of these artists also were involved in the art movement and art education in Iraq, founding new groups and publishing on the arts. Unfortunately, because of the state of art education in Iraq their achievements, as well as those of other Iraqi artists, have been ignored by art educators in their own country, who consider only Western art. Inclusion of their works, criticism, analysis, and theorizing is crucial for art education in Iraq.

Second, art education should reflect the existing cultural diversity in Iraq by teaching the ethnic and folk artistic traditions of the country. Third would be a democratization and multiculturalism that would enable all artists, art educators, and people the right to express themselves artistically. Fourth, art education should go beyond formalism and modernism and adopt more eclectic approaches to meet the growing needs of a diverse Iraqi society. Fifth, art education should be based on an interpretation of art as a cultural form that is closely related to its social and cultural contexts.

APPENDIX A
SHAKIR HASAN AL-SAID'S LETTER

Letter from artist Shakir Hasan al-Said responding to my questions (see Chapter 8).

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

My Brother Professor Muhammed:

Thank you for consulting me concerning your research in art. I wish you much healthy success. As you know you are qualified for fruitful inquiry, are efficient, and are capable of accomplishing what any sincere Iraqi can achieve on a cultural, human and world level.

You ask me, "Is there any relationship between my artwork and critical methodology?" The answer is no, not at all. Certainly, you know that every artist has his own vision or artistic perspective and of course it is unlike the ideology, because it brings together a connection between the thought and existence (or between the ideology and the utopia). In general, every artist starts his artistic "consciousness" by discovering his own vocabulary and means from a zero point. He is different [from the scientist] because he [the scientist] is not an accumulator or is he inspired. As far as he is concerned he must have a methodology that he feels along his journey. Say that the work of any artist cannot be judged if we do

not examine chronologically his development from the start to the end. Thus, the relationship between my artwork and my critical methodology is a relationship [of continuous examination] every aware artist should achieve. In other words, every artist is a creator [builder] or evaluator [critic]. As concerning me individually as a practitioner [of criticism] in addition to painting, I do not criticize myself only, but I try to evaluate the works of others, too. Thus, in such criticism I have to be for the other [objective] and not for the self [subjective]; however, my artistic vision in painting should have some link with my vision in criticism, but not with the nature of methodology but with the vision. Undoubtedly, my vision as a painter is different from my vision as a critic, for the constructive [act] in painting is not the analytic [act] in criticism.

The “one-dimension”: it is a vision, attitude and method at once. As [a vision] it represents my relation to this world or to the other. And from this perspective, the one-dimension is a matter that is concerned with the question of *ab'ad* [dimensions]. How do I deal with the dimensions in the pictorial surface? And why I have chosen to be interested in the [one-dimension] in its relation to the two-dimensional or pictorial surface? These questions, or these two questions, represent the position of the plastic artist or the painter, in particular in addressing the question of *ba'd* [the invisible dimension] and *ba'd huddari* [the present dimension] in art. The question is whether it is enough for me to paint using two dimensions on a two-dimensional surface and let this be the present dimension in painting, or should I try to use what is *ghaybi* [illusive], which is the third dimensional in figurative painting and one dimension in post-abstract painting, as in my case? Thus, my position concerning the one-dimension is that of a man who does not paint to represent the visible only, but also paints to represent the invisible as part of the expression or realization and search for the truth. Finally, the one-

dimension is a method to be used if you were tied to “three dimensions” in the visual world. I have to rediscover [the one-dimension] as a means to access the invisible; thus, the intellectual and esthetic necessities lie in such rediscovery/discovery: the rediscovery/beauty/thought which are preexisting. By past existence, I mean *azali* (eternal), what has been veiled by the relativity of the human attitude toward the world. And so beauty and thought have had their own existence ever since eternity (*azal*) and they will continue to remain in such existence forever. There is no beautiful and ugly because such distinctions are a relative matter, yet there are the absolute beauty and the thought which are unlisted by any limitations, and the approach toward that requires that they be discovered as much as being conditioned by the ambition of the researcher or what he has been able to attain of knowledge, then and now in a particular time and place.

As for the letter with regard to its symbolic value [or semiotic] and esthetic value. The value of the letter is to add techniques to the atmosphere of the picture [within the inquiry into the meaning of the one-dimension]. And as you know, the letter belongs to the world of language. On the other hand, the treatment of the pictorial surface belongs to the world of wall or earth or the surface of paper..., etc. Thus, my exceeding of the surface [two-dimensions] by calligraphic collage and by writing letters on a line which is basically one-dimensional. Herein lies its aesthetic and textual value [calligraphic].

Y

مشارك في مستقباتي هذا بعض المفاصم والمصالح الفقهية في بيان
حكمكم في الفتي وأنتي لكم وأمر الصلوة والتوفيق. والله كما أعلم هل
للمسح للسر وعلى أنتي أمقدر لا يخاف ما يستطيع أي عرائس عبيد
أجلاء على الصلوة الثقافية والأبني على الصلوة العالي.

ناتى من هذه علاقة بين محلى الفنى ومزاجى النظام، والجواب هو:-

النظر الواحد : رؤية موصف ومعلم في نفس الوقت.

تَشَوُّعُ (دُرُودِیَج) لِلَّهِ بِمَنْ عِلَاقَتِیْ اَنَا الَّذِیْتُ بِالْعَالَمِ اَوْ بِالْاَخَرِ

وَقُلْ هَلْ مِنْكُمْ مَنْ يَمْلِكُ الْقِيَامَ بِالسَّاعَةِ

في انظر التصوري ١٢ وماذا احدثت الامم من

الواجب من حيث علاقته بالمعدوس (المعدوس له واجب من حيث علاقته بالمعدوس)

فصل في معرفة (أمر وانكماش) الإله (يملأ) موقعه

— انشكبا على الرسام على الاخص مصنفات (او نزلة) من النظم

الحبيبي راجد الحضور كرم الله (هو) البقي يا محمد بن

سَلَامٌ عَلَى سَائِرِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَآلِهِمْ وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ أجمعين (وهو الصلوة التي هي من آيات القرآن)

سأشخصه في السعد الواحد في الرسم فابعد الشكر يدك يا هذا الخيال و

اما العالم فان سكرانی

لإنسانية أو أخيراً القرن تجسّد لوجوده أو أي القرن .. أو نقل بعض
 آثر متروكاً :- ان (بالتكليف) الثقافة الفنية التشكيلية و سراج
 يفرض التساوي بين الفكر والوجود (د الثقافة والطبيعة) ونحن
 منذ منذ نصف القرن اكتشفنا أهمية هذا الفكر (ولكن في حالة
 أخرى لا بعد نزاعاً إقليمية للتمييز بينها (فما بعد الحداثة) هو
 مفهوم كمن هذا (اللا- تمييز) . دلجة العليا التشكيلية أقول :-
 ان الفن ما بعد التجريد هو أيضاً فن ما بعد تشخيصه . ففي
 هذا هذا الاعتقاد بين التجريد والتشخيص يتم التجريد
 الفكر (الثقافة المعقنة) كما يتم الاضمار لها في نفس الوقت .

فن السحاب في العراق :-
 نرى أي ان فن السحاب انتهى في العراق ...
 (سحاب ما بعد الحرب) استطاع وضعه كونه (ما بعد
 هذا شيء) لولا انه يعاين (مما حوت) أنه في حدود
 النابض من حادثي الواقع الاستعارة (أي كونه مبرراً)
 (خاصة بغياب الاقتصاد والسيطرة)
 فن السحاب في العراق اليوم (فلا فرق) خبره بالبحث
 وضوء (سحاب فن ما بعد الحداثة) وهو
 هذا الفن صائراً لأن يصح من (ما قبل التجريد)
 أي ما قبل (ما بعد الحداثة) وهو أيضاً (ما بعد ما
 بعد الحداثة) . فكذلكه الرغبت ان منطقاً ما قبل - هذا شيء [
 لا زال يعني هذا الاتجاه اصلاً جيداً للنقد ؟
 لأن النقد ليزال دون هذا الاهتمام : او نقل ان
 النقد المعنى وفي كل العالم هو الميعوم دون الابداع [يعني
 ان سلطة النقد لا تسمح باندياعات الفنان . ذلك
 الذي يحاول ان مثل سلطة النقاد التشكيلية في نفسه في
 عصرنا [التشكيلية هي صديقاً ما بعد - تكليفيه] .
 الاساس الفلني والتجريد لمناجى التقى تحت صفة
 اني ابني لدرس التشكيلية في النقد المعاصر (وبالضبط
 المدرس المصنوعه (يقتازم) ومقادها ان أكون
 محلاً للعمل الفني وضوء اللا- ربحانية
 وتعوده فندياً لهذا الفنان من فنان (المدرس
 استلح) .. مثلاً : [هواد سليم كما سجد تقدي
 لهذا الفني في كتاب مقالات في النظر والنقد الفني]

APPENDIX B
DIYA AL-AZZAWI'S LETTER

AZZAWI

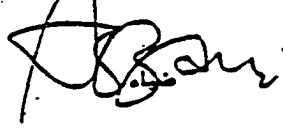
187 Darvaz Rd. Palmers Green - London N13 4QA
123 A. Smith Lane - London NW10 6AH UK

٢ تموز ١٩٩٥

الاخ محمد .

سلامات

أرسل اليك الاجابة على بعض الاسئلة . املا ان تكون مفيدة لك مع الاجوبة كتاب شاكر مع دليل ممارضي
الاشهرة . لسمع اخبارك بظهر .



Brother Mohammed

July 2, 1995

Greetings:

I send to you the answers to some of the questions. I wish they will be useful for you.
With the answers I send the book of Shakir with my recent exhibition's catalog. Look
forward to hearing from you.

Diya

١ . لعل أبرز ما ميّز الحركة الفنية هو اهتمامها منذ البدايات في إشكاليات ذات علاقة بالنظام الاجتماعي والسياسي ، أي أن تطوير خصوصيتها بأبحاث متنوعة ، لعل أهمها ، بالنسبة لي ، هو تلك الأبحاث التي طالت الموروث الحضاري للمراق دون أن تتمزّل عن الحاضر الفني المحلي ، مما جعلها في موقف متأزم ناتج عن البحث المستمر لاكتشاف نظم الأفكار والإشارات التي تسعد على تحقيق الهوية الفنية ليس بمعناها الفولكلوري بل بكونها جزء من الأبحاث المحلية التي غالباً ما جعلها تنهب إلى ثقافات وحضارات مقاييرة عنها ، لذا أجد مثلاً الكثير من التواضع في البحث البصري بين الأمريكي (Adolph Gottlieb) في الأربعينات وبين حواد سليم في بداية الخمسينات . (١) حيث كلاهما ذهباً إلى الأسطورة كموروث لتحقيق انتماءات معاصرة حقاً .

٢ . لا يعكس الفن في المراق التقاليد الثقافية والحضارية المربية إلا في بعضه ، وحتى هذا البعض لا زال مشروعا غير متكامل بالمعنى الفني الجاد ، إن بعض فناني جماعة بغداد وهم تحديدًا ، حواد سليم وشاكر حسن وبعض تجارب خالد الرحال ، إلى جانب مساهمات من فنّانين خارج الجماعة مثل كاظم حيدر ، اسماعيل فتاح قد قللت بشكل ما إلى تأسيس ملامح لها مرجعية واضحة بالموروث إلا أنها مرجعية منفتحة تأخذ بمنحى الاعتبار أن العمل الفني هو نتاج ينبغي لنتماه في النهاية إلى المورث الإنساني .

٤ . بالنسبة للحركة الفنية المربية عموماً لا بد وأن تنجم علاقة ما مع الموروث والتقاليد الحضارية ، لأنها وسيلة في تحقيق التراكم المعرفي الذي هو في النهاية المعادل للكثير من الإنجازات والتجارب في الفن المحلي الحديث ، أتني لا أعتقد بأن الفن اكتشاف بالمعنى العلمي ، بل هو تراكم ثقافي ومعرفي واسع يتخذ من المورث الإنساني مصدراً للتطوير والإبداع .

٥ . الفن التقليدي هو نتاج فني يلائم تقاليد الإنتاج التي ينتمي له ، وهو بهذا محلي ومنفلق على قيم وأفكار تلك المجتمع .

٦ . لا أعتقد أن الجانب الزخرفي هو القيمة المطلقة للتقاليد الفنية المربية ، إذ هناك مغزون هائل يتبدى في العديد من الاتجايزات الفنية ، خاصة ونحن نعلم إن هذه التقاليد لها امتداداتها في الفن الإسلامي الذي حقق لهم إنجاز على الصعيد الإبلاغي الإنساني عندما دعى وعمل على إعطاء قيمة العمل الفني لذاته وليس لكونه رسم لما هو مشاهد .

٨ . ذلك تعبير دعاء الفن المحلي ، بالنسبة لي لا تمنيني تلك التهدييات ، لأنني أجد أن القيمة الإبداعية هو خصوصية قائمة على تقاليد ثقافية واجتماعية خاصة ، أن قدرتي على الاطلاع والتعرف على الثقافات الأخرى لا يعني بأنني لا أختلف في مفهومي للعديد من عناصر الحياة اليومية ، إن مشاهدة قناة ال CNN الأمريكية وصيغاتها الإخبارية لا تمنيني ما تتميز به ال BBC البريطانية وكلاهما لا يلفهان معرفتي وتكويني الثقافي العربي . أن عقلية الأكل السريع وشيوع النموذج وباسماء متنوعة نتيجة تنوع اللغات لا يمكن أن تأخذ حيزها في النشاط الفني والثقافي ، إذ لا زال هناك رسماً مثل دي كوتك الأمريكي والتقاليد والنمط كغير الألماني المهوس

١ . الأسلوب هو وسيلة لمشاهدة الأشياء المحيطة من جهة ، والقدرة على تحقيقها كماله مستقل في حضورها البصري والفني . لما من التلاحية الفكرية فهو ارتباط ذهني يمتد طاقا الاحساس بالفرديات البصرية والثقافية التي تهم الفنان او تدخل ضمن مكونات عله الفني .

٢ . أسلوب الفني يتشكل عبر جمع بين للفرديات الحية لموروثا الثقافي القومي والوطني سواء كان ذلك اشكالا او نظام افكار وبين الانتقاه الثقافي العالمي ، ومن هنا تبدو للفرديات الثقافية والبصرية (المحلية بمفهومها القومي او الوطني) قائمة وفعالة بمقدار كونها جزء من التراث الانساني بمفهومه العالمي ، انه تقاطع الثقافات التي تحولت بفعل التطور الهائل لوسائل الاتصال السلمي والبصري ، بتولوا انسانية تدل على الخصوصية المحلية وبنفس الوقت تفتح رحاب العقل الانساني على غنى متنوع ومثير .

٣ . يعود توجهي الفني للموروث الثقافي المراقي بالذات مع بدايات دراستي لعلم الآثار في جامعة بغداد ، ومن ثم عملي لسنوات في هذا الحقل مما جعلني قريبا جدا مع اهم الانجازات الفنية على الصعيد التاريخي للحضارة الانسانية ، لثرتني تلك الاعمال عبر تفردها وتميزها مما كان يعطيها من حضارات ، وعندما بدأت اجمع بين معرفة الآثار ثقافيا وعلميا وبين دراسة الفن ، تولد لدي الاحساس بضرورة التميز على الصعيد الشخصي مما جعلني اذهب الى اقرب المصادر الفنية لي وهو تاريخ الفن المراقي .

٤ . ليس هناك أسلوب وطني للفن العراقي ، هناك محاولات تأسيسية في الخمسينات لها مرجعية فنية في الحركات العلية لسنوات ماضية ، أي أن انجازاتها لم تكن معاصرة لما كان يحدث عليها خاصة المتأثرين بالدراسة الفرنسية أو الإيطالية ، بنفس الوقت باستاء جواد سليم وشاكر حسن ومعمود صبري وكاظم حيدر كانت أكثر المحاولات هو تزيين للتكوين الأكاديمي المحافظ ، حيث كان البحث عن الأسلوب معزولا عن المفهوم العلم للفن . فيما بعد أخذت الحركة بالتحسب مفهوما وتقنية ، وصار شعار جملة بغداد (نعو فن عراقي) الذي كان مثيراً في الخمسينات شعارا معليا سرعان ما تجاوزت الفئتين بعد منتصف الستينات كإنجازات فنية وحضور على الصعيد المراقي والمصري . ولعل هذا التجاوز من اهم التحولات الفنية التي أغنت التجربة المراقية بما قسمته للفنان المراقي من امتداد رحب للتقاليد الثقافية والفنية العربية ، وبنفس الوقت جعلت من المفهوم الثقافي والفني مفهوما منفتحا ومعني بعوار الثقافات الذي له بعد معرفي إنساني .

٥ . لايمكن لي أن أكون فنانا ذات امعالا عليية بدون انتمائي المصري والمراقي . ليس ذلك كلاما عن الجغرافية بل هو تحديد للمؤثرات او المرجعية الفنية كدالات ابداعية .

٦ . هو في محاولاتها على الخصوصية الفنية والفكرية التي لها مرجعية متنوعة الابعاد في البناء الاجتماعي والثقافي وليس ضروريا أن تكون هذه المرجعية ذات علاقة بالتاريخ القومي والوطني . المهم أن تأخذ الحركة الفنية جانب التجريب والانتماء الى هذا المصيريس كتاج يكرر ما هو منتج بل في طاقة الاكتشاف والتعرف على ما هو معرض على المفامرة الفنية .

APPENDIX C

STUDENT'S RESPONSE TO A PRESENTATION ON CONTEMPORARY ARAB ART

The Ohio State University
The Department of Near Eastern, Judaic,
and Hellenic Languages and
Literatures

Contemporary Arab Art
Lecturer: Mohammed Al-Sadoun

Student's Name: Brett Heisab
Date: 2/5/1996

I am very interested to have your opinion about contemporary and art forms, art tendencies in the Arab world. Since recent development in contemporary Arab art remains invisible to the Western world in particular in the U.S. I hope that my presentation will bring to your attention the present condition of art in the Arab World. Based on what you have experienced and learnt, please answer the following question:

Question: What are the major characteristics, approaches as well as trends in contemporary Arab art? Please answer the question by focusing on basic values, expressive qualities, sensibilities and techniques that mostly have drawn your attention.

Answer: Arab art is much more abstract than western art. There is a lot more use of language itself as art. For example American signs are extremely clear, whereas the Arab art uses the written language in a very beautiful, sensory way. I enjoyed looking at the smooth flowing aspect of some of the written art.

APPENDIX D

STUDENT'S RESPONSE TO A PRESENTATION
ON CONTEMPORARY ARAB ART

The Ohio State University
The Department of Near Eastern, Judaic,
and Hellenic Languages and
Literatures

Contemporary Arab Art
Lecturer: Mohammed Al-Sadoun

Student's Name: ARMY M. ARNOLD
Date: 2/5/1996

I am very interested to have your opinion about contemporary and art forms, art tendencies in the Arab world. Since recent development in contemporary Arab art remains invisible to the Western world in particular in the U.S. I hope that my presentation will bring to your attention the present condition of art in the Arab World. Based on what you have experienced and learnt, please answer the following question:

Question: What are the major characteristics, approaches as well as trends in contemporary Arab art? Please answer the question by focusing on basic values, expressive qualities, sensibilities and techniques that mostly have drawn your attention.

Answer:

Arab art seems to focus around religious themes. The themes are expressed through religious words written in elegant calligraphy form mixed with color washes and detail designs. I believe the Arab art would have been more meaningful to me, if I could read Arabic or understood Arabic letter form.

APPENDIX E

STUDENT'S RESPONSE TO A PRESENTATION
ON CONTEMPORARY ARAB ART

The Ohio State University
The Department of Near Eastern, Judaic,
and Hellenic Languages and
Literatures

Contemporary Arab Art
Lecturer: Mohammed Al-Sadoun

Student's Name: Wendy Beaton
Date: 2/5/1996

I am very interested to have your opinion about contemporary and art forms, art tendencies in the Arab world. Since recent development in contemporary Arab art remains invisible to the Western world in particular in the U.S. I hope that my presentation will bring to your attention the present condition of art in the Arab World. Based on what you have experienced and learnt, please answer the following question:

Question: What are the major characteristics, approaches as well as trends in contemporary Arab art? Please answer the question by focusing on basic values, expressive qualities, sensibilities and techniques that mostly have drawn your attention.

Answer:

I think that the contemporary Arab art that you showed us was very interesting. I have never really been exposed to Arab art before, so this was a wonderful opportunity for me. I really enjoyed seeing how many Arab artists incorporate the Arabic letters in their art. The use of repetition and bright colors to express their art was very well done.

FIGURES



Figure 1. Illustration from the *Assemblies* of Hariri by al-Wasiti (Iraq, 13th C)

Note. From "Libraries in Arab history: A passion for books" by Stone, C., 1984, Ur, pp. 39- 43.



Figure 2. A Bismillah by Ibn al-Bawwab (d.413/1022), with enlarged detail

Note. From *The Splendor of Islamic Calligraphy* (pp. 116-117) by Khatibi, A. and Sijelmassi, M., 1996, New York: Thames and Hudson.



Figure 3. A Bismillah by al-Qandusi (19th century)

Notes. From The Splendor of Islamic Calligraphy (p. 144) by Khatibi, A., and Sijelmassi, M., 1996, New York: Thames and Hudson.

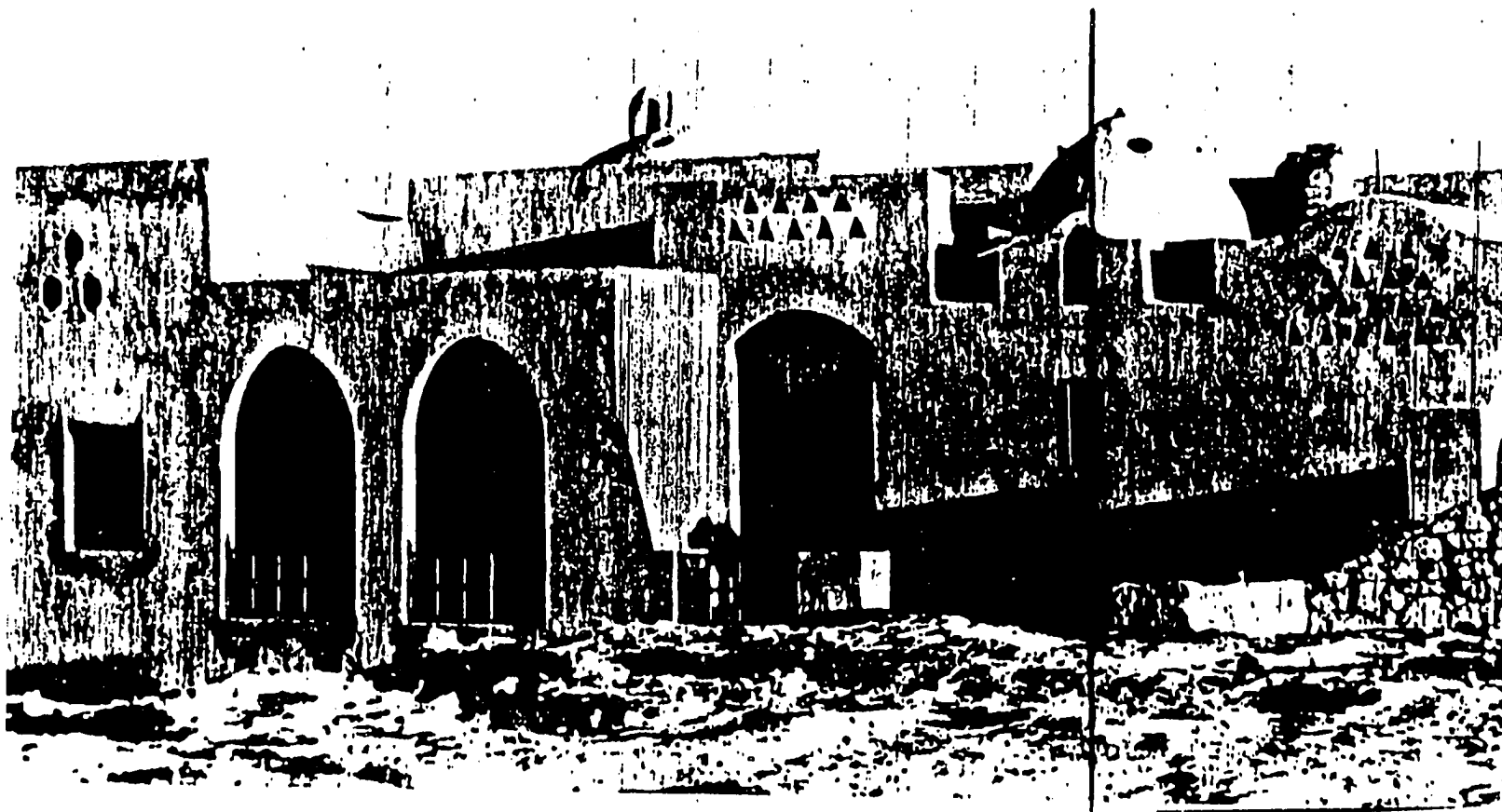


Figure 4. Hasan Fathi, Gurna Village
Note. From Ur, 1, 1982 .

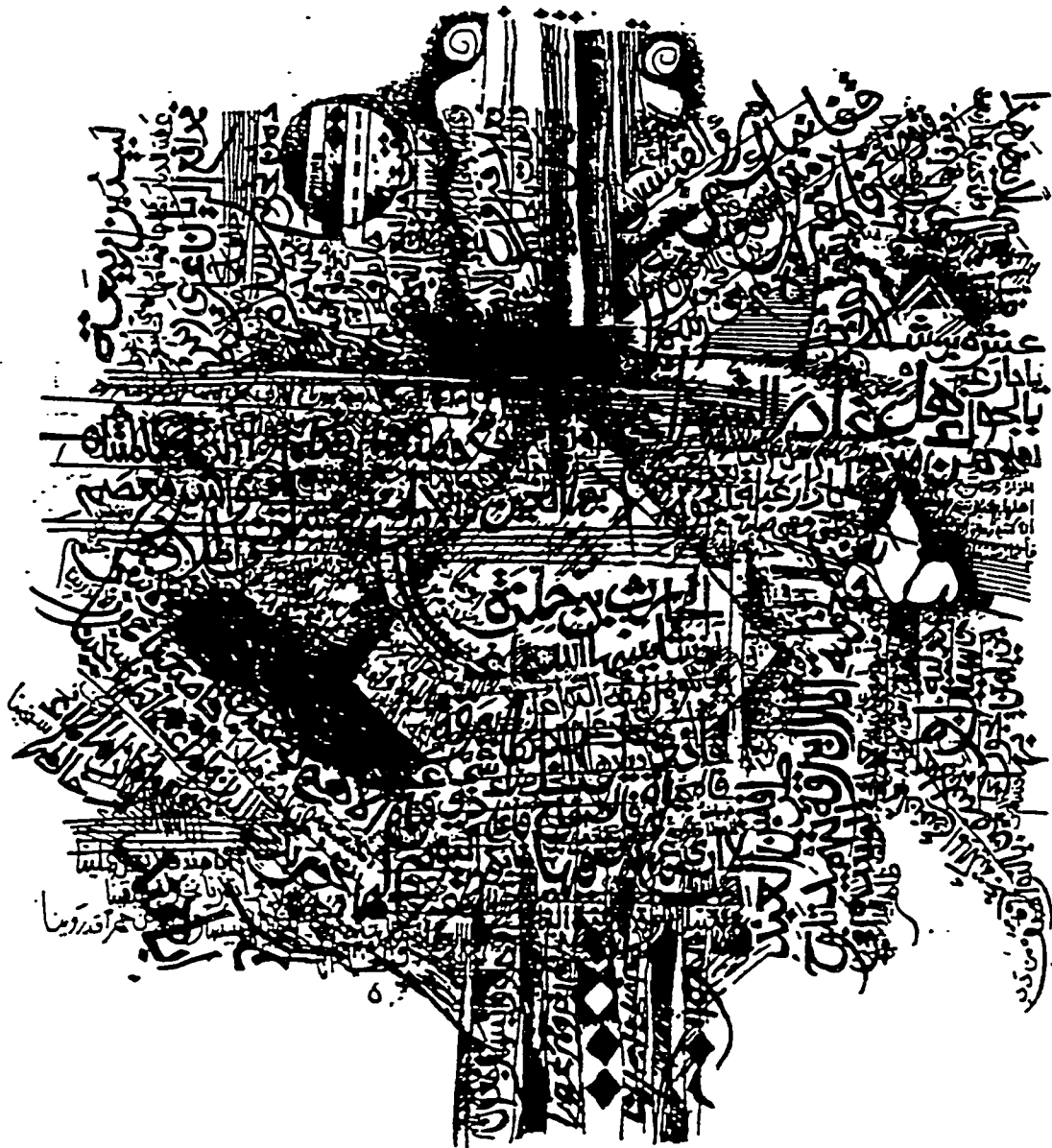


Figure 5. Diya al-Azzawi, *Introduction to the Seven Odes*, 1978, silkscreen print, 43 1/8 x 31 1/8 in.

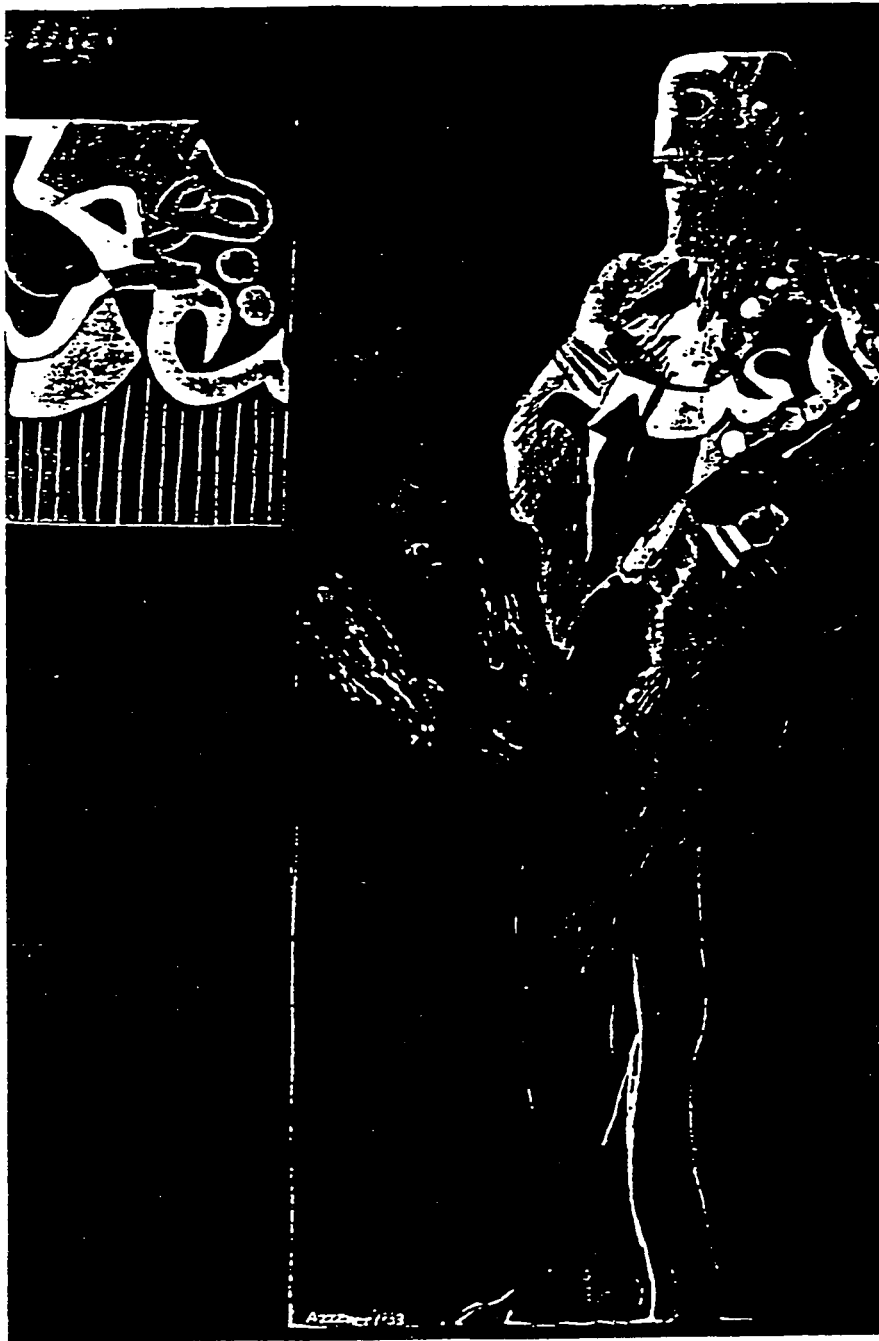


Figure 6. Diya al-Azzawi, *What Al-Niffari Said to Abdullah No. 4*, 1984, Gouache on Paper. 44 in x 30 in (112 x 76 cm)

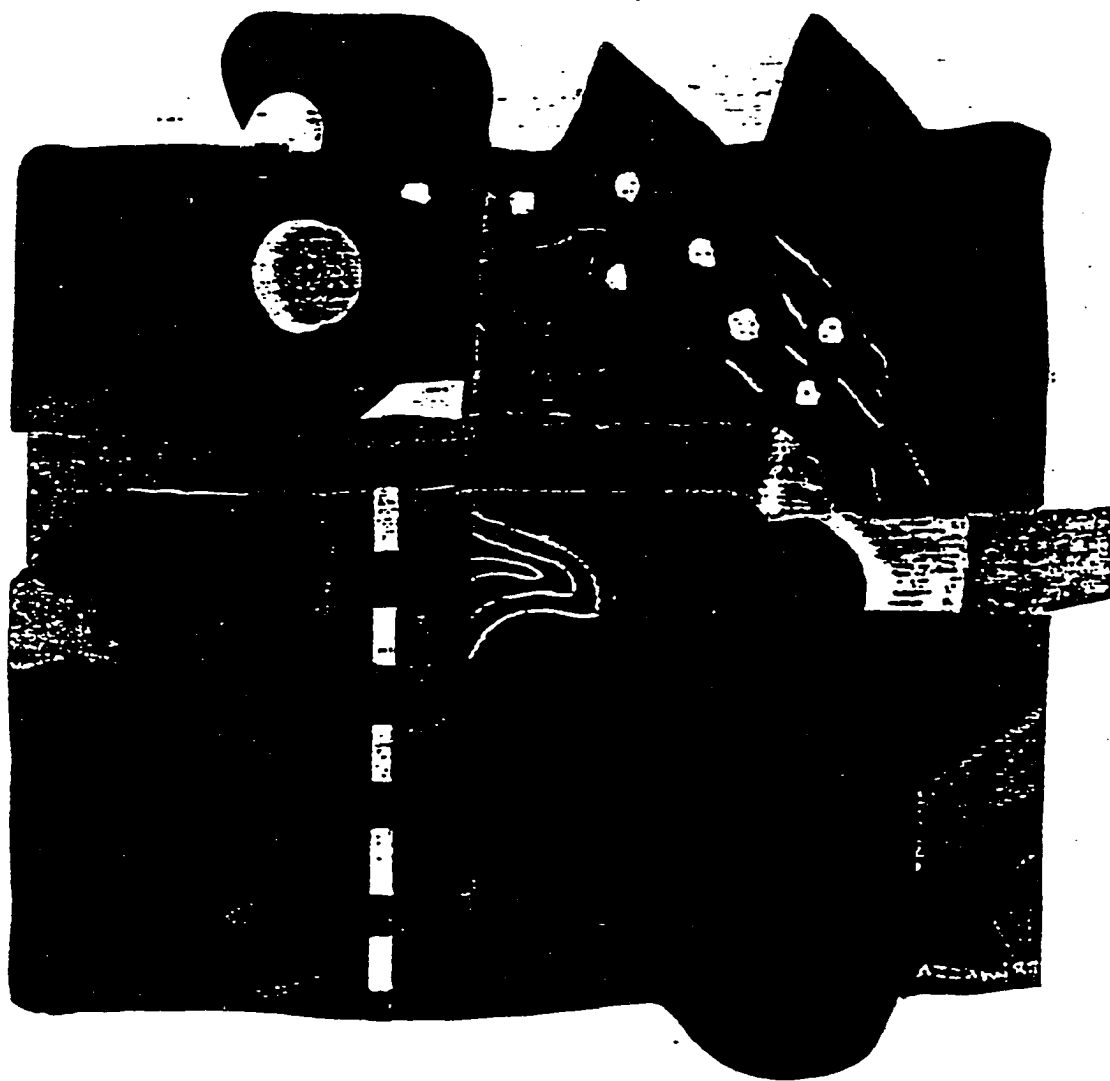


Figure 7. Diya al-Azzawi, *Oriental Window No. 1*, Acrylic Goldleaf on Wood, 24 x 24 1/2 in (62 x 63 cm), 1983

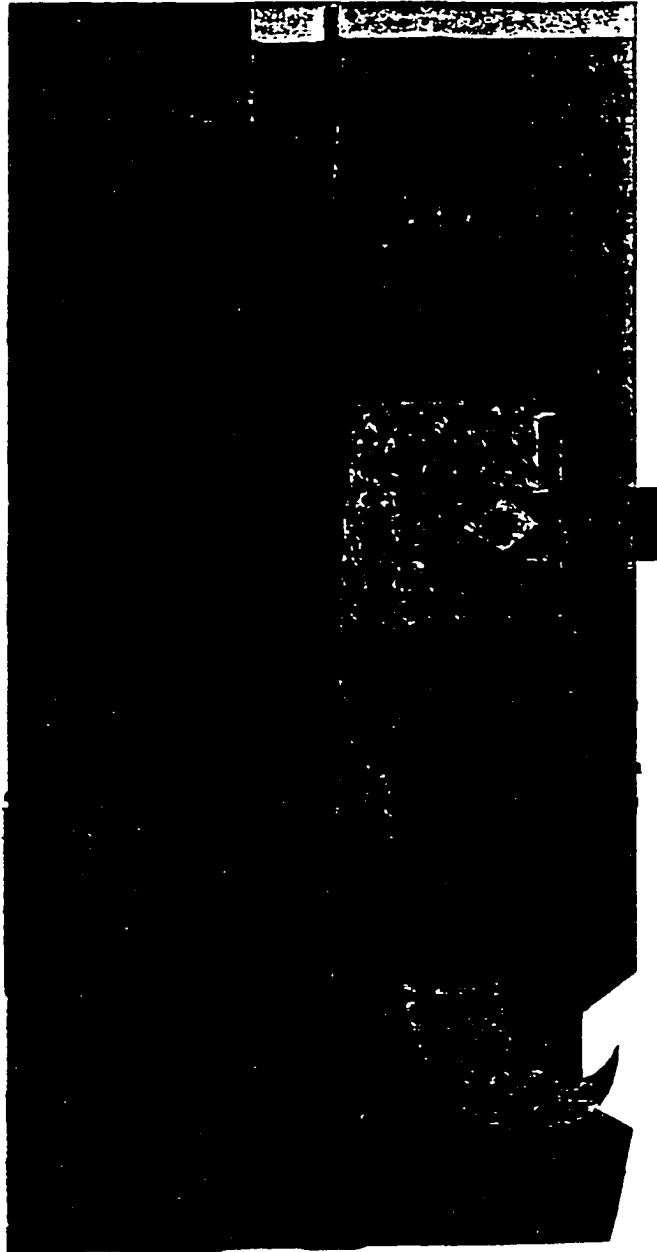


Figure 8. Diya al-Azzawi, *Old Baghdadi Door*, 1983, Acrylic on Wood, 84 1/2 x 24 1/4 in (123 x 63 cm), 1983

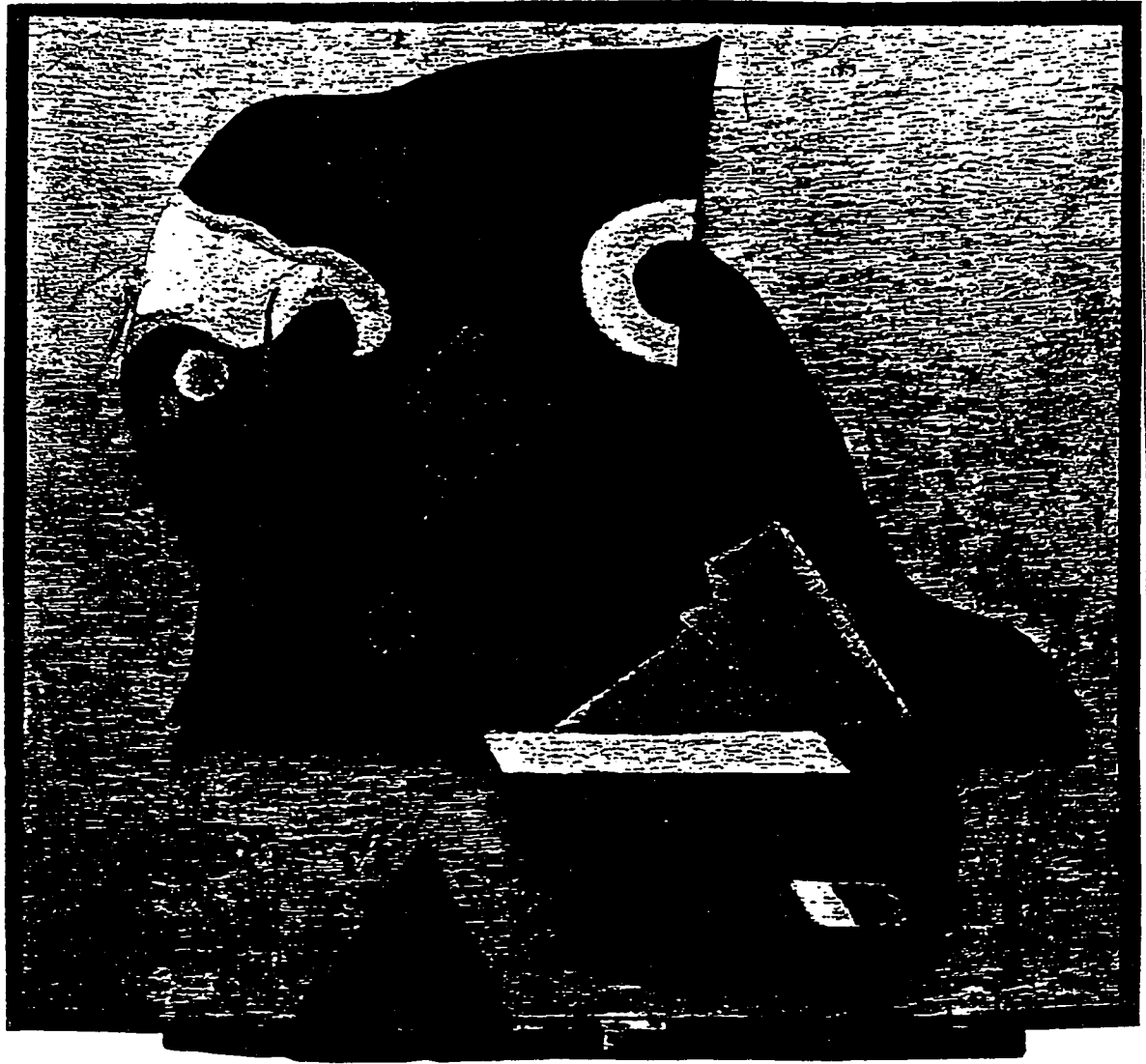


Figure 9. Diya al-Azzawi, *Enkidue Mask*, Acrylic and Goldleaf on Wood, 1985, 45 cm x 45 cm



Figure 10. Diya al-Azzawi, *Calligraphic Scene*, Acrylic on Canvas, 90 x 80 cm, 1984

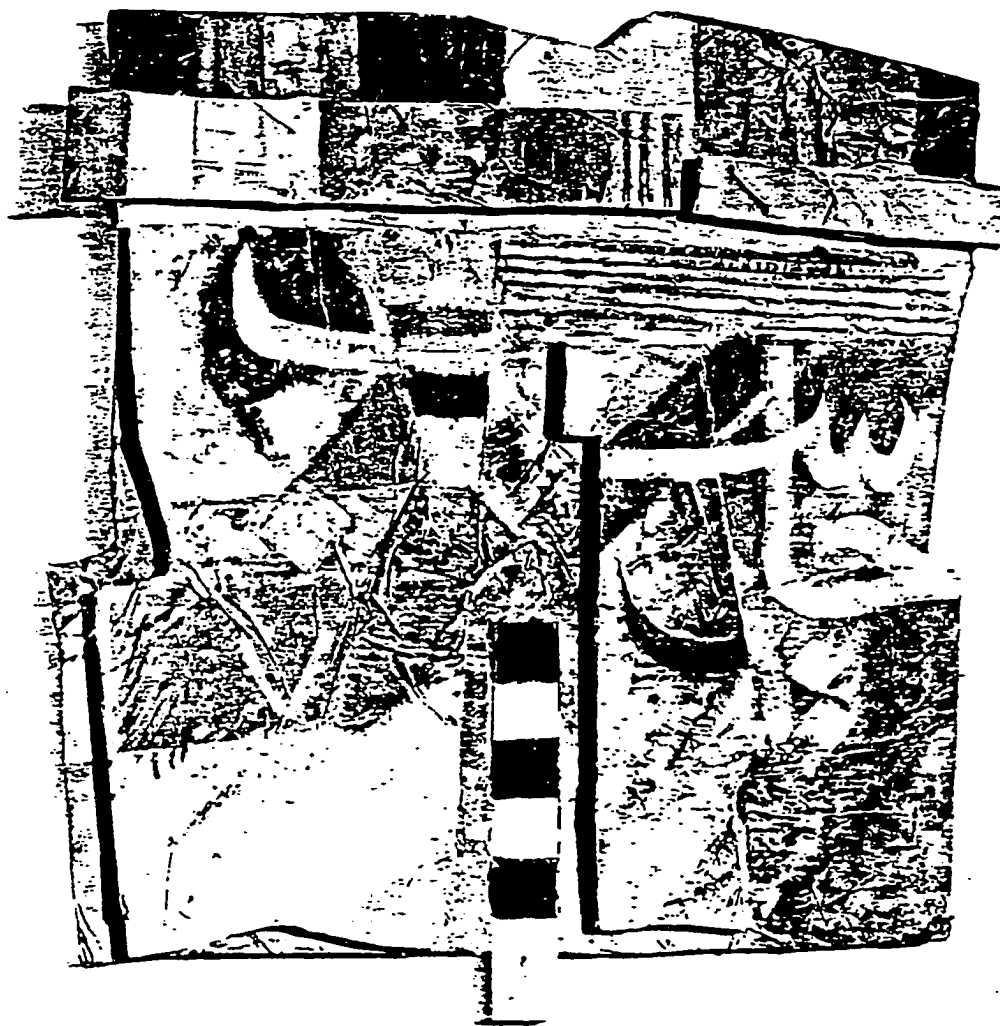


Figure 11. Diya al-Azzawi, *Archeological Scene*, acrylic on paper, 24 1/2 in x 22 1/2 in (57 x 62 cm)

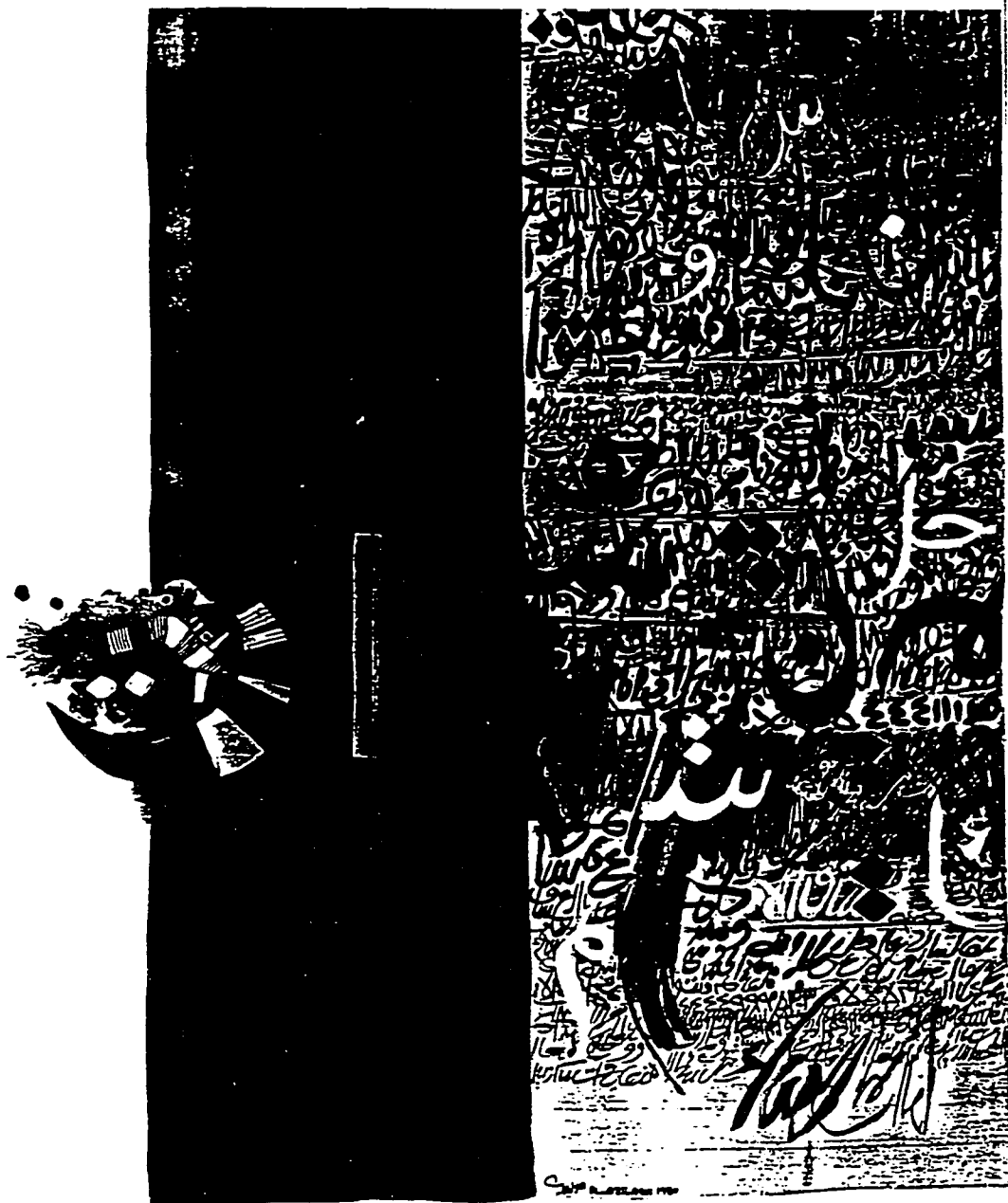


Figure 12. Diya al-Azzawi, *Manuscript*, 1980, gouache on paper, 64 x 85 cm

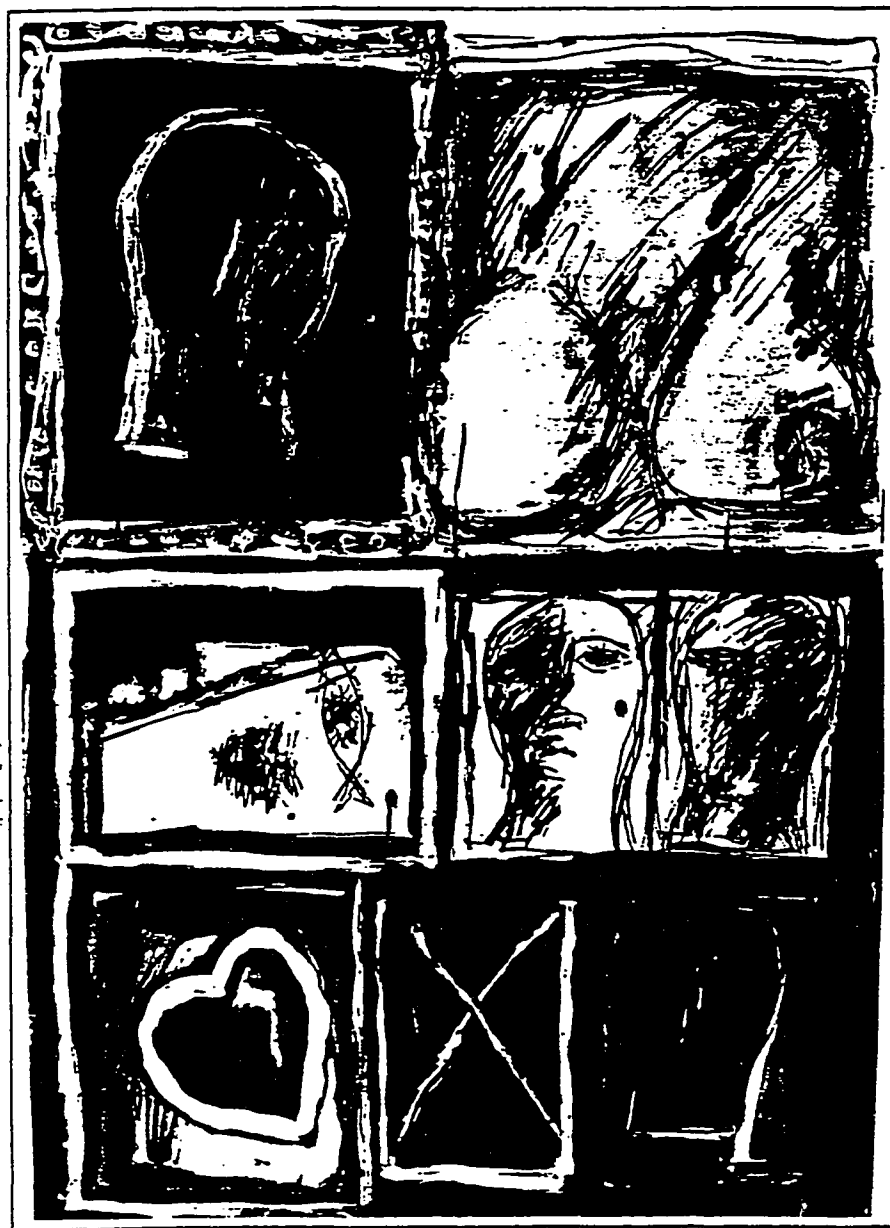


Figure 13. Ismail Fattah, *Various Forms*, 1988, 102 x 70 cm, mixed media on paper

Note. From Ismail Fattah. London: Serif Graphic.



Figure 14. Ismail Fattah. *Woman II*, 102 x 70 cm, 1988, mixed media on paper

Note. From Ismail Fattah. London: Serif Graphic.



Figure 15. Ismail Fattah, *Sitting Man*, bronze

Note. After Muzaffar, M. (1987). "Ismail Fattah: The celestial and the earthly," *Gilgamesh*, 3, 7-17.

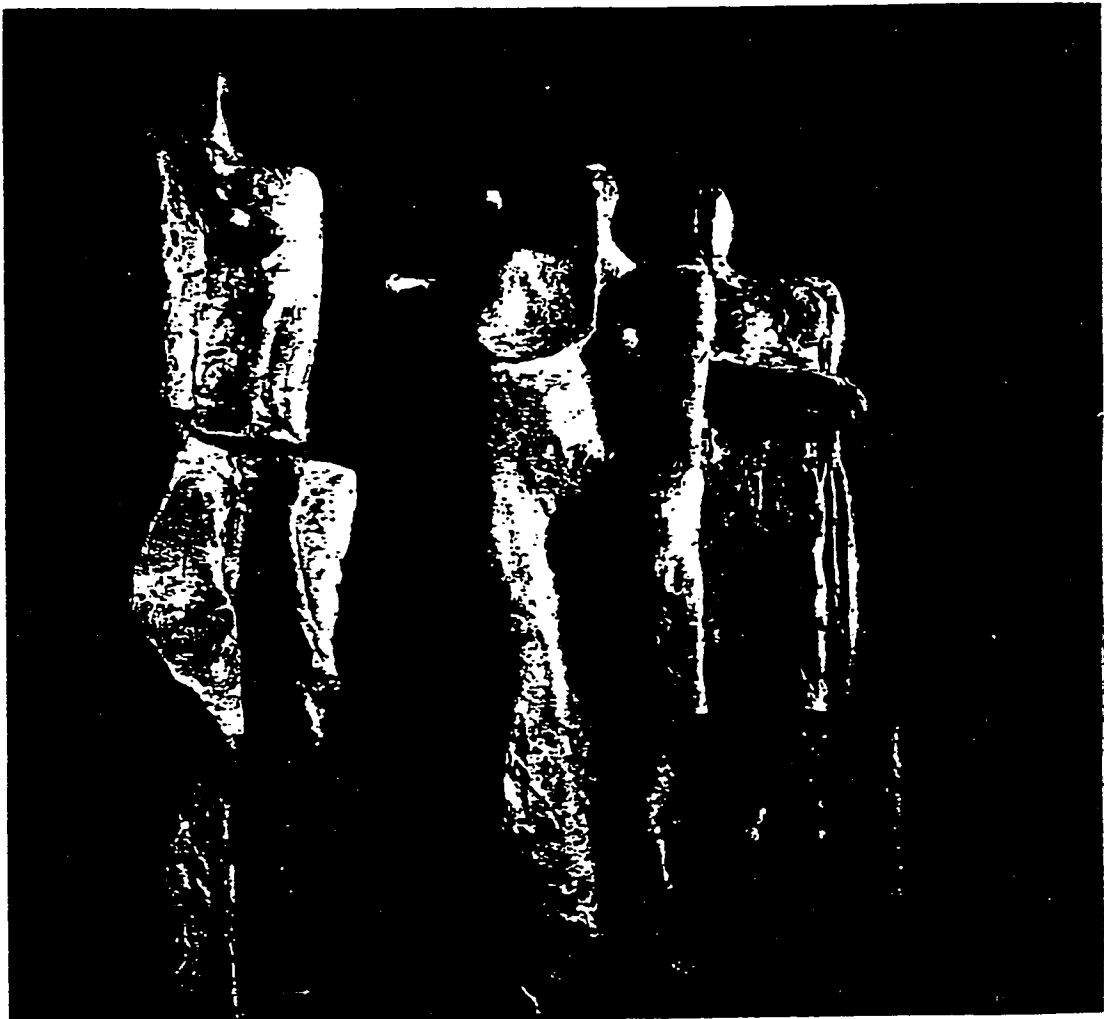


Figure 16. Ismail Fattah, *Family*, bronze

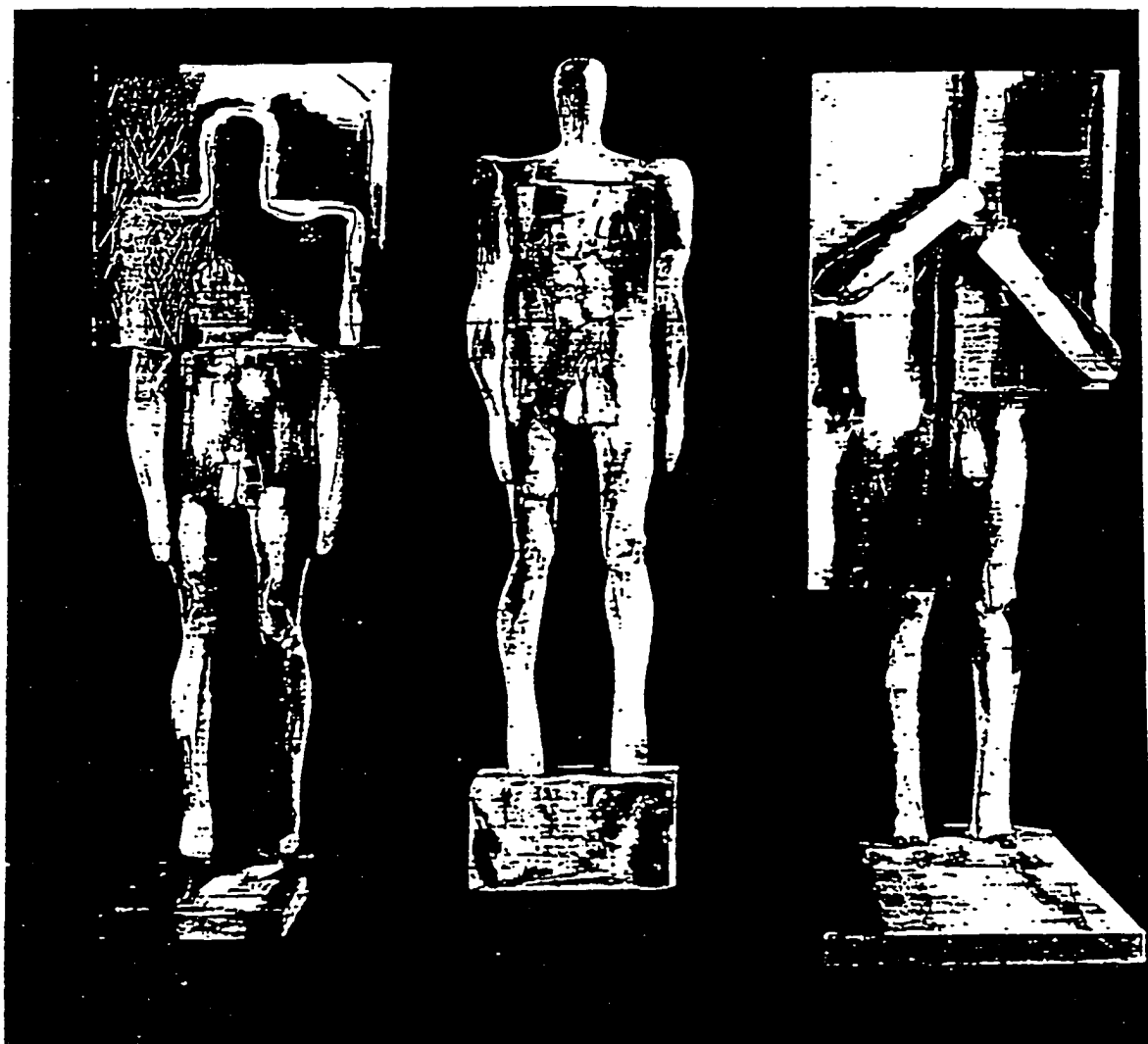


Figure 17. Ismail Fattah, *Three Situations and Head From the Holy Land*, 1985-1986, plaster, 32 x 127 cm. 60 x 35 cm

Note. From Contemporary Arab art: Collection of the Institute of the Arab World. Paris: The Institute of the Arab World.

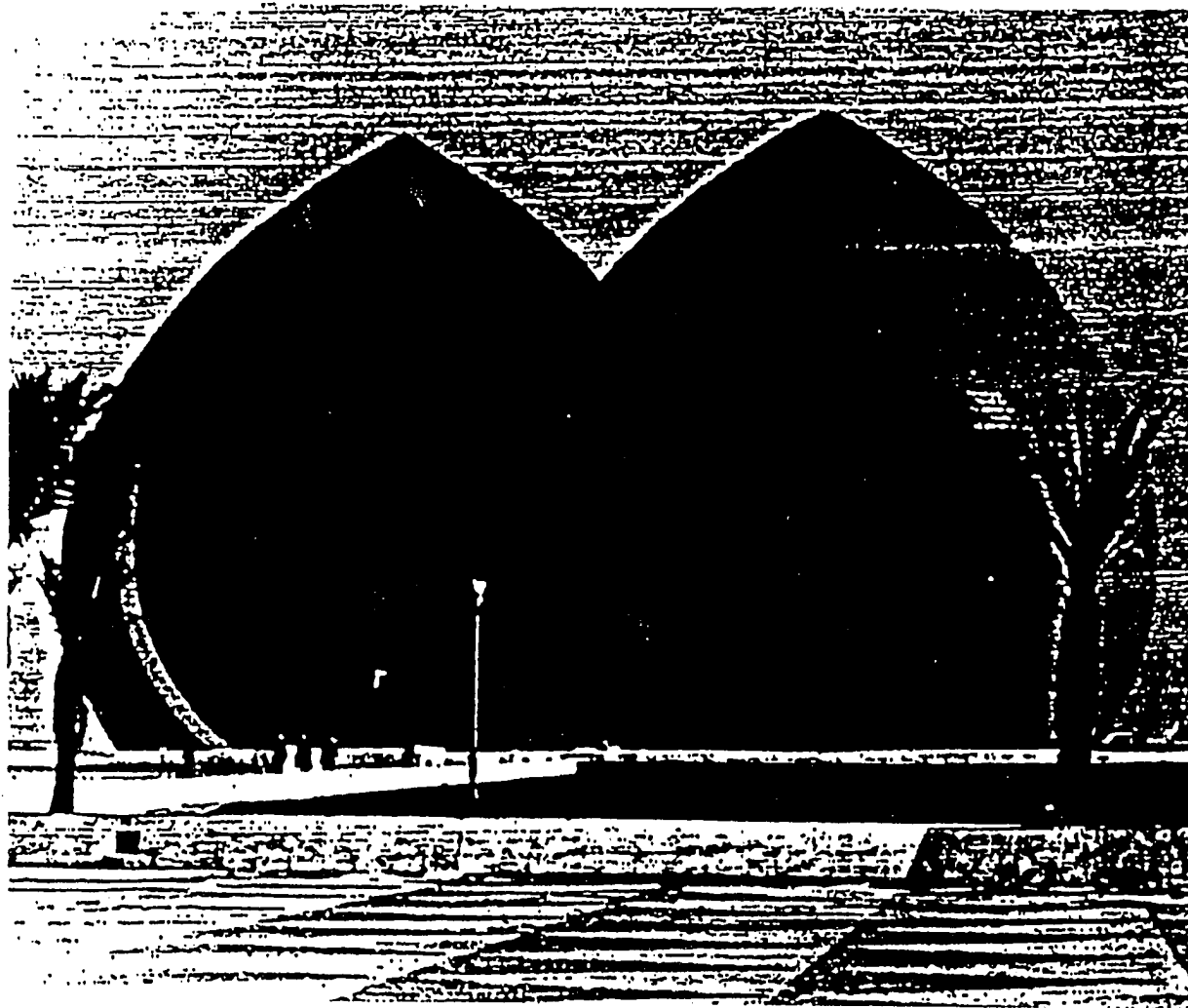


Figure 18. Ismail Fattah, *Martyr Monument*, 1983

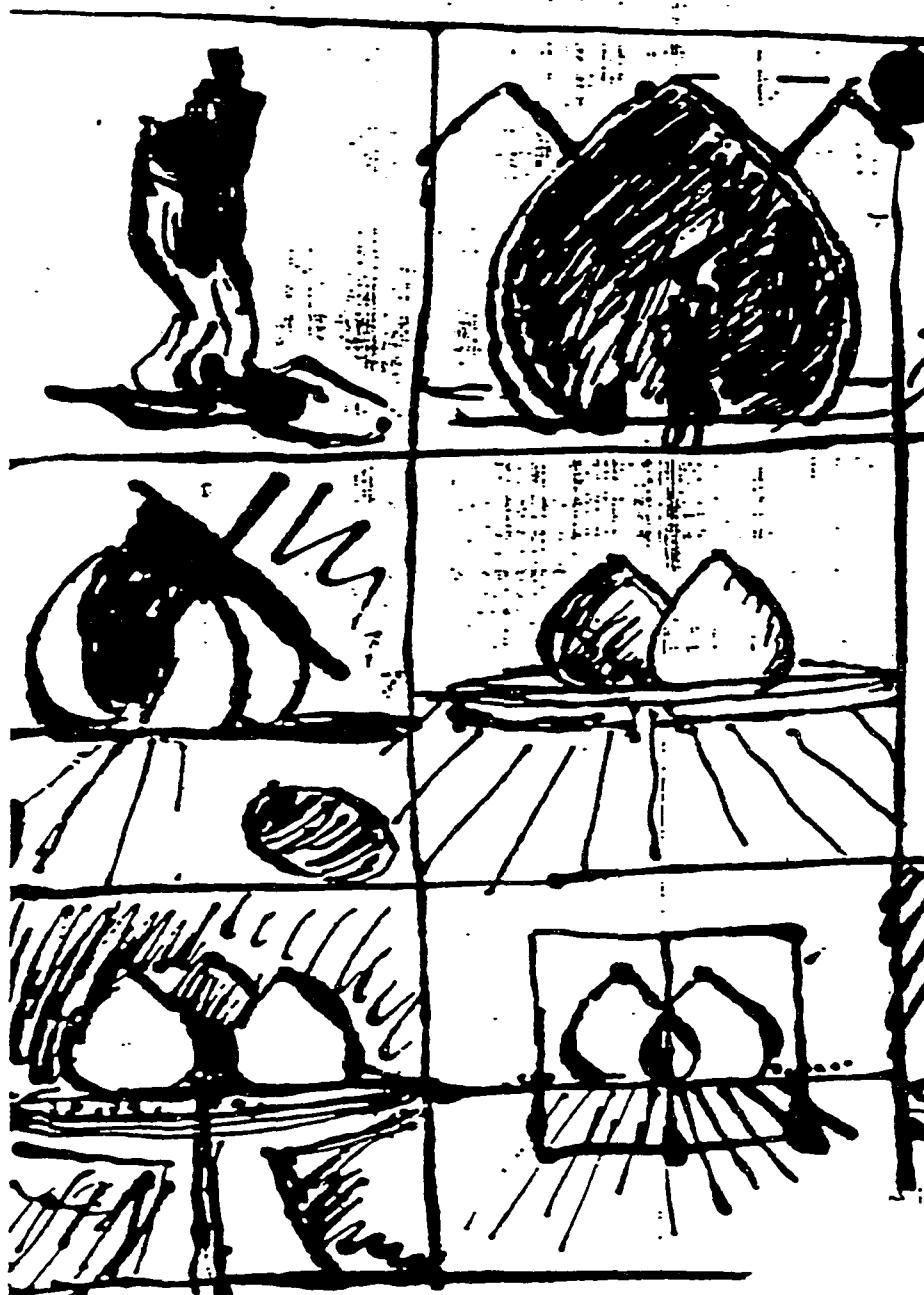


Figure 19. Ismail Fattah, Studies for *Martyr Monument*, ink on paper



Figure 20. Salih al-Jumai'i, *Untitled*, mixed media on canvas

Note. From *Iraqi Contemporary Art* (p. 196) by Salim, N., 1977, Milano: Cooperative Edizioni Jaca Book.

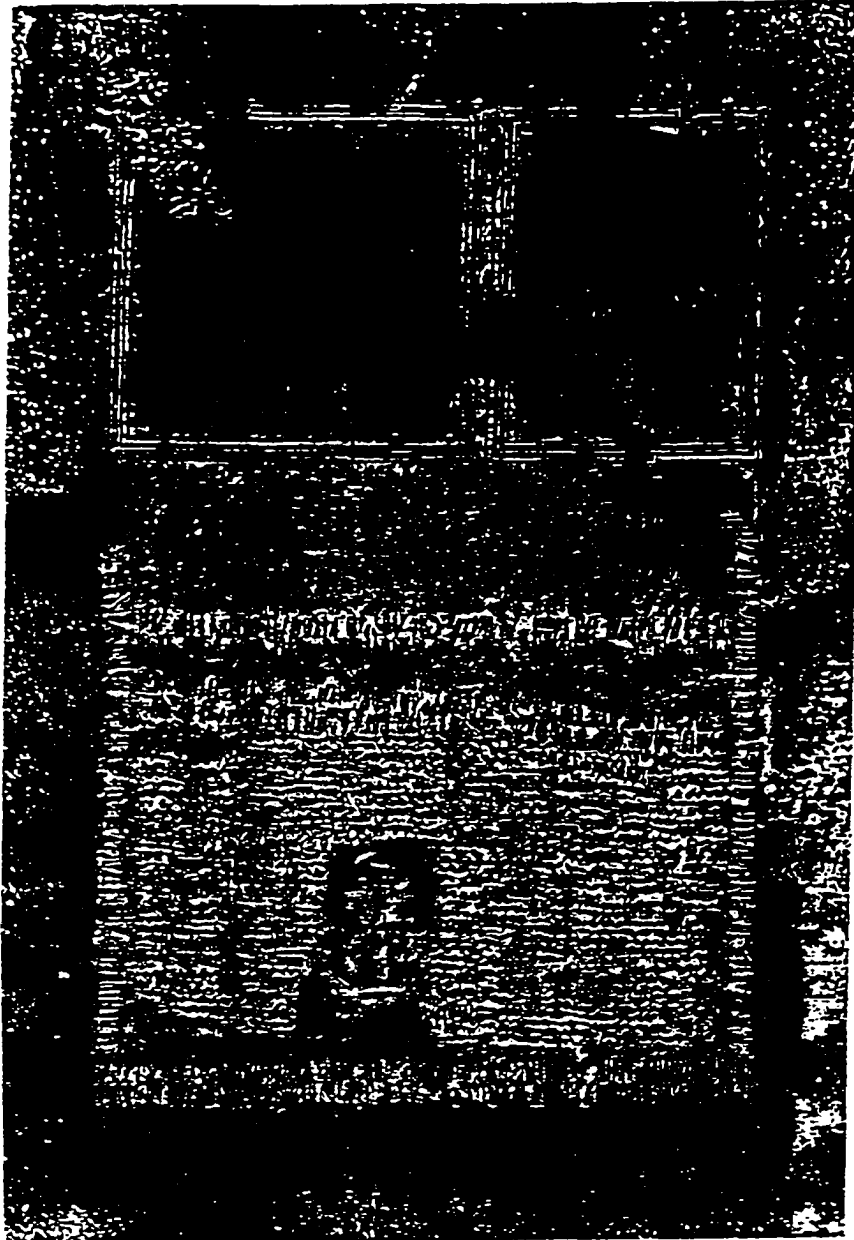


Figure 21. Salih al-Jumail'i, *Pages From an Old Book*, 1987, oil and watercolor on paper

Note. From Contemporary Arab art: Collection of the Institute of the Arab World. Paris: The Institute of The Arab World.



Figure 22. Salih al-Jumai'i, *Letter Seen*, mixed media on canvas

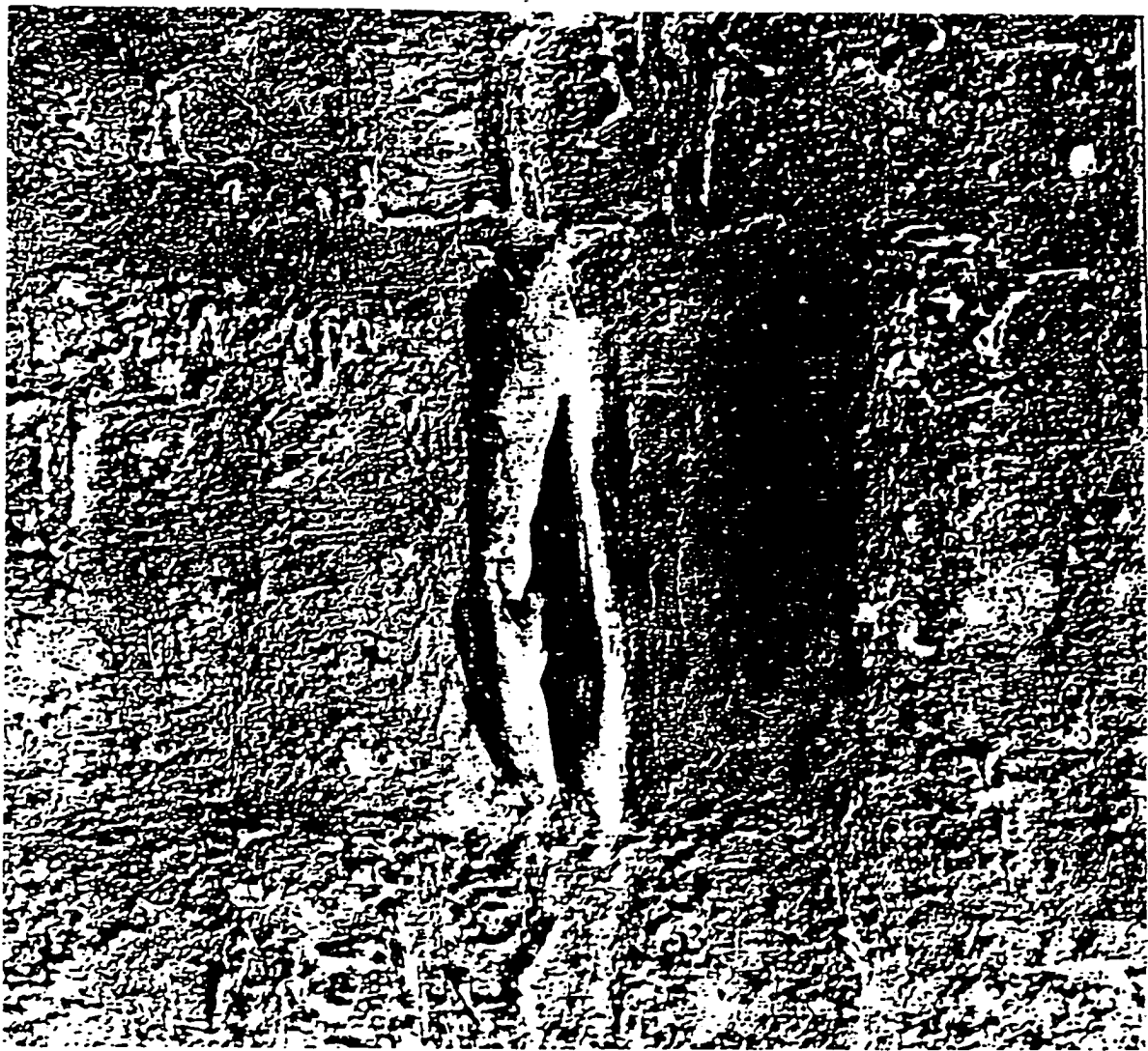


Figure 23. Salih al-Jumai'i, *Untitled*, mixed media on canvas, 1980

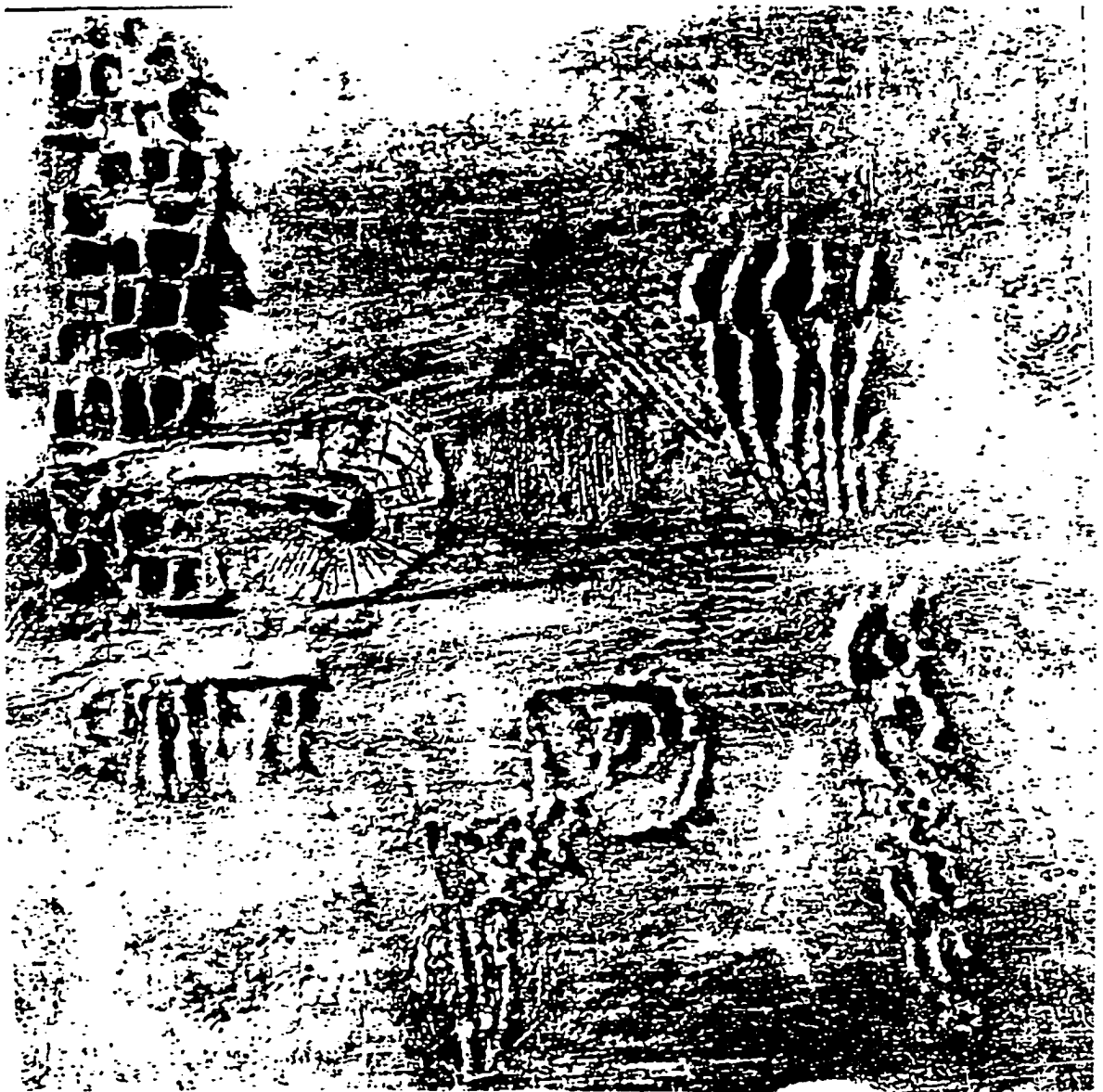


Figure 24. Salih al-Jumai'i, *Untitled*, mixed media on canvas, 1980



Figure 25. Salih al-Jumai'i, *Untitled*, mixed media on canvas, 1980

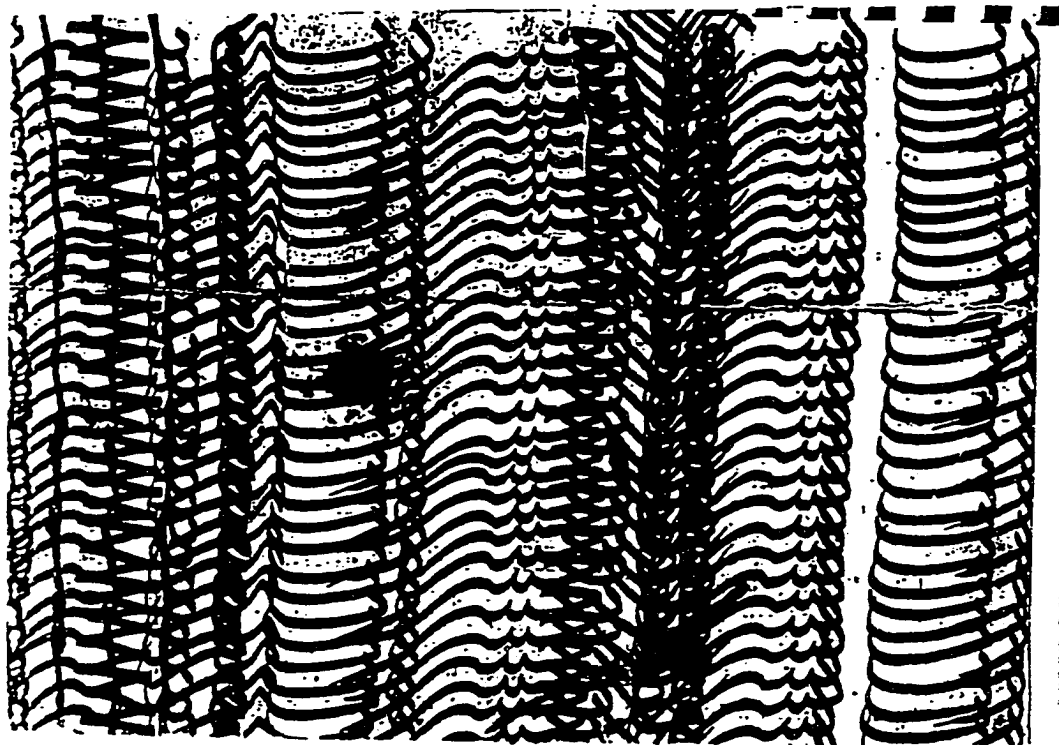


Figure 26. Niazi Malawalai Baghdadi, *Calligraphy*, undated, ink on paper, National Archive, Baghdad.

Note. From Al-Said, S. Chapters from the History of the Plastic Art Movement in Iraq (p. 47).

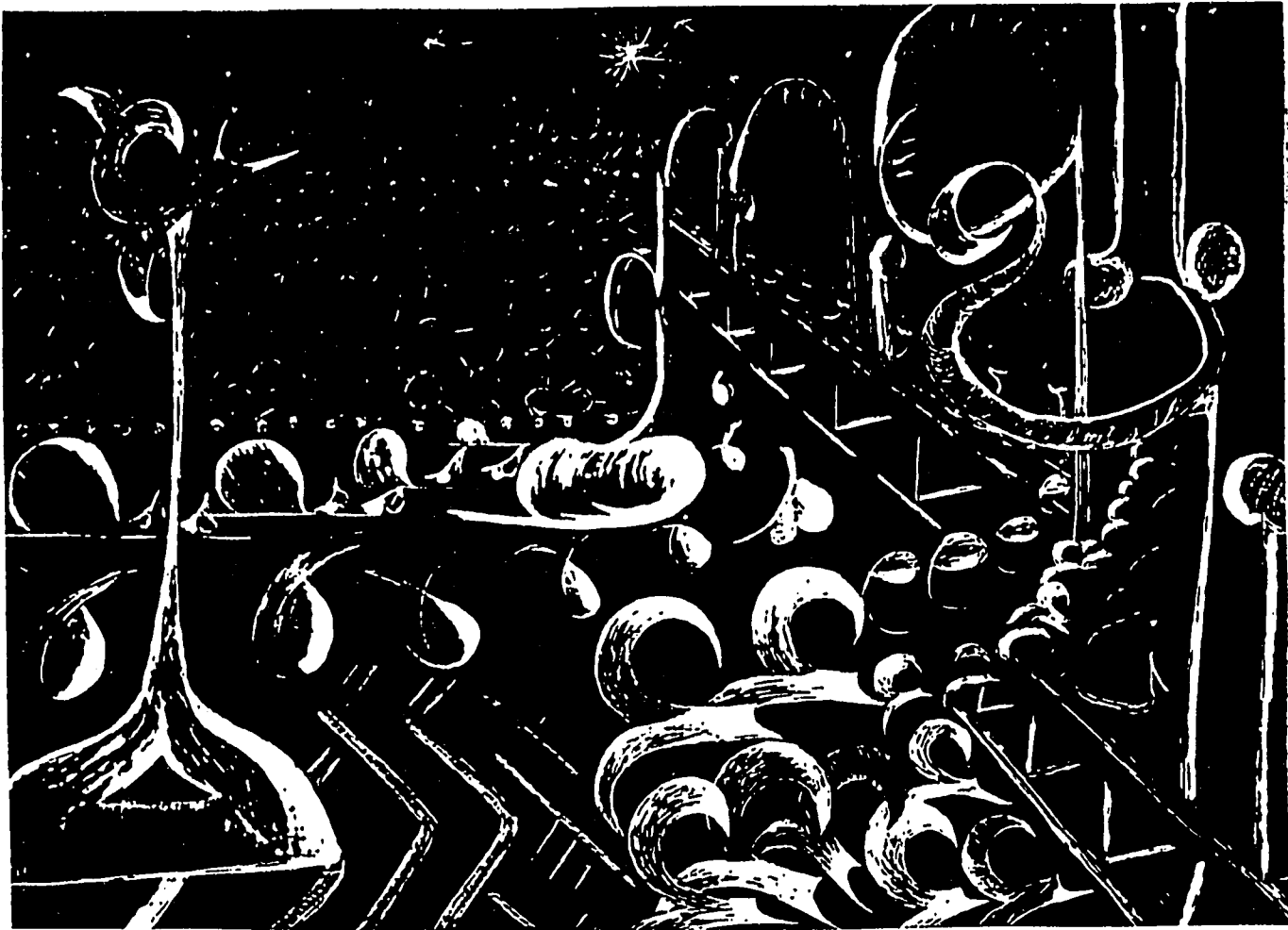


Figure 27. Madihah Umar, *At The Concert*, 1948, ink on white scratchboard, 9 1/2 x 13 in

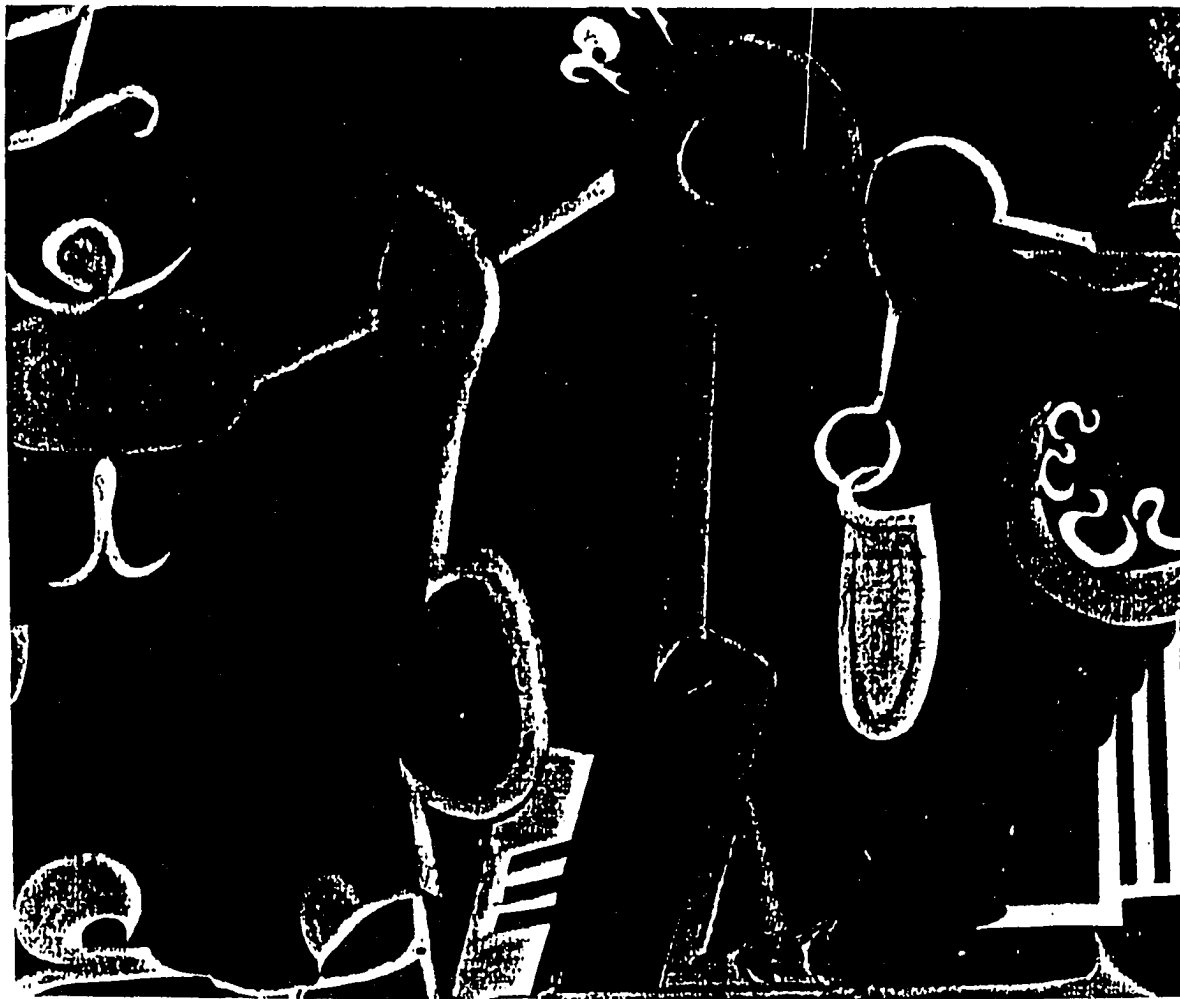


Figure 28. Madiah Umar, *Life at Night*, 1949, watercolor on paper

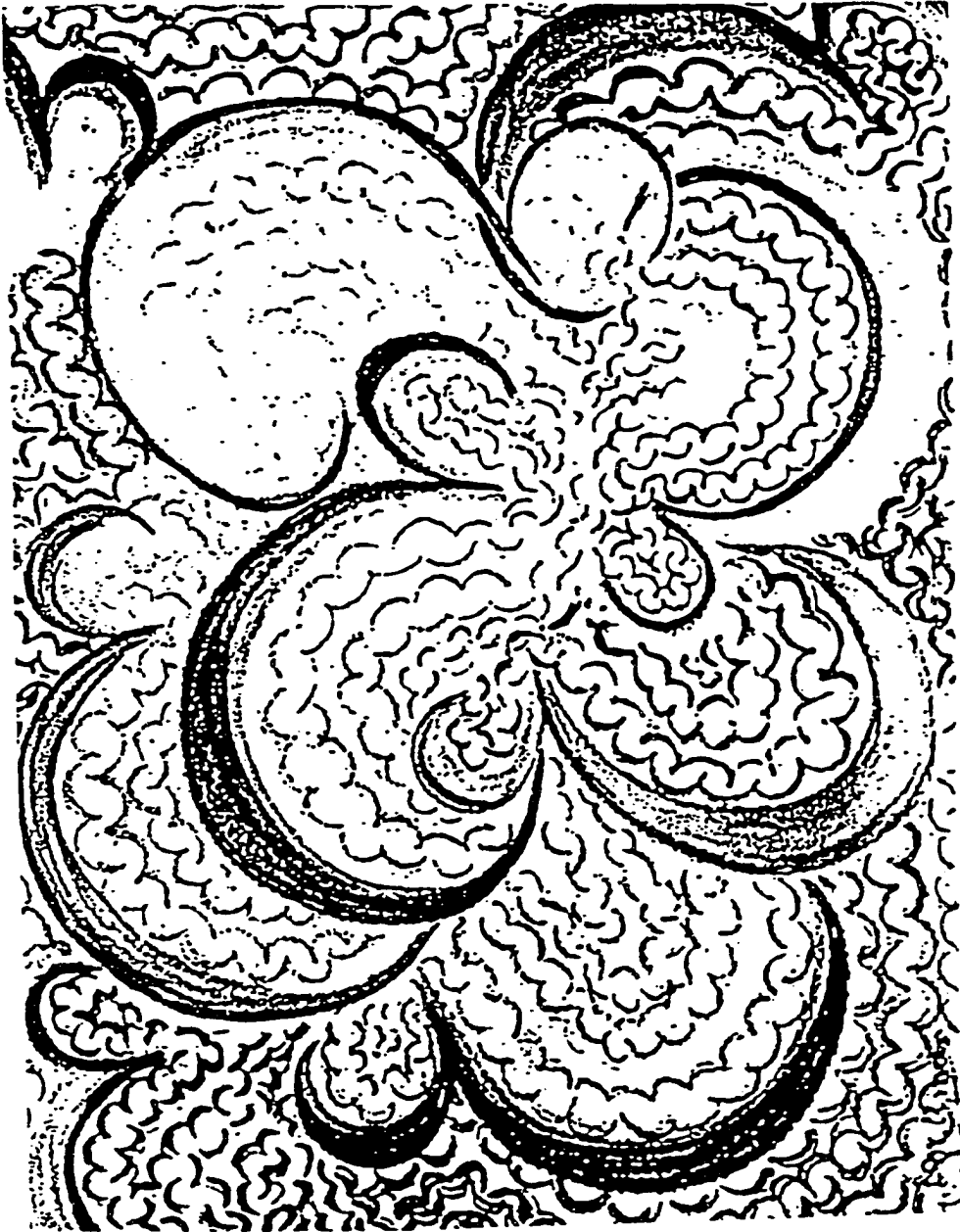


Figure 29. Madihah Umar, *The Letter Ayn*, watercolor on paper



Figure 30. Shakir Hasan al-Said, *Return to the Village*, 1951, oil on wood



Figure 31. Shaker Hasan al-Said, *Drawing*, 1962



Figure 32. Shakir Hasan al-Said, *Miraj (Ascension)*, 1970, ink on paper, 50 cm x 70 cm

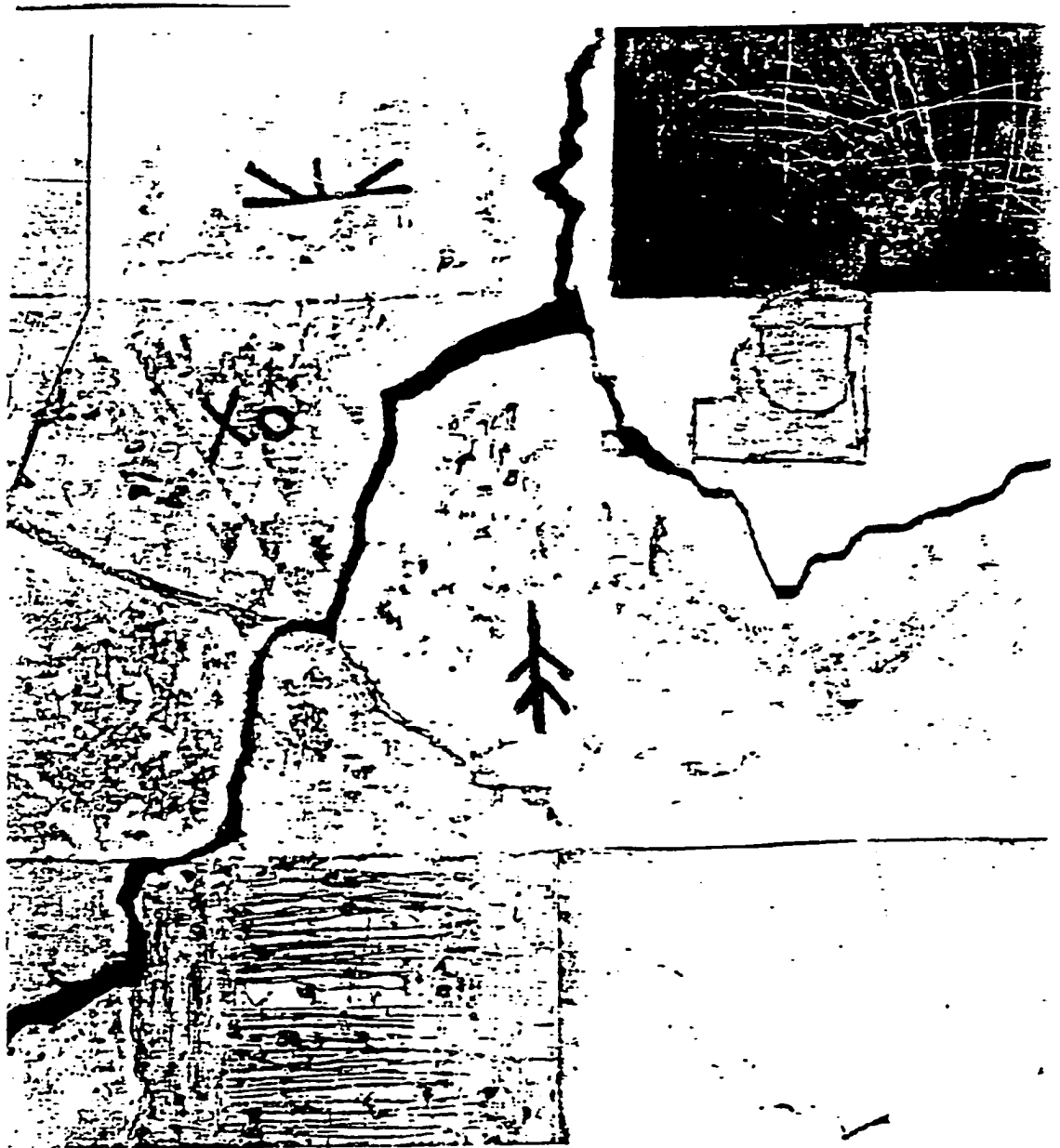


Figure 33. Shakir Hasan al-Said, *Hadhar Mural*, 120 cm x 120 cm, mixed media on wood



Figure 34. Shaker Hasan al-Said, *Mixed Media on Wood*, 1986

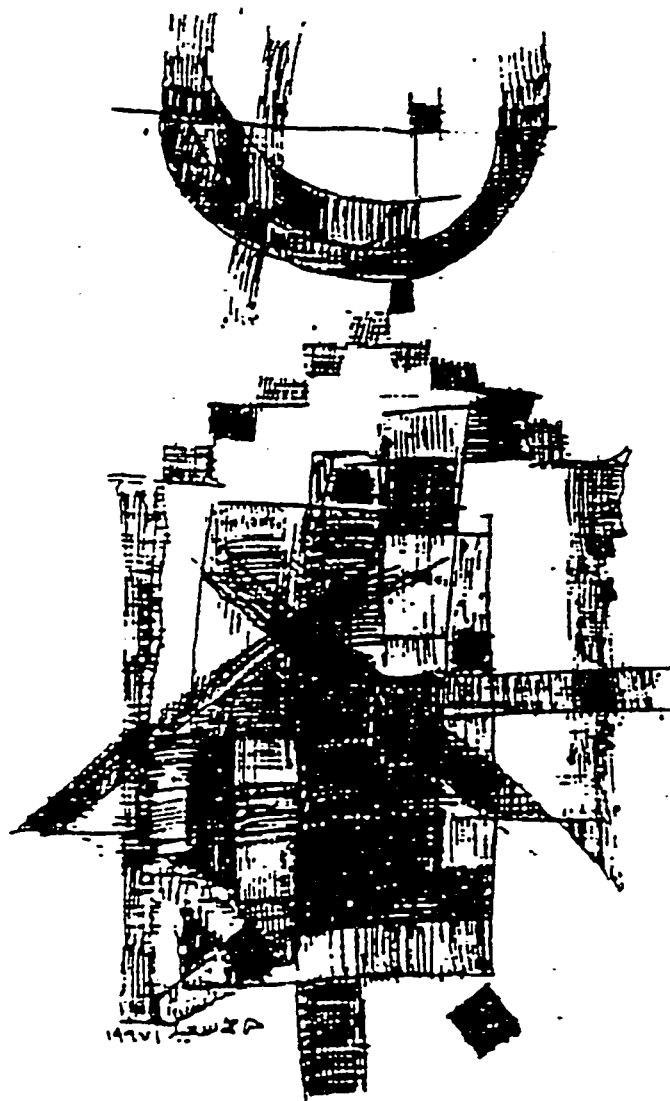


Figure 35 . Shakir Hasan al-Said, *Crescent and Star*, 1967, ink on paper



Figure 36. Shakir Hasan al-said, *Objective Contemplations*, 1984, oil on wood, 120 x 120 cm

Note. From Contemporary Arab art: Collection of the Institute of the Arab World. Paris: The Institute of The Arab World



Figure 37. Jawad Salim, *The Murdered Tree*, watercolor on paper

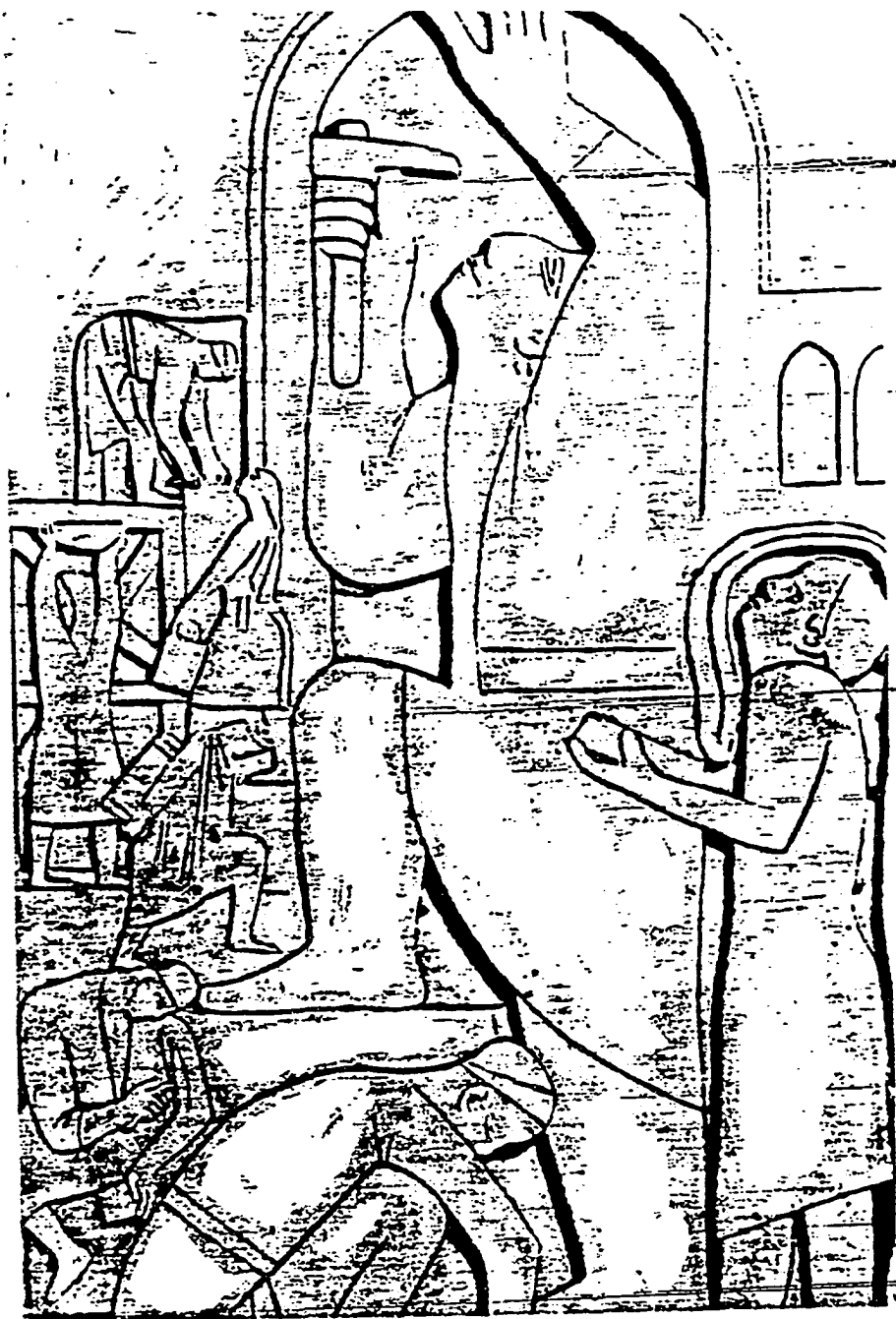


Figure 38. Jawad Salim, *The Master Builder*, marble, 1944-1945

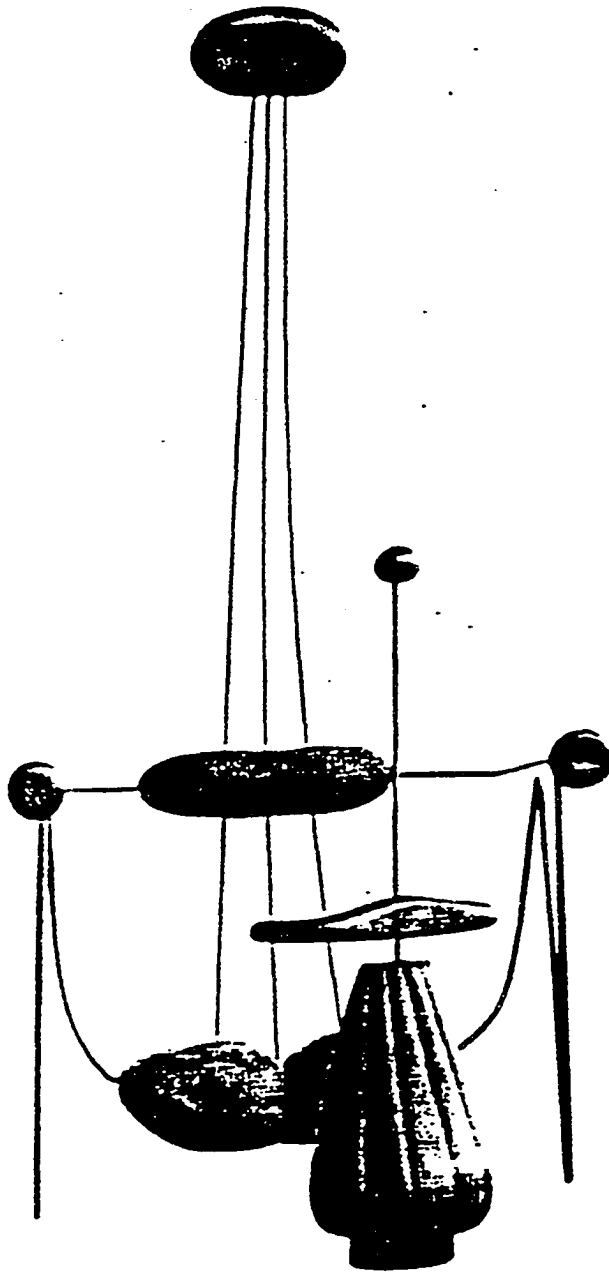


Figure 39. Jawad Salim, *Motherhood*, wood and wire



Figure 40. Jawad Salim, *Ox*, 1954

Note. From *Jawad Salim wa al-akharun* [*Jawad Salim and the Others*], (p. 168). By Al-Said, H., 1991, Baghdad.

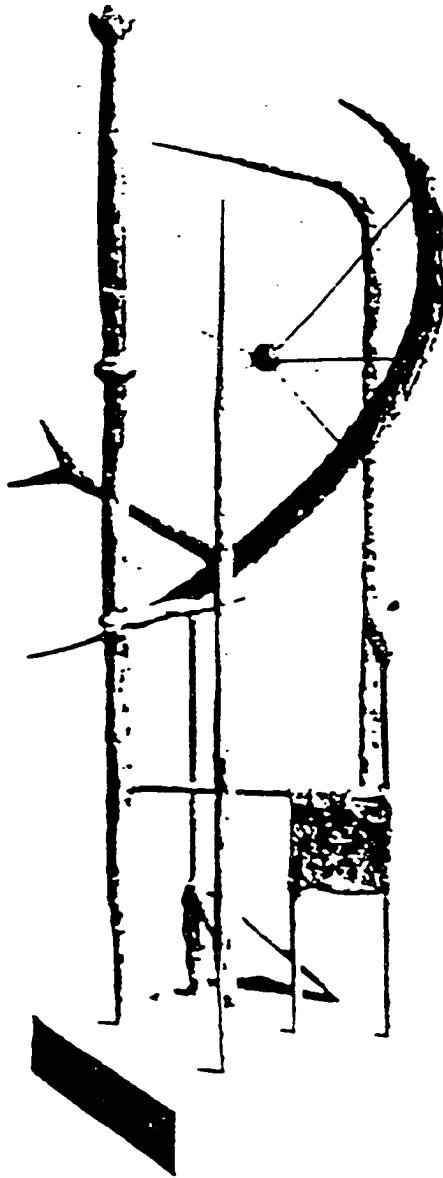


Figure 41. Jawad Salim, *The Unknown Political Prisoner*, 1952

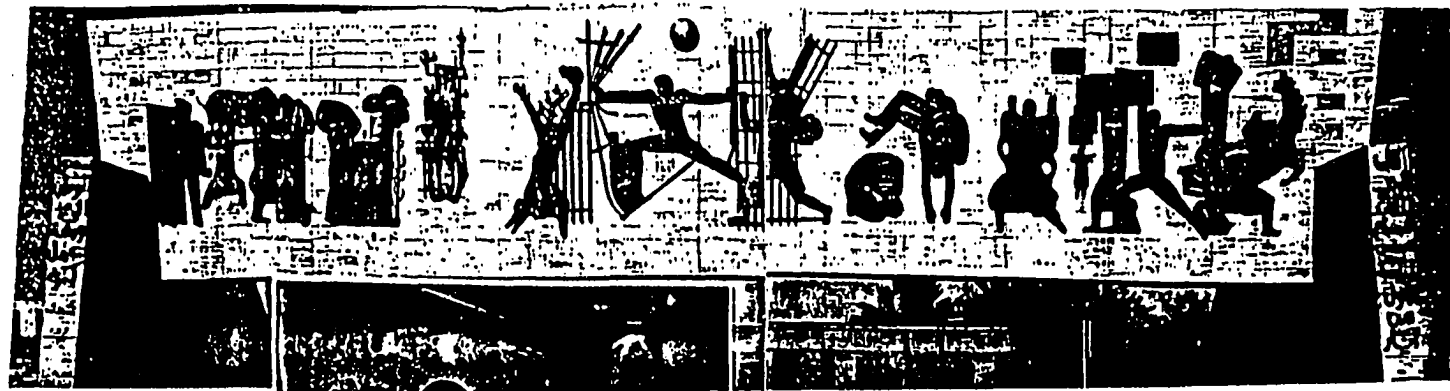


Figure 42. Jawad Salim, *Freedom Monument*, 50 x 10 meters, bronze

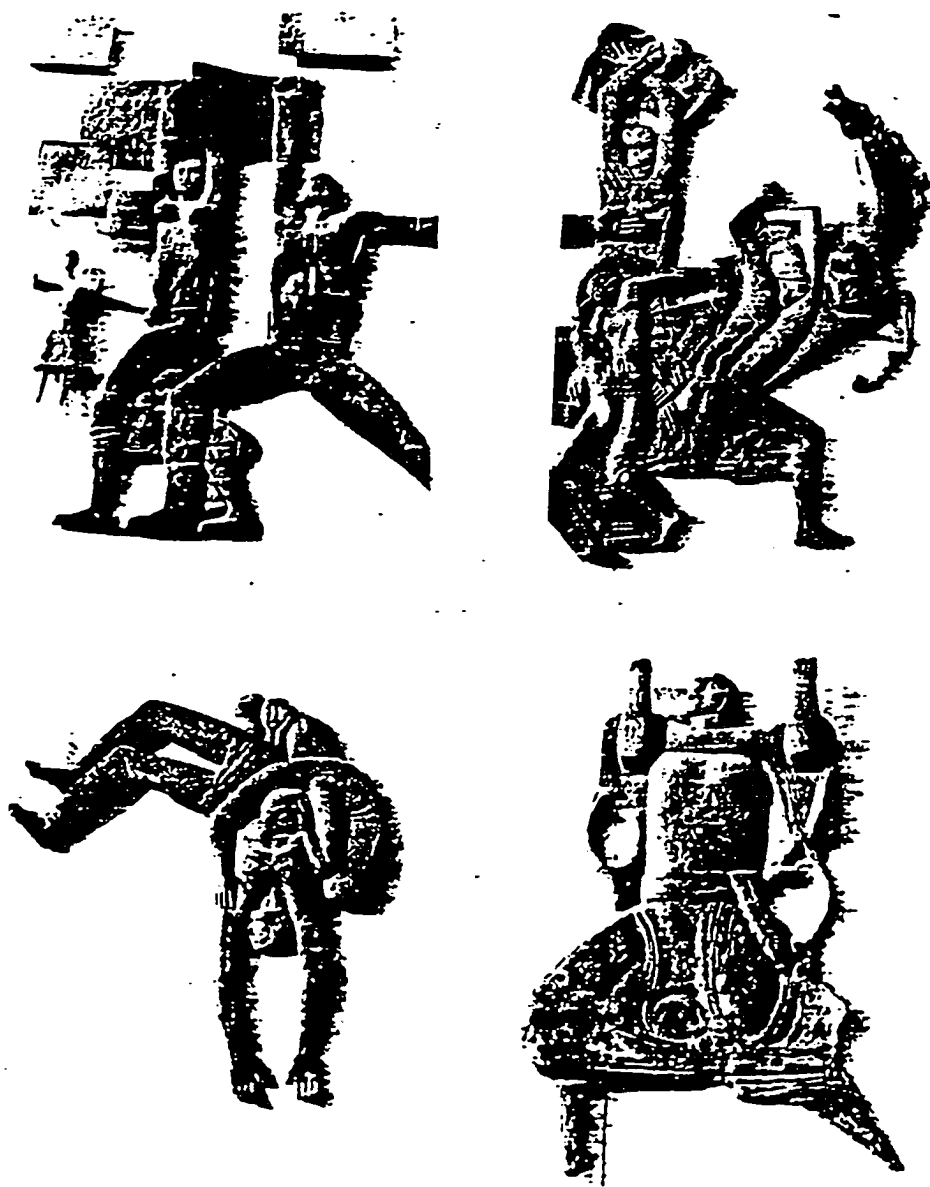


Figure 43. Jawad Salim, detail from the *Freedom Monument*

Note. From *Jawad Salim wa al-akharun* [Jawad Salim and the Others], (pp. 212-213).
By Al- Said, H., 1991, Baghdad.

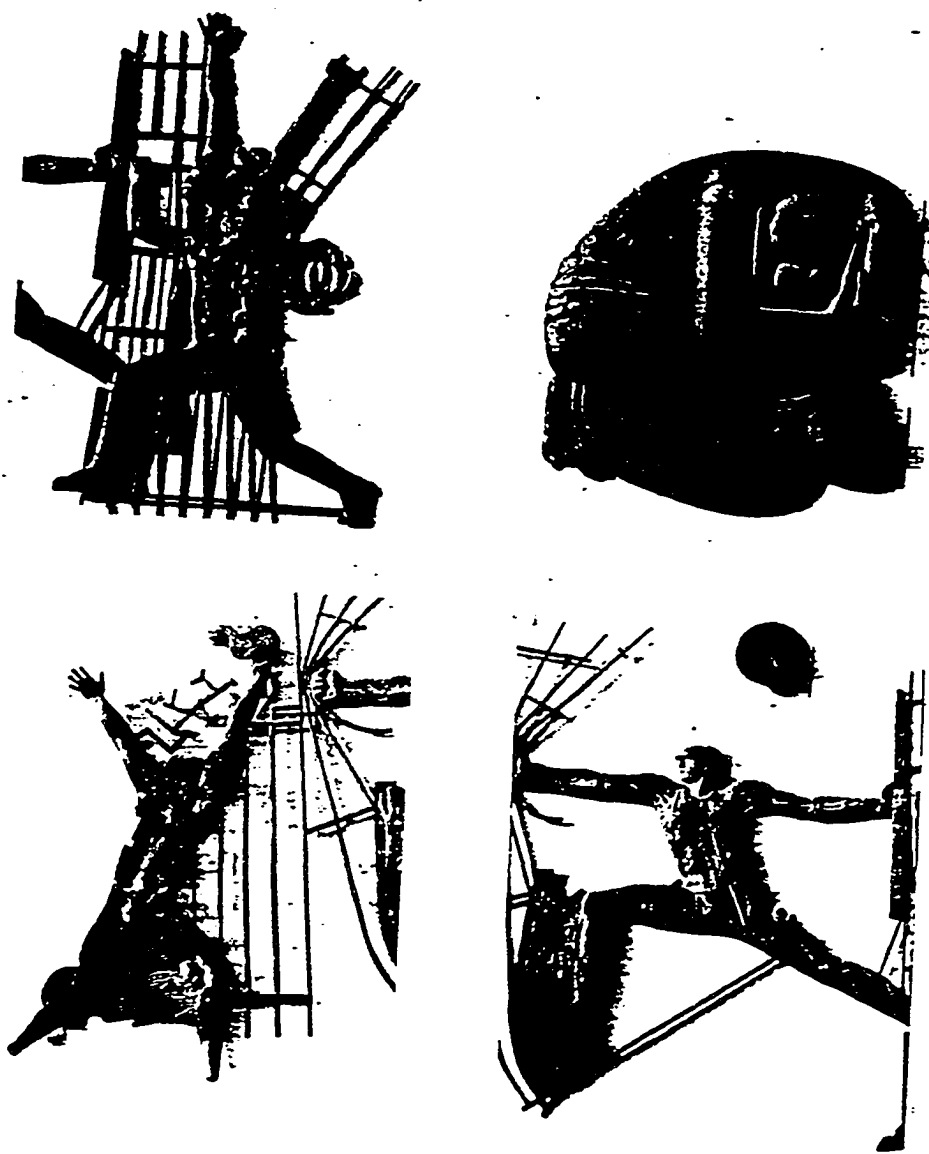


Figure 44. Jawad Salim, detail from the *Freedom Monument*

Note. From *Jawad Salim wa al-akharun [Jawad Salim and the Others]*, (pp. 212-213).
By Al- Said, H., 1991, Baghdad.

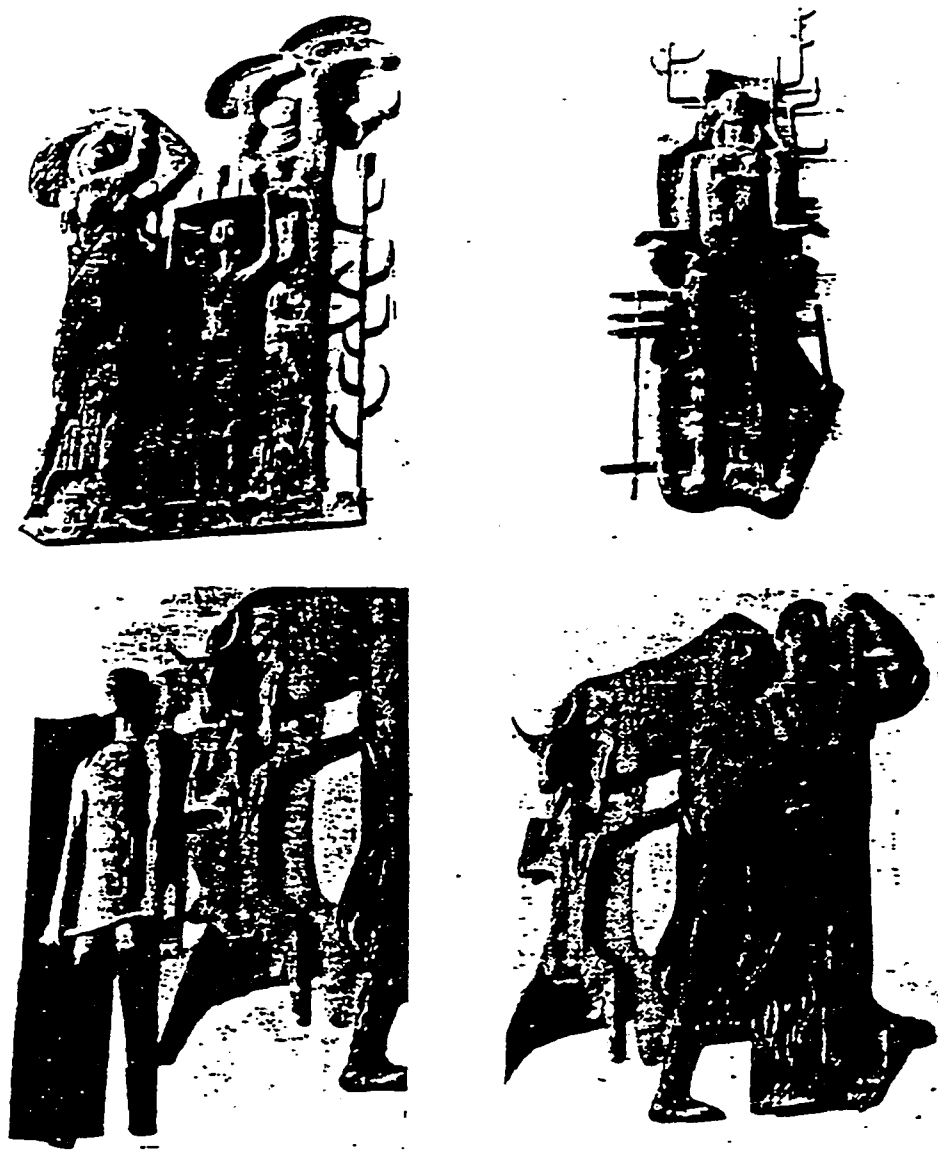


Figure 45. Jawad Salim, detail from the *Freedom Monument*

Note. From *Jawad Salim wa al-ahkarun* [Jawad Salim and the Others], (pp. 212-213).
By Al- Said, H., 1991, Baghdad.

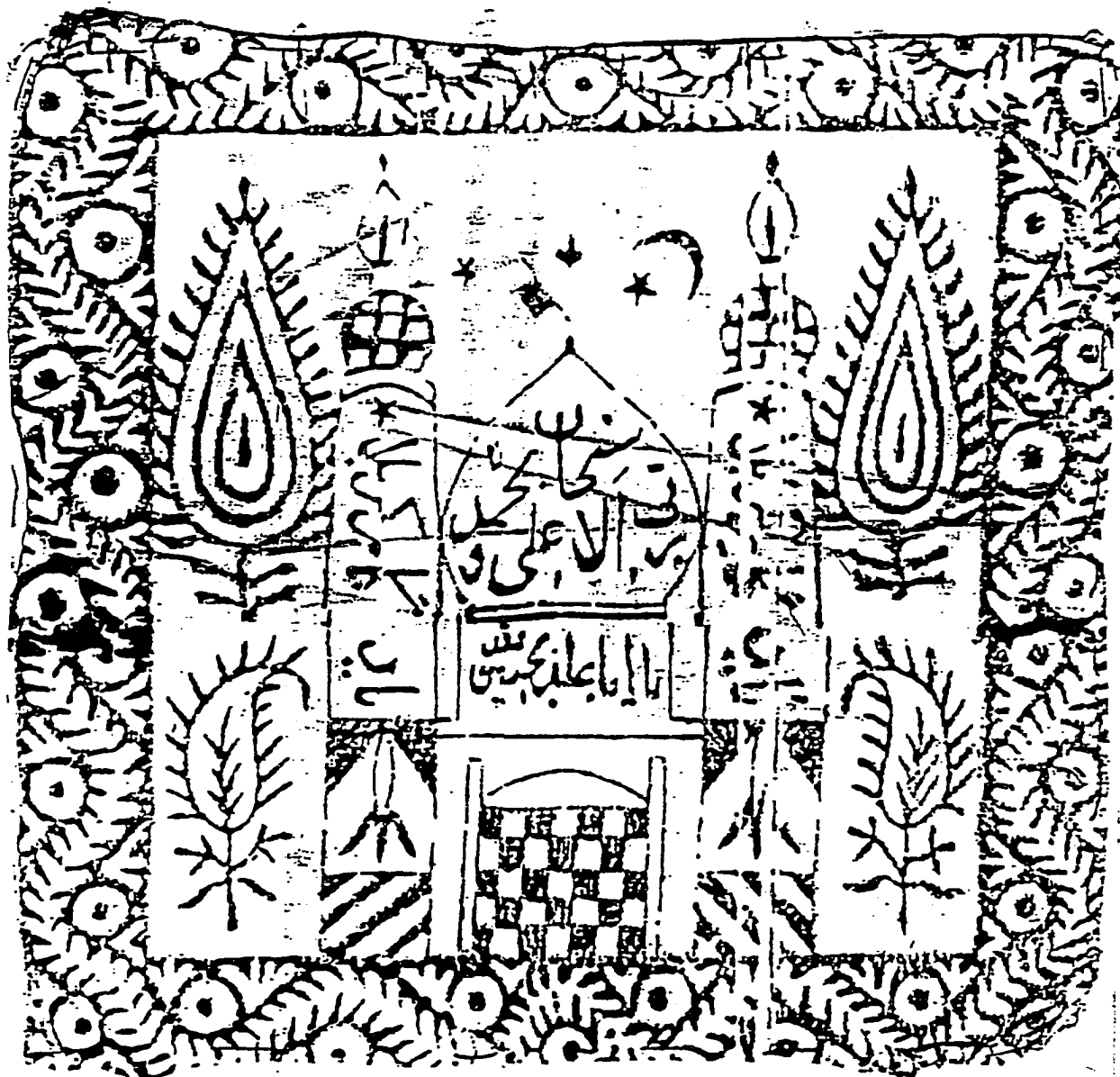


Figure 46. A popular religious writing (Iraq)

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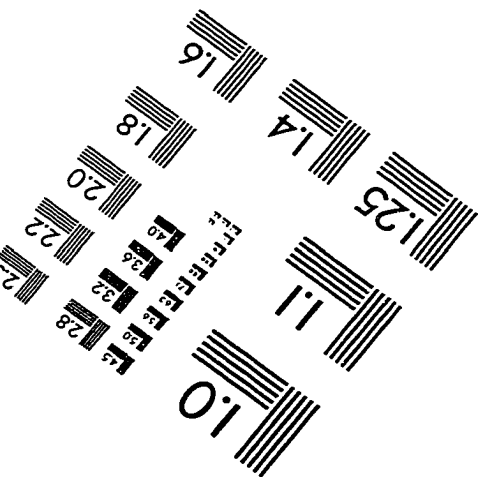
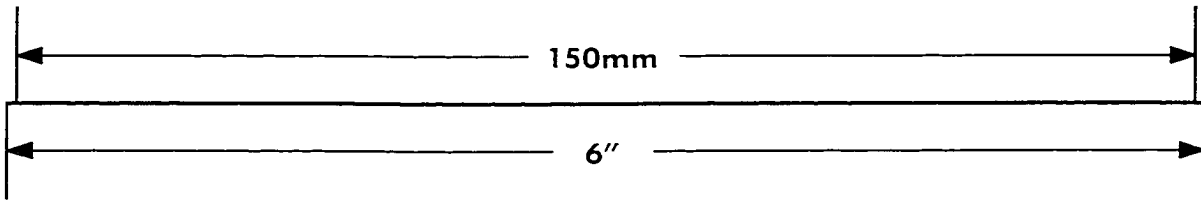
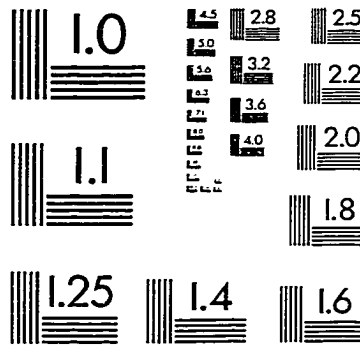
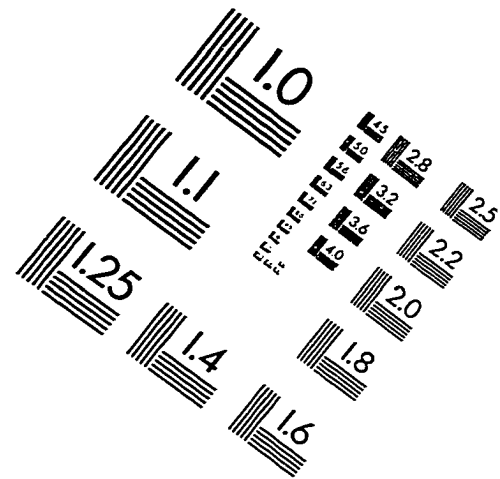
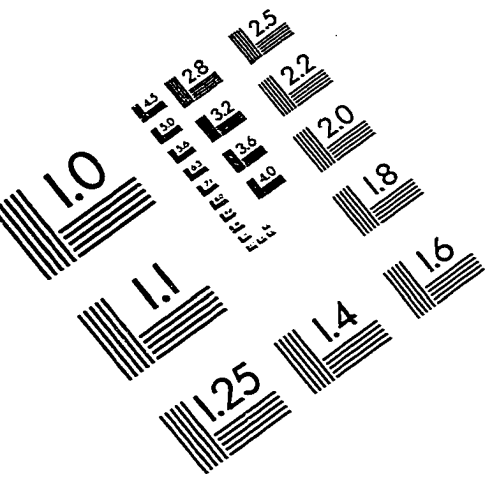
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