



Art: The Gateway to Knowledge

by Hasanain Al-Ibrahimi

In the scientific, industrial, and technological journey of the Western man, which began since the Enlightenment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the twentieth century, he was able, with his relentless cognitive pursuit and his exceptional and persevering intellectual and physical effort, to reach successive and steady, unprecedented and amazing achievements. The great leap in quality of human life was the widest historically, transferring him to a previously unattained degree, the world supposedly subjugated to him, to another level of luxury and comfort, strengthening their control over the planet's resources. Man subjected all creatures on earth to serve his goals, aspirations, economy, and uses. This scientific, research-based, and technological boom was framed by the thought and philosophy of the Enlightenment philosophers, who called for separating religious institutions from civil institutions that govern and manage societies. Thus, Western civilization and urbanity were established and gave birth to hundreds of thinkers who laid the foundations of philosophical schools that played a major role in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and to this day. Most of these schools can be classified under the broad heading of materialistic philosophies, which took a negative stance toward the idea of religion and denied most of its literature, heritage, and foundations. They dealt with the idea of the unseen and the afterlife and all the beliefs and stories that came in the main religious books from a position of denial. Rather, they worked to ignore them, bypass them, belittle them, and consider delving into them and researching them to be remnants of the superstitious mind and medieval ideas. Thus, an essential missing part

of this wonderful panorama of human achievements remains. Educational, academic, and research curricula were built, including those in the field of visual arts. Most artists believed in materialistic ideas and were devoted to materialistic philosophies, distancing themselves from the religious establishment, except for a few of them who continued to search and strive to approach spirituality and the unseen in their rational and relative scientific way by separating the curricula of science from the path of free worship. It has become clear with time that this tremendous technological, informational, and scientific development has not provided the desired balance in the human soul. Man has remained in need of a comprehensive idea and a depth of knowledge that qualifies him to provide reassuring answers to the major questions that have occupied the human mind since the beginning of thinking and the formation of knowledge. These are the same questions related to humanity's fate and their outcomes after this life, their spiritual dimension and how to achieve a balance with the material dimension lived in this life, as well as their position with regard to what is beyond tangible nature (the unseen); is there a Greater Creator beyond this life and beyond this universe?

I claim that one of the major problems in which modern man has fallen is the consideration of belief in the Greater Creator, the Unseen, the existence of another life, and the presence of beings parallel to ours, to be in reality belief in and recognition of the role of the religious institutions and its crimes and corruption in past centuries. There was no room for presenting a hypothesis that separated God, His unseen, His spiritual worlds,

and faith in Him from the religious institution that the human has created and managed.

There was no space to acknowledge the metaphysical, spiritual, and universal dimensions that combine sciences and techniques and integrate them into explanations and analyses, providing new interpretations beyond those that the religious establishment had provided over the past centuries. The ideas of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, modernity, and post-modernity are all based on rejecting the interpretations of the religious establishment, dismantling its intellectual bases, and smashing its objectives. Contemporary man has taken this doctrine and adopted these propositions on a large scale for his suffering, misfortunes, and tremendous struggles that the alliance between the religious establishment and political and economic tyranny had caused and produced.

In the modern era, the creativity of man, who is a relative and limited being, reached stages of miracles in three centuries of freedom compared to his achievements during the thousands of years preceding it, even if it was marred by two compelling world wars and crises that put the world on the brink of destruction more than once. But this freedom and creativity came to confirm that man is walking in a material evolutionary process through which he will soon reach the edge of truth to the need to believe in the existence of the Glorious Creator, the Omniscient, and Omnipotent, and that He is the central principle and end of this universe. He is the First Signifier, Immortal, and Eternal. Acknowledgment, belief, and certainty of His Existence are what allow us to compare what an elite group

of humans has accomplished in three centuries of miracles; they had their own relative intellect, limited capabilities, and strength, which cannot be compared to the power of nature and the immensity of the unknown, which to this day is still impossible to predict and forecast with all its actions, timings, and effects. So what about the Absolute Power and Knowledge?

The achievements and creative conquests of man in this brief period of three hundred years which are insignificant in comparison to the leaps of his development from the human condition to the human state that had taken tens of thousands of years, a journey that cannot be compared to the age of the Earth or to the age of the cosmos itself, and this is the conclusion that our limited mind reaches when it compares the size and influence of our planet, or rather our entire solar system, with the size and influence of the galaxies, groups, planets, and suns of this vast universe.



Shakir Hassan Al-Said (1925 - 2004)

Ascension, 1975

Mixed Media on Carton - 55 x 65 cm

Signed Lower Left

The artist occupied this work during the period of his theorizing of “Al-Ma’arij” and linking it to “the five ideas of religious thought, folklore, heritage, trace, and abstraction of the Arabic letter” and the extent of the persistence of the idea of jinn, meteors, and Al-Ma’arij (spiritual ascensions) in the collective mind of our societies. I cannot imagine that Shakir Hassan has been interested in religious concepts for the sake of an otherworldly goal that is devout and purely spiritual.

We claim that any other artist associated with his people and his land and a formative and visual researcher has used religious allusions, symbols, and theorems to express a socio-political message related to the life and destiny of his people and their fate. In this work, he speaks in paintings and signs about his five ideas and links them to his times, days, and events. “The surface of the painting is an unlimited space, and the Mi’raj (ascension) is a spiritual movement that cuts through this sky. Formally, the Mi’raj is the movement of color; the convergence of gradients, and later a slit or an aperture, not dimension, ascending in the center of the board like a burning meteor in space, an unknown comet, a root or spark of lightning”.¹

In this work, Shakir Hassan shows us his ingenuity in employing material as a creative element that creates beauty and perfection and uses it as a dazzling element from the brush of an experienced artist.

The history of the painting coincides with the holding of the “Cannes Somer” Festival in France in 1975 and the artist’s participation in it with several works of art.

Al-Said 1975
Shakir Hassan

¹ Brochure for the ‘Tawashuj al-‘Alamat (Interlacing of Signs)’ exhibition – 1988



Shakir Hassan Al-Said (1925 - 2004)
 Untitled
 Mixed Media on Board - 50 x 70 cm
 Signed Upper Left & Lower Right

“What does the artwork represent, and what is its aim? It represents the deconstructions of an objective actor whom many names can call according to the experiment’s needs, the field we work in God, the surrounding environment, time, and the archaeological excavations. The artist recovered a series of results of this agent by gnawing, scribbling, deleting, displacing, accumulating, and erasing. He coordinated between them as if this coordination was a new reading, with contributions from the artistic medium. The work of art becomes a meeting place between the artist and the manifestations of the universe or the surroundings, in addition to the fact that the symbolism and spirituality of this encounter is a form of spiritual training”.²

The history of this painting coincides with the holding of: The Triennial Exhibition in New Delhi in India in 1986 and the artist’s participation in several works of art. Exhibition of Synergy of Signs (Tawashuj Al-‘Alamat) at the Institute of the Arab World in Paris in 1988, and the artists participated in it with several works of art with other artists.

² ‘Al-Khashn wal Na’im: Qadhaya wa Afkar fil Fann Al-‘Iraqi Al-Mu’asir’. I (The Coarse and the Soft: Issues and Ideas in Modern Iraqi Art. I), p. 94 - Suhail Sami Nader.

The human mind, having the ability to comprehend the holistic picture of the justifications for its existence on this planet, will bring forth an important step closer to comprehending the existence of worlds beyond matter and will lead it to embody the unseen concept of faith, which may be what a person needs to reach a kind of psychological, spiritual, or even physical balance. Belief in this idea and what follows it in terms of adopting, comprehending, and applying what results from the integrated value system that urges him to reconcile and take positive positions towards himself, his family, his society, and the environment and motivates him to build an individual, unilateral, vertical and abstract relationship with the absolute rational power without intermediaries will be a healthy, elegant, beautiful and beloved cognitive recipe that completes his happiness, stability, and inner peace.

From this standpoint and following the example of the Greatest Creator and the Greatest Maker, the Former and Fashioner, creativity, creation, design, renewal, and innovation are a good and essential characteristic of the balanced, hard-working, and persevering person, as well as the artist who is dedicated to his work.

Suppose a person tries to adopt such a rapprochement. In that case, it will help them open a gate overlooking a broad horizon of peace and balance accompanied by an amazing psychological state of amazement, ecstasy, and reconciliation with oneself and with others.

Suppose we can present plastic art from this perspective and in an understandable way. In that case, it will likely be a key to the gate of total knowledge, through

which we will explore limitless worlds, sciences, arts, literature, history, and philosophies.

It can be said that most of the schools and styles of modern and contemporary art were linked in some way to major materialistic philosophies that played a fundamental role in shaping our lives in the recent past and present and will continue to do so in the future. Many of them still contain sources of beauty and creativity, especially those that adopted the formative methods of visual arts aesthetically, expressively, and formally. They avoided going deep into materialistic thought with its negative systems and results. Most of the masterpieces of Renaissance art, which are now priceless from the perspective of circulation, aesthetic value, and market value, enjoy a prestigious and lofty position in human aesthetic taste. They were the product of creators who devoted their lives to spiritual beauty and devoted their lives with tireless dynamism to presenting good, good and immortal achievements that are in line with the human nature of the brilliant artist, in prayer and glorification, humble and supplicant in the altar of creativity and absolute beauty and imitating His works.

From the core of the visual arts and their products, a gateway to knowledge opens with a rich field of view for literature, social transformations, historical events, tales, stories, folklore, and the effects of previous civilizations. Through its applications, we understand some of chemistry, physics, engineering, biology, anatomy, medicine, and others. From its analysis, we delve into the secrets of language, the humanities, criticism, literature, stories, novels, and poetry.

From its business management, we learn about the sciences of management, marketing, sales, accounting, and human resources management. We understand cybernetics, governance, communication, media, pragmatism, and other challenges of the era.

Visual arts are a key to human knowledge and a language of dialogue between the law of human creativity and the law of creation and existence that was perfected and created by the Absolute Great Creator.

Hence, an artwork that does not have a subject to present cannot be affixed to human memory, quickly disappearing even before it is given an opportunity to be born. The artwork is a cognitive entity that roams the fields of knowledge and explores the horizons of culture. Therefore, the artwork is accompanied by aesthetic analysis, critical presentation, and semantic presentation, even if it sometimes seems subjective. However, this is the gist of the matter. The artwork may accompany the artist's reaction to a historical event, a social topic, a religious idea, a cognitive issue, or a scientific touch worthy of connection and interpretation. This in itself is an expression and documentation of feelings and emotions in a symbolic, suggestive way that is the essence of art and its beauty.



Kadhim Haider (1932 - 1985)
Anthropoid "Animal Anatomy of Human Being", 1960
Multiple Print - Etching - 40 x 50 cm
Signed Lower Left

The name of this work was mentioned in the booklet of the late Kadhim Haider's exhibition entitled 'Animal Anatomy of the Human.' It is a graphic work of several signed copies. The name in Arabic refers in some way to a forest human or a monkey similar to humans (anthropoid) or hominins. Biologists believe that there is an evolutionary relationship between these apes and humans through the 'primate' and that the evolution of Homo sapiens came from this branch. This work was completed during the artist's study in London between 1959-1962.

In this graphic work, the artist represents a biological topic no Iraqi artist has previously touched upon. It is on evolution, not only in its anatomical sense but also in its cognitive, ethical, and spiritual meanings. What matters to the educated artist is not the biology of human development as much as it is the human aspect

of this rational and sophisticated being who has moved from a stage of barbarism and savagery to civilization and culture. However, the man can always return to his former bestiality and brutality.

This work was shown in the artist's solo exhibition, 'Animal Anatomy of the Human,' which he held at the hall of the National Museum of Modern Art in Baghdad in 1964.



Amar Dawod (B. 1957)
Alchemistic, 2010
Acrylic on Canvas - 200 x 250 cm
Signed Upper Left

“In this work, I deliberately used overlapping as a method, that is, making the items and spaces intersect, communicate, or even cover each other while being transparent at the same time to reveal what is underneath. It is a work characterized by complexity in composition and structure. It introduces content related to the philosophy of alchemy and its goals, such as working to change the world and the self and experimentation in order to achieve the transformation of the base metal into gold. However, alchemy is a philosophy greater than this, as it is known as an ancient science that preceded modern chemistry. It is also a philosophy that believes in the possibility of transforming the world for the better, and an example of this is its desire to produce an elixir that sustains the youth of man and prolongs their life. Alchemy is distinguished as a method and a spiritual path taken by many scientists and philosophers of the world, including the Arabs among them.

“Whoever follows the operations of this work and is diligent in tracing the effect of some operation that is not apparent except in simple parts to be seen will find that there are spaces in it that suggest the alchemist’s workshop or his room in which he works, with the presence of items that refers us to the world of animals, plants, and humans, such as the crocodile, the snake, and the plants that appear in the form of decoration, man and inanimate objects, which are all components of the world in which we live.”³

The creation date of the painting coincides with the holding of the joint exhibition ‘Art in Iraq Today, Part III’ at the Meem Gallery in Dubai in 2011.

³ E-mail directly from the artist himself, commenting on the work above – January, 2017



The Epistle of Forgiveness⁴

“We live and die in several levels of paradise and hell, from the bliss of homelands and their destruction to our share in the society in which we happen to be found, even what we are supposed to end up with... From these levels, our personal hell and paradise that we carry within us will be formed.”⁵

In this work, Ali Al Tajer presents his personal dictionary and understanding of a historical monument whose title he used without intervening in the content and details of the monument itself. As he has accustomed us to his style, which distinguishes him in the visual scene and belongs to the school of Maximalism Art, he crowds the surface of his works with dark colors, numerous intertwined symbols, and dark lines. He divided his work surface into geometric squares, intending to create suggestions of a heterogeneous visual sequence of events that, in their adjacent images, express the chaos of this life and its intermingling of good and evil, sorrows and joys, asceticism and extravagance, asceticism and debauchery, angels and demons, shepherds and killers, dreamy romanticism and unfair realism, successes and failures, good and bad, a hymn of symbols and signs that coexist until the viewer imagines that he is actually in the furnace of unbearable sorrows, so he asks himself, “are we the ones who can bear to live in them?”

This painting was displayed in the exhibition: “Babylon” held at Al-Anda Gallery - Amman - in 2017.

⁴ The Epistle of Forgiveness is an epic literary work by Abu al-Ala al-Ma’arri, an Abbasid poet and philosopher (363 AH- 449 AH) (973 AD- 1057 AD). It is considered one of the most beautiful works written by al-Ma’arri in prose. It is a letter that describes the conditions in: bliss, hellfire, and the characters there. It is said that Dante Alighieri, the author of the epic poem The Divine Comedy, took the idea and content of the epic from Abu al-Ala. The Epistle of Forgiveness by Abu al-Ala is considered one of the greatest books of the Arab literary and critical heritage, and it is one of the most important and beautiful works of al-Ma’arri. He wrote it in response to the letter of Ali Ibn al-Qarih. It is a letter of a fictional nature, as al-Ma’arri made Ibn al-Qarih the hero of a strange literary imaginary journey in which he dialogues with writers, poets, and linguists in the afterlife.

⁵ E-mail directly from the artist commenting on the work above – April, 2018

Ali Al Tajer (B. 1962)
The Message of Forgiveness - 2017
Acrylic on Board - 100 x 125 cm
Signed Lower Left



Desert Rose:

The wind, rain, and Sun join together to erode and engrave into the elements of nature, with minerals, sand, and salt, according to a precise and well-set measure, proportion, and form. It carries a transparent process, decreed by time, to form this complex and crystalline structure made by natural factors. The desert rose is both “engineered” and organic. It is like a sculptural pattern in the form of flowers, even though they are not real “flowers.” These shapes are similar in most deserts across the planet.

Is it possible for nature to randomly carve such shapes? Can chaos create beauty like this? Can the law or the rule be random? A geometric work like flowers in the plant kingdom is something scientific and vital that we can understand and explain. Still, the rigid factors of nature make the form of flowers similar and not the same, leading you to faith in the golden ratio, the mathematical secret and law that represents one of the codes of existence.

Dia al-Azzawi (B. 1939)
Desert Rose No. 4, 2012
Colored Aluminum Sculpture – H:95 x L:86 x W:54 cm
Signed Lower on Side

Front Cover:
Rafa Nasiri (1940 - 2013)
Manifestations of Nature - 1981
Acrylic on Canvas - 100 x 120 cm
Signed Lower Right



The Publications of Ibrahim Collection for Fine Arts
Baghdad - Iraq
Karrada Kharij, Dist. 905, St. 7, Bld. 35
P.O. Box 2489 Jadriah, Baghdad - Iraq

Amman - Jordan
Shmeisani, Abdulrahman Irshaidat Str., Build. No. 5
P.O Box 942109 Amman 11194 Jordan

Website: www.ibrahimicollection.com
Email: doc.office@ibrahimicollection.com
Google Arts & Culture
<https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/ibrahimi-collection>
Facebook: Ibrahim IC
Instagram: Ibrahim Collection
YouTube: Ibrahim Collection