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Visual Language Between Image and Poetry in Contemporary Arab Art

Jehad Hasan Alameri^{*1}, Haifaa Bani Ismail, Hussam N. Fakhouri², Mohammad Wasef³, Ehab Abu-Hannoud⁴

Abstract

This research aims to reveal the image of poetry in contemporary Arab art, by attempting to answer the research questions: how did the Arab artist represent the poetic language and transform it into a visual language, and what are the poetic themes and the mechanism of producing the artwork? The researcher relies on the descriptive analytical method to dissect the artistic works that were inspired by poetry, choosing artistic experiences of five artists from different countries whose works focused on the research topic based on the theoretical framework of the interplay of arts (poetry and painting). This study aims to reveal the importance of the poetic image in shaping the visual image in contemporary Arab art and to explain the effect of the artist's inspiration from poetic poems. The study culminated in several key results, among which the most note-worthy is the substantial influence of poetry on contemporary Arab art, both thematically and in the artistic process. This research highlights the emergence of innovative forms in Arab art, particularly the integration of art books along-side traditional painting and the incorporation of Arabic calligraphy into the very essence of artworks that draw inspiration from poetry. These findings under-score the dynamic interplay between literary and visual arts in the Arab artistic landscape, reflecting a rich fusion of mediums and styles.

Keywords: Visual Language, Interplay of Arts, Contemporary Arab Art

1 Introduction

The relationship between the arts and their interplay with each other, forming an artistic work, whether it is literature, visual, or auditory arts, leads us to the visual language that binds the arts, forming the story of mutual influence between the arts especially the art of poetry and painting. This story, which is estimated to be three thousand years old in the history of literature and art in the West and East, is intriguing and perplexing, raising more than one question about the reception of poetry by artists and the reception of artists by poets, about the relationship between the fine arts in general and the arts of poetry and painting in particular. However, the issue does not seem self-evident when we contemplate it with a bit of thinking, and when we explore the nature of this relationship between poetry and artistic work in terms of its nature, function, means, and aesthetic forms, as opinions differ about this relationship.

The research is based on the principle of the intersection of the visual painting with the poetic poem, an integrative intersection aimed at achieving the most beautiful degree of reception and understanding of the poem. The painting, through spaces of emptiness, degrees of light, and levels of color, helps in drawing the poetic meaning or clarifying the poetic image presented in

¹ Visual Art Department, School of Arts and Design, The University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan, *Corresponding author Email: j.alameri@ju.edu.jo

² Data Science and Artificial Intelligence Department, Faculty of Information Technology, University of Petra, Amman, Jordan.

³ Department of Music, School of Arts and Design, The University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan.

⁴ Applied Arts, Faculty of Fine Art, An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine.

the poem. The visual image is an exceptional aesthetic medium in analyzing the semantic level and exploring the poetic imagination through its various spaces, as the artist's imagination embodies the poet's imagination and vice versa.

This research confirms the symbiotic relationship between different artistic genres, whether they are pure linguistic texts or purely visual texts. The evolution of artistic movements has managed to approximate and parallel arts in the postmodern era, which believes in deconstructing the text and dispersing its semantic intentions to make the semantic level open, thus enhancing the power of text reception by all spectra of recipients.

The opposing ideas and opinions about the interplay of arts quickly dissipated with the immense amount of experiences. The interplay of literary and artistic genres poetry and painting – does not mean negating one art for the sake of the other, as art by its nature evolves and renews itself and its creations. The boundaries between the arts, with the evolution of artistic forms, have collapsed and been surpassed, with no art dominating another, and most of the time, accompanying and complementing each other.

The historical relationship between poetry and artistic work has produced a close relationship between the creators of these two arts, (the artist and the poet), who have made many approaches in the history of this relationship. When an artist paints a poet's poem, but with a different symbolic field, each art has its means of expression, whether in approaching or distancing from the subject. This problematic has made the difference in concepts a matter in need of study, considering the differences between painters and poets, their affiliations, and their production conditions. Upon reviewing the history of the image of poetry in artistic work, we find artistic productions in which the painter tried to create a single artistic work through the use of a poetic text, and the history of Arab art contains many such experiments.

Our study, titled "Visual Language Between Image and Poetry in Contemporary Arab Art," delves into the intricate relationship between contemporary Arab artistic creations and the poetic verses that inspire them. This research explores the vivid portrayal of poetry within these artworks, unraveling the unique methods of expression and distinct characteristics foundational to their creation. Central to our investigation is the analysis of how these artworks, primarily in the medium of painting, derive their thematic and formal essence from the original poems. The researcher aims to shed light on various facets of these artistic endeavors, addressing key questions surrounding these creative experiments and their poetic muses.

2 Research Questions and Objective

The research raises a set of questions regarding the visual language between image and poetry in contemporary Arab art, represented by the following questions:

- How the Arab artist was inspired by poetry in artistic works?
- Has the Arab artist been able to embody the poetic poem through visual language?
- What are the poetic themes that the Arab artist has drawn inspiration from in their works?
- Did the Arab artist create artworks that are independent of the content of the poem or imitative of it?
- What are the artistic techniques and methods of producing the works of the Arab artist who was inspired by poetic works?

The objective of this research is to elucidate the pivotal role of poetic imagery in molding the visual narratives of contemporary Arab art. It seeks to unravel the profound impact that artists'

engagement with poetic verses has on their creative expression, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the symbiotic relationship between literary poetry and visual artistry within the Arab cultural context. This study aims to bridge the gap between the written word and visual representation, highlighting how poetic inspiration transcends into the realm of visual art, enriching its form and substance.

Further, this research aims to explore several critical aspects of the intersection between poetry and visual art in the Arab world. Firstly, it explores the ways in which Arab artists have been inspired by poetry in their artistic creations, examining the process and extent of this inspiration within the realm of their visual works. Additionally, the study will explore the Arab artists' proficiency in translating poetic themes into visual language, examining their capability to capture the essence of poetry visually. A key focus will be identifying and analyzing the specific poetic themes that have influenced Arab artists, aiming to understand the thematic synergy between literary and visual expressions. Another important aspect is to determine whether Arab artists tend to create artworks that are independent interpretations of poetic content or lean towards direct imitation of the poems' themes and styles. Finally, the research will investigate the artistic techniques and production methods used by these artists, particularly those who draw inspiration from poetry, to understand how these techniques influence the aesthetic and thematic outcomes of their artworks.

3 Research Methodology

The research will adopt a comprehensive descriptive-analytical approach, meticulously analyzing selected art samples from various Arab countries spanning the period from 1990 to 2024. This approach aims to provide a thorough understanding of the interplay between visual art and poetry within this cultural context. A carefully curated collection of five distinct artistic experiences from Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Bahrain will be the focal point of this study. These experiences have been chosen for their representative value and diversity, ensuring a broad perspective on the subject matter. Each selected experience comprises artworks that have been significantly inspired by Arabic poetry, offering a rich ground for analysis.

4 The Image: Its Origin and Concept

The image we perceive is a part and component of the world we live in, as it enters through various processes of its analysis into personal behavior and then into forming the behavior of groups and their cultural output.

The image is constantly flowing and present at every moment, evolving and diversifying in a way that is often difficult to keep pace with in various fields, whether in daily life or in artistic and literary works. As the saying goes, "the spirit does not think without images,"[1] the image in its visual discourse has transcended many connotations, reminding us of the Chinese proverb that says "a picture is worth a thousand words," to see the impact of the image in shaping cultural awareness and what can be received from parallel and varied visual language in its cultural carriers.

The image of the artistic work was not immune to the rapid and pivotal transformations that accompanied the era of technology and knowledge that the world has witnessed. In terms of criticism and philosophies of the image, the change in artistic work quickly responded to the theories and philosophical opinions that emerged in the modern era, forming the image of

modern artistic work as an intellectual state where the image with its visual orientations touched social and human reality and participated in it.

The artistic work, whether it is a painting, graphic work, or sculpture, has influenced the processes of awareness and communication between societies, becoming an important part of human heritage. Humanity has realized the realities of ancient civilizations through the preserved images drawn in caves, and the uninterrupted readings and interpretations of those visual images. The arts, or the artist, have attracted the attention of philosophers, being one of the pillars producing the image, and proving issues related to ethics, existence, and knowledge.

Gatshev noted that the unity of the logical and the historical is one of the principles of scientific method, requiring the real history of the phenomenon to match its theory.” [2] Based on this, we attempt a theory similar to a birth theory of the image or a theoretical history of it. Gatshev added that the prerequisites of the image were formed long before the appearance of the artistic image, in its conventional sense, just as the moment of beauty in human work was born before art. When art and literature shine with the light of true creativity, it is no coincidence that the features of pre-historic culture - almost - find understanding in contemporary man.” [2]. The image is the primary material upon which important meanings that we need to convey the world visually are based. For example, drawing is a visual language where means of perception, imagination, and knowledge combined turn into an image and then into sensibility.

We can explore the image from some of its multiple characteristics. There are images that mimic reality and others that express it. This duality takes us back to the origin of art, where the image is based on the existence of a connection and resemblance, but what are the things that we connect and establish a resemblance between? The red color of a star or planet reminded the ancient man of blood, and foretold of strife and wars in human society. Likewise, Eastern poets likened the beloved’s lips to coral; all these are miniature pictorial entities formed by a connection between nature and society and vice versa.” [2]

For every entity there is a face and a back, for every leaf a front and a back, for every perspective a hidden aspect, as for every image an apparent and an inner aspect.” [3] Most ancient and modern uses of the concept of the image revolve around imitation or resemblance, that is, reproduction. In the Arabic language, the meaning of the image goes to the form of the act or the act and its description, and by imagining something, we mean imagining its image and thus it is visualized to us. The concept of the image and the image of thought are among the most important philosophical issues that have accompanied the issue of the image from the beginning, and the effects of those mental or religious suggestions are still evident in many modern artistic orientations, making some themes and characteristics inherited in the form of icons or depicted symbols since the beginning of the history of civilizations.

In this context, the researcher would like to present some of the many definitions of the image, as the image is a special way of expression, or an aspect of significance, its importance lies in what it causes in terms of specificity and impact in a meaning. Regardless of this specificity or impact, the image does not change the nature of the meaning itself, it only changes the way it is presented, and how it is delivered.” [4] In another context, we see the concept of the image in the combined arts as “an aesthetic vision experienced by the artist, writer, or poet, which can be directly or indirectly perceived within the framework of aesthetic ideals according to the ideological affiliations of the artist or poet, and according to his comprehensive philosophical view and his specific aesthetic doctrine.” [5]

We see that the image for the artist and poet is a production of their inner consciousness, and we can either perceive the image with them or not. Here, the image is a complex compositional unit and a basic component for the artist and poet, as Louis believes that "the image is a drawing whose essence is words charged with sensation and emotion." [6] Here, the researcher sees different variations of the concept of the image, some related to external perceptual or internal mental images, or the image in the literary sense. The image that the researcher deals with in his study is a structured entity representing cognitive thinking in the artistic work, whether it is a drawing or an engraving, resulting from the reference of the poetic text, whether this structure - the image - is close to or distant from the poetic content.

5 Poetry and Painting

It seems almost self-evident, especially in this era, to emphasize the relationship between the arts and their interplay with each other, forming an artistic work, whether it be literature, visual art, or auditory art. In this regard, Baudelaire said: "One of the distinctive phenomena of the spiritual situation in our century is that all arts tend to reinforce each other at the very least. If not, they work to substitute for each other by lending each other new powers and resources." [7]

Comparative research between art and literature has become one of the most enjoyable studies today. Although the interest in studying the relationships between creative arts began in the 17th century, despite the existence of this relationship historically before that, the intimate interplay between the arts did not reach its maturity until the end of the 20th century. A review of the history of art and literature reveals the extent of influence and the close relationships that arose particularly between artists and poets. "Painting and writing have much to say to each other, as they share many things. The novelist thereafter wants us to see." [8]

The arts and literary genres aim for aesthetic impact, and literature, for example, has tried to reach the effects of painting, to be called 'painting with words', or tried to achieve the effects of music, to turn into music. [9]

Therefore, it is now certain that this interplay between the arts cannot be denied and tends towards the correspondence of the arts and the migration of techniques from one art to another. In a single work, one can see painting, music, and poetry. The researcher believes that the interplay of texts - i.e., the interplay of the arts - with each other can lead to an open creative work that enriches and deepens the work. This reminds us of the concept of Intertextuality in the arts, defined by the American critic Robert Scholes as "a text within another text forming its meaning whether the author intends it or not." [10] Philippe Sollers points to the relationship of the text - the painting - with a group of artistic works and not just one single artistic work, Every text lies at the intersection of several texts, being at once a rereading, emulation, condensation, transfer, and deepening of them." [11]

It is possible for art to be influenced by other arts without the artist realizing this influence. The history of art is rich in artistic works that have taken directly and indirectly from other arts.

Despite the ancient relationship between poetry and painting, which concerns us in this research, "The oldest text we know in the history of Western literature and criticism about this enchanting and mysterious relationship between poetry and the visual arts is the phrase attributed to Simonides of Ceos (from the island of Ceos in Greece, who lived around 556 to about 468 BC) in which he says that poetry is a speaking image or a speaking painting, and that

painting or imagery is silent poetry.”[12] In this clear phrase, there is a reciprocity in the performance, i.e., in the tools of art. Poetry has become an image, but it is speaking, and painting has become silent poetry. Here, the reciprocity in the roles of the arts with each other, especially poetry and painting, is evident.

The phrase of Ceos is echoed in the book of the Roman poet Horace (65-8 BC), Poetry is painting (Un Pictura Poesis)” where he compares the poem to the image, demanding the effort to polish the poetic verse and shape it with his phrase as is painting, so is poetry,” which found resonance over the centuries in many ways by both painters and poets. For example, Antoine Coypel advised in his speech before the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1741: ”The painter in his noble style must be a poet, I don’t say that he must write poetry, as one might do that without being a poet, but I say that he must be filled with the same spirit that moves life in verse, and he must also necessarily know its laws which are the same as those of painting... Painting must do to the eye what poetry does to the ear.”[13]

The researcher also finds a notable observation by Picasso, recalled by Françoise Gilot, stating, Painting is poetry that is always written in a poetic form with a pictorial rhyme, and it is never written in prose. [14] Additionally, the phrase by Horace found a lasting echo in critical circles to this day. Wallace Stevens emphasized that No poet can overlook how much a word, a related object, or a remark about painting often applies to poetry as well. It appears that there is a collection of notes on painting, mostly by the painters themselves, which are as significant for poets as they are for painters. 15] This demonstrates how insights and contexts in the art of painting gain traction and benefit among poets, highlighting their significance in constructing a literary work. This view is shared by American poet Ezra Pound: A truly effective artistic work is one that requires its interpretation to involve a hundred works of a different literary genre. A work that includes a curated collection of images and drawings is the nucleus of a hundred poems.”[12]

The relationship between poetry and painting resurfaced from the late 19th century onwards, largely due to the Western world’s exposure to Eastern arts. People sensed the poetic essence of Eastern drawings and the inclination of Chinese and Japanese poetry towards painting and illustration. Critical studies elucidating the close relationship between poetry and painting increased. Often, Chinese poets were painters themselves, and critics, especially in the 11th and 12th centuries, stressed the parallel between poetry and painting in terms close to those of Simonides and Horace. One of them, Kurson, asserted, Painting and writing are a single art; one can paint poetry just as a painter can write voiceless poems [12]

Ezra Pound highlights the calligraphic value of Chinese writing and what he terms ’derivations of the image.’ He reveals his understanding of the coordinated and robust combination that words and painting create, embodying the spirit of Chinese art. The pictorial aspect of writing in Japanese and Chinese art connects poetry to painting. As previously mentioned, there’s a shared characteristic between the line in writing and drawing and poetry, within a single painting. For instance, to create one of his calligraphic works, Koetsu started with a paper made to his specifications, on which he painted a background decoration in gold and silver Picasso, in another context, affirms the meeting of poetry with painting in a linear growth, justifying the exchange between the two actions - writing and painting - when he declared: After all, all arts are one, you can write a picture with words just as you can paint emotions in a poem.”[16]

There is no denying the relationship between the arts, whether we imagine it as a relationship of parallelism or exchange, interaction, and influence through the ages and literatures.

However, the issue does not seem self-evident when we contemplate it with a bit of thinking, and when we explore the nature of this relationship between the arts in terms of their nature, function, means, and aesthetic forms. If we were to trace the matter in the history of literature, art, and criticism, we would find conflicting opinions and varying degrees of doubt.

This led the Enlightenment writer, playwright, and critic Lessing to consider poetry and painting in terms of their relationship to time and space, distinguishing sharply between temporal forms in art from spatial forms, and outlining the consequences of mixing them in a single artistic work and the resulting effects on the internal structure, different in poetry from painting. The artistic theories based on Horace's principle were, in his opinion, the main reason for the confusion and harmful mixing between the arts in his era. [12]

No matter how much we distinguish arts from each other and highlight the structural differences that make them express different worlds with different means, the symbolic function is one in all types of artistic expression (as philosopher Susan Langer says), and all divisions, classifications, and different aesthetic conceptions ultimately converge in one deep unity. (As Croce says in his book on poetry) Whether we understand from this final unity that all arts aspire to become harmony and music, or that they ultimately transform into worship and prayer, this hoped-for unity indicates in any case the intimate connection between all arts. [12]

The opposing ideas to the interplay of the arts quickly dissipated with the immense amount of experiences, as the interplay of literary and artistic genres - poetry and painting - does not mean the negation of one art in favor of the other. Art by its nature evolves and renews itself and its creations, and new artistic genres emerge from its creators. As time evolves and with the accumulation of artistic formulations in the history of art, art always tries to produce new and interlaced genres. The boundaries between the arts have collapsed and been surpassed with the evolution of artistic forms, so there is no art that dominates another, and if it exists, it is temporary, and most of the time, it accompanies and complements it.

"There is complementarity between thinking with images and thinking with words, and images have come to enrich words, not to replace them. What we see now of the dominance of the image is a temporary and apparent dominance, as words now accompany images in the form of messages, subtitles, and word advertisements, which now accompany images in one form and may reach a balance with them." [17]

5.0.1 Introduction to the Poetic Image in Contemporary Arab Art

Upon contemplation and scrutiny of contemporary Arab painting at the present time, it is evident that it has formed a significant presence and has become historically significant in aesthetic research. The researcher believes that the history of Arab painting is not separate from the history of Arab societies and the events that have clearly influenced the making of the history of Arab painting.

In considering contemporary Arab art, it is essential to touch upon two fundamental references in shaping the Arab painting: the Arab-Islamic culture with its aesthetic qualities and the convergence and blending of Western culture with the East. The researcher sees the necessity to quickly focus on these two milestones due to their importance in the formation of Arab painting and their impact on contemporary Arab artistic output. "For decades, Arab poetry has been in dialogue and proximity to visual art, thus creating a distinct margin within Arab culture, clearly and differently manifested in what later became known as Arabic

calligraphy, i.e., the use of pictorial representation through letters, then through poetry and poetic writing, eventually transforming the painting itself into a visual poem.” [18] When discussing Arab-Islamic aesthetics in Arab visual art, it’s undeniable that we will encounter abstraction and embodiment, which contain issues in this culture. Generally, in Islamic culture, it’s known for its preference for geometric abstraction over embodiment for religious reasons.

The history of Islamic art and the details of religion’s influence on it gave special attention to the prohibition and forbidding of depicting living creatures, which had a real impact on figurative art in Islam. [19] Moreover, most old and modern uses of the concept of image and depiction in Arab culture revolve around imitation or resemblance and reproduction (creation). In this sense, the perception of the image in Arab-Islamic culture, which associated it with idol worship (idolatry), has evolved.

”All monotheistic religions are naturally hostile to the image and sometimes combat it, as the image is considered, at best, an excess of decoration and suggestiveness, and always outside the essential.”[20] The analyses and interpretations around the prohibition of depiction in Islam were personal interpretations, as there is not a single text in the Quran that categorically prohibits depiction. The jurists relied on interpretations and explanations of the Prophet’s hadiths, ”The most severely punished people on the Day of Judgment are those who try to imitate Allah’s creation.”

Here, the stance of Islam on depiction and the distinction between depiction and creation becomes clear. Islam forbids depiction or any act that leads to its worship, whether of a sculpture or a painting. However, these opinions diminished due to the lack of a clear Quranic text on prohibition. ”Depiction made its way into decorating palaces without adhering to the jurisprudential stance, indicating a contradiction between it and the official position on depiction.”[21]

There is much evidence of Muslims’ transgression of the prohibition, including numerous examples, such as the minting of coins by Abdul Malik bin Marwan featuring prominent images and the Muslims’ care in decorating and painting the walls of their palaces, which still stand as a testament to this. The researcher does not wish to prolong the discussion on prohibition, a complex issue, but felt it necessary to mention. In this context, the researcher speaks of the clear and advanced evidence of depiction in the history of Arab painting in Islamic culture.

We see the impact of miniatures in conveying Arab-Islamic aesthetics to the pinnacle of embodiment and the blending of embodiment with geometric and narrative composition at that time. ”When we lose the memory of language, words seek to be reduced to univocal meanings, and we lose with them the roots of meaning, semantic multiplicity, and the inherent relationships between fields and human and cultural practices. Perhaps this explains how calligraphy transformed into the art of the image par excellence in the Arab and Islamic world and how the image in general, in its visual aspect, was derived and reduced to the realm of rhetorical image.” [22]

The first book in which miniatures appeared was ”Kalila wa Dimna” in 230 AD, featuring images of animals expressing themes in a simplified style.[23] Originally an Indian book, it was translated into Persian several centuries before Islam and then translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa.

Miniatures at their peak of artistic development and greatness were associated with Arab literature, particularly the ’Maqamat’, due to their rich pictorial enjoyment and imagination.”

[24] The most important miniatures in Arab-Islamic history, which established significant values in Arab depiction and its association with depicting social life in the 13th century, are the Maqamat al-Hariri of 1237 AD, drawn by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti. "The Maqamat al-Hariri was distinguished by its linguistic originality, and in addition, the poetry rich in language, clarity, and impact." [24] When examining the miniatures in Maqamat al-Hariri, it's essential to consider their artistic characteristics, pictorial aesthetics, and their relationship with writing (poetic and narrative texts), as well as revealing the written contents through depiction. The artist understood the story and formulated it pictorially (in drawing) in a way that later established the foundations of pictorial representation in depiction. "We see that the collection of miniatures in the illustrated Maqamat al-Hariri, due to its artistic and aesthetic value, established the foundations and outlines of an original artistic school known as the Baghdad Arab school in Islamic depiction." [24] [22]

The researcher sees the importance of the presence of the line – the linguistic text

whether poetry or prose, in Islamic miniatures, as an important characteristic in their formation. The blending of written text with drawing in Islamic manuscripts gave a beauty dimension through the focus on shapes and their formulation within the space of the written text, sometimes surpassing the visual – drawn – text over the written – linguistic text. The importance of accompanying illustrations to the linguistic texts became significant in Arab civilization, as many manuscripts were adorned with drawings consistent with the content of the written manuscript, maintaining the visual pictorial – value of the book as a testament to the Muslims' Arabs' interest in the overall form of the text in general, containing both language and drawing. The writer would send his text to a specialized artist to adorn the texts and decorate them with ornaments or depict them pictorially, as in the Maqamat al-Hariri.

One of the most distinguishing features of Arab culture is "Arabic calligraphy," which "occupied a high status under Islam and played an important role in society for several reasons, including that Islam encouraged reading and writing, and calligraphy became an official and religious tool, and it was beautiful and acceptable." [25] "When we lose the memory of language, words tend to be reduced to univocal meanings, and we lose with them the roots of meaning, semantic multiplicity, and the inherent relationships between fields and human and cultural practices. Perhaps this is what explains how calligraphy transformed into the art of the image par excellence in the Arab and Islamic world, and how the image in general, in its visual aspect, was derived and reduced to the realm of the rhetorical image." [22]



Fig. 1 The Assemblies of Al-Hariri.

6 Arab Visual Experiences

Poetry is a central and important reference in the history of contemporary Arab art. We see that there have been numerous experiments by Arab artists who have been inspired by poetic verses, attempting to create a visual narrative through the language, which has and continues to evoke significant aspects in Arab societies. "Historically, the dialogue between the poem and the painting in the Arab world dates back to 1978 with a joint book by the artist Shafiq Abboud and the poet Adonis titled 'Mirrors for a Time of Collapse.' This was an artistic book printed on stone, and in the precise artistic sense, there are some unarchived experiments." [26] In this regard, the researcher sought to explore the artistic experiences of Arab artists who were inspired by poetry in their artworks, focusing on influential experiments and selecting intentional samples for study to answer some questions about this relationship.

"The dialogue between poetry and visual art transcends the duality of imitation and randomness to affirm that the direction of both visual art and poetry is the same, vertical, and unites the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the transcendent. Despite the differences in support and material, and relying on vision and vision, sight, and insight, this is their common destiny, which is always capable of being activated and discovering other unknowns in the horizon of the poetic experience, both in form and poem." [18]

With the evolution of Islamic arts, Arabic calligraphy went beyond being merely a linguistic carrier of meaning. The migration of Arabic calligraphy from parchment to architectural elements, tools, vessels, fabrics, and various textiles is a testament to its penetration beyond its nature as a carrier of semantic meaning to its function as a carrier of aesthetic meaning. "There is a migration in manuscripts of calligraphy from its function as a depiction of meaning and its carrier to the function of depicting the spatial formative space and depicting the relationality of its geometric elements with their carriers. It is clear that dealing with letters and words and their beauty has become a carrier for aesthetic formation in itself, without regard to the function of clarifying meaning." [27]

6.1 Rashid Al Qureshi Experience

The collaboration between the poet Mahmoud Darwish, the painter Rashid Al Qureshi, and calligrapher Hassan Massoudy stands as a significant event in the realm of Arab art and culture. This joint experience, which merged poetry, painting (etching), and calligraphy, marked its visual signatures in an exhibition that opened in 1997 in Amman, hosted by the "Darat al Funun" of the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, attended by the poet Mahmoud Darwish and the artist Rashid Al Qureshi.

Abdelkebir Khatibi, in his text included in the book published alongside the exhibition, which comprised Qureshi's 'Readings' and Massoudy's 'Suggestions' on Mahmoud Darwish's poetry, states: "Let's contemplate these transformations, these translations from one sign to another, from one image to another. A collection of etchings dramatizes the Arabic language in its poetic and written form. This script, written and read from right to left, whose distinctive graphic direction serves as a spa-tial model, reaches out to all languages. From pictographic writing to semi-symbolic writing, passing through Arabic line expression, whether this writing is readable or resistant to reading, inverted or fitting on the canvases in every direction as if trying to escape from these etchings, stripped of frames." [28]

This collaboration is a notable example of how different artistic disciplines can come together to create a new, integrated artistic expression. The interplay of poetry, visual art, and calligraphy

in this project highlights the richness and depth of Arab cultural heritage, reflecting its ability to evolve and embrace contemporary artistic forms while staying true to its roots.

The exhibition featuring the collaborative work of poet Mahmoud Darwish, artist Rashid Al Qureshi, and calligrapher Hassan Massoudy in 1997 in Amman, hosted by "Darat al Funun" of the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, was a significant cultural and artistic event. This unique artistic experience carried profound artistic and cultural connotations, particularly in how it represented a cohesive blend of the works of three "exiles": Rashid Al Qureshi "away from his homeland, Algeria," through his creation of engravings and prints; the poet Mahmoud Darwish "away from his homeland, Palestine," through the formulation of his poems; and the calligrapher Hassan Massoudy "away from his homeland, Iraq," through his crafting of Arabic lettering art.[29]

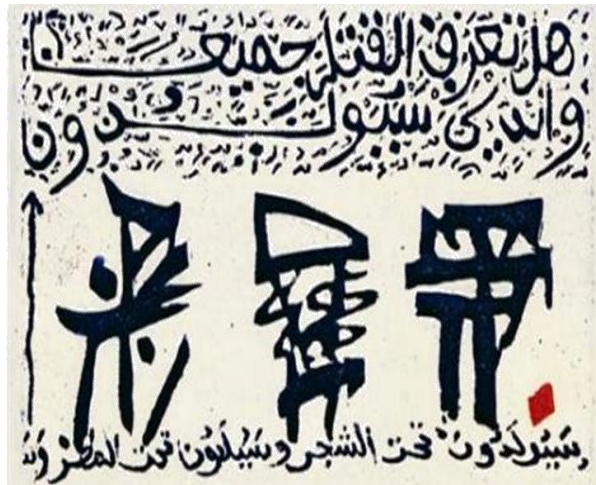


Fig. 2 Rashid Al Qureshi Art Work.

Abdelkebir Khatibi writes in his text included in the book released alongside the exhibition, discussing Qureshi's 'Readings' and Massoudy's 'Suggestions' on Mahmoud Darwish's poetry: "A poet, a painter, and a calligrapher, doesn't this meeting in itself represent a scenographic display of a civilization often obstinately accused of persecuting figuration? But we continue to assert that the Islamic civilization, which is a civilization of the sign par excellence, must be read and interpreted through aesthetic concepts different from those of representation (representation of nature, society, and the human body), concepts capable of comprehending the uniqueness of this civilization in its imaginative forms, organized here between the spaces of poetry and calligraphy and their transformations through the art of engraving." [28]

Rashid Al Qureshi represented twenty poetic segments by Mahmoud Darwish through twenty panels, which were part of the exhibition. These panels, created by Qureshi using the technique of lettering and printing, showed his endeavor to study the symmetrical space between the black of the formation and its dynamics and the white of the paper. The artistic works' color value represented a dialogue between two opposites, black and white, and the spaces that intertwine them, perceived by the viewer through the interaction between the poetic image and the visual image of the artworks. Qureshi also aimed to distribute letters and directions of movement in a way that creates harmony between the details of the artwork and the psychological and symbolic states he wanted to convey. He juggled between the intentionality and aesthetics of Arabic letters and their clashes, which confer an aesthetic value in terms of

form, and between concealing the intentionality of highlighting the aesthetic value of the letter or symbol (many symbols that draw from various cultures), focusing instead on revealing the content – at least as the poems suggest – which here does not stray far from Palestine: the homeland and the idea. The poetic texts focus on the theme of homeland (Palestine) and the longing to touch the torments of loss and exile.

The artistic works represent an added value to the relationship between poetry and painting in the history of Arab art by relying on the aesthetic mimicry of poetry and its molding and melting into the intellectual content of the text to represent a new text. This approach enriched the mechanism of artistic production and added a new value to the color value of the work, resembling the poetic image.

6.2 Mohammed Al Ameri experience

The artistic experience of Jordanian artist Mohammed Al Ameri is an exemplary model of integrating poetry and visual art. He has engaged in numerous artistic endeavors, blending poetry and visual text. Al Ameri has visually interpreted the poetry of several Arab and foreign poets, including Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, and Jordanian poet Rashid Issa.

In a notable project, Al Ameri worked on a poetic book titled "Jabriya" by the Jordanian poet Rashid Issa. The artist's first approach was to select a number of his paintings that he saw as fitting to accompany Issa's poems for publication in the book. These paintings had a profound aesthetic impact on the readers, enhancing both the visual and psychological interaction and the semantic space of the poetry. Then, Al Ameri himself utilized this poetic book in his artistic project by creating a series of visual texts - a collection of paintings that complement each other and reveal the aesthetics of poetic imagination.

Al Ameri delved into a kind of mystical journey with Rashid Issa's poems, finding them touching upon themes of family, motherhood, and nature. He tried to capture these themes visually, incorporating elements like a mother figure, a cane, and an image of a father. In his artworks, Al Ameri ensured that the color spaces included some of Issa's poetry as unspoken signals, where writing transformed into a visual sign moving within the canvas space. He described his process as dipping his brush in the water of Issa's poetry and walking it across the paper as if he were writing his poetry in colors born in a moment of emotion. He followed the narrative paths of the texts to reach a depth filled with the herbs of pain, leading to a destination steeped in tears. [30]

The harmony between the poem and the structure of the painting, as well as the subject of the poem and the meaning of the painting, establishes a model of aesthetic partnership between the poem and the painting. All the poems in the poetry book have philosophical nuances that resonate with nature – birds, trees, stones – which Al Ameri symbolically represented in his visual text through form and color. He blended this with the value of Arabic calligraphy, which the artist leaned on within the fabric of his shapes and colors that reveal and elucidate the nuances of the line and its presence. Thus, the artistic works became a new interpretation through the mechanism of artistic production, which took on a new form. Instead of searching for the meaning of the written poetic language, the viewer explores meanings through colors and elements of the artwork.

6.3 Dia Al-Azzawi Experience

Dia Al-Azzawi, an Iraqi artist, has made a significant contribution to the world of contemporary Arab art, particularly in his special attention to integrating poetry into his artistic expression.

His artistic journey, spanning from the 1980s to the 21st century, has encompassed a variety of mediums including painting, sculpture, and ceramics.



Fig. 3 Mohammed Al Ameri Art Work.

Al-Azzawi has depicted the poetry of numerous celebrated Arab poets, such as Saadi Youssef and Adonis, with whom he collaborated, as well as other poets like Muzaffar Al-Nawab, Amal Donqol, Youssef Al-Sayegh, Dunya Mikhail, Sargon Boulus, Qassim Haddad, and more.

Al-Azzawi has focused on the art book in this context, using it as a medium and a path to inspiration through his artistic notebooks. These notebooks blend drawing and poetry, combining poetic language with visual art, merging the written and the drawn to create a pathway for visually reading the written text. He navigated between the visible and the invisible, drawing unique aesthetic references from the manuscript and the illustrated image "the miniature," with its inherent aesthetic characteristics of Arab-Islamic art, its decorative and ornamental formation, as well as his pictorial composition style with its dual Arab dimensions, which can coincide with each other in an absolute environment, according to the form of folded pages.

Al-Azzawi utilized Arab cultural references dealing with issues still pulsating within society, such as freedom, nostalgia, and place. This pictorial and artistic experience represents an organized visual and artistic vision, achieved through selecting a theme for the sketchbook and attempting to shape it within a beautiful horizon and artistic representations, in harmony with the artist's stylistic experience. In these notebooks, texts, formal signs, configurations, multiple perceptions, and various compositions are gathered and treated through artistic vocabulary, with the introduction of different pictorial treatments.

This approach of Al-Azzawi represents a rich and multifaceted interaction between visual art and poetry, offering a nuanced exploration of themes and ideas through the lens of his artistic style. His work stands as a testament to the deep and ongoing dialogue between different forms of artistic expression in the Arab world.



Fig. 4 Dia Al-Azzawi Art Work.

7 Poetry as an Aesthetic Reference

Dia Al-Azzawi's unique artistic expression through his sketchbooks represents a significant milestone in the history of contemporary Arab art. These sketchbooks, which differ from other forms of visual art, have served as a catalyst for Al-Azzawi to explore new territories and employ poetry as an aesthetic reference in his pioneering work. Notably evident since the 1980s, these sketchbooks centered around poems by Iraqi and Arab poets. They resonate with the artist's experience, showcasing an intricate interweaving of drawings with poetic texts, harmoniously blending visual and aesthetic expressions. The treatment often involved repetition or refinement when choosing the text, incorporating line hints and special pictorial uses of letters and writing, formulated in a stylistic manner consistent with the painter's creative ideas.

Al-Azzawi was inspired to create these sketchbooks partly due to the impact left by his first encounter with an Islamic manuscript, particularly the "Ajayib al-Makhluqat wa Gharaib al-Mawjudat" (Wonders of Creation) by Al-Qazwini, which delves into "the science of the universe's characteristics," from the description of the sky, planets, constellations, their movements, the seasons, and more. Al-Azzawi states, "I was inspired by the only version of the art-poetic book, which is akin to colored and unnumbered manuscripts." This experimental study of sketchbooks fostered a special interest in the artist for the pictorial effect associated with these writings, prompting him to undertake this pioneering artistic endeavor. [31]

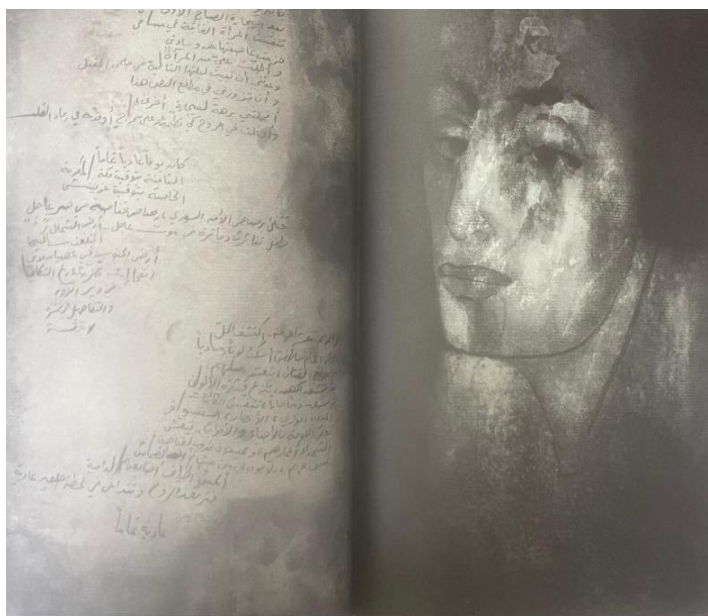


Fig. 5 Ismail Al-Rifai Art Work.

Al-Azzawi's experience represents a reference point in the history of contemporary Arab art, due to its richness and diversity. His visual forms, which melted into the fabric of the poetic language he documented, created uniqueness in his experiment, in addition to diversifying the form of the art book from boxes to accordion-style note-books for narrating the poetry content within a visually aesthetic system. Al-Azzawi's works abound with diverse color values, interplays between Arabic calligraphy and the line of drawing, and shapes that accompany this system to form a visual tapestry.

7.1 The Artist Ismail Al-Rifai

The artistic journey of Ismail Al-Rifai illustrates the profound relationship between poetry and painting. His works are distinguished by their exploration of visual language within poetic language, both in terms of theme and the mechanism of producing his art. It is noteworthy that the artist himself is also a poet, painting his poetry and taking it as a clear reference. He translates his written language into a visual one, synchronizing what he writes with what he paints. His artistic experience, as represented in works like "At the River's Bend," "The Child's Notebook," and "The Painter's Notebook," embodies his understanding of the relationship between poetry and painting.

Al-Rifai, in his book, leans towards the language of mysticism, concepts that bridge the visible and the invisible, the explicit and the expressive. The artist-poet or poet-artist did not resort to a technical solution or formal metaphor but sought to establish a structural relationship between word and image. Charbel Dagher, in his book "At the River's Bend," observes that Al-Rifai's approach to his art is not just about writing but also about forming the language. Thus, the linguistic line takes on different formations, starting at the beginning of the page, in the middle, or in clusters of lines that take on a specific visual form. This means that the poetic language itself undulates and changes.

Al-Rifai's artistically monochromatic focus on black and white creates color values that hint at the form woven into the artwork. He establishes backgrounds for constructing the artwork based on gradients of white and black, carving his shapes within them between the visible and the hidden. This approach evokes his spatial memory along the banks of the Euphrates River, drawing on his visual references and nostalgia for the memories that faded and aged in his exile from his country. The dialogues in the poetic language, written as poetic memoirs about the place of childhood, take free forms within the range of the drawing. Here, the surface of the artwork becomes a window leading outwards, narrating the place and the story where the river water (Euphrates) blends with the color that takes on significant value within the artwork. The artist allows the colors to overflow onto the water, represented using watercolor and ink techniques.

In this experience, the language is not just written but also shaped. The poetic line adopts various formations, starting at the top of the page, in the middle, or converging in clusters with a particular visual form. This indicates that the poetic language also undulates and changes. [32]

7.2 The Artist Jamal Abdul Rahim

Jamal Abdul Rahim is a prominent Arab artist known for his work bridging poetry with visual art. His contributions to the Arab art scene have been significant, especially in the realm of manual printmaking and transforming poetic verses into visual texts. Abdul Rahim has drawn inspiration from the poems of many renowned Arab poets, including Al-Mutanabbi, Charbel Dagher, Mahmoud Darwish, and Adonis, whose work we will explore here due to its richness and presence in the artist's experiments.

In his project "The Place: Yesterday's Place Now" (2001), a manuscript attributed to Al-Mutanabbi and published by Adonis, calligraphed by artist Abdulillah Al-Arab and integrated by Jamal Abdul Rahim in an artistic compilation, the artist attempted to meld poetry into the printed visual work using various techniques. Abdul Rahim's unique engraving and printing techniques, which he excelled in for mimicking poetic texts, had their own distinctiveness. He believed that the art of printmaking requires keeping up with everything new, not just in terms

of tools but also in terms of allowing the artist the freedom to innovate and develop tools himself, responding to what his imagination proposes in creating artworks with new visions.

Abdul Rahim paralleled the value of the textual and visual languages in his work, ensuring that neither overwhelms the other. Both contribute equally to the aesthetic value that encompasses the artworks. Sometimes the shape is clear and visible, and at other times, the poetic text melts into the shapes to form a single fabric in the printed artwork's production mechanism. The production process clearly contributed to the poetic book's value, representing the artworks through a manually printed art book in multiple copies. The artist engaged in this art form by mimicking the poetic book as a collaboration with calligrapher Abdulillah Al-Arab. In his artistic construction, Abdul Rahim relies on characterizations with a robust build, surrounding these forms with calligraphy by Abdulillah Al-Arab, adding strength and sensitivity to the translation of poetry into visual images through color and the mechanism of producing the printed artwork. The unseen images in the artwork's content are apparent to the viewer through the accompanying and interwoven lines. In his project "Zocalo" (2013) with Adonis, Abdul Rahim visually represented his vision through the external shape of the artworks, taking the form of a circle based on the intellectual content of the poems, which speak of life and the universe in an endless cycle of death and rebirth. The concept of death and rebirth reveals the infinite forms of creation. In this experience, the value of Arabic calligraphy is prominent in the margins and folds of the artwork, where words and Arabic script printed in blind print lead the viewer to their hidden reading. Inside the core of the artwork, the poem's presence is highlighted through the calligraphic value of the Arabic script, which accompanies the shapes and becomes part of the work's fabric, enhancing its artistic value. The artist successfully engages the viewer in the duality of margin and core within the artwork, sometimes searching in the margin as the essence, and other times the margin becomes an additional component of the core of the artwork.



Fig. 6 Jamal Abdul Rahim Art Work 1.



Fig. 7 Jamal Abdul Rahim Art Work 2.

8 Results

Poetry has played a prominent role in contemporary Arab art, significantly influencing both the subject matter and the form of artistic works. This integration of poetry has led to the diversification of artistic production mechanisms, introducing new forms in Arab art. Among the most notable developments is the emergence of the art book, which exists alongside drawing and manual printmaking. The presence of Arabic calligraphy within the fabric of artworks that draw inspiration from poetry has had a profound impact. It facilitates a deeper understanding of poetic language and the artistic themes within the artwork. This blend of textual and visual elements enriches the reading and interpretation of both the poetry and the visual art.

The relationship between Arabic poetry and visual art is a rich field for further study. There is a recommendation for comprehensive research to explore various experiments in this domain. Such studies can shed light on how contemporary Arab artists have uniquely incorporated poetic elements into their visual works, contributing to a distinct and richly layered aesthetic experience. This interplay between word and image not only reflects the cultural heritage of the Arab world but also illustrates the dynamic and evolving nature of its contemporary art scene.

9 Limitations

First, the time frame of 1990 to 2024, although extensive, might exclude significant artistic developments outside this period that could provide additional insights into the evolving relationship between visual art and poetry in the Arab world. Additionally, the reliance on available literature and resources, along with potential challenges in accessing and communicating with some artists for primary data, might impact the depth of understanding and interpretation of the artistic works. Lastly, the subjective nature of interpreting art and poetry could introduce bias, as different researchers might perceive and analyze artistic expressions differently. Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide valuable insights within the defined scope and contribute meaningfully to the understanding of visual language in contemporary Arab art.

10 Conclusion

This research reveals a profound symbiosis between poetry and visual art in the Arab world. It highlights how contemporary Arab artists have creatively woven poetic themes and language into their visual works, introducing innovative forms like art books alongside traditional painting. The integration of Arabic calligraphy adds a significant aesthetic and interpretative layer, enriching the overall artistic expression. This blend of textual and visual elements not only reflects the rich cultural heritage of the Arab world but also underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of its contemporary art scene. The research underscores the need for further comprehensive studies to explore this intricate and culturally significant artistic interplay.

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