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## Aesthetics of the Plastic Tendency in Contemporary Iraqi Painting (2000-2016)

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### Abstract:

Throughout history, from the cave era to the present day, artists have continuously innovated and updated their styles and techniques to reflect contemporary events and developments. The artist has expressed formalist tendencies in various mediums such as painting, ceramics, and sculpture since ancient times. Iraq, rich with a profound cultural heritage, takes pride in this legacy. Iraqi artists have notably been influenced by impressionism and cubism, producing prominent figures such as Jawad Saleem, Hafidh Al-Droubi, and Shaker Hassan. This study concludes that contemporary Iraqi artists have successfully embodied the aesthetics of modern plastic trends, harmonizing heritage with modernity. Contemporary artworks have prominently featured abstract tendencies that vividly express reality, crafted by artists characterized by refined sensibility and taste, capturing life's highest forms of beauty.

**Keywords:** *Aesthetics, Plastic Tendency, Iraqi Painting..*

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### Chapter One:

#### Research Problem:

Visual arts have served as a clear cultural symbol in Iraqi culture since ancient times, notably from the cave era in painting, sculpture, and pottery. Early humans were known for their animal and plant drawings on cave walls, sculptures, and pottery works. Art accompanied human civilization through medieval, Islamic, and modern eras, each characterized by distinctive artistic features and methods, establishing a foundation for various artworks enriched with aesthetics and creativity. This raises the question: What is the plastic tendency in contemporary Iraqi painting?

#### Importance and Need for Research:

This research contributes to broadening the understanding of plastic tendencies among contemporary Iraqi artists. It is beneficial for relevant institutions, particularly faculties and institutes of fine arts, and notably for postgraduate students.

#### Research Objectives:

The current research aims to identify the plastic tendency in contemporary Iraqi painting.

#### Research Limitations:

Temporal limitations: 2000–2016 Spatial limitations: Iraq Objective limitations: The study focuses on contemporary Iraqi painting.

#### Definition of Terms: Beauty (linguistically):

The opposite of ugliness, beauty involves successful emotional communication between participants—conveying meaning effectively between the artist and the perceiver. Beautiful art succeeds in depicting the artist's

intended deepest emotions. Beauty (terminologically): A measure of influence; the extent of our immersion in the artwork and grasping the artist's conceptualization. Beautiful art successfully portrays the artist's deepest intended emotional experiences. Beauty (operationally): Beauty is a pleasant perception of things in all their meanings, details, and forms.

Tendency (linguistically): Derived from inclination, meaning leaning or direction toward something.

Tendency (terminologically): The relationship established through common aesthetic values shared across different art forms, prominently evident in contemporary Iraqi art. Tendency (operationally): The central viewpoint or focal perspective in diverse art forms, including painting, sculpture, and design.

### Chapter Two

#### (Theoretical Framework)

#### Plastic Tendency in Art

##### Section One:

##### The Concept of Plastic Tendency in Art

Contemporary visual art productions in Iraq, particularly painting, are associated with diverse analytical approaches that establish clear visual relationships with references deeply rooted in the collective memory of contemporary Iraqi artists. These analytical approaches enrich the aesthetics of modern Iraqi painting significantly.

Art in Iraq represents an environmental heritage that dates back to its foundational period. Artists like Faeq Hassan inclined toward depicting the desert landscapes,

while others adopted academic realism, especially figurative representation. Similar to global artistic contexts, contemporary Iraqi art demonstrates individualized stylistic expression regardless of the prominence of an artist or the significance of their artistic experience. It reflects the artist's internal tensions and psychological pressures, demonstrating the Iraqi artist's success in expanding their intellectual and conceptual scope.

Throughout history, visual artists have continually innovated their styles and techniques to align with the immense scientific developments that profoundly enrich their intellectual and philosophical perspectives, subsequently reflected in their artistic creations. The contemporary artist is no longer confined to predetermined terminologies or externally imposed definitions. Modern art fundamentally revolves around the indescribable, or as defined by Egyptian scholar Dr. Jamal Qutb: "Sensory implications and emotional interactions with visual perspectives; emotional projections that evoke meanings inherent within the self, psychological factors, and the reciprocal interactions they generate between the artist and their unconscious tendencies within their private realm—all of which defy categorization into repetitive copies or identical productions."

Cubism is one of the most influential modern artistic movements, named after the exhibition of seven paintings by French artist Georges Braque at the French Autumn Salon in 1908. His works presented new intellectual content by simplifying and transforming elements into cylindrical, conical, spherical, and cubic forms. Critics initially described his works as piles of cubes, leading to the term "Cubism." This movement subsequently influenced numerous later artistic trends. Credit for its creation goes to Georges Braque and Spanish artist Pablo Picasso. Cubism, in its simplest definition, represents a geometric abstraction of visible forms and volumes infused with aesthetic sensibilities. Cubism evolved through several modification phases, initially driven by philosophical and creative objectives. Analysts divided Cubism into three stages: the Cézanne phase (1907-1909), named after Paul Cézanne; the Analytical phase (1910), focusing on fragmenting elements into cubes; and the Synthetic phase (1911-1914), a reaction to analytical cubism emphasizing a return to realistic forms. This movement continued circulating among artists without significant additions or

innovations until further developed by Braque and Picasso.

In his famous painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Picasso led Cubism towards exploring artistic roots and simplifying forms into geometric elements that could be easily understood by art enthusiasts. This movement attracted many Arab artists, including the late artist Mohammed Siyam, contemporary artists Mohammed Bouqis and Mohammed Al-Rabbat, as well as artists who participated in collective exhibitions, such as Abdullah Hamas, Fahad Khalif, Nassir Al-Samarah, and others who adopted Cubism to modernize their artistic styles.

### **Artistic Trends in Cave Paintings and Ancient Iraqi Art**

Cave dwellers engaged in an intense struggle with environmental phenomena and conditions, whose dangers eventually became a source of constant anxiety. Some suggest that the motivation behind cave paintings was mythological, stemming from the cave dweller's desire to achieve magical effects through his imagination to attain effective influence. Similarly, the art of early civilizations—such as Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Egyptian, and Indian—arose from various motives and reasons, rooted in the ongoing conflict between humans and their environments.

Since the hunter-gatherer era, when humans first inhabited caves, continuing through the agricultural era and village settlements, and up until today, artists have consistently drawn inspiration from their natural surroundings. This demonstrates that the environment played a central role in guiding artists toward transforming natural elements into artistic expressions driven by aesthetic considerations. Bertamy confirmed that environmental elements significantly impacted the visual effects, shaping both the mood of the artwork and the artist's inspiration.

Painting and drawing are among the oldest art forms, dating back to when early humans first began recording their existence on Earth. Since prehistoric humans first illustrated their achievements on cave walls, painting in Iraq has emerged as one of the oldest known arts, rooted deeply in civilization's foundations. Indeed, the civilizational foundations of human societies first appeared in Mesopotamia, preceding all other ancient civilizations. Iraq, stretching from its northernmost to southernmost regions, preserves precious historical treasures, and its ancient laws and legislation predate those of all other societies and civilizations by thousands of years.

When the Sumerians regained control of Sumer from the Gutians, who had attacked and overthrown Akkadian rule, significant social and political conditions changed within the community. The primary characteristics of this era were structural societal changes along with technical and industrial advancements. Socially, the feudal system declined, a new form of governance emerged, and the aristocratic class evolved into nobility. In ancient Iraq, the arts continuously evolved alongside the development of civilization itself, forming what can be considered the early foundations of those arts. Archaeological discoveries from earlier generations revealed the beginnings of pottery, sculpture, painting, coloring, decoration, and many other aspects related to visual arts. This laid the initial foundations for art in general and specifically for Iraqi art.

In Mesopotamian civilization, artists recorded their history and daily events through expressive forms that directly represented their visual perceptions of shapes, colors, and the environmental elements surrounding them. These artistic works carried diverse aesthetic meanings and content.

Religious beliefs and political life strongly influenced the nature of art in Iraq, constituting its primary expressions. Iraqi paintings notably incorporated psychological meanings and social indications, reflecting the conditions experienced by the artist as both a citizen and creator. Artists skilfully transformed political issues into profound artistic statements, effectively capturing meaning and value even during challenging circumstances.

Through expressive thought and symbolism, Iraqi artists employed available materials and contemporary concepts to create an artistic experience characterized by a modern movement away from classical standards. Their artworks encompass sensory, symbolic, functional, and expressive values uniquely tied to artistic elements such as composition, techniques, materials, lines, colors, and ideas, all executed distinctively and powerfully.

#### **Artistic trends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance**

The year 330 AD, when Emperor Constantine established Byzantium as the capital of the Byzantine Empire, marks the beginning of Byzantine art history. Primarily religious, this art was characterized by direct sensory representation in both form and color. Byzantine proportions adhered to a principle based on the organic structure of the human body as the starting point. Rooted in the Greek tradition, Byzantine art's distinctive features

were shaped mainly by Christianity and imperial traditions.

In Europe, despite the Middle Ages, an influential artist emerged who distinguished between Byzantine and Renaissance art—Giotto (1266–1337), considered the spiritual father of Renaissance painting.

The period between the 13th and 14th centuries marked a significant Renaissance revival. Italian literature flourished, and the Renaissance era revived Greek knowledge and culture, leading to profound transformations in spiritual and aesthetic needs.

#### **Artistic trends in modern art**

Realism, from an aesthetic perspective, views art as a mere imitation of nature, contrasting with surrealism, which transcends reality. Philosophically, realism accepts the existence of external realities beyond perception, contrasting with idealism. There is naïve realism, perceiving the world exactly as seen and felt, and critical realism, which mentally processes the external world rather than accepting it as-is. Characteristics of the realistic style in painting include:

- Reduced reliance on criticism, recognizing it as vulnerable to illusion and error.
- Emphasis on detailed form and adherence to traditional perspective rules.

Romanticism played a significant role in Western society, thought, and art, marking the beginning of the modern era. Romantic art emphasized exaggeration in depicting tragic and dramatic scenes; colors were brighter than reality, movements were more violent, heroes more heroic, villains more malicious, and women portrayed with extraordinary charm and beauty. Initially influenced by philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century, romanticism sought a return to nature, sparking an artistic and literary movement that rejected rigid classicism, which had become stagnant under artists like David. Classicism deemed certain themes unsuitable for artistic treatment, especially those involving ordinary people. Romanticists rebelled against these restrictions, embracing all subjects as worthy of artistic expression. This transformation became evident when the Church's authority weakened, religious control over society diminished, and new intellectual and philosophical movements emerged among the bourgeoisie and intellectual elites, influenced by innovative aesthetic philosophies succeeding classical ideals.

Like Kant, Schiller, and Schopenhauer, Romanticism represented a revolt against classical art and traditional artistic conventions imposed upon artists. This

movement sought to unleash the artist's emotions and imagination, allowing the spontaneous expression of inner psychological experiences. Romanticism emphasized psychological expression as a counterpoint to the traditional pursuit of aesthetic values in artistic creativity.

Impressionism paved the way for modern art by freeing artistic perception of nature from the strict rules of academic traditions. This liberation was significantly influenced by the scientific understanding of light discovered by Isaac Newton. Additionally, by the late 19th century, the invention of photography diminished the need for precise descriptive representations of nature, as previously practiced by Realist artists. Young Impressionists were dissatisfied with realism's overly photographic depiction of subjects and felt painting needed change. They searched for new artistic values, initially inspired by Courbet's selection of subjects and Corot's precisely realistic, nearly photographic technique.

Ultimately, these studies led them to new goals, moving painting from indoor studios into the open air. They began experiments with sunlight's effects outdoors, initiating profound changes in the art of painting. Claude Monet (1840–1926) and others implemented their discoveries about painting by depicting scenes exactly as their eyes perceived them in the moment. Monet executed this through varied color patches, eventually leading to his renowned work displayed alongside his peers Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, Degas, and Cézanne at the Salon des Refusés. Impressionism faithfully captured nature's fleeting and transient moments, expressing precise sensory perceptions and a new understanding of humanity and the world.

Several factors influenced Impressionism's emergence at the turn of the 19th century, including Isaac Newton's discoveries about the physical properties of light and the invention of the photographic camera, inspiring Impressionists to capture the ephemeral nature of a moment. Thus, Impressionism in painting paralleled Positivism in philosophy.

The Impressionist artist embarked on sensory experiences, believing beauty emerged through sensory responses in the presence of nature, based on conscious engagement. Impressionists thought that atmospheric and optical phenomena had been inadequately explored, so they chose to paint outdoors (*en plein air*) to better capture these phenomena.

Impressionism prioritized capturing immediate visual impressions as accurately and transparently as possible, highlighting moments' fleeting and ephemeral nature. Artists sought rapid techniques to grasp the precise yet transient essence of a moment, capturing colors quickly before their disappearance—for instance, roses with blue shadows or orange tones contrasted with purple shadows. Artists aimed to swiftly capture their visual impressions, aiming for the utmost precision, transparency, and immediacy before these ephemeral moments vanished. In this sense, Impressionism represented a genuine revolution against established artistic rules and conventions, rejecting stagnation and rigidity incompatible with the industrial revolution and contemporary discoveries. It effectively contributed to modernizing art, replacing classical spatial illusion with vibrant color contrasts. Most Impressionist artists moved away from emphasizing the human figure, often simplifying it into mere color patches, reducing the human form to a fleeting silhouette captured rapidly.

For example, artist Claude Monet's innovations allowed the shift from drawing indoors to outdoor painting, exploring sunlight's impact and atmospheric effects, causing significant transformations in painting. Similarly, most Impressionists shifted away from depicting the human figure in detail, frequently representing it as simplified color patches, shadow-like forms quickly captured in passing.

Degas sought spontaneity and immediacy in human and equine movement, painting horse races—not the race itself but scenes immediately preceding it, capturing riders' and horses' tension and readiness, as in his famous paintings of racecourses. He also explored dancers' shifting moods and dynamic movements, conveying continuous rhythm, as seen in his works such as "Waiting Room" and "Dance Class."

Camille Pissarro similarly painted cityscapes and rural scenes, notably capturing streets and landscapes in varying atmospheres. He depicted Boulevard scenes under changing light, capturing transient moods, as seen in his well-known urban landscapes.

Notably, Claude Monet experimented extensively with outdoor lighting at different times, sparking significant transformations in painting techniques. This approach allowed Impressionists to better capture natural effects of light, atmosphere, and spontaneous sensations—qualities neglected by classical art—ultimately shaping a distinctive and pioneering style that resonated deeply with modern artistic movements.

The Fauvist artists focused on uniform lighting and flat construction, creating color surfaces without traditional chiaroscuro techniques (light and shadow). They avoided tonal values, relying instead on intense, pure colors of a single nature. Fauvism embraced the principle of simplification, particularly influenced by Islamic art. Henri Matisse, the pioneering figure of this movement, notably utilized Islamic decorative elements in his artwork "Islamic Vegetation".

The origin of the term "Fauvism" dates back to 1906, when a group of young artists, committed to simplification in art and intuitive depiction of forms, displayed their works in an exhibition. Upon seeing their vibrant paintings displayed alongside a traditional sculpture by artist Donatello, critic Louis Vauxcelles exclaimed ironically: "Donatello among wild beasts (fauves)!" Thus, the movement acquired the name Fauvism, signifying its radical departure from conventional artistic methods. Henri Matisse emerged as the leader and symbol of this style, alongside artist Georges Rouault.

Expressionism, in contrast, is based on manifesting the subjective emotions and inner experiences of artists. It arises from deep internal reflection and powerful emotions, unveiling the hidden aspects behind nature's superficial appearances.

Cubism's importance lies in its significant role among modern art movements at the start of the 20th century. It served not only as an innovative visual and conceptual vision but also inspired numerous contemporary and subsequent modern art movements, such as Futurism and Abstract art. Cubism represented a total and definitive break from the traditional concepts and visual methods established by Renaissance, Classicism, and Romantic art. One of Cubism's key traits is the broad utilization of materials, textures, and techniques, including collage made of paper or wood and mixed-media relief works.

Abstract art seeks to convey artistic forms free from concrete details and realistic references. It does not portray tangible, objective reality. Abstract art is mainly classified into two categories:

- Lyrical or expressive abstraction, whose pioneer was Wassily Kandinsky.
- Geometric abstraction, whose pioneer was Piet Mondrian.

Dadaism (also known as Dada) is another influential and enduring artistic and literary movement initiated by the Romanian poet Tristan Tzara (1896–1963) in Switzerland as a protest against the outbreak of World

War I. Unlike other art movements before it, Dadaism aimed at liberating art from the restraints of traditional logic, reason, and causality. Dadaists considered traditional drawing techniques, colors, and brushwork irrelevant, preferring spontaneous scribbling or arbitrary assemblages to express aesthetic value. A Dadaist artwork might include discarded cigarettes, old shoes, damaged military helmets, or empty food cans arranged randomly as "art."

Surrealism found its true philosophical home in Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious. Freud viewed dreams as keys to the complexities of life, just as the Surrealist artist found great inspiration within the unconscious. Surrealists aimed not simply to illustrate their dreams but to explore unconscious content deeply repressed within the mind, using any available method. The surrealist approach emphasized estrangement and distortion of conventional proportions.

#### **Artistic trends in modern European art**

The plastic tendency in modern European art manifests clearly in Pop Art and modern realist trends. The human figure's representation in contemporary visual arts owes much of its development in recent decades initially to Surrealism. Still, significant contributions were made by Pop Art and Realist currents in the 1960s and 1970s, placing the human subject at the center of artistic production. While abstract and informal art dominated Western trends, British artist Francis Bacon used modern imaging techniques from newspapers, magazines, and photography. However, rather than accurately representing reality, he portrayed evocative interpretations of human forms. Bacon often drew from cinematic influences, framing his human figures similarly to cinematic or photographic techniques— isolated within a defined frame and depicted from unusual, suggestive angles.

In his painting *Pope with a Helicopter Dome*, Bacon merges Diego Velázquez's depiction of Pope Innocent X with imagery drawn from unconscious memory— specifically a still from the film *Battleship Potemkin* depicting a screaming woman. This fusion of images creates an impression of extreme psychological anguish akin to screams provoked by torture.

#### **The Plastic Tendency in Conceptual Art**

Conceptual art appeared widely for the first time in the 1969 exhibition titled "Concept" at Leverkusen Museum in Germany. This exhibition marked Europe's encounter with a new artistic movement, prominently influenced by American artists. The new conceptual approach was



illustrated by artists like Nauman, Vostell, Joseph Beuys, and Richard Long, whose works defied traditional artistic conventions. Artist Sol LeWitt famously emphasized conceptuality in his mural at the Rockland County in New York, titled *Lines Not Short, Not Long, Not Straight*, demonstrating a dissolution of traditional notions about idea and form.

In conceptual art, the "idea" itself becomes the machine that generates art. This artistic form does not adhere strictly to theories or rules but rather emphasizes intuitive exploration, integrating intellectual processes without definite objectives. Conceptual art generally abandons conventional craft skills, turning the very term "conceptual art" into an equation or cryptic message from the artist to an astonished public. This profoundly altered traditional relationships in artworks, shifting emphasis from artistic execution to the underlying concept itself. Thus, conceptual art represents a significant activity stage between the original idea and the final product, making it the core of artistic production.

#### **Plastic Tendencies in Contemporary Iraqi Painting**

The beginning of the 20th century marked a significant point in contemporary Iraqi painting. Early Iraqi artists, such as pioneers who started painting at the time, primarily relied on accurately depicting nature through landscapes, some portraits, scenes of horses, and occasionally archaeological subjects that carried historical or touristic value. These artists initially lacked stylistic freedom beyond faithfully imitating nature. Consequently, their paintings conveyed tranquility and serenity, avoiding stylistic experimentation or rebellion. Their works resembled photographic still images rather than dynamic artistic expressions.

Social and political transformations during the early twentieth century profoundly affected artistic development in Iraq. By the mid-twentieth century, specifically between 1953 and 1968, notable artists—including Hafidh Al-Droubi—formed the "Pioneers" group. This group aimed to surpass the limitations of direct imitation and pursue innovative visions aligned with contemporary global artistic movements. They experimented extensively with color inspired by nature, blending experimental methods with community aspirations for modernization. Prominent members included Hafidh al-Droubi, Hayat Jamil Hafidh, Faeq Hassan, Ata Sabri, Abd al-Amir Qazzaz, Mudhaffar al-Nawab, Mundhir Jamil Hafidh, Abdul Amir Qazzaz, and others.

#### **JAWAD SELIM:**

Jawad Selim effectively represented the evolving reality of contemporary Iraq. Although he pursued a clear artistic goal, he explored the inherent contradictions of society through multiple perspectives, portraying women, portraits (like Baghdad figures and "The Victim"), and various other themes. He sought to convey these complexities through a structured artistic style, continually embracing experimentation and influences from global artists such as Henry Moore, which encouraged him to transcend classical limits and traditional approaches.

Jawad Salim's exploration was not merely stylistic but profoundly intellectual. He continuously sought to formulate an artistic philosophy defined by clear intellectual standards rather than mere visual traditions, combining heritage with contemporary perspectives.

#### **Hafidh al-Droubi**

Droubi aimed for dynamism in his artwork, incorporating musical rhythms within his compositions. He led the "Impressionists" group in Iraq (1953–1968), emphasizing experimentation in color, attempting to integrate artistic experiences with societal developments and modernization. Group members included notable artists like Mudhaffar Al-Nawab, Abdul-Amir Qazzaz, Munther Jamil Hafidh, and Hayat Jamil Hafidh.

#### **Shakir Hassan Al Said**

Shakir Hassan is renowned for his emphasis on philosophical and contemplative concepts. Since co-founding the "Baghdad Group for Modern Art" in 1953 alongside Jawad Selim, he consistently explored philosophical and contemplative foundations in art. Despite differences in approach, Shakir Hassan significantly influenced Iraqi modern art by embedding philosophical propositions into painting, deeply impacting subsequent generations.

#### **Faeq Hassan ("The Pioneers" Group)**

Faeq Hassan was central to modern artistic experiments, seeking a uniquely Iraqi style compatible with global modern art trends. His artistic career evolved through various phases resembling European movements—from Impressionism and Cubism to Abstract, Expressionist, and finally Realist art. Hassan particularly excelled in color experimentation, believing that color served simultaneously as a means and an end, articulating personal perceptions. Although he explored numerous styles, he ultimately favored realism as the most direct expression of his thoughts, deeply impacting Iraqi art traditions and the training of future generations.

### **Ismail Al-Shaikhly**

Ismail Al-Shaikhly consistently addressed themes of alienation, focusing predominantly on rural women and men, repeatedly refining his subjects, colors, and techniques. His repeated exploration was intentional, creating a distinct and imaginative universe over two decades. As noted by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Shaikhly sought to deepen the essential ideas inherited from his generation—authenticity and a detailed study of reality. He preferred the rural village as his main subject, symbolizing pure and nostalgic aspects of Iraqi identity, contrasting the chaos of urban life. Shaikhly also addressed social issues such as poverty, floods, and despair, especially in the late 1950s, from a realist-expressionist viewpoint.

### **The Generation of the 1960s**

Rafie Al-Nasseri initially adopted a realist style shaped by his four-year studies in China. However, Nasseri later rejected strict realism, stating that while China gave him foundational techniques, he later pursued personal expression through meticulous execution and disciplined experimentation, striving for deeper artistic understanding.

Kazim Haidar's creative experiences culminated in his masterpiece "The Martyr's Epic," depicting the story of Imam Hussain through symbolic and mythological visual language, making it one of the boldest examples of symbolic realism in Iraqi art.

Mohammed Muhyeddin did not strictly adhere to Realism, Expressionism, or Abstraction. Instead, he combined multiple artistic movements intelligently and harmoniously. Unlike others who similarly integrated multiple styles but ended up with incoherent results, Muhyeddin's synthesis was harmonious, logical, and artistically cohesive.

### **Plastic Tendencies in Contemporary Iraqi Painting**

The beginning of the 20th century marks the true renaissance of modern Iraqi painting. During this era, Iraqi painting clearly gravitated toward depicting both still-life and natural environments. Among the earliest Iraqi artists who represented this approach was **Abdul Qadir Al-Rassam**, who produced artworks mostly focused on landscapes, occasionally portraits, scenes of horses, and archaeological subjects valued for tourism or professional commemoration. Early painters had limited stylistic possibilities beyond imitating nature and traditional social themes.

Their initial contributions were characterized by simplicity, involving faithful representations of Iraq's natural landscapes and local environments. These works conveyed tranquility and serenity, far removed from stylistic rebellion or experimentation. Their art resembled photography more than creative visual expression.

### **Transformation during the 1930s**

Significant changes took place in the 1930s, notably beginning in **1931**, when the Iraqi state allocated a modest budget for sending art students abroad to study painting and sculpture in Europe. The first student was sent to Western institutions, experiencing a new world far from traditional local settings, as described by Iraqi art critic Nouri al-Rawi. Soon after, artists like Faiq Hassan traveled to Paris, Ata Sabri and Hafidh Al-Droubi to Rome, and later Jawad Salim to Paris in 1938. These educational missions and individual journeys continued over subsequent decades.

### **Baghdad Group for Modern Art**

#### **Jawad Salim**

Jawad Salim effectively reflected Iraq's changing social realities. Despite clear artistic objectives, he captured social contradictions through various thematic angles, including women, portraits ("Baghdadiyat" and "The Victim"), and numerous other subjects. Salim always sought artistic depth by merging thematic content and stylistic form, integrating spiritual and intellectual dimensions into his work.

Notably, Jawad Salim boldly experimented across various artistic and intellectual directions, inspired by global artists like Henry Moore, Picasso, and Joan Miró. He was also influenced profoundly by ancient Arab and Islamic art, particularly the works of Al-Wasiti. Salim's primary goal was to develop an intellectual-artistic theory bridging heritage with modern perspectives.

#### **Hafidh Al-Droubi**

Hafidh Al-Droubi, educated in Rome and London, led an art group called "The Impressionists" (established in 1953). Although this group never formally issued a statement outlining their vision, its members were connected by friendship and shared experiences. They experimented with color, seeking new artistic perspectives and avoiding mere imitation. Their works represented a blend of realism, impressionism, cubism, and abstraction. Members included Hafidh Al-Droubi, Saad Al-Ta'i, Dia Al-Azzawi, Alaa Shibir, Saad Al-Kaabi, Mudhaffar Al-Nawab, Hayat Jamil Hafidh, Abdul

Amir Qazzaz, and Mundhir Jamil Hafidh. Their activities continued from 1953 to 1968. Al-Droubi's work sought dynamism, often incorporating musicality through vibrant colors, rhythmic movements, and expressive contrasts.

#### **Shakir Hassan Al-Said**

Shakir Hassan Al Said is among Iraq's most philosophically driven artists, continually formulating intellectual and contemplative theories since co-founding the "Baghdad Group for Modern Art" with Jawad Salim in 1953. Shakir Hassan's influence significantly differed from that of Jawad Salim; while Jawad maintained stylistic freedom, Shakir Hassan pushed art toward abstraction and philosophical reflection, profoundly affecting subsequent Iraqi art movements.

#### **Faiq Hassan ("The Pioneers Group")**

Faiq Hassan constantly explored new techniques to establish an Iraqi artistic identity aligning with contemporary global art trends. His art evolved through various phases—from Impressionism to Cubism, abstraction, and Expressionism, eventually returning to realism. Hassan deeply valued color as a medium to represent internal feelings and external realities. He believed realism was the best style to reflect the Iraqi artist's mindset, becoming foundational in the development of modern Iraqi art traditions and nurturing future generations.

#### **Ismail Al-Shaikhly**

Shaikhly persistently portrayed themes of alienation, rural men and women, and repeated motifs and techniques to achieve imaginative depth over decades. Critic Jabra Ibrahim Jabra highlights Shaikhly's deep attachment to realism and the significance of rural life as opposed to urban chaos. Beyond village scenes, Shaikhly addressed broader social issues such as poverty, flooding, and social despair during the late 1950s through a Realist-Expressionist lens.

#### **Generation of the 1960s**

Rafie Al-Nasiri initially studied realistic methods in China for four years but later described his Chinese training as foundational rather than constrictive. Ultimately, he sought to explore personal artistic identity through rigorous experimentation and precise technique, aiming for innovative visions beyond realism.

Kazim Haidar's creative output included "The Martyr's Epic," boldly illustrating the historical story of Imam Hussain through symbolic realism, merging

mythological narrative and modern symbolism in contemporary visual storytelling.

Mohammad Muhaiddin uniquely integrated various art styles—not purely realism, expressionism, nor abstraction—but created harmonious works incorporating multiple schools. Unlike others whose eclectic integration of styles often appeared dissonant, Muhi Aldeen succeeded in achieving coherent and logically consistent results, combining multiple influences effectively and creatively.

#### **The 1970s Generation**

Artist **Walid Sheet** excelled at detailing, clearly communicating his ideas through calm, simple representations of everyday Iraqi life. He skillfully arranged pictorial elements, capturing nightly atmospheres, distant lights, and two central figures—one carrying a large drum (*Dammam*) and another gesturing as if calling out. Behind them is a night watchman strolling through Mosul's unique alleys lined with traditional shanasheel balconies and closely packed houses, centered by a prominent mosque dome and minaret that establish perspective depth. Sheet successfully evoked nostalgia for beautiful past nights during Ramadan, characterized by community warmth despite darkness.

**Faisal Laibi's** style reflects modified realism, or perhaps quiet expressionism, with figures directly facing viewers, quietly expressive rather than overtly emotional. Laibi explained his repeated frontal portraits as inspired by similar depictions found in Sumerian heritage. His recent works recall French artist Fernand Léger (1881) and Colombian Fernando Botero (1932), particularly the rounded or oval-shaped faces reminiscent of Islamic art traditions, notably the Baghdad school and illustrations of Al-Wasiti.

#### **The 1980s Generation**

Artists of the 1980s, willingly or unwillingly, were thrust into turbulent times marked by war and societal crises. These circumstances reshaped art's meaning and purpose. Their modernity became one of explosive confrontation rather than harmony, reflecting profound social and political upheavals. Artistic expression emphasized new experimental tools that embraced destruction as a form of creation. Artists shifted from the philosophy of "I think, therefore I exist" to "I rebel, therefore I exist," adopting experimental methods that sought to disrupt traditional painting structures,



exploring expressive forms unconstrained by classical standards.

### The 1990s Generation

The 1990s artists faced a catastrophic war followed by crippling sanctions that deeply impacted Iraqi art, leading many artists to leave the country and causing creative activities to decline. Nevertheless, the 1990s generation aimed to reflect deeply personal experiences and embraced innovative artistic methods. Notable artists like **Hanaa Malallah** addressed war and devastation in their work. Malallah developed innovative techniques to philosophically portray themes of death and disappearance. Similarly, artist **Karim Risan** depicted the struggles of Iraq in the 1990s symbolically through figures like "Al-Hallaj," creating works that transcended mere historical narration into epic representations of human suffering. In works such as "The Fires of Baghdad" (2003), he dramatically expressed existential dualities—life and death, good and evil, light and darkness—capturing Iraq's profound tragedy through stark visual contrasts.

In general, 1990s artists collectively rejected clearly defined meanings in favor of conceptual ambiguity and symbolic language, reflecting awareness of global contemporary philosophies and new aesthetic approaches. Artist Karim Risan, notably, held numerous international exhibitions, exploring large canvases and unique techniques to explore deeper philosophical and semiotic dimensions, moving beyond mere representation to evoke complex intellectual meanings and contemporary sensibilities.

### Chapter Three:

#### Research Procedures

#### Artist Rana Al-Nasiri

In this painting, shades of gray predominate, creating a harmonious gradation of tones. The gradual blending of grayscale colors conveys a subtle aesthetic, enriched by an interplay of nuanced gradations. Moreover, the painting acquires balance through its meticulous composition and careful repetition of linear elements, enhancing its visual appeal. Nasiri skillfully employed subtle tonal variations, adding dynamism and vitality to the artwork, infusing it with contemporary spirit aligned with modern artistic expression.



**Artist: Mohammed Muhridin**

This painting clearly demonstrates contemporary artistic tendencies, particularly through the use of unconventional forms aimed at achieving expressive depth and aesthetic beauty that embodies a dynamic and evocative spirit. These unusual forms serve to express both emotional and aesthetic dimensions, reflecting the contemporary artistic spirit. Mohammed Muhridin successfully achieves harmony through the diversity of forms, showcasing his ability to create a cohesive yet varied contemporary artistic style within a single artwork. The painting underscores Muhridin's talent for integrating diverse, modern artistic expressions within a unified, compelling composition.



In this painting, we find a connection to deeply-rooted traditional standards, perceiving the past as a model of authenticity and modernity simultaneously. Modernity, in this context, views the past as both authentic and contemporary. This artwork distinctly showcases figures whose presence and traditional clothing highlight cultural practices of that era. The depiction of individuals, particularly the woman in the traditional

"Abaya," emphasizes the contemporary artist's interest in heritage, acknowledging its role as the roots of our current reality. Thus, the painting bridges past authenticity with modern artistic expression.



**Artist: Fakher Mohammed**

In this painting, Fakher Mohammed emphasizes innovation through unconventional elements and symbolic meanings drawn from the artist's imagination. The composition is marked by diverse, and occasionally contrasting, elements skillfully unified within a cohesive artistic theme. The carefully chosen colors, thoughtfully selected and arranged by the artist, create an effective visual discourse that communicates clearly and expressively.

expressive essence of contemporary plastic art, presenting an effective visual narrative using abstraction.



**Artist: Asim Abdul Amir**

Asim Abdul Amir is among the contemporary artists whose work prominently exhibits modern plastic tendencies. In this abstract painting, Abdul Amir captures an idea deeply embedded in his emotional core, embodying a contemporary spirit through abstract forms, colors, and compositions. The piece manifests the

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