



**T.C.**  
**ÇANKIRI KARATEKİN UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN**

**ANALYZING ABSTRACT PAINTINGS IN  
CONTEMPORARY IRAQI ART**

**Firas Saeed Ibraheem AL-RAWE**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Supervisor**  
**Prof. Dr. Muhammed Emin SOYDAŞ**

**Çankırı – 2023**



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## **SCHOLARLY ETHICS STATEMENT**

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work. In addition, I declare that there is no personal data in the thesis belonging to anyone except for the ones used with a written consent; that I give my consent for my personal data, which features in the printed or electronic copy of the thesis that I personally submitted, to be included in the thesis; and that any material in written, visual, audio or other formats, the copyright of which belongs to someone else, is used in the thesis only within the framework of ethical principles and/or by obtaining the necessary permissions.

Firas AL-RAWE

## TEZ KABUL VE ONAY

### ÇANKIRI KARATEKİN ÜNİVERSİTESİ GÜZEL SANATLAR ENSTİTÜSÜ

Enstitümüz Sanat ve Tasarım Anabilim Dalı öğrencisi Firas Saeed Ibraheem AL-RAWE tarafından hazırlanan *Analyzing Abstract Paintings in Contemporary Iraqi Art* başlıklı bu çalışma, 22/06/2023 tarihinde yapılan Tez Savunma Sınavı sonucunda oybirliğiyle başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

#### TEZ JÜRİSİ ÜYELERİ

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#### ONAY

Bu tez, Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Enstitüsü Yönetim Kurulunun 15/06/2023 tarih ve 19/09 sayılı kararıyla belirlenen jüri tarafından kabul edilmiştir.

Prof. Dr. Ersoy YILMAZ  
Enstitü Müdürü

## **FOREWORD**

I would like to acknowledge the support and generosity I received while conducting this research. Without it, this study would not be completed.

First and foremost, I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Dr. M. Emin Soydaş for his invaluable support, advice and guidance throughout the entire process. His constant ideas and encouragement made this thesis a stimulating challenge against the difficult burden that I felt a lot. I would also like to thank Asst. Prof. Thulfiqar Hussein, who gave me valuable ideas in the decisive moments of the study.

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20/06/2023

Firas AL-RAWE

## ABSTRACT

**Thesis Title** : Analyzing Abstract Paintings in Contemporary Iraqi Art  
**Author** : Firas Saeed Ibraheem Al-Rawe  
**Supervisor** : Prof. Dr. Muhammed Emin Soydaş  
**Thesis Type** : Master's

Abstract art is considered one of the most important movements in contemporary art. This thesis primarily investigates the recent developments in Iraqi abstract painting, and comprises four chapters. Chapter one mentions the research problem, research aim and method. Chapter two provides a theoretical background to the topic, by addressing the definitions of abstraction, and also the philosophical and historical perspectives, most important features as well as the most famous artists of the abstract movement. Iraqi abstract art in terms of history and its pioneers is introduced in this chapter as well. The last section is dedicated to the review of previous studies. Chapter three is the core of the thesis, and deals with a detailed description and analysis of 20 Iraqi abstract paintings as a selected sample for the research, using a systematic analytical tool. At the end of it, the results of the analysis are discussed. Chapter four presents the conclusion based on the analysis. The main conclusions could be summarized as follows: the Iraqi artists became acquainted with the style of the abstract art movement through the influence of Western artists; despite the international style, the Iraqi artists were able to establish an Iraqi identity in most of the paintings; expressions of wars, tragedies and sadness were represented in most of the works of Iraqi artists; these Iraqi paintings are characterized by deconstruction, dispersal and reconstruction using a clear abstraction.

**Keywords:** abstract art, painting analysis, contemporary Iraqi art

## ÖZET

**Tezin Başlığı :** Çağdaş Irak Sanatındaki Soyut Resimlerin Analiz Edilmesi

**Tezin Yazarı :** Firas Saeed Ibraheem Al-Rawe

**Danışman :** Prof. Dr. Muhammed Emin Soydaş

**Tezin Türü :** Yüksek Lisans

Soyut sanat, çağdaş sanatın en önemli akımlarından biri olarak kabul edilir. Bu tez öncelikle Irak soyut resmindeki son gelişmeleri incelemekte ve dört bölümden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bölüm araştırma problemi, araştırmanın amacı ve yönteminden bahsetmektedir. İkinci bölüm, soyutlamanın tanımlarının yanı sıra soyut akımın felsefi ve tarihsel perspektifleri, en önemli özellikleri ve en ünlü sanatçıları ele alarak konuya teorik bir arka plan sağlar. Tarihsel açıdan Irak soyut sanatı ve öncüleri de bu bölümde tanıtılmaktadır. Bölümün son kısmı önceki çalışmaların değerlendirilmesine ayrılmıştır. Üçüncü bölüm tezin özünü oluşturmakta ve araştırma için seçilen 20 adet Irak soyut resminin sistematik bir analitik araç kullanılarak ayrıntılı bir şekilde tarifini ve analiz edilmesini kapsamaktadır. Bölümün sonunda ise analiz bulguları tartışılmaktadır. Dördüncü bölüm, tezin analize dayalı sonuçlarını sunmaktadır. Ana sonuçlar şu şekilde özetlenebilir: Iraklı sanatçılar Batılı sanatçıların etkisiyle soyut sanat akımının üslubuyla tanışmışlardır; uluslararası üsluba rağmen Iraklı sanatçılar resimlerin çoğunda bir Irak kimliği oluşturabilmişlerdir; Iraklı sanatçıların eserlerinin birçoğunda savaş, trajedi ve hüznün ifadeleri temsil edilmiştir; bu Irak resimleri açık bir soyutlamanın kullanıldığı yıkım, dağılma ve yeniden inşa ile karakterize edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** soyut sanat, resim analizi, çağdaş Irak sanatı

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the World War II and the political, intellectual and economic transformations, the following era witnessed great importance for the development of postmodern art in the history of contemporary art, which led to the emergence of new and innovative artistic movements that followed modernity in its methods and artistic movements. The abstract expressionism movement was one of the most important artistic currents that followed the war, which emerged as a new artistic current in the United States, especially after the weakening of the Paris School, due to the emigration of artists to the United States of America. For political and economic developments, New York was the ideal venue for artists from different countries to gather. New York witnessed the effects of wars and political pressures, and artists found an outlet that gives them freedom for their art and ideas away from wars and tragedies, in addition to presenting the American government with a project to support artists affected by the economy and political crisis. The role of the American government was very effective in the emergence of the abstract expressionism movement and making it more acceptable (Imhaz, 1996, p. 227).

The abstract movement formed a flexible tool for expressing post-war ideas by moving away from the old artistic traditions and the old artistic style that adhered to traditional rules. The abstract art movement formed a new system in line with the intellectual transformations that affected life and the directions of human cultural activity, and it became comprehensive in all fields, and was characterized by the diversity of styles, techniques, and execution methods, which led to the creation of artistic achievements of great aesthetic value, and this is what made abstract art global.

Iraqi art was not far from the developments of global art movements that took place in the West, especially postmodern art movements. Artists had to travel to Europe and get acquainted with new works and get acquainted with new styles in art in terms of form, content and style, so the Iraqi artist turned towards abstraction. This is because this trend possesses high capabilities in expressing the artist's feelings in a deep way and with complete freedom of thought.

The Iraqi painter began to produce works of purely artistic aesthetic value, ignoring classical forms, and moving away from the visual representation of nature, bypassing visual forms and tangible sensory effects, and because the art of painting is one of the arts that keep pace with civilized developments, the productions of Iraqi painters began to bear creative features of aesthetic value. This has been an experience that had an active role in consolidating the scientific, cultural and artistic foundations and principles in artistic trends.

The characteristic of abstraction is manifested in Iraqi art, especially in many of the works by young artists. It seems that other artistic trends such as surrealism, realism, and impressionism recede before the stream of abstraction emerged and could be observed in various art exhibitions. The transition from concrete reality to abstract reality in addition to artistic techniques gave the Iraqi artist a holistic vision that makes the artist treat his abstract paintings as a medium to express the various dimensions of the artwork, not just a set of colors, spaces, and shapes. The abstract style opened the doors for the Iraqi artist to use his artistic and sensory skills to blend Iraqi reality with European abstract painting techniques.

### **1.1. RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Contemporary Iraqi painting has been through several intellectual and aesthetic shifts, which characterized different periods. These shifts triggered mixed opinions divided across acceptance and rejections. This seems normal as it is not possible in our contemporary world to agree on a unified aesthetic thought to determine the rules of the art of painting. Even modernity itself did not impose any particular intellectual or aesthetic style.

Plastic art plays an important role in the process of influencing people through the use of expressive artistic symbols. Therefore, it became necessary to confront the traditional methods of painting and invent new creative methods, which were the reason for the emergence of abstract features that are made by stripping reality out of its shell and by highlighting the distinctive qualities. This is how the features of contemporary Iraqi abstract art emerged.

The creative process of the Iraqi artist is influenced by several factors, and its aesthetic appreciation requires us to consider different perspectives to show abstract features that move away from strict rules. This, of course, allows for the incorporation of the artist's feelings in the creative process of painting. The influence of Western art on Iraqi art and the latter attempt to emulate modern methods in European painting was a major reason why the abstract style emerged as one of the characteristics of contemporary Iraqi painting. The Iraqi Artist's feeling, of course, is one of these factors. In this context, mixing the local social reality with European abstracts affected the artist's conscious and subconscious artistic manifestations. Therefore, the Iraqi artist was able to add his/her abstract touch to create an aesthetic value in his/her painting.

The history of plastic art in Iraq took an interdisciplinary path, which indicates its tendency to accept major transformations, especially in the modern era. Abstractionism is one of these major transformations, not only in an artistic sense in intellectual and philosophical senses. This is because the abstract was motivated by different psychological, social, political, and historical motives. The research problem revolves around the transformations found in contemporary Iraqi art. Thus, the present research attempts to address the following questions:

1. What are the references that were instrumental in the diversity of contemporary Iraqi abstract painting?
2. What is the impact of international abstract art on the Iraqi painting style?
3. Have the wars in Iraq affected the characteristics of the abstract art?

## **1.2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE AND AIM**

In this thesis, the state of artistic expression in selected paintings is investigated and analyzed; the artistic characteristics are discussed in general, with a focus on the elements and features of the abstract movement. This is of course to highlight the impact of abstract art on the Iraqi paintings. The thesis provides a rereading of the selected painting visually and aesthetically. This study attempts to shed light on the sensory side of the artist and the reason for the existence of these abstract qualities

and their constructive relationship to contemporary artwork, in addition to their importance as an academic study for students and researchers.

This research aims to:

1. Explore the localization of abstract art movement within the Iraqi context.
2. Investigate how abstract features enrich creativity in Iraqi contemporary painting.
3. Highlight the influence of international abstract art on contemporary Iraqi painting.

### **1.3. SOURCES AND METHOD**

The method employed in this thesis is mainly qualitative in nature, aiming to describe how abstract art is different across the western and Iraqi contexts. First, the information was researched and collected from the sources related to the subject under discussion, which are mainly international and Iraqi. Artists' personal websites were also browsed to view paintings and other artworks. Some interviews were conducted with a number of artists and experts to collect information related to the research questions, as well as some exhibitions were visited and various artworks were viewed.

Based on the information collected from various sources such as books, articles, theses and websites, a theoretical framework is presented, and an explanation is provided on the global abstraction movement and contemporary Iraqi abstract art. Previous research related to the subject of the thesis is reviewed in this context. The known extent of the influence of Western abstract art on contemporary Iraqi abstract art is also discussed. Then, a sample of contemporary Iraqi abstract paintings that belong to the period between 2000-2018, which were selected and collected through websites or directly from artists and other secondary sources, are analyzed using the Feldman's model.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. ART: TERMINOLOGY, MEANING, AND USE

The term art (*ars* in Latin, *techne* in Greek) was used in earlier times in order to distinguish works of art from works of nature (Alperson, 2015, p. 6). That is, art is industrial manual labor and skilled labor, but a distinction must be made between skilled labor and artistic work. The artwork must be mixed with the artistic sense that reflects the inner feeling of the artist and an attempt to show the hidden potential mixed with feelings that affect the recipient's sense of taste.

The definition of art has been debated for centuries among philosophers. "What is art?" is the most basic question in the philosophy of aesthetics, which really means, "How do we determine what is defined as art?"

A set of definitions have provided conceptual explanations for the meaning of art from the point of view of many philosophers must be evoked. And the beginning is with the moral philosopher Kant, who sees in his conception that art differs from nature in the same way that industry differs from action or effect-making in some way (Bahawi, 2017, p. 14).

According to Plato's definition, art is a sacred gift that came to man from the sensual world, and that the artist's task is greater than merely expressing the image (Stolnitz, 1960, pp. 33-34).

Aristotle traces art back to the love of imitation and recognizing likenesses which characterizes humans. But for him, art was not mere copying. As a realization in the external form of a true idea, art idealizes nature and completes its faults seeking to grasp the universal type in the individual phenomenon. "The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance" (Ray, 1984, p. 45).

### **2.1.1. The Concept of Art in Contemporary Philosophy**

From the perspective of contemporary philosophy, a work of art should not be traditional, not bound by ancient rules and theories, but only related to art, giving great importance to the result of the artist's work. Art can be defined in philosophy based on the ideas of the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, who does not consider art moral, if morals are important to man, then it is not correct to apply this matter to works of art, because the work of art is an independent subject and mental perception that reveals the truth, and does not present what is true or false. This is because it is just a reflection, not a physical phenomenon, that is, it does not accept measurement, but it is an axiom (Al-Taie, 2013).

Through the previous definitions of art according to different philosophical directions, we reached the understanding that the definition of art is linked to the philosophical dimensions in every era, so we see it sometimes affected by the subject and other times by the form. For example, if we look at classical philosophy we see that the subject is the basis in art, likewise the idea of dreams with regard to the surrealist movement and the idea of deletion with regard to abstract art. Thus, modern art is distinguished by its nature, its focus on the creative process and artistic creation. This is where the basis of the intellectual and philosophical struggle of art lies.

## **2.2. ABSTRACT ART**

### **2.2.1. Definition of Abstraction**

Abstraction (from the Latin abs) is the process of taking away or removing characteristics from something in order to reduce it to a set of essential characteristics (Wigmore, 2021).

Abstraction is defined as the intellectual capacity to attempt to separate an item from its context and to conduct the process of analysis and development of a concept for it. This means that abstraction includes the removing of properties from the element and reducing it to basic properties, that the remaining thing or element is a

representation of the original with the omission of unnecessary details, where the result is an object or element in which it is an abstraction or entity with the same properties, behavior or meaning as the basic element (Wigmore, 2021).

The New Collins Dictionary defines abstraction as an artistic direction that has nothing to do with and is not related to ordinary subjects, but is associated with the geometric formulation of forms and elements far from any connotation of visible reality (Bassiouni, 2002).

The Oxford Dictionary defines abstraction as a symbol of things in the visible world, or as a way of representing physical things whose importance is diminished and most of their details are obliterated (Bahnasy, 1996).

### **2.2.2. Historical Perspective**

Till the end of the 19th century, most art was representational art, as it depicted images and pictures that were very straightforward and easy to see and understand. This was the only type of art at the time and there was this need to create something different and unique. To meet this need, an art movement arose in Europe in 1870 by the name of the Impressionist movement, which in turn introduced abstract art for the first time in paintings (Schapiro, 1937).

During that period, artists wanted to create a type of art that represented the reality of nature as in the depths of water and the effect of light on natural objects and elements. The contrast in the shape depends on the effect of light to create different and varied colors.

The Neo-Impressionist movement appears to have been inspired by the Impressionist movement, a new technique of using dots in tandem to create shapes and images that were not fully represented (Petersen, 2015).

Art began to move from representation to abstraction during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, as it took new meanings until the beginning of abstract art, where the main goal of art was to depict objects and images, but abstract art created a new goal, which was to evoke feelings and ideas (Wigmore, 2021).

Abstract art gained so much importance in the early twentieth century that the artist could now delve into thoughts and imagination and create art that is not limited to depicting things as everyone sees them. Abstract art at this time originated in many countries and places of the world around the same time period. Abstract art comes in different forms and is known by different names: for example, in Paris as Cubism, in Moscow as Rayon, and in Munich as Bauhaus. Hence the term Abstract Expressionism (*Abstract Art*, 2023).

Abstract art became famous in Europe, specifically in Paris, but during the 1940s with the emergence of the Abstract Expressionist movement, its fame and popularity swept the United States of America, specifically New York. Breaking with the shackles of the past and prevailing social mores, Abstract Expressionists began the process of creating art that was previously not accepted in the art world. As a result, abstract art can be called a rebellion by artists of that time period (Mohamed, 1963).

As a result, it can be said that (historically) abstract art is a process that developed slowly, but with steady and powerful steps, which reached its peak and climax with the advent of Abstract Expressionism or true abstract art (Lowry, 2013).

Here, a question must be asked about the historical beginning in which abstract art began, and what is the historical point from which abstract art appeared?

To answer this question, it is necessary to search the historical sources that reviewed this topic, and here I reviewed some sources:

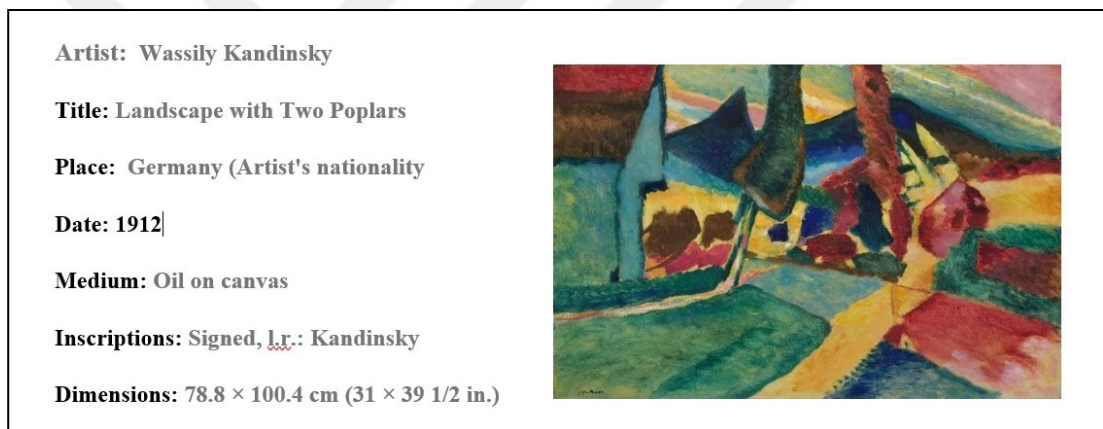
Wassily Kandinsky is considered by many art historians as the main founder of abstract art, as his first untitled watercolor in the collection of Center Georges Pompidou in Paris is the starting point for abstract art. Kandinsky is also believed to have paved the way for abstract expressionism, which has become the dominant school of painting ever since the World War II. His companions called him "Prince of the Soul" and "Knight" (Nassar, 2020).

This novel was later called into question, especially in the 21st century with a renewed interest in Swedish artist Hilma af Klint. She had created her first abstract painting in her Stockholm studio in 1906, five years before him. What's more, she

had taken the same path towards abstraction, without knowing each other's existence (Voss, 2019).

### 2.2.3. Philosophical Perspective

Abstract painting often evokes a sense of joy and purity with the general arrangement of the picture. The influence of the philosopher Nietzsche appeared through his theory of the new man, and the will to power which is the will to create on the ideas of abstract artists, where art consists of the expression of feelings and emotions. As for the idea of Wassily Kandinsky's abstract painting *A Landscape with Two Poplars* (1912) (see figure 2.1.), it is actually a landscape painting in such a way that it turns the image into something like a piece of music.



**Figure 2.1.** *Landscape with Two Poplars* (Kandinsky, 2022a).

Kandinsky believed in his theory of self-energy about the dramatic lines with their formations independent of nature and of spatial and temporal existence. He gave colors spiritual properties that can be perceived and influenced in the same scene in his painting. It is certainly difficult to accept a palette made up of colors and shapes that do not represent anything. However, abstract art has emerged as independent and achieves an absolute conception of aesthetics in a familiar form. Abstract art is sometimes interpreted as realization. It may contradict the basic order of nature, or a pure form of art, as a purely aesthetic activity, with the principle of art as a representation or imitation of nature, which remained prevalent from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century (Mohsin, 2006, p. 75).

The philosophical concept of abstraction refers to the mental process through which ideas are separated from things and objects, which leads us to distinguish the general theoretical concept of the meaning of abstraction in its separation from real matter, whether this reality is something known, or an event perceived by other senses (Shafak, 1963).

Herbert Reid believes that the term abstraction means what is derived from nature, represents a kind of purity associated with the basic form extracted from concrete details, and that it is an artistic direction that expresses the thinking associated with the requirements of the times. It represents a transitional stage from reality to a new reality, and is an absolute world of purity folded on spiritual meanings related to the elements, laws, and structural foundations of forms representing nature. Abstraction affirms the sovereignty of the artist's mind, in the capacity to recreate the world minutely in a narrow, intimate field by series of abstract calculations of perspective and gradation of color (Read, 1937, p. 35).

As for Plato, he said that straight lines, arcs, flats, and the resulting stereoscopic shapes are not relatively beautiful, that is, their beauty does not depend on their relationship to other forms, but they are beautiful in the absolute (Read, 1968, p. 65). Cézanne believes that natural shapes tend to the simplicity of geometric shapes, which are spherical, cylindrical, and conical, and there is no doubt that we notice these geometric shapes clearly in many forms of nature. The shape of the tree takes a cylindrical shape; many fruits and even celestial bodies such as the sun and the moon take spherical shape, and as we often see conical or semi-conical shape such as the tops of mountains and trees (Mohamed, 1963, pp. 135-237).

One of the most important reasons that made abstract art the persistence and continuity of the artwork is a group of images of internal feelings that settle in the emotional depth of the human being, because the abstract work is subject to interpretation, possibilities and interpretations, and any person has the right to interpret it in the way he sees or feels, which results in suggesting the content of a work as an expression of the artist's goal (Hassan, 1975, p. 184).

Plato's philosophical interpretation is the separation between material existence and intangible existence, as he explains this theory by the necessity of ascending from material existence to intangible existence, that is, there is another world of our world with visible objects consisting of models. From this interpretation, we can summarize Plato's idea of the existence of two worlds, a concrete world, which is a changing world and/or a material world, and the other is the world of absolute truths and constants, where the mind must perceive the sensory world and rise and ascend to the ideal world, rational knowledge (Naji, 2000, p. 21).

The philosopher Parmenides could imagine pure forms when he presented his search for the abstract truth and the adoption of the mind to reach that truth, as he says: "There is an existence that transcends all that ordinary experience knows, and this is existence that the mind perceives only. As for what the senses perceive and what appears to us from language, it is something different from that being, it is non-existence" (Gigon, 1959, p. 365).

One can argue that the issue of abstraction in Greek philosophical thought can be understood as a call to leave the reasonable world and turn with art and human thought towards the immutable truth and what is spiritually absolute through the control of the mind to reach those facts and the imposition of a geometric structure that intersects with reality.

#### **2.2.4. Characteristics**

Abstract art takes many different forms, but there are shared key structural features centered on two basic relations to nature. The first abstracts from nature, to give selected aspects of it a new and extremely unfamiliar appearance. The second affirms a natural creativity that issues in new, autonomous forms that are not constrained by mimetic conventions (Wunsche, 2012). Abstract art also has several distinctive features. Simplicity of shapes and colors is one of the most important features of abstract art, coding and gesture make abstract art a type of art characterized by a moral, pure and logical character, and abstract art moves away from an accurate description of things in terms of realism and nature. It is famous by many different names among artists, for example, self-art, tangible art, because the paintings do not

describe a particular object or place, what the viewer sees of color, size, shapes, as well as brush strokes, but at the same time it is not considered complex, exaggerated, or art that alters the features of things like Cubism (Wigmore, 2021).

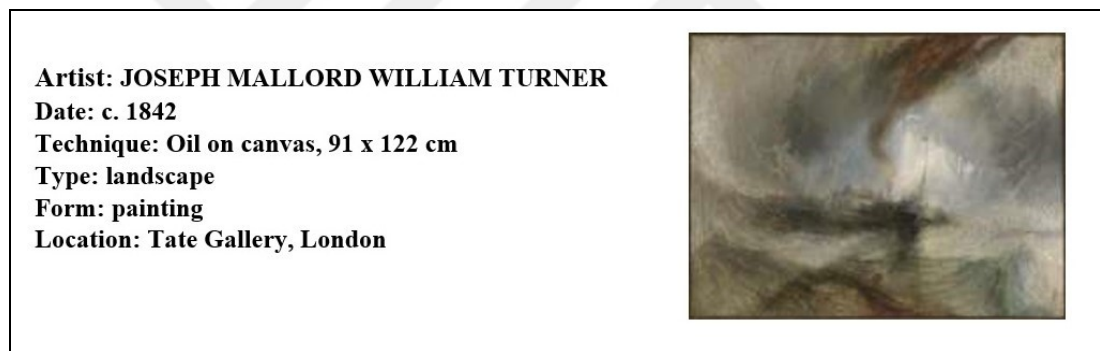
Abstract art, which first appeared in the 20th century in 1910, relies on abstract forms that do not resemble natural figures and forms. The basic idea of this type of art is to reduce the ideas and forms that exist and transform them into forms of imagination using colors, lines, and geometric shapes, thus forming a new form that does not resemble the original form (Bahawi, 2017).

The word abstraction involves separating the thing from its context to analyze and develop a concept according to the artist's vision. Abstraction depends on the simplicity of colors and shapes, using simple geometric shapes and colors. For example, the spherical shape may symbolize the globe or the ball of the pitch or the sun and many other forms, i.e., the one form carries a lot of meanings and indicates a lot of things.

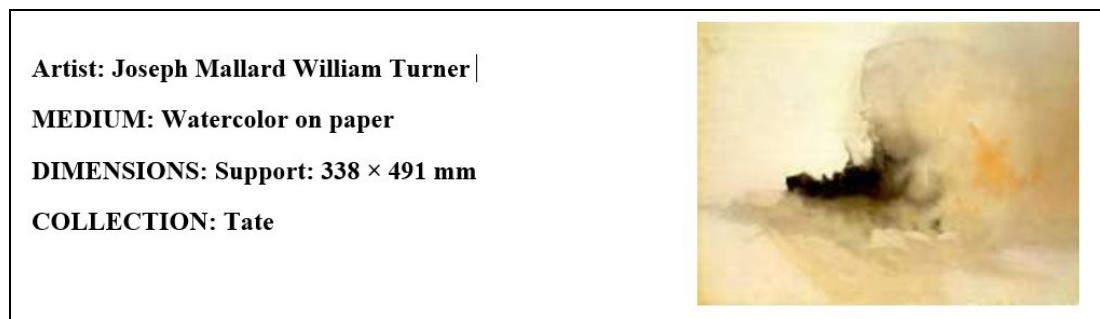
“Abstract Art is art, which distorts figures and forms from their true appearance. In abstract art, there are very slight references to the original look of any object or feature and these references are also often not recognized and understood by most viewers of abstract art. Abstract Art is art that does not show reality as it is seen. This type of art is generally spontaneous and usually takes a form depending on the moods and emotions of the artist. Abstract art is often a release of the unconscious creativity of the artist. It inspired by objects and things which are very much real, but its aesthetic content is depicted in shapes and colors and not its actual appearance and form. For someone who views abstract art, they rarely are able to distinguish what it actually depicts and can find no resemblance in the art and its name” (*Cubism and Abstract Art*, 1963).

Defining the term abstract art as non-objective, non-representational or concrete art refers to a work of art that does not depict recognizable objects. There is a difference of opinion and views on the definition of abstract art in

terms of aesthetic importance, as there is no consensus on a specific definition. Picasso believed the absence of such a definition, while many art critics see that most artworks are abstract, because the painting is a reflection of what the painter sees and what his imagination expresses, and there is a difference of opinion even from some interested in the art of painting about what can be called a painting “expressive” or “abstract”. A comparison of two paintings, a watercolor *Burning Ship* (1830, Tate) (Figure 2.3), and an oil painting *Snow Storm - Steam Boat off a Harbor's Mouth* (1842, Tate) (Figure 2.2) both by artist J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) can give us an opinion. Although abstract art theory is dealing with a separation from reality, it can be difficult to separate abstract art from non-abstract art.



**Figure 2.2.** *Steam Boat off a Harbor's Mouth* (Turner, 2022a).



**Figure 2.3.** *Burning Ship* (Turner, 2022b).

### **2.2.5. Prominent Artists**

More than a century after abstract art emerged as a major art genre, it remains an important aspect of contemporary art, and prime examples - both historical and modern - can be found in many major art museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Guggenheim Museum. This focus is on the intrinsic characteristics of art during the evolution of styles from Impressionism and Post-Impressionism to Cubism and Expressionism. The final break occurred during the early twentieth century, and several artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Kasimir Malevich are credited with being the first to develop pure abstraction. But no matter who invented it, abstraction has radically changed art history. In this section, the most important artists, who left an impact on abstract art, are presented.

#### **Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944):**

Wassily Kandinsky was born in Moscow to a wealthy family, and he was one of the most original and influential artists to emerge in the twentieth century. He is known primarily for his daring use of color in startling non-objective works. Vasily Kandinsky: A Colorful Life is the most comprehensive and fully illustrated account to date of his early work, from 1900 to 1914, the period in which he made his radical shift to abstraction (Barnett, 1996).

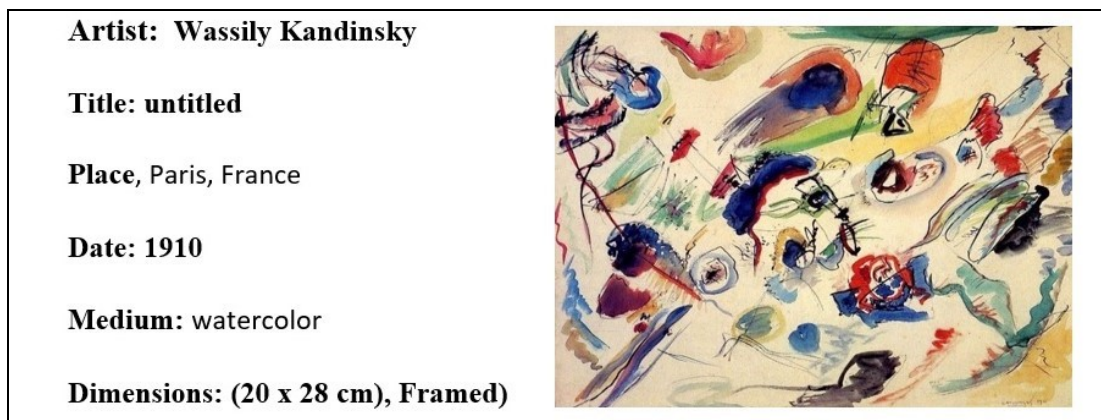
At the age of thirty he suddenly decided to give up his legal profession and devote himself to art. His decision was motivated by two important experiences. In 1895, he attended an impressionist exhibition, where he saw a painting by French artist Claude Monet (1840-1926) of a haystack. Kandinsky later realized that it was the color and composition of the paintings, not their subject matter that caused his reaction. At a concert in 1896, he suggested that music can elicit an emotional response without association with a known subject. This experience led him to believe that painting should be just music.

In 1896 Kandinsky left Russia for Munich, where he studied art and began pursuing his new career. In 1908, while in his forties, he began developing a range of artistic

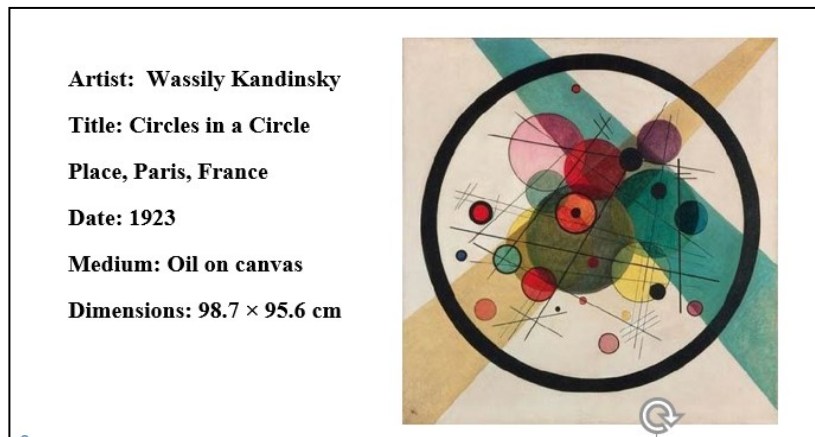
tools, gradually stripping recognizable images from his work. Kandinsky was involved in many of the most influential and controversial art movements of the 20th century, among them the group *Der Blue Reiter*, which he founded in 1911 with German artist Franz Marc (1880-1916) (Herbert, 2012).

Kandinsky's life was heavily influenced by the wars and politics that broke out in Europe during the early twentieth century. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Kandinsky left Germany and returned to Moscow. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, he remained in Russia and in 1921 returned to Germany. In 1929, he became a German citizen - one of the three nationalities he embraced during his lifetime, along with Russian and French - but the rise of the Nazis to power and the closure of the "decadent" Bauhaus in 1933, where he was studying, forced him to move to France. Despite the war and the German occupation of France, his work was shown in small exhibitions. In 1939 he became a French citizen and died in Neuilly-sur-Seine outside Paris in 1944 (Vasily Kandinsky, 2022).

Abstract art begins with the works of Kandinsky according to the opinion of most critics, specifically in 1910. During his artistic life, Kandinsky advocated the search for the essential essence of form. For this reason, his work can be summed up in three words: color, perception and sensation (Taylor, 2015). Critics believe that his painting (see Figure 2.4) dated 1910 with the inscription abstract watercolor on the back, has long been considered the first abstract piece in the entire history of painting.



**Figure 2.4.** Kandinsky painting (Kandinsky, 2022b).



**Figure 2.5.** *Circles in a Circle* (Kandinsky, 2022c).



**Figure 2.6.** *Black Lines* (Kandinsky, 2022c).

### **Jackson Pollock (1912-1956):**

Pollock was an American painter and a key figure of the abstract movement, as he was one of the pioneers and innovators of the art movement in the postwar period. Where the artist turned the creative process into a harmonious dance, where every step in his work was the thing that the true painter strives for, as Pollock believes that the more a symbol is born on the canvas, the more creative it is (Jachec, 2011).

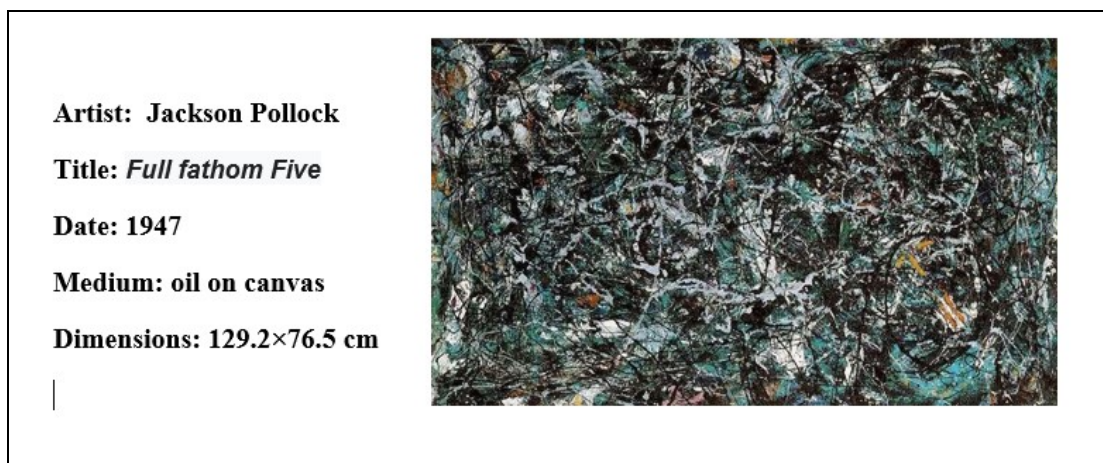
Pollock invented his own style of painting, where he sprayed paint directly from the color box onto the canvas without using a brush or any tool, as this method gave the

impression that the artist sprayed colors spontaneously and boldly without fear of staining the artwork (*Jackson Pollock and His Paintings*, 2022).

Rather than fixing his canvas to an easel, most of his canvases were either set on the floor, or laid out against a wall. From there, he used a style where he would allow the paint to drip from the paint can. Instead of using the traditional paint brush, he would add depth to his images using knives, trowels, or sticks. This form of painting, known as "action painting", had similar ties to the surrealist movement, in that it had a direct relation to the artist's emotions, expression.



**Figure 2.7.** *Autumn Rhythm* (10 most famous paintings, 2022).



**Figure 2.8.** *Full Fathom Five* (10 most famous paintings, 2022).

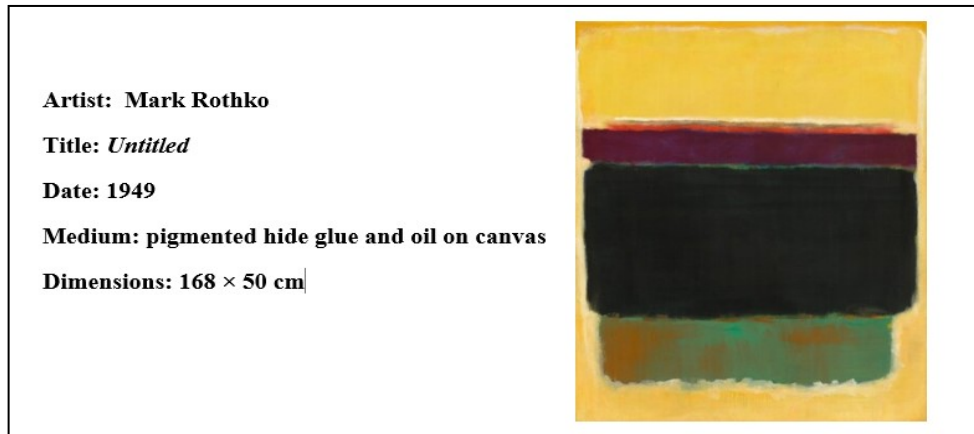
### **Mark Rothko (1903-1970):**

Mark Rothko (born Marcus Rothkowitz in Dvinsk, Russia) is one of the great 20th century American artists. Like Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Claude Monet and Leonardo da Vinci, Mark Rothko has been lionized by hundreds of art critics. Rothko remains a greatly admired painter (Davis, 2011).

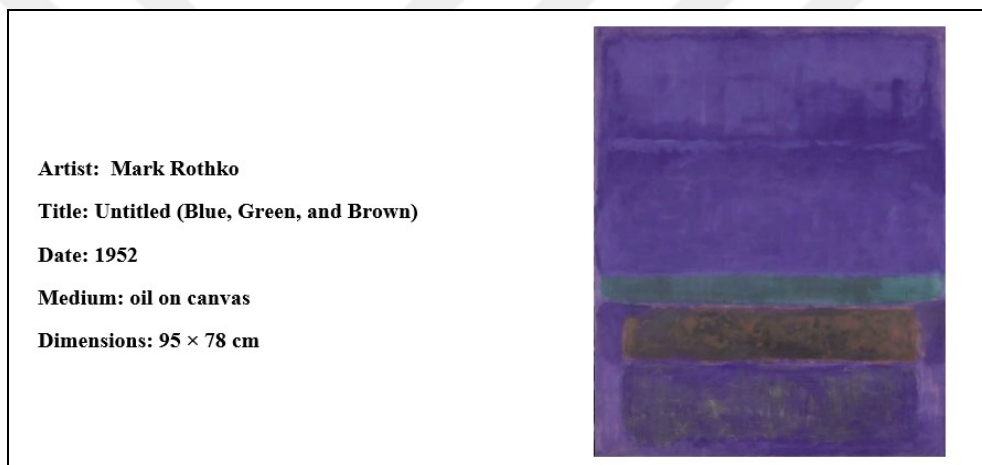
Rothko is considered one of the artists who revolutionized the art of abstraction, exemplifying the evolution of his style from pictorial visual imagery to abstraction rooted in the observer's active relationship to painting. Rothko described this relationship as a complete experience between the image and the viewer. What Rothko was interested in was the experience of the viewer in his paintings, the integration of the work, the observer beyond verbal comprehension, and no set of observations could explain our paintings, he once said. Their interpretation must come from a complete experience between the image and the viewer. The appreciation of art is a true mating of minds. And in art as in marriage, the lack of perfection is the cause of nullity (*Mark Rothko and His Paintings*, 2022).

Rothko's art is characterized by alternating darkness and brightness with a very high degree of emphasis on pure properties such as color, surface, and scale, as it was believed that these elements could reveal the existence of a high philosophical truth. The artist linked visual elements such as brightness and darkness, contrasts of color and wide space, with deep themes such as ecstasy and tragedy, yet Rothko avoided explaining the content of his work, as he believed that an abstract image could directly represent human drama (*Mark Rothko*, 2022).

"I'm not an abstractionist... I'm not interested in the relationship of color to form or anything else...I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions - tragedy, ecstasy, and so on. And the fact that a lot of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I can communicate those basic human emotions... The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them. And if you are moved only by their color relationship, then you miss the point" (*Mark Rothko*, 2022).



**Figure 2.9.** Rothko painting (*Mark Rothko: Classic Paintings*, 2022).



**Figure 2.10.** Rothko painting (*Mark Rothko: Classic Paintings*, 2022).

### **Agnes Martin (1912-2004):**

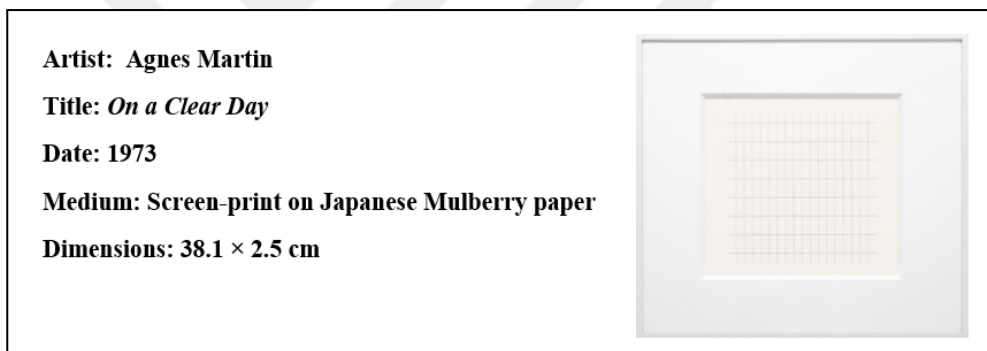
Agnes Martin was born in rural Canada, specifically on a farm located in Saskatchewan, then immigrated to the United States of America in 1932, and moved to Taos in the desert plains, New Mexico, where she painted abstract painting with organic forms. The artist moved to New York in 1957 (Martin, Haskell, & Chave, 1973).

Over the next decade, the artist developed her style into painted panels six by six feet tall, covered with finely striped lattices at the edges. Although she appeared with the abstract artists of New York, her style sought to be outside all the vocabulary of abstract expression, repetition, and systematic simplicity, as her practice was

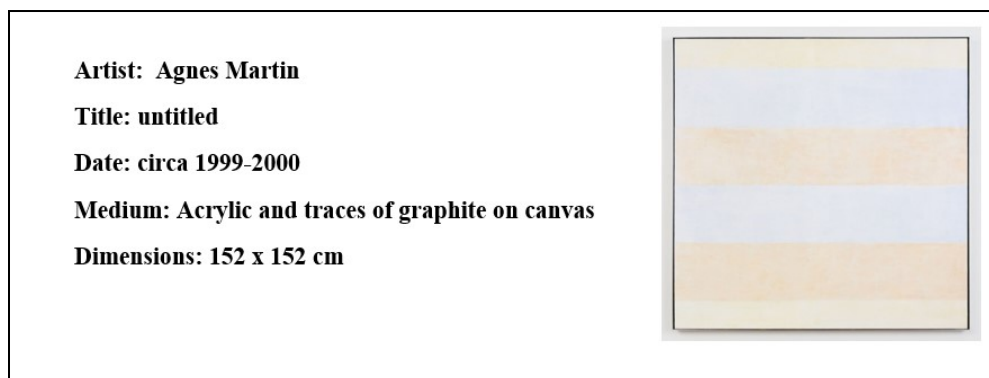
associated with spiritual ideas formed from a mixture of American transcendental culture and Zen Buddhist ideas.

Gorgeously quiet in color and composition, Agnes Martin's paintings have a distinctive grace that sets them apart from those of the Abstract Expressionists of her day and the Minimalist artists she inspired. Her grid-based works are attributed to metaphysical motivations, lending a serene complexity to her oeuvre that defies easy categorization. Perhaps for this reason, critical and scholarly analysis of her paintings has been scarce until now (Anastas, 2011).

Agnes Martin said “When I think of Art, I think of beauty. Beauty is the mystery of life. It is not in the eye; it is in the mind. In our minds there is awareness of perfection” (Beckley & Shapiro, 1998, p. 199).



**Figure 2.11.** *On a Clear Day* (Martin, 2022a).



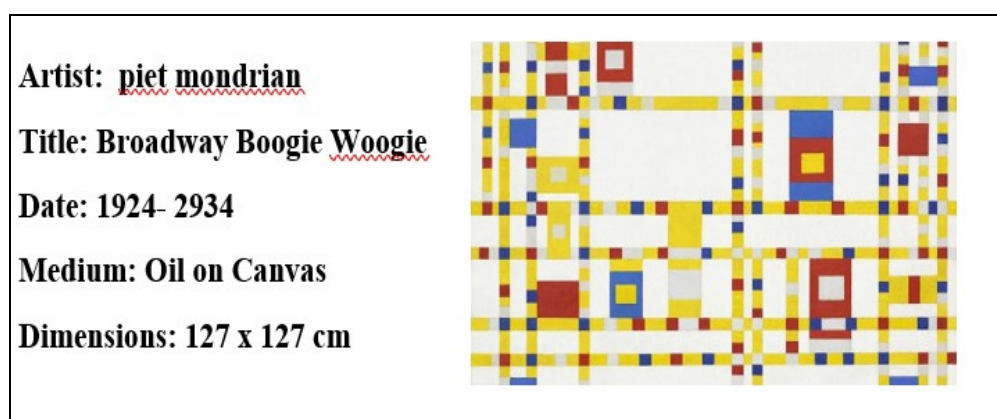
**Figure 2.12.** Martin painting (Martin, 2022b).

### **Piet Mondrian (1872-1944):**

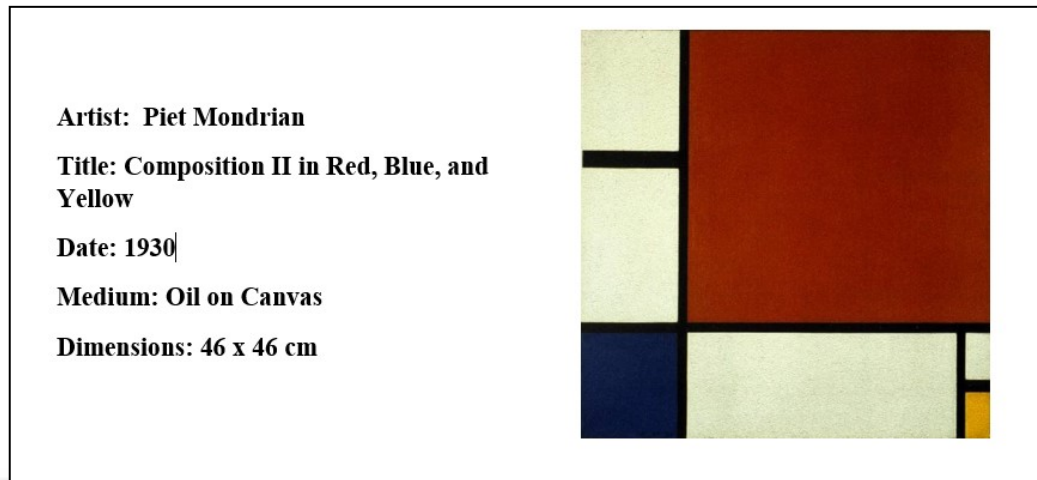
One of the greatest artists of the 20th century, the Dutch painter and theoretician Piet Mondrian was an important leader in the rise of modern abstract art. He is one of the founders of De Stijl, which included an art movement for abstraction and new art forms introduced in the early twentieth century, and a feature of this movement was that it was based on reductionist theory, which took larger images and life on canvas. Mondrian was born in 1872 in the Netherlands, his real name was Peter Cornelis Mondrian, and he died in 1944 in New York, United States (Mondrian & Russell, 2018).

In his mature paintings, Mondrian used the simplest combinations of straight lines, right angles, primary colors, and black, white, and gray. The resulting works possess an extreme formal purity that embodies the artist's spiritual belief in a harmonious cosmos (*Piet Mondrian and His Paintings*, 2022).

Mondrian's work had an enormous impact on 20th century art, influencing not only the course of abstract painting and many major artistic styles and movements (such as color palette, abstract expressionism, and traditionalism), but also in fields outside of painting, such as design, architecture, and fashion.



**Figure 2.13.** *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (Mondrian, 2022).



**Figure 2.14.** *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow (Piet Mondrian and His Paintings, 2022).*

## **2.3. IRAQI ABSTRACT ART**

### **2.3.1. Historical Outlook**

The Iraqi civilization has gone through great developments that can be traced through the stone ages to ancient historical times, then to the Islamic times, and finally to the contemporary stage, and through this long period of history, the most important abstract features that can be drawn in Iraqi art.

#### **2.3.1.1. Abstract Art in the Ancient History of Iraq**

The arts in ancient Iraq were in constant development parallel to the development of the ancient civilization, until we got what could be the beginning of those arts. The traces of the ancient generations revealed the beginnings of the art of sculpture, drawing, coloring, decorations and many things that enter the field of plastic arts, where the first roots of art in general and Iraqi art in particular were formed.

In Mesopotamia, the artist, through his direct expression of visual perceptions, whether of shapes, colors or elements in the surroundings of his environment, recorded his history and daily events in expressive formulas with diverse and multiple aesthetic effects. The process of the development of ancient Iraqi thought

allows us to observe and conclude through the abundance of visual forms that celebrate abstraction, as these artistic productions constitute the most important cultural, aesthetic and social reference found in human thought. For example, we find within the early civilization periods (before writing) and up to 7000-5000 BC some artifacts consisting of some primitive-colored pottery engraved with abstract geometric shapes such as horizontal triangles, vertical and wavy lines, which represent pure abstraction (Marlowe et al., 1977, p. 92).

Some of the most elaborate and imaginative wares have been found in the Samarra stage (5500-800 BC), filled with geometric motifs of an abstract nature and interwoven with other decorative plant units, in a way that is predominantly pure abstraction through lines, squares, rectangles and rhombuses (Fadel & Al Bayati, 2009, p. 13). These symbols can be described as formations rich in idealistic meanings. They express the development of people's religious beliefs according to their mythological beliefs and ideas, and they also express their fears. For example, we observe in some pottery scenes of four birds, each holding the other, and in another scene of four women in an expressive dance; and in all its extreme simplicity, this is a great pictorial style.

In the historical period 5000-4500 BC, the Iraqi artist's interest in the mechanisms of abstraction and its aesthetics varied in his production of pottery (cups, pots, jugs, circular dishes, flasks) decorated with geometric shapes (circles, triangles, lozenges, rectangles) as well as some plant shapes such as flowers, fruits, stems, leaves, and other animals such as birds and deer. These formations were represented by simplification, abstraction, and reduction away from limited visual appearances (Al Moussawi, 2011, p. 52).

In the time period between 4800-3500 BC, the ancient artist began to depict abstract human forms to the point of symbolism, as well as some visual scenes of a purely abstract character in Warka, where artistic production was characterized by social and religious maturity. Due to the appearance of cylinder seals executed in an abstract style, the shapes intertwine with each other and together form a form that is

far from nature, and the method of abstraction of cylinder seals has simplified and reduced the shape (Al-Bayati, 2013, p. 50).

The method of implementing the seals reached a degree of perfection in terms of the themes executed on them, as it was clear and many repetitions, depending on the identification of scenes and characters without clarifying their details using the method of symbols in representing the gods, as well as the use of animal and plant symbols such as the tree and scorpions as well as the symbol of the spike, in a way that is close to abstraction (Al-Assaf, 2005).

In the era of the invention of cuneiform writing in 3000 BC after writing was pictorial in the past, any form that the eye sees such as humans, dwellings, animals, plants, where the relationship represented the word and sound together, were used for a dual purpose. Once it had a verbal value and again it became a symbol, so that the writing became more schematic in an advanced manner before ending with a complete abstraction in cuneiform (Marlowe et al., 1977, p. 144).

The products of the Sumerian artist were not purely physical items, but spiritual symbols of heavenly and cosmic concepts. They sought to free the statue from its material substance by approximating its shape with a superimposed composition, such as being in the form of a man with the head of a demon or in the form of a woman with the head of a snake, to give it a supernatural power to influence the recipients in order to perform religious rituals (Al Moussawi, 2011, p. 14).

Starting from the total to the partial in the structure of the composition, the ancient Mesopotamian man reveals the intellectual fabric inherent in the structure of the scene, and diagnosed as an active symbol in the movement of social thought, being a decorative singularity tending to intellectual connotations seeking fertility, reproduction and abstraction in the migration of the manifestations of nature into symbols. Here lies the creative specificity that is led by the mind and performance in the expressive marriage between the structural elements of the form and the intellectual implications associated with it (Sahib, 2011, pp. 45-49).

The Sumerian forms were characterized by manifestations of simplification, reduction and abstraction, which is the important feature of these forms which is based on reaching the essence behind the phenomena. An aspect of exaggeration in some parts of the sculptures are encountered, such as of the organs, with no interest in realistic representation, but rather the abstract idea in the geometric way (Sahib, 2005, p. 65).

In the Akkadian era and with the abundance of ideal products that it contained in this era, we note that the Akkadian man at that time was interested in art, which gave a positive sign of creativity, as the artist used materials with geometric shapes in the decoration of the walls of temples, where there are large areas with geometric units characterized by abstraction (Al Moussawi S. M., 2011, p. 60).

It is noticeable how the Babylonian artist used his figurative system of a symbolic and mythical nature in order to propose visual forms that celebrate abstraction, polychromatism, and special materials, where seals represent their religious beliefs and social mores.

### **2.3.1.2. Abstract Art in the Islamic Period**

Iraqi art entered a new phase with the Islamic art and the new spiritual ideas it carries. Islamic art has obvious abstract characteristics in elevating visual scenes by transforming nature into abstractions until it almost loses its nature (Al Bassiouni, 1980, p. 121). A feature of Islamic art is that it is imbued with the thought of the divine faith with an originally abstract tendency, in which the artist does not search for sensual and emotional beauty, but seek a form of spiritual beauty. Religiously, meditation and the power of intuition are full of abstraction and its aesthetics (Al-Khuza'i, 2013, p. 56). Islamic art is the fruit of rational contemplation, a spiritual view of the world or the truth behind the universe, and this can only be achieved by taking Islamic art out of the world of perspective and feeling the world of symbol and intuition (Al-Sayegh, 1988, p. 92). Therefore, Islamic art was able to establish its intellectual and stylistic base, which made it an independent art in its entity, through its free and renewable spirit, its own motives, and the pursuit of what is more general and comprehensive than simulating natural manifestations. Therefore, simplification

and abstraction became the distinguishing feature of Arab thought after the emergence of Islam (Beecher, 1952, p. 19).

It is noted that the Muslim artist relied on plastic methods that mainly aim to move away from the sensory world in conveying reality in his artwork, which is what the artist tried to reach an abstract mental image that can be interpreted using forms and symbols that were characterized by ideal aesthetics, and thus trying to combine different artistic methods, such as drawing/painting with decoration, letters with decoration, or using words with decoration and other types (Khafaji , 2009, p. 54).

Through these and other abstract methods joined the so-called principle change, which allows the artist to prove his spirit and adherence to the idea of unification towards their adoption of abstraction mechanisms away from the proportions of perspective that disappear in the visual image. The structural unity of Islamic decoration was directly related to the idea of Islam. Emphasizing the importance of the relationship between the symbol and the abstract form, the Islamic decoration is a continuity from the world of embodiment and sensation to the world of disembodied, where the Muslim artist created in these formations beautiful visual forms and scenes characterized by abstraction (Al Moussawi, 2011, pp. 173-174).

It appears that the Muslim artist adopted the method of abstraction associated with the idea of infinity, as the artist relied on intellectual connotations related to the world of absolute holiness, as he relied on the processes of simplification and reduction of visual forms. Heading in this way achieves an aesthetic rapprochement from the world of the infinite Absolute.

### **2.3.1.3. Abstract Art in Modern Painting**

The history of the plastic movement in Iraq is associated with the first envoy to study the art of painting in England in 1930, the artist Akram Shukri. Iraqi plastic art began to be influenced by Western artistic trends and styles, followed by the travels of artist Faeq Hassan to Paris, then Ata Sabry, then Hafez Al-Droubi to Rome, and by Jawad Selim to Paris in 1938, where Iraqi artists began the journey of discovering plastic solutions because of their artistic dilemmas, and thus those experiences became signs

of breaking into the wall of traditional assumptions that were prevalent in artistic circles at that time (Al-Rawi, 1971, p. 41).

After the scholarship students returned from the West, the Iraqi painter began to change their idea and style, due to the influence of the methods and ideas of Western countries. This transformation was through communication with culture, visions and methods from the Western world, as it seems that it led to a kind of shock and astonishment for the Iraqi artist who believed that world art is moving towards visions and styles they did not know before. The Iraqi artist interacted with this new style gradually, at first, until the Western style was completely imitated, before calls appeared to return to Iraqi authenticity and identity that was defended by the artist Jawad Selim. The forties was a fertile ground for the growth of some European influences, through the Iraqi artist's desire to gain experience and keep pace with global artistic movements "because every experience is the fruit of interaction between man on the one hand and some aspects of the world in which he lives on the other hand" (Doi & Zakaria, 1963, pp. 78-79).

One can argue that the artist Jawad Selim had a great influence on the path of modern and contemporary Iraqi art, as he was the reason for changing the direction of Iraqi art and giving it an Iraqi identity that distinguished from others. Iraqi culture in the eighties went through a real crisis, although in the sixties it was well founded. In this regard, the critic Salah Abbas says, "I think that the history of Iraqi culture since the sixties did not originate from nothing, and was not made, but it appeared as an inevitable result of the specificity of the global cultural struggle in that period, and we mean the culture of the world after the two world wars" (Abbas, 2006, p. 6).

In the eighties, a cultural center for arts was established under the name Baghdad Center for the Arts in 1987. The center had a significant and clear impact on the establishment of local and international festivals. The center also contributed to the spread of books, publications and studies specialized in art, which helped the formation of numbers of artists who became present in the history of Iraqi art (Al-Sefo, 2002, p. 92). In that time period, many artistic groups were established, which restructured the artwork in form and content, and these groups were characterized by

ambition and perseverance, as they were able to free themselves from the techniques and repetition that prevailed, and produce works, which brought back the humanitarian and spiritual trends of Iraqi art (Al-Samurai, 2005, p. 133).

This generation was diligent in searching for new experiences in which they could establish their identity. The search ended with them in the world of modernity because this world is the basis of demolition and construction as well, and for this reason the spaces of experimentation expanded, as the artist Asim Abdel-Amir called this generation “the generation of the two wars”. This generation, which was able to possess the characteristic of Iraqi art on the collective and individual levels, as it was called “Group of Four” appeared in that period (Khazal, 2011, p. 150).

The war had a great impact on the generation of the eighties; the war caused the crystallization of art that mimics the Iraqi reality on the one hand, but in a way that tends to modernity in terms of different techniques in the treatment of paintings. Thus, the long-standing style of academic creativity has changed, and it has become necessary to identify the attributes of ideas that see facts. It also contributed to the creation of forms in the abstract direction, as features of rebellion appeared in the works of many young artists, illustrating pain, anguish and tragedy.

Most of the artists in the nineties were able to identify the features of their presence in the field of painting. They were able to occupy a place that can be referred to in the Iraqi plastic movement. Although the efforts of this generation were dispersed, the nature of the sudden changes that occurred in the art scene and due to the conditions of the country at that time, it was difficult for them to meet in gatherings or hold exhibitions. Nevertheless, the artist of the nineties was able to occupy a distinguished position in that period (Al-Asam, 1999, p. 86).

The characteristics of modernity that characterized the nineties had a clear impact on its overlap with the eighties, as it produced an achievement of a pluralistic nature focused on the interests of the decade. The Iraqi artist in that period was able to reach the fore with more confident steps, and the artist's effects appear without difficulty. This generation imposed a great dominance in the nineties, which made their

presence an inevitable necessity, so that many names appeared here: Karim Rasan, Qassem Sebti, Karim Safwa and Shaddad Abdel Qahar (Al-Asam 1999, p. 95).

Amir points out that "the trend towards the mythical elements in this decade within the elements of the vision of the two wars generation going to the myth is no longer similar to what happened during the fifties or sixties, and perhaps it is a cruel irony that turning reality itself into a source of legends, there is no longer a need to go back to the legendary paintings" (Amir, 1999).

At the end of the nineties and the beginning of the second millennium a new generation of artists appeared. They can be described as a generation enchanted by abstraction, concerned with the surface and structure of the painting. New brave experiences emerged that prompted the Iraqi artist to use art with complete freedom and to break all tyrannical restrictions boldly and freely.

In the post-2003 period, a new stage appeared in Iraqi thought and capabilities. After ideas and ideologies were directed by the ruling authority, various capabilities emerged at this stage in a different style that can be described as more open and more connected to the outside world, especially after the spread of modern means of communication. There was the possibility of rapid access to information without any restrictions, such as the Internet and mobile phone networks and others, in addition to the ability to travel freely, so these factors led to the emergence of a bold, renewed and more open artistic generation (Al-Jizani, 2014, p. 203).

### **2.3.2. Prominent Artists**

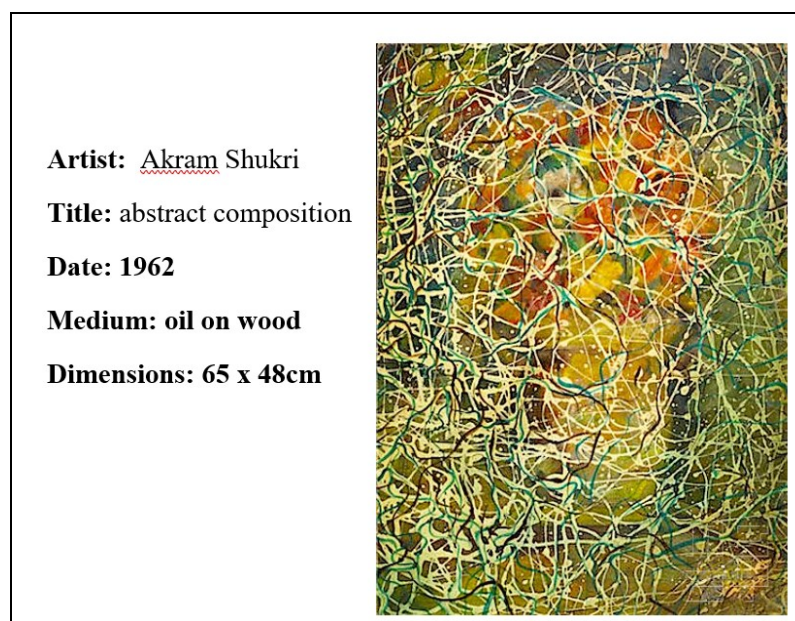
#### **2.3.2.1. Akram Shukri (1910-1983)**

Artist Akram Shukri's style in his paintings is characterized by the color coordination of the subject, where the artistic treatment and brushstrokes mixed with saturated colors from the heat of the sun appear in the painting of the light that touches the domes of mosques and the rooftops of old houses in Baghdad. His method was to pour colors and move the hand with deliberate movements to paint (Shawkat, 1976, p. 31).

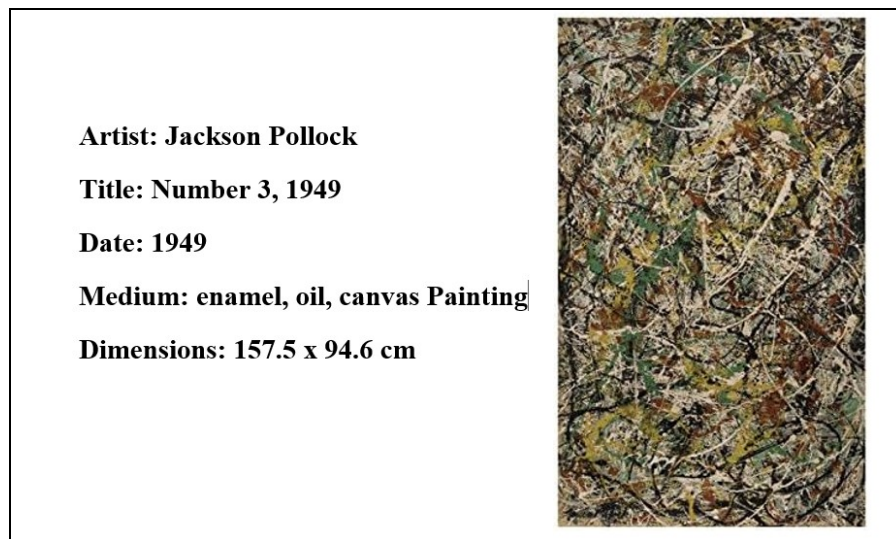
It is noted that the artist Akram Shukri was influenced by the style of Pollock. This confirms the influence of Western art on Iraqi art. This stage is considered the beginning of the transformation in the production of the artist Akram Shukri, who encouraged artists to transcend the rules of painting, break restrictions and destroy the traditional form in Iraqi painting. Akram Shukri said "after traveling to Mexico and then to America, at that time I thought of a way to develop my style, and I was very impressed with the plastic movement in Mexico, but the change was in the United States of America from the American painter Jackson Pollock, I imitated his method in the modification of technology" (Makhlaf, 1982, pp. 6-7).

Akram Shukri's association with the expression of Iraqi life and its impact on its events could be confirmed by the "Friends of Art" group that was established in 1940, and his participation with the group in art exhibitions for the years 1941-1942, and his participation in the "Ibn Sina" exhibition in 1952 (*Jyl Altabiea Alsaamitah*, 2020).

A comparison between the painting (Figure 2.15) by the artist Akram Shukri, and the painting (Figure 2.16) by Jackson Pollock, reveals the similarity in style, shape and colors between the two models, which indicates the influence on the Iraqi artist in this style.



**Figure 2.15.** Shukri painting (Shukri, 2022).



**Figure 2.16.** *Number 3* (Pollock, 2022).

#### **2.3.2.2. Shakir Hassan Al Said (1926-2004)**

This Iraqi artist was born in the city of Samawa in 1926, then moved to Baghdad in 1942. In 1953-1954, he participated with the artist Jawad Selim, the artist Muhammad Ghani Hikmat, and the artist Naziha Selim in the establishment of “Baghdad Group for Modern Art”. He graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts in 1954 and held his first personal exhibition in the institute hall in Baghdad, and taught at the French institutes for the period 1955-1959 (Dagher, 1990, p. 75).

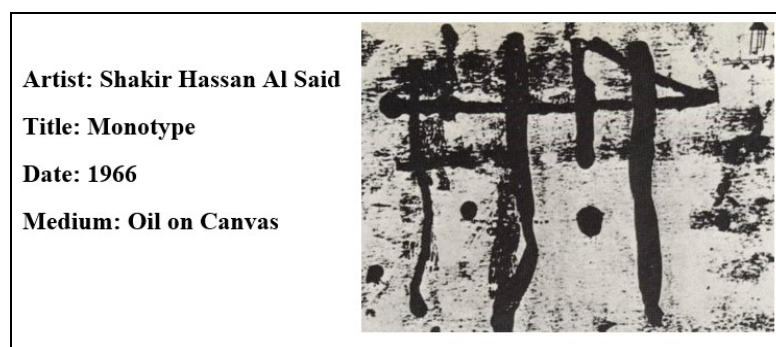
His works in the 1950s and 1960s were an expression of the ideals the group promoted in their search for a distinctly local style that combined local and global trends while expressing individuality and independence at the same time. The artist said: "Our inspiration for heritage in art is the basic premise of reaching a civilized vision with modern methods" (Said, 1995, pp. 161-165).

Al Said's work turned into an investigation of the spiritual field in art through abstraction. However, his delving into this topic not only focuses on the content and form of art, but also skips it to consider the cognitive meaning of art itself. In fact, his concept of trend making is a new form of Islamic aesthetic art with its principles in favor of the abolition of individualism. Art was not considered a process (creation)

but contemplation. "It is, of course, a meditation on the glory of God as the individual self dissolves into the eternal self." (Al-Said, 1966, p. 8).

Al Said's early works reveal his influence on European art movements, particularly Expressionism and Cubism. However, he also based his work on his Arab-Islamic heritage and popular culture. His work has evolved since the 1960s after he began focusing on Sufism in the 1960s. From that time on, he began incorporating Arabic letters as a visual element in his compositions. His artistic philosophy was rooted in both Sufism and modern Western ideals regarding structuralism, semiotics, deconstruction, phenomenology, and existential ideas. Iraqi characteristics of modernity and postmodernism are precisely embodied in all of his work and artistic approach. While the strength of this calligraphy became an important focus in his works, especially after the establishment of The One Dimension group, his works were characterized by a unique contemporary aesthetic, which embodies the marriage of Arab and Islamic styles mixed with the Western style (Al-Shabout, 2008).

Al-Saeed has published several books on modern art in Iraq and many articles in Arab magazines and newspapers. He is known as one of the fathers of modern art in Iraq. His influence as an artist, educator, and pioneer of modern art is extensive. His work has been shown in major museums, such as the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and the Sharjah Art Museum in the United Arab Emirates.



**Figure 2.17.** *Monotype (Artist Shaker Hassan Al Said, 2016).*

**Artist: Shakir Hassan Al Said**

**Title: The Great Symbol**

**Date: 1999**

**Medium: Oil on Canvas**

**Dimensions: 110 x 110 cm**



**Figure 2.18.** *The Great Symbol* (Mejcher-Atassi, 2022).

**Artist: Shakir Hassan Al Said**

**Title: unknown**

**Date: 1961**

**Medium: Oil on Canvas**

**Dimensions: 82 x 94 cm**



**Figure 2.19.** Shakir painting (Mejcher-Atassi, 2022).

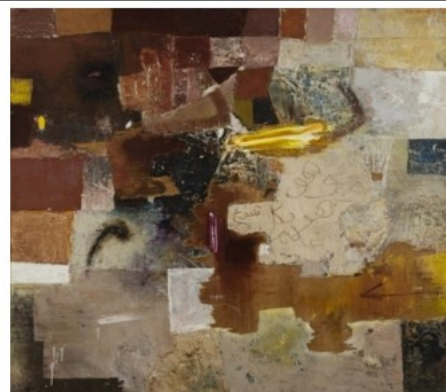
**Artist: Shakir Hassan Al Said**

**Title: Letters & colors**

**Date: 1991**

**Medium: Oil on Canvas**

**Dimensions: 100 x 100 cm**



**Figure 2.20.** *Letters & Colors* (Al-Said, 2022).

### 2.3.2.3. Asim Abdul Amir (1954)

He was born in Iraq in the city of Diwaniyah in 1954. He held his first solo exhibition at Athr Gallery in Baghdad in 1977. He participated in many art exhibitions around the world, including the “The Tower” exhibition in Germany in 1980, and several exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates in 1989, the Sultanate of Oman and other countries. The artist is considered one of the founders of the “Group of Four” movement and participated in all their exhibitions. He works as a university professor at the University of Babylon and a full-time artist (*Asim Abdul Amir*, 2022).

His paintings, in the early 1980s, were based on Expressionism. We find in his paintings an approach of another kind, sometimes rough faces that look like rectangular stone blocks, others submerged in their parts or lying in the open. At the same time, figurative units with a childish root studded with faces appeared to him, or dissolved in the middle of the vast space, but the actual involvement in childhood climates broke out at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties. "The artist shows a tendency that takes deconstruction as a destination, camouflaging centers and splintering them in space" (Al-Asam, 1999, p. 85).

The artist turned to children's drawings with expressive and abstract features. His forms are in harmony with his restless and rebellious self in his quest to build city worlds inhabited by peace and tranquility (Noir, 2008) (Figure 2.21). Asim Abdel Amir was also influenced by the artist Paul Klee through his reflections on what revolves around him, and these reflections were on his own style, as he transferred the forms according to his vision, style and dealing with it, in a fantastical way (Wahab, 1988).

Although Asim Abdul-Amir was influenced by Western art, he was able to form his own style belonging to his environment and the diverse history that he possesses, and add the distinctive character of Iraqi art. The personality or identity is the accumulation that the thinking style carries in the Iraqi personality, that is, it is a cognitive balance in a diverse and continuous manner. Therefore, the artist Asim Abdel-Amir confirms that he did not draw children from the simulation site, but did

what he did as the French painter Jean Dubuffet, where he instilled all his cognitive qualifications in the world of childhood (Al-Asam, 1999, p. 85).

In an interview conducted by the journalist Nabil Abdul-Amir Al-Rubaie with the artist Asim Abdul-Amir, when the journalist asked him about returning to childhood memories and using them as a phenomenon in some of his works, he replied:

That's for sure, in the '80s, especially in the "Group of Four" exhibition, this became clear to me. There are some influences from children's art to this day. They still inspire me a lot from my fantasies and imaginations. Children are great painters, and they have given me many things, including trying Breaking into the terrifying white surface Marquez said (this unknown surface...how the unknown turns into the known!), the children have given me this as you have provided me with techniques and the freedom to deal with ideas and forms. Thus, I paint as a child but I do not reproduce what he does children rather try to remove the structures of childhood and adapt them in favor of my own logic to understand drawing (Abdul-Amir, 2014).

Through my personal analysis, I can note that the effect of the psychological crisis seems clear to the artist, which made him destroy the forms, reduce them to abstraction, because of his desire to set off a revolution within him. Personally, I consider it an invitation to simplicity and childishness in shortening effort and time. This embodiment appears in his works wonderfully in the aesthetic description of the deep psychological dimension.



**Figure 2.21.** *Childish Fun* (Al-Hamdani, 2022).



**Figure 2.22.** Three Amir paintings (Asim Abdul Ameer, 2022).

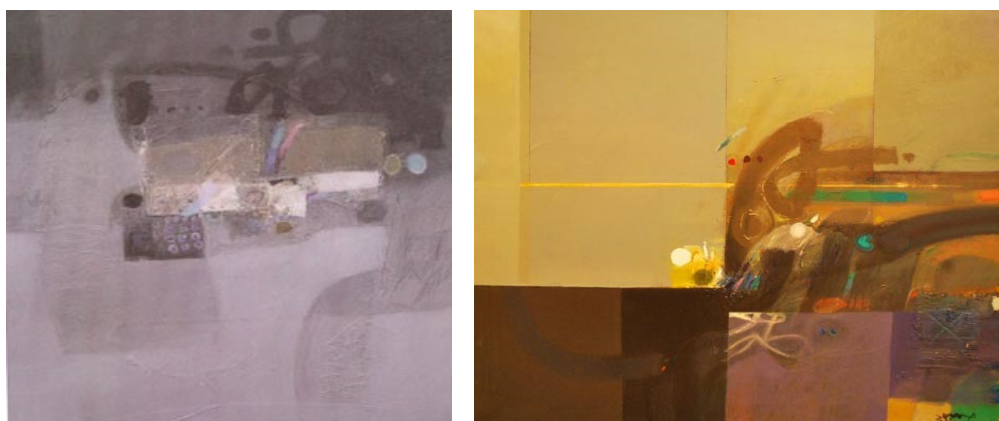
#### **2.3.2.4. Hassan Abboud (1956)**

He is an Iraqi artist from the city of Karbala, one of the founders of the group of four. He participated in many group exhibitions and held many individual exhibitions inside and outside Iraq, including: Graphic Norway 1985 exhibition, Yugoslav graphic exhibition 1986, Rome Graphic exhibition 1990, Sharjah exhibition 1995-1999. He received the first prize in graphics in 1986 at the Sixth Al-Wasiti Festival - Baghdad, and certificates of appreciation from the Syndicate and Society of Iraqi

Plastic Artists. He has participated in many exhibitions in the Netherlands where he resides since 1996 (Abboud, 2008).

His works were characterized by a kind of variables in mental scenes, and emotional transformations that can be described as a dialogue with the self, and from the features of his works. It is the spontaneous distribution of the vocabulary of the artwork using several materials (color density, canvas, cardboard, etc.) (Rashid, 2004). The artist was very interested in the treatment of mental disorders in his works, sometimes depicting scenes of panic, fear and darkness, and sometimes scenes that mimic relaxation and psychological stability.

He notes in all his works that the details are crowded around the center of the subject, in order to complement the pictorial quality of the composition of the artwork. The details of these visual units often end up in what looks like a catastrophe to come, as the artist was adept at creating optical structures capable of carrying aesthetic components without extravagance. This artist's participation in most exhibitions of the "Group of Four" was graphically oriented (zinc engraving) and his use of different materials in his graphic surfaces, governed to some extent by "the spontaneous effect and novelty of fragmentation and alienation, resulting from repeated indentation, friction and skimming on abstract color spaces" (Al Moussawi, 2012).



**Figure 2.23.** Two Abboud paintings (*Artist Hassan Abboud Exhibition, 2022*).

#### **2.3.2.5. Makki Omran (1961)**

Born in Babylon in 1961, he obtained his doctorate in 2000 from the College of Fine Arts, Baghdad. He has several exhibitions and participations inside and outside Iraq. He is a member of the Iraqi Plastic Artists Association. He is currently a professor at the College of Fine Arts in Babylon.

Makki Omran is an artist with a special style. He neither reproduces an experience nor evokes a model in shaping it in order to retrieve it. Instead, it produces its own composition. It cannot be said that his works belong to a particular art movement. He searches for beauty within the aesthetic components of modern art movements (Al-Morhej, 2018).

This artist's work was distinguished by its boldness and adventure, and its emphasis on the explosion of context familiar in the art of painting, by simulating the artistic thought of the recipient and redirecting artistic ideas to new horizons for the art of painting, which created a wide controversy in his artistic style among the recipients of this type of art.

Makki Omran presented experiments within stages, the most important of which is the stage of lyrical abstraction, which celebrates harmonious chromatic relations, and expression through calm chromatic rhythms. "The color in these works can be considered a phenomenon, because they were able, through some manipulation, to turn our knowledge into a universe of colored signs" (Alsharqiya Series, 2016).



**Figure 2.24.** Two Omran paintings (Al-Morhej, 2018).

## **2.4. PREVIOUS STUDIES**

### **Al-Shabani's Study:**

*Abstract Expressionism and its Reflection on Contemporary Iraqi Ceramics* is thesis submitted by Assaad Jawad Abdul-Muslim Al-Shabani (Al-Shabani, 2011) to the Council of the College of Fine Arts / University of Babylon, and it is part of the requirements for obtaining a master's degree. The research objective is to understand the reflection of abstract expressionism on contemporary Iraqi ceramics.

The theoretical framework includes three sections:

The first: Abstract expressionism, origin and roots - Abstract expressionism, style and technology - Content in abstract expressionism - Structural drawings.

The second: Abstraction and its reflections on contemporary European ceramics - Abstraction and its reflections on contemporary American ceramics.

The third: The basic sources of abstraction in contemporary Iraqi ceramics.

The sources include the contemporary artistic ceramic works of a group of Iraqi potters who had an active role in enriching the contemporary Iraqi plastic movement

with ceramic works in the confined period between 1970 and 2002. The research sample consists of 24 artworks belonging the period.

The researcher relies on the indicators that resulted from the theoretical framework in building an analysis tool for the research.

#### **Tufaili's Study:**

*Stylistic and Artistic Dimensions in Abstract Expressionist Paintings* is a thesis submitted by Mahdi Abdel-Amir Ismail Al-Tufaili (Al-Tufaili, 2009) to the Council of the College of Fine Arts / University of Babylon, and it is part of the requirements for obtaining a master's degree. This thesis is specialized in the study of stylistic and artistic dimensions in abstract expressive paintings, and the research objective is to recognize the stylistic and artistic dimensions of abstract expressionist paintings.

The theoretical framework includes three sections: method, art techniques, and abstract expressionism between origin, roots and structural treatments.

The research sample consists of 20 artworks belonging to the period between 1940 and 1970.

The researcher relies on the indicators that resulted from the theoretical framework in building an analysis tool for the research, and uses the descriptive analytical approach to analyze the content of the research sample.

#### **Aidan's Study:**

*Features of Surrealism in Contemporary Iraqi Painting* is a thesis submitted by Enas Ghazi Aidan (Aidan, 2019) to the Council of the College of Fine Arts / University of Baghdad, which is part of the requirements for obtaining a master's degree in Fine Arts / Painting. The research includes a study of the feature of surrealism in the works of contemporary Iraqi artists. Theoretical framework mentions an introduction to existential thought, the founding references for surrealist painting and contemporary Iraqi painting, the foundational references to realistic methods.

The research sample consists of 20 artworks belonging to the period between 1950 and 2017.

The researcher relies on the indicators that resulted from the theoretical framework in building an analysis tool for the research, and uses the analytical descriptive approach to analyze the content of the research sample.

#### **Muzaffar's Study:**

*Symbol in the Works of the Pioneers of Contemporary Iraqi Painting* is a study presented by Luqman Wahhab Al-Muzaffar (Al-Muzaffar, 2020) to the University of Kufa / College of Education, and is concerned with revealing the cultural dimension of the symbol in contemporary Iraqi painting.

The theoretical framework includes three topics: the multiplicity of the symbolic dimension, features of the cultural symbol, refinement of the symbol in contemporary Iraqi painting.

The research sample consists of 6 works of different stages between 1989 and 2013.

The researcher relied on the indicators that resulted from the theoretical framework in building an analysis tool for the research, and uses the analytical descriptive approach to analyze the content of the research sample.

#### **Albubadran's study:**

*Contemporary Abstract Art in Iraq: An Analysis of Geometric and Lyrical Paintings* is a study submitted by Omar Haitham Mohialdeen Albubadran (Albubadran, 2022) to Çankırı Karatekin University Institute of Fine Arts, and it is part of the requirements for obtaining a master's degree. The research objectives include identifying the most prominent artists of the Iraqi abstract school and their works, and understanding abstraction in contemporary Iraqi art, and also the types and methods used in the paintings.

The theoretical framework includes three sections: types of abstract art, the concept of abstraction in contemporary Iraqi plastic art, and an overview of the famous artists

of abstraction. The thesis also dedicates a chapter to provide an overview of the contemporary Iraqi art and abstraction.

The research sample consists of 10 contemporary paintings of Iraqi artists from the period between 2000 and 2018, who had an active role in enriching the contemporary Iraqi abstraction movement

The researcher relies on the indicators that resulted from the theoretical framework in building an analysis tool for the research, and adopts the studied method in selecting the research sample because it is related to achieving the research objective.

### **General Assessment:**

The objectives of the study of Al-Tufaili and Al-Shabani differ from the current study in terms of the objectives, also methodically and technically. Research scope varies between these two studies, with only the subject-wise approach focuses on the emergence of abstract movement. The current study is based on contemporary literature, especially the analysis of works by the artists from the post-war period between 2003 and 2020. The abstract movement in the field of paintings is more important and prominent than that in ceramics, because it is originally a trend that arose in the field of painting and its techniques apply to painting. The studies of Al-Muzaffar and the study of Al-Aidan also differ in terms of objectives and content when compared to the current study. The two studies differ, as Aidan's study focuses on the surrealist movement in Iraqi painting, with a similarity in the time period of the study. As for the study of Al-Muzaffar, it focuses on the symbol in Iraqi painting, but it differs in the sources and content, as the current study focuses on the contemporary period.

The study of Al-Bubadran is similar to the current study in terms of theme, which is Iraqi abstract art. However, while his study focuses on geometric and lyrical qualities, the current study focuses on the identity and characteristics of Iraqi abstract paintings, considering also the impact of that global movement on Iraqi art. Due to these differences in analytical foci, the two studies come up with different results and provide different insights related to abstract painting in Iraq.

### **3. ANALYSIS OF IRAQI ABSTRACT PAINTINGS**

#### **3.1. FRAMEWORK AND THE SAMPLE**

The time period covered by the research is between 2003 and 2020 and it is characterized by the abundance of artistic production that cannot be statistically limited. The researcher reviewed the literature and a collection of a number of various paintings of Iraqi artists locally and internationally, in which the characteristics and qualities of abstract art emerged clearly, to be studied within the limits of the research topic.

The researcher was able to collect information from art galleries and private collections of a number of artists, in addition to the works found on the Internet in artists' websites and virtual art galleries, and benefit from them to define the limits of the research and achieve the aim. The researcher attempted to collect the largest amount of sample that can be used for the analysis related to the research topic.

In this thesis, Feldman's model of art criticism is preferred for analyzing the artworks. Accordingly, description, interpretation and evaluation accompany the analysis as far as possible.

Because of the large number of artists and artworks related to Iraqi abstract art that fall into the limits of the current research, it was difficult to cover all the artworks of the mentioned period. The researcher decided to choose the sample by taking into account the artworks of a number of expatriate artists, because they are considered to constitute a truly important element in the contemporary Iraqi abstract art movement. 20 artworks were carefully selected according to the following criteria:

- Its popularity and its high artistic and monetary value.
- Its clear characteristic as an example of abstract art.
- Its artistic style as a representative of contemporary Iraqi abstract painting.

### 3.2. ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE

1



**Salem Al-Dabbagh, Iraq, 100x50 cm, oil on canvas, 2001, *Tent* / خيمة, artist's private collection.**

This artwork consists of a group of geometric shapes painted by the artist in a beautifully constructive way, as he used colors such as blue, red, gray, and orange on the right side in the upper part of the artwork. It can be seen that the black square geometric shape is in the middle of the work being repeated in different sizes, and these shapes may represent a group of tents, where some strings or ropes come out from these corners to fix the tent.

It appears that there is a contrast between shapes and colors through the color gradient that occurs between black, gray and white. This indicates the transparency of the artwork, which give rise to a beautiful transition of color that proves the artist's ability to mix color with form.

Technically, it can be seen that the squares were painted with irregular intersecting lines, which means that the artist drew the geometric shapes in a sparse and uneven manner without clear angles, and the colors may symbolize the colors of the Arab clothing specific to the desert region, which are black, gray and white. It is also noted that the area of gray and brown color, with very light color gradations, covers most of the area of the artwork, which gave freedom of movement to the shapes of the artwork, as there are shapes of several tents at the top left of the artwork which is the largest tent, then a slightly smaller tent in the middle of the work, where the artist distributed tents randomly and irregularly, which indicates that the artist has used his imagination completely freely. The process of repetition of shapes in the artwork represents consistency, harmony and balance in the artwork.

It seems that the artist has preserved the basic geometric units, as well as the use of specific colors in his artwork. This is obvious in the artist abandoning of the traditional perspective in favor of moving away from the third dimension in his artwork. This made the artwork concentrate on the aesthetics of color and shape, and the feeling of emotion through mixing colors. What is also obvious is the focus on the distribution of geometric shapes in the workspaces, with flowing lines that generate a sense of the artist's movement in painting this artwork.



**Makki Omran, Iraq, 60x60 cm, various materials on wood, 2003, *Abstract / تجريد*, artist's private collection.**

In this work, it is obvious that the purely abstract style is adopted by the artist Makki Omran. The artist divided the work into two parts, where the upper part of the work represents an open space, and the lower part of the work represents darkness. It is scattered with lines and colors, and behind it there are contents that are invisible, where the scattered lines in the lower section of the work represent a ladder to make salient the meaning of ascent and transcendence from the world of space to the world of time. The viewer contemplating this artistic painting can find that there is a force of attraction between the point and the lines, which represents the artist's tendency to move away from the center of the painting and approach the margin. In other words, this margin has become one of the centers of the painting.

The artist set out to depict his work, giving the pictorial surface a spiritual and aesthetic dimension according to his artistic treatments of line and color, and mixing it with simplicity to the point of reducing it to its units, where the game of contrasts becomes clear. It has different meanings in the space that he entered.

The nature of fantasy and imagination dominates the artist's figurative expression, since the process of building the pictorial surface with its vocabulary depends on the artist's orientation towards religious faith. To work on new mechanisms based on freedom, break logical relationships, and escape from the power of the mind according to a dreamy fantasy vision, the artist paints what he imagines of abstract meanings, not what he sees, and the painting has a wide-open area in which shapes and colors move freely so that they hardly settle in a certain center.

The artist achieved a new system outside the usual in the construction of his artwork, and was able to move its elements in different and open spaces to give a sense of movement and openness and transformation from static to moving, and the forms achieved their movement within an open space towards infinity, through the deviations of the artwork that expresses the mystical desires that the artist feels in the way that satisfies him, whether it is abstract, realistic or symbolic. There is just a reference to the remains, in a way that leads us to infinite other worlds to reveal other things. The illogical grouping of forms made the composition escape from the control of the specific and fixed meaning, since the content of the work does not reveal itself directly, but rather makes us look at the semantics and symbols. The artist wanted to engage the recipient with visual effects that open up the process of interpretation according to the phenomenon data provided in the artwork.

From the above, I think that it is possible to refer to the mechanisms that achieve fragmentation that the artist worked on, and it is clear through the artist's effort to work on some concepts that were associated with postmodern art such as diffusion and marginalization, and the dispersal of the visual system, and the adoption of the tendency to deconstruction, which led to the denial of the center and the multiplicity of focal points in the painting and activating the role of the margin, so the figures seemed scattered. Fragments on the surface of the canvas are unlinked or grouped with specific causal relationships, giving the recipient the freedom to project the meaning of what he sees.



**Daa Al-Khuzai, Iraq, 80x80 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2004, *Abstraction* / التجريد, artist's private collection.**

The work represents one of the distinctive styles of the abstract movement, which is painted with a mixture of feeling and emotion by relying on the pigment of color and animated in a mechanical way through a manipulative movement based on speed in performance without having a pre-designed work in an attempt to express internal fears or express visually internal perception. The colors and shapes in the scenery of the painting do not indicate sensory signals, except for the circular shapes that may look like a bicycle wheel, which the artist worked to include in most of his paintings, and which constitute one of the structural elements in those paintings. The inner anxiety results from the set of contradictions that exist in our time.

The artist replaced the traditional concepts of artistic expression in an attempt to present a new, contradictory vision in its relationship to reality, through his complete liberation from traditional means of expression, which is what most postmodern artists worked on in particular. The artist tried to break the traditional perspective of painting by dismantling the components. The realistic scene of the scattering of

objects within an open building outside the calculations of time and space, and the scattering of color blocks cause fragmentation in the absence of the center of the painting or the main viewpoint. Here the viewer can choose any point from which to start wandering inside the work, as Dia Al-Khuzai says in this regard: "Things for me are open and time is also, and everything I paint I leave open and loose because it is the painting that I have in a state of constant anxiety." He also says: "I despise the constants. Life is always in conflict. I build things and destroy them later, or separate them later and turn them into leftovers" (Al-Zaidi, 2006).

The artist worked on blurring the visual vision, in his quest to crush the heavy volume of color spaces and dismantle the blocks to turn everything into colored fragments, with rapid random strokes of color in which the greatest share is the investment of what opportunity and experience. Presentations of new relations that penetrate the static figurative surface escape from the static to the moving, so that the physical dimensions of the painting are fragmented towards an open space in which the margin is equal to the center in importance, while making use of the efficacy of irrational references that characterized his work as absurd and unconscious in marginalizing the subject in relation to inner emotion, to assert the state of the self's fragmentation. It immediately evokes the artist's skill, conscience, and psychic potential, drawing on fragmentation mechanisms that often invoke the forces of the subconscious.

The work as a whole constitutes a deconstructive artistic act or activity, regardless of its multiple content or ramifications. Here the artist tried to influence the recipient and distract their mind. The painting in its visual language provokes the recipient with its cheerful colors that are distracted by the speed of brush strokes and the force of emotion, which prompts him to try to interpret the work, and search for the meaning of the aesthetic message that the artist tried to present. The other is the number of readings for this work. The artist here is not concerned with the output of his artistic treatments as much as he is concerned with the free play of his experience.



**Muttee Al Jumaily, Iraq, 100x100 cm, various materials on canvas, 2004, *Composition* / تعبير, artist's private collection.**

In this artwork, black dominates the work, forming patches that overlap each other so that they lose their structural identity to represent objects, as colors including yellow, red, blue, green, violet and white hide behind black, and these colors appear in other periods above black.

The composition is considered within the abstract works, as the dispersion of the dark red and violet color adjacent to the background of the work, which is a metaphor for dry blood, with some other colors such as the blue line to give the dimensions of the space, the white as a floor supporting the rest of the elements, green expressing the natural environment, and yellow to give the work brightness and illumination.

It is noticed in the works of Muti' Al-Jumaili that they tend to take certain forms despite their distance from diagnosis, but the truth is not so, as they are structures formed in a form tainted by ambiguity, confusion and nullity, and reliance on

conveying the feeling of excitement during integration into the artwork. Muti` Al-Jumaili followed the high paste technique and the direct technique, sometimes the color intensity increased and sometimes decreased. Accordingly, its technology varies between high paste and direct coating. Through these two techniques, Muti` Al-Jumaili was able to combine calligraphy and colored space to compose the art scene with its broad lines, pure colors and complex objects that suggest it, and expresses its subjective position through color.

In this artwork, the artist presents a bleak image that relies on dazzling and amazement to attract the recipient; it gives a sense of crumbling, the space between parts, and the lack of effect in looking at the essence of the artwork. There is no vanishing point at which the work will fall back.

The artist was inspired by postmodern thought with a lot of meanings, as spontaneity, freedom and boldness appeared in this work in the movement of the brush on the metaphorical surface in different directions, based on acute emotions and psychological emptying of the content of the self, so that this coincidence and accidental event are among the advantages of his expressive artwork about him automatically in order to reveal the motives of the human soul, shrouded in mystery and troubling.

I think that the artist Muti` Al-Jumaili wanted to distort the general view, turning it into a disjointed wreck, using linear spraying of pure color, at the expense of shapes and volumes, so that he had a color space, which was like an undiagnosed or objective world, expressing movement and stillness in the same time, form, formlessness, meaning and absence of meaning, and in the end there is nothing but free abstraction.



**Hossam Abdel Mohsen, Iraq, 100x120 cm, various materials on canvas, 2005, Baghdad / بغداد, artist's private collection.**

The artist Hossam Abdel Mohsen was able to depict a group of symbols that he shows as free color units that are homogeneous in color, and others interspersed with different light and dark lines that crossed or intersected with the colored spaces. At the same time, some of its parts were connected with a different color, and the painting was executed in an open method, so that it did not appear as clear geometric lines, and the colors with warm effects that took on the overlapping of the neutral black and white colors had a perspective character that included the entire area of the painting.

The artist created his painting with a harmonious color combination, in which he mixed color spaces, so that the painting appears in its general framework in response to the conditions of contemporary art, which is concerned with the abstract form and not resorting to direct subtraction character of compliance. We see that the artist has given his painting some darkness at its edges and focused the lighting on the center

of the painting by intensifying the white color, which indicates the penetration of light into the painting.

The artist was able to gain experiences by integrating previous knowledge with acquired and subsequent knowledge, thus achieving intellectual and cultural richness in parallel with the accumulated experiences, and the new painting environment is inspired by miniature formal structures as if expressing modern statements. In a new space where color exchanges its role with calligraphy, it seems the artist invested his experience in a new understanding of a creative work away from the tendencies of diagnosis that he has mastered.

We see the artist's transitions between spaces and manipulation of the intensification of the color paste, as well as his focus on revitalizing the atmosphere of tension in a particular area through the intensification of lines and their branching in a small space and the apparent relaxation in other areas. It indicates the artist's comprehension and knowledge of contemporary art contexts and their cultural influence on him.

The work, despite its clear association with contemporary art, appears to have been executed in a way that suggests the artist's recollections of areas of his previous memory. He was influenced by the local environment with all its red land and soil, which he expressed by using earthy and overlaying colors in them and mixing them with a range of warm and neutral colors. This resulted in a torrent of colors that reflected the state in which the artist was in harmony with his environment, as he was living in the shadow of a silent nature, so it was free from noise and disturbance.



**Thamer Daoud, Iraq, 100x100 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2006, *Abstraction* / تجريد, artist's private collection.**

The artist Thamer Daoud drew this artwork in a simple abstract way, as he divided the pictorial surface into two parts, and these two sections are interspersed with some spontaneous lines, as the artist placed a circular hole in the center of the painting approximately, and on the right side there is a wide red line, with some simple symbols on the left side of the hole, and two opposite triangles are placed above the red line.

It can be argued that the artist is able to embody the pictorial surface in an abstract and simple way, to find in it his desire to reach liberation from the part to the whole, evident in this work the infinite view through eternity. There are the movement of space, the symbols of fading and scattering in the workspace, and the red line expressing the data of the ephemeral sensory world, disappearing or cutting through the pictorial surface of the canvas through the circle that represents the infinite. In

addition, the artist laid a floor with earthy colors with spiritual connotations and meanings, to swim in this vast universe, and then set off again to penetrate the wall of the figurative surface behind it.

The features of abstraction in this work are very clear; in its technique we find an attempt to reach what is close to spontaneity, where abstraction and flatness were taken as a basis for its subject, and therefore the work in its entirety constitutes an act or disintegration of artistic activity through which the artist tried to influence the recipient and distract his mind. The painting in its visual language provokes the recipient with its colors and empty spaces on the pictorial surface, prompting him to try to interpret the work, and search for the meaning of the aesthetic message that the artist tried to present. Therefore, I see that this artwork is embodied in abstraction through its short and simplified formations and the interconnected relationships between them to reveal the sublime truth.



**Jabr Alwan, Iraq, 150x150 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2006, *Lying Down* / الاستلقاء, artist's private collection.**

What appears in this work is what looks like a sofa in brown with some shades of yellow, and there is a quiet woman sitting, relaxed with one knee on top of the other, calm and serene. It is surrounded by a cool neutral color, which contrasts with the sharpness of black outlines and scribbles in pastel colors. The woman puts her hands behind her head. The artist tried here to reformulate the scale according to a new perspective that allows changing the point of view, in an attempt to break up the center, as the woman's body is distributed on the canvas, which pushes the sides of the plate towards the form and changes the center of the artwork.

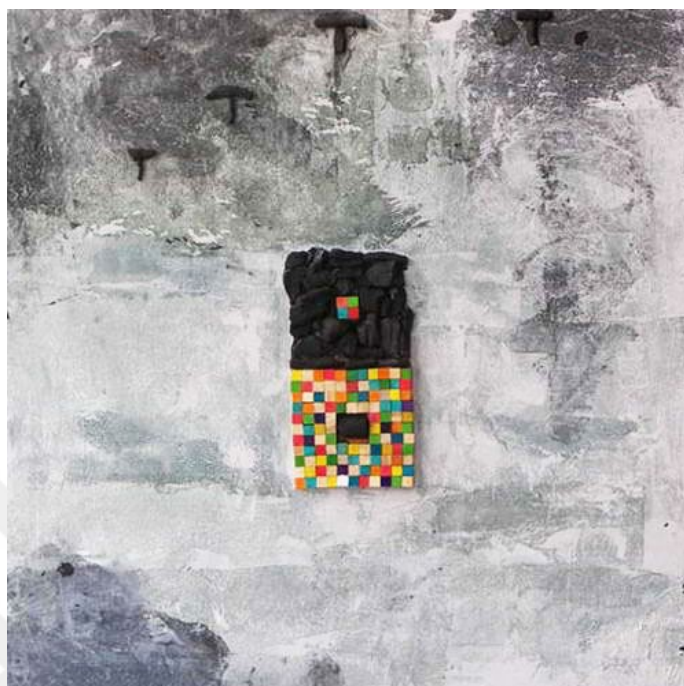
The light source comes from the left, leaving shadows on the floor in brown and gray with few strokes that reflect some of the room's colors and the whites cover part of the floor. As for the wall, the gray-brown color is also in different shades. The artist Jabr Alwan depicts the woman within the limits of abstract features, giving her emotional aspects, as the place suggests isolation and alienation by manipulating

surfaces and creating dark color gradations that reveal hidden feelings for women that do not express themselves.

The bold and quick strokes of the brush gave instant expressions in documenting the moment within a framework that simulates the feelings, through the surfaces surrounding the form, to contribute in cooperation with each other in creating an abstract atmosphere, which results in a reading of reality according to an intellectual vision that ignores the virtual image and creates a new one that fits with the basic idea of the subject.

The meaning of beauty in form and matter is directly related to sensory perception and in an imaginative process that includes dispersion, chaos, deconstruction and installation in a new way, but it is linked to previous experiences, where the relationships between forms are renewed in the formation of an aesthetic discourse that stems from the interaction of formal structures after turning them into a new artistic product. The aesthetic idea lies in the subject and suggests pleasure as a result of the association of aesthetic features with forms of childish influences that took root in the artist's mind that made him biased towards the women, so the woman carried multiple meanings according to her position in the artwork.

Quick brush strokes created color relationships and different color gradations, through which we notice the unity in the composition that brought the woman together with the sofa and the characteristics of the place in general under a formal harmony and one color, which gave an abstract expressive value to the subject.



**Ghassan Ghayeb, Iraq, 100x100 cm, various materials on wood, 2007, *Positive Negative* / إيجابي سلبى, artist's private collection.**

This work can be divided in terms of the formal composition into three squares. The first square is the figure that forms the outer limits of the work, and consists of a wooden plank interspersed with color treatments predominantly gray, distributed in the upper part of which are pieces of charcoal formations resembling nails or hammers, and in the middle of it are two squares that can be called the second and third squares. The second square consists of adjacent pieces of charcoal attached to the wooden board (the first square) and in the middle is a small square consisting of two contrasting colors (red and green), and the third square consists of group of color squares with a black square in the middle.

The artist's work has a peculiarity that although it is similar to many world experiences, it has the special feature of an adherence to place, which becomes an alternative proposition to familiar objects and the natural environment, and despite the lack of work for these objects, the viewer of this work sees them as latent. It is

hidden in the symbols that the artist evokes through imagination and the mental image stored in memory to be embodied in the painting.

As a result of the war after 2003, the artist moved from the depicting area to the documentation area, where the colors of smoke, ash, dust and darkness took a different location from their first colors. Extraneous like charcoal is used to bring the image closer and increase its barebones effectiveness.

The expression is no longer attracted to the beauty in this work, but to a style filled with symbols, connotations and questions that refute the masks to form a concept that delves into the reworking of surfaces as interior mirrors, which the artist recomposes conflicts, cracks, and dismantling until the work surface appears as a time conveyed by calamities and wars, taking advantage of his imagination loaded with the smell of gunpowder and destruction and what has befallen the country.

With a glimmer of hope and optimism for a better tomorrow, expressed by the bright colors of the colored wooden cubes in the middle of the ash pile, the artist creates a balance between them between the black square in the middle of the colored squares, and the colored square in the middle of the charcoal black squares, embodying the struggle between the forces of good and evil, war and peace, light and darkness from a purely abstract conceptual perspective.

Through our vision of the work, we discover the nature of the use of the abstract method, and the way to employ the raw material in the artwork, which often comes from outside the world of painting. The artist borrows it from its original environment and puts it to work. The artist's performance varies greatly, as he comes up with pieces of charcoal to make shapes using the collage technique, as an attempt to reach objects through familiar materials borrowed from nature.



**Blasim Mohamed, Iraq, 100x100 cm, various materials on canvas, 2008, untitled, artist's private collection.**

The general form of this artwork represents a man lying on a bed slightly higher than his usual figure, and a woman sat supporting him with her left arm on the edge of the bed from the side of the head. The movement of the man was characterized by complete relaxation through the method of the headrest and the flow of the right hand parallel to the extension of the body to take the form of a pillow to lean on, except for the position of his left foot, which rose from the bed to form an almost right angle. We find that there is a white human figure that appears as if sitting on the edge of the bed to support the man and embrace him with care and tenderness, and a state of reassurance and relaxation appeared in the form of the man.

The method of using line and choosing colors is the hallmark of this artwork, where absurd white lines spread over the area of the canvas, including human figures, in a bold way in choosing two colors (black and white) and gradients, to give human figures the advantage of black color with a tinge of dark gray, while white and light gray dominated the entire area of the painting, with simple warm touches of blue

(represented by the mattress on the floor of the scene) and orange (represented by the man's shirt buttons and the sun dial centered in the space of the painting).

In the process of the disappearance of the human form and its manifestations of modified and abstractly reduced artistic symbols of many human details, reference causes and goals are closely related to the artist's fantasies and emotional impulses. In order to get away from everything related to reality, the artist was keen to fabricate his forms and transform them into symbolic components stemming from his mental perceptions that derive their energies from the artist's culture, abstract capabilities, and aesthetic and technical experiences.

The presence of the man and the woman, and the state of friendliness and intimacy that he represents are shown by the way they sit together, and there is a jelly-shaped, white-colored thing in the scene that resembles a ghost or an angel, to penetrate that intimate serenity quietly and separate them by sitting next to the woman and taking the man in his arms and supporting him.

A glimmer of hope is represented by the appearance of the sun disk from outside the space of the painting and through the window overlooking the scene in the middle of the work. Likewise, black with its tragic connotations and white with its cheerful connotations suggest hope.

The movement of the scattered lines on the area of the painting, sometimes smoothly and calmly, and at other times harshly and violently, is another evidence of the presence of the artist's psychological state, and his urgent desire to show it and vent about it, through the symbolism closely related to the artist's character and personal motivations.

This artwork constituted an artistic grant in terms of artistic style used in the process of formation and creativity, as well as through the technique of employing material in its pictorial space in a manner consistent with its intellectual and abstract dimensions.



**Ali Talib, Iraq, 100x100 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2008, *Landscape* / منظر طبيعي, artist's private collection.**

The work consists of homogeneous colors; at the top we find the black color, then the blue color, where the scattered shapes are concentrated, representing open flowers, and to the left there is a black square on which the scattered flowers have fallen, and at the bottom we find the gray color.

The painting indicates that it deals with colors black, blue, and red in general, and it goes in a clear symmetrical manner, and this is what formed and opened a wide space for the artist's imagination. The visual forms do not stop at the limits of what they refer to, it thus becomes itself a thing that has an independent existence, and is formed in an imaginary world, an artistic and aesthetic world with an active presence in the structure of the work of art.

As the artist Ali Talib sought to discover the subconscious mind and daydreams, signs and symbolic images spread in the artist's imagination without logical control, and the performance of freedom and spontaneity, so the media discourse was more

vibrant and beautiful. The layers of the semantic painting formed in each of them a semantic sign, and its special gustatory treatment in producing a meaning or an aesthetic or cultural approach, and the upper (black) region showed the state of being,

At first glance, it appears visually clear, while the two figures from the right-side show that there is an abstract figure bearing the focus in the act of reading and interpretation. The subjects are crowded in the second area (blue), and the artist Ali Talib wanted to show that this color has a special effect in the sense of to have a focus in the distribution of the subject in the painting.

As for the third (gray) area, it remained the same, and this proves that it was presented as a value representing the open space, but it is occupied by the meaning of color and its relationship to the adjacent spaces, which led to its appearance. It gives an indication of space that allows the eye to relax because of the neutrality of color, in addition to its importance as a color between black (darkness) and white (light/purity), and there appeared in some of its fields overlapping subjects or shapes, interacting with them. It shows other color values, and this is one of the artistic treatments of the artist Ali Talib in this aspect, because it represents the crowding of symbols.

Ali Talib found in the elements of the artwork and its technical formulation an attempt based on the chromatic artistic construction, which refers to a formal formulation in which the graphic expression is in a discursive visual unit that he achieved brilliantly, making it transform into an abstract intellectual symbolism (in its mental and imaginative/emotional level), with the increase of creative relations with the structure of the self and the elements of its realization, a transformation occurred in the form and a formulation of constructivism, its general technique and its particular colors.



**Fakher Mohamed, Iraq, 40x42 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2009, *Babylonian Orchards* / بساتين بابلية, artist's private collection.**

This work was carried out in acrylic colors, where the artist covered the floor of the painting with light colors that predominate what the artist symbolizes with the color of the earth, and he used symbols, lines and triangles using colors green, red and black to overcome equal areas of the painting.

It is noticeable that the process of repetition imposed by the artist in this artwork, and this repetition of the shape of the point; there are points above the letters, and also the presence of three in the middle of the woman's dress, which is the right of the painting that seems to raise her hands to the sky, and another point in a position at the top of the dress that can be interpreted as a religious vision.

I can explain the religious artist's vision as being part of the artist's depth and composition, and I think that the point that lies in the woman's dress is nothing but an affirmation of modesty and chastity, and I believe that she represents the mother, as three sons emerge from her, and the white color indicates both sides of the woman. On the purity of the mother's heart, the green represents the earth and

tenderness, and the black color in the middle represents the sadness rooted in the culture of the region from which the artist came.

There are triangle shapes at the top of the artwork, it appears to be a bird or a plane, but just below the figure there is a figure that can be interpreted as a sword and under it is a red shadow, which may represent blood, there are also two points on the sword handle, and there is another triangle standing on a line, a straight cross with three lines. In the center of the painting there is a shape with three squares, and also three shapes of similar size at the bottom of the center of the painting, very similar to one of the Arabic letters. We also see a square shape above an oval and in the middle are two points, and the shape at the bottom of the painting can be explained as a dog with straight legs and one point above it, with the colors white, red, green and black representing the Iraqi flag.

The work is full of vocabulary and symbols that express symbolic contents that the artist created from the civilized environment that surrounds the artist, giving them aesthetic values that lie in the vocabulary to provoke controversy for the viewer to refer them to magical or mythical worlds, where symbols of the social values of a character loaded with graphics, letters, multiple materials and colors give them an authentic aesthetic.

There is the element of spontaneity, as well as the multiplicity of eccentricities in the process of creating the pictorial surface through the process of deconstructing the components of the scene, from which the artist moved to the spaces where there is no specific point based on it, where the artist created a scattered perspective containing deceptive laws belonging to the subconscious.



**Rafea Al-Nasiri, Iraq, 40x40 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2009, *Yemen Gate*, باب اليمن, artist's private collection.**

This square-shaped work consists of color spaces divided horizontally into two parts of similar size, where the upper part of the artwork appears illuminated in an earthy yellow, while the lower part is dark brown, and a few colored squares rise from the lower part to cover an area of the part. Above, in the middle of the upper part of the panel is a square shape in dark blue interspersed with areas of earthy yellow; this figure is surrounded by a rectangular frame of blue. In the upper part of this work appear regular rows of small circular holes in white, which turn blue within the square shape, and five other white dots, arranged in a horizontal row, which are larger than the others where the place above the lower part is colored dark brown.

I think that in this work the artist tried to combine a set of structural elements, balancing sharp geometric shapes (rectangle and blue square), freeform and chromatic camouflage, which rise from below from the artwork, which leads the recipient's eye in an upward direction. It ends by focusing on a small area within the boundaries of the blue square, while the wide areas extending around it are an earthy

color space as a wide and lively area, where blue shapes and white holes move, representing the artist's ability to control the visual surface, through the manipulation of contrasting colors, which carry the most important features that are spontaneous and reductive, so that most parts of the work seem free from the effects of the artist's direct intervention.

The artist resorted to employing the automatic results resulting from the printing process colograph, where he inserted symbols and shapes that play a vital role in the structural equilibrium process, so that the five white points at the bottom of the artwork appear closer to a kind of structural solution invented by the artist. This is to balance the weight shown at the top of the work.

It seems that the compositional structure of this work is based on the process of creating a set of color elements, as the artist deliberately made them fluctuate between geometric shapes on the one hand, and lose their strict geometric properties. On the other hand, in order to make them more flexible and lively, the artist conducted the process of mixing structural composition in rhythm kinetic, as it has the ability to attract the eye of the recipient towards the center represented by the square.

The beauty of the composition in this artwork is centered on the complex, which oscillates between the horizontal linear composition and creates a symbol of nobility and grandeur, and the vertical composition that comes from the fusion of the blue square with the horizontal axis. The aesthetic of the compositional construction is also caused by its oscillation between “closed” on the one hand, and this is represented by the elements included in the construction that search for the frame of the painting as if they were supports to tighten the frame, and from “open” on the other hand, which represents the upper part of the artwork, a wide horizon.

The artist relied on the feature of the clear and tactile color difference between the floor and the shapes floating on its surface, so that the work turns into mere relationships between geometric and semi-geometric shapes, which are characterized by a tangible character that carries some roughness.



**Kareem Risant, Iraq, 180x150 cm, mixed media on canvas, 2010, *Paintings and Marks* / رسوم وعلامات, artist's private collection.**

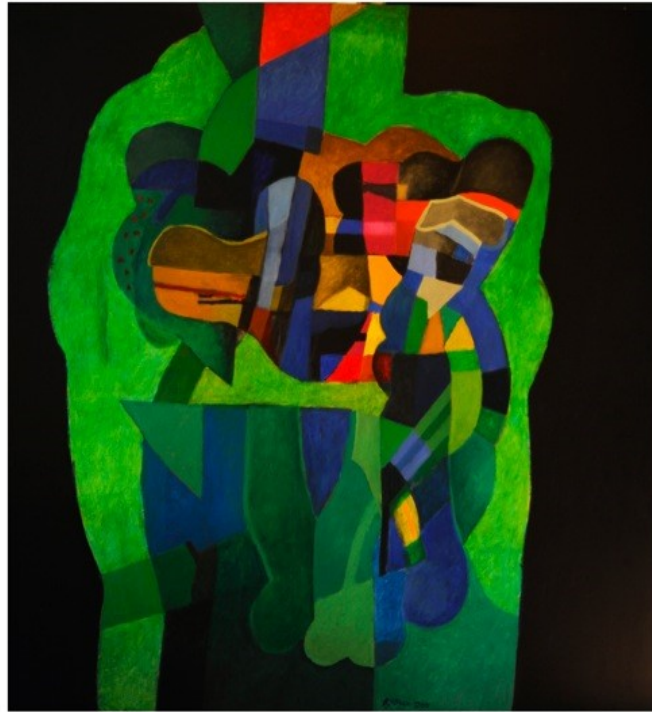
The artist painted this work using different types of colors on canvas, and the pictorial surface can be divided into several sections, where the upper part on the left of the work consists of a color space in a bluish-brown, painted using chromatic brush strokes, where brush marks can be seen longitudinally clear. As for the right part, it consists of a brown color space and occupies the left longitudinal part until the end of the canvas. For the lower part of the plate, there is a dark brown color area at the end of the plate, and there is a black square shape, and it is noted that there are some small black circles, and also a rectangle black shape, with some shapes near this line. There are some Arabic letters for an incomprehensible word.

In this artwork, the artist depicted his impact on the war and the occupation of Iraq after 2003. The artist's memory has preserved images of the repercussions of that war. It seems that the theme of the painting revolves around one of the Iraqi alleys during the war years after the entry of American soldiers and what followed this entry. The artist portrayed the intentions in gray, which is a reference to the Iraqi

buildings that witnessed battles when the occupation entered. The black circles on the right simulate the bullet holes that made holes in the wall as a result of the battles that took place there, as well as the presence of Arabic letters that form part of the word, which is one of the customs that appeared at that time. They represent anti-American occupation graffiti and slogans (*Iraqi Contemporary Art*, 2010).

I believe that the artist tried to express his feelings in his memory of what happened to his country, with the feeling that the city was abandoned by people with some traces of smoke resulting from the battles, as he combined all those feelings in a beautiful and simple abstract style.





**Dia Al-Azzawi, Iraq, 190x190 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2011, *Imaginary Garden* / حديقة خيالية, artist's private collection.**

What is evident in this work is the intensity of the colors painted by the artist. The painting begins with a clear black frame that surrounds it, giving more focus to the center of the painting, and green prevails in varying degrees over most features of the work surface. It is also noticeable that there are irregular geometric shapes within the artwork in an irregular manner, as they formed a group of different shapes and colors between red, yellow, green and several colors. The dominant feature of this work is the clarity of frank and bold colors, as this painting gives a sense of joy and comfort when looking at its details and colors.

The beauty of this artwork is a mixture of heritage and contemporary man, as if the artist sought to clarify these symbols and make contemporary man more familiar and accustomed to them, as he played the role of interpreter of this heritage and brings it closer to the ordinary visual vision. It is an aesthetic function by which the artist Dia

Al-Azzawi wants to raise the vision to its fullest extent. Hence the importance of his visual compositions in painting, which are closely related to the legacy of Mesopotamia.

That is why his paintings captivate the visual locally and globally, as each of them searches for his aesthetics. Bright colors are not just an intense brushstroke, with which the artist wants them to be distinct, but rather that color energy that the artist was saturated with throughout his first life in Iraq.

We can say that the artist transformed the storage of his memory into colors, so that he intends to make us differentiate between what is old and what is modern and contemporary, as this artwork evokes the feeling of abstract artistic sense and the amazement of discovery.



**Balasam Jassam, Iraq, 100x100 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2015, untitled, artist's private collection.**

This work was done in the form of a square, and the artist used acrylic colors on the canvas, and in the upper part of the work an area of gray color appears to the right of the painting, and to the left of the upper part. The colors vary up to a dark color, while the lower part of the painting is equivalent to half of the area of the artwork, and in the middle of this part there is a figure of a woman, with some color brush strokes on the left side of the artwork, and there are some colored spots and lines placed on the figure of the woman in the middle of the artwork, with blurry colors covering most of the artwork.

The artist was able to depict a scene for Iraqi women by adding some details to women's clothing that refer to the Iraqi folklore, with a head covering, which is familiar to women in Iraqi society, and there is an unclear figure behind the woman, which indicates that there is another woman. She walks behind the first woman, and

to the left of the woman there are some color strokes that may represent a door to a neighboring building and some windows within a color combination suggesting the presence of buildings. Intersecting lines represent the shape of the palm tree, which is considered one of the most prominent trees in Iraq. By adding blur in the colors, the artist was able to create the impression of a perspective within the artwork, a clever move by the artist that confirms his mastery of the artwork's tools.

The artist has properly utilized the spaces of the artwork in distributing his subjects, and was able to make the figure of the woman who mediates as center of the artwork, by using large and dispersed areas of colors ranging from light to dark. We see brown and gradient to dark color in the upper part of the painting and also in the sides, with an emphasis on the details and the different colors of the woman's figure.

I think the artist emulated his passion for the past and his childhood. The viewer of the painting can distinguish that the features of the artwork simulate the Iraqi past through the colors and costumes that Iraqi women previously wore, and this confirms the artist's nostalgia for the past. It can be argued that the artist was able to accomplish this work in a wonderful way, as he gave references to this work of art.



**Vian Sora, Iraq, 75x75 cm, mixed media on canvas, 2016, *Wall of Nimrud* / حائط نمرود, artist's private collection.**

This artwork consists of a square shape, and the work was done using different oil colors on the canvas, and the color spaces are distributed gradually, as the light and bright colors are in the upper part of the artwork. The colors continue gradually to dark in the lower part, with brush strokes of irregular color gradations here and there, and there are features of the shape of an ancient statue, and several light-colored lines forming the shape of the palm can be seen on the left side of the artwork. To the right of the work there are random lines and some brush strokes light colored, and in the lower right are horizontal brush strokes that look like a wall of stones.

What seems to me in this artwork is that the artist deliberately distributed the colors in this way, so the distribution of colors between light and dark and focusing on the bright light color in the middle of the work give a sense of a spot of light. To give this feeling that you are viewing a historical wall, it is also noted that there is the shape of the palm tree, which is one of the most important features of Iraq, and there is a shape similar to the statue of the ancient Iraqi civilization, as well as the

horizontal brush strokes in the right corner of the work forming the remains of an old wall, or it may be from artifacts, while the zigzag lines in light color may represent the method of writing in ancient Iraqi civilization.

The title of this work (*The Wall of Nimrud*) indicates the content of it. The ancient city of Nimrud in Mosul was destroyed during the last war. It seems that the artist tried to depict this tragedy in a beautiful abstract artistic style. This artwork is full of abstract codes, as it expresses the sad feelings within the artist for what happened to this city, as the artist tried to convey those feelings from the inside in order to communicate them to the recipient in a way full of details, which makes the viewer of this work roam inside the work trying to absorb all the messages inherent in it.

The color aesthetic in this work of art lies in the use of a few colors in many shades, which reveals the artist's ingenuity in the use of color. There is a beautiful harmony between the colors, where the colors are used as lighting within the canvas with the rest of the color spaces skillfully, and also the ability of the artist to enter all these codes in a beautiful abstract image is apparent.



**Tahrir Ali, Iraq, 70x80 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2016, *Karrada Crime* / جريمة الكرادة, artist's private collection.**

This work is structurally composed of rectangular color spaces in which black and white predominate, and the contrasting meanings that they carry to express the state of “good and evil”, “peace and destruction”, “life and death” and many other meanings, and it is noticeable that these colors focus on the spaces formed on the edges of the work. Artistic style includes smears from white to gray, which can be considered a sign by the artist of a space of hope synonymous with black, signifying destruction, and in the center of this work a group of gradations of orange, yellow, green, and gray in a completely harmonious way, where they intertwine. Those colors are combined with each other, producing a meaning for the live drama.

This work was accomplished after the tragedy of the terrorist bombing of the Karrada compound in the capital, Baghdad, which killed more than 500 people, including children, women and youth. This criminal act left a great impact on the hearts of all Iraqis, including the artist Tahrir Ali, who embodied this tragedy in a beautiful abstract style that simulates feelings of sadness and pain.

That painful tragedy was embodied in this artwork in an abstract style and a different vision of the real scene, where there is what can be compared to the wings of a

headless bird, and there are terraces that end in black darkness, and unknown signs here or there, all these elements gave the viewer an opportunity to interpret the scene, suggesting pain and limitation of a terrible terrorist incident.

The technique used in this work is based on spraying with color splashes, color drips, and bold and fast strokes of color, all of which represent the style of the abstract artists. In addition, this work is a case of fragmentation and absurdity in the vocabulary of form and the intertwining of forms, symbols and figurative themes with each other according to a vision that is not without ugliness and drama, two of the prominent features achieved by contemporary postmodern arts.

The artist was not isolated from what was going on in his community. The 1980s war took its toll on Iraqi artistic achievement, with repercussions on society as a whole. The image of the war was visible to everyone and left psychological traces. Its semantic authority confirms the depth of the tragedy that befell Iraq.

The artist tried to convey to us an event of the highest levels of violence and panic that Iraq experienced in terms of destruction, wars, terrorism and all the pressures that increased their effects on society psychologically and politically, as expressed by the artist, that can be compared to a cry of pain in a reality of horror and destruction.



**Hashim Hannon, Canada, 122x122 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2017, *City Colours* / الوان المدينة, artist's private collection.**

This artwork consists of a square shape, and many saturated colors are distributed over it, and it consists of many geometric shapes such as circles in the lower part of the painting, and square shapes in the upper part of the artwork interspersed with some circles, with some rectangles here and there, and the colors can be described as clear and bright as well as varied.

The artist's use of those colors that represent the colors of summer gives the feeling that it is a view of a touristic city with a great hustle and bustle of people. There are colored circles at the bottom of the artwork representing umbrellas in different colors, the blue in the middle of the panel representing water as well as the shapes representing sailboats at the top of the artwork, with several shapes representing the buildings to the right of the work in multiple colors (Cino, 2019).

I think this work brings feelings of joy and activity to the viewer a lot. The artist tried to convey feelings of happiness and euphoria with this beautiful scene. The bright

and varied colors that spread throughout the artwork add a kind of beautiful detail that creates curiosity in the viewer about what is going on in this work.

I think the artist has done this work in a beautiful abstract style, relying on a multiplicity of colors and geometric shapes. It is clear that he relied on brush strokes to fill in small areas of geometric shapes scattered throughout the artwork. It is also possible to notice some color distortion to give the illusion of perspective to distant figures. With all these elements, this work has been done in a beautiful abstract style.

This work lacks any reference to Iraq, so it is clear that the artist painted this artwork to depict some aspects of European life, which indicates that he was influenced by European culture. It can be argued that this work involve universalistic feature of abstraction.



**Nasser Samary, Iraq, 100x80 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2017, *ISIS and Eve* / داعش / وحواء, artist's private collection.**

It is clear in this artwork that the strokes of colors are in a geometric way, as the depiction of the girl in the white dress was done in an abstract style very similar to children's drawings, and it is noted that the letters and words are unorganized, random and incomprehensible. Also in this work there are areas of colors that can be described as colors popular for the Iraqi environment.

The artwork consists of a set of multi-colored blocks of green, brown, orange and blue, as these colors are concentrated in the upper part of the work, and there is a dark color space that mimics the human figure, in addition to the female figure, which is the central element that dominates the work.

The artist Nasser Al-Samari used acrylic colors for large strokes of color, allowing him to create multi-colored spaces in a clear abstract style, as these striking strokes are characterized by freedom of movement from one area to another within the work. The spontaneous movement of the lines allows the artist to form multiple formations, which generates a visual pleasure resulting from the multiplicity of these formations, and then turns into mental communication to deliver a beautiful visual message.

The artist focuses on an important issue of the terrorist organization ISIS on women through the act of killing, assault and torture, and he symbolizes this topic through the girl in the center, who wears white as a symbol of chastity. On the other hand, ISIS is symbolized in black and placed at the end of the painting; it represents the extent of the injustice that falls to women through ISIS philosophy in the painful conditions of terror of destruction, injustice and tyranny. This was explained by the artist in the color spaces that resembled walls and houses, as well as in the letters and words that express the incomprehensible beliefs of this terrorist organization.

In this artwork that the artist's association with what happened in Iraqi society is clear, where the artist relied on art as a means of expressing the event in a way that can be described as media to spread it among the masses. The artist also used the method of criticism of social stories in an abstract manner, to indicate that his style lies in his ability to use color as an abstract value. The work differed in its focus on humanitarian and women's issues and the infliction of injustice on them through terrorist organizations whose consequences extend to the artist's life, whether he lived, witnessed or heard about it. The artist also relied heavily on color justifications, in the choice of social themes, and his representation in an abstract expressionist style.



**Satar Luqman, Iraq, 150x150 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2018, untitled, artist's private collection.**

The work is in the form of a square, and was executed in different acrylic colors. As for the pictorial surface of the artwork, the artist used geometric shapes throughout. It is possible to notice the division of the work into squares with large areas of light color as a background for the work of art, with a difference in the color texture in each part of the work. In the middle, there are two main shapes in the form of a twisted rectangle resembling a dagger, and in the lower part of the work there are square shapes in different colors, with some lines and shapes including what looks like an eye, and dotted here and there with small geometric shapes, such as triangles and small circles.

It is clear from the constituent elements of this artwork that the artist has embodied shapes inspired by the southern environment of Iraq, where the curved rectangular shapes represent one of the types of boats known in Iraq, in which the artist used some types of decoration. Inspired by the same environment, the artist also deliberately used explicit colors, as he mixed them with the motifs to give a basic color block to the work, and some inscriptions on the boats suggest a kind of decoration inspired by the Iraqi environment, in a clear indication of the originality and ethnocentricity of the Iraqi work.

It seems that this work has an impact on the recipient by distributing the red color throughout the artwork; it is moving, making the recipient carefully follows the work with passion and pleasure. The dominance of the square shape of the work makes it an objective center for attracting the attention of the recipient. Additionally, the dividing lines in the work are soft, sharp, frank and light. The artist collected all these elements on a light brown and gray background to confirm the environmental identity of the artwork. Moreover, the artist shortened the visual scene in a beautiful abstract way by collecting all the elements that indicate the environment of southern Iraq and rearranging them in a distinctive abstract manner.



### 3.3. ANALYSIS RESULTS

- 1- Works 2, 14, 16, 15 show that the contemporary Iraqi artists employ colors in the pictorial scene to transform the scene into color strokes scattered across the different parts of the artwork. The employment of color expression in such a way shows the influence of the abstract art movement on the Iraqi painting.
- 2- It is clear in most paintings that the contemporary Iraqi artist avoids straight lines, as the artist tends to paint slanted, curved, and intersecting lines, and employs them in the process of moving the pictorial surface, which confuses the vision. This feature characterizes most contemporary Iraqi artworks, and provides a more expressionistic freedom in a way similar to stereotypical abstract art.
- 3- What is noted in the works 2, 5, 9, 14, 16, 19 is the attempt of the contemporary Iraqi artist to dismantle and fragment the blocks and redistribute them in a free abstract manner, without being bound by academic methods and laws, and this is what gave the Iraqi artist greater flexibility in presenting the aesthetics of the artwork.
- 4- The general characteristic of these paintings confirms the Iraqi artist's reliance on the concept of spontaneity, freedom, and manipulation of form that lacks causal and logical links to the sensory world, which represents one of the most important features of abstract art.
- 5- The dominant feature in most paintings is breaking the rules of perspective, spreading signs, and abandoning the depth dimension, which are among the most important features of abstract art.
- 6- The artworks show that the Iraqi artist can be distinguished by his liberation from the material form and the sensory world, and his orientation to the world of free creativity and multiple mental images, as evidenced by the paintings 17, 18, 19.

- 7- New methods have been used in the period from the end of the nineties to the present day in the pictorial surface, where they depended on the diversity of the material, including what is new such as water-resistant colors and the use of wood, types of paper, etc. Also, the contemporary Iraqi artist used various new techniques such as scratching and spraying to express emotions in an abstract manner. Application of the colors by spraying and using the paste are found in the works 1, 2, 4, 10, 14, 16.
- 8- The contemporary Iraqi artist turned to the open expression, as they relied on open space and the dispersion of constructive relationships within the artwork, which extended the painting beyond the framework of the artwork, as evidenced in the works 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11.
- 9- The contemporary Iraqi artist paid attention to the subjective aspect, by investing in irrationality when producing forms that express the artist's special states such as absurdity, dreams and spontaneity, which makes the forms appear distorted, camouflaged or torn, as is evident in the works 7, 9, 11, 19.
- 10- The analysis showed that one of the distinguishing features in most contemporary Iraqi paintings is the advantage of shifting from static to moving, lack of stagnation and calmness, as well as excitement and speed of performance, and a high sense of movement. All of these factors led to the dispersion of structural and kinetic form in artworks.
- 11- Contemporary works of art were distinguished by their impact on the economic and political reality in expressing loneliness and isolation, which was reflected in the works of art accompanying those conditions, as in 1, 5, 17, 18. This indicates that the Iraqi artist differed from the European artist in motives, despite the similarities between them.
- 12- One of the most important features that distinguished contemporary Iraqi paintings, as represented by the sample analyzed, is the inclusion of various

and contradictory contents. This characteristic reflects the process of dispersion in the eyes of the recipient.

- 13- From a comparative perspective, the analysis of the sample indicate that after the Iraq War in 2003, new styles have emerged in the Iraqi paintings related to the abstract art, in terms of the multiplicity of materials used and the method of assembling these materials within the artwork. This new tendency provided a larger space for richer meaning and freer expressionistic potential.



## **4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **4.1. CONCLUSION**

The analysis showed that the Iraqi artist was influenced by the artistic and critical methods of the postmodern period, which was characterized by freedom of expression that was not restricted by any artistic laws. This gave the artist complete freedom in expressing his art, and because of the characteristic of deconstruction, dispersion and rearrangement of elements, these features provided the Iraqi artist with a rich reference and a variety of artistic expression, and a new experience in artistic style.

Among the most prominent characteristics of global abstract art are deconstruction and rearrangement, as well as free and unrestricted painting. The analysis suggests that these characteristics were well reflected in the contemporary Iraqi art, as the artist managed to manipulate colors, used various tools in painting, and applied various painting techniques to produce abstract artworks. The analysis highlighted the Iraqi artist's ability to keep pace with the development of abstract art and also the important role it played in contemporary Iraqi art, which bears a global abstract touch.

The findings suggest that despite the spontaneity and dispersion of contemporary Iraqi artworks, these stereotypical abstract features did not greatly affect the Iraqi identity, as local symbols, signs and indicators remained present in most of the abstract paintings. This was indicated in the Iraqi artist's adherence to his local environment and the preservation of the Iraqi identity in most of the artworks.

The findings indicate that the contemporary Iraqi artist was able to cross a period of pressures that imposed the laws of art and style, and head to new paths against the previous proposals of modern art, through the Iraqi artist's philosophy and his way of understanding reality. The characteristics of spontaneity and chaos appear in the analyzed sample of contemporary Iraqi paintings; this led to demolishing the familiar form and transforming it into obscure forms, which gave the artwork several interpretations. The effect of dispersion and spontaneity on the unconscious side of

the human led to the discovery of the hidden meanings of the human psyche. This gave the contemporary Iraqi artist intellectual flexibility that was translated in terms of expressive imagination and non-adherence to academic rules. Such flexibility enriched contemporary Iraqi painting with stylistic tendencies and modern artistic techniques, which helped to push contemporary Iraqi painting to new horizons beyond the limits of conventional academic or artistic patterns.

The analysis explicitly shows that the impact of the wars and the difficult conditions that Iraq has been through had a major role in contemporary Iraqi artwork, which preoccupied the Iraqi artist's imagination with depiction of tragedies, anger and sadness in most of the contemporary paintings. However, the findings also suggested that such difficult political conditions forced the Iraqi artist to deal with specific topics that might have restricted their freedom of artistic expression.

Many of the artworks analyzed herein represent the signs of war and terrorism that affected the Iraqis after 2003, as the contemporary Iraqi artist expressed the influence of those conditions with the symbols and signs that appeared on most of the subjects of the paintings. The findings indicate that such a period formed a fertile material to highlight the technical skills of the Iraqi artists and make them launch their imagination to describe their feelings on the canvas.

Iraqi abstract art is not an Iraqi production, but rather it was acquired through contact with international experiences. But the main contribution of the present thesis is to highlight the fact that the Iraqi artist added a local touch, creating a characteristically localized version of abstract art. While such a localized version of abstract painting made abstract art more appealing and relevant to the local audience, it contributed to a more culturally expressive and diverse abstract art at the international level as well.

#### **4.2. SUGGESTIONS**

The information presented in this study can be useful for postgraduate students and students of art academies who are interested in global and local art movements, from historical and artistic perspectives.

It is important to raise the level of aesthetic taste of Iraqi people, and to define the significant role of art in human life by publishing information and promoting the artistic works of contemporary Iraqi painting.

Studying international works of art, exchanging experiences in the artistic field, and taking advantage of new technologies and ideas is crucial for keeping pace with artistic developments.

Publishing and translating several works on abstract art in general and abstract art in Iraq could be useful for students and interested public.

Following related topics could be preferred for future academic studies:

- the impact of the cubist art movement on contemporary Iraqi art
- the influence of Islamic arts on European art
- the most important art movements that affected Iraqi society
- the impact of the social environment on contemporary Iraqi painting
- the emotional factor and its role in contemporary painting techniques.

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