

In “Wooden Pillars”

Likeness means nothing, illusion is obliterated, and things are exactly what they seem...

By: Ahmed Rashid Thani

“Literature is impossible to evade; it is worthless to try to engage in more literature”.
Jean Cocteau.

One of the works that Hassan Sharif presented to the latest United Arab Emirates Fine Arts Society exhibition is a piece he called “Wooden Pillars” next to which a sign was hanged saying:

“September 1985- this type of wooden pillars has many uses, like being placed in front of private parking spots with signs saying “No Parking”; this pillar has been placed in a box ”

Then he continues:

“The box’s dimensions are- 40 by 16 by 16 inches- items used- a box of wood and glass.”

From here we see that all Hassan Sharif has done is taking this “No Parking” wood, trivial in its everyday use, repetitive and not eye catching, putting it in a box and restricting its usefulness and functionality. Restricting functionality is the artistic obsession of Hassan Sharif in this work. He locked the box with the pillar inside, we cannot use it, the only use to be extracted from the pillar once it is placed in a locked box is for it to be a piece of art by Hassan Sharif.

Hassan in this piece makes likeness mean nothing, for he doesn’t aim at reformulating that which is ordinary and trivial to create a photo-illusion, nor does he aim at revelation, he has the same message of the modern novel of “A. Robbe-Greillet” He looks at things through “totally unbiased eyes” and denounce “The holy psychological analysis”, disregards the person, obliterated the illusion, “and guides our attention to the outside world”. He plays, but with a special cunning... it is not his game to create the absolute then destroy it to recreate it in another form... he does nothing to the thing; he doesn’t add to it, doesn’t take anything from it, he defines it, restricts its space, it’s functionality, and puts it on view as something that is not connected to anything, not connected to its role in life. There is no life for the wood outside of this box, it has been completely uprooted from its natural environment, and became a work of art, its breath a piece of it, and it is neutral, it is exactly what it seems to be, in its new world and surroundings.

In the work, the wooden pillar is something it wasn’t, its own genre. It has a nature it didn’t possess before, yet no one has given it this nature, except this artist. The thing was not preferred, it was not acquired, it was not special in anyway, it was not placed in a box for any quality or merit, it is something like all other things that we use in our everyday life, it does not excite us or catch our attention, or say anything to us. Hassan doesn’t care about any quality or merit, he doesn’t get excited, or stop and think of what it says. He doesn’t want to say anything to us except what that thing said to us before in our daily life, only he brings it, and puts it in front of us, facing us with it as a statement. He places it

there, pauses our routine illusionary view towards it, and confronts us with what we consider trivial, normal and consumptory.

Confronting that from which we escape from seeing everyday, from which we cast away our eyes as if it carries not the wretchedness of our humanity, but the physical space which we think we rob and use, this space that brings with it struggle and confusion, like a one-sided passion, often dripping off the wings of nothingness, in pieces.

Hassan Sharif gives the thing its freedom of space and position, conserving it as an object and not interfering with its being, not infringing on its innocence and separate existence, he does not fall on it, prevents himself from saying, because that would be naivety and stupidity and would only nurture suffering... he offers no representative for himself, he didn't choose it alone amongst other things as an outside shell for his psych and depth.

He refuses depth, he grabs psychology by its neck; he doesn't let it breathe beyond the wooden disposition, he doesn't let it invade his speech, cancel his personality... His true game lies in that he lets the thing speak for itself, lets it to be as it seems, he works it not to preach to us, his work fails if we come out from the experience with some of some sort of connection or relationship... his failure as an artist happens when we are able to interpret the piece, to explain the choices, it is silence... From here springs its importance and job as an art form, from here we can communicate with his vision as an artist, through a silent point of view that tries to tell us nothing. This thing that you don't know, that you don't understand that is in front of you is exactly what it seems to be, with nothing added to it, nothing changed from it. Nothing is meant by it, it says nothing about me, it speaks for itself, it says what it is, exactly what it seems to be, nothing more.

Al- Khaleej
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