

Hassan Sharif, A misunderstood artist in the UAE. (1)

**“They entered the studio’s bathroom and they didn’t get it”!
They can’t comprehend my art because it requires a higher intelligence.**

By: Ahmed Rashid Thani

The responses varied on the latest Hassan Sharif exhibition, just as they did on his entire artistic corpus since his return from his study abroad trip.

The scope of difference between these responses lies between what some say about Hassan Sharif’s art as non-art, completely unrelated to what art is, “absurd” in its form and content, that an artist should scoop down to the level of society then carry it up with him to the loftiness of his art; others decorate their words and play the cultural card saying that this is western art, imported and foreign, culturally different and derogatory in its trivialization of the Arabic man; another from our tiny desert roads might simply says: “I don’t understand” and might add that he wants to.

And because there is no art critic who can explain the “language of the artist”, as Hassan Sharif calls it, in these works we can only look for one (explication) from the artist himself. We give him his due right to speak his mind, especially in the absence of the critic.

When we look at old art, dancing or cinema, or anything else, in the past a person used to look at a painting using his sense of sight, and then translated what he saw into thought, the *perception*. Then he decided that this was a beautiful painting, or that it was an ugly one... He went to listen to music, heard it then translated it and decided on its aesthetic value...

In poetry, at first people couldn’t read, they would listen to a poem... Then there was writing and then we could no longer read a poem, we could see it...

Here I am talking about fine arts, because I am concerned with a transitory painting. From a beautiful woman that you can see, it was transformed into pure shapes and lines. It changed into what is called non-objective or abstract art. At the same time it is objective.

And so that the viewer can understand the objective of a non-objective painting, he must modify his “*perception*”- in order to interact with this we must modify this sense that can only developed through reading... We read about music...

* Are those developments in arts that you are talking about related to the subject of destroying beauty that has been controversial in the west since “Flinkman” in the early last century and till now?

- You cannot destroy beauty. To destroy it we must first define it in front of us... the first step is to know it then to destroy it. Beauty in the common sense is boring. First the artist must understand the common and then decide why this common is boring? Then he can come up with the new that is not boring; that is what beauty is.

* Don’t you think that we are dealing here with two ideal sentimental structures: beauty and boredom. What do you mean here?

- If the artist can convince a group of people that this is not boring then that is beauty. Let that beauty be common after that. Boredom here means that it is useless.

* But who decides that here... that this common beauty is boring, useless and negative?

- What decides is the artist's personal vision. He embraces an idea that is the result of his human experience. Before birth, mythology, after birth, childhood etc...

* And where does the issue of awareness you have eluded to in many of your previous interviews come in play?

- When a person uses this vision. This is awareness. Those who are not aware are those unable to use it.

* How does a person develop this use?

- Personal vision is a priority, eternal and unchanging- it is the consciousness of the person, which we can call the first awareness. The second awareness is different. It is not his awareness of his vision but his awareness of the language he adopts, the musician is first aware of his personal vision, and then of the language he uses.

* By "the language he uses", do you mean the prevalent art form?

- No. I mean the language I use when I tell you how I think. And when you understand how I think. That is the language. It is somewhat complicated. You should use your own language, the capabilities of your language to interact with me. Here we enter a crossroads of many topics that deal with the psychology of the artist and the audience.

That is why the artist is clever because he directly spells out language. He asks a vague question and our non-understanding is what is important. The problem with this field is that people cannot understand that it is not important to understand. The issue is not about understanding or not.

* This remains somewhat general, how about further explaining it?

- If you go back in the history of art, we see futurism in 1909 or before that, it aimed at controversy. It provoked the audience and that's what characterized it. For that they formulated methodologies in numerous art exhibitions, theatrical productions and other artistic works.

Then we hear about Dadaism. Dadaism had a similar goal, and its distinguishing feature was to not admit a definition of art to the extent that they would say something today only to refute it tomorrow!

After the long dominance of these two schools a new group of young artists emerged in 1960 to change these ideas. Why don't we provoke the viewers as in futurism and denounce any definition of art as in Dadaism, as well as changing the prevalent ideas about art.

This young group changed these notions and didn't give the critic a chance to speak about their works. There was only the artist and he took over art. He designed his work, implemented it and modified it. There was no longer a role for the critic. "There are no critics in art" the critic used to perform his role like a thief or a crook. And when this group of artists understood that they didn't give any critic the chance to victimize them.

And in order to change the common notions about art and the artist they had to come up with a new idea, a new concept of art, to introduce an art that is different than common art.

This art aims towards "Art and thought" and its importance lies in its vital relationship to the artist's thoughts and concepts and thus his psychology, his philosophy... in perfect concord.

The beginnings of this art go back further beyond 1960 to "Marcel Duchamp" in the 20s of his view of art... Briefly we can say the following. Duchamp stated: "Throughout history people saw the artist as a fool while they say the poet or philosopher as an intellectual." He said: "I don't want to be a fool I want to be an intellectual." Thus he turned away from what is naively emotional to what is intellectual.

Of his work is "The Large Glass" to which he devoted 13 years of his life. This is an extremely complicated work and we need to read about it in order to understand it. That made him publish a book called "The green box". Now when we go to see this work we understand nothing. When we read the book we understand nothing either, but we do understand two aspects, First how Duchamp created his paintings on this glass and how he used the materials and secondly how he thought and how he chose those materials...

We go back again to the exhibition and the pieces displayed through the relationship this group introduced through these works.

We go back again to the idea of personal vision which we talked about previously. My question was how I could express my personal vision? I tried that through caricature. I wasn't aware of my personal vision so I used caricature for a while between 1970 and 1979, and got immersed in it. After that I left caricature and studied art.

Now I realize that through caricature I was trying to express my personal vision even though I wasn't aware of that. After I started painting, I started wondering how I looked at the form of the painting and how I arranged the materials I used in it. I had a tendency while painting to use mathematics and letters and numbers and shapes. Therefore my paintings lacked the emotional side as much as they were logical, thoughtful and intellectual...I care about letting the viewer know how I painted the painting?

There is a difference between the question and what the viewer comes out with when he sees the painting?

The second question doesn't concern me. What concerns me is "how"? I want the viewer to know how I dealt with the form or the color in the painting stage.

And in the same way we differentiated the first and second question, we must here make the distinction between "Formal art" that deals with the form and "Conceptual art" that deals with the "How"; then comes the artist... the artist for me is like the factory manager, Johannes Itten said that too, for he choose his employees, the materials he is going to use; he

is the one that searches for these material, then brings them together and works. He decides to put this one next to that one and he decides how to deal with these materials and sometimes even decides to eliminate some of them.

The question that the artist would like to pose to the viewer is “How”, How did this artist deal with these materials? How did he choose them? What did he do with them? And why?

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Translated by: Mohamed Aydabi

Hassan Sharif, A misunderstood artist in the UAE. (2)

**“They entered the studio’s bathroom and they didn’t get it”!
They can’t comprehend my art because it requires a higher intelligence.**

By: Ahmed Rashid Thani

The one-day art exhibition that the artist Hassan Sharif held aroused the curiosity of the audience. The pieces seemed bewildering and perplexing. The audience couldn’t understand because of the obscurity of the language of the displayed pieces. On asking him about whether those works are in the nature of the question the artist expects the viewer to ask about the manner in which the artist chooses his topic he answered:

- There was a written plan on a paper placed in the studio’s bathroom. I didn’t want to tell the viewer how I chose the stones, I wanted him to ask me: Why did you choose those stones? Why their different sizes and why are they hanged here and not there? But no one asked. If they asked me I would have told them about the paper and where it was. Some went to the bathroom but no one noticed the paper.

- What is the difference between the one-day exhibition and the latest exhibition you held?

- In the latest I tried to give them the paper. I let them read it and how I dealt with the “barrel” for example, or how I dealt with the “Al Mareejah gallery project”. How I thought of it. That is why the shape of the barrel I made and where I placed it were secondary. What I wanted the viewer to follow are the three papers hanged on the wall above the barrel.

- In the meeting of the first day of the exhibition some said that it displayed two different types of works. What are your comments?

- Indeed there are two types but they are intricately related in the first I dealt with the object I chose like the “table” or the “text-book”, for instance, so that the viewer would perform an action to uncover what is underneath the table or within the text-book; and I watched them do that and caught them in the act. In the second type I did the action. I told the viewer I measured certain steps between the barrels. Whether I did that or not is unimportant to the viewer, but I told them that I did.

The connection between them is that in both cases there is interaction with the object. In the first case I interacted with something like “the barrel” and in the second I chose the barrel to interact with, and the viewer to interact with the textbook.

- How did the audience react to your last exhibition?

- Most people said, “we don’t understand”, and I am amazed at that and don’t understand why they didn’t understand. The issue is that the language is missing and needs more time for people to recognize it... it needs books to be read, references to be translated, and an intellectual development to take place.

A very small group of people is able to understand me.

- How?

- I ask myself the same question! How were those people able to understand?!

- What did they say?

- I understand through our conversations, through our meetings, that some sort of connection between my work and them was established. In this case I feel that those people have the linguistic tools in them.

- And now what will you do... after the exhibition?

There is a group of young people trying to learn how to paint. They come every day and we talk... about how they deal with form, how they correlate shapes and at the same time we encourage them to live with the paper and pencil and the materials they use. They also try to come up with new materials and a few of them are very promising... I try to learn from them too.

Poor audience!

Following the first day of the exhibition was a meeting joined by many members of the audience. They conversed with the artist mainly about “the lost language” between them and the artwork. Ahmed Al-Jasmy spoke about the importance of the artist stepping down to the level of the audience and then carrying them up with him to the height of art and the artist’s level. About this issue there were two opinions: The first agreed with what Ahmed Al-Jasmy claimed and the second said that people possess different thinking patterns and the viewer should identify with the artist’s thought. The artist cannot think the same way the viewer does and even if he wished to it would be difficult considering the number of the viewers and all their different ways of thinking.

Some saw that art should be employed to change society, through gradually modifying it and spreading awareness through it...

Others saw that presenting such works was simply an attempt by the artist Hassan Sharif to be different and prove that he graduated from art school!

Yousif Khaleel spoke about the pieces, and in detail about how the artist dealt with them; that made the audience slowly dwindle until the meeting ended with very few people present, talking tensely about certain topics through which he portrayed the audience as “pathetic”, needing to be led by the artist to understand his art.

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