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ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY IN CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN MURALS, WITH AN ESSAY ON ARAB TRADITION AND ART.

The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1965
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ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY IN CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN MURALS, WITH AN ESSAY ON ARAB TRADITION AND ART

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Youssef Mohamed Ali Sida, M.Ed.

*****

The Ohio State University
1965

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
School of Fine and Applied Arts
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PLATE I

WITH THE NAME OF ALLAH

31-1/2" x 13-1/4", enamel on hard masonite
Hieroglyphs, on one of the two red granite obelisks of Queen Hathshpsut, at the Temple of Karnak, the New Kingdom, XVIIIth Dynasty, ca., 1480 B.C.
PLATE 3

Unknown artist, Candy Doll, from the Birthday of Mohammed, candy and varied materials, Cairo, Egypt (a symbol of native arts).
PLATE 4

Candy Doll and Horse, 42" x 35", 1955, oil on canvas, by Y. Sida.
Do not let your heart become proud because of what you know; 
Learn from the ignorant as well as from the learned man. 
There are no limits that have been decreed for art; 
There is no artist who attains entire excellence.

From The Wisdom of Ptahhotep, Fifth Dynasty, c. 2500 B.C.
INTRODUCTION

A major problem for the artists of Egypt is the search for a new artistic form that will express contemporary Arab culture. There is a pressing need for an art based on Arab cultural traditions that would at the same time be compatible with contemporary modes of Egyptian life, goals, and objectives. The search for a new form in Arab art has been studied not only in conferences of artists, critics, and art teachers, but also in newspaper and magazine articles and in television and radio programs. It has become a matter of popular concern in many Arab countries, and especially in the United Arab Republic.

The need for a new form in Arab art is part of the development of a new concept of the Arab nationalism that has arisen in the second half of the nineteenth century. Arab nationalism and the revolutions for freedom, which increased after World War I when foreign armies evacuated Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and Lebanon, are reaching their peak.

When Syria joined the United Arab Republic in 1958, Arab artists exchanged ideas and exhibits in an effort to determine the future of an Arab art of the United Arab Republic which would
reflect the cultural, social, and economical developments of the
new political regime.

One of the major problems in creating a new Arab art has
been that of developing an art which would be representative of the
Arab people and would also communicate meaningfully with them.
For the Arab artist there is a great opportunity to influence and be
influenced by the people.

For a number of years I have been engaged in developing an
art of painting which would recognize and perhaps contribute to the
solution of this artistic problem. It is my intention in this essay to
set forth some of the considerations which have governed the direc-
tions I have taken in my thinking about art and in my painting. In
working out an artistic program, I have sought most intensively to
reconcile the requirements of individual creativity—without which
significant art cannot be produced—and of social responsibility—
which is essential for a viable national art. I am increasingly
confident that these requirements can be achieved in contemporary
art and it is my hope that the type of painting which my work repre-
sents is one way of achieving this end.

To conceive a program for contemporary Arab art requires
us to review the development of the new movements in Egyptian art
of the last generations. It also requires us to examine the cultural
source and the possibilities of employing these sources for the creation of an Arabic art that will be truly a natural evaluation and growth from indigenous tradition and at the same time representative of universal contemporary needs and standards of artistic achievement.
CHAPTER I

CONTEMPORARY ART OF THE UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC

The United Arab Republic has created a new program for the Egyptian masses. It has implemented numerous constructive plans in order to raise the standard of living for the majority of the Egyptian people and to meet their urgent social, cultural, educational, and economical needs. During the last few years the United Arab Republic has built many architectural constructions as great as, and even greater than, those which were built by the ancient Egyptians. Instead of great pyramids, such as those dedicated to the sun-god Re at Giza, or gigantic temples, as those dedicated to the "hidden god" Amun, at Luxor, or those dedicated to Rehorakhty, Ptah, also to Amun, at Abu Simbel (Plate V), today a massive dam (El Sad il-Alli) is built at Aswan to support Egyptian Industry and to provide electricity for all.

Construction of the high dam at Aswan was carefully and gloriously pictured as the rational step to revolutionize the Egyptian standard of living. Two million acres of new land would be irrigated and almost limitless kilowatt hours of electricity generated. Upper Egypt would become industrialized and relieve the population pressure. This,
joined to a thirty percent increase in arable land, would give Egypt a balanced and healthy economy.  

The United Arab Republic has built many different types of buildings (Plates VI, VII, VIII and IX) to meet the needs of the people. There are schools, youth centers, playgrounds, hospitals, governmental buildings, towers, terminals, airports, and factories. For most of these buildings the plans call for mural paintings. In this way, the government has created a new task for artists.

Because of this new program, a new type of artist and a new type of public has appeared. The public response to the new trends in art has encouraged a rebirth of relationships which had been lost for thousands of years. Relationships have been re-established between the artist and his public and, as a new unity of plastic arts has been developed, a more harmonious relationship has developed between the artist and the architect.

Some of these results could be considered only as responses to urgent needs of the public, especially the need to create an art "to the public" rather than "of the public." An art "to the public" has been produced by a number of contemporary artists who were encouraged by the great opportunities and the support provided by the authorities.

The Pioneers of Contemporary Egyptian Art

The new directions in Arab art that have appeared since the Revolution of July, 1952 can be traced back to the efforts of a few pioneers of an older generation.

The artistic character of modern Egypt began to bloom when a school of industrial arts, known as the School of Artisans, was established more than 150 years ago. This school trained men in certain trades and arts. A little later a new section was affiliated to it, with the purpose of training men in applied arts which provided a good opportunity for the revival of local arts, such as engraving, etching and inlaying on metal and wood, and carving in stone, etc.

At the opening of the present century these sections were grouped together in a new independent school known as the School of Decorative Arts.2

Soon after 1900 the School of Fine Arts of Cairo was founded. Later the movement was extended to Alexandria by the graduates of the School of Fine Arts and the School of Decorative Arts at Cairo. There were also some "free artists" who were instrumental in helping to establish the new movement, as well as some professors of art education and some artists of the School of Fine Arts.

Artists of the School of Fine Arts

Among the early graduates of the School of Fine Arts appear the famous sculptor Mukhtar, the artist

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Mohammed Hassan, the painters Ahmed Sabri, Ragheb Ayyad and Yusef Kamel, and the sculptors Haggar, Gaber, Rizk and Mustafa Nagib.  

The second generation of progressive Egyptian artists of the School of Fine Arts included the former Cultural Art Director to Mexico; the painter, Hussain Fawzy; the graphic artist, Al-Hussain Fawzy; a painter and Cultural Art Director to Italy, Salah Kamel; the painters Hussain Bikar and Abdel Sallam El-Sheriff; and the painter and Director of the Opera, Salah Taher.

**Artists of the School of Decorative Arts** (the School of Applied Arts)

The School of Decorative Arts had...given birth to some figures who were to direct in turn the contemporary applied art movement along its present channel, with the styles and methods which were set by its first Egyptian Director, Mohammed Hassan. Among these are Ahmed Yusef, Osman, El-Sadr, Mansur, Ezzat, Ismail Hussain, El-Sheaty and Faheem.  

Also among this second generation are the potter and the Head of the Ceramic and Sculpture Department at the Institute of Art Education, Abdel-Ghany, El-Shall, and the sculptors, Kamal Ebaid and Fathy Mahmoud.

**The "free artists"**

A group of artists who called themselves "free artists" was headed by the painter Mohammed Nagi who started

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3Ibid. 4Ibid.
his career as a diplomat and later devoted himself wholeheartedly to the study of art. The painter Mahmoud Said, a legal counsellor in the Mixed Courts, is another example of an artist who set out to study art, putting all his experience into his new career.  

Included among the "free artists" of the second generation are the famous Alexandria painters, Adham and Saif Wanley; and the painters Margret Nakhlah, Hamed Abdulla, Tahia Halim, Saad El-Khadem, Khadiqa Relad, and Kowkab Youssef.

The Pioneers of Art Education

In this movement, the pioneers of art education played a part of equal importance to the above artists. Most of these teachers of art started as exhibiting artists. They were early graduates of the original "Higher School of Teachers" at Cairo. They created a new interest in the plastic arts and in the appreciation of art through drawing courses taught in elementary and secondary schools. Today a limited number of them are well considered as exhibiting artists in water color or pencil drawings. Among these are two former Vice-Ministers of Education, Shafik Zaher and Mohamed Abdel Hadi; the former deans of the arts education administration, Habib Georgy and Said El-Gharably; the artist and the head of the "Group of Art Studies," Hamed Said; the painters and former deans of the
Higher Institute of Art Education for Men Teachers, Youssef El Affifi and Shafik Rizk; and the painter and former Dean of the Higher Institute of Art Education for Women, Mrs. Zainab Abdo.

Of the second and third generations of artists who are also considered as art educators are the painter, Mrs. Iglal Hafez; the painter and the Dean of the Institute of Drama and Theatre, Said Khattab; the painter and the Head of the Art Department of the Higher Institute of Art Education, Mustafa El-Arnaouty; the painter, Hamdy Khamis; and the Head of the Education Department of the Higher Institute of Art Education, Mahmoud Bassiony; and Youssef Sida.

The Pioneers of Art Criticism

The pioneers of art criticism in Egypt are Salama Mousa, Tawfik El-Hakim, George Hunain, Gabriel Boctor, and Sidky El-Gabakhangy. Of the later generation of critics are Kamal El-Mallakh and Osman El-Antably.

Some of the leading artists, teachers, and critics of the first and second generations emphasized the need for a rebirth of a concept of national Egyptian arts that would replace the academic art practiced in Egypt since the beginning of the nineteenth century. They advocated that the new Egyptian art should be influenced by ancient Egyptian, Coptic, and Islamic art. The following quotation
emphasizes the influence of the ancient arts of Egypt on the concepts of some artists of the pioneer generations:

The art of Mukhtar has been described as Egyptian, deriving its principles from purely Egyptian origins in their most remote times. Mukhtar, however, did not copy from Pharaonic predecessors but felt the dignity and simplicity of their works, and so found the relation between Pharaonic art and his masterpieces in the creativity and regeneration which his skill so well expressed. 6

Most Egyptian artists of the first and second generations amplified their studies in France, Italy, or England. Despite their training in European art, their work was very noticeably affected by the traditional Egyptian arts. They retained many motifs, stylistic features, and techniques from the arts of ancient Egypt.

The artists of the first generation introduced Egypt to the various European movements: Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism, and post-Impressionism. They often employed these styles in painting subject matter drawn from the Egyptian national historical context.

The Art Movements

Quant au mouvement de "L'Art Indépendant", pour important que pût être le rôle de réveilleur qu'il assuma, il n'en est pas moins vrai que le cosmopolitisme qu'il confondait avec l'universalité et un penchant à faire de l'art à thèse sociale empêchèrent la naturalisation des

6Ibid., pp. 9-10.
During World War II, George Hunain, a writer of cosmopolitan taste, formed "L'Art Indépendant." The members of this group included a few art teachers from the first and second generations and a majority of the painters and writers of the third, such as Hussain Amin, Saad El-Khadem, Rateb Seddik, Ramsess Younan, Abou Khalil Loutfy, and El-Bakry. The group made a decided effort to establish some firm basis for the development of a modern Egyptian art. The manifesto of this movement was pronounced, both figuratively and literally, from the citadel in the native quarter of Cairo; it called for an art which would be both "to and of the public."

The art produced by "L'Art Indépendant" was highly subjective; it was a "psycho-cultural" art based on inner feelings, on personal dreams and on symbols in illogical representation. In general, these artists employed devices similar to those used in the Surrealist art of Dali. The mystery which lurks in their work was not understood or admired by the Egyptian public. It appears that after a time the artists themselves became bored with their own work. Like the Dadaist in Europe, some of them burned their

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early works or gave up painting. The greatest value of this move­
ment was that it introduced Egypt to the art and literature of Dada
and Surrealism and, in general, to European art movements of the
first decades of the century.

Another association, "La Voix de l'Artiste," was organized
by a few artists of the younger generation who were free artists or
colleagues of the School of Fine Arts. However, for its last
exhibition in 1946, it accepted works by any productive artist. This
exhibition took place in a central square of Cairo and it included
works of 67 young Egyptian artists representing most of the recog­
nized schools and institutions as well as a few independent trends.
The exhibit filled three large rooms of the building of the "Teachers'
Association" and was attended by hundreds. What made possible
the gathering of all these young artists was; (1) a reaction against
discrimination against some of the graduates of different art institu­
tions, (2) the current social and political situation, and (3) the need
of the young artists for recognition.

In addition, the younger artists of the group felt the need for
an art library. Subsequently, the artists started their own art
center with loans of books, records, and record players. The
center founded by "La Voix de l'Artiste" was comparable to other
centers established by the "Union of Art Teachers," the
"Organization of the Artists," "The Fine Arts Union," and "The Applied Arts Union," and foreign art centers in Cairo and Alexandria. Many activities were organized at "La Voix de l'Artiste" center. Members could paint, read, or listen to music. There were lectures on all types of plastic arts, on literature, and even on film production. Trips were arranged to museums or to paint in the native quarters or where tropical landscapes existed.

In 1947 the activities of "La Voix de l'Artiste" were discontinued. However, "La Voix de l'Artiste" had helped to encourage an interest in the native arts and in the integration of the traditions of the ancient Egyptian, Coptic, and Islamic arts with the progressive European movement of the twentieth century, such as Impressionism, Fauvism, Symbolism, Cubism, and Expressionism. It had also encouraged the relation between the artist and the public and promoted a better understanding among the artists of the younger generation.

"La Voix de l'Artiste" was really a turning point in modern Egyptian art. After it discontinued its activities in 1947, four new art groups were founded. These four groups were (1) the "Group of Modern Art," (2) the "Group of Modern Artists of the Higher Institute of Education" (art division), founded by Youssef El Affifi in January, 1948, (3) the "Special Group of Art Studies" (the school
of Hamed Said), (4) the "Group of Contemporary Art" (the school of Hussain Amin).

Azar defined the esthetic trends of the group of "Modern Art" as follows:

Mais il nous tarde de définir l'Esthétique du Groupe de l'Art Moderne. Ces jeunes peintres comprirent assez tôt l'urgence d'une Ecole nouvelle qui ne point un sousproduit des artistes d'Europe on d'ailleurs et qui, par le traitement des moyens plastiques aboutit à une expression égyptienne. Et tandis que la plupart des membres du Groupe de l'Art Contemporain prônaient un art essentiellement autochtone qui devait remonter à l'art populaire égyptien, retrouver certaines données encore valables des arts pharaonique et oriental et, ainsi, aboutir à un langage plastique égyptien, les peintres du Groupe de l'Art Moderns soutenaient qu'il était impossible d'aboutir à un art modern sans d'abord accepter les moyens d'expression occidentaux, quitte à les faire servir, par la suite, à la manifestation d'un message égyptien. ⁶

The group of "Modern Art" was founded, in early 1947, by a few members of "La Voix de l'Artiste," and by colleagues of the Higher Institute of Education (the art section), the School of Fine Arts, the School of Applied Arts, the Institute of Fine Arts for Women, and some independent artists. This group felt the need to develop a modern Egyptian art based not only on Egyptian and Oriental traditions but also on universal forms of expression. They introduced a more objective type of art related to the life of

⁶Ibid., pp. 6-7.
the Egyptian people. A few of them introduced native features in tropical landscapes, in still-lifes, or in subjects taken from daily Egyptian life. Their art represented the extroverted side of Egyptian environment and people. They reflected their understanding of international trends in art by using distorted perspective and arbitrary shapes in order to create better pictorial compositions of expressive meaning. During the late 1940's, their work was clear and definite.

The group of "Modern Artists of the Higher Institute of Education" was established by Youssef El Affifi in January, 1948. Youssef El-Affifi invited both Sida and Nabih of the "Group of Modern Art" to exhibit their work along with four other colleagues, Hatem, Taiseer, El-Barday, and Mohanny. These six artists were graduates of the Higher Institute of Education, chosen because El-Affifi considered that their work was modern in a style representing his viewpoints and differed from that of Hamed Said which then dominated the Institute. Also, this style differed from the styles that dominated the work of the graduates of both the School of Fine Arts and the School of Applied Arts. Azar pointed this out in the following way:

Cependant, Youssef El Affifi, porté lui aussi, par tempérament à refuser l'enseignement académique que l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts enseignait à une jeunesse malheureusement sans autre source de connaissance
This group was later joined by Saad El-Khadem, Ewais, Taiseer, and others. Saad, with his impressionist style, had added his colorful pictures to the expressionist styles of Nabil and Hatem.

The "Special Group of Art Studies," or the "School" of Hamid Said, was established to revive and to glorify the ancient Egyptian arts of painting and sculpture. This group started with a kind of analytic cubist style, went on to Realism, and ended in Surrealism. Their Surrealistic style was especially apparent when a few members of the group combined the figures of the ancient Egyptian gods (which they studied in the temples or in the museums) with their double aspect, animal and human, with naturalistic objects referring to ancient mythology. A few members of this group, such as Kamal Ebaid and others, went on to develop their own style based on contemporary Egyptian life.

The Group of Contemporary Art was founded by Hussain Amin, and included his former students from the Faculty of Fine Arts. They started to revive Dada and Surrealism or, in other words, to continue the objectives of "l'Art Independant." This time, however,

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9Ibid., pp. 5-6.
they tried to evolve something related to native arts and to the lives of the natives. They painted the mythical-religious themes of the life of the peasants but without direct contact with their existence. They tried to give their work a native style and a content based on Egyptian or oriental myths. Comparing their works with that of the group of "L'Art Indépendant," it can be said that their work was based more on local sources and native themes.

Between 1949 and 1952, a number of artists of the second and third generations returned from abroad. These include Sigini Abdallah and Yousry from France, Hamouda and Zainab from Spain, El-Arnaouty, El-Shall, Khattab, and later, El-Agaty from England, and Khamis, Basseiony, and Sida, and later, Abo Khalil Loutfy from the United States. The variety of their styles was recognized as follows: expressive symbolism in the works of Sigini, Sida, and Khamis; analytic, synthetic, and hermetic cubism in the works of Bassiony, Hattab, and Yousry; romanticism in the works of Hammouda and El-Arnaouty; and abstraction in the works of El-Shall, Abo Khalil, and Hamed Abdulla.

These artists met a new public and a new generation of art critics. Both the public and the artists developed an increased interest in the plastic arts due, to some extent, to the influence of
the new social and political situation before, during, and after the Revolution of July 23, 1952.

**Types of Contemporary Art Criticism in the United Arab Republic**

Contemporary art criticism in Egypt developed much later than the art movements. Louis Arnold Reid in his book, *A Study in Aesthetics*, a book which is widely read in Egypt, divided art criticism into four categories:

1. Representational or "signpost" criticism, which represents or describes the weakness or the strength of the work of art—that useful kind of criticism we get from an illustrated book or a good magazine which helps the beginning artist to know what to look for or what to avoid.

2. Technical criticism, which is especially important to the artist, since it deals with the technical and constructive processes of art. Applied to painting, the stress is on the composition, balance of lines, space, form, textures, or color and expression.

3. Historical or "biographical" criticism, which criticizes the work of art in the context of art history and the life and the

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viewpoint of the artist. In France this type of art criticism is
sometimes known as "scientific."

4. Impressionistic criticism, as exemplified in Oscar
Wilde's *The Critic as Artist*, which is like the "Signpost" criticism
except that the critical writing here turns out to be a work of art in
itself and expresses the feelings of the critic in literary form.

The early pioneers of art criticism in Egypt were Salama
Mousa and Tawfik El-Hakim. Both writers wrote on art in an
impressionistic manner and introduced many quotations from
major writings on the plastic arts. Another critic, Hunaim,
introduced Egyptian artists to the French readers in Egypt. He
was followed by Boctor (also in French but in an Egyptian maga-
azine). Boctor's style of criticism is rather biographical in that
he is primarily concerned with the incidents that affect the artist's
life. Also of the second generation of biographical criticism are
El-Gabakhangi, El-Antably, Bikar, and El-Mallakh.

The "signpost" type of art criticism was fostered by one of
the leading newspapers which weekly devoted a page to articles by
Hassan Osman and K. El-Gewaily, and to theoretical writings by
many artists. In this way, Hassan Osman proved the usefulness
of journalism as an educational method of art communication in
which all types of art criticism and the opinions of the various
schools are open to discussion. Journalistic criticism has proved effective not only with the public but also in helping many young artists to become familiar with the established artists. Ragy Enayat, of the third generation, has recently contributed to this type of art criticism.

**Summary**

Since the Revolution of July 23, 1952, art in Egypt has followed a new trend which is a reflection of the objectives of the revolution and of the interest of the artists in creating a new form of art—an Arab art of the twentieth century.

The Revolution of 1952 was a turning point in Egyptian history and in the awakening of the Middle East. The revolution has not only affected the Egyptians socially, politically, economically, and culturally, but has influenced all Arabs as it encouraged Arab nationalism and also created a feeling towards Arab unity.

Since Arab nationalism and Arab unity have affected the new forms of modern Egyptian and Arab art, it is important to relate the circumstances which encouraged the development of nationalism in Egypt and the Arab world.
CHAPTER II

ARAB NATIONALISM AND ARAB CULTURE

**Definition of nationalism**

Any use of the word nationalism to describe historical happenings before the eighteenth century is probably anachronistic. Patriotism toward city-state and empire existed in ancient Greece and Rome.

Patriotism identifiable with devotion to the nation spread widely and became popular in western Europe only toward the end of the eighteenth century during the era of the French Revolution. It is with reference to this era that the term nationalism can accurately be used for the first time. 11

Nationalism, however, has taken different shapes and been defined in many ways. Some are related to Hegel and his followers:

The nation was a kind of Hegelian organism, a soul or a spiritual principle arising out of the history and the nature of man. . . .

Yet the historical and contemporary significance of this "myth" cannot be denied. Nationalists everywhere have worshiped the nation, if not as super-natural creation, then as something beyond the individuals and institutions which compose it. 12


12 Ibid., p. 6.
The elements that differentiate one nation from another can always be traced to an original race, a common culture, traditional beliefs related to a common history, a common language, a common dominant religion or faith, a common crisis or pride, a geographically related territory, or, of greatest importance, a common goal.

Nationalism is like a work of art which can be created out of one or more elements, such as line, color, or shape relationships. A nation may be created by a common language, race, or geographical unity in a national state. This could mean equally that addition or omission of one element or another would not affect the unity of nationalism. It is like art, also, in that it can change styles and techniques from one period to another. The following statement helps clarify this point:

The American nationalisms, lacking deep roots in history and evolving under different material conditions, are not exactly synonymous with those of Europe and Asia. The lateness of German and Italian unification, as well as their different earlier histories, has made their nationalisms somewhat dissimilar to those of older Britain and France. A moat of twenty miles has helped to differentiate British nationalism from that of the French, who have been little protected by river and mountain. The revolutionary national patriotism of France in 1789-1790, influenced by eighteenth century rationalism, was more humanitarian than that of the French in a year of war and terror, 1793, . . . Consequently, because the thing itself has differed and changed, the meaning given the word has varied with
each language, each nationalist, and with each period of time.\textsuperscript{13}

Arab nationalism and unity had existed informally a long time before the nineteenth century due to a common religion, a common race, a common culture and tradition, and a common language. Every crisis of one Arab nation is always shared with sympathy in every Arab land.

Nationalism in Arab countries had been encouraged by pioneer Arab leaders. Among these were Abdel-Rahman El-Kawkabi of Aleppo, "one of the first to separate Arab national revival from pan Islamic,"\textsuperscript{14} Salah El-Din, Arabi, El-Afghani and his pupil, Sheikh Mohammad Abdu, along with his students. The following statements relate to the development of Arab nationalism:

Arab nationalism [was] also aroused by the privileged position of foreigners, especially in Alexandria; by the building of Suez Canal; and by the numerous Turkish families, who held a disproportionate number of positions under the khedive and owned a large part of the cultivated land of Egypt. The uprising of Arabi Pasha in 1880's was an outburst of this feeling.\textsuperscript{15}

Arabi was an army officer. He was the first in the Middle East to use an army revolt to free his country, not because

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{14}Fisher, p. 352.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.
"high-ranking officers were Turks," as Fisher states, but because of the corruption in the court of Khedive Ismail, and his son Tawfik, as detailed in the following quotation:

From the moment of Ismail's accession in 1863 until his disposition in 1879 life at the court in Egypt was sumptuous and money flowed like the waters of the Nile. Ismail showered munificent gifts upon all, and his trips to Europe and Istanbul were lavish in every detail.\(^{16}\)

Celebrating the Suez Canal, Ismail burdens Egypt with an enormous debt, "When [the canal] was finished in 1869, Ismail spent 1,000,000 on the opening ceremonies. The Empress Eugenie was the guest of honor among six thousand guests."\(^{17}\)

The revolt of Arabi was on the verge of succeeding when Khedive Tawfik asked for British support. The British exiled Arabi and occupied Egypt only a few years after the completion of the Suez Canal. The British obviously did not occupy Egypt only to help the Khedive but also to insure the passage of their ships to India and the Far East. The British intended their occupation to be temporary. "The British administration presumed that occupation would be temporary and of short duration. Thus, an attempt was made to return Egypt to her position.\(^{18}\)

But "temporary" occupation lasted seventy-two years. The

\(^{16}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 287.} \quad ^{17}\text{Ibid.} \quad ^{18}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 290.}\)
struggle for freedom that never ceased during those years gave
impetus to Egyptian nationalism.

It is important to emphasize the similarity between the cir-
cumstances existing before the uprising of Arabi in 1880 and those
of 1952. Both occurred after corrupt governments and after a
growth of Egyptian nationalism, as reflected by the many groups
that took part in each revolution. Farouk was bolder than Ismail
and Tawfik, in that he took an active interest in politics. As
explained by Fisher:

Politics were unstable in Egypt because of the corrupt-
ness and vagaries of King Farouk and his Palace entourage.
With immense wealth in land at his disposal, his political
power was vast and no one could foretell where his fancy
might stop. For a time .... His influence over appoint-
ments, government contracts, policies of all kinds, land
sales, every aspect of society smothered the sparks of
political responsibility of democratic action and tended to
corrupt a number of wealthy land owners. 19

This corruption also resulted in an army revolt that had
successful consequences. The revolt of Arabi was an expected
phenomenon. The leaders of the July 23, 1952 Revolution had
learned much from international revolutions as from the mistakes
of Arabi. They studied the circumstances, chose a more convenient
and perfect time, planned good strategy and tactics, and climaxed
their work with successful action.

19Ibid., p. 613.
It was the Revolution of July 23, 1952 which ended the British occupation, in 1954, under the leadership of Nasser. It is interesting to see what Nasser himself and the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) learned.

Nasser wrote in his account of the revolution that the RCC soon learned, after waiting briefly for the Egyptian people to unite in such a task, that vigorous leadership was necessary to prevent chaos and accomplished its dream. The RCC revolution in Egypt was three revolutions in one; a "French Revolution," to get rid of a king and form a republic; an "American Revolution," to drive out the British; and a "Kamal Ataturk Revolution," to transform and regenerate the social and economic facets of an old civilization. 20

**Arab Faith and Culture**

Arab culture is a part of the Islamic culture that has flourished from the beginning of the seventh century. Islamic culture spread until it reached Spain and Morocco through the whole territory of North Africa, Turkey, Persia, the south of Russia, and parts of India to China.

The Arabs are of the Semitic race and originally inhabited the Arabian Peninsula. Today the term Araby (Arab) includes any of the inhabitants of the thirteen Arab nations who occupy territory from the Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean. These nations are Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt (UAR), the Sudan, Syria,

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Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, the Arabian Peninsula, El-Kuwait, and Yemen. The common language of these nations is Arabic, except in Algeria where the French language is still spoken due to the French occupation. Today there is a rebirth of Arabic culture in Algeria and Arabic is being taught again in the schools.

The common faith of the majority of these people is Islam. Lebanon, where Christians are in the majority, is an exception. However, Moslems have always judged the contribution of Christians in the Arab world by their patriotism and not by their religion. Since Islam has affected the whole Arab world, it is useful to clarify the term "Islam" in order to erase the misunderstanding and confusion which has affected the term. The meaning of "Islam" is "submission." The Moslem submits to the will of Allah (the only God, in their belief) as an end and not as a means, because Islam came with a new faith and a belief in a doctrine, duties and virtues stated in the Koran (the Holy book of the Moslem faith, transmitted by Gabriel to Muhammad, "the messenger of God"). Islam also has its roots in the word (salam) "peace," which ends every Moslem daily prayer. Fisher explains as follows:

Muslims regard the Koran as the word of God, transmitted to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel; and for many centuries they considered that the Koran contained all knowledge of any value. It furnished the basis for law in the Islamic World for all Moslems...
It also prescribed a pattern of daily individual and community living which distinguishes Islamic culture from all others.  

Islam faith has affected Arab thinking as much as the civilizations of the territories in which Islam has flourished since the seventh century:

Clearly, the new faith must have satisfied the needs of vast multitudes of peoples more fully than any of the older religions of the Hellenized Orient. . . .

The unique quality of Islam and the core of its tremendous appeal is the blending of ethnic and universal elements. . . . It opened its rank to everyone, stressing the brotherhood of the faithful before God, regardless of race or culture.  

**The Influence of Cultures**

The strength of Arab culture derives in part from the need and the will of the Moslems to understand the cultures of all peoples, and not only those who accepted Islam as a new faith. This may explain why Islamic art in its early stages was first affected by the pre-Islamic arts of the nations before Islam and why Moslems translated Greek, Indian, Persian, Spanish, and Chinese works.

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21Ibid., p. 59.

In every country where Islam has flourished, it has fostered the natives' interest in other cultures in order to develop a universal Islamic culture. This search for new sources of culture in previous civilizations has given special strength of Islamic art and culture. Islamic art and Islamic culture have also depended to some extent upon the traditions of every land in which Islam has developed.

The unity of Islamic art corresponds to the philosophy of Islam that furnished the natives under the new faith with the support of the new culture. The new faith changed most of the nation's ethos and created new styles and ideas in art, as well as in mathematics, philosophy, science, and commerce.

The Moslem Empire therefore meant more than another new state and a new religion; it created the most advanced form of civilization in the Western World between the ninth and thirteenth centuries and made outstanding scientific, commercial, and administrative achievements.\(^2^3\)

Islam with its simple nature enabled people by means of Islamic dogma to see a new viewpoint for the development of their own culture. The artist in Iraq or Egypt during the time of Islam looked back to his indigenous traditions for inspiration. An example of this is the usage of the spiral shape in the minaret of the Mosque of al-Mutawakkel at Samarra in Iraq and the Sultan

Hussan mosque in Cairo. It seems that the simple viewpoint of creating the new Islamic forms based on the tradition of the people and the new function of architecture related to its environment and developed by skilled artists of the same territory through the doctrine of Islam was understood differently by Janson in relation to al-Mutawakkil mosque in the following statement:

The most spectacular aspect of the building is the minaret, linked with the mosque by a ramp. Its bold and unusual design, with a spiral staircase leading to the platform at the top, reflects the ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia, such as the famed Tower of Babel. . . . Did al-Mutawakkil wish to announce to the world that the realm of the caliphs was heir to the empires of the ancient Near East?24

The Sultan Hassan mosque with its minarets (Plate X) captures the characteristics of the columns of the temple of Amon Re at Luxor with their capitals, which resemble the open flower of the papyrus plant (Plate XI). Since the function of the mosque differs from that of the temple, the space relations have changed to meet this new function. The temple was convenient for the limited number of worshipers (the king and his priests), but the mosque is for the people to pray in and for use as a school and a cultural center. This need has affected Islamic architecture and created the huge "sahn" or interior court of the mosque. As the

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24 Janson, p. 188.
Egyptian temple has always stressed the inside rather than the outside, the Sultan Hussan mosque, located on top of "El-Mokattam mountain," has concentrated on the spiritual and poetic atmosphere inside while the outside is mainly a massive construction. When seen from a distance, the only signs that distinguish it as a mosque are the two minarets and the dome in a disymmetrical position. They create a solid and void relationship and express a poetic atmosphere.

It is interesting that the sound of the "moaathen" (who calls for prayers) is heard not only outside but also inside as well. It seems that the mosque was also designed with an "audio-spatial" relationship. Another indication of this (and also of the progress of mathematics and practical science at the time of the construction) is the fact that the Imam who leads the prayers can be heard from any corner inside the mosque.

Moslems practiced the technique of using "ready made objects" from pre-Islamic styles as long as they did not interfere with the new idea of Islam. An example is the architectural use of Roman or early Christian columns in the mosque of Amro Iben El-Aas in Cairo or in the mosque of Cordova.
The Islamic Influence on the Arts

Many explanations have been given for the lack of three-dimensional images and images of human figures in Islamic art. Bazin states his views as follows:

Our understanding of Moslem art has been distorted by the accusation that, in obedience to some bar laid down in the Koran, it excluded any image of living things. Nothing of the sort is to be found in the Koran, and only in later texts was the artist warned against the realistic reproduction of living things.25

In connection with this question, Ettinghausen has made a careful study of the meanings of many critical Arabic words bearing upon artistic representation. He states:

The Koran gives no direct support for such an assumption [the interdiction of natural images]. Even in its most specific pronouncement it speaks out only against certain heathen practices, among them the use of images, apparently of a religious nature and hence regarded as idols (Sura v. 92).26

By comparing the Koran with the classical language, he came to the following conclusion:

In the Koran the word for "to fashion or form" (sawwara) is synonymous with the word for "to create" (Bara's), and


God Himself is not only called a creator (al-bari') but also a mussawwir, which is the common word for "painter." 27

Since Islam came as a faith that forbade the worshipping of anyone but Allah, the Moslems, following the Koran, do not believe in idols. Since they believe in Ibrahim and the way he destroyed the idols, they were aware of accepting statues or pictures which could be worshiped even as the symbol of God or Mohamed or any living images which would exemplify the religious faith.

It would be impossible for artists at the beginning of Islam to paint or to carve human figures when Mohammad had just condemned idolatry and had removed idols from Al-Kaaba. However, when the concepts of the caliphs of Islam had changed towards the supernatural powers, statues, and pictures of humans or animals, images were accepted.

Appreciation of figural representation appears only two hundred years after the Prophet's death. Finally, as often stated in the Koran, Muhammad regarded himself only as an ordinary human being whom God had selected to bring His message. He did not claim to be a performer of miracles or to be endowed with supernatural power. 28

Summary

Characteristic Islamic art is a result of the idea of Islam. Islam allowed the artists to create a universal Islamic style. One

27 Ibid., p. 13.  28 Ibid.
of the characteristics of this art is the use of "words." A new form of artistic design based on the configuration of words led to an art which was meaningful, symbolic, and traditional in the Arabic culture and which was also an effective way of spreading the doctrine of Islam. Arabic calligraphy and its usages were needed to provide the artist with a form that is descriptive and convenient for expressing the images of the Koran in an abstract shape. At a later period Arabic calligraphy led to an additional ornamental system, "the arabesque." It is my belief that "the arabesque" is a reflection of the understanding of the abstract ideas of the Greek philosopher Plato concerning relative and absolute forms.

Plato, for example, distinguishes between relative and absolute form, and I think this distinction must be applied to the analysis of pictorial form whose ratio or beauty was inherent in the nature of living things and in imitations of living things; by absolute form he meant a shape or abstraction consisting of "straight lines and curves and the surfaces or solid forms" produced out of such living things by means of "lathes and rulers and squares."²⁹

As the Moslems could not use the relative forms in the beginning, they found that absolute forms were more suitable for the new doctrine.

In the twentieth century the use of Arabic calligraphy as a cultural and artistic medium again challenged the Arab artist. It is one of our main concerns in our attempt to regenerate the traditional esthetic forms based upon the Arabic language. The Arabic language is one of the common elements in the growth of Arab nationalism.
CHAPTER III

THE USE OF WORDS IN EGYPTIAN AND ARAB TRADITION

Language gives evidence of its reality through three categories of human experience. The first may be considered as the meanings of words; the second, as those meanings enshrined in grammatical forms; and the third and, in the view of this author, the most significant, as those meanings which lie beyond grammatical forms, those meanings mysteriously and miraculously revealed to man. . . . Language as the power of universals is given to man in order that he may transcend his environment, in order that he may have a world. It is the law of language to create the world. 30

I may add to the above categories one more, that of the "human experience" which is embodied in the shape of words. Before we talk about the shape of content in my murals, which is based also on the use of words, it will be important to discuss the origin of words and their significance in the tradition of Egyptian mythology.

The origin of words in Egyptian mythology may go back to the Old Kingdom. The creation of Atum is above all the myth that deals with both the creation and the power of words. As ancient Egyptian

culture and art have always affected each other and depend in their
growth on prior tradition, it may be helpful to give an idea of how
the Atum myth has developed through ancient Egyptian theology.

[The Egyptian gods] were universal deities, whose
activities were not linked to any specific place of worship.
Fanciful myths and speculations led to the development of
various religious systems which considered the problem
of the origins of the world and of life itself. According to
the doctrine of Heliopolis the principal deity is Atum, who
created himself. 31

In the Doctrine of Heliopolis dating from the Old Kingdom, Atum
first existed as the principal deity who created himself and also as
one of the three ways of symbolizing the sun god, e.g., in the
evening when he appears in human shape. In the Doctrine of
Hermopolis, Atum's place was taken by Nun, while in the Memphite
theology, Ptah took his place.

In the theology of Memphis the eight primeval gods of
Hermopolis, who played a part in the creation of the world,
are combined in the person of the god Ptah, while the ennead
of gods at Heliopolis are regarded simply as manifestations
of Ptah. Ptah is the god of creation, and as the deity of the
capital he is superior to all the other gods. He carries out
the act of creation with "his heart and tongue," i.e. by his
"thought" and by "utterance." He knows the nature and name
of all things, and by mentioning them gives them life—a
concept that is in complete accordance with the magic beliefs
current among the Egyptians. Knowledge of the name and
familiarity with certain sayings confers superiority and
power. 32

31 Irmgard Woldering, The Art of Egypt (New York: Crown
32 Ibid., p. 50.
The most important myth of Atum has a direct relation with the power of words and the action of transformation rather than creation.

Another version carries the idea somewhat away from the physical by observing that Atum was All within himself, and that he brought the other gods into being by naming the parts of his body. The utterance of a name which has never before been spoken is in itself an act of creation; it gives form and identity to that which previously had been unknown. 33 Atum was All, or the universe, a self-creator with the identity or name of Atum, a word that has a shape of a content, as a will. His will can be identified with the power of his words, and by his will alone, expressed through the spoken word, "he brought the other gods" into being by transformation. The transformation of "the parts of his body" into other shapes means that Atum (All), or God, still exists but in different shapes and identities.

The power of the spoken word in Egyptian cult represents the will of Atum, the god. Later the written word was considered as powerful as the spoken word, and so the removal of one's name was considered as gaining power over him through the knowledge of his name.

Whether it belonged to a god, a king, a man, or an animal the personal name was much more than a means of identification. It was an essential part of the person.

The Egyptians believed in the creative and compelling power of the word. The name was a living thing. A child's name might express gratitude to a god, a happy augury uttered during the confinement, a prayer for the new-born infant, or even a spell cast against the enemies of Egypt. Every name could thus be translated and was full of significance. . . . Cheops means "May he protect me," Ramses means "Re has created him," etc. Naturally, by writing the name of a person and uttering it, he was given life and survival. But, at the same time, it was enough to know someone's name in order to have power over him. . . . In politics, there was no more effective way of settling scores with one's dead enemies than by disfiguring the cartouches on their monuments and thereby making certain that such people as Hatshepsut and Akhnaton were well and truly dead.34

The power of the word has not only had its roots in Egyptian cult, but it has been perpetuated in Arab culture.

The Usage of Words in Islamic Culture

A wise man has said: "Writing is a spiritual geometry, wrought by a material instrument." And another has said: "Writing is the offspring of thought, the lamp of remembrance, the tongue of him that is far off, and the life of him whose age has been blotted out." Jahiz (El-Jahiz) says: "Writing is a tongue to which the heart runs and is the depository of secrets, the investigator of news, and the preserver of historical memorials." . . . Another has said: "Fine utterances (set out) in elegant handwriting are a pleasure to the eye, and a joy to the heart, and fragrance to the soul."35


The influence of the Egyptian cult of mythology on Islamic thought is rather clear as has been mentioned above. It also seems that writing in Islamic culture gained its respectable and honorable position because of the Koran which is considered as the Book of God" (Ketab Allah), descended on His prophet Mohammad. When the calligraphers started the art of the "book," or when they wrote Koranic images, their craft became an honorable task, and Arabic calligraphy in Islamic culture became the symbol of Islam and the Islamic nations. The use of Arabic words in the Koranic Surahs and the use of the pen was honorable because it was mentioned in the Koran.

The Lord of Lords, whose names are hallowed in His incontrovertible Revelation, swore--"By the Pen and what they write" (Qur. IXVIII. 1) and he spake these words: "Recite! thy Lord is the most generous, who hath thought by means of the pen. Hath taught man what he knew not" (Qur. XCVI. 3-5). 36

Calligraphy allowed the artist to list himself as a scribe rather than a painter (mussawer) as described by Janson:

To a Moslem the calling of scribe was an ancient and honorable one; a skilled calligrapher might do pictures if the text demanded them, without having to feel that this incidental activity stamped him as a painter. 37

36 Ibid.
37 Janson, p. 192.
Later Janson describes in the following way the influence of Koranic images and ideas:

The Koran remained the calligraphers' domain, as it had been from the very beginning of Islam. In their hands, Arabic lettering became an amazingly flexible set of shapes, capable of an infinite variety of decorative elaborations, both geometric and curvilinear. At their best, these designs are masterpieces of the disciplined imagination that seems to anticipate, in a strange way, the abstract art of our time.  

Calligraphy and Epigraphy in Tradition

The term calligraphy has been used lately to mean any work of abstract art that is based on a dynamic and esthetic linear relationship; while the term epigraphy is only used by a few professionals who could distinguish both terms and their real meanings. As we shall use these terms, it is most useful to introduce some of the facts that deal with their nature.

The term "calligraphy" means "beautiful writing" or "elegant penmanship" (from the Latin calligraphia; in turn derived from Greek...). Today calligraphy generally refers to the art of beautiful writing as a profession or field of study, that is, of writing as dependent on esthetic considerations. Linguistic usage distinguishes between epigraphy (lapidary writing incised on durable materials with a chisel or similar instrument) and calligraphy proper (rendered on perishable materials with a brush or pen)....  

Although writing serves a primarily utilitarian purpose, the styles of other art media have placed their imprint on

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38Ibid., p. 194.
the development of its various forms, as in pictographic or iconographic script (Ancient Egypt, pre-Columbian America), ideographic or synthetic script (China and Japan), and alphabetic script (Kufic, Carolingian, Gothic, Renaissance, etc.). Writing in turn has always been of primary importance as a means of ornamental enhancement of painting, sculpture, and architecture. At its best, calligraphy may equal other forms of esthetic expression, and at certain times it has been regarded as an art not inferior to painting.39

The first known Egyptian writing (hieroglyphic) was developed in Egypt as early as c. 3400 B.C. and became a highly cultivated system of writing by the end of the Second Dynasty c. 2980 B.C.

The hieroglyphic writing of ancient Egypt was already well developed at the time of Menes (about 3400 B.C.), the first historical king of Egypt. It consisted of pictograms, signs representing objects or associated ideas, and phonoglyphs, signs representing the sounds of the words for the object depicted.40

Hieroglyphic writing can be considered as "epigraphy, or monumental," because it was always used as sunken or high relief carved on monuments, statues, and on the walls of the early tombs and temples, of the Old Kingdom. This is why it gained its Greek name as "hieroglyphoi," or the "carved sacred symbols." But later, when it was painted only, one could call it calligraphy.

There is a confusion, however, about the consideration of hieroglyphics as pictographs, because some Egyptologists call it so since its signs represent to them actual objects, while others cannot accept the idea. We are in favor of those who relate it both to pictographs and to the alphabetical systems of script, because of its alphabetical and pictorial nature. Hieroglyphics are signs and symbols that represent full pictures of the human body or parts of it, mammalia, human occupations, birds, and other writing and musical signs.

The hieroglyphic method of writing therefore remained for the whole of its long life-span an unresolved compromise between two systems: the alphabetic and the pictorial. The Egyptians succeeded in evolving a flexible alphabet of their own, using a sign to represent a sound or letter, or even a double or triple sound or letter; but primitive method of using pictures as well. Of all their senses, the visual sense was always the most highly developed. Thus they would write out a sentence like "The girls run down the street" in alphabetic signs ("Grls rn dn strt") without being able to resist tacking on to the individual words little pictures depicting a girl, a person running, and a street. 41

Types and Styles of Arabic Calligraphy

Arabic calligraphy has appeared in many types and styles. It has developed from a simple "Kufic," that was rather flat, short, and static into a more delicate and longer form, especially

since the eleventh century. It was during the Seljik period that Kufic became more elegant in shape. After this period there developed many new Arabic calligraphic styles, such as the "Naskh," the "Farsi" (Persian), sometimes known as the "Taalik," then a combination of the "Naskh" and the "Taalik," a style used especially for manuscripts. These styles can be distinguished one from the other, but as the word calligraphy means beautiful writing, one can notice that the artist had opportunities, within the limits of the existing styles of writing, to create real masterpieces which can be considered as works of non-objective art. For an artist, it is important to notice that the calligraphy used for Koranic or religious purposes was based more on geometrical compositions than other types of writing. Religious calligraphy depended on straight lines arranged in verticals opposing horizontals. From this developed a spiritual or expressive connotation of a religious nature.

Another calligraphic style, more dynamic in nature, is based on more curved lines; it is more suitable for secular writings. It is clear that religious calligraphy was influenced by the Islamic concept of an art based on absolute forms and particularly those forms related to static geometrical arrangements. From the geometric religious style developed a secular style with dynamic shapes and more cursive arrangements.
To see Arabic calligraphy that attained a creative standard, one must examine the work displayed in the great mosques or the writing of Koranic manuscripts, especially those by the famous artists, Shah Nameh, Kalilah wa Dimnah, and Mokamat El-Harriri. In these works the calligrapher has not only been concerned with the style of writing and the meanings of the text but also with technical processes, the distribution of shapes, patterns, lines, and color, and the unity of the whole composition in the relationship to the parts. The calligrapher, like any modern artist of the twentieth century, has forgotten himself in order to create new shapes. To do this, he usually had to rearrange some of the required shapes so that they would fit together in the type of symmetrical relationships known as a "shamsah" (sun). In this case he showed his sensitivity to the demands of a work of art (Plate XII).

By the end of the fourteenth century Arabic calligraphy had reached exceptionally high standards and had become an important and real characteristic of Islamic arts. Outstanding examples are found in the masterfully decorated pages of the Koran of Arghun Shah in the National Library of Cairo. This manuscript is dated approximately 1368 to 1388. It combined abstract geometrical
shapes with arabesque forms in a calligraphic unity. These pages have been described by Ettinghausen as follows:

These decorative pages represent the highest form of non-objective painting in the Arab-Muslim world. Although their vibrant discus and starlike polygons were genetically associated with the sun—as is evident from the Arabic designation, shamsa, from shams (sun)—these products of abstract thinking and geometry have gone beyond the concrete shapes of the material world. These configurations made of straight lines and segments of circles have reached a higher, more basic form of esthetic perfection, a kind of platonic ideal "whose beauty is not relative like that of other things"; as Socrates says in Philebus, "they are always absolutely beautiful." 42

In the traditional arts of Islam, Arabic calligraphy was always used as a decorative pattern, sometimes related to geometrical arrangements, sometimes to arabesques, but never as an independent composition. When one does find Arabic letters used independently, it means that they are apt to be used as an artistic cliche in a special style of inscript. In this case the independent letters usually follow the chosen style of writing and the sceptor has to stick to that style or his work is considered "out of style." What the Arab artist had done in the past was limited to the style of a period and particular "schools." He divided the space into different geometrical divisions, then started to organize his calligraphy within the limitations of a particular

42 Ettinghausen, p. 175.
style. In many works one can recognize several styles of writing combined on one page of a book or within a single building. In addition, the traditional calligrapher was limited to a few colors and to highly specialized technical processes in applying his gold or paint. He was also limited to a very shallow space relationship in the organization of figures and ground in overlapping patterns.
CHAPTER IV

A PROGRAM FOR CONTEMPORARY ARAB ART

In the previous chapters we have considered a complex of factors which provide the basis for new directions for a new impulse in the contemporary Egyptian arts. The major problem has been, and continues to be, the problem of achieving an art of quality that would fulfill the social, political, cultural, and the practical needs of the Egyptian people at this period in their history.

The Arab nation is proceeding through revolutionary changes, and in the course of this revolution is deepening its feeling for its historical tradition, while at the same time strengthening its understanding and absorption of contemporary life and thought.

An art which is capable of reflecting all of these trends would be a revolutionary art—in order to embody the new revolutionary objectives; it should be a creative art—to grow side by side with the universal and contemporary trends in paintings; it should be an art of a popular and of a communicative nature—in order to help develop the natural insight and the instinctive taste of the public;
and it should be an art that could support a new constructive aim, the urgent need and goal of the majority of the Arab peoples to fulfill their search for a great Arab nation.

From the history of mankind we know that most revolutions not only affect the social life but also the forms and styles of art. It could be helpful to recall some earlier examples from Egyptian history.

Amenhotep IV, with whose name the great cultural revolution is connected, is not only the founder of a religion, not only the discoverer of the idea of monotheism, as he is generally known to be, ... but also the first conscious innovator in art; the first man to turn naturalism into a program and oppose it to the archaic style, as a newly attained achievement. Bek, his chief sculptor, adds to the titles which he bears, the words: "the pupil of His Majesty." What art owes to him and artists learnt from him is obviously a new love of truth, a new sensibility and sensitiveness which leads to a kind of impressionism in Egyptian art. 43

Amenhotep IV, or Ikhenaton, changed the function of art to support his revolutionary ideas. However, it must be said that Bek, Ikhenaton's painter artist, must have believed in the new ideas of Ikhenaton or he would not have arrived at such a standard. Bek looked for new sources of inspiration, sources that would lead him toward a new art form representative of Ikhenaton's ideas within the framework of Bek's past experiences and his abilities.

In his search for a new form, the artist was influenced by the new philosophy. This is not to say that Bek followed exactly the ideas of Ikhenaton; in that case he would probably not have developed a truly creative form of art. He faced up to problems in a creative manner. He was not content merely with the application of a theory.

Islam also was a revolutionary force that affected the political and cultural life of the Egyptian people as much as it did other Islamic nations. The interest of the pioneer Moslem rulers in art and in its functions must have suggested the types of arts and crafts needed for the early revolutionary period. There was a need for weapons to defend the new religion, as well as a need for a place to worship and to practice the duties of Islam. At first, art was produced in simple forms which sometimes were dependent on other traditional art shapes, and may have been used only for their functional purposes. But later, after Islam was established, and the caliphates' interest changed from the simple to the luxurious life, one could notice a great change in several fields of arts and crafts. There were produced works of art that followed the doctrine of Islam, in which the artist created new abstract forms suitable to the early Islamic revolution. In this period, the characteristic non-representational, ornamental, and geometrical abstract shapes of the Islamic arts were introduced. It was only at later periods
when representational arts and human figures were used in religious, romantic, or in "self-glorification" types of art.

In the well-integrated and mature Persia of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, we notice a kind of romantic and mystic escapism which found its expressions in many ways. The most obvious are the illustrations to the poems of Nizami of the Timurid period. The most beautiful princes and princesses are placed in enchanting landscapes in many noble attitudes. They live in a kind of magic world which is usually separated from us by a brook in the foreground and by a range of hills towards the back, from which only a few happy people are allowed to look onto the scene.

These creations are quite different from those of Egypt. It is in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods that we find the full integration of the arts and crafts, which represent there not so much the spiritual, but rather the political aspect of the Islamic life. Colorful symbols of the feudal state show the self-glorification of the emirs (princes) who have risen from the ranks. The main monuments are the madrasas (schools), a large important section of which is the mausoleum of the sultan erected during his lifetime.

In a similar way, the situation after the Egyptian Revolution of July, 1952 affected many artists and created new artistic tasks. Many Egyptian artists reacted to this situation by painting the incidents of the revolution in a literal, realistic manner, while others sought to express their feelings regarding the revolution through symbolic content. Now that the regime has been established,

a new type of art is needed, an art that will parallel the social, political, and the industrial revolution.

The work of art cannot escape the ambience of such intangible effluences (the philosophies and theologies of the period). To the extent that a work of art is romantic or classical, realistic or symbolic, it will certainly be beyond the personal control of the artist. Even the structure of the work of art (the style of composition) may be a matter of taste or fashion determined by social contacts. 45

**The freedom of the artist**

The creative artist cannot depend entirely on the ideas given to him by his patrons. Ancient Egyptian artists may have believed, under the pressure or influence of the priests, that the god Ptah was the patron of all artists and craftsmen, or that the king (the living god on earth) had taken his position as the protector of the artists. They may have followed the suggestions of the Ashraff (nobles) as the owners of the tombs or the advice of the High Priests in charge. The Egyptian painter may have been responsible for a limited task as one of the several artists or craftsmen assigned to execute a temple or a cut-rock tomb, and he may have been tied by a canon (rule) or by the style of the school of art he belongs to and by a religious doctrine. But we will never be able to imagine that any creative artist (or even a craftsman, as most artists of the past

were known) failed to find a way to express his ideas or thoughts in new creative art forms.

The following statement can only be applied to mediocre artists or craftsmen rather than to those whom we consider as leading artists in any time:

The Egyptian artist more nearly resembled the obscure artists who worked on our mediaeval cathedrals. They were anonymous; they were not self-assertive; they did not make a fetish of their individuality. They were bound in the service of their king, their community, and their religion. They did not regard themselves as creatures set apart or subject to a special destiny.46

During the time of Islam, the freedom of the artist may have been affected by circumstances similar to those that the ancient Egyptian artist met. The chief patron of painters was the ruler, whether the caliph—that is, the "successor of the Prophet"—or in later times the sultan, the actual wielder of political power.47 The freedom of Moslem artists may also have been affected by the rising class of the new wealthy merchants, by the theologians of Islam, or by the new canon of Islamic style at the time, although the creative Islamic artist still directed his search towards a highly original production of Islamic art (that is, of characteristics of the well known Islamic arts.

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46 White, p. 153.

As Egyptian artists gained more freedom, from the end of the nineteenth century when the relations between artist and patron were broken, the artist's goal became a part of the human search for individuality. However, there is a great difference between freedom and irresponsibility, especially during and after a revolution, for the artist must still be judged by his actions. The freedom of the artist is now essentially the freedom to create new forms, technical processes, and styles. The artist in a revolutionary epoch must not only be concerned with the formal elements of the painting, such as line, shape, contrast, harmony, color, size, pattern, position, and texture, but he must also be concerned with an educational purpose or goal.

The creative artist

The true artist, revolutionary or not, has always dealt with the creative process whenever he has tried to forget himself or the purpose of his work partly or completely in order to develop original forms or to discover new techniques; yet he has always controlled his actions to some extent in order to keep his work within the boundaries of the plastic arts, and its esthetic standards.

An esthetic product results only when ideas cease to float and are embodied in an object, and the one who experiences the work of art loses himself in irrelevant reverie unless his images and emotions are also tied to the object, and are tied to it in the sense of being fused.
with the matter of the object. . . . It is as favorable an example to the dreamlike theory of art as can be found. But the imaginative material did not and could not remain dreamlike, no matter what its origin. To become the matter of a work, it had to be conceived in terms of colors as a medium of expression; the floating image and feeling of a dance had to be translated into rhythms of space, line, and distribution of light and colors.\(^{48}\)

The creative artist must explore the nature of the pictorial forms that differ in type or style according to the philosophy of the artist and his epoch. These forms may be representational, non-representational, objective, or non-objective. By many contemporary abstract artists, art historians, and art critics, these forms are understood as contents.

**Contemporary art and the shape of content.**

The work of an artist who is concerned with both shape and content has to arrive eventually at a position where his interest in the creative process must be balanced with that of its social and educational purpose in order to make his work readable or suitable to a special society; yet he must seek to preserve the creativity of his art. Contents, however, differ in quality and in quantity from

one type of art to another; contents can be symbolic, meaningful, meaningless, constructive, destructive, human, or unhuman.

They are, even in this most extreme wing of non-content painting, simply differences of content.

I have said that form is the shape of content. We might now turn the statement around and say that form could not possibly exist without a content of some kind. It would be and apparently is impossible to conceive of form as apart from content. . . . If the content of a work of art is only the paint itself, so be it; it has that much content. We may now say, I believe, that the form of the most nonobjective painting consists of a given quantity of paint, shaped by content, its content consisting in a point of view, in a series of gestures, and in the accidental qualities of paint. 49

In his search for creative art forms the contemporary Arab artist must be aware of the contemporary universal trends in the plastic arts; yet his new work of art should be nourished by Arab arts and Arab traditions, but not to the extent of producing simply a local art not deep enough to be compatible with the current international art movements.

Because of the many possible differences of contents in contemporary art, it has been advised that contemporary Arab art seek a content that is constructive rather than destructive, lest it mislead the Arab or the Egyptian people and lest it confuse the public.

The Egyptian artist (and the Arab artist in general) is as never before facing a great responsibility. His responsibility is not only that of producing a contemporary creative art of constructive content but also of producing an art of a communicative nature and of a revolutionary spirit.

At this stage, the Arab task is in need of all the experience achieved by the Arab Nation in its long, glorious history. It is also in need of its profound wisdom as much as it is in need of its revolutionary spirit and will. . . . Arab unity is not a uniform constitutional form that must inevitably be applied. It is rather a long path with several stages leading to the ultimate aim. 50

Today, most Arab people believe that Arab unity is a major goal to be reached within the coming few years. Arab unity would be realized when most Arabs believe in it and take real actions towards it, since every bit of sincere effort will shorten the time for the final form of the United Arab Republic.

For the commitments of the Arab people, it is suggested that paintings in mural form would provide the most effective and appropriate artistic means. Mural paintings have their roots in Egyptian and Islamic tradition and have always emphasized a social function.

Mural Paintings in the Tradition

Definition of mural painting

Mural painting, that branch of art and interior decoration consisting of adornment of walls by painting. It is not an independent art, but is of necessity closely allied with architecture. The four major mediums it employs are fresco, encaustic (with a wax base), tempera, and oil painting. Mural painting is a very ancient art form; it is found on the walls of prehistoric caves. Murals were highly developed by the ancient Egyptians, the Minoans of Crete, and the Greeks; ... In modern times mural paintings have again been revived, although the old techniques have for the most part been abandoned, modern murals being painted in oil on canvas, and later attached to the walls. 51

People have tended to connect mural paintings with fresco techniques because of the great number of mural paintings that have been executed in fresco by western painters. Although the use of collage and various materials such as acrylic, painted collage, burlap, canvas, mosaic, glazed tile or glass, plastic, and even wire and metal plates has shown that murals can be executed in many different techniques. 52 Most of these materials are used for their textural effects.


52 Dr. Atl-colors have been used in Mexican mural paintings. Dr. Atl was the first to use a mixture of oil paint, wax, and resins soluble in gasoline.
The earliest known mural painting painted on a "man-made flat surface" comes from Hierakonpolis, Upper Egypt, c. 3500 B.C. This mural painting represents the early steps of Egyptian murals on a brick wall, but it also shows some of the characteristics of the ancient Egyptian art, such as the flat space and birds-eye view. This particular mural tells a story from daily Egyptian life, combined with a theme. This theme is represented in the bottom part of the mural and it symbolizes the early struggle of the Egyptian people to reach a unity between the south and the north. The struggle between Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt was being resolved at the time of King Menes (Narmer) who united Egypt during the first Dynasty.

Mural paintings were executed during the Old Kingdom at Sakarah in Lower Egypt as painted reliefs on limestone walls of tombs or temples. To some extent the result recalls the earliest cave paintings at Altamira in northern Spain where the bison cow is painted on the natural relief shape of the stone wall.

Could it be that the nature of the stone wall suggested to the caveman the character of the painted relief surface and also to the ancient Egyptian artist? I would say that in both cases the use of painted relief existed to emphasize a social function of
mural painting. In the first case, it depicted a source of food; while in the second, it symbolizes belief in eternity.

In Egypt, painting hardly existed as an independent art; it generally appears as an accessory to statues and the relief carvings on the walls of tombs and temples, where it accents forms created in the more durable medium of stone. For permanence was an essential quality in the means by which the Egyptians sought to record for eternity those forms which embodied his experiential concepts and the relatively fragile character of painting alone did not encourage its extensive development. 53

The nature of mural painting is architectonic insofar as it is controlled by scale and design of walls inside or outside the building. To realize the full qualities of mural painting, cooperation between the architect and the painter is needed. It depends upon the nature of the architecture and the willingness of the architect and the painter to compromise. A lack of collaboration between architect and painter may be evident, especially when they belong to different schools of arts. A good painter may be able to achieve a balance with the architectural design through illusionistic or other pictorial devices.

It is precisely in this architectonic function of mural painting that there lies for the painter a temptation to make more drastic intrusions in the contours of his room, not only in order to correct the architect or adjust what had been disturbed by external circumstances but also to

throw into relief his own peculiar qualities, as a painter against those of the architect. The space of a painting and the space of architecture are by very nature irreconcilable, but they do come together in the mural painting. 54

One can notice the lack of collaboration between architect and painter (or even between one architect and another) in ancient Egyptian temples such as Karnak at Luxor and in the mosque of Amro-iben El-Aas at El-Fustat (Misr El-Kadima southeast of Cairo, Lower Egypt), because additions to the architecture made in later periods have interrupted the original unity. The unity of art and architecture can take place only when there is full cooperation between all the artists and craftsmen. They must have a unified interest in the work and a clear common goal in order to achieve a final unity for the whole work.

One of the best examples of such unity is the mosque of Al-Sultan Hassan in Cairo where every part of the architecture, the epigraphy reliefs on the walls, the Minber (where the Imam preaches), the inlaid ivory and metals which decorate the wooden doors, and even the arrangements of light have reached their highest standards because of a common esthetic feeling, religious faith, and a common attitude between broad-minded artists who

54Sven Sandström, Levels of Unreality (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksells Buktryckeri Ab., Appsala, 1963), p. 16.
were willing to cooperate to produce a work without loss of individuality.

Since the nature of mural painting places the work of the mural painter as the final process, he usually has the opportunity to give the walls a final touch of his own creation. New pictorial modifications have sometimes been used by modern mural artists in decorating the interior and exterior walls of buildings. These new methods can often create new formal relationships that change our perception of the original walls by developing a field of dynamic effects within the static surface.

The development of my work

In 1936, I started to learn something about art that has much to do with my recent research. I first learned to copy Arabic inscript in the traditional arabesque and oriental styles. In 1939, I specialized in painting, stained glass, and mosaics. In 1945, I became familiar with the bold expressive forms and the vivid colors of children drawings. At that time I also started to study Coptic and Islamic art and the art of ancient Egypt in the museums of Cairo. I was most attracted to oriental patterns, colors, and two-dimensional shapes in these arts, as well as to the contour line drawing, where lines are used to define the shape of an object rather than light and shade modeling.
As early as 1945, I painted native still-lifes and popular subjects. I was especially impressed by the relationships that exist among the drawings of children and the folk and oriental arts. I found that my interest in painting native subjects provided me with a source of varied and vivid color schemes and decorative patterns, and also of symbolic forms. My close observation of the drawings of the children provided me with examples of a simple use of "bird's-eye" viewpoints, rather than normal perspective, distorted figures, and non-naturalistic colors. These studies influenced my work at that time. My paintings of this period were compared with the work of the Fauves and other European painters by art critics in Egypt and in the United States. Sam Hunter has said that, "The Fauve painters freely distorted form and invented a vivid, spontaneous color expression in the effort to liberate themselves from more traditional painting procedures." However, instead of seeking liberation from traditional painting procedures, I was trying to revitalize Oriental art.

In 1948, I painted from nature in a somewhat primitive environment in the suburb of Simbiliawain, Egypt. I painted

cows, buffaloes, landscapes, the buildings of the peasants, the
native markets, and the veiled Beduines and gypsies with their
colorful and lace-decorated dresses. I also painted the life of
the sailors and the porters unloading sand from the sailing boats
on the bank of the Nile across the street from my house in my
native town, Damietta. In 1949, I had my first one-man show in
Cairo. At that time my work reflected some formal character-
istics of cubism. I used clippings from newspapers in collage
both for their literal meanings and their formal patterns, in
compositions of still lifes or human figures. There were certain
relationships between my work and German expressionism.
Perhaps this resulted from my direct contact with the primitive
life of the Egyptian peasants and gypsies in Simbillawain and my
involvement with children's drawings with their distorted and
expressive forms. Moreover, my great enthusiasm for native
folk symbols and high intensity hues introduced into my work a
type of expressionism. I was really trying to express a realistic
quality of the life of the Egyptian peasants at the time but my
techniques were limited.

I think I was inspired by these original sources that had
inspired African artists, who in turn affected the works of the
French and German Expressionists. However, in my
"expressionism" I was not inspired by religious feeling, as was Emil Nolde, or the mysticism of a Van Gogh or a Kokoschka expressed in their attitudes towards humanity in order to glorify "redemption through suffering" or self-sacrifice.

To understand the character of Die Brücke as a movement, it should be kept in mind that the French and Germans discovered the arts of Africa and Oceania at almost exactly the same time. Many Paris artists utilized these materials primarily for aesthetic purposes, as in the elegant stylizations of Modigliani or the eclecticized from studies of the Fauves and even of Picasso, but to the Germans it was the spirit of these arts that counted most. Their work, therefore, became primitive in quality rather than primitive in form as the French; ... 56

In 1950-52, while a graduate student majoring in art education at the University of Minnesota, I developed an interest in the international similarities in children drawings and the parallels between children art and contemporary art movements. A research report was prepared on this subject as part of the Master's degree requirements.

Along with my studies of children's art I studied international contemporary art. I found certain resemblances between children drawings of the age group two to four and such modern artists as Kandinsky and the Abstract Expressionists. This interest directed

my attention toward Der Blaue Reiter group of the German Expressionists.

The Blue Rider are increasingly abstract and finally nonobjective painters. The term nonobjective (sometimes nonfigurative is subtle distinction) describes completely abstract art that is independent of subject even as a starting point for the derivation of forms.

The Rider group is a more cheerful one than The Bridge, more influenced by Gauguin than by Van Gogh, interested in rhythmical, "musical" compositions composed of sweeping curves and flowing lines rather than harsh moody, restless, or abrupt ones. . . . Their (The Blue Rider) background was international rather than specifically German, . . . 57

What interested me at the time was their freedom in manipulating shapes and color. Because I believed that art may be freed from naturalistic resemblances with respect to color and shape, and still carry symbolic and literary content, I felt that I could maintain my interest in communicable subject matter even though I rejected nationalistic forms.

In August, 1952, I returned to Egypt a month after the Revolution of July 23. At that time, many Egyptian artists were attempting to express their feeling for the historical events by painting historical scenes and nationalistic themes. I returned to painting the native subjects. My work at that time reflected my

interest in more dynamic, colorful and relatively abstract forms of expression. I worked in oils and also with metal, plaster, combined with glass, wood, stone, terra-cotta, and did some lino-cuts, and collages in water colors. I could maintain some contact with international art movements through books, magazines, and through the exhibits of contemporary occidental and oriental art which the Fine Arts Administration in Cairo organized each year, and I visited Europe during 1956 and 1957.

In accordance with plans made in Egypt, I enrolled in 1961 at The Ohio State University to study mural arts. I was faced with the extreme developments of "Abstract Expressionism."

A term first applied to Kandinsky's non-objective paintings after 1910. In recent years critics have most commonly used it in reference to a varied body of abstract painting which emerged in America during and after World War II and whose main exponents in this country have been the painters Gorky, Pollock, Motherwell, Rothko, Still, De Kooning, Kline, Guston and others... Abstract Expressionism synthesizes the liberties of Surrealism with either the emotional force of expressionism, or more recently the hedonistic refinements of late Impressionist paintings.

Although I was aware of the dangers of imitation, I knew that the creative artist should study the achievements of artists in other cultures with the possibility of filling gaps in his own.

58 Hunter, p. 186.
Mexican artists, such as Rivera and Orozco, studied Cubism as part of their effort to develop a Mexican art of the twentieth century. Jackson Pollock, among the American abstract expressionists, studied French and German Expressionism and Surrealism during the period they were developing their "action painting," one of the significant contributions to the contemporary American arts. I see my studies of art of the past--such as Arabic inscript--as a similar kind of study. I have used some aspects of Arabic art to develop and enrich the style and the content of my paintings. However, it was not until 1961 that I developed the idea of using Arabic calligraphy directly in my pictures.

In 1961, I started to use Arabic calligraphy for its dynamic and abstract shapes and not just as a decorative pattern; and I explored the possibility of introducing this calligraphy as a means of extending the content of my work.

As part of my graduate studies, I studied international folklore and I became familiar with those types and motifs found in folk literature which relate and connect almost tradition of the world's folk literature with each other. I had painted many pictures illustrating oriental folktales and I became aware of their relation to world folk literature. Now, I tried to find a way of introducing references to Egyptian and Arabic folktales,
through calligraphy, into my painting. In other words, to use them both for their literal references and as pictorial motifs in my pictures.

**A Program for a Contemporary Arab Painting**

There is a great need for artists to realize their responsibility to human society, to help create a better world. But they must have full freedom to create new forms and kinds of content. An artist has to be a responsible human being and a responsible member of society, just as a scientist has to be responsible in pursuing research and discoveries, even though some of his discoveries may be capable of destroying humanity and the whole world.

In the plastic arts, the social purpose of the art is always connected to its content. When words are presented in calligraphic forms, the words have what Ben Shahn once called "the shape of content." Words are abstract but achieve communication. Words have meaning as forms and the form of a word is the unity of its varied letters presented in a context of other words. Depending on the context, the word can be meaningful or meaningless. Shifting the relationship of the words or the letters in a word will not only affect its form but also its meaning because the position
of the letters has a direct bearing on its formal relationships and its functions as a means of communication.

**Means of Communication and Arabic Calligraphy**

A problem may face those who do not read Arabic, since they cannot follow the Arabic themes in my murals; a similar difficulty would face the Arabs who cannot read Arabic and only speak it. Words are only meaningful as a means of communication when they reach a reader. But, when used as calligraphy, words have shapes and colors that can have a direct effect on those who cannot understand the meanings. Thus, even those who cannot read the words have a share in the communication; they will be able to react to the expressive quality and color of the forms.

Those who are experienced in art and, at the same time, can read Arabic will be able to "read" the work of art in the same way as they read a book.

Words presented in calligraphic script are, of course, different than they would be in simple content. The calligraphy puts the emphasis on the formal and expressive qualities of the shapes. The words can be presented as part of the composition of abstract shapes in the picture. They can be presented in varied size and positions, with lines running in different directions, with
colors that are in contrasted and harmonic units, and with textures of high or low key; they can be presented in spatial contexts either as voids or solids.

These formal involvements need not prevent the murals from being a means of communication that carries a message to the people of Egypt and the Arab world whether they can or cannot read the words or appreciate the symbolic connotation of the forms. "Artistic activity, even if it aims at creating stable and universal values, is always directed to a particular society or at least to a particular public." \(^{59}\)

Communication through mural painting depends on the particular experience and mentality of the spectator. When I painted the murals for this dissertation study, I intended them to be suitable for the walls of public buildings and I intended them to embody both local and universal values. I have kept in mind that my murals cannot be directed only to the Egyptian or the Arab people but must also be directed to those of different cultures and traditions. I believe that the public (any public) should learn

to "re-create" new experiences through the visual art and through the "visual training" that art affords.

The re-creative experience of a work of art depends, therefore, not only on the natural sensitivity and the visual training of the spectator, but also on his cultural equipment. . . . Thus the "naive" beholder not only enjoys but also, unconsciously, appraises and interprets the work of art; and no one can blame him if he does this without caring whether his appraisal and interpretations are right or wrong, and without realizing that his own cultural equipment, such as it is, actually contribute to the object of his experience. 60

To me, the color in the painting has as much power to communicate as representational images. When the colors are "warm," they express "warm" and vivid feelings and they can reach the layman and communicate with him. They can attract his attention to the meanings inherent in the abstract forms and shapes. Perhaps the layman will not literally understand either the abstract form or the calligraphic content, but he will still sense them and enjoy them, as he does when he finds them in a work of folk art. Most native peoples throughout the world--and particularly in the Near East--enjoy colors of high intensity. By using colors of high intensity, I have tried to give my work a more popular expressive character.

Types of Art and Characteristics of the Twentieth Century Arts Used in My Murals

Types of art

Painting can be classified into two main types: representational and non-representational. Both types can be found in the art of the primitive peoples, the "native" arts, and both types are found in Contemporary art. Representational art depends on the artist's admiration or imitation of nature (the creation of God); non-representational art depends on the artist's interest in his own creations, in what he is able to construct, to conceptualize, to abstract from his experience and knowledge of the world.

In the Islamic artistic tradition, we find both of these types. Representational forms were used to illustrate human beings, plants, and animals, as an art of admiration for God's creation. Non-representational forms were used to illustrate the abstract creations of man. They were particularly used in calligraphic forms to present the words of the Koran. In the art of Islamic calligraphy, the Arabic words appear in compositions where a repeated unit (either in the normal readable position or in reverse) is developed as a decorative formal pattern. The various styles of Arabic writing, such as the Kufic, the Naskh, the Naskh-Tallik, and the Persian, show different formal
characteristics in their use of colors and in the relationships of line and pattern.

**Characteristics of Twentieth Century Painting**

There are some common characteristics of twentieth century painting which I have attempted to identify and to incorporate in my own work. One of these is the conception of painting as a composition of forms on a flat surface. This conception can be found as early as 1890; it later affected the Fauves, the Cubists, Mondrian, and other twentieth century artists. "Denis (Maurice Denis) had already asserted in 1890 . . . , that the picture is first of all a flat surface covered with colours set side by side according to a certain order."\(^{61}\) Due to the emphasis of most twentieth century artists upon the flat surface of the picture, contemporary pictorial composition is based on shape rather than volume.

A second characteristic is the emphasis on "dynamic," rather than static relationships of forms and colors. In contemporary abstract painting, we generally find the use of overlapping focus that generate dynamic directions of action by

means of lines in varied width and movements and of colored shapes in various positions and relationships.

How expressively varied in character abstract painting can be .... Pollock composed his (Number 7) frieze in three complex linear rhythms which play across the entire width of the canvas. ... The surface of the picture is emphasized by pasting paper or dripping paint upon it, but in Rothko's Number 10 the surface of the canvas seems almost to have disappeared. Instead, mists of color, white, violet blue, golden yellow, pale grey seem to float over it like impalpable translucent blinds drawn, one upon another, .... The large size of this painting, its quiet horizontals, broad muted tones, evanescent surfaces and subtle edges combine to create an effect of imminent serenity and silence. 62

A third characteristic is the use of opaque and transparent planes as overlapping facets or "crystals" to create a pictorial structure which can sometimes make a poetic atmosphere. This is found, for example, in Cubism and in the works of Delaunay and Feininger.

Feininger's art is a particularly distinguished one with which Cubism had a great deal to do. It is crystal clear, precisely joined in sharp-edged planes, sometimes defining recognizable objects, sometimes losing the object in abstract planar extensions, but always with a poetic favor that is expressionist within the Cubist variation. 63


63 Canaday, p. 433.
A fourth characteristic common to the arts of the twentieth century is the use of "chance" or "accident" in the process of creating the work of art. The possibility of exploiting accidents or chance occurrences was advocated in psychoanalytic theory; it was used by the Dadaists as a central interest, by the Surrealist as a means of expressing the inner self, and by the Abstract Expressionist as a means of generating new types of compositions. For the "action painters," "accident" is used primarily for the discovery of new technical effects and original combinations of patterns and textures.

In the painting of Pollock and DeKooning free rein is given to impulse, fancy and a massive flow of material evidence of the untransformed painting process. Such painting suggests an "impure" attitude of mind which accepts chance, change and "action" and art bound to time and duration. At the opposite pole is the art of such painters as Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still, a type of painting based on more pure and absolute attitude of consciousness. Originally derived from "Symbolist" modes, their art admits "accident" and unpremeditated effects only at the margins and seeks instead a more hieratic style that stands above contingency and chance: a non-temporal, starkly simplified and stable art. 64

A fifth characteristic is the use of color and color relationships to express directly a particular mood or feeling or, possibly, a mental image on association.

The really creative painter regards color very differently; it is a language of expression... It may be

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64 Hunter, pp. 153-54.
spatial as in Braque and Gris, lyrical and evocative as in Kandinsky. It may be airy, mysterious, dramatic, startling pure. It is sometimes exquisitely decorative but it also has the capacity to stir one's deepest feelings. 65

The use of twentieth century characteristics in my murals.

The following briefly describes my usage of the pictorial dynamics of abstract contemporary art in my present paintings and my attempt to incorporate Arabic calligraphy into pictorial compositions based on the contemporary idiom of Abstract Expressionist painting.

I have tried to produce compositions with planar forms developed on a scale suitable for murals. I have tried to achieve compositions which contain both static and dynamic forms, the static forms presented by straight lines of varied widths in horizontal and vertical combinations, the dynamic forms presented by curved lines in rhythmical or abrupt transitional directions. I have combined both the static and the dynamic forms to produce a personal interpretation of a dynamic field. I also used the method of combining in overlaid patterns flat and transparent planes, in order to give my work a kind of fantasy and poetic atmosphere. I have tried to use the "accident" to help free my

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painting from traditional techniques. I have tried to use color in
dynamic lines or shapes to express poetic moods and certain
mental images or connotations.

My dissertation exhibition, held at The Hayes Hall gallery,
The Ohio State University, on September 29, 1965, includes paint­
ings in which I have used some of the characteristics of contemporary
art mentioned above.

The following is an attempt to describe two of the panels in
this exhibition.

The Opening, Plates XIII and XIV, oil on canvas, is the first
painting I did in this series of murals. A theme of the picture is
the words, which the majority of the Arabs believe, of the "open­
ing" from the Koran with the name of Allah. The words are painted
in dark blue; they move from right to left, in straight and curved
lines related together to form a focal point around the central part
of the patterned square on the right of the picture which divides
the composition into a square and a rectangle. I have used a red
to symbolize the word "unity." I have tried to divide the painting
horizontally with visible and hidden lines to create an overlay of
forms, which, however, remain very close to the surface of the
panel. I have used varied sizes of Arabic letters in different
colors and intensities to create a dynamic relationship of shapes
around the oval at the top left which is the letter mim. This is the second focal point of the composition.

Towards an Arab Art, Plates XV and XVI, oil on canvas, presents what I conceive to be a discussion or argument about contemporary Arab art. The panel is divided into four vertical areas with a square to the right and a rectangle to the left. The major focal point of the composition is near the center of the panel. A variety of circles and curves, forming "closures" against the vertical and horizontal shapes, is intended to produce a harmony of opposing forms and colors. This second panel appears, I think, more dynamic than the first, even though it is divided into four stable areas, because of the varied sizes and positions of the shapes of brightest intensities. In the first panel the emphasis was placed upon a "central vision," which is focused close to the horizontal center of the panel. In the second picture, I have used a different color relationship and a different system of overlaid patterns. I have done this in order to achieve a kind of oriental, poetic atmosphere and to create an air of fantasy.

In Plates XVII-XXX, one may identify both the calligraphic symbols which present the themes of the pictures and the various formal methods I have used to organize the compositions in accordance with the experience and aesthetic requirements of my themes.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Today the search for a new style of Arab art is a major problem for the Egyptian artist, because of the pressing need since the Egyptian Revolution of July 23, 1952, for a contemporary Egyptian art that is representative of the social and political situation; for a contemporary Arab art that searches in Arab cultures and traditions; for an art that reflects the main goals and objectives of the Arab nation; and for art of a communicative nature as well as of universal form. The new regime has built a number of gigantic buildings and other architectural constructions that are suitable for the public needs. These buildings call for mural paintings.

It is important, then, to examine the developments of Egyptian art in the last 160 years. I have reviewed the pioneers of the Egyptian art, the history of art movements, and the development of the criticism of the arts, all of which have helped to put contemporary Egyptian art on a progressive basis. The pioneers represented the early graduates of the Schools of the
Fine Arts and of the Applied Arts, of the Art Education Institutes, and included some independent artists. One could notice that most of the art movements in Egypt have been established since World War II, and also that Egyptian art has been developed parallel to Egyptian and Arab nationalism.

Thus, I felt it was necessary to discuss Arab nationalism and the struggle of the Egyptian and Arab people for freedom and for unity. Arab nationalism and Arab unity has existed informally for a long time, because of a common original race, a common Arab culture, a common language, a common dominant religion, a common Arab pride, history, and geography. As there were pioneers of Egyptian art, there were pioneers for Egyptian and Arab nationalism. Among the early pioneers of Arab nationalism are El-Kawkabi of Allepo (who called for nationalism separated from religious influences), Al-Afighani and his pupil El-Sheikh Mohamed Abdo with his students, and Arabi, the first to use an army revolt to free his country. The successful Revolution of July 23, 1952 emerged from similar circumstances, that is, corrupted courts and foreign occupation. The rise of nationalism has encouraged a unity of Arab cultures and arts and a revival of Arab traditions.
Arab culture owes much to the Islamic culture that started the search to produce a culture and an art which is functional to the doctrine of Islam and based on its dogma. Calligraphy was one of the important contributions of Islamic arts. Because of its abstract form and communicative nature, the esthetic aspects of Islamic calligraphy have challenged contemporary Arab artists.

As one of the Arab artists, I believe that the use of words in a contemporary Arab painting would assist in emphasizing common elements in the growth of the Arab nation based on Arab unity. The use of words has its roots in Arab tradition, in the ancient Egyptian mythology as in the creation of Atum, then in Islamic culture, where it has a sacred and honorable position. I believe that its use in Islamic culture can always be related to the influence of the ancient Egyptian civilization.

The Islamic forms of calligraphy and epigraphy resemble those of ancient Egypt, where hieroglyphics had been developed into the heratic and demotic styles as in the Islamic period we find the Kufic, Naskh, Naskh-Taalik styles. When I thought of reviving calligraphy for contemporary mural painting, it was because it allowed the possibility of combining my interests in communicating a literal content with my interest in abstract forms.
Every revolutionary period produces a revolutionary art. Examples of this can be found in the ancient history of Egypt during the time of Ikhenaton, when Egyptian artists found in that revolution a source of inspiration which led to the creation of new artistic forms and contents. During the Middle Ages, Islam was also a revolutionary force that affected both social life and the arts. The Islamic artists looked for inspiration to previous Near Eastern civilizations, but in time they were able to create and produce an art of their own that reflected the doctrines of Islam.

The Egyptian Revolution of July, 1952, has created a responsibility for the Egyptian artist. Today the Egyptian artist has a duty toward his nation, to humanity, and to his own art. The creative artist has always had to deal with forms primarily for their esthetic value, while the subject matter he uses is a matter of the culture he lives in and his personal judgment. The content changes from one epoch to another, according to the viewpoint of the artist and the requirements of a given society.

To me, an art that is creative must deal with a constructive purpose and content, especially at the time when Egypt is passing through a transitional period. There is real need for "experienced achievements" in all fields. Mural painting has roots in the Egyptian
and Arab traditions. It could serve the function of fulfilling the artist’s commitments toward the Egyptian and the Arab peoples.

My artistic background includes study of Arabic inscripts of different styles, of children’s art, and of folk arts and literature. I have executed many paintings in different sizes and media which deal with Arabic calligraphy and with pedagogic or folkloric content; more recently I have done, as part of my dissertation, oil paintings of mural size of themes that are taken from Egyptian life and, particularly, of subjects related to Arab unity. These murals are single panels, diptychs, or triptychs.

In developing this type of painting, I have been aware of the problem that may face those who do not read Arabic, since they cannot follow the Arabic themes in my murals. But, I cannot direct my murals only to those who read Arabic. I have tried to include in my murals expressive colors and forms that would have a general effect. The use of native colors, the emphasis on dynamic shapes and compositions, and color schemes that can carry expressive meanings should attract those who cannot read Arabic and should communicate with them. I believe that the public must also have a responsibility, the responsibility to learn from the visual art and to learn to "re-create" new experiences from the pictures they see. And, I believe that the writers on
art and teaching of art should help to familiarize the Egyptian public with the current art movements at home and abroad in order to develop a greater interest in the arts and a new relationship between the artist and the public.
APPENDIX
PLATE V

TWO SEATED COLOSSI OF RAMSES II (ABU SIMBEL)

20 metres height, at the entrance of the rock-cut temple dedicated to Rehorakhty, Amun, Ptah, and Ramses II.

The New Kingdom, XIXth Dynasty, ca., 1250 B.C.
PLATE VI

Modern building, Cairo
PLATE VII

U.A.R., Main telephone offices, Cairo, 1956.
PLATE VIII

PLATE IX

THE TOWER OF CAIRO

Height, 600 feet, Gezira Island, Cairo, 1961, based on the shape of a papyrus flower, cf. Plates X and XI.
To (right) one of the two minarets of El-Sultan Hassan's mosque and madrassah (school), Cairo, 1356-63; to (left) the two minarets of El-Reffai's mosque, Cairo, ca., 1866-1911, cf. Plates IX and XI.
PLATE XI

Three massive papyriform columns with open papyrus umbel as capitals, from the colonnade of Amenophis III, dedicated to Amun, Mut, and Khunso (the moon god), the Temple of Luxor, Thebes, The New Kingdom, XVIII Dynasty, ca., 1390-1362 B.C., cf. Plates IX and X.
PLATE XII

Ghaibi Iben At-Tawrizi: Arabic calligraphy, early fourteenth century, ceramic tile, Mamluk period, Egypt.

The tile is decorated with Arabic words from the Koran representing the use of different styles as a unity.
PLATE XIII

THE OPENING

52-1/4" x 106"., oil on canvas.
PLATE XIV

THE OPENING

52-1/4" x 106", oil on canvas.
PLATE XV

TOWARDS AN ARAB ART

52-1/4" x 106", oil on canvas.
PLATE XVI

TOWARDS AN ARAB ART

52-1/4" x 106", oil on canvas.
PLATE XVII

EL-SAAD EL-AALI

52-1/4" x 106", oil on canvas.
PLATE XVIII

EL-SAAD EL-AALI

52-1/4" x 106", oil on canvas.
PLATE XIX

ON ARAB UNITY

106" x 156-3/4", "Triptych," from the series on Arab unity, oil on canvas.
PLATE XX

ON ARAB UNITY

106" x 156-3/4", "Triptych," from the series on Arab unity, oil on canvas.
PLATE XXI

ON ARAB UNITY

106" x 156-3/4", "Triptych," from the series on Arab unity, oil on canvas.
PLATE XXII

ON ARAB UNITY

106" x 156-3/4", "Triptych," from the series on Arab unity, oil on canvas.
PLATE XXIII

FROM THE SERIES OF ARAB UNITY

104-1/2" x 106", "Diptych," oil on canvas.
PLATE XXIV

FROM THE SERIES OF ARAB UNITY

104-1/2" x 106", "Diptych," oil on canvas.
PLATE XXV

THE FRIEND AND THE ENEMY

104-1/2" x 106", "Diptych," oil on canvas with burlap (collage).
PLATE XXVI

THE FRIEND AND THE ENEMY

104-1/2" x 106", "Diptych," oil on canvas with burlap (collage).
PLATE XXVII

COURAGE AND DISCOURAGE

104-1/2" x 106", "Diptych," oil on canvas and burlap (collage).
PLATE XXVIII

COURAGE AND DISCOURAGE

104-1/2" x 106", "Diptych," oil on canvas and burlap (collage).
PLATE XXIX

EL-SAAD EL-AALI

52-1/4" x 106", oil on canvas.
PLATE XXX

THE UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC

40" x 50", oil on canvas.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Youssef Sida

Born -- July 19, 1922, Damietta, Egypt, U.A.R.

Schools Attended and
Visits Abroad:

1939-42 School of Applied Arts in Cairo, specializing in mosaic, stained glass, and painting. (Diploma in Applied Arts, 1942.)
1942-45 Higher Institute of Education, Art Section, Cairo. (Diploma in Art Education, 1945.)
1950-51 University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. (Smith-Mundt Fulbright Award.)
1951-52 University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, M.Ed. (Egyptian Government Scholarship.)
1961 Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A. (Egyptian Government Scholarship), Painting.
1963 Visit to Mexico City, Guadalajara, Oaxaca, and Milla.

Prizes Obtained

1951 April  First prize for painting at the Spring Salon, Minneapolis.
1952 April  Grumbacher Award of Merit, Florida International Art Exhibit, Miami, Florida.
1955 July   Third prize for painting, First Biennale Art Exhibit of Alexandria, Egypt.
1955 December First prize for painting at the "Arts and Science Day," Cairo, Egypt.
1957 July   Award of Merit for painting, Egyptian (State Fair), Cairo, Egypt.
1959 May  Award of Merit for painting (Exposition, concours des Paysages), "Musée D'Art Moderne," Cairo, U.A.R.

One-Man Exhibits

1949 Dec.  USIS, Cairo, Egypt.
1950 Aug.  International House of New York, N.Y.
1951 Feb.  Harriet Hanley Gallery, Minneapolis, Minn.
1952 July  District of Columbia Public Library, Georgetown, Washington, D.C.
1954 Dec.  USEF, Cairo, Egypt.
1964 Mar.  Middle East House, Washington, D.C.
1964 May  Middle East House, New York, N.Y.

General Exhibitions (Abroad to represent Modern Egyptian painting)

1949  Egypt-France Art Exhibit, Paris, France.
1952  Florida International Art Exhibit, Miami, Fla.
1953  La Biennale de Sao Paulo, Brazil.
1953  Egyptian Art Exhibition, Khartoum, Sudan.
1956  Biennale de Venicea, Italy.

Teaching Career (and positions held)

1945-48  Teacher of drawing at Munira Primary School, Cairo
1948-50  Teacher of drawing at Simbilawain Secondary School, Simbilawain, Mansura, Egypt.
1952-61  Instructor of painting and drawing at the Higher Institute of Art Education, Cairo, Egypt.
1957-60  Instructed design as a Delegated Member of Staff, at the Higher Institute of Education, for Women Teachers, Cairo, Egypt.
1958-60  Instructed painting as a Delegated Member of Staff, at the Faculty of Applied Arts, Cairo, Egypt.

1960-61  Appointed as a judge-director for the program of the Round Table Discussion on the plastic arts, U.A.R. Broadcasting, Cairo, Egypt, U.A.R.

1963  Recognized as Assistant Professor at the Higher Institute of Art Education, Cairo, Egypt, U.A.R.

1965  Appointed as a Visiting Professor at the Art Education Department, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minn., U.S.A.