

THE IMPACT OF SOCIETAL ISSUES ON CONTEMPORARY INSTALLATION SCULPTURE IN THE MIDDLE EAST (ANALYTICAL STUDY)

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Abstract. This research discusses the impact of contemporary societal issues on Arab compositional sculpture. The effect of Arab reality on contemporary Arab installation sculpture is known through a group of artworks related to contemporary installation sculpture. The study analyses five artworks (the study sample) considering the topics and ideas raised in these artworks. Five recent Arab installation sculptural works from (2015 - 2021) are considered to confirm whether the current Arab reality and its societal issue effects contemporary Arab art, especially contemporary installation sculpture. The study follows the descriptive-analytical approach. The impact of modern Arab reality and its problems on contemporary Arab installation sculpture art is shown, despite the limited works of Arab installation sculpture.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, Arab reality, Installation Sculpture, Societal Issues, Middle East.

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1. Introduction

Today, the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, it has become remarkable for those who follow contemporary plastic art. The expansion of artistic activities attracts artists who have strong motivations to venture outside the frameworks of traditional methods in seeing the artwork based on concepts that carry fundamental questions (Aldulemi, 2021).

Contemporary art is characterized by being more humane and having a social and educational function because it gives the viewer information to search and explore for concepts and ideas, and differs from the nature of morphological visual art, which presents something visually beautiful or ugly only (Al-Asqah & Al-Rasheed, 2018).

In his book (What is Art?), Tolstoy sees that art plays an important role in contemporary life. Its issues and art lose value as it moves away from its primary goal, which is life. In the same book, he indicates that the philosopher "Marcuse" sees that art plays the primary role in societies. Tolstoy also confirms that contemporary art played a revolutionary role in contemporary issues (Spens, 2013). The above is an affirmation of the importance of contemporary art and the strong relationship that binds it to society and its contemporary issues, whether social, political, or otherwise, and this connection in the world in general and the Arab world in particular, due to the complex political and social conditions that the Arab world is going through.

Al-Hawas (2019) confirms that the Arab countries faced difficult and complex events that affected them in all aspects of life. Since the beginning of this century, he stated that the Arab region had been subjected to the grave and terrifying events, represented by wars and conflicts, and the resulting killing, displacement, and migrations. These events were embodied in the so-called Arab Spring. Through the preceding and what we see happening in the Arabic region from the wars as mentioned earlier, conflicts, tyranny, poverty, and the absence of social justice resulting from these conditions and many other problems, we conclude that the Arab world has lived and is experiencing an actual crisis and fierce wars. This destroys these societies, whether they are internal wars or External. Of course, these events and conflicts are considered among the hottest events in the world. They negatively affect Arab society for sure.

Mar'ae (1985) believes that contemporary events and challenges facing the Arab region affect Arab societies. On the other hand, he believes that art is an important field that involves life and is affected by various situations and issues. Alyasiri (2011) shares with the Mar'ae mechanism that there is a strong connection between the individual, society, and the surrounding environment. He stresses that the surrounding environment impacts all areas of life. This influence is linked to scientific, technological, developmental, social, artistic, and other developments. Bashir (2011) presents Laure Deutevel, the director of the International Art Exhibition for Contemporary Art, saying that the events and conflicts in the Arab world were significantly and noticeably changing the form of art. Laure, in the presentation, says that the emergence of contemporary art in its contemporary forms expresses the issues and events in a contemporary manner that is consistent with present art. Basir (2011) further argues that the structure of contemporary installation sculpture has emerged recently.

2. The study problem

No previous studies or research confirmed the impact of reality on contemporary Arab compositional sculpture in particular. However, compositional sculpture focuses on its connection to reality, the philosophy of contemporary art in general and compositional sculpture in particular. Therefore, this study will answer this question:

- is there an impact of reality on contemporary Arabic installation artworks?
- is there a close relationship of the lived reality with Arabic installation artworks?

Where Previous studies and research focused on the relationship between art and political situations, Melkonian's (1997) study focused on the relationship of contemporary art to the political conditions that occurred in the Arab world. Moreover, Melkonian (1997) discussed in his research the impact of the influence of Arab political issues on contemporary art, especially on artists who lived a life of asylum, and how they conveyed their concerns and issues to the international community through contemporary art forms to be able to deliver their messages in a modern way acceptable in this time. Ramadan (2014) emphasized in his article the need to develop contemporary Arab art and its forms so that it can keep pace with modern changes and developments in international art, as Arab art is part of this art and has its mark throughout history because it believes in the influential role of art in guiding the future.

Research Objectives

The research aims to shed light on contemporary Arab installation sculpture as one of the forms of contemporary art that is concerned with community issues and the extent

to which they relate to and represent these issues, as art is one of the areas of life that affects and is affected by other areas.

Research Hypothesis

The researcher assumes that contemporary Arab installation sculpture is greatly influenced by the community issues surrounding it. It presents these issues differently from traditional art forms.

Research Importance

- Learn about installation sculpture and its relationship to contemporary societal issues.
- Getting to know the most important works of contemporary Arab artists whose works belong to installation sculpture.

Research limits

Temporal search limits: from 2015 to 2021. Spatial search limits: The Arab world (Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Sultanate of Oman).

Methodology

This research deals with the impact of contemporary Arab and its societal issues reality on contemporary Arab installation sculpture in the Arab world. The researcher will use the descriptive-analytical method to achieve his goal.

The researcher will collect the available information through what has been written and published about the artworks (the study sample), describing and analysing them to reach the main idea of these artworks, and discuss these ideas by the researcher to prove the relationship between the artwork and the issue raised by this work, and then determine the impact of reality and contemporary issues in contemporary Arabic sculptural works. Finally, conclusions that confirm the assumptions of this research were presented. This is what we see in Figure 1, which shows the descriptive-analytical framework of the artworks.

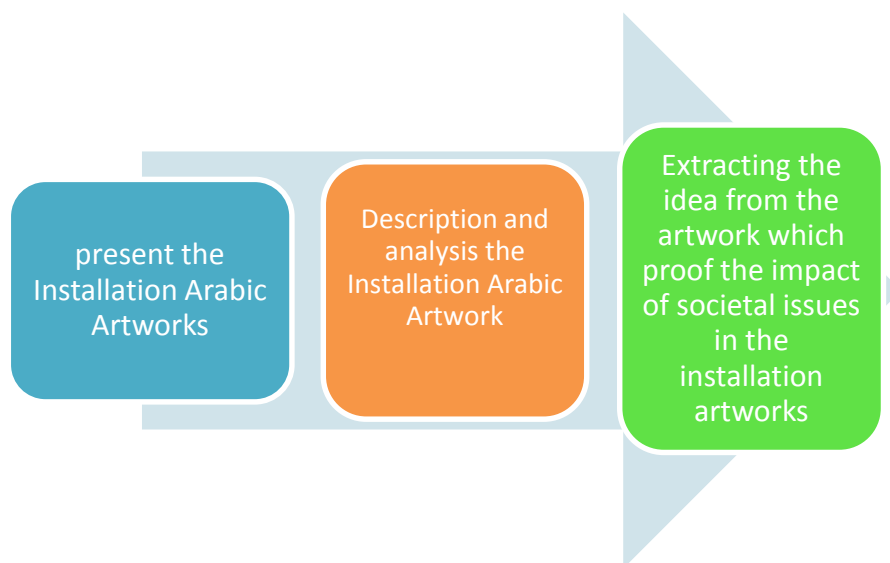


Figure 1. Descriptive analytical framework

3. Analysis of Artworks

a. Artwork 1



Figure 2. Letters from Beirut (2021), Tissa and Tara Sakhi, Lebanon

The Idea of the Artwork

The installation comes under the title “Letters from Beirut” in honour of the Lebanese society. Those affected by the Beirut port explosion (<https://www.addustour.com>).

What prompted them to collect two thousand touching messages from the Lebanese citizens who survived the explosion to share their thoughts and feelings with others. The purpose of the project is to collect the charitable donations necessary to support those affected by the explosion of the Port of Beirut and to provide assistance in various sectors, including health care, infrastructure, and education (<https://www.addustour.com>).

These bags, displayed on a horizontal wall, carry messages containing the experiences and expertise of Lebanese citizens affected by the disaster that struck Lebanon last August 4. This artwork strengthens ties and dialogue about the Lebanese collective memory and the future and reconstruction of Lebanon (Nakhla, 2021).

Discussion

If we look at the work of the artists (Tissa and Tara Sakhi) and through what was written about it, we find that the artists unleashed their feelings about what happened in Lebanon in the incident of the Marfa explosion, to share the feelings of the survivors of this explosion with others, and embodied this through a contemporary sculptural installation work.

It is evident through the artwork the strong relationship between installation sculptural work and reality, and the issue it raises, as it introduces a real problem that affected Lebanese society and affected all aspects of life in it. The case of the port explosion that hit Beirut cannot be separated from society because it has radically affected the community through the numbers of dead and injured and the numbers of those who fled to other countries because of the lack of a sense of security and stability in Lebanon, and the consequences of all of this of losing identity and lack of an understanding of security and stability Poverty and many other problems that occurred after that explosion.

b. Artwork 2



Figure 3. Protection 1(2021), Naela Al Maamari, Sultanate of Oman

The Idea of the Artwork

The artist (Naela Al-Maamaria) says about her works regarding this pandemic that they are installation works that included paintings of them under the name of Protection 1 and Protection 2, where the globe was covered with masks, and here is an address to people in all parts of the world to take maximum protection for themselves by wearing masks, as it represents the segment of doctors and medical scientists who have been working hard for more than a year to contain the disease to limit its spread. There is an explicit representation of the hand trying to withdraw the globe, where the efforts of governments and organizations are also trying to save the whole world from this epidemic (<https://alarab.co.uk>).

Discussion

We see that the artist (Naela Al-Maamari) expressed what is happening in the world and the Omani society in particular due to the Corona pandemic and its impact on communities, as this pandemic affected society negatively. Here we see the positive role of art in this pandemic as an outlet to express the extent of the pandemic's impact on society through artwork and the role of art in raising awareness of the community and individuals to overcome this pandemic.

The close relationship between artwork and the lived reality in society appears the urgent and contemporary issues affecting this society through his presentation of the Corona pandemic, its consequences, and its impact on societies in general and individuals in particular. Thus, the contemporary installation sculpture has raised a significant contemporary social issue that affected the artist's society.

c. Artwork 3



Figure 4. Instability in life - this condition is not suitable for children (2020), Faten Nabil, Lebanon

The Idea of the Artwork

The work of the artist (Faten Nabil) is considered one of the artworks that express feelings, ideas, and creative visions about “Corona,” social distancing measures, quarantine, and ways to combat the virus (National Media Agency, 2020).

Discussion

Through what we see in the work of the artist (Faten Nabil) and what was written about it, a societal and humanitarian issue that affected all societies of the world in general and the Lebanese community in which the artist lives in particular, it presents the suffering of humanity, especially children, in the Corona pandemic, and the impact of the pandemic on children in particular, and the state of instability, anxiety, and fear that occurred for children due to this pandemic. Thus, the artwork raised a general societal issue that affected Lebanese society and the world in general. The artwork shows the fear and anxiety that appears on children's faces due to this epidemic, one of the most important and most influential contemporary social problems and issues affecting society. This shows the strong relationship between the artwork and the societal issues and how art is influenced and affected by culture.

d. Artwork 4

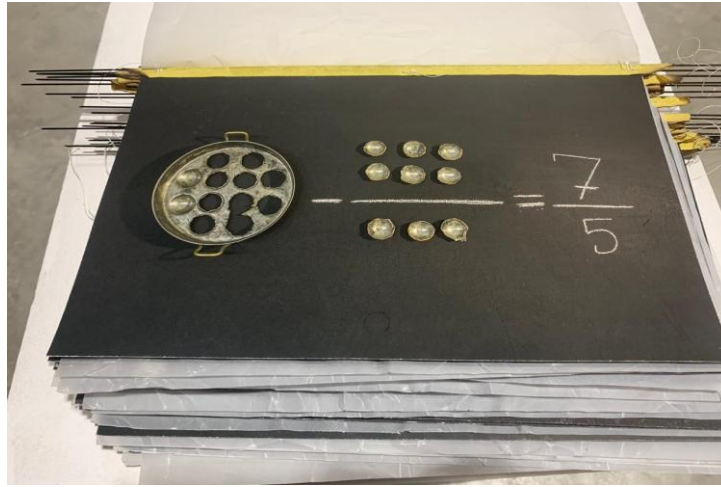


Figure 5. Mathematics Book (2017), Heba Al-Ansari, Syria

The Idea of the Artwork

The artist (Heba Al-Ansari) suggests that we enter the intimate area from the rubble. Her sculptural installation work is inspired by the mathematics textbook that the artist found while she was in the city of Kafranbel for a Syrian girl who was killed by the warplanes bombing her city. The artist presents us with a mathematics book that shows information, geometric shapes, and numbers through the remains of destroyed houses. The geometric equations in the book are made up of tools, and the book contains fabrics, paper layouts, and ruined pages. In presenting her artwork, the artist writes, “The work is based on the concept of organized vandalism and repetition of forms under the effects of the pressure of explosions, subjecting things to the absurd and illogical of the explosion” (Rashidi, 2020).

Through her artistic work, Al-Ansari tries to build her logic that is closer to the lived reality. The (Mathematics) concrete figures in which a girl lived in Kafranbel, which was supposed to be a safe and robust dwelling, were destroyed within seconds and turned, along with thousands of other houses in Syria, into “geometric shapes.” irregular and sometimes to grains of ash in the air and on the ground. The spongy figures inside them remained as they were, despite their logical weakness. Irrationality is the fragility and logic taught in the mathematics book, turned into a dead body (Sahili, 2018).

Discussion

In the artist’s artwork (Heba Al-Ansari), we see a clear expression of what the Syrian society has suffered and suffers from the effects of the war on society and individuals, particularly from the killing of defenseless innocents for no reason other than they are innocents and peaceful. The artist presented in her artistic work the effects of wars on contemporary Syrian society and the amount of unjustified destruction that the Syrian people are experiencing. The artist, La, presents the logic of wars, the fragility and weakness of life in times of war, and how wars change the equations of life in situations of peace that are supposed to be fixed and don’t change, but this logical stability quickly vanishes due to the war machine that changes all standards and values.

We see a strong connection and relationship between the installation work and the suffering of the Syrian people from the scourge of war and its devastating effects on societies and change it for all systems and values that are assumed to be fixed and don't change, which confirms the strength of the relationship between Contemporary (Sculpture) art and the societal issues surrounding it.

e. Artwork 5



Figure 6. Chamber of Terror (2016), Zaina Salem, Iraq

The Idea of the Artwork

The artist's work (Zaina Salem) was to enter a room that turned into a (horror room) with very dim light, filled with black banners mourning the martyrs. For nearly forty years, the Iraqi people were flooded with their suffering and sorrows, as if the room was a tomb in which the inside felt a bit of fear or terror while it was There is a video recording showing pictures of my dead with a voice saying (we die and the homeland lives) repeated all the time, while at the edge of the room lies a small open bag containing a collection of books and a doll. As for the title of the exhibition (Suggestions), it is a confirmation that the Iraqis were and still are the offerings (<https://elaph.com/Web/Culture/2016/1/1069706.html>).

Discussion

The artwork (House of Horrors) shows a sad and frightening scene of what happened. It is happening in Iraq due to the ongoing wars. The artist focused on highlighting the amount of fear and horror that the viewer suffers in case of entering into the experience of watching the artwork and feeling what the artist wants the viewer to feel. The artwork includes an experience that shows the tragedies and scourges that the Iraqi people have suffered due to wars and the amount of torment, fear, feelings of loss, and sadness experienced by the Iraqi people. As the artwork shows the relationship between it and the surrounding community through the transmission of images of murder and tragedies of wars, and their impact on the innocents who live in those societies, and this is evidence of the depth of the relationship Between the artwork and the societal issues surrounding it.

4. Conclusion

These artistic experiences and practices are considered some of the rest of the deep and diverse Arab backgrounds that adopted installation sculpture as an innovative path that starts from society and its contemporary issues to lean on the multiple means that the artist deems appropriate to serve his artistic work and the point he raises, as it is an expression and representation of the surrounding reality and the issues that occur. The artworks (the study sample) presented some contemporary Arab problems, such as the wars that languish in many parts of the Arab region, destroy their societies, and negatively affect citizens. And also, the Corona pandemic, which devastated all communities and Arab organizations, notably, showed the amount of terror and fear that individuals felt in these societies in light of this pandemic and its negative impact on communities and individuals in particular. Where we see the solid relationship between these installations sculptural works and reality by raising essential issues affecting Arab societies that suffer from these problems and issues, and thus we see the impact of the contemporary Arab reality with its various points on the ideas presented in the works of installation sculpture clearly and clearly. Where the role of art is fundamental and pivotal in societies for its essential role in addressing real issues and problems and drawing the attention of governments and organizations to those issues and the risks facing these societies and the world in general, in a creative philosophical way that is out of the ordinary and far from traditional forms of art, which is what we have already seen in These are contemporary artworks. These works are considered installation works of Arab art that raised political and societal issues that the Arab countries suffer from and the impact of these issues on Arab societies in particular and the world in general. The main goal behind its produce these artworks was to draw attention to the tragic situation in the Arab countries because of issues and problems which facing and their future consequences, which gives this contemporary artistic trend (Installation sculpture) the conscious philosophical characteristic that is responsible, and not absurd in raising contemporary societal issues.

Research Recommendations:

This section presents recommendations for future works based on extending the present research:

- Future research should explore future topics such as expanding the research ground of contemporary Arabic art through additional studies and workshops by renowned thinkers and critics to explore its intellectual characteristics and ability to represent the social-political crisis in the Arab world.
- Attempt to implement a comprehensive documentation project overseen by the respective national institutions for archiving the installation artworks of Arab artists (whether produced inside or outside the Arab world) and facilitate the researchers' access to artwork samples for future studies.
- Also worthy of consideration are further studies on the study subject focusing on other contemporary art trends such as environmental art and conceptual art, performance art, and video art.
- Arab artists are encouraged to choose contemporary art as a meaningful and legitimate way to effectively express their concerns over current issues and communicate them to the global community.
- Sources and references Produced in English and Arabic to enrich the Arab library with publications in contemporary art.

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