

The dilemma of representing women's body and expressing identity in contemporary photography

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Abstract:

Photography presents questions about presence and identity. We have look for evidence of our existence, and moments that enable us to understand ourselves, or what we can become, and often we have discovered multiple identities within us. The representation of the body in the visual arts is central to society's construction not only of norms of sexual behavior but of power relationships in general.

Through an analytical reading, the research explores the history of body representation in photography, and the concepts associated with the representation of the body through different era, in addition to its relation to contemporary issues.

It also examines the changes that have been shaped the ideas, and the artistic practices through changelings that occurred of technology, which accompanied changes in society at all levels, by close reading to photographs of women photographers from the Middle East, the research explores concerns and questions were posed by them, and compare their perspective to the Western female perspective.

Keywords:

fine art photography - conceptual photography - women - body and identity - culture - sacred – inherited

Research problem:

The lack of close reading and in-depth studies of the contemporary photographic works of women photographers in the Arab and Islamic world, which represent the female body and its symbolic and expressive implications in the social system. In addition to, the use of the female body as a photographic subject highlights many social, religious and cultural problems that face preconceived ideas or stereotypes on the level of criticism and expression that because many women photographers have trapped in either feminine eulogies, or blatant feminist expression, which make them separated from the reality. So that by close reading, the visual experience of viewer will be developed, in the way he will be able to deconstructing the symbols, which terminates a lot of conflict.

Research Importance:

The question how and by what means, a body is represented produces more valuable answers than do stylistic analysis and connoisseurship.

Research Objectives:

- Examine the theoretical heritage of the body from a feminine perspective, and study the similarities as well as the differences between the Western and Eastern perspectives
- Communicate with traditional culture, to find an innovative relationship that embodies the feelings and image of women in the contemporary society.
- Examine how the human body has been represented by photography throughout the history for exploring the relationship between identity interpretations, culture and heritage.
- Investigate how photographic representations of the body shape and reflect not only obvious issues of personal identity, sexuality, gender, and sexual orientation but also issues of power, ideology.

Methodology:

The study relies on careful analytical reading in many of the photographic works of contemporary women artists who have used their bodies as an equivalent to expressing their identity, or to express how others look to female body, also they represent concepts related to women body as a commodity or a temptation, in the light of cultural openness, the study concerns of the interpretation of identity, especially as the embodiment of identity is influenced by culture, heritage, history and our own vision of our bodies.

Introduction:

Photography has the ability to read the human history, due to its ability to freeze a moment of time. There is no doubt that the image has cognitive, aesthetic and human dimensions. The camera expresses the cultural identity of places and people by reflecting their relationship with their community and beliefs .Photography poses questions about presence and identity. It is obvious that the photography not only meets the artist obsession, but also touches the viewer, because we are looking for evidence of our existence, and moments that enable us to understand ourselves and what we can become, maybe we discover multiple identities within us.

The body has had a strong presence throughout the history of art, it has inspired many artists since the Renaissance, there is no doubt that the representation of women's body has developed, since classical era Which focused on the proportion and the simulation of nature, ending with contemporary art where the new of creative methods have emerged to express emotions and feelings. In the early 19th century, Julia Margaret Cameron transformed the image of the female in photographs from a silent, rigid image into a dynamic woman expressing an independent personality. Since then, many photographers (especially women) have started to rely on women's bodies as an important theme in photography as a fine art. In attempt to break the stereotype and reproduce new concepts of prevailing ideas about sex, religion, and expression of identity. The body of women is one of the most widely used subject in cultural discourse, since the body may carry many indications related to identity, taboo, sacred, etc.

Framework:

The research explores the history of the body's representation in photography, and remarks the beginning with portrait photography, when the social class was defined by possession of a portrait, at that time, the person's possession a portrait for himself reflected the individual and social importance. Juxtaposition with the emergence of questions about the psychological aspects of the image. The research studies the factors of the spread of portrait photography, beside the emergence of the concept social context of the image, in addition to the role has been played by body's representation in the consolidation of the colonial.

The research examines some concepts related to the body representation in photography, such as the beginning of naked body representation in photography, which was intended to study anatomy and body movement. then move from the representation of naked male to representation of naked women, how images transformed to sexual means, also the emergence of the expression (hide excitement in art). Some critics argue that pornography would not have spread without the proliferation of photographs with public. Ending with Surrealism, this focused on the body as a subject.

The research discusses the concept of sexuality, gender and its relation to the body. With the emergence of waves of modernity and postmodernism, liberal concepts emerged in society, and photographer broke the forbidden taboo, by discussing concepts related to sexual identity, child rape and the persecution of homosexuals.

The research explores the body's representation from a female perspective, by monitoring the changes that have occurred to the image, due to women who have worked in photography field, and the different subjects were treated by women photographers. Beside discuss the role of industrial, technological and sexual revolutions in changing the concept of women's body as an aesthetic element, in addition to the demands of the new feminist wave to represent women in social life and the arts. By analytical reading in the works of photographers from the Middle East, the research explains the most important questions and concepts that dealt with them in their work.

Results:

- Body representing in photography, not only reflects the obvious issues of personal identity, sex, gender and sexual orientation, but also issues of power and ideology.
- photographs taken by western female photographers do not include an opposite point of view, for Mental image of men, if they have deal with the same issue.
- Understanding how the body is represented and which techniques are used provide more valuable answers than just analytical method, and develop the visual experience of viewer, in the way he become able to deconstructing the photography symbols.
- Women photographers in the Middle East, have been able to connect with traditional culture, and find an innovative relationship that reflects their feelings as well as their inside reality.

Western women photographers tend to use their bodies as means of expressing contemporary cultural and social issues, while Oriental women photographers tend to deal with their body as a reflection of their fears and their impact on the surrounding society.

- media and society tend to consolidate the masculine image of women, or to understand them through a masculine context
- The Oriental women photographers refuse the Western view of Arab and Muslim women, even if they are from a feminine perspective, emphasizing their cultural identity, even if their works criticize certain customs.

The West borrows its concepts and issues and tries to project them on women in the East without awareness of their issues.

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