

## **The philosophical dimensions of Autofiction in the visual arts in the light of the 13th International Cairo Biennale works**

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### **Abstract :**

The emergence of autofiction by Serge Dubrovsky in 1977 was a counter reaction to the claims of the author's death and the independence of the artwork from him within the postmodern society, , Therefore, it became one of the art forms that spread at the end of the twentieth century, and although it was one of the forms of literary arts, the idea of autofiction was associated with some of the works of visual arts and was characterized by a critical and philosophical nature in some forms of art., which the artist performs himself as a champion for the work such as conceptual and performance art, therefore the study seeks to monitor the philosophical dimensions of the concept of autofiction in the work of visual arts to turn into one of the mechanisms for criticizing and reading the artwork in the light of 13<sup>th</sup> International Cairo Biennale works, , The research problem: What are the philosophical dimensions of autofiction in the visual arts in the light of 13th International Cairo Biennale works?

The research assumed that postmodern artists were able to achieve a visual conception of the autofiction that possesses philosophical dimensions which can be traced to some of the works of 13th International Cairo Biennale.

The research goal: The research aimed to trace the philosophical dimensions of the concept of autofiction in visual arts in the light of 13th International Cairo Biennale works .

### **Key words:**

Autofiction ,The philosophical dimensions, International Cairo Biennale

### **Introduction:**

The 13th International Cairo Biennale was able to gain the attention of the Egyptian cultural community for its return after a period of interruption, and the artistic participation of international artists, most notably the French guest of honor, Gerard (Garouste)1946, who exhibited his works in Egypt for the first time. Writings that dealt with the guest of honor's work to introduce him , whether as a biography or a reading of his work, theorists adopted an affirmation of the similarities between the works of Garouste and the works of expressive tendency artists such as "Joya" and "Jericho" and linked them to the world of legends, fiction and religious stories to emphasize his appreciation of these sources and his passion for them Ignoring that he is an artist belonging to the twenty-first century, some described him as "an artist outside the currents and artistic fashions looking for modernity through aesthetic standards and that he is both classical and contemporary just because he "still believes in the canvas"

However, this traditional reading, which sees artistic work as a reflection of the reality of the psycho-social artist and a mirror of his culture, may lack a specialized critical study because Garouste 's works carry ideas supporting postmodern thought, and despite his interest in myths and religious stories and his influence on major narratives, what Garouste did is a reenactment

of this stories. The stories are in light of postmodernist concepts, as he is not interested in searching for the meaning as the modernists did, and does not occupy him with pluralism in interpretation, but the aim of his handling of these religious narratives is to search for the hidden links that link the past and the present by representing himself inside the work as one of the characters of the event mixing between the events of the past and his personal life, here the artist moves the recipient to one of the contemporary forms of art, the art of auto fiction, this French-born concept that was able to move from the field of literature to the field of visual image with the escalation of postmodern thought at the end of the twentieth century. With the artist joining the work, he becomes an eyewitness to the events he is monitoring in the light of the identity of a confrontation - and it may be a violation - of his actual reality, which appeared in a large number of " Garouste " works that were subjected to legendary topics. What is striking is the multiplicity of the idea of self-imagination within the competing works of the biennial, such as the work of the British Natalia Mali and the American Sama Al-Shaibi and the American Suzanne Horvitz, which raises questions about the nature of this artistic form that was raised as one of the forms of literary arts in one of the books of the French writer Serge Doubrovsky, to turn into a contemporary aesthetic strategy, its impact in the field of conceptual art and the surrounding aesthetic studies has been reflected.

Background of the problem: Postmodern philosophies emerged as an attempt to explain social and cultural developments within Western societies in the second half of the twentieth century, which are no longer correspond to modernist philosophies that dominated the Western mind for nearly a century to turn into what are known as major narratives that are no longer accepted in light of contemporary historical reality. Therefore, postmodernism replaced the transcendent modernist ideas and everything that expresses the concept of logos with the concepts of text and image to miss the role of the human mind and in light of technological domination, and the idea of the death of man and the death of the artist or author spread to live the artistic work and text instead of it, a saying made by the French critic Roland Barthes (1915-1980) in 1968, who believed that. Here criticism sought to search for new mechanisms by which the artwork is interpreted away from its creator, so he resorted to the concept of intertextuality rather than the active self / artist because the language, whether literary or mock, is the speaker within the artwork, thus liberating the artwork from the authority of the author / artist. However, with the end of the last century, the elements of artwork, led by the artist, reappeared again, but by introducing in the image to move from the individual self to the idea of multiple subjects, which was presented by the French Writer Serge Doubrovsky (1928 - 2017) in the light of the concept of autofiction. Which is one of the art forms that sparked widespread controversy in literary studies because it is a literary genre that combines (biography and fantasy Fiction), and thus it is difficult to define stylistic techniques for the art of self-imagination, is it a completely imaginary pattern or contains an aspect of realism? Recounting events or addressing the recipient? but the agreed upon is he has to base the idea on the combination of the writer, the narrator, and the central character in one image, varying in its sincerity, because it is without reference, which entitles the recipient to ignore the search for the truth within the work, where the idea lies in the artist's quest to make the subject of his identity an area of imagination to become difficult to separate between the real and the fake within the artwork, the idea of self-imagination allowed the artist to use from the facts of his life a starting point for imagination to refer to the mixing of truth and imagination within his artwork, and this art form - belonging to

the formulation of " Doubrovsky " - has become a common form of literary arts in postmodernism. Despite the presence of a number of artists who practiced autofiction in their literary works before " Doubrovsky ". Many decades ago, the poet "Dante Alighieri" (1265 - 1321) who is perhaps the most famous in his epic divine comedy. The Divine Comedy, in which he personified himself as a hero to work in imaginary worlds representing hell, purified, and paradise, things that the depiction of theology was not so clear about, and so on.

The emergence of autofiction at the end of the twentieth century was a reaction to the claims of the author's death and the independence of art work from him within the postmodern society, and in an effort to revive the active self / artist through his representation of the ambiguous ego inside him, the interaction between real and fictional invented a new, unrealistic self, as the artist in this experiment does not retrieve his childhood or youth but reshapes them in the light of his current awareness. Despite the concept of the concept literally, the idea of auto fiction was associated with some forms of contemporary visual arts, especially that the artist himself performs as a champion for artistic work such as conceptual art and performance art, and therefore the present study seeks to monitor the philosophical dimensions of the concept of autofiction in the work of visual arts to turn into one of the mechanisms of Criticism of the artwork and its reading in light of the 13th International Cairo Biennale works.

**Research problem: From the above, the research problem is summarized in the following question:**

- What are the philosophical dimensions of the concept of autofiction in the visual arts in light of the 13th International Cairo Biennale works?

**Research objective:** The research aims to track the philosophical dimensions of the concept of autofiction in the field of visual arts in light of the 13th Cairo International Biennale works.

**Research imposition:** Postmodern artists have been able to achieve a visual conception of the concept of autofiction that has philosophical dimensions that can be traced to some of the works of the 13th International Cairo Biennale.

**The search limits:**

Theoretical framework: includes a presentation of a number of points (the concept of autofiction in the field of literature - the historical dimensions of the idea of autofiction in the visual arts).

**The practical framework:** an analysis of a number of the works of autofiction participating in the 13<sup>th</sup> International Cairo Biennale in light of the philosophical concepts representing postmodern thought.

**Research methodology:** The research follows the descriptive and analytical method.

Importance of the research: The research indicates a strategy developed within contemporary art practices that can be used as a way to read postmodern arts works according to the criteria of the concept of visual self-imagination.

Autofiction in the visual arts: The features of autofiction in the field of visual art are manifested in artistic forms belonging to past historical eras in which the artist was keen to represent himself within the artwork in a case that departs from the personal image and depends on self-representation within imaginary worlds, such as the group of drawings belonging to the art of rocks in Australia (Figure 1) Which is dated back to about 47 thousand years ago, in which the ancient person embodied himself as a small ghostly shadow that does not possess distinct



Fig 1

individual characteristics, confined within a gathering of huge fictional beings that are not human or animal and are difficult to identify, stemming from his imagination accompanying another group of nature's surrounding objects in a metaphysical narrative. It can be interpreted within the framework of practices that may be magic, and it was possible, through the strange imaginary image of these creatures, to express the hidden forces represented in this form that can influence it, then the ancient Egyptian history came to give up the artist's presence within the artwork under the doctrinal art occupied in it. The gods star in artwork, in addition to famous people who may be the king or one of his close associates, and the artist continued to be absent with the presence of Religious Arts until it reappeared in the Renaissance with the return of humanism after the medieval period, and the philosophical ideas that were the product of the ideas of Christian ideology faded back to the idea of self-imagination appearing in some works of Renaissance art, perhaps the painting of the School of Athens (1510-1511 (Figure ٢) is the most famous of them, as the artist Raphael embodied himself in the work which its



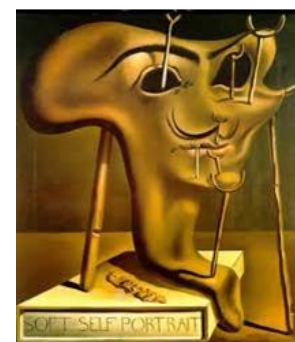
Fig 2

characters belong to a spaced era spanning hundreds of years. In the work Raphael looks at the scenes in a hidden self-portrait within a group of flags of philosophy and science from different ages and cultures. Different, the artist's eagerness to record himself within this intellectual crowd had many interpretations, perhaps the most important of which is that the artist's representation of himself as one of the characters of this imaginary world is his reference to the role of image art in shaping the human mind through the ages, especially in the Western civilization, which was able to visual art whether it was a sculpt or a picture that control European human thought and beliefs by embodying ideological ideas in a visual image according to the artist's self-vision. The artist's inclusion of his self-image within religious subjects was a trend sought by a number among the former artists before Raphael, it is a tradition with a history in the Renaissance period. This is the concept of autofiction nation within the works of Renaissance artists by transcending historical reality and penetration of the boundaries between truth and imagination, the artist has become thanks to autofiction a fictional character and did not disclose his identity or role within the work. In its development on this classic view, the expression of an unknown identity turns into a fictional view of time and space, and it becomes clear that the artist / narrator retreated from showing himself, as it is happening in the classic portraiture.



Fig3

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With the emergence of modernity, the transition to the Cartesian image of the self that linked it with the mind through its interest in knowledge and how to get to the truth through experience and reasoning helped. Psychoanalysis studies also linked the concept of intuition to the ideas of modernity, as these studies led to a new vision of the concept of self in a heterogeneous picture that resulted in the modernist artist formulating the idea of autofiction in many of his works in the light of the aesthetic thought of each art school, the surrealism school had the largest share of the works of autofiction in the period of modernity because it adopted the idea of



Fig 4

imagination in its works, as is in Dali (Fig3). Where Dali sought in the work of (a soft self-portrait with roast pork) to confirm his concepts about the loss of identity and the collapse of borders in the world of imagination by representing himself in the form of an elastic material in a form similar to the iconic form of his liquid watches that does not link them with his true image, except some hints of his features. The Character "the inverted mustache", and the name of the work, , Picasso was 'avant-garde' as usual in the way he deals with the mechanisms of self-imagination as his collection of works reveals the artist and his model (Figure 4) - which he presented in many works throughout his artistic life – Forge



Fig 5

Idiomatic invented by Picasso to express himself and called it the artist in which he re-represented the same subject with different treatments and artistic style, the work always consists of placing a confrontation between the artist Picasso with his idiosyncratic features such as head cover and chin inside the studio with the model during the creation of the artwork, and here the imagination was limited to processing away from the subject as these works were the embodiment of Picasso's ideas about the nature of the creative process, and the methods that help inspiration, the most important of which are the sensory aspects between the artist and the model, that Picasso managed through the idea of intertextuality - which dominated a large number of his series of works, which is a group of Sabine women (Figure 5) of the most famous - to be inspired by the idea of classical artists to include their personal images within the work independent of the artist in time and space as it appeared in one of his treatments for the work of Sabine women by Jacques-Louis David, where the artist represented himself in the middle of the work as if he was a member of the battle in a similar form to his body in the artist and model group, and the situation is not devoid of cynicism from the sensual character that dominated many of the works of classical art, and here was Self-Visualization is an expression of a state of criticism of classical doctrines of legendary themes within the artwork.

The critical vision in the works of autofiction - which was marked by Picasso - was a starting point for this tendency towards the artist's representation of himself within a work that combines fiction and reality, but within a conceptual framework that fits post-modern ideas, with the beginning of the transition towards post-modern philosophies, the self has moved from its nature Pure Cartesian fundamentalism to the idea of the death of this rational modernist self and the glorification of all material sensory and hybrid . Here, the works of body art appeared, so autofiction became a kind of confrontation between the artist and the recipient to announce the



artist's self-vision on the subject being discussed within the work, if after modernity, it is the birth of the recipient under the artist's death, the autofiction confirms that the artwork is the product of a group of quotes from many cultural sources, one of them is the artist Self-Imagination and artist's Death:

"Roland Barthes" (1980-1915) announced the concept of the death of the author in a cultural milieu in which the idea of the endpoints spread to all the categories and ideas of modernity, the most important of which is the concept of centralization) in the second half of the twentieth century, which affected the nature of aesthetic experience whether in the field of creativity, reception, or criticism, where the author's death theory refused to acknowledge the artist's centrality and his ability to influence the recipient's vision because that stops the work by giving it final meaning, making the work subject to the domination of the linguistic heritage that constitutes a reference context for the artwork, and consequently the result was pluralism in the significance of the technical work in his meeting with the recipient away from the artist's intention, so the emergence of the idea of autofiction was an attempt from the artist to appear again, but not in the image of the creator of the work but rather one of his tools to express the idea, which Barth referred to in his late works as he confirms in an article from the effect to the text.



Fig 6

Autofiction in the works of Gerard Garouste and the question of metaphysics. Attendance / religious authority: the autofiction artist has overtaken the traditional practice of autobiography through its separation from itself, and its reflection is fragmented to be received by the recipient from multiple viewing angles. His classic central position, but thanks to the idea of self-imagination, he managed to produce an open artwork, and this openness is achieved through the ambiguity surrounding his existence within the work, the confusion between fiction and the autobiography, and the suggestion of multiple meanings without defining them, as in the works of Gerard Garouste, which belongs to the idea of autofiction, in action (Figure6). The appearance of the artist raises a state of ambiguity among the recipient for his presence in a scene mostly belonging to religious stories due to the existence of a group of sacred books and donkeys which appeared repeatedly in some of its stories, the most famous of which is the donkey of Balaam, who refrained from moving with a celestial inspiration, and perhaps the name of the traffic passage was sure to display for this event, here the question arises about the nature of the artist's presence in the event, is it an alternative to one of the characters of the event or just an eyewitness, and what does the authority signify to show it? What is the nature of his performance? Mostly his performance inside the work seems interactive and not separate like the Renaissance artists, it is listed in the context of the strange identity that appears in most of his works, where he depicted "Garouste" himself worried about his body being wandered, wandering within a mythical world that is not temporal, no place seems scattered perhaps because of a state of lack of the certainty in dogmatic principles which is formulated in scriptures for this. He interrogates the myths and sacred texts that he was keen to introduce to the recipient by writing the name to clarify the nature of the content and the differences between them and the books of myth and fables and the nature of interdependencies between them, this combination of the same contemporary artist and personalities of religious heritage within the same time and place was an attempt to penetrate the sacred one of the great narratives with his strange treatments for the state of his existence,

and here the link between the old narration and the Garouste narration is an attempt to reach the role of religious narratives and the course of their events on the reality of the present, and questioning the religious images that lie within us, through his summoning to the people and ancient places to contain his self-narration to achieve an illogical formulation, questions arise about common concepts in ancient and modern such as the nature of evil, knowledge, time, doubt and how to combine duality such as guilt and innocence, disagreement and punishment.

Reading Garouste's works in light of a post-modern reading, the recipient will realize that his works are a permanent search for what has been hidden within everything that is ruled, therefore, the heart of symbols, denatured forms, and hybridization of the self are its tools for expressing the nature of knowledge within these narratives and the controversy over their interpretation, and thus was the opposition of major references and narratives, and the call for the fall of authority-based narratives - the most important of which is religious or intellectual authority - the real goal of Garouste's treatments, as it led to the state of confusion that he was subjected to and found the only way out is to represent himself within it as one of the treatments of autofiction to raise his questions, here it can be said that Garouste's works represent a deconstructive vision of sacred religious issues that he was able to formulate in the light of the idea of autofiction.

Natalia Mali and summoning the marginal / sacred: The work of autofiction multiplied within the Biennale and its genres varied between photography, including the work of the Russian artist "Natalia Mali" (1971-), an artist known for the works of autofiction, she is the main hero in most of her works, whether they are photographs or video art, the work is classified as one of the works of performance art, which is a 3-part film. Each part represents a situation in which the artist is present and performs differently in an interior containing vocabulary that seems old and some have lost their functional role due to obsolescence, such as old chandeliers lying on the ground, in the first part called the solution (Figure7), the artist seems to be practicing magic rituals by climbing over an old piano to lie on its back and make gestures in the presence of sound effects similar to church music, and the first part ends up directly to the second part, which is called obliterating ablution. Ablution, as the recipient travels to a different side of the first space that looks more forward with dilapidated walls, the natural sources of light from multiple outlets inside the place reflect dim shadows on the surfaces. The floor and the ground, and the light is focused on the artist's location and around it. In this part, the artist performs one ritual: washing her hair using a jar of water. The third, entitled Seven circles, is the seven circles. It combines the two spaces in one field of vision with the same vocabulary, where the artist continues to practice the rituals, placing a white mask on her face, and scattering it precisely as it moves in a circle seven times to escalate the rhythm.



Fig 7



Fig 8



Fig 9

Intertextuality to move reality to the legend: Natalia appears as if in scenes from the dream world, a link between reality and imagination, it seems as if it recounts her own myth, through her presence in the ruins of this unknown place, what leads Natalia is a group of practices that she used to perform in a number of her works, "such as pouring water over her head and spreading white flour in a circular shape, as in the work of min'7'0". This repetition with the multiplicity of works confirms the symbolic importance of these practices in Natalia Mali's work. The accompanying ambiguity for the first part of its title or performance, it may be explained by a case of transition from a real world to another legendary one through the idea of the ascension of the ladder, which is indicative of the idea of transition as it is with the ancient Egyptian in the scenes of the Book of the Dead, where it appears in the first part as if it was preparing to enter in a subconscious state that is mostly spiritual, leading to the idea of imagination and separation.



Fig 10

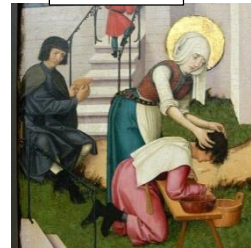


Fig 11

Spirituality in its materialistic image: the concept of purification is embodied in its materialistic image in Christianity, usually in an iconic image representing St.

Verena Coptic in its famous statue (Figure 10) - located on the middle of the Rhine River bridge between Switzerland and Germany - and it holds the water urn and the comb, as well as the icon in Stuttgart that She belongs to the sixteenth century represented by her washing the head of a resident of Europe (Figure 11) and showing the form of peace in the background, perhaps to indicate the idea of moving to a state of purity. Then the phase of obliterating ablution is an attempt by Natalia to reach the spiritual side of the self by practicing the rituals which require a state of purity achieved by bringing the personality of the saint inside the artist's body by performing its role and using its vocabulary to purify the soul.

Reaching to the Absolute: As for the third part, it displays the rituals of the seven courses, which is a religious ritual practiced in the ecclesial mass. It is a symbol of entering into eternity and victory over death or annihilation through life without end as the circle, and perhaps wearing the mask before performing the ritual of the seven circles is a sign of separation from Self-Identity by wearing a collective mind mask as Karl calls it Young to help him get rid of the human identity and move towards eternal identity. The pure white flour scattered on the ground is a reference to Christ in Christian beliefs. The strength of the influence of religion on the individual is nothing but a feeling outside the framework of consciousness that the individual accepts and gives him the character of the absolute. In order for consciousness to give an absolute characteristic to this feeling, he focuses on a subject to become sacred and is called upon to achieve the act of holiness, thus Natalia was able through self-imagination to summon the letters of holiness from the unconscious, and indicated - in light of the confrontation with the self and turning it into a tool for the presentation of the idea - that I found the solution in resorting to the doctrinal vision of the concept of cleansing or ablution to get rid of everything that is material and defiled, and succeeded in reaching eternity through the idea of seven circles through emptying the self of any reference meaning to being Natalia the artist and turned the self into Narrated by the past to enter into a search for solutions to the human self that has been facing the world with all its conflicts, and to reach the concept of truth that has become one of the most obscure and difficult to understand concepts.

Sama Alshaibi and Resisting Speeches of Power / Orientalism:



The third work is by Sama Al-Shaibi (1973-) who participates in the Biennale with a number of large-size photographs, each with a separate title, combined by the idea of her existence as a hero to work in the foreground of the image without any temporal or spatial dimensions except for the nature of Urdu, which indicates its difference to a previous historical stage, as well as the group of surrounding vocabulary that also belongs to cultures. Nineteenth century and early twentieth century.



Fig 12



Fig 13

Contemporary philosopher M. Foucault (1926-1984) the most important founders of body sociology to: ““ The body is historically subjected to the laws of power that was practiced after it was rationally controlled by it. The artist has this idea in her work, where the images show the forms and conditions of the artist in a form that seems in contradiction with the images and paintings of orientalists in the nineteenth

century that were exposed to the female body, which was the most present and significant in these works. However, Sama Al-Shaibi dealt with the idea in the context of a post-modernist feminist vision, it is an image that was based on the colonial tendencies of the Orientalists, as it is an imaginative East that is the product of the power letters produced by Western hegemony to represent another exotic primitive exodus that needs European guardianship to give its intervention in the East an enlightening character. The image



Fig 14



Fig 15

depicts the principle of dissent, as Sama's pictures are isolated from her environment to emphasize the situation in which the woman from whom the character of joy has disappeared, and the common view of contentment and surrender - as in the eye of the cultivation of William Holman Hunt - replaced by the look of challenge and confrontation among the Chibi. For pictures of women in works of orientalists, which are a speech that indicates the state of humiliation and hardship that Arab women suffer in their societies, as the artist emphasized in most of the images of the work, they are exaggerated and have logical Colonial / masculine authority discourse: In this work she uses the poison of her body, its conditions, and expressions as a symbolic sign of the perseverance of this



Fig 16

occupied woman by the West and perhaps by her society as well, because the body remains always pregnant with the effects of power), the female body has been portrayed as the embodiment of the land and east of the country, and its stability in the face of the colonial vision despite the heavy loads in confirmation of the persistence of the peoples of this land, as a critical post-modernist vision that may exceed this direct meaning in expressing the type of letters authority . In light of the ideas of radical feminism, Orientalism may be a representation of masculinity that is always embodied in the framework of culture / reason / technology, while women are represented in nature / beginning / instinct, and according to this vision, the images of women among orientalists are only a reflection of the form of male power in eastern societies, and they are a colonial view also of the female body. The eastern woman in Sama's works is physically and morally exploited by her community. Perhaps the loads were a symbol of authoritarian socio-cultural practices by the male community and the various forms of

exploitation, that made the West take from the woman's body as a way to express a decline. The culture of these societies, as the East is a primitive feminine that must be explored, which Edward Said pointed out. Sama Al-Shaibi's works as an autofiction are distinguished by the presence of the artist as a single in her works, but it is a picture of the macro from the experience listed inside the work. The work of Sama Al-Shaibi is a feminist reading of orientalist paintings revealing the male vision in Eastern societies for the image of women loaded with all kinds of primitiveness and distance from the manifestations of culture to legitimize the forms of colonialism practiced on them, which is consistent with the concept of authority speeches by Michel Foucault. The images of Sama Al-Shaibi are considered to be speeches loaded with the rejection of male authority within the eastern societies that you linked to the imperial authority on the east to reveal on an authoritarian discourse, its presentation may lead to combating incumbent colonial powers within the societies of the East today and in the future.

### Results:

- 1- Autofiction is a philosophical discourse of a critical nature inherent in the means of expression of the artist and seeks to direct the recipient to reach the true self-image of humanity through the same artist.
- 2- The works of autofiction are realized in a narrative representation that usually represents a combination of real or imagined narrative representations, similar or opposite, as in (Jarost's works contradictory to the narratives of the Holy Books and Myths) and (Natalia Mali's work intertwined with the image of purification with the saint) and (work Sama Al-Shaibi intertwined with oriental paintings).
- 3- The concept of truth when autofiction refers to the total truth, which is always absent in recording self-events.
- 4- Autofiction is an experimental concept that frees the writer from any kind of commitment. Rather, the use of imagination imposes on him complete freedom.
- 5- Autofiction seeks to overcome the standard chronology within the artistic work by creating new treatments such as confusion as in the work of Jarost and the use of the narrative present with irrational transfer as in the work of Natalia Mali, intensification and fragmentation as in the work of Sama Al-Shaibi.

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