

## **Between loyalty and breaking free: the transformations of the artistic style of Najla Mohammed Al-Saleem**

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### **Introduction:**

Getting affected and influenced by someone's stylistic model is a phenomenon often seen in the arts domain, whether it is the arts teacher, one of the parents, or even a famous artist who attracted attention of fans, and they tend to follow him/her. It is a phenomenon that often has impact on the next generations, sons and daughters of famous artists often get impacted by the parent artist. When criticized by writers and critics, sons and daughters of artists often find themselves in the dilemma of either continuing to be loyal to the others' models or setting free to establish their own style.

This stylistic influence might be direct or indirect upon them in various levels. It may last for a life time or be temporary, and then the artist develops his own advanced stylistic model, especially in the domain of traditional arts including drawing, visual arts, graphic arts, sculpture. The impact is often evident in the arts' stylistic expression.

### **The research Problem:**

**The research problem is defined by the following two questions:**

- What are the stylistic changes in Najla Al-Saleem's paintings throughout her artistic career in view of getting under the influence of her father's style and her endeavors to break free?

### **Significance of the research:**

**The importance of the research lies in the followings:**

- It is a scientific documentation supported by analysis of Najla Muhammad Al Saleem's career as a contemporary Saudi artist.
- Shedding light on one of the most important local artistic styles in visual arts as an influential factor passed from parents to children.

### **The research objectives:**

**The research objectives are stated as follows:**

- To investigate the artistic style transformations of the Saudi artist, Najla Al-Saleem, as the daughter of an artist, and her endeavors ranging from being loyal to her father's style or establishing her own.
- Reveal the role of the challenge faced by Najla Al-Saleem to overcome the influence of an artistic style in the creative process.

**Research Methodology:**

The research applied the descriptive-analytical approach onto the arts works produced by the artist Najla Muhammad Al-Saleem, employing research tools, namely observation and unstructured interviews, while analyzing the intellectual aspects and artistic style in each one of her artistic collections.

**Research limits:**

The research is limited to studying and analyzing the visual arts collection of the Saudi Artists Najla Muhammad Al-Saleem during the period 2008-2020.

**The Theoretical Framework:****The artistic style:**

The artistic style is one of the components of any artistic work. On one hand, the creative process includes intellectual aspects such as the artist's stylistic specificity, how he employs his tools while expressing his concepts, opinions and references of encoding systems, and on the other hand, material aspects, such as the artistic medium that he chooses and his own technique in dealing with his tools.

The artistic style ranges from being a pattern such as the Renaissance art or Victorian pattern; in addition to fashions that are associated with religions, such as Islam or Buddhism, and might also be characteristic and individualistic. As the name indicates it is associated with the individual, his personal dispositions, tendencies and abilities that give him the trait distinguishes him from others in a unique style with certain characteristics that differentiate him from others.

**Shaping the artistic style of Najla Al-Saleem:**

Being the eldest daughter of Al-Saleem, Najla grew up so close to her father. She used to sit with him in his studio, so she grew up saturated with arts, she got to know colors, brush, painting, and the relationship that build up between the artist and his environment. Al-Saleem was the source of inspiration for his daughter since her first years of life, and she was with him since he was establishing his arts vision, the "horizonism" that emerged from deep reflections on the desert horizon, with visual field stretching endlessly, the rhythms interplay of surfaces, mountains, and sky with colorful sights at dawn and sunset. It is the style of "desert arts", as defined by Al-Saleem, where the theme is based upon the horizon line extending left and right giving an infinite line to such an extent that makes you anticipate the rest of the subject beyond the frames. In the middle of the horizon between the two frames lies the highest concentration, to highlight the important elements of the theme. Although Al-Saleem may use different materials, the structural bases remain the same.

Najla was able to learn the foundations of this style directly from her father, especially in mixing oil paints and using the knife to distribute color on the painting. The influence of "Horizonism" has extended widely, and can be seen in the arts works of several Saudi artists.

**Analytical framework:**

At the beginning of her career, due to family and official work obligations, Najla couldn't spare enough time for her arts works in order to establish her own artistic style, so her participations in collective exhibitions were an array of various styles. Najla was challenged by critics describing her work as a copy of her father's in terms of formation, shape, and artistic themes, however after few years she commenced establishing her own style, arranging her own art exhibitions. Her artworks "lies under psychological effects, but the process of manifesting the dazzling element remains existing in the paintings, often switching the positions of lines or colors from one place to another, in addition to models of various elements", as quoted by critic Al-Obaidi 2012.

**Samples of artworks:**

Najla participated in collective art exhibitions during 2008 -2011, presenting vertical formations paintings, although they don't represent horizonism, but rather converges on the technique of coloring, using various color hue ranging from dark in the middle around the main formation. Most often related to human personification, slightly beyond the environment themes. Early 2012 Najla commenced drawing paintings through the technique of manipulating color contrast, some of them from the environment. In the same year she arranged her own art exhibitions in Dubai. This exhibition displayed various sizes 16 paintings portraying the covered Saudi woman.

Her second personal art exhibition was held inside KSA, Ad Diriyah, under the title Shijar "Quarrel", it included 20 different sizes paintings expressing the state of quarrel that was transformed by Najla into positive quarrel. In this collection Najla tried acrylic colors, enabling her to practice new techniques, that was not known in her previous works, pouring and drawing out colors on canvas surface, and then complete the work using the brush to draw trees' branches and trunks.

In 2014 Najla made two paintings on the two holy Mosques. Deriving from her father could be easily notable in Al Kaba painting, especially in shaping the formal component items and coloring group, green and yellow, and even in the size of the painting.

Najla also made a painting named Umouma (motherhood) presenting a woman holding her child. Here similarity is notable with her father's painting bearing the same name, made in the same semi-abstract style, but with Horizonism coloring style.

In 2016 Najla presented two art collections, one of them was exhibited in a collective exhibition under the name Houwa "Eve" with other Gulf States women artists.

**Exhibition Rooh Al-Madinah (City Spirit)**

Najla held her third exhibition in Riyadh, Gallery Nayla where she presented 25 acrylic colors various sizes paintings. She tried to express her feeling towards the cement city and to revive the city spirit, as she thinks that such soul is more important than its high buildings and entertainment facilities, as it revealed aesthetics that otherwise wouldn't be seen by naked eye.

**Exhibition Rooh Al-Diriyah (Ad Diriyah Spirit)**

Among other artists, Najla was selected to establish personal exhibitions within the scope of official tourism activities in Ad Diriyah province. This was her fourth exhibition named Rooh

Ad Diriyah. She presented 14 paintings displaying Najdi popular clay made houses with their doors and balconies.

### **Research Findings:**

Through theoretical and analytical study and investigation on the transformations of the artistic style of the artist Najla Al-Saleem, the research concluded to a number of results to answer the research question, what are the style changes in Najla Al-Saleem's paintings throughout her artistic career that started with the influence of her father's style on her artworks and her endeavors to break free and establish her own style?

### **The findings are as follows:**

- As an educated and insightful Saudi woman, Najla Al-Saleem interacts with the surrounding environment and society, uses her expressive language as an independent artist exploiting the rhythm of color and the overlap of shapes in a contemporary painting reflecting an individual styles repeated throughout her art collections.
- Influenced by her father, Najla's arts works reflects inspiration from her father's ideas depicting and expressing the environment in his arts works, as well as his techniques and methods in carrying out most of the works. This was evident in the beginnings of her artistic career and later faded out over the years.
- The transformation of the artistic style was evident in Najla Al-Saleem's paintings, and it can be felt through the emergence of "horizonism" in her arts works, then quitting, moving towards creation, and modernization. Her works still reflect such impact, and she continues to practice more diverse artistic styles.
- Falling under stylistic influence was not a hindrance to Najla Al-Saleem, because she possesses the academic knowledge and technical tools that enabled her to work with intellectual and technical independence; through which she developed her works and presented artistic collections that reflect this.
- Najla Al-Saleem's artistic topics ranged mainly between the environment and society, as she relied on the use of oil colors more intensely than any other material, as it gives her the material and moral sense of convergence with her father.

### **Recommendations:**

Through the findings of the research, a number of recommendations could be made that contribute to the development of Saudi visual arts field of study as follows: -

- In order to reveal the stylistic influences and transformations in Saudi visual arts, it is required to carry out more "case study" research in the field of Saudi visual arts, to be applied on contemporary Saudi artists, of different artistic generations, both women and men.
- Study artistic styles, being a manifestation of creativity and distinction between artists, to enrich and contribute to the development of visual arts' academic teaching.
- In view of scarce scientific literature published on the cultural and historical documentation on Saudi artists, it is required to perform and publish more researches and literature.

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