

Intellectual content of portraying women in contemporary murals

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Abstract:

Women are a basic pillar in society and they are the source of life. Throughout history, women have been a reflection of the nature of the society in which they live in, and a criterion of the extent of progressive or reactionary ideas prevailing at a particular time. Throughout the ages, arts were the most important means of expressing the values prevailing in societies. The woman was and still is an inspiration to the artist and a symbol of beauty, motherhood, fertility, giving and dignity, thus forming a wide field of study and research as a beautiful and expressive model that contains intellectual and symbolic artistic values that the artist uses to express what the subjective topics are and convey his feelings to the recipient.

Every civilization has been concerned with how to present the image of the woman that she represents to become a symbolic sign and icon of that civilization or culture, as if it crystallizes in the features and details of women all the meanings and connotations of civilizations, their culture and their arts. The position of women is evident in the arts of ancient civilizations, as they appeared in the mural painting in the most beautiful, spiritual and ideal forms, in multiple images, namely the queen, the princess, the gods, the mother and other forms of expression of her functions in society throughout history.

Since the twentieth century, artistic movements have emerged in a more liberal way, in rebellion against the inherited aesthetic formulas and traditional models that represent women to liberate art from its idealistic tendencies.

In our current era, women are considered one of the most important visual elements in the art of mural painting, which contribute to illuminating the most important problems that women suffer from, developing the artistic sense of the recipient, and clarifying women's issues to the society. Where this research deals with a study of the intellectual content of the form of women as a formative element in models of murals that depicted women in ancient civilizations and presented the most important contemporary models that depicted women and expressed through them various topics, and how the design philosophy of contemporary artists differed in the expression of women, whether it was intellectual – content that are presented directly or symbolic content that provides a specific message to the recipient or defends and honors women's rights. The research also presents the practical experience of the researcher and theorizing the art exhibition, which was entitled (Women ... and a Contemporary Mosaic Vision) through the work of proposed designs for implementation in the university campus for expatriate students in Alexandria.

Key words:

Women - Intellectual content – Mural painting

Research problem

1- What is the benefit from studying the plastic solutions of women as a plastic element over the different eras through understanding the intellectual content of the subjects of mural painting across different civilizations?

2- How to reach innovative plastic treatments for women as a contemporary plastic element that fits with the requirements of the times?

Research importance

The importance of the research is determined in showing the intellectual content of mural painting through women as a distinctive formative element, and highlighting the impact of mural painting in emphasizing the role of women in society, by presenting the applied experience of the study in question.

Research aims

- Presenting some models of murals from ancient civilizations that depict women, and monitoring the most important contemporary murals that depict women as a formative element, and studying their intellectual content that they present on the issues of society and women and their support.
- Presenting the practical experience of the researcher who relies on the woman's form as a formative element to provide messages of support and honor to the expatriate students from Alexandria University.

Research Methodology

The research follows the descriptive approach and the applied approach to the practical experience of the researcher.

Introduction

God honored the woman and created a distinguished position for her in all heavenly religions, so she had a major role in the reconstruction of life on earth and the rise of ancient civilizations in Egypt and the whole world.

Since the beginning of creation, women have played an important role in life, which made them one of the most important elements that artists have dealt with in their works throughout the ages. She is the symbol of life and its source, and she is the most important example among all the elements of nature, and because she has multiple roles, the method of dealing with her in arts varied according to the role she plays. In mythology, she is a goddess, and in life she is a mother, wife and daughter, a queen or a maidservant, and she is a symbol of femininity. Societies' view of women has differed throughout the ages, sometimes the man is everything and the woman is nothing but a source for preserving the gender, and sometimes she takes a social status that is no less than that of the man, and this appeared through her plastic representation of different size for the man, sometimes they are of equal size and at other times the size of the man was greater than her, and the size of the woman was rarely more than the size of the man.

Mural painting derives its great importance from the topics it presents and the intellectual content that emanates from it with ideological or intellectual content, and since the function of

architectural buildings in the modern era has multiplied, this has necessitated a multiplicity of mural painting topics. Contemporary artists adopted the idea of spreading plastic awareness in the daily life of the ordinary citizen through mural painting in order to raise the public taste, intellectual and cultural awareness and artistic sense of the public regarding industrial and technological progress.

Women have occupied a large part of the mural work throughout the ages, which depends on recording the culture of the age and intellectual and social contents. In our present time, many artists are keen to express women's different issues, hopes, aspirations and problems through their mural works, which were characterized by the sincerity of their creative message, and due to different methods and techniques of these artists as they have varied artistic visions of the image of women and their roles, which appeared in the starring role of the artistic formations in their works.

The portrayal of women as a formative element, whether realistic or symbolic in mural painting, is characterized by a great deal of sensitivity because it reflects to us the system of ideas and sensory, spiritual, artistic and aesthetic values in every civilization as a message to man and society.

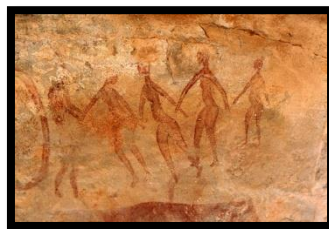
The form of a woman as a formative singular in mural painting does not have a single appearance. Every civilization and every artist have added to it within their artistic and plastic creations. Some of them borrow the shape of the face or body from the visual and real world, but use it in artistic work with concepts different from the familiar, and some of them use the form of a woman as a symbol or an abstract form, and some of them achieve the overlap between fantasy and reality.

About the depiction of women in murals in ancient civilizations

The forms and images of women in mural painting vary throughout the ages, so we find the mother, sister, or wife. It also depicted the working woman or the housewife. We also see her in the image of the queen, the princess, the leader and the mistress. Some civilizations portrayed her in the image of the gods, the priestess, the nun, the saint, the fairy, the angel, and the witch in myths. This difference occurs according to the intellectual content presented by the murals in each of the ancient civilizations.

Prehistoric age

The image of the woman began to appear on walls of caves, as we can see in the Tassili Cave (Fig. 1), which dates back to 30000 BC. It shows scenes from everyday life. Therefore, there was no specific intellectual content provided by cave murals in that period, other than the expression of human feelings and fears.



(Fig. 1) Detailed of women painting - Tassili Cave – Algeria

Ancient Egyptian civilization

Where the Egyptian woman had a high position in the ancient Egyptian society as the only partner of the man in his religious and worldly life according to the theory of creation and the cosmogony found in the pharaonic religious principles, in terms of full legal equality and the man's association with the woman for the first time in the sacred bond and his participation in tasks of daily life

The position of women in ancient Egyptian art appears almost equal to that of men, as the intellectual implications of murals show the respect of the ancient Egyptians for women, as in (Fig. 2), which shows Isis embracing Ramses III and they are of equal size.



(Fig. 2) Detailed mural in the tomb of Prince Amon-her-khepeshef.. It depicts the goddess Isis embracing Ramses III - 12th century BC.

Aegean Islands

The Aegean artist excelled in depicting women, body shape, movement, details of clothes and hair, and showing the age differences between the forms of women, where the importance of women in Aegean society is clear, which has reached the level of priestesses.

In (Figure 3), we see three women on a blue background. The women wear luxurious, open-breasted costumes in the Minoan style, as well as delicate necklaces and bracelets, in addition to their distinctive hairstyles. Their three faces were distinguished by a gentle smile, one of them looking in the opposite direction to the other two women. Some scholars have interpreted this scene as a depiction of three priestesses or goddesses, and others have indicated that they are merely women of high standing in Minoan society. In both cases, it is clear from the content of the figure the extent to which women are respected and revered in the arts of the Aegean islands and the extent of attention to the details of the aesthetics of the woman's form.



(Fig. 3) Depiction of women on a blue background - Knossos Palace - 15th century BC.

Coptic art

Coptic art is considered a part of Egypt's cultural identity and an important chapter of its history and heritage, with all its visual vocabulary inspired by the society and culture prevailing in it. Every culture complied her with the image closest to it, and the depiction of the Lady Mary always included religious messages, as we see in (Fig. 4).



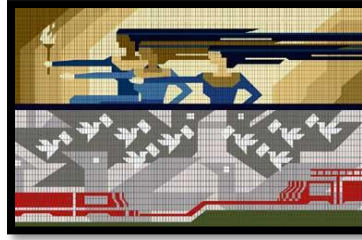
(Fig. 4) Mural of Sheikh Ubadah - Minya – Egypt

The depiction of women in contemporary murals

Since the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, women have attended in literature and arts, in a way that highlights their capabilities as an important presenter and partner in all walks of life. This presence transcends the classic view that focuses on women as a symbol of fertility, growth and love, in a more serene and lively way, it goes beyond the stereotypical view to emphasize its main position in the advancement of society and development. Where women are a major element of concern to contemporary artists, women occupied a large part of their mural works, which resulted in a multiplicity of artistic treatments of the form of women as a result of the different nature of societies and artists' methods to highlight the intrinsic value and intellectual contents of their subjects that use women as a formative element to support and honor women's issues. Each artist has his own mark through his philosophy of design, plastic and color treatment methods, building composition and his use of the woman's form, whether directly or indirectly.

The development that took place in the image of women in contemporary murals was to document their role in society and to communicate civilized and cultural messages through the intellectual content of the murals to bear the essence of women, their aspirations and problems. Women have always symbolized family, motherhood, society, revolution, dignity and steadfastness.

Many artists portrayed women to express social and political issues and to present content that symbolizes freedom, giving, land and fertility. New plastic treatments appeared that replaced the traditional formulas of the form of women in a contemporary style that contributed to the consolidation of new aesthetic concepts far from ideal, as we will see in the following models. In **Egypt**, we find the mural of the College of Girls' station; the mural was designed by the artist Dr. Mohamed Mekkawi, the former dean of the College of Fine Arts in Zamalek, and it was implemented in one of the metro stations. This station serves the students of the Girls' College, Ain Shams University and the neighboring residential and commercial areas (Figure 5). Therefore, the design philosophy relied on presenting a message that includes emphasizing that women are representing half of the society and she is the mother who prepares the next generation with its leaders. It was necessary to look at her from a perspective that confirms her position and her quest to break the chains of backwardness and ignorance while retaining her dignity and orientalism. The artist symbolized this by drawing Egyptian women wearing Egyptian clothes, one of them carrying the torch of freedom and science, piercing all the barriers of backwardness and ignorance represented by sharp flats with broken lines, moving forward with strength and reluctance to a bright future.



(Fig. 5) Girls' College Station mural - artist Mohamed Makkawy

Examples of murals that include a message to honor women are a large mural on the facade of a building in **Beirut**, 25 meters long and 8 meters wide (Fig. 6), where the face of the writer Emily Nasrallah and the plastic painter Huguet Callan, both of whom are at an advanced age, have their faces filled with wrinkles.

The mural was implemented within the framework of a project in which a group of Lebanese organizations and associations participate to provide an important intellectual content about the role and effectiveness of women in society. The philosophy of the mural's design depends on the selection of women who played roles worthy of celebration, and a reminder of their importance, so the artist chose two contemporary names, Emily Nasrallah and Huguet Callan, who passed away recently, and their achievements should be highlighted.



(Fig. 6) Mural (I am a story) by the artist Rola Abdo – Beirut

In **Jordan**, a group of artists in the Jordanian capital, Amman, beautified the city's walls with murals, providing implicit messages about empowering women in the region, and combating the prevailing stereotypes of them.

One of the most important of these murals (Women Overcoming Challenges) in Zarqa, Jordan (Fig. 7). This huge mural depicts a woman in an abstract manner in a self-defense position with a bird above her head. The content of the mural aims to raise citizens' awareness about social issues to combat violence against women.



(Fig. 7) A mural of women transcends challenges - Jordan

In **United States of America**, there are a number of murals in which women play the heroic role to provide a symbolic content or to express directly women's issues. One of the most important of these murals is the "Peace Teacher" mural (Fig. 8), which was painted in 1994 by seven mural artists, about 100 volunteers, on the facades of the women's building, which provides services and cares for immigrant women or those who have been subjected to oppression and violence. It is one of the largest and most famous murals in San Francisco, and is a testament to the courageous contributions of women throughout history and around the world.

The diversity of women's forms and personalities provides implicit messages calling for love and peace, and the rejection of violence and racism that women face.



(Fig. 8) The Peace Teacher mural - San Francisco - United States of America

The mural of American power by the artist Tristan Eaton (fig. 9) in Miami, who relies in his designs on a mixture of characters, drawings, letters and slogans. On the colors and symbols of the American flag, so that the content of this mural serves as a tribute to the strong women in this country who face violence and injustice in the society.



(Fig. 9) The mural of American power by the artist Tristan Eaton – USA

In **Ukraine** in October 2010, the artist Remed was invited to make a mural for the 1st Mural Art Festival in Ukraine, on an area (9 x 17 m). The artist was inspired by the idea of his design from two of the most important symbols of the city (Fig. 10). The first was a woman standing in front of a boat, and behind her were the founders of the city of Kiev. The second statue is called Motherland, which is a huge woman holding a shield and putting her sword in the air. The philosophy of the design of this mural was to provide a content symbolizing resistance and strength, so the artist painted a woman on a boat (Fig. 11), moving through waves of the past and the present towards the future, to spread the message of resistance, strength and peace.



(Fig. 10) Two of the most important statues in Ukraine (Fig. 11) A mural of a woman on a boat by the artist Remed

In **Morocco**, we find many large murals of a number of international and local artists from Morocco to emphasize the role of art in public places, turning entire cities into open exhibitions. Notable among these are the Jedar Festival, an annual gathering of dozens of international and Moroccan artists in Rabat, and the Sbagha Bagha Casablanca Street Art Festival, both organized by the same non-profit organization, EAC - L'Boulevard, which supports music, contemporary arts, and urban culture in Morocco. The walls of Casablanca have been decorated with giant murals whose intellectual content depends on different feminist themes, with the participation of local and international artists who tried to convey different messages by portraying women of different generations as we will see in the following murals, including (Fig. 12) a mural whose design depends on a group of portraits of women of different ages and shapes to symbolize the ability and endurance of women to transcend time and crises. In (Fig. 13) a mural, the artist was inspired by a woman in the street wearing a red veil. The color group depends on the diversity and contrast of colors in addition to the reflection of the woman's form, which symbolizes the amount of contradictions and pressures that women face in their daily lives.



(Fig. 12, 13) of the murals of the Jedar Festival, which depend on women as an element of plasticity – Morocco

The researcher's practical experience

An introduction

A woman in Arab societies in general suffer from many problems and pressures, starting with a negative view of their role in society, despite being the mother, the working woman, the housewife, the teacher and the doctor, despite her capabilities, she is sometimes even pushed to leave important stages of education and work. Hence, the choice of the University City for the expatriate students in Alexandria was to implement the mural proposal, which relies on the image of women to support the female students and emphasize their role in society and the need to adhere to science and work to face their daily problems. The woman in mural painting is

considered an artistic visual component of the most important sources of inspiration for artistic work which has the ability to express cultural heritage and social and human values.

Philosophy of design and intellectual content of the experience

In this exhibition, I present designs with a contemporary vision that can be implemented using mural painting techniques, with the aim of adding an aesthetic touch to the gardens of the University City for expatriate students in Alexandria, and turning them into a permanent exhibition. Where the University City for female students consists of 6 residential buildings, the approximate capacity of one building is 400 female students. It was taken into account when designing the city that the spaces are filled with vast areas of green spaces coordinated between the corridors and the city's courtyard, between and around the buildings, in order to instill a spirit of optimism, and then the ability to achieve the students' academic achievement, and here the idea of the project centered around the exhibition was manifested, which is Adding plastic and aesthetic solutions to these spaces with works of mural painting, to raise the general taste of the students and develop artistic and cultural awareness towards their role in building the future of society, also as a kind of psychological support for them through art.

The shape of the surface bearing the proposed mural works in this experiment depends on the element of the circle, which symbolizes continuity and eternity associated with the role of women and their ability to give and their importance to the continuation of life.

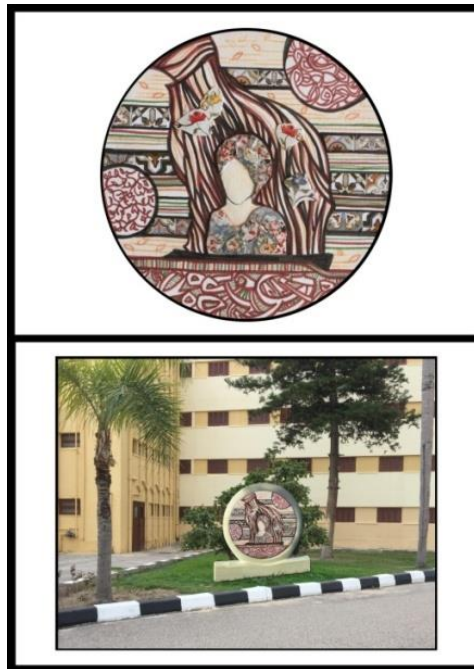
The works of the exhibition have taken the woman as a main focus for the plastic sentences in these designs, as she is the role model, she may be the mother, the sister, or the teacher. A woman is an expatriate girl who left her family and her hometown in search of knowledge. She went out to face the difficulties of life on her own, carrying within her femininity, her faith, the history and heritage of her country.

Therefore, the plastic vocabulary of the designs was inspired by flowers and plants with their delicate colors, the Arabic letters as a symbol of the Arab identity and the importance of adhering to it, and some symbols and motifs from the Coptic and Islamic arts and from the folklore in a harmony and rhythm in which the essence of the proposed site and its environmental and functional character was taken into account.

The design philosophy is based on presenting messages to the recipient through the intellectual content that is represented in the struggle of women in our time between adherence to authenticity, values and identity, between urbanization and aspiration for the future, the pressures of society, and being affected by technology and globalization. And that is through portraying women as a symbol of endless aesthetic values and depicting their essential features and expressing their femininity and beauty through the forms of roses and plants in harmonious tones, with the woman being placed in the center of the circle to symbolize that she is the center of the universe and the origin of life, in artistic treatments that were addressed in a symbolic style that includes abstract plastic treatments. She enjoys the richness of form and color, but with silent faces without features, so that every woman sees herself in the situation that she feels close to her soul and her personality, in an attempt to embody moral beauty, which is expressed in the expression of core values and different abstract emotional states such as happiness, calm, ecstasy, maturity, fun, departure, looking forward to the future and contemplating reality. The decorative units used in designs inspired by the Egyptian heritage symbolize originality and

adherence to Egyptian customs, traditions, values and identity, while the birds symbolize women's aspiration and hopes for the future, freedom, peace and reconciliation with oneself.

Some suggested designs that can be visualized on the site



(Fig. 14) The design depicts a girl in the center of the circle resting on a base of horizontal lines and a formation in Arabic letters that symbolize originality and identity. Behind them are lines that move in flexibility as if they were rain, and in the background are horizontal lines to achieve balance in the design with Islamic and Coptic motifs inside.



(Fig. 15) The design depicts a girl in the center of the circle within a frame crowned with foliage, and at the base of the design are motifs from the Egyptian heritage and an interweaving of plant branches and flowers, which tend towards the shape of the girl. In the background on both sides, there are irregular geometric shapes of decoration, and in the background there are flowers and leaves.



(Fig. 16) The design depicts a woman in a side position against a background of interwoven leaves and looking towards a bird. At the base of the design is a formation of Arabic letters intertwined with the intertwining of Islamic motifs and the lotus flower from the ancient Egyptian civilization as a symbol of adherence to the Egyptian identity.

Implementation technique

The mosaic technique was chosen for implementation with a variety of materials of ceramics and azmaldo to be suitable for weather resistance in Alexandria, with its suitability for ease of formation to achieve the design and the color group chosen to suit the design philosophy and to achieve organic unity with the environment surrounding the work. The researcher also implemented parts of the designs as proposals for implementation using mosaic technology, as we can see in the following figures.





Figures (17 - 20) are details executed by mosaic technique from the designs proposed by the researcher

Research results

- Women were an essential component of mural painting in ancient civilizations.
- The artistic treatments of the woman's form varied in the history of mural painting in ancient civilizations, according to the artistic style of each civilization.
- The intellectual content presented by murals depicting women in ancient civilizations was often for a religious, funeral, or ritual purpose, or to depict scenes from daily life.
- Women have an important and clear role as an expressive and inspiring plastic element in the art of mural painting in ancient civilizations and in our contemporary time.
- Contemporary murals provide many intellectual implications through depicting women to express community issues in general or women's issues in particular, or in honor of women and in appreciation of their continuous giving.
- The image and form of women in contemporary murals vary according to each artist's style, the intellectual content he wishes to express, and the message he presents to the recipient.
- Depicting women with various plastic methods and treatments has the ability to express the intellectual contents of artists and deliver specific messages to the recipient through symbolic and realistic connotations and vocabulary.
- The plastic solutions and treatments for the shape of women in contemporary murals are characterized by innovation and diversity.

Recommendations

- The necessity of carrying out cosmetic mural works related to women in care homes, the role of expatriates, and institutions supporting women's rights as a kind of psychological support for them.
- Paying more attention to supporting and honoring women's issues through mural painting in different countries, especially third world countries, because art has the ability to influence souls and minds.
- Encouraging art students to express, through women, various intellectual topics and contents, and employing them as an expressive and inspiring plastic element in a variety of artistic ways.
- Urging mural artists to pay attention to the intellectual content they present in their works, as mural painting has the ability to deliver specific messages to a large number of the receiving audience and raise the public's taste.

- The need for art institutions to support mural artists and give them more opportunity to present mural works with an intellectual content on women and community issues.

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