

Woman in the eyes of orientalists**Dr. Ali Taha Omar****Coordinator for the restoration sector at The Italian-Egyptian Center for Restoration and Archaeology CIERA, Egypt**alitahaomar@hotmail.com**Woman in the eyes of Orientalists****Dr. Ali Taha Omar,****Coordinator for the restoration sector at The Italian-Egyptian Center for Restoration and Archaeology CIERA, Egypt**alitahaomar@hotmail.com**Abstract:**

Antoine Galan (1646 - 1715 AD), the French Orientalist had translated the book "One Thousand and One Nights" in 1704 to the French, and it was the first translation of this book in twelve volumes. This translation had led to open the eyes of the West to the East, and he was followed by the English orientalist **Edward William Lane (1801-1876 AD)** by his translation to the same book to English from 1838 to 1840, and then began the great interest in the East. The eastern woman had occupied the attention of the Orientalists since the beginning of the Western colonial conquest to the East, Westerners had a passion for two themes: the veil (**hijab**) and the **harem**. The veil (**hijab**) and the lack of deal of the Arabian women with the Orientalists made it difficult for seeing the Arabian woman, there was also her own world that was difficult to break into, it was the enclosed space in their houses controlled very well by the authority of men, also the Islamic architecture, and the architect attention to not to allow woman to be seen and must have her privacy, so we find broken doorways, **haramlek**, and **mashrabiyya** made it impossible to see the Arabian woman. This was the reason for the headstrong of the orientalist imagination, and hinting of exotic experiences, and sensuality with veiled women, so we see them obsessed with painting the women in their bedrooms in intimate and sexual positions, although many of them had not seen the eastern woman and never entered her bedroom. Comparing the paintings of the western woman, she was always painted busy in cooking, embroidery, knitting or anything else, in the same time, the Eastern woman appears in her bedroom in intimate and sexual positions or putting make up while she was waiting for the man, or appears in the slave market completely naked and for sale, she looked like had no role in society only that. And we find the paintings that show the eastern woman in the market or the street, that show the eastern woman in his nature, without any make up, with a dress that cover all his body even she cover her head, we can see the veneration and the respect of the eastern woman, and that can give an evidence of the lying paintings of these orientalists who used their imagination to describe the eastern woman in her bedroom. **Lady Evelyn Cobbold**, the first English lady that performed Hajj who is died in 1964 said when Islam came, brought back to the woman her freedom, Islam makes her a partner with the man, makes her dividing everything with him in life, and if the man is tired of working to earn what is necessary to live, also the woman is working for him at home, and Allah orders that the woman is like the man, even the man has to do more. By these words, **Lady Evelyn Cobbold** explained what's the real role of the eastern woman in society.

The East was, and still is, carrying within it many sources of inspiration for the West, which were embodied in the works of European artists. They came with different goals and visions, and the trend of “**Orientalism**” became a historical reality that demonstrates the extent of the influence of the magic of the East on Western and Arab art, both past and modern. There is no doubt that the “woman”, with her features and life, occupied the first place in the topics of the works of the “Orientalists”, until she became a symbol of life in the East. The image of the Eastern woman was formed in the minds of Western society through the spread of this movement artistically, and it sparked controversy around it and differed points of view.

The concept of "Orientalism" in art:

“**Orientalism**” as a term is the West's view of the East. This is the West, which saw the East as a model in philosophy, art, literature, poetry, science, and history since the ninth century AD, but during the colonial era and its campaigns, it would not see the East in the same image, but rather through a bird's-eye view that came to embody the reality of the West's vision of the East until today. Let us know that the image of The East prevalent in Western thought was dependent on the influences and ideas of Orientalism, and it is this image around which much controversy revolves. We find, for example, the book (**Orientalist Painters and Travelers**), published in 1993 by the English historian **Lynne Thornton**, that the camel, which became an indication of the nomadism of the East, is a common denominator in a large number of paintings, imprinting in the Western mind those sticky code signs that we still suffer from. Because of the difficulty of erasing or changing it, thus consolidating the idea of refusing to engage in the field of human civilization and the impossibility of debating others. However, despite this, we cannot neglect the positive output of the Orientalists and the great inheritance they provided, and we cannot be certain that the situation was entirely evil. There are artists who made their works a record of the features of the historical East, with its architecture, antiquities, and arts. They made this legacy an illustrated document and an irreplaceable treasure. Rather, there are always those human achievements that, although they formed the structure of the Western collective mind and contributed to that relative gap between the East and the West, they nevertheless called on the East to confront the truth, and the necessity of obtaining that knowledge that the West built on the basis of superiority over the essence and truth of the East, and from Then it prompted the people of the East to read itself and revive its true heritage realistically and rationally. (**Ahmed Fouad Selim; 2008**)

Photographs, literature, travelers' writings, and artistic paintings were major factors in producing what is called the emergence of (Orientalism), and on the basis of them, the West issued its vision of the East and its features of the world and how it is another, “different” world. It was mentioned in the book of the Palestinian thinker, **Edward Said. (1935 - 2003 AD)** in his book on (Orientalism), which was published in 1978 AD, which means that the East, for the West, is a place for the rich colonies that Europe occupied, the source of its civilizations and languages, and its civilizational competitor, and represents the other and lower side of culture with images that carry many negative things, Unfortunately, these images still persist, not only in the world of politics, but in art and culture, which depict the East and the Arabs as representing nothing but naivety and barbarism, and women as exposed to sex and pleasures. In light of **Edward Said's** analysis of Orientalism, the Western description in arts and cultural studies of the East was closer to the ideological distortion consistent with the global political

system in Europe during the nineteenth century AD and after it, and perhaps before it as well, as it attributed everything that was positive in this reality. Orientalism is for the West and everything negative in it is for the East. In light of this, the West has the right to its superiority and the necessity of its sovereignty over the East. He saw that the Orientalist movement was the reason for this gap between the East and the West. (Shaker Abdel Hamid, et al., 2020)

As for the Orientalist tendency in art, as the English political scientist **Timothy Mitchell (1955)** points out, it was not only formed through various studies of the East, literature, and its romantic novels, but also through art and culture, and the display of imagined images of the East over and over again in museums and exhibition halls. Through Western visions, they were carefully organized to evoke in the viewer many meanings related to history, and also to transform the viewer into subjects of visual and sensory pleasure. Here came the role of the works of the Orientalists, and the image of the East became more concentrated through their paintings. These artists belong to different nationalities, most of them French or English. We see in their works the finest details of place and time, and scenes of houses inside and outside them, villages, markets, animals, trade, mosques, deserts, antiquities, the Nile, women, slave girls, and the nomadic men, and other aspects to depict the lifestyle of the East.

As for the people of the country, and women in particular, the works of the Orientalists turned into subjects rather than into living souls and feelings. Women appear as objects of pleasure, sex, or pleasure only, with pale, rigid looks on their faces towards the unknown, despite the beauty of their physical features, the details of their clothes, their faces, and the features of life around them. Thus, if men's topics were mentioned, they were characterized by nomadism, but when we moved to women's topics, the dominant idea was scenes of pleasure, bathing rituals, dancing, and female slaves or harems that included wives, daughters, and female courtiers, and the king's or prince's maids and his 'wives and daughters' maids - often appearing in a nude or semi-nude image. Naked, sometimes with her back to the world and sometimes surrounded by curtains and extravagance, she turns her gaze forward in a stilted, contrived gesture like most of the scenes of women that appear in the works of Orientalists, such as the painting "**The Grand Odalisque**" by the French artist "**Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres**" (1780 - 1867 AD) or in the oriental version. "**Fátima**", which is considered the most famous work in the history of depicting Eastern women in the history of Western art and its symbolism in depicting the features of Eastern women perhaps until now.

We find in the book of historian **Caroline Juler**, published in 1994 under the title (**Orientalists of the Italian School**), that it included approximately 145 works by Italian artists, including about 50 or more paintings that present the Eastern woman to us as a physical project for the pleasure of men, and there is no pleasure for her more than the pleasure of pleasing a man. (Ahmed Fouad Selim; 2008)

Therefore, we find that for Orientalist artists, women were nothing but a symbol of joy and excessive sex. The Western artist wanted to show all the hidden places, as every hidden thing was exciting for them, so images of naked women were repeated in the halls of the harem, the slave and slave markets, in the bathhouses, and in the dance halls. A recurring pattern to consolidate that semantic image and turn it into a symbol in itself, an isolated object with limited concepts that carries nothing but excitement. Women were sometimes associated with the black slave or the black slave girl, as we see in the painting (**Moroccan Bath**) by the French artist **Jean Léone Gérôme (1824 - 1904 AD)**, which is also a recurring theme that reinforced some

racist and sexist notions about the difference of dark skin. And whiteness in the Western concept, which had symbolic connotations of the white man's power over the East, as well as the man's power over women. It revealed an assumption and controversy of another kind that has become strongly prevalent in Eastern thought until now. Women have no role except to be submissive, subordinate and a target for pleasure only for men.

The East has exercised its temptation and influence on Western artists for centuries, but the most important of these centuries in terms of influence is the nineteenth century, when it reached the point of madness, and travel to it became more than ever before, especially since means of travel such as the ship and the railway have greatly facilitated the task, as the distance between east and west are only three days apart.

Most of the nineteenth-century Orientalist artists who did not leave their homelands resorted to repeated stereotypical depictions of the harem. Indeed, most of the paintings present Eastern women free from moral restrictions, by depicting them naked, stripped of the clothes that cover them, or wearing clothing that carries sexual connotations. It is as if the East is a paradise for love, and a place where there is sexual freedom that is not available in the West.

These stereotypes did not appear only in Orientalist photography, but also in the arts of literature. The Irish author **Oliver Goldsmith (1774 - 1730)** wrote a letter to one of his friends in which he said: "They told me that there are no parties in the East, but there is a **"harem"**, they also told me that the women of the East are the most responsive women on earth in love relationships". As the English writer **Thomas More (1478-1535)** wrote, he describes the world of Eastern life as: "A world full of women with wide, black eyes, full of love and desire, but trapped by evil men. It is also full of luxurious banquets, silks, jewels, perfumes, dancing, and poetry".

Relying on rumors and imaginations originating from Western travelers, who in general often exaggerate their descriptions of the various appearances they see, or hear about from others, therefore Western artists often derived harem scenes, especially the behavior of women and the king's concubines while they were lying naked or in oriental clothes.

Among the travelers who were not able to enter the world of the harem and learn about its secrets was the artist **Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780 - 1863)**, who never traveled to the East, but he was inspired by the scenes of naked women in his famous painting "The Turkish Bath" through **Lady Montag's** letters. Lady Montague, wife of the English ambassador in Istanbul, in her letters to him. The writer **Tharwat Okasha** called them **"photographers of soft chairs"**.

The artist **Jean-Léon Gérôme (May 11, 1824 - January 10, 1904)** also had paintings representing **harem** in their private places. He was a French painter and sculptor in the style now known as Academic. His paintings were reproduced on such a large scale that by 1880 he was arguably the most famous living artist in the world and considered one of the most important painters of this academic period. In his paintings, we find him using his Western imagination to imagine what happens inside women's bathrooms, which of course could not be the case. Any man, whether Arab or Western, has the right to enter this area forbidden to men. We find this, for example, in his painting known as **"The Big Bath in Bursa,"** which is a Turkish city.

Likewise, his famous painting **"Pool in a Harem"** in which he painted a black slave offering **"shisha"** to women in the bathroom, as if women at that time only cared about adornment for

men and their whims until they could not dispense with smoking in the bathroom. The “**Harem**” means the place that belongs to women and they can be alone in it for their privacy.

Likewise, in his painting known as “**THE HAREM ON THE TERRACE**”, in which we show the shisha as a basic element of the painting, and there is a naked woman playing while there is a black slave standing as if guarding a flock of sheep, as if they were adorning themselves and preparing for their master, and the rest of the ladies are naked, while he appears at the end of the painting. A man seems to be their master and looks at them as if he is choosing one of them to enjoy, which shows that the artist imagined women as if they were a flock for their owner who did not represent his ability to enjoy sexually with them, as if women in the Arab and Islamic world were created for this thing only.

Among the Orientalist artists who paid attention to women in their paintings was the Italian artist **Domenico Morelli (August 4, 1823 - August 13, 1901)**. Among his most important paintings was the one with the same titles as other Orientalists: “**The Turkish Bath**”, in which women appear naked between lying down and taking off their clothes to bathe.

Many Italian Orientalist artists contributed to describing women in the East, such as **Giulio Rosati (Rome 1857 - Rome 1917)**, and one of his most famous paintings is “**The Harem Dance**”, where he painted a person reclining in the back of the picture, while the rest of the figures are women playing. The music is played with different musical instruments, while in the middle of the painting is a woman dancing with a bare chest and stomach, which suggests that all the women inside this room are subjugated to tempt and satisfy the desires of this man in the back of the picture. This is what the observers imagined, that the Eastern man owns many women, all of whom are like slave girls, subjugated to satisfy the desires of the man in the back of the picture. the man.

Among the Italian Orientalist artists who imagined the harem and what was happening inside it, but in a more respectful way, was the artist **Olleras Quintana Blas (1851-1919)**. This appears in his painting, a Harem Scene. Four women appear in the painting, one of whom is reading a book and the other three are sitting. Between a listener and a laugher, there are cups upside down, which indicates luxury and opulence, as well as roses on the floor, and even that painting is all from the imagination of the artist who imagined the luxury of women, but in his own way, even if it is far from nudity.

Through the paintings that were displayed, or many other paintings by Orientalists that dealt with the private lives of Eastern women, we find at first glance that the works of Orientalists have an important role in recording and documenting the features of life in the East through important periods of its history, but in fact, they contain in their aspects some historical fallacies about the image of women. Eastern, and in fact, Eastern and Arab women have a great position with an influential presence that must be taken care of to crystallize it in its correct image in front of the West.

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